

i-D

moma's 'new photography' series asks what it means to be human

André-Naquian Wheeler

MAR 27 2018, 3:58PM

Six photographers talk about their work in the standout show.

Last year, New York's Department of Cultural Affairs found almost half of NYC artists can not afford art supplies. As a result, MoMA's New Photography series — which has run every two years since 1985 — shines a necessary spotlight on emerging talent, devoting wall space to photographers who have never shown in the museum before. The latest iteration is titled *Being: New Photography* and, as its name suggests, the exhibition explores what it means to be human today. This year, the 88-year-old institution called on 17 artists from eight different countries to provide their own interpretations.

The breadth of themes found in *Being* is its most striking aspect. The young photographers boldly dissect and expand upon representations of womanhood, queerness, and blackness. One of the most distinctive pieces is "My Birth" by Carmen Winant. The hallway-spanning work features photos of women giving birth taped onto the walls. The Ohio-based artist puts the beauty, gore, and pain of childbirth on full display. When you look at the found vintage photos, it's difficult not to think about how the reproductive rights of women have been under attack.

Carmen Winant. *My Birth* (detail). 2018. Site-specific installation of found images, tape.

This kind of eye-catching approach illustrates how the emerging generation of photographers are set to disrupt the art world. "I've gone to past New Photography exhibitions as a visitor," photographer Paul Mpagi Supya tells i-D. Paul commonly employs self-portraiture to explore blackness in relation to the male body. "I remember the past shows with Deana Lawson, Barbara Probst, Moyra Davey... and they blew me away and I can still recall the moment of first encountering Probst's double portraits. Each one of them, and many others, have influenced my work and pushed me to work harder. To actually be included in this current iteration of *Being* feels like the biggest reward for my risk-taking, work, and dedication to keeping making artwork — especially when I almost gave up on it just five years ago."

Here, i-D talks to six artists featured in *Being: New Photography* about what it means to be a young photographer in 2018.

Em Rooney

When did you first start photography?

When I was in high school. I printed in a community darkroom.

What themes and ideas do you find yourself interested exploring in your work?

Derosia

André-Naquian Wheeler, i-D, March 27, 2018

I often speak with my students about how for many of us, especially in economically developed areas, photos, or pixel-based images, have become the stuff of life — like air. They are everywhere. The democratic nature of photography has been exploited and is now capitalized on by companies trying to buy us or sell to us. Because of this, I am always trying to get away from them, and their violence. Sometimes I make video as a way to open up space for nuance to present itself — the nuance of a place or a subject — a cure to the truncated and essentializing still. Sometimes I let the photos be blurry or “bad,” or I describe them instead of sharing them, in the spirit of Herve Guibert. Sometimes I exclude them entirely and use sculptural forms as semantic stand-ins for people or places.



Em Rooney. Elliot. 2015. Hand colored gelatin silver print in artist's frame, 13 1/2 x 11 inches (34.3 x 27.9 cm). Courtesy the artist and Bodega, New York. © Em Rooney 2018

What is your technical process?

I use whatever I've got. My cell phone, a DSLR, screen grabs that I turn into digital negatives, a Nikon 35mm camera, sometimes I hand color them, sometimes I shoot with my 4x5 camera. I used to do that a lot more, and I've certainly been inspired by artists like Dawoud Bey, Catherine Opie, Peter Hujar — people who've done portraiture in this way, using medium or large format cameras in highly considered lighting situations. I have a lot of portraits I've taken like that, but I tend to not show them. They're too good and can look editorial. I've never really known how to situate them inside the project of my work. I would love to, on the one hand, make editorial photographs, but on the other—they've got no place in my particular method of artistic production. There is one image in the show that is more or less a traditional portrait, in that style, that I took with my 4x5 camera— Elliot. The only reason I was able to reconcile with it is that I accidentally exposed the negative twice in the camera, so the imageness of it is no longer clear.