

DESSA
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DISCOVER
SILVER
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FARAH AL QASIMI
ANETA BARTOS
NICOLAS BLOISE
ELLIOTT JEROME BROWN JR.
NONA FAUSTINE
RINDON JOHNSON
TOMMY KHA
PIXY LIAO
MATTHEW MORROCCO
BRYSON RAND
PAUL MPAGI SEPUYA

Housed at Westbeth Gallery, *Discursive Selves* explores the contested meaning of the Self Portrait. This collection of photography and film by eleven contemporary artists reveals nuanced definitions of selfhood that acknowledge the influence of one's social environment on one's inner sense of identity. These artists use the camera to navigate between both fluid and fixed perceptions of the Self, and are thus able to present who they are on their own terms.

The Self Portrait plays an essential role in the development and establishment of one's identity— it informs and is informed, creates and is created, is both concrete and ephemeral. For some, it manifests as an artifact, a material body, or a form of testimony; for others, it is a projection, a speculation, or a performance. Working in a new genre of critical photography, these artists play with the paradox of “public intimacy” to explore the relationship between private life and public persona. Portrayals of the Self range from fictitious characters and imagined scenarios to biological self-studies or familial ties.

Discursive Selves dissects the myriad practices of formulating oneself as both an intimate ritual and a method of responding to one's outer world. In a rapidly expanding global information society, this exhibition invites a moment of pause for contemplation in contemporary life.

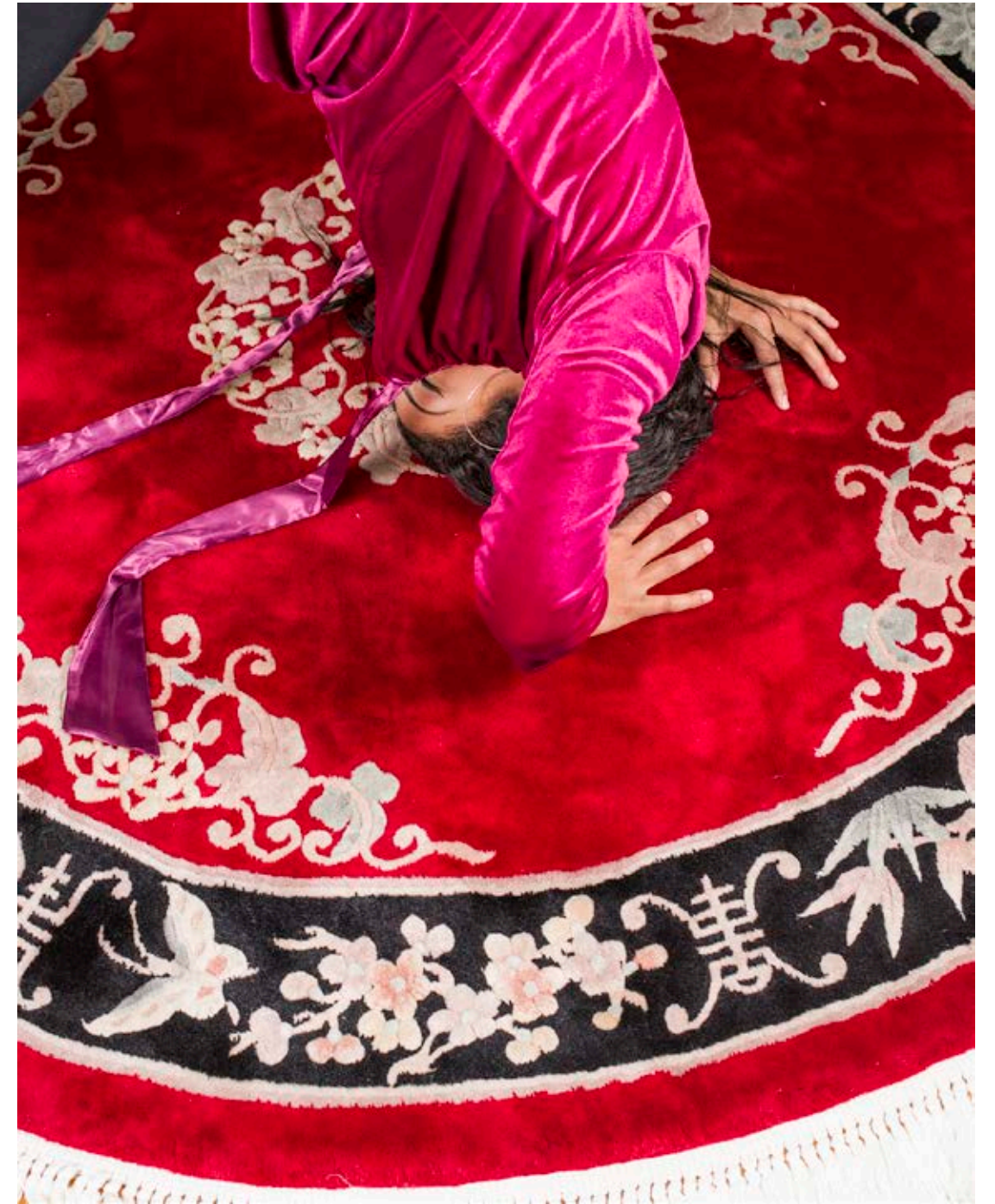
Farah Al Qasimi

B. 1991, Abu Dhabi

Farah Al Qasimi is an artist and musician based in New York and Dubai. She is a recent graduate of the Yale School of Art and a current resident at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine. Selected exhibitions include *A Scream Runs Through the House*, Helena Anrather Gallery (New York); *Coming Up Roses*, The Third Line (Dubai); the first Biennial for Arab Photography, Institut du Monde Arabe, (Paris); and *Accented*, Maraya Art Center (Sharjah).

Al Qasimi's practice over the years has moved fluidly between private and public spaces, but the content has primarily remained focused on locating the fantastic in the everyday. She also explores how consumer culture seduces people, particularly women, with promises of beauty or self-improvement.

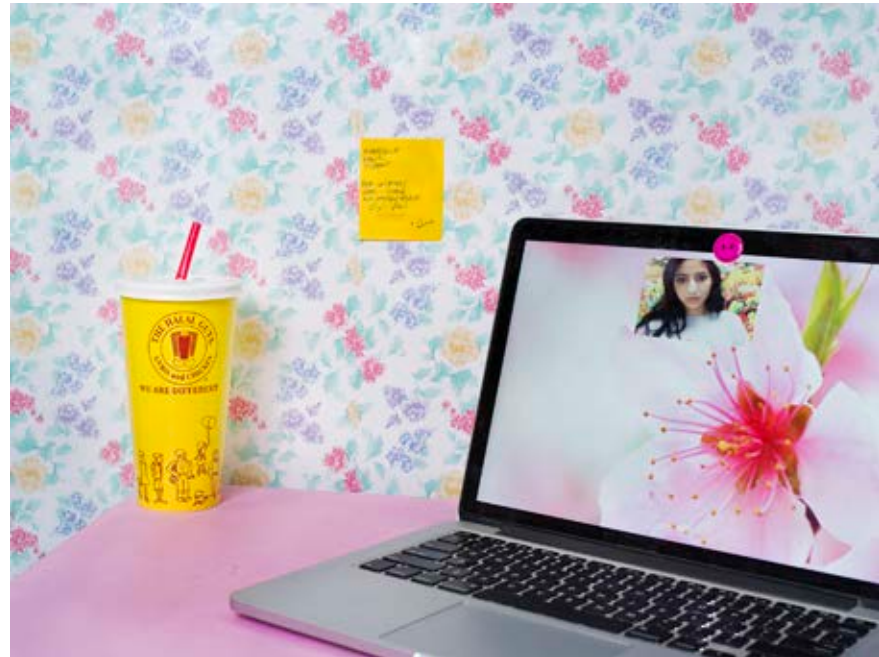
This work is an investigation into the anxieties of hypervisibility and the loss of privacy within domestic space. The images seek to mirror the tension of a life under constant surveillance, abstracting figures as a form of relief or protection from outside forces. Moments of stress or violence are dulled by the flatness of two-dimensionality. A pomegranate is sliced open on a counter and left out to bleed, revealing its contents. A Skype call is interrupted by strange glitches. An official portrait of the artist's father is partially hidden by a plastic orchid. In the end, the home proves to be as frightening and strange as it is comforting and familiar. Here, Al Qasimi attempts to turn the camera back on the people watching her and her family, only to wave back and say "hello - I am watching you too."



