Colleagues and Supporters,

Nueva Luz is once again proud to present our 3rd Annual Photography Fellowship recipients which has generated significant interest from artists, curators, gallerists and general readership. This year's review process was an extremely competitive, generating 162 submissions from which ten were selected by a panel of arts professionals. The 10 artists represented in this issue will be on exhibit, entitled In-Between, at the Andrew Freedman Home, opening June 6th and closing on July 6th.

Special kudos to Eva Mayhabal Davis who organized and curated the Nueva Luz Fellowship Issue and the In-Between exhibit. Her extraordinary skills and insights can be readily appreciated. Eva also represents the type of new voice that En Foco is looking to articulate the issues that younger, emerging artists will be challenged by. She's also Smack Mellon's Gallery and Studio Manager.

Two recipients. Daesha Devon Harris and Cinthya Briones-Santos from last year's Photography Fellowship Initiative have been selected by the Blue Sky Gallery in Portland, Oregon for solo exhibitions, opening June 7th. This collaboration in its pilot phase will continue in 2019 and perhaps much longer. In addition, En Foco is currently in the planning phase to organize an exhibition tour of select Fellowship artists in select SUNY Museums and Galleries, beginning in the Fall, 2020 with the Dorsky Museum, SUNY New Paltz. Other venues are under consideration.

Of special note and significance is the impact that Nueva Luz and the Fellowship Initiative has had on our artists and readership. Exhibition professionals look to En Foco for artists representing new trends and issues of concern to the communities the artists represent. Nueva Luz as the public "face" of En Foco, is the go-to resource that exhibition organizers are increasingly calling on.

To publish Nueva Luz semi-annually and maintain the highest professional standard, a special acknowledgement needs to be directed to the En Foco Team: Layza Garcia, Oscar J Rivera and Nestor Otero. Without them, Nueva Luz would not have the impact it has today. I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge our friends and supporters.

Bill Aguado
Director
En Foco’s Photography Fellowship Winners 2018

Rhynna M. Santos

Yu-Chen Chiu

Antonio Pulgarin

Tau Battice

Layah Amatullah Barrayn

Hidemi Takagi

Mark Aghatise

Gioncarlo Valentine

Jonathan Gardenhire

Alexis Ruiseco-Lombera

In-Between  Eva Mayhabal Davis | Curatorial Statement

Photography is a practice that captures both close-ups and landscapes of life. A photographer will often frame an image that focuses the viewer’s eye on the candid nuance of a place or person. These scenes will tell a story, capture a truth, unravel in a series of scenarios, and allow one into an intimate experience. This is especially important when artists capture an in-between space, where the subject is straddling between a lived experience and context—either physically, socially or politically—ultimately, sharing an experience that bonds viewer, subject, and photographer.

En Foco’s ten Photography Fellows are contemporary photographers, exploring their vision and voice, and marking the spirit of the times, this Fellowship supports their creative initiative and development as well as exposure. It is exemplary to see an established and mission-driven cultural endorsement during times when social and political institutions are threatening the very voices that have critical perspectives. Today, En Foco is at the forefront of supporting historically underrepresented artists. The ten photographers selected for this fellowship are included in this issue of Nueva Luz. Side by side, they challenge the viewer to not only see and feel but to also find joy, reflection, intensity, and empathy. In the summer of 2018, these images and more will culminate in an exhibition at the Andrew Freedman Home. The stage created by En Foco for these artists to be published and accessible to a wider audience is a vital step toward supporting diverse voices.

True art always comes from cultural necessity. —Elizabeth Catlett

The photos presented are portraits of the self, a subject, the moment, and space: each one capturing a story ready to be told. In thinking about why these images are important, I thought about history and the personal narratives that are birthed from our socio-political existence. Elizabeth Catlett, an artist, was highly praised for her portraiture of women and her true-telling imagery charged with poise and dignity. As a working class, African American witnessing the Civil Rights era, Catlett conveyed her surroundings and her personal experiences. Primarily creating sculptures and prints; her mark-making demonstrated the presence of a body, a story, and mind. Similarly, the ten photographers presented here reveal a story that evokes contemporary realities and in-between lives.

