

The Museum of Modern Art

MoMA'S CELEBRATED NEW PHOTOGRAPHY SERIES RETURNS ON MARCH 18 EXPLORING IDEAS OF PERSONHOOD AND REPRESENTATION IN CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY

Being: New Photography 2018

March 18–August 19, 2018

Floor 3, The Edward Steichen Galleries

Press Preview: Tuesday, March 13, 9:30–11:30 a.m., with remarks to follow.

NEW YORK, February 21, 2018—The Museum of Modern Art presents ***Being: New Photography 2018***, the latest presentation in MoMA's celebrated New Photography exhibition series. Since its inception in 1985, New Photography has introduced more than 100 artists from around the globe, and it is a key component of the Museum's contemporary program. Every two years, New Photography presents urgent and compelling ideas in recent photography and photo-based art. This year's edition, *Being*, asks how photography can capture what it means to be human. On view from March 18 through August 19, 2018, the exhibition includes over 80 new and recent works by 17 artists from ten countries. While at various stages in their careers, all are presenting their work at the Museum for the first time. *Being: New Photography 2018* is organized by Lucy Gallun, Assistant Curator, Department of Photography.

At a time when questions about the rights, responsibilities, and dangers inherent in being represented—and in representing others—are being debated around the world, the works featured in *Being* call attention to assumptions about how individuals are depicted and perceived. Many challenge the conventions of photographic portraiture, or use tactics such as masking, cropping, or fragmenting to disorient the viewer. In others, snapshots or found images are taken from their original context and placed in a new one to reveal hidden stories. While some of the works might be considered straightforward representations of individuals, others do not include images of the human body at all. Together, they explore how personhood is expressed today, and offer timely perspectives on issues of privacy and exposure; the formation of communities; and gender, heritage, and psychology.

Andrzej Steinbach (German, born Poland, 1983) upends familiar tropes from both traditional portraiture and fashion photography. His series *Gesellschaft beginnt mit drei* (Society Begins with Three) (2017) uses the conventional format of a group portrait, yet each picture depicts only one figure in full, cropping the others out of the frame and switching the sitters' positions and clothing throughout the series.

Works by **Paul Mpagi Sepuya** (American, born 1982) explore the intersections of race, gender, and desire within the history of portrait photography. In his ongoing series *Figures, Grounds, and Studies*, and in a new collage made for this exhibition, Sepuya uses the

materials of the studio itself—making the camera visible, layering multiple pieces of photographic paper, and foregrounding the platform and drapery upon which the model poses—to force viewers to confront their own perspectives.

Often beginning with a model against a studio backdrop, **Aida Muluneh** (Ethiopian, born 1974) constructs characters through colorful make-up and costume and by doubling figures or limbs. Titled after her grandmother's saying, "The world is nine; it is never complete and it's never perfect," Muluneh's series *The World Is 9* (2016) conveys the multiplicity and contradictions inherent within an individual.

In the series *Cargo Cults and Passport Photos (Migrants)*, **Stephanie Syjuco** (American, born Philippines, 1974) reinterprets standard tropes of 19th-century ethnographic portraiture and the ubiquitous format of passport photography. The "migrants" pictured in her passport photos, for example, have covered their faces, suggesting that making their physical identities known might pose great risk.

Similarly, **Yazan Khalili's** (Palestinian, born Syria, 1981) work challenges contemporary assumptions about the appearances of individuals associated with a given place, background, or culture. His video *Hiding Our Faces like a Dancing Wind* (2016) utilizes facial-recognition software on both still and moving images to evoke the histories of photographic "evidence" that served to identify or classify individuals through their facial characteristics.

Matthew Connors (American, born 1976) has a longtime interest in representing individuals as part of collective cultures, as well as frictions between citizens and their governments. In a series of recent photographs made over several trips to North Korea from 2013 to 2016, he combines a documentary style with a more metaphoric approach, capturing images of people as well as charged symbols.

In a special project conceived for the exhibition, **Adelita Husni-Bey** (Italian, born 1985) led a multiday workshop with former and current members of MoMA Teens programs that imagined possible uses for the Museum after a future fictional global disruption. The photographs for *Being* were shot on the last day of the workshop as participants enacted the imagined characters they had developed.

B. Ingrid Olson (American, born 1987) frames photographs of figures or body parts—including her own—within other pictures or within acrylic boxes. By presenting the body through both literal and metaphorical mirror effects, as in *Felt Angle, box for standing* (2017), or *Model for a folded room, bound girdle* (2017), Olson's works challenge clear-cut understandings of psychology and identity.

Sofia Borges's (Brazilian, born 1984) photographs depict masks and models, often through manipulations of images she originally shot in museums, zoos, aquariums, or archival collections—all institutions in which display mechanisms play a central role. Her works, such as the immersive wallpaper piece *Theatre, or Cave* (2014), invite viewers to experience the artifice and spectacle of photographic representation.

Throughout the history of photography, photographs have served as a way to remember those who have passed. **Harold Mendez's** (American, born 1977) photographs from the Necrópolis Cristóbal Colón and other nearby funerary sites in Havana, Cuba—such as *At the edge of the Necropolis* (2017) or *Siempre serás* (2017)—address this role by capturing the faded identifying markers on tombstones or the detritus left behind at graves and memorials by the living.

