

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 Baroque Modernism and African American Performance in Gertrude Stein and Virgil Thomson's <i>Four Saints in Three Acts</i> American composer Virgil Thomson's opera <i>Four Saints in Three Acts</i> (1934), on a libretto by his compatriot Gertrude Stein, is a case study in modernist transition and transformation. A model of avant-garde collaboration hatched in Paris in 1927, this "baroque fantasia" bridged media, eras, and geographies. Running to not three but four acts, it staged not four but over thirty Spanish saints anchored by Teresa of Avila (divided into two personae) and Ignatius of Loyola, intoning Stein's cubistic language 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</i> opened on February 7, 1934, to inaugurate the new Avery 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. This essay traces three interrelated transitions that define the opera's modernism: the transition of the American avant-garde from fringe to mainstream, the transition of baroque culture from the pre-Enlightenment to the 1930s, and the transition of African American performance from blackface minstrelsy to the legitimate stage. These three levels of transition were powerfully complementary in ways that illuminate the transitional character of modernism itself.			