

# PAT WARD WILLIAMS: A NARRATIVE CHRONOLOGY

by Moira Roth

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Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Mother and father are teachers. Williams has one sibling, Denise, who is five years younger.

*My father was an avid photographer—I consider myself the second generation photographer in the family: My father never really studied photography but he had an eye for capturing people. So I had scads of pictures that I can now draw from for a lot of family history pieces [1989]. I grew up in Yeadon, Pennsylvania, a suburban but segregated community that later was featured in Time magazine as the first all-black middle-class suburb.*

*Both my father and mother worked hard for what we had: a big house with a yard, a collie dog, the newspaper on the porch every evening...that type of thing. We spent a good deal of time together as a family: We all went to church on Sundays. It was a warm family: My mother was very social. All her family lived close by so we would often take trips to Camden, New Jersey to visit them. We would go down to North Carolina to see my father's family: We always had at least forty for a sit-down dinner at Christmas. My mother gave a gigantic picnic with all her club members on every other Fourth of July when we had fifty or sixty people at the barbecue. She was like the Perle Mesta of Yeadon.*

*I took art classes on Saturdays, but my family really encouraged art more as a hobby rather than as a profession. It was made very clear to me that I should pursue something more lucrative, or become a commercial artist so that I could earn my own money: [1991].*

*I had a very interesting childhood, although I can only say this in retrospect. I had many advantages in my life. I was freed from a lot of pressures that many black women are under in different circumstances, but I was also subjected to a whole new set of dilemmas. I was part of the ten percent black minority in a predominantly white high school. I went to a school that was academically oriented, so as an art major I felt like an outsider. Because of these and other circumstances, I felt isolated from the mainstream black community: For a long time I felt like an outsider. Not until I became aware of and could identify with the world African community could I comfortably express myself [1989/1991].*

1960s

*In the mid-1960s I became aware of Roy DeCarava's Sweet Flypaper of Life. I had never seen anything like this before—beautiful photographs and a text by Langston Hughes. This contained characterizations of black people and black families who were human, not statistical, and I was just in love with it. For a very long time, I drew pictures from those photographs. I still have my copy of the book, which I "liberated" from the school library [1991].*

1972

Begins work in photography.

*I think that I've always been an artist. I used to do paintings and drawings. I did pen-and-ink sketches that were very tight and photographic. Then, in 1972, I was given a camera as a present, and I said to myself, "This is it. This is what I want." At first I shot a lot of portraits. I loved*

*to take photographs of people but I became very dissatisfied with the idea and practice of one photograph being used to describe the whole person [1989/1991].*

1974

Attends the summer program at the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Deer Isle, Maine. Experience is a major turning point for Williams's sense of herself as an artist. *Earlier I had attended Cheyney State College, majoring in special education, which is where I met my husband, who was a chemistry major. We married and moved to Hightstown, New Jersey I started traveling to Princeton to attend life drawing classes with Rex Gorley the black painter and printmaker; and gradually made my way into an artistic milieu. I found out about the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, and I sent in an application with my pen-and-ink life drawings and ceramics. I was really shocked to be accepted, but I was pleased.*

*It turned out that this summer was a unique time at Haystack—it was the African and African-American summer of 1974! There were famous Nigerian artists teaching there: Twins Seven-Seven, a painter and printmaker; his wife Nike, a batik artist, and Jimo Burohimoh, a painter who did bead work. I had never taken a formal course in photography e—I learned to use my camera by reading Kodaks Guide to Existing Light Photography. At Haystack I learned to process and print. But more than just learning techniques there, it was the first time I was ever in close contact with black people of my own age who were interested in becoming artists.*

*That summer for the first time I was around people who were exactly like me, who thought like me, who saw and felt things and translated them visually into photography or wood or ceramics or fabric. I realized that I wasn't a rebel. but that I just had different ideas and concerns about what I wanted to do with my life. I saw that there was a way for me to become an artist besides just reading books and taking pictures.*

*The people I met there have since become quite successful: Martha Jackson-Jarvis, who does ceramic sculpture; Jerome Meadows, a woodworker and sculptor; Winnie Owens-Hart, a ceramicist and professor at Howard University in Washington, D. C.; Joyce Scott, a working artist from Baltimore; and my sistez; Denise Ward-Brown, a teacher in St. Louis. I am still in close contact with all of these people [1991].*

1975

Daughter, Janaya, is born.

