Photographs about Black Experiences in America and Lost Identity

Ernest Entsie
Dickinson College

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Photographs about Black Experiences in America and Lost Identity

By
Ernest Entsie

Submitted in partial fulfillment of Honors Requirements for the Department of Art and Art History

Anthony Cervino, Supervisor
Rachel Eng, Supervisor
Todd Arsenault, Reader
Andy Bale, Reader

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Conversations around race tend to be a topic that western society tend to stray away from. Progress or understanding cannot be achieved without an open dialogue. I strive to get these difficult conversations about race started through my use of photography. I mostly draw from my own personal experiences and those of my fellow black individuals. My work prior to my recent body of work had been non-alienating topics because I envisioned my photography to be an escape for others and me. But that changed at the beginning of this academic semester. I wanted to touch and speak about the countless experiences that people of the African Diaspora are presented with in predominately white or western societies in addition to lost identities.

In my photographs, I want my primary focus to be my combination of light and darkness and colors in my photography. I meticulously construct my images in a way to draw in people then later hit them with the heavy topic as an aftermath. This way, they can be drawn into engaging in the difficult conversations/think about them. As an artist dealing with such alienating topics, being explicit can quickly lose audience. And my work-around that was being discreet most times. The subject matter in Will I Make It (2021) can easily be overlooked but once discovered, the viewer questions why they are in such position. That is when the meaning of the pose is presented to viewer, which was about the idea of the “black tax”.

Working in COVID restrictions on campus forced me to become the subject matter of my photos. There are a few times where I fall into my comfort zone where I went ahead to work with others. Token (2020) and Only Us (2020) reflect that. To push myself further, I began to explore different processes alone, especially in the second semester. I play around with different shutter speeds with the subject in motion. My first successful experimentation was Trauma (2020), a triptych. To emulate a feeling of entrapment, I use light, darkness, colors, and subject matter in
motion to my advantage. The bar shadows are created with the use of a chair in front of a spotlight in a studio room. *Loving Myself* (2021) and *Finding Myself* (2021) take process experimentation further where it draws from Andres Serrano’s *Piss Christ*. *Finding Myself* (2021) show the figure hands spread out and in motion and feels like they are evaporating. The warm color in the piece feels like a crucifixion or sacrifice taking place as it draws on the colors of fire.

Towards the second half of the second semester, I noticed a lot of images were constructed with the presence or assistance of mirrors. *Trauma* (2021), for instance, was created with the help of a mirror where my camera was at an angle looking at the mirror as I stood at a different angle. *Obsession* (2020) had a similar execution where I lay a mirror on the ground as the subject stood on a table above where the light source was present. I played around with mirrors to allude to the notion of reflection. Mirrors are often used to reflect on self-appearance and how we would present or look like to others. I wanted to dig deeper into some of these countless black experiences that was centered around reflection. Using mirrors from variety of perspectives, I created *Am I Allowed?* (2021), *To Be Or Not To Be?* (2021), and *Might Be My Last Night* (2021) as a series for me to make a commentary on the intersectionality of black and queer identity.

Ultimately, a lot of my photographs feels like they have been pulled from a larger body of works. I intentionally touched on a lot of topics because I had a lot to say. And I wanted my viewer to want more from me as a I did with my *Obsession* (2020) piece. I plan on revisiting these topics and delving more into them to create an even larger body of work. For me, it was important to get my ideas out in the open in my most aspect of my work. These photographs
serve as the foundation of what I want and how I want my photographs to venture into with my work.
Images

1. The Day I Fear, 2020, photography, 13.333 in × 20 in
2. All I have, 2021, photography, 13.867 in x 20.8 in
3. Disco ball, 2021, photography, 13.867 in x 20.8 in
4. Will I Make It?, 2020, photography, 16.517 in x 24.775 in
5. America Vs. Me, 2020, photography, 55.553 in x 55.553 in
6. The Talk, 2020, photography, 7.4 in x 4.933 in
7. Another Gone, 2020, photography, 20.158 in x 17.333 in
8. Only Us, 2020, photography, 17.78 in x 22.21 in
9. Token, 2020, photography, 24.665 in x 28.43 in
10. Obsession, 2020, photography, 25 in x 16.667 in
11. Void, 2020, photography, 25 in x 16.667 in
12. Getting Through It All, 2021, photography, 24.666 in x 16.443 in
13. Finding Myself, 2021, photography, 13.868 in x 18.088 in
14. Loving Myself, 2021, photography, 13.823 in x 19.267 in
15. Trauma (1/3), 2021, photography, 17.777 in x 26.667 in
16. Trauma (2/3), 2021, photography, 17.777 in x 26.667 in
17. Trauma (3/3), 2021, photography, 17.777 in x 26.667 in
18. Am I Allowed?, 2021, photography, 17.777 in x 26.667 in
19. To Be Or Not To Be?, 2021, photography, 17.777 in x 26.667 in
20. Might Be My Last Night, 2021, photography, 17.777 in x 26.667 in