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Berlin, February 15, 2023

Press release

n.b.k. Billboard

Carrie Mae Weems

Queen B (Mary J. Blige)

Opening: Friday, March 10, 2023, 7 pm

March 11 – August 27, 2023

Intersection Friedrichstrasse / Torstraße

Press preview on Friday, March 10, 5 pm, with the curator.

Curator: Lidiya Anastasova

Since the 1980s, Carrie Mae Weems has consistently explored issues of gender, race, and class, as well as the asymmetry of sociopolitical power relations and their consequences, while constantly questioning the status quo. Her artistic practice spans photography, video, site-specific installations, texts, performances, and activist campaigns. Weems often uses visual quotations from historical, scientific, museum, and pop cultural contexts as an act of reappropriation and empowerment concerning the politics of representation in general, and of Black (hi-)stories and lived experiences in particular.

For the n.b.k. Billboard series, Weems adapted the photograph *Queen B*, which is part of an extensive series of images devoted to the R&B icon and actor Mary J. Blige. Weems produced the series in 2017 for a special issue of the magazine *W*. A version of the work was presented in 2020 as part of the exhibition series *Safety Curtain* by museum in progress at the Vienna State Opera. In context of the n.b.k. program, this work will be represented for the first time in the urban space. Here, it undergoes a temporal and spatial recontextualization to take on further narrative strands, for instance, with regard to current events surrounding the British monarchy.

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Weems staged the opulent set for *Queen B* by recalling the pictorial structure and codes of baroque still-life painting – a reference to the “golden age” of Western European art and the economic growth of colonial powers based on exploitation. The abundant arrangement of flowers, fruits, crystal glass, and silver was enriched by the artist with artifacts such as a Bambara Tyi Wara headdress from Mali and an ebony figurine from Nigeria, as well as objects by contemporary artists such as Kehinde Wiley, suggesting wider narrative threads around power and beauty. With the crown motif, Weems also references Jean-Michel Basquiat, who used it in his art as a recurring symbol associated with expressions of Black culture.

Multidimensional perspectives that do justice to the complexity of humanity are central to Weems’ oeuvre. She reflects on representations of power and examines the objectifying gaze inscribed in the history of the medium of photography. In her meticulously composed works, Weems deliberately seeks to destabilize and reverse (historical) power relations.

The work *Queen B* follows on from Weems’ earlier *Slow Fade to Black* – the 2010 series pays homage to Black musicians and cultural figures of the 20th century, including Dinah Washington, Nina Simone, Leontyne Price, Mahalia Jackson, Shirley Bassey, Ella Fitzgerald, Abbey Lincoln, Eartha Kitt, and Koko Taylor.

Biographical information

Carrie Mae Weems (*1953 in Portland/Oregon, lives in Syracuse/New York) is the recipient of numerous awards, most recently the Bernd and Hilla Becher Prize and the Harlem Stage Transformative Artist Award (both 2022), the Artes Mundi 9 Biennial Prize, Cardiff (2020), and the Royal Photographic Society Honorary Fellowship (2019). Solo and group exhibitions include at Barbican Art Centre, London (2023); Getty Center, Los Angeles (2023); Kunstmuseum Basel (2023); KBr Fundación Mapfre, Fundación Foto Colectania, MACBA, Barcelona (2022); Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart (2022); Park Avenue Armory, New York (2021); The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (2014); Guggenheim Museum, New York (2014); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2012). Carrie Mae Weems is represented by Jack Shainman Gallery, New York; Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin; Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco.

About the n.b.k. Billboard:

The n.b.k. Billboard is a public art project located at the intersection Friedrichstrasse / Torstrasse, a two-minute walk from Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (n.b.k.) and embedded in a central and highly frequented urban environment. Every six months, an artwork that has been specially developed for the large-format billboard by an international contemporary artist invites the Berlin public to actively engage with the sociopolitical and aesthetic implications of contemporary art and the urban environment.

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For further information and images please log in to the site www.nbk.org under *Press*.

Username: presse, password: n.b.k.2023

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