5. Orange Applied: Artistic Appropriations

In this final chapter, I turn to artists who seek to use Safety Orange’s hypervisibility as a tool of protection and redress, a way to force the state to make good on its promise of public safety. These artists explore whether the violence encoded in Safety Orange—violence rendered routine, uneventful, turned into a chronic crisis—might be used to compel the state to fulfill its duty of care. They ask: Must orange remain an abdication, an eternal traffic cone beside a pothole? Or, alternatively, can the color of warning and state racism be turned against its own logic and used instead to empower communities? However, these questions also pose their own problems. As we will see, many of these artists intervene on behalf of communities not their own, and their works often reflect the difficulty of forging solidarity through orange.

In the mid-2000s, an anonymous group of artists called Object Orange began painting abandoned homes in Detroit “Tiggerific Orange” (from Behr’s Disney paint series) to draw attention to the city’s pervasive urban blight, which is easily overlooked by those only passing through. For the series of interventions, which they called *Detroit, Demolition, Disneyland* (2006–8), the group chose to paint abandoned houses visible from the highway. They leveraged the visual rhetoric of state oversight to compel a dialogue about state inaction, drawing attention to the neglected houses’ negative
impacts on their communities. Among those impacts cited in coverage of the work were the drug use they shelter and the dangers they pose to children who play in the collapsing structures.¹

By attempting to use the color of state control against itself, the project wields orange as a catalyst, an agent that in and of itself has the power to trigger a reaction. The artists tap into the bureaucratically coded language of orange as a means to force the state to respond. They deploy color as a tactic, much as anti-fracking activists have done by painting and copyrighting trees as works of art in order to halt the expansion of natural gas pipelines.² What these undertakings have in common is that they both exploit a right of protection afforded by the legal category of art. For the antifracking activists, the act of painting protects the trees by making them legally recognized as art; for Object Orange, it protects the artists by enabling their work not to be dismissed as mere vandalism and endowing it with a new kind of public significance (as “newsworthy” public art) and thus wider visibility.

Like the multiple valences of paint itself, the equivocality of Safety Orange makes it difficult to control, which allows it to be critically and politically recoded. We find a similar process of recoding at work in how protestors around the world have reimagined the uses of traffic cones beyond their uses as instruments of state control. From Hong Kong to Minneapolis, orange cones have been redeployed as creative tools of resistance, their ubiquity leveraged to challenge militarized state power: they have been used to trap tear-

¹. Detroit Free Press, “Bright Light on Blight.” (Object Orange, Detroit. Demolition. Disneyland). One member of the group explains that the artists selected abandoned houses with facades that overlooked major arteries. Before painting the houses, they scouted the sites for several weeks to make sure they were no longer in use (Interview with author).

². Rahmani and Steinhauer, “Using Art to Stop a Pipeline.” Tyree Guyton has done something similar. When the city of Detroit attempted to demolish the Heidelberg Project in the 1990s, the artist responded by legally registering the work as a nonprofit. Agrell, “Detroit a Hotbed of Cool Art?”
gas grenades to contain the gas’s spread, to function as makeshift megaphones during large protest gatherings, and to block roads as part of guerrilla public demonstrations. In the former instances, the cone’s appropriability is a function of its form; in the latter, it is largely a function of its color.

As a consequence of Safety Orange’s flexibility as a sign, at issue in the color is the question of who gets to do the appropriating and on whose behalf. In this regard, the ethics of Object Orange’s interventions are hardly straightforward, as the artists themselves recognize. When half of the houses were demolished soon after they were painted, it appeared that the project had successfully forced the hand of the city to make good on then-Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick’s lapsed promise to demolish 5,000 buildings in his first nine months in office. However, the city’s response showed the project to be primarily a dialogue between the artists and the city, largely staged for an elite art world and academic audience. Despite Object Orange’s good intentions, perhaps because of its status as a public artwork, *Detroit, Demolition, Disneyland* largely speaks past the community on whose behalf it is acting. If the work’s viewership has the relative social and financial capital to intervene, what does such an intervention actually do for the people who live in these neighborhoods? What are the power implications when primary

3. For use of traffic cone in Hong Kong and Black Lives Matter protests, see Diss, “Hong Kong Protesters Get Creative”; and Ma, Shutler, and Bromwich, “Why Protest Tactics Spread Like Memes.”

