

Welancora Gallery
Press Release
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Helen Evans Ramsaran: *Strange Fruit*
Opening reception: Thursday, October 10 from 6:00pm-8:00pm



Welancora Gallery is pleased to announce the opening of *Strange Fruit*, a solo exhibition of 30 new bronze sculptures by Helen Evans Ramsaran (b.1943). The exhibition spotlights Ramsaran's ability to infuse her work with recent historical references while maintaining the same cerebral and physical tension found in her practice over forty years ago. In the history of contemporary African-American art, Ramsaran is one of only a few women sculptors working in bronze. *Strange Fruit* will be on view through January 4, 2025.

Created in response to the history of lynchings and the utilization of the woods and forest as sites of terrorist activity in the American South, this subject matter is a departure from the themes that Ramsaran is known for addressing in her work, primarily ancient African

architecture, their way of life and reverence for nature, and other indigenous cultures. Instead, this new series deals directly with the brokenness of the African-American experience and the fruitfulness that it produced. The exhibition includes a wall installation, tablets inspired by ancient scribes, a grouping of tabletop sculptures, and three large works that use trees, vines and the female body to directly reference the trauma experienced and endured as a result of racial violence.

Much of the exhibition reflects Ramsaran's time spent during the Covid pandemic revisiting historical narratives, personal/collective trauma, and plant life as symbolism. Her work has always been informed by extensive research and a profound understanding of cultural histories, anthropology, archaeology and ancient art forms gleaned from her travels throughout Africa, Japan, Mexico and parts of Europe during the 1980s and 90s. The difference here is a focus on botanical resilience as metaphor for survival, defense and renewal. We see Y-shaped branches reappear in the works as a central motif paying homage to ancient African architecture. These branch-like structures in bronze suggest a natural sanctuary of protection and unity amongst family members, with scarification representing the trauma and resilience of the community.

The wall installation consists of works representing fragments of life amid chaos. Inspired by political commotion in the 1960s – riots against the Vietnam War, burning buildings, and the upheaval following Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination – these pieces evoke the tumultuous struggle for survival and identity. The swirling mass of fragments speak to the resilience of these African American communities. Much like a plant's tendrils, these communities hold on amidst devastation, stretching out their limbs to clutch on to the last vestiges of life. Similarly, three tabletop sculptures explore the effect of violence on families, particularly the children of the deceased. These pieces reflect the painful memories and lasting impact on those left behind, embodying both sorrow and a sense of continuity. Displayed on plinths, these works invite intimate contemplation.

About the Artist

Helen Evans Ramsaran was born in Bryan, Texas. She received a Bachelor of Science degree in Art Education (1965) and a Masters of Fine Art in sculpture (1968) from Ohio State University, where she studied bronze casting under David Black and welding with John Freeman. Ramsaran has taught at John Jay College of the City University of New York, Florida A&M University, and Bowie State University in Maryland. She studied photography at the New School for Social Research in New York, and anatomical drawing at the Art Students League in New York.

Ramsaran's solo exhibitions include the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, New York, the Chrysler Museum in Norfolk, Virginia, the American Museum of Natural History, New York, New York; Wilmer Jennings Gallery at Kenkeleba House, New York, New York; Taller Boricua, New York, New York; Abrons Art Center, New York, New York; Sculpture Center, New York, New York; and MoMA PS1, Queens, New York. Her work is in the following public collections: Ohio State University, the Sheldon Museum, and the Mead Art Museum, among others. Ramsaran splits her time between New York and Europe.

