

Miscegenated Family Album (1980/1994)

by Lorraine O'Grady

Summary

Miscegenated Family Album, O'Grady's 1994 photo-installation of cibachrome diptychs, is perhaps her most complete and satisfying work. It had a long gestation period. Its 16 diptychs were selected from the 65 image pairs of *Nefertiti/Devonia Evangeline*, the 1980 performance of mourning and reconciliation in which slides comparing her sister Devonia, Nefertiti, and their families were projected behind the artist's live action. She retired the performance in 1988 following its presentation in *Art As A Verb*, curated by Leslie King-Hammond and Lowery Sims, because it now felt emotionally and theoretically redundant. However, *Art As A Verb* simultaneously featured her first wall installation, "Sisters," a group of four doubled images taken from the performance. O'Grady soon decided that the quadriptych, shown in isolation from its larger context, was both too baldly political (one artist said it was more political than David Hammons's "How Ya Like Me Now?" also in the show) and too pretty. She would turn down an invitation to exhibit it in the landmark *Decade Show* of 1990.

In 1994, she was able to present the full installation as she imagined it. While in residency at the Sharpe Foundation, she was invited to be in *The Body as Measure* at Wellesley's Davis Museum. On the floor of her studio, color xeroxes of the 65 diptychs from *N/DE* were spread out, moved, deselected and rearranged. With the final grouping of 16 diptychs, it seemed to go past the personal and political limits of earlier versions to become "a novel in space," one that could speak beyond words.

In the 1990s, *Miscegenated Family Album* was also shown at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford and at the Louisiana Museum in Denmark (where, wonderfully, its tiny dark room felt like the inside of a sarcophagus). In 2008, an edition was purchased by the Art Institute of Chicago and exhibited in its Permanent Collection Galleries. It also in 2008 received its first show in New York, at Alexander Gray Associates, O'Grady's new gallery.