

College of Foreign Languages and Literatures, FJCU

## Transition and Transformation: Explorations in Language, Literature, Culture, and Translation

輔仁大學外語學院2024跨文化研究國際學術研討會：

轉銜·轉變：外語、文學、文化與翻譯之探究

Paper Abstract (English)

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Title : Baroque Modernism and African American Performance in Gertrude Stein and Virgil Thomson's <i>Four Saints in Three Acts</i>			
Fields of specialization : American Modernism, American Literature, African American Studies, Opera, Baroque Art and Theater			
摘要：英文250或中文500字以內 Abstract : fewer than 250 words in English or 500 words in Chinese			
<p>Baroque Modernism and African American Performance in Gertrude Stein and Virgil Thomson's <i>Four Saints in Three Acts</i></p> <p>The scholarly enterprise of “baroque modernism” sees the twentieth-century avant-garde emerging through a retrospective fascination with the baroque era of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This essay will analyze composer Virgil Thomson's opera <i>Four Saints in Three Acts</i> (1934), on a libretto by Gertrude Stein, as a case study in this baroque transition to modernism. A “baroque fantasy” running to not three but four acts, the opera features not four but over thirty Spanish saints centered around Saint Teresa (divided into two personae) and Saint Ignatius of Loyola, intoning Stein's cubistic language games across Thomson's eclectic soundscape of Southern Baptist and neo-baroque idioms. John Houseman's direction, Frederick Ashton's choreography, Maurice Grosser's scenarios, Florine Stettheimer's cellophane cyclorama, and a cast of Black singers from Harlem rounded out the first production of this American modernist <i>Gesamtkunstwerk</i>. <i>Four Saints in Three Acts</i> opened on February 7, 1934, to inaugurate the new International Style wing of Hartford, Connecticut's Wadsworth Atheneum, which simultaneously featured the first American Picasso retrospective; two weeks later it hit Broadway and became a national phenomenon. Focusing on the self-presentation and public perception of its all-African American cast, my essay breaks new ground at the work's intersection between Blackness and the baroque. By examining libretto and music, contemporaneous reviews, archival photographs, and commentary by both white and Black collaborators, I trace a tension between the opera's aesthetic goals, which leveraged racial stereotypes toward baroque modernist effects, and the uncontainable meanings borne by its African American cast.</p>			