

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

Caroline Goldstein, "I'm Not Making Something Because It's Fun:' Watch Artist Carrie Mae Weems Stage a Performance About Violence and Forgiveness" *Harper's Bazaar*, June 4, 2020

## artnet

### On View

## 'I'm Not Making Something Because It's Fun': Watch Artist Carrie Mae Weems Stage a Performance About Violence and Forgiveness

As part of a collaboration with Art21, hear news-making artists describe their inspirations in their own words.

Caroline Goldstein, June 4, 2020



Carrie Mae Weems at the Creative Time Summit, Washington, DC, 2016. Photo by Serli Lala, courtesy Creative Time.

In June 2015, almost exactly five years ago, the country was reeling in the aftermath of the shooting at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, which killed nine worshippers. Now, once again, the country is reckoning with its legacy of violence against black Americans, as protesters around the world join the fight for justice in the wake of George Floyd's murder at the hands of Minnesota police officers.

In June 2016, just one year after that incident, artist [Carrie Mae Weems](#) debuted the multimedia performance *Grace Notes: Reflections for Now* at the College of Charleston's Sottile Theatre, just three blocks away from the church. Weems is best known as a photographer, but *Grace Notes* blends music, spoken word, dance, and video to honor the deaths of so many black Americans.

The work's title pays homage to then President Barack Obama's eulogy for South Carolina state senator Clementa Pinckney, who was killed at the church, when he sang an impromptu, and deeply moving, version of "Amazing Grace."



Production still from the Art21 "Extended Play" film, "Carrie Mae Weems: 'Grace Notes: Reflections for Now.'" © Art21, Inc. 2016.

In an exclusive interview with [Art21 from that year](#), the artist described the genesis of *Grace Notes*, which was inspired by the Greek tragedy *Antigone*, in which a woman is unable to bury her brothers because the community denies that their deaths ever happened. "The thing to me that is remarkable about our history," she told Art21, "about how we have conducted ourselves in the onslaught of history, has been to maintain our dignity... that to me is really the ultimate call of grace."

The video, which appeared as part of [Art21's \*Extended Play\*](#) series, also includes a performer who participated in the event challenging Weems: "Why we always got to goddamn forgive so quick?" That is a question that so many around the world are asking themselves, as tragedy after tragedy unfolds, and Weems acknowledged the incredible stress put upon Black men in particular.

"I'm not making something because it's fun," she told [Art21](#). Instead, she wants audiences to leave with questions, like those posed by her fellow performer. If "they have really engaged with something deep for themselves... but there is some glimmer... then I'm alright."

*Watch the video, which originally appeared as part of Art21's PBS series "Extended Play" below.*