

## Emma Amos

### Flomenhaft

Emma Amos, a longtime pioneer of feminist and African American art movements, captures moments of black experience in a way that exudes pride accompanied by just the right touch of satire. Working with African fabrics, unstretched canvas, photocollage, and watercolor, she often combines these elements in works that can be at once cozy and confrontational.

The centerpiece of this exhibition was *The Gift* (1990–4), a grid of 48 portraits of women who

contributed to the feminist art movement, from Lucy Lippard and Miriam Schapiro to bell hooks and Elizabeth Catlett. Amos, a participant in several activist groups, pictures these women as friends and fellow travelers rather than as unapproachable historic figures. The deceptively simple watercolors capture something of the spirit and interrogatory outlook of these pioneers. It can be seen in the thick black lines portraying the dreadlocks framing Lorna Simpson's face and in the mischievous smile on Faith Ringgold's lips. Taken as a whole, this wall of faces staring down at viewers provided a snapshot of a moment in art history when women artists—sans makeup—directly confronted the art world despite the towering odds against their success.

More recent pieces here included *Carmen* (2012), a painting of a stunning black woman in a red dress framed by an indigo-and-orange triangle-patterned cloth with the name "Carmen" embroidered below, and *Sun and Moon* (2010), a similarly constructed canvas, featuring a boy and a girl forthrightly greeting viewers without fear or hesitation. Such works evince a sense of contentment missing from earlier ones here, including *Confederates* (1994), in which the artist and two other figures, set against a backdrop of the Confederate flag, confront the audience. This well-selected survey of Amos's multi-decade career showed her progress as an artist while also revealing a certain confidence and maturity that has always pervaded her work.

—Barbara Pollack



Emma Amos, *Africa and Picasso*, 2000,  
oil on linen and African fabric border, 31" x 42". Flomenhaft.