4. Bello, “Urban Art with a Cause.” However, the artists have complicated this outcome; they now say that the group’s aim was not to have the buildings torn down but rather to raise awareness of Detroit’s housing crisis outside the borders of the communities that bore its brunt (Object Orange, interview with author, May 4, 2021). In an anonymous piece penned by the group, the artists maintained that problems of deindustrialization and suburbanization could only be superficially resolved by demolition and pondered whether reinvestment and renovation might be a better outcome (Object Orange, “Detroit. Demolition, Disneyland”).
audiences of the artwork (art critics and collectors, the mainstream press, intellectuals, suburban drivers) are “just passing through”?5

Object Orange was inspired by the Heidelberg Project, Detroit artist Tyree Guyton’s thirty-five-year effort to revivify his once-neglected block by painting polka dots on vacant houses (an effort not without its own ethical quandaries and considerable pushback from residents).6 One key difference between the projects is that Guyton has lived in the east side Detroit McDougall-Hunt neighborhood he works in, and the very house he grew up in anchors the Heidelberg Project.7 Object Orange’s success in grabbing the interest of the national press and art world was a short game, as Guyton has pointed out: “Now that these guys have gotten attention, where do they go from there? That’s something you have to think about.”8 Certainly, Object Orange raises difficult questions about the ethics of outside artistic intervention—not least of which: Is it ethical to turn abandoned homes into public artworks? But my point here is not that artists always need to be part of the group on whose behalf they purport to act. Rather, it is that Object Orange, in attempting to put orange to use on behalf of others, makes manifest something important about how the color works: as a sign, orange inherently surrogates itself for, and thus abstracts, its subject. As a result, it can have the inadvertent consequence of exchanging one form of social invisibility for another.

5. As one member of Object Orange admits, “It’s fair to say that Object Orange did not do a lot of surveying of various community members. We were interested in putting the work out there. . . . A dialogue about these things is important and necessary and the goal was to get that started” (Interview with author).

6. For more on the Heidelberg Project and its self-sustaining mission, see https://www.heidelberg.org/. “The HP believes that a community can re-develop and sustain itself, from the inside out, by embracing its diverse cultures and artistic attributes as the essential building blocks for a fulfilling and economically viable way of life.”

7. Larsson, “Art of Abandonment.”

Like Object Orange, Amanda Williams’s “Flamin’ Red Hots” strategically brandishes color to expose the arbitrary or ambiguous distinction between urban blight and urban beautification. “Flamin’ Red Hots” (named after the Cheetos flavor) is part of her year-and-a-half-long Color(ed) Theory installation series (2014-6) in Chicago’s Englewood neighborhood. Williams, though a trained architect, says she is not interested in Color(ed) Theory as an architectural solution or intervention; instead, she is concerned with making visible what is present and not present, and in that case, with highlighting the lack of investment and resources in the neighborhood. She uses color to lift into view the racialized structures of urbanization and gentrification and to visually disrupt the landscape produced by Chicago’s discriminatory housing lending practices, calling attention to the double bind of Blackness’s simultaneous invisibility and hypervisibility. Orange is only one color in Williams’s broader palette, which is “based on hues primarily found in consumer products marketed toward Black people” in her hometown South Side neighborhoods. Williams has said that the socially coded colors she chooses—which include Pink Oil Moisturizer (a light pink), Newport/Squares (a deep blue-green), and Harold’s Chicken (an orangey-red)—are rooted in the collective memory and experience of the people who live in the houses she paints. Echoing Pope.L’s amusement with the term “person of color,” Williams tongue-in-cheekily identifies herself as an “artist of color”—a phrase with a double meaning: she is both a Black artist and a painter whose primary medium is color. Inviting her audience to consider the structuring logic of color at work in processes of urbanization and gentrification (“redlining,”

