

MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ROBIN COSTE LEWIS

Intimacy

6 May – 21 July 2023

Marian Goodman Gallery New York is delighted to present *Intimacy*, a moving-image and sound film by Robin Coste Lewis that will be presented in our Third Floor Gallery, from 6 May - 24 June 2023.

A single-channel video projection with sound, the installation features projected images derived from a selection of 66 photographs representing a modern 20th-Century photographic archive depicting the Lewis family and their friends. The trove of portraits, discovered by Lewis approximately 25 years ago in the home of her maternal grandmother, Dorothy Mary Coste Thomas Brooks, are sepia, tintypes, color and black-and-white pictures that recount the history of the Lewis family and circle.

The Lewis family, along with millions of other Americans, fled the Southern States of America in the 20th Century as part of the Great Migration west, in search of a place devoid of racism, injustice, and white terrorism. With the upheaval of forced migration, and concomitant scattering of a family unit and dispersal of possessions, the existence of this deep collection of photographic images represents a distinctive vernacular collection, especially notable for its volume, rarity and joyful, private sentiment.

Through graduations, birthdays, weddings, recreational and holiday gatherings, the pictures play with with depiction and the notion of lineage. On the one hand, the photographs in *Intimacy* gives the viewer the illusion of charting this American family and their significance within the context of Black history. The photographs denote resilience and resistance to the profound historical enmity that surrounded them through the celebratory nature of the moments encapsulated on film.

However, the sound element of the installation, which features the voice of Lewis, diverges from the intense nostalgia evoked by the photographs. In both deliberate syncopation and pauses, Lewis reads her existentialist lyric poem titled *Intimacy (for Julie) Part 2*. The entrancing and moving reading of approximately 24 minutes, serves as an homage to the multitude of Diasporas human beings have created over millenia—and the central roles Black people have played within this enduring history. As such, the soundtrack relocates Blackness within the history of the universe and human evolution.

The poem and the resulting composite installation stems from a political and aesthetic friendship between Lewis and Julie Mehretu, which grew over decades, the outcome of a continuing conversation between the two who met as graduate students during the heady 90's through shared studies of post-colonial theory, queer studies, and critical race theory. *Intimacy* mediates on their mutual interest in language, the history of time, mark-making, human migrations, desire and the abstract. The installation in our New York space follows on the premiere of the work at Galerie Marian Goodman, Paris, in 2022, and more recent screenings and conversations at MoMA and LACMA. The Paris presentation highlighted a poignant aspect of Lewis' heritage, given that her Great Grandmother, who was French, had emigrated to the former French colony of Louisiana, now US. *Intimacy* therefore traces the lineage of descendants of the survivors of French colonialism in Louisiana, a defiant answer to the destructive nature and intention of colonialism.

Archive of Desire, a series of multimedia performances celebrating the poet C.P. Cavafy featuring Robin Coste Lewis, Vijay Iyer and Jeff Ziegler, and Julie Mehretu will take place at National Sawdust in Brooklyn on 3 and 4 May 2023. The event was created for a weeklong festival to be held courtesy of the Onassis Foundation.

Robin Coste Lewis (b. 1964, Compton, California) is the former poet laureate for the city of Los Angeles, where she now lives and works. In 2015, her first book of poems, *Voyage of the Sable Venus*, which examined the fraught history of art, gender, and race, won The National Book Award in poetry, marking the first time a debut by an African American had ever won the prize in the Foundation's history, and the first time a debut collection of poetry had won the award since 1974. The images in *Intimacy* also appear in her new book of poetry, *To the Realization of Perfect Helplessness* (2022), published by Knopf, which recently won an NAACP Award in Poetry and PEN Award in poetry.

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Lewis received her Bachelor of Art from Hampshire College in creative writing and comparative literature; a Master of Theological Studies degree in Sanskrit and comparative religious literature from the Divinity School at Harvard University; a Master of Fine Art in poetry at New York University; and a PhD from the University of Southern California Creative Writing and Literature Program. Lewis, who has taught at Hampshire College, Hunter College, Wheaton College, and the NYU MFA in Paris, is writer-in-residence at the University of Southern California. In 2021, she was the Joseph Brodsky Rome Prize Fellow at the American Academy in Rome, and is currently a Ford Foundation Scholar-in-Residence at the Museum of Modern Art.

For further information, please visit our website mariangoodman.com, or please contact Marian Goodman Gallery New York at: 212 977 7160.