

## Sojourner Truth, Photography, and the Fight Against Slavery

UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive  
July 27–October 23, 2016



*Carte de visite* of Sojourner Truth, 1863; albumen print mounted on cardboard; 4 x 2 1/2 in.; BAMPFA, gift of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby.

(Berkeley, CA) July 18, 2016 — The University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA) presents **Sojourner Truth, Photography, and the Fight Against Slavery**, on view July 27 through October 23, 2016. The exhibition features a large selection of photographic *cartes de visite* of the famed former slave, as well as other Civil War-era photographs and Federal currency, none of which have been exhibited before.

The exhibition is organized by Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, Richard and Rhoda Goldman Distinguished Professor in the Arts and Humanities at UC Berkeley and author of *Enduring Truths. Sojourner's Shadows and Substance* (University of Chicago Press, 2015), the first book to explore how Truth used her image, the press, the postal service, and copyright laws to support her activism and herself. Many of the photographs included in the exhibition were a recent gift from Professor Grigsby to BAMPFA.

Runaway slave Sojourner Truth gained renown in the nineteenth century as an abolitionist, feminist, and orator. This exhibition showcases the photographic *carte de visite* portraits of Truth that she sold at lectures and by mail as a way of making a living. First invented by French photographer André-Adolphe-Eugène Disdéri in 1854, *cartes de visite* are similar in size to the calling cards that preceded them, approximately two-and one-half by four inches, and consist of albumen photographs made from glass negatives glued onto cardboard mounts. By the end of the 1850s, the craze for the relatively inexpensive *cartes de visite* had reached the United States. Americans who could never have afforded a portrait could now have their likeness memorialized. Combined with the emergence of the new US postal system, these cards appealed to a vast nation of dispersed peoples.

Truth could not read or write, but she had her statements repeatedly published in the press, enthusiastically embraced new technologies such as photography, and went to court three times to claim her legal rights. Uniquely among portrait sitters, she had her photographic *cartes de visite* copyrighted in her own name and added the caption "I Sell the Shadow to Support the Substance.

Sojourner Truth," foregrounding her self-selected proper name, her agency, and her possession of self.

This exhibition places Truth's *cartes de visite* in context by reconstructing the flood of paper—federal banknotes, photographs, letters, autographs, stamps, prints, and newspapers—that created political communities across the immense distances of the nation during the Civil War. Like the federal government that resorted to the printing of paper currency to finance the war against slavery, Truth was improvising new ways of turning paper into value in order to finance her activism as an abolitionist and advocate of women's rights.

**Sojourner Truth, Photography, and the Fight Against Slavery** is organized by Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, Richard and Rhoda Goldman Distinguished Professor in the Arts and Humanities at UC Berkeley, with the assistance of UC Berkeley undergraduate Ryan Serpa. The photographs included in the exhibition were a recent gift from Professor Grigsby to BAMPPFA.

## Public Programs

### Carte de Visite Workshop

Sunday, July 31, 2 p.m.

Create your own personalized *carte de visite* inspired by those on view in **Sojourner Truth, Photography, and the Fight Against Slavery**. Make a photographic portrait, using props and text to experiment with self-presentation, then make your own set of calling cards using the Art Lab's Risograph printer. With artist Raphael Noz.

*Included with admission*

### Family Fare: The Story of Sojourner Truth

Saturday, September 10, 11:30 a.m. & 1 p.m.

Compare and contrast a series of portraits with guide Shivani Sud, including those on view in **Sojourner Truth, Photography, and the Fight Against Slavery**. Then, with artist Kaya Fortune, connect with the experiences of Sojourner Truth by making collages using reproductions of historic photographs, autographs, and stamps from the Civil War period. For kids ages 6 & up and their families. *Free for kids plus one adult.*

### Black Activism and Photography from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement

Saturday, September 17, 1 p.m.

Former slave Sojourner Truth strategically deployed photography as a form of political activism. In this roundtable discussion presented in conjunction with **Sojourner Truth, Photography, and the Fight Against Slavery**, UC Berkeley professors Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby (History of Art) and Leigh Raiford (African American Studies) and photographer/photography historian Makeda Best of the California College of the Arts consider how photography has been used in the African American struggle for political change.

*Included with admission*

### Sojourner Truth Reading Group: Frank B. Wilderson III

Saturday, September 17, 5 p.m.

Join award-winning writer, poet, and UC Irvine professor Frank B. Wilderson III for a screening of his 2005 film *Reparations . . . Now*, a critical documentary that captures the terror of unnamable loss shouldered by twenty-first-century descendants of slaves, followed by a group conversation about the issues raised by the film.

*Included with admission*

## **Sojourner Truth Reading Group: Regina Mason**

Friday, October 7, 7 p.m.

International speaker, author, and storyteller Regina Mason is the third great granddaughter of ex-slave and autobiographer William Grimes. In this talk, learn the fascinating story of how she took history into her own hands by authenticating her ancestor's book, *Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave*, the first American fugitive slave memoir.

*Included with admission*

### **Visitor Information**

#### Address

2155 Center Street Berkeley, CA 94704

#### Hours

Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.; Fridays and Saturdays, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.

#### Gallery Admission

\$12 general admission

\$10 Non-Berkeley students, disabled , 65+

Free for BAMPFA members; UC Berkeley students, faculty, staff, and retirees; 18 & under + one adult

Free First Thursdays: Free gallery admission on the first Thursday of each month

#### Social Media

[facebook.com/bampfa](https://facebook.com/bampfa)

[twitter.com/bampfa](https://twitter.com/bampfa)

[instagram.com/bampfa](https://instagram.com/bampfa)

Hashtags: #SojournerTruth #BAMPFA

### **About BAMPFA**

Internationally recognized for its art and film programming, the UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA) is a platform for cultural experiences that transform individuals, engage communities, and advance the local, national, and global discourse on art and film. Founded in 1963, BAMPFA is UC Berkeley's primary visual arts venue with its screenings of some 450 films and presentations of up to twenty exhibitions annually. BAMPFA's mission is to inspire the imagination and ignite critical dialogue through art and film.

The institution's collection of over 19,000 works of art dates from 3000 BCE to the present day and includes important holdings of Neolithic Chinese ceramics, Ming and Qing Dynasty Chinese painting, Old Master works on paper, Italian Baroque painting, early American painting, Abstract Expressionist painting, contemporary photography, and Conceptual art. BAMPFA's collection also includes over 17,500 films and videos, including the largest collection of Japanese cinema outside of Japan, impressive holdings of Soviet cinema, West Coast avant-garde film, seminal video art, as well as hundreds of thousands of articles, reviews, posters, and other ephemera related to the history of film—many of which are digitally scanned and accessible online.

### **Media Contact**

Rachael Dickson

510-643-3994

[bampfapress@berkeley.edu](mailto:bampfapress@berkeley.edu)