



CENTER FOCUS

BLACK WOMEN PHOTOGRAPHERS

ELIANA CARTER • ANDREA K. CASTILLO • POOCHIE COLLINS
MARIA J. HACKETT • MYESHA EVON GARDNER • ASHLI OWENS • EDOLIA STROUD

NOËLLE, Ashli Owens

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



Hi-ARTS and El Barrio's Artspace PS109 are situated on the island of Manhattan (Mannahatta), on Munsee Lenape and Wappinger homeland.

We pay respect to Munsee Lenape and Wappinger peoples, their ancestors, and their elders—past, present, and future. Whose land are you on? Learn more about the land you're on and those who came before you at [Native Digital Land](#).

CENTER FOCUS



BLACK WOMEN PHOTOGRAPHERS
APRIL 11-29, 2022

Eliana Carter
Andrea K. Castillo
Poochie Collins
Maria J. Hackett
Myesha Evon Gardner
Ashli Owens
Edölia Stroud

Gallery Hours

Tuesday, Wednesday 1-6 pm
Thursday, Friday 1-8 pm

Opening Reception

April 11, 7-9 pm

Artist Discussion

April 13, 7-9 pm

Closing Mixer

April 29, 7-9 pm

#centerfocus

Exhale, Andrea K. Castillo

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This year many of us have found ourselves in a space of expanded understanding — our collective perspectives have been deeply developed and informed by significant shifts in culture, and in the atmospheres of both our intimate spaces as well as the larger society. Informed by both trauma and triumph, these shifts have defined a clear distance between BEFORE and NOW. And whatever was BEFORE is not just an echo of NOW. Radical distance generated by this shift has served as an invitation for many overdue revelations, realizations, revolutions, and pieces of understanding to wade through and over our lives.

For Polly Irungu the Founder of the Black Women Photographer Collective, radical distance offered an invitation of belonging — specifically, an invitation for her to manifest a vibrant, joy-filled multi-national network, resource, and support community for Black Women Photographers in which to belong. Birthed out of the racial reckoning of 2020 and to disrupt the notion that it is difficult to discover and commission Black creatives, Black Women Photographers is a global community and directory of more than 1,000 Black women and non-binary identifying photographers, spanning more than 46 countries and 32 U.S. states.

Curated by HiARTS and in collaboration with Polly Irungu, *Center Focus* is the inaugural exhibition for the collective. In its brevity, it is just the first breath of brilliance of what is sure to be a long luminous life for the collective. **Center Focus is an invitation to the voices of seven dynamic visual storytellers: Eliana Carter, Andrea K. Castillo, Poochie Collins, Maria J. Hackett, Myesha Evon Gardner, Ashli Owens, and Edölia Stroud.** Through their creative practices, these Black women photographers illuminate layers of warmth, solitude, transition, struggle, love, loss, motherhood, identity, respect, tenderness, strength, separation, and tradition.

Eliana Carter and **Andrea K. Castillo** re-shape light and perspective in both intimate and shared spaces — from the four walls of a bedroom or Grandmother's ornate kitchen counter to the vast expanse of a familiar skyline or sunset that have all gained new meaning during a time of separation and seclusion through the pandemic.

The work of **Poochie Collins** evokes power, beauty, grace, and all of the mystery that comes with the process of self-reflection and self-reclamation. **Maria J. Hackett's** *Changing Realities* series captures the vulnerability and tenderness of realities experienced in transition — her work issues a clarion command to the viewer that Kristie Marino, Tiffany, Princess Iyánifá Adzua Boakyewaa Ifáfunmiláyo Opore, and son Prince Boakum be held in their fullness, not as subjects before a lens but rather as souls filled with stories to graciously share with us.

CENTER FOCUS



Myesha Evon Gardner pulls us into the corners of life with her work *Jaquea Expecting Love* which amplifies and elevates space that is essential to the strength and structure of a place but is often overlooked. **Ashli Owens'** work is playful and dynamic, using shadow, light, depth, and color to capture vibrant portraits of friends with an abstract edge. **Edölia Stroud** flexes her deep intuition for timing and her talent for capturing stillness between moments of movement and heightened emotion from the intimate and deeply personal, to a moment of love caught in passing, Edölia submerges us in her field of vision and leaves us searching for oxygen.

