Dear Friends & Supporters of En Foco,

Building on the public's response to the 2016 Nueva Luz Photography Fellowship initiative, we increased the number of Fellowships awarded from five to ten and as expected, the quality of the submissions were superb. What you will see in this Spring 2017 issue is the work of ten extraordinary artists, selected by a panel of arts professionals, who are deserving of special attention by our contemporary arts collectors, curators, critics and museum officials...a community that very rarely notices artists of color, like the ones who celebrated in this Nueva Luz issue.

We would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the essayist, Gabriel de Guzman, who as curator of the related Fellows exhibition, “Immediate Surroundings,” wrote an in-depth commentary on the artists and their work that further articulates the substance and nuance of the work generally under-appreciated.

A special thank you to Stephanie Baptist who as editor and Nueva Luz curator undertook the Herculean task of integrating the works by ten artists into a seamless and provocative publication. Partnering with the artist/designer, Nestor Otero, once again elevates Nueva Luz into an art form.

Nueva Luz is now online and free to download. It is an excellent way to spread the word about the work of photographers, representing so many cultures. It is important to note that we continue to invest in quality artists through our Photography Fellowship initiative. An investment as you can see that will generate a return of great value. One last thank you goes to Kim Rose, the architect and online grants administrator.

Once again, we thank you for your support, enjoy this issue of Nueva Luz and continue to support the artists in our communities.

Bill Aguado
Director

Layza Garcia
Programs Manager / Editor
Several weeks ago, I read Bell Hooks essay “Choosing the Margin as Space of Radical Openness.” In this 1989 prose, Hooks speaks on the complex and shifting realm of power in relation to cultural practice, as historically marginalized communities have been excluded from hegemonic cultural practices based on race, sex, and class. Almost three decades ago, Hooks called for art workers, producers, writers of color to make a choice. She proposed that art workers can decide to remain silent or decide to stand in resistance, by creating, vocalizing and developing new ways to “form counter-hegemonic cultural practice and make culture towards that revolutionary effort which seeks to create space where there is unlimited access to the pleasure and power of knowing, where transformation is possible? The choice is crucial. It shapes and determines our response to existing cultural practice and our capacity to envision new, alternative, oppositional aesthetic acts. It informs the way we speak about these issues, the language we choose.”

When I think about my current practice, and the work of my friends who are in the field of journalism, art, film and media, I know that we have made a choice. We occupy spaces where transformation can be possible. We are all working to tell a sense of place, where we come from and the beauty of that diversity. That is why it is such an honor to work with En Foco, an organization that has been standing strong in this transformational space for decades and is a shining example of social equity and community engagement. As the editor of this issue of Nueva Luz, I am hyper aware of the privilege to do this work, as exposure of diverse narratives through publishing is extremely important.

As a review panelist alongside colleagues Amy Chin, Special Advisor for Cultural Initiatives at Chinatown Partnership and Sabrina Cedeno, Membership Associate at Fractured Atlas for the 2017 Fellowship, we examined the work of more than 100 photographers of color, living and working in New York. The diversity of talent was staggering and ranged between photographic installations, hyperrealism, documentary, and portraiture. The subject matter and project locations equally diverse. Inspired by the range of visual arts practice, the decision-making process was no easy feat. We recognize the value in opportunities such as these, as often they are far and few between. While so many were deserving, we selected 10 photographers: Cinthya Santos Briones, Lisa DuBois, Santana Copeland, Daesha Devón Harris, Rhea Karam, Daniel Martinez, Erika Morillo, Byron Smith, Jonathan Santiago, and Nichole Washington. Collectively, they present stories that inform, educate and inspire.

Thank you to Bill Aguado, Layza Garcia and Kim Rose for this opportunity.

Immediate Surroundings

Gabriel de Guzman

The precise role of the artist, then, is to illuminate that darkness, blaze roads through vast forests, so that we will not, in all our doing, lose sight of its purpose, which is, after all, to make the world a more human dwelling place.

James Baldwin | The Creative Process 1962

Artists who work in photography, a medium which depends on light, illuminate what is taking place around us. They notice what is hidden in plain sight, revealing the overlooked—whether it is the geometric abstraction of New York’s urban architecture or the grandmothers who form the bedrock of Latin American families. For many photographers, their practice takes them on travels to document unfamiliar surroundings, such as the battlefield of Mosul in Iraq, or the weather-beaten landscape of Bangladesh.