Farah Al Qasimi, *Self Portrait in Red*, 2016. Archival Inkjet Print, 34 × 27 in. Courtesy the artist and The Third Line, Dubai.



Farah Al Qasimi, *Untitled Portrait*, 2016. Archival Inkjet Print, 22 × 28.50 in. and *Still Life with Laptop*, 2016. Archival Inkjet Print, 22 × 28.50 in. Courtesy the artist, Helena Anrather, New York, and The Third Line, Dubai.



Farah Al Qasimi, *Pomegranate*, 2016. Archival Inkjet Print, 22 × 28.50 in. Courtesy the artist, Helena Anrather, New York, and The Third Line, Dubai.

Aneta Bartos

B, Tomaszów Mazowiecki, Poland

Born in Poland, Aneta Bartos moved to New York City to attend The School of Visual Arts. Aneta is currently preparing for a solo exhibition at Postmasters Gallery, opening September 8, 2017. Her work can be seen in *NSFW: Female Gaze* at Museum of Sex through August 2017 and *Magic Mirror* at Daniel Cooney through July 21, 2017. Most recently, her work was exhibited at *Spring/Break Art Show 2017*, *The Art Show 2016 (ADAA)*, *Photo London 2015*, and *Spring/Break Art Show 2015*. Earlier in 2015, she participated in *Pheromone Hotbox* at Steven Kasher Gallery. In 2013, she exhibited her project titled *Boys* in a solo show curated by Jon Feinstein at the Carlton Arms Hotel, New York. In 2017, she was awarded a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant.

This series is my attempt to capture childhood memories revolving around my father. He has spent all of his 69 years in a small city in Poland and has been shaped by its culture, rural lifestyle, and decades under communist rule. Since he was a young man, he has strutted proudly down these streets, displaying his impressively sculpted body – a gentle giant, a man unmotivated by greed and always true to his principles.

His presence takes me back to my youth, to what felt like an endless stretch of days in a worry-free world anchored by my powerful and loving father. I reflect on how his commitment to education, bodybuilding, organic food, and the simplicity of basic living has kept him so young and full of vitality.

These images represent phantoms of the past, but they are living and captured in the present. My father is steadfast and consistent, the embodiment of stability and strength. Nothing has changed. I can still smell the meadows, hear the forest, dive into the lake, and always see the outline of the majestic figure of eternal love nearby.

– Aneta Bartos



Aneta Bartos, *Dangle*, 2016. C-Print, 20.40 × 20 in. Courtesy the artist.



Aneta Bartos, *Scythe*, 2016. C-Print, 20.40 × 20 in. Courtesy the artist.



Aneta Bartos, *Chicken*, 2016. C-Print, 20.40 × 20 in. Courtesy the artist.

Nicolas Bloise

B. 1993, San Francisco, CA

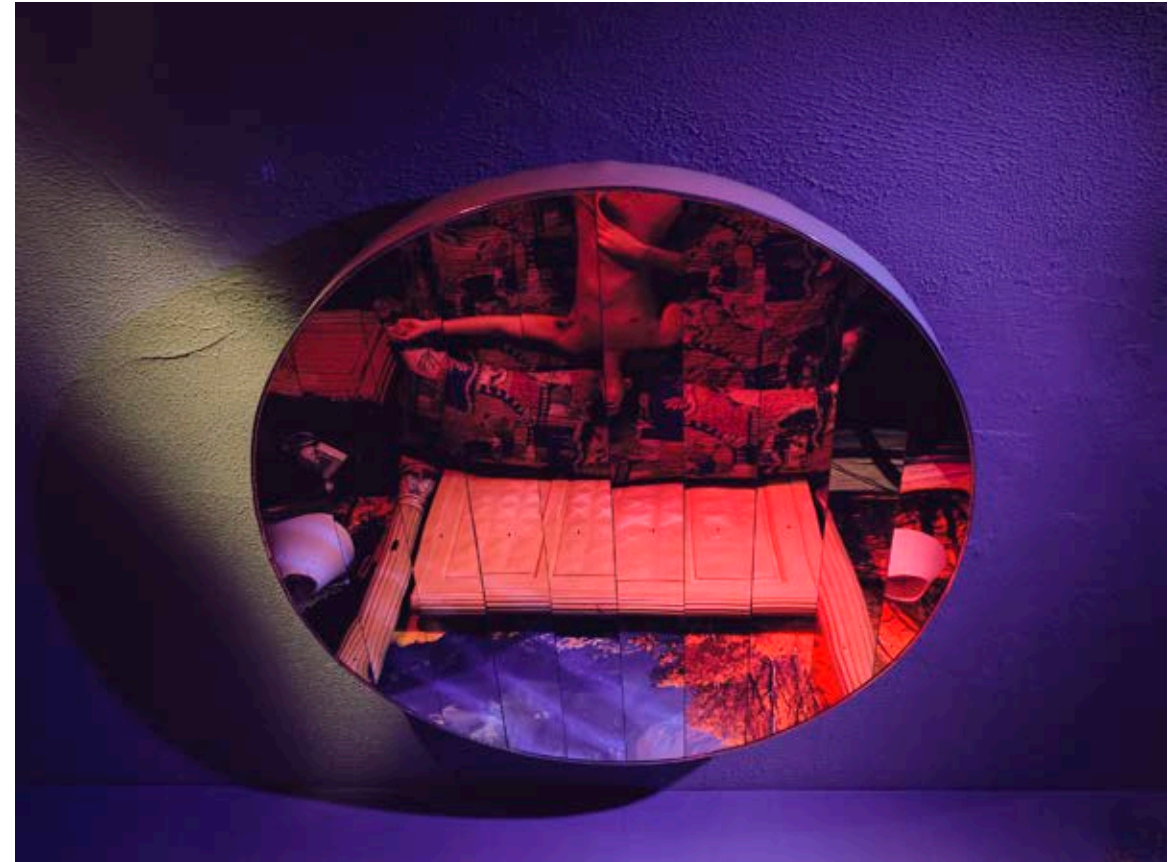
Nicolas Bloise is a photographer and performance artist. Originally from San Francisco, he moved to New York City to complete a BFA in photography and imaging from the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University. He is currently based in New York and remains fascinated by the distinctions between pornography and fine art as well as the practice of becoming an object of fantasy.

In *The Love Motel*, Bloise explores the deception that permeates fantasy in a series of self-portraits taken in hourly motel rooms. His work focuses on the tensions found within ideas of identity and intimacy. In photographing himself, his body becomes an extension of these rooms—rendered vulnerable, nude, and alone. Bloise tests the confines of his own fantasies, staging his self-portraits as temporal constructions manufactured to deceive.

