

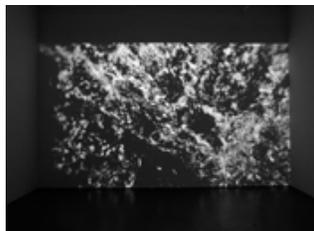
NYC Gallery Shows
THE NEW YORK LIST, 4/27/2012
by Emily Nathan



Lorraine O'Grady, "New Worlds," installation view, 2012, Alexander Gray Associates, New York



Lorraine O'Grady
The Fir-Palm
1991/2012
Alexander Gray Associates, New York



Lorraine O'Grady
Landscape (Western Hemisphere) (installation view)
2011
Alexander Gray Associates, New York

Lorraine O'Grady: New Worlds

Alexander Gray Associates
508 West 26 Street # 15
Apr. 11-May 19, 2012

For her second show at Alexander Gray Associates, the legendary feminist performance artist and photographer Lorraine O'Grady (b. 1934), who trained in economics and worked for years as a rock journalist, focuses on the idea of the hybrid -- cultural, theoretical, biological. Taken together, the three works included in the show, a 19-minute film and two photomontages from the artist's iconic "Body Language" series.

initiated in 1991 and re-formatted this year, seem to insist that our contemporary world is shaped and inflected by miscegenation far more powerfully than we might like to acknowledge.

To that end, each work straddles artificial divides of genre and type and resists easy categorization. In *The Fir-Palm*, a literally hybridized tree -- part Caribbean palm, part New England fir -- emerges from a smooth black ground against a cloud-rolled sky. The photomontage looks like a landscape, until you detect the sinuous, sensual curves of a black female torso where you thought you saw only earth. In the photo-diptych *The Clearing*, whose composition is inspired by Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, an interracial couple makes love outside in one panel, elevated above the ground by ecstasy, and lies together awkwardly in the other, the female vacant and resigned, the male aggressive, masked by a skull and draped in chain-mail. Both scenes seem to give some account of colonial history, and each is equally dubious.

Lastly, O'Grady's moody, atmospheric film *Landscapes* transforms her own strands of coarse, silver-streaked hair into a fluttering cosmic abstraction. Set to an occasionally deafening soundtrack of gusts of wind, the camera focuses on these bundles of organic fiber as they dance and flip, tossed about mercilessly. Shot up close and without context of any kind, the work is entrancing and hypnotic, a visual ode to communion with nature.