The layers of gaze shared by these seven artists pull the viewer into focus and invite us to remember the significance and beauty of our own spaces. An invitation to remember that in a world where we are centered, loved, cared for, in a world where our souls can rest, where we hold the gaze and will always be the voice that tells our story best.

As you walk through this space we ask that you center the stories of these artists and their lives within their work, lift them up, celebrate with them, and take time to reflect on your own story, your own journey to this moment of centered focus. Thank you to all the voices, hands, and hearts that have led to this moment — we hold this space for you.

Joyous Pierce,
Hi-ARTS Program Manager

Belonging is primarily about finding and making home —“a place where the soul can rest”.
— bell hooks, *Belonging: A Culture of Place*, 2009

BLACK WOMEN PHOTOGRAPHERS



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POLLY IRUNGU

Founded by Polly Irungu and birthed out of the racial reckoning of 2020 to disrupt the notion that it is difficult to discover and commission Black creatives, Black Women Photographers is a global community and directory of more than 1,000 Black women and non-binary identifying photographers, spanning more than 46 countries and 32 U.S. states. Through conversation, workshops, educational resources, virtual and in-person events, as well as an active directory of photographers available for hire, BWP is committed to providing a home for Black women identifying photographers with the aim of increasing access to professional and paid opportunities for Black creatives.

EXHIBITION WORKS



Poochie Collins
Return To Innocence Lost (2021)
20" x 12" CATALOG NO. 1



Poochie Collins
Who Heals The Healer (2020)
12" x 10" CATALOG NO. 2



Poochie Collins
Who Heals The Healer 2 (2020)
12" x 10" CATALOG NO. 3



Poochie Collins
What Do You See When You Look At Me (2017)
14" x 19" CATALOG NO. 4



Edölia Stroud
Toyin (2021)
20" x 15" CATALOG NO. 5



Edölia Stroud
Untitled (2021)
12" x 10" CATALOG NO. 6



Edölia Stroud
Desnudo (2018)
13" x 16" CATALOG NO. 7



Edölia Stroud
Searching for Oxygen (2016)
10" x 12" CATALOG NO. 8



Andrea K. Castillo
Exhale (2017)
10" x 13" CATALOG NO. 9



Andrea K. Castillo
Tradition (2016)
11" x 18" CATALOG NO. 10



Andrea K. Castillo
Up and Away (2018)
13" x 16" CATALOG NO. 11



Maria J. Hackett
Changing Realities, Kristie Marino (2019)
10" x 12" CATALOG NO. 12



Maria J. Hackett
Changing Realities, Tiffany, Bronx, NY (2019)
12" x 14" CATALOG NO. 13



Maria J. Hackett
Changing Realities, Tiffany, Bronx, NY (2019)
12" x 14" CATALOG NO. 14



Maria J. Hackett
Changing Realities, Princess Iyanifá Adzua Boakyewaa Ifáfunmiláyo Opare and son Prince Boakum, Queens NY (2020)
10" x 12" CATALOG NO. 15



Maria J. Hackett
Changing Realities, Princess Iyanifá's son, Prince Boakum, Queens NY (2020)
10" x 12" CATALOG NO. 16



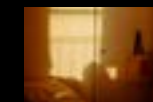
Ashli Owens
NOËLLE (2019)
11" x 18" CATALOG NO. 17



Ashli Owens
RAHEL (2019)
26" x 14" CATALOG NO. 18



Eliana Carter
Self Portrait (2020)
12" x 10" CATALOG NO. 19



Eliana Carter
Sunrise (2022)
12" x 10" CATALOG NO. 20



Myesha Evon Gardener
Jaquea Expecting Love (2021)
20" x 15" CATALOG NO. 21

Myesha Evon Gardener
Know Thyself (2020)
24" x 18" CATALOG NO. 21

ELIANA CARTER



"I started photographing seriously during the pandemic. I had been exclusively an iPhone shooter for a few years before ever picking up a camera, but I never considered what I was doing was photography. In the summer of 2020, I began experimenting with my parent's old cameras. I wanted to shoot on film so I scoured eBay for a film camera and learned how to develop film at home in hopes of cutting the cost in the long run. Photography quickly became a central focus for me. I was shooting around my hometown in Upstate, New York nearly every day. I was interested in the shapes and forms of light and shadow, the way light can change a space.

I was thrilled when I found Black Women Photographers. It was something I'd been searching for for a long time. I felt there was a huge lack of representation in online photo communities and a lack of knowledge about Black artists, especially Black women and non-binary artists. I have learned so much from my peers in BWP and seeing my friends grow in their art through the opportunities BWP has opened up is super inspiring. I was able to publish work through an opportunity I found in BWP and meet many other artists I admire and now call friends. There is so much strength in community.

Right now I am learning as much as I can and pushing myself to experiment with new photographic projects. I'd like to keep shooting and collaborating with other artists and get my work published. A dream I hope to soon realize is to make a zine or book —some sort of physical collection of my work."

ANDREA K. CASTILLO



"I took a liking to photography as a child. My uncle Steve would always take photos of the family on holidays and during more mundane/everyday activities. He gifted me my first Nikon digital camera when I graduated high school, and since has handed down a film and digital camera to me. Over the years, I've always had some type of camera in hand and would take photos of friends, family, and flowers over the years for fun. In my career thus far, I have photographed many musicians and live concerts, food, fashion shows, backstage at special events, and nature. In my journey, I am currently in a place where I am reeling back the reins, and focusing on creating photos for my own pleasure over assignments for clients. I like to create my own art in my own time. I am headed to a space of creating art over content.

My uncle Steve, family, and close friends have helped and uplifted me along the way. I have many friends that are fellow photographers who have been great at helping me use new equipment, as well as encouraging me to stay steadfast in my photographic journey, as it is one that I was not always confident in. My community has been a constant champion of my art and artistic abilities."



POOCHIE COLLINS



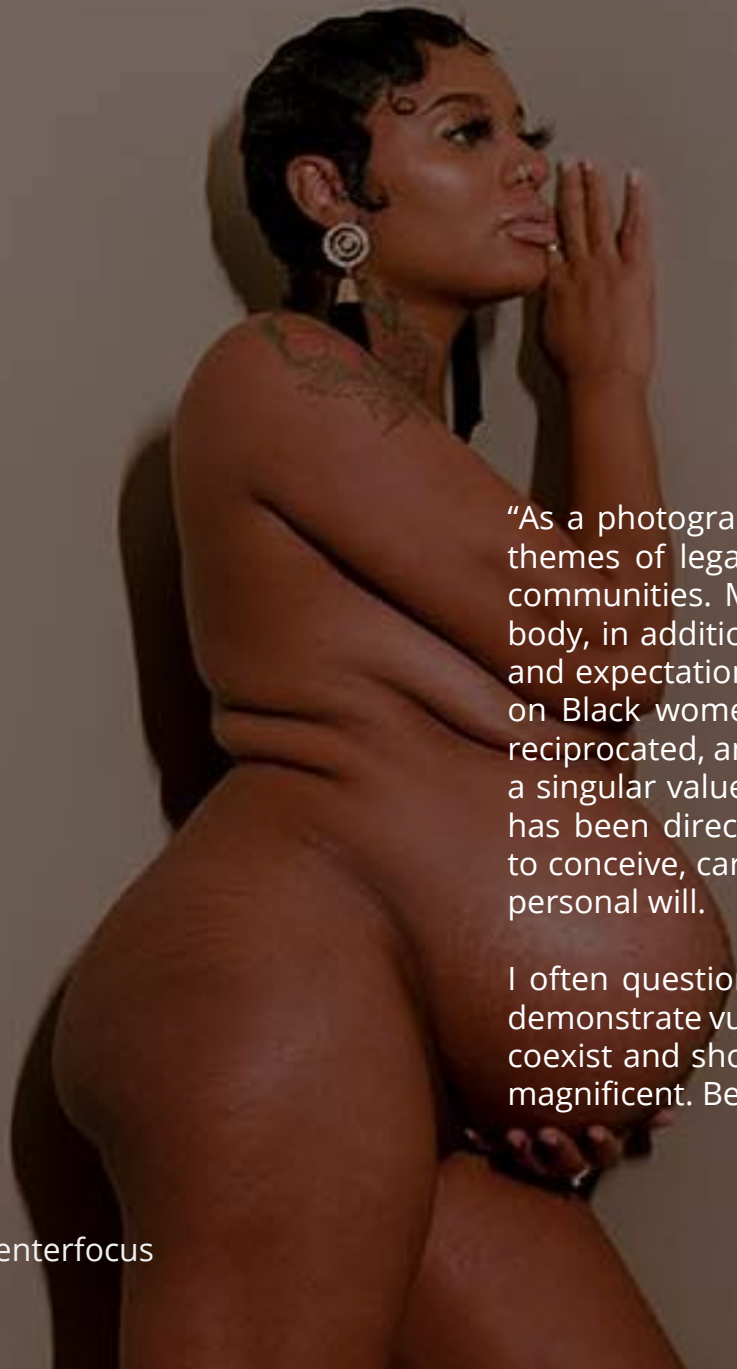
"Originally from Richmond, Virginia, I am a Brooklyn-based, double rooted, ambidextrous, chocolate-loving visionary who writes love letters with light. I initially began pursuing portraiture through self-studies. These sessions allowed me to become more comfortable navigating my camera and its functions and developed how I wanted to communicate with the world.

