

# PAULA COOPER GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**JA'TOVIA GARY**

***flesh that needs to be loved***

521 W 21st Street

February 15 – April 25, 2020

Opening Reception: 6–8pm on Saturday, February 15, 2020

NEW YORK—Opening February 15, 2020, "flesh that needs to be loved" marks Ja'Tovia Gary's inaugural exhibition at Paula Cooper Gallery. The presentation includes the East Coast premiere of *THE GIVERNY SUITE*, 2019—an immersive, three-channel extension of her acclaimed forty-minute film, *The Giverny Document (Single Channel)*, 2019—as well as the artist's first-ever multimedia sculptural installation. Using a broad range of techniques such as direct animation, documentary, experimental film, video art, and cinema vérité, Gary charts the ways structures of power shape our perceptions around representation, race, gender, sexuality, and violence. Her work seeks to liberate the distorted histories through which Black life is often viewed, while fleshing out a nuanced and multivalent Black interiority.

Filmed on location in Harlem, New York, and in Claude Monet's historic gardens and orchards in Giverny, France, *THE GIVERNY SUITE* is a multi-textured meditation on the safety and bodily autonomy of Black women. Undergirded by Black feminist theory concerning the body and the flesh, Gary bears witness to lives, traumas, and fleeting moments of beauty that have been obscured by the afterlife of slavery.<sup>1</sup> "Do you feel safe?," she asks a range of multigenerational and transnational Black women at the intersection of Malcolm X Boulevard and W 116th Street. The installation's central channel forms the work's narrative thread while its two flanking feeds broaden its critical and affective resonances. Woven as a cinematic poem, Gary employs repetition and montage editing to layer sequences of original footage with archival video and film—including Nina Simone at the Montreux Festival in 1976; Diamond Reynolds following the murder of Philando Castile in 2016; Josephine Baker in the 1934 motion picture, *ZouZou*; Fred Hampton speaking on political education, c. 1968-69; and an early twentieth-century Haitian travel log. Through audacious formal experimentation, Gary explores the creative virtuosity of Black femme performance while interrogating the histories of Black women's lives and bodies as spaces of forced labor and commodified production.

*The Giverny Document (Single Channel)*, 2019, which occupies the center channel of *THE GIVERNY SUITE*, premiered at the prestigious Locarno Film Festival in August 2019, where it was declared the winner of the Moving Ahead Award. This was followed by an Honorable Mention at the Camden International Film Festival in September. In December 2019, the film was awarded the Douglas Edwards Experimental Film Award by the Los Angeles Film Critics Association.

For her first sculptural installation, Gary will recreate an approximation of her 1990s childhood living room in Dallas, Texas—a familial tableau with discretely positioned recliner, table lamp, rug, and other decorative accents. Illuminated by condensed chiaroscuro lighting, the room evokes a

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<sup>1</sup> Saidiya V. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006).

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prismatic dreamscape, at the center of which stands a slanted tower of stacked monitors. Each playing a unique looped video, the three monitors and their domestic circumambience spotlight the paradoxical intersection of violence of the interior and notions of home and placemaking. As a meditation on memory, bodies, and the realm of the haptic, the piece asks: *When is it clear that the old life is over, a new one has begun, and there is no looking back?*<sup>2</sup>

Ja'Tovia Gary was born in 1984 in Dallas, TX, where she currently lives and works. She earned her MFA in Social Documentary Filmmaking from the School of Visual Arts in New York City. Concurrent to the exhibition at Paula Cooper Gallery, *THE GIVERNY SUITE* will premiere on the West Coast in a one-person exhibition at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (February 2 — May 17, 2020). Gary's other films have been screened at numerous festivals including Houston Cinema Arts Festival; BlackStar Film Festival in Philadelphia; the American Film Institute Festival in Los Angeles; the Montreal International Documentary Festival; International Film Festival Rotterdam; Frameline LGBTQ Film Festival, Edinburgh; New Orleans Film Festival; and Ann Arbor Film Festival. Gary's work is part of the permanent collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Studio Museum in Harlem, and the Memorial Art Gallery at the University of Rochester. Exhibitions have been presented at cultural institutions worldwide including the Schomburg Center, NYU Florence, Goldsmiths University, MoCA LA, MoMA, Brooklyn Museum, ICA Boston, and MoMA PS1. Her work has received support from the Sundance Institute and The Jerome Foundation. In 2016 Gary participated in the Terra Foundation Summer Residency program in Giverny, France. She was named a 2019 Creative Capital Fellow, a 2019 Field of Vision Fellow, and a 2018-2019 Radcliffe Fellow at Harvard University.

For more information and images, please contact the gallery:  
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