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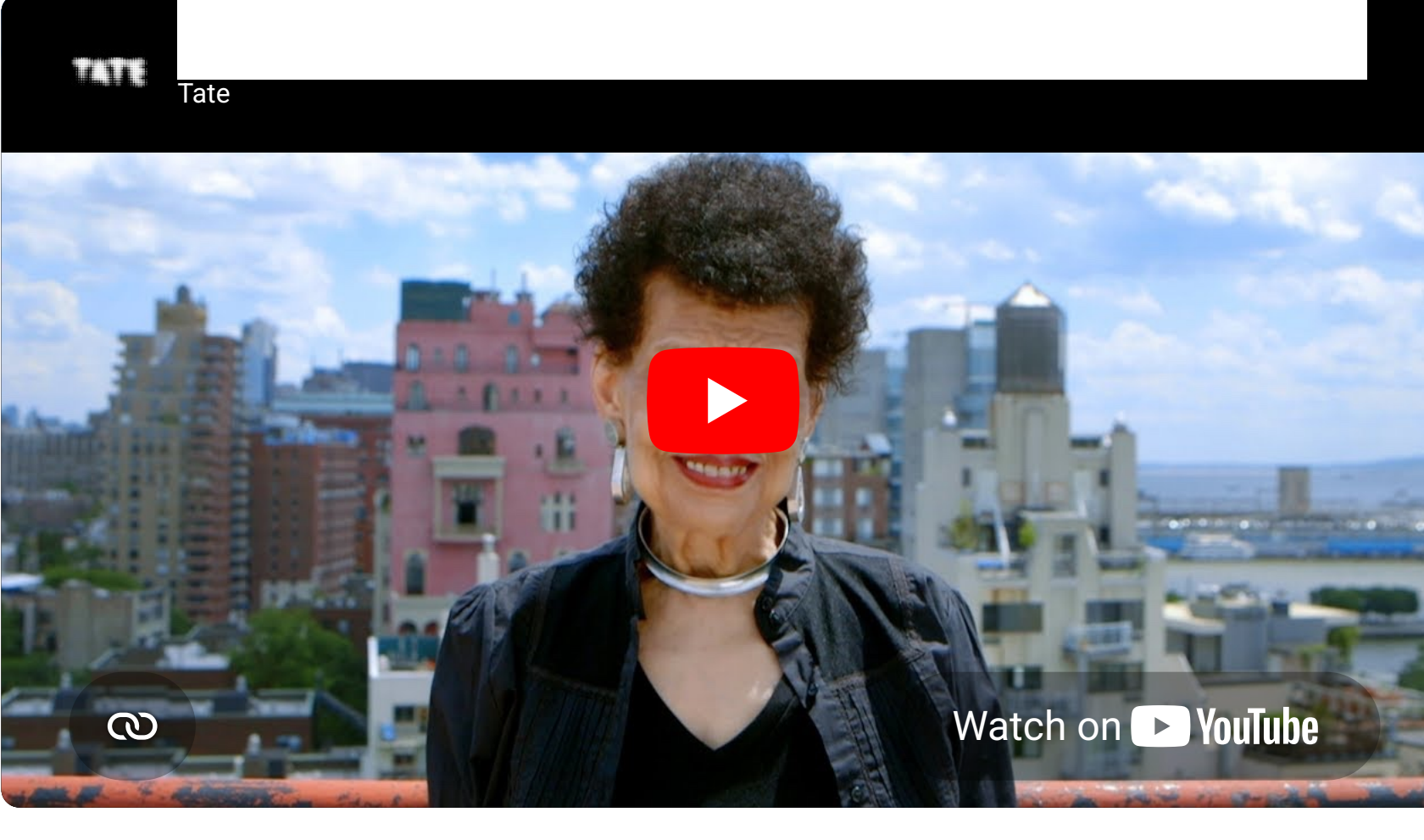
Lorraine O'Grady (1934–2024), conceptual artist and cultural critic

by Eric San Juan • 3 min read • Dec 16, 2024

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Lorraine O'Grady was a conceptual artist and cultural critic who won acclaim late in life for her mixed-media work, which often explored race and cultural identity, especially from the perspective of a Black woman in the United States.

