



Media Release

December 3, 2019

Exhibition: *Southern Rites*, Gillian Laub, February 5 – May 24, 2020

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OJMCHE Features Gillian Laub's *Southern Rites* Powerful Photography Exhibition Examines Legacy of Racism in America

Gillian Laub's *Southern Rites* is a provocative and timely visual study of one community's struggle to confront longstanding issues of race and inequality. The project began as an exploration of racially segregated proms and homecoming rituals in one community in rural Georgia. Gillian Laub continued to photograph its residents for more than a decade, recording their experiences—in their own words—as she created a portrait of an American town. In the process, she investigated the racial tensions that scar much of American history. This traveling exhibition is organized by the International Center of Photography and Curator Maya Benton.

In 2009, Laub's photographs of Montgomery County, Georgia, were published in the *New York Times Magazine*, bringing national attention to the town for the first time. The following year, the power of those photographs served as a catalyst for the integration of the town's proms. For a moment, progress seemed inevitable.

Then, in 2011, the murder of an unarmed young black man by an older white man in Montgomery County seemed to confirm every assumption about the legacy of inequality and prejudice that the community was struggling to relinquish. Laub recognized that a larger story needed to be told, and she began to film as well as photograph the changes taking place in the town—including the murder trial. Her project, which began as an exploration of

segregated high school rituals evolved into a decade-long mandate to confront painful, deeply rooted national realities.

"This is our second partnership with ICP and we are gratified to be working with Curator Maya Benton," notes OJMACHE Director Judy Margles. "The photographs in *Southern Rites* evoke multiple concerns that relate to our mission. As Oregon's only museum tasked solely with educating the general public in discrimination, persecution, immigration, and first and foremost in the Holocaust—OJMACHE connects the painful past to the relevant present. *Southern Rites* provides the museum with the opportunities to once again teach our audiences the singular lesson that we "minorities" are not isolated cases and that we have a responsibility to one another."

Laub has spent the past two decades investigating political conflicts, exploring complex family and community relationships, and challenging assumptions about cultural identity through her photography and filmmaking. *Southern Rites* is the culmination of that work, underscoring the hope that by examining history, future generations will liberate themselves from a harrowing and traumatic past to create a different future.

"In *Southern Rites*, Gillian engages her tremendous skills as a photographer, filmmaker, and visual activist

to examine the realities of racism and raise questions that are simultaneously painful and essential to understanding the American consciousness," says Maya Benton, Curator.

"Through her lens and the voices of her subjects we encounter that which some of us do not want to witness, but what is vital for us to see. Gillian's work explores how a generation of African American youth are grappling with the legacy of segregation and racially motivated violence, and provides an inspiring example of how concerned photography can affect social change."

MORE ABOUT SOUTHERN RITES

In May 2009, the New York Times Magazine published a photo essay by Gillian Laub titled, "A Prom Divided," which documented Georgia's Montgomery County High School's racially segregated homecoming and prom rituals. Laub's photographs ignited a firestorm of national outrage and led the community to finally integrate. One year later, the murder of a young black man—portrayed in Laub's prom series—by a white town patriarch reopened old wounds. Through her intimate portraits and first-hand testimony, Laub reveals in vivid color the horror and humanity of these complex, intertwined narratives. The photographer's inimitable sensibility—that it is the essence and emotional truth of the singular person in front of her lens that matters most—ensures that, however elevated the ideas and themes may be, her pictures remain studies of individuals, a chronicle of their courage in the face of injustice, of their suffering and redemption, possessing an unsettling power.

The exhibition is accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue, heralded as one the best photobooks of the year by Time, Vogue, Smithsonian, American Photo, and LensCulture. The exhibition is also accompanied by Laub's HBO film—praised by the New York Times film review as "Riveting...In a calm, understated tone, *Southern Rites* digs deep to expose the roots that have made segregated proms and other affronts possible. *Southern Rites* is a portrait of the inequities that lead to disaster on the streets of cities like Baltimore and Ferguson."

ABOUT GILLIAN LAUB

Gillian Laub (b.1975, New York) is a photographer and filmmaker based in New York. She graduated from the University of Wisconsin–Madison with a degree in comparative literature before studying photography at the International Center of Photography, where her love of visual storytelling and family narratives began. In addition to ICP, Laub's work has been widely collected and exhibited, and is included in the collections of the Museum of Fine Art, Houston; High Museum, Atlanta; Terrana Collection, Boston; Jewish Museum, New York; Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University; Brooklyn Museum, New York; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (now American University Museum Collection in Washington, DC); and a wide range of corporate and private collections. In 2014, Laub was the recipient of an Aaron Siskind Foundation Fellowship. She regularly photographs for Time, New York Times Magazine, and Vanity Fair, among many other publications.

ABOUT ICP

The International Center of Photography (ICP) is the world's leading institution dedicated to photography and visual culture. Cornell Capa founded ICP in 1974 to preserve the legacy of “concerned photography”—the creation of socially and politically-minded images that have the potential to educate and change the world— and the center's mission endures today, even as the photographic medium and imagemaking practices have evolved. Through its exhibitions, school, public programs, and community outreach, ICP offers an open forum for dialogue about the role that photographs, videos, and new media play in our society. To date, it has presented more than 700 exhibitions and offered thousands of classes at every level. ICP brings together photographers, artists, students, and scholars to create and interpret the realm of the image. Here, members of this unique community are encouraged to explore photography and visual culture as mediums of empowerment and as catalysts for wide-reaching social change. Visit icp.org to learn more.

About Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education

The Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education (OJMCHE) explores the legacy of the Jewish experience in Oregon, teaches the universal lessons of the Holocaust, and provides opportunities for intercultural conversation. Through exhibitions and public programming OJMCHE focuses on Jewish art, history, and culture, while simultaneously recognizing the challenge of remaining relevant in a changing and tumultuous world. OJMCHE challenges our visitors to resist indifference and discrimination and to envision a just and inclusive world.

The museum has gallery space that accommodates traveling exhibitions as well as core exhibitions. The facilities include state-of-the-art storage for archives and artifact collections, an auditorium, a gift shop, and a café. OJMCHE serves as the community repository for the Jewish experience in Oregon and as the proud stewards of the Oregon Holocaust Memorial in Portland's Washington Park, offering year-round tours and speakers from our Holocaust Speakers' Bureau and bringing thousands of school children to both the museum and the Oregon Holocaust Memorial.

OJMCHÉ provides a community-wide gathering place for exhibitions, public events, educational programs, and performances, and offers a wide range of collaborative opportunities. At OJMCHÉ we seek to teach visitors how to recognize the roots of hatred, how to instill values of inclusion and respect, and how to participate in an inclusive, vibrant democracy built on understanding one another and reconciling differences. Our values shape all of our exhibitions and programs, which celebrate and explore – in the broadest terms – issues of identity, the forces of prejudice, and Jewish contributions to world culture and ideas. For more information, visit www.ojmche.org.

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