

WHITNEY

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Press Release

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KARA WALKER'S FIRST AMERICAN MUSEUM SURVEY TO OPEN AT THE WHITNEY ON OCTOBER 11, 2007



Kara Walker, *You Do*, 1993/1994
Collections of Peter Norton and Eileen Harris Norton, Santa Monica, California
Photo courtesy the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York

The first full-scale American museum survey of the work of artist Kara Walker arrives at the Whitney Museum of American Art on October 11, 2007, where it will remain on view through February 3, 2008. Organized by Philippe Vergne, Deputy Director and Chief Curator, and Yasmil Raymond, Assistant Curator, at the Walker Art Center, in close collaboration with the artist, *Kara Walker: My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love* features works ranging from the artist's signature black-paper silhouettes to her acclaimed recent film animations. The Whitney installation will be overseen by Chrissie Iles, the Museum's Anne & Joel Ehrenkranz Curator.

Kara Walker is among the most provocative and prolific American artists of her generation. Over the past decade, she has gained national and international recognition for her room-size tableaux depicting historical narratives, haunted by racism, sexuality, violence, and subjugation, which she makes using the genteel 18th-century art of cut-paper silhouettes. Set in the antebellum American South, Walker's compositions play off stereotypes and portray, often grotesquely, life on the plantation, where masters and slaves engage in a profoundly unsettling historical struggle.

Over the years the artist has used drawing, painting, colored-light projections, writing, shadow puppetry, and, most recently, film animation to narrate her tales of romance, sadism, oppression, and liberation. Walker's scenarios put an end to conventional readings of a cohesive national American history and expose the collective, and ongoing, psychological injury caused by the tragic legacy of slavery. Her work leads viewers through an aesthetic experience that evokes a critical understanding of the past and proposes an examination of contemporary racial and gender stereotypes.

Walker's visual epics systematically and critically walk a line—the “color line,” to quote W.E.B. Du Bois—that moves us from the antebellum South to an analysis of the sustaining economic, social, and individual power structures still in place today. Deploying an acidic sense of humor, she examines the dialectic of pleasure and danger, guilt and fulfillment, desire and fear, race and class. She has said, “The black subject in the present tense is the container for specific pathologies from the past and it is continuously growing and feeding off those maladies.”

Organized deliberately as a narrative, the exhibition articulates the parallel shifts in Kara Walker's visual language and subject matter: from a critical analysis of the history of slavery as a microcosm of American history through the structure of romantic literature and Hollywood film to a revised history of Western modernity and its relationship to the notion of “Primitivism.”

About the Artist

Born in 1969 in Stockton, California, Kara Walker received her BFA from the Atlanta College of Art in 1991 and her MFA from Rhode Island School of Design in 1994. Since that time,

she has created more than 30 room-size installations and hundreds of drawings and watercolors, and has been the subject of more than 40 solo exhibitions. She is the recipient of numerous grants and fellowships, including the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Achievement Award (1997) and, most recently, the Deutsche Bank Prize (2004) and the Larry Aldrich Award (2005). She was the United States representative for the 25th International São Paulo Biennial in Brazil (2002). She currently lives in New York, where she is associate professor of visual arts at Columbia University, New York.

Catalogue

To accompany the exhibition, the Walker Art Center has published a 418-page illustrated catalogue containing critical essays by scholars and cultural critics on the myriad social, racial, and gender issues present in Kara Walker's work by exhibition curator Philippe Vergne; cultural and literary historian Sander L. Gilman; art historian and critic Thomas McEvilley; art historian Robert Storr; and poet and novelist Kevin Young. The publication features more than 150 four-color images of the artist's work, a complete exhibition history and bibliography as well as an illustrated lexicon of the recurring themes and motifs in the artist's most influential installations by Yasmil Raymond. Kara Walker has contributed a 36-page visual essay to the catalogue, which is distributed by D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, Inc.

After its premiere at the Walker Art Center (February 17–May 13, 2007), the exhibition is traveling to the ARC/Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris (June 20–September 9, 2007), before coming to the Whitney; it will also be seen at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (March 2 - June 8, 2008).

Kara Walker: My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love is organized by Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, and is made possible by generous support from the Henry Luce Foundation, the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc., the Lannan Foundation, the Peter Norton Family Foundation, Linda and Lawrence Perlman, and Marge and Irv Weiser. Additional support is provided by Jean-Pierre and Rachel Lehmann.

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ABOUT THE WHITNEY MUSEUM

The Whitney Museum of American Art is the leading advocate of 20th- and 21st-century American art. Founded in 1930, the Museum is regarded as the preeminent collection of American art and includes major works and materials from the estate of Edward Hopper, the largest public collection of works by Alexander Calder, Louise Nevelson, and Lucas Samaras, as well as significant works by Jasper Johns, Donald Judd, Agnes Martin, Bruce Nauman, Georgia O'Keeffe, Claes Oldenburg, Kiki Smith, and Andy Warhol, among other artists. With its history of exhibiting the most promising and influential American artists and provoking intense critical and public debate, the Whitney's signature show, the Biennial, has become the most important survey of the state of contemporary art in America today.

Current and Upcoming Exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art:

Gordon Matta-Clark	Through June 3, 2007
Taryn Simon	Through June 24, 2007
Lincoln Kirstein	Through August 26, 2007
Summer of Love: Art of the Psychedelic Era	Through September 16, 2007
Rudolf Stingel	June 28-October 14, 2007
Kara Walker	October 11, 2007-February 3, 2008
Lawrence Weiner	November 15, 2007-February 10, 2008
Modernisms	Through November 2007
Demuth's Late Paintings of Lancaster	February 23-April 27, 2008
2008 Whitney Biennial	Opens March 2008

The Whitney Museum is located at 945 Madison Avenue, New York City. Museum hours are: Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Friday from 1 p.m. to 9 p.m., closed Monday and Tuesday. For information, please call 1-800 WHITNEY or visit www.whitney.org

Current and Upcoming Exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art at Altria:

Matthew Brannon Through August 26, 2007
The Whitney Museum of American Art at Altria is located at 120 Park Avenue at 42nd Street. Gallery hours: Monday through Friday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Thursdays 11 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Sculpture Court Hours: Monday through Saturday from 7:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m., Sundays and holidays 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. The Whitney Museum at Altria is funded by Altria Group, Inc. Admission is free. Free gallery talks are offered every Wednesday and Friday at 1:00 p.m. For further information, please call (917) 663-2453.