

KARA WALKER

USA

Kara Walker is an interdisciplinary artist best known for her room-sized tableaux of black-and-white silhouette works that invoke themes of African American racial identity. The style is reminiscent

of the traditional African illustrations through the lines she draws and often portrays folklore and scenes of slavery, conflict, and violence from the pre-Civil War United States. The works draw attention to and archive these historic moments. The cutouts, often affixed directly onto the walls of the gallery, seem at first glance to portray fairy tales rather than horror. Walker also utilizes light projectors so that when the viewer walks around the work, their own shadow is cast among the silhouetted stories, drawing on the idea of how we are accountable for the past and what role we can play in the future.

The works often deal with somber and cruel depictions, but Walker has a keen sense of humor and generously allows the viewer to interact with it. She states, “I wanted to make work where the viewer wouldn’t walk away; he would either giggle nervously, get pulled into history, into fiction, into something totally demeaning and possibly very beautiful.” Another facet to Walker’s works is seen in her sensational installations such as *Fons Americanus* or *A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby*. Both allude to the sculptural language of racist stereotypes and how closely economy and global success are connected to the history of slavery. Walker shows the viewer that slavery is not a thing of the past but a specter of the present, and, unless we come to terms with the vibrations of history, we will never be free from it. (PR)

1
A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby, an Homage to the unpaid and overworked Artisans who have refined our Sweet tastes from the cane fields to the Kitchens of the New World on the Occasion of the demolition of the Domino Sugar Refining Plant
2014, polystyrene foam, sugar
Approx. 10.8 × 7.9 × 23 m
Installation view:
Domino Sugar Refinery,
A project of Creative Time, Brooklyn, NY, 2014

2
Fons Americanus
2019, non-toxic acrylic and cement composite, recyclable cork, wood, and metal
Main: 22.4 × 15.2 × 13.2 m
Grotto: 3.1 × 3.2 × 3.3 m
Installation view:
Hyundai Commission—Kara Walker, Tate Modern, London, United Kingdom, 2019



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