

# barbican

## **Carrie Mae Weems: Reflections for Now**

Barbican Art Gallery, London

**22 June – 3 September 2023**

[www.barbican.org.uk/CarrieMaeWeems](http://www.barbican.org.uk/CarrieMaeWeems) #CarrieMaeWeems @barbicancentre



L: *Carrie Mae Weems*, portrait by Jerry Klineberg

R: Carrie Mae Weems, *Lincoln, Lonnie, and Me – A Story in 5 Parts* (detail) 2012 © Carrie Mae Weems, courtesy of the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York / Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin

Opening 22 June 2023, Barbican Art Gallery is proud to present the first major solo exhibition of **Carrie Mae Weems** in a UK institution. Widely considered to be one of the most influential American artists working today, Weems (b.1953) is celebrated for her exploration of cultural identity, power structures, desire, and social justice through a body of work that develops questioning narratives around race, gender, history, class and their systems of representation.

Highlighting her remarkably diverse and radical practice, this survey brings together an outstanding selection of photographic series, films, and installations spanning over three decades, many of which have never been seen before in the UK. Presenting the development of her unique poetic gaze and formal language from the early 1990s to the present day, this exhibition reflects on Weems's pioneering career. On display are works from her early iconic *Kitchen Table Series* (1990) which explores how power dynamics are articulated in the domestic sphere and the potential of the home as a space for resistance, to her acclaimed series *Roaming* (2006) and *Museums* (2016) where Weems's muse confronts architecture as the materialisation of political and cultural power. Her oeuvre challenges dominant ideologies and historical narratives created by and disseminated within science, architecture, photography, and mass media.

Activism is central to Weems's artistic practice, as she has stated:

***“My responsibility as an artist is to work, to sing for my supper, to make art, beautiful and powerful, that adds and reveals; to beautify the mess of a messy world, to heal the sick and feed the helpless; to shout bravely from the roof-tops and storm barricaded doors and voice the specifics of our historic moment.”***

Weems came to prominence in the early 1980s through photographic work that questions how the representation of the Black subject, particularly within the United States, has historically reproduced systemic racism and inequality. Highlight works in the exhibition include *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried* (1995–6), a series which appropriates 19th and 20th century photographs of African and African American people to underline how the representation of this diaspora has been historically reduced to a set of degrading stereotypes. These works are presented alongside more recent works such as *Constructing History* (2008), in which Weems

worked with college students to recreate landmark moments in twentieth century history to interrogate how they still affect our present, and *Lincoln, Lonnie, and Me* (2012), an installation that, inspired by the Pepper's Ghost theatres of the 19th century, examines how the collective traumas of the past are being constantly renegotiated.

The largest presentation of the artist's multi-disciplinary work in the UK to date, the exhibition also captures the performative and cinematic nature of Weems's artistic expression, featuring seven-chapter panoramic film *The Shape of Things* (2021) focusing on the current political climate and the consequences of a long-lasting history of structural oppression and violence in the US. Weems's lyrical sensibility encourages the viewer to move through the work and become a participant, to confront their own prejudices, and to claim history as their own.

Weems populates the gallery with images and sound, reflecting her lasting interests in language, rhythm, and music. Often inserting herself as a performer and narrator of history, the artist depicts the complexity of human experience across multiple communities. Weems's provocative and life-affirming approach to image making, developed over the course of her career, has been distinguished by her opposition to racial violence and all forms of oppression, and her commitment to radical social change.

The exhibition is accompanied by *Carrie Mae Weems: Reflections for Now*, the first publication devoted to the artist's writings. It will highlight Weems's influence as an intellectual, reflecting the dual nature of her career as an artist and activist. A public programme of events, including a programme of films in Barbican cinema, will also run throughout the course of the exhibition.

### **About the Artist**

Carrie Mae Weems was born in 1953 in Portland, Oregon, USA. She received her BFA from the California Institute of the Arts, Valencia (1981) and MFA in photography from the University of California, San Diego (1984).

Weems has received many awards, grants, and fellowships, including the prestigious Prix de Rome and The National Endowment of the Arts. In 2012, Weems was presented with one of the first Medal of Arts by the US Department of State in recognition of her long-time contributions to its Art in Embassies programme and cultural diplomacy. In 2013 Weems received the MacArthur "Genius" grant and the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's Lifetime Achievement Award.

She has participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions at major national and international museums, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Frist Center for Visual Art, Nashville, Tennessee; The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, and the Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo in Seville, Spain. Recent solo exhibitions include *The Shape of Things* (Park Avenue Armory, New York, 2021), *The Evidence of Things Not Seen* (Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart, 2022) and *A Great Turn in the Possible* (Fundación Mapfre, Foto Colectania and MACBA, Barcelona, 2022). Weems has been deeply committed to activism throughout the pandemic. Her public health campaign "Resist COVID /Take 6!" has been displayed in multiple locations to bring attention to the outsized impact of COVID-19 on Black, Latino, and Native American communities.

