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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COOLEY GALLERY PRESENTS WORKS BY MAJOR AFRICAN AMERICAN ARTISTS ALONGSIDE HISTORICAL EPHEMERA

PORTLAND, OR (January 14, 2008) – From January 22 – March 2, 2008, the Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery presents *Working History, African American Objects*, an exploration of African American art and material culture that exhibits cutting edge contemporary art—created during the last 20 years—alongside historical ephemera. The exhibition is curated by Cooley Gallery director and curator Stephanie Snyder from major U.S. collections, as well as from artists' studios and regional archives.

A public celebration for *Working History* will take place on February 15, 6:30 p.m., beginning with a free public artist talk by participating artist Nick Cave, at 6:30 p.m in Vollum Lounge on the Reed campus, followed by a reception at the Cooley Gallery from 8:00-10:00 p.m.

Exhibiting artists: Nick Cave, Willie Cole, David Hammons, Glenn Ligon, Fred Wilson, Io Palmer, Kianga Ford, Dave McKenzie, Adrian Piper, Kara Walker, Sam Durant, Lorraine O'Grady, and Faith Ringgold.

View the contemporary works in the exhibition at: <http://www.reed.edu/gallery/workinghistory.htm>
Special winter gallery hours: Thursday–Sunday, 12 noon to 6 p.m. Always free.

COOLEY GALLERY OUTSTANDING AFRICAN AMERICAN ARTISTS LECTURE SERIES

Nick Cave: "Art and Performance Lecture"

Friday, February 15, 6:30 p.m.

Vollum Lounge, Reed College

Followed by a reception at the Cooley from 8:00–10:00 p.m.

Io Palmer: "Artist Talk"

Friday, February 22, 6:30 p.m.

Eliot Hall room 314, Reed College, followed by a gallery walk-through

Faith Ringgold: "30 Years and an Artist and Activist"

Sunday, February 24, 3:00 p.m.

Kaul Auditorium, Reed College

Kianga Ford: "Artist Talk"

Wednesday, February 27, 6:30 p.m.

Eliot Hall room 314, Reed College, followed by a gallery walk-through

This lecture series was made possible in by a grant from the Oregon Council for the Humanities (OCH), a statewide nonprofit organization and independent affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities, which funds OCH's grant program.

Exhibition Description

Working History brings together exceptional works of art by contemporary African American artists, and—extending conventional exhibition strategies—displays the work in the same context as historical artifacts and ephemera, further exploring the works' material, social, and historical associations. Each artist in *Working History* explores and reworks accepted historical narratives, re-making, making strange and co-opting the traces of specific histories, identities, events, and materials.

In "African American Flag," (1989) for example, **David Hammons** remakes the U.S. flag in the pan-African colors red, green and black, creating an optimistic yet ironic symbol of nationhood and cultural affiliation. In the "Runaways" series (1993), **Glenn Ligon** adopts the graphic structure of 19th century runaway slave posters in order to consider black masculinity and autobiography. **Faith Ringgold** performs a similar transformation when she employs traditional quilt-making techniques to create a stitched and painted portrait of openly gay African American filmmaker Marlon Riggs (1994), placing Riggs on a vertical swath of color at the center of the quilt like an infant Christ surrounded by "saintly" black historical figures. **Nick Cave** exhibits his most recent 'Soundsuit,' (2008) a ritualistic performance "garment" with deep

roots in both African and American material and religious traditions. Cave's performance cloak is constructed of metal, beads, and cloth. Cave's work explores the migration of materials, rituals, and symbols across continents and generations.

Glenn Ligon's "coloring book" portraits (1991–2007) of African American historical figures such as Harriet Tubman share the improvisation and exuberance of Cave's "pieced" vernacular. To create the works, Ligon reproduced the pages of 1970s "black power" coloring books and gave them to young children ages 3-12 for coloring. Ligon then pieced together the students' renderings and silk-screened and painted them on canvas. Also included in *Working History* is an original 1970s black-empowerment coloring book entitled "The Think Black Coloring Book," and the "Black Panther Coloring Book," the infamous children's coloring book created and distributed by COINTELPRO (the FBI's Counter-Intelligence Program) but attributed to the Black Panthers. The book depicts the Panthers as dangerous and degraded, showing African American children stabbing and devouring white cops in the literal guise of "pigs."