In the series of portraits by Rhynna Santos, A Transcendent Calling: Latina Muslim Portraiture, the viewer meets the gaze of women that identify as Latina Muslims. Captured in quotidian settings, the image brings to light the details that enrich their identity. The kitchen roosters, orange decor complimenting a green hijab, and the subject’s forefront presence grants us a moment to visit her kitchen. Santos creates a portrait of her subjects as they’re surrounded by precious imagery and spiritual idols. This visual melting-pot shows the complex state of Muslim-Americans, and Latinx—an image ever more important in sight of rising Islamophobia and negative stigmas. Santos reflects further on identity in the portrait for the Jerome Avenue Workers Project. Here, she presents a local business on Jerome Avenue: a place of small business economies vital to the neighborhood. Isabel Kahlife, a cashier at this shop, is standing with pride and presence. The viewer’s eyes walk the aisle of the shop with trinkets, Goya tamarindo drinks, and dulces. Since 2015, the Jerome Avenue Workers Project has been documenting the working class folks and shops along a now re-zoned Jerome Avenue in the South Bronx an initiative lead by the Bronx Documentary Center. Santos has been a contributing member, mentor, and founder of the Bronx Women’s Collective. Her portraiture of women and their spaces reflects an image of the people who lives in the United States today.

Contemporary life in the US is also captured by the documentary photography of Yu-Chen Chiu. Experiencing Western culture as an immigrant, her work revolves around analyzing pop culture, idealized Americana, and mythologies that Hollywood movies entrance. Chiu documents her personal memory, influenced by cross-country road trips, and emerging herself in American culture, she frames pictures that enter and bind a collective memory. The landscapes portray an unseen and unperceived America. In the portrait, Fort Worth, Texas, an iconic cowboy sits on a
In the stories captured by each image, the poise of the person projects their voice, their stance and strength. In the works by Gioncarlo Valentine, the subjects of these portraits capsule the space of loving self and the intersections that challenge this experience. Valentine’s portraits are intimate. These portraits capture Black LGBTQ+ experiences of pride, loneliness, love, poverty, doubt, and isolation. There is also a monumental presence especially potent in the portrait, MJ from the series *Trans Quality of Life*. Their gaze confronts the viewer without apology. This confrontation becomes an ongoing story trope that pulls back and forth to examine the power of the gaze. Portraiture creates an in-between of interactions that considers the subject, the photographer, and the viewer.

In the case of the works by Jonathan Gardenhire, there is a gaze and a figure as well as a third dimensionality with references to historical texts, popular culture, literature, and objects. In *Untitled (Requiem for the Price of Culture)*, an image of other portraits, books, text, a scattered composition that informs the photographer. This deliberate composition connects to the viewer, moving one’s eye to read and connect, symbols like the raised Black Power fist. The portraits derive from research and studies, mapping out intertwined histories. Their power is in how they feed back to the audience. Creating a narrative that layers popular culture, Black history and interwoven Latinidad, these portraits are an accumulation of self-reflections that ultimately claim space.

Similarly, photographer Alexis Ruiseco documents intersections that highlight the beauty and complexities of queerness, Latinx identity, and presence as well as Ruiseco’s sensitivity for composition and color frame powerful portraits. From a personal and collective narrative, these works are a light on a Cuban queer community that Ruiseco invites us into. The figures in the series of works *Ahoranza*, oscillate in and out of the landscape they embody. The solitude of the body is majestic as it reflects on how and where in the world queerness exists. Figures vibrate through the greenery, bodies, water, sky, and eyes.

The image, the photograph, and the legacy of Nueva Luz stands as self-evident work of and by peoples of color; historically marginalized voices that continue today to reverberate and show the future. I recall the words of Gloria Anzaldúa on the spirit that lives through cultural intersection of histories, lineages and communities that are shared, but also a monumental presence especially potent in the portrait, Yachiyo, from the series *6 Nueva Luz* by Hidemi Takagi, the story is told with images, objects and interviews. Here, Takagi’s photographs present conversations that reflect on bonds and friendships at the Saint Teresa of Avila Senior Apartments in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. Each image exudes a pop of color with vibrance and hyper-saturation. The portraits hold senses of joy and nostalgia that is as much about the present as it is about past lives. These interactions activate an oral history about the changing neighborhood and the changing times. The portrait of *Jachyso*, further connects with portraits from her personal archive holding a life of over 90 years, lineage and history as a Japanese-American. Her portrait lives alongside a history of immigration of 20th century in the US and each photograph connects to each other as much as to us, the viewers.

The image can be activated in many ways, from exploring digital possibilities, installation, and final presentation. The image has properties that are explored through the subject matter and material. In the works by Mark Aghatise, the process presents an intersection of subject and image. In these portraits, the gaze of the subject is soft and the body language is strong. The images have a strategic distortions in rips, crumbles, and *Xerox* scans. Each one exploring the self, body, and dysmorphia. There is a sense of reflection in what is scanned, who stares back, who is printed, and who is scanned from the self.