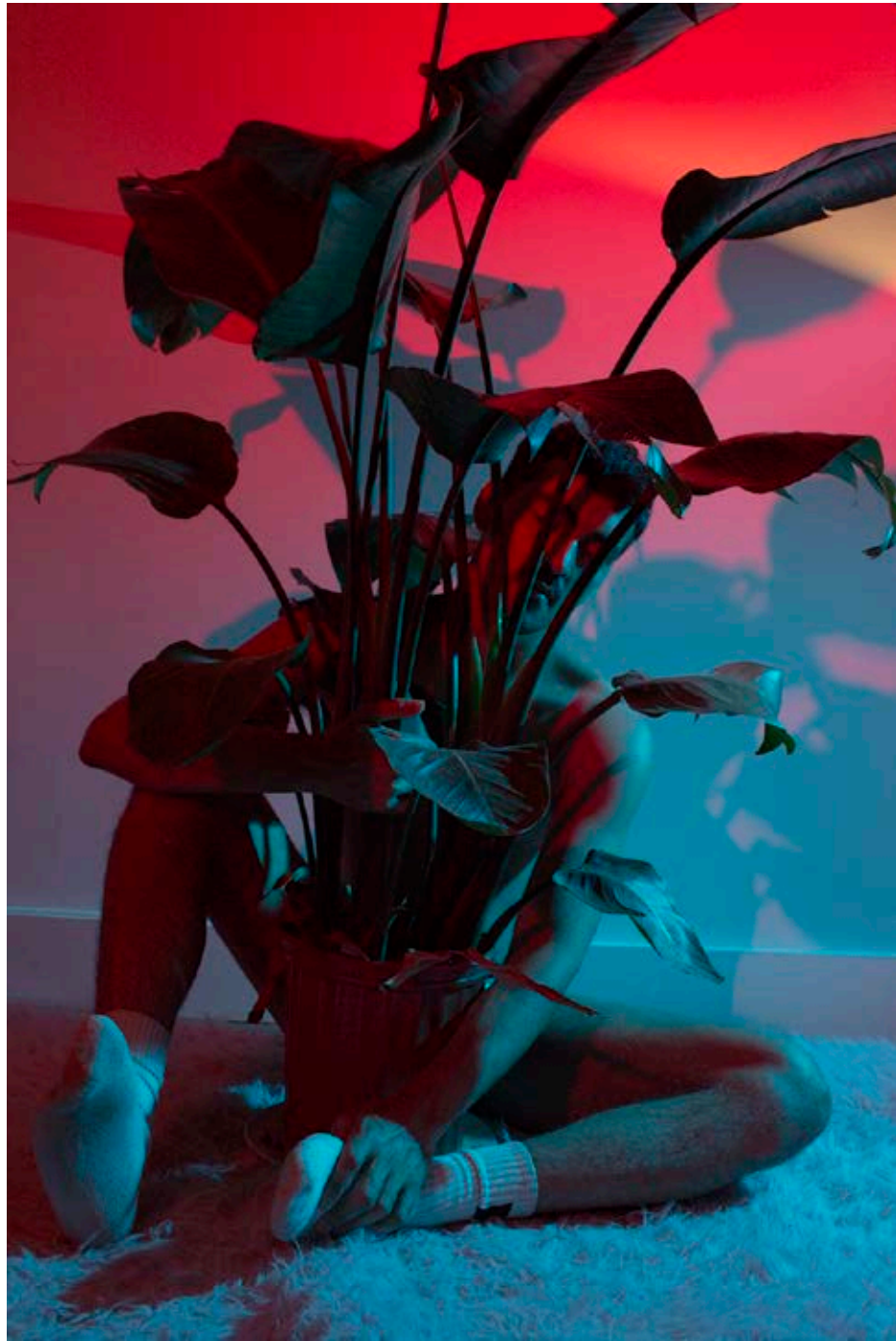
The video installation *Sleeping with Strangers* is a montage of recorded material obtained while the artist spent several nights sleeping on Omegle.com, a website which randomly assigns strangers to stream each other's webcam feeds. Presenting himself in a passive state of sleep, Bloise broadcasts the traditionally intimate act of sleeping for the entirety of the cyber-world to witness. Although in a state of half-consciousness, the artist approached this project as an invitation for interaction.

The ritual of distortion is not one we are unaccustomed to. How often do we modify behaviors and mannerisms to conform to the societal expectations bestowed upon us in a day? Perhaps more usually than we realize. In an environment of my own, the living room, I perform this act of submission, attempting to blurring the lines between performance and reality, portrait and space.

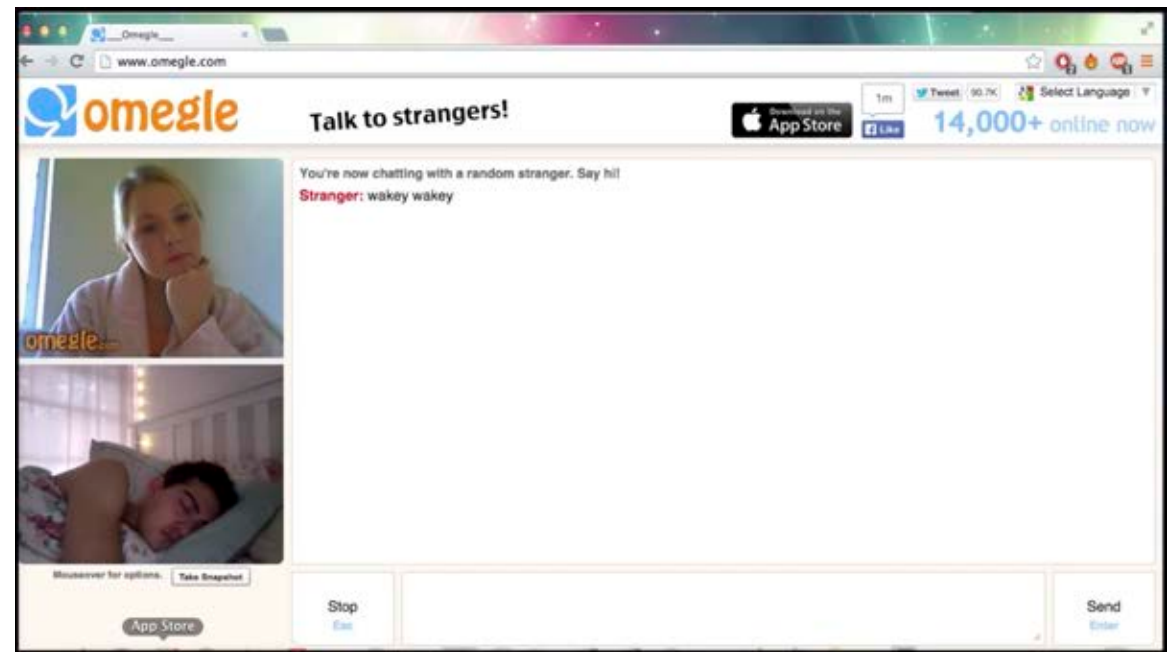
- Nicolas Bloise



Nicolas Bloise, *Love Room #3*, 2015. Archival Pigment Print, 30 × 40 in. Courtesy the artist.



Nicolas Bloise, *In the Living Room (Bird of Paradise)*, 2015. Archival Pigment Print, 30 x 20 in. Courtesy the artist



Nicolas Bloise, *Sleeping with Strangers*, 2014. Single Video, Dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist.

Elliott Brown Jr.

B. 1993, New York, NY

Elliott Jerome Brown Jr. is a conceptual photographer working on ideas related to intimacy, vulnerability, and social perception. In addition to a visual practice, he is also the curator of *DATE NIGHT*, an interdisciplinary exhibition set in private homes. Brown received a BFA in Photography and Imaging from New York University. Group shows include *Shared Subjects*, Spring/Break Art Show, New York, NY (2017); *Lintel, Mantel, Module, Shelf*, La Mama Galleria, New York, NY (2017); *art + crush: Elliott Jerome Brown Jr.*, Platform Gallery, Baltimore, MD (2016); *Respond*, Smack Mellon Gallery, Brooklyn (2015); and *5th Annual Contemporary Photography Exhibition*, Philadelphia Photo Arts Center, Philadelphia (2014).

In the Vein of the Father explores the identities of a father and son, considering how the differences between the two have influenced their relationship and expectations of each other. As a metaphor for their kinship, the multi-channel video presents their individual selves as being both isolated from and parallel to one another. The piece is framed by the son's request for his father's help, and considers the bond that they have forged despite a missed connection, and the strengths and weaknesses of this love.

The resulting images, set within biographical, private, and public spaces, demonstrate how the subjective body is in tension with past and available imagery as well as with politicized representations of the body. In making images, Brown captures a person in a place of presumed comfort, grounding the bizarre or glamorous into a moment that feels lived in; a gesture or pose that speaks to an experience and is less prepared; incorporating an element of ordinary as a way to value the person photographed through several stages of expression; to offset what it means to be respectable and dignified through a picture.



Elliott Jerome Brown Jr., *In the Vein of the Father*, 2015-2016. Three-channel Video, 9:06 minutes. Courtesy the artist.



Elliott Jerome Brown Jr., *What does R.a.g.s stand for*, 2015-2016.
Archival Inkjet Print, 18 × 13 in. Courtesy the artist.

Nona Faustine

B. 1976, Brooklyn, NY

Nona Faustine is a photographer and visual artist born and raised in Brooklyn, NY. She is a graduate of The School of Visual Arts and The International Center of Photography at Bard College's MFA program. Her work focuses on history, identity, and representation, evoking a critical and emotional understanding of the past. Through her work, Faustine proposes a deeper examination of contemporary racial and gender stereotypes.

