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Dawoud Bey: Pictures 1976 – 2019
Sean Kelly, Los Angeles

April 29 – June 30, 2023

Opening reception: Saturday, April 29, 5-7pm

Dawoud Bey will be in conversation with Hamza Walker, Director, LAXART at 6pm

Sean Kelly is delighted to announce *Dawoud Bey: Pictures 1976 – 2019*, the artist's first solo exhibition in Los Angeles. Surveying five decades of work through the lens of five iconic series—*Harlem, U.S.A.* (1975-1979) *Street Portraits* (1988-1991), *Harlem Redux* (2014–2017), *Night Coming Tenderly, Black* (2017), and *In This Here Place* (2019)—this presentation illuminates Bey's foundational importance to the development of photography as fine art, historical documentation, and social practice in the United States. The exhibition coincides with *Dawoud Bey & Carrie Mae Weems: In Dialogue*, on view at the Getty, April 4–July 9, 2023. On Saturday, April 29, the gallery will be open from 10am-7pm. The artist will be present for a reception and artist's talk from 5-7pm.

Bey first came to attention with *Harlem, U.S.A.* (1975-1979) a visual journey through the iconic neighborhood, which, in 1979, was the subject of his first solo exhibition at The Studio Museum in Harlem. Since then, Bey's photographic and social practice—he is highly regarded as an educator as well as a photographer—has been defined by the empathy he brings to his subjects and the complexity with which he depicts them. In succeeding decades and successive bodies of work, Bey has moved from working “in the streets” with a small, hand-held 35mm camera to creating more

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formally structured portraits using a 4 x 5 camera and the monumental 20 x 24 Polaroid view camera.

The exhibition opens with early photographs from, *Harlem, U.S.A.* which Bey began photographing at the age of twenty-two. Inspired to capture residents of the neighborhood due to Harlem's status as a symbol of, and wellspring, for Black American culture, Bey portrayed its citizens as complex individuals free of stereotypes. The use of a small 35mm camera, with a slightly wide-angle lens, gave him the flexibility and spontaneity to get close to his subjects while grounding them in the cityscape behind them.

In the next series featured in the exhibition, *Street Portraits*, begun in 1988, Bey decided to slow down his process, moving to a larger format camera, which engendered a reciprocal exchange with his sitters. Like other photographers working at that time, Bey was increasingly concerned with the ethics of traditional street photography, "which privileged the photographer at the expense of the subject." Bey approached individuals he wished to photograph to give "the Black subjects [a space] to assert themselves and their presence in the world, with their gaze meeting the viewers on equal footing," thus developing a different tradition of picture making that weds the subject to their environment, to create a "studio of the streets."

Harlem Redux represents the moment when Bey made the critical decision to shift away from portraiture to conceptually based photography. In 2014, 40 years after *Harlem, U.S.A.*, Bey returned to the iconic neighborhood to create a series of photographs which visualized the profound socioeconomic forces changing the landscape of this epicenter of Black community and culture. This series, in color, records how in Bey's words, this community is "increasingly defined by a sense of 'erase and replace,' wherein pieces of social and cultural history, along with memory itself, are routinely discarded."

With *Night Coming Tenderly, Black*, 2017, Bey turned to landscape photography for the first time in his career, removing the presence of the figure entirely. This series imagines the flight of enslaved Black Americans along the route of the Underground Railroad that operated in Ohio—the final fifty miles before reaching the vast expanse of Lake Erie, on the other side of which lay Canada, and freedom. His most recent series, *In This Here Place*, created in 2019, is the third project in Bey's ongoing history series which chronicles the history of Black Americans in the United States. This body of work focuses on plantations in Louisiana, continuing the artist's examination of African American history and his efforts to make the Black past resonate in the contemporary moment.

Dawoud Bey will be the subject of an exhibition at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, opening in 2023, entitled *Elegy*, that brings together his three most recent history and landscape-based projects, *Night Coming Tenderly, Black, In This Here Place*, and a new group of work, *Stony the Road*, along with a new video work *350,000*.

Dawoud Bey holds a Master of Fine Arts degree from Yale University School of Art. In 2017 Bey was awarded the MacArthur Foundation "Genius" Fellowship. He is also

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the recipient of fellowships from United States Artists, the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, amongst other honors. In 2020, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art opened a major retrospective exhibition of Bey's work that traveled to the High Museum of Art, Atlanta and The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. To celebrate the exhibitions, Yale University Press and SFMOMA published *Dawoud Bey: Two American Projects*. Bey's work is featured in numerous publications, and is the subject of several monographs and publications, including *Class Pictures* (Aperture, 2007), *Harlem, U.S.A.* (Yale University Press, 2012), *Picturing People* (Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, 2012), and *Dawoud Bey: The Birmingham Project* (Birmingham Museum of Art, 2013). In 2018 a major forty-year retrospective publication, *Dawoud Bey: Seeing Deeply*, was published by the University of Texas. His work has been included in important solo and group exhibitions worldwide and is included in the permanent collections of the Addison Gallery of American Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Brooklyn Museum, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard University, the High Museum of Art, the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, the Museum of Contemporary Photography, the Museum of Modern Art, NY, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the Studio Museum in Harlem, the Tate Modern, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and many other museums worldwide.

On Saturday, April 29 at 6pm Dawoud Bey will be in conversation Hamza Walker, Director at LAXART, at Sean Kelly, Los Angeles. Walker and Bey have a long history together. During his tenure as the Curator and Director of Education at the Renaissance Society in Chicago, Walker organized a survey exhibition of Bey's early work titled *Picturing People* in 2012.

For additional information about Dawoud Bey, please visit skny.com

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Image caption: Dawoud Bey, *West 124th Street and Lenox Avenue*, 2016, archival pigment print, framed: 40 3/8 x 48 3/8 inches, edition of 6 with 2 APs © Dawoud Bey Courtesy: Sean Kelly