En Foco’s ten Photography Fellows represent rising stars in the field. This Fellowship shows the importance of supporting artists of color, giving them an opportunity to develop their creative voice and gain well-deserved exposure. In today’s political climate, when public support for the arts is under threat, those who suffer especially are artists from historically underrepresented communities. How do artists survive and find the support they need to express their viewpoints and professional ambitions. Organizations like En Foco are more crucial than ever. The ten fellows represented in this issue of Nueva Luz are all included in an exhibition that I curated at the Andrew Freedman Home in the Bronx, making their work accessible to public audiences. The portfolio of images published in the pages of this journal gives their work significant visibility and posterity, not to mention a critical perspective on the important subject matter that they portray. As skilled photographers do, these artists bring awareness to the people who have lacked visibility and shed light on what has gone unexplored in our history and in our current environment. The photographers selected for this fellowship challenge us to look at our surroundings, to heighten our awareness of it, and to imagine possibilities for improving how we relate to one another.

Several artists are trying novel approaches for looking at everyday sites. Santana Copeland takes the city’s buildings, scaffolds, lampposts, and ancillary architecture and reduces them to the abstract shapes and grids that make up the infrastructure of a dense metropolis like New York. The stark contrast of black and white highlight the severe angles in Copeland’s images. Skewed vantage points turn modernist towers into isolated fortresses and storefront gates into gridded lattices. Through this reductive imagery, Copeland makes city dwellers aware that the commonplace geometry of these secular structures actually forms barriers, obscuring views and cutting off access.

Daniel Martinez also focuses his lens on a common urban space—the basketball court. His series A Gated Community gives reverence to these fenced off recreational areas, places that the artist and friends in his Bronx neighborhood come not only for athletics but also to play, socialize, eat, fight, perform, and enjoy the summer. Martinez considers the courts “a home away from home.” The images reveal the balance of playfulness and rivalry that the courts engender for the Bronx youth depicted. In one photograph, a group of boys is giving their friend a wedgie so strong that it pulls him off the pavement. In another, a teen holds a fake gun to his friend’s head in jest, but the scene is jarring nonetheless. Another image shows a young woman with a daring look on her face as she holds a basketball to her hip while a group of boys stand behind her appearing to chuckle and taunt.

A few of the photography fellows, including Lisa DuBois, Daisha Devon Harris, and Jonathan Santiago, have focused on the crucial importance of water but are taking distinct approaches to the subject. In her photojournalistic practice, DuBois photographs water rituals in cultures across the globe, from New York to the Caribbean and throughout the African Diaspora. Her recent series, Holy Water, highlights water’s universal significance, not only as an essential element for survival, but also its value spiritually and culturally. Harris captures the role of water as a means of cleansing, whether literally for bathing the body, or figuratively for purifying the soul in religious ceremonies. In one image, for example, a woman pours molasses into the sea as a libation.

Inspired by African American folklore, slave narratives, and Harlem Renaissance poetry, Harris’ series Just Beyond the River is a reflection on the black experience that is deeply connected to the landscape, the home of its and its intersections with water. In this context, water becomes symbolic of freedom. While bodies of water can be a vehicle for movement, they can also be a barrier, one that represents social, cultural, and political borders. Harris’s work combines anonymous historical portraits and still life images of flora and man-made forms from the local landscape. They suggest forgotten narratives of those who have struggled and made important sacrifices for future generations.

Santiago’s long term project, Bengal, documents the effects of climate change on Bangladesh, which is in Bengal, one of the most impacted regions in the world. Hundreds of thousands of migrants are forced to flee their homes because of calamity and economic hardship inflicted by natural disasters. Over the next decade, Santiago aims to document the individuals affected. The images from his first trip to Bangladesh show people living on the southern islands who were at risk of being displaced due to river erosion. The panoramic photograph, for example, portrays a woman whose home and land are under threat of disappearing in the next violent storm.

Artists such as photojournalist Byron Smith are addressing the displacement resulting from conflict and violence in the Middle East and other regions. He has been documenting the war in Iraq from the perspective of the civilians caught in the crossfire. Attempting to understand the clash between the U.S.-backed Iraqi Security Forces and ISIS, the photographer captures the events of history unfolding. While the Iraqi army’s offensive push to retake the city of Mosul from the Islamic State has waned, there remains a steady flow of residents fleeing the hostility. Parents struggle to keep their families safe amid the carnage and rubble. Smith reveals the disturbing everyday reality in which children play on the front lines of violence and destruction. In these images Smith tries to photograph the cause and effect of this worsening conflict.

