

Kara Walker

CUT TO THE QUICK from the Collections of
Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

July 23–October 10, 2021

Kara Walker: Cut to the Quick, from the Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation includes over eighty works in various mediums, created between 1994 and 2019. Walker (b. 1969, Stockton, CA) is best known for her groundbreaking large-scale silhouette tableaux. Inspired by history, literature, mythology, and fantasy, they employ racial stereotypes to address slavery, racism, exploitation, gender, and physical and sexual abuse. Her hard-hitting, unorthodox depictions of unspeakable subjects expose the raw flesh of generational wounds that have never healed.

Kara Walker: Cut to the Quick, from the Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation was organized for the Frist Art Museum by co-curators Susan H. Edwards and Ciona Rouse. All works in this exhibition were acquired by Jordan D. Schnitzer, one of the premier collectors of prints and multiples in the United States. The foundation, established in 1997 as a nonprofit organization to manage the collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His family, provides supplemental funding for education and outreach in conjunction with related exhibitions and publishes scholarly texts. Since its inception, the foundation has organized more than 110 exhibitions, lending art to over 160 museums.

Bird of Freedom / Whereas the Negress Can Fly

Eenie-meenie-miney-mo. This woman's body is not her own. Even her shadows belong in part to the sun. If she hollers, he holds her mouth. If she opens her truth, he shuts her down. He centers himself in the crux of her diaphragm and plucks the feathers about to emerge from her spine. She learns it with his alphabet: A. B. C your body is not your own. 1. 2. 3. 4 generation after generation, too many not released from the heft of slavery. All of these masters stand, not ashamed of when they put their hands in her body. Not ashamed of how they force their bodies in her hands. What if she squeezed a bit harder? What if she bit into their hardness? What if every *not* got emancipated to *now*? Whereas he stands now ashamed. Whereas the crushing weight of slavery is now untethered to her progeny. Whereas her body is now her own. What if a body was never owned? Whereas on the first day all persons shall then be, shall be then forever free.

A swallow only knows

Wings wild, unfettered & flapping

She swallows him whole

Ciona Rouse

The Emancipation Approximation (Colophon and Scenes #1–26), 1999–2000

Screenprint

Edition 7/20

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Race and Representation

The earliest and latest works in *Cut to the Quick* underscore how negative stereotypes create and reinforce the discrimination and prejudice that limit access to education, employment, property rights, voting rights, social mobility, and a fair share of generational wealth and power. Walker shocked the art world in the 1990s with images of exaggerated physiognomy exhibited in a fine arts context such as the full lips, bug eyes, and wiry hair that define *Topsy* (1994), the character of an enslaved girl in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). The author, intending to be empathetic, ultimately articulated a characterization of otherness based on race that endured after the Civil War, during Jim Crow, segregation, the civil rights era, and beyond. The descendants of formerly enslaved workers continued to receive little of the wealth they created with subsequent farm labor systems such as sharecropping, tenant farming, and the forced servitude practiced in some prisons today.

In the next gallery, *Fons Americanus* (2019) condemns the violence and complicity of governments and private enterprise in constructing the transatlantic slave trade and perpetuating its legacies. The bronze replica of Walker's now-demolished installation in Tate London's Turbine Hall was based on the Victoria Memorial at Buckingham Palace. Walker's monument was an allegory of the Black Atlantic and the global waters that disastrously connect Africa to the economic prosperity of America and Europe. The flow of figures and scenes, including an Afro-Caribbean Venus, seafarers, a tree with a hangman's noose, and the scales of justice, satirize the pride of empire and imperialism.

Topsy, ca. 1994

Photoetching

Edition AP

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Do Just So, 1996

Etching with aquatint

Edition of 35

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Canisters, 1997

Glass

Edition of 100

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Cotton, 1997

Etching with aquatint

Edition 27/35

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Li'l Patch of Woods, 1997

Etching with aquatint

Edition 27/35

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Untitled (John Brown), 1997

Etching with aquatint

Edition 27/35

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Vanishing Act, 1997

Etching with aquatint

Edition 27/35

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Sketch for a Fabulous Tale, from Skowhegan portfolio no. 1, 2011

Lithograph

Edition 10/30

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Freedom, A Fable: A Curious Interpretation of the Wit of a Negress in Troubled Times, 1997

Book

Edition of 4,000

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

False Face, 2017

Bronze

Edition 1/10

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

The High Note, The Low Note, The Psychotic and The Judge, 2018

Painted laser-cut stainless steel

Edition 22/30

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

The Bush, Skinny, De-boning, 2002

Painted stainless steel cutouts

Edition 53/100

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Resurrection Story with Patrons, 2017

