

*Knight, or Lancela Palm-and-Steel*, is Lorraine O'Grady's most recent artistic persona. The Knight arrives 40 years after O'Grady's earlier avatar, the renowned Mlle Bourgeoise Noire, confronted the prevailing racial segregation of the mainstream New York art world through unannounced performances at public art events. The Knight—together with attendants Pitchy-Patchy, her squire, and Rociavant, her horse—has set out to finish what her progenitor began. This time, however, the avatar's identity is obscured. She wears a custom-forged suit of armor in the Early Renaissance style of the conquistadors, but its symbolic burden is subverted by the botanical Caribbean and other headdresses that alternately sprout from her barred burgonet helmet.

O'Grady has been gradually introducing the Knight to the public, beginning in 2021 with the landmark retrospective *Lorraine O'Grady: Both/And* at the Brooklyn Museum. In the museum's European galleries, images of the Knight interacted with massive Rodin sculptures and with Early Renaissance paintings.

Later in 2021, at the height of the pandemic, O'Grady had herself filmed as the Knight doing a performance-without-audience in selected galleries of the Brooklyn Museum retrospective of her work. Under the watchful and approving gaze of Mlle Bourgeoise Noire (invoked by a mannequin clothed in her iconic gown of white gloves nearby) the Knight declared her guiding concerns in the form of 9.5 theses. The edited footage became the "performance-film" *Greetings & Theses* which premiered at the museum later that year.

Although *The Knight, or Lancela Palm-and-Steel* is young and surprisingly sexy work, it addresses multiple audiences separately and simultaneously. It poses a question that is fundamental to the problem of subjectivity and to the politics of visibility in Western modernity and artistic modernism: "If you conceal everything—race, class, age, gender—what is left? What is possible?"

The project amounts to a stunning recapitulation of the main conceptual and political ideas that have driven much of O'Grady's work as an artist and cultural critic: an anti-hierarchical approach to difference within such binary categories as Black and White, self and other, West and non-West, and past and present. It furthers the artist's long-standing interrogation of hybridity and multiplicity inscribed in the logic of "both/and," a conceptual framework she has favored over the binary "either/or" logic inherent in Western philosophy.

While active research for the Knight began in 2017, the persona was shaped, like most of O'Grady's projects, by a near-constant reprisal and reassessment of prior works, ideas, and personal experiences. From the medieval armor collections of the Art Institute of Chicago and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which served as important touchstones for O'Grady as she began to conceive of the character and her attendants, to texts such as Howard

Pyle's illustrated novels of King Arthur's court that she'd learned how to read as a 5-year-old and on to figures like Joan of Arc and Pallas Athena whom she later encountered at Girls Latin School in Boston, nothing escapes or is wasted. To develop the multiple headdresses worn by her persona, O'Grady first spent two years studying contemporary carnivals of the Western Hemisphere before finally landing on a hand-colored lithograph in Isaac Mendes Belisario's 1837 portfolio of Junkanoo in Jamaica for inspiration.

The series of four "Announcement Cards"—carte de visite-style photographic portraits of the Knight in full costume posing variously with sword and lance in hand—will be seen for the first time in a single, contiguous unit as intended by the artist. The four portraits, printed nearly at life size, are complex character studies. They introduce some of the Knight's defining traits and behaviors and depict her in various stages of becoming, embark on a series of actions ranging from self-exploration to cultural critique. In addition, two "Family Portraits" — one formal, the other "real" — depict the Knight in relation to her companions. Rociavant is a toy wooden horse reminiscent of those in ancient European and Near Eastern folklore. The other, Pitchy-Patchy, her squire, is based on a combination of characters from Jamaica's Junkanoo Christmas festival, which O'Grady's parents grew up with, as well as from the Wanaragua festival of Belize, where her maternal grandmother was born and raised before moving to Jamaica.