

**Express Newark Presents**  
***Picturing Black Girlhood: Moments of Possibility,***  
**an Exhibition Centering Multi-Generational Black Women, Girls,**  
**and Genderqueer Artists Working in Photography and Film**



Doris Derby, *Rural Family Girlhood*, Mileston, Mississippi, 1968, Archival Pigment Print  
Ángelina Cofer, *Nineteen*, Chicago, 2021, Digital C-Print

**Picturing Black Girlhood: Moments of Possibility**  
**February 17–July 2, 2022**

**Newark, NJ, [January 27, 2022]** --Express Newark, a center for socially engaged art and design at Rutgers University-Newark presents *Picturing Black Girlhood: Moments of Possibility*, an exhibition exploring the concept of Black girlhood through the work of more than 85 Black women, girls, and genderqueer artists working in photography and film. On view from February 17 through July 2, 2022, at Express Newark in downtown Newark, *Picturing Black Girlhood* is co-curated by photographers and activists Scheherazade Tillet and Zoraida Lopez-Diago.

Bringing together iconic image-makers, emerging artists, and young photographers (the artists range in age from 8 to 94 and over half of them are under the age of 18), *Picturing Black Girlhood* restages intimate Black girl coming-of-age narratives made through the reifying the lens of Black women and genderqueer artists and the real-time experiences and perspectives of Black girls themselves.

“The exhibition situates images made by iconic photographers such as Lorraine O’Grady, Carrie Mae Weems, and LaToya Ruby Frazier side by side with

contemporary counterparts made by Black girl artists during the past ten years,” said curator and photographer Scheherazade Tillet. “We are doing a Black Girl Takeover of Express Newark, The City of Newark, and Photography. We are disrupting traditional art-world hierarchies by centering Black girls as subjects, artists, and agents of their own lives.”

“Our show is in direct contrast to a history of photography and film in which Black girls have routinely been oversexualized or adultified,” said curator Zoraida Lopez-Diago. “And as a result, have become more invisible and vulnerable to violence in our society.”

Ambitious in scale and scope, *Picturing Black Girlhood* is an urgent response to the crisis of racism and sexism that Black girls continue to face, as well as a radical re-imagining of our world through their gaze and those of the adults that were once Black girls themselves. Half of the artists in the exhibition are Black girls under the age of 18 who were identified for the project from art organizations, including A Long Walk Home, The Beautiful Project, Bronx Documentary Center, International Center of Photography, and Perfect Ten.

The signature images, Doris Derby’s *Rural Family Girlhood, Mileston, Mississippi* (1968) and Ángelina Cofer’s *Nineteen, Chicago* (2021), were taken more than 50 years apart by Derby, a civil rights activist, and Cofer, a Black Lives Matter and Me Too movement leader. While both images are invitations into the interior lives of Black girls, their distinctions from subject to self-portrait, rural to urban, and black and white to color do not undermine their shared themes but enable viewers to see what is at stake when the Black girl’s gaze is captured versus self-created.

The first floor explores the theme of collaboration, community, and individual agency, featuring images from Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe’s historic “Daufuskie Island” series, 16-year-old Stevia Ndoe’s moving “Sister Sister” portraits, and “Sophisticated Soul,” the larger-than-life photograph of a young Victorian-styled Black girl by Kahran Bethencourt from Creative Soul’s “Afro Art” series. Another major motif is Possibility. The window display showcases Samantha Box’s documentation of Black joy, ecstasy, and ballroom culture during her time photographing the only homeless shelter for LGBTQ+ youth in New York.

The stairwell, called “Higher Plane” features Zainab Floyd’s coming of age series made when she was an adolescent, and New Jersey artist Deborah Jack’s meditation on history, regeneration, and her Caribbean Black girlhood. The box gallery has been transformed into a dreamspace, centering Nydia Blas’s panoramic urban and pastoral landscapes as a portal into the secret language that Black girls speak to one another.

A set of pairings serve as the cornerstone of the exhibit: *Untitled (Woman and Daughter with Make Up)*, (1990), by Carrie Mae Weems, LaToya Ruby Frazier's *Grandma Ruby and Me* (1982), and Lola Flash's *Tenzin* (2008) are actively in conversation with then-8-year-old Seneca Steplight-Tillet's video *Make Up Time*, the self-portraits in 12-year-old Jadyn Miles's *Two Months After the Worst Day Ever*, and 17-year-old Jada Rodriguez's *The Ball Ends at 5 am*.

