

# PRESS RELEASE

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## SEATTLE ART MUSEUM PRESENTS GROUNDBREAKING PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAWOUD BEY AND CARRIE MAE WEEMS

*In Dialogue* traces the careers and 45-year friendship of two of the most significant photo-based artists working today



SEATTLE - The Seattle Art Museum presents *Dawoud Bey & Carrie Mae Weems: In Dialogue* (November 17, 2022-January 22, 2023), featuring over 140 works by two of the most significant photo-based artists working today. Both born in 1953, Bey and Weems explore ideas grounded in the experiences of Black people refracted through issues of gender, class, and systems of power. *In Dialogue* presents a series of thematic explorations of their distinct yet overlapping concerns and approaches. This is the first time their celebrated work—the subject of numerous solo and group exhibitions—has been shown together to explore their spirited engagement with each other over the years.

SAM is the third stop on the exhibition's US tour, which was organized by the Grand Rapids Art Museum (GRAM) and curated by Ron Platt. SAM's iteration is curated by Catharina Manchanda, Jon and Mary Shirley Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art. "The work of these two artists has never been more relevant, combining a tender embrace and celebration of Black people with a clear-eyed awareness of the power imbalances to which they have been subjected since the days of slavery," says Manchanda. "We are excited to invite everyone into their career-long conversations about art, culture, and history."

In conjunction with the exhibition, the museum will present dynamic programs and engagement opportunities. A free community opening will be held on December 1 during First Thursday when the museum is free to all, all day. And social media initiative #SAMPhotoClub invites people to share photographs based on themes inspired by the exhibition for the opportunity to be highlighted on SAM digital channels.

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## EXPLORING THE EXHIBITION

Bey and Weems first met in 1976, when they were both 23 years old. Bey was teaching a photography class at the Studio Museum in Harlem and Weems was a student. The two bonded and in the decades that followed continued to connect over shared artistic concerns, including their broader goal of using photography to create authentic images of Black Americans that would deepen the understanding within the larger culture of the complexity and beauty of Black lives and experiences.

The artistic careers of Bey and Weems overlap in a number of ways. They are joined by their passion for a complex understanding of the history of Black lives within the hierarchies of existing power structures. They both create visually and technically stunning photographs using different camera formats and processes. Finally, both artists work in thematic series, which when seen together carry particular weight.

In addition to photography, the exhibition includes one video work from each artist. *In Dialogue* also features a visual timeline of their lives, careers, and historical events, to provide visitors with opportunities to go deeper with the references explored in their work.

### **Early Work**



section are intimate family scenes and portraits of people met on her travels.

The first section features scenes of city life and domestic scenes with passers-by or family as subjects. Bey's penetrating portraits show a tenderness and close rapport with his subjects; this section also includes *Self and Shadow* (1980), an evocative image of his shadow cast on the street. Weems' works reflects a poignant understanding of the body's power to communicate psychological depth when staged in space. This section features Weems' *First Self Portrait* (1975), in which the artist stands with her back to camera in a domestic space, seeming to hold herself in comfort. Also on view in this

### **Broadening the Scope**



This section traces the artists' development in the late 1980s and '90s. Bey deepens his engagement with his subjects, especially teens, working with them in the creation of evocative portraits that reflect a mutual trust. This period also sees Weems' increasing use of narrative frameworks, including her groundbreaking *The Kitchen Table* series (1990), a fictional photo essay featuring the artist among the subjects that explores women's self-perceptions.

## Resurrecting Black Histories



This section explores the artists' mutual interest in the history of Black people in America. Bey's *Night Coming Tenderly, Black* series (2017) documents sites thought to be on the Underground Railroad, a network aiding enslaved people to freedom during the 19th century. These large-scale works show Bey working in a more abstract, poetic mode, placing the viewer viscerally in the point of view of someone navigating the landscape. Shades of velvety black and gray create a subtle play of light and dark that's

inspired by 20th-century photographers, notably Roy DeCarava. Meanwhile, Weems' *Sea Islands* series (1991-92) features locales of the islands of the coasts of Georgia and South Carolina that are home to Gullah communities and culture, including ruins, markers, and objects, reflecting her interest in the significance of oral histories and mythologies. In Weems' series *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried* (1995-96), the artist enlarged and edited images from 1850 in which enslaved Africans were shown as anthropological subjects rather than humans; Weems questions the racist history and purpose of these images.

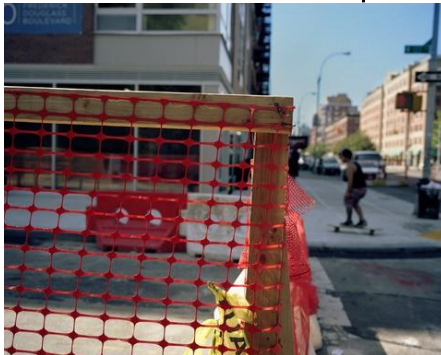
## Memorial and Requiem



Also on view are works that express the importance of memorializing in Black culture. Bey's *Birmingham Project* (2019) features portraits of present-day Birmingham-area children and teens who are the same age as six Black youths killed in the Alabama city in 1963, including the four girls killed in the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church; these are placed in diptychs with Birmingham-area adults who are the would-be age

of the youths today. Weems' *Constructing History* series (2008) focuses on well-known images of 20th-century tragedies such as the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and John F. Kennedy, reenacting them with students and community members in Atlanta.

