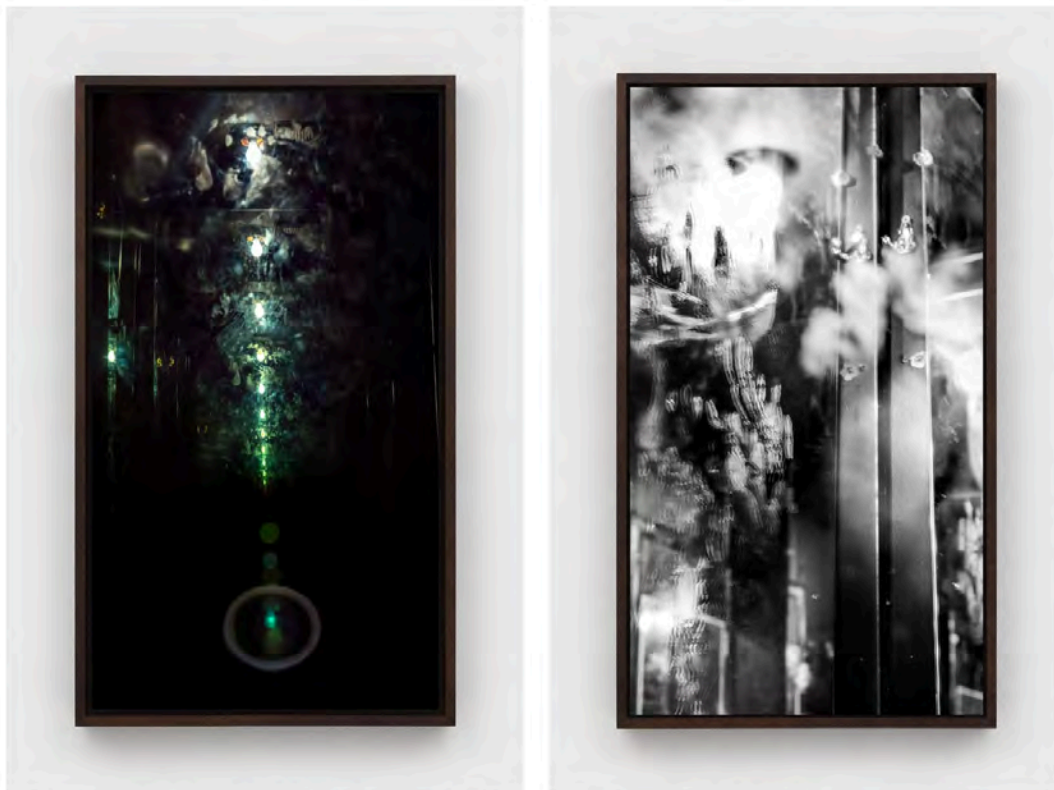


Payal Uttam

On the rise at Art Basel in Basel

In this year's Statements sector, seven young artists dig deep into history and longing



Left: Elliott Jerome Brown Jr., No Title, 2022. Right: Elliott Jerome Brown Jr., No Title, 2022. Courtesy of Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York City.

Elliott Jerome Brown Jr.
Nicelle Beauchene Gallery

Elliott Jerome Brown Jr. photographs people from unusual angles, with their backs to the camera or with their faces partially concealed from view. The New York-based artist is fascinated by the idea of interiority, both within individuals and domestic spaces. By deliberately withholding information, he affords his subjects control over how they appear within the frame. Often a tension exists in his prints between privacy and the resistance to representation, and opening up and allowing vulnerability. On view at the fair is a new series of ethereal images, including tender portraits and a large sculptural work featuring a series of recessed, back-lit prints.

**Five Photographers
to Watch**

**Elliott Jerome Brown Jr.
Koral Carballo
Marcel Pardo Ariza
Paul Niedermayer
Cameron Ugbodu**

In Focus

Five contributors and *frieze* editors nominate a young photographer whose work excites and intrigues them. The selection demonstrates the breadth of ways young artists use the medium to abstract the figure, explore notions of gender and selfhood, find the extraordinary in the everyday and articulate complex interpersonal dynamics.

Elliott Jerome Brown Jr.
uses photography
and sculpture to visualize
intimacy, communion
and self-possession

Selected by *Terence Trouillot*,
senior editor of *frieze*.



From top to bottom

Elliott Jerome Brown Jr., *What was it you said about mirrors? Wonderful and overcome? Passive, dumbfounded? I can't remember, but I know I won't have the opportunity to hold yours again*, 2020, UV-laminated archival inkjet print, 81×101 cm. All images courtesy: the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York

Elliott Jerome Brown Jr., *Knotted in communion, three times over and without boundary*, 2020, UV-laminated archival inkjet print, 52×99 cm

Elliott Jerome Brown Jr., *Stoking the flame of a prayer made six years ago*, 2020, UV-laminated archival inkjet print, 32×99 cm

Opposite page

Elliott Jerome Brown Jr., *Slow want*, 2020, UV-laminated archival inkjet print, 40×30 cm

Elliott Jerome Brown Jr. is a queer Black American artist and photographer. In 2019, they received an Emerging Visual Arts Grant from The Rema Hort Mann Foundation, New York, USA. They show with Nicelle Beauchene Gallery in New York.





Elliott Jerome

WORDS

Ferren Gipson

Selected by WePresent guest curator Solange Knowles

When studying at NYU, artist Elliott Jerome Brown Jr. worked on a brief that ignited a curiosity within him regarding photography and the notion of privacy. Alongside his personal work exploring these themes, he also shoots editorials for magazines, and takes portraits of some of the world's biggest artists. His work has been selected by Solange Knowles as part of her guest curatorship for WePresent. Here, he speaks to art historian and writer Ferren Gipson about the ideas that inform his practice.

"Elliott Jerome photographs with a masterful force that permits the viewer to imagine worlds and narratives for his portraits. His work demonstrates an expressionist, storytelling style that is resonant and reviving. I've always connected with the emotional visibility and Blackness' plural presence in his work. There's a multi- dimensional spirit to his art and I recognize myself in the vulnerability of his subjects."

– Solange Knowles



Elliott Jerome Brown Jr. describes having a “sensitivity for space” that stems from his experiences growing up in Long Island, New York. He recalls visiting his maternal and paternal grandparents’ homes and observing how their interiors aligned with the different personalities and habits of each resident. One home was pristine and tidy, the other filled with boxes and less orderly. Brown Jr. now views these domestic spaces as offering ways of understanding the people that inhabited them.

“It could be used as an entry point into thinking about how they raise their families, what they choose not to share, what they evade,” says Brown Jr., speaking from his maternal grandparents’ living room. “I think, based on the way that they organize space, those behaviors and interpersonal dynamics have a metaphor.”

“Photographing in a space where people choose privacy or anonymity means that you show up with a different toolset.”

Elliott Jerome Brown Jr.

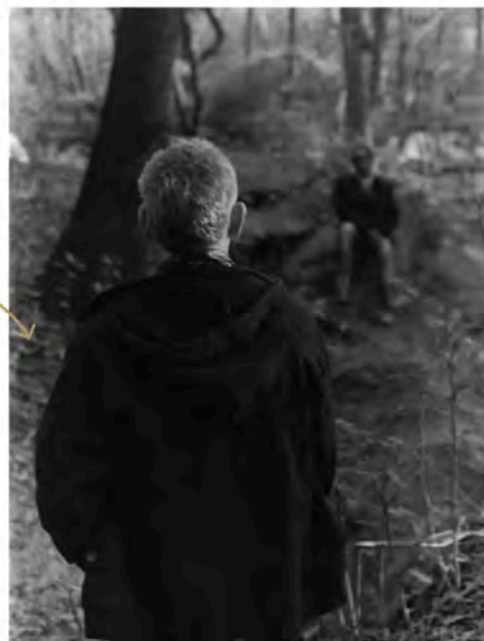
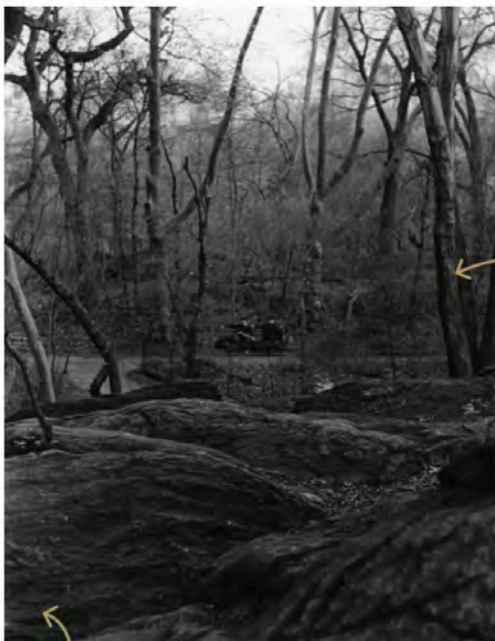
From around age 10, he began to take an interest in photography as a way of documenting objects and people. He took pictures of items he wanted at the mall or close-up shots of family, with no particular artistic objective in mind. At this time, he mainly associated art with painting and felt disconnected from it as a subject and practice. This shifted when, in high school, a friend told him she aspired to become a fashion photographer. Referencing the show “America’s Next Top Model,” she explained what the career entailed, and Brown Jr. was sold. From then, he was more intentional in the way he captured images as he embarked on his own journey towards the same goal.

After enrolling at NYU, a professor encouraged Brown Jr. to think more broadly about his practice. The teacher pressed the students (many of whom were interested in fashion photography) to focus on how they saw the world, which could then be transferred to their work. “That led me to thinking about my gender, thinking about my sexuality, and thinking about my Blackness, and wanting to create a theater of that experience,” he says.

His work
comments on our
perception of
space



He first explored these themes through a pseudo-documentary about the Ramble in Central Park. This is a wooded area historically associated with, both, birdwatching and gay cruising. Brown Jr. conceived the project at a time when he was exploring his own sexuality. Having first learned about cruising in an informal class discussion, he decided felt inspired to create work around it.



“Photographing in a space where people choose privacy or anonymity means that you show up with a different toolset,” says Brown Jr. “That project helped me develop tools that are maintained in my practice now, but they had developed for a completely different intention at that point: photographing people with their backs turned, photographing people from a distance, photographing the space at large and maybe layering the space and layering people and the environment overlapping them.”

In this project, he photographed people in pursuit of private moments carried out in public. Brown Jr. took care not to reveal their identities, thus maintaining discretion while also shining a light on the person. It is here that we begin to see the thematic push-and-pull between public and private—as well as closeness and distance—that continues to be a central feature in his work. The “layering” he refers to also recurs in different ways—sometimes through depicting objects and people at varying distances or by using mirrors, which creates images within images. Mirrors also work to create distance between the person in the photograph and the viewer by showing a likeness of a likeness, rather than a direct image of a person—another sort of distance.