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The image, the photograph, and the legacy of Nueva Luz stands as self-evident work of and by peoples of color; historically marginalized voices that continue today to reverberate and show the future. I recall the words of Gloria Anzaldúa on the spirit that lives through cultural production: “Our work of casting a spiritual light on the bridge enables us to venture into unknown territories. It prepares us to fortify the old bridges, build new ones and cross these when we come to them... As keepers of the fire of transformation we invite awareness of soul into our daily acts, call richness and beauty into our lives; bid spirit to stir our blood, dissolve the rigid walls between us, and gather us in.”

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**Eva Mayhabal Davis** is a collaborator. She works with artists and creatives in the production of exhibitions, texts, and events. As a curator and cultural liaison, her focus is on supporting multifaceted incubation spaces by increasing visibility and mediating conversations among artists, objects, and audiences. She was a Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation Curatorial Fellow at the Bronx Museum of Art and is an alum of the No Longer Empty: Curatorial Lab. Following the completion of the Art & Law Program Fellowship, she will curate the En Foco 2018 Photography Fellowship Exhibition. Eva Mayhabal was born in Mexico, raised in the United States, and studied art history at the University of Washington. She is currently the Gallery & Studio Program Manager at Brooklyn’s Smack Mellon and a founding member of El Salón, a monthly meetup for cultural producers.

*Photograph Cougar Vigil*
As a Puerto Rican Bronx resident, I bring a new perspective to my photographic work and therefore to the community of artists in NYC. I consider myself an art activist who has developed my craft as a photographer in relation to this often negatively stereotyped but nonetheless vibrant New York City borough. For example, my photo series on Latina Muslims featured Bronx residents who form part of the complex social fabric of the city. Featured in the New York Times, this series provided the City and the world the opportunity to learn from and work with internationally renowned photojournalists. For example, Michael Kamber, BDC founder and director, led the Jerome Avenue Workers Project and taught our team of photographers how to use a Hasselblad camera.

Our collected work captures images of workers on Jerome Avenue now facing the tides of gentrification. My experience with this project encouraged me to teach photography in the Bronx as well. My classes with senior citizens at Mitchel Senior Center and teenaged students from Butler Community Center and GDLU allow me to develop as a photographer by teaching and learning together with my students. I am also very proud of my series on Star Wars fans of color and their unique perspectives on race, body image, and fandom. My broad range of interests reflect the unique lens and insights that emerge from my engagement with art and community.
I was born in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, grew up in Taipei, and have been living in New York City for a decade. My experience of internalized cultural conflict, living as both an immigrant and a rooted citizen in this country, have been big influences on my photographic approach and the themes I pursue. Primarily, my work looks at the displacement and longing so often associated with the culturally uprooted, living in a trans-cultural environment. This is often seen in a juxtaposition of geographic environments.

American culture has always had a big influence on me. I still remember being intrigued by the colorful characters of Sesame Street at the age of 8. When I entered adolescence, forced by my family to attend boarding school, Hollywood movies were my only escape from overwhelming schoolwork. Later, as a Literature major in college, American literature helped me understand Western culture. I left my family in Taiwan and immigrated to the United States fifteen years ago to further explore American culture. Since then, I have been photographing the daily life of the country in cross-country road trips as a document of collective memory, and personal diaries.

Yu-Chen Chiu is a photographer currently residing in New York City. Her background includes a B.A. in English Literature from Chinese Culture University and a M.A. degree in Communication Studies and Film Productions at New York University. She has also studied photography at the Cooper Union and International Center of Photography.
In my practice, I incorporate both photography and photographic collage. I am a Colombian-American artist and as such I tackle the themes of cultural and sexual identity, memory, and displacement. My photographs are inspired by the connections between my cultural roots and my experiences as a Latino living in the United States. Earlier work draws inspiration from the sense of community formed growing up in the housing projects of Brooklyn, NY and Colombian mother and Dominican step-father. I was inspired to document the political and social issues impacting the communities of both my native Colombia and the Dominican Republic. Ultimately, seeking to contribute and process the conversations of the Latino narrative in the United States and beyond.

Through this work, I seek to challenge the construct of Latino masculinity and machismo, all while re-contextualizing the fabric of my own identity. Each image in this series presents a deconstructed version of the original archival images incorporating cultural materials. These photographic compositions place emphasis on the fragmented relationship shared with both my culture and these central figures.

