

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Sasha Ali
Manager, Exhibitions & Communications
sasha@cafam.org | 323.937.4230 x25

BETYE SAAR: KEEPIN' IT CLEAN

May 28 - August 20, 2017

Craft & Folk Art Museum presents solo exhibition of new and historic washboard assemblages by Betye Saar



Supreme Quality, mixed media on vintage washboard, metal washtub, wood stand, 1998. Courtesy of the artist and Roberts & Tilton, Los Angeles, CA

LOS ANGELES - The Craft & Folk Art Museum (CAFAM) presents *Betye Saar: Keepin' It Clean*, a solo presentation of the seminal contemporary artist's washboard assemblage sculptures, which she began in the late 1990s and continues to make to this day. Born in 1926, Saar is a prolific artist and iconic figure of the Black Arts Movement of the 1970s, whose complex assemblage sculptures address race, memory, and Black consciousness. Curated in close collaboration with the artist, the exhibition presents twenty-four new and historic works that center the washboard as a symbol of the unresolved legacy of slavery and the subsequent oppressive systems facing Black Americans today, particularly Black women. Saar's renewed focus on making washboard assemblages stands as an urgent act of cleansing the race- and gender-based violence that American society continues to inflict. In Saar's own words, "the increase of police shootings and the Black Lives Matter protests are examples that America has not yet cleaned up her act." *Betye Saar: Keepin' It Clean* is on view May 28 through August 20, 2017.

Saar commonly utilizes racialized, derogatory images of Black Americans in her art as political and social devices. *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* (1972) is Saar's most well-known art work, which transformed the stereotypical, nurturing mammy into a militant warrior with a gun. Aunt Jemima continues to be a reference point for Saar even now, as she brings her back to life to take on the ongoing racial injustices faced by Black America, including disproportionate police violence and poverty. Combining images of mammies and laundresses with potent words from spirituals and poetry within the washboard structure, Saar emboldens and ennobles the once subservient figure-no longer in service of white supremacy.

"Betye Saar's washboard assemblages are a brilliant in how they address the ongoing, multidimensional issues surrounding race, gender, and class in America," says exhibition curator Holly Jerger. "She compresses these enormous, complex concerns into intimate works that speak on both a personal and political level. With the increasing erosion of civil rights in our country, it is more important than ever to exhibit Saar's work, and we are deeply honored to have that opportunity."

"I wanted to do an exhibition of my washboards because they are intimate and hands-on," says Saar. "It's a body of work that I am still making, and the new works are inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement. People think racism happens everywhere else, but racism still exists in Los Angeles."

Bars of soap, worn with age and use, are collaged onto works such as *National Racism: We Was Mostly 'Bout Survival* (1997) and *Gonna Lay Down My Burden* (1998), with the slogan "Liberate Aunt Jemima" pasted onto them. Several washboards have the words "We was mostly 'bout survival" embellished onto them, as well as "Extreme times call for extreme heroines." Clocks have become an integral part of Saar's more recent washboards, indicating that history continues to repeat itself, especially as the current political administration normalizes racist, sexist, and xenophobic rhetoric. Recent works such as *Birth of the Blues* (2015) and *Banjo Boy* (2015) include male musicians as central



Extreme Times Call for Extreme Heroines, mixed media on vintage washboard, 2017. Courtesy of the artist and Roberts & Tilton, Los Angeles, CA



Dark Times, mixed media on vintage washboard, 2015. Courtesy of the artist and Roberts & Tilton, Los Angeles, CA



Liberation, mixed media on vintage washboard, 2011. Collection of Sheila Silber

figures, alluding to the young black men and boys being killed by police violence. To give deeper context to the washboard assemblages, two related tableaux and a selection of washboards from Saar's personal collection are also included in the exhibition.

An opening reception for *Betye Saar: Keepin' It Clean* takes place on Saturday, May 27 from 6:00 - 9:00 p.m. The reception is free for CAFAM members and open to the public for a \$12 entry fee.

SPONSORS

This exhibition is made possible in part by The Philip and Muriel Berman Foundation, the Greenberg Foundation, and The Antonia and Vladimer Kulaev Cultural Heritage Fund.

CATALOGUE

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully-illustrated catalogue with an essay by Steven Nelson, director of the African Studies Center and professor of African and African American art history at UCLA. It will be available in the CAFAM Shop or at cafamshop.org.

PROGRAMS

CAFAM will offer exhibition-related workshops and events in conjunction with the exhibition, including CraftNight on the first Thursday of the month from 7:00 - 9:30 p.m. and CraftLab family workshops on the second Sunday of each month from 1:30 - 3:30 p.m.

Keepin' It Clean: A Conversation with Betye Saar and Steven Nelson

Sunday, June 25 | 3:00 p.m.

Situated on historic Museum Row since 1973, the **Craft & Folk Art Museum (CAFAM)** is an invaluable contributor to Los Angeles culture, exhibiting current artists with intriguing perspectives and distinctive practices. Exploring the leading edge of craft, art, and design, CAFAM gives audience to diverse makers and artists whose work is often not represented in larger art institutions. The museum is a place to see art and make art - all under one roof. CAFAM coordinates a robust roster of hands-on workshops led by professional artists and makers. The intimate, atypical museum space and independent spirit at CAFAM combine to create an atmosphere of excitement and innovation, where people in Los Angeles deepen their relationships to art, creativity and one another. For more information, visit www.cafam.org

Location: 5814 Wilshire Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90036

Admission: FREE every Sunday Regularly: \$7 for adults; \$5 for students, teachers, and seniors; free for CAFAM members

Hours: Tuesday-Friday, 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.; Saturday & Sunday, 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.; closed Mondays. Every first Thursday of the month, extended hours 6:30 - 9:30 p.m.