

## PRESS RELEASE

### **Posing Beauty in African American Culture**

September 11–November 21, 2010

Williamstown, Mass. — The Williams College Museum of Art is pleased to present *Posing Beauty in African American Culture*, an exhibition that explores the contested ways in which African and African American beauty have been represented in historical and contemporary contexts through a diverse array of media including photography, video, fashion, and advertising. On Thursday, October 21, the museum is hosting a discussion about the exhibition with curator Deborah Willis, art historian Robin Kelsey, and artist Carrie Mae Weems. This event takes place at 7:00 pm at the Brooks-Rogers Recital Hall on the Williams College campus. This is a free program and all are invited to attend.

Beauty as a subject has been idealized, as well as challenged, throughout the history of Western art and image-making. *Posing Beauty* explores contemporary understandings of beauty by framing the notion of aesthetics, race, class, and gender within art, popular culture, and political contexts. The images in this exhibition challenge idealized forms of beauty in art by examining their portrayal and exploring a variety of attitudes about race, class, and gender.

The first of three thematic sections, “Constructing a Pose,” considers the interplay between the historical and the contemporary, between self-representation and imposed representation, and the relationship between subject and photographer. The second theme, “Body & Image,” questions the ways in which our contemporary understanding of beauty has been constructed and framed through the body. The last section, “Modeling Beauty & Beauty Contests,” invites us to reflect upon the ambiguities of beauty, its impact on mass culture and individuals, and how the display of beauty affects the ways in

which we see and interpret the world and ourselves.

On view at WCMA from September 11 through November 21, *Posing Beauty* features over 90 works of art drawn from public and private collections and is accompanied by a book published by W.W. Norton. Artists in the exhibition include, among others, Carrie Mae Weems, Charles "Teenie" Harris, Eve Arnold, Gary Winogrand, Sheila Pree Bright, Leonard Freed, Renee Cox, Anthony Barboza, Bruce Davidson, Mickalene Thomas, and Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe.

The exhibition was organized by the Department of Photography & Imaging at New York University, Tisch School of the Arts, and curated by Deborah Willis, University Professor and Chair of the Department. The touring exhibition is made possible in part by the J. P. Morgan Chase Foundation and Curatorial Assistance Traveling Exhibitions. Additional support has been provided by grants from the Tisch School of the Arts Office of the Dean's Faculty Development Fund, Visual Arts Initiative Award from the NYU Coordinating Council for Visual Arts, and NYU's Advanced Media Studio.

The Williams College Museum of Art presentation of *Posing Beauty* was organized by Dalila Scruggs, Mellon Fellow for Diversity in the Arts, and John Stomberg, Deputy Director and Chief Curator, in consultation with Deborah Willis.

**Related Program:**

**Posing Beauty in African American Culture: A Discussion**

Thursday, October 21

7:00 pm

Brooks-Rogers Recital Hall, Williams College

Deborah Willis, curator and Chair of the Department of Photography and Imaging at the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University, Robin Kelsey, Shirley Carter Burden Professor of Photography and Director of Graduate Studies in the History of Art and Architecture Department at Harvard University, and artist Carrie Mae Weems.

## **Williams College Museum of Art**

The Williams College Museum of Art is located on Main Street in Williamstown, Massachusetts. It is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10 am to 5 pm and Sunday from 1 to 5 pm. The museum is wheelchair accessible and open to the public. Admission is FREE. For more information, contact the museum at 413-597-2429 or visit [www.wcma.org](http://www.wcma.org).