

Kunstinstituut Melly

PRESS RELEASE

Press Release - 12 December 2025

Kunstinstituut Melly opens Marilyn Nance's first exhibition in Europe: ***Spirit Faith Grace Rage***.



Photographs © Marilyn Nance c/o Pictoright Amsterdam 2025

Rotterdam, Netherlands – On **December 13, 2025**, *Kunstinstituut Melly* will open ***Spirit Faith Grace Rage***, the first exhibition in Europe dedicated to Brooklyn-based photographer and archivist ***Marilyn Nance***. Spanning **five decades**, the exhibition traces *Marilyn's* longstanding commitment to documenting African diasporic life and preserving personal archives as essential sites of historical knowledge. The exhibition brings together a selection of photographs accompanied by sonic fragments collected by *Marilyn* and arranged by artist and technologist *Ali Santana*.

Marilyn Nance has been a **two-time finalist** for the ***W. Eugene Smith Award in Humanistic Photography***. Her work has been included in major public collections, including the *Brooklyn Museum of Art*, the *Art Institute of Chicago*, *MoMA*, the *Smithsonian American Art Museum*, the *Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture*, the *Virginia Museum of Fine Arts*, and the *Library of Congress*. Her photographs have also been featured in numerous publications, including *The World History of Photography*, *History of Women in Photography*, and *The Black Photographers Annual*.

[Learn more about Spirit Faith Grace Rage](#)



Connecting Five Decades of Work

Marilyn Nance started creating images of daily life in New York City at the age of eighteen. At age twenty-three, Marilyn joined the ***FESTAC'77*** United States delegation as technical support for the *Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture* in Lagos, Nigeria, where she created one of the most vibrant visual records of the *Pan-African gathering*. This photographic archive is chronicled in the book ***Last Day in Lagos (2022)***, edited by *Oluremi C. Onabanjo*. After *FESTAC 77*, she continued making images with a dedicated equal attention to historical events, family moments, community gatherings, trips abroad, and quiet moments.

While studying and taking care of her photographic archive, she began using the title *Spirit Faith Grace Rage* to tie together her work made across different times and geographies. For *Marilyn*, ***Spirit*** is the underlying energy of an event; ***Faith*** lies in the belief that everything works towards the greater good; ***Grace*** acknowledges the spiral of time and the beauty, love and joy that lives in the everyday; ***Rage*** is that built-up energy that finds expression and moves us forward.

For this exhibition, she meticulously selected photographs that bring together family reunions, communions, intimacies, dance trains, stages, street or church scenes, and political actions in an interconnected constellation of timeless gestures. The sonic fragments collected by *Marilyn* over the years and arranged by artist and technologist *Ali Santana* imbue the space with the social and intimate contexts from which the images emerge.

These ideas underpin the structure of the exhibition, which assembles photographs that bridge time periods, places, and social contexts. The result is a mapping of the connections between Black American life, African diasporas, and global histories of resistance and celebration.



A Visionary in the Digital Archiving Movement

Long before digital preservation became standard practice, *Marilyn* was actively building online infrastructures for her archive. Since **1995**, her website soulsista.com has served as a public access point, while her social media presence, especially [@marilyn.nance](https://twitter.com/marilyn.nance) and [@festac77archive](https://twitter.com/festac77archive), continues to update and contextualize her work for new audiences.

Marilyn's ongoing method of reaching out to the individuals she photographs, and to scholars who can add insight, exemplifies an archival approach rooted in community exchange rather than institutional authority.

Kunstinstituut Melly and *Marilyn Nance* acknowledge the essential contributions of ***Ashlyn Diaz*** (*Archive Fellow*), ***Ali Santana*** (*Exhibition Technologist*), and ***RaFia Santana*** (*Exhibition Technologist*) to both the exhibition and the ongoing care of the *Marilyn Nance Archive*.

Photographs © Marilyn Nance c/o Pictoright Amsterdam 2025

Partners

The exhibition is supported by the *Hartwig Foundation* and the *Netherlands-America Foundation*.



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ABOUT KUNSTINSTITUUT MELLY

Kunstinstituut Melly is Rotterdam's contemporary art and knowledge-sharing institution. Since its founding in 1990, the institution has been committed to presenting and commissioning thought-provoking exhibitions, public programs, and educational initiatives. With a focus on emerging and underrepresented practices, *Kunstinstituut Melly* provides a vital platform for dialogue and artistic experimentation, rooted in the cultural and social fabric of Rotterdam and connected to international developments.

Press Contacts

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Wednesday – Sunday: 11:00 – 18:00
Friday (during Kunstavond): until 21:00

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