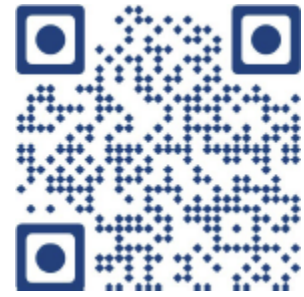


Press Release
Welancora Gallery
Art Basel Miami Beach
December 6-8, 2024
Miami Beach Convention Center
Booth N9
Contact: pr@welancoragallery.com



Reflections on Planting and Harvesting, 2018

Welancora Gallery is delighted to announce our participation in Art Basel Miami Beach 2024 with a solo presentation of works by **Deborah Willis, Ph.D** in booth N9. The fair's VIP preview days are December 4-5. The fair opens to the public December 6-8 at the Miami Beach Convention Center.

Created in 2018 and 2020, Deborah Willis' series of photographs, *Meditation On Joan Baez's Civil War*, the *Clothesline Series*, and *Sundays in Harlem*, are timely visual frameworks for understanding America's past, present and future. Utilizing the projection of a film she directed and conceived as the backdrop, Willis foregrounds the experiences of Black Civil War soldiers framed in the act of a waltz. With the dancers frozen in space and time, and their silhouettes looming large, Willis signals the conflict in a relationship between a man and a woman as a guidepost for imagining and reimagining the American Civil War.

In these works, Willis captures a past collective memory of conflict that reflects the present day, where the contemporary American political climate holds up a grim resemblance to the ills that gave rise to the Civil War. By incorporating projected visuals from 19th-century archives, works by Gordon Parks and Hank Willis Thomas, and her own photographs, Willis seeks to emphasize clothing, objects, memory and storytelling through gesture and movement, while reclaiming the body's agency through a practice of resilience. Willis has described the performance as being "both sensual and hypnotic", and so is the everlasting gaze embedded in the pensive images behind the dancers. Among the visuals include portraits of Black Civil War soldiers – posed amongst themselves, solo, or with their families, – poised with perfect posture donning firearms; imagery of enslaved Africans working the field; Parks' reenvisioning of Grant Wood's *American Gothic*; and Willis' contemporary photographs. Her *Sundays in Harlem* series acts as a witness to the memory of an older Harlem. As the neighborhood continues to undergo changes, Willis chooses to illuminate the joyous scenes of church celebrations - a uniting space of safety and spiritual solace for much of the Black community. Her *Clothesline Series* was created during 2020, the year of the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage. Images foregrounding the women leading the movement and women from the present day are superimposed onto cloth; this installation, reminiscent of *The Clothesline Project*, is a reflection on the years of struggle and perseverance.

This set of juxtaposing imagery gives way to a dark paradox in the United States. In between these echoes of patriotism lies the contradiction in feigning democracy – it is not true that one size fits all. Through a meditation of the photographs, and the layers of history and re-interpretations within them, we simultaneously bear witness to the past and the present. As a pioneer in the field of Black American photography, Willis has made countless scholarly and artistic contributions to the field for the past four decades, including her 2020 publication, *The Black Civil War Solider*. As she stated in her book, "The archive speaks. If we search, if we listen, it can reveal worlds of brutality and kindness, of shame and glory."

About the Artist

Deborah Willis, Ph.D. (b. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) is an historian, accomplished photographer and an author. Willis's work has been instrumental in advancing the study of Black aesthetics in photography. She is currently the University Professor and Chair of the Department of Photography & Imaging at the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University. In November 2024, Willis was appointed chair of the board of the Andy Warhol Foundation.

Willis earned her B.F.A. degree in photography from the Philadelphia College of Art in 1975. She received an M.F.A. in photography from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn in 1980 and a Ph.D. from George Mason University in 2002. After graduating from Pratt Institute, Willis became the curator of photography and prints and the exhibitions coordinator at the New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, curating collections that included scenes from black history, and portraits of famous African Americans. In 1985, she published her first book, *Black Photographers, 1840-1940: An Illustrated Bio-bibliography*, featuring the works of more than three hundred photographers, followed by *An Illustrated Bio-Bibliography of Black Photographers, 1940-1988*.

Willis has received numerous awards including the International Center of Photography Award in Writing (1995); the MacArthur Fellowship (2000); the Guggenheim Fellowship (2005); CAA Distinguished Lifetime Achievement Award for Writing on Art (2021); the Robert Mapplethorpe Photographer In Residency at the American Academy in Rome and the Don Tyson Prize for the Advancement of American Art (2022). Her work has been featured in various exhibitions across the country at institutions including the Smithsonian, the Woodmere Art Museum, the African American Museum in Philadelphia, the Bernice Steinbaum Gallery and Anderson Ranch in Aspen. Willis' work is in the collections of the Montclair Art Museum, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Sugar Hill Museum of Art and Storytelling, among others.

During the run of Art Basel Miami Beach, the Norton Museum of Art will present *Strike Fast, Dance Lightly: Artists on Boxing*, encompassing more than 100 artworks from the 1870s through present-day. Including Willis' works, the exhibition will feature the work of more than 50 artists who have explored the combat sport through paintings, sculptures, works on paper, photography and videos. This dynamic presentation will be the largest comprehensive survey of artwork depicting this global sport and its cultural impact. This show is on view from October 26, 2024 to March 9, 2025.