Beirut-born, New York-based artist Rhea Karam documents urban environments in transition, focusing on “public walls and the role they play in our daily lives.” They reveal shifting identities, socio-political change, and the history of displacement in the landscape. Working primarily with photography, Karam also employs strategies from street art, such as screen printing and wheat pasting. In her series Déraciné (uprooted), the artist has photographed trees in New York that she then prints, paints, transplants, and “replants” by wheat pasting these images onto public walls in Lebanon. After relocating the tree into its new environment, she then photographs it in the often incongruous, dilapidated urban context. They are green interventions that question the lack of urban planning and viable natural space. At the same time, these images represent the displacement of being transplanted from one country to another, an uneasy feeling that many immigrants share.

Other photographers are exploring the human condition by mining their personal experiences and relationships. Erika Morillo uses photography as a tool for a personal endeavor and for evoking the emotional environment that surrounds her. The word Umbral, the title of her current series, means gateway or portal. Portraying her son in various scenes, this body of work attempts to capture moments of transition that occur during childhood and adolescence. As a woman who became a single mother at a young age, taking care of her child, she wants her son to experience and enjoy his childhood in a way that she never could because of her upbringing in a dysfunctional family. In this work, Morillo creates an imaginary space for her son, but she cannot keep reality from creeping into the scenes. Her work appears to be dreamlike but also lost in contemplation—sitting at the edge of a bed, lying in a field of dandelions, or curled up on a window sill reading a book. While the artist gives her young son freedom to explore this fantasy world, she also realizes that she cannot prevent him from growing up.

Photographers like Nicholson Washington and Cinthya Santos Briones are using the camera’s power as an image-making tool to show pride in their cultural identity and their community. Raised in the 1990s, Washington’s recent work looks back to the decades before him as a source of inspiration. In his series Déraciné, Washington uses the camera’s power as an image-making tool to show pride in their cultural identity and their community. Raised in the 1990s, Washington’s recent work looks back to the decades before him as a source of inspiration. In his series Déraciné, Washington uses the camera’s power as an image-making tool to show pride in their cultural identity and their community.

The undокументed Mexican immigrant women in Santos Briones’s series Abuelas represent the elders of their community. Twenty or thirty years after settling in New York, often working unstable jobs with low wages, many of these grandmothers remain invisible and undocumented even though they have managed to build lives here for themselves and their families. Photographed in the comfort of their own domestic spaces, the sitters choose how and where they would like to be represented. They dress in their personal clothing, choosing items that reflect their own identity. In the images, the grandmothers are portrayed larger, symbolically recreating their culture, memory and pride across borders. By allowing the grandmothers to participate in their own representation, the artist attempts to reverse the power imbalance and exploitation that these women have experienced.

In our current political environment, divisive rhetoric and actions have continued to marginalize people of color. For political gain, those in power have misrepresented and perpetuated persistent stereotypes about communities of which they know little. It is more important than ever to support artists from underrepresented populations, who pay attention to their immediate surroundings and who uncover forgotten narratives. En Foco’s Photography Fellowship is a celebration of these artists’ visionary work, opening our eyes to diverse perspectives, to what many have chosen to ignore or avoid. While these images form mere glimpses, collectively, with artists as our guides, we can begin to see the fuller picture.
The late photographer Ruth Orkin helped shape her approach to photography while attending the School of Visual Arts. Lisa continued her studies at the Germain School of Photography and graduated with awards in Photojournalism. Lisa’s exploration for an understanding of the world through photography has taken her to interesting places. Her ability to connect with people in an exceptional way is evident through her work. During the nineties, Lisa’s paparazzi days were spent photographing events and popular celebrities for the Village Voice, New York Post and various news stock agencies. During this time she worked as a photo editor for the Black American News, and Class Magazine.

Lisa taught herself Photoshop and began to produce surreal and conceptual photography while raising her daughter. She spends time documenting subcultures in New Orleans and New York and is a contributing photographer in the creative department at Getty Images. Lisa has exhibited in Europe, Asia and the United States. Her work on New Orleans subculture is sold to collectors through the Sutton Gallery in Louisiana. The main attraction for this work comes from her distinctive technique that involves printing her photographs on canvas and embellishing them with paint. Photography has never translated into work for Lisa, every time she picks up the camera it is a stimulating new experience.

Holy Water

Water rituals have existed in all cultures since the beginning of time. These photographs portray people from cultures that place a spiritual significance on water and its sublime power. It is a visual comparison that links traditions shared by Eastern and western cultures. I became interested in the power of water and its effect on people while photographing water ceremonies. The rituals begin before dawn and peak at sunrise. The photos are taken in low light.

There are prayers and offerings of flowers in the water which summon the ancestors and spiritual deities. There are some who make direct contact with the spirits during the water ceremony that elevates them into a trance. While photographing, I experience a strong transference of their euphoria, leaving me feeling elated and physically tired as if I had shared their spiritual experience.

My developing curiosity for understanding the nature of water and its role in rituals led me to the work of the late Dr. Masaru Omoto; a Japanese author, researcher, photographer. Based on numerous tests, Dr. Omoto concluded that the chemical structure of water changes due to the positive or negative thought patterns of those interacting with the water. This led me to question whether his theory works in reverse.

Does contact with water during ceremonies have a powerful effect on the thoughts and emotional state of a person? Through examining my photographs of individuals involved in water rituals I realized that their facial expressions proved that water plays a significant role in elevating one into a trance. Many cultures further share the belief that water can be transformed to facilitate healing. During certain ceremonial rituals water is changed into holy water; whereby it is believed to have healing properties. A strong belief in the ability of holy water to heal can have a favorable impact on the individual seeking a cure.

There are so many unanswered questions concerning the meaning of life and death. Water ceremonies that connect people with God, ancestors and deities are a way of celebrating the magnificence of the mystery in life. I hope my photography raises and answers thoughtful questions and expresses a unique viewpoint on universal spiritual traditions.
Men in states of ecstasy during an annual fire hose baptism taken place in Harlem New York.

A woman is entranced during a spiritual ceremony honoring all those lost through slavery.
Maafa (or Holocaust of Enslavement, terms used to describe the history of the atrocities inflicted on African people. Coney Island, New York
Daesha Devón Harris is a Saratoga Springs, New York native, artist and photographer who has spent time in Buffalo, NY and San Francisco, CA. Narratives are central to Harris’ art practice and the stories that inspire her work have both local origins and that of the greater African diaspora. Her earliest mentor was her Great Uncle, Joseph Daniels, a self-taught artist and accomplished painter from whom she received painting instruction as a young child. She credits her parents for always fostering her creativity and fueling her interest in stories and history, but most importantly for teaching her the importance of community. Both her multicultural family and the unexpected death of her young father have greatly shaped her life. She holds a BFA in Studio Art from the College of Saint Rose and a MFA in Visual Art from The University at Buffalo. She is a member of various organizations and plays an active role in her community as a youth advocate, social activist and cultural history preservationist. Harris is an award-winning artist that has been featured in numerous exhibitions across New York State as well in Philadelphia, PA, Louisville, CO, and beyond. She is also an avid fisherman and hobbyist gardener.

Just Beyond the River

Quite simply family, history and landscape are three interconnected and continual sources of inspiration to me. Growing up my greatest joy was exploring both the urban and pastoral landscape of my immediate and extended home. These outings allowed me to not only experience familial traditions connected to the landscape but also to learn personal and cultural history. The stories that my family told entranced me and compelled me to seek out the missing stories- those untold and those of forgotten kinsfolk. In my work I enjoy combining elements from both shared narratives and those that are specific to myself.

The selected pieces from my “Just Beyond the River” series are inspired by Negro Folklore, Slave Narratives and Harlem Renaissance poetry. This work aims to illuminate America’s aged but enduring cultural, historical and societal ideologies regarding race, while reiterating the central narrative that emerges from the referenced memoirs - the ongoing struggle for Freedom. By using elements from these stories in combination with unidentified historical images and aquatic landscapes this work claims the significant contributions and sacrifices that our ancestors gave civilization in both life and in death and acknowledges the burden of social constructs that to this day continue to threaten people of color.

This series is about the Black experience that is deeply connected to the landscape, the idea of home and it’s intersections with water. Water becomes symbolic of Freedom whether it is in this world or the next and at the same time is evidence of social and cultural boundaries. Water has to be crossed on the journey to Freedom.

