

QIANA MESTRICH

THRALL

sepiaEYE is thrilled to present *Thrall* (2017-2020), a solo online exhibition by Qiana Mestrich. By integrating the outdoor studio, staged portraiture, still life, and family photography, Mestrich externalizes her thoughts around recent political, social, and cultural discussions on white supremacy and Black consciousness.

"I was inspired to create this work during a visit to a museum with my children, when we encountered a towering statue of Pandora in front of a large window. In Greek mythology, Pandora is the first woman created by the gods and this sculpture (made in 1871 by Chauncey Bradley Ives) depicts her in the act of opening the box/jar containing humanity's evils.

Despite her divine origin and childlike curiosity, Pandora's misfortune is allegorically and literally giving birth to civilization's "dark" tendencies. Pandora's marmoreal overbearance inspired me to create photographs that reflect the enforcement of classical ideals of beauty and the production of a normality of whiteness regularly on display in our art institutions. . . With Thrall, I endorse the Black Mother's role as Creator, Author and Photographer. She is no longer hidden as a prop or forced labor. She is superhuman and in control of the image, utilizing the home and immediate environment as her studio."

— Qiana Mestrich

Some images in *Thrall* allude to whiteness as a blanketing, nearly invisible pressure. The first four photographs in this series reflect this obscurity— as if the viewer is peering into a foggy space, looking through a window but not seeing the entire picture or object underneath. Once the mist has cleared, Mestrich refuses the standard visual representations of mother and child. She does not appear in the photographs nor does she record the events of her home life. Collaborating with her children, she allows them to dance, be unruly, wondrous and curious in Nature. Her compassionate, protective role as Mother or Creator, mirrors her own upbringing and awareness of the world as a Buddhist.

"I do not depict myself with my children, nor am I willing to represent or perform trauma which further perpetuates the camera's early use and abuse of power as a colonial instrument. Moving towards an understanding and acceptance of all things natural, I also seek to (re) discover a Black relationship to the outdoors, without fear."

Furthering this exploration of the outdoors, Mestrich incorporates weed plants as ornamentation in the series, challenging their subjective classification as "invasive" or not worthy of admiration. "How has nature itself been regulated through the cultivation of plants for the production of capitalism, namely the colonial realms of the plantation and traditional horticulture (or the garden)," states Mestrich.

In *Thrall*, she employs photographic elements like shadow and the inverted silhouette as additional characters in her visual narrative. Branches and leaves that were saved and used to hide faces, the silhouette of these branches were then ghostly transferred to brown paper or are obscured by a white scrim. We then see arms and eyes break through or peek through the brown paper. The use of these elements as simultaneous metaphors for canvas or shield, in tandem with an array of dried and collected chicken wishbones, lead the viewer to make connections between the ideas of "traditional" portraiture and of hope and wishes in an uncertain future.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

EXHIBITION ONLINE
sepiaeye.com

EXHIBITION DATES
February 15 - April 15, 2021

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Qiana Mestrich
Morning Weeds, 2020



"I frame a poly-consciousness shaped by my own experiences around identity as a first-generation American, Black, mixed-race woman. I want to question the powers that make dominant narratives legitimate."

The *Thrall* series will open at the Fotografie Forum Frankfurt in Germany as part of Triennial RAY Fotografieprojekte Frankfurt/RheinMain from June 3 to September 12, 2021 and is dedicated to the topic of IDEOLOGIES.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Mestrich is the founder of the Dodge & Burn blog, co-editor of *How We Do Both: Art and Motherhood* (Secretary Press, 2012), and has self-published numerous books including *Some Kind of War* (2013), *Invisible – Part I and Part II* (2012), and *Hard To Place* (2015). In 2020, she co-taught a photo workshop with Justine Kurland, curated exhibitions for the Artist/Mother Podcast, juried the American Photography Open, and wrote the catalog essay for En Foco's *Dos Mundos: (Re)constructing Narratives* traveling exhibition.

Qiana Mestrich will be a part of international Triennial RAY Fotografieprojekte Frankfurt/RheinMain, June-September 2021, Germany. Recent exhibitions include London Art Fair's Photo50 in 2018 and the BRIC Biennial Volume III in 2019. Exhibitions include; *Hard To Place*, Brooklyn Art Space, Brooklyn, NY (2016), *Inherited Patterns*, New York Public Library Picture Collection, New York, NY (2014 – 2015), *The Project Space at Corridor Gallery/RUSH Arts*, Brooklyn (2014) as well as group exhibitions including *On Being Black*, Arnika Dawkins Gallery, Atlanta, GA (2015).

ABOUT sepiaEYE

sepiaEYE is dedicated to showing a spectrum of modern and contemporary photography and video work. Established in September 2009 by Esa Epstein, sepiaEYE will continue to foster artist development through exhibitions, publications, trade fairs, and festivals. We are honored to represent the Estate of Bhupendra Karia. sepiaEYE is interested in the rediscovery of lesser known artists and significant periods within the history of photography and in the support of emerging artists. Esa Epstein has published eight titles on modern and contemporary photography including: *Atul Bhalla: Yamuna Walk* (sepiaEYE & UW Press, 2011), *Jungjin Lee: Wind*, essays by Eugenia Parry and Vicki Goldberg (Aperture/SEPIA, 2009); *Ketaki Sheth: Bombay Mix*, preface by Suketu Mehta (Dewi Lewis/SEPIA, 2007); and *Vivan Sundaram: Re-take of Amrita*, essays by Vivan Sundaram and Wu Hung (SEPIA, 2006). SEPIA exhibitions have been reviewed in numerous publications, most notably, *The New York Times*, *ARTFORUM*, *The New Yorker*, *Hyperallergic*, *ARTnews*, and *Art in America*. Gallery artists have gained critical acclaim and international recognition, and their works are included in the collections of major European and US museums and private collections. In her former position, Esa Epstein has helped build an impressive collection of Indian photography and, along the way, has offered her expertise to both private and public collections. Esa Epstein continues to offer institutional planning and arts management through sepiaEYE.

