



Alexander Gray Associates

Lorraine O'Grady

Frieze 2019 | New York  
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Randall's Island Park  
New York City

Cover: *Untitled (Mlle Bourgeoise Noire beats herself with the whip-that-made-plantations-move)*, 1980-83/2009, detail, silver gelatin print, 9.69h x 7.31w in (24.61h x 18.57w cm)  
First fold: *Untitled (Mlle Bourgeoise Noire celebrates with her friends)*, 1980-83/2009, detail, silver gelatin print, 7h x 9.31w in (17.78h x 23.65w cm)  
Image 1: *Cutting Out CONYT 20*, 1977/2017, letterpress printing on Japanese paper, cut-out, collage on laid paper; diptych, each: 41.75h x 30w in, overall: 41.75h x 60w in.  
Image 2: *Cutting Out CONYT 26*, 1977/2017, letterpress printing on Japanese paper, cut-out, collage on laid paper, 41.75h x 30w in (106.05h x 76.20w cm)  
Image 3: *Untitled (Mlle Bourgeoise Noire shouts out her poem)*, 1980-83/2009, silver gelatin print, 9.69h x 7.5w in (24.61h x 19.05w cm)

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**“An esprit formed in exclusion”  
Lorraine O’Grady and Just Above Midtown (JAM)**

For more than four decades, Lorraine O’Grady has challenged cultural conventions. Her multidisciplinary practice seeks to confront the limitations of a culture built on exclusivity and resistance to difference by advocating for concepts like hybridity, gender fluidity, and process rather than resolution.

Born in Boston to West Indian parents, O’Grady was a talented scholar. After studying economics and Spanish literature at Wellesley College (class of 1955), she worked as a Research Economist at the Bureau of Labor Statistics. In 1961, she left her post in the US government to write fiction, ultimately entering the Iowa Writers’ Workshop in 1965. By the late 1960s, O’Grady was working in Chicago at a commercial translation agency while volunteering for Jesse Jackson and his organization Operation Breadbasket. However, after opening her own translation agency and fulfilling large contracts for *Playboy* and *Encyclopædia Britannica*, she decided to move to New York. Abandoning translation, she wrote for *Rolling Stone* and *The Village Voice*, reviewing acts like the Allman Brothers, Bruce Springsteen and the E-Street Band, and Bob Marley and the Wailers. After growing increasingly dissatisfied with her role in the music world, O’Grady accepted an offer to teach literature at the School of Visual Arts (SVA). There, she describes, “I felt I was home. I knew I was an artist.”