9. Williams, “Conclusion.”
10. Williams observes: “There's not a day that goes by that I don’t think about color as both an artistic medium, and then also as race. As an African-American person, color is always in the foreground as a racial signifier.”
“white flight,” “greenlit” projects, etc.), Williams asks: “What color is urban? What color is gentrification? What color is privilege?”

While Harold’s Chicken approximates Safety Orange, Williams has said that she purposely chose not to use the bureaucratic color standard, presumably for its association with state violence. When the artist most pointedly addresses issues of safety and security in Color(ed) Theory, she opts instead for bright yellow. Williams appears to entertain deep misgivings about the possibility of repurposing Safety Orange—misgivings, I hazard, likely shared by many of the Black artists whose work I discuss in chapter 4, namely David Hammons, Cameron Rowland, Hank Willis Thomas, and Cauleen Smith (with the possible exception of William Pope.L). How can we explain these artists’ seeming reluctance? My guess is that for these artists, trying to repurpose Safety Orange entails accepting the terms dictated by a state founded on and structured by anti-Blackness. Moreover, as a form of state speech, orange functions not in spite of but because of its uncanny capacity to say one thing and its opposite (to mean both safety and danger), while never challenging the ideologies that underpin it. It is precisely orange’s capacity to be repurposed that has made it such a useful tool of neoliberal state violence.

Although Color(ed) Theory visually echoes the work of Object Orange, the two projects also differ in other important ways. First, the artists who make up Object Orange at the time lived in Michigan but not in the Detroit neighborhoods where they painted; Williams grew up on Chicago’s South Side, where her project is rooted. Second, unlike Object Orange, Williams’s project uses houses already slated for demolition, and the houses are not painted anonymously, under cover of nightfall; instead, they are painted collectively by residents, making the project more about a community reclaiming a sense of ownership of its surroundings. For Williams,

13. Bianca Marks, representative for Amanda Williams, email to author, February 1, 2021.
the eventual demolition of the buildings is part of the project, but her main goal is to create space for community reflection about the buildings’ demolition (though as of 2017, half of the buildings still stood due to a backlog of condemned houses).\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Color(ed) Theory} aims to memorialize the homes rather than erase them, as one could argue of Object Orange.\textsuperscript{16} Williams wants people to register a sense of loss, to mourn the casualties of state divestment. However, she dismisses the idea that community members would have a strong response to the project; the reality, she says, is that they are too “desensitized” to care.\textsuperscript{17}

Much as William Pope.L’s, Williams’s use of orange explores the political possibilities of embracing extreme visibility. Like Frank Ocean’s iconic album \textit{Channel Orange} (whose bright orange cover captures the artist’s synesthetic experience of being in love for the first time) or urban fashion’s adoption of hunting and work safety gear (with the popularity of orange-loving brands like Carhartt and Supreme and collaborations by Helmut Lang x Travis Scott and Fenty Puma), the \textit{Color(ed) Theory} series appropriates the terms of visibility by which racialized surveillance operates in order to celebrate pride and pleasure in everyday Black life.\textsuperscript{18} Set against these

