

Kara Walker to exhibit powerful and elegant artworks at Skidmore's Tang Teaching Museum Jan. 18–June 1

SARATOGA SPRINGS, N.Y. —The Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College will present *Kara Walker: Narratives of a Negress*, from Jan. 18 through June 1, 2003. An exhibition of selected and new works by the internationally acclaimed New York-based artist, *Narratives* was organized jointly by the Tang Museum and the Williams College Museum of Art. The exhibition showcases the work of an artist whose anti-racist parodies—rendered in exquisitely beautiful cut-paper silhouettes—have made her one of the most important young American artists working today, according to Tang Curator Ian Berry, one of the exhibition's four co-curators.

A highlight of the Tang exhibition will be Walker's appearance at Skidmore to deliver the college's Malloy Visiting Artist Lecture at 5:30 p.m. on Friday, Jan. 31. The annual lecture, which brings preeminent visual artists to the Saratoga Springs campus, will take place in Skidmore's Bernhard Theater, and it will be free and open to the public.

One of several contemporary African-American artists to address racial identity in a confrontational way, Walker is best known for life-sized black-paper cutout silhouettes that depict racial stereotypes, slavery, sex, and violence in the antebellum South. "Her charged and visceral imagery not only brings to light troubling episodes from the history of black and white relations in America," said Tang Curator Berry, "but also highlights the problems of racism, sexism, and abuse that continue into the present."

"The idea that African-American art can only be noble, appealing, and beautiful does not sit well with me," Walker has said. "I have always been drawn to art that was unsettling for me." Whether she is "on the cutting edge or over the line," the *Boston Globe* noted, Kara Walker is "one of the hottest—and most controversial—black artists in America."

The artworks on view in *Narratives of a Negress* will span the artist's career, beginning with her installation titled *Gone, An Historical Romance of a Civil War as it Occurred Between the Dusky Thighs of One Young Negress and Her Heart*. Described in *Artnews* as "lewd, provocative, and lovely," the 50-foot mural has not been on public view since its debut in 1994 at the Drawing Center in New York City. Another highlight of the Walker exhibition will be *Negress Notes (Brown Follies)* (1996), a series of 24 small watercolors.

Several of Walker's artworks have elaborate titles that harken back to 19th-century slave autobiographies, such as a wall-sized panorama titled *For the Benefit of All the Races of Mankind (Mos' Specially the Master One, Boss) An Exhibition of Artifacts, Remnants, and Effluvia EXCAVATED from the Black Heart of a Negress III* (2002). The installation uses colored-light projections that illuminate the cut-paper images as well as the gallery walls and ceiling with brilliant color—and simultaneously project the shadows of viewers onto the wall, mixing them into the turbulent scene itself.

As art historian Anne Wagner notes in the exhibition's catalogue, Walker is "dead set on remembering, so as to show that the outrages of the past have had inescapable consequences for the content and formation of present-day selves. And the task of remembering has something to say about the artist's own self-scrutiny as a black woman in America today."

Additional public events related to the exhibition will include the following:

- opening reception (Saturday, Feb. 1, 6:30-8 p.m.);
- noon curator's tour (Tuesday, March 11);
- panel discussion (Wednesday, March 12, at 7 p.m.);
- "Dialogue" featuring cultural critic Michele Wallace and Skidmore faculty (Thursday, April 10, at 7 p.m.);
- "Family Saturdays" (2-3:30 p.m., March 22 and April 5); and guided tours (Tuesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays at 1 p.m.).

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in Stockton, Calif., in 1969, Walker moved with her family to Atlanta, Ga., when she was 13. While earning a B.F.A. degree from the Atlanta College of Art, she began combining themes of slavery, sex, and violence (drawn from such cultural influences as black memorabilia, folklore, cartoons and movies, Harlequin Romances, and slave narratives) with a most unlikely medium, the old-fashioned, genteel craft of black-paper silhouettes. As *Artnews* noted, that fusion "[transformed] this innocuous 19th-century technique into biting, in-your-face art."

Three months after Walker earned an M.F.A. degree from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1994, her work appeared in a group show at New York City's Drawing Center. After numerous solo and group exhibitions, Walker was awarded a MacArthur Foundation "genius" award at the age of 27. Her work appeared in the Whitney Museum's 1997 Biennial and she represented the U.S. at the 2002 Sao Paulo Bienal in Brazil.

Walker lives and works in New York City and teaches at Columbia University.

EXHIBITION BACKGROUND

Besides Tang Curator Ian Berry, the exhibition's four co-curators include Darby English, associate director of research and academic programs at the Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Mass.; Vivian Patterson, curator of collections at the Williams College Museum of Art; and Mark Reinhardt, associate professor of political science at Williams College.

After its debut at the Tang, the exhibition will travel to Williams College in Williamstown, Mass., where it will be on view from Aug. 30 to Dec. 5.

Narratives of a Negress will be accompanied by an illustrated catalogue, co-published by the Tang Museum, the Williams College Museum of Art, and MIT Press. The 208-page catalogue will be available through the Tang Museum Store.

The exhibition catalogue will be the first significant scholarly treatment of Walker and her work and will contain reproductions of the artworks; writings by the artist; and essays from co-curators English and Reinhardt, art historian Anne Wagner, and cultural critic Michele Wallace. The catalogue will consider Walker's work from multidisciplinary perspectives, including political theory, art history, literary criticism, and cultural studies.

The Tang Museum is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday, and closed Mondays and major holidays. Admission is free. For more information on exhibitions and events, call 518-580-8080 or go to www.skidmore.edu/tang.

The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College offers a range of programs designed to explore cross-disciplinary communication through the visual arts. Skidmore College, located in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., is an independent, liberal arts institution with an enrollment of approximately 2,200 men and women. The college offers the bachelor of arts and bachelor of science degrees in more than 60 areas, including majors in both traditional liberal arts disciplines and in such fields as business, the fine and performing arts, and social work. Skidmore is known for its interdisciplinary curriculum.

Founded in 1926, Williams College Museum of Art is one of the nation's foremost college art museums, with an active program of changing exhibitions that emphasize the broad areas of American art, modern and contemporary art, and art from Asia and other non-Western civilizations. Established in 1793, Williams College is an undergraduate, residential, privately endowed, coeducational, liberal arts institution with graduate programs in the history of art and development economics.

Editors and reporters: For more information on the Kara Walker exhibition at the Tang, please contact Barbara Melville in the Skidmore Office of College Relations, at 518-580-5740 or bmelvill@skidmore.edu. Electronic images are available via disk or e-mail.