

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Jas Keimig, "Two Photography Titans Are Coming to Seattle,"
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Two Photography Titans Are Coming to Seattle

Here's a Sneak Peek at the Upcoming *Dawoud Bey & Carrie Mae Weems: In Dialogue* exhibit at the Seattle Art Museum

JAS KEIMIG



An early portrait work from Carrie Mae Weems. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST, JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, AND SAM

This fall, Seattleites will have the opportunity to view works from the two of the greatest living photographers: Dawoud Bey and Carrie Mae Weems. Both are artists of world renown who have meticulously told stories of Black people, Black history, and Black subjectivity in the United States since their careers began back in the 1970s. And, on top of it all, they are friends.

Originally organized by the Grand Rapids Museum of Art in Michigan, Dawoud Bey & Carrie Mae Weems: In Dialogue will make its stop at the Seattle Art Museum from November 17, 2022 through January 22, 2023.

Despite being friends for nearly fifty years, this show is the first time Bey and Weems have shown together. While their approaches to the medium of photography differ—Bey is often more documentarian while Weems focuses on the self and narrative works—both artists are fundamentally interested in reframing and challenging power dynamics in art.

“It feels almost as if the United States is catching up to the important work that these artists have been doing over five decades,” says SAM’s modern and contemporary art curator Catharina Manchanda, who is organizing the exhibition here in Seattle. “Whether it’s a celebration of the Black community, whether it’s a way of foregrounding power imbalances that are in the landscape... or histories that have been overlooked—these are all themes they’ve dedicated their entire careers to.”

Composed of over 140 pieces, Dawoud Bey & Carrie Mae Weems: In Dialogue will be split into five roughly chronological sections that move through the artists’ early work—the establishing of their perspectives, their interest in the Black history of America, and how landscapes appear and impact their bodies of work. This exhibition covers the half-century of their respective careers and contains photographs from Bey and Weems’s most well-known series.

Carrie Mae Weems’s Untitled (Woman and Daughter with Children) from The Kitchen Table Series (1990), gelatin silver print



Weems makes these narrative scenes so piercingly psychological. COURTESY OF ARTIST, JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, AND SAM

Taking the more narrative route is Weems's Kitchen Table Series. In 1989, she set up a camera at her kitchen table and photographed herself acting out different fictional scenes. The setting of the series never changes—the wooden table and single triangle overhead light—but she does.

The woman sadly drinks alone at the table, shares a meal with a male lover, gets her hair brushed by a friend, does makeup with her daughter, looks directly at the camera. This photo essay portrays the life of a Black woman as she puts on different selves—a mother, a wife, a friend, a sister, herself—and the different psychological states those modes entail. While Blackness is certainly an element explored in this series, it also universally speaks to the experiences of women in their private lives. This particular body of work profoundly impacted the fine art world. Generations of artists who were her contemporaries or came after Weems described the Kitchen Table Series as foundational to their practice, reshaping their understanding of the medium of photography as well as Black representation.