Sam Durant's *Huey Newton's Chair* (2002) is another work that addresses 1960's counterculture and the Black Power movement, and specifically the Black Panthers. The photograph depicts Durant's bronze replica of Newton's iconic wicker chair. In this particular version (Durant also made a version of the chair in black), the bronze copy has been "whitewashed" and glows within an ethereal, mirrored space. The photograph suggests a calm peacefulness while it represents an intensely utopian and difficult time, when a counterculture both succeeded and failed at changing the world. Durant's work also raises questions about the *representation* of blackness, whether projected or internalized. Also included in *Working History* is a set of documents from the Reed College Special Collections archive of the Eric V. Hauser Memorial Library that describe the unsuccessful creation of a Black Studies curriculum at Reed in 1968. These vital documents, included recorded proceedings, tell the story of a deep ideological struggle within the Reed community—a struggle that continues on many college campuses.

Io Palmer's installation piece entitled "Janitorial Supplies," (2007) explores the history of African American labor, class, and physical adornment. Palmer transforms the "heads" of large janitorial mops into a variety of black "hairstyles." The first American-American millionaire, Madam C. J. Walker, made her fortune developing chemical treatments to smooth and style black hair. **Willie Cole** also reinterprets the history of black bodily adornment in his "ethnographic" (and autobiographical) portraits of African-American "tribesmen" whose bodily markings have been made by household irons, and who wear ritual costumes made from domestic appliances. The portraits appear like pages torn from a history book. In fact, they are collages, reminiscent of early modern collage works exploring "primitive" imagery.

In “Miscegenated Family Album,” (1980–88) seminal feminist artist **Lorraine O’Grady** traces her “miscegenated” (racially mixed) matrilineal family line alongside the racially mixed matrilineal family line of Egyptian Queen Nefertiti. As part of this investigation, O’Grady developed a performance piece, “Nefertiti/Devonia Evangeline” which laid out the narrative and visual similarities between Nefertiti’s family and her own. O’Grady’s performance and these photographs explore sibling relationships, cultural hybridism, and definitions of black beauty. Also included in *Working History* is a 1932 Reed College “Griffin” (student yearbook) containing an image of Geraldine Beatrice Turner—the first African American student to graduate from Reed College. Akin to Lorraine O’Grady’s project, the 1932 yearbook provides a context for considering the characteristics and achievements that bind people into social groups, or create difference.

Kianga Ford’s chalk on blackboard series, “Counting,” (2000–08) examines racial identity through an intermingling of textual narrative and abstract mathematics. “Counting” responds to the contemporary currency of quantitative strategies of self-narration, like ‘I’m half __,’ or, ‘I’m 25% ____.’ Ford collaborated with a statistician and an abstract mathematician to render 12 American racial “definitions” as mathematical equations. Based on research into the history of legislative decisions and dictates about who counts as what, the equations focus on twelve defining moments in racial discourse in the U.S., from the strict sorting percentiles of the antebellum past to the 2000 census debates. Juxtaposed with an original story about a young Polish-American who ‘passes’ as black—*The Incredible True Adventures of a Boy Named Quest*—the equations take up the complexities of self-definition, the relationship of external evaluative criteria to personal experience, and the historical fluidity of categorization. Ford re-makes the work each time it is exhibited, allowing the text and the equations to smudge and degrade over time.

There are more works in the exhibition, but the above descriptions provide a context for the exhibition’s focus on exploration and experience beyond simple definitions of identity, whether individual or communal, or statistical. Conjoining artwork and artifact in the exhibition opens a field of inquiry between objects that have been consciously made as art, and common objects and documents. Neither the artworks nor the historical artifacts are presented as intrinsically more valuable than the other; both are offered as objects for investigating social, historical, and economic realities. This diversity allows viewers to reflect somewhat differently upon the critical and unique manner in which African American artists have re-purposed and “worked” historical source material into forms of social and political critique and personal revelation.

