

KARA WALKER



Freedom, a Fable is an illustrated artist's book with text and pop-up silhouettes. At first glance it appears to be a nineteenth-century children's book, but it is decidedly not. It tells the story of a female slave whose life after emancipation veers far from her dreams of meritocracy, revealing that *Freedom, a Fable* is not just the title of the work but is also the lesson to be learned.

Much of Kara Walker's work engages the historical art form of the black paper silhouette to re-present African-American history. Her beautiful, laser-cut figures initially attract. But quickly one notices their demeaning postures and exaggerated features, which recall negative stereotypes of African-Americans portrayed in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century minstrel shows, novels, and art. Walker's figures depict a physically and sexually violent antebellum South, often the source of these virulent typologies. Walker's inversion of the portrait silhouette—a supposedly representative art form—reveals the corrosive power of stereotypes and prejudice. To heighten the irony and poignancy of her message, her cutouts are normally wall-size installations. In contrast, the miniaturized images in *Freedom* address the viewer on an intimate, personal scale.

Born in Stockton, California, in 1969, Walker moved to Atlanta, Georgia, at age thirteen. Her transition from an integrated town to the racially divided atmosphere of the South had a profound impact on her. She received her BFA from the Atlanta College of Art and her MFA from the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, having begun her exploration of the silhouette while in school. At age twenty-seven, Walker received a John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation award. Her first retrospective exhibition was at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, in 2007.