My process always begins with extensive amounts of research, collecting stories, references, imagery, memorabilia etc. In this series I have incorporated a personal collection of unidentified carte de visites and cabinet card portraits. After creating a transparent version of a specific portrait, I then take the transparency to a local body of water, collect flora from the area, place the transparency in the water and arrange an aquatic still-life which I then photograph. The resulting image with a layered visual effect is in fact a single frame. The locations where each of the images are shot are all waters in and around my home region, and because of the locality, hold meaningful associations both personally and historically. The trail begins in my hometown of Saratoga and ends North at Timbuctoo (the revolutionary free Black settlement in North Elba, NY).

The thought of “home” has always been a comfort and an inspiration to me: the concept, people, places, history and the actual physical structure. My work explores this theme as it relates to the African American experience, and the issues that encompasses- notably community, race and class.
Daesha Devón Harris. We wear the mask that grins and lies with torn and bleeding hearts we smile, Just Beyond The River, A Folk Tale Series. 2015

Daesha Devón Harris. I have sown beside all waters in my day, Just Beyond The River, A Folk Tale Series. 2015
Rhea Karam was born in Beirut and grew up between the U.S. and France. She is based in NY where she graduated from the International Center of Photography in 2007 and was the recipient of a director's scholarship. Her work focuses on documenting domestic and urban environments with an emphasis on public walls and the role they play in our daily lives. In 2009 she published Breathing Walls, a visual archive of the political transition in Lebanon. Her work has been exhibited internationally in both solo and group shows and has won several awards among which are the Silver Eye Fellowship commendation award, best of show at the Colorado Photographic Arts Center and was named top 10 emerging Middle Eastern artists to watch by CNN.

Déraciné (Uprooted)

The series Déraciné (Uprooted) consists of trees I have photographed in New York, printed, painted, transported and “replanted” so to speak onto public walls of Lebanon through the process of wheat pasting questioning the lack of urban planning and viable green space. After placing the tree in its new environment I then photograph it in context as a record of its new modified habitat. This physical intervention alters the urban landscape and tackles the personally relevant themes of identity and its relationship to the urban environment by the symbolic gesture of being uprooted from one country to another.

Rhea Karam

Rhea Karam

rheakaram.com
Rhea Karam. Treescape #05, Déraciné (Uprooted) Series, Lebanon. 2015.
Daniel Martinez is a photographer/artist born and raised in The Bronx, New York. Growing up in the city, he was molded into an individual who strived for opportunity. Following high school, Daniel was accepted to The School of Visual Arts and attended for a year before deciding to take time off to pursue photography full time. Leaving school wasn’t a simple decision to make but it was the one that made the most sense and eventually shaped his life for the better. From a very early age, Daniel felt he was meant to do more than what was expected of him and having a passion for photography pushed him to begin his career. He began his own photography business and photographed over one hundred weddings in the first two years. Although he specializes in wedding photography, his true passion lies in telling stories and documenting the people and places that are a part of his life. His main goal with his career is to not only document what he’s passionate about, but also to challenge himself to do things differently with each endeavor. His work has been featured in the New York Times online edition and was also on display at Photoville 2016. Daniel is an after-school photography program instructor at Lab High School in Manhattan and is currently planning to launch the gallery show for A Gated Community by this September.

A Gated Community

My photography teacher probably didn’t know it at the time but her words inspired me to find a story worth telling and to use my craft as a way to communicate what I feel, what I see, and what I am a part of. Throughout the beginning of my photography career I’ve been in search of that story, and little did I know it was one of closest things to me. They call it the Bronx, the birth place of hip hop, the BX, but for me it was home, and that’s why I chose to share this story through my photographs. It’s the story that starts at the small basketball court that to many of us was our own backyard. It was the place I spent every summer since the age of 12, where I witnessed everything from gang fights to just regular summer love. This was a piece of my community and I loved every bit of it.

A Gated Community (AGC) is a series of photos documenting the basketball court that was a huge part of my life. Capturing the good the bad and the ugly. I want to show that the Bronx has way more to offer than just the Yankee Stadium, the Bronx Zoo or its bad reputation. I want to tell the story of my community as well as introduce my community to a different experience that’s rarely a part of our lives.

For example, I will never forget when I started the project and lugged out huge lights and cameras to take photos of my friends, immediately after showing them, they said “yoooooooo it looks like I’m on a magazine!” followed by tons of kids saying “wow I didn’t even know you were a photographer” or “now I want to learn that in college.” It opened my eyes to how excluded we were from the art world, and how little it takes to inspire someone and push them in a different, more creative direction. My ultimate goal with this project is to bring the arts to the small community in my neighborhood. When A.G.C is complete and I have enough photos to properly represent my community, the final art show will be exhibited inside the actual basketball court. I want people to get an experience that is as real and raw as the photos I try to capture.