Faustine's work has been exhibited at the Schomburg Center for Black Research in Harlem, the International Center of Photography, Mana Contemporary in Jersey City, the Studio Museum of Harlem, and The Art Gallery of College of Staten Island CUNY alongside Kara Walker in an exhibition entitled *I can't breathe* (2016). In 2016, she was featured in two solo shows with Smack Mellon and Baxter St. Camera Club in New York City.

Faustine explores issues regarding the black body within photography and history and the inherited legacy of trauma. In her series *White Shoes*, she builds from stereotypes, folklore, and anthropology in order to reconstruct a narrative of race, memory, and history. Using her body as a central component of the landscape, Faustine situates herself within a photographic tradition yet simultaneously questions the very culture that bred that tradition. Her work provides a larger commentary on the American dream, challenging the very ideologies set by our country's founding fathers.

Through self-portraiture, Faustine responds to the politicized bodies of black subjects who were put on display in the early history of photography as examples of inferiority in the pseudoscience of phrenology. In protest and solidarity, the artist stands along with the people whose names have been forgotten and whose contributions remain unacknowledged.



Nona Faustine, *Over My Dead Body*, 2013. Archival Pigment Print, 30 × 40 in. Courtesy the artist.



Nona Faustine, *Isabelle, Lefferts House*, 2016. Archival Pigment Print, 30 × 40 in. Courtesy the artist.

Rindon Johnson

B. 1990, San Francisco, CA

Rindon Johnson is a multidisciplinary artist and writer. Johnson has exhibited and read widely in Europe and the United States. Johnson is the author of “Nobody Sleeps Better Than White People” from Inpatient Press and the virtual reality book, “Meet in the Corner” from Publishing-House.Me. Johnson’s writing has appeared in *Hyperallergic*, *Rhizome*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, and the *Miami Rail*. Together with Sophia Le Fraga, Johnson founded the publication *Imperial Matters*. Johnson is an MFA Candidate in Sculpture at Bard College’s Milton Avery Graduate School for the Arts. Johnson lives primarily in Brooklyn.

NBA 2k16’s facial recognition software can not accurately read and output a black male face. *Away with You* considers the invisibility and malleability of this specific facial recognition software. The artist states, “I scanned in my own face to see what sort of man I could become,” using the face as a template to provide a larger commentary on the public view of one’s own identity. With the background sound of ASMR guided meditation, the video installation features an overlapping series of projections against a backdrop of mesh basketball jersey fabrics.

While living in Berlin all my possessions of any value were stolen. In response, I began to work almost exclusively with free magazines and foto-automats (photo booths). These are my self-portraits from that time period. They incorporate line sketches, photo booth photographs, and found images.

