

Kandis Williams: A Field
Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University
November 6, 2020 – August 2, 2021

Kandis Williams: A Field features new, site-responsive commissions by Kandis Williams, an LA-based artist and founder of CASSANDRA PRESS, an artist-run publishing and educational platform centered on femme-driven activism and Black scholarship. Through a combination of sculpture, video, and installation, *A Field* addresses the regimes of control associated with Black labor, including at prison farms in Virginia. The exhibition transforms the ICA's soaring top-floor gallery into a horticultural environment filled with plant sculptures, drawing connections between the oppression of Black people in America and the world of non-human plant life, and exploring the ways in which people, much like the crops they cultivate, can be subject to exploitation and control.

The centerpiece of *A Field* is a new video, *Annexation Tango* (2020), produced on-site in Virginia and Los Angeles and supplemented with green screen videography and found footage. The fields that appear as backgrounds were formerly those of the Lorton Reformatory and the Virginia State Prison Farm, two facilities where incarcerated people were made to work as a condition of their sentences. In Williams's aerial footage, several prison facilities appear among plantation-style homes, open fields, and pastures, providing an uncanny convergence of past and present architectures of oppression. Superimposed onto this landscape is dancer Roderick George performing a solo tango—a dance and musical form originally introduced to Argentina by Africans brought to the Americas via the transatlantic slave trade. The video also incorporates footage from the ongoing California wildfires as a symbol both of the ways people limit their freedom through environmentally destructive activity as well as the urgency of resistance and revolution.

In *A Field*, Williams fills the gallery with photographic collages affixed to the wire forms of monsteras, palms, banana trees, and vines. The collages depict laboring bodies in action, including archival photographs of chain gangs on Mississippi farms; images from vintage pornographic magazines; and depictions of dancers performing the Urugayan tango, a choreography conscripted from workers' traditions. In these overlapping images, a schema is revealed in the relations between labor and performance, performance and sexualization, sexualization and labor.

On November 12, the ICA will present "[In Discussion: Kandis Williams + Amber Esseiva](#)," a public Zoom conversation between the artist and ICA Associate Curator Amber Esseiva focused on the research topics explored in *A Field*. In 2021, the ICA will also launch "[Public Annotations](#)," inviting audiences to lend their voices to the research process through collaborative edits to open-access PDFs that explore topics including sexuality, Blackness, and botany. "Public Annotations" will engage with Williams's practice as a researcher and publisher, expanding her commitment, as CASSANDRA PRESS, to propagating dialogue focused on Black scholarship and activism.

Kandis Williams: A Field is curated by ICA Associate Curator Amber Esseiva and is the third iteration of *Provocations*, an annual commission series that takes its name from architect Steven Holl's design intention for the ICA's soaring True Farr Luck Gallery, which he calls "a provocation for artists to engage." Past *Provocations* have featured new commissions by Rashid Johnson (2018) and Guadalupe Maravilla (2019).

About Kandis Williams

Kandis Williams (b.1985, Baltimore, MD) is an artist, educator, writer, and publisher based in Los Angeles, California. Williams' work utilizes collage, printmaking, video, and performance to deconstruct critical theory around race, nationalism, authority, and eroticism. Williams currently lives and works in Los Angeles, California and teaches at California Institute for the Arts.