His art explores
the storytelling
potential of
objects and spaces



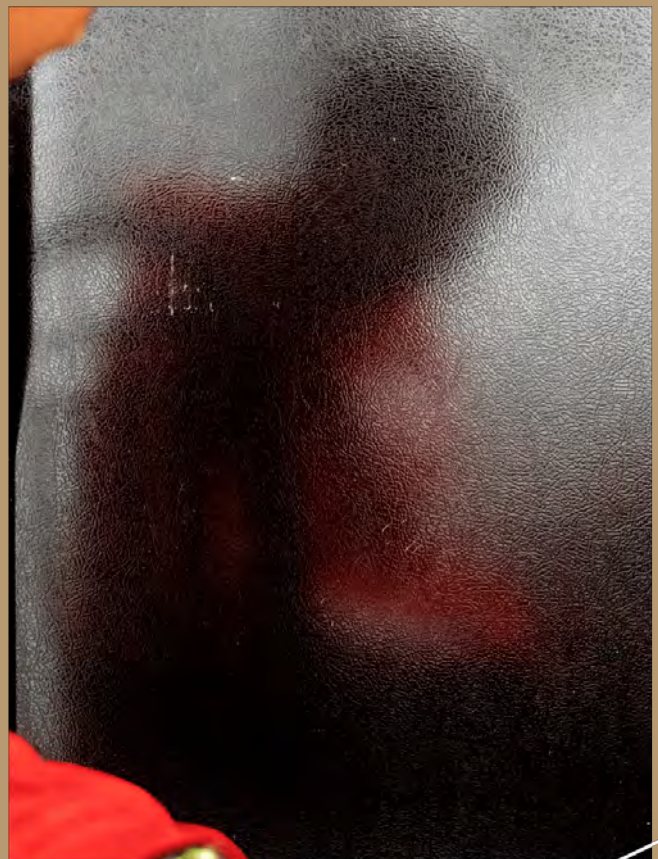
After encountering the photography of Deana Lawson, Brown Jr. began to reflect on how he could capture others in a way that allowed for varied expressions of dignity and self. Rather than drawing on classical art historical references to represent Black sitters as he saw some artists do, he felt there was an opportunity to portray people in a way that incorporated their personal visual languages. When he spent time with family and friends—often in their homes—his camera was at the ready. The observations he made about interior spaces in his childhood and his learnings from shooting the Ramble coalesced as he started to showcase people in personal, domestic spaces. Still, he maintained a sense of distance, by sometimes showing partial views of figures or withholding context from the viewer. To create captions or titles for some portraits, he might focus on a detail and imagine a narrative around it, creating an alternative reality. These texts, therefore, disorient the viewer and can only be trusted as inclinations of what *could* be happening, and not necessarily what is taking place.

“Now, I’m more interested in resuscitating privacy towards powerful means.”

“It’s about realizing something in this person’s likeness, or this environment, has the potential to indicate and less so about how these works become representative of any one individual,” he says.

As Brown Jr. has immersed himself in investigating varied ways of seeing the world, big brands and publications have taken notice. Among his many accomplishments, he’s shot editorials for *W* magazine and *Dazed*, captured stunning portraits of Solange and Janelle Monáe, and has photographed major campaigns for TELFAR. These collaborations challenge him to work outside of his usual practice, where he typically eschews strict biographies, and he takes the opportunity to connect with individuals to understand how they would like to be represented.

His work invites the audience to participate and engage





The themes of privacy and distance in Brown Jr.'s earlier work have shifted slightly to concepts of power and boundaries as he explores the relationship dynamics that go into making personal revelations. "I think earlier the privacy and the withholding was in the service of people who were traumatized and people who were at risk," says Brown Jr. "Now, I'm more interested in resuscitating privacy towards powerful means."

In his recent work, he engages with these ideas through a series of three-dimensional structures that incorporate photography. For one piece, Brown Jr. installed a white cube in a gallery. At a distance, it appears blank, but as viewers approach, photographs printed in white pearlescent ink reveal themselves on the sides. A rectangular recess going back 20 inches conceals a black-and-white photograph of a man's smiling face with the arm of another person resting on his head. It's joyful and intriguing, but Brown Jr. once again withholds the full image and story, leaving the moment private. These choices empower the people he photographs and establish boundaries for the viewer, as we are only allowed to see a limited amount. The work embodies the change in Brown Jr.'s approach to privacy and is an exciting glimpse into where his work is heading.

When asked what he'd like viewers to understand about his work, Brown Jr. emphasizes the positive connection between power and boundaries: "Distance is often read as a thing to challenge," he says. "I want to develop a relationship [with distance] with a view of strength."



Four Studies of Black Healing

April 2, 2021

Care and community take different forms after a painful year of plague and protest.

By Gioncarlo Valentine and Elliott Jerome Brown Jr.

After a year of disproportionate loss from the pandemic and the continuous threat of police violence, on top of centuries of discrimination and disenfranchisement, what does healing look like for Black Americans? The photographers Gioncarlo Valentine and Elliott Jerome Brown Jr. traveled to Virginia, the Carolinas, Louisiana and Georgia looking for answers to that question — reaching out to friends and family, artists and organizations along the way. They sought to document the rituals and relationships that create space for joy, solace and restoration.

View & read the two chapters of this digital online:

Chapter 3

[Space](#)

Locating the restorative properties of physical place.

Chapter 4

[Care](#)

Leaving a mark of love.



"Tom taking a shower." Photo courtesy of Elliott Jerome Brown Jr. and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery.

Artists Elliott Jerome Brown Jr. and Zalika Azim on exploring time, space and the Black body

The pair discuss self-portraiture, the importance of exhibiting art in the communities where it's made and their latest exhibition at Welancora Gallery in Brooklyn.

i-D

In a beautiful 19th Century brownstone in Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant neighbourhood sits Ivy N. Jones's Welancora Gallery — a designated space for guest curators to organise exhibitions of artists from around the world. Her current show, curated with New York City-based artist Damien Davis, features photographs, ephemera and a performance by Elliott Jerome Brown Jr., Zalika Azim, Colette Veasey-Cullors, Melvin Harper, Daonne Huff, Anders Jones and Deborah Willis, that aims to unpack the assumptions and expectations about spaces inhabited by the Black body.

Here, photographer Elliott Jerome Brown Jr. and conceptual artist Zalika Azim sit down to discuss their work, home and the importance of exhibiting art in the communities in which it's made.

Zalika Azim: We met in 2011, I had just transferred from the San Francisco Art Institute to come back home and join the photo department of New York University. I don't know if it was in class or in the hallways?

Elliott Jerome Brown Jr.: There were very few Black people in the photo department, but because Deborah Willis is the head there's a certain tone throughout the halls so you don't feel as isolated. Zalika, you're certainly a stand out woman, confident with such a command to your walk. Your thesis show had a huge impact on me and so many of us in the department. It really shocked and galvanised us.

My thesis show was me jumping off the ledge a little bit because for the first couple of weeks, I came into school with two huge suitcases of family photographs that I had just found. I was really thinking about the importance of the home space, community building and about what the possibilities of the gallery space could look like. I got a bit of pushback because most people on the program were doing more traditional documentary work, which is the work I came in doing. It shifted when I started thinking about how Black and brown people specifically have used the camera to shift what their narrative had been previously.

You were doing the work of investigating yourself and the context that brings you, your family and others like you to the fore. You are still supported and stabilised by that inquiry, whereas my primary issue with the way that others practice photography is this inclination to tell others stories. Mind your own fucking business and tell your own story.

Your work has changed so much. When we were in school your images were mostly of yourself — your physical body in proximity to others and spaces that you were looking to question or unpack. It made me think about how images are presented and at times withheld. I'm thinking about protection and intimacy in a way where the thing doesn't always have to be spoken in order to be explained or communicated.

i-D

When I was making those [self-portraits](#) that I applied to Tisch (NYU Tisch School of the Arts) with, I remember one of the special questions on that application was: what is home to you? I said the only home that I truly have is my body. At that time, my parents were in the midst of getting a divorce. My mom was considering selling this house that I had grown up in and I was also struggling with my sexual and racial identity. These parts of me were just kind of prickly and I just needed a way to reflect on myself. In college I continued the practice of self-portraiture because I didn't have a lot of time and flexibility in my schedule, so I really had no choice but to look at myself. At that point, I was a little bit more comfortable with my sexuality, but still exploring it in ways that brought a lot of shame or didn't make me feel very good. The photographs really reflect that, they're very sad, violent photographs. I needed a place to enact or perform what I thought was happening to me, what my experiences were as a Black, queer man from Long Island, with Southern roots.



"SYLLABLES OF JOY AND DEVASTATION (2)." PHOTO COURTESY OF ELLIOTT JEROME BROWN JR. AND NICELLE BEAUCHENE GALLERY.

So, they had a healing quality?

Yes, for sure. It was like a public affirmation of this identity. It provided a lot of agency for me. But after a while I started looking at the images that I was making and I was like, “Why would any Black person feel affirmed by these photographs? Who is this helping?” The process of self-portraiture made me really understand that any photograph you make is a reflection of you regardless of whether you’re physically in the photograph. I carried that on when photographing other people, but I found uneasiness in representing others and didn’t want to speak for anybody, I didn’t want to simplify anybody’s experience, I didn’t want to codify it to fit a particular understanding of existence. It didn’t last very long that I was making portraits in that purely representational way. Pretty immediately I asked them to turn their backs to the camera, which allowed me to look at the environment more seriously without getting caught up on the particulars of a person’s face.

It highlights a narrative that exists at the margins, and for me that comes through when I look at your work. I grew up between my dad and my grandmother’s home, and I remember specifically the years that I lived with my grandmother, being in her household and asking internal questions about how she placed things around the home: how images would be sort of stuck into crevices of mirrors and what she put in the refrigerator. How did those details contribute to the larger conversation of existence and presence?

I definitely think that something we share as a foundational quality of our work and our interests is in how space is organised, particularly in our family homes. My father’s parents’ home in Queens is this beautiful two-floor cottage house with a fabulous porch and a lot of peace and quiet. My nana would get up every morning and sweep the sidewalk, but there was a lot of mess inside. Things on top of each other, unopened boxes and packages, mail in the cookie container — just so much chaos but I felt so valued and warm within that particular design that it didn’t matter to me that it was a mess to move through. On the opposite end was my mother’s parents’, where certainly my mother’s sensibilities are derived from, where their home was just much more orderly. Not rigid at all, it still felt very personal but exceptionally clean, pristine. Growing up I’ve just had this very keen awareness of space and its reflection on the personalities of the people that are responsible for that space, and the people that are raised in that space. I think that’s something you’re also keen on.

As you were talking I was visualising the spaces that I’m from. Before my dad was a teacher, he was an ophthalmic photographer, so basically, he photographed the backs of people’s eyeballs. He would keep the 35mm slides, so growing up I was looking at these abstract images that I didn’t realise were photographs of a component of people’s bodies, as well as photographs he’d made as a teenager living in the village and being a drummer chasing after Jimmy Hendrix. He was an artist, so there was a lot to look at. Then my grandmother lived in an apartment in East New York that my great-grandmother had been in since the early 50s. Being in a home space that has been lived in, nurtured and grown over an extended period of time — three or four generations — made me think about how

i-D

things come together over decades. After my grandmother's passing, as we were packing up that house, I found out what it looks like to displace objects and items that seem so set in their own spaces.

Something I've been thinking about in the last three years, consistently, is how a place like Brooklyn becomes qualified as a Black space? It has a very particular Black history, but Canarsie is literally named after the native American people that lived there, so thinking about our relationship to indigenous land.

It's a very important conversation, especially because so much of both of our works thinks about community and that home space. About a week ago, I started sourcing images of 30s and 40s Bed-Stuy, two blocks away from Welancora Gallery. I was really interested in how the community has transitioned and pairing those with conversations with my dad and grandfather, who moved to Virginia. I have seen the neighbourhood change over the past 30 years. I have very vivid memories of being 16, and every Saturday morning I would leave the house and go on these pilgrimages around Brooklyn for hours. There's this image that I made actually of a house ten doors down from Ivy's gallery, of this house that had a family of cats that lived in this abandoned building. I also remember Mr. James who grew a mango tree and every spring and summer I would walk past and there would be all these really rich aromas.

