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Installation view, 2006.

PROVIDENCE

“Voice: Women in Contemporary Art”

THE PROVIDENCE ART CLUB
11 Thomas Street
May 14 - June 2

If there is an artist who can curate a show and evade viewers' compulsions to read said show through her own art, Kara Walker is not she. Strange bedfellows—the Hive Archive, a Providence-based feminist art organization founded in 2001, and the Providence Art Club, a private association founded in 1880—produced this juried exhibition of works by twenty-seven women; Walker selected the pieces from five hundred entries. Anna Mikhailovskaia's matte-black—you might even say *silhouette*-black—freestanding staircase takes center stage; line drawings by Sophia Dixon (of a woman piercing herself in the stomach with an arrow while looking you right in the eye) and Karen Kirchhoff (of a burning gingerbread house) echo Walker's surreptitious menace; and Eliza Myrie's handmade book, in which tiny cutouts of lynching photographs hang, mines Walker's depraved vein of American history. The associative reception in no way reflects poorly on the strong work on view, nor is it unexpected: Walker writes in her statement that she selected work that appealed to her own “interests in personal narrative and figure drawing” and expressed “an ironic disposition that I hope will challenge the viewer to reconsider propriety.” In “After the Deluge,” Walker's curatorial foray currently up at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, her work is in the mix; here it is not. Nonetheless, it's instructive and astounding how powerfully it pulls, even in absentia.

— Jennifer Liese

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