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LORRAINE O'GRADY
Miscegenated Family Album

ALEXANDER GRAY ASSOCIATES (New York)
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Discussion of framing as a technique of meaning in O'Grady's conceptual photo-installation.

Photo: Lorraine O'Grady, "Sisters III" (1980/1994). Cibachrome prints, 26 x 37 in. Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, New York

Passe-partout, a french term meaning both a "master key" and a technique for matting a photograph or painting, was adopted by Derrida to explain the way an image is metaphorically framed by its context. And attention to framing, both literal and metaphorical, is key to understanding Conceptual artist Lorraine O'Grady's 1980/1994 photographic installation *Miscegenated Family Album*. On first glance, the work's pairing of family photos with ancient statues of Nefertiti seems an elaborate and fantastic way to establish royal lineage, but this family album has little to do with genealogy. Instead it is a subtle recounting of O'Grady's strained relationship with her older sister, Devonia, a rift that was not resolved before Devonia's untimely death at 37. O'Grady finds a striking parallel between her sister and Nefertiti, who disappeared in her late thirties, leaving behind six children and her younger sister Mutnedjmet. All the images in the album are scaled identically, eliminating hierarchy and reinforcing a poetic link between the two families. bouquet in hand, Devonia as a matron of honor is juxtaposed with a relief of Nefertiti performing a purification ritual, while the wistful, faraway look worn by

Kimberly (Devonia's daughter) is mirrored by a bust of Nefertiti's daughter Maketaten. O'Grady is best known for her performances as Mlle Bourgeoise Noire, who crashed art openings in the '80s in an attempt to draw attention to artworld apartheid, but here she sets aside the struggle to assert her identity. Far from being polemical, this somber series delves into the experiences that shape our sense of self, exploiting the frame as a passe-partout that conflates the historical and the personal, uniting human beings across time and space.