Weems was the first African American living artist to have a solo exhibition at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2014). Her work has been featured in important group exhibitions such as *Black Male, Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art* (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1994), and more recently in *Blue Black* (Pulitzer Arts Foundation, St. Louis, 2017); *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965-85* (Brooklyn Museum, NY, 2017); and *Grief and Grievance: Art and Mourning in America* (New Museum, New York, 2021).

Weems lives and works in Syracuse, New York, USA, and is represented by Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, and Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin.

## ENDS

### Notes to Editors

#### Press Information

For further information, images or to arrange interviews, please contact:

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#### Press images available online

A link to the image sheets can be found [here](#). Please contact the press team for images.

#### Barbican Press Room

All Barbican Centre press releases, news announcements and the Communication team's contact details are listed on our website at <https://www.barbican.org.uk/our-story/press-room/>

#### Tickets

Available to book here; <https://www.barbican.org.uk/CarrieMaeWeems>

#### Press Tickets

All press tickets will need to be booked 48 hours in advance by contacting a member of the Barbican's Visual Arts Press team. Our inbox is monitored Monday to Friday 10am-6pm. Please let us know if you have any access requirements. We look forward to welcoming you to the Barbican.

#### Public Information

Barbican Art Gallery

Silk Street, London, EC2Y 8DS

[Barbican.org.uk](http://Barbican.org.uk)

#### Opening Hours:

Saturday – Wednesday 10am - 6pm (last entry 5pm)

Thursday – Friday 10am - 8pm (last entry 7pm)

Bank holidays: Please check the website as opening times vary

#### Exhibition

*Carrie Mae Weems: Reflections for Now* is at Barbican Art Gallery from 22 June – 3 September 2023. The exhibition is co-curated by Raúl Muñoz de la Vega and Florence Ostende, assisted by Amber Li, with architectural design by Architecture Doing Place and graphic design by Shaz Madani Studio

#### Book

A richly illustrated book *Carrie Mae Weems: Reflections for Now* accompanies Weems' exhibitions at the Barbican and Kunstmuseum Basel (4th November 2023 – 17th March 2024) bringing together the artist's own writings, lectures, and conversations for the first time. Published by Hatje Cantz, it will be available from June 2023. £30 paperback (Barbican shop price £19.99).

## Events

A dynamic programme of events will accompany the exhibition. Check the website for full listings as they are updated: [www.barbican.org.uk/artgallery](http://www.barbican.org.uk/artgallery)

## About the Barbican

A world-class arts and learning organisation, the [Barbican](#) pushes the boundaries of all major art forms including dance, film, music, theatre and visual arts. Its creative learning programme further underpins everything it does. Over a million people attend events annually, hundreds of artists and performers are featured, and more than 700 [staff](#) work onsite. The architecturally renowned centre opened in 1982 and comprises the Barbican Hall, the Barbican Theatre, The Pit, Cinemas 1, 2 and 3, Barbican Art Gallery, a second gallery The Curve, public spaces, a library, the Lakeside Terrace, [a glasshouse conservatory](#), conference facilities and three restaurants. The City of London Corporation is the founder and principal funder of the Barbican Centre.

The Barbican is home to Resident Orchestra, [London Symphony Orchestra](#); Associate Orchestra, [BBC Symphony Orchestra](#); Associate Ensembles the [Academy of Ancient Music](#) and [Britten Sinfonia](#), Associate Producer [Serious](#), and Artistic Partner [Create](#). Our Artistic Associates include [Boy Blue](#), [Cheek by Jowl](#), Deborah Warner, [Drum Works](#) and [Michael Clark](#). The [Los Angeles Philharmonic](#) are the Barbican's International Orchestral Partner, and [Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra](#) are International Associate Ensemble.

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## Barbican Art Gallery and The Curve

Our visual arts programme embraces art, architecture, design, fashion, photography and film. Many of our exhibitions explore the interconnections between disciplines, periods and cultures, and aim to imagine the world in new ways. Designers, artists and architects are our collaborators in this process.

We invest in the artists of today and tomorrow; The Curve is one of the few galleries in London devoted to the commissioning of new work. Through our activities we aim to inspire more people to discover and love the arts. Entrance to The Curve is free. Through Young Barbican we offer £5 tickets to 14 – 25 year olds for our paid exhibitions, children under 14 attend for free.

Our exhibitions are complemented by comprehensively researched catalogues and a full range of public events. In partnership with renowned museums and art galleries, many of our exhibitions travel to reach both national and international audiences.

The Barbican believes in creating space for people and ideas to connect through its international arts programme, community events and learning activity. To keep its programme accessible to everyone, and to keep investing in the artists it works with, the Barbican needs to raise more than 60% of its income through ticket sales, commercial activities and fundraising every year. Donations can be made here: [www.barbican.org.uk/join-support/support-us/for-individuals/make-a-donation](http://www.barbican.org.uk/join-support/support-us/for-individuals/make-a-donation)