The exhibition also includes an excerpt of **Shilpa Gupta's** (Indian, born 1976) 2014 project in which she represented 100 individuals, who had changed their surnames for various political, familial, or emotional reasons, with a framed picture that had been sliced into two. The pieces, which are often not figurative depictions, are placed close enough to their mates that viewers can find and “complete” the whole image, but they can also be read as fragmented portraits of an individual's identity.

Em Rooney (American, born 1983) selects photographs from her personal archive and presents them with unique frames or armatures, some crafted from old books or built from cloth, metal, glass, or ceramic materials. Works like *Elliot* (2015) or *Sarah with a painting of her own eye* (2017) underscore how photographs, like mementos or keepsakes, can become objects to cherish.

In their collaborative multi-photograph work *The opposite of looking is not invisibility. The opposite of yellow is not gold* (2016), **Hương Ngô** and **Hồng-Ân Trương** (American, born Hong Kong, 1979; American, born 1976) mined their own family albums for 1970s-era snapshots featuring their mothers, both of whom immigrated to the US from Vietnam. The artists juxtaposed these photographs with textual excerpts from transcripts of US Congressional hearings about Vietnamese refugees, setting terms such as “aliens” or “illegals” alongside intimate family photographs.

Frowst—a little-known English word more frequently used (though still uncommon) in Britain—refers to a warm, stuffy, claustrophobic atmosphere. Examples from **Joanna Piotrowska's** (Polish, born 1985) series *Frowst* (2013–14) depict people in similarly uncomfortable environments. The figures in these works appear to be at once awkward or ill at ease, as well as to possess a closeness with one another: some bodies are positioned so that they seem to merge; others depend upon each another physically and perhaps emotionally.

Multiple photographs and the premiere of a new two-channel video from **Sam Contis's** (American, born 1982) series *Deep Springs* (2017) illustrate actions and relationships between bodies. The series is set at the historically all-male liberal arts college of the same name, situated in the remote high desert of California. Contis's subjects are pictured on the brink of adulthood. Here, such development is informed by group social dynamics and by connection to the western landscape.

Carmen Winant's (American, born 1983) *My Birth* (2017–18), a site-specific installation for the exhibition, fills two facing walls from floor to ceiling with images of women preparing for

and in the process of labor and childbirth. Using images appropriated from books and magazines, Winant explores how these essential activities are often kept hidden—even in our image-saturated culture—and reflects upon her own birth experience within a web of collected representations.

#NewPhotography2018

SPONSORSHIP:

Major support for the exhibition is provided by The William Randolph Hearst Endowment Fund and by David Dechman and Michel Mercure, and The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation.

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Additional support is provided by the Annual Exhibition Fund.

AUDIO GUIDE:

Audio commentary from the artists accompanies selected works in the exhibition. MoMA Audio is available for streaming and download on MoMA's free app on iTunes and moma.org, and is also available free of charge at the Museum.

MoMA Audio is supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies.

PUBLIC PROGRAM:

Expanded Portraiture

Wednesday, April 18, 6:00 p.m.

The Celeste Bartos Theater

On the occasion of *Being: New Photography 2018*, MoMA will host a panel discussion on the theme of expanded notions of portraiture. While the exhibition is organized around recent photography, this discussion will focus on forms of representation beyond photography, and will not be medium-specific. Cultural producers from diverse fields will explore alternative definitions of and approaches to “portraiture.” The program will be moderated by Lucy Gallun, Assistant Curator, Department of Photography, and artist Carmen Winant, whose work is included in the exhibition.

This program is made possible by the Anna Marie and Robert F. Shapiro Seminar and Lecture Endowment Fund, established by Jeanne and Bob Savitt, Kristen and A. Andrew Shapiro, and Robert F. Shapiro, Jr.

MoMA CLASS:

Contemporary Photography at The Museum of Modern Art

4 Tuesdays: 3/20, 3/27, 4/10, 4/17 (no class on 4/3) at 11:00 a.m.–12:50 p.m.

This course presents a survey of modern and contemporary photography, paying particular attention to examples in MoMA's biannual New Photography exhibition and Stephen Shore retrospective. We will also examine the role of photography in documenting performance art in the exhibition *Club 57: Film, Performance, and Art in the East Village, 1978–1983*.

Participants will discuss how photographers have preserved moments in time, captured innovative and beautiful visions, and challenged stereotypical ways of looking at the world.

David Smucker is an art historian whose research focuses on the intersection of photography and the American road trip.

For the full classes schedule and registration visit moma.org/classes. Nonmember \$355, member \$325, student/educator/staff of other museums \$250

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For downloadable high-resolution images, register at moma.org/press.

Public Information:

The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019, (212) 708-9400, moma.org.
Hours: Saturday through Thursday, 10:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m. Friday, 10:30 a.m.–8:00 p.m. Museum Admission: \$25 adults; \$18 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$14 full-time students with current I.D. Free, members and children 16 and under. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs). Free admission during Uniqlo Free Friday Nights: Fridays, 4:00–8:00 p.m. moma.org: No service charge for tickets ordered on moma.org. Tickets purchased online may be printed out and presented at the Museum without waiting in line. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs). Film and After Hours Program Admission: \$12