

ART IN REVIEW

Lorraine O'Grady: 'New Worlds'

By HOLLAND COTTER

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Alexander Gray Associates

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Video is alive and well represented at Alexander Gray Associates. A solo show by Coco Fusco at the gallery last month revolved around a meditative video about politics and the passing of time in contemporary Cuba. Lorraine O'Grady's current solo show also has a video centerpiece, this one about the personal-as-political embodied in the artist herself.

In a career going back more than three decades, Ms. O'Grady has frequently called on her ethnic background — she was born to Jamaican parents in Boston — as a subject, and she does so again here, with deep ambivalence in two black-and-white photomontages. In one of them, a hybrid tree — half palm, half New England fir — protrudes like a freakish growth from the back of a prone dark-skinned body. In a diptych-format picture, an Edenic racially mixed coupling is matched with the figure of Death dancing.

The 18-minute-long video called “Landscape (Western Hemisphere),” made last year, is abstract by comparison. It's a sustained image of what looks like a dense cluster of trees or bushes swept by a constant wind, set to a soundtrack that alternates urban noises and forest sounds. The restlessly moving foliage, which always seems about to reveal something beyond itself but never does, is a close-up of the artist's gray hair blown by fans.

Hair as a marker of race and gender has done heavy duty in art over the last 20 years. Ms. O'Grady, now in her 70s, adds age to the symbolic mix, and keeps the turbulence constant. The result is the visual equivalent of a disturbing thought that won't leave the mind alone.