



ARTIST

Ayana Vellissia Jackson

TITLE

Portrait of the New Guard 1

DATE

2008

DIMENSIONS

35.5 in H x 35.5 in W

MEDIUM

Inkjet Prints

IMAGE NOTES

Paper size: 37.5 x 38 Archival Pigment Print

CATALOGUE NUMBER

2013.013

CURRENT LOCATION

The Warehouse

AYANA VELLISSIA JACKSON

CULTURAL HERITAGE

African-American

LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP

Artist-in-Residence, 2010

LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS

Contact Sheet 162

BIOGRAPHY

Ayana V. Jackson has travelled the world to make her portrait-based work, spending time in places such as South Africa, Germany, Ghana, and Mexico. Collectively, her diverse array of projects, which includes co-founding an artist space in Berlin in 2005, references the African diaspora in many parts of the world as well as attendant themes of identity and memory. The acclaimed series *African by Legacy*, *Mexican by Birth*, which has been exhibited widely and published as a catalog, explores these coexisting international cultural influences.

Just before arriving in Syracuse, Jackson spent a number of weeks at Project Row Houses in Houston, TX, where she installed her part of the multi-person exhibition, curated by William Cordova, called *eco, xiang, echo: meditations on the african, andean & asian diasporas*. The exhibition, which will be on view in Houston's Third Ward until June 20, 2010, investigates societal and historical connections among cultures. Previous to the show at Project Row Houses, Jackson attended and exhibited her work in the 8th Bamako Encounters African Photography Biennial, curated by Michket Krifa and Laura Serani, in Bamako, Mali.

While at Light Work, Jackson will make use of our scanners to digitize a backlog of negatives, edit and archive her images, and begin work on a new book project that will take the form of a travelogue. She also plans to realize some large format prints of her work during her time here.

Ayana Jackson holds a BA from Spelman College, and she studied under Khaterina Sieverding at the University of Arts, Berlin. She has exhibited her work at Gallery MOMO, Johannesburg; Galerie Peter Herrmann, Berlin; Franklyn W. Williams Caribbean Cultural Center, New York City; San Francisco Mexican Museum; and Philadelphia African American Museum. She has received grant support from Inter-American Foundation, Arlington, VA; PUMA Creative; and Cultures France, among others.

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ESSAYS

On a trip in 2009 to Sao Paulo, Buenos Aires, and Lima, I gained insight into an area of interest that I had sporadically delved into in the past—the presence, or more appropriately, the lack of presence of people of African descent in the Americas. While Brazil has a more visible connection with many countries across Africa—as a result of varying degrees of economic and cultural exchange—in the rest of the Americas, the silence of the African presence is as resounding as the spectre of invisibility. Ayana V. Jackson's photographs foreground some of the issues and themes which highlight this historical disconnection. Influenced by the discourse of Double Consciousness that promotes the idea of Black emancipation and self-articulation espoused by W.E.B. Du Bois, Jackson is also conversant with the notion of the Black Atlantic, put forth by British theorist Paul Gilroy, as a transnational concept which goes beyond specific ethnicities or geographical locations. Her documentary practice is part of a growing interest in exploring African identity beyond a centralized dialogue that has, up to now, positioned African-American and Black British life as indicative of all African Diasporic experience. Through her images, Jackson not only asks questions about the social, economic, and political role Africans in the Americas play in their communities, in their society, and in the global African Diaspora, but also the platforms available for engagement with their cultural heritage. Jackson's work over the past decade has revolved around two primary themes of exploration. The first prioritizes the expansion of the African discourse outside of its current geographic and experiential boundaries. The other focal point attempts to deconstruct a static and derogative presentation of Africa. In so doing she highlights the interconnectedness of shared experiences across music, fashion, as well as everyday realities. She demonstrates—by photographing in regions as diverse as South Africa, Kenya, Ghana, Colombia, Nicaragua, and Mexico—that in a global world, our contemporary conditions are, in effect, similar. Within this context Jackson's critically acclaimed and ambitious photographic survey *African by Legacy Mexican by Birth* remains significant. The result of a three-year collaboration with writer Marco Villalobos, the series combines writing and photography to excavate the story of the 600,000 estimated Black Mexicans in the country today. This rich combination of text and image expands the potential of the photograph, especially in its use of portraiture as a framing device to record and document the African presence in Mexico. Jackson's use of portraiture is an appropriate genre successfully employed by her predecessors such as James Van Der Zee, Roy de Carava, and more recently Dawoud Bey, as well as early African photographers such as Seydou Keita and Okhai Ojeikere, who used the medium not only as a tool for self-representation, but also as a means to challenge social stereotypes. Jackson's work also enriches our knowledge of a historically alienated and invisible group within Mexican society. Her follow up series *Aguadulce*, a similar investigation into Afro Colombia and Nicaragua, serves as a next chapter in this evolving research. Jackson's series *Full Circle* explores the influence of Hip Hop—long considered a quintessential American popular art form—and its manifestation in Ghana as *Hip Life*. While Hip Hop's roots are known to come from traditional African drumming and call and response performance, few studies have looked at the genre beyond an American or Western discourse in which other "authentic" versions are considered derivative. In *Full Circle* Jackson focuses on the younger generation of musicians among whom she found less difference in dress, attitude, and musical style to the mainstream American versions. In this way, *Full Circle* goes beyond American boundaries to present the development of a global phenomenon that has given birth to a Ghanaian brand of music, fashion, and lifestyle in which local and global culture collide. In her series *Commuter Vans and No Man's Land and Portrait of the New Guard*, created in Kenya and South Africa, respectively, Jackson continues to cross and blur boundaries whether cultural, geographic, or racial. Her work unequivocally engages a wider ideal, a different world, one which is aware of the resources at its disposal, in which mobility and a sense of interconnectedness contributes to another vision and narrative of Africa and its Diaspora. Jackson forms part of a generation of artists who own their stories, highlighting the complexity of the Diaspora, its history, and how it lives today. Bisi Silva Ayana V. Jackson was a Light Work Artist-in-Residence in April 2010. For more information about Jackson and her work, please visit her website at www.avjphotography.com. Bisi Silva is an independent curator and founder/director of the Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos, Nigeria.