Having the show up in Welancora, I'm curious how people receive your work or how people who are not artists, and would maybe feel isolated by art, arrive at it?

My mother's family is from the Caribbean — Trinidad — and my dad's family is from South Carolina, and in the communities that I have lived around, the accessibility to art hasn't always been present. I think there have been some barriers. But growing up in Bed-Stuy, murals were such an important part of my upbringing. They've been a really important commemorative and celebratory piece of the community. Within the context of the gallery space, there are moments when that's not considered. It brings up questions about what is art? And to who?

There is a fairly didactic relationship in most casual experiences of public art, where there's an understanding of an outcome and purpose — a mural is meant to symbolise these specific things. Whereas in a gallery space there is an opportunity for art to be a little bit quieter and through that quietness encourage a deeper investigation. But that expansiveness that art seeks to bring to our experience can be co-opted in a hierarchy of understanding, and it's a lot easier to give up and to feel isolated by the thing. What's interesting at Ivy's show is the way that the frame around the photograph relates to the trim in the moulding and the floor of the space itself. It makes the photographs in that space feel very at home within the gallery. Galleries can be very isolating to audiences, but also very isolating to the work itself.

My work in the gallery is this single tear of wallpaper that comes down the contours of the wall and sort of outlines the mouldings of the floor and extends out to the floor and what is overlaid over it is an image that was taken — a roll of double exposed film that I found in my grandmother's archive.

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You see a woman in the background standing in one of New York City's projects at a BBQ and another woman in an interior location, a home space, who is also confronting the viewer so they're both returning the gaze. I've been doing research on old sayings about protection of the home space and of communities. There's this one that talks about wallpaper as a means to prevent evil spirits or haints, before they can do harm they have to unpack and repack the wallpaper, so as long as you do it in a busy pattern you're safe from that evil spirit. I'm pulling from those sorts of ideas, thinking also about the history of wallpaper as this element of the home space that initially referenced royalty from tapestries, and then how tapestries then became accessible to middle class families. For me, growing up, wallpaper was a really big thing.

My photograph was taken in a barbershop that stood on this cement pedestal on a hill at the edge of Harlem. It was elevated by maybe two and a half, three feet and I believe when I passed it they had just closed, but the gate was just partially down. As soon as I saw that I knew that it was a pretty significant visual representation of my practice, these things that happen in public, but that have a very private component to them. I invited 20 people that I knew to come to the barbershop, bought food and drinks so I could set the stage for an impromptu conversation. In the photograph, there are four people: one with a kind of storytellers command, one listening to them with beautiful red painted nails and this green silk blouse. In the back someone is on their phone, maybe ready to go, ignoring the conversation completely, which actually works really well for that person's personality. There's another person at the back who is looking through the glass, and seems to be protective and vigilant in keeping watch beyond the barbershop's gate.

"Beyond the gate," that's very poetic, and it makes me think about how we both title our works and the narrative that goes into that, but also this idea of beyond the gate being somewhat of a liminal space or if not a space for immense possibility. I think a lot about migration and movement and how I'm working between New York and the South. I feel like I'm constantly having conversations about those specific locations, but I'm not necessarily talking about that in-between space.

That is exactly what the work is about. I'm interested in amorphous space, things that have the potential to be eschewed for other happenings and meanings. My other photo in the exhibition is of a friend in her bedroom. That photograph is about [intimacy](#), making something unavailable through shadow, but then also making something clear. I think the capacity to linger in the way that a haint does, as Zaliqa was saying, is something that I'm endlessly interested in. How can you imbue what can appear straightforward with a lingering energy such that there is capacity to expand beyond this image?

W

Artist Elliott Jerome Brown Jr. on Making Work in the Margins



INTERVIEW BY MICHAEL BECKERT

Welcome to [Ways of Seeing](#), where two artists sit down to discuss [the nuances of their work](#), [trade industry secrets](#), and [catch up on their latest projects](#). The only catch? One of them is on staff at W magazine. In this week's edition, visuals editor Michael Beckert chats with Elliott Jerome Brown Jr., a talented photographer whose career has experienced a meteoric rise in the past couple years—he's shot a campaign for Telfar x Gap, commissions for *The New Yorker*, and a coveted Janelle Monáe September cover.

You started off 2020 with a pretty major collaboration, photographing the campaign images for [Telfar x Gap](#) in January. Can you tell me more about that?

[Telfar \[Clemens\]](#) and I had seen one another at parties, and just as a fellow creative Black person to a fellow creative Black person, we would say hi to each other out of an unspoken respect. I remember when they did their Century 21 collaboration, and they were selling

W

the bags for a significantly lower price than they usually are. I had gone to the pop-up, and that was actually the first time that I had met [Telfar creative director] Babak Radboy, who asked me to shoot the campaign. I said to Babak, "Girl, you know these bags don't have the sensors on them?" As I was saying that to him, a friend of mine did end up taking one of the bags and we laughed about me saying something afterwards. I'm pretty sure Babak didn't do anything about it when I told him; he welcomes chaos and things that other businesses maybe have more of an ego about.

You shot these images in Paris, and they debuted in that city's Gap storefront.

The images appeared in Paris, but we shot them in Florence.

What was that like?

It was very exciting. The only other time that I had been to Florence was in 2016, for something related to NYU's campus there. My hotel at that time was in the same area as where we did this Telfar shoot. There was a dinner on the first night, and a show to debut the collection the following afternoon. The dinner experience was something that they wanted to have in celebration of themselves and this moment in Florence, and the larger creative community they are part of. All of the clothes that you see in the photographs, they are clothes from the fall 2020 Telfar show, but the images were used on the side of the Gap to announce their collaboration.

How much time did you have to shoot?

I had a full two days. I shot during the preparations for the dinner, during the fittings with all of the creatives. They were pretty clear that they didn't want the images to be a look book, even though I think the images do have a look book feel to them. My look straddles documentary and theater—and I guess that is somewhere between look book and candid.

When do you feel the most connected to your work? Is it after you've created it, or once you've shared it via Instagram, or when it debuts in a Paris storefront?

I think that dissonance only comes about when I work in an editorial capacity, and I don't work as editorially as often as I work for myself. And usually when I do have that feeling, I just don't share the image from that editorial thing. I try to only share things that I'm proud of which reflect me, or an experience I'm satisfied with. When I was making the Telfar images, it was an isolating experience. Seeing those images on the side of the Gap, that's just something that I could never have asked for. That's never really been a goal of mine, to participate commercially in such a large-scale way, but it was really beautiful to see the work that I did for the brand that I also have a lot of respect for, seen there. As an artist, you have to be the primary defender of your work, in addition to being the primary author of it.

W

So when I put something out, it really is because I'm interested in sharing with folks. But if it didn't land with people for aesthetic concerns, I don't care so much about that.

The last time we worked on something was actually for *W*—you shot some really beautiful images of [Ato Blankson Wood](#), who starred in Jeremy O. Harris's *Slave Play*. When we got the images back, there were some that included an anonymous pair of hands holding Ato's head. My team asked, "Whose hands are those? And why are they there?" I found myself unable to explain the purpose of this aesthetic choice beyond that it made me look twice at the photograph. How would you explain your choice to include extra, sometimes strange, details in your pictures?

Working with the margins at first grew out of a political positioning, recognizing that the margin is an important way to read the center. And what's held at the margin—there's a lot of power there, because it isn't fully included. So, in the instance of the Ato portrait, I was using it fairly metaphorically. As with any tool that you employ, it begins to take on a life of its own and it reveals things that you hadn't necessarily planned for. But I think above all, tucking things into the margins of the photograph allows me to indicate that there is something beyond the focus, or the purported focus, of this image. And that's often why a lot of the people in my pictures aren't really looking at the camera as well, because that sense of eye contact really grounds the photograph and grounds the viewer's connection with the photograph in the individual. The individual, for me, is as important in the image as the space is. In order to equate them, I often have to downplay the importance of the individual, because that's typically what people are rushing to.

Many of my favorite photographers have such a strong voice that, regardless of what they're shooting, whether it's Janelle Monáe for the cover of *King Kong*, or a personal project, you can place images from either shoot next to one another and see the conversation they're having about that artist. I do see a lot of consistency in your work. Do you actively try and achieve this consistency?

No. There is a way I see that is undeniable, and a lot of my images do have a consistency that you're speaking to. I often work with people inside of their homes, even though a lot of the images that I've made recently are of people outside. Most of the recent ones haven't really used any added, artificial light, either. Oftentimes, working with available light, especially if I'm continuing photos with people inside, means working with shadows and working with darkness a lot more often. So I think that I approach every assignment in every work that I make with an effort to forefront what is foundational to that person's experience and what are their tools for fortifying themselves in that moment. I arrive at things thinking, "How can I visualize power? How can I visualize intimacy? How can I visualize warmth?" How can I do those things without exploiting this relationship or the environment that I have access to? How can I present these things in a way that is respectful and that is still engaging? Those are questions that I bring to each thing I do.

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You're approaching your work with consistent questions, not necessarily with consistent visual tools or tricks.

Yeah, I pretty much arrive at everything with the same questions around respect, power, and warmth. I did a commission for the Public Art Fund where I made a photograph for them that is not of people. It is more of a landscape image, but it references a landscape that has multiple uses for individuals. Even in the way I rendered that landscape, there is an abstraction to it. There is still an interest in privacy.

Do you have moments when you're working in editorial spheres and you are being challenged to abandon the aesthetic choices that were the same choices that attracted the client in the first place? For instance, if they're saying, "No, we want them to look directly at the camera," or, "Why are you doing that thing in the margins?" How do you stay confident about that?

I actually run into this every time I've worked editorially. I try to also view editorial work as a challenge to think about the history of the publication that has commissioned me. Who are the people that they often work with? What do those photographs look like? And I try to get into the headspace of the editors, the editorial leadership of that publication. A friend gave me a piece of advice when I was asked to photograph Rujeko Hockley for Cultured magazine: "You should make a photograph of her that shows what you think of her." It was a very simple suggestion, but what I took from it was that I should try not to be as elusive or ambiguous as I would choose to be in my own work. Then I can begin to make something that feels honorific but that also feels like it's part of me. Now, before I agree to an assignment, I talk to editors about what sense they have of my work, because that's how I'm going to make the work, and if that approach isn't interesting to you or isn't what you want, you should go to somebody else. And I'm totally fine passing up jobs. I say no to things all the time. So if it's not the right fit, it's just not the right fit but, for instance, this last thing that I did for the New Yorker—

Oh, I wanted to talk about that!

I was a bit confused on how I would approach this sort of assignment. And I was also startled that the New Yorker had even asked me to make these pictures, because I hadn't worked for them in two years. And I have never photographed a dancer before, but I also have encouraged editors to hire me for things that they may not immediately think of me for. So when I got to the park to scout locations for the shoot, I had spent some time with two places in particular. And when I was walking to the entrance of the park to meet Jamar Roberts, I saw this other place that was shrouded in darkness, but the light was hitting the stone really crazy. And I was like, "Oh, that could be really interesting." Where my practice is going in relation to these ideas of withholding is working more significantly with darkness and a lot of dark negative space. That was the first location that we photographed,

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and I was immediately satisfied by those images because it complemented the article's sense of mourning.