About Reed College

Since its founding in 1911 as an independent undergraduate institution, Reed College has remained steadfast to one central commitment: to provide a balanced, comprehensive education in liberal arts and sciences, fulfilling the highest standards of intellectual excellence. Reed provides one of the nation's most intellectually rigorous undergraduate experiences, with a highly structured academic program balancing broad distribution requirements and in-depth study in a chosen academic discipline.

The distinctive Reed experience includes a challenging curriculum involving wide reading, conference and laboratory-based teaching in small groups, and a student body motivated by enthusiasm for serious intellectual work. Reed offers a B.A. in one of 22 major fields and numerous interdisciplinary fields, as well as an M.A. in liberal studies degree.

With an enrollment today of about 1,350 students, Reed has produced the second highest number of Rhodes Scholars (31) for any liberal arts college, as well as over 50 Fulbright Scholars, over 60 Watson Fellows, and two MacArthur ("Genius") Award winners. Reed ranks third in the nation among institutions of higher learning in the production of PhDs in all disciplines. Reed is first in this percentage in biological sciences, and second in chemistry and humanities. Visit web.reed.edu for further information.

Exhibition Wall Labels

David Hammons

The Holy Bible: Old Testament, 2004

Handmade book with slipcover

Edition 165

Dimensions variable

Collection of Peter Norton, Santa Monica

David Hammons' *The Holy Bible: Old Testament*, is a "re-mix" of Arturo Schwarz's seminal text *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, originally published in 1969. Hammons plays with familiar objects and beliefs by conjoining different perspectives—in this case Christianity and Modernism—binding them together, literally, yet concealing the union's purpose or intent. The work is Duchampian in nature, appropriating two readymades into one unique object. Given the importance of religion in African American art and culture, Hammons' *Holy Bible* also plays with stereotypes of the preoccupations of black artists in general.

Nick Cave

Sound Suit, 2008

Metal, beads, mixed media

Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Nick Cave created his first *Sound Suit* in 1991 as a response to the beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles the same year. Cave was both horrified and fascinated by the event, specifically by the LAPD's descriptions of King, which characterized him as an unpredictable, threatening beast. Cave's first *Sound Suit* consisted of a huge swarm of twigs; it surrounded his body like a talismanic buffer, rustling as he moved. Cave has since made hundreds of performative sculptures—floating worlds exploring cultural politics, identity, masquerade, and spiritual presence. For Cave, the *Sound Suits* reference the past as much as the present, embodying African American history and his personal experiences as a black male. Cave inserts his artistic investigations into public spaces, creating happenings in which groups of people wearing *Sound Suits* mysteriously appear and interrupt daily life.

Willie Cole

Rosa Parks, 1994

Shoes, wood, wire, screws

20 x 20 x 14 in.

Courtesy Alexander and Bonin, New York

Willie Cole

Silex Male, Ritual, 2004

Archival inkjet print

Edition 8/12

61 x 44 in.

Courtesy Alexander and Bonin, New York

Sam Durant

Huey Newton Chair, 2002

C-print

Edition 1/5

40 x 30 in.

Collection of Eileen Harris Norton, Santa Monica

Sam Durant's *Huey Newton Chair* depicts the same kind of "Peacock chair" in which Black Panther Party for Self-Defense cofounder Huey Newton sat, spear in one hand, rifle in the other, for the photograph that would become emblematic of the Panthers' resistance and determination. Durant has also explored "Huey's chair" in other media, in one instance creating a bronze replica of the chair and installing it in a museum to be used by visitors. The wicker copy in this photograph is white, and is positioned within a somewhat ethereal, mirrored space. The photograph suggests a calm peacefulness while it represents an intensely utopian and difficult time, when a counterculture both succeeded and failed at changing the world. Durant's work explores a complexity of representations of blackness—both projected and internalized.