Antonio Pulgarin is a Colombian-American artist based in Brooklyn, New York. His work takes on family lineage, loss, memory, and interconnectedness. In exploring his own family history, Pulgarin layers conceptually and physically most recently working in photo collage for the series, Fragments of the Masculine and capturing cultural truths and hybrids in series like Los Banilejos. Through a deep exploration of personal narrative she finds context that stretches boundaries of identity and belonging.

Pulgarin trained at the School of Visual Arts where he received his BFA in Photography in 2013. His work has been included in various exhibition spaces including the Fort Wayne Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum, Daniel Cooney Fine Art Gallery, The Margulies Collection at the Warehouse, Photo LA, Photo Tennis, and International Photo Festival Leiden. His work has received honors from the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, YoungArts, Latin American Fotografía, American Photography, and PDN Photo Annual. Pulgarin’s photographs have been featured in publications such as Vice, Vice Colombia, Slate, LensCulture, The Huffington Post, and Photo District News.
Antonio Pulgarin. A Memory Lost, Fragments of the Masculine series. 2017

Antonio Pulgarin. He was Only 25..., Fragments of the Masculine series. 2017
I am always seeking the light, finding it and using it to highlight common human conditions. I am attracted to people, photographing our shared humanity. My parents were teenagers, my father was Rastafari, and they lived in the so-called ghetto. Coming from that setting and growing up keenly aware of perceptions and lived outcomes, I am organically attracted to the stories of those on the fringes: the marginalized, the mute, the subaltern, the counted-out, el subestimado. And so these are the people I strive to help articulate their stories.

For the most part, I photograph my indignations. Much of my subject matter has been bothering me — and particular communities — for years. Combined with conversation, these images allow me, but more-so my partners, to purge, to get free. My camera allows me to document those very real but silenced narratives. Always I strive to portray the deity and the dignity of the person before my lens. Where my images are concerned, photography is not just a way of liberating bodies, but also, and even more importantly, a way of liberating minds.

Last June, I traveled to Cartagena, Colombia to further my intensifying investigations into the African contribution, continuous African presence in the Americas and its representation or lack thereof. I stepped off the airplane uncharacteristically unsure of what I would find and thus open to learning and receiving the energies of the place and the peoples. Early the next morning, I took a long cab ride to a long bus ride to a long “moto-taxi” ride and jumped off in the maroon village of San Basilio de Palenque: the first settlement of formerly-enslaved, runaway Africans in the Americas. Immediately — from the dashikis, the dark melanin and facial features of the people — I was struck by the African-ness of these hidden Colombians. And then in conversation, they talked of the Congo and Angola with unbridled black pride. This was the deepest black than I had yet witnessed.

This was the story of resistance and self-determination I had to tell: the story I had to help the Palenqueros tell visually.

Colombia: A Darker Shade of Black is a significant part of my ethno-visual personal work spanning the Americas from Harlem, St. Kitts-Nevis, The Dominican Republic, and Brazil. Through portraiture and interviews, this body of work explores the present and future of Palenquero culture.
Tau Battice. Edinson, La Reina, San Baslo de Palenque, Colombia series. 2017

Adriana, La Reina, San Baslo de Palenque, Colombia series. 2017
Through documentary photography and portraiture, I seek to investigate social bonds and collective histories of subjects as varied as resistance movements in West African sufism to queer identities among Black women living in New York City. I am interested in highlighting the intersectionality of these communities, specifically as it relates to religion, gender / sexuality and class. I travel regionally and internationally observing how identity is expressed collectively and individually, in communities where I am local. I am committed to using photography as a tool to broaden conversations on social, cultural, and human rights issues that could benefit from an increased diversity of perspectives.

In my latest work, I travelled to Zanzibar, a collective of islands on the east coast of Africa. It’s technically part of the mainland nation of Tanzania. The largest island of Zanzibar is Unguja and it is home to the capital city, Stone Town. As a majority Muslim country, I was interested how religion played a part in the current mental health crisis. In recent times, psychotic and psycho-social disorders, as well as substance abuse, have increased dramatically. As things get worse, many residents have skipped the traditional western medical approach - hospital and psych ward admissions - and have begun to utilize traditional approaches, most popularly, exorcisms. As this issue permeates the community, particularly people with less options for treatment, profiteering traditional healers have often taken advantage of the demand. This photo series takes a look at a session from a “mass exorcism” in Stone Town, Zanzibar, we the spiritually wounded gathered to alleviate their challenges.
Growing up in Japan, I adored American films from the 1950s and ‘60s. The George Lucas classic American Graffiti made a significant impression. My projects reflect this influence as I recreate the characteristic vibrancy and hyper-saturation of color creating a nostalgic throwback. As a resident of New York City since 1997, living in various neighborhoods in Manhattan and Brooklyn, I find the established cultures within my new homes – the Dominican population in Washington Heights, barbershop culture in Bed-Stuy, a senior home in Crown Heights - and photographs the color, joy and life of the people who came from diverse communities around the world to become Americans, and a future America.

