

# FRAENKEL

49 GEARY STREET SAN FRANCISCO 94108 415 981 2661

For immediate release:



## CARRIE MAE WEEMS *WITNESS*

September 9 – October 23 , 2021

49 Geary Street, San Francisco

*"Art has saved my life on a regular basis."* — Carrie Mae Weems

Fraenkel Gallery is pleased to present a survey of the work of Carrie Mae Weems examining her extraordinary achievement over four decades. Focusing on history, identity, and the structure of power, *WITNESS* traces Weems's use of performance and her exploration of the inscription of authority in architecture and photography. Weems's inaugural show at the gallery highlights many of her most important bodies of work and celebrates the gallery's recently announced representation of the artist.

The exhibition begins with early documentary-style photographs from the series *Family Pictures and Stories*, depicting Weems's own multigenerational family in a joyful and nuanced vision of Black family life. In her

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iconic *Kitchen Table* series, Weems cast herself as a woman at the emotional center of an imagined domestic world, staging photographs that build a rich fictional narrative around her role as a lover, friend, and mother.

In the series *Museums*, *American Monuments*, and *Roaming*, Weems photographed herself in front of institutions and public spaces around the world, dressed in black and facing away from the camera. Weems has described the character she depicts as a witness whose presence invites the viewer to consider how power is inscribed in these spaces and which groups are welcomed and represented in them.

Weems has often used performance marked by highly constructed artifice to explore how history is remembered and created. In *Constructing History*, Weems worked with college students to re-enact moments of social upheaval from the 1960s, building stage-like photographic tableaux. In the video *People of a Darker Hue*, Weems addresses more recent history, pairing footage of buoyant city life and solemn protest with a stark, highly stylized vision of oppression, in commemoration of Black men and women killed by police.

In *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried*, one of Weems's best known and most powerful series, photographs of enslaved men and women and other Black subjects, collected from museum and university archives and other sources, are tinted red and overlaid with heartbreaking and poetic texts. Using important images in American photography to explore not only race, but rather race through the lens of American photographic history, the series takes on both photography and the racist structures it has supported.

Carrie Mae Weems (b. 1953) has been featured in major exhibitions at museums including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; and Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo, Seville, Spain. This winter, the Park Avenue Armory will host an exhibition and convocation curated by Weems, and in 2022 her work will be exhibited in a solo show at Württembergischer Kunstverein in Stuttgart, Germany, and in a two-person exhibition with Dawoud Bey at the Grand Rapids Art Museum. She has received numerous awards, grants, and fellowships, including a MacArthur "Genius" grant, the U.S. State Department's Medal of Arts, the Joseph Hazen Rome Prize Fellowship from the American Academy in Rome, NEA grants, the Louis Comfort Tiffany Award, and the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's Lifetime Achievement Award, among others. Her work is in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; and The Tate Modern, London.

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Image: Carrie Mae Weems, *Untitled (Playing harmonica)*, 1990-1999

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