Performance artist Karen Finley brings provocative new show to Vermont, Aug. 2
“Grabbing Pussy / Parts Known” addresses politics, sexuality, the border crisis, and more.

PUTNEY, Vt. — The Brattleboro Museum & Art Center (BMAC) and Next Stage Arts Project present celebrated performance artist Karen Finley in a one-woman show, “Grabbing Pussy / Parts Known,” on Friday, August 2, at 8 p.m. at Next Stage Arts Project in Putney, Vermont. Tickets are $20 in advance ($25 at the door) and may be purchased at brattleboromuseum.org, nextstagearts.org, or in person at BMAC.

In 1990, Finley and fellow performance artists Tim Miller, Holly Hughes, and John Fleck gained national notoriety as the “NEA Four,” drawing the ire of then-Senator Jesse Helms and other conservative politicians for creating “indecent” art. Helms brandished a photograph of Finley, popularly known as “the chocolate-smear woman,” on the Senate floor. Finley and the other three artists sued the NEA for withdrawing grants on the grounds of indecency. “National Endowment for the Arts v. Finley” went all the way to the Supreme Court.

Finley’s current show is based on her new book, “Grabbing Pussy” (OR Books, 2018) and is
presented in connection with the BMAC exhibit “Dona Ann McAdams: Performative Acts,” which features the “chocolate-smeared woman” photograph and images of other performance artists of the time. The performance will be followed by a Q&A with Finley, McAdams, and Obie- and Bessie-winning producer Lori E. Seid.

Finley has long provoked controversy and debate through her highly politicized and subversive depictions of human sexuality and her unique performative responses to oppression in culture and politics. In “Grabbing Pussy,” Finley offers a breathless cascade of poetry and prose that lays bare the psychosexual obsessions that have burst to the surface of today’s American politics. Alternately funny and disturbing, Finley explores the Shakespearean dynamics that arise when libidos and loyalties clash in the public and private personas of Donald Trump, Hillary and Bill Clinton, Anthony Weiner, Harvey Weinstein, and others. The aggression of intimacy, the disparity of gender, and the vital importance of hair are all expressed with Finley’s raucous candor.

In “Parts Known,” Finley responds to the separation of families at the border, the suicides of Anthony Bourdain and Kate Spade, and the struggle and strength of “being a New Yorker [...] the resistance of not being depressed and moving forward with the experience of activism of the past.”

Combined into a single performance, approximately one-hour long, the two works expand on Finley’s career-long pursuit of performatively articulating the injustices committed by the U.S. government and society at large—an undertaking that includes her commentary on the rise of HIV and AIDS in the 1980s (“We Keep Our Victims Ready”) and her criticism of homophobia (“The Father In All of Us”).

A performer, artist, writer, musician, poet, teacher, and lecturer, Finley is the recipient of two Obies, two Bessies, and numerous grants from the NEA and NYSCA. Her art is in the collection of the Centre Pompidou in Paris and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, among other institutions. Finley is a professor in the department of Art and Public Policy at Tisch School of the Arts, New York University.

In addition to the famous image of Finley, “Dona Ann McAdams: Performative Acts” includes images of activist protests, nuns, people with schizophrenia, racetrack workers, and farm animals. The exhibit is on view at BMAC through September 23.

Founded in 1972, the Brattleboro Museum & Art Center presents rotating exhibits of contemporary art, complemented by lectures, artist talks, film screenings, and other public programs. The Museum’s galleries and gift shop are open every day except Tuesday, 11-5. Regular admission is $8 for adults, $6 for seniors, and $4 for students. Members and children 18 and under are admitted free of charge. Located in historic Union Station in downtown Brattleboro, at the intersection of Main Street and Routes 119 and 142, the Museum is wheelchair accessible. For more information, call 802-257-0124 or visit www.brattleboromuseum.org.
Major support for BMAC is provided by its members and Allen Bros. Oil, Brattleboro Savings & Loan, C&S Wholesale Grocers, the Four Columns Inn, Sam’s Outdoor Outfitters, and Whetstone Station Restaurant & Brewery.

# # #