I'm willing to go back to an editor, talk to them about it and I'm always willing to defend the choices that I made, including the choices that maybe weren't the right ones. If it was shit, if I think it was shit, I'ma tell them, "Hey, this is shitty. I didn't like how this was approached." But if I believe in it and I believe in how it tells the story, then I have no problem advocating for myself. But if somebody else doesn't see it, I'm not going to spend too much energy on it because that is the responsibility of the editor's imagination. This happens to me in exhibitions too, with group shows: People who ask me to participate under a specific guise. And then, I offer them something and they're like, "Huh, why this?"

Especially over the last few months, with the Black Lives Matter movement becoming a headline across media outlets again, I've seen the photography community band together, using its resources to do some concrete good. People are shifting their Instagram content from their own work to helping others, BIPOC photographers are sharing resources, and there are print sales like Reframing the Future, and Miciah Carter's project, See in Black. I'm wondering what the last few months have been like for you, especially on social media and seeing both real allyship and some that's performative.

Something that I shared with a friend of mine, Gioncarlo Valentine, feels relevant. We had a conversation over Instagram Live about a month and a half ago. Gioncarlo, as somebody who takes up a lot of public space on his own Instagram and who writes for various outlets as well, is not only showing up in private and showing up among his trusted people, but trusts himself to show up in public as well. He trusts that public voice, because it's a tool, one that should not dull. So in terms of Instagram and social media, they don't feel like spaces that are any more intense right now than they usually are. Instagram is a space for cultivating information, a space for sharing resources, a space for encouraging action. Those are all things that we should welcome. When I do need to be quiet, sometimes I need to not talk to my friends, so that means not engaging with these extended friendships or these extended casual relationships on the internet. That's a fine thing to do, too. I don't talk to my mom every day. Some days, I really just need to be alone to orient. What is my work in this current moment? Not all of the work benefits this movement or is in mind of this movement—some of it is just, "How do I need to take care of myself today?", which abstractly is related to this movement, but directly, it's just related to me. So I don't think about this moment as being overwhelming. I think about it as just being another critical one within this ongoing struggle for liberation of Black people and demanding a standard of living for all people which includes, at the least, being able to live.

I do think that white people feel overwhelmed, and that's actually the problem. The implication, then, is that you're feeling overwhelmed because you're not typically confronting this discriminatory part of yourself. Knowing that, it's interesting to

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consider that it's not any more overwhelming for you than it might be if you were pressured as a Black artist to speak about this.

There's no pressure, no pressure to speak. When you allow yourself the energy to educate folks around how their actions are harmful—especially because we need to hear it from the direct source about how it's harmful in order to move forward—the overall tone ends up being sorrowful. But when you are working intra-communally, there is a lot more balance. So when I'm talking to other Black people, we're going to battle each other, and we're going to collect each other as necessary. We're going to hold each other accountable, but we're also going to celebrate one another. We're going to cook for each other and care for one another and we're going to be gentle with each other. When I'm sharing things online or I'm speaking up online, that's out of a responsibility to myself and it's also out of a responsibility for the people that I love and care for. And that is not something that I feel pressure from white people to describe. In fact, I find that a lot of the time, I'm talking to other Black people in the things that I'm sharing. When I'm talking to white people directly, I say that directly. I don't feel any pressure from white people to do anything. I'm actually, as I said earlier, more than okay having someone know I'm not going to speak on this and maybe redirecting them elsewhere.

I'm really grateful to work for myself. I'm represented by a gallery and the director of it is a white woman. We speak intermittently, but our relationship is rooted in how she can be a support to me and what it is that I need for my practice. It still is a one-to-one thing. Whereas somewhere like *W* is employed under this larger corporate umbrella. There's a lot under the surface there. There's a poison that feeds into the foundation of the way that all of these companies work. There's a lot of work to do to suck it out, but I would really be more comfortable with allowing these companies to fail and be replaced by something more substantive and more accountable. Something that, at its core, at its foundation, is already thinking about ideas of expansion and how we can actually be useful to our constituency as opposed to feeling like this is a phase that needs to be done. White people are going to be tired the second that it's time to go back into the office. White people are going to go back to their business of being inattentive, lacking discipline, lacking focus. It'll happen all over again. Something large will happen, and then it'll be like, "Wow, where are the black people?"

The conversation, especially in the media industry, becomes even more complicated when you realize that as white people, when we, for example, report on Juneteenth, a Black holiday, we're somehow benefitting monetarily from people reading our story online. In that sense, the coverage of Juneteenth is somehow putting money in the pockets of white people.

I enjoyed when Juneteenth was a thing that people just celebrated amongst themselves. I really don't like holidays at all, but for those people who did celebrate Juneteenth more actively, it felt really almost gaslighting to see various institutions cover the holiday. To get

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a notification on the phone from Apple News saying, "Hey, it's Juneteenth. Happy Juneteenth," is bizarre when this has been a thing for so long that other people didn't recognize.

I'll end here: much of the reason why Toni Morrison ended up winning the Nobel Peace Prize, in addition to her work, is because a lot of Black people were campaigning for her to win the Nobel Peace Prize and were campaigning for the institution to recognize her as someone who was deserving of it. So then eventually, she gets it. I was thinking about the way that you honor somebody like Toni Morrison who has spent her entire career thinking through the condition of Blackness in its variety. The way that you honor someone like Toni Morrison is actually through destruction. It isn't through giving an award, giving a prize, giving these material benefits but it actually is in destroying things as we currently understand them. It is really nice to be recognized for your work. It's really nice to have a moment of peace around your work, and to be taken off of your feet a bit because of all of the work that you've done—and Toni Morrison also very thoroughly enjoyed a party, and she very thoroughly enjoyed celebration and very thoroughly enjoyed gifts. So she definitely accepted the Nobel Peace Prize with tremendous honor. But I think Black people really throw a wrench into pretty much all means of doing anything, that it isn't enough to just give someone an award. It needs to be met with structural impact, structural change. It has to be a complete structural revision, but they have to be destroyed first, in order for something to be made of it.

I end each interview by asking: what are you most proud of so far in your career?

I'm most proud of the way that I practice photography. What is greater than the greatest achievement, for me, is the way that I photograph people: it's rooted in respect for people, rooted in wanting to see that person across varying stages of dignity and not simply within the aspirational stage of it, wanting to actually see a space no matter how messy or neat, and offer it a plane.

Works for the Now, by Queer Artists of Color

Pride Month may be coming to a close, but the wide-ranging pieces shown here have staying power.

June 29, 2020, 3:00 p.m. ET

As the country wraps up [Pride Month](#) and continues to contend with ongoing violence against queer and BIPOC communities, it's paramount that voices from those communities are heard. Not all artists are activists, of course, but they are all keen observers, ones who invite the viewer to consider their way of seeing things, whether their chosen subject is as expansive as prison reform or as singular as their own sense of self. Each work tells a story, and here, we've asked 15 queer artists of color to elaborate on theirs. (Look for a coming compilation of works by queer Indigenous artists in the weeks ahead.)

These interviews have been edited and condensed.

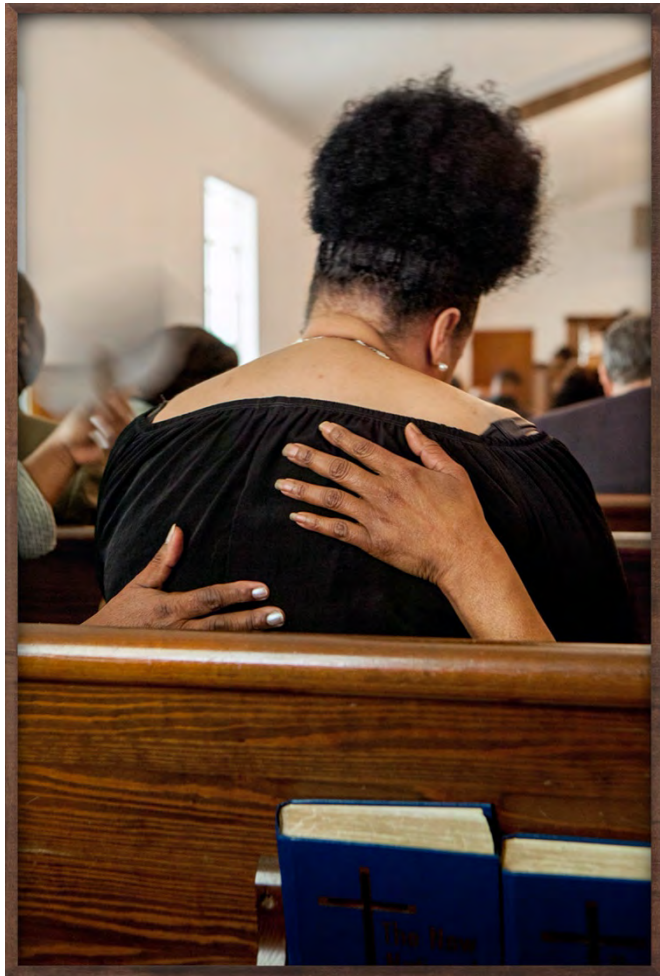


Brown's "Prune and grout" (2019). Courtesy of the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York

**By Elliott Jerome Brown Jr., 26,
based in New York**

“Prune and grout” (2019) I took last year at a New Orleans bar. There’s a companion piece to this that shows a woman with her head down on the bar, as though she’s mourning someone’s absence. This image shows the logistical setup — the person pictured here was just helping me with the other shot, but there was such concern in his eyes. His hand, which is just outside the frame here, was holding that of the woman.

The image [at right] is from one of the rare occasions when I was invited to make photographs in a documentary context. I attended the funeral of a person who had a storied life, despite having suffered an incredibly traumatic racial violence early on. This was the only image I felt comfortable sharing with a wider audience; the guests’ identities aren’t disclosed, and yet it communicates why I was there and serves as a way of paying my respects. I noticed that those who had been closest to this person moved through the day with ease — mostly they seemed proud and at peace — and it made me think about the power the deceased had and whether forgiveness was a tool for cultivating that power. A lot of my work involves interiority, both of physical spaces and of individuals — I’m interested in what constitutes their foundation and enables them to act. Your attacker might not repent and the state might assist in perpetuating violence, so, in that lack, what tools do you have to fortify yourself?



Elliott Jerome Brown Jr.’s “Oftentimes, justice for black people takes the form of forgiveness, allowing them space to reclaim their bodies from wrongs made against them.” (2018). Courtesy of the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York

PIN-UP

INTERVIEW: PHOTOGRAPHER ELLIOTT JEROME BROWN JR. TALKS INTERIOR LIVES

By [Tony Jackson Jr.](#)

New York-based photographer [Elliott Jerome Brown Jr.](#) creates images of people that are often partial, oblique, even obscure. They depict individuals or interactions not through faces, but through the construction of interior life, and, in many instances the depiction of literal interiors. While regularly in the pages of magazines (including [PIN-UP](#)) or hung on walls, when presented in galleries, Brown Jr.'s work is also often presented as more objects, with cut wooden overlays, irregularly shaped frames, or even sculptures set in front of light-boxes. His pictures are architectural in both the most direct and expanded senses of that word. Brown Jr. has recently created new work for [MIEN](#), a digital exhibition and fundraiser organized by design studio [TRNK](#) and its co-founder Tariq Dixon. During Pride Month, MIEN brings together seven queer artists of color who challenge the status quo of LGBTQ+ portraiture. Brown Jr.'s contribution depicts two figures in a relationship at once inaccessible and intimate, which bears a title as extended caption, a sort of prose poem that begins "Breath tucks in and weighs the eyes closed." Posters will be available for purchase until June 30th, with proceeds going to the [Ali Forney Center](#) to support homeless LGBTQ youth. (The exhibition also includes work by another frequent PIN-UP contributor, [Dorian Ulises López Maciás](#)). Musician, DJ, curator, and native New Yorker [Tony Jackson Jr.](#) (aka [Skype Williams](#)), spoke with Brown, Jr., about experiences of domestic space, the relationship between photographer and photographed, legacy, memory, and music.

