

JORDAN SCHNITZER MUSEUM OF ART

Teacher resources and information for:

Carrie Mae Weems: *The Usual Suspects*.

Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, Harold and Arlene Schnitzer Gallery

January 18 to May 3, 2020

In this body of work, created between 2014 and 2018, Weems addresses the constructed nature of racial identity—specifically, representations that associate black bodies with criminality and the resultant killings of black men, women, and children without consequence. Through a formal language of blurred images, color blocks, stated facts, and meditative narration, she questions this sustained history of violence and judicial inaction.

NOTE: The video installation in the exhibition contains disturbing sound and imagery, including police footage, that may not be appropriate for all visitors.

JSMA's webpage for this exhibition: <https://jsma.uoregon.edu/CarrieMaeWeems>

Access to Carrie Mae Weems recorded introduction at LSU Museum of Art:

<https://www.facebook.com/LSUMOA/videos/10156256481029508/>

Selected quotes by Carrie Mae Weems from her introduction to the public opening of *The Usual Suspects* at Louisiana State University Museum of Art, April 12, 2018. The selections below are intended to clarify the audio in the above mentioned video recording at LSU and to assist you with preparation for student visits to the exhibition for middle and high school visitors.

Beginning of the artist's 15 minute talk:

“The work, the work that’s in this room, this work that is dealing with this sustained level of violence, this sustained level of threat to the body, to the black body, to black men, to black women, to people of color, to women—this sustained history has been sustained for a long time.

And so the images that are on these walls are images that we all know one way or another. We’ve all grappled with them one way or another. You’ve seen it on the news one way or another. And we’ve decided to look one way or another or we’ve decided *not* to look one way or another.

The material and the ideas have been there. And so I’ve made this work and it’s been complicated to make this work. It’s painful to have to deal with this work constantly, but it’s also painful to have to deal with this life constantly. And the threat constantly. And the challenge constantly.

And so, my sense is that within all this mess, how do you unpack it for yourself?

Where do you place it?

How do you negotiate it?

How do you live with it?

How do you create something out of it?

How do you bring a large audience to it?”

Excerpts from the middle of the talk:

“I want to commemorate the fallen.”

“I’m really interested in how do we measure and value our lives?”

“Why is it that there is this systematic, brutal, authority of the state that is systematically directed against black bodies and black men?”

Why is it sustainable?

How has it been allowed?

What has allowed it to continue?

What makes it allowable?”

Excerpts from the end of the talk:

“The work that is in this room is related to gun violence and authority and structures of power. I’m always trying, one way or another, to investigate and unpack the territory around power.

Who has it?

What is the violence of representation?

What is the violence of poverty?

What is the violence of abuse?

What does systemic violence look like and how do you crack it open from a variety of positions?”

Additional publications related to Carrie Mae Weems biography and exhibitions:

Artist’s Website biography page: <http://carriemaeweems.net/bio.html>

Art21.org Carrie Mae Weems video *Grace Notes: Reflections for Now*: <https://art21.org/artist/carrie-mae-weems/>

University of Oregon, *Around the O*, Jan. 27, 2020 article related to the current exhibition:
<https://around.uoregon.edu/content/works-carrie-mae-weems-examine-race-police-shootings>

Goodreads synopsis of exhibition catalog: <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/43672080-carrie-mae-weems>

There are many fine lectures by Carrie Mae Weems on the internet including this one, where the artist speaks to her body of work on the opening day of her retrospective at the Cantor Arts Center:

Artist lecture: Carrie Mae Weems, Stanford University May 5, 2014: <https://youtu.be/v2AlbEG83Ak>