Born and raised in Dominican Republic, Erika Morillo has been working as a freelance professional in New York City for over a decade. She studied clinical psychology and sociology, which influenced her to photograph as a way to understand her family dynamics and the social environment she inhabits. Morillo has extensive experience as a documentary photographer, mainly with projects/assignments that focus on social issues, public health and Latino culture. Her personal projects deal with the issues of family, inner city life and the finding of identity. Her work has been published and exhibited in the United States, Dominican Republic, Chile and Canada. She currently lives in New York City with her son Amaru.

Umbral

In Spanish, Umbral means gateway, a portal, the first step towards something. As I witness my son’s childhood, I often see him in that in-between space, drifting in and out of reality and the places I have imagined for him. Becoming a single mother at a young age proved frightening to me, and not for the obvious reasons. I felt a huge responsibility to create a nurturing childhood for him, different from the dysfunctional one I had lived. With these images I wanted to intervene, to somehow create a magical space that could lessen his generational baggage. With this project I aim to explore both my fantasies of what childhood should be and the freedom my son needs to live his own reality.
As a child, Santana Copeland ran around the house taking pictures with a camera that had no film in it. His fascination with images and storytelling led him to Bard College where he received a BA in Film and Electronic Arts. He made the transition from the moving image to the still image and earned an MFA in Studio Art from Long Island University Post. He was a panelist at LIMarts' The Artist's Vision: Understanding the Creative Inspiration & Process and has exhibited at Bushwick Community Darkroom, Studio 5404, SIA Gallery, The Steinberg Museum of Art, and Ripe Art Gallery. He has given artist presentations at Farmingdale State College, Suffolk County Community College, and Hunter College. Currently, Santana Copeland is a Museum Educator at the Museum of the Moving Image and a Teaching Artist at BRIC Arts Media. Despite his age, he continues to be a child that runs around the house.

BlackWhiteColor

There is complexity in something that appears simple; yet at the same time, simple things are easily ignored and discarded. My attention is drawn towards these overlooked subjects. I am influenced by my immediate surroundings and as my surroundings change, so does the train of thought. The camera allows me to analyze the differences in the way we interact with others, the environment, and ourselves. Each body of work starts with a question and I approach the subject as if shooting a short film. As the work progresses, I arrange the images as if they are songs in an album, both able to stand on their own as a single unit as well as able to fit together to tell a larger story.

BlackWhiteColor is inspired by Harry Callahan’s Weed Against Sky, Detroit. The silhouette of a skinny plant is backed by a white sky. There is a sensation of a relaxed day, but any time I look up to the sky I rarely see nature. I see buildings, communication wires, traffic signs, scaffolds, and all that comes with city living. This project takes the tonal style of Callahan’s image and collapses it onto the world around me; condensing everyday structures into abstractions.

This is how I make sense of the world. I take it apart, rearrange the pieces, and put them together in a new order. I break things in order to see how they work and what remains becomes a documentation of my journey for understanding.
Jonathan Santiago is an American photographer and filmmaker based in New York. Born in New York City to a Puerto Rican family, his work reflects his background and experiences. A self-taught photographer, his interest in documentary photography took off after a trip to Nepal. Afterwards he took to the streets of the Bronx and after some time came across the Bronx Documentary Center. It is here where his image making and storytelling skills continue to develop.

Santiago is a member of the Bronx Photo League, a collective dedicated to social issues within the borough and with whom he created the book, Jerome Ave (BDC Editions, 2016). He is currently a teacher at the Bronx Documentary Center after-school program and works as a freelance photographer and videographer. His work can be found in publications such as The New York Times, Burn, and Time.

The river took my home

My selection includes images from personal projects such as ‘The River Took Our Home’, which follows climate change migrants moving from the south of Bangladesh to the vastly overpopulated city of Dhaka, as well as ‘Vioenta’, a story on my grandmother which explores questions on identity, faith, and death, as well as work from my street photography portfolio, in which my aim is simply to document the Bronx, as it continues to undergo changes brought on by gentrification.
A young boy plays in one of the narrow alleys of the Bholu Slum in Dhaka, Bangladesh. 2016

Old Dhaka, Bangladesh. 2016
Before becoming a documentary photographer, Cinthya Santos Briones studied anthropology and Ethnohistory, which led her to work as a researcher in different institutions in Mexico, focused on the study of indigenous and rural communities.