Such groupings intentionally appear throughout the exhibition to encourage new interpretations of iconic images and embrace Black feminism as a genealogy in photography and film. In this lineage, the boundaries between collage, portraiture, commercial, conceptual, and documentary photography, sculpture, and experimental film are collapsed, transformed, and eventually reveal an underlying utopian impulse that drives this show.

This sense of change also appears in unexpected ways, in reflections on grief and mourning in Sophia Nahli Allison's documentary short, *A Love Song for Latasha*, and Jamaican artist Ebony Patterson's coffin-shaped sculptures reminding us that lost innocence, death, and violence are also constitutive to Black childhood. Such mourning, however, renders protest inevitable, and as shown in Deborah Roberts's *Rosa* (series) as well as 17-year-old Fanta Diop's documentation of Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, a prerequisite for democracy.

Beauty also takes on a heightened significance in "Picturing Black Girlhood." Featured prominently on the top floor in Rashida Bumbray's short film, *Braiding and Singing (a point)*, on the history and rituals of hair braiding and 13-year-old Savannah Flower's *Edges* and several images by The Beautiful Project. Taken together, these works expose beauty's power as an aesthetic and political category. Many of the artists featured here – as seen in Sheila Pree Bright's "Plastic Bodies" series - openly reject the exclusion of Black girls from white beauty standards, while 14-year-old Cara Star Tyner's "Old Childhood Memories" project made during the pandemic shutdown in March 2020, celebrate how Black girls redefine it.

Black girlhood is recognized throughout as a fundamental right of passage and liberating process for these artists, and for the curators, Tillet and Lopez-Diago themselves, who have chosen to include each other's works while candidly acknowledging that Black girlhood was, and continues to be, foundational to their own photographic practice and their ethic of collaboration and sisterhood.

"*Picturing Black Girlhood* is again reflective of our times," said Tillet. "In this current pandemic moment of longing for reconnection and racial reckoning, these artists offer up intimacy, rest, renewal, and exaltation as an answer and a freedom."

“Now, we can witness the full breadth of Black girls and gender-expansive youth,” said Lopez-Diago. “On their own terms, and those of the people they will soon become.”

### **Artists in the Exhibition:**

Heather Agyepong (b. unknown)	Adama Delphine Fawundu (b. 1971)	Paloma Osborne (b. 2007)
Alliyah Allen (b. 1996)	Lola Flash (b. 1959)	Nzingah Oyo (b. 1976)
Sophia Nahli Allison (b. 1987)	Berlinda Fleurimond (b. 2006)	Ebony G. Patterson (b. 1981)
Azariah Baker (b. 2005)	Savannah Flowers (b. 2005)	Arielle Jean Pierre (b. 1990)
Olivia Barker-Duncan (b. 2004)	Shukurah Floyd (b. 2006)	Deborah Roberts (b. 1962)
Latoya Beecham (b. 2003)	Zainab Floyd (b. 1997)	Jada Rodriguez (b. 2003)
Kahran Bethencourt (b. 1980)	LaToya Ruby Frazier (b. 1982)	Brianna Sanders (b. 2004)
Ciara Binns (b. 2006)	Jamaica Gilmer (b. 1981)	DeViniece Scott (b. 2006)
Nydia Blas (b. 1981)	Allison Janae Hamilton (b. 1984)	Lillianna Shea-Johnson (b. 2004)
Ahmadie Bowles (b. 2003)	Zilah Harris (b. 2000)	Yvonne Michelle Shirley (b. 1982)
Samantha Box (b. 1977)	Leslie Hewitt (b. 1977)	Amachi Smith-Hill (b. 2003)
Sheila Pree Bright (b. 1967)	Faren Humes (b. Unknown)	Brooklyn Starks (b. 2005)
Nakeya Brown (b. 1988)	Deborah Jack (b. 1970)	Cristin Stephens (b. 1988)
Nia Brown (b. 1998)	Ayana V. Jackson (b. 1977)	Seneca Steplight-Tillet (b. 2012)
Quianna Brown (b. 2002)	Fabiola Jean-Louis (b. 1978)	AlineSiteo A. Sy (b. 2007)
Tanazia Brown (b. 2006)	Cyrah Joseph (b. 2005)	Shayane Telsaint (b. 2005)
Rashida Bumbray (b. 1978)	Savanah Juste (b. 2009)	Jada Thompson (b. 2003)
Widline Cadet (b. 1992)	Zoraida Lopez-Diago (b. 1981)	Scheherazade Tillet (b. 1978)
Tawny Chatmon (b. 1979)	Kellie Marty (b. 1998)	Lacquen Tolbert (b. 2008)
Ángelina Cofer (b. 2002)	Chloe Mason (b. Unknown)	Cara Star Tyner (b. 2007)
Tatiana Coleman (b. 2004)	Dashara McDaniel (b. 2001)	Carrie Mae Weems (b. 1953)
Lydia Corbey (b. 2002)	Qiana Mestrich (b. 1977)	Adrienne Wheeler (b. 1957)
Doris Derby (b. 1939)	Jadyn Miles (b. 2004)	Elizabeth Moore Wheeler (b. 1928)
Fanta Diop (b. 2003)	Zarria Miller (b. 2004)	Shanice Williams (b. 2007)
Kaleica Douglas (b. 2005)	Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashé (b. 1951)	Isyss Imani Williams (b. 2004)
Modupeola Fadugba (b. 1985)	Stevia Ndoe (b. 2002)	Monfia Wright-Brown (b. 1999)
Lisa "Majiq" Farrar-Medina (b. 1991)	Danielle Nolen (b. 2000)	Leila Zachary (b. 2002)
Nona Faustine (b. 1977)	Lorraine O'Grady (b. 1934)	

***Picturing Black Girlhood: Moments of Possibility*** is organized by Scheherazade Tillet, a photographer, art therapist, and the executive director of A Long Walk Home, a non-profit that empowers young people to use art to end violence against girls and women. Zoraida Lopez-Diago, a photographer, an environmental justice activist at Scenic Hudson Inc. and as the co-creator of Women Picturing Revolution, the co-editor of the book, “Black Matrilineage, Photography and Representation: Another Way of Knowing.

Alliyah Allen is the assistant curator. Anonda Bell is the Director of the Paul Robeson Galleries. Kristen Owen is the Curator of Programming. Jazmine McLaurin is Gallery Assistant. Marcus Jamison is the curator-in-residence at Express Newark.

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***Picturing Black Girlhood: Moments of Possibility*** is part of a yearlong series of events exploring the theme of Play and Performance at Express Newark.

### **About Express Newark**

Express Newark is a center for socially engaged art and design that brings together the community, the campus, and the City of Newark. Supported by Rutgers University, Newark, it is conceived as a “third space” for students, artists, and activists to make art that matters, addresses our city’s most prevailing social justice issues, and advocates for systemic change.

### **About *Black Portraiture[s] VII: Play and Performance***

*Black Portraiture[s]* is an academic conference committed to the study of African diasporic art and culture that began as a colloquium hosted by Harvard University and New York University in Paris in 2013. Now in its seventh iteration, the conference *Black Portraiture[s] VII: Play and Performance* will be hosted by Rutgers University-Newark at Express Newark from February 17-19, 2022, with Black Girl Play as a featured exhibition.

### **About Rutgers University - Newark**

Rutgers University – Newark (RU-N) is a remarkably diverse, urban, public research university that is not just in Newark but of Newark—an anchor institution of our home city. We think of anchor institutions as place-based organizations that persist in their communities over generations even in the face of substantial capital flight, serving as social glue, economic engines, or both.

### **COVID**

In accordance with Rutgers University and State of New Jersey guidelines, visitors 12 years and older must be vaccinated against Covid-19, and visitors two years and older must wear a mask. Photo ID and proof of vaccination or negative PCR test from a test taken no more than 72 hours before the event must be presented when entering an event. This applies to all populations: student, faculty, staff, alumni, visitors.

### **Visitor Information**

Express Newark is located at 54 Halsey Street in downtown Newark, NJ.

Exhibition Hours: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday 12-5 pm, Thursday 12-8 pm, Saturday 12-5 pm.

Admission is free.

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