

# Sinister Wisdom

A Multicultural Lesbian Literary & Art Journal

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## **Statement on the Cover Art for *Sinister Wisdom* 107: *Black Lesbians—We Are the Revolution!***

Recent dialogue about the cover photograph on *Sinister Wisdom* 107 provides an opportunity for us to articulate why we, co-editors, cover photographer, cover model, and editor and publisher of *Sinister Wisdom* 107, view this cover as revolutionary.

**JP Howard**, Editor of *Sinister Wisdom* 107: While readers may not be aware of the back story, this photograph was part of a larger photo shoot, specifically curated for this issue. This was one of numerous photographs that Amber and I considered. The cover photograph of black lesbian model, Amadi Agbomah, titled *Liberation*, was submitted for consideration, along with an artist statement by black lesbian photographer, Akinfe Fatou. Akinfe's statement, submitted and viewed in conjunction with the photograph, immediately resonated with both of us. Akinfe's artist statement reads "*Black lesbians have always been at the forefront of change leading the charge for equality and redefining beauty standards and cultural norms. Liberation depicts afro expressionism, womanism and protest: a Black lesbian in full authority of her agency and her faculties fiercely proclaiming to the world... my divine body, my human rights, my conscious choice.*" When Amber and I first saw "Liberation" and accompanying artist statement, we too saw a Black lesbian in full "authority of her agency" staring confidently at the lens and agreed that we needed to include this bold and visionary photograph.

Like the multiple and diverse genres of writing and unique artwork selected for inclusion in the journal, the cover photograph is a representation of the diversity of work produced by brilliant Black lesbian artists. Black lesbians are not a monolith, and our revolution takes on different shapes and dimensions for each of us. We, brilliant black lesbians, have a long-standing history of producing work that is both dynamic and thought provoking. Our cover art reflects and complements the bold, unflinching voices that line pages and pages of this issue. *Liberation*, as depicted and celebrated in this cover photo, pays homage to the statement by late Black lesbian poet and activist, Pat Parker, who once said "*The day all the different parts of me can come along, we would have what I would call a revolution.*" I view this photograph as revolutionary and see it as functioning on multiple levels. It embraces our blackness, owns our lesbianism,

celebrates our “afro expressionism” and ultimately, documents our strength and agency over our own black lesbian bodies. If that’s not REVOLUTIONARY, then what is!?

**Amber Atiya**, Editor of *Sinister Wisdom* 107: I was immediately drawn to this image titled *Liberation*, which challenges dark-skinned femme invisibility in LGBT/Black lesbian communities and within larger culture and media. When dark-skinned women are given air time, it's as mummies, nannies, best friends, desexualized entities, the butt of the joke, especially when played by Black male comedians in drag whose character (manly, awkward, unattractive) is almost always juxtaposed with a high femme, light-skinned love interest. Also, as I told JP, I've noticed over the years how a lot of dark-skinned Black women, especially women with fuller, thicker, rounder, wider features, are posed looking down or away from the camera—but not Amadi, who stares defiantly into the camera. This gives me so much life, and why can't The Revolution reflect that? Why can't The Revolution be both body and sex-positive? Why, instead of finding a million things wrong with *Liberation* can't we see everything *right* and *yesss* about it? Why not ask ourselves why this photo is called *Liberation* in the first place? Perhaps we as Black lesbians need a revolution of perspective, an ability to use a Black womanist and loving gaze to contemplate our bodies, our sexualities, to experience *Liberation* without being afraid of or intimidated by it, to know there is power and beauty and something greater than beauty there.

**Akinfe Fatou**: photographer, poet and provocateur: Issue 107 echoes the inspiration of our many Black lesbian heroines with its imaginative and transformative art and literary offerings. I've been so moved by the groundswell of support and praise for the cover. I am truly grateful that the work has been well received. Particularly, as a Black lesbian photographer in an industry dominated by white men.

The photograph was created in collaboration with model Amadi Agbomah and centers Black queer eloquence set as a powerful radical act of self love, defiance and fearlessness in a climate that seeks to control and strip Black lesbians of our autonomy and ability to make decisions concerning our bodies, reproductive and basic human rights.

The cover photograph speaks to and embodies the brilliant multidimensional work in issue 107, challenging the white gaze of Black lesbian bodies, conventional patriarchal norms and oppressive inequitable beauty standards. Black Lesbians: We Are The Revolution is a definitive proclamation holding brave space and drawing from the courage of its editors and contributors who are redefining the visual landscape and literary canon as we know it.

It embraces and lifts up the profundity of our complex identities, resilience, intelligence, creativity and sexuality, inspiring a fluid dialogue around perception, erasure, body shaming, and the ways in which Black queer women have been marginalized and silenced. Bringing to bare the haunting traumas, weaponization and misrepresentation that our bodies have endured. The pose of the model is a reclaiming of our magic, our spells, and our divinity, channeling our experiences in a way that harnesses and calls our power back to us.

We don't see Black lesbians featured enough in mainstream publications, cinema and television productions, on the cover of magazines, on stages, in board rooms, in front of and behind the camera. Representation is central to how we see and position ourselves in a society indifferent and/or in favor of violence against Black lesbians in America and around the world who face constant abuse, corrective rape and death. Issue 107 is a means of reframing, creating, and controlling our narratives and increasing the visibility of Black lesbians globally.

**Amadi Agbomah**, Model: Being a BLACK Queer Model means embracing the beauty of being Black. The struggle, the passion, the magic. Queerness is synonymous to being Black because I am intersectionality exemplified.

**Julie R. Enszer**, Editor and Publisher of *Sinister Wisdom*: The cover of *Sinister Wisdom* 107: *Black Lesbians—We Are the Revolution!* joins a long line of visually provocative covers that have featured lesbians of all races, ages, and sizes with ample nudity and presentations of unabashed sexuality. As the publisher of *Sinister Wisdom*, I was pleased to work with editors JP Howard and Amber Atiya to fulfill their vision for the issue, including the selection and presentation of the cover images. Rather than centering a white male gaze—or even a white female or lesbian gaze—the cover of *Sinister Wisdom* 107 centers a radical, Black lesbian gaze that challenges ideas that Black lesbians are only sexual or not sexual at all. The cover photograph, artfully staged and executed by Akinfe Fatou, brings a powerful young woman in control of her sexuality into view of a variety of lesbian audiences. The variety of reactions to this cover is a welcome joyful noise of thinking about and engaging with contemporary Black, lesbian, and feminist politics across generations. In short, the cover image—and the entire issue—contributes to the mission and work of *Sinister Wisdom* in the world.