

FREDERICK WESTON

December 12, 2020 – January 30, 2021

Ortuzar Projects is pleased to present *Frederick Weston*, an exhibition realized in collaboration with the late artist and Gordon Robichaux, New York. Weston (b. 1946, Memphis; d. 2020, New York) was an artist, poet, activist and menswear designer who called New York City home for nearly fifty years. This exhibition is the most extensive survey of his work to date, and includes drawings, altered photocopies and dot matrix prints, multimedia collage works, and a series of *Body Maps* all completed between 1979 and this year.

Weston's practice of soberly re-organizing the symbols of a disposable consumer culture—much like a 20th-century ragpicker or self-confessed vagabond—often results in intricately detailed, multi-panel works that honor communities of care far outside the mainstream, trading simplified tropes for excess and multiplicity. Classified according to a personal filing system that filled his apartment-cum-studio, this rich collection of ephemera is the origin of his entire oeuvre, serving as an active tool for dispersion rather than a guarded archive. If collage and photomontage proved critical strategies for postwar American art—especially among Pictures Generation and feminist artists—then Weston's lifelong project of accumulating found printed matter perhaps recovers a neglected dimension of this high image discourse.

With themes that range from wellness to realness to queerness, Weston's collage also attends to expressions of the body in various shapes and tones. *Boxers (for Emile Griffith)*, 2020, pays tribute to the legendary fighter, a regular at the gay hustler bar near Times Square—Stella's—where Weston worked the coat check for many years. *Sambo Schema I and II*, 2006, reveal the broad differences across which that pejorative is applied, while recalling the 19th-century protagonist who survived on wit alone (*The Story of Little Black Sambo*, 1899). Designed to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Village Center for Care, *2025*, 2016 imagines a near future desert-scape in which both the stigma and the specialized therapies for AIDS have vanished. A suite of five shaped collages, or life-size *Body Maps*—including *Money Man*, 2017 and *Creature from the Blue Lagoon I*, 2019—trace the artist's own outline and those of intimates and friends. The composite forms draw from pattern-making in garment construction yet play on the notion of the standard prototype.

As a tribute to his friend, fashion designer Claude Payne, Weston drafted the series of photocopied and hand-colored works on paper, *Claude Payne*, 1979. Without disclosing his subject's gaze, Weston still gets a crisp attitude by manipulating the low-resolution mechanical likeness, captured in a Times Square photobooth. Other works from this period—*Freddy in Green (Paradise Garage)*, 1979 and *Self-Portrait*, 1979—further tease out the tension between a rigidly imprinted grid and the artist's loose (even messy) rendering of rounded human features. This rare body of early work reveals a rigorous engagement with seriality, variation, and the grid, approaches which developed through his use of the photocopier and later collage compositions. From photoshoots conducted in his single room occupancy residence, featuring young men from the Chelsea streets styled in clothing he had collected and sewn, Weston charted a theory of 144 looks, or personalities, that must be socially performed in a lifetime—from nude to business casual—as detailed in the 12-by-12 grid of Polaroids, *Barry*, 1993–96.

Weston studied merchandising and marketing as an undergraduate in rural Michigan and was afterwards active on the club scene in Detroit, where he grew up. In the early 1970s, he moved to Manhattan with a small group of friends, and by night frequented the Tenth Floor, Paradise Garage, Studio 54 and other venues. The “doll children,” as they were known, gained a reputation with their exaggerated style, fresh manner, and committed looks. Weston’s exhibition practice, which began as precarious street assemblage—including the distribution project *Homeless Shopping Network* (1990s)—later infiltrated the clubs and day treatment facilities he attended, and has long been supported by Visual AIDS.

Frederick Weston performed lectures and readings for Visual AIDS as well as at Gordon Robichaux, New York (2019); Artists Space, New York (2018); and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2016). His solo installations and projects have been exhibited at La Galleria, La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club, New York (2018); Gordon Robichaux, New York (2019); and the Ace Hotel, New York (2020). His mid-career retrospective, *For Colored Boys Who Have Considered Suicide When All You Ever Needed Was the Blues*, was organized by the Rankin Art Gallery, Ferris State University, Big Rapids, Michigan (2011). His work also featured in the survey exhibition *Tag: Proposals on Queer Play and the Ways Forward*, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia (2018), curated by Nayland Blake. A book-length conversation between the artist and acclaimed author Samuel R. Delany will be published by Visual AIDS in early 2021, as the seventh volume in the DUETS series.