When words never seemed to translate my thoughts accurately, I sought a way to express them through photography. Unbeknownst to me, my work became breadcrumbs of my life story depicted through reflections of people, documenting moments of stillness, and finding my way back to myself. I continue to evolve, and how I communicate with the world will continue to change. Photography has soothed and healed me many times through movement and celebration of self and my community. My own evolution and my work go hand in hand."

#centerfocus

Return To Innocence Lost, Poochie Collins

MYESHA EVON GARDNER



“As a photographer and storyteller, my work examines truth by documenting & redefining themes of legacy, labor, the perception of beauty AND familial love in underrepresented communities. My explorations on themes such as vanity and the function of the woman’s body, in addition to my own self-reflections, seek to examine the profoundly complex roles and expectations assigned to women by our culture and society—with a personal emphasis on Black women, in particular. These roles and expectations are not always aligned, nor reciprocated, and through my studies, I have all too often observed women stripped down to a singular value dictated entirely by others. Womanhood, both traditionally and universally, has been directly linked to singular role expectation; women are predominantly expected to conceive, carry, give birth and sustain life, regardless of other circumstances or their own personal will.

I often question where and how we, as women, are allowed to feel safe and nurtured, to demonstrate vulnerability and strength. It is my goal to document the many dualities that may coexist and show that there is no one way to be a woman, rather, we are multifaceted and magnificent. Being feminine is, and should be, however, a woman chooses to exist.”

MARIA J. HACKET



"Through my documentary work, I find the opportunity to connect with various communities of various backgrounds to share their stories that often go unheard. Such stories are of heavy importance as they deserve to be shared and in capturing them photographically — they are given the opportunity to be shared, creating conversation, connection, and awareness.

Changing Realities is an ongoing photographic series documenting various mothers of differing backgrounds as they face numerous challenges mothering in modern-day society. As this project unexpectedly surfaced along my own personal journey of motherhood, I began meeting many different mothers of similar and different stories of their own motherhood journey - both challenging and beautiful stories. With this series so far, many mothers expressed a sense of feeling heard in being able to share, while creating conversation among others who view their stories from the outside. Whether it's single motherhood, breastfeeding, shifts in family roles, financial struggles or those of disadvantaged communities, these stories continue to inform others."

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*Changing Realities, Princess Ìyánifá Adzua Boakyewaa Ifáfunmiláyo
Opare and son Prince Boakum, Queens NY, Maria J. Hackett*



ASHLI OWENS



"Born in Las Vegas, Nevada, and raised in Tucson, Arizona, I consider myself a South-Western jewel now working as a portrait photographer in Brooklyn, New York. I was given my first camera from my grandpa at the age of 12 and have seemed to have a camera in my hand ever since.