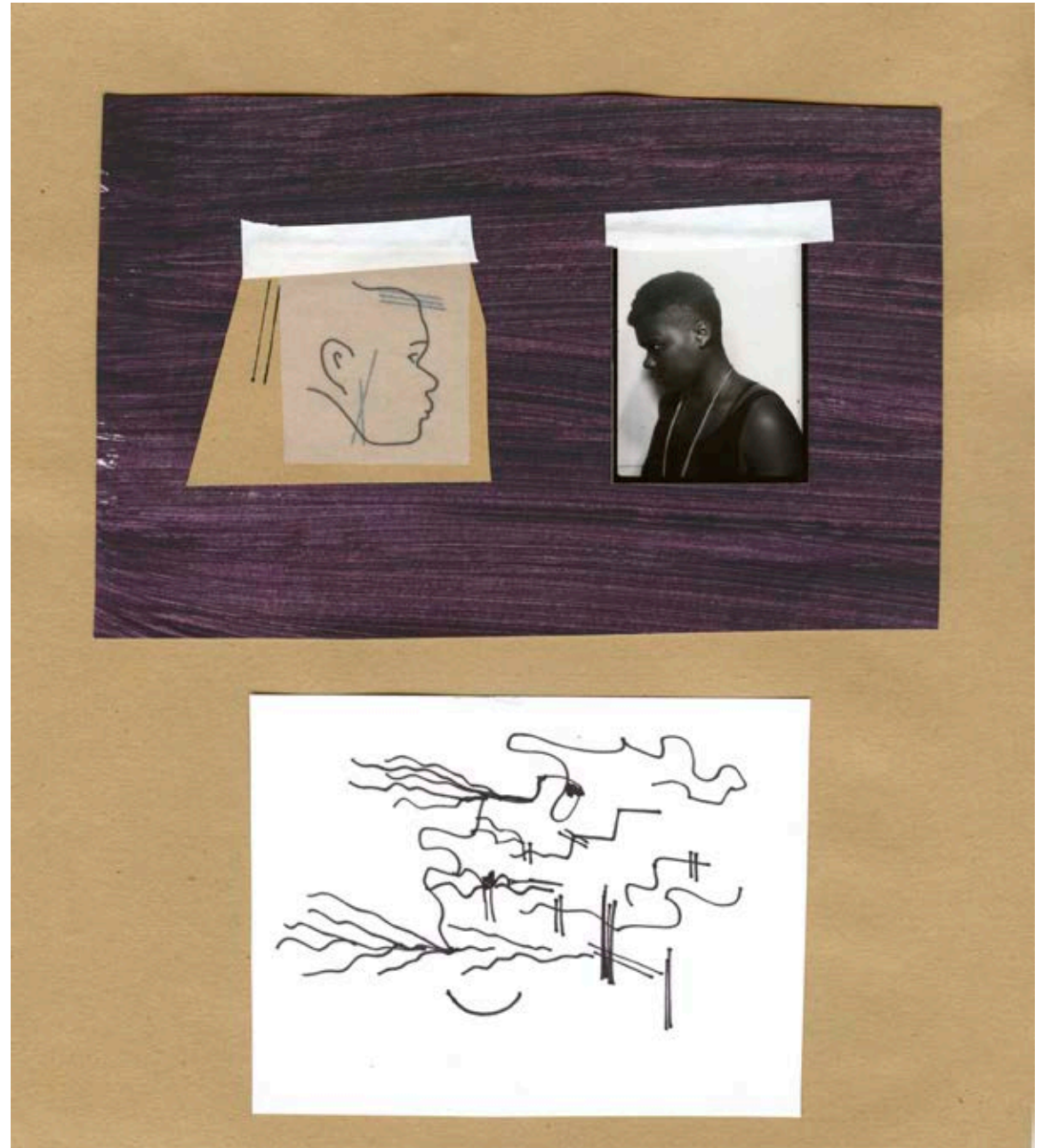
- Rindon Johnson



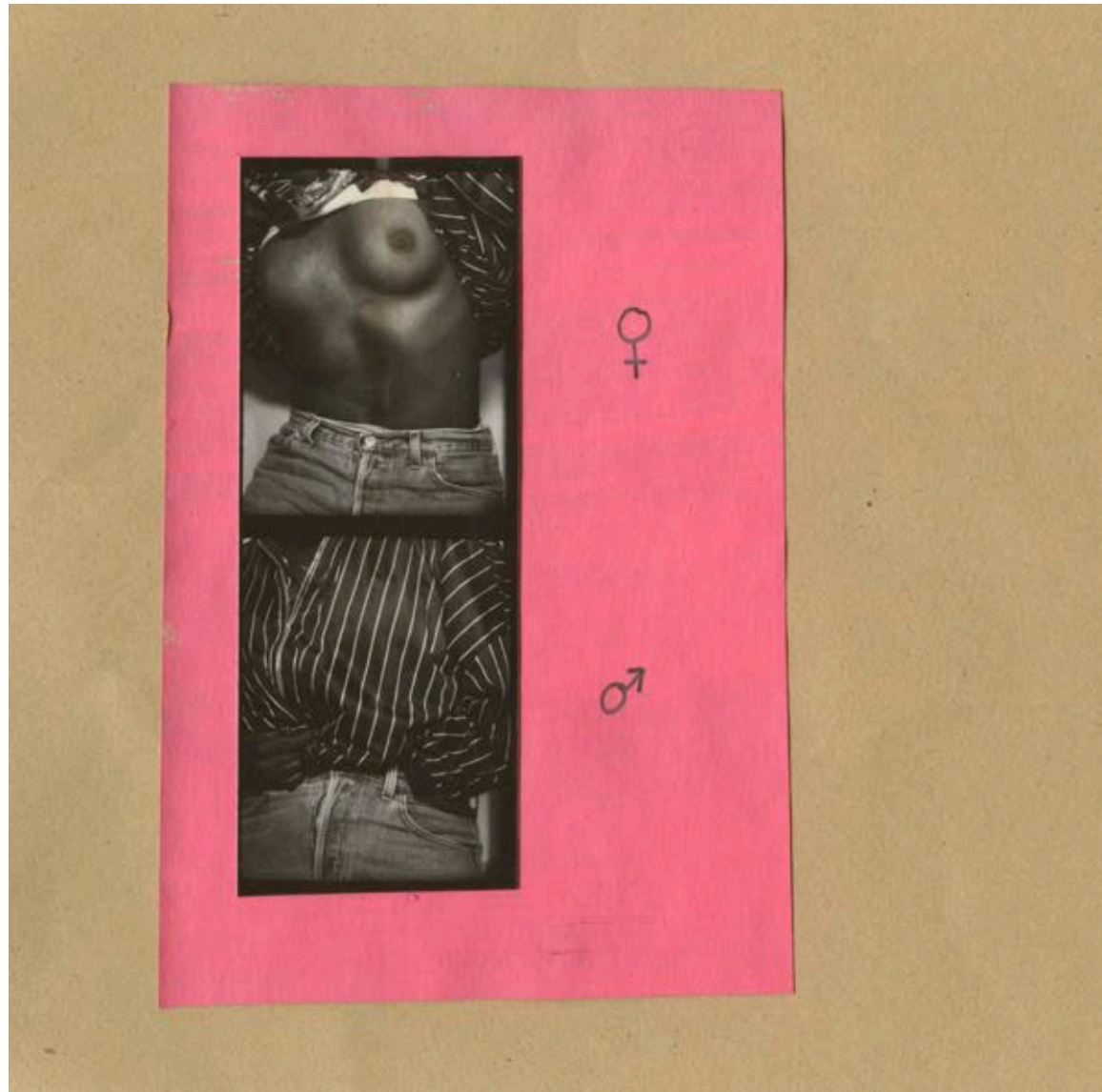
Rindon Johnson, *Away with You*, 2016. Video projection on jersey fabric, Dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist.



Rindon Johnson, *Self Portrait with Help*, 2012. Archival Pigment Print, 7.75 x 6.30 in. Courtesy the artist.



Rindon Johnson, *A New haircut*, 2012. Archival Pigment Print, 8.30 x 7.40 in. Courtesy the artist.



Rindon Johnson, *Identity Crisis*, 2012. Archival Pigment Print, 7.75 × 7.75 in. Courtesy the artist.

Rindon Johnson, *Neat's going away party*, 2012. Archival Pigment Print, 6 × 9.50 in. Courtesy the artist.



Rindon Johnson, *Strong Arm*, 2016. 6x6 Medium Format Film Slide. Courtesy the artist.



Rindon Johnson, *The wind actually carries the litigation II*, 2016. 6x6 Medium Format Film Slide. Courtesy the artist.

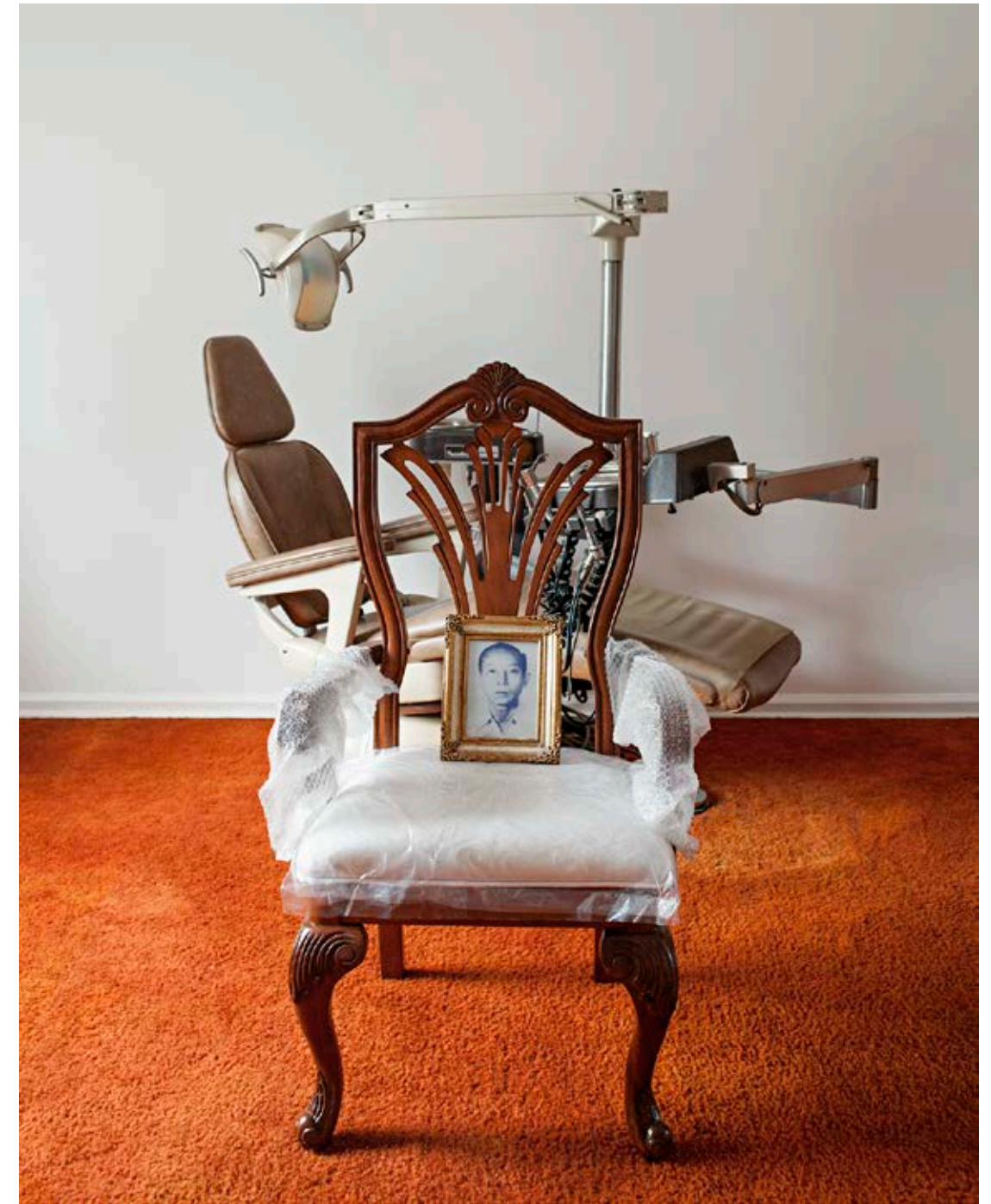
Tommy Kha

B. 1988, Memphis, TN

Tommy Kha is photographer and artist living and working between Brooklyn and Memphis. His work has been published in *Modern Painters*, *Hyperallergic*, *BUTT Magazine*, appeared in Miranda July's "We Think Alone," and has been exhibited in LMAK Gallery, Deli Gallery, and Georgia Scherman Projects. He is a recipient of the En Foco Photography Fellowship, and a former resident at Light Work, Center for Photography in Woodstock, and Fountainhead. He received his MFA in Photography from Yale University.

Tommy Kha's photographs operate within the conventions of the self-portrait, exploring the divide between self-depiction, image, and representation. *Return to Sender* is an ongoing body of work where the artist has asked friends, strangers, lovers, and ex-lovers to kiss him. Without kissing back, the artist deliberately remains stoic and neutral, deliberately presenting himself as a desired object. As of late, the artist has developed the project further by restaging well-known kissing scenes from cinema. In this body of work, Kha not only reflects on his own relationship exposed through the camera, but also examines the performance of social intimacy in a public setting.

