

## SELECT BIOS

### style bio

LORRAINE O'GRADY was born in Boston in 1934 and educated at Wellesley College. After careers as a research economist, translator, and rock critic, she began making art in 1980, when she first performed her art-critical persona *Mlle Bourgeoise Noire*. O'Grady's work as a conceptual artist using performance, photo-installation, video and other media incisively addresses personal and cultural issues such as diaspora, hybridity, and black female subjectivity from the perspective of art criticism. Restlessly experimental, O'Grady employs a range of borrowings, both from early modernist Futurism, Dada and Surrealism, all of which she has taught extensively, as well as from post-modernist appropriation. Works which may have apparently different surfaces, however, are invariably characterized by a unique amalgam of formal elegance and beauty with strong and sometimes abrasive political content. O'Grady believes there is no inherent contradiction between beauty and politics since elegance is an enduring quality of black style that remains politically malleable. The diptych is another of her continuing motifs, used as a refusal of simplistic resolution in the work and at the same time as a "both/and" critique of the "either/or" dualism of Western philosophy. In addition to her work as a visual artist, O'Grady has also made innovative contributions to cultural criticism with her writings, including the now canonical article, "Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity." Current projects include work based on the relationship of Charles Baudelaire, the founder of modernism, and his black common-law wife Jeanne Duval. In 2006, Holland Cotter, writing in *The New York Times*, called O'Grady "one of the most interesting conceptualists around." And in 2007, her performance *Mlle Bourgeoise Noire* was made one of the entry points to the groundbreaking *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, the first major museum exhibit of one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's most important art movements.

## honors bio

LORRAINE O'GRADY was born in Boston in 1934 to parents from Jamaica. She was educated at Girls Latin School and Wellesley College and later attended the Iowa Writers Workshop. A conceptual artist who works in performance, photo-installation, video and other media, O'Grady began her art career in 1980 with the now legendary performance *Mlle Bourgeoise Noire*. Since then she has received many honors and awards, including the Bunting Fellowship in Visual Art from Harvard, the Vera List Senior Fellowship in Art and Politics from New School University, grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and from the New York State Council on the Arts, the Sharpe Space Program residency, and funded residencies at the Yaddo, Macdowell and Millay colonies. O'Grady has lectured widely on her work at various universities and museums, including the Museum of Modern Art and the International Center for Photography in New York, and the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut. Both an artist and a writer, her articles have appeared in such publications as *Artforum* and *Afterimage* magazines, and her frequently anthologized text "Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity" was most recently published in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, Routledge. She has had an extensive teaching career in studio art and humanities, with appointments at the University of California Irvine, the School of Visual Arts in New York City, the Skowhegan School of Art in Maine, and the International Summer Academy of Fine Art in Salzburg, Austria. In 2006, *The New York Times* called O'Grady "one of the most interesting American conceptualists around." And in 2007, *Mlle Bourgeoise Noire* was made an entry point to *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, the first-ever museum exhibit of this historically important art movement. O'Grady is currently an independent artist living and working in Manhattan.