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**ALWAYS FRESH
ALWAYS FREE**

**The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston is pleased to present work
by artist LaToya Ruby Frazier.**



LaToya Ruby Frazier, *Momme*, 2008. Gelatin silver print. 20 x 24 inches. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Michel Rein, Paris.

LaToya Ruby Frazier: WITNESS
June 22 – October 13, 2013

Opening Reception
Friday, June 21 | 6:30-9PM

Artist's Lecture*
Saturday, June 22 | 6PM
*Special location: Eldorado Ballroom, 2310 Elgin, Houston 77004

HOUSTON, TX (June 6, 2013)—LaToya Ruby Frazier's work in photography, video, performance, and activism is fundamentally and critically concerned with issues of agency. Frazier focuses her attention on her hometown of Braddock, Pennsylvania, home to industrialist Andrew Carnegie's first steel mill, the Edgar Thomson Steel Works, established in 1872. Like many municipalities across the United States, Braddock has faced numerous crises in recent decades as it struggles to weather the country's

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shift from a manufacturing economy to an information economy. Many of Braddock's steel plants closed or drastically downsized between 1980 and 1985, and the number of steel industry-related jobs in the town plummeted from over 28,000 to less than 4,500. The sudden rise of unemployment and under-employment resulted in economic instability that led many residents to abandon the area. Abandoned homes and businesses fell into disrepair or outright collapse, often taking neighboring structures down with them. Discriminatory 'redlining' practices (the practice of denying or charging more for basic services such as health care and banking) and the biases of the Reagan administration's War on Drugs further disenfranchised the remaining community. What was once a thriving metropolitan area with more than 20,000 residents is home today to less than 2,500 people.

LaToya Ruby Frazier: WITNESS features photographs, videos, digital works, and a recent photolithograph series that speak to these conditions. Frazier documents Braddock's deterioration with an unflinching eye and a gift for communicating through documentary images that connects her to other socially engaged practitioners like American photographers Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, and Gordon Parks.

As she sees it, Frazier's work is "the story of economic globalization and the decline of manufacturing as told through the bodies of three generations of African American women." The primary players in this story are Frazier's Grandma Ruby (b. 1925-2009), her Mom (b. 1959) and the artist herself (b. 1982). This exhibition includes a selection of more than 20 black-and-white photographs from the artist's renowned *Notion of Family* series. The core of this exhibition is a selection of experimental self-portraits shot by the artist in collaboration with her Mom, who is a co-author, artist, and subject in her own right. Their unified self-portraits complicate and expand notions of portraiture and suggest new forms of social and political engagement. *LaToya Ruby Frazier: WITNESS* also includes the digital videos *Momme Wrestle* (2010) and *Self Portrait (United States Steel)* (2010), in which we see Frazier extending her practice into new media.

Most recently, Frazier's documentary explorations have considered Braddock as a paradigm for the entwined relationship between an individual and her environment. Grandma Ruby died from complications related to pancreatic cancer, Mom suffers from cancer and an undiagnosed neurological disorder, and Frazier herself suffers from lupus. She believes their illnesses are-in part-due to exposure to environmental toxins released by the steel mills. In a broader holistic sense though, Frazier sees the illnesses experienced by her family and many other individuals in Braddock as the psychosomatic results of the internalization of social bias: "We were demonized as bad, poor, black drug addicts. Every stereotype you can think of is what I grew up seeing in the media."

Frazier's recent photolithograph and silkscreen print series *Campaign for Braddock Hospital (Save Our Community Hospital)* (2011) is a critical assessment of a Levi's ad campaign that was shot on location in Braddock which many residents found patently offensive. According to Frazier: "they're promoting a romanticized idea of this 'urban pioneer,' and they have no clue about those of us in Braddock who have been here all along, fighting for access to safe housing and health care." Overlaying original and appropriated images with textual commentary, Frazier draws attention to the concerted efforts of the activist group Save Our Community Hospital during protests against the closure of a University of Pittsburgh Medical Center facility in Braddock. The photographs *Landscape of the Body (Epilepsy Test)* (2011), *U.P.M.C. Braddock Hospital and Holland Avenue Parking Lot* (2011), and the video *DETOX (Braddock U.P.M.C.)* (2011) address the reverberations of the shuttering and demolition of this facility in 2010-2011, while U.P.M.C. simultaneously constructed a new \$250M facility in an affluent Pittsburgh suburb.

In the face of these hardships, or perhaps precisely because of them, citizens in Braddock have been mobilizing to take matters into their own hands. The community endures. Forged in this crucible, Frazier's documentary practice is a form of visual propaganda that is deeply concerned with how power can be identified, claimed, and redirected. While popular opinion may assert that a participant driven by her emotional connections to an issue may be too biased to see a situation clearly, Frazier's work communicates her concerns with the utmost clarity and conviction. Even as she addresses urgent issues, emotion never clouds her vision, but instead affords it a compelling authenticity. The precision, economy, and honesty of Frazier's delivery make her stories so available that, like a mirror, it lets us see ourselves in her work. *LaToya Ruby Frazier: WITNESS* is curated by Dean Daderko, CAMH Curator, and will be on view at the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston from November 12-March 2, 2014.