Kianga Ford

Counting, 2000–08

Chalk and paint on board with audio

Installation dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist and Charles Guice Contemporary, Berkeley

Kianga Ford's installation examines racial identity through an intermingling of textual narrative and abstract mathematics. *Counting* responds to the contemporary currency of quantitative strategies of self-narration, such as "I'm half ___," or, "I'm 25 percent ___." Ford collaborated with a statistician and an abstract mathematician to render 12 American racial "definitions" as mathematical equations. Based on research into the history of legislative decisions and dictates, the equations describe 12 defining moments in racial discourse in the U.S., from the strict sorting percentiles of the antebellum era, to debates about the 2000 U.S. Census. Juxtaposed with an original story about a young Polish-American boy who "passes" as black—*The Incredible True Adventures of a Boy Named Quest*—the equations take up the complexities of self-definition, the relationship of external evaluative criteria to personal experience, and the historical fluidity of categorization. Ford remakes the work each time it is exhibited, allowing the text and the equations to smudge and degrade over time. An accompanying audio recording consists of Ford reading *The Incredible True Adventures of a Boy Named Quest*.

David Hammons

African American Flag, 1989

Sewn fabric

96.75 x 60.5 in.

Collections of Peter Norton and Eileen Harris Norton, Santa Monica

In 1920, the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA) passed a resolution within the Declaration of Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World, creating the Pan-African flag. The flag served as the official symbol of all peoples of African descent. The flag had three wide horizontal stripes of red, black, and green. As described by Marcus Garvey, “Red symbolizes the ‘color of the blood which men must shed for their redemption and liberty,’ black, ‘the color of the noble and distinguished race to which we belong,’ and green for ‘the luxuriant vegetation of our Motherland.’ David Hammons’ *African American Flag* conjoins the U.S. and Pan-African flags to form a symbol of hope, but not without irony, for Hammons’ flag describes a fantastical history—an America without racism, founded on coexistence and liberty for all.

Willie Cole

Sunbeam Male, Ceremonial, 2004

Archival inkjet print

Edition 8/12

61 x 44 in.

Courtesy Alexander and Bonin, New York

Glenn Ligon

Harriet Tubman (version 2) #1, 2001

Silk-screen, oil crayon on primed canvas

48 x 36 in.

Collection of Eileen Harris Norton, Santa Monica

Glenn Ligon's "coloring book" portraits of African American historical figures such as Harriet Tubman share the improvisation and folk art origins of Nick Cave's "pieced" garments and Faith Ringgold's quilts. To create the works, Ligon reproduced the pages of Black Power coloring books from the 1960s and gave them to young children ages 3-12, inviting them to color the pages. Ligon then pieced together the children's renderings and silk-screened and painted them onto canvas. Ligon collaborated with the children in order to investigate their aesthetic responses to representations of African American life and history.

Glenn Ligon

Runaways, 1993

Portfolio of 10 lithographs on paper

Edition 11/45

20 x 16 in. each

Collections of Peter Norton and Eileen Harris Norton, Santa Monica

In the *Runaways* series, Glenn Ligon adopts the graphic structure of 19th century runaway slave posters in order to explore narrative, history, and trauma. Ligon asked ten people to describe him as if he were, in fact, a runaway slave, and then incorporated the responses into historical poster forms, creating an archive of slightly different but generalized descriptions. Ligon's facilitated autobiography locates the artist at the center of a deeply painful history, though the project is based on collaboration and trust. The work speaks to the inexpensive printing technology that both hindered and advanced the emancipation movement. Letterpress printing allowed slave owners to disseminate information quickly and widely, but it also allowed authors such as Frederick Douglas to publish works of autobiography and literature that would help ignite a revolution.

Dave McKenzie

Yesterday's Newspaper, 2006

Yesterday's newspaper, maple

Edition 1/5

20.5 x 17.25 x 2.25 in.

Collection of Sarah Miller Meigs, Corvallis

Dave McKenzie investigates the *idea* of the past, specifically as it applies to the present. For McKenzie, the creation of history is something that can happen quickly and somewhat mysteriously, depending on who or what is in control of telling the story. Will "yesterday's news" be here tomorrow? By creating a separate "stage" for yesterday's newspaper, McKenzie positions the very recent past in an indeterminate holding ground where its significance and endurance is called into question.

