



**ARTIST**

Carrie Mae Weems

**TITLE**

Untitled

**DATE**

1991

**DIMENSIONS**

11 in H x 11 in W

**MEDIUM**

Mixed Media

**IMAGE NOTES**

China Plate with Enamel 11 inches diameter; Light Work Fine Print Program

**CATALOGUE NUMBER**

1991.059

**CURRENT LOCATION**

3D-3

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**CARRIE MAE WEEMS**

**BORN**

1953

**BIRTHPLACE**

Portland, OR

**GENDER**

Female

## **CITIZENSHIP**

United States

## **CULTURAL HERITAGE**

African-American

## **LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP**

Artist-in-Residence, 1988  
Fine Print Program, 1991  
Platinum Editions, 1998  
Robert B. Menschel Gallery, 1996  
The Light Work Collection: Circumstances Over DesignMain Gallery, 2003  
Group Exhibition - Embracing EatonvilleLecturer, 2009  
Master Print Edition, 2011  
Book Collectors Program, 2011  
Social StudiesFine Print Program, 2004  
Book Collectors Program, 2017  
Kitchen Table SeriesFine Print Program, 1998  
Fine Print Program, 2011  
Kathleen O. Ellis Gallery, 2018  
Be Strong and Do Not Betray Your Soul

## **LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS**

Contact Sheet 61  
Contact Sheet 97  
Contact Sheet 124  
Menschel Gallery Catalogue 45  
Contact Sheet 173  
Contact Sheet 198

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Carrie Mae Weems is considered one of the most influential contemporary American artists. In a career spanning over 30 years, she has investigated family relationships, cultural identity, sexism, class, political systems and the consequences of power. Weems' complex body of art employs photographs, text, fabric, audio, digital images, installation and video. Weems has received numerous awards, grants and fellowships, including the prestigious MacArthur "Genius" grant and the Prix de Roma. She is represented in public and private collections around the world, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, The Museum of Modern Art and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Weems participated in Light Work's Artist-in-Residence program in 1988.

## **ESSAYS**

A black female comedian delivered a joke recently on TV that went something like this "I think it's important for white people to get to know black people better...at least then, you might have a reason for not liking us." Jokes, stories and anecdotes pass from generation to generation can sustain prejudice, but they can also help us understand our own personal history so that we can draw strength from knowing who we are. Carrie Mae Weems investigates the power of racial jokes and explores the tradition of oral history in her work which incorporates photographs, narratives, autobiographical accounts and hearsay. Weems feels that "there is something grand in the knowing and creating of ourselves, and something grander still about how we know and create our personal histories." She transforms these feelings into photographs and text that expose our need to understand our personal prejudices while uncovering our profound will to ignore them. In the hands of a less skilled artist these ideas could be overwhelmed by reactionary ramblings or dismissed as rhetorical preachings. Weems is a skilled storyteller, she conveys her strong personal convictions so that her point is embraced, while the listener is engaged by how the story is told. Carrie Mae Weems was an Artist-in-Residence at Light Work from July 1-30, 1988. She lives in Northampton, MA and teaches photography at Hampshire College in Amherst, MA and at Hunter College in New York City. Jeffrey Hoone (c)1988The seminal Kitchen Table Series by Carrie Mae Weems is widely recognized as a masterpiece of performance and story-telling within the photographic image. In this series, Weems uses a subtle vocabulary of props, gesture, and gaze to frame complex questions about identity, gender construction, representation, parenthood, and the nature of human relationships. Weems describes her intention of Kitchen Table Series as a personal view on the world around her, "I endeavored to intertwine themes as I have found them in—racial, sexual, and cultural identity and history—and presented them with overtones of humor and sadness, loss and redemption." The nonlinear narrative and issues presented in Weems' Kitchen Table Series remain as topical and thought-provoking today as when the images were first created in the early 1990s. Rendered in exquisite black-and-white, this Gelatin Silver Print is hand-printed by Griffin Editions in New York City. See more at: <http://www.lightwork.org/shop/carrie-mae-weems/#sthash.h3fN0A09.dpuf>Un/Common Threads In organizing the exhibition "Un/Common Threads: Selections from the Light Work Collection," curator Kaylen Williams went beyond a superficial perception of diversity that has become pervasive in the United States. As a 2007 study by the sociology department at University of Minnesota revealed, many Americans happily endorse diversity as a nebulous concept; however, many are still at a loss to discuss the specifics of diversity and its related sub-topics, such as gender, race, ethnicity, economic status, and sexual orientation. (1) "Un/Common Threads" harnessed the power of photographs, using a visual language to voice these all-important specifics of diversity. Williams used the visual language that coalesced among the various images to stimulate dialogue about the complex challenges of a pluralist culture in ways that addressed both broad and personal implications. Exhibiting together the work of artists such as Myra Greene, Dawoud Bey, Clarissa Sligh, Yuri Marder, Hank Willis Thomas, and Binh Danh, among others, certainly highlighted the individuality of their concerns and aesthetic choices. Yet this varied grouping also served a common goal by giving voice to specific, possibly contentious topics surrounding diversity. To emphasize this unity of purpose, Williams combined the "Un/" in the exhibition title with "Common Threads," acknowledging the connections that can occur between diverse artists and the viewers of their work. Many of the photographs in "Un/Common Threads" manage to evoke the idea of connections and also simultaneously turn it on its head by asking viewers to re-examine preconceptions that they may bring with them into the gallery. Ellen M. Blalock's photograph,

