

*The High and Soft Laughter of the Nigger Wenches at Night, in the Colorless Light of Day*  
October 25–December 21, 2024

Sikkema Jenkins & Co. and Kara Walker are pleased to present *The High and Soft Laughter of the Nigger Wenches at Night, in the Colorless Light of Day*. This solo exhibition features a new body of colored-watercolor and ink collages and works on paper, alongside a series of bronze busts. *The High and Soft Laughter...* is on view at Sikkema Jenkins & Co. from October 25 through December 21, 2024. A public opening reception with the artist will be held on Friday, October 25 from 6-8pm.

Through collage, drawing, sculpture, and installation, Kara Walker has consistently interrogated the legacy of American myth making as it manifests through systems of race, sexuality, and violence. Her work leverages satire and archetypes to needle at the dominant narratives and prevailing dissonances of the United States' own self-conception. In Walker's work, the impulse to allegorize is thrown into stark, panoramic relief: history is the oft-repeated fable, power is the oft-wielded script, and her subjects are the preeminent players.

Since the start of her career, Walker's monochromatic silhouettes have featured in scenes characterized by unfettered mayhem and darkly humorous referentiality. For her newest body of collage works presented here, Walker began by ignoring her own usual conventions, instead embracing the pleasure of color and formal compositional rules. Strokes of sumi-e ink and Gansai watercolor cast a mélange of shades over the cut-paper figures, effectively elevating the silhouette's fundamental reduction of form with new dimensions of hue and texture. Arranged in a tangle of overlapping limbs and brushed contortions, Walker's subjects appear closer to an abstracted landscape rather than coherent representation of bodily forms.

In creating these large-scale collages, Walker considered the role of the sublime in landscape art and the romantic longing for an organic relationship between humans the environment—while paving over any individual or group that stands in the ideology's way or questions its logic. In contemporary political contests, such fantasies appeal to an imagined return to nature while simultaneously looking towards an increasingly technologized, "post-work" future. The locational words in Walker's titles further allude to this mythic sense of place and expansion, referencing a grand "vista," "terrain," and "scenery." In a chromatic swirl of earthen pigments, her collage figures have *become* the topography upon which such towering ideals of freedom and individual determination are proclaimed, if not unequivocally realized.

Shown alongside the works on paper are a series of four bronze busts, developed in connection to Walker's interactive installation *Fortuna and the Immortality Garden (Machine)* currently on view at SFMOMA. Three of the busts were cast from the original set that became the automatons of the *Immortality Garden*, while one was produced from an unused prototype. Poised on futuristic pedestals, their expressive faces are a vaguely humanistic counterpoint to the fleshy pastoral tableaux around them.

Kara Walker was born in Stockton, CA, in 1969, and raised in Atlanta from the age of 13. She received her BFA from the Atlanta College of Art (1991) and her MFA from the Rhode Island School of Design (1994). She is the recipient of numerous awards, including the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Fellowship Award in 1997, and the United States Artists Eileen Harris Norton Fellowship in 2008. She was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 2012 and became an Honorary Academician of the Royal Academy of Art in London in 2019. Her work can be found in the collections of prominent institutions worldwide, including Kunstmuseum Basel; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museo nazionale delle Arti del XXI secolo (MAXXI), Rome; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC; Tate London; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, among many others.

On July 1, 2024, Walker's multi-part, interactive commission *Fortuna and the Immortality Garden (Machine)* was unveiled at SFMOMA. Melding handcraft with technology, the larger-than-life automatons on display draw from a wide range of sources—including antique dolls, Bunraku puppetry, historical ephemera, and the speculative fiction of Octavia Butler. The mechanized figures perform a halting choreography of familiar actions, while the installation's namesake, Fortuna, responds to each visitor with a slip of paper bearing a cryptic message of her own. Standing atop a field of volcanic glass, Walker's Gardeners speak to the memorialization of trauma and the potential to transcend the negative energies that afflict contemporary society. *Fortuna and the Immortality Garden (Machine)* is on view at SFMOMA through Spring 2026. The project was produced in collaboration with technical lead Noah Feehan, design and engineering studio Hypersonic, couturier Gary Graham, and fabrication company New Project.

For any press inquiries, please contact Laura Weinthal at (212) 929-2262 or [laura@sikkemajenkinsco.com](mailto:laura@sikkemajenkinsco.com).