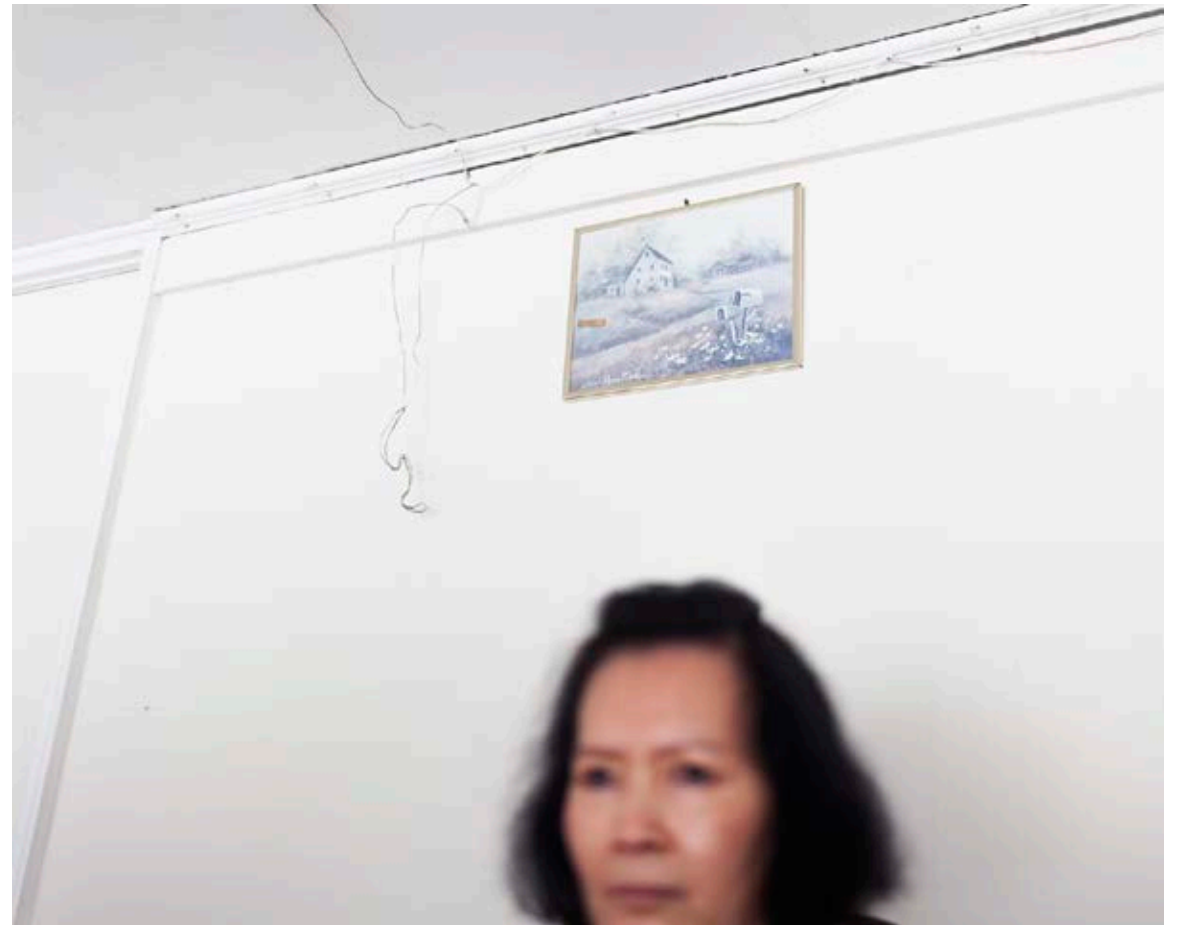
Kha's works primarily focus on the role of photography within queer and Asian spaces, often manifesting through self-portraiture, performance, and humor. In the visual autobiography *A Real Imitation*, Kha creates images of his mother and his hometown. Through this subject matter and setting, the artist explores the need to reveal his Chinese ethnicity and sexuality growing up in Memphis, Tennessee.



Tommy Kha, *Fathertown (or Portrait of My Grandfather I Could Never Make)*, Memphis, TN, 2012. Digital Chromogenic Print, 20 × 16 in. Courtesy the artist.



Tommy Kha, *Facing Towards the Sun*, Memphis, TN, 2013. Digital Chromogenic Print, 16 × 20 in. Courtesy the artist.



Tommy Kha, *Eden*, Memphis, TN, 2015. Digital Chromogenic Print, 16 × 20 in. Courtesy the artist.



Pixy Liao

B. 1979, Shanghai, China

Pixy Liao currently resides in Brooklyn, New York and holds a MFA in photography from University of Memphis. She is a recipient of NYFA Fellowship in photography, En Foco's New Works Fellowship and LensCulture Exposure Awards, etc,. She has completed artist residencies at Pioneer Works, Light Work, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, Center for Photography at Woodstock, and Camera Club of New York. Liao's photographs have been exhibited internationally, including at the He Xiangning Art Museum (China), Museum of Sex (NY), Asia Society (Houston), Leo Xu Projects (China), Flower Gallery (NY), Metro Pictures (NY), First Draft Gallery (Sydney), VT Artsalon (Taiwan), Kips Gallery (Korea), The Running Horse Contemporary Art Space (Lebanon), Format (UK), Noorderlicht (Netherlands), among others.

As a woman brought up in China, I used to think I could only love someone who is older and more mature than I, who can be my protector and mentor. Then I met my current boyfriend, Moro. Since he is 5 years younger than I am, I felt that whole concept of relationships changed, all the way around. I became the person who has more authority and power. One of my male friends even questioned how I could choose a boyfriend the way a man would choose a girlfriend. And I thought, 'Damn right. That's exactly what I'm doing, and why not!'

I started to experiment with this relationship. I would set up all kinds of situations for Moro and me to perform in the photos. My photos explore the alternative possibilities of heterosexual relationships. They question: What is the norm of heterosexual relationships? What will happen if man and woman exchange their roles of sex and roles of power? Because my boyfriend is Japanese, and I am Chinese, this project also describes a love and hate relationship.

