

# NEWS

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## WALKER ART CENTER TO OPEN FIRST MUSEUM SURVEY OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY ARTIST KANDIS WILLIAMS

### *A Surface* to Feature Major Bodies of Work and Lesser-Known Objects, Engaging Audiences with Depth and Intricacy of the Artist's Practice



Kandis Williams, *Triadic Ballet*, 2021.  
Courtesy the artist; Heidi, Berlin; and  
Galerie Hubert Winter, Vienna.

**MINNEAPOLIS, MARCH 12, 2025**—For more than a decade, multidisciplinary artist Kandis Williams (US, b. 1985) has engaged with the politics of representation, labor, and the body through an impressive array of media, from collage and sculpture to film and performance, and to writing and publishing. On April 24, 2025, the Walker Art Center will open the artist's first institutional survey, inviting audiences to connect with her incisive and timely practice. Titled *A Surface*, the expansive presentation will feature both major bodies of work and lesser-known objects that will be shown in a museum context for the first time. Together, the depth of works captures the incredible range and intricacy of Williams's practice and invites engagement with themes and ideas that are especially resonant in our contemporary moment. *A Surface* will remain on view at the Walker through August 24, 2025.

The exhibition is curated by Taylor Jasper, the Walker's Susan and Rob White Assistant Curator of Visual Arts, with support from Laurel Rand-Lewis, the Walker's Curatorial Fellow in Visual Arts. *A Surface* is accompanied by a richly illustrated publication produced by the Walker's design studio in close collaboration with the artist. Offering the most comprehensive written overview of Williams's work to-date, the publication will include essays by Jasper as well as Denise Ryner, the Andrea B. Laporte Curator at the Institute of Contemporary Art Philadelphia.

Throughout her work, Williams positions the experience of the body within histories and expressions of racism, nationalism, eroticism, and authority. In particular, she

illuminates and challenges the ways that Black bodies have been displaced, disciplined, dispossessed, and commodified, while creating space for reclamation, agency, and autonomy. Within her practice, collage serves as a critical connective thread, allowing her to layer, fragment, and disrupt newly made and archival imagery across the many media with which she works. In this way, she is both physically and conceptually unraveling systems of oppression and establishing new structures and vocabularies, leveraging the power of visual culture to dismantle longstanding hierarchies to reveal new opportunities for the making of personal and communal identity.

Williams's distinct engagement with material surface as a site of action and transformation serves as the foundational anchor of the exhibition and gives the presentation its name. Across sculpture, video, installation, and works on paper, *A Surface* unfolds as an interrogation of visibility, power, and the conditions that shape and discipline Black bodies. Each gallery builds on Williams's exploration of surveillance, movement, labor, and mythology, revealing how systems of oppression are inscribed on the body and how those same bodies resist, subvert, and reimagine the terms of their existence.

The first gallery, titled *Politics of the Gaze*, examines the ways Black bodies have been made hypervisible and are judged under the patriarchal and racialized gaze. Here, Williams's two-channel video *Eurydice* (2017–2021) transforms the classical myth into a meditation on spectatorship and surveillance. Within the work, Orpheus's fateful backward glance is reframed as an act of scrutiny and possession, implicating the audience in the very power dynamics Williams critiques. Collages and works on paper in this section further explore how race, gender, and beauty ideals have been visually codified. Together, these works challenge the idea of looking as a passive act, instead asserting that looking can carry the potential for both violence and agency.

In the second gallery, titled *Mapping Power Through Movement*, Williams considers how bodies are organized and controlled through choreography, spatial restriction, and social expectation. In particular, she draws on the histories of Black performance, from vernacular dance to spectacle, to expose how bodily expression is shaped by both individual agency and forces beyond a person's control. At the heart of this gallery is the video *Triadic Ballet* (2021), which captures a dancer moving within a rigid geometric grid. Their movements are directed by imposed spatial boundaries that evoke both the disciplinary nature of classical ballet and the broader regulation of Black bodies. The room's accompanying works push this core exploration further.