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{15} Svachula, “MCA Exhibit.”
  \item \textsuperscript{16} As the art critic Susan Snodgrass observes in her discussion of these works by Object Orange and Amanda Williams, the Berlin-based artist Katharina Grosse’s \textit{psychylustro} (2014) is an instructive analog to the time-based aims of these projects. With the support of the City of Philadelphia’s Mural Arts Program, Grosse also used bright house paint—in her case, orange, green, pink, and white—to transform rail line corridors running through the city’s most impoverished areas, “converting the walls of abandoned buildings, broken fences, piles of rubble and patches of overgrown grass, into sites of momentary beauty and reflection.” But where Object Orange and Amanda Williams must grapple with the question of whether its intervention can (or should) invite the lasting effect of demolition, \textit{psychylustro} thematizes the fleeting nature of its impression on the enduring landscape; it is a one-time intervention that will be allowed to fade over time (“Painting as Urban Archaeology”).
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Sargent, “Amanda Williams’ Color Theories.”
  \item \textsuperscript{18} See Corsillo, “5 Ways to Wear Safety Orange”; Schimminger, “Sorry
stylistic practices, the series stands in strong contrast with the other projects I discuss in this chapter insofar as it trades Black survival for Black thriving; in its embrace of hypervisibility, *Color(ed) Theory* runs counter to the Black politico-aesthetic projects of undetectability and counter-surveillance articulated by Simone Browne as “dark sousveillance” and Shaka McGlotten as “black data,” which seek refuge from the glare of mass surveillance and biometric technologies trained on Black and Brown bodies.\(^{19}\)

If the art projects I have discussed thus far in this chapter are (at least initially) “additive” in their application of orange, Michael Rakowitz’s *A Color Removed* (2015–18) is by contrast decidedly “subtractive.”\(^{20}\) *A Color Removed* is a community-produced conceptual artwork, which proposed to remove all orange objects from the city of Cleveland. Rakowitz, an Iraqi American artist, invited members of the public to donate orange objects as a statement on the safety denied to Tamir Rice, a twelve-year-old boy who was murdered by police in 2014. Responding to a call about a young man with a gun outside of a recreation center in a predominantly African American neighborhood, one of the two responding officers, Officer Timothy Loehman, shot Rice twice in the stomach less than two seconds after the police car door opened. Police claimed that Rice was shot because the toy gun he was playing with was missing

---


20. This distinction is also an oversimplification. While Object Orange’s and Williams’s artistic processes can be characterized as “additive,” in the sense of layering paint over existing edifices, both projects are engaged in the problematics of removal. In one interview, Williams observed: “Architecture in certain neighborhoods is marked by a process of removal, not addition” (Sargent, “Amanda Williams’ Color Theories,” emphasis added). Characterizing Rakowitz’s process as subtractive runs into the opposing issue; although it is premised on the removal of a color from a city, the exhibition itself amasses those removed objects to fill up the gallery. These contradictions highlight an inverse relationship between these artists’ practices and their products. (I thank Dylan Volk for pointing this out.)
the orange plastic safety tip that identified it as a toy; it lacked the orange signifier of harmlessness that would have marked Rice as a child rather than a risk. The officers’ claim about the lack of orange was an attempt to deny that their unchecked use of lethal force was racially motivated. It was just an unfortunate accident, they seemed to say; any child playing with a realistic-looking toy gun would also have been killed. The lack of orange, in other words, was used as an alibi for Rice’s murder. And this alibi worked, for neither officer was indicted for the killing.

On the far wall of the Cleveland gallery SPACES, the viewer finds a makeshift altar: an orange-framed picture of Tamir Rice, accompanied by a poster reading “He was only 12.” Another poster, mounted alongside emblems of a typical American childhood—orange plastic baseball bat, football, and school-issued recorder—reads “He was only a kid playing in a park.” The altar, the creation of Rice’s mother, Samaria Rice, is surrounded by four traffic cones, a brutally belated refashioning of the danger associated with what Christina Sharpe has called “the apparatus aimed at corralling black life” into a memorial of safekeeping. The traffic cones allude to the disavowed affinity between Blackness and state infrastructure. Black bodies are the United States’ foundational infrastructure, the elided backbone of the nation’s economy since its founding. But Black bodies have instead been treated as a crisis to be managed. Here, the traffic cone bears witness to the hole in Rice’s family and community—the empty site of loss brought about by a perpetually broken system.

