

# WILDING CRAN GALLERY



## John Simmons *And then there's love*

Curated by Karon Davis

March 26th - May 14th

Wilding Cran Gallery is pleased to present *And then there's love*, an exhibition of John Simmons' photographs documenting Black love, community, and the importance of locating joy in our day-to-day lives, curated by Karon Davis.

Since the mid-1960s, photographer John Simmons has travelled the country covering everything from Black Panther Party meetings and the 1968 Democratic National Convention, to snapshots of the everyday lives of the American people. The exhibition of *And then there's love* unites Simmons' iconic photographs with selected collages as mediums for chronicling Black community, culture, and authenticity. Inspired by the legacy of pioneers such as Gordon Parks and Roy DeCarava, Simmons sets out to capture the challenges and complexities woven into the fabric of humanity.

Raised on the South Side of Chicago, Simmons recalls the rarity of positive images of Black people throughout popular culture and mainstream media. The exhibition of *And then there's love*, aims to impart sincerity through images of family and friendship, public and private life, revelry and reverie. Immediately upon entering the gallery space, the viewer locks eyes with one of the most vulnerable and striking images of the exhibition: a little girl eating chocolate ice cream, with a balloon wrapped around her fingers, her eyes fixed on the lens of the camera in front of her. Taken in 1967, *Girl Eating Ice Cream* has been resized, amplified, and applied to the gallery wall in vinyl. All around her, each accompanying photograph lends itself to Simmons' narrative of the miraculous in the mundane. And, while it is easy to place certain subjects into historical time-frames (such as Angela Davis, Nina Simone, and Kathleen Cleaver), the exhibition holds an aura of timelessness, with the ability to lend itself to any era.

Unlike the selection of photographs documenting Black life in the 1960s and 1970s, the works on paper exemplify one of Simmons' more recent bodies of work. Drawing inspiration from current events, the artist sees his collages as documentaries, political and social narratives punctuated with striking pockets of hope. The selection of collages exhibited within *And then there's love* unite historical imagery, newspaper headlines, hand-painted accents, and vibrant backdrops. Black and white melds with color, as desolate cityscapes and American flags meet starry skies and beaming rays of sun. These elements serve to unveil the juxtaposition of turmoil and tenderness, isolation and interconnectedness, despair and hope. While each collage tells its own story, when viewed together, the works serve as puzzle pieces, as chapters in the archive of human history and reckoning. When viewed in context with the selected photographs, Simmons' collages conjure visions of collective violence and grief in coexistence with the raw beauty of love and community.

In the tumultuous environment of our world, it is easy to lose sight of the beauty in small moments, to fall out of rhythm with where we all fit into the celebration of life. For John Simmons, the camera has the ability to memorialize this complex emotional space, to eternalize the ever too brief spurts of joy, so that we may return to them, so that they may remind us of our totality. Through this exhibition of photographs and works on paper, *And then there's love* seeks to impart the notion that no matter where we are from, or what we are living through, we will always have family and friendship, music and dance, apartment stoops and country roads, and even the occasional scoop of chocolate ice cream.

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## **About John Simmons**

Born and raised in Chicago, John Simmons came of age at the height of the politically charged, artistically fluent 1960s. His talent as a photographer was identified and nurtured by Robert “Bobby” Sengstacke who ushered him into his early years of publishing his photographs and to his formal education in art and photography as an undergraduate.

His next educational milestone was studying cinematography at USC and moving to Los Angeles where he currently resides. John is a working cinematographer, carries his still camera with him everywhere he goes and continues to mentor and be inspired by the life around him.

At age 15 Simmons began shooting photos for The Chicago Defender newspaper — the oldest Black-owned publication established in 1906. After leaving Chicago he studied fine art at Fisk University and completed a Master’s degree in cinematography at the University of Southern California. In 2004 he was inducted into the American Society of Cinematographers (ASC) where he currently serves as the co-chair of the ASC Vision Committee. He is also on the Board of Governors of the Television Academy and champions increased diversity on-set.

John Simmons, ASC has had a prolific career as both a still photographer and cinematographer. He has filmed numerous music videos and commercials for artists such as Stevie Wonder, Britney Spears, Snoop Dogg and many more. He has collaborated with filmmakers including Spike Lee and Debbie Allen, and has served as the Director of Photography for more than 25 television series. Simmons earned an Emmy for his work on Nicky, Ricky, Dicky & Dawn, another two nominations for his work on Pair of Kings, and a third for Family Reunion. His feature film credits include Once Upon a Time ... When We Were Colored, The Killing Yard, Collected Stories, The Gin Game, Asunder, The Old Settler and the documentaries Cool Women and Dark Girls.

His photographs are held in the collections of the Getty Museum, Los Angeles, CA; Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge, MA; High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; Center for Creative Photography, Tucson, AZ; American Society of Cinematographers, Los Angeles, CA, and the David C. Driskell Center, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

## **About Karon Davis**

Karon Davis grew up in New York, NY, attended Spelman College, Atlanta, GA, and film school at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles. Davis has a wide-ranging multimedia practice that encompasses installation, sculpture, film, photography and performance. Her background in dance, film, and theater informs her approach to representing the human body and physical relationships through figurative sculpture. She sculpts in plaster, a medium that conveys a sense of the temporary, of having captured a fleeting, singular moment in time. Like Egyptian mummies and archeological remains, Davis’s work conveys a historical record through the body. She is the cofounder of the Underground Museum in Los Angeles.

Museum exhibitions include: To Begin Again: Artists and Childhood, ICA Boston, Boston MA; (forthcoming); Black American Portraits, LACMA, Los Angeles, CA; Starless Midnight, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Newcastle, UK; NEW SUNS, Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht, NL; and Reclamation! Pan- African Works from the Beth Rudin DeWoody Collection at the Taubman Museum of Art, Roanoke, VA. Gallery solo and group exhibitions include: MUDDY WATER and Pain Management, Wilding Cran Gallery, Los Angeles, CA; Noah Davis, David Zwirner, New York, NY; No Good Deed Goes Unpunished, Jeffrey Deitch, NY; FEEDBACK, curated by Helen Molesworth, Jack Shainman Gallery | The School, Kinderhook, NY; POWER, Sprüth Magers, Los Angeles, CA; Rock my Soul, curated by Isaac Julien, Victoria Miro, London, UK; CONDO London, Herald St., London, and Dreamweavers, UTA Artist Space, Los Angeles, CA. Davis is a recipient of The Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation 2017 Biennial Grant. Davis' work is in the collections of Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles CA; Pérez Art Museum Miami, Miami FL; The Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Houston, TX; The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY; The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA; Beth Rudin DeWoody Collection, The Bunker, West Palm Beach, FL; and the Rubell Museum, Miami, FL.