"Jermame," a portrait of a black teenage father pictured full-frame in an intimate embrace with his baby daughter, may provide a good example of this phenomenon. Those who find themselves jarred by the tender presence of emotion displayed by the young African American father must question and explore the sources of any biases regarding age, race, and gender. This is the inherent power of such photographs—when a viewer accepts involvement in questioning such preconceived connections, he or she is more inclined to get involved in talk of answers that can lead to a deeper understanding of identity and diversity. Many of the artists whose work curator Kaylen Williams, a graduate student of Museum Studies in the College of Visual and Performing Arts, Syracuse University, selected for "Un/Common Threads" engaged the topic of diversity from a personal perspective. Regarding her impetus for organizing the exhibition, Williams explains, "This project was of particular interest to me because of my own ethnic background of Japanese and Western European ancestors. Many students on campus are, like me, a mix of diverse cultural backgrounds. My Japanese mother was adopted by Americans and never had an opportunity or the encouragement to explore her racial identity." In culling this selection of images from the Light Work Collection, Williams invited viewers of Un/Common Threads to explore the diversity of identity and to participate in the critical mass that follows an expansion of consciousness. Laura A. Guth (c)2008 1. Joyce M. Bell and Douglas Hartmann, "Diversity in Everyday Discourse: The Cultural Ambiguities and Consequences of 'Happy Talk.'" American Sociological Association: American Sociological Review 72, no. 6 (December 2007): 895–914. The exhibition was on view in the Robert B. Menschel Photography Gallery from January 16 to April 19, 2007. It was curated by Kaylen Williams. The exhibition included work by the following artists: Don Gregorio Antón, Dawoud Bey, Ellen M. Blalock, Binh Dahn, Sylvia de Swaan, Lonnie Graham, Myra Greene, Saiman Li, Yuri Marder, Nzingah Muhammad, Osamu James Nakagawa, Suzanne Opton, Kanako Sasaki, Clarissa Sligh, Tone Stockenström, Lida Suchý, Hank Willis Thomas, Linn Underhill, and Carrie Mae Weems. When she curated the exhibition, Kaylen Williams was a graduate student of Museum Studies in the College of Visual and Performing Arts, Syracuse University. She graduated in 2007. Laura A. Guth is an artist and educator. She lives in Manlius, NY. Embracing Eatonville Portfolio Prints from the portfolio: Lonnie Graham, Thompson Avenue, Eatonville, FL, June 2003; Deborah Willis, View from the Pulpit, Eatonville, FL, 2003; Dawoud Bey, Jason, 2003; Carrie Mae Weems, Untitled, 2003 -- Embracing Eatonville is a photographic survey of Eatonville, FL—the oldest black incorporated town in the United States, and a place where celebrated writer Zora Neale Hurston lived and worked. The project is a collaboration among Light Work, the artist's collective A Social Studies Project (ASSP), and the Zora Neale Hurston National Museum of Fine Arts in Eatonville. Beginning in January 2002 and continuing through the middle of 2003, photographers Dawoud Bey, Lonnie Graham, Carrie Mae Weems, and Deborah Willis spent time in Eatonville making photographs in an effort to provide a meaningful reflection of Eatonville's spirit and character while concentrating on the social, political, and cultural landscape of this historically unique place in Central Florida. In an attempt to address the unique character of the community and its history, these artists have produced a diverse portrait of Eatonville using traditional documentary approaches, as well as interactive and interpretive methods. Deborah Willis' color landscapes and portraits describe the look and feel of the community, while emphasizing the importance of the church and the beauty parlor as traditional meeting places. Lonnie Graham's black-and-white landscapes evoke the feel of romantic charm reminiscent in the work of Clarence John Laughlin—on a more modest, but equally revealing scale—while his portraits present an openness between photographer and subject that reveals as much as his landscapes conceal. Dawoud Bey looked to the next generation of Eatonville's residents as he combined portraits of high school students along with quotes from each subject, which serve as both time capsules for the community and expressions of personal hopes, fears, and dreams. Carrie Mae Weems departs most from the traditional photographic survey format as she assumes