

Carrie Mae Weems

Social Studies

May 20 - September 19, 2010

This exhibition has been produced by the Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo. Curated by Elvira Dyangani Ose.

On the occasion of this exhibition a catalogue has been published.

Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo

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Access

- Avda. Américo Vespucio nº 2
- Camino de los Descubrimientos s/n

Transport

C1 y C2 buses

Timetable

May, June and September

Tuesday to Saturday: 10 - 21 h.

July and August

Tuesday and Saturday: 10 - 21 h.

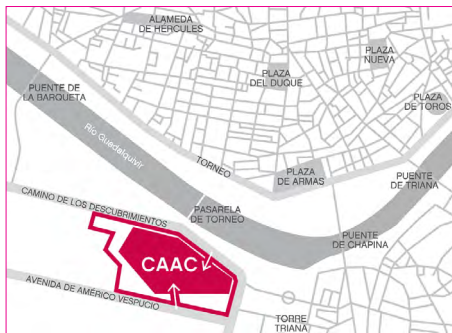
Wednesday to Friday: 10 - 15 h. and 20 - 24 h.

Sunday: 10 - 15 h.

Closed on Monday

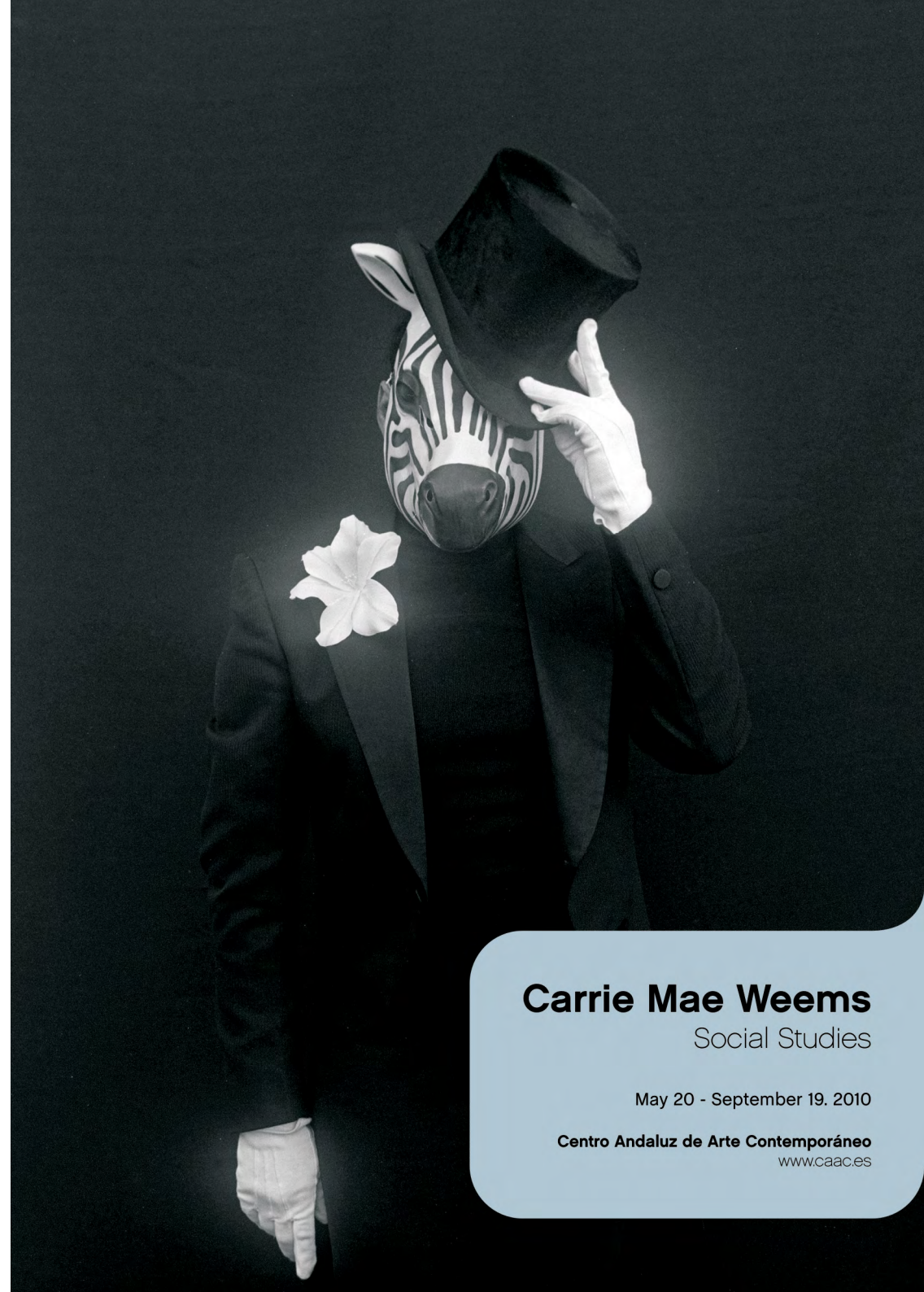
Holidays: Please consult web

Tickets sale until 30 minutes before closing



Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo
CONSEJERÍA DE CULTURA

Missing Link, Happiness, 2003. From the series Louisiana Project



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Are we—in any possible way—capable of changing history? Interfering in the making of history seems an unreachable utopia. However, we know somehow that any possible attempt towards that change would modify the history yet to come, and would force us to embody the role of the intellectual. Could any one of us be an intellectual? What is an intellectual? Is an artist a public intellectual? And, if she is, what are the responsibilities that come along with that? This exhibition, featuring essential works by artist Carrie Mae Weems, explores—from that particular juncture—the role of the intellectual in culture and history making.



From the series *From here I saw what happened and I cried*, 1995

“If given the opportunity to change history, what would you do?” Carrie Mae Weems, while rescuing historical episodes and figures from oblivion, asks viewers, in turn, to project their own desires and expectations onto the process of producing history. It is a strong metaphor of an ideological discourse that calls one to action, announced by the most lucid intellectual. It is indeed an organic intellectual statement. There is something about the way in which this multi-faceted artist narrates untold stories; something about the strength with which she claims space for certain figures to be heard, to be remembered, that always brings to mind a type of social and/or political avowal. Weems re-inscribes certain subjects in history, subverting dominant discourses from inside the codes these are criticizing, creating a legitimate reading of overlooked episodes, instead of establishing a new history that falls outside of the so-called “Official History”.

Carrie Mae Weems. *Social Studies* features essential series from the last thirty years of Weems’s career, and explores aspects such as the revision of history, the appropriation of collective imagery; sometimes that inversion occurs out of irony and sarcasm, by transposing the racist stereotypes that abound in our everyday use of language. At other times, images previously kept in dark restricted historical archives, are charged with text and color to enact a deliberately vehement intervention, to produce, as Houston A. Baker Jr. points out, “the artist’s configurations of history to respond [to history itself, *my emphasis*] with a new and more humane understanding”.

