I would be hard pressed to think of anyone in the visual arts who has done more to make public the centuries old discrimination of race and gender, the oppressive effects of power, the intricacies of domesticity and our general sense of place as human beings than Carrie Mae Weems.

As we are only about one year apart in age, I can remember quite well the level of racial inequality that Ms. Weems was born into. I can also remember very clearly, the buzz created when a non-stereotypical, everyday African American housewife appeared in a laundry soap commercial for the first time. It was a 1970, Wisk detergent television advertisement, and since I lived in a largely white community defined by hardworking blue and white collar husbands paired with stay-at-home, homemaker wives, the vocal backlash that ensued could generally be placed into the category of “what is the world coming to?”

When you think about how systemic and ingrained the feelings, subtle or profound, were regarding race, gender and the system of power built upon those prejudices that Ms. Weems addressed all those years ago a very different, very intense level of strength and courage emerges. Yes, it's true that the Civil Rights movement had already begun, and was gaining worldwide recognition and ground every day. The art world too, very much mirrored all of society as it was dominated by white males of European descent who afforded little room for women, especially women of color, to thrive and succeed.

Carrie Mae Weems: Three Decades of Photography and Video is a landmark exhibition curated by Kathryn E. Delmez for the Frist Center for the Visual Arts in Nashville, Tennessee. The exhibition will include numerous examples of all of Ms. Weems most impressive series from the Family Pictures and Stories (1978-84), where the artist confronts black cultural myths by representing her own middle-class African American family; to Slow Fade to Black (2010), which honors, with very soft focused images, the fading memories of the careers of some of our nation's greatest female performers such as Josephine Baker, Marion Anderson and Nina Simone.

DDL: I can't imagine how difficult it must have been for you to make your selections, considering the volumes of work created by Ms. Weems. Is there anything in particular you would like to share with our readers with respect to the process?

KED: You are right to point out that Weems is a very prolific artist; she is always thinking about and working on new projects. My goal for selecting objects for our exhibition was to provide an opportunity to really go deep with this important and in many ways underrepresented artist, to see both well-known works such as the Kitchen Table Series and From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried as well as previously unpublished surprises like her earliest documentary photographs from the late 1970s and early 80s or selections from less exposed series such as Black Women, Monuments, or Dreaming in Cuba. We've
also been able to include work that she has finished only in the last few months, including a new video project entitled *Cornered*, which offers insight into her most current direction. To see over 200 photographs, videos, text pieces, and even one of her large scale fabric installations together provides an unprecedented chance to really trace her evolution as an artist and the conceptual links between her many varying bodies of work.


DDL: I'm glad you pointed out the conceptual thread that weaves through her work. Ms. Weems has managed, while working through an impressive variety of subjects and settings, to maintain her vision and goals against all odds. She never wavers with her dedication to uncovering and exposing the truth about who we are, what we have always been and how we see each other is no less than inspirational. This brings me to think about the person behind the work. I know she has looked at and been inspired by the photographs of James Van Der Zee and Roy DeCarava as you mention in your catalog essay. Has Ms. Weems ever shared her thoughts with you on how she has, or hopes to continue to inspire ensuing generations to seek the truth about social, political and racial issues? I ask this question because I believe that the most important aspect of creating thought provoking art is how it speaks to and inspires others.

KED: Weems's driving force truly IS to inspire others to seek a more complete truth, as you state, and she is particularly interested in engaging youths in that process. She recently told me that more and more college-aged students are approaching her and telling her how much of an impact her work has had on them. She seemed a little surprised but was of course delighted, as this is what it is all about for her. In addition to speaking to a younger generation through her art, she personally connects with many students through various guest appointments at universities. When I was visiting her last year, for example, she was teaching two classes at Syracuse University and invited me to sit in on the classes. The level of engagement was very palpable and it was clear that Weems takes her role as an educator and mentor very seriously. Sometimes she even includes her students in actual bodies of work, as she did with *Constructing History: A Requiem to Mark the Moment* when she was an artist-in-residence at Savannah College of Art and Design. She felt like it was important to include these young people in her staged recreations of important moments in the struggle for Civil Rights for, even though they did not experience the history first-hand like their parents or grandparents, “through the act of performance, with our own bodies, we are allowed to experience and connect the historical past to the present--to the now, to the moment...we live the experience; we stand in the shadows of others and come to know firsthand what is often only imagined, lost, forgotten.”
DDL: In closing, I would like to hear your thoughts about how Ms. Weems art has affected you on a personal level.

