

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Michael Walter, "38 Images That Change the Way We See Women" *Saturday*, May 18, 2024

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POWER POSES

38 images that changed the way we see women

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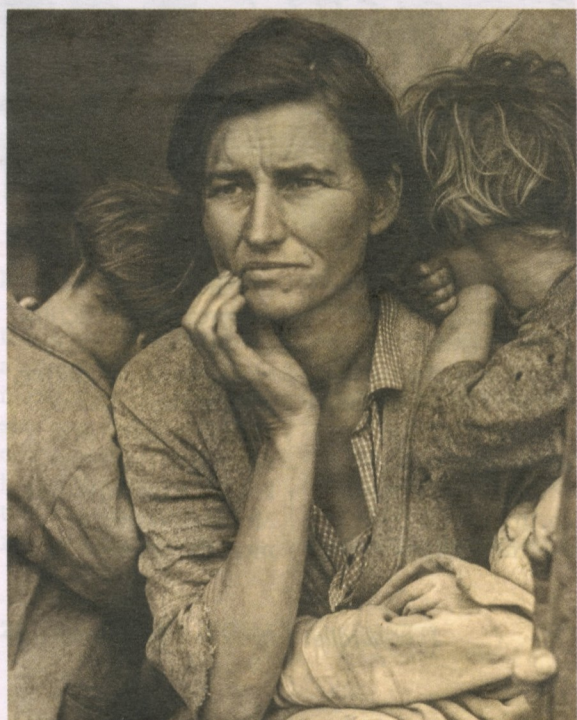
→ **Untitled (Woman and Daughter with Makeup), 1990**

By Carrie Mae Weems

When Carrie Mae Weems first photographed herself at her kitchen table in 1989, she had no idea of the impact such images would have. “I knew what it meant for me, but I didn’t know what it would mean historically,” she told *W Magazine* in 2016. Over two years, Weems captured staged scenes of herself, as well as friends, neighbours and strangers, at the table, reflecting themes of family, love and power. The result is a series of 20 photographs, interweaving narratives acted out across a single frame and illuminated by a single light above Weems’ table.

The kitchen table is a site that has historically belonged to women, yet it is rarely depicted as somewhere of importance. Weems positions it as a place where key human experiences unfold: “The site of the battle around the family, the battle around monogamy, the battle around polygamy, the battle between the sexes,” the artist, now 71, has said.

The series was pivotal for Weems as an artist - she went on to achieve international success - and paved the way for a new generation to explore race, representation and domesticity through photography. **MW**



← **Human Erosion in California (Migrant Mother), 1936**

By Dorothea Lange

In the mid-1930s, the photographer Dorothea Lange was working for the Resettlement Administration, a New Deal-era agency created by Franklin D Roosevelt to combat rural poverty. While walking through a pea picker’s camp, Lange spotted a young mother with seven children. “I approached as if drawn by a magnet,” Lange told

Popular Photography magazine in 1960. The 32-year-old woman told Lange she had sold her car tyres to buy food, and was living off frozen vegetables and birds the children had caught. “There she sat in that lean-to tent with her children huddled around her, and seemed to know that my pictures might help her, so she helped me. There was a sort of equality about it.”

Lange’s images appeared in the *San Francisco News* in March

1936. They showed the extreme hardship workers faced, and soon after the government sent 20,000lb of food to the camp. By that time, the mother and her family had moved on. Who she was remained unknown until 1978, when Florence Owens Thompson wrote to the *Modesto Bee* newspaper, identifying herself.

In a later story, she said, “I wish she hadn’t taken my picture ... I can’t get a penny out of it. She didn’t ask my name.

She said she wouldn’t sell the pictures. She said she’d send me a copy. She never did.”

The revelation that Owens was a descendant of two Cherokees led to speculation about whether the photograph would have resonated so widely if it had been known its subjects were Native American. Even with its contested backstory, the image is a testament to how photography can shape public opinion and influence policy. **MW**

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