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Adam Pendleton, "Carrie Mae Weems," *PIN-UP*, November 15, 2024

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MUSEUM

MUSEUMS BY
CARRIE MAE WEEMS



Carrie Mae Weems, *The Cleveland Museum of Art* – Cleveland, 2006–present.

CARRIE MAE WEEMS

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Carrie Mae Weems, *The Louvre*, 2006–present.

In her *Museums* Series, the Artist
Confronts the Institutional Thresholds
of Histories

ARTWORK BY CARRIE MAE WEEMS
TEXT BY ADAM PENDLETON



Carrie Mae Weems, *The British Museum*, 2006–present.

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Carrie Mae Weems, *The High Museum of Art*, 2006–present.



Carrie Mae Weems, *Berlin History Museum*, 2006–present.

Based in Syracuse, New York, Carrie Mae Weems (born 1953) is an artist who investigates history, identity, and power, finding connections between personal experience and the larger structures and institutions that shape our lives. For over 40 years, Weems’s expansive practice, which includes analogue photography, writing, textile, audio, digital images, installations, and video, has given a voice to people whose stories have been silenced or ignored. Weems’s work can be found in the collections of New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art, Los Angeles’s Museum of Contemporary Art, and London’s Tate Modern, among others. She is currently the artist in residence at Syracuse University. Her most recent New York

exhibition, *The Shape of Things*, showed at Gladstone Gallery, September 14–November 9, 2024.

In Carrie Mae Weems’s series *Museums* (2006–ongoing), we encounter a work that simultaneously inhabits and challenges the space of institutional critique. Weems, positioning her body before the fortified façades of global art institutions such as the British Museum, the Louvre, or the Philadelphia Museum of Art, enacts a performance of presence that destabilizes the normative functions of both the photographic medium and the museum apparatus.

Weems’s photographic frame serves a dual purpose: it at once documents and constructs a new spatial paradigm. Her figure, against varying

architectural backdrops, creates a visual meter, a human measure that recalibrates institutional grandeur. This formal device echoes Leon Battista Alberti’s idea of *istoria* in Renaissance painting, yet Weems inverts the relationship between figure and ground. Her silhouette, almost like a shadow, becomes less a subject within the frame than a lens through which we view the prospect, promise, and agitated deferral of her images.

Operating within a dialectic of visibility and invisibility, presence and absence, Weems creates a hybrid space of representation. Shrouded in black, her back to the viewer, she is a kind of a cipher—a stand-in for histories of exclusion and a harbinger of

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Carrie Mae Weems, *Pergamon Museum Berlin*, 2006–present.

potential futures. This figural strategy recalls Jacques Rancière’s concept of the “part of those without part,” embodying those systematically excluded from the realm of representation, while simultaneously creating a new space of enunciation.

Each museum façade presents a unique formal language, yet all share a common function: to signify cultural legitimacy and regulate access. By consistently positioning herself as neither an insider nor outsider, but rather a figure on the threshold, Weems problematizes the very notion of architectural boundaries. She is the call and the architecture is the response. A dialogue that transcends traditional institutional critique creates a third space of negoti-

ation. As Weems has stated, “I’m always looking at the ways in which power is exercised, so I’m always in a dialogue with history and the history of art.”

Like much of Weem’s work, *Museums* makes manifest Homi Bhabha’s concept of the “third space”—a site of hybridity and potential transformation. The museum façade, in Weems’s framing, becomes less a barrier than a membrane, a point of negotiation between public and private, and the “sanctified” space of art. Her recurring presence suggests a performative architecture, one that is activated by and continuously redefined by the bodies that inhabit architectural peripheries, and the potential of the gaze of those who stand outside.

Adam Pendleton (born 1984) is a New York City-based artist who is a central figure amongst a cross-generational group of painters defining the medium as it relates to process and abstraction. In addition to working in his Brooklyn studio, he frequently travels to upstate New York, where he visited Carrie Mae Weems’s exhibition *Remember to Dream* (June 22–December 1, 2024) at CCS Bard countless times.