KED: From a young age, I have been interested in learning more about people who are different from me and various “hidden histories,” as Weems calls the stories not written into mainstream accounts. I was the child, for instance, who was always more intrigued by the servants’ quarters when touring grand homes than the owners’. Weems’s art has provided a meaningful way to continue this desire as an adult to see the world through other perspectives. In doing so, I have also been able to see the many connections that cross cultural, racial, and generational boundaries. Her work has also made clear the importance of digging deeper to find a more true truth and challenging the status quo when needed. I believe that I now see the world with greater awareness and compassion.

Carrie Mae Weems: Three Decades of Photography and Video opens at the Frist Center for the Visual Arts in Nashville, Tennessee on Friday, September 21st, 2012. After it’s run at the Frist ends on January 13th, 2013, it will travel to the Portland (Oregon) Art Museum, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford and the Guggenheim Museum in New York.

Follow D. Dominick Lombardi on Twitter: [www.twitter.com/ddlombardi](http://www.twitter.com/ddlombardi)
NASHVILLE  Carrie Mae Weems’s first retrospective, “Three Decades of Photography and Video,” curated by Kathryn E. Delmez, is an engrossing, overdue look at an artist whose name is often better known than her work, with the exception of her acclaimed series “Kitchen Table” (1990).

Each black-and-white photograph in that suite (shown here in its entirety) is staged with Weems (b. 1953) at a kitchen table, often with other people. The domestic tableaux suggest cycles of love, friendship, motherhood and solitude in the life of a spirited, clear-eyed, tough-minded black woman, “the other of the other,” as the artist, quoting Lacan, put it in her talk at the center. Wry wall panels are linked to a narrative tradition also tapped by Faith Ringgold’s story quilts. The word, written or spoken or both, has been integral to Weems’s practice from the beginning, as have a certain classic formality and theatricality.

Occupying the ample galleries of the Frist Center’s ground floor, the show begins with Weems’s early series “Family Pictures and Stories” (1978-84), which features middle-class African-Americans. Here the artist rebuts the stereotype of black families as
atomized, feckless and rootless. It is her own family (she grew up in Portland, Ore.) that she shows—an extended, interwoven multigenerational clan in all its complex, functional and dysfunctional humanity—accompanied by text and audio recordings that recount the lives of individual members.

The show’s selection of around 225 photographs, videos and installations is largely thematic and loosely chronological. Its walkabout format invites viewers to delve, at will, into issues of otherness, race, gender, identity, class, history, migration and place. Weems has a lot on her mind, including the black body and social marginalization. Many of her images are barbed and politically incorrect: for example, the picture of a young black man with an Afro, holding a watermelon, from the series “Ain’t Jokin’” (1987-88). Weems is particularly concerned with black women and how they are portrayed, remembered and forgotten. Her appropriated, softly blurred images of Nina Simone, Josephine Baker, Marian Anderson and others in the series “Slow Fade to Black” (2010) offer a poignant assessment of uncertain celebrity.

Weems turns to disturbing 19th-century daguerreotypes in the series “From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried” (1995-96). Photographs of slaves she has stained blood-red are labeled with phrases like “A Negroid Type” or “You Became Playmate to the Patriarch.” In “The Hampton Project” (2000), Native Americans are shown in enlarged before-and-after pictures, their traditional bearing and attire suddenly transformed by white influences, a change that raises difficult questions about assimilation and difference.

In “Roaming” (2006), a series of large-scale photos taken in Italy, Weems addresses these conundrums in a manner reminiscent of Korean artist Kimsooja’s persona, Needle Woman. Positioning her robed, regal self with her back to us, the artist gazes at the Old World. Does she belong? Is she an interloper? Like a solemn muse, black or otherwise, she seems to ask: Who writes history? Who rewrites it, and where and what is our place in it?

