Essentially, as art and design educators, we need to navigate ourselves away from unconsciously and unintentionally perpetuating racial inequalities. This involves being mindful of how our socialisation, gender, positionality and privilege affect implicit assumptions, as well as ensuring we don’t unintentionally disempower and exclude diverse students. It also means exploring our racial identities, constructed perceptions of race and becoming cognisant of what has influenced our perceptions and practice. As art and design reveals introspective aspects of ourselves, so too can it challenge our usual frame of references and provide us with rich visual sources to contextualise, explore, discuss and question taken-for-granted ideas and beliefs about race. Through using counter-narratives we can reflectively critique privilege and unconscious bias. By developing our receptiveness to different truths and experiences, we can demystify hidden meanings, making visible the often-invisible narratives and power structures. Acknowledging that assumptions are based upon socially inculcated messages, we can deconstruct stereotypical misconceptions and unlearn misrepresentations of racial identities. United with individual reflection, we can develop our critical consciousness and racial literacy. In so doing, we provide opportunities for our students to engage with different perspectives that may otherwise have been dismissed. Making art culturally relevant to the diversity of students’ voices, we can develop students’ cultural confidence for better educational outcomes.

In challenging misconceptions of racial identity, artist Peggy Diggs makes ‘whiteness’ visible. Diggs unveils hidden racial assumptions to encourage anti-racist agency. She engages observers through dialogue, interviews and overheard conversations around ideologies of ‘whiteness’ and leaves the spectator to question the problematics of the dominant ideological constructs of race. With Cost of Privilege, her pixelated portrait reveals no detail of personal identity, but is obscured and unseen, leaving a vague reflection of reality. This ambiguity with the bold texted message powerfully reminds the viewer of their obliviousness to ‘white’ privilege.

As art educators, if we intend to be agents for social and racial justice, ‘business as usual’ schooling will not suffice. Art and design provides us with great opportunities for anti-racist practice, to challenge unspoken norms, knowledge and assumptions about culture, power and identities.
Cross-phase

Safety barrier, protecting the dominant ‘white’
It serves as a reminder that socialisation forms a
basic protective wear – like skins which are
paper clothing with text from interviews form
century. Historically, these paintings implied
in colonial Mexico during the 18th to 19th
coloured identity markers as a psychological
status. This is a concept which Báez
colour – the lighter hues awarded the higher
constructs of race.

Diggs further develops these predicaments with
Oblivious from her Being White series. The white
paper clothing with text from interviews form
basic protective wear – like skins which are
fragile yet simultaneously restrictive in quality.
It serves as a reminder that socialisation forms a
safety barrier, protecting the dominant ‘white’
ideology and stereotypical understandings of
racial identity. Only through demystifying the
hidden, implicit, socialised norms and
unconscious biases can we begin to consciously
see a different perspective and reframe
constructs of race.

Firelei Báez challenges the arbitrary
constrains of racial identity based upon the fluid
categorisations of skin colour and hair texture.
In her series Cut / Pass?, Báez explores these
measured identity markers as a psychological
and personal journey through self-portraiture,
influenced by ‘Casta’ paintings which originated
in the USA, which qualified black Americans access to
‘white’ privileges if their skin tone matched or
was lighter than paper bag. Similarly, the hair
test was a Dominican Republican measure
whereby the more the hair flowed under a fan,
the ‘whiter’ attributes a person possessed.

Báez colour-matched her forearm and drew a
silhouette of her hair for a day each month.
Depending upon the daylight, phenomenologically
tones and colour perception changed, making
the test temporal. Metaphorically, this aligns

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The white

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expression and wording such as ‘worthy’.
These innocent black children are
memorialised, juxtaposed against a surface
riddled with bullet-like holes. Patterson
addresses the systemic brutality black children
face, such as 12-year-old Tamir Rice, whose
name appears on toy brick as a tragic reminder of
how a toy gun in the hands of a black child is
misinterpreted, resulting in being shot by
police. The artist contests the hegemomic
stereotypes of ‘black’ identity as being
associated with loss of innocence and guilt.
Similarly, the photographer and street artist
JR challenges stereotypes of young black
males with his The New
Republic paintings. His fine art
empowers ‘black’ individuals whom historically had been
omitted from cultural narratives. His male
models are posed to replicate and replace
royalty or ancient mythological characters from
imperial Western tradition. They wear
cultural capital rather than suits normally
associated with power and privilege. Instead of
creating stereotypical images of homogenised,
hyper-masculine males, he gives his models
individuality, solitude, gentleness and grace. He
raises the status of those men, their unavoidable
presence and personhood through realism and
monumentality, and reclaims a new position for
black men in the history of representation and
politics of racial identity.

These are but a few examples of artists
that we, as educators, can utilise to critique
histories, reframe and challenge implicit
racialised assumptions. Through our resolute
openness, development of our critical
consciousness and racial literacy, art can give
us agency in creative anti-racist praxis.

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1a. Oblivious, 2019, from Being white series.