Etching with aquatint, sugar lift, spitbite, and drypoint

Edition 7/25

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Snared, 2013

Lithograph

Edition PP 3/4

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Untitled (Monkey Grinder), 2002

Screenprint

Edition 21/30

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Untitled, from Collective Impressions, 1998

Lithograph

Edition 65/70

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Chanterelle Menus: Untitled (May 21, 2006), 2006

Screenprint

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Porgy and Bess

The 1935 opera *Porgy and Bess* is set in 1920s Charleston, South Carolina, to music by George Gershwin with a libretto by DuBose Heyward and Ira Gershwin. Porgy, a disabled beggar, tries to free the beautiful Bess from her manipulative lover, Crown, and the drug dealer Sportin' Life. The tragedy was criticized almost from the beginning for its characterization of the lifestyle of poor African Americans, as well as its use of their dialect, as imagined by white authors. While observing rehearsals for a 2011 performance, Walker made sketches "to understand the music and to allow myself to get caught up in the fantasy of theater."

Later, Walker created sixteen original lithographs to illustrate a 2013 publication of the libretto by Arion Press. She also produced four companion lithographs not included in the book. Lithography is well suited to the expressiveness of Walker's smudges, rubbings, and loose, broad strokes. The artist says of the characters, "They've become archetypes of another no less grand drama, that of: 'American Negroes' drawn up by white authors, and retooled by individual actors, amid charges of racism, and counter charges of high art on stage and screen, in the face of social and political upheaval, over generations."

Porgy & Bess, 2013

Book with sixteen lithographs

Edition 6/400

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Porgy & Bess: Strawberry Woman, 2013

Lithograph

Edition 6/40

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Porgy & Bess: Porgy and Crown, superimposed, 2013

Lithograph

Edition 6/40

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Porgy & Bess: Porgy and Bess, embracing, 2013

Lithograph

Edition 6/40

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Porgy & Bess: Sailboat in storm, 2013

Lithograph

Edition 6/40

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation



National Archives Microfilm Publication M999 Roll 34: Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands: Six Miles from Springfield on the Franklin Road, 2009

Video

Original music by Alicia Hall and Jason Moran

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Running time: 13 minutes, 22 seconds



*The Slave Ship Gets Nowhere without The Sea to Carry It**

Once upon a now you motion still, perilous and inviting. You wave. You slide upon shore and shingle, with your foam inching toward my toes. Will you bite or sting or send me something more serene? With you, I never know. Are you witness? Are you accomplice? Are you forgiven? Come high days of humility, and you simply wash my pits. Come high days of holy, and you baptize my forehead. Come days of your wrath and whip, you flatten my cities. Come days of commerce and cargo, you hold a ship. And once upon a then you held bodies in the bosom of a ship until they leapt. And you swallowed them down. Drowned: these bodies unwanted to be owned. I said, you carry a heavy vessel but pin a body down. Yet word around town is you are life, sustaining and satiating all that I eat and breathe and be. And every sea in me shifts with the moon of memory. Ancient griefs still haunt me, propel me, lift me so that no body can let me down. Call me Venus or call me by name, however you see me, see me free. See these hands, these wrists unroped. See how I'm born, what I've borne, how I re-live again and again. Get closer to what pours out from me, open your mouth.

Ciona Rouse

*The title is borrowed from Kara Walker's notes.

A Black Hole Is Everything a Star Longs to Be.

Kara Walker

Fons Americanus, 2019

Bronze

Edition 9/30

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Burning African Village Play Set with Big House and Lynching, 2006

Painted laser-cut steel

Edition 4/20

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Excerpt, 2014

Lithograph

Edition PP 3/5

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Boo-hoo (for Parkett no. 59), 2000

Linocut

Edition PP 5/6

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

The Means to an End . . . A Shadow Drama in Five Acts, 1995

Etching with aquatint

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

The Keys to the Coop, 1997

Linocut

Edition 39/40

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

I'll Be A Monkey's Uncle, 1996

Lithograph

Edition 24/25

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

African/American, 1998

Linocut

Edition 22/40

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

The silhouette lends itself to avoidance of the subject—of not being able to look at it directly—yet there it is, all the time, staring you in the face.