History is also evoked in the installation Ritual to Revolution (1998), its hanging muslin scrims conjuring the history of the world through translucent pictures, and in “Constructing History: A Requiem to Mark the Moment” (2008), a video and photo series reenacting crucial events from the Civil Rights movement. Weems takes due note of social progress, but also its glacial pace. The latest work in the show, the video installation Cornered (2012), utilizes two adjoining screens mounted in a corner. On the opposing sides, groups of people protest angrily for and against desegregation during the 1965 Boston riots, the looped news footage slowed to match the tempo of Samuel Barber’s elegiac “Adagio for Strings,” the only sound.

Photo: Carrie Mae Weems: The Edge of Time—Ancient Rome, from the series “Roaming,” 2006, digital chromogenic print, 73 by 61 inches; at the Frist Center for the Visual Arts.

find this article online: http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/reviews/carrie-mae-weems/
WHEN Carrie Mae Weems was first teaching photography in the late 1980s at Hampshire College in Massachusetts, she was struck by the difference in how her male and female students presented themselves in pictures. “The women were always turning away from the camera, always in profile,” said Ms. Weems, demonstrating by obscuring her face seductively with her graceful hands. “They never squared themselves. The boys were squaring themselves.”

At night she would return to her studio to work on her own photographs that told a different story. She centered herself at the end of a kitchen table and composed vignettes about the life cycle of a romance, the camaraderie among female friends, the demands of motherhood and finally her solitude, all unfolding at the table under a harsh, expository overhanging light. These photographs in “Kitchen Table Series” tell stories of selves that are both private and public, and in so doing, they show how photography can be a means of self-expression and self-discovery.
Series,” completed in 1990, are accompanied by 14 panels recounting the path of a 38-year-old woman with a “bodacious manner, varied talents, hard laughter, multiple opinions,” as a panel says, who resists classification and embraces complexity.

Using herself as a surrogate for all self-possessed women and controlling the narrative as both subject and photographer, Ms. Weems found her artistic voice. The series was shown widely, including at the Museum of Modern Art in “Pleasures and Terrors of Domestic Comfort” in 1991.

“I emerged in that incredible moment in the 1980s when all kinds of social questions about subjectivity and objectivity, about who was making, who was looking” were being asked, Ms. Weems said in a recent interview at the Jack Shainman Gallery in Chelsea, which represents her work. She, along with fellow African-American artists like Glenn Ligon, Lorna Simpson and Gary Simmons, began to receive more recognition than black artists had previously seen. “There was a real shift,” she said.

The painter Mickalene Thomas was inspired to become an artist after seeing “Kitchen Table Series” at the Portland Art Museum in Oregon as a student in the early 1990s. “It was the first time I saw work by an African-American female artist that reflected myself and called upon a familiarity of family dynamics and sex and gender,” Ms. Thomas said.

Now 59, Ms. Weems is having her first comprehensive retrospective, which opens on Friday at the Frist Center for the Visual Arts in Nashville and includes some 225 photographs, videos and installations, from her earliest, never-before-published ‘70s documentary photographs influenced by Roy DeCarava and Henri Cartier-Bresson to brand-new pieces referring to works by Marcel Duchamp and Ana Mendieta, among other artists. It will travel to the Portland Art Museum in Oregon, where she grew up and is home to almost 400 members of her close-knit extended family, as well as to the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York.

“When you’re talking about Carrie Mae Weems, you’re going to talk about race and gender and classism,” said Kathryn Delmez, curator of the exhibition. “But I really think it goes beyond that to her desire to insert all marginalized people into the historical record, as she says, to tell the stories that have been ignored or forgotten or erased. Through Carrie’s lens she’s looking at who’s writing history, who has the power to influence other people’s lives.”


“What can this black body project, and how will that projection be understood and received no matter how you attempt to shift it?” Ms. Weems asked. “It’s laid with a certain kind of history that’s almost insurmountable. I’m always attempting to push against it, to insist that there be another kind of read.”
In person Ms. Weems has a regal bearing and easily forges moments of intimacy. Her strong physical presence and rich, melodic voice are central to her still photos and video pieces over the decades, in which she sees herself serving variously as alter ego, muse and witness to history. She studied movement at Anna Halprin’s progressive Dancer’s Workshop after moving to San Francisco at 17.