PIN-UP



Elliott Jerome Brown Jr., *Breath tucks in and weighs the eyes closed. Beyond that callused layer lie a circular gradient of white, into yellow, into burnt orange and red. A euphoric entrance into day, and yet space becomes obscure and distant in the dark. Suddenly, in the aftermath of that quiet to-do of colors, my body is the only thing I know to be here. "Take your time," you whisper.*, 2020. (Courtesy of the artist and TRNK.) A poster for MIEN, a Pride Month exhibition organized by TRNK and Tariq Dixon to benefit the Ali Forney Center.

Tony Jackson Jr.: Being in video chats, like we are now, because of social distancing, has been cool in a way — getting to see how people are positioning their cameras and what they want to show. If you go to somebody's house, you see everything, but when you see somebody through a camera, you're seeing what they want you to see. What area of your house are you gravitating towards for video calls?

Elliott Jerome Brown Jr.: I'm in an unusual situation where I work as a caretaker for a historic house museum in Queens. In exchange for basic maintenance and basic groundskeeping of the house, I live there. The first floor is open to the public. It contains all the information related to the man and his accomplishments and whatnot. Then, the second floor is my living quarters, and then the offices for the two directors and various interns. My space is sectioned off. It's private. It's outfitted with

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all the things that a normal apartment would have. The house receives a great amount of sun in pretty much each of the rooms throughout the day. This was supposed to be temporary, but I've been offered the position permanently, so now, there's the possibility for that relationship to deepen in that this is my space for as long as I'd like to keep it and as long as the museum is operating. Already, the house has become a friend of mine. The living room is my favorite place in the house just because of its expanse. Funny enough, the text for the photograph that is included in the MIEN exhibition is an abstract text where I was thinking about my productivity during the day. It was a direct reflection on walking into the living room and literally feeling euphoria, amidst all of the possibilities that are available to me just by way of waking up.

You've said before that you feel like you have a responsibility to the people that you photograph. I feel like if you're photographing friends, they get it. What does that look like when working with people you don't know, for people who don't immediately "get it"? How did you go about depicting intimacy in the photograph for the [MIEN poster](#)?

The reference for that image was a screenshot of these two guys who were having sex with each other that I likely found on Twitter and the top was so entranced with something that was off the camera. I assume that it was a mirror. It looked like they were in a bathroom space. I was fascinated by how transfixed he was by his impact on this person, but it was a very confident, tough but very soft and sensitive interaction between the two of them. When I was thinking about someone who might be able to convey that, this person came to mind almost instantly just because of how they had shared themselves on Instagram, which is where I'd only really seen him. I told him about the idea. When I asked him, I said, "Choose someone to interact with that you would feel comfortable with," as opposed to me being the person who makes the selection. It was just one scene. What we're seeing here is one image, and it was actually an outtake but I liked it. The erotics of the scene are important to me, but it's also important to honor the introspective way that might bring both people together. In addition to this interior space, in addition to this bodily space, overall, what I need to get at in making photographs is what is the cerebral space? What's the intangible space? How can I make a photograph of that?

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I think it's interesting that you talk about the intangible spaces because I was thinking about black interiors in a physical aspect, but also you're thinking about the aspects that aren't physical. Often you see black spaces in a political context in a way that's really flat. But to photograph people in intimate spaces is sacred. How do you balance or combine capturing that interior, mental landscape, and that physical interior space?

I definitely think the interior space of an individual is primarily communicated through the full package experience of the photograph itself: How is the photograph composed? What is the lighting doing? What does the lighting in the composition make available in terms of being able to orient yourself to the image as a viewer? I think because I insist on these obstructed views of people, with this particular image, the shadows do a lot of that work for me and then the margins do the work where you're not fully seeing this character. This person is slowly appearing to you out of the light. I think making photographs like that, for me, helps articulate the interior space of an individual as opposed to making a portrait.

I grew up in a lower class neighborhood in Queens. When people photograph black interiors that are familiar, that look like what I've seen, it's surreal to see that in a gallery or in a magazine. Because usually, if it's through the lens of a white person, the feeling that they want the viewer to feel is danger or sex. It's not all these other emotions and things in between. Do you think non-black people should photograph black people in black spaces, in their homes? They're going to, but...

Yeah, they are going to. Look. I would really prefer for people who are not black to not make pictures of black people, period. I often wonder what blackness means to white people in their images? So often, white people will make images of black folks and they will do it under the guise of "I'm facilitating a space for these underrepresented people's voices to be heard." When you are an oppressed person, you have to not only live your life, but you also have to be smart enough to understand your oppressor. I find white people to use black people as a moral compass of a sort when really, they could be investigating this need for ignorance, this need to assume power over one another, over other people. They could be doing that just well and fine

PIN-UP

amongst white people. I don't think white people need to be concerned with giving black people voices.

Do you think that extends to non-black people of color?

Yes. But I think that there is such a thing as solidarity. Like the [Yellow Jackets Collective](#), I went to school with all of them, at NYU. I've watched them and watched the work that they do. I watch how they orient themselves in relationship to anti-blackness and doing the work to undo it, and it is specifically from their perspective as Asian people and then the diverse perspectives within that. They are very intentional about how they take up space in relation to these issues so it doesn't look like, "Hey, let's do a photo shoot with some black trans girls". It looks like "How do we actually talk amongst ourselves as Asian people about how we participate in and perpetuate anti-blackness?" That is useful work. We don't need y'all to be making pretty images of black people.



Left: Elliott Jerome Brown Jr., *Keep that one metaphorical*, 2018. Courtesy of the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York.

Right: Elliott Jerome Brown Jr., *Sweeping the bricks to the edge of a door too heavy to hold its own.*, 2019. Courtesy of the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York.

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I think a lot of people make work because they're not seeing what they want to see out in the world. Do you think your work is in response to what you're not seeing or are you trying to be a part of a larger conversation?

When I started working, I was thinking about myself, I was thinking about the ways that I didn't see portraiture portrayed. As I've worked more in this vein, it's become clearer to me how other people have worked in this way both explicitly and not. For instance, Roy DeCarava and Langston Hughes made [*The Sweet Flypaper of Life*](#) (1955), and those were images that I believe Roy had taken just on to himself of people in a very documentary capacity. But then Langston Hughes's job and really Roy's job as well, in terms of the sequencing of the photos in the books, was to recontextualize the reality of those images in a fiction around this larger theory around this community of black people. I make work in that legacy of making images of something that's in reality. It's making images in this improvised way but trying to re-contextualize it so that it serves some other truth or reality that's not related to biography or related to fact.

I'm interested in how, going into the future, people will document black space and what they'll choose to emphasize. If I think of the 70s, black space was *Good Times* and *The Jeffersons*, at least in media and in the public imagination. In the 80s was *The Cosby Show*. The 90s, I think of *Living Single*, that house that they all lived in.

That is something that I've considered about my photographs before, that they are a representation of what folks' living spaces look like now, especially in New York. There are several images in which the paint is really indicative, the buildup of the oil paint to me is indicative of New York and that the hand of New York is constantly changing over and over again. People don't live in the same apartment for more than two years. Maybe they're not even on the lease, period. They're images of people's temporal relationship with New York, the transplants who have come here from any number of places who are just trying to take root here.

You named the [2019 exhibition](#) that you did at Baxter Street Camera Club of New York after Billy Preston's "[I Wrote a Simple Song](#)." This is a general question, but I'm a music person so I have to ask: What role does music play for

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you as an artist? When I look at your work, I feel music in it. There's a musicality to the images that you create.

I definitely wish to create in a way that I find that music does. Music is really instantaneous in its communication, and it also is a really animated communication. Whereas, I think photographs are really delayed, and visual art can be a really delayed experience. I think about music and the tenets of it and how to adopt them into making visual work. I don't know why, but my body already had an answer to this question, but it's not giving me the words. (Long pause.) Someone asked me to make a playlist at the beginning of the month that I've been working on for the last two months. The playlist is about a trajectory of a relationship and therefore a trajectory of love and its dissipation. That playlist has been on my mind a lot. I use the same brain to make the playlist as I do the images. For some reason, I keep wanting to talk about [Jill Scott, "Slowly Surely,"](#) because that song is constantly on my mind because it is so simple. Simple format, but it is so impactful. I love how much of a wordsmith she is and how agile she is with language that she can just break apart a singular word and do something to it. Music definitely has an impact on how I think, what I do.

At [Baxter Street](#), it was a kind of installation. It wasn't just photographs framed. Is that the first time you did installation for the show?

In this part of my career, yes, but the very first show that I did was an installation, but I don't ever show anybody those images.

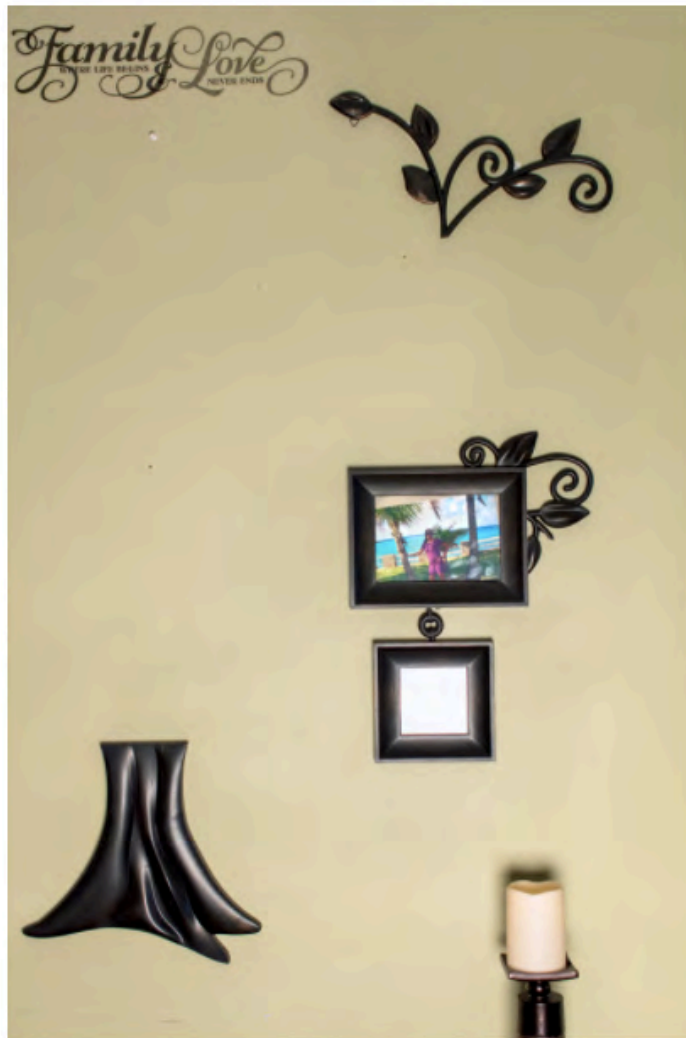
What made you want to do an installation for that show?

In the same vein of the captions for the images, how the captions appear to have a very random relationship to the image, the installation of the image is yet another point. It's an element to help guide the experience of the photograph. It makes sense to me to not just put something into a regular frame. That limits an opportunity for additional context. A part of that goes back to this obsession with space, this obsession with objects, this obsession with physical interiors and wanting to make an object out of photography, something that is tactile and tangible. That is a direct reflection of my upbringing going to all these different houses and it just sticking with me.

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Is there an image or a scene or space from when you were younger that you go back to a lot?

My maternal grandparents' house is more or less the same as it has been since I was young. The mirror wall that they had that leads up into the main part of the house has always really stayed with me. There was a particular smell that I remember my cousins' house in Maryland having when we would go to visit. It was a really comforting smell. It definitely smelled like skin and it smelled warm and maybe even a little like mothballs, but it just stuck with me.



Elliott Jerome Brown Jr., *Look at how much we look alike*, (2018); archival pigment print, 23 x 32 inches

Elliott Jerome Brown Jr.
in Flushing, New York.
*Right: To Keep Your
Company (2019).*

**"HIS IMAGES SUCKED ME IN
AND HELD MY RAPT ATTENTION.
SIMULTANEOUSLY TENDER AND
POWERFUL, THE PHOTOGRAPHS
HOLD YOU CLOSE."**

— JUSTINE LUDWIG



elliott jerome brown jr.

FLUSHING, NY | PHOTOGRAPHY

It's impossible to capture a memory in a photograph, yet that's exactly what Elliott Jerome Brown Jr. sets out to do in his mesmerizing images. By manipulating his intimate stills with the addition of objects and sculptural frames, he broadens the scope of the camera, creating varying angles and layers of time. Showcasing subjects with "backs turned, eyes closed, or bodies obstructed," he also explores the value of privacy in a medium that is all about exposure.

ON VIEW: After receiving a BFA from New York University in 2016, Brown participated in group exhibitions at P.P.O.W. Gallery, the Studio Museum in Harlem, and New York's La MaMa La Galleria, plus residencies in New Orleans at the St. Roch Community Church and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine.

GOING SOLO: This year marked not his first solo show—but his first three: Nicelle Beauchene Gallery in New York, Staple Goods in New Orleans, and Baxter St at the Camera Club of New York.
elliottjeromebrownjr.com

THE NEW YORKER

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

ART GALLERIES – DOWNTOWN

Sept. 18, 2019

Elliott Jerome Brown, Jr.

This young artist's titles are poetic companions to his lyrical photographs. "Syllables of joy and devastation" portrays a young person lounging in bed, regarding the camera with almost closed eyes. Neither posed nor candid, the shot captures an attitude of trusting indifference—an air of true intimacy. Many of Brown's subjects are shown from behind, a perspective that might come off as voyeuristic, but instead seems deferential to their privacy. In "Oftentimes, justice for black people takes the form of forgiveness, allowing them space to reclaim their bodies from wrongs made against them," a woman sits in church as comforting hands reach out to rest on both sides of her back. The point of view implies that Brown is attending the service, too.

—*Johanna Fateman*



Sophia Narrett, *Wishes* (detail), 2019, embroidery thread, fabric, 73 × 39". From "Do You Love Me?"

"Do You Love Me?"

P.P.O.W

Elliott Jerome Brown Jr., Kyle Dunn, Martine Gutierrez, Gerald Lovell, Reba Maybury, and Sophia Narrett were the six artists featured in "Do You Love Me?," a group show that took on a number of subjects, such as intimacy, sexual politics, and the body as a site of wonder and horror—ideas that, thankfully, moved beyond the exhibition's cheeky title.

Gutierrez explored the transmutability of gender and reality as it pertains to self-presentation. Two groups of seven small-scale, black-and-white photographs, *Girl Friends (Rosella & Palama)*, 2014, and *Girl Friends (Anita & Marie)*, 2014, portrayed the artist and a doppelgänger mannequin, similarly attired, in various settings. We saw the artist reaching out for a fake horse in *Girl Friends (Anita & Marie 5)* as Gutierrez's "twin" turns away from us in the background under a dusky, lunar sky. With *Girl Friends (Rosella & Palama 4)* the pair, in black evening gowns, are framed by heavy curtains on one side and a grand staircase on the other in a gilded, palatial room. As a reflective device, the dummy provides a clever, even humorous foil. But its

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effect was diminished by the works' formulaic repetition. (This was also true of the artist's constant presence, as she struck those all-too-familiar modeling poses while sunbathing, for instance, or hitchhiking. The work often struggled to surpass the clichés of its inspiration.) An exception was *Girl Friends (Anita & Marie I)*, wherein both characters, in diaphanous white dresses, gaze in awe through an abundant woodland scene of Pre-Raphaelite charm and light. The image recalled the aesthetic of the early-twentieth-century "Cottingley Fairies" photographs, which elaborately intertwined fiction and fantasy. A fellow traveler in the realms of the fanciful was Narrett, whose incandescent Rococo embroideries avoided the egotism that hampered some of Gutierrez's images. The artist's *Wishes*, 2019, is an intricately rendered blaze of gorily seductive florals and creepily surrealist tableaux, featuring rowboat orgies; lurid medical sex role-play; and manic bands of leaping, hypnotic rabbits, among other sinister sights. The six-foot-high cavalcade here was presided over by the artist, who depicts herself as a smiling mystic in the work, telepathically directing the gleefully macabre circus from a tree-house window.

The photographs of friends and relatives in domestic settings captured by Brown—a far cry from the reveries of Gutierrez and Narrett—made us feel as though we were looking through a pinhole into his life. Information regarding who or where his subjects are, or what their relationships might be, is left to interpretation. Clear narratives are further obscured via precise croppings of both objects and people, the formal tactic subtly articulating the peripheral status endured by black people in the United States. Brown's subjects' theatrical gestures, which convey exhaustion, victimization, and violence, evoke the pathos of a Greek tragedy. The most notable piece here was *Is it that I desire to see Jesus bend, to witness them at odds or in question? Jesus loves me, but I believe that Jesus is in process too*, 2018, which features a young man lying in bed, propped up on his elbows and wearing baggy shorts and a tank top while facing away from the viewer. The image is quietly intriguing, but generally the selection of Brown's work for this show didn't do his vision justice.

Maybury is an artist, essayist, and dominatrix who vivisected our capitalist patriarchy in eight acrylic self-portraits, collectively titled *The Consequences of His and Hers*, 2018–19. Maybury, clad in policewoman outfits, is depicted as "Mistress Rebecca," while other works feature hybrid renderings of her submissives in fetish attire. All of the paintings were made by her clientele—various of whom are nicknamed Horsey, Billionaire Heir, and the Dutch Wetter—in exquisite-corpse style and under her supervision. In her writings, the artist describes these artmaking sessions, her financial hardships, the aggravating behavior of men, and her life as a sex worker. These paintings manifest Maybury's anthropological interest in dismantling male power structures by working within them—insidious aspects of our culture that require fearless investigation, not our love.

— Darren Jones

ARTFORUM



Elliott Jerome Brown Jr., *He gave and he gave / but he wouldn't have given at all if I didn't let him in / if I didn't cover my body in soap three times / swish oil between my teeth 47 minutes ahead of the time / that I expected him. / (Wounded)*, 2018, archival inkjet prints on aluminum, wood, and brass wire, 31 x 31".

NEW YORK

Elliott Jerome Brown Jr.

BAXTER ST AT THE CAMERA CLUB OF NEW YORK
126 and 128 Baxter St
January 9–March 2, 2019

Elliott Jerome Brown Jr.'s *He gave and he gave / but he wouldn't have given at all if I didn't let him in / if I didn't cover my body in soap three times / swish oil between my teeth 47 minutes ahead of the time / that I expected him. / (Wounded)* (all works cited, 2018) features several images that sit behind a timeworn, family-style "collage" picture frame, decorated with gold accents. The frame strategically occludes much of what we see—through the apertures we take in a shirtless and barefoot man facing away from us; a boy lounging in a tank top and athletic shorts, his face hidden; and socked feet hanging in the foreground, unattached to any visible body. Other works here show people relaxing on couches, braiding hair, or eating together.

These informal, intimate scenes of black life—often tender—dominate Brown's first solo exhibition, "a simple song," the title of which is based on *I Wrote a Simple Song*, soul artist Billy Preston's 1972 record that talks about the disappointment of making deeply private music for public consumption. Brown addresses this quandary, too, with his partially obstructed photographs. Another work from 2018 captures a full-length oval mirror, a figurine, a dog statuette, and a strip of wallet-size studio portraits trapped beneath a sheet of glass on top of a table, or maybe a dresser. The top half of the mirror is partially obscured by a dark rectangle. When the piece is observed from another vantage point, the rectangle reveals a woman resting her head on her hand while glancing downward. She is an added jolt of melancholy—a kind of phantom who presides over this sullen tableau.

The show's centerpiece is *Ssssummmmmwhhhhhhhhhhere*, a sizable light-box piece depicting a young man lifting a couch. His face is blocked out, but his strained legs are visible. In front of the light box are bars, made from painted aluminum and willow. This odd addition puts some distance between the viewer and the work. Brown allows us to get close, but never *too* close.

—Megan N. Liberty

FLASH ART

Elliott Jerome Brown Jr. “a simple song”
Baxter St. at the Camera Club of New York, New York
by Sean D. Henry-Smith



Elliott Jerome Brown Jr., *He gave and he gave but he wouldn't have given at all if I didn't let him in, if I didn't cover my body in soap three times, swish oil between my teeth 47 minutes ahead of the time that I expected him. (Wounded,)* 2018. Archival inkjet prints on aluminum, wood (sapele), and brass wire 31 x 31 in.

alternatively works in service of the full autonomy of those photographed. He instructs the viewer to do the work: instead of “who are we looking at?” we are to ask “*how* are we looking?” Only then we are offered the kind of proximity that lets us gather humbly in meditation in *Just beyond* (2018), or to giggle with the mischievous and knowing smirk of *On ice* (2018), as if Anansi himself was asked for his portrait. We sit outside the prayer and the laughter, but we are allowed a brief glimpse inside if we look with care.

Elliott Jerome Brown Jr.’s song is not without complexity or rigor — in fact, it depends on it — yet it cuts to the necessary, the essential gesture. Gets deep in the groove and thumbs it quietly, hums a low hymn of ease.