- **Died:** December 13, 2024 ([Who else died on December 13?](#))^{c2}
- **Details of death:** Died in New York at the age of 90.^{c2}
- [We invite you to share condolences for Lorraine O'Grady in our eGuest Book.](#)^{c2}

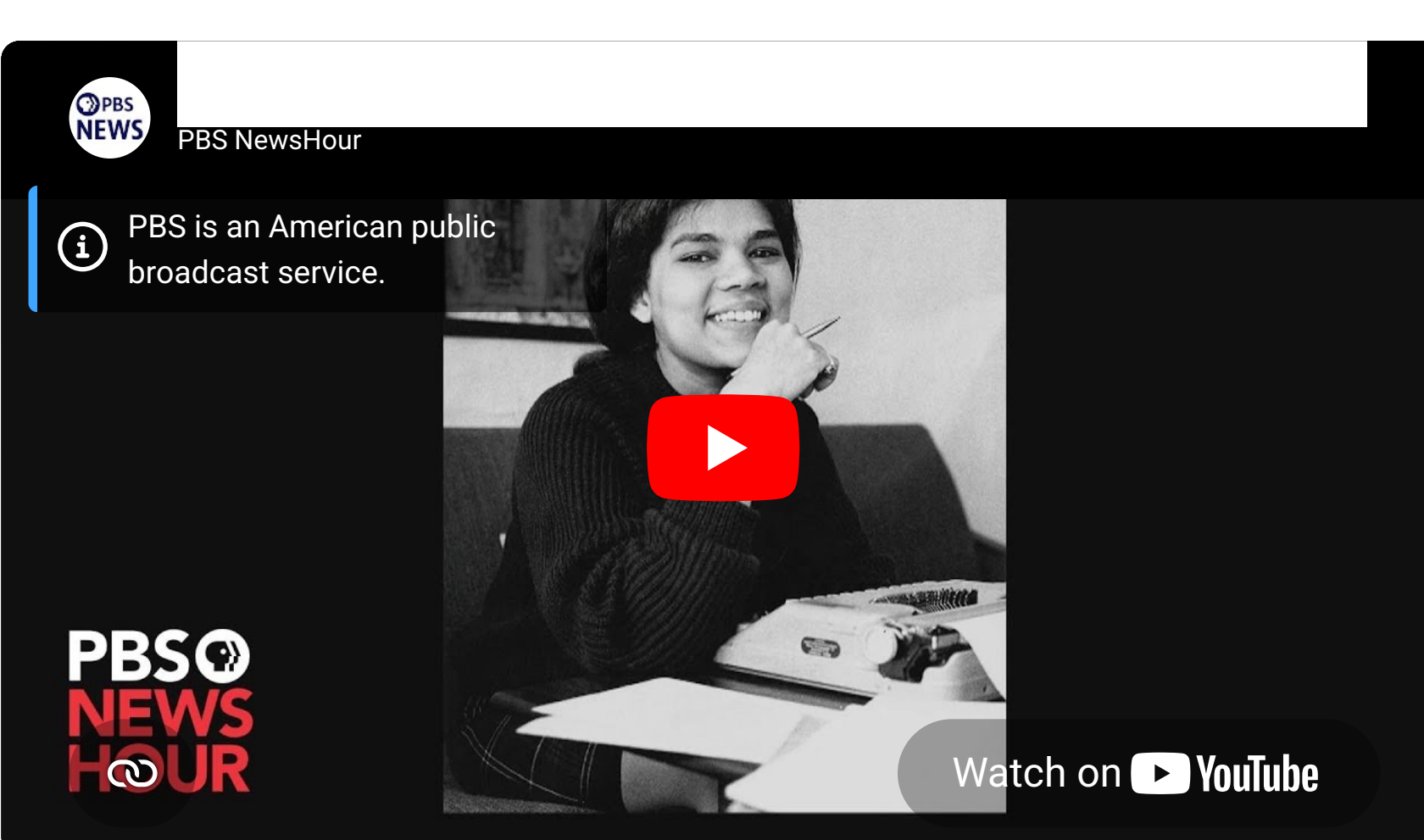


Lorraine O'Grady's legacy

Before challenging and changing the art world, O'Grady worked in a capacity far removed from the art world: she was an economist working for the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. As an economics major with a degree from Wellesley College, it may have seemed like a natural fit. Turned out it did not suit her, so a love of writing took her overseas to write. Once home in the states, she studied fiction at the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop, gaining her master's degree, and taught Spanish.

