



Art | Basel | Miami Beach
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Lorraine O'Grady

Art Is . . .

Art Basel Miami Beach 2009, Art Nova

Booth H27

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For Art Basel Miami Beach 2009, Alexander Gray Associates is proud to present a solo exhibition of veteran performance artist, Feminist theorist and cultural critic Lorraine O'Grady. Central to the presentation is the premiere of a new body of photographic works, which documents O'Grady's 1983 Harlem performance.

Art Is . . ., a joyful performance in Harlem's African-American Day Parade, September 1983, was, from the point of view of the work's connection with its audience, O'Grady's most immediately successful piece. Its impetus had been to answer the challenge of a non-artist acquaintance in the Heresies Feminist collective, that "avant-garde art doesn't have anything to do with black people." O'Grady's response was to put avant-garde art into the largest Black space she could think of, the million-plus viewers of the parade, to disprove her friend's presumptions. The performance was undertaken in a spirit of elation which carried over through the day; unlike previous works which had critiqued the art world from within, this piece was to be about art, not about the art world. Rather than an invasion, it was more a crashing of the party. The 9 x 15-foot antique-styled gold frame mounted on the gold-skirted parade float moved slowly up Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard, framing everything it passed as art, and the 15 young actors and dancers dressed in white framed viewers with empty gold picture frames to shouts of "Frame me, make me art!" and "That's right, that's what art is, WE're the art!"

The timelessness, elegance and simplicity of O'Grady's gesture belies the complex readings conveyed in the resulting images. In 2009, the work takes a photographic form; both independently and as a group, the images convey the motion and spirit of the action itself. Today, they are time capsules of Harlem's community before the impact of the crack epidemic and real estate gentrification, a reminder of the politics and power of art making, and the joy in experiencing art itself.

Lorraine O'Grady's work as an artist, writer, and critic presents hybridized notions of aesthetics and identity to re-diagram the politics of diaspora. Born in Boston in 1934 to West Indian parents, O'Grady came to art late, not making her first works until the late 1970s, after multifaceted careers ranging from an intelligence analyst for the U.S. government to a rock critic at the *Village Voice*. Ultimately, her broad background contributed to a distanced and critical view of the art world when she entered it and to an unusually eclectic attitude toward art-making. Since the early 1980s, O'Grady has challenged racial and sexist ideologies in performance and photo installations that combine both opposition to philosophies of division and exclusion, and humanist studies of women throughout history.

Unlike more prolific artists of her generation, O'Grady is an artist who selectively produces works of quality at a gradual rate. The influence of her seminal works is undisputed; her performance work, *MilleBourgeois Noire* (1980–1983) is considered an important work in the history of Feminist art, and was an entry point in the landmark exhibition, *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*. Her photo installation, *Miscegenated Family Album* (1980/1994) has been widely reproduced and is included in the permanent collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, Brooklyn Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, and the Wadsworth Atheneum.