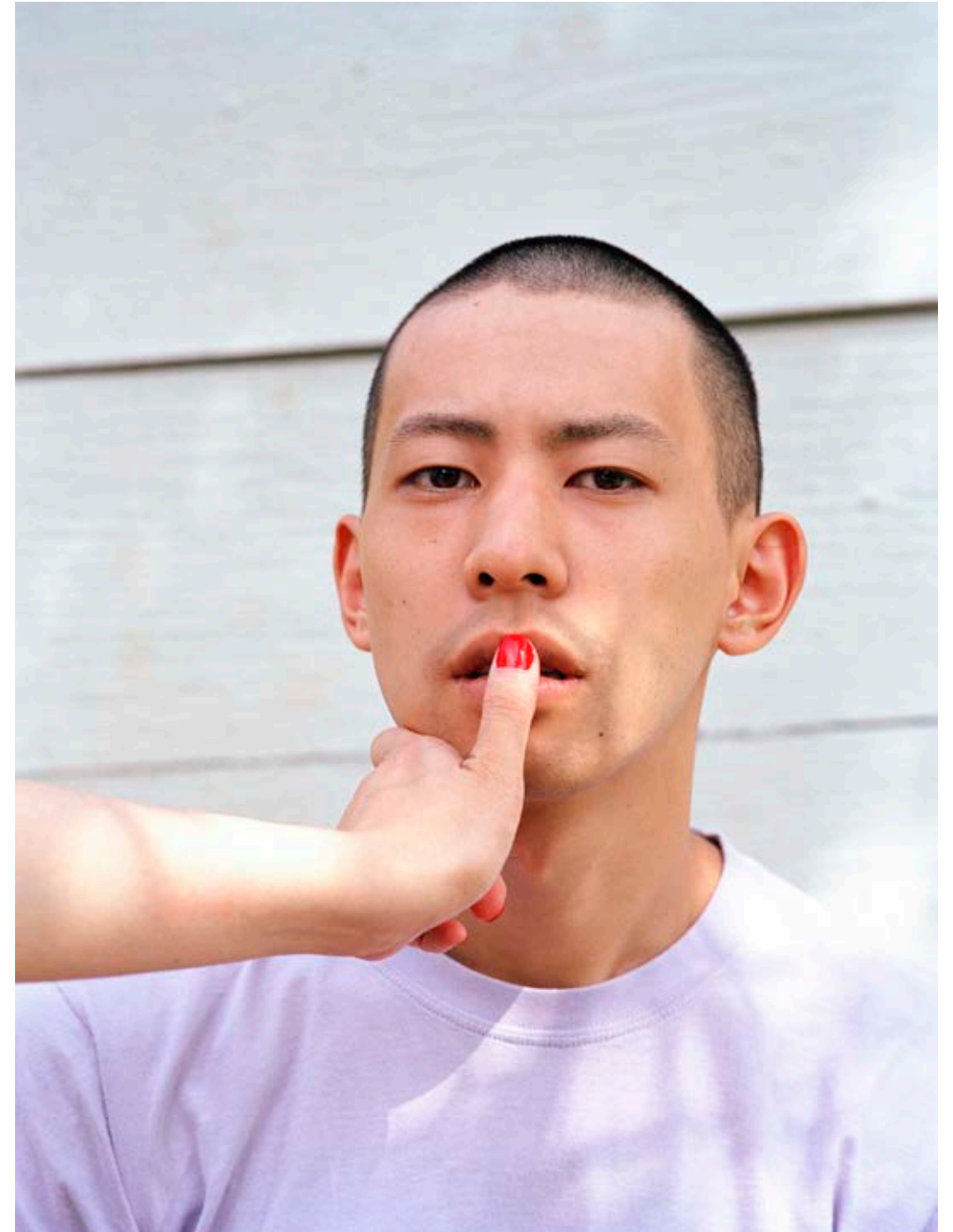
- Pixy Liao



Pixy Liao, *Creating a world just for us*, 2013. Digital Chromogenic Print, 18 x 24 in. Courtesy the artist.



Pixy Liao, *Start Your Day With a Good Breakfast Together*, 2009. Digital Chromogenic Print, 16 × 20 in. Courtesy the artist.



Pixy Liao, *Hush, Baby*, 2010. Digital Chromogenic Print, 20 x 16 in. Courtesy the artist.



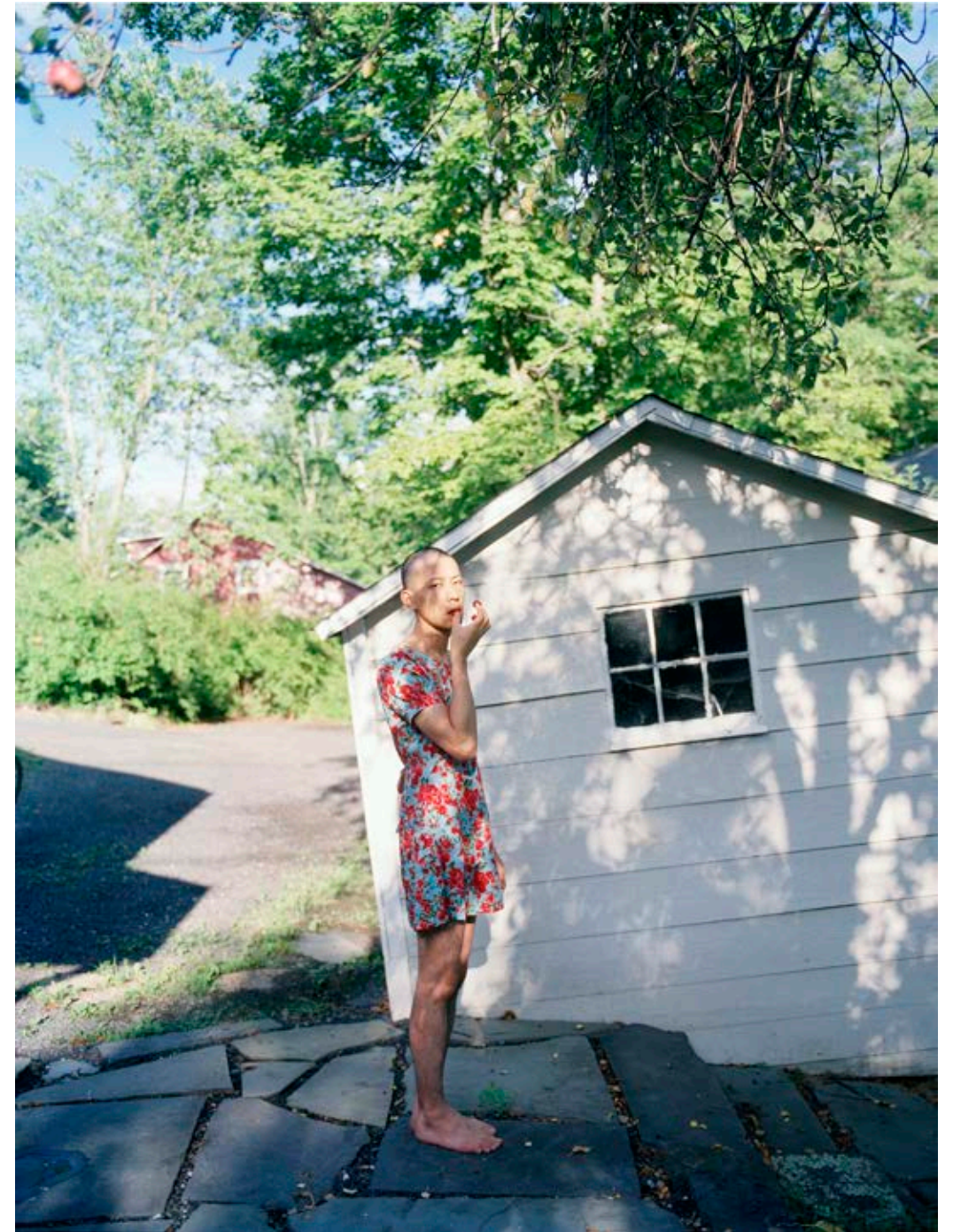
Pixy Liao, *The King Under Me*, 2011. Digital Chromogenic Print, 16 × 20 in. Courtesy the artist.



Pixy Liao, *Try to live like a pair of Siamese twins*, 2009. Digital Chromogenic Print, 40 × 30 in. Courtesy the artist.



Pixy Liao, *Relationships work best when each partner knows their proper place*, 2008. Digital Chromogenic Print, 40 × 30 in. Courtesy the artist.



Pixy Liao, *You don't have to be a boy to be my boyfriend*, 2010. Digital Chromogenic Print, 20 × 16 in. Courtesy the artist.

Matthew Morrocco

B. 1989, Providence, Rhode Island

Matthew Morrocco is a fine art photographer whose work examines the tension between sexuality and intimacy. His work engages heavily with themes of history, aging, sexuality and isolation. Morrocco received a BA in Philosophy from New York University's Gallatin School of Individualized Study and an MFA from Columbia University. He is a 2016 New York Foundation for the Arts fellow and has participated in the Picture Berlin Residency Program.

For this show, the artist has created a site-specific installation of his *Self Portrait with Rodney I* and *Self Portrait with Rodney II* in the two windows of the gallery, creating a light box illuminated by the sun. Morrocco pictures intergenerational subjects and mirrors in order to visually demonstrate virtual reproducibility and connect the dots of human history in search of the unattainable self.

The mirror, as we know it today, was invented in the early 19th century, shortly before Niepce and Daguerre started to fix images to paper. Long before iphones and the internet, mirrors and photographs gave humanity itself- the long sought and rarely found subject. Every technology- from the telescope that proved the earth moves around the sun, to corporeal evolutions like childbirth, to mirrors and photographs-facilitates self-reflection. The sun can tell us what time it is like photographs tell us time has passed. Family relations reflect back at us like mirrors, the phone camera gave us selfies.

- Matthew Morrocco



Matthew Morrocco, *Self Portrait of Rodney I*, 2015. Inkjet Print on window pane, Dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist.



Matthew Morrocco, *Self Portrait with Rodney II*, 2015, Inkjet Print on window pane, Dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist.

Bryson Rand

B. 1982, Phoenix, AZ

Bryson Rand lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. He received a BFA from the University of Colorado in 2004, an MAT in Art Education from School of Visual Arts in 2009, and an MFA in photography from Yale School of Art in 2015. Bryson had his first solo show, *Some Small Fever*, at La MaMa Galleria in 2017 which was accompanied by a book of the same name, published by *Raw Meat Collective*. His work is part of the Leslie Lohman Museum collection as well as the private collections of Bill Arning and Chuck Close, among others.