Upon entering Baxter St. at the Camera Club of New York to witness Elliott Jerome Brown Jr.’s “a simple song,” I am drawn, moth-like, to the backmost wall of the gallery. The photo-sculpture

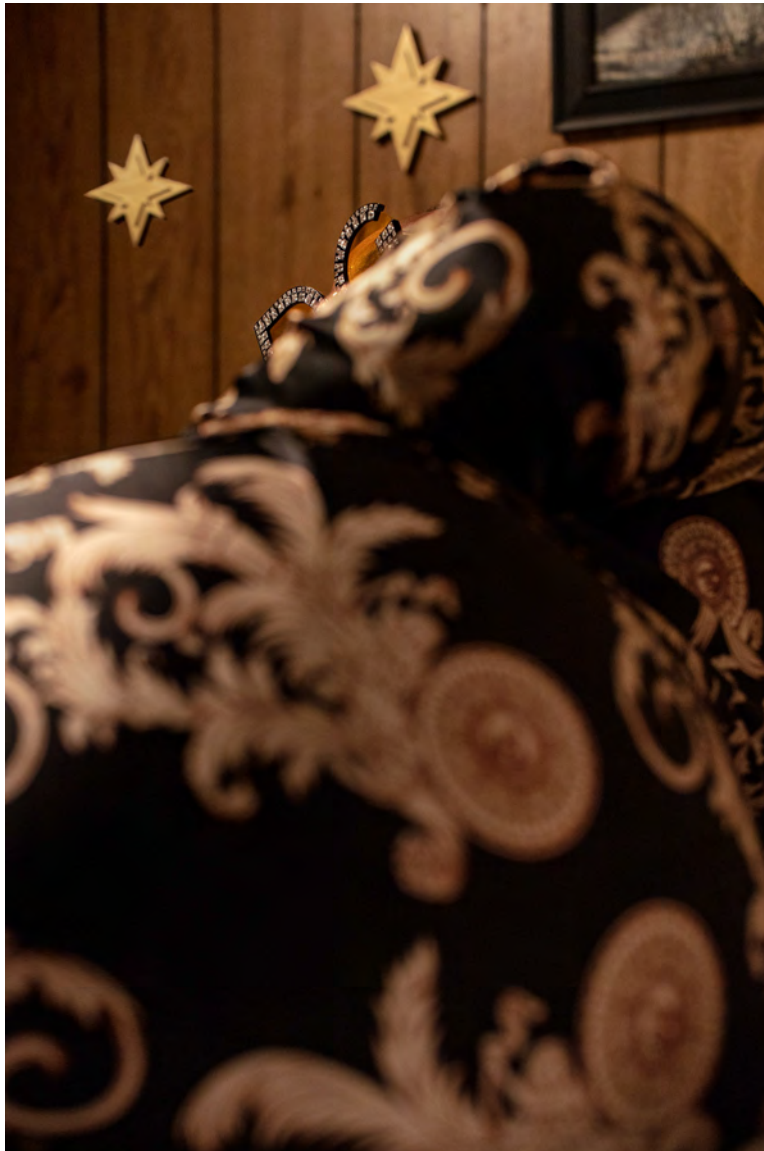
Sssummmmmwhhhhhhhhhhhhere (2018) features a large light box protected/intercepted/interceded by six beams made of aluminum and hand-woven willow — a labor-intensive material that must first be soaked for one week. Bold and sparse, the beams build toward and guard the light box, which illuminates a photograph of a couch being lifted and the legs of the lifter at work. The mismatched feet of the couch mirror the mismatched socks of the lifter. A wrinkled receipt worms nowhere. I can almost imagine the lifter doing this alone, a feat of impossible and allegorical strength. The exhibition, which is Brown Jr.’s first solo show, borrows its title from Billy Preston’s 1971 album *I Wrote a Simple Song*, and I see Preston’s song “John Henry” in the labor of the lifter, unafraid and determined, tossing the couch into the atmosphere. Brown Jr.’s photographs allow this kind of fiction-building in their quietude and openness, a kind of folklore to be told at the fire, in the living room. “Can’t you see the possibilities?” Preston sings, as does the photographer.

Brown Jr.’s offering of Black secrecy and intimacy presents a vulnerability that is not for the viewer but

BOMB

The Potential of Additional Happenings: Elliott
Jerome Brown Jr.'s a simple song by
Stephanie E. Goodalle

Photographic portraits that reveal and conceal.



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Imagine you're visiting your friend's home for the first time. You can't remember the directions to the bathroom, and you accidentally enter the living room where a relative of your friend is preoccupied with some activity. You're nosy, so you stand there a little bit longer as curiosity gets the best of you. Every time you inch closer, something obstructs your view. You think you see one thing, but the possibilities are endless. More importantly, it's not your business. I constantly encountered some version of this scenario while visiting Elliott Jerome Brown Jr.'s first solo exhibition, *a simple song*, at Baxter St at the Camera Club of New York. Named after a track on Billy Preston's 1971 album, *I Wrote a Simple Song*, the deceptively direct, nine multimedia, photo-sculptural, and photographic images thrust visitors into the private and intimate daily occurrences of the photographer's family and friends.

Sssummmmmwhhhhhhhhhhere (2018) is a large lightbox image that emits a bright glow which drew me into the gallery. It features sepia-hued calf muscles dressed in mismatched Harry Potter-themed ankle socks supporting a squatting figure lifting a heavy piece of furniture that blocks the rest of the body. A metal and willow awning that Brown considers a totem or guide is installed in front of the light box, creating a physical barrier between the viewer and the piece. At the same time, the gallery space doesn't fully service the scale of *Sssummmmmwhhhhhhhhhhere*, as I was distracted by its glare reflecting onto other pieces.

He gave and he gave, but he wouldn't have given at all if I didn't let him in, if I didn't cover my body in soap three times, swish oil between my teeth 47 minutes ahead of the time, that I expected him (Wounded) (2018) is an excellent example of how Brown treats photographs both materially and conceptually. It shows on the left a bare-chested male figure wearing brown pants and seated in a thinking position. The back of his head is turned toward the viewer. The male figure on the right is reaching over the bed as if he is looking for something. His legs appear separated, but it's three sets of legs extended from the person's torso. In turn, the photo is blocked by a handmade frame. Brown uses sculptural elements to recontextualize the work in ways that the image itself is unable to do on its own. For example, a foot in the photograph is magnified by a circular portion of the frame.

Grandma through the mirror (2015/2018) and *Grandpa through the mirror* (2015/2018) attracted me with their quiet presence. The set of photographs shows Brown's grandparents resting in separate areas of their home of thirty-five years. Both are seated and contemplatively looking down. A large painting with four women in warm-toned dresses dancing in a gold frame behind Brown's grandmother and an African mask behind his grandfather are subtle markers of a black household. *Grandma through the mirror* was taken from a stairwell leading to an area that was off-limits to Brown when he was younger. These photographs implore the viewer to reassess ideas about privacy, space, and boundaries while also honoring family and culture.

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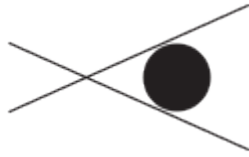
Help me bear my weight (2018) as well as *She threatened the most people off the dance floor. Fingers now laced quietly along the red countertop* (2018) are intensely intimate and tender. The first shows a figure focused on retwisting another person's locs while resting on a knee. The photograph is taken from below as if Elliott is spying on them. The latter image captures a reclining female form. Her unfocused backside rests in the foreground, and viewers can see the rhinestone sunglasses that peer over her shoulder. It is refreshing to see black people at rest, enjoying one another and presented with care.

Brown's sitters are not defined by outside factors; instead, they are simply being. Much like Deana Lawson, a major influence on his work, Brown shows that dignity, especially for the black body, can be defined in a myriad of ways. a simple song is a gentle tug and pull. Viewers are urged to come closer, but the images demand respect, privacy, and agency for their subjects.

Elliott Jerome Brown Jr.: a simple song is on view at Baxter St at the Camera Club of New York in New York City until March 2.

Stephanie E. Goodalle is a curator, writer, and researcher based in New York. She is BOMB's Oral History Fellow.

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For This Young Photographer, A “Simple Song” of Images

Elliott Jerome Brown Jr.’s photographs capture the private moments hiding in our everyday, public lives.

Luther Konadu | 3.28.2019

Looking at artist Elliott Jerome Brown Jr.’s photographs over the last few years, I can’t help but feel like I’m missing out on something, like catching the middle of a conversation between friends on public transit, or overhearing one side of a phone call. In the presence of Brown’s photographs, you remain in wonder, speculating within the gaps he leaves for us onlookers. Instead of giving in to photography’s susceptibility to spectacularize or idealize, Brown opts for the uneventful, seemingly inconsequential bits and pieces laden with history and elliptical meaning.

It’s no surprise that Brown’s recent solo show at the Baxter Street Camera Club was titled *a simple song*—a reference to a Billy Preston track, initially created as a hushed

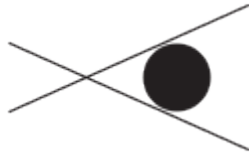
intimate recording, that later became propped up by label heads for commercial success. When I spoke with Brown recently, he described that act of communicating something private in public as being core to his overall practice. “I’m inherently dealing with visibility but privileging the interiority of the individuals and spaces I have access to,” he explained.

Throughout the works in *a simple song*, Brown manages to be plainspoken, but only enough to keep you at a distance. Every decision, from the images themselves to their idiosyncratic titles and their



Elliott Jerome Brown Jr., *On Ice*, 2018.

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physical displays, feels highly deliberate and considered. There's no identifiable beginning or end the viewer might try to piece together into a neat narrative. Over our conversation, we got further into the ways he continues to complicate his photographic practice through sculpture, and what it means to reach beyond the mere flatness of a photograph.

Luther Konadu: You briefly mentioned before we started talking that you might be working on a public installation. Have you ever done anything like that before?

Elliott Jerome Brown Jr.: No, I never have but always wanted to. Most everything that we interact with can be repurposed to structure a photograph. Everything is made out of a rectangle. Everything has a square in it. Everything that is a shape, a photograph can somehow occupy. I would like the opportunity to do something public and that can breathe in a different way in terms of who would interact with it and what the work is. A lot of the time, working with photographs, you end up working with them as these precious objects, and I'd like the opportunity to make something physical that can take some use or be impacted by the environment somehow.

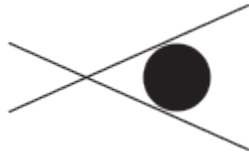
Konadu: Do you see that as something that is coming out of your recent work, in terms of incorporating relief elements into the photograph, which is otherwise flat on the wall?

Brown: That is an aspect of the recent work. The largest structure in my show at Baxter Street was a piece inspired by an awning, but didn't end up referencing an awning. It's made of willow so there's a natural element involved in its actual structure. It was an object that no matter how I handled it, I could make missteps or not be as gracious with it. I appreciated that one wrong move would not render this piece unseeable; it could still be shown in public space. Similarly, in another piece constructed after a traditional photo panel, a lot of the damages were a result of working through how to make this thing. The wire was coming out of the groove and breaking as I worked with it. I decided to intentionally wound some areas of the work so that it made sense. I think ultimately, because of the reference for that structure and thinking about how that structure may have lived in someone's house, or may have received some kind of wear over time, it works. The damages don't stop it from being displayed.

That process reminded me of my mother's collection of Lenox Angels. Lenox is a brand that makes plates and other dining ware, but they also make angels. They were specifically making these African-inspired angels where each of the angels was given a significant name. One of them represented music, another strength, and agility, et cetera. My mom has collected over fifteen angels and, over time, a lot of them have been broken. In the various houses—three or four homes—my mother has lived in since my parents divorced, those angels have always had a place to be seen in the house regardless of their damage. Sure, these items were intended to be protected, but the sentiment and the act of cherishing them are consistent; therefore, they'll continue to be displayed. I like objects from that perspective. They don't have to be perfect. They can exist publicly even as they've been transformed by time.

Konadu: The lightbox in the show feeds into this outdoor way of viewing images as it relates to advertising billboards. The scale of it is also something we haven't seen from you before.

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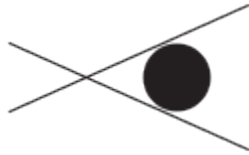
It sounds like you are very much in that place of physicality: thinking about how objects in space enact with our bodies, trying to make a linkage between the two-dimensional way of working—collapsing our three-dimensional space into these flat surfaces—now that you are going back into a very physical mode of working. Was it inevitable that you'd take this new turn?

