

## “Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art”

CONTEMPORARY ARTS MUSEUM HOUSTON

5216 Montrose Boulevard

November 17–February 15

An expansive survey that offers a range of work in various media by thirty-nine artists, “Radical Presence” purports to be the first exhibition of its kind to focus solely on the role of performance in art by black artists. The show features pieces from the past five decades, with videos and photographs appearing alongside print-based works, sculptures, and installations. What is perhaps most interesting is the confluence of pieces that locate the exhibition at the interstice of two points: artists whose practices encompass performative strategies, and artists whose works interrogate and explore the notion of blackness as performance. For instance, Dread Scott’s series of photographs “I Am Not a Man,” 2009, revisits the sanitation workers’ strike of 1968 (while also referencing Glenn Ligon’s *[Untitled] I Am a Man*, 1988) and prods overlapping issues of race, class, gender, language, and representation. This work’s relationship to the exhibition’s theme is evident, whereas a video by the duo Girl (Chitra Ganesh and Simone Leigh), *my dreams, my works must wait till after hell . . .*, 2011—a single-channel projection of a woman lying on her side, whose head is covered by a pile of rocks—connects to the theme more ambiguously.



Girl, *My dreams, my works must wait till after hell . . .*, 2011, HD video, color, 7 minutes 14 seconds.

Curator Valerie Cassel Oliver has included many noted artists: There are seminal works by Coco Fusco, Lorraine O’Grady, Adrian Piper, and William Pope.L. Yet these are deftly woven within the exhibition in a manner that acknowledges and pays homage to the artists’ contributions to the history of performance in contemporary art while also recognizing the work of more emerging artists. The interplay between Jayson Musson (aka Hennessy Youngman)’s satirical webinars on art history and Adrian Piper’s iconic *The Mythic Being*, 1973, as well as between Maren Hassinger’s and Tameka Norris’s separate pieces which individually address issues of space and the body, speaks to the continuum of Conceptualism within the genre of performance and contribute to the exhibition’s dynamism. So, too, does the series of live performances and discussions that are being held throughout the show’s run.

— Sally Frater