I came into grad school with notions of becoming a street photographer; Somewhere along the line, I convinced myself it that was the most legitimate approach to making pictures. Throughout school, I was attempting to fashion myself as a gay Lee Friedlander. At the same time, I started creating images of men in their homes, scheduling times to meet, directing the participants as I worked. I was learning that I could create a world that felt unique to the experiences I was sharing with the men who were posing for me rather than hunting for some small reflection of myself in what David Wojnarowicz called the 'PRE-INVENTED WORLD'. Fighting to work within the definitions and expectations set out by straight white men, I shrug much of that baggage off in order to begin forging my own path. The miniscule shadow reflected in the mirror speaks to the sense of smallness and compression I feels under the weight of a legacy I admire but also feel outside of.

- Bryson Rand



Bryson Rand, *Untitled (Los Angeles)*, 2014. Archival Pigment Print, 17 × 12 in. Courtesy the artist.

Paul Sepuya

B. 1982, San Bernardino, CA

Paul Mpagi Sepuya lives and works in Los Angeles. He received his MFA from the University of California Los Angeles in 2016 and a BFA from New York University Tisch School of the Arts in 2004. Sepuya has participated in residencies at Hyde Park Arts Center, Chicago, 2014; Fire Island Artist Residency, 2013; Studio Museum in Harlem, 2010; Center for Photography at Woodstock, 2010; and Workspace, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, 2009. Sepuya was the recipient of the 2017 Rema Hort Mann, Los Angeles Emerging Artist Grant. Sepuya's work has been featured in numerous exhibitions including at the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles; The Studio Museum in Harlem; Franklin Art Works, Minneapolis; and the Artist Institute, New York.

Paul Mpagi Sepuya's work is rooted in portraiture, homoerotic visual culture, and the role of the studio. His highly crafted photographs, in which his subjects are often revealed in fragments, alert us to the artifice and performance that are an integral part of the photographic process. Thus a constant negotiation is created between the artist, the sitter, the viewer, and the work itself.

Describing his subjects as a cast of friends, intimates, and muses, Sepuya sees these relationships as being mediated by the making and production of photographs. Using a combination of draped fabric, careful framing, and layering of images of his previous work, the viewer sees arms, thighs, torsos, and hands, but rarely the whole of the subject's body. Through shooting into his studio mirror, Sepuya draws his varied source materials together into one plane. His deliberately provocative approach is designed to create a feeling of longing within the viewer, to see what is concealed. This form of active looking implicates the viewer within the creative process, and highlights the role of desire as a productive and critical force.



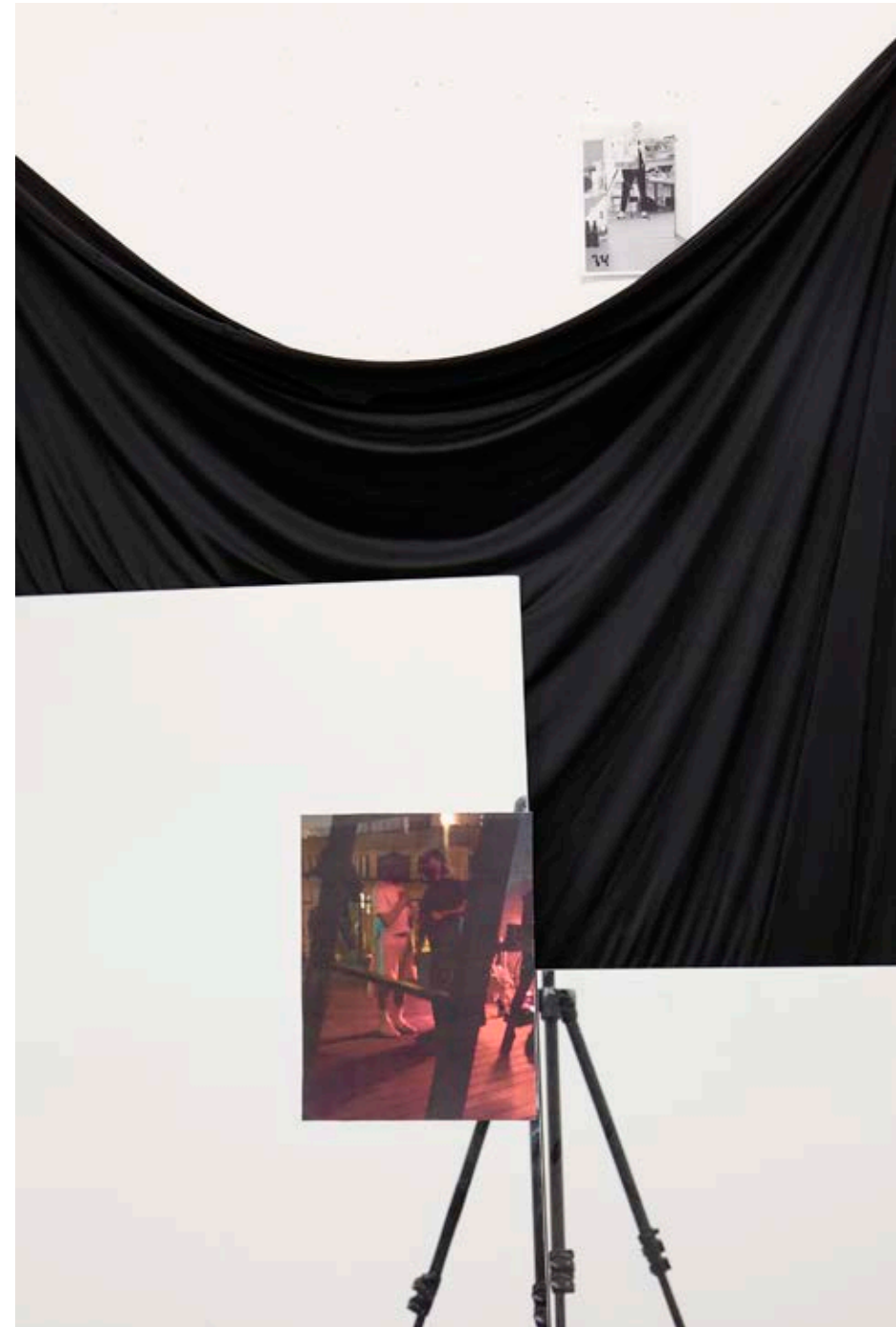
Paul Mpagi Sepuya, *Mirror Study (MG_1237)*, 2017. Archival Pigment Print, 51 × 34 in.
© Paul Mpagi Sepuya, courtesy of the artist and Yancey Richardson Gallery.



Paul Mpagi Sepuya, *Draping* (IMG6936), 2015. Archival Pigment Print, 13.33 × 10 in.
© Paul Mpagi Sepuya, courtesy of the artist and Yancey Richardson Gallery.



Paul Mpagi Sepuya, *Darkroom* (91980970), 2016. Archival Pigment Print, 13.33 × 10 in.
© Paul Mpagi Sepuya, courtesy of the artist and Yancey Richardson Gallery.



Paul Mpagi Sepuya, *Untitled Study (4R2A9181)*, 2016. Archival Pigment Print, 13.33 × 10 in. © Paul Mpagi Sepuya, courtesy of the artist and Yancey Richardson Gallery.

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Discursive Selves, the exhibition and accompanying catalog, was made possible through the support of Art + Commerce.

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Printed and bound in the United States.

ISBN 978-0-692-92026-8

This book is published on the occasion of the exhibition *Discursive Selves*, held at Westbeth Gallery, New York, July 21 – August 11, 2017, and curated by Eric Lawton and Daphne Takahashi.

Westbeth Gallery
55 Bethune Street
New York, NY 10014
westbeth.org

This exhibition has been generously supported by Art + Commerce.

Special thanks to Nadine Javier Shah and Philippe Brutus.

Book design by Eric Lawton

Text edited by Daphne Takahashi

This book is typeset in Gotham and printed on 100lb. Mohawk Superfine Eggshell Ultrawhite Text and 100lb. Cadet Grey CLASSIC® Techweave (cover).

Printing and binding by GSB Digital, New York.

Additional thanks to all the participating artists, Helena Anrather, Karin Batten, Isolde Brielmaier, Jane Cavalier, David Chan, George Cominskie, Steven Dam, Danielle Fee, Abby Heath, Michael Van Horne, Marina Jordan, Katherine & Richard Lawton, Rachel Lawton-Colman, Paul McAdory, Pia Mileaf-Patel, Sophia Orlow, Alex Pigeon, Yancey Richardson, David & Emily Takahashi, Melody Takahashi, Maximilian Thümler, Maya Ward, and Matthew Whitworth.

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