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## The rebel spirit of Carrie Mae Weems

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For Carrie Mae Weems, being in Havana is not a novelty. In 2001 she exhibited the series **Dreaming in Cuba** here, an impeccable photo essay and visual poetry about the daily life of the African-Americans population in a context of continuous revolutionary transformations.

At that time, she was already a recognized artist in the United States, given her aesthetic achievements and outstanding social activism, advocating for Black communities and the emancipation of women.

Among her most notable works are the collections **Family pictures and stories** (1984), **It's no joke** (1987-88), **American icons** (1988-89), and **Colored People** (1989-90), in which photos are accompanied by texts on stereotyped views of Blacks. **Kitchen Table** (1990) and **From here I saw what happened and I cried** (1995-96) represented turning points in her discourse, adding more force: on the one hand exposing the mobilizing factors behind the empowerment of African-American women, and on the other, appropriating 30 images from anthropological studies on the iconography of the Civil War and advertising, to draw attention to the racial discrimination. Tireless in her search, Weems resorts to photography, video, and performance to question realities.

The Weems who arrived at the XIII Havana Biennial is one who has reached a high level of artistic development, and assumed a remarkable position in the public life of her country. She did not come alone, but leading a multidisciplinary project, **The spirit that resides**, from the Carr Center, in which Ricky Weaver, Viktor L. Ewing-Givens, Katrina Sarah Miller, Erin Falker,

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Nadia Alexis, Ganavya Doraiswamy and Andrew Wilson also participated.

Her personal contribution to the project can be seen in prints on fabric, including a very powerful one reflecting violence against Black skinned citizens of the United States.

"Freedom must be conquered every day," Carrie Mae says, "and the voice of the other is just as important as one's own, or more so. That is why I give great importance to this communion of different languages ??to achieve an objective. Nobody owns the truth, but among all of us we can get closer to what we want to convey. In all this, there is a vision in which the political, the cultural, the intellectual, and the emotional intersect. For ideas to triumph, we have the duty to expose and discuss them; that is what this exhibition is about, which I am happy to share with you in a framework of so much creative life, the Havana Biennial of Havana."

The exhibition was shown in a house on San Lázaro Street, in Centro Habana, near the Malecón, close to the urban beat. Carrie Mae held a discussion with professors, students, and the general public at the National Museum of Fine Arts about her three and a half decades of creation and activism, and also joined the "Ríos intermitentes" program, hosted by outstanding artist María Magdalena Campos Pons, in Matanzas.

When I spoke with her in Havana, I recalled that in August of last year, **Time** magazine published a portrait of the filmmaker Spike Lee on its cover, and featured an article about the impact of his film **Blackkklansman**, recently screened in Cuba and reviewed by my colleague Rolando Pérez Betancourt. Lee and Weems share a strong connection, nurtured by a community of political and social interests.

She is very clear about her philosophy of life: "In the darkest hours, the struggle is to keep pushing, to move forward, to rebel and protest, to raise our voices against all forms of injustice, as we try to overcome the mistakes of the past, advance to a terrain higher, and cling more to hope ." (Quotes translated from the Spanish version of this article)

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