Kara Walker

An Unpeopled Land in Uncharted Waters: no world, 2010

Etching with aquatint, sugar lift, spitbite, and drypoint

Edition 19/30

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

An Unpeopled Land in Uncharted Waters: beacon (after R.G.), 2010

Etching with aquatint, sugar lift, spitbite, and drypoint

Edition 19/30

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

An Unpeopled Land in Uncharted Waters: savant, 2010

Etching with aquatint, sugar lift, spitbite, and drypoint

Edition 19/30

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

An Unpeopled Land in Uncharted Waters: the secret sharerer, 2010

Etching with aquatint, sugar lift, spitbite, and drypoint

Edition 19/30

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

An Unpeopled Land in Uncharted Waters: buoy, 2010

Etching with aquatint, sugar lift, spitbite, and drypoint

Edition 19/30

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

An Unpeopled Land in Uncharted Waters: dread, 2010

Etching with aquatint, sugar lift, spitbite, and drypoint

Edition 19/30

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

The Civil War

Between 1861 and 1865, *Harper's Weekly* reported contemporaneous accounts of Civil War battles and political developments, largely in support of Lincoln and the federal government. In 1894, the weekly published one thousand illustrations of battlefields, maps, plans, and likenesses of military figures in *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War*, by Alfred H. Guernsey and Henry M. Alden.

In 2005, Kara Walker superimposed her signature silhouettes over large-scale prints from the pictorial history. The *Harper's Weekly* images had been intentionally inoffensive to a Southern white readership. Walker's flat, opaque figures insistently interject a previously, conspicuously absent African American point of view. Silhouettes obfuscate the original intention while beckoning the viewer into a black hole of spiraling emotions about the unreliability of history. Who is telling the story? Whose history is included and whose is omitted? Who is validated and who is obliterated?

Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated):

Crest of Pine Mountain, Where General Polk Fell, 2005

Offset lithography and screenprint

Edition 21/35

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated):

Alabama Loyalists Greeting the Federal Gun-Boats, 2005

Offset lithography and screenprint

Edition 21/35

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated):

Banks's Army Leaving Simmsport, 2005

Offset lithography and screenprint

Edition 21/35

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated):

Foote's Gun-Boats Ascending to Attack Fort Henry, 2005

Offset lithography and screenprint

Edition 21/35

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated):

An Army Train, 2005

Offset lithography and screenprint

Edition 21/35

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated):

Lost Mountain at Sunrise, 2005

Offset lithography and screenprint

Edition 21/35

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated):

Confederate Prisoners Being Conducted from Jonesborough, 2005

Offset lithography and screenprint

Edition 21/35

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated):

Pack-Mules in the Mountains, 2005

Offset lithography and screenprint

Edition 21/35

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated):

Cotton Hoards in Southern Swamp, 2005

Offset lithography and screenprint

Edition 21/35

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated):

Signal Station, Summit of Maryland Heights, 2005

Offset lithography and screenprint

Edition 21/35

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated):

Deadbrook after the Battle of Ezra's Church, 2005

Offset lithography and screenprint

Edition 21/35

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated):

Exodus of Confederates from Atlanta, 2005

Offset lithography and screenprint

Edition 21/35

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated):

Occupation of Alexandria, 2005

Offset lithography and screenprint

Edition 21/35

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Silhouette

Long long ago (& also not really so), a girl leapt in hopes she might step down into her shadow. Stand inside the black hole of her body. Let mystery hold her more tender than anything illuminated. But then her toes betray. No matter which way you chase a shadow, doesn't it always keep itself one step ahead? Is that why you stalk it? Sometimes she feels darkest when she lets you light her face and trace it. Ride her coastline, her curls and waves. Touch the tip of her nose, her lips and nape. Her nipples, her knees, her hills like dark high notes. Touch her deep bass. But no more hands on her body this time. Only her silhouette. A story begins & middles & ends. And even though it starts before the thought of you, it still casts itself against all your old-fangled names. All of your mothers' pains. Sometimes I feel darkest when I shine my own face and trace it and cut to the quick of my understanding. Whatever you assigned to darkest, leave it. Whatever to body, forget. And touch & leaping. Why don't you cut that, too?

Plunge into her true

silhouettes. They may pluck your neck.

Et la tête. O-o-oh.

Ciona Rouse

The Katastwóf Karavan (maquette), 2017

Painted laser-cut stainless steel

Edition 29/30

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation



Testimony, 2005

Photogravure

Edition 12/14

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Pastoral, 1999

Latex paint on wall

Edition 5/15

Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation

Kara Walker: Cut to the Quick, from the Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation



Co-curated by Susan H. Edwards and Ciona Rouse

Silver supporter
The Sandra Schatten Foundation

The Frist Art Museum is supported in part by

THE FRIST FOUNDATION



Connect with us
@FristArtMuseum



#TheFrist #FristWalker

¿Habla usted español?
Visite FristArtMuseum.org/Walker para obtener información en español sobre esta exposición.

Frist Art Museum

919 Broadway, Nashville, TN 37203