Dave McKenzie

Open Letters, 2006

Ink and pen on paper

11 x 8.5 in. each

Collection of Laurel Gitlen, Portland

Lorraine O'Grady

Sisters I-IV, 1980–88

From the series *Miscegenated Family Album*

Cibachrome diptychs in artist's frames

Edition 2/8

39 x 28 in. each

Collection of Thomas Erben, New York

In the *Miscegenated Family Album* series, feminist artist Lorraine O'Grady traces her matrilineal family line alongside the matrilineal family line of Egyptian Queen Nefertiti. O'Grady was interested in exploring the visual and cultural similarities between ancient Egyptians and African Americans; a process she began while visiting Egypt. In 1980, O'Grady created a performance piece, *Nefertiti/Devonia Evangeline*, which laid out the narrative and visual similarities between Nefertiti's family and her own. The images depict O'Grady, her sister, and her two nieces, alongside photographs of sculptures of the Egyptian queen Nefertiti and her three daughters. O'Grady's performance and photographs explore cultural hybridity, diaspora, and definitions of black beauty. In 1987, Martin Bernal published the controversial work *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*. Bernal contended that ancient Greek civilization owed its development to African and Semitic, as opposed to Aryan, influences.

Kara Walker

The Means to an End . . . A Shadow Drama in Five Acts, 1995

Line etching and aquatint on Somerset Satin

Edition 16/20 (set of 5)

35 x 24 in. each

Collection of Marjorie Myers, Portland

Kara Walker employs Victorian silhouette cutting and vernacular paper craft techniques to investigate race, gender, and sexuality in African American culture and history. Constructing ambiguous, emotionally charged visual narratives that evoke early animations, Walker's work is often inspired by works of literature, such as Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* or 19th century slave narratives. Of late, Walker's work has been particularly controversial. The artist has been criticized for "resurrecting" and profiting from the use of racist imagery. But for Walker, the open exploration of racist stereotypes is a form of exorcism and a source of empowerment.

Kara Walker

The Humane Acquisition of Chitlins, 1994

Paper

64 x 39 in.

Collection of Marjorie Myers, Portland

Io Palmer

Janitorial Supplies, 2007–08

Industrial dusters, mops, synthetic hair, bobby pins, and steel wool

Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist

Io Palmer's installation explores the history of African American labor, class, and physical adornment. Palmer transforms the "heads" of large janitorial dusters and mops into a variety of hairstyles and disguises. Palmer's work references the first African American millionaire, Madam C.J. Walker, who made her fortune developing chemical treatments to smooth and style black hair, arguably to make it more appealing to white society. Like Willie Cole, Palmer investigates the intense "working" of the black body throughout history, both through its ritual origins in Africa, and also through its migratory, hybrid forms, and practices in Black Diaspora countries like the U.S.

Faith Ringgold

Marlon Riggs: Tongues Untied, A Painted Story Quilt, 1994

Acrylic on canvas with pieced fabric border

89 x 59.5 in.

Courtesy the artist and ACA Galleries, New York

Marlon Riggs was the groundbreaking filmmaker whose documentary *Tongues Untied* chronicled the everyday lives of gay African American men. The film was partially funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, and in the politically conservative climate of the 1990s, the film was often censored by public television networks. Riggs defended *Tongues Untied* in a 1992 *Washington Post* interview, stating: "People are far more sophisticated in their homophobia and racism now, they say 'We object to the language, we have to protect the community'—those statements are a ruse." *Tongues Untied* was awarded Best Documentary of the Berlin International Film Festival, Best Independent Experimental Work by the Los Angeles Film Critics, and Best Video by the New York Documentary Film Festival. Riggs died of AIDS in 1994.

Fred Wilson

Seat of Power, 1991

African wood fertility sculpture, Victorian-style chair, Bible

99 x 25 x 21 in.

Collections of Peter Norton and Eileen Harris Norton, Santa Monica

Unknown photographer

Refugees after the Vanport Flood, 1948

Reproduction of original photograph

8 x 10 in.

Courtesy the Oregon Historical Society, Portland

This photograph depicts displaced residents in Portland, Oregon, after the flood of 1948, also known as the Vanport Flood. Vanport had been built to house World War II shipbuilding workers and was the second largest city in Oregon and the largest public housing project in the nation. Vanport was flooded when a dike holding back the Columbia River gave way at 4:05 p.m. on May 30, 1948. Vanport, 15-feet below Columbia's water level, was completely underwater by nightfall. Fifteen people died in the flood. Houses were washed off of their foundations and the entire town was lost.