the character of Zora Neale Hurston wandering through Eatonville. Her photographs reflect the quiet serenity, simple pleasures, and ease of enjoyment that Hurston found so familiar and comforting in her adopted home. Later in this catalogue Franklin Sirmans discusses the artists' work in greater detail, and N.Y. Nathiri, executive director of the Hurston Museum, provides her reflections on Eatonville's history and contemporary significance. The exhibition will travel to the Hurston Museum in January 2004 to be included in the Fifteenth Annual Zora Neale Hurston Festival of the Arts and Humanities. Plans are also underway for a more extensive traveling schedule for the exhibition. Zora Neale Hurston was an enigmatic artist and folklorist who wrote stories, novels, plays, anthropological folklore, and an autobiography. When compelled, or perhaps when necessary, Hurston would often embellish stories about her own life and experiences, never at a loss to improve on the ordinary. In the decades after her death in 1960, her spirit of creative independence, mixed with serious scholarship and a powerful personal writing style, made Hurston the perfect muse for a generation of artists and cultural workers looking for the signpost of change and a beacon of hope in the dawn of the Civil Rights Movement. She expressed her own passions for the creative spirit when she wrote, "Anyway, the force from somewhere in Space which commands you to write in the first place, gives you no choice. You take up the pen when you are told, and write what is commanded. There is no agony like bearing an untold story inside you." The artists and organizations that came together to produce this project wanted to illuminate the untold story of Eatonville, while carrying the torch of Hurston's legacy as their inspiration. In the ensuing years since Hurston's time in Eatonville, the landscape of Central Florida has become fertile ground for the creative capital of America's tourist industry radiating out from Orlando a few miles away, increasing the pressure on Eatonville to retain its unique historical place and character. In 1987, a group of concerned citizens led by N.Y. Nathiri formed the Association to Preserve the Eatonville Community, Inc. (P.E.C.), which was successful in having Eatonville listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1998. These efforts also led to the founding of the Zora Neale Hurston National Museum of Fine Arts in 1990. Carrie Mae Weems was invited to exhibit her work at the museum in 1999. At that time, conversations between Weems and Nathiri led to serious discussions concerning the formation of this project. All of the artists selected to work on Embracing Eatonville have also participated in Light Work's Artist-in-Residence program, bringing the project's partnership full circle from Eatonville to Syracuse. The collaboration, sparked by Weems' inquiries, began in earnest in 2001 with the idea to give artists the opportunity to look at Eatonville in order to draw attention to its character, its citizens, and its place in history. Photographic surveys were so popular in the 1970s that the National Endowment for the Arts created a funding category devoted to sponsoring these efforts. Several significant projects were supported during this time, but changes at the NEA and in the public's support of the arts eliminated the funding category of photographic surveys, leaving support of future projects to other sources which practically eliminated them altogether. Artists always work whether there is support of their work or not. Embracing the importance of a project about Eatonville, these artists, led by Weems, set out to do what the government no longer felt was relevant. While there are aspects of Embracing Eatonville that link it to the tradition of photographic surveys, the artists have worked to look at Eatonville as a starting point and springboard to extend Hurston's vision for the celebration, accomplishment, and preservation of African-American art and culture. We honor many things with this project: the enigmatic and creative character of Zora Neale Hurston, the importance of history celebrated by the successful efforts of the Association to Preserve the Eatonville Community, and the muse that Zora Neale Hurston is for artists more than forty years after her death, where her sense of the importance of place became a destination, a state of mind, a call to independence, and a cradle where community ideals and shared experience provide inspiration and sometimes, daily bread. Jeffrey Hoone (c)2003