

PAULA COOPER GALLERY

SARAH CHARLESWORTH, JA'TOVIA GARY, CHRISTIAN MARCLAY, PAUL PFEIFFER

The Politics of Desire

243A Worth Ave, Palm Beach

February 12 – March 14, 2021

A group of works by Sarah Charlesworth, Ja'Tovia Gary, Christian Marclay and Paul Pfeiffer examine the subjects, objects, and politics of human desire. Having mined the archives for still and moving images of celebrated figures, fantastical sites, and idealized bodies these artists cut, rearrange and re-present manipulated images. The resulting works in a range of media reveal the unreality of the fabricated images that are their source material, and the spectacular nature of the culture that produced them.

Sarah Charlesworth's *Objects of Desire* series, produced between 1983 and 1989, sought to make visible the “shape of desire.” Meticulously excising images from a range of sources—including fashion magazines, pornography, fanzines, and archeological textbooks—she re-photographed the cutouts against fields of pure color. Enclosed within lacquered frames, the seductive Cibachrome prints propose an iconography of visual culture, and the values encoded within. Charlesworth's desire is both broad and specific: iconic ‘must-have’ items such as a white T-Shirt and a red scarf are given the same treatment as the moon. The inclusion of celebrity figures such as Japanese movie star Toshiro Mifune as *Samurai* (1981) literalizes the objectifying power of the desiring gaze.

The formation and fragmentation of identity through fame, particularly popular music, is also the subject of **Christian Marclay's** *Body Mix* series (1990–92). Inspired by the Surrealist exquisite corpse, the artist stitches together record covers decorated with bodies to create strange, hybrid superstars of indeterminate race and gender. In one example, the head, shoulders, and outstretched arms of composer Erich Leinsdorf are completed by the stomach and thighs of an anonymous 1970s disco dancer, and the calves and feet of Tina Turner, clad in patent leather high-heeled shoes. With sly humor Marclay draws attention to the already fragmentary format in which the body is presented to us in this medium, and the degree to which a human is never whole but already a sum of parts.

Known for his innovative manipulation of digital media, **Paul Pfeiffer** recasts the visual language of spectacle to uncover its psychological and racial underpinnings. In works from the *Four Horseman of the Apocalypse* series (2004–06) Pfeiffer uses a technique comparable to Charlesworth, removing the context from an NBA image of a basketball player in a key moment of play so that he is alone against an interchangeable crowd, his identity intensified by virtue of his isolation. In the video works *Caryatid (De La Hoya)* (2016) and *The Long Count (Thrilla in Manila)* (2001) Pfeiffer edits footage of boxing matches, superimposing background imagery over the performers to selectively erase their bodies and allow them to evade the desiring gaze. Screened on unusual, hybrid display monitors that are alluring objects themselves, the works both obstruct and incite desire.

Shot on location in Claude Monet's garden in Giverny, France, and imbued with the idealized beauty of that place, **Ja'Tovia Gary's** *Giverny I (Négresse Impériale)* (2017) is a six-minute examination of the precarious nature of Black women's bodily integrity, the continued violence of global imperialism, and the art historical canon. While Pfeiffer removes racialized bodies from a violent space to shift the focus to the structure of the spectacle and disrupt the act of looking, Gary does quite the opposite, inserting her own body into a traditionally white place that is also a site of fantasy, a verdant garden already emptied of bodies and primarily known through painted images that have been reproduced to oblivion. The insertion as disruption is emphasized by Gary's flickering form and the interweaving of archival video and film—including Diamond Reynolds following the murder of Philando Castile in 2016 and Fred Hampton speaking on political education, c. 1968-69. *Giverny I (Négresse*

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Impériale) is the only work in the exhibition that includes the artist's own body, and with it, Gary challenges the gaze by presenting the desiring self and the desired subject as one.

Sarah Charlesworth (1947-2013, b. East Orange, New Jersey) is considered a key member of The Picture's Generation. Charlesworth's work has been the subject of one-person exhibitions at a number of institutions including the major survey, "Sarah Charlesworth: Doubleworld," at the New Museum, New York (2015), which traveled to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2017); and a retrospective organized by SITE Santa Fe (1997), which traveled to the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego (1998), the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC (1998), and the Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art (1999). Her work is in important public collections such as the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; the Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Christian Marclay (b. 1955, San Rafael, California) has explored the connections between vision and sound for forty years. Marclay garnered international acclaim at the 54th Venice Biennale for *The Clock*, for which he received the prestigious Golden Lion award. Marclay's work has been exhibited in one-person presentations at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington (1990), the Musée d'art et d'histoire, Geneva (1995), the Kunsthaus, Zurich (1997), Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (2001), San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2002), MAMCO in Geneva (2008), the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2010), Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul (2010), Garage Center for Contemporary Culture, Moscow (2011), and the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (2019). His work is in the public collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York; the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D.C.; Tate Modern in London; and the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris.

Paul Pfeiffer (b. 1966, Honolulu, Hawaii) has created celebrated works of video, photography, installation and sculpture since the late 1990s. He has had one-person exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art (2001), the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2003), the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (2005), MUSAC León, Spain (2008), and the Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin (2009)—and was the subject of a retrospective at Sammlung Goetz in Munich, Germany (2011). Pfeiffer's work is in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Inhotim Museu de Arte Contemporanea, Inhotim, Brazil; the Pinault Collection, Venice; and Kunst Werke, Berlin.

Ja'Tovia Gary (b. 1984, Dallas, TX) uses documentary film and experimental video art to address representation, race, gender, sexuality, and violence. Her critically-acclaimed immersive multimedia piece *THE GIVERNY SUITE* (2020) was the subject of one-person exhibitions at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, in 2020. Gary's other films have been screened at festivals including Houston Cinema Arts Festival; BlackStar Film Festival in Philadelphia; the American Film Institute Festival in Los Angeles; the Montreal International Documentary Festival; International Film Festival Rotterdam; Frameline LGBTQ Film Festival, Edinburgh; New Orleans Film Festival; and Ann Arbor Film Festival. Gary's work is in the collections of the Smithsonian Museum of American Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Studio Museum in Harlem, the Memorial Art Gallery at the University of Rochester, and the Thoma Foundation.