Study for friendship, D.C.S and F.C. (2106), 2015

144 POWERS
Paul Mpagi Sepuya

ON VIEW JUNE 14 - SEPT 19, 2022
From 2003 - 2014 the house I lived in at 144 Powers was the central gathering point for socializing and artmaking and it really was a muse. I began photographing friends in the kitchen and backyard. I then moved to photographing in my bedroom, where the sheets and pillows where my friends sat became a recurring landscape and an important foundation to the work. So bringing some of these images into the Alice Austen House definitely resonates with that history of domestic portraiture, friendship and intimacy in a home which becomes a shared, queer space.
Even though my work has changed and expanded in many ways since the initial portraits, and you see that in the 2014-15 Studies, portrait-making and friendship has been at the center of my work. I think that’s been a key in the continuum of gay, lesbian, trans and queer photographers. We start with what’s closest and share that with the world.

—PAUL MPAGI SEPUYA, 2022
Self-portrait holding Joshua’s hand, 2006
Michael (Proofs), 2006
ARTIST STATEMENT:
The subjects appearing in my work are a cast of friends and intimates, muses, lovers, mentors, and peers. I am inspired to work with these “shared subjects,” as I call these friends, for their mobility and visibility at the particularly charged intersection of creative, social, and sexual in the queer community.

I am keyed into the recognition that happens weeks after a turn in the darkroom - like the photographer’s dark room, the queer dark room allows for the memory of a kind of vision you can’t explain to one who hasn’t entered.

"The relationships that exist across subjects and myself serve as the basis for the organization and editing of my work.”
Pericles, 2008
Alex, 2008
The mid-2000s, when I began my first portrait projects, I was enmeshed within the Queer Zines revival, the debut of BUTT Magazine and its countless spin-offs, and the emergence of online social networking sites Friendster, Myspace, Manhunt, and Adam4Addam.

I was distributing my work through zines and online, and the digital dissemination of the work immediately left the realm of my control and authorship. My interest quickly shifted from straight portraiture to the ways in which queer portraiture was being used and re-contextualized, how the same portrait could serve both as artwork in one context and solicitation in another.
To be honest, at the time these ideas were not so clearly formed, but in retrospect it is interesting how I found stability through the discovery of a history of photographic portraiture’s relationship to literature. In literature the author and subject more easily slipped, swapped places, lingered in the space where roles co-exist.”

- PAUL MPAGI SEPUYA, 2017

PAUL MPAGI SEPUYA (B. 1982, SAN BERNARDINO, CA) is a Los Angeles-based artist working in photography, and Associate Professor in Media Arts at the University of California San Diego.

His work is in the collections of the Baltimore Museum of Art, the Getty and Guggenheim Museums, the Hammer Museum, LACMA, MoCA Los Angeles, MoMA, SFMoMA, the Studio Museum in Harlem, and the Whitney Museum, among others. His work has been covered in the New Yorker, the New York Times, Art in America, The Nation, and The Guardian, and was featured on the cover of ARTFORUM’s March 2019 issue.
Recent museum exhibitions include those at the Barbican Centre, LACMA, the Guggenheim Museum, the Getty Museum, and a project for the 2019 Whitney Biennial. A survey of work from 2006-2018 was presented at CAM St. Louis and Blaffer Art Museum, accompanied by a monograph published by CAM St. Louis and Aperture Foundation.

Most recently, Paul was an artist-in-residency at the Anderson Ranch Arts Center, and was featured in the PHOTO 2022 International Festival of Photography in Melbourne and a group exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington D.C. A solo exhibition at Bortolami in New York is open through late June.
Amy, singing, 2006
Devein, 2008
“...The queer dark room allows for the memory of a kind of vision you can’t explain to one who hasn’t entered.“

- PAUL MPAGI SEPUYA