Reading Response to Rent-A-Negro.com

Having lived in the racially diverse suburbs of San Francisco for the majority of my life, views and opinions on racism and superiority over others due to race have never been a topic of issue. Even while growing up and attending a primarily Caucasian-dominant school, one of my close friends was African American but her race was insignificant to our relationship. It could have been the community in which we lived, a sort of naïve bubble sheltered from the real world, maybe because I was young or that I am considered a “minority” and lack the direct involvement in the tense history between Caucasians and African Americans that still plagues the political and emotional state of people today. However, now in my adult years and recent events with Trump as President, I see how relative and realistic Ayo’s 2003 satirical website is in bringing racism to surface.

I think Rhizome’s Net Art Anthology is extremely significant to the work, Rent-A-Negro.com, itself because it exemplifies, supports, and provides an understanding to the issue Ayo attempts to address with her satirical website. I feel that the requests she received are critical for the viewer to gain insight to the fact that racism is real, and it is here now even if it is not blatantly apparent through slavery. Without Rhizome’s anthology, Ayo’s work potentially falls victim to what many artists experience as a message misconstrued. Sometimes artists do not want their audience to solely take away one message, the intended message, but interpret the work through their own ideas, views, and opinions. However, as the responses Ayo received has shown, some individuals took the website seriously and inquired for service, going as far as a rental request for lynching. So the question arises, is this artwork supporting or hurting Ayo’s message and to whom is the message intended for? I personally feel that the Anthology in providing this information validates Ayo’s message, that racism is real. However, I do not consider myself a racist, especially since I have not experienced the situations mentioned on the website. So, is the target audience being reached by this work? Do people who are racist see this website as supporting and validating racism? All these questions reflect on the work itself, but as far as a reflection on Rhizome’s Net Art Anthology, I think that the collection of various viewpoints aids in the understanding of Rent-A-Negro.com.