For her 20th birthday her boyfriend gave her a camera. “Suddenly this camera, this thing, allowed me to move around the world in a certain kind of way, with a certain kind of purpose,” she said. In 1976 she moved to New York to study photography at the Studio Museum in Harlem and then returned west to earn a bachelor of fine arts degree at the California Institute of the Arts in 1981. She received a master of fine arts degree at the University of California, San Diego, in 1984.
Nashville Rising: Carrie Mae Weems and Other Current Exhibits

It happens quickly -- discomfort in a public place -- and it is a very effective element to control, as you will experience with the work of Carrie Mae Weems. Early on in the exhibition at the Frist Center for the Visual Arts, Carrie Mae Weems: Three Decades of Photography and Video, Weems confronts her audience with her AINT JOKIN' series from 1987-88. Here she combines images and text that project racial stereotyping with works such as "Black Woman with Chicken" [left] and "Black Man Holding Watermelon." In another piece nearby we see a vintage political drawing of Abraham Lincoln looking a bit disheveled, seated in a room filled with props and papers positioned above the question: WHAT DID LINCOLN SAY AFTER A DRINKING BOUT?. The answer-box nearby reveals: I FREED THE WHAT?. The exposure to this, and other bits of appropriated hurtful humor will surely prompt an uncomfortable feeling in most viewers as it flies in the face of current, 'public' trends toward universal political correctness.

On an opposite wall in this same first room are Weems's FAMILY PICTURES AND STORIES (1978-84), which shows, through photographs and an audio track by the artist, her nuclear and extended families as they raise children, work, gather for an extended family photo, or just have fun in her hometown of Portland, Oregon. This juxtaposition of these first two series mentioned above is not coincidental, as the starkly contrasting worlds of perception and reality meet to represent this physical and psychological battleground.

CONSTRUCTING HISTORY: A REQUIEM TO MARK THE MOMENT (2008) records staged reenactments, with Atlanta residents and Weems's Savannah College of Art and Design students. The resulting photographs, which mimic life-changing events ranging from the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King to the death of one of the four Kent State students, are set in an interior space that includes lighting stands, camera tracks and black-out fabrics in the picture plane. One would assume that Weems is opting for a more Surreal or dreamlike statement that for one, evokes the initial disbelief many of us felt as the knowledge of such horrible events originally worked their way into our daily lives. It’s that feeling of the initial shock tempered by disbelief that is more precisely what is at play here.

Cornered (2012), which consists of two video screens that converge in one corner of a room, shows two lines of protest made up of pro and con de-segregationists responding to Boston's 1965 Racial Imbalance Act. On each side is one key figure that taunts the other with stare-downs and dares. The only sound is Samuel Barber's "Adagio for Strings," which greatly enhances the viewer’s already heightened alarm. Since you cannot hear what they are saying, you are left to imagine their words and thoughts, making this gut-wrenching scene even more turbulent.

Also in the same room is the series SLOW FADE TO BLACK (2010-11), which depicts out-of-focus images of African American women of stage and screen, an homage to the stars who once inhabited the front lines of the entertainment field such as Nina Simone and Josephine Baker -- two of the many great personalities that now are lost in our collective memories.

On an opposite wall hang two stunning photographs printed in a tondo format of children enjoying simple pleasures as their minds fill with daydreams. May Flowers and After Manet are from the MAY DAYS LONG FORGOTTEN series taken in 2002, and they show Weems's strength when it comes to photographic richness and flawless composition. Just beyond these two works is the entrance to a room that holds the series FROM HERE I SAW WHAT HAPPENED AND I CRIED (1995-96). All of the photographs here are appropriated, and were originally intended to depict the pictorial profiles that supported the basis of racism back in the day. The text, phrases such as YOU BECAME A SCIENTIFIC PROFILE, A NEGROID TYPE, AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL DEBATE, and A PHOTOGRAPHIC SUBJECT that Weems has etched into the glass gives each subject some form of identity, and in doing so, restores a modicum of dignity. The rest is a nearly unbearable reminder of a past covered with the blood and sweat of the people these photographs attempt to represent.

It is important to note that this is Carrie Mae Weems's first major museum retrospective -- an exhibition long overdue -- and the Frist Center for the Visual Arts should be commended for taking the initiative, for doing the hard work of amassing the art, and for so respectfully mounting such an important exhibition of one of our most important living American artists.

