

The Ministry of Citizenship, the Fundação Bienal de São Paulo and Itaú present the 34th Bienal de São Paulo

**Centropy, a solo exhibition of Deana Lawson's recent work
opens at Kunsthalle Basel on 9 June 2020**

The exhibition by the US photographer, whose work and research explores blackness and representativeness among African diasporas, is co-produced by the Fundação Bienal de São Paulo as part of the multiple exhibitions and ongoing events that make up the 34th Bienal de São Paulo – Though it's dark, still I sing

Deana Lawson: Centropy

Solo exhibition

9 June – 11 October 2020

Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland

co-produced with Fundação Bienal de São Paulo as part of the 34th Bienal de São Paulo – *Though it's dark, still I sing*

As part of Deana Lawson's participation in the 34th Bienal de São Paulo, the US photographer was invited to travel to the northeastern state of Bahia, in Brazil. There she produced a set of photographs that portray people and places marked by the strong presence of cultures deriving from the African diaspora. These photographs are included in her exhibition at the Kunsthalle Basel, *Centropy*, on view from 9 June until 11 October 2020, a show co-produced with Fundação Bienal de São Paulo as part of the 34th Bienal.

Sensitive to the stereotypes in Western, African and afro-descendant portraiture, Lawson predominantly explores topics such as physicality, identity, gender and family in a practice that is grounded in thorough research on blackness and representativeness. Even though they reveal a profound degree of intimacy with their subjects, Lawson's photographs are meticulously staged and often based on drawings and sketches she makes before the session, and include theatrical objects carefully chosen by the artist. Mostly produced in domestic indoor spaces, these photographs are endowed with an ambiguous atmosphere, between the voyeuristic, the theatrical, the ethnographic and the activist, without being completely subsumed by one of these possible interpretations.

Lawson's new series was developed in the city of Salvador, in Bahia, one of the Brazilian regions where the rites, gastronomy, religions and music of African origin are most present. The exhibition in Basel will present a selection of around twenty large-scale photographs, as well as a series of smaller pieces and videos, most of them never exhibited before.

As part of the 34th Bienal de São Paulo's original curatorial project, *Centropy* would be presented at the Bienal Pavilion, in São Paulo, in July 2020. With the changes enforced by the Covid-19 pandemic, this show and other events preceding the major group exhibition had to be cancelled. Adapting to its new shape, the curatorial project will now incorporate a large number of the photographs from *Centropy* into the group show scheduled to take place in São Paulo between 3 October to 13 December 2020.

Several themes addressed by Lawson's research and production relate to discussions proposed by the Bienal de São Paulo project more broadly. Marked by mutual encounter and leverage between the curatorial project and the Bienal's institutional activity, the **34th Bienal de São Paulo – *Though it's dark, still I sing*** emphasizes the multiplicity of possible readings of an artwork proposing an exhibition based on the concept of "relations", approached by thinkers Édouard Glissant and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, among others.

Led by Jacopo Crivelli Visconti (chief curator), Paulo Miyada (adjunct curator), and Carla Zaccagnini, Francesco Stocchi and Ruth Estévez (guest curators), the 34th edition of the Bienal offers opportunities for artists to be exhibited in different contexts and to generate different relations and understandings. "The 34th Bienal de São Paulo largely revolves around a reflection on the importance of the context that surrounds an artwork. In that sense, the partnership with Kunsthalle Basel on an exhibition as *Centropy* is highly symbolic: each of Deana Lawson's images tells a story, and that story is likely to be understood and felt in profoundly different ways in places like Basel and São Paulo", says Jacopo Crivelli Visconti.

"Since its inception in 1962, the Fundação Bienal has been committed to the establishment of connections, and the 34th Bienal encapsulates this aim, as it joins efforts between the curatorial project and the institution's vocation of creating bridges between different people, contexts and countries. With international partnerships, such as with Kunsthalle Basel in Switzerland, this edition also highlights the heightened focus and growing importance of the Fundação's international collaborations since 2016, when the foundation's International Advisory Board was created," says José Olympio da Veiga Pereira, president of the Fundação Bienal de São Paulo.

EDITORS NOTES

Deana Lawson

Deana Lawson is a photographer from Rochester, NY, USA. She received her M.F.A. in Photography from RISD - Rhode Island School of Design in 2004. Her practice borrows from traditional aesthetics, ranging from photographic and figurative portraiture, social documentary aesthetics, and family album photographs. Lawson received the prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship in 2013, which was the turning point in her career from when she expanded her practice to international territories and cultures. She has since then photographed in DR Congo, Haiti, Jamaica, and Ethiopia, and Brazil, among others.

Her work has been included in exhibitions at several institutions, including Whitney Museum of American Art, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), Art Institute of Chicago, Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia, MoMA PS1, Studio Museum, and KIT Museum in Dusseldorf Germany. Lawson is the recipient of the Guggenheim Fellowship, Art Matters Grant, John Gutmann Photography Fellowship, Rema Hort Mann Foundation Grant, Aaron Siskind Fellowship Grant, and a NYFA Grant in 2006.

Recently, The Underground Museum (Los Angeles, US) held a solo exhibition of Deana's Lawson works in 2018-2019, as well as The Carnegie Museum of Art (Pittsburgh, US), in 2018. Lawson currently teaches photography at Princeton University.

Fundação Bienal de São Paulo

Established in 1962, the Fundação Bienal is constantly looking for the new without losing sight of its six decades of history and its primary vocation of connecting different people, institutions and contexts to each other and to contemporary art. Other than realizing the Bienal de São Paulo, its traveling exhibitions and several outreach projects, the institution houses a historical archive on modern and contemporary art seen as a benchmark in Latin America and holds a consistent educational programme that includes guided tours of the exhibitions, sessions for teachers, lectures and seminars.

Kunsthalle Basel

Kunsthalle Basel is a place for innovative contemporary art exhibitions of an emerging generation of artists. Established in 1872 by the Basler Kunstverein (Basel Art Association), is considered Switzerland's oldest and still most active institution for contemporary art. Kunsthalle Basel is also renowned for engaging with pioneering practices in art.

Deana Lawson: *Centropy*

09 June – 11 October 2020

Solo exhibition at Kunsthalle Basel

co-produced with Fundação Bienal de São Paulo as part of the 34th Bienal de São Paulo – *Though it's dark, still I sing*

Visitors information:

Address: Kunsthalle Basel, Steinenberg 7, CH-4051 Basel

Phone: T +41 61 206 99 00

Opening hours: Tue/Wed/Fri 11 am–6 pm; Thurs 11 am–8:30 pm; Sat/Sun 11 am–5 pm; Closed on Mondays.

Free admission

34th Bienal de São Paulo – *Though It's Dark, Still I Sing*

Curatorial team

Chief curator: Jacopo Crivelli Visconti

Adjunct curator: Paulo Miyada

Guest curators: Carla Zaccagnini, Francesco Stocchi and Ruth Estévez

Guest editor: Elvira Dyangani Ose in collaboration with The Showroom, London

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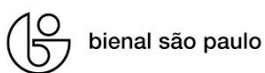
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