

Media release
Basel, June 3, 2021

Kara Walker
A Black Hole Is Everything a Star Longs to Be

June 5–September 26, 2021, Kunstmuseum Basel | Neubau
Curator: Anita Haldemann

The Kunstmuseum Basel mounts the Black American artist Kara Walker's (b. 1969) first major exhibition in Switzerland, featuring more than six hundred works on paper from her personal archive that have never been on public display. These works, which date from the past twenty-eight years, are presented together with brand-new drawings that address contemporary concerns such as Barack Obama's legacy.

One of the most high-profile artists working in the United States today, Kara Walker combines traditional creative techniques with extraordinary technical finesse to create provocative works that grapple with history, race relations, gender roles, sexuality, and violence. Walker does not propose a conciliatory view of the past, instead prodding the viewer to question established narratives and entrenched myths. She is unsparing in her analysis of deep-rooted conflicts and persistent social ills. As recent events and the worldwide attention generated by the Black Lives Matter movement have demonstrated, Walker's oeuvre speaks poignantly to some of today's most urgent issues.

The artist rose to renown in the mid-1990s with wall-sized silhouettes. In the winter of 2019/2020, she made headlines with her monumental sculpture *Fons Americanus* at the Tate Modern in London. Yet drawing on paper remains the foundation of Kara Walker's creative practice. For the exhibition in Basel, she throws open the doors to her zealously guarded private archive, allowing visitors unprecedented insight into the making of her art. Small sketches, studies, collages, and meticulously finished large-format works appear side by side with diaristic notes, typewritten reflections on index cards, and dream journals. The graphical intimacy of each individual sheet contrasts with the stunning abundance of the works on view: zooming in and out, the beholder effectively becomes an eyewitness to the genesis of Walker's art, observing her as she enacts her thinking on the paper and invents, adapts, and transforms figures and narratives.

Compared to the elegant panoramic silhouettes, the drawings have an air of spontaneity and unfiltered emotion. Many of them were executed with the brush, which lends them a flowing and open dynamic. Scrutinizing her own identity—as an artist, a Black woman, a mother—Walker probes both its personal dimension and its social implications in the context of current events. The latter aspect is prominent in four sensational role portraits she created for the exhibition that reflect on Barack Obama's presidency and legacy. The presentation

also includes the 38-part work *The Gross Clinician Presents: Pater Gravidam*, a searching examination of questions around inspiration and creativity as well as traditions in graphic art that are richly represented in the museum's collection of prints and drawings.

A lavishly illustrated catalogue with contributions by the artist, Anita Haldemann, Aria Dean, and Maurice Berger has been published by JRP Editions (ISBN 978-3-03764-558-1).

The exhibition was produced by the Kunstmuseum Basel and will travel to the Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt am Main, Germany, in the fall of 2021 and then to the De Pont Museum, Tilburg, Netherlands, in 2022.

The exhibition is supported by
BLKB
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Media conference

Thursday, June 3, 2021, 11am
Kunstmuseum Basel | Neubau, St. Alban-Graben 20, 4052 Basel

Imagery and information on the exhibition

www.kunstmuseumbasel.ch/medien

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Biographical information

Kara Walker was born in Stockton, Calif., in 1969. When she was thirteen, her family moved to Atlanta, Ga. She earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Atlanta College of Art in 1991 and a Master of Fine Arts from the renowned Rhode Island School of Design in 1994.

Kara Walker's art has garnered numerous awards, including a John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Achievement Award in 1997 and an Eileen Harris Norton Fellowship in 2008. Walker is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters (elected in 2012) and the American Philosophical Society (elected in 2018). In 2019, the Royal Academy of Arts, London, named her an Honorary Royal Academician.

Walker's work has been acquired by renowned museums and public collections across the United States and Europe, including the Kunstmuseum Basel's Kupferstichkabinett (Department of Prints and Drawings); the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Tate Gallery, London; the Museo Nazionale delle Arti del XXI secolo (MAXXI), Rome; and the Deutsche Bank Collection, Frankfurt am Main.

The artist lives and works in New York.

Events

Kara Walker in conversation
with Dr. Anita Haldemann, head of the Kupferstichkabinett and curator of the exhibition
Fri, June 4, 2021, 6:30–8pm (free Live-Stream on Youtube: <https://youtu.be/7jZyg7nOkcc>)