

RYAN LEE

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RYAN LEE at **The Amory Show**
Pier 92, Booth F13
March 8–11, 2018

Emma Amos: Photo Transfer Works to Address the Contentious Body

RYAN LEE is pleased to present a selection of Amos's paintings featuring her experimental use of photo transfer and collage, including the seminal self-portrait *Work Suit* (1994) and the monumental *Valued* (1999). Amos's practice is deeply rooted in challenging perceptions of the black body as it has been depicted throughout art history by white male artists. Beginning in the 1990s, Amos's incorporation of photo transfer techniques and collage is a logical process of appropriating images to re-contextualize and re-evaluate them through her own lens.

In *Work Suit* (1994), Amos appropriates canonical images by the white male artist—in this case, Lucian Freud—and challenges the authority of his particular viewpoint. The identity of Freud and Amos becomes one, inverting the power dynamic as Amos assumes total control of Freud's body and chooses to wear this "suit." Amos saw Freud's painting *Painter, Working, Reflection* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1993, and she walked away both awed and appalled by the work as well as the fanfare surrounding the exhibition. Related to the painting is a series of 10 small works on paper, made to look like 19th century daguerrotypes, that document Amos putting on a Freud bodysuit in a performative gesture.

Valued (1999) is a monumental painting that depicts four shirtless black men—models and former studio assistants of Amos—posed in reference to the Black Power salute used by black athletes during the 1968 Olympics as a protest. Amos produced an IRIS print from the digital photograph of the models and then transferred the figures onto the canvas, bordered with Kente cloth and fabric American currency.

Models (1995) uses painting and photo transfer to juxtapose Kritios Boy, the Early Classical Greek sculpture considered the precursor of later male nudes, with Gauguin's *Te Nave Nave Fenua (Delightful Land)* and an anthropological photograph of an African woman. *Models*, like *Work Suit*, questions artistic authority and the Western idealization or fetishization of certain bodies.

X-Ray Showing Norman Lewis (1993), *Malcolm X Morley*, *Matisse and Me* (1993) and *Tee for Gilbert and George* (1993) continue to assess and assert Amos's position as a black woman within the given art historical canon and its artists. Amos directly references both her contemporaries and her predecessors, such as Abstract Expressionist painter Norman Lewis and Matisse's *The Blue Nude (Souvenir de Biskra)*, and re-frames them in African fabric alongside photo transfers of her uncle George Shivery's photographs taken in 1930s Mississippi and Tennessee. Alternating between paint and photo transfer to reproduce or manipulate her subjects, Amos considers historical truth and contests white male universality.

Emma Amos (b. 1938 Atlanta, GA) was the youngest and only woman member of Spiral, the historic African American collective founded in 1963, as well as a member of the important

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feminist collective, Heresies, established in the 1980s. Influenced by modern Western European art, Abstract Expressionism, the Civil Rights movement and feminism, Amos explores the politics of culture and issues of racism, sexism and ethnocentrism through her paintings and works on paper. Over six decades, she has employed color theory, innovative printmaking and weaving techniques, photo-transfer and collage. Amos graduated from Antioch College in Ohio in 1958 and the Central School of Art in London in 1960. She subsequently moved to New York and became active in the downtown arts scene, working alongside prominent Spiral artists such as Romare, Bearden, Hale Woodruff, Norman Lewis, Alvin Hollingsworth and Charles Alston. In 1965, she earned her Masters in Arts from New York University and taught art at the Dalton School in New York. She is a former Professor and Chair in Visual Arts at the Mason Gross School of Art at Rutgers University where she taught for 28 years.

Her work is held in the collections of the Bass Museum of Art, Miami; Birmingham Museum of Art; British Museum, London; Bronx Museum of Art, New York; Fowler Museum of Art, Los Angeles; James F. Byrnes Institute, Stuttgart, DE; Museo de las Artes, Guadalajara, MX; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Newark Museum; Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, and Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, among others. Amos's prints were recently included in the British Museum's 2017 *American Dream* exhibition, and her paintings were included in Tate Modern's *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power* and the Brooklyn Museum's *We Wanted A Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965-85*. In 2016, Amos received Georgia Museum of Art's Larry D. and Brenda A. Thompson award and was honored by the Studio Museum in Harlem as an Icon and Trailblazer, along with Faith Ringgold and Lorraine O'Grady.

In 2018, Amos will be included in the upcoming National Portrait Gallery, London exhibition *Michael Jackson: On the Wall*. In 2020, Amos will be the subject of a retrospective at Georgia Museum of Art at Georgia University in Athens.