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Media contact:

Andrea Schwan, Andrea Schwan Inc.

info@andreaschwan.com, +1 917 371 5023

DOMINIQUE LÉVY GALLERY TO INAUGURATE “THE BACK ROOM” WITH AN EXHIBITION OF RECENT AND HISTORICAL WORK BY SENGA NENGUDI

Senga Nengudi

September 10 – October 24, 2015

Dominique Lévy

909 Madison Avenue

New York City

New York, NY—Dominique Lévy is pleased to present its first exhibition with the artist Senga Nengudi. Organized by Begum Yasar, this selection of recent sculptures and 1970s performance stills inaugurates “The Back Room,” the gallery’s new 3rd floor project space.

In the 1970s, Nengudi worked in Los Angeles as part of an emerging community of African American artists that engaged with multiple radical political movements underway in the United



States and around the globe, including the Black Power movement and the feminist movement. Using quotidian materials to create installations, sculptures, performances, and videos, these artists were key participants in the emergence of identity politics within the visual arts. During this time, Nengudi—who was formerly a dancer—began to develop a style of performance in which the human body entered into a relationship with sculptural constellations of worn nylon mesh pantyhose, sand, and other malleable, ordinary, or discarded materials. Such sculptures link the wall—the “proper” space of art—to the floor, the realm of movement, horizontality, gravity, and physical connection to the human body. Integrating the California assemblage aesthetic with contemporaneous forms of modern dance, Nengudi worked in collaboration with such peers as Maren Hassinger, Ulysses Jenkins, Noah Purifoy, Franklin Parker, Houston Conwill, David Hammons, Betye Saar, and Barbara McCullough, to activate and perform with her sculptures. These soft sculptures would be distended into various shapes and

configurations in response to the choreographed actions of the performer. These early projects led to a long-standing collaboration with Maren Hassinger, who often dances with Nengudi's sculptures.



Senga Nengudi at Dominique Lévy features recent nylon mesh pantyhose and sand sculptures that respond directly to her performative, biomorphic, and political series *Répondez s'il vous plaît (RSVP)* (1975-77). Engaging in a dialogue with both post-minimalism and second-wave feminism, the stretched, twisted, and knotted fabric of the *RSVP* works and more recent *Reverie* sculptures recall contorted flesh. Nengudi's

corporeal sculptures, which often suggest genitalia and breasts, take on feminist associations as "part-objects" in the absence of adjoining bodies. In this way, the sculptural works on view invite meditation on the physically and socially imposed limitations on the female body, while presenting a formal exploration of the sensual tactility of flesh and skin as universals.

Also on view are photographic performance stills of important 1970s works, including *Performance Piece* (1978), *Ceremony for Freeway Fets* (1978), and *Masking It* (1978-79). These photographs document the intertwining of dance and sculpture in Nengudi's early work, and register the diverse social and artistic traditions from which that work drew inspiration. Among Nengudi's influences were Nigerian Gelede spectacles, the public displays of colorful masks in which art and ritualistic dance combine to celebrate the power and spiritual capacity of female elders and ancestors. Other influences were the avant-garde dance-drama of classical Japanese Kabuki theater and the multi-media, experimental spirit of international Fluxus Happenings.

Senga Nengudi will be on view at Dominique Lévy Gallery through October 24, 2015, and will run concurrently with the exhibition *Gego: Autobiography of a Line*. The gallery will publish a critical companion of newly commissioned essays by Rizvana Bradley, Ellen Tani, Jasmine Johnson, and Jessica Bell Brown, edited by Begum Yasar, on the occasion of the exhibition.

About the Artist

Senga Nengudi was born in 1943 in Chicago, IL. Her solo exhibitions include *Senga Nengudi: Improvisational Gestures*, University of Colorado, Colorado Springs Gallery of Contemporary Art, Colorado Springs (2015); *Performances, 1976-81*, Thomas Erben Gallery, New York (2013); *Lov U*, Warehouse Gallery, Syracuse University (2012); *Warp Trance*, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia (2007); *R.S.V.P. Retrospective*, Thomas Erben Gallery, New York (2003); *Vestige - "The Discovery of America by Christopher Columbus" S.D.*, Just Above Midtown Gallery, New York (1981); and *Répondez s'il-vous-plaît*, Just Above Midtown Gallery, New York (1977).

The artist has participated in various group exhibitions including *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art*, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (2012-2013, traveling); *Blues for Smoke*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2012-13, traveling); *Now Dig This! Art and Black Los Angeles, 1960-1980*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2011, traveling); *Under the Big Black Sun*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2011); *Los Angeles Goes Live: Los Angeles Performance Art, 1970-1983*, Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (2011); *Video Studio: Playback*, The Studio Museum in Harlem (2011); *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2007, traveling); *Second Lives: Remixing the Ordinary*, Museum of Art and Design, New York (2008); *Double Consciousness: Black Conceptual Art since 1970*, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (2005); 54th Carnegie International, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh (2004); *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949-1979*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (1998); *Afro-American Art in the Twentieth Century: Three Episodes*, Bronx Museum of the Arts, Bronx, NY (1980); *Afro-American Abstractions*, P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City, NY (1980); *Freeway Fets*, public art project, freeway underpass, Los Angeles (1979); *The Concept as Art*, Just Above Midtown Gallery, New York (1977); *California Black Artists*, The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (1977); and *Sapphire Show*, Gallery 32, Los Angeles (1970).

Nengudi's work is in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, NY; The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA; Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY; Brooklyn Museum, NY; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, NY.

Senga Nengudi lives and works in Colorado Springs, CO.

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Senga Nengudi
Performance Piece (detail)
Activated by Maren Hassinger; photo: Harmon Outlaw
1978
Triptych
Silver gelatin print
31 1/2 x 40 inches each
Copyright the Artist
Photo: Tom Powel Imaging, Inc.

Senga Nengudi
Ceremony for Freeway Fets (detail)
Photo: Quaku / Roderick Young
1978
Series of 11 C-prints
12 x 18 inches each
Copyright the Artist
Photo: Tom Powel Imaging, Inc.