Sister Tamisha et al

The Think Black Coloring Book, c.1969

Ink on paper

8 x 10 in.

Reed College Art Collection

The Think Black Coloring Book was produced in the late 1960s by East, a Brooklyn, New York, organization that published the *Black News* and founded the Freedom Now School, an African American only K-12 private school. As the introduction states, the coloring book was produced "with the whole family in mind." The book is a radical cry to action; mixing drawn and collage with text in order to describe pressing issues in the African American community.

Black Student Union, Reed College

Special B.S.U. Edition, Reed College *Quest*, October 15, 1968

Silver ink on black paper

Special Collections, Eric V. Hauser Memorial Library, Reed College

On December 11, 1968, members of the Black Student Union occupied Eliot Hall, barricading the building and using the office of then Reed College president Victor G. Rosenblum. The students, recruited to attend Reed through the Minority Group Program—initiated in 1964 by former president Richard Sullivan—demanded that a Black Studies program be established at Reed, that the college hire black faculty, and that the Black Student Union have, in their words, “*absolute* control in the selection of the black faculty for black studies,” and “control over the black studies curriculum until there are enough black faculty to do the job.” On March 4, 1968, the Reed faculty approved the creation of a Black Studies program, one that did not meet the original demands of the Black Student Union.

Photographer unknown

Students asleep in Eliot Hall, December 1968

Gelatin silver print

5 x 7 in.

Special Collections, Eric V. Hauser Memorial Library, Reed College

The photograph depicts students asleep in a stairwell during the occupation of Eliot Hall in 1968.

Photographer unknown

The occupation of Eliot Hall and related protests

December–February 1968

Gelatin silver prints

5 x 7 in. each

Special Collections, Eric V. Hauser Memorial Library, Reed College

On December 11, 1968, members of the Black Student Union occupied Eliot Hall, barricading the building, including the office of then Reed College president Victor G. Rosenblum (pictured, speaking to the press). During the occupation, white students held protests on campus and conducted a sit-in, on February 26, 1968, in the Portland office of Rudie Wilhelm, secretary of Reed's board of trustees. Five students were arrested, but the charges were dropped when the students agreed not to disturb other trustee's offices.

Photographer unknown

Geraldine Beatrice Turner

Reed College *Griffin*, 1932

Special Collections, Eric V. Hauser Memorial Library, Reed College

This *Griffin* contains the senior picture of Geraldine Beatrice Turner—the first African American student to graduate from Reed College. By the time the Black Student Union occupied Eliot Hall in 1968, only a small number of black students had graduated from Reed.

Black Studies at Reed

Reed College *Sallyport*, July 1969

Special Collections, Eric V. Hauser Memorial Library, Reed College

In July 1969, the *Sallyport*, precursor to *Reed* magazine, published “Diary of a Confrontation,” an account of the Black Student Union’s activities at Reed, including the occupation of Eliot Hall, in support of the creation of a Black Studies program. The “Diary of a Confrontation,” consists of a draft report chronicling the events of 1968, interwoven with a review of the document authored by Reed professor emeritus Marvin Levich—one of a number of people asked to review and comment on the report. To the left of this issue are a number of other publications from the time.

Black Student Union

On a Black Curriculum

Proceedings of the Black Student Union, October 1968

Audio recording transferred from reel-to-reel to CD-ROM

Special Collections, Eric V. Hauser Memorial Library, Reed College

This recording captures a Black Student Union meeting convened in October 1968, several months before members of the B.S.U. occupied Eliot Hall on December 11, 1968.

Adrian Piper

Colored People, 1991

Offset lithography

Edition 1000

12 x 10 in.

Special Collections, Eric V. Hauser Memorial Library, Reed College

'Tickled pink. Scarlet with embarrassment. Purple with anger. Blue. Green with envy. Jaundiced yellow. White with fear. Black depression,' Adrian Piper's *Colored People* is a collaboration with sixteen people who were asked to take the above 'metaphorical moods' and record them as photographic self-portraits which Piper then took responsibility for sorting—and coloring—depending on her response to the images. *Colored People* is a project that attempts to deal with two aspects of prejudice; those made about others, and those made about art's ability to address political issues.