



Untitled (Woman and daughter with make-up), from the "Kitchen Table Series"

Date

1990 (printed 2010)

Primary Maker

Carrie Mae Weems

Medium

Gelatin silver print

Description

In her diverse but largely photographic practice, the contemporary artist Carrie Mae Weems probes the power structures that perpetuate unjust notions of race, gender, and class and that continue to dictate aspects of personal identity and prevent social and political equality. Weems earned a bachelor's degree in photography from the California Institute of the Arts and a master of fine arts from the University of California, San Diego, before entering a graduate program to study folklore; these two strands of her work ultimately intertwined, although that was not her original intention. The artist has frequently incorporated text that she writes herself—often narrative in nature—alongside or within her photographs. "Kitchen Table"—Weems's second major body of

work, after "Family Pictures and Stories" (1981–82)—is probably her best-known series. When she began, she was still working her way through the complexities of how to express herself both as a woman and as an artist. "Back in 1985, '86, '87," she has explained, "young women really had no sense of how to image themselves. And, black women had not been imaged in a way that I could appreciate, or admire . . . so, we were in this quandary." Like many female artists before her, she used domestic space—specifically, the kitchen—to examine this conundrum. "Kitchen Table" consists of twenty photographs (of which this is the sixteenth) and fourteen accompanying text panels. In the series, the artist tells the story of a "bodacious" Black woman—a traditionally marginalized figure but here the indisputable protagonist. The accompanying third-person text follows the woman as she fulfills different roles with respect to various figures in her life, experiencing love, heartbreak, motherhood, and friendship. In this series, as in others, Weems photographed herself in the role of the central female figure. Although the narrative is influenced by her experiences, it is not meant to be read as autobiographical but rather as universal. (SOURCE: Alcauskas, INNOVATIVE APPROACHES, HONORED TRADITIONS, 2017) This series was created while Weems was teaching at Hampshire College. Of the series, she said: "I had just started working on Kitchen Table, I was just scratching my way through it... Back in 1985, '86, '87 young women really had no sense of how to image themselves. And, black women had not been imaged in a way that I could appreciate, or admire... so, we were in this quandary, this place. I started working on this series using that space I think in a way that any number of women have importantly used interior spaces, the home space, the domestic space in order to craft their image making. Kitchen Table was a wonderful way of, finally for myself, describing what I was doing really as an artist and what I could actually do as an artist." (SOURCE: Franklin Sirmans, "A World of Her Own: Carrie Mae Weems and Performance," in Carrie Mae Weems: Three Decades of Photography and Video (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, in association with Frist Center for the Visual Arts, 2012), p. 47).

Dimensions

Image: 9 15/16 × 9 7/8 in. (25.2 × 25.1 cm) Sheet: 13 15/16 × 11 in. (35.4 × 27.9 cm)