The rest of the gallery is filled with single-use orange plastic consumer goods and synthetic toys and foods donated by members of the community in response to Rakowitz’s call: artificial flowers, cups, coat hangers, parking signs, sleds, sand buckets, Halloween pails, NERF footballs, Play-Doh, Ramen noodle packages, Garfield

21. In the United States, it is required by law that the barrels of toy guns have tips of Blaze Orange, the same color as Safety Orange (“Marking of Toy, Look-Alike and Imitation Firearms”).
22. Qtd. in English, To Describe a Life, 1.
watches, Despicable Me merchandise, Cheetos packets, Tootsie Pops, crayons, and so on. A Color Removed’s statement on the state’s brutal denial of protection to Black citizens is also an implicit commentary on environmental racism, for the environmental and health impacts of single-use plastics and processed foods fall disproportionately on lower-income communities of color, and particularly on their children. Safety Orange thus signals the structural enmeshment of consumer marketing, poverty, racial inequality, and climate injustice. Safety Orange is inextricable from the wider ecological and necropolitical material economies of toxic petrochemicals, which constitute about 90 percent of all plastics on the market.

23. In his work on the slow violence of environmental racism, Thom Davies has shown that petrochemical pollution is in large part produced on the site of former slave plantations: the lower course of the Mississippi River is home to the densest cluster of chemical facilities in the western hemisphere, with 136 petrochemical plants and 7 oil refineries stretching along 85 miles of riverscape. “Many former slave plantations along the Mississippi were sold directly to petrochemical companies in the mid-20th century, and turned into chemical processing facilities. This exchange of land use—‘from plantation to plant’—has exposed local residents, many of whom descend from slaves, to the life-limiting and protracted threat of harmful pollution” (“Slow Violence and Toxic Geographies,” 6). In this legacy of endangerment, which trades one form of dispossession for another, one can observe that “the legacy of the slave plantation ‘provided the blueprint for future sites of racial entanglement’” (9).

24. Due to the lack of government regulation, manufacturers are not required to list the ingredients of their plastic products or the amounts of synthetic dyes used in foods, and it is impossible to trace the full extent of petrochemicals’ presence in these products. For a discussion of consumer transparency and federal regulation of plastics manufacturing, see Freinkel, Plastic, 95. The FDA requires food manufacturers to list all ingredients on the label, in descending order of amount, and “certified” color additives like Yellow 6 to be listed by name (“certified” meaning they require continual certification in batches); however, the FDA does not require that the precise amount be listed (U.S. Food and Drug Administration, “Color Additives Questions and Answers for Consumers”).

25. Recent developments in the plastics industry (fabrication technologies such as injection molding) mean that these products are inexpensive to produce and can be manufactured at unprecedented rates. Freinkel, 24–25.
Crude-oil based products like traffic cones and plastic toys—the types of products that can be easily manufactured using orange colorants—are typically made from polyvinyl chloride, better known as PVC, the single most poisonous and environmentally damaging of all plastics.26

A Color Removed connects American anti-Black racism to global racism, depicting other sites where state violence manifests abroad. The installation includes a video of a mural created in solidarity with Rice by the people of Aida Refugee Camp; the mural memorializes Aboud Shadi, a thirteen-year-old Palestinian boy murdered by an Israeli sniper in 2015. The installation also includes a life vest that was used by a Syrian refugee who drowned before reaching Europe. The wall text for these items explains: “These objects make more apparent the entanglements of A Color Removed by drawing connections between the global endemics of racism, dispossession, militarism, and colonialism.” Using orange as a common denominator for the incommensurate impacts of colonial, ethnic and racial violence, the artwork seeks to open up a dialogue about the unseen commonalities between those subjects denied the care of the state.27

But as a reflection on the limits of solidarity, even as it attempted to initiate a dialogue about the intersectional politics of risk and