My latest work, “Hello, it’s me” (title), began as a part of More Art’s Engaging Artists Residency, during which I regularly visited the Saint Teresa of Avila Senior Apartments in my neighborhood of Crown Heights. While taking photographs of the center’s activity classes and occasionally portraits of the residents, I developed great friendships. Here, the seniors began sharing their family narratives, as well as the changes that the historically African-American and Caribbean-American neighborhood is undergoing.

I asked each participant to share one story about themselves and another about their family. The project gave the residents an opportunity to recollect and narrate their personal memories and share them with their future generations in a multi-sensory experience.
In researching artists in New York and the questions they sought to answer through their work, the changes in technologies and who could access them in that decade, and particularly the work of young black artists at the time, I came into this space that made the body of work you see. I especially found interest in Xerox art and its intersection with pop art and fashion in its height of popularity amongst artists in the eighties. Taking all this in, I wanted to contextualize my work with the conversations of the 80s and its experimentation.

This sample of work features images that were created to be distorted, ripped, crumbled and many other forms of destruction and construction. I sought to further this manipulation through processing the images through a Xerox machine and obstruct and confuse whoever chooses to view the series of work these images come through. We are exposed to so many perfected images (both in technicality and composition) and I want to present the exact opposite.

My photographic work came as an exploration to answering the questions I had of my own self, my body and my dysmorphia with it, and understanding its place in the world. Through photographing other black bodies, I began to better understand my own and ultimately how to contort and queer the space it inhabits. I was able to take my own mask off, put it onto another, and learn to see the mask through a lens that in turn helped me understand my own self.

Moving past using photography to answer the questions my dysmorphia posed, I have used the medium to primarily explore the black male figure. What shapes can it take? What mistakes does it make when I assign it a task over and over again? So many of my questions also coincide with ideas of sexuality and sensuality, difficult for me and other young queer black men to answer at times, which is exactly why I ask them.

Mark Aghatise is a London-born, New York-based, artist. His work explores the processes of deconstructing and constructing images of the black male figure. Movement, repetition, and the failure of both are central to his photographic studies and endeavors. His work interrogates our current cultural understanding and relationship to photographs and photography as a medium. Through a design-oriented lens, Igbinadolor scans, rips, and distorts images to question and stretch our perceptions of reality within an image. His practice aims to put pressure and ultimately a consciousness back onto the audience's gaze.

My work is about longing for community. I find myself along many intersections: gay, Black, fat, and femme. But even in these intersectional spaces I am on the outside looking in. Much of my work is a dissection of this desire to belong, the convoluted relationships between my intersections, and how this conflict resonates throughout so many Black and LGBTQ+ experiences. I use photography as a tool of reconciliation.

It allows me to connect with people in a tangible and authentic way, and oftentimes to lift people up, creating space for vulnerability. I approach my work as an anthropological act of cultural preservation and inspection. Questioning, how does poverty affect the strength of community? What does a portrait mean to a group of isolated persons? How can we do less harm to people more vulnerable than we are through reckoning with our own role in their vulnerability? How do you accurately tell a story without erasure, domination, or gaze? These inquiries drive my work and form my photographic sensibilities. The aim is to confront these ideas in a way that illuminates Blackness in its simplest forms, irrespective to whiteness or the politics of domination.

Gioncarlo Valentine is a writer and photographer born and raised in Baltimore, Maryland. He studied English at Towson University and during his time there, discovered a love for photography. At the core of his work lays a desire to belong. The overarching themes in his work touch on the intersections of class, race, sexuality, and gender and how they impact or restrict notions of community. Lived experiences such as physical and sexual violence, transience, depression, and ostracization have ultimately helped to shape his varying visual perspectives. His influences include Gordon Parks, Hilton Als, Eli Reed, Richard Avedon, Ming Smith, and James Nachtwey.