Elsewhere in Nashville

The backbone of Nashville’s art scene is its impressive not-for-profit spaces. In addition to the Frist Center for the Visual Arts there are the Tennessee State Museum, which I did not get over to see this time around, the Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art, the Parthenon and the Carl Van Vechten Galleries at Fisk University.
Two Artists Salute a Legacy

By FELICIA R. LEE

POINTING her camera, the artist Carrie Mae Weems lobbed directions. “A little more smoke!” and “Women, raise your mirrors!” she instructed the performers gathered recently in a black-box theater on the Lower East Side. Geri Allen, the jazz pianist and composer, sat nearby, scribbling notes.

Ms. Weems, known for photography and film projects that plumb issues of race and gender, was filming the Persuasions, four men tricked out in purple suits, in a flirtatious encounter with three female singers in regal black turbans.

“Trust me, love me, feel me,” the men crooned.

“Can I trust you?” the women cooed back.

“What happened to ‘No, no, no’?” Ms. Weems asked.

“It sounds great,” Ms. Allen shouted from the sidelines. “Just do more!”

Ms. Allen and Ms. Weems were creating images for a multimedia show called “Slow Fade to Black,” set to have its premiere on Friday at Celebrate Brooklyn!, the Prospect Park summer festival of performing arts and film. Marrying Ms. Weems’s images (on three giant screens) to original music by Ms. Allen, the show is among the festival’s 32 mostly free events, which began last week with the reggae star Jimmy Cliff and will end in August with the country singer Lyle Lovett.

“Slow Fade” is an unusual first-time festival collaboration for two African-American artists who tend to inhabit separate citadels of culture: museums and galleries for Ms. Weems, and concert halls and clubs for Ms. Allen. For this project the two will be joined by the Grammy-winning members of Ms. Allen’s trio, Esperanza Spalding, a bassist and singer, and the drummer Terri Lyne Carrington.

Also part of the show are, among others, the tap dancer Maurice Chestnut; the singers Lizz Wright...
and Patrice Rushen; and Afro Blue, Howard University’s vocal jazz ensemble.

If the title “Slow Fade to Black” sounds familiar, it’s because it is the culmination of a project that began in 2010 and continued in 2011: a series of blurred, soft-focus photographs of famous black female performers like Eartha Kitt, Nina Simone and Marian Anderson. The title works in two ways, Ms. Weems said. The blurry photographs are a comment on the women’s receding from cultural prominence and the idea of a fade “to black” suggests a new generation of emerging black female artists. Many of the “Slow Fade” photographs will be projected while Ms. Wright sings on Friday. Ms. Allen composed a song to accompany the images.

“I first and foremost view this as an evening of music, centered on this idea of a woman’s journey, the span of a life,” Ms. Weems said recently as she and Ms. Allen dined in an Italian restaurant in the West Village.

“The journey is from your first feeling of emotion and love, the birth of your children, growing old,” she said. She and Ms. Allen are both in their 50s. They have known each other more than a decade and have worked together before.

Ms. Weems, tall and ebullient with a dash of curly hair, is perhaps best known for her 1990 project “Kitchen Table Series.” It deployed text and images to show a woman (Ms. Weems herself) sitting at the same kitchen table at various points in her emotional life.

More recently, her 2009 video project “Afro-chic” explored 1960s pop culture, concentrating on younger women. Ms. Weems’s 1995-96 project “From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried,” part of the permanent collection at the Museum of Modern Art, is a layered work consisting of about 30 representations of African-Americans in the history of American photography. They are accompanied by text that explores the history from Ms. Weems’s perspective, creating a counternarrative to the way the images were often intended.

In the Celebrate Brooklyn! project, “the images will inform the performance,” said Ms. Allen, a soulful, post-bop pianist whom Ben Ratliff of The New York Times recently called “one of the more important jazz musicians of the last 25 years” and whose album “Flying Toward the Sound” made several “best of” lists for 2010. She is shorter and quieter than Ms. Weems, her face framed by locks.

While the overall structure of the show has been mostly sketched out, there will be plenty of improvisation as things get cooking, the women said. Sometimes the three screens will form a triptych or linger on Ms. Allen’s hands on the keyboard. Look for Ms. Allen and Ms. Rushen to
perform a version of “Que Sera Sera” and for Ms. Allen’s contemporary arrangement of the
spiritual “Oh, Freedom,” to be sung by Afro Blue. Images on the three screens will shift between
video projections and the live action onstage.