26. Petrochemical plastics (including food additives containing Yellow 6) are disproportionately sold to lower-income communities and communities of color, and many of them primarily target children. Since these products are highly durable—one of their selling points—they are non-biodegradable and also require large amounts of chemical pollutants and fossil fuels to manufacture. Their cycle of production, use, and disposal releases toxic, chlorine-based chemicals that build up in the water, air, and food chain, causing severe health problems such as cancer, immune system damage, and hormone disruption (Greenpeace, “PVC”). See also Freinkel’s Plastic on the particular dangers of PVC and its effects on poor communities.

27. Bins set up around Cleveland to collect orange objects for the artwork were stenciled with these words: “The right to safety is a transnational problem that binds policing, militarization, colonialism, and racism. / Cleveland is Ramallah, / is Ferguson, is Soweto, is Kabul, / is Belfast, is Baghdad, is Standing Rock, / is Sydney, / is Bethlehem . . .”
safety, *A Color Removed* received some pushback from local activists and artists and one scholar close to the project. After some local Black artists and activists criticized *A Color Removed* for failing to include Black people, Rakowitz met with the artists and activists to discuss their critiques of the project. He responded to these concerns by reframing the exhibition as a collaboration featuring the works of four Cleveland-based African American artists who address related themes: Amber N. Ford, Amanda King (as part of the Shooting without Bullets youth photographers collective), M. Carmen Lane, and R. A. Washington of Guide to Kulchur. An early collaborator of the project later dropped out after accusing the work of appropriating the trauma of the Rice family, an accusation Rakowitz (who collaborated with Samaria Rice on the exhibition) strongly refutes. Such critiques of the work resonate


29. The ethics professor Jeremy Bendik-Keymer first invited Rakowitz to propose the project as part of a lectureship at Case Western University in 2015. According to Rakowitz, Bendik-Keymer abandoned the project in March 2018 a few months before the exhibition was scheduled to open (Rakowitz, email to author, June 24, 2021). Bendik-Keymer has publicly criticized *A Color Removed* on the grounds that it “piled trauma on top of trauma” and made hasty associations between Rice’s killing and multiple other forms of violence wreaked by global neoliberalism: gun violence writ large, the refugee crisis, Palestinian occupation, and so on (not unlike the state’s arbitrary and hasty application of Safety Orange to elicit constant caution) (“Beyond Gestures”).

30. Rakowitz explains that he sought and received consent from Samaria Rice to proceed with the project and has worked to maintain collaborative ties with Rice and the Tamir Rice Foundation. The orange objects donated for *A Color Removed* were given to Ms. Rice for use by the foundation and eventual exhibition in the Tamir Rice Afrocentric Cultural Center. The drop boxes used for donations have since been repurposed to collect art supplies for the Cuyahoga County Jail Coalition Arts and Culture Team to support teaching efforts at youth detention centers (Rakowitz, email to author, June 24, 2021).
with larger cultural debates over the right of non-Black artists to 
eXtract and display Black and Brown trauma subsumed under the 
sign of orange—a dynamic that threatens to abstract racial and 
ethnic violence from its lived experience, as some accused the art-
work of abstracting the Blackness that underpins it and replacing 
it with orange.

By attempting to forge an intersectional politics, to create a kind 
of shared, cross-racial solidarity, *A Color Removed* offers a means 
of materializing—of making sensible and visible—calls for a radical 
collective vision for confronting a world beset by environmental and 
political crises. However, attempts to forge a common language 
against structural forms of oppression are, for some, not only im-
possible but unethical. Perhaps the most resolute proponent of this 
argument is Afropessimist Frank B. Wilderson III, who has argued 
that Palestinian and Black communities (two communities whose 
suffering *A Color Removed* explicitly draws into comparison) do 
not “share a universal, postcolonial grammar of suffering” even 
if they share the position of being targeted for state oppression. 
From such a perspective, artworks like *A Color Removed* can only 
ever fall into a form of solidarity politics that “analogize[s] black 
suffering with the suffering of other oppressed beings.”

