

Wall Text.
Art Institute of Chicago.
MISCEGENATED FAMILY ALBUM.*

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In 2008, the AIC became the first museum to purchase the full *Miscegenated Family Album* installation. The initial exhibit was that summer, in a Permanent Collection gallery shared with the work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres.

LORRAINE O'GRADY

Miscegenated Family Album, 1994

As an artist of African, Caribbean, and Irish descent, Lorraine O'Grady has mainly focused on representations of black female subjectivity, often through the lens of family, literary and art-historical narratives. All of her work combats the elimination of difference across a spectrum of social concerns while championing the positive values of hybridization. In her own words she has been "obsessed with the reconciliation of opposites: past and present, conscious and unconscious, black and white, you and me." O'Grady's culturally complex childhood often left her feeling that she "belonged everywhere at once and nowhere at once," but through it she learned to skillfully negotiate a range of social, racial, and class milieus.

Miscegenated Family Album, the artist's masterpiece, is a series of 16 diptychs, each containing an image of the ancient Egyptian queen Nefertiti paired with an image of the artist's deceased

* In advance of the scheduled opening of a new Contemporary Art wing in May 2009, *MFA* was first temporarily exhibited in Permanent Collection Gallery 136 in Summer 2008.

sister, Devonia Evangeline O'Grady Allen, or members of their respective families. The physical resemblances between individuals within any given diptych are sometimes startling. Both families, in fact, reflect the consequences of generations of cross-cultural exchange and interracial marriage. (Miscegenation, the procreation between members of different races, was still illegal in 15 states in 1967, when such laws were finally overturned by the United States Supreme Court.) The dramatic contrast between the evolution of Nefertiti's family, which resulted from advantageous political alliances, and that of Devonia's forebearers – subjected into slavery and then dominated – sexually and otherwise – resonates throughout the series. In defiant triumph, O'Grady illuminated the regal bearing of both families.