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DAVIS MUSEUM REOPENS WITH EXHIBIT OF LORRAINE O'GRADY'S WORKS



The reopening of the Davis Museum has been a long-anticipated event for many Wellesley students this year, considering its 14-month closure as a new exhibition was installed. But the wait was well worth it; on Feb. 8th, the Davis Museum reopened their main gallery for the general public. The exhibit — titled "Lorraine O'Grady: Both/And" — is meant to consolidate the many facets of esteemed alumni Lorraine O'Grady's '55 extensive career and artistic pursuits into one place.

Since the opening of the Davis Museum in 1889, various directors have lent their unique visions to the institution. Combining permanent works with a rotating collection of featured artists, many of which tie themselves back to the College, the Davis Museum serves as both a space of artistic expression and educational collaboration. That same spirit and appreciation was apparent in the reopening of the museum, when students, faculty, and curious art appreciators flocked to the evening opening. There was wine and cheese, a real frame in which students could mimic O'Grady's iconic work and a general atmosphere of long-awaited excitement. O'Grady's works have been widely regarded as revolutionary, and this is an opportunity to view their ever-changing methods and meanings in one place. O'Grady has held many roles including government analyst, educator, rock critic, translator, writer and most recently a visual artist who has not always been welcomed by the art world.

As the Davis Museum puts it in their overview of the exhibit, O'Grady's work spans a wide range of subjects, such as "black female subjectivity in Western modernity and artistic modernism; colonialism and slavery; hybridity and diasporic experience; multiplicity and selfhood; and intersectional feminist theory and praxis." And those subjects were all revealed within "Both/And," which included a written performance by O'Grady called "Rivers, First Draft, or the Woman in Red," her famous frame portraits taken during the Harlem's African-American Day Parade in 1983, and her 1994 photography exhibition titled "Miscegenated Family Album," in which she compares family members to old Egyptian statues. The exhibition also included a large portion of her 1977 "Cutting Out the New York Times," which contained poetic sayings and phrases clipped out of New York Times articles. Across the board, the show exemplified the life's work of Lorraine O'Grady; simultaneously, it gave students and faculty a peek into the process of creating such works, as well as the extensiveness of O'Grady's career.

In addition to the celebration of the Museum opening and the new arrival of a featured collection, the event itself was even more extensive than just one exhibition night. Two events that accompanied the reopening were "Taking the White Gloves Off: A Performance Art Series in Honor of Lorraine O'Grady '55" — a performance piece curated by Dr. Nikki A. Greene, a Wellesley faculty member — and a symposium titled "Teaching/Learning with Lorraine O'Grady's Both/And." Both events served to further elaborate on Lorraine O'Grady's success and put it in the context of how a Wellesley student, or any student, can relate to and draw from her work.

I had the pleasure of attending the panel during the symposium, which was chaired by Dr. Semente and paneled by Rhonda Gray, Dr. Liseli A. Fitzpatrick, Dr. Erin Battat, Noely Irineu Silva and Dr. Nikki A. Greene, all of whom are intimately aware of Lorraine O'Grady's impact on multiple disciplines. They spoke about teaching O'Grady's work in their classrooms, and how her cultural commentary reflects on all of their fields. Ranging from meditative practices, as Rhonda Gray spoke about when she said, "O'Grady gives us a template for loving darkness, primarily through the use of the body," to the impact of artistic expression on the soul of society, as Dr. Liseli A. Fitzpatrick remarked, "The heart cannot exist in the absence of art, and an artless society is a heartless society," it is clear O'Grady has had an impact that is long-lasting and far-reaching.

From classroom to community space, Lorraine O'Grady has been widely recognized for her historic impact on the world, and specifically at Wellesley. Her work as an alumni of the College, and her donation to the College's art and culture are both noteworthy. Documenting how race, society, artistic expression, and a connection of the mind, body and soul can pervade every aspect of life gives current students a new perspective — one that invites them to pursue limitless possibilities, and to dare to make statements as O'Grady did.

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