She was twice a fellow of the State Fund for Culture and the Arts of México. She is co-author of the book “The Indigenous Worldview and its Representations in Textiles of the Nahua community of Santa Ana Tzacuala, Hidalgo”, Cinthya has published and broadcasted her work in media as well in books and magazines in Mexico, Spain and the United States, related with issues of migration, textiles and shamanism.

Her work as a photographer is centered on community, migration, gender, identity and the struggle for human rights. Cinthya is a recent graduate of the Visual Journalism And Documentary Practice Program at the Internacional Center Of Photography in New York City. In the autumn of 2016 she received a fellowship granted by the Magnum Foundation. Cinthya has worked in pro immigrant organizations in New York as a community catalyst and organizer.

Abuelas: Portraits of the Invisible Grandmothers

This series focuses on undocumented Mexican immigrant women who came to New York decades ago in search of opportunity for their families. Overtime they have built lives here and have become the elders of their community: the abuelas. Many have children and grandchildren living on either side of the border. Yet, twenty and thirty years later, still remain invisible and undocumented.

The series centers on portraits of these women photographed in the intimacy of their homes. These images seek to contemplate the women’s relationship to place and the shaping and appropriation of their environment. In these photographs, the home’s decorations become part of the women’s wider symbolic recreation of culture, memory and ownership beyond borders.

I photograph these environmental portraits in a participatory manner. I ask the women: “How do you like to be seen or represented through photography?” They choose how and where they want to be seen in their homes and what outfits they want to wear. The series seeks to offer them the opportunity to face the camera and be depicted in a way that reflects their own sense of identity.

Although these grandmothers are seemingly well established in the city of New York, they must work in unstable jobs with low wages and are often the victims of exploitations and human rights violations. They work as house cleaners, seamstresses, nannies, factory workers and in restaurants.

My interest in photographing these grandmothers arises from the need to find new forms of visual narratives that allow us to document migration from a human perspective, told through the subjects themselves. The participatory style of this series allows us to see and know the lives of these migrants through these portraits, which highlight the pride and respect the abuelas still have for Mexican culture and communities within the transnational family.
Gisela Bravo Martínez in her apartment at 45th Street in the neighborhood of Sunset Park, Brooklyn, New York. She is from San Bernardino, Acatlán de Osorio, State of Puebla, Mexico. She has been living in New York City for more than two decades working in groceries and factories, though she is a professional seamstress. She is 66 years old and is a grandmother of 6.

Irma Verduzco is from Morelia, Michoacán, México. She came to New York 26 years ago, crossed the border with one of her two children. She has three jobs: cleaning houses, babysitting and picking up plastic bottles out on the streets. She lives in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, New York.
Byron Smith is an award-winning photojournalist focusing on human interest stories. Born in Brooklyn and raised in rural Warwick, N.Y., he graduated from Boston University in 2008. After numerous internships he landed a staff photographer position at The Sentinel and Enterprise. After two years, he moved to Boston to freelance, eventually moving to NYC in 2011. He has covered the Occupy Wall Street movement, the Sandy Hook shooting in Newtown, C.T., unrest at the 2014 World Cup in Rio, the European refugee crisis in Greece to most recently, the Mosul Offensive. Smith is a regular contributor to The New York Times and The New York Daily News. He currently lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Mosul Offensive 2016

Nearly two years since the Islamic State took the city of Mosul in northern Iraq, the Iraqi Army launched an offensive to wrest the city back from the insurgency in October of 2016. While the forward push of the Iraqi Security Forces has slowed down after a month of fighting, the exodus of residents fleeing the violence has not. According to estimates, it is predicted that the number of internally displaced will hover around one million people.

My purpose here was to expose how the clash between the U.S. backed Iraqi Security Forces and ISIS was effecting the civilians caught in the middle. Instead of focusing on the frontline action, I tried to document the cause and effect of the conflict. These are images taken from my first time being in a war zone, a place I thought I’d feel at home for one reason or another. I went because I never felt fully invested in the tragedies occurring in my own backyard. I wanted to be a part of significant, international history and document it as it was unfolding. There was always this gnawing feeling, an itch that needed to be scratched. Here is the product of me scratching back at it.