In the 1970s, O'Grady took up work as a translator, listing clients that included Playboy and Encyclopedia Britannica. She got bylines as a critic for Rolling Stone and the Village Voice, plus spent time teaching literature at the School of Visual Arts. It was while teaching that O'Grady began creating her own multimedia art. She did not explore traditional forms of visual art. Instead, O'Grady sliced apart the New York Times, crafted pieces that questioned cultural norms in the United States, and created works that challenged discussions on race in America.

By the 1980s, performance became an integral part of what she brought to life via the cotillion gown-wearing character she portrayed, Mlle Bourgeoise Noire, who whipped herself and gave flowers away at NYC exhibit openings. In 1983, she pulled together one of her best-known pieces, "Art is..." a float for the annual Afro-American Day Parade in Harlem, New York that included participants carrying gold picture frames that showcased them and onlookers as the art.



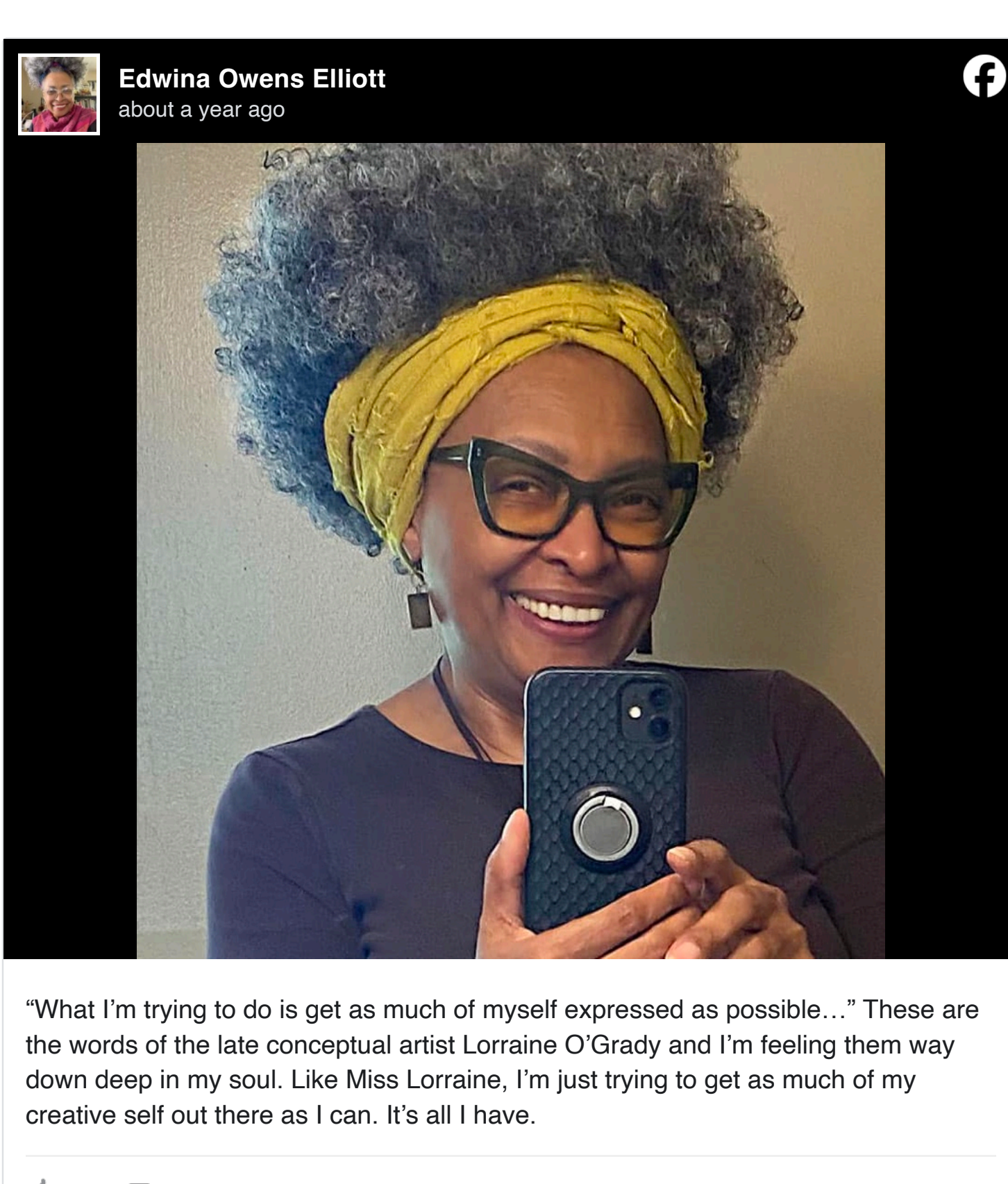
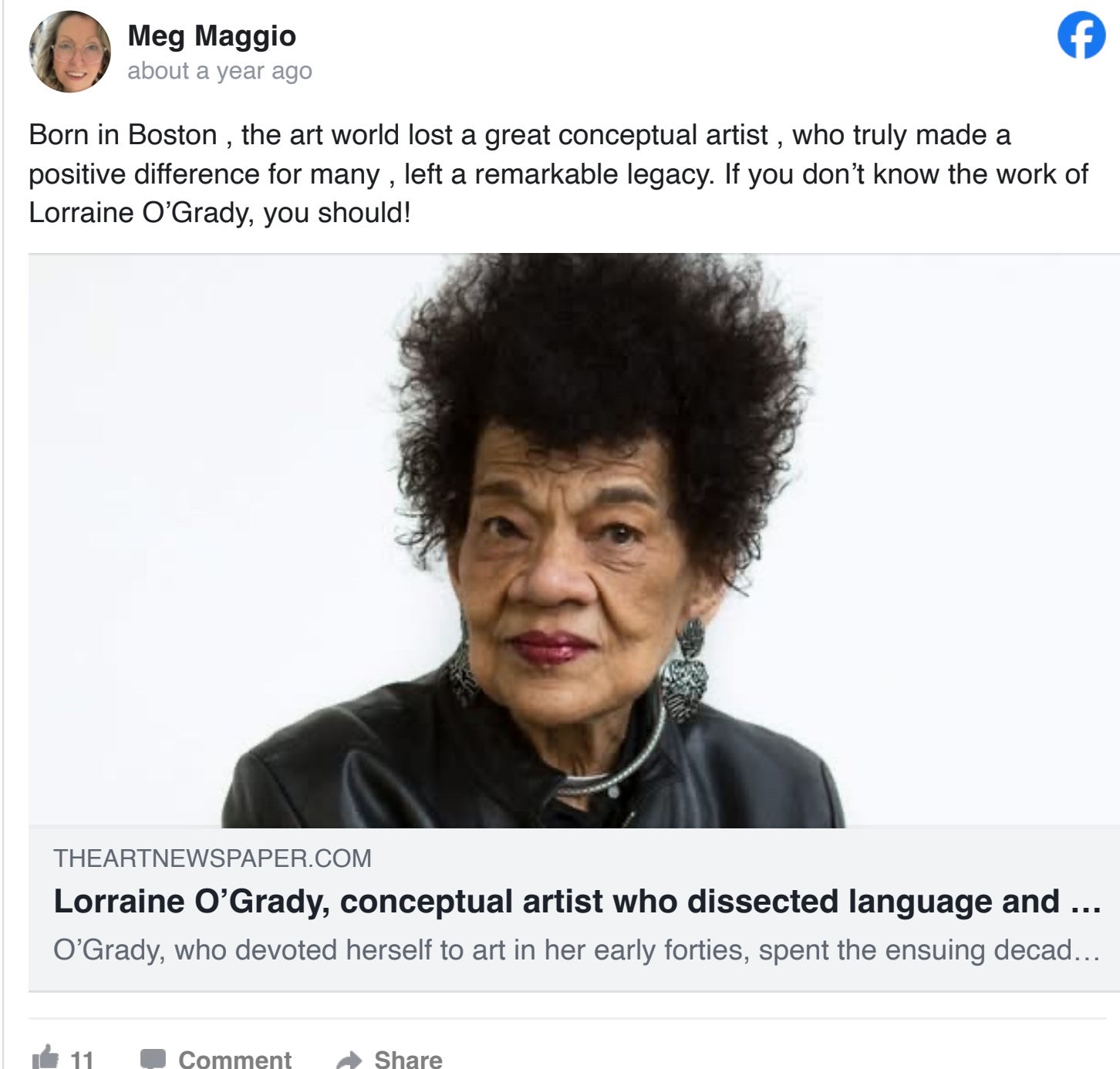
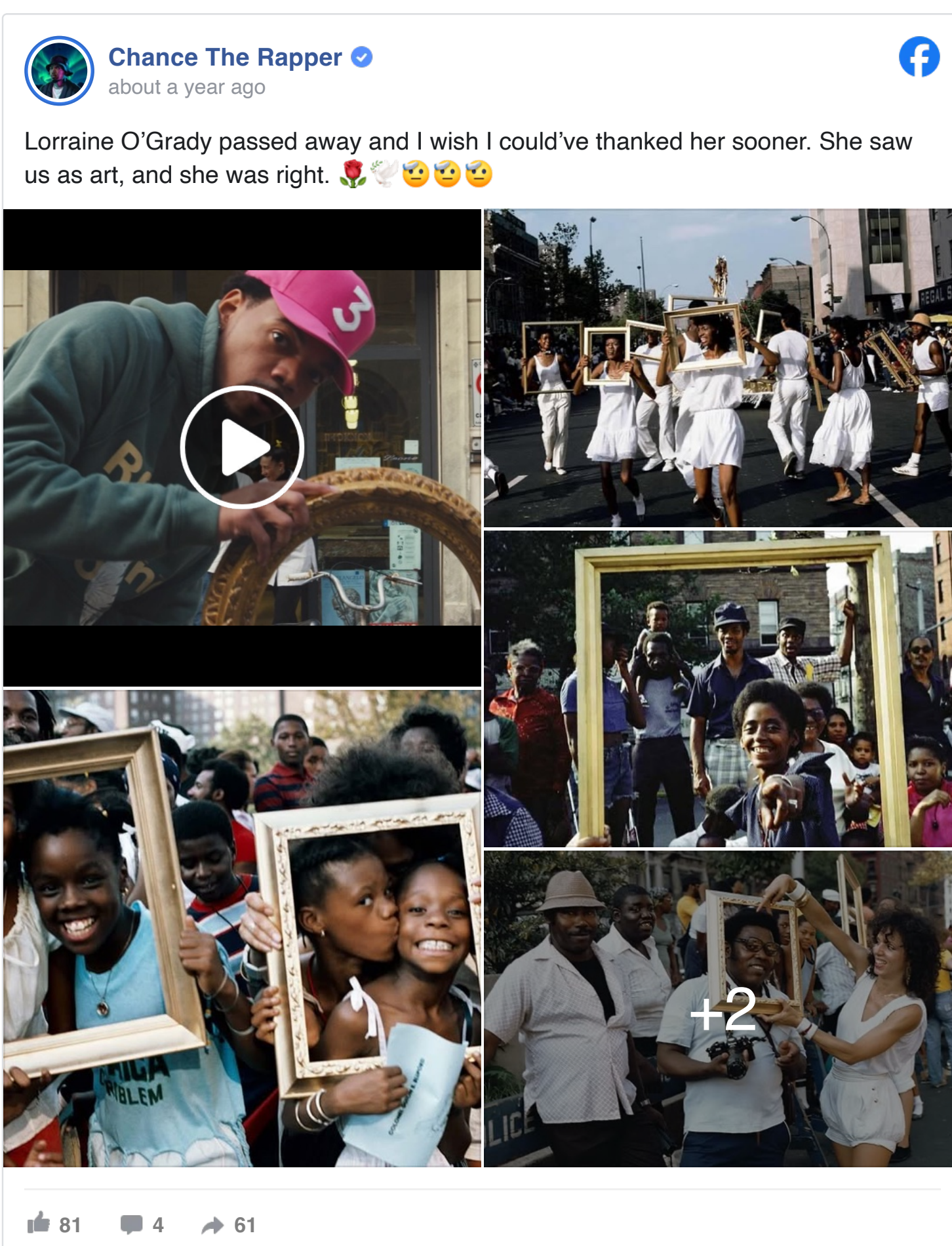
O'Grady's artistry still flew largely under the radar until the 1990s, during which the art world began to take a more serious look at her creations. By the 2000s, decades after she began exploring her craft, O'Grady had finally become the giant she is today.

She was awarded a United States Artists Rockefeller Fellowship in Visual Art, Guggenheim Fellowship in Fine Arts, the College Art Association's Distinguished Feminist Award, and many other honors. There are permanent exhibits of O'Grady's art at institutions including the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis.

Notable quote

"The most important thing that I had to do as an artist was to have the concept of Black genius uttered out loud." ^{mdash}interview with the New Yorker, 2022

Tributes to Lorraine O'Grady



Full obituary: [The New York Times](#)



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