In conjunction with this exhibition, Frazier will work with students in Jack Yates High School's photography magnet program to produce their own documentary photographic works around the theme: "Capturing and Contesting the Changing Face of Houston's Third Ward." The school is located in the Third Ward, a historically African American neighborhood. In 2013 Katharine Shilcutt of the *Houston Press* observed that "the Third Ward possesses a dynamic mix of old and new as the area slowly undergoes a slow gentrification process: beautiful brick homes abutting wonderfully divey restaurants like Chief Cajun Snack Shack, 80-year-old meat markets turned into vegan coffee shops, non-profit arts organizations such as Project Row Houses side-by-side with still-occupied row houses." Working with Frazier, these Yates photographers will document evidence of the gentrification of their community, and an exhibition of the resulting artworks will be on view in CAMH's Cullen Education Resource Room, September 1 - October 13, 2013, in tandem with Frazier's show.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

LaToya Ruby Frazier was born and raised in Braddock, Pennsylvania. She earned a BFA in applied media arts from Edinboro University of Pennsylvania in 2004 and an MFA in art photography from Syracuse University in 2007. She completed the Whitney Museum of American Art Independent Study Program in 2011. Her work has been exhibited in museums and galleries nationally and internationally. In New York City, her work has been featured at venues including the Whitney Museum of American Art's 2012 *Whitney Biennial*; *Greater New York 2010* at P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center; and the 2009 triennial *Younger Than Jesus* at the New Museum. In Paris, her work has shown at Galerie Michel Rein. Her recent solo exhibition *A Haunted Capital* is on view at the Brooklyn Museum through August 11, 2013. Since 2007 Frazier has been the Associate Curator of the Mason Gross Galleries at Rutgers University, where she is also a photography instructor at the Mason Gross School of the Arts. Frazier was appointed Critic in Photography at Yale University's School of Art in 2012.

PUBLICATION

LaToya Ruby Frazier: WITNESS is accompanied by a bound, illustrated catalogue including an essay by the exhibition's curator, Dean Daderko, a checklist of works in the exhibition, and biographic and bibliographic citations. The catalogue is available for \$9.95 in CAMH's Museum Shop, or request your copy by clicking [here](#).

Perspectives catalogues are made possible by a grant from The Brown Foundation, Inc.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

All events are free and open to the public and take place at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston unless otherwise noted. For complete listings and current information, please check www.camh.org.

Opening Reception: LaToya Ruby Frazier: WITNESS

Friday, June 21 | 6:30-9PM

Join us for the opening reception of *WITNESS*. Reception with cash bar.

Artist's Lecture: LaToya Ruby Frazier*

Saturday, June 22 | 6PM

*Special location: Eldorado Ballroom, 2310 Elgin, Houston 77004

Join artist LaToya Ruby Frazier for an artist's talk about her work and influences at the historic Eldorado Ballroom in Houston's Third Ward. *This event is co-presented with Project Row Houses.*

EXHIBITION SUPPORT

LaToya Ruby Frazier: WITNESS and the *Perspectives Series* is made possible by a major grant from Fayeze Sarofim and by donors to the Museum's Perspectives Fund: Allison and David Ayers, Bright Star Productions Inc., The Brown Foundation, Inc., Dillon Kyle Architecture, Heidi and David Gerger, Kerry Inman and Denby Auble, Mady and Ken Kades, Poppi Massey, Leslie and Shannon Sasser in Honor of Lynn Herbert, Andrew Schirrmeister III, William F. Stern, and 20K Group, LLC.

EDUCATION SUPPORT

The Museum receives support for its education programs from: Anonymous, Dillon Kyle Architecture, Frost Bank, Louise D. Jamail, Mr. and Mrs. I.H. Kempner III, Kinder Morgan Foundation, Robert and Pearl Wallis Knox Foundation, Leticia Loya, Elisabeth McCabe, M.D. Anderson Foundation, Marian and Speros Martel Foundation Endowment, Andrew R. McFarland, Mark and Mary Ann Miller, Nordstrom, Inc., Ms. Louisa Stude Sarofim, Texas Commission on the Arts, Texas Women for the Arts, Martha Claire Tompkins, and Elizabeth Satel Young.

Teen Council is supported by Ms. Louisa Stude Sarofim, Texas Women for the Arts, and Texas Commission on the Arts.

GENERAL SUPPORT

Funding for the Museum's operations through the Fund for the Future is made possible by generous grants from Chinhui Juhn and Eddie Allen, Anonymous, Jereann Chaney, Sara Dodd-Spickelmier and Keith Spickelmier, Jo and Jim Furr, Barbara and Michael Gamson, Brenda and William Goldberg, Marley Lott, Leticia Loya, Fayeze Sarofim, Andrew Schirrmeister III, and David and Marion Young.

CAMH's operations and programs are made possible through the generosity of the Museum's trustees, patrons, members and donors. The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston receives partial operating support from the Houston Endowment, the City of Houston through the Houston Museum District Association, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Texas Commission on the Arts, The Wortham Foundation Inc., and artMRKT. CAMH also thanks its artist benefactors for their support including Ricci Albenda, McArthur Binion, Brendan Cass, Jack Early, Robert Gober, Wayne Gonzales, Sean Landers, Zoe Leonard, Klara Lidén, Donald Moffett, Rob Pruitt, Rusty Scruby, Laurie Simmons, Josh Smith, and Marc Swanson.

United is the official airline of the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston.

CAMH MISSION

The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston is a leading destination to experience innovative art. CAMH actively encourages public engagement with its exhibitions through its educational programs, publications, and online presence. **ALWAYS FRESH, ALWAYS FREE**

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston is located at 5216 Montrose Boulevard, at the corner of Montrose and Bissonnet, in the heart of Houston's Museum District. Hours are Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday 10AM-7PM, Thursday 10AM-9PM, Saturday 10AM-6PM, and Sunday 12PM-6PM. Admission is always free. For more information, visit www.camh.org or call 713 284 8250.