## Revelations in the Landscape



*In Dialogue* also looks at the impact of place on our lives. Bey revisited the site of his early work with *Harlem Redux* (2014-16), moving away from close-up portraits to a focus on the relentless gentrification of the cityscape and disappearance of Black culture, photographed in color. In Weems' strikingly spare and formally constructed *Roaming* series (2006), she stages her own body within architectural spaces throughout Rome, Italy—a reminder of the city's history of power, conquest, and domination from

Ancient and Imperial Rome to Mussolini's Fascist government in the early 20th century.

## HOURS & TICKETS

### **Museum Hours**

- Closed Monday & Tuesday
- Wednesday–Sunday 10 am–5 pm
- Holiday hours on the website

### **Ticket Prices**

- Adult: \$29.99 advance / \$32.99 day of
- Senior (65+), Military (with ID): \$27.99 advance / \$30.99 day of
- Student (with ID), Teen (15–18): \$19.99 advance / \$22.99 day of
- Children (14 and under): FREE
- SAM members: FREE

### **Special Prices**

- First Thursdays: Free to all
- First Fridays: Free general admission for seniors (65+)

Details are subject to change. For the most up-to-date information on planning a visit, go to [seattleartmuseum.org](http://seattleartmuseum.org).

## EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

A 176-page illustrated catalogue with 200 color and black-and-white illustrations published with DelMonico Books and distributed by Distributed Art Publishers, Inc. will be available for purchase at [SAM Shop](#) (\$50). Also titled *Dawoud Bey & Carrie Mae Weems: In Dialogue* (ISBN: 978-1636810454), the catalogue includes scholarly essays by Grand Rapids Art Museum Chief Curator Ron Platt and National Museum of African American History & Culture Deputy Director Kinshasa Holman Conwill, along with reflections by both artists.

## EXHIBITION ORGANIZATION AND SUPPORT

*Dawoud Bey & Carrie Mae Weems: In Dialogue* is organized by the Grand Rapids Art Museum, with presenting support generously provided by MillerKnoll. Additional support is provided by Wege Foundation, Agnes Gund, the National Endowment for the Arts, and Eenhoorn, LLC.

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**Image credits:** *Couple in Prospect Park*, 1990 (printed 2018), Dawoud Bey, American, born 1953, gelatin silver print, 21 7/8 x 17 1/2 inches, Grand Rapids Art Museum, museum purchase, 2018.22. © Dawoud Bey, courtesy of Stephen Daiter Gallery. *Harlem Street*, 1976–77, Carrie Mae Weems, American, born 1953, gelatin silver print, 5 5/16 x 8 15/16 inches, © Carrie Mae Weems, courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. *First Self Portrait*, 1975, Carrie Mae Weems, American, born 1953, gelatin silver print, 8 5/8 x 8 5/8 inches, © Carrie Mae Weems, courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. *A Young Man Leaning on a Fence*, Brooklyn, NY, 1988, Dawoud Bey, American, born 1953, gelatin silver print, 24 x 20 inches, © Dawoud Bey, courtesy of Stephen Daiter Gallery. *Untitled #5 (Tree Trunk, Picket Fence and, House)*, from the series *Night Coming Tenderly, Black*, 2017, Dawoud Bey, American, born 1953, gelatin silver print, 48 x 56 inches, © Dawoud Bey, courtesy of Stephen Daiter Gallery. *The Birmingham Project: Taylor Falls and Deborah Hackworth*, 2012, Dawoud Bey, American, born 1953, archival pigment prints mounted to dibond, 40 x 64 inches (two separate 40 x 32 inch photographs), © Dawoud Bey, courtesy of Stephen Daiter Gallery. *Boy on Skateboard, Harlem, NY*, from the series *Harlem Redux*, 2014, Dawoud Bey, American, born 1953, archival pigment print, 40 x 48 inches, © Dawoud Bey, courtesy of Stephen Daiter Gallery.

## ABOUT SEATTLE ART MUSEUM

As the leading visual art institution in the Pacific Northwest, SAM draws on its global collections, powerful exhibitions, and dynamic programs to provide unique educational resources benefiting the Seattle region, the Pacific Northwest, and beyond. SAM was founded in 1933 with a focus on Asian art. By the late 1980s the museum had outgrown its original home, and in 1991 a new 155,000-square-foot downtown building, designed by Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates, opened to the public. The 1933 building was renovated and rededicated as the Asian Art Museum in 1994, and it reopened on February 8, 2020, following an extensive renovation and expansion. SAM's desire to further serve its community was realized in 2007 with the opening of two stunning new facilities: the nine-acre Olympic Sculpture Park (designed by Weiss/Manfredi Architects)—a “museum without walls,” free and open to all—and the Allied Works Architecture designed 118,000-square-foot expansion of its main, downtown location, including 232,000 square feet of additional space built for future expansion. The Olympic Sculpture Park and SAM's downtown expansion celebrated their tenth anniversary in 2017.

From a strong foundation of Asian art to noteworthy collections of African and Oceanic art, Northwest Coast Native American art, European and American art, and modern and contemporary art, the strength of SAM's collection of approximately 25,000 objects lies in its diversity of media, cultures, and time periods.