Byron Smith

Plum Island, Nueva Luz 41
Byron Smith  •  Mosul Offensive 2016 Series  •  2016

Seen from a building that has taken artillery fire, smoke billows from one of the remaining oil wells set ablaze by ISIL in their retreat from Qayyarah on November 27, 2016. Nearly two years since the Islamic State took the city of Mosul in northern Iraq, the Iraqi Army launched an offensive to wrest the city back from the insurgency in October of 2016.

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Lafi, 63, (no last name given) tries to calm his grandson Yousef, 2, as he and his family joined other Internally Displaced People fleeing ISIS from Mosul as Iraqi Security Forces move to clear the city of the terror network, at Khazir Camp in Kurdistan Region on December 4, 2016.
Nichole Washington uses portraiture to explore her identity as a black woman. She instructs her subjects on poses and style of dress in order to mimic expressions that have influenced her. Through this process she aims to reveal underlying personalities within the labels placed upon her. She hopes her work will empower women to express themselves fully and freely.

Nichole was raised in Roseville, Minnesota. In 2005 she moved to Los Angeles where she earned her bachelor’s degree in fashion marketing. She moved to NYC in 2009 to further develop her skills in photography. She is a recent graduate of School of Visual Arts where she earned a Master’s degree in digital photography. During her graduate studies Nichole was a recipient of the 2016 MPSDP Thesis Scholarship. In 2016 Nichole was a part of multiple group shows including “Sight Seen” at SVA-Chelsea Gallery and “Hola Back” at Studio 301. Nichole’s latest work “For My Girls” was featured in three exhibitions at the 2016 Photoville Festival in Brooklyn, NY. This including being featured on her very own emerging cube. “For My Girls” was also featured online by Refinery 29 and by Italian news publication La Stampa. Nichole is currently based in NYC.

For My Girls

In “For My Girls” I explore how 1990s female hip-hop artists inspired me to be proud of my African-American lineage, unapologetic for my liberated behavior and forceful in my approach to the culture at large. To translate this into photographic form, I start by creating highly active studio portraits of young black women, style them appropriately and ask them to strike specific poses. Then I paint and draw on the actual photographic prints, producing a one-of-a-kind image. Each subject determines the way I apply the paint, some strokes are aggressive and others are fluid.

Hip-hop has been the source of many role models for black youth in modern America. During the 1990s black women were a dominating force in this genre of music. Artists such as Missy Elliot, Da Brat, Queen Latifah and Salt’n Pepa had boisterous voices and styles to match. All of these women had unique musical sensibilities, fashion choices and physical attributes. As a girl growing up in the 1990s, I viewed many of these artists as role models. There was an element of sisterhood among them that I admired and that I feel is missing in today’s hip-hop culture. I hope that “For My Girls” will empower women as a whole to honor themselves as well as the women who inspire them.
Nichole Washington. I considered her my blood and it don’t come no thicker, For My Girls Series. 2016

Nichole Washington. Don’t be a hard rock when you really are a gem, For My Girls Series. 2016
Carmen Oquendo-Villar, PHD, Harvard
compañía, sentida como una ausencia.
de la otra, le da la bienvenida a la propia
contacto. El exorcismo de la piel del otro,
la vaivén de las olas. Se debate entre
acarician. Su textura funciona como
a la vez que amenazan con el exorcismo,
Las palabras de Ivette Rivera Morales,
mandíbula
Una mirada al dentro de Ivette.
De rasgaduras sangrantes
Miriam
De amores y significados
Poemas de un solo trazo
Desde el órgano herido
El exorcismo de mi piel
De ganas inmensas…
Grito de soledades
Riesgosamente
De orgasmos
De verdades
De adentros
Hambriento
Exorcizados
Vomitados
Conjuros
Mock
Montes
mandíbula
rivera
morales
ivette
piel
de tu
El
exorcismo
ivette
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The En Foco Permanent Collection is a significant historical asset that contains original issues of Nueva Luz, nearly 700 photographic prints and slide registry, and historical documents from the mid-1970s to the present.

Nueva Luz was first published in 1985 and continues publication to this date, totaling 21 volumes with 62 distinct issues.

Past Nueva Luz artists include Sophie Rivera, Dawoud Bey, Pedro Mayer, Coreen Simpson. Past Nueva Luz essayists include Lucy Lippard, David Venable, Deborah Willis, Elizabeth Ferrer, Kellie Jones.

Digitizing and archiving the complete Permanent Collection is an ambitious undertaking that requires institutional resources and infrastructure.

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