The staged images of men and women that Ms. Weems created at the Lower East Side theater will
be there too. They are intended as explorations of the nature of love, desire and female identity,
examining women’s relationships to men, children and, most important, to themselves, she said.
For example, the images show women looking at themselves and one another in mirrors or
approaching a man who looks away.

“When everyone in the audience pick up every nuance of the music or the images?” Ms. Weems
asked. “Maybe not, but enough will, and we are excited about presenting this to an audience in
Prospect Park.

“Geri is more introspective; I’m more visual and animated,” she continued. “I think those qualities
are what we bring to the evening — the deep introspection on one hand, and this level of visual
noise and visual sensuousness on the other.”

Ms. Weems, who is married and has an adult daughter, lives in Syracuse and Brooklyn. A single
mother, Ms. Allen lives in New Jersey, with a hectic schedule that includes touring, caring for two
teenagers (a third child is grown) and teaching music at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
The women mostly worked apart after an initial residency at Mass MoCA last year to jump-start the
project.

It helped that the two had collaborated before. In 2009 Ms. Weems created an art film called
“Refractions: Flying Toward the Sound,” which explored Ms. Allen’s life as part of a larger look at
women’s lives. The film uses Ms. Allen’s composition “Flying Toward the Sound,” a concert-length
piano suite with pieces inspired by Cecil Taylor, McCoy Tyner and Herbie Hancock. Ms. Allen
wrote the piece while on a Guggenheim fellowship. In turn, Ms. Weems’s film projections
accompanied Ms. Allen’s concert performances of “Flying.”

“Slow Fade” was commissioned by Bric Arts Media Brooklyn, the festival producers, as part of a
mission that includes bringing artists not usually associated with free festivals to Prospect Park,
said Rachel Chanoff, the artistic director of Celebrate Brooklyn!

Ms. Allen and Ms. Weems have been established artists for years but they continue to come into
their own. The first major museum retrospective of Ms. Weems’s work — some 225 photographs,
videos and installations — begins on Sept. 21 at the Frist Center for the Visual Arts in Nashville. It
will travel to the Portland Art Museum in Oregon, the Cleveland Museum of Art and the Guggenheim Museum in New York.

“In Weems’s video work the scores are an integral part, and this festival is a way for the viewer to have an immediate, all-sensory experience in an unexpected way,” said Kathryn Delmez, the curator of the Frist retrospective.

Ms. Allen, known for her collaborations, has worked with a glossy roster of musicians that includes Betty Carter, Ornette Coleman, Charlie Haden and Ravi Coltrane. Her new trio with Ms. Carrington, who is in her 40s, and Ms. Spalding, who is 27, showcases her with a younger generation. Ms. Carrington’s album “Mosaic” (with various artists, including Ms. Allen) was awarded the 2011 Grammy for best jazz vocal album of the year. Mr. Chestnut can be heard on the album “Geri Allen and Timeline Live,” along with the bassist Kenny Davis and the drummer Kassa Overall, who will both perform on Friday.

Although “Slow Fade” begins through “the lenses of a black cultural experience, ultimately, it’s about the experiences of all women,” Ms. Weems said.

Mr. Chestnut, 28, speaking the other day, said, “I see it as just a celebration of this history — African-American jazz, tapping, as well as a tribute to women.”

At a recent rehearsal, at Ms. Allen’s suggestion, Ms. Weems read some Harriet Tubman quotations as part of the evening.

“I had no one to welcome me to this world of freedom,” Ms. Weems read in her husky, melodious voice.

Ms. Weems then told a story about how Tubman left her husband behind in one of her Underground Railroad excursions. Returning to find him with another woman, Ms. Weems said, Tubman simply asked the other woman to join her in escaping bondage.

Ms. Allen and Ms. Weems exchanged a knowing high five.