Brown: The very first piece I ever exhibited was in my junior year of college in 2015. And I was thinking about how I wanted to frame it, but something about the work didn't make sense in a traditional frame. I had this idea to instead frame it in ribbed undershirts that were stained and bloodied by a costume designer. The work was about internal dialogue and conflict, so I wanted to communicate a sense of abuse that was tangible. I knotted and stapled them around the piece and that was the frame. That was my first gesture as an exhibiting artist but also an artist that cared about each element involved in showing my work to people. And so, these dimensional qualities have always existed when I'm making a photograph. The flatness of the picture is something that I love but it's also a limitation. I love objects and the things they possess; how they can communicate various experiences and time. The objects in my images are oftentimes equally as important as the individuals in them. When I'm making a picture, I'm already thinking about how I can incorporate the space that the photograph is made into the image and *beyond* the image. The camera limits the frame to a certain view, so how can I embellish what is not pictured here?

Konadu: That's something I'm always thinking through with my own work. I'm always trying to figure out how I can continue a single image or multiply it in a way that the reference points to different directions. I think a great example of this in your work is a piece you have in the show right now: *He gave and he gave ...* (2018). That piece is almost disorienting. I have to slow down and look at it several times. I like what you are doing there. You are not making it easy for the viewer to passively consume the image. I think that ties into what you were saying about the frame and the image coexisting together.

Brown: I'm invested in how people live with photographs in public and private spaces. When I'm in public, I'm constantly observing spaces where images can or do inhabit and how I can use that in my own work. The same thing happens when I'm in an interior and thinking about how images inhabit people's private spaces. That piece was inspired by the way my grandmother collects photographs and the frames she uses to organize them. But more specifically, I had already been thinking about family photo panels and how I can use the frame to cause a tension with the photograph. I wanted to use my own photographs that would work in this fractured, compartmentalized, disjointed way, kind of against how the family photo panel was designed to function.

Family photo panels are traditionally used to organize photographic experiences that are somewhat scripted celebratory moments, experiences of accomplishment such as graduations or awards. Experiences are organized very neatly in these frames and I wanted to reference how sometimes experiences in my life are not neat. Things are haphazard. When you recall some of these experiences as a memory, there are certain memories that are pronounced that you are hyperaware of. There are other memories that are lost and not visible in the photograph that your memory



creates. That drove the way that I obscured and made visible the images in that piece. The title also helped reveal my inclination behind putting those two images together.



Elliott Jerome Brown Jr., *Is it that I desire to see Jesus bend, to witness them at odds or in question? Jesus loves me, but I believe that Jesus is in process too.*, 2018

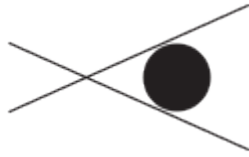
Konadu: I like how you play with a discontinuity in your work. Photography can easily fall into a narrative driven space, but you seem to jump in and out in the way you image the spaces, objects, and figures in your work. It sometimes seems like you are showing us something specific, but that leads us nowhere in particular. I'm wondering if you can speak about the usefulness in engaging with discontinuity in terms of how the individuals in your images are read.

Brown: The recent *Soul of a Nation* exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum was talking about the history of photography as it pertains to black people's usage of it. It talked about the Kamoinge collective headed by Roy DeCarava, and the ways in which that collective practiced photography rooted in reality to prove their thesis. So, they go out and make photos of people on the street and of events and these photographs serve a particular purpose in terms of how you position them through history. But then it started talking about how the next movement of photography by

black photographers was led by people like Carrie Mae Weems and Lorna Simpson, who began to consolidate experience into these re-fabricated non-specific moments. So, when you think about Carrie Mae Weems's *Kitchen Table* series, it's a completely fabricated moment where she's thinking about a lot of different things and symbolizing them, as opposed to documenting how these things show up in reality. These are photographers who are conjuring an image within an environment that looks familiar. And so, it teeters on the line of a document versus a studio fabrication. And I think it is within that tradition that I work. I work in ambiguity in the way that someone like Lynette Yiadom-Boakye creates these characters that exist within an environment that can be either real or imagined or someplace in between.

These moments of happenstance where people are at leisure or in dialogue—that's something I'm interested in when framing my work. I don't work in series and so working within these structures allows me to imbue these singular images with a relationship to one another, but also with a multiplicity where their biographical context—presenting it on its own—might not allow. I'm

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making photographs that move around, challenge other images, offset them, complement and broaden the span of the moment and what they can be of service to.

I think that my practice is maybe more akin to how I see painters work with perspective and how you can be placed in multiple places at once. When I first saw Jonathan Lyndon Chase's paintings, it really shot my mind. The way he depicts the figure is exactly what I want to communicate in my work. He's able to make the bodies and the space transcend their natural limits and speak to this collective way we experience and recall things. I think other mediums are often more successful in doing that than photography.

Konadu: Some of your images carefully consider color, texture, and composition the way a painter would—I'm taken by those elements. Examples of this are in works like *96 degrees in the shade* (2017) or *An underline through dried cement* (2016) or *Mommy, Jayden and I at Christmas* (2016). It comes to be a deflection of direct observation of sorts from the viewer—we are not seeing a person but instead a picture of them. If I describe this as formalism, it is not simplifying the image but rather form acting almost like a blockade.

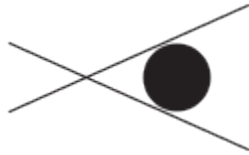
Brown: The form is definitely integral to how you navigate the work in terms of defining the viewer's distance to the piece. There are some photographic works by other artists that are confrontational. They position the gaze in the way that while you are looking at this work, this person who made the work and the people in them are looking at you. Notions of agency and power dynamics are integrated into such works. There are photographs that work to fold you into the experience of that space or event. In my work there are a lot of things that are peppered through the space. There are a lot of points that allow you to imagine further about this work because all of the work is about intimacy, maintaining a certain privacy, and discretion; naturally the viewer is not allowed mentally and physically to have a certain proximity to the work.

I think the form helps guide that. I think that process of your body relating to these works is a part of the work itself. When you think about the large awning structure I was talking about earlier, it dictates the distance you have to stand. I'm still working on the



Elliott Jerome Brown Jr., *An underline through dried cement*, 2016.

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language around this but the structure dictates that there's a certain way that you should behave when guiding these works. I don't think of that behavioral requirement as abusive or repressive but educational. Here is a way to relate to someone's life that does not require me to own or know everything, but requires me first and foremost to be respectful. When I'm making these works, I'm thinking about how I interact with others. It foregrounds behaviors within my own life.

Konadu: You talk about intimacy and private encounters as being central to your work. How is that sustained as you continue to move outward and become more extroverted with the scale of the work, the sculptural components, and potentially future public works?

Brown: It's amplified. Sometimes, when I think about these dimensional elements, it comes out of feeling like the photo is not enough to communicate what's on my mind. But the structures are often like periods or exclamation marks at the end of a sentence that would've already exclaimed or ended without those markers. The markers are helpful in contextualizing the work further. The intimacy is still there. Those are the moments I want to photograph. I'm really interested in the parts of ourselves that cannot be articulated or can't be made available to other people.

Luther Konadu is a visual artist and writer based in Winnipeg, Canada.

CULTURED

NON-CONFORMING NARRATIVES: FIVE PHOTOGRAPHERS UPENDING NOTIONS OF QUEERNESS

EM GALLAGHER | 09.27.2018

“You can embrace a term like ‘queer’ and not be defined by it,” Res says as I leave their studio. This idea is a throughline between the practices of five emerging photographers—Elliott Jerome Brown Jr., Lia Clay, Naima Green, Matthew Morrocco and Res—who represent the vanguard of the medium. Their recent work probes concerns shared by many young artists: How can the intersections of identity be expressed through an art practice? How should we navigate visually-driven social media platforms? How can artists communicate queerness differently in personal versus commercial and commissioned work? And what are the possibilities of expressing oneself as an individual while identifying with a larger community?

Attempting to fit these five young artists into a box would be impossible. Queerness refuses form in contemporary photography, and that very mutability injects images with a newfound energy.

Elliott Jerome Brown Jr.

“Most of my photographs aren’t staged, but I do strive to make something that is theatrical,” Elliott Jerome Brown Jr. tells me at his kitchen table on a stagnant summer night. The dichotomy between



ELLIOTT JEROME BROWN JR. *LOW TACK*. 2018.

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natural and theatrical seems irreconcilable, but Brown proves otherwise. The photographer shoots candid moments, often of close friends, family and fellow artists. This could make for a straightforward narrative of personal intimacy—yet Brown finds a way to move beyond conventional portraits.

His collaborators are found with their backs turned, eyes scrunched in laughter and bodies contorted away from the lens. They shift our point of view, asking us to leave the literal behind. “There’s a reason why I insist the biographical information not be the most important reading of the image. I don’t want my relationship with the person I’m photographing to end the conversation.” Rather, Brown says, “I’m interested in the residue of presence or activity, which encourages a slower, more ambiguous reading, versus an image that explicitly shows that action.”

In repurposing biography, Brown’s work requires a reckoning with the broad words associated with identity politics. “At the beginning of college,” Brown remembers, “my artist statement literally said, ‘I am looking at the intersection of blackness and queer identity.’ I was being confronted with all these terms, and it took time to make them my own.” This process was helped along by the artist’s taking a series of self-portraits—an introspective process that solidified Brown’s interest in framing narratives, rather than playing a starring role.

In September, Brown braces for a new act: journeying to New Orleans, where he begins a nine-month residency program through the St. Roch Community Church in the 8th Ward.

Though this residency marks the first time Elliott Brown will live outside New York, he expresses a gravitational pull to the region. “I have a deep relationship with the South, though it feels internal rather than physical,” he says. Emanating an unmistakable warmth himself, Brown will have no trouble drawing from his new life and cast of collaborators.

ARTFORUM



Elliott Jerome Brown Jr., *Devin in Red Socks*, 2016, ink-jet print, 24 x 36".

NEW YORK

"Stranger Things"

OUTPOST ARTIST RESOURCES

1665 Norman St.

June 9–July 7, 2017

Sculptor Doreen Garner extends her inquiries into intimacy, hygiene, latent sexuality, and racialized violence in her first curatorial effort to date. From Chicana punk tattoo artist Tamara Santibañez to Hollywood special-effects animator Erik Ferguson, the artists in this group exhibition hit Garner's themes from many different angles.

Nakeya Brown's photo series "If Nostalgia Were Colored Brown," 2014, presents quietly domestic tableaux peppered with clues to a vibrant life: 1970s disco albums, salon hair dyers, curlers, and a flowerless African violet. In Ted Mineo's pictures *Mist*, *Not*, *Shipping*, and *Ride*, all 2017, common

objects are rediscovered as otherworldly specimens: Tinted by luscious studio lighting, objects such as rubber gloves and a mound of polymer clay float through bursting galactic droplets. Ferguson's *Day-Glo Untitled Video Compilation*, 2017, renders fleshy trunks and monstrous sexual appendages flailing through gleaming digital space. His body-horror animation corresponds with Jes Fan's futuristic sculpture—leftover props from a performance—*Disposed to Add*, 2017. Fan's tub is filled with wet, slug-like silicone tubes that seem as if they're the remains of some alien surgery.

In *Untitled: Bureau*, 2017, a sculpture by Garner herself, a wooden dresser bulges with frizzy black hair—her straightforward use of materials falls short of evoking the startling uncanniness her work is known for. Hair is also manipulated by Kenya (Robinson) with her suite of blond-haired brooms. These janitorial tools fitted with dangling synthetic locks, such as *Reclining Blue*, 2016, are a bitter statement on race and maintenance labor. But the daily negotiation of pain in black life shifts to tenderness with Elliott Jerome Brown Jr.'s photograph *Devin in Red Socks*, 2016. Here, a young man holds aloft a towel that conceals his torso as he poses in a bedroom. A tiny hole in his sock is a punctum—a wounded doorway for the heart to rush in.

— Vanessa Thill