



Dracula and the Artist, 1991/2019. Archival pigment print on Hahnemühle Baryta pure cotton photo rag paper. Diptych: 40 x 50 inches each (101.6 x 127 cm each)

Lorraine O’Grady: *Body Is the Ground of My Experience*

New York: April 28–June 11, 2022

Alexander Gray Associates, New York announces Lorraine O’Grady: *Body Is the Ground of My Experience*, an exhibition of the artist’s pivotal 1991 black-and-white photomontages. Drawing on formal strategies of Surrealism and on O’Grady’s own visceral, nuanced engagement with aesthetics, representation, and cultural history, these diptychs are both a turning point, from live performance to wall installation, and a refined iteration of the complex politically and personally radical theses and practices that have occupied the artist throughout her career.

O’Grady produced *Body Is the Ground of My Experience* for her first one-person exhibition at New York’s INTAR Gallery in 1991—this presentation marks the first time in more than thirty years the complete body of work has been on view in the city. Previously known primarily for her work as a performance artist—with incendiary personas like *Mlle Bourgeoise Noire* (1980–83), as well as the dream-like Künstlerroman *Rivers, First Draft* (1982)—the shift to wall works in *Body Is the Ground of My Experience* marked a major formal evolution in her practice. Rather than being passive, oblique, or annotative, the title of this body of work foregrounds a truth that might no longer be structurally obvious: even as the form of the work changes from physically embodied performances to works on the wall, the body itself remains a conceptual through line and field for engagement.

In works like *The Fir-Palm* and *The Strange Taxi*, a Black body operates as a literal ground on which history acts and is unexpectedly modified. This centering of embodied experience is itself an act of resistance against the dry, disassociated formalism of postmodern photography that dominated the landscape at the time. Against this grain, O’Grady constructs imaginative psychologies and uncanny arrangements influenced by Surrealism, a movement whose literature and images she taught for 25 years at the School of Visual Arts in New York. In *Dracula and the Artist*, a woman with half-styled hair faces away from the viewer, insisting on her right to interiority. Confronting broken combs that fly at her—their sharp teeth evocative of the titular vampire—she turns away from their allure and violence to embrace her art.

Expanding her interrogation of the body as the foundation of experience, O'Grady's *Gaze* and *Dream* quadriptychs are comprised of portraits of eight individuals, each with a second, smaller image of themselves superimposed on top. Given different prompts to react to, each panel of these works functions as a collapsed diptych—schematically enacting both subjectivity's stunting by history and latent resistance to it. As the curator Stephanie Sparling Williams writes, "The body layering presents to the world two faces of the same individual, and through the artist's prompting, both an outer and inner view is captured—the metaphysical and the physical."

Probing the instability of dualities via the subversion and reconfiguration of art historical referents, *Body Is the Ground of My Experience* generates an uncanny confluence between the artist's unflinching gaze and the monochromatic, minimal arrangement of her compositions. An embodiment of O'Grady's artistic ethos, its diptychs illuminate the more universal structures at work as they operate on and are refracted by human bodies across space and history. Created thirty years ago, they bring undeniable resonance to work being created by others today.

Lorraine O'Grady was the subject of a 2021 retrospective *Lorraine O'Grady: Both/And* presented by the Brooklyn Museum, which traveled to the Weatherspoon Art Museum in Greensboro, NC in 2022. Other one-person exhibitions of her work include *From Me to Them to Me Again*, Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) Museum of Art, GA (2018); *Family Gained*, Museum of Fine Arts (MFA), Boston (2018); *Lorraine O'Grady: Initial Recognition*, Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo, Monastery de Santa María de las Cuevas, Seville, Spain (2016); and *Lorraine O'Grady: When Margins Become Centers*, Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA (2015). Her work has also been included in numerous group exhibitions, including *Just Above Midtown: 1974 to the Present*, Museum of Modern Art, New York (2022); *Michael Jackson: On the Wall*, National Portrait Gallery, London (2018), traveled to Grand Palais, Paris (2018), The Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn, Germany (2019), and Espoo Museum of Modern Art, Finland (2019); *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power*, Tate Modern, London (2017), traveled to Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, AK (2018), Brooklyn Museum, NY (2018), The Broad, Los Angeles (2019), de Young Museum, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, CA (2019), and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX (2020); and *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women 1965–85*, Brooklyn Museum, NY (2017), traveled to California African American Museum, Los Angeles (2017), Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY (2018), and the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), Boston (2018). Her work is represented in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, IL; Brooklyn Museum, NY; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA; Museum of Fine Arts (MFA), Boston; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; and Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. She has been a resident artist at Artpace San Antonio, TX, and has received many awards, including the 2022 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Women's Caucus for Art, a Skowhegan Medal (2019), the Francis J. Greenburger Award (2017), a 2015 Creative Capital Award in Visual Art, a Lifetime Achievement Award from Howard University, Washington, D.C. (2015), the Distinguished Feminist Award, College Art Association, New York (2014), an Art Matters grant (2011), a United States Artists Rockefeller Fellowship (2011), and the Anonymous Was A Woman Award (2008), among others. In addition to her work as a visual artist, she has also made innovative contributions to cultural criticism with her writings, including the now canonical article, "Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity." A book of her collected writings, *Lorraine O'Grady: Writing in Space*, published by Duke University Press, was released in 2020.

Alexander Gray Associates is a contemporary art gallery in New York City and Germantown, NY. Through exhibitions, research, and artist representation, the Gallery spotlights artistic movements and artists active in the twentieth and twenty-first century. Influential in cultural, social, and political spheres, these artists are notable for creating work that crosses geographic borders, generational contexts, and artistic disciplines. Alexander Gray Associates is an organization committed to anti-racist and feminist principles.

New York: Tuesday–Saturday, 10:30 AM–6:00 PM
Germantown: Friday–Sunday, 12:00 PM–6:00 PM, and by appointment