Almost invariably, Weems dwells on the subtler, poetic and beautiful aspects hidden behind those facts. The constrained violence

of some of those episodes can be compared to the intensity with which the artist transmits to viewers her need to take sides, urging them to action and questioning their participation in the political and social challenges of our time.

Artists like Weems interrogate history, and regularly call into question the visibility (or invisibility) of history’s contributors. Artists like Weems unveil what Michel-Rolph Trouillot calls “silenced stories”. Those silenced stories. Artists who, as Weems indicates, “are really engaged in the art of the appropriation, who think that there is a larger story to tell.” That is not the only coincidence between scholar and artist. According to Trouillot, human beings participate in history both as actors and narrators. Weems highlights this participation by demanding her protagonists’ awareness within that process. Together they highlight the nuances inherent in the definition of the word “history”. Trouillot refers to its ambivalence to support his assertion; “history means both the facts of the matter and a narrative of those facts, both “what happened” and “that which is said to have happened”. The first meaning places

From the series *(Untitled) Kitchen table*, 1990



the emphasis on the socio-historical process, whilst the second rests on our knowledge of that process or on a story about that process”. Art proposes another reality to interfere with the socio-historical process: the subjective reality of the art exhibition. It is in this realm of the subjective—as delimited by artworks, the artist’s agency, the agendas of museums or galleries, and the curator’s agency—which is incapable of altering both discourses of the real. It is precisely there where artists find their place as agents in the production of history.

Despite the fact that history as a discipline places excessive limits on amateurs, some contemporary artists, like Weems, make Trouillot’s declarations her own, reminding us that there are other characters who appear alongside professional historians and also contribute to the production of history. These other characters are not able to destabilize its power spheres but they can add layers of complexity to its production.

The exhibition presents works in which artist questions the medium itself, using documentary

photography to explore photography as performance and re-enactment. Her work also analyzes disciplines such as art, where she discusses and inverts the canons, questioning the role of its institutions. Weems observes as well disciplines such as architecture, where she reflects on its symbolic character and use as a representation of power, likewise paying special attention to the codes of cultural, gender and class identity occurring in both the private and public spheres.

The exhibition displays about twenty of her major series and includes more than one hundred photographs of large and small format, digital prints on fabric and on wallpaper, audiovisual installations and video.