

CRITICS' PICKS

CURRENT

New York

Lorraine O'Grady

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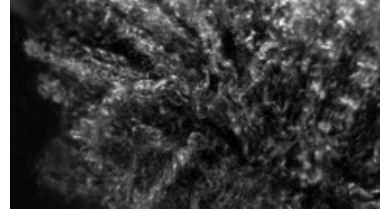
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The centerpiece of Lorraine O'Grady's exhibition "New Worlds" is *Landscape (Western Hemisphere)*, 2011, a video that leads the viewer to initially believe its nineteen minutes of black-and-white footage depict something akin to a thicket upswept by the wind. An ambient sound track features birdcalls and cicada songs, but it hints at a more developed land through the distant rumble of train tracks. In actuality, what we see is O'Grady's own hair in extreme close-up, shaking and swaying between two fans. The intentionally misleading title is an extension of O'Grady's long-standing examination of cultural identity, specifically the colonized female body. This beautiful, straightforward video instantly conjures Western culture's numerous presumptions about women of color: the exoticness of natural hair, a bodily connection to the land, and the expectations of performance from such bodies.

Two photomontages from O'Grady's earlier "Body/Ground" series further this comparison; *The Fir-Palm*, 1991/2012, literally connects a hybrid tree to the small of a black woman's back. More obliquely, the diptych *Body/Ground (The Clearing: or Cortez and La Malinche. Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings, N. and Me)*, 1991/2012, depicts on the left a white man and a black woman in a loving embrace floating among the clouds, and on the right a theatrical death, seemingly by the man's own hand. O'Grady's inclusion of herself in this lineup of history's most notorious interracial couples demonstrates that even at present, she believes we remain beholden to the racist consequences of the New World.



Lorraine O'Grady, *Landscape (Western Hemisphere)*, 2011, still from a color video, 19 minutes.

— Lumi Tan