

PIPPY HOULDSWORTH GALLERY

Carrie Mae Weems

Color: Real and Imagined

10 October 2014 - 15 November 2014

Following her recent survey show at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, Pippy Houldsworth Gallery is honored to present a carefully curated selection of Carrie Mae Weems' work from the past 30 years, along with a new work, from 10 October 2014. Significantly, this will be Weems' first solo show in the UK in a commercial gallery. Alongside the main space, visitors will also have access to a comprehensive selection of books and a number of the artist's films within an adjacent reading room. Subverting African-American stereotypes, Weems provides a critical insight into the life of marginalised subjects by looking at the formative role of the past. Directly confronting conventional depictions of gender, race and class, Weems uses photography as a way in which to destabilise notions of identity in visual culture.

Set within a domestic setting, Weems' seminal Kitchen Table series (1990) narrates the life of a modern black woman. Portrayed by herself, Weems has said, 'I use my own constructed image as a vehicle for questioning ideas about the role of tradition, the nature of family, monogamy, polygamy, relationships between men and women, between women and their children, and between women and other women—underscoring the critical problems and the possible resolves.' Constructing a skillfully woven narrative by combining text and photography, this particular series serves to emphasise the importance of the voice, both written and spoken, in her work. In the exhibition, this sense of narrative is best exemplified by the triptych: *Untitled (Woman with Friends)*. Moving from one photograph to the next, Weems manages to encapsulate the vicissitudes of the main protagonist as her emotions move from grief to acceptance.

Unearthing traces of racism and imperialism, place is also integral to Weems' practice. Broadening her geographical scope during the 1990s and early 2000s, the artist began to concentrate on the history of race and its relationship to locale in series such as *Africa* (1993) and *Dreaming in Cuba* (2002). Specifically, in the *Slave Coast* (1993) series, Weems explores the legacy of slavery by documenting the holding facilities used on Gorée Island in Senegal to house African slaves before they were shipped across the Atlantic. Envisaging the traumatic experiences of those imprisoned, the artist pairs photos of these haunting locations, now perturbingly empty, with African words which evoke the slaves' helplessness.

Weems also employs architecture as a way in which to explore questions of power and authority. In the *Roaming* series (2006), created during her residency at the American Academy in Rome, Weems addresses the function of civic buildings in asserting social order; standing in front of a panorama of whitewashed dwellings in *The Edge of Time – Ancient Rome*, the artist's body is rendered insignificant against the grand, mythological backdrop. Like many of the images from these series, Weems appears as a ghostly presence, with her back to the camera, as if bearing silent witness to the past. Nevertheless, clad head to toe in black, her striking figure serves to confront the authority embodied by these structures of power. Discussing the role of architecture, Weems explains that 'you are always aware that you are sort of a minion in relationship to this enormous edifice—the edifice of power. I thought I could use my own skin in a series of performances as a way of leading the viewer into those spaces—highly aware—and challenging them.'

Colour is also a central tenet within Weems' practice. Between 1989 and 1990, the artist created *Colored People*, a series of portraits accompanied by colloquial terms used within the African American community to investigate the beauty encapsulated by different 'shades of blackness'. As curator Kathryn E. Delmez explains, 'the coloring of the photographs highlights the artificiality of these naming traditions but also underscores the diversity of these differences.' In *Untitled (Colored People Grid)* (2009-10), a reworking of the earlier series, Weems juxtaposes the same tinted portraits of young children with bright, monochromatic square panels. Presented in a monumental grid, Weems uses scale in order to exacerbate the breadth of this diversity.

Weems has participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions at major national and international museums including the Whitney Museum, the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Her work was recently the focus of a major retrospective, *Carrie Mae Weems: Three Decades of Photography and Video*, which began its run at The Frist Center for Visual Arts in Nashville in 2012, moving to Portland Art Museum; Cleveland Museum of Art and Cantor Center for Visual Arts, Stanford, before ending at the Guggenheim Museum, New York earlier this year.

Weems has received numerous awards, grants and fellowships including the prestigious Prix de Roma, The National Endowment of the Arts, the Alpert, the Anonymous was a Woman and the Tiffany Awards. In 2012, Weems was presented with one of the first US Department of State's Medals of Arts in recognition for her commitment to the State Department's Art in Embassies program. In 2013 Weems was not only the recipient of the MacArthur "Genius" Grant, but she also received the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's Lifetime Achievement Award.

She is represented in public and private collections around the world, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY; The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; the Museum of Modern Art, NY and Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Weems will be honored at the Guggenheim International Gala in November 2014.