In *Plots of Resistance*, Williams shifts her focus to the historical and contemporary exploitation of Black labor, tracing its enduring links to land, agriculture, and extraction. The plantation, prison farm, and factory emerge as interconnected sites where Black bodies have been forced into economic production. The video *Annexation Tango* (2020) anchors this section. In the work, Williams layers together footage of a dancer performing atop the agricultural fields of Virginia's prison farms and historical imagery of enslaved laborers. The dancer's movements blend tango, voguing, and contemporary dance, making visible the ways in which Black cultural expression carries the weight of oppression and the opportunity of artistic freedom.

The final gallery, titled *Myth, Media, and the Monstrous Other*, unpacks how

Blackness has been framed as a site of both fascination and fear. Williams dissects the ways dominant narratives construct Blackness as something to be controlled, punished, or eliminated—often through the language of mythology and horror. The works in this section draw on archival sources, pop culture, and historical imagery to interrogate how Black people have been rendered monstrous within the white supremacist imaginary. The video *Medusa* (2023) reimagines the Gorgon myth through a contemporary media lens, examining how Black femininity is framed as both threat and spectacle. The room's other works explore how horror tropes have been used to justify racialized violence while also gesturing toward the ways Black artists and storytellers reclaim these images.

Across these interconnected rooms, *A Surface* unfolds as an incisive examination of how visual culture constructs Blackness. At the heart of Williams's practice is the notion that surfaces—whether paper, screen, stage, or skin—are not merely passive planes for representation, but active sites of power, control, and resistance. Through acts of cutting, layering, and recombination, Williams offers a deeply researched and visually urgent meditation on the history and opportunities held by Black bodies.

“Kandis Williams’s work feels especially urgent in this moment, as questions of visibility, power, and control over the body continue to shape our social and political landscapes. Through *A Surface*, we see how her practice not only critiques these structures but actively works to unravel and reconfigure them. Her approach—melding historical research with contemporary media, movement, and collage—makes clear that these forces are not abstract; they are lived, embodied, and deeply felt,” said Jasper. “At a time when the policing of bodies, narratives, and histories is intensifying, Williams’s work offers a critical space for reflection, resistance, and reimagination. This exhibition is an opportunity to engage with an artist whose practice challenges us to see with more complexity and to recognize the stakes of what remains visible, what is erased, and what can be made anew.”

#### **ABOUT KANDIS WILLIAMS**

Kandis Williams (b. 1985, Baltimore, Maryland) has participated in group exhibitions at a wide range of institutions, including the Hammer Museum and Huntington Libraries, Los Angeles; Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore; Wignall Museum of Contemporary Art, Rancho Cucamonga, CA; Frye Art Museum, Seattle, WA; Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; and the Underground Museum, Los Angeles. Her work is in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore; Julia Stoschek Collection, Berlin; and the New Berlin Art Society, Berlin. She is the 2021 recipient of the prestigious Mohn Award, granted by the Hammer Museum in recognition of artistic excellence, and the Foundation for Contemporary Arts' 2021 Grants to Artists Award. Williams received her BFA from Cooper Union in 2009. She lives and works in New York and Berlin.

#### **ABOUT THE WALKER ART CENTER**

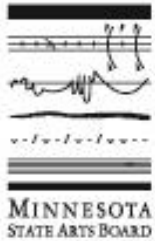
The Walker Art Center is a renowned multidisciplinary arts institution that presents, collects, and supports the creation of groundbreaking work across the visual and performing arts, moving image, and design. Guided by the belief that art has the power to bring joy and solace and the ability to unite people through dialogue and shared experiences, the Walker engages communities through a dynamic array of

exhibitions, performances, events, and initiatives. Its multiacre campus includes 65,000 sq. ft. of exhibition space, the state-of-the-art McGuire Theater and Walker Cinema, and ample green space that connects with the adjoining Minneapolis Sculpture Garden. The Garden, a partnership with the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board, is one of the first urban sculpture parks of its kind in the United States and home to the beloved Twin Cities landmark *Spoonbridge and Cherry* by Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen. Recognized for its ambitious program and growing collection of more than 16,000 works, the Walker embraces emerging art forms and amplifies the work of artists from the Twin Cities and from across the country and the globe. Its broad spectrum of offerings makes it a lively and welcoming hub for artistic expression, creative innovation, and community connection.

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