“Slow Fade to Black” is Friday night at 8 at the Prospect Park Bandshell, Prospect Park West and Ninth Street, Park Slope, Brooklyn; $3 suggested donation; (718) 683-5600, bricartsmedia.org.
CARRIE MAE WEEMS
SEPTEMBER 7, 2012 – MAY 26, 2013

CARRIE MAE WEEMS

Lincoln, Lonnie and Me – A Story in 5 Parts
video projection on mylar (duration: 18 minutes)
2012

Part One – Lincoln
  Tap – Tap
  Gestures and Snow
  Lincoln – Historical Address

Part Two – Lonnie
  A Question of Management
  He’s Scared, I’m Scared

Part Three – Me
  I Know You
  A Woman Soon
Carrie Mae Weems has developed a complex body of art that uses photographs, text, fabric, audio, digital images, installation, and video to investigate family relationships, gender roles, the histories of racism, sexism, class, and various political systems. Her deep explorations of these issues have been exhibited at major institutions throughout the world. Weems earned a BFA from the California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, and a MFA from UC, San Diego, continuing her studies in the Graduate Program in Folklore at UC, Berkeley.

Visit the artist’s website at carriemaeweems.net
Enticing special exhibits await at metro Detroit museums

By Mark Stryker
Detroit Free Press Arts Writer

Attendance at museums spikes during the holiday season, and it's no secret why: With many folks on vacation and households full of families and friends, entertainment options are at a premium. Besides, you can't sit around eating 24 hours a day. (No arguments, please.)

As usual, metro Detroit museums are well-stocked with special exhibitions to take you through the New Year. From exquisite Fabergé eggs to contemporary photography to skyscrapers made of Legos, there are a lot of items on the menu. The options are particularly rich this year with the $40-million Broad Museum of Art at Michigan State University now open, the renovated Detroit Historical Museum back on line and the newly incorporated Michigan Science Center preparing to open Wednesday.

Here's a summary of notable special exhibitions. Keep in mind that most museums also have permanent collections on view,

Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History

"Visions of Our 44th President"

Ambitiously conceived, this exhibition explores the meaning and metaphor of Barack Obama as America's first black president. Organized by guest curator Ashley Whitfield, the premise is fascinating: Forty-four artists across the country were given an identical colorless bust of Obama and the freedom to create whatever they wanted. The show is the Wright Museum's first that will travel to other museums and libraries -- a milestone.

Many of the pieces are exuberantly painted, hagiographic expressions of joy and pride, but the most valuable dig into issues of identity. Joyce Owens' layered paint and dotted lines suggest a mask, evoking W.E.B. Du Bois' ideas of double-consciousness. Tatyana Fazlalizadeh's "Is He Black Enough?" finds the president's facial tone gradually shifting from pitch black to lighter brown; the title conjures up criticism Obama has faced from some blacks while also referencing the pride or fear that the idea of blackness sparks in others.

The stand-out is Carrie Mae Weems' multilayered mixed-media piece. The viewer dons headphones to hear a narrator expressing views of Obama from across the political spectrum with Barber's "Adagio for Strings" in the background. A video stream manifests these literal projections onto the bust of Obama -- he's Lincoln, the Joker, Hitler, Alfred E. Neuman of Mad magazine, a minstrel in blackface. It's a powerful and provocative piece. (Through Aug. 4)

• Also on view: "Moving to His Own Beat -- Fela: The Man, the Movement, the Music" and "Pathways to Freedom in the Americas: Shared Experiences between Michigan and Mexico."

9 a.m.-5 p.m. Tue.-Sat., 1-5 p.m. Sun. 315 E. Warren, Detroit. 313-494-5800. thewright.org. $8, $5 ages 62+ and 3-12, free ages 2 and younger. Closed Christmas and New Year's Day.
Secretary Clinton Hails 50 Years of Art as "Tool of Diplomacy"

By Lauren Monsen | Staff Writer | 30 November 2012

Washington — For half a century, visitors to U.S. embassies and consulates around the world have enjoyed works by American artists that transcend boundaries of geography, culture and language, thanks to the U.S. Department of State’s Art in Embassies (AIE) program.

Created to promote deeper cultural understanding through sharing art, the AIE program — which marks its 50th anniversary in 2012 — selects and displays artwork purchased or borrowed for embassies, consulates and ambassadors' residences.

On November 30, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton hosted a luncheon at the State Department to recognize AIE’s achievements and to honor five artists who have demonstrated an enduring commitment to the AIE mission: Jeff Koons, Cai Guo-Qiang, Shahzia Sikander, Kiki Smith and Carrie Mae Weems.

