

# Arena

HIGHLIGHTS FROM TMAGAZINE.COM

ARTS AND LETTERS

## Celebrating the Fullness of Black Lives

For T's #TBlackArtBlackLife Instagram series, we ask prominent Black American artists to share a work of art, whether their own or one created by another, that shows Black people in moments of joy, hope, dignity, pride, sorrow or agency — in other words, in the fullness of life. Below are five works chosen by the artists Ayana V. Jackson, Sadie Barnette, Kwasi Boyd-Bouldin, Dawoud Bey and Eli Reed, along with what each had to say about the selection. Follow @tmagazine for future installments.



COURTESY OF AYANA V. JACKSON AND MARIANE IBERHEIM GALLERY

### Ayana V. Jackson

On her work "Moments of Sweet Reprieve" (2016)

In this image, part of my series "Intimate Justice in the Stolen Moment," my body is represented twice — seated and lying in my own lap, providing comfort to and for myself. It is a depiction of self-care. I chose this image because, historically in times of extreme dis-

stress, it is the Black community that finds itself coming to its own aid, providing and advocating for its own needs. Much of this happens behind the scenes, out of view from others. These two women dressed in 19th-century clothing occupy a historical moment that suggests they may be in servitude or bondage. However, to depict this stolen moment of leisure allows us to consider

other aspects of their realities. Even an enslaved woman might share a moment of escape with a mother, a sister, a lover — or she might choose to be alone with herself. I made the work in South Africa the day Trump was elected. Going into the studio was the best way to care for myself on such a disturbing day.

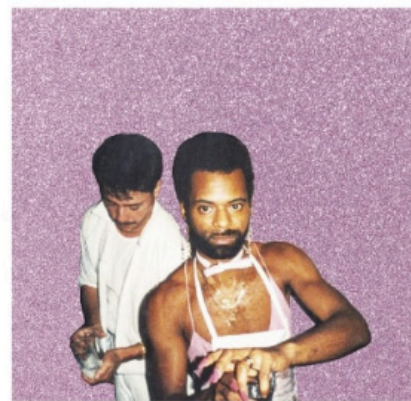


ELI REED/MAGNUM PHOTOS

### Eli Reed

On his work "Mother and Son in Bedford-Stuyvesant" (1986)

I took this picture in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn in 1986. The day before, I had done photography on a New York magazine story about the drug trade in one section of this area. I saw this woman on a neighborhood street and asked if I could come back the next day and photograph her. When I did, she brought me to the upstairs of this house into a room full of people sleeping. I sensed it was a place people went when they had nowhere else to go. But her son was there and I could tell there was more to the story. She took such pride in him, and was so clearly doing what she needed to take care of him. The lights were out in the room but there can be light in a person, a spark in the eyes. A lot of people are going through difficulties and you always want to see them rise above, and she was definitely that person on that day.



A PROJECT OF THE SAN FRANCISCO ARTS COMMISSION'S ART ON MARKET STREET KIOSK POSTER SERIES

### Sadie Barnette

On her work "The New Eagle Creek Saloon was Here" (2019)

The New Eagle Creek Saloon WAS HERE. It existed. In 1990, my father, Rodney Barnette, opened the New Eagle Creek Saloon to serve a multiracial gay community marginalized by the racist profiling practices of San Francisco's gay bar scene. Located at 1884 Market Street, the bar was a space of celebration and resistance — hosting fund-raisers for activist groups, honoring Black holidays and heroes and participating in the historic Market Street vigils for those lost to AIDS. Sammy "Le Creek" was here and Frank a.k.a. "Lady F" was here, and ances-

tors whose name we can't recall were here and existed and loved and danced and struggled. How do I honor history and those who made history and hold space for what can't be remembered? With this project, through photography, a zine and hosting an actual bar space/sculpture/monument, I introduce the New Eagle Creek Saloon into the channels of existing queer histories but am also manifesting its own archive, which recognizes the limits of "official histories" and celebrates the unknown and unknowable. The bar closed in 1993, but the legacy of its spirit is embodied in its slogan: "A friendly place, with a funky bass, for every race."

### Kwasi Boyd-Bouldin

On "Flying High, Brownsville, Brooklyn, 1982" by Jamel Shabazz

When I was in my 20s and still figuring things out as a photographer, I stumbled upon a copy of Jamel Shabazz's "A Time Before Crack" (2005) in a bookstore in Los Angeles, and it was like seeing a light — the wheels started turning in a different way. Here were pictures that, apart from being exceptionally good, presented an authentic view of the photographer's own city. I first saw this image on the cover of the Roots' "Undun" album in 2011 and realized later that it was one of his. I was actually born in Brooklyn but have no memory of living there (I



COURTESY OF JAMEL SHABAZZ

moved to L.A. when I was 2). The boys in the picture give me a sense of the neighborhood I could have experienced if my family hadn't relocated. To me the photo captures pure joy. I go back to it, and to

Shabazz's entire body of work, quite often. His ability to portray his world on his own terms inspires me to double down on doing the same when I portray mine.

### Dawoud Bey

On his work "A Couple in Prospect Park" (1990)

Young Black men, and young Black women, too, have a world stacked against them, one in which the larger society tends to see them as social types and not as fully human. When I saw this young Black couple strolling through Prospect Park one afternoon, I had to make a portrait of them. The evident joy that they were experiencing in each other's presence is something I wanted to affirm. And because this was positive/negative film,



COURTESY OF DAWOUD BEY

I was able to give them a small print, an affirmation of their young love. Now if young love isn't joy, I don't know what is.

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