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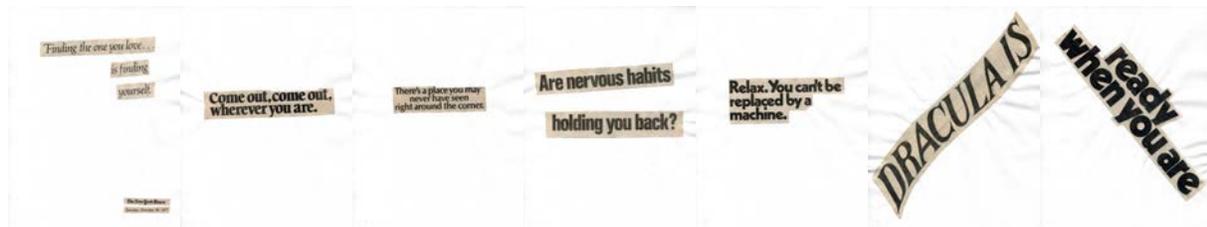
Lorraine O'Grady

May 28 – June 27, 2015

"In my work I keep trying to yoke together my underlying concerns as a member of the human species with my concerns as a black woman in America... because I don't see how history can be divorced from ontology and still produce meaningful political solutions." – Lorraine O'Grady

The exhibition focuses on two early series that are foundations for O'Grady's performance and critical development, representing two approaches to finding one's personal and artistic self. The exhibition debuts photographs of O'Grady's performance work, *Rivers, First Draft* (1982/2015) and features selections from her first collages *Cutting Out The New York Times* (1977/2015). The works reveal the artist's nuanced perspectives on art history—specifically Dada and Surrealism—and the topical issues of the late-1970s and early 1980s, when Multiculturalism and Feminism were articulated and tested in the art world. Typical for O'Grady's practice, complex theoretical concerns collide with the mining of family history, and the works from this period result in deeply personal portraits of the artist's community and values, taking form in New York—the city and its art world.

Ground Floor Gallery



Finding the one you love...is finding yourself, from "Cutting Out the New York Times," in 7 parts
11h x 55.09w in (11h x 7.87w in each part)

Cutting Out the New York Times, 1977/2015

Toner ink on adhesive paper
Edition of 8 with 1 AP

The series was created over twenty-six consecutive Sundays during the summer of 1977, resulting in twenty-six text-based images assembled from headlines and advertising tag-lines. In a private and performative gesture, O'Grady explains, "I would smooch the cut scraps around on the floor until a poem appeared." At that time, O'Grady was teaching the course "Futurist, Dada and Surrealist Literature" at the School of Visual Arts in New York, while simultaneously exploring alternative avenues of creative fulfillment and expression. Her interest lay in challenging the Dadaists' and Surrealists' embrace of the random and irrational as oppositional attitudes to rational Western society. O'Grady welcomed the random in order to expose and force meaning back into it, making instead "an effort to construct out of that random public language a private-self, to rescue a kind of rational madness from the irrational Western culture I felt inundated by."

The resulting works—digital color-prints of the original text—became a vital and transitional piece for O’Grady. She connects the piece to her personal history when she worked as an intelligence officer for the Departments of Labor and State in the years leading up to the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. Her job entailed reading ten newspapers a day, unedited transcripts of Cuban radio, and classified agent field reports. By the end, O’Grady states, “Language had melted into a gelatinous pool. It had collapsed for me.” Through *Cutting Out The New York Times* she investigated the potential of visual art through a linguistic mode. She viewed the creation of the poems as an aesthetic exercise, exploring a means of visual and performative expression beyond the purely linguistic. Relating the poems to Concrete Poetry, O’Grady creates their visuality through the linear and syncopating placement of the cut-outs. The juxtapositions of size and style between the typefaces add to the collages’ visual rhythm. These poems present a highly personal narrative that touches on themes such as love, family, womanhood, hybridity, race, and self, subjects that would unfold in O’Grady’s subsequent performances and artworks.