Gioncarlo Valentine

Buffalo70 in Red, Untitled series. 2017
Gioncarlo Valentine. Aja (Untitled), Trans Quality of Life series. 2017

Gioncarlo Valentine. MJ (Untitled), Trans Quality of Life series. 2016
My approach to picture making is rooted deeply in the history of photography, my own family history and representation both of my self and other black bodies in the art world. After studying photography at Parsons, I grew a heavy sense of insecurity and anxiety toward my work. Through this time, made pictures of people; mostly young black men. These pictures were strongly lit studio portraits that are almost painterly in nature. I am interested in how people perform for the artist, or in this case the photographer. How can works change because of the interaction between the subject and the maker? What is the artist’s role in all of this? Where do black people fit into the spectrum of the art world?

Due to the lack of diversity of the Parson’s photography department at the time, it was rare that I would receive constructive critiques of my work. Considering the overflow of non-black subjects in art, I was not interested in photographing people who didn’t look like me. Instead, my “peers” would question my family history and recollection of my memories of that history as a method of compartmentalizing my blackness in relation to various stereotypes of black people. My photographs went from being about beauty and performance to conversations around the “broken black family,” and the monstrous (yet seductive) black male body. From this point, I introduced still life into my work as a didactic ploy to reveal bits of black history. These still life images of piles of books, photographs, and other Black American paraphernalia reference my questioning of what it means to be black: not only by my peers but also my personal relationship blackness. Together, the still life pictures and portraits provide a multifaceted view of the complexities of blackness. Many of the books I photograph are from libraries unless I have sought out specific editions. They reference James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Nina Simone, Angela Davis, Frederick Douglass, WEB Debois, Deborah Willis, Thelma Golden, Robert Maplethorpe and Glenn Ligon, among others.

Jonathan Gardenhire (born 1992, Lower East Side, New York) is an artist and cultural producer whose work explores representations of race and sexuality, most often with an emphasis on black masculinity. His practice critically examines how constructions of power, value, knowledge and social change are produced and shared in the cultural sector.

Gardenhire received a BFA in photography from Parsons The New School of Design in 2014 under artist and academic, Bill Gaskins and the late photographer George Pitts. He has also taken photography coursework at School of Visual Arts and International Center of Photography. His work has been exhibited at Slought Foundation (Philadelphia), International Center of Photography, NY, Milk Gallery, NY, The New School and Bronx Art Space, among others. In 2017, Gardenhire was the subject of a solo exhibition, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God and Other Pictures,” at the Brooklyn apartment gallery Medium Tings.

Using traditional methods of photography, such as studio portraiture, and more contemporary methods, such as appropriation, Gardenhire’s work traces a “mis-history” in an attempt to redefine and reclaim black identity through a variety of imagery to reshape perceptions of black humanity at large.
Alexis Ruiseco is a Cuban born-American queer photographer born in Güines, Cuba. In 2009, he enrolled at the Miami Dade College to study photography. Focusing on the Miami queer Latino community exploring performance and domestic spaces as sites of resistance. Through image and story telling Ruiseco’s work is archiving and activating queer history throughout Habana and rural parts of Cuba – finding place for a personal and collective narrative. In their images there is a power of connecting space, with the body, and addressing a displacement that explores the gender binary and sexuality.

After moving to New York City they graduated from Parsons, The New School for Design with a BFA in photography. Ruiseco has shown at Milk Gallery, NYC; Kendal Gallery, Miami, and forthcoming at the Leslie Lohman Museum and a performance at the Museum of Modern Art. He has been featured in VICE, and Teeth Magazine.

I am a Cuban born-American queer photographer investigating notions of identity, trauma, and displacement. From a triangular trajectory that ventures through Cuba, Miami, and New York, I am using my access to reflect on issues of visibility and admission. Merging queer narratives, trauma and personal desires, self-portraiture and portraiture, I examine personal and social narratives of intimacy and sexual identity. Displaced through exile from the communist regime and marginalized for my queerness, I navigate the cultural and sociological ruptures of migrating and being a queer Cuban.

As the actor and director, I am interested in the process of identity, transformation, and resistance to deconstruct the binary of gender and sexuality; responding to hyper masculinity in Cuban culture. I construct self-portraits. Often attributing feminine dress onto myself and creating distinctions with my male body. I immerse myself into queer culture, exploring performance and domestic spaces as continuous sites of resistance. Prompted by erasure I reimagine queer history and archive, project, and represent alternative ways of existing.