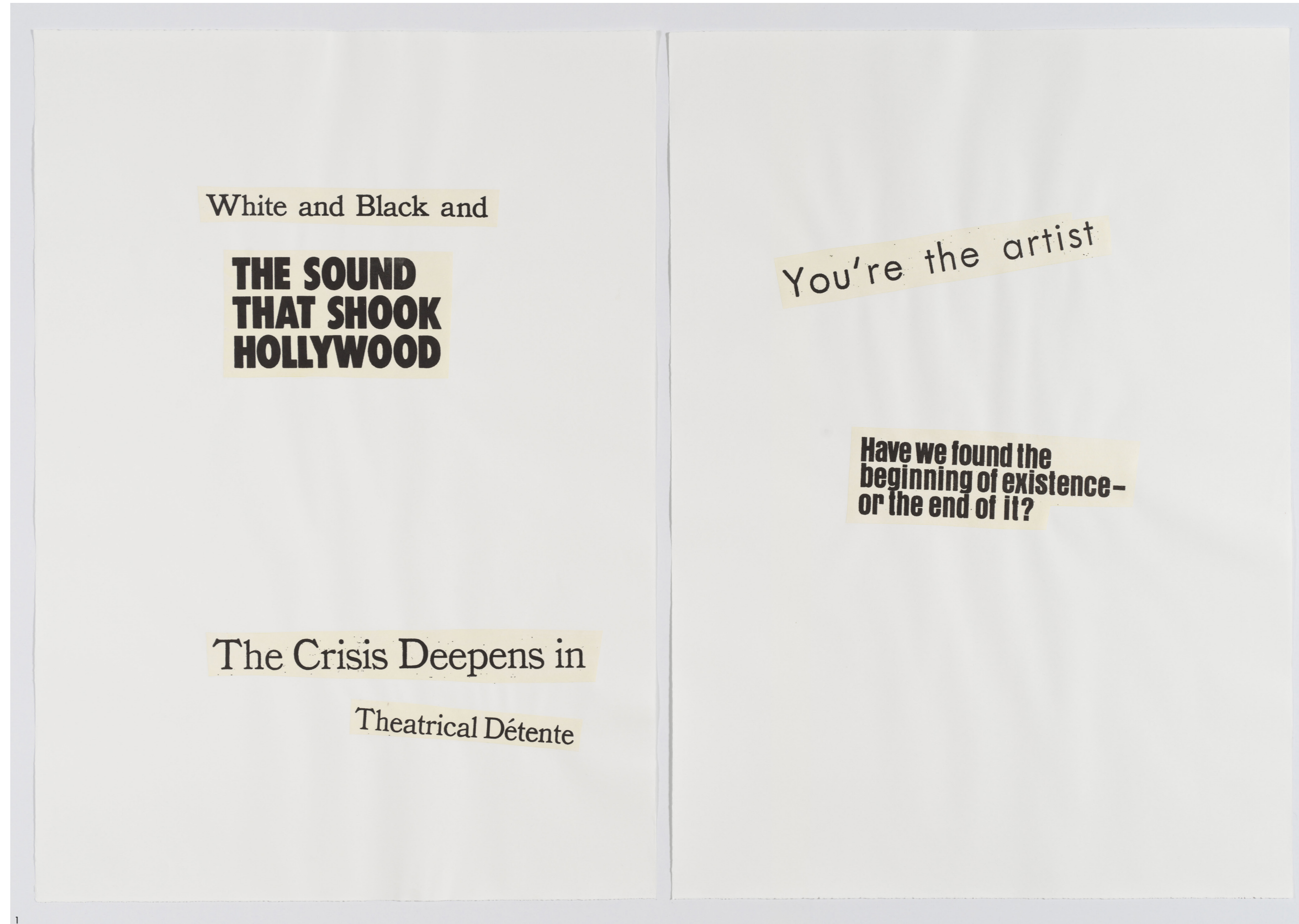
By the early 1980s, O’Grady had become an active voice in the alternative New York art scene. A volunteer at the black avant-garde gallery Just Above Midtown (JAM), she produced work that critically reflected on race, class, and social identity. Reflecting on her experience at the gallery, O’Grady writes, “JAM was an *esprit* formed in exclusion. A kind of isolation that brings strength, brings weakness, brings freedom to explore and to fail, to find the steel hardened within. . . . JAM was a place as much as a world, a place where people ate together, discussed and argued, drank and smoked together, collaborated on work, slept together, pushed each other to go further, and partied ‘til the cows came home.”

Inspired by her fellow JAM artists, O’Grady pioneered institutional critique, creating her groundbreaking performance *Mlle Bourgeoise Noire* (1980–83). Making unannounced appearances at openings at both JAM and the New Museum of Contemporary Art, Mlle Bourgeoise Noire attacked the racial apartheid and sexism of the art world. Sporting a costume crafted from 180 pairs of white debutante gloves and carrying a rope cat o’nine tails studded with white chrysanthemums, as Mlle Bourgeoise Noire (Miss Black Middle-Class) 1955 O’Grady was an equal opportunity critic. Lashing herself with her whip, which she dubbed the “whip-that-made-plantations-move,” she shouted protest poetry and gave timid black artists and thoughtless white institutions a “piece of her mind.”

In contrast to this overtly political performance, O’Grady’s more recent series champion hybrid subject positions by adapting and playing with the diptych form. For O’Grady, the diptych presents a constant exchange between equals, forwarding “miscegenated thinking” by eroding hierarchical divisions. As she argues, “With the diptych, there’s no being saved, no before and after, no either/or; it’s both/and, at the same time.”

In *Cutting Out CONYT* (1977/2017), O’Grady repurposes her 1977 series of found newspaper poems, *Cutting Out The New York Times*, into 26 new “haiku diptychs.” By concentrating and refining the original poems, *Cutting Out CONYT* serves as a bridge between O’Grady’s early and later works. As she explains, “Making it has allowed me to maintain the tensions between my more explicit voice and my less explicit voice in a way that feels fruitful to me.” These two voices, which O’Grady has alternately identified as narrative/political, expressive/argumentative, inner-directed/outer-directed, and post-black/black, inform all of her practice. Refuting binaristic thinking through its “both/and” diptych format, *Cutting Out CONYT* allows O’Grady to examine apparent oppositions between her voices, siting her work in the interstitial space between the personal and the political. As she ultimately concludes, “There was no extrication of the personal from the political, because these qualities were not opposites but obverse and reverse of the same coin.”