I Heard My Sister Speak My Name
88.19h x 7.87w inches, in 8 parts



Just the two of us
11h x 86.6w inches, in 8 parts



Missing Persons
11.02h x 102.36w inches, in 13 parts



The Renaissance Man is Back in Business
11.02h x 86.61w inches, in 11 parts

Second Floor Gallery

Rivers, First Draft, 1982/2015

Digital C-print from Kodachrome 35mm slides in 48 parts

Printed in Kodak Professional Endura Premier Glossy Paper

Horizontal: 16h x 20w in

Vertical: 20h x 16w in

Edition of 8 with 2 AP

Rivers, First Draft (1982/2015) includes forty-eight images of the 1982 performance O'Grady created for the public art program, "Art Across the Park" curated by Gylbert Coker, Horace Brockington, and Jennifer Manfredi. *Rivers, First Draft* was performed in the Loch, a northern section of Central Park, on August 18. O'Grady envisioned the performance as a "collage-in-space," with different actions taking place simultaneously on two sides of a stream and further up a hill. She describes its structure as a "three-ring circus," in which multiple temporalities and micro-narratives coexist and speak to O'Grady's life experiences. The narratives that compete for attention present multiple realities with the aim of uniting two different heritages, the Caribbean and New England, and three different ages and aspects of O'Grady's self, family dynamics, and artistic identity. It involved seventeen performers, including O'Grady, with precisely designed costumes and props. The characters were identified by their vibrantly colored clothing, such as the Woman in Red (O'Grady's adult self), the Woman in White (O'Grady's mother), the Teenager in Magenta (O'Grady's adolescent self), and the Young Man in Green. Serving as *tableaux vivants* of O'Grady's past are the Girl in White, who recites Latin grammar government lessons through a megaphone, the Woman in White, who disinterestedly grates coconuts throughout the entire performance, and the Nantucket Memorial, a symbol of O'Grady's New England upbringing. In the 1970s reality of the Woman in Red, she navigates her entrance into the New York art world through the characters of the Debauchees (who represent her life in the realm of pop culture as a rock critic), Art Snobs, and Black Male Artists in Yellow. A decisive moment in the piece is when the Woman in Red spray-paints a white stove red, shown in the photograph *The Woman in Red starts painting the stove her own color*. This action not only signifies the moment O'Grady begins her artistic transformation, but also when she becomes her own person outside of her mother's indoctrination, aligning her own narrative with the Feminist discourse of the time. The ending sequence of *Rivers, First Drafts* unites O'Grady's childhood, adolescent, and adult selves as the characters walk down the stream together. For her, this scene represents the moment before she performed her first artwork, the now iconic *Mlle Bourgeois Noire*.

The piece was performed only once, for a small invited audience of friends from Just Above Midtown (JAM) gallery and the occasional passersby. In the early 1980s, as O'Grady embarked on a new career as an artist, she found a supportive and challenging community in JAM. Headed by Linda Goode-Bryant, artists such as David Hammons, Senga Nengudi, Maren Hassinger, Tyrone Mitchell, and Dawoud Bey congregated around JAM, as well as the art historians Lowery Stokes Sims, Judith Wilson, and Kellie Jones. O'Grady explains, "For me, doing *Rivers* in the context of Just Above Midtown was a unique art-making moment, one when the enabling audience—the audience which allows the work to come into existence and to which the work speaks—and the audience that consumes the work were one and the same." In addition, she cast JAM artists George Mingo and Fred Wilson as characters in the performance. Having taken place in the daylight, the lush green sun-dappled nature of the Loch was a prominent backdrop, adding to the conglomeration of saturated color and sound. O'Grady's succinct selection and cropping of images reflect this simultaneity and the dream-like quality of the original performance. Only Kodachrome 35 mm slides of the piece survive to memorialize the event. In collaboration with Kodak, the 2015 manifestation of *Rivers, First Draft* captures the rich colors and deep contrasts of the performance, achieved with analog and digital technology and photographic paper from Kodak's headquarters in Rochester, NY.

Starting Northeast wall, left to right



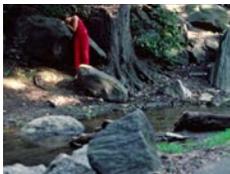
The Woman in White continues grating coconut



The Nantucket Memorial stands motionlessly in the stream



Two Art Snobs dissect who's who and what's what in the art world



The Teenager in Magenta stands depressed on the bank of the stream



The Young Man in Green enters the scene



A Little Girl with Pink Sash memorizes her Latin lesson



Their flirtation begins



As the Black Artists in Yellow work in their studio, the Debauchees enter at the top of the hill



The Young Man in Green makes love to the Teenager in Magenta



The Young Man prepares to leave, and the Teenager tries to hold on to him



The Debauchees dance to New Wave music with the Woman in Red following



The Woman in White grates coconut in her kitchen, with the fir-palm tree outside



The Debauchees dance down the hill, the Woman in Red falls further behind



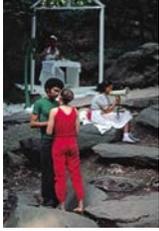
The Art Snobs briefly stop bantering



The Young Man pulls away



The Debauchees dance in place, and the Woman in Red catches up to them



The Young Man in Green rouses the Teenager from depression



The Nantucket Memorial blends into the granite and the stream



The Debauchees ignore the Woman in Red



The Teenager in Magenta sits alone with her headphones



The Woman in Gold rejects the Woman in Red



The Teenager curls up in a fetal position



The Art Snobs' chatter continues



The Woman in White eats coconut as she looks away from the action



The Woman in Red walks toward the studio of the Black Artists in Yellow



The Woman in Red goes to the Black Male Artists' door and the Debauchees dance back up the hill



The Woman in Red tries to join the Black Male Artists but is ejected by them



The Woman in Red hesitates outside after the Black Male Artists in Yellow eject her



The Debauchees intersect the Woman in Red, and the rape begins



The Artists in Yellow work on their projects as the Woman in Red struggles with the Debauchees



The Woman in Red begins to break away from the Debauchees



She descends to the stream where the white stove is standing



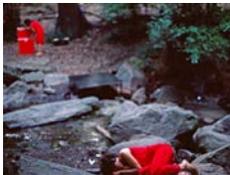
The Woman in Red starts painting the stove her own color



The stove becomes more and more red



The Woman in White works impassively



The Woman in Red cooks, and the Teenager in Magenta lies curled across the stream



The Woman in Red, on a bed jutting into the water, skims an accordion-folded album of photos



As if from its pages, the Nude Swimmer emerges from the water and fondles her



The Art Snobs comment for the last time



The Woman in Red returns to her album, and the Nantucket Memorial comes to life



She is absorbed, but the Memorial insists



The Nantucket Memorial guides the Woman in Red to the other side of the stream



The Woman, the Teenager in Magenta, and the Little Girl in Pink Sash steady each other's footing



The three enter the stream



Preceded by the Nantucket Memorial, the three make their way down



The Woman in Red, the Teenager in Magenta, and the Little Girl in Pink Sash wade the stream



They exit the bridge tunnel at The Loch's end



The Woman in the White Kitchen tastes her coconut