

NEWS RELEASE

Exhibition: Carla Williams: *Circa 1985*  
Dates: October 11 – December 9, 2023  
Opening: Wednesday, October 11, 2023, 6pm – 8pm

Address: 16 Main Street, Ground Floor, Brooklyn, NY 11201

Higher Pictures restages Carla Williams' Princeton University Bachelor of Arts thesis exhibition from 1986. The seventy-two intensely personal self-portraits included here were made between 1984 and 1986, two years after Williams began studying photography at age 17. Her professor Emmet Gowin called it *the best thesis show in his thirty-six years of teaching*. Only a handful of the works have since been exhibited or published. This is the artist's first exhibition at the gallery.

Williams' images are at once tender and wise, awkward and exhilarating. They reflect a young woman's burgeoning sexuality and expansive curiosity about the medium. As a Black woman processing a canonical history that positioned so many models, girlfriends, and wives as muses to their photographic 'masters,' Williams did not see herself reflected in any of the history books' most revered images. She was nevertheless absorbing a classic, timeless aesthetic of female representation.

Her photographs were made using mostly Polaroid 4 x 5 and instant 35mm film formats. The immediacy of results allowed her to interact with the images at the time of the sitting rather than wait for the darkroom process, lending both an energy and technical looseness to the photographic finish. The images reflect Williams' creative urgency, her desire to render the likeness in the moment. It would become a signature style in her work.

As a child of Hollywood, Los Angeles native Williams grew up with her own portfolio of head shots. She consumed the culture of performance, observing, mimicking, and fantasizing about the reality and representation of adult life, another role, another costume. Aged out of acting by her teen years, Williams would ultimately find her creative refuge on both sides of the camera.

The proliferation of selfie-culture in the last decade has compelled Williams to reflect on the populism and popularity of contemporary technologies and self-representation.

*A lot of my influence at the time was popular culture, so it felt like the right time to see the images in the context of the present and to fill in another important piece of Black women's contributions to the medium.*

Williams received her BA in photography from Princeton University and her MA and MFA from the University of New Mexico. She spent the next decades working independently as a photography historian, writer, and editor. She has occasionally participated in publications and exhibitions, but never pursued a creative career.

For more information please contact the gallery at [office@higherpicturesgeneration.com](mailto:office@higherpicturesgeneration.com).