Lorraine O’Grady’s work has been the subject of numerous one-persons exhibitions, including *From Me to Them to Me Again*, Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) Museum of Art, GA (2018); *Family Gained*, Museum of Fine Arts (MFA), Boston, MA (2018); *Lorraine O’Grady: Initial Recognition*, Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo, Monastery de Santa María de las Cuevas, Seville, Spain (2016); *Lorraine O’Grady: When Margins Become Centers*, Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA (2015); *Art Is...*, The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY (2015); *Looking for the Face I Had Before the World was Made: Lorraine O’Grady*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver, CO (2010); and *Miscegenated Family Album*, Art Institute of Chicago, IL (2008). Her work has been included in countless group exhibitions, including *Michael Jackson: On the Wall*, National Portrait Gallery, London, United Kingdom (2018), traveled to Grand Palais, Paris, France (2018), The Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn, Germany (2019), and Espoo Museum of Modern Art, Finland (2019); *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power*, Tate Modern, London, United Kingdom (2017), traveled to Crystal Bridges Museum of American, Bentonville, AK (2018), Brooklyn Museum, NY (2018), The Broad, Los Angeles, CA (2019), de Young Museum, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, CA (2019), and The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX (2020); and *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women 1965—85*, Brooklyn Museum, NY (2017), traveled to California African American Museum, Los Angeles, CA (2017), Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY (2018), and Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), Boston, MA (2018). Her work is represented in innumerable public collections, including the Art Institute of Chicago, IL; Brooklyn Museum, NY; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA; Museum of Fine Arts (MFA), Boston, MA; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY.



White and Black and

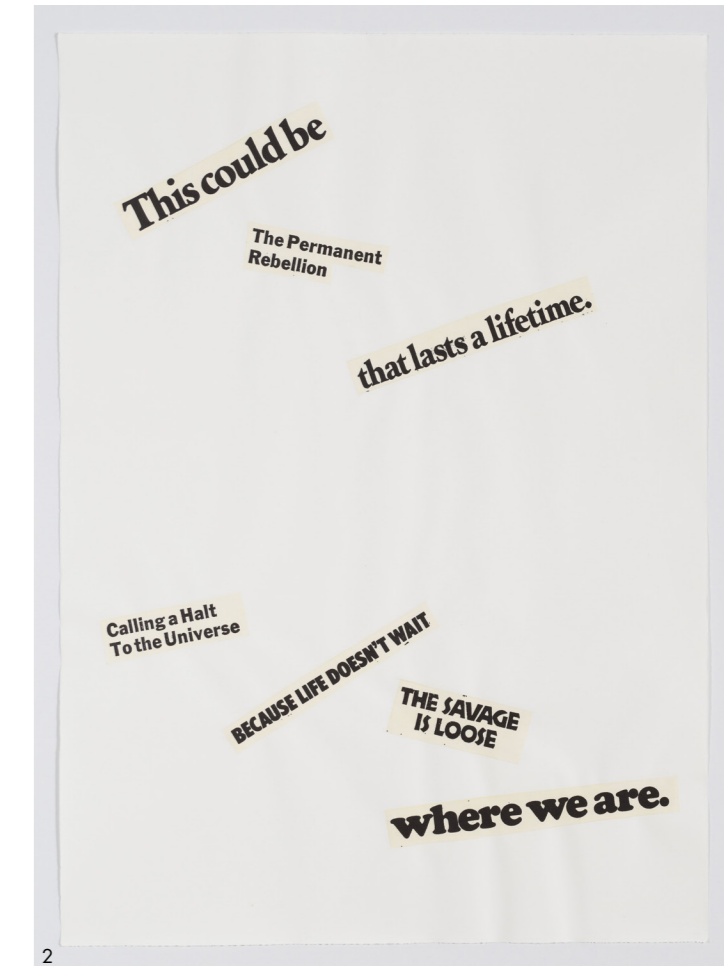
**THE SOUND  
THAT SHOOK  
HOLLYWOOD**

You're the artist

**Have we found the  
beginning of existence—  
or the end of it?**

The Crisis Deepens in

Theatrical Détente



This could be

The Permanent  
Rebellion

that lasts a lifetime.

Calling a Halt  
To the Universe

BECAUSE LIFE DOESN'T WAIT

THE SAVAGE  
IS LOOSE

where we are.

