

Harlem Is Watching

The **Contemporary Art Modern Project** is proud to be launching our online residency for emerging artists with a solo exhibition from film photographer Cai Crosby, titled *Harlem Is Watching*. Cai is a Brooklyn based film photographer who, in their first exhibition, is paying homage to Black Mecca--Harlem, NYC. As a sister project to Art from An Experience Based Identity, *Harlem Is Watching* brings us into the present moment, as we see remnants of what the neighborhood has been through.

The northern portions of America became a promised land of opportunity in war industries with the onset of the First World War in 1915, causing masses of African Americans to migrate from the south. By the 1920's, Harlem was booming with Black cultural and artistic expression, marking the start of The Harlem Renaissance. She became the stage for creative leaders like Langston Hughes, Aaron Douglas, and Alain Locke, to name a few, who proclaimed to the world that African Americans are intellectual, creative and have voices of value. The Cotton Club was central to the Renaissance, as it held talents of jazz like legends Duke Ellington and Ella Fitzgerald. Through her lens, Cai brings us back to this historic club in *Cotton Club* and *Crack in The Cotton*, both of which look onto the building with nostalgic reverence. *Crack In The Cotton* focuses on a black crack in the white facade of the building, representing the way Black performers and their music broke through the industry and reached white patrons at the club. *Mosaic 1 & 2* shows us the humble beauty of this music: it's color, liveliness and instinct, all of which is seeking no more than the space to exist, a feeling communicated by the low eyes of both the dancers and musicians.

Fast forward to the 1960's, Harlem's voice transitioned from artistic to political. The Harlem Riots began on July 16, 1964 after a 15 year old black boy, James Powell, was shot and killed by a white off duty police officer for something that onlookers felt could have been handled without deadly force. This triggered a number of civil uprisings and protests against police brutality, racial discrimination and segregation. Cai's shot *Pink Cross* serves as a visual memorial of the bloodiness of racial intersections, during that time and still today. Then we have *Camera On*, *Apollo* and *Adam Clayton Powell*, images which communicate to the viewer that Harlem is not only aware of the racial tensions she's bore witness to, but that she is still watching and demanding respect for her people.

2020 saw a fierce revival of The Renaissance, young black women and men expressing themselves fearlessly, despite the police brutality they still face. *Harlem Is Watching* anchors us in the truth that Black Americans, and the geographical places they've called home, remember it all. There is a consciousness that is living on through Black art, and through *Harlem Is Watching*, artist Cai Crosby is immortalizing the founding footprints of this consciousness through and about Harlem, impressions that she will forever be home to. It is said that history tends to repeat itself unless, of course, there is great care, attention, and effort employed in moving forward. This exhibition epitomizes this sentiment with its careful attention to detail, it's allusions to historical implications and it's plea to social responsibility.

Statement by Brianna Luz Fernandez
Curated by Brianna Luz Fernandez