In portraiture, I am a placeholder for a narrative often invisible in Latino and American communities, reconnecting with my cultural heritage by unraveling my own experience of alienation from my homeland. Reflecting on issues of visibility and admission; and using my camera as the threshold to archive the way Cuba’s queer community is developing. Not only giving them the visibility they deserve but creating a testament to alternative ways of being. As history begins to move at a rapid rate in Cuba it become imperative to document these changes. Reflexively constructing a transcultural body of work, I re-imagine queer history in Latino America: responding and resisting.
An Opportunity for the En Foco Voice

This Op Ed is a pilot initiative, designed for artists, curators, and cultural workers of color to specifically voice their thoughts and opinions on contemporary cultural and social issues. We invite all to respond and with space permitting, we will publish related commentary in the next Nueva Luz issue. We will also make all related responses available on our website and through social media. You can send your responses to info@enfoco.org.

This issue’s Op Ed piece is submitted by Oscar J Rivera, En Foco’s Exhibitions Manager and Curator. His thoughts reflect his concern for queer artists of color who are marginalized within the larger context of artists of color.

Bill Aguado

Queer Legacies  Oscar J Rivera

People of color (POC) are tragically mis- and underrepresented in popular media and culture, where as Queer people of color (QPOC) are practically nonexistent outside of the success of RuPaul and a few others who’ve broken into the mainstream vernacular. The gay rights movement has been criticized for focusing on the plight of the gay white male, and fighting solely for marriage equality and not equity for all people. Marriage has been treated as the end all be all for the movement. There is very little effort placed on curbing the spread of HIV/AIDS in impoverished communities of color or the murders of trans women across the country. There is a culture of whitewashing and ignoring the issues that affect queer bodies of color. The impacts and struggles of queer people are being erased and replaced with those of the more marketable “marginalized” population: cis white men. The names of important figures in queer history have been buried and have been reduced to footnotes on the pages of the very change they incited.

There is a real threat of violence in communities of color, against queer people of color, and there is no effort being made to help. There are no Human Rights Campaign efforts, there are no videos aimed to educate, and there is not enough being done to protect queer people of color, or provide the support afforded to cis white males. Statistically in 2016, gay black men accounted for 39% of new HIV infections, among men aged 13-24. ‘Gay and bisexual men, accounted for 58% of African Americans diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. HIV diagnoses among African American gay and bisexual men aged 25 to 34 increased 30%. According the Center for Disease Control (CDC), African Americans and Latinos from poverty stricken areas in the country are twice as likely to contract HIV than anywhere else in the country. The rates of infection in impoverished areas are similar to those in Ethiopia. These stats push the rates well beyond the criteria to be categorized as an epidemic. These stats are readily available, but are not given the attention or resources to make a lasting change.

QPOC and POC are often viewed as objects of sexual desire. They are often fetishized, one dimensional and only around as long as they are desired. Black men are reduced to the size of their penises. Black women are angry, sexy, and oversexualized. Black trans people are confused and have lost their way. Latino men are sexy pool boys. Latina women are fiery, sex crazed, and passionately insane. Asian men are soft, delicate and unsexy, and Asian women are obedient. These stereotypes are detrimental to progression, and force the audience of the gay rights movement to view all QPOC and POC with these learned lenses and strip people of their individual cultural identities, and instead replace them with the labels that the media inscribes on their bodies, while erasing the individual, and their legacy. Kathryn Bond Stockton in her book Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame where “black” meets “queer,” states that the first wound dealt to queer people, and more specifically queer people of color, is a “cloth wound.” Queer people are expected to present themselves as their designated at birth genders, or as their culturally defined definitions of personhood, and not as what they define themselves as. For queer people of color, the choice becomes to bear the “cloth wound” and present as is expected of them, or present their authentic selves, and potentially fall victim to societal dangers of deviating from the norm, and bear bodily wounds.

POC are lumped into the category of “Other,” and are rarely granted the same access as their white contemporaries. Larry Clark, one of the masters of contemporary documentary photography, built his career around photographing white teenagers doing drugs, having sex, and behaving like teenagers. These photographs have been bought and sold and accepted as the tragic truth of adolescence. While similar narratives by artists of color about youth of color, are written off as the product of urgency, and are not deserving of recognition. Representation for POC rarely goes beyond the pre-approved narratives of slavery and segregation, and lies in the “ghetto.” There is a gross acceptance of these assumed narratives surrounding communities of color. Very rarely are POC allowed to deviate without a societal pushback, very rarely are POC allowed to celebrate or feel pride in their legacy without the current culture deeming the celebrations or pride inappropriate or unprofessional.

