

EXTENDED BIO

(by Alexander Gray Associates, NY)

Lorraine O'Grady (b.1934) combines strategies related to humanist studies on gender, the politics of diaspora and identity, and reflections on aesthetics by using a variety of mediums that include performance, photo installation, moving media, and photomontage. A native of Boston, MA, her work involves her heritage as a New Englander, and daughter of Caribbean immigrant parents. After she graduated from Wellesley College in 1956 studying economics and Spanish literature, she served as an intelligence analyst for the United States government, a literary and commercial translator, and rock music critic. Turning to visual arts in the late 1970s, O'Grady became an active voice within the alternative New York art world of the time. In addition to addressing feminist concerns, her work tackled cultural perspectives that had been underrepresented during the feminist movements of the early 1970s.

In the 1980s, O'Grady created two of her most currently recognized bodies of work, *Mlle Bourgeoise Noire* (1980–83), a guerrilla performance taking place in the heart of New York City's downtown art scene, and *Art Is...* (1983), a joyful performance in Harlem's African-American Day Parade. In *Mlle Bourgeoise Noire*, O'Grady's extravagant persona responded to the Futurist dictum that art has the power to change the world and was in part a critique of the racial apartheid still prevailing in the mainstream art world. Wearing a costume made of 180 pairs of white gloves from thrift shops and carrying a white cat-o-nine-tails of sail rope from a seaport store that she had studded with white chrysanthemums, *Mlle Bourgeoise Noire* (Miss Black Middle-Class) was an equal-opportunity critic. She gave both timid black artists and thoughtless white institutions a "piece of her mind." Under this persona, O'Grady visited both the burgeoning Just Above Midtown black avant-garde gallery and the then recently opened New Museum of Contemporary Art.

Art Is... embodied O'Grady's desire to fully connect with the audience. The performance was undertaken in a spirit of elation which carried over through the day; unlike previous works which had critiqued the art world from within, this piece went outside to be about life and art. O'Grady used a 9 x 15 foot antique-styled gold frame mounted on a gold-skirted parade float that moved slowly up Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard, framing everything it passed as art. Today, the work is a compelling reminder of the politics and power of art making, as well as the joy of experiencing art.

Concerned with the lack of African-American and other representation in the Feminist movement of the 1970s, O'Grady critiqued the effort's inability to "make itself meaningful to working-class white women and to non-white women of all classes." O'Grady has continued an ongoing commitment to articulating "hybrid" subjective positions that span a range of races, classes and social identities. In addition to her work as a visual artist, she has also made innovative contributions to cultural criticism with her writings, including the now canonical article, "Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity".

Lorraine O'Grady's work has been recently exhibited at MoMA PS1, New York (2014);

Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN (2014); Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (2015, 2013 and 2012); Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2013), the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (2012), the Whitney Museum, New York (2012 and Whitney Biennial, 2010); Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha, Qatar (2012); La Triennale Paris, France (2012); Prospect.2 New Orleans, LA (2011); Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa (2011); Manifesta 8, Murcia, Spain (2010); Museum of Modern Art, New York (2010 and 2008); Art Institute of Chicago, IL (2008); and Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2007). Her work is represented in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Art Institute of Chicago, IL; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA; Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York; Rose Art Museum, Waltham, MA; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; and Fogg Art Museum at Harvard, Cambridge, MA. O'Grady has been a resident artist at Artpace San Antonio, TX, and has received numerous other awards, including the CAA Distinguished Feminist Award, a Lifetime Achievement Award from Howard University, the Art Matters grant, the United States Artists Rockefeller Fellowship and, most recently, a Creative Capital Award in Visual Art.