

SPRÜTH MAGERS

From Black and White to Living Color: The Collected Motion Pictures and Accompanying Documents of Kara E. Walker, Artist.

Kara Walker

Sprüth Magers London OCTOBER 04 - DECEMBER 21 2019

Public reception: Thursday, October 3, 6-8pm

Monika Sprüth and Philomene Magers are honoured to present the first retrospective of Kara Walker's video works at Sprüth Magers London. Film has long played a crucial role in Kara Walker's groundbreaking artistic practice. Eight of Walker's films highlight her diverse approach to filmmaking, signature use of silhouettes, and insightful handling of space, sound and time to expose profound and enduring historical traumas and narratives. The exhibition will also include an array of artefacts that shed light on Walker's process as she conceives of and composes her films. Shot lists, handwritten notes, cut-and-pasted lines of text, sketches and puppets are interspersed with the artist's moving images, deepening our understanding of her films and her expansive practice of unforgettable work across mediums.

The concept of the exhibition has been formulated for many years by Hilton Als, who himself has known Walker for several years. The exhibition moves from the earliest film, from 2004, entitled *Testimony: Narrative of a Negress Burdened by Good Intentions*, to later works such as *Fall From Grace*, *Miss Pipi's Blue Tale*, 2011. Walker's film works develop her early cut-paper series into short videos that evolve the paper silhouettes into small hand-operated puppets. After initially experimenting with shadow projections overlaid onto her cut-paper works, Walker's use of puppets developed from reading German books on shadow puppet theatre and studying the work of animator Lotte Reiniger, whose early cartoon films preceded those of Walt Disney.

The films range, literally, from black and white to 'living color' [sic] montages, tackling issues of black history, racial and gender disparities in a bold and brutal look at America's bloody past. A historical tableaux of life in the antebellum South, inspired by Walker's own youth spent living in racially charged Georgia, the films are composed of semi-linear narratives which are interspersed with surrealist scenes that add to the referential complexities. Depicting the harrowing psychological impact of slavery and its legacy, drawing a subtle contrast between historic and present-day race issues, Walker's use of silhouettes and dark, dramatic, shadowy settings offer an aesthetic interpretation of the darkness of her subject matter. The silhouette/puppetry aesthetic manifests a double legacy: silhouettes were often the choice for bourgeois portraiture in a pre- or early photographic era, but they were also used to depict racially over-determined 'scientific' misrepresentations. Thus the puppets call on universally recognisable iconography (in the form of historical caricatures) to portray the harsh realities of the black American experience, enacting obscene and

tragic scenarios that parody and draw upon the historical realism of slavery and the fantastical space of the romance novel to create seductive yet nightmarish fictions. In deploying caricatures in this way, Walker's films link black bodies and their exploitations to the development of (American) artistic aesthetics.

Opening concurrently to this exhibition, Kara Walker's Hyundai Commission for Tate Modern's Turbine Hall, a new site-specific work, will be open to the public from October 2, 2019 until April 5, 2020.

Kara Walker (*1969, Stockton, USA) was raised in Atlanta and lives and works in New York. A retrospective of her work was organised by the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, USA (2007) and traveled to ARC/Musée d'Art Moderne de la ville de Paris; Whitney Museum, New York; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; and Museum of Modern Art in Fort Worth, Texas. Other solo exhibitions include those at the Domino Sugar Refinery, Brooklyn, organized by Creative Time, New York (2014); Camden Arts Centre, London (2013); Art Institute of Chicago (2013); Center for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw, Poland (2011); and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2006). Walker's *Katastwóf Karavan* was recently presented as part of Prospect.4, New Orleans, and other major group exhibitions include *America Is Hard to See* at the Whitney Museum, New York (2015); *Remembering is Not Enough*, MAXXI, Rome (2013); the 11th Havana Biennial (2012); the 2007 Venice Biennale and the 1997 Whitney Biennial.

Hilton Als (*1960, New York, USA) is a staff writer for *The New Yorker* magazine. He is the author of *The Women, and White Girls*. His work also appears in the *New York Review of Books*, and the *New York Times*. He has curated shows about Alice Neel and James Baldwin for David Zwirner Gallery, New York, and Victoria Miro, London.

For further information and press enquiries, contact Silvia Baltschun (sb@spruethmagers.com).

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Opening hours: Tuesday – Saturday, 10am – 6pm