Currently, I am navigating my life as a freelance artist. Crafting ways to merge my passion and my full-time career. Along the way, I have looked outwardly for much support because this life is difficult! Resources such as Black Women Photographers, fellow freelancers, and family have really helped to hold it down as well as offer abundant knowledge. Aside from that reading poetry. The book, *The How* by Yrsa Daley-Ward has offered me so much peace, guidance, and light in moments I have struggled to believe in myself."

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RAHEL, Ashli Owens

EDÖLIA STROUD



“My name is Edolia Stroud and I am a creative director and photographer from Brooklyn, New York. Working in the mediums of both photography and mixed media, my work explores themes of female identity. My narrative fine artwork weaves images together telling emotional stories through portraiture, still life, and documentary. My fashion work exudes beauty and playfulness with a focus on color.

As a legally blind photographer, I've grown up struggling to see the world around me. My disability has made it difficult to learn and live in general. Art has always been an important part of my life and the main source I use to not only express who I am but represent who I am from the inside out. Photography has always been the medium in which I truly thrive. It inspires me to create images in film, digital, and even mixed media.

Currently, in my journey, I am learning a new medium format camera. I've been photographing most of my personal work in analog which has made my journey edifying. Creating in analog alone has copiously been inspiring. I've also been practicing photographing in black and white more as I mainly work in color and I've been learning more about color theory to elevate my color photography. I am unsure where I am headed in my journey as a black woman photographer but I am grateful for this journey and I know the end result is fruitful. I would love to be given the opportunity to travel more and compose images for campaigns as well as editorials”.

ABOUT Hi-ARTS



Hi-ARTS, formerly known as the Hip-Hop Theater Festival, is a leading organization within the urban arts movement. For 20 years, Hi-ARTS has consistently broken new ground, advancing urban art by empowering artists to develop bold new works, while creating a lasting and positive impact on urban communities. Our commitment to this work has developed an audience that is unique, young, and ethnically and racially diverse. Located at the center of creative and community practice at PS 109, Hi-ARTS engages arts and culture both locally and nationally. Learn more about our history and mission at hi-artsnyc.org.

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Marketing Assistant

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Project Associate

Kirya Traber
Curator in Residence

ABOUT Hi-ARTS



SKY LAB

Developed in direct response to the COVID-19 crisis, SKY LAB supports artists in developing work beyond the four walls of a traditional studio or theater. As an incubation and innovation space, SKY LAB allows artists with a community-engaged practice rooted in performance to take their ideas to the next stage through a remote development process and public works-in-progress sharing presented virtually. The process-centered program is designed to support the needs of the artist and best support the trajectory of their project.

CRITICAL BREAKS

Hi-ARTS offers our CRITICAL BREAKS residency program year-round for artists who are in a pivotal phase of developing an existing work. As an incubation and innovation space, CRITICAL BREAKS allows supports this through an intensive development process and public works-in-progress sharing. The process-centered program is designed to support the needs of the artist and best support the trajectory of their project

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Jay Délise

&&&ART

CRITICAL BREAKS

Zachariah Ezer & Dominique Rider

An Unclear World: Experiments in Afropessimism

CRITICAL BREAKS

Friday Lynton

An Artisan & Her Process

SKY LAB

Germono Toussaint

The Last Gatekeeper

CRITICAL BREAKS

Brian Quijada & Nygel D. Robinson

MEXODUS

CRITICAL BREAKS

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SUPPORT Hi-ARTS



Support innovative theater, performance, and visual art. A donation of any size will make a difference for Hi-ARTS as we empower artists to develop bold new work, while creating a lasting and positive impact on urban communities.

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Hi-ARTS 215 East 99th Street, New York, NY 10029

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Call Development Manager Masud Grant at PHONE NUMBER. While staff is working remotely due to COVID-19, please leave us a voicemail and we will return your call.

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ElBarrio Artspace PS109

KEEP IN TOUCH!



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hi-artsnyc.org



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Hi-
ARTS

NOËLLE, Ashli Owens