1978

Witnesses killing of Cornell Warren, which constitutes another major turning point for Williams. *Winnie Owens-Hart, who had been at Haystack, was having a show in Philadelphia at the Afro-American Cultural Museum. Jerome Meadows, whom I had met at Haystack, traveled from Washington to see Winnies show Jerome and I were in a parking lot in the back of the museum s building. A black man ran by with his hands behind his back. He disappeared behind the wall, and then we saw a policeman running in the same direction, gun in hand. We just stood and watched. The policeman Qisappeared behind the wall too, and then we saw both men at the opening of the wa1kway in front of our car. The policeman hit the man with his gun, and the man fell backward. The policeman stomped on him. He then put the gun to the mans head and shot him e—twenty feet in front of us! That same year Winston Hood also was killed by a policeman. And the MOVE house in Powelton Village was stormed by the police and then bulldozed. It seemed as if it was open season on black people in Philadelphia.*

*The case went to trial, and Jerome and I were witnesses. Everyone told me how brave I was, but I merely thought that it was my civic duty to testify. If you see someone murdered, you go to the police, tell your story to the judge and then the murderer goes to jail, right? In this case, the murderer didn't go to jail. The policeman was acquitted. I couldn't get over it. I had always thought that justice would prevail. I was devastated. I began to realize that life was very short. During the*

*year of the trial, I had other realizations, both political and personal. A year later; I ended my marriage and enrolled in Moore College of Art.*

*I was admitted to Moore, put my four-year-old daughter into a good daycare center; and set out on the road to making art. Moore was a good place for me. There is a tremendous benefit in going to a women's college as opposed to a coeducational institution. Everyone there was a serious artist. It makes a big difference in a woman's education not to be ridiculed for having a feminine/feminist point of view.*

*During those years at Moore, there wasn't any way for me to insert who I was, what I was, into the photographic frame. It's only when the viewer knows the photographer's name, sex, intention, and other contextual information that he or she can begin to grasp the photograph's meaning. I wanted to find another way of making photographs that would include this information. At the time, all my photographs had captions and titles that would attempt to describe who I was and what I was trying to do in making the photograph. But that didn't really work either; especially with portraits, and specifically with portraits of black people. Everyone comes to a photograph with his or her own cultural and emotional preconceptions of black people. In my case, the photographer was asking the viewer to fill in the blanks with information the viewer didn't have [1991].*

1980–1981

*Awarded the Emily Sartain Traveling Fellowship for Photography, and in 1981 travels to Nigeria. This was a wonderful trip. I sat down with traders and kings. It was exciting—stimulating and dangerous. I traveled alone but eventually stayed with some of the artists I had met at Haystack. I tried to make photographs, but my first attempts seemed voyeuristic. Once again I tried to take “normalized” portraits, yet the pictures I came home with looked like those in National Geographic: people wearing traditional clothes but carrying boom boxes, people watching television but cooking over open fires. There was a disturbing contradiction in seeing primitive people with the toys of Western technology. When I came home, I was even more disenchanted with the single shot. The single frame had no context. My idea and my aim became to expand the content of the photograph to include what was outside the frame [1991].*

1982

B.F.A. degree, Moore College, Philadelphia. Has first one-person exhibition at Temple Gallery, Temple University, Philadelphia.

*When I graduated from Moore, I wanted to become a photo artist but knew if that didn't happen, at least I could make a living. I went out to look for freelance photography work. For the next few years it kept me alive; it was good training. I learned to move the people in front of my camera and make them feel comfortable [1991].*

1982–1983

*During this period I discovered Diego Rivera, who had continued a cultural tradition of mural painting. I was struck by something he said when he talked about being a painter and being political, and how these two things can be linked together—that art can be a powerful weapon in the larger struggle against oppression [1991].*

1983

Group exhibition: “Black Woman: Power and Image,” Antioch University.  
Leaves Philadelphia for Baltimore to initiate photography program at the Baltimore School for the Arts, a magnet high school for artistically talented students. Orders equipment, designs darkrooms, develops the curriculum. Students win prizes, and several enter photography as a career. Between 1987 and 1988 is a staff photographer for the *Baltimore AfroAmerican Newspaper* and is a contributor to *City Paper*. Teaches at the Baltimore School for the Arts (1984–1987), College of Notre Dame of Maryland, Baltimore; and Bowie State University, Bowie, Maryland (1987–1989). As part of the Artist-in-Residence Program sponsored by the Maryland Arts Council, teaches photography in regional elementary and secondary schools (1985–1989).

1984

Group exhibition: "Transitions/1984," Faculty exhibition, Alcazar Gallery, Baltimore School for the Arts, Baltimore.

1985

*Oh, She Got a Head Fulla Hair*

*The inspiration for this piece came from my reading a short story by Ntozake Shange. In the story, a black woman becomes obsessed with her hair, believing that everything she has ever wanted will come to her if only her hair grows longer. The work at first seems to be about black women's hair, which can be straight, curly; kinky; fuzzy; nappy; and a variety of other textures. Hair texture has historically been a symbol and sometimes a determinant of social class for black women. Transforming fuzzy locks into feminine grace is a very common obsession among black women. I wanted the photographs to reflect that obsession, so I layered the images in the camera. These photographs are displayed on an altar/mantelpiece with the story written on hanging paper strips. Each strip of paper has a passage that is provocative but does not contain the whole story: The audience is encouraged to read the strips, but there are more than a hundred strips to read. The compulsion to read the whole story becomes an obsession, like black women's obsession with their hair. The viewer feels this obsession, and it becomes the true subject of the work. By creating this alternative display for my photographs, I was creating a one-to-one relationship between my art and the viewer. I had found through my presentation of the photographs a way to break away from the photo frame [1989/1991].*

Group exhibition: "School 33 Resident Artists Exhibition," School 33 Art Center, Baltimore. Receives a two-year Ford Foundation grant, which enables Williams to attend graduate school at the Maryland Institute, College of Art, Baltimore.

1986

*Loa*

*I remembered the spirituality I had felt in Africa, and the feeling that there were parallel planes of existence. This was the idea that I wanted to portray: fully visible forces and spiritual powers inside of things that can reach out and touch the other side. In this piece there are photographs behind and in front of the windowframe that act as a metaphor for the dichotomies of secular and sacred, past and present, fantasy and reality [1991].*

*Ghosts That Smell Like Cornbread*

*This piece is about the women in my family whom I never knew except through oral histories and family photographs. I had heard stories about Aunt Radie and Aunt Ethel and what happened to Aunt Glara when she got married, and things like that. I have heard incredible things about these women. In *Ghosts That Smell Like Cornbread*, the narrative begins at the lower right. You see my hands holding and looking at these family snapshots. The photographs seem to grow to mythic sizes in proportion to the stories I've heard, especially the stories about my Aunt Radie, who is perched on the bumper of a 1940 Buick.*

*I was drawn to the tales of heroism and common sense that I had heard about these women. To illustrate my admiration for them. I made this a shrine piece. I used curved windows for their ecclesiastical look. The stones, arranged in a circle, serve to mark the grave sites of my ancestors [1989/1991].*

*Accused/Blowtorch/Padlock*

This work consists of a photographic reproduction and three enlarged details of the photograph, surrounded by tarpaper with handwritten text. In the center are four photographs in a windowframe. The photograph in the windowframe to the left is torn from a book, *The Best of Life*. Below the photograph is this caption: "Accused in 1937 of murdering a white Mississippi man, this black man was tortured with a blowtorch and then lynched." To the right are three details of the

photograph; across these three photographs is printed "ACCUSED/BLOWTORCH/PADLOCK" in large red letters. Each time the work is exhibited, Williams changes the text slightly.

*I used a combination of dominant and subordinate pictures. I force the viewer to look at what is really going on by dissecting the important body of information and by directing with text what the viewer should notice: the tied hands (accused). the scarred back (blowtorch). and the lock, chain, and tree (padlock) [1987].*

#### *North Avenue Project*

Williams is appointed one of the official photographers for the North Avenue Centennial Project, organized by the Baltimore Folklorist Association, whose intent is to record the appearance of this Baltimore neighborhood before its renewal. Williams takes official documentary photos and creates North Avenue Project, a more personal response.

*North Avenue and its surrounding neighborhood had fallen into disrepair. But as gasoline prices rise for commuters from the white suburbs, this black neighborhood is too close to the center of Baltimore to continue in this state of benign neglect.*

*The window in the piece is a metaphor for prophecy Through this window North Avenue is pictured as segmented by and compressed between two forces. At the top are the steel and glass windows symbolizing downtown interests; below; the cracked sidewalks and the trash on the street show negative aspects of a neglected community The most prophetic aspect of the image is the almost complete disappearance of black people from the picture, both literally and figuratively My prediction is that North Avenue will be segmented and distorted, as it is in this work, until its original appearance and character have vanished [1987].*

Group exhibitions: "School 33 Resident Artists Exhibition," School 33 Art Center, Baltimore; "Baltimore Artists Exchange Exhibition," Painted Bride Art Center, Philadelphia; "Humor, Wit, and Whimsy," Montpelier Cultural Arts Center, Laurel, Maryland; "Black Invitational," Life of Maryland Gallery, Baltimore.

*Accused/Blowtorch/Padlock* is exhibited for the first time in a group show, "Sweet Land of Liberty," School 33 Art Center, Baltimore. This is an exhibition of work in the Baltimore-Washington area juried by Brian Wallis, adjunct curator at The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, who selects the artists after studio visits. In the small brochure, Wallis describes the political content of the exhibition within the context of the 1986 centennial of the Statue of Liberty (a photograph of the statue appears on the brochure's cover). Of Williams's work, Wallis writes: "Since the way we see ourselves is often predicated on representations in the mass media, Pat Ward Williams's photographic works address the ways in which such representations are constructed, particularly in relation to her own experience of being a woman and being black. In part because she is herself a journalistic photographer, Williams has a keen insight into the structure and impact of photography in the media. . . . This shocking image provides a sharp contrast to Williams's earlier work, which often focuses on more private and contemplative aspects of daily life, and in particular to specifically female activities (one work, for example, centers on the meditative activity of hair brushing)." Wallis recommends *Accused/Blowtorch/Padlock* for the 1987 Hunter College Art Gallery exhibition, "Race and Representation," in New York.

1987

#### *Sibling Rivalry*

*The meaning of the imagery is immediately clear. Anyone with brothers and sisters knows the toy tally taken on gift-giving holidays. The addition of "hers" and "mine" to the traditional Christmas snapshot ("Let me take your photograph under the tree ") evokes feelings of territoriality familiar enough to laugh at. These snapshots, with only apparent changes in time, suggest the sustaining of a ritual and evoke a feeling of calm. The windowframes suggest a feeling that is at once playful and nasty [1987].*

*32 Hours in a Box . . . Still Counting*

In the initial version, the work is composed of a series of cyanotype photographs of a crouching black man, installed in windowframes. The five windowframes form a box. For the "Art Scape" exhibition in 1988, Williams added barbed wire and pillars with black-and-white photographs attached to them. For the traveling exhibition, "Black Photographers Bear Witness: 100 Years of Social Protest," the barbed wire was removed for reasons of safety.

*We as black people have to find different solutions to overcome political and personal obstacles. This is a piece about Henry "Box" Brown and problem-solving. Henry Brown was a slave who had himself nailed in a box and mailed to freedom in Philadelphia. I thought this was an extraordinarily inventive solution to a problem. When he arrived in Philadelphia he got out of the box and became known as Henry "Box" Brown. This makes this man my hero. I like to think of this piece as a kind of heroic sculpture, maybe even a monument [1989].*

One-person exhibitions: "Social/Sexual/Person: Politics," The Cloisters Gatehouse, Washington, D.C.; and "New Work," Rockland Art Center, Ellicott City, Maryland.

Group exhibitions: "Art Scape '87: Rooms with Views," Baltimore; "Space: New Form/New Function," Arrowmont Gallery, Gatlinburg, Tennessee; "Image/Identity," Maryland Art Place, Baltimore; "Eighth Annual National Exhibition," J. B. Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky (wins purchase prize); "Homage to Sir John Herschel, or The History and Practice of the Cyanotype," Gormley Gallery, College of Notre Dame of Maryland, Baltimore; "23rd Annual Juried Exhibition" juried by Bill Olander of The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York), Academy of the Arts, Easton, Maryland; "Seventh Annual Atlanta Life National Art Competition and Exhibition," Atlanta, Georgia (receives first place purchase prize for *Loa*).

*Accused/Blowtorch/Padlock* is exhibited for the first time in New York, in "Race and Representation: Art/Film/Video" at Hunter College Art Gallery, New York, along with works by Robert Colescott, Roy DeCarava, Edgar Heap of Birds, Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Ana Mendieta, and Howardena Pindell. This exhibition/symposium is accompanied by a substantial catalog in which Maurice Berger, the project codirector, writes: "The irresponsibility of representation is the central issue of the work of Pat Ward Williams. In

*Accused/Blowtorch/Padlock* (1986), a section of a photograph appropriated from the pages of Life magazine serves as a shocking reminder of the indifference of the media and the arts to their social responsibility" [Race and Representation catalog, Hunter College Art Gallery, New York City, 1987, 13].

M.F.A. degree, Maryland Institute, College of Art, Baltimore.

*My difficulties in school stemmed from the kind of black imagery I presented. It wasn't so much the image of a black face they objected to. Because the image of passive blacks and our exotic customs had long been a popular subject in photographs. It was called documentary My photographs of black people were very "normalized." . . . [Though] most people I knew and loved were black and I would naturally want to photograph them, some instructors saw the exclusion of white people in my photography as aggressive* ("Interview with Joyce Scott, Winnie Owens-Hart, Martha Jackson-Jarvis, and Pat Ward Williams," in *Next Generation: Southern Black Aesthetic* catalog, Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, 1990).

1988

Williams creates *MOVE?* and *Beware of the Dog*. Both employ new materials: video and Xerox in *MOVE?* and audio in *Beware of the Dog*.

*MOVE?*

First shown at the CEPA Gallery in Buffalo and later in the year (with changes in the video editing) in the group exhibition "Politically Charged," First Street Forum Art Gallery, St. Louis, Missouri.

The *MOVE?* exhibition in St. Louis is the subject of a newspaper article, "Art from A Political Perspective," by Jabari Asirn. "It deals with the 1985 incident in which Philadelphia police teamed

with city officials to bomb a residence containing black citizens who were deemed 'undesirable' because of their membership in a politically active group known as MOVE.

"Picture a typical American living room, complete with appropriate family photos, knickknacks on doily-laden tables, comfortable armchairs, and a large color television. The feelings of warmth and serenity created by the room's cozy confines are disrupted by a series of blaring television newscasts. Vivid scenes of war pour from the screen: an army of policemen firing an endless array of bullets, screams and shouts erupting amid uproarious confusion, entire city blocks blazing out of control while firemen stand idly by. . . . [Williams] has further augmented her tableau by covering the walls of the room with Xeroxed copies of relevant autopsy reports, and supplementing them with additional handwritten details." Asim quotes Williams: "I got the material [the official body of evidence on the event] and used the Xerox machine as an imaging device. . . . My work forces people to take sides—you either love it or hate it. I'm not trying to proselytize my own viewpoint. It's meant to inform" [*St. Louis American* 10–16 November 1988].

*The violent confrontation on May 13, 1985, between the MOVE organization and the Philadelphia city government was widely publicized. The controversy centered around the police dropping a bomb on a row house. The consequences of this action left eleven MOVE members (five of them children) dead and sixty houses destroyed. It was the most controversial event in the city's history. It still remains a controversial subject.*

*I left Philadelphia in 1984. As a lifelong resident of Philadelphia, I was familiar with the longtime parallel history of the Philadelphia police and the MOVE organization.*

*MOVE members may be viewed as the ultimate "other" This group of black and white adults and children alienated white people by their integrated lifestyle, their custom of taking the surname of "Africa," and their revolutionary rhetoric. At the same time, MOVE was an affront to their working-class black neighborhood because of the members' dreadlock hairstyles, their back-to-nature lifestyle, and their disregard for authority.*

The Xeroxed Evidence. On the walls Williams places masses of Xeroxed pages from the report of the Philadelphia Special Investigation Commission. On the first and second walls are coroner's reports and an eyewitness account by Birdie Africa, the nine-year-old boy who survived. On the third and fourth walls are the official police reports; Williams comments that their "use of military time. . .tactical phrases and buzz words. . .gives insight into the aggressive stance of the police toward this group."

The Video. This is an altered twenty-minute news broadcast. Based on a local TV station's all-day news coverage of the event, "It is edited to retain all the 'flash' of THE NEWS, with its 'updates,' 'team coverage,' and 'special reports.'

*My version, however, removes most references to the MOVE members' appearance and lifestyle. Instead it 'reports' with actual news footage the city sponsorship of this police action.*

The Writing on the Wall. "This information is written with chalk directly on the walls. There are excerpts of MOVE speeches, writings and court testimonies. These are sometimes written in the flowery language of utopian rhetoric. Because of their references to 'truth' and family loyalty, these short paragraphs are handwritten so that, I hope, the viewer can hear the human inflection of a voice."

Williams edits this work five times before feeling that it is finally right ["MOVE?" Center Quarterly 11:1990/1991].

### *Beware of the Dog*

First shown in Baltimore, at the Eubie Blake Art Center. The installation consists of a windowframe containing a large image of a man flexing his muscles. Below sits a phone and an

answering machine, which is activated by the viewer. "It's about an old lover and a message he left on my answering machine. The piece is a confession by both of us" [1989/1991].  
Receives National Endowment for the Arts Regional Visual Arts Fellowship for Works on Paper, and a City/Arts Individual Artist's Grant, Mayor's Advisory Committee on Art and Culture, Baltimore. Receives the National Newspaper Publishers Award, best news photography.  
One-person exhibitions: "Personal Political Observations," CEPA Gallery, Buffalo; "Photographic Installations," Gormley Gallery, College of Notre Dame of Maryland, Baltimore; and "Political Varieties," INTAR Latin American Gallery, New York City.

Carol Wood reviews the Gormley Gallery exhibition, and ends stating: "A significant art begins to surface in Baltimore, its creators, like Pat Ward Williams, warrant support and recognition if the process of cultural development is to continue" [*New Art Examiner*, September 1988:51].  
Group exhibitions: "Politically Charged," First Street Forum Art Gallery, St. Louis, Missouri; "Ford Foundation Grantees," Eubie Blake Cultural Arts Center, Baltimore; "Art Quest '88," Los Angeles; "Autobiography: In Her Own Image," INTAR Latin American Gallery, New York.  
INTAR's "Autobiography: In Her Own Image" travels to Nexus Contemporary Art Center, Atlanta, Georgia; Mills College Art Gallery, Oakland, California; Ritter Art Gallery, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton; and Women & Their Work Gallery, Austin, Texas.  
Panel presentation: "New Black Photographers," Society for Photographic Education, Houston, Texas.

1989

Moves from Baltimore to Los Angeles in order to teach at the California Institute of the Arts, Valencia.

*Cal Arts was a wonderful move for me. Its a fabulous art school. a thinJdng person s art school. The students take an active interest in new forms of the photographic medium in an environment where real-life questions are addressed.*

*After I moved to California, I found that I didn't have the facilities to do cyanotype and vandyke processes. Cal Arts did have facilities for photo murals. I enjoyed using these materials, but they didn't have the same type of feeling of handwork for me as working with cyanotype and vandyke. I enjoyed working with an untested surface I prepared myself [1991].*

#### *Day of the Dead/little Angels*

The installation is made up of a charred windowframe containing photos of children overlaid with typed texts.

*This piece was specifically about the children of MOVE. It was made for the "Via de Los Muertos, Los Angelitos" exhibition at the Alternative Museum, New York. Their theme that year was children who had died because of political oppression. One can become horribly obsessed with MOVE history The biggest mystery is why Birdie Africa saw his brother and sister running down the alley ahead of him, but their bodies were found inside the house. There is speculation that, during all the smoke and excitement, the police killed these children in the alley and brought the bodies back to the house to cover up their mistake; then they allowed the whole neighborhood to bum down. That is what the charred windowframe is for—to give you that immediate reference to the children and how they died. How they died is very graphically depicted in the autopsy reports, but those are very clinical, very dry; very matter-of-fact, with no feeling to them at all. "Body G consists of the incomplete remains of a female child. " That is a horrendous sentence! Can you hug your own child without thinJdng about "incomplete remains"? Should someone drop a bomb on your entire neighborhood because you won't come out of your own home? I used the autopsy reports, the schematics of the bodies and partial bodies—used them as film positives—and behind them I placed photographs of real children—children at play; children smiling at the camera, children in their Sunday outfits. These MOVE children were real children and this is what happened to them. When I was spreading out the autopsy schematics of their*

bodies, I was struck by how they made a macabre paper doll pattern, so I put that across the bottom—the little children, with their incomplete remains, holding hands [1991].

#### *Negro Poster Girl 1989*

*I made a piece about my being a hot property on the job market in 1989 and called it Negro Poster Girl 1989. I used a photograph of myself with a distorted face. You can see that I was happy about what was going on but I was also confused, sometimes flattered, sometimes suspicious. In the background are the words from a verbose and dense affirmative action form. All around my face are little smiling lips that seem to be saying, "Oh, we are so glad to see you, and we are so glad to interview you." All those little false smiles surrounding me. The windowframe was decorated with garlands that can be Xeroxed for the poster girl of 1990 whenever she comes along. They are fake accolades, phony praise [1991].*

#### *Brokenhearted*

*When I first moved to Los Angeles, I was tremendously lonely. Brokenhearted is about California and living in Valencia. Each day I would read in the Los Angeles Times about everything that was going on that I could be making art about. Very often, news is a "muse" for me. I'll read an editorial or news item and my reaction will often express itself in my art.*

*Valencia is one of those planned communities: a thousand cul-de-sacs surrounded by walls. I had no studio. I couldn't get photo paper bigger than eight by ten, couldn't buy EPY film, let alone get it processed in two hours. I wanted to make art, and wanted to continue doing cyanotypes and vandykes, and I wanted to get out of Valencia. I was stuck in Valencia. What could I do but make art about that frustration?*

*In Brokenhearted I covered the walls of a room with pages from the Los Angeles Times, and then added little palm trees in gold and silver all over them. I used the actual pages from the Los Angeles Times as negatives for the diazo prints and then inserted these wonderful articles that I wished I could make art about. I substituted all the photographs in the Times pages for photographs of my feet, which, like the rest of my body was stuck in Valencia—in the pizza parlor, in the desert, the supermarket, the video store [1991].*

One-person exhibitions: "Brokenhearted," Jamaica Arts Center, Jamaica, New York; "Political Varieties," Fayerweather Gallery, University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

Group exhibitions: "Constructed Images: New Photography," Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York; "Black Photographers Bear Witness: 100 Years of Social Protest," Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, Massachusetts; "Dia de Los Muertos, Los Angelitos," Alternative Museum, New York City; "Hal Woodruff Memorial Biennial," The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; and "Loaded," Blue Star Art Space, San Antonio, Texas.

In a review, Andy Grundberg describes this Williams College exhibition of the earlier history of black photography as "fascinating evidence of the incomplete and unsettled state of photography history," and describes the later trend of black photojournalism of the 1960s and 1970s. "But in the 1980s, according to the exhibition's account, a far more self-consciously artful approach came to the fore. Christian Walker, Carrie Mae Weems, and Pat Ward Williams are the photographers who represent this new direction; not surprisingly, all three have had art school backgrounds. ... Miss Williams's sculptural installation, *32 Hours in a Box . . . Still Counting (Homage to Henry "Box" Brown)* is the exhibition's show stopper. . . . As the text written on the box makes clear, it is also meant to be symbolic of the contemporary struggles of black Americans. But as befits a work of art, *32 Hours in a Box* is not exclusively didactic. Arrayed , around the box are four free-standing columns on which photographs are hung: the images— of a violin, a doll's eye, a skyscraper and a rose—add a healthy sense of ambiguity and possibility to the proceedings" ["A Century of Black History Brought Into Focus," *The New York Times*, Arts & Leisure section, 2 July 1989].

1990

#### *The Cost of Living*

Created for a group exhibition, "The Tell Tale Heart," at the Washington Project for the Arts. This exhibition, curated by Mel Watkin, consists of four artists: Ken Little, James Luna, Judy Southerland, and Pat Ward Williams.

*Part of this room installation included a mural-sized print. The image was from a snapshot of my aunts and uncles and me, which I enlarged to a mural print of eight feet by eight feet with a large printers halftone dot. At a distance of some twelve feet it looked like a continuous-tone photograph; as the viewer moved closer; however; the dots caused the image to break into random dot patterns and the viewer was unable to make out the features in the photograph. There was additional text and photography to read and examine, so the viewer was forced to come closer to the work. The entire piece is about memory and how fragile it is. Here I investigate the role of the present-day self-image projected onto the snapshot, which is a documentation of the past self. What do we remember because it is pictured in the snapshot? What have we forgotten because it was never photographed? How can the family snapshot album construct a past that never was? [1991]*

#### *I Remember It Well*

Shown in "Family Stories," a group exhibition at the Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art, Staten Island, New York.

In *The New York Times* review of the exhibition, Andy Grundberg describes this exhibition of nine artists "who draw inspiration from their upbringing. . . . The stories told come from families of Chinese, Jewish, Mexican, and black descent. The artists live in New York, California, Kansas, Maryland, and Texas. Some of the memories are warm and comforting, others are angry and bitter. . . . In a piece called *I Remember It Well*, Pat Ward Williams fills three walls with greatly enlarged black-and-white photographs of social occasions (six women in gowns, a club dinner, a family portrait) and inscribes them with handwritten comments. 'Uncle Charlie drank whisky from a mayonnaise jar,' one reads. 'In a few years I would learn to hate my hair,' says another. On a fourth wall is a shelf holding three framed portraits, but the individual identities are blurred by halftone dots the size of golf balls" ["Ladies and Gentlemen, Welcome to My Life," *The New York Times*, 3 August 1990].

*Like The Cost of Living installation for the "Tell Tale Heart" exhibition, this uses the same technique but is larger in scale. One of the classes I taught at Gal Arts was called "Family Stories: Expanding the Photo Album." There I worked with students who wanted to use family photographs as a basis for making art, exploring their own lives and their own family situations. We looked at relationships and dynamics within the family and started to think about what was going on in the photographs. But we looked at the photographs subjectively rather than objectively How do we construct a past on the foundation of present self-knowledge?*

One-person exhibitions: *MOVE?*, Los Angeles Center for Photographic Studies, Los Angeles; and "Pat Ward Williams," Redeye Gallery, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island. Group exhibitions: "Art and Conscience," Center for the Arts and Religion, Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C.; "Blues in the Night," Otis Art Institute of Parsons School of Design, Los Angeles; "The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s," The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York City; "Family Stories," Snug Harbor Cultural Center, Staten Island, New York; "Home: Contemporary Urban Images by Black Photographers," The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York City; "News as Muse," School 33 Art Center, Baltimore; "Next Generation," Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, Winston-Salem, North Carolina; and "The Tell Tale Heart," Washington Project for the Arts, Washington, D.C.

*Accused/Blowtorch/Padlock* is included in "The Decade Show," an exhibition accompanied by a catalog with a series of essays by C. Carr, David Deitcher, Jimmie Durham, Guillermo Gomez-Pena, Julia P. Herzberg, Susana Torruella Leval, Eunice Lipton, Margo Machida, Micki McGee, Sharon F. Pat ton, Lowery Stokes Sims, Laura Trippi/Gary Sangster, and Judith Wilson.

Williams is included in the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art's "Next Generation: Southern Black Aesthetic," Winston-Salem, North Carolina, a traveling group exhibition curated by Leslie King-Hammond. The catalog includes essays by Lowery S. Sims and Adrian Piper. There is also an interview conducted by Dennis Szakas with Joyce Scott, Winnie Owens-Hart, Martha Jackson-Jarvis, and Pat Ward Williams.

*I'm learning that the subject is not always the message. I've always been interested in issues of representation and the impact these ideas have in shaping people's viewpoints. This of course has been a very hot topic in photographic circles, this imaging of the other; and it's presented to us as new: But these issues have been dealt with from within our community for a very long time. If it seems new it just illustrates the lack of concrete contact between groups.*

*You don't want to preach only about your own views, so you have to find a level at which you can describe the effects of these issues on a personal level. For instance, the statistic that three women out of five have been raped is politics at a distance most of us can live with; it makes no personal contact. But ask someone to think of five women he or she knows. To make that person realize that three of those women have been raped is to make politics personal and the issue very real. I like my work to agitate that way*

Receives a National Endowment for the Arts Photography Fellowship. Williams is invited to the School of the Art Institute of Chicago to be part of its Visiting Artists program. A videotape is made from an interview with Angela Kelly (distributed by the Video Data Bank, Chicago), and a transcript is published in *Affirmative Actions: Recognizing a Cross-Cultural Practice in Contemporary Art*, edited by Jeanne Dunning (Chicago: The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 1990). In the interview, Williams discusses *32 Hours in a Box . . . Still Counting; Oh, She Got a Head Fulla Hair; Accused/Blowtorch/Padlock*; and *MOVE?* She also critiques the tendency to merge sexism and racism together.

*Art in America* (September 1990) publishes an interview with Williams as part of "Speaking Out: Some Distance to Go." Six African-American artists, including Williams, "talk frankly about the roles of museums, the nature of patronage, and the functioning of art markets in fostering misunderstandings of African-American art." *Artforum* (November 1990) publishes "In Their Own Image," an article by Kellie Jones that discusses photography by women of color in the United States and England. Jones comments on Williams's work: "Like [Ingrid] Pollard, [Zarina] Bhimji and Williams fuse personal and collective history. . . . How can we rely on memory with no extant documents to support our claim to existence? If, in the images given, we are pictured as exotic, violent, or victims, then what? Ward Williams sees herself not only as a recreator but as an active part of the chronicle. . . . Her three-dimensional piece commemorating Philadelphia's MOVE tragedy or Henry 'Box' Brown might be seen as political because they don't conform to either 'popular' images or to those of broad historical currency. But these, too, are stories, part of the individual tales that reveal the larger issues of a society. For Ward Williams, nonsilver and physically and conceptually constructed photographs better convey her ideative stance. Her installations further define meaning by creating an environment within which the photographs may be seen, thus communicating more of the photographer's intent."

Lucy R. Lippard includes *Accused/Blowtorch/Padlock* in her 1990 book *Mixed Blessings: New Art in Multicultural America*. In the short accompanying text, Lippard writes: "The windowframe (which she has used in other works) functions as a distancing device at the same time that it forces us to look through it and enter the picture's reality; the scrawled text also insists on participation by its initial illegibility. Although this piece appears to be about race alone, the anguished series of questions to the viewer demands a response as critical as it is sensational, and raises the issue of responsibility in the print media, the idea of holding mental 'turf.' Williams examines not only the act of lynching but the act of photographing that act."

*Politics invades our personal lives. All types of politics, national politics, racial politics, family politics, and sexual politics are part of everyday life. The politics in my work comes out of the way that politics affects me.*

1991

Leaves job at California Institute of the Arts. Appointed Assistant Professor, University of California, Irvine, in Orange County, California.

*Sig Alert*

*Artforum* commissions an experimental work with Kodak's prepackaged Stretch camera. She creates *Sig Alert*, a panoramic study of Los Angeles traffic jams. Project is published in *Artforum* (October 1991).

*Because of Aunt Adeline*

*This is a projection piece shown at the INTAR Gallery (November–December 1991) in their series "Discovery and Conquest." I changed the idea around slightly from the discovery of America to include more personal discovery and revelation. The piece consists of four projected images, all toned in red. The visuals are all taken from a single photograph, a formal photograph of myself when I was about six years old. I am pictured sitting smiling at the camera, with my hands folded daintily in my lap. The first slide presents this photograph. The handwritten text states: "Because Aunt Adeline was part Indian. . . ." The second slide shows a portion of the first slide. It details my face and my long hair. The text reads: "I was, too." The third slide details my hands, and the text reads: "I discovered later that she wasn't my real aunt but a product of one of those casual adoptions that happened a lot in colored families." The fourth slide shows the first photograph again but no longer is it red. Now the skin tones of my face and hands have been childishly scribbled in brown because I wasn't a "real" Indian, I was brown again. On the background of this are rubber stamps of spades [1991].*