Within the context of the art world, there is a rich history of the lives, bodies, and legacies of POC being overwritten and exploited by white contemporaries. The achievements of Queer photographers of color have often been eclipsed or written off as low-brow, whereas when white contemporaries appropriate similar visual languages and cultures, they are heralded as purveyors of style. The exploitation and fetishization of QPOC has led to the idea that the stories and histories of POC are only important when delivered by a white artist; that POC are only considered beautiful when viewed through the lens of a white artist. These ideas have become ingrained into the context of the cannon of “capital A” art, allowing artists like Robert Mapplethorpe to reach superstardom for his erotic images of black men, while Rotimi Fani-Kayode, a queer Nigerian and Yoruba artist, who was forced to leave Nigeria because of Civil War, used the nude black male form to challenge the tensions between race, culture and sexuality, has faded. We accept flat, one-dimensional representations of POC because a post-colonial society does not trust POC with our histories. POC are not afforded agency over their legacies. The fetishization of (queer) bodies of color has created the message that POC are only valuable as (sex) objects. POC are plot devices to be used by a white majority and never developing a personhood beyond submission.

The canon of art history has historically only represented and celebrated cisgender, straight, white men. This legacy has truncated the visual and cultural languages available to people of color, whose various diasporic backgrounds have already created limited cultural legacies. In order to begin to create and reinforce equal and fair representation, people of color must be given control of their narratives. We must accept all narratives and truths, and accept the personhood of all peoples, and see beyond the societal pressures that limit how people of color are perceived and ultimately represented. We must honor those that have come before us and continue to create platforms for QPOC and POC to exist unapologetically and celebrate the efforts of POC to begin create a lasting legacy, independent of the history all too eager to forget us.

1According to The Center for Disease control break down of the rates of HIV/AIDS among African American Men

Oscar J. Rivera was born in Brooklyn, New York, studied photography at Parsons The New School for Design and is a founding member of the Poor Brown Kids Art Collective. He works covers a range of themes including personal relationships, sexuality and gender identity, as well his quest to define his latinidad. Rivera often creates bodies of work that incorporate found artifacts, vintage photographs, and his own work to create diaristic approaches to storytelling. He was previously a Studio Art Mentor with Studio in A School, and worked within several summer programs teaching art to children in NYC public schools. Rivera received a scholarship to attend the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education to develop programming on campus at The New School. He currently is the Exhibitions Manager and Curator at En Foco.

Photograph: Claire Dorfman. 2017

Exhibitions Manager and Curator at En Foco.
We are delighted to support En Foco’s ‘2018 PHOTOGRAPHY FELLOWSHIP’ Winners.

Congratulations to
Alexis Ruíseco-Lombera, Antonio Pulgarin, Gioncarlo Valentine, Hidemi Takagi, Jonathan Gardenhire, Laylah Amatullah Barrayn, Mark Aghatise, Rhynna Santos, Tau Battice, and Yu-Chen Chiu!

En Foco has been committed to providing independent visual artists with technical assistance and fiscal resources for 44-years.

The Bronx Culture Collective (BxCC) is also committed to advocating for equitable and diversified funding and access for our independent artists and creative community. We will be hosting a series of community-wide gatherings throughout the summer and fall called NOMADICO to bridge the most relevant issues and self-actualize advocacy strategies.

NOMADICO is a mobile artist-engagement series bringing the South Bronx’s creative brain-trust together to discuss and envision the ways we can preserve the region’s cultural capacity, reclaim our historical narrative, and amplify its significance to the world.

To find a forthcoming NOMADICO gathering date, point your web-browser to

bronxculturecollective.nyc/nomadico

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UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS

IN BROAD DAYLIGHT: Greek Women Street Artists
Opening Reception: Saturday, May 19, 6-9pm

STRANGERS IN GOOD COMPANY: New Commissions by Bronx Artists
Opening Reception + Block Party: Saturday, July 14, 2-6pm

HUMBLE: Artist Collective Representing Various Tribal Nations
Opening Reception: Saturday, September 1, 6-9pm
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Submit your work for consideration for a solo exhibition at Blue Sky. All photo or video based work is eligible and there is never a fee to submit your work.

For details go to: blueskygallery.org/submissions/

Established in 1975 in Portland, Oregon, Blue Sky Gallery has a long history devoted to showcasing the finest in photographic vision and innovation. We present two solo exhibitions each month by national and international artists from our 3,700 square foot gallery in the heart of the Pearl District, Portland’s largest arts neighborhood.

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image: Daesha Devón Harris, You Bid Me Hold My Peace and Dry My Fruitless Tears, Forgetting That I Bear a Pain Beyond My Years, exhibited in the artist’s solo show at Blue Sky, June 2018.