Three of the five artists are U.S.-born; Cai was born in China and Sikander was born in Pakistan. Both Cai and Sikander now live in New York.

Praising the AIE program as “an internationally recognized leader in cultural diplomacy,” Clinton said that “today, there are more than 10,000 works hanging or standing or being exhibited in some way, depending on the medium, in more than 200 [U.S.] overseas missions.”

Citing public-private partnerships “between government and business, between civil society and academia” that help support AIE, she thanked donors and other partners for their generosity. Support for AIE’s mission is vital, she added, because art helps tell America’s story and explains who Americans are to audiences across the globe.

“Let me just take a minute to explain why this is such an important cause for me personally...
and for our country,” Clinton said. “Starting when I was first lady, ... I saw the importance of conveying who we were as Americans in as many different venues and using as many different approaches as we could muster. And I have seen the results from my extensive travels now for more than 20 years.”

Advancing U.S. values and interests sometimes requires old-fashioned diplomacy, such as meetings with foreign leaders, or using new technology to reach out to people and “give them a voice,” she said. “But art is also a tool of diplomacy. It is one that reaches beyond governments, past all of the official conference rooms and the presidential palaces, to connect with people all over the world. And that’s the art we are celebrating this afternoon, along with the luminous talents of our honorees and their contributions to the artistic landscape of our nation and to our diplomacy.”

During the luncheon, Clinton presented the State Department’s first Medals of Arts to Koons, Cai, Sikander, Smith and Weems, recognizing the artists for their commitment to AIE and international cultural exchange.

“Each of them has delighted imaginations for decades,” Clinton said of the five artists. “And they truly are living testaments to the timeless and unending human urge to create and connect. So they provide us with another language of diplomacy, one that evokes our universal aspirations as human beings, our common challenges, and our responsibilities for thinking through and addressing the problems that we face together.”

A colorful Koons sculpture, on loan to the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, stands outdoors on the embassy grounds, while one of Cai’s works on paper is displayed inside the embassy. Some of Smith’s works can be seen at U.S. embassies in Istanbul and Mumbai, and Weems’ photographic pieces can be viewed at U.S. missions in Madagascar, Liberia and Mali. Sikander is working on a project for the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad in her native Pakistan.

“Just think of what each of these artists means for people yearning to express themselves — that young artist living under a repressive regime, that budding painter who’s not quite sure if he or she fits in,” Clinton said. “Now, not all of these people will ever meet any of these artists, but they will learn about them and themselves, maybe even know something of their spirit and tap into a deeper level of inspiration because they will encounter their works.

“I feel it every time I walk into an American embassy or consulate in any part of the world,” she said. “And I hear so many people who visit our missions comment on the art. And, of course, the Americans who live and work there are the most grateful of all.”

In addition to providing and installing art for U.S. missions worldwide, AIE fosters cultural exchange by arranging lectures and workshops by American artists overseas. The AIE program also exhibits American art alongside works by host-country artists and encourages U.S. artists to go abroad and engage with local cultures.

To learn more about AIE and other events commemorating the program’s 50th anniversary,
Secretary Clinton Hails 50 Years of Art as "Tool of Diplomacy" | IIP Digital

visit the AIE website.

KEYWORDS: U.S. State Department Art in Embassies program, cultural diplomacy, cultural exchange, Jeff Koons, Cai Guo-Qiang, Shahzia Sikander, Kiki Smith, Carrie Mae Weems, State Department Medal of Arts, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton

TRANSLATED: English

SHARE Delicious Digg reddit Facebook StumbleUpon Twitter

MORE COVERAGE

Clinton at Art in Embassies 50th Anniversary Luncheon

U.S. Embassy in Beijing Honors American and Chinese Art

This site is managed by the U.S. Department of State. External links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views or privacy policies contained therein.
Snapshots from Miami

Some things we saw at the Basel art fair (and beyond)

This is not a Duchamp

Undated Man Ray drawing and 1965 Richard Pettibone at the stand of Dada expert and Duchamp biographer Francis Naumann. There were a few Duchamps there too.

This is not a Duchamp either

At Jack Shainman, Carrie Mae Weems riffs on Duchamp’s creepy last sculpture, plaster model of a naked woman in front of a waterfall, visible through a peephole in her permanent resting place at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.