

Carrie Mae Weems

‘In one way or another, my work endlessly explodes the limits of tradition. I’m determined to find new models to live by. Aren’t you?’ asked Carrie Mae Weems to her fellow photographer Dawoud Bey, in a 2009 interview for *Bomb* magazine.

Carrie Mae Weems (Portland, Oregon, 1953) is an Afro-American artist who, throughout her career, has developed a multidisciplinary body of work including photography, performance, video and installation. Drawing upon the methods of analysis of the social sciences, Weems explores the relationship between violence and power that has existed throughout history around the issues of race, gender, identity, class and the systems of representation.

Her photographic series *Family, Pictures & Stories* (1981–82) and *The Kitchen Table Stories* (1990) focus on everyday domestic life as a way of reflecting on the models of family, work and women, and on the intimacy of interpersonal relationships. In other works, such as *Colored People* (1989–90) or *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried* (1995–96), the artist analyses the visual narratives of oppression and racism that have historically been used to represent the Afro-American community.

Weems’ praxis aims to transcend her immediate context to establish a dialogue with a multiplicity of communities, a call and response that connects different generations on the basis of reciprocal influence, responsibility and care.

*Lincoln, Lonnie, and Me* (2012), the video installation presented at the Capella MACBA, occupies the space in the manner of a large theatrical stage with the aesthetics of nineteenth-century phantasmagoria. Through heavy, half-open red curtains, we witness a game of shadows in which life-size phantasmagorical figures alternate with projected documentary images.

A tap dancer, a boxer punching the air and the artist herself dressed like a Playboy bunny are some of the characters appearing on the screen, alluding to the spectacularisation that has historically iconised the Afro-American community.

The title of the work, *Lincoln, Lonnie, and Me*, refers to a fictitious dialogue between the US President Abraham Lincoln, the artist herself, and her

collaborator, the activist and artist, Lonnie Graham. The work is a reflection on the way historical narratives are constructed and on how the tragedies of the past are constantly being reactivated and renegotiated.

At a given moment, Weems recites with a hypnotic voice President Lincoln's mythical Gettysburg Address, while, projected on the stage, we can see, among others, images of her series *Constructing History*, a re-staging of the assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy. Another time, archive images of civilian protest during the 1960s are accompanied by Lonnie Graham's voice analysing the difficulties in carrying out true social transformations.

The enveloping blues of Blind Willie Johnson and Urge Overkill's version of *Girl, You'll Be a Woman Soon* by Neil Diamond, for the music track of *Pulp Fiction*, trap viewers in a never-ending loop of sounds and images that will pursue them beyond the time and space of this artistic experience.

*Lincoln, Lonnie, and Me* is being presented at MACBA as part of the project *Carrie Mae Weems. A Great Turn in the Possible*, curated by Elvira Dyangani Ose (Director of MACBA) and organised by Fundación MAPFRE in collaboration with Fundación Foto Colectania and Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart.