Kara Walker is best known for her room-size tableaux of black cut-paper silhouettes that examine the underbelly of America's racial and gender tensions. Her works often address such highly charged themes as power, repression, history, race, and sexuality. Born in Stockton, California, Walker moved to the South at age 13 when her father, artist Larry Walker, accepted a position at Georgia State University and her family relocated to Stone Mountain, a suburb of Atlanta. Focusing on painting and printmaking in college, she received her BFA from the Atlanta College of Art in 1991 and her MFA from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1994. Walker was included in the 1997 Biennial exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Later that year, at the age of 27, she became the youngest recipient of the prestigious John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's "genius" grant, which launched a public controversy around her work. In 2002 she was chosen to represent the United States in the São Paulo Biennial in Brazil. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally and is included in the collections of major museums worldwide. The 2007 Walker Art Center–organized exhibition *Kara Walker: My Complement, My Oppressor, My Enemy, My Love* **is the artist's first full-scale U.S. museum survey. Walker currently lives in New York, where she is a professor of visual arts in the MFA program at Columbia University.**

Kara Walker's work is steeped in the subject of race. Her precise and often exaggerated drawings of facial features, body shapes, and costume use line and form to signify the ethnicity of her subjects and comment on the way race is used to define us. Her use of the 18th-century form of the silhouette is both an ironic and complex way to address these issues, since the paper Walker uses to cut out most of the images for her wall murals is black. This material eliminates the need for her to create skin tones and effectively renders all of her figures "black." For these pieces, as well as her watercolours and drawings, the racial status assigned to her characters is visible through stereotype and caricature. (See Humour.) For Walker, using the silhouette came from, in part, her thinking about what it means for groups of people to define themselves through images. This is a personal interest of the artist, who says that making artwork about race translates into intimate issues about identity.