

KARA WALKER

Go to Hell or Atlanta, Whichever Comes First

Private View 6 – 8pm, Wednesday 30 September

Exhibition runs 1 October – 7 November 2015

Victoria Miro, 16 Wharf Road, London N1 7RW



Kara Walker, *Negress Notes* (from series), 2015

Victoria Miro is delighted to present the first of two exhibitions at the gallery this autumn by the celebrated American artist Kara Walker.

Often provocative and humorous, Kara Walker's work explores the tensions and power plays of racial and gender relations. Walker's work engages with historical narratives and the ways in which these stories have been suppressed, distorted and falsified. This exhibition extends her exploration of the brutalising histories of colonialism and slavery, and the political and psychological consequences that accompanies identity formation in contexts of oppression and violence.

Drawing from art historical and literary sources, Walker creates and deconstructs scenarios that expose biases and prejudices, exploring the power struggles underlying personal and political relationships. Her work proposes alternative mythologies, and new ways of engaging with traumatic historical material. Walker uses historical decorative styles including the silhouette to create complex and sophisticated narratives, emphasising and undermining the ways in which images and narratives can be subject to stereotyping.

For her first exhibition with Victoria Miro, Walker is producing a new body of work made with the gallery's unique spaces in mind. In *Go to Hell or Atlanta, Whichever Comes First* Walker has drawn inspiration from the southern American city where she spent her teenage years. The centrepiece of the exhibition will be a cut paper installation and large scale photographic wallpaper

piece, the latter made in collaboration with photographer and filmmaker Ari Marcopoulos. These works reference Stone Mountain, a park on the outskirts of Atlanta featuring the world's largest exposed granite monolith, the surface of which features a partially completed bas-relief carving of Confederate generals on horseback.

The mountain and the park that bears its name have had a chequered history. In 1915 Stone Mountain was declared the spiritual home of the Ku Klux Klan; more recently it has become a theme park with a wild west train ride and popular laser shows. Walker's work draws on the layered histories and associations of the site.

The Atlanta works will be complemented by *Four Idioms on Negro Art*, which addresses forms of representation that have a stereotypical association with 'low' art: Folk Art, Graffiti and Primitivism. Each monumental work shows the artist taking on the attributes of a specific visual language, simultaneously paying homage to and satirising the motifs and style of the given forms.

In a sketch outlining her conception of this body of work, Walker sets up the Idioms in contradiction to *Four Desires: Conceptual Art Practice, Fine Art, Technical Mastery and Mind Boggling Scale*, and suggests a parodic dichotomy between the form and intention of art based on gender, class, education and skill.

A publication accompanies the exhibition featuring a conversation between Kara Walker and Ari Marcopoulos and a text by James Hannaham.

In November **Victoria Miro Mayfair**, will present a selection of preparatory drawings, sketches and models related to the production of Vincenzo Bellini's two-act opera *Norma* that Kara Walker directed and art directed for Teatro La Fenice. This production, staged for six performances between May and June 2015, was a special project commissioned by Okwui Enwezor to coincide with the 56th Venice Biennale.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a publication with texts by the artist and by Hilton Als.

Biographical details: Walker was born in Stockton, California in 1969. She currently lives and works in New York. In 2015, as a Special Project of the 2015 Venice Biennale, Walker was selected as director, set and costume designer for the production of Vincenzo Bellini's *Norma* at Teatro La Fenice, Venice, Italy. The public art commissioning agency Creative Time presented the artist's large-scale public project *A Subtlety* at the Domino Sugar Factory, New York in 2014; in the same year, Walker curated the group exhibition *Ruffneck Constructivists* at the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania. Recent major solo exhibitions include presentations at the Camden Arts Centre, London (2013); Art Institute of Chicago (2013); Center for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw (2011); Fondazione Merz, Turin (2011); Cincinnati Art Museum (2010); Centro de Arte Contemporáneo de Málaga (2008); and Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle (2008). In 2007-2008 the artist was the subject of the major retrospective *Kara Walker: My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love* at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles and the Museum of Modern Art, Fort Worth. Her work is in the collections of major museums including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Tate, London; Museo Nazionale delle Arti del XXI Secolo, Rome and Mudam, Luxembourg. Walker received a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship in 1997, the Deutsche Bank Prize in 2000, and the United States Artists Eileen Harris Norton Fellowship in 2008.

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