



# Moving Performances: Divas, Iconicity, and Remembering the Modern Stage

*Jeanne Scheper*

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## **Moving Performances: Divas, Iconicity, and Remembering the Modern Stage** Jeanne Scheper

Fabulous yet fierce, imperious yet impetuous, boss yet bitchy—divas are figures of paradox. Their place in culture is equally contradictory, as they are simultaneously venerated and marginalized, hailed as timeless but then frequently forgotten or exhumed as cult icons by future generations.

Focusing on four early twentieth-century divas—Aida Overton Walker, Loïe Fuller, Libby Holman, and Josephine Baker—who were icons in their own time, *Moving Performances* considers what their past and current reception reveals about changing ideas of race and gender. Jeanne Scheper examines how iconicity can actually work to the diva's detriment, reducing her to a fetish object, a grotesque, or a figure of nostalgia. Yet she also locates more productive modes of reception that reach to revive the diva's moving performances, imbuing her with an affective afterlife.

As it offers innovative theorizations of performance, reception, and affect, *Moving Performances* also introduces readers to four remarkable women who worked as both cultural producers and critics, deftly subverting the tropes of exoticism, orientalism, and primitivism commonly used to dismiss women of color. Rejecting iconic depictions of these divas as frozen in a past moment, Scheper vividly demonstrates how their performances continue to inspire ongoing movements.

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