This conviction—and the broader questions of who has the 
right to speak and to set the terms of representations about Black 
suffering—has been at the center of fierce debates by museums, 
curators, and artists following a series of explosive events in the

31. “Collective affect,” T. J. Demos argues, in one such call, is “precise-
ly what is needed in expressing the intangible sense of justice’s necessary 
embeddedness and ultimate defining role in collective struggles like the 
Black radical tradition, decolonial praxis, and climate justice activism.” 

form of racist hatred but the genome of Human renewal; a therapeutic balm 
that the Human race needs to know and heal itself?” Wilderson writes (17, 
emphasis in original).

33. Wilderson, 14.
art world related to white and non-Black artists’ representations of Black death. In her book chronicling these events, critic Aruna D’Souza writes: “The question of when, and on what terms, a person is justified in taking up the cultural forms and historical legacies of groups (races, ethnicities, genders, etc.) to which they themselves are not part is always fraught, but especially so in the art world where cultural ‘borrowings’ are the cornerstone of the European avant-garde tradition we’ve been taught to admire.” Other artists, such as performance artist and theorist Coco Fusco, countered the polemical stance forwarded by Wilderson and others, asserting that “the argument that any attempt by a white cultural producer to engage with racism via the expression of black pain is inherently unacceptable forecloses the effort to achieve interracial cooperation, mutual understanding, or universal anti-racist consciousness.” My intention is not to adjudicate the ethics of using orange to bridge the representational chasms created by structural racism; it is merely to tease out why some artists have chosen to use the color, while others have not. By displacing the color onto objects and environments (rather than bodies), artists like Object Orange and Michael Rakowitz have employed Safety Orange’s tendency toward abstraction precisely to avoid spectacularizing black suffering. And yet by virtue of its abstracting nature, orange cannot but inscribe black suffering in an attention economy that exceeds the boundaries of its lived experience, and thus threatens to perpetuate the very trauma it seeks to redress.

For these artists, the use of orange presents a double bind: it encodes both the moral imperative for non-Black artists to respond to Black suffering and the risk of inadvertently reproducing that suffering. Even as they struggle with this double bind, these works

34. Among these explosive events was the decision by the Whitney Biennial to exhibit Open Casket, white artist Dana Schutz’s painting of Emmett Till.
35. D’Souza, Whitewalling, 37.
36. D’Souza, 40.
effectively advance Safety Orange as a conceptual tool for making visible the plight of certain subjects, communities, and environments. They suggest creative ways in which the color orange can be used to deflect state reprisal: to protect against arrest, to preserve against demolition, and to shield against other forms of legal retaliation. And yet at the same time, projects like *Detroit, Demolition, Disneyland,* and *A Color Removed* reveal the limits of an orange solidarity. These are not just the limits of a “politics of visibility,” which assumes that raising awareness is the same as enacting social change—a promise that Safety Orange makes but never entirely fulfills. But more significantly, these projects show that when orange is used to resist oppression or neglect, it almost always abstracts (in a sense, removes) those being oppressed or neglected—and it is unclear to what extent it improves the lives of those it seeks to champion.

Ultimately, like Safety Orange, these artworks work by highlighting something different than they originally set out to highlight. By leveraging the slipperiness and mobility of Safety Orange as a sign, they further underscore the privilege that underlies orange’s significatory power: they show *who* can make orange mean *what.* By using the color to remediate the state’s failure to protect, these works cannot but participate in an attention economy that maintains whiteness’ implicit authority to set the terms of signification. This is not a condemnation of these artworks but an invitation to think alongside them about the conditions that afford certain actors the power to make meaning and not others. Indeed, these same conditions bind this book, since they are inherent to the very medium used to make a problem visible: Safety Orange.