**Kara Walker Recreates Scenes from Antebellum South through Life Sized Silhouettes**

**BY KRISTIN STERLING**

Kara Walker infuses the 18th and 19th century history with a modern scale: utilizing life-size cut-outs often spanning an entire wall or room. And her subject matter—the antebellum South, slavery and stereotypes surrounding African Americans seen through a contemporary intellectual lens—is as intriguing as her methodology.

In 1994, three months after receiving her M.F.A. from the Rhode Island Design Institute, Walker, now a full-time visual arts professor at Columbia’s School of the Arts, had her debut show at the Drawing Center in Soho. There she created a 50-foot mural depicting a southern plantation scene by pasting her oversized black paper cutouts on a large white wall.

More recently at the 2002 Sao Paulo Biennial, one of the largest and most prestigious international art exhibitions, Walker represented the United States with a cyclop- rama, a grand scale painting in the round, 85-feet in circumference. She built the installation, entitled “Slavery! Slavery!”, on site and filled it with her signature life-sized silhouettes. Like Atlanta’s famed Cyclorama, Walker’s installation portrays the battle of Atlanta during the Civil War.

But how does she create such vast murals and life-sized cutouts? She lays large papers on the floor and, without models or photographs, outlines people in white chalk. She then cuts them out and puts them directly on the wall.

“Watching Kara draw is like it must have been to watch Picasso,” said Bruce W. Ferguson, dean of the School of the Arts. “She has an incredible blend of pure skill, talent and imagination, all of which make her a great artist and a great teacher. We are enormous-ly grateful to have her here at the School of the Arts where both undergraduates and graduate stu- dents have access to her as an artist and teacher.”

Walker, who won a MacArthur Foundation “genius award” at age 27, began using silhouette form in the early 1990s. While in graduate school she started combining themes of slavery, violence and sex, drawn from cultural influ- ences that include folklore, cartoons, movies, black memorabilia, Harlem romance novels and slave narratives.

Such large-scale works catch the viewer’s attention and often spark curiosity. Upon careful inspection, viewers may realize that the silhouette is a narrative device Walker employs to mix historical facts and stereotypes of racism and sexism. Her work is particularly controversial among the previous generation of African American artists who fought for civil rights and are sometimes offended by her use of degrading characterizations.

Throughout her career, Kara has challenged and changed the way we look at and understand American history,” said Thelma Golden, chief curator at the Whitney Museum, which is currently exhibiting one of Walker’s installations. “Her work is provocative and emotionally wrenching, yet overwhelmingly beautiful and intellectually compelling.”

The installation from “Narratives of a Negress” was on display through Sept. 28. The exhibition, organized by the Tang Teaching Museum and Williams College Museum of Art, spans her career and will travel to Williams College in Williamstown, Mass, through Dec. 5.

The “silhouette says a lot with very little information, but that’s also what the stereotype does,” Walker explained in the catalogue for her solo exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. “So I saw the silhouette and stereotype type as linked. Of course, while the stereotype, or the emblem, can communicate with a lot of people, and a lot of people can understand it, the other side is that it also reduces differences, reduces diver- sity to that stereotype.”

Another way Walker comмуnicates with her viewers is by bring- ing them into the story. In “Amer- ican Primatists,” last fall at the Brent Sikkema Gallery in Chelsea, and in part of the travel- ling exhibition “Narratives of a Negress,” this spring at the Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, Walker set up colored-light pro- jectors that cast colorful landscape designs over the cutouts on the wall. As viewers moved around the installation and crossed in front of the projectors, their shad- ows were also cast on the wall, joining the scenes.

“Her charged and visceral imagery not only brings to light troubling episodes from the history of black and white relations in America, but also high- lights the problems of racism, sexism and abuse that continue into the present,” said Ian Berry, cura- tor of the Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College.

Walker’s work has been on exhi- bit around the world, including group shows such as: Moving Pic- tures, Guggenheim Museum, New York; La Belle et La Bete, Musee d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; Conceal/Reveal at SITE Santa Fe, an exhibition curated by Dean Fer- guson; and Contemporary Artists and a 19th-Century Vision, Hay- ward Gallery for the Arts Council of England, London.

Columbia Law School commemorative stamp

**Columbia Law School Alumni Paul Robeson Honored With US Postal Stamp**

**BY MICHAEL LARKIN**

Columbia welcomed the family, friends and admirers of one of its most accomplished graduates last week when the United States Postal Service unveiled the Paul Robeson commemorative stamp at a special ceremony hosted by The Center for Contemporary Black History.

Robeson, Law ’28, was a sem- inal figure in black American his- tory during the 20th century where he used his popularity as a singer and actor to speak out against civil and social injustices.

“This stamp is a symbol of our nation’s recognition of Paul Robe- son’s service not only to America but the world,” said Paul Robe- son, Jr.

Speakers that included, Presi- dent Lee C. Bollinger, former New York City Mayor David Dinkins, Provost Alan Brinkley, Law School Vice Dean Richard Briffault, New York Postmaster Vinnie Malloy and Professor Farah Jasmine Griffin, director of the Institute for Research in African American Studies, spoke of Robeson as a man of “great spirit,” “intellectual integrity” and “unique courage.”

Manning Marable, founder of the Institute for Research in African American Studies and the current director of the Center for Contemporary Black Studies, described Robeson as “one of the greatest and most extraordinary Americans of the 20th or any other century.”

Columbia has honored the life and legacy of Paul Robeson through the Annual Paul Robeson Conference and Gala, hosted by the Columbia Law School Black Law Students Association (BLSA), and the Annual Paul Robeson Lecture, held by the Law School’s Center for the Study of Law and Culture. Leading scholars including Manning Marable, Cornell West and K. Anthony Appiah, a professor of Afro-American Studies of Har- vard University, have given past lectures.

Paul Robeson fellowships have also been established by the Institute of Research in African American Studies. Cur- rent Robeson fellows are Tiffany Ford, Tiaki Hamilton, Natasha Korzun and Jamie Whit- field.

The Robeson commemorative stamp is part of the Heritage Stamp Series, which includes the images of Harriet Tubman, Dr. Martin Luther Jr., Langston Hughes, Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Mar- shall, and A. Phillip Randolph.