

Alexander Gray Associates

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Lorraine O'Grady: *New Worlds*

April 11 - May 19, 2012



The Fir-Palm, 1991, silver gelatin print (photomontage)
50h x 40w in (127h x 101.6w cm)

Alexander Gray Associates is pleased to present Lorraine O'Grady's second exhibition with the Gallery, entitled *New Worlds*. On view is the artist's recent video work, *Landscape (Western Hemisphere)*, 2011, in conversation with two photomontages from her iconic *BodyGround* series, conceived in 1991 and re-formatted in 2012.

The Fir-Palm (1991), a black-and-white photomontage, depicts a hybrid New England fir–Caribbean palm tree sprouting from a female torso, clouds looming in the background. With this legible symbolism, O'Grady—born and raised in Boston to Jamaican parents—questions the nature of desire, identity, and stability in a society rooted in physical, psychological, and cultural hybridity.

Where *The Fir-Palm* identifies a new Western landscape, O'Grady's photo-diptych *The Clearing* confronts the old one through narrative. The left panel presents an image of an inter-racial couple, ecstatic and intertwined, floating in the sky. Two children play in the forest clearing below, a pile of clothing topped with a gun laying haphazardly nearby. In the right panel, the Black woman's vacant body is stretched out on the grass, and her White partner is masked by a skull and draped in a chain-mail vest. No children are in sight. Through its subtitle—or *Cortez and La Malinche, Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings, N. and Me*—O'Grady reminds viewers that this most basic Colonial interaction, in all its pleasure, brutality, and complexity, paved the way for the Western hemisphere as it is known today.

O'Grady's amalgamation of the colonized body and landscape reaches its zenith in *Landscape (Western Hemisphere)*, in which O'Grady's own hair is transformed into landscape. For the duration of the video's 18 minutes, the artist's hair waves, rustles, and bends to the wind, against a subtle audio collage of sounds from the hemisphere's natural and urban landscapes.

"My attitude about hybridity," says O'Grady, "is that it is essential to understanding what is happening here. People's reluctance to acknowledge it is part of the problem.... The argument for embracing the Other is more realistic than what is usually argued for, which is an idealistic and almost romantic maintenance of difference. But I don't mean interracial sex literally. I'm really advocating for the kind of miscegenated thinking that's needed to deal with what we've already created here."

In addition to her work as a visual artist, O'Grady has also made innovative contributions to cultural criticism with her writings, including the now canonical article, *Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity*. O'Grady's work is included in *La Triennale*, "Intense Proximity," curated by Okwui Enwezor (2012) in Paris, France. On April 23 and May 9, 2012, O'Grady performs with Adam Pendleton at the Museum of Modern Art, New York and at the *Whitney Biennial* in New York, respectively. Additionally, she joins in conversation with Kellie Jones for the Performa Institute at NYU Tisch School of the Arts, New York (April 25, 2012), and with Linda Goode-Bryant in concurrence with the exhibition *Shift* at the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (May 10, 2012).

O'Grady was featured in 2011 in *Rose O'Grady* at Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, and in the *Prospect.2 New Orleans* biennial and was selected for the 2010 *Whitney Biennial* as well as for that year's *Manifesta 8*, Murcia, Spain. In 2007, she was in the landmark exhibition, *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, organized by Connie Butler for the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA, and was a resident artist at Artpace San Antonio, TX. O'Grady has received numerous awards, most recently an Art Matters grant, and in 2011 was named a United States Artists Rockefeller Fellow.

Alexander Gray Associates is a contemporary art gallery based in New York. The gallery has established a profile for high-quality exhibitions focused on mid-career artists who emerged in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Influential in political, social and cultural spheres, these artists are notable for creating work that crosses geographic borders, generational contexts and artistic disciplines. Gallery hours: Tuesday–Saturday, 11:00 AM – 6:00 PM.