

# Wallpaper\*

Sadie Barnette: "New York show explores the legacy of Black women in visual culture"

By Harriet Lloyd-Smith

May 23, 2022



Sadie Barnette inkjet install shot of 'In Plain Sight' exhibition at Henry Art Gallery Seattle 2019. Photography: Mark Woods; courtesy of the artist and Henry Art Gallery University Of Washington Seattle

**'Black Venus', curated by Aindrea Emelife and on view at Fotografiska New York, is a cross-generational survey of the Black female body. Through the work of 17 international artists, the show captures a complex past and reclaimed present**

Black Venus', curated by [Aindrea Emelife](#) is a story of historic objectification and contemporary reclamation. Held at Fotografiska New York (until 28 August 2022), the exhibition surveys the legacy of Black women in visual culture - from fetishised, colonial-era caricatures, to contemporary image-making, which depicts a renewed agency in Black womanhood. The cross-generational show features 30 artworks by 17 international artists with birth years spanning 1942 to 1997. These include Deana Lawson (recipient of the 2022 [Deutsche Börse Photography](#)

**JESSICA  
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108  
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508

[Foundation Prize](#)), Zanele Muholi, Kara Walker, Carrie Mae Weems, [Shawanda Corbett](#), Ming Smith and Coreen Simpson.

Contrasted with archival depictions of Black women dating back to 1793, the contemporary works – predominantly photography, but also featuring [sculpture](#), mixed media works and film – together create a global survey of the Black female body; its historical 'othering', and contemporary empowerment.



Deana Lawson, *2 Live Crew Video Girl* (2008). Courtesy of the artist, David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles and New York and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York

'By visiting the exhibition and exploring the Black female image from the late-1700s until now, viewers are invited to confront the racial and sexual objectification and embodied resistance that make up a significant part of the Black woman's experience – and to celebrate the current upheaval of this stereotype, at the hands of Black artists,' says Emelife.

'Black Venus' is rooted in the image of the 'Hottentot Venus', the assigned stage name of Saartje Baartman (born 1789 in South Africa). Baartman, enslaved by Dutch colonisers, was paraded around Europe as part of a 'freak show' due to her non-Western body type. These images harbour an unsettling reality and are potent reminders of the colonial exploitation, objectification, racism, and commodification endured by Black people. The show acknowledges the tribulations of and pays homage to Black female icons throughout history, while optimistically reflecting on the socio-

**JESSICA  
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108  
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508

cultural shifts in Western perceptions of Black women. 'In an age where Black women are taking positions in power, fronting the covers of fashion magazines, and taking up space in all manner of fields and industries, it is a reminder to look back and see how far we've come, so we can look to the future,' Emelife explains.

"Black Venus" is a feeling. It is a valiant call to action to be seen and to celebrate in Black women; their aspirations, convictions, contributions and how perceptions of Black womanhood have shifted over time - how agency has been reclaimed,' says Emelife. 'This exhibition is a celebration of Black beauty, an investigation into the many faces of Black femininity and the shaping of Black women in the public consciousness - then and now.'



Coreen Simpson, *Black Girl with Eye*, (1992) from *About Face* series. *Courtesy of the artist*

**JESSICA  
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108  
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508



Coreen Simpson, *Masked Nude*, Harlem NY (1999). Courtesy of the artist



Widline Cadet, *On A Clear Day I Thought I Saw Forever 3*, 2020. Courtesy of the artist

**JESSICA  
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108  
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508



Shawanda Corbett, *It Was Just Yesterday* 2021. Courtesy the artist Corvi Mora London and Salon 94 New York



Kara Walker, *Walker Fons Americanus* 2019. Copyright: Kara Walker Courtesy Of Sikkema Jenkins; Spruth Magers

**JESSICA  
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108  
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508



Zanele Muholi, 'Miss Lesbian I Amsterdam From The Series Miss Black Lesbian' 2009 Credit Line. Copyright Zanele Muholi, courtesy of Yancey Richardson New York And Stevenson Capetown And Johannesburg

**JESSICA  
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108  
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508