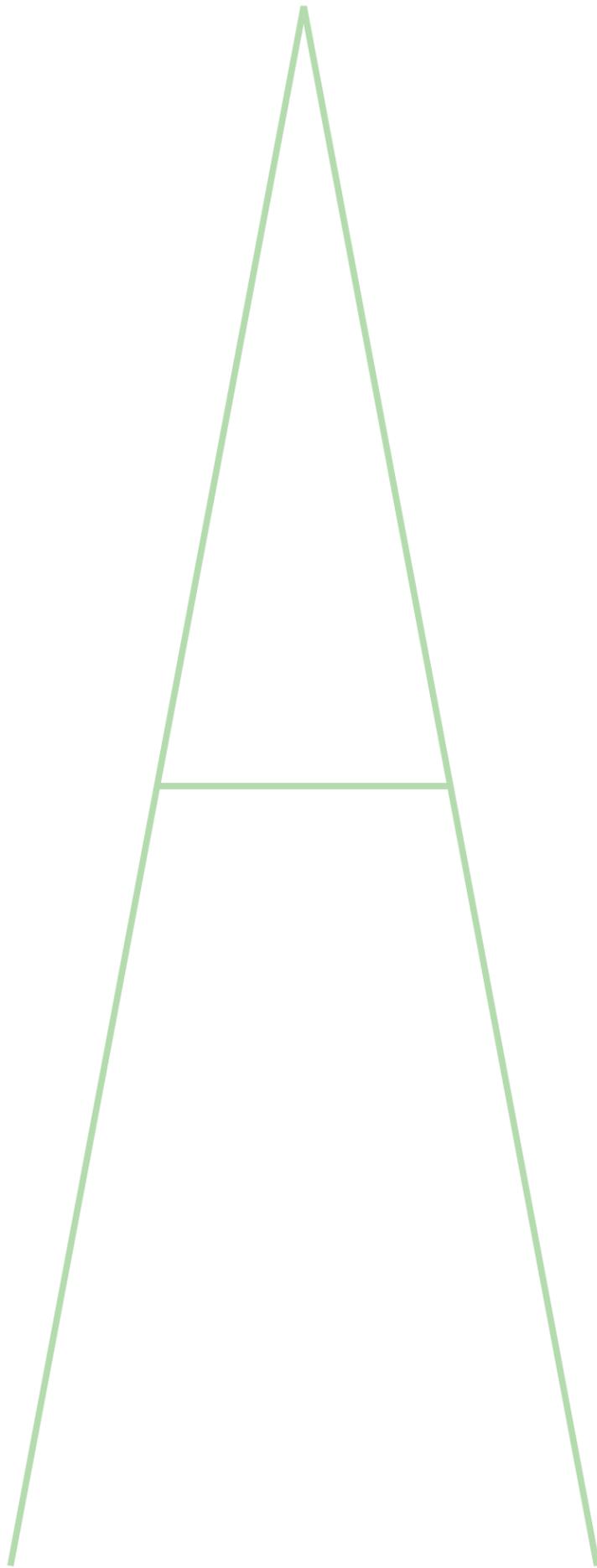


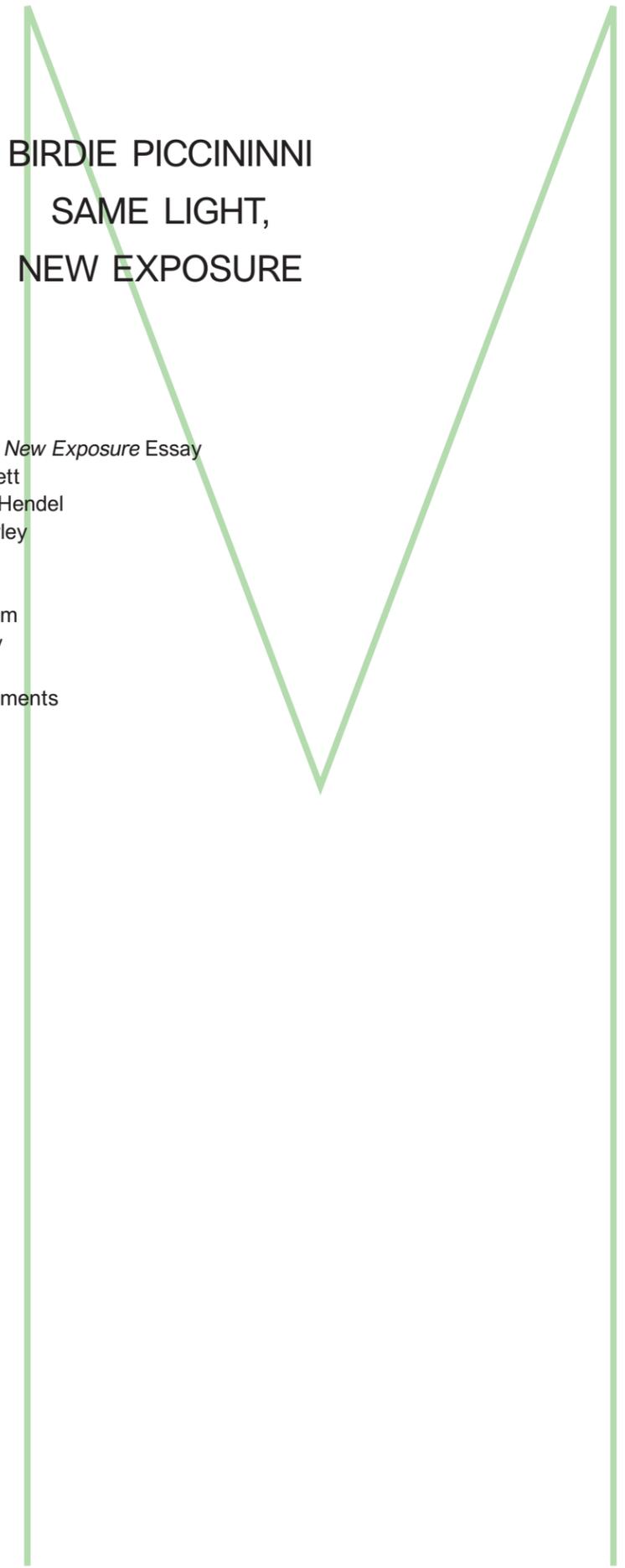
Same Light,
New Exposure

BIRDIE PICCININI



BIRDIE PICCININNI
SAME LIGHT,
NEW EXPOSURE

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INTRODUCTION

What it means to point a camera at another person, I think that there's a brutality about that.

—Barbara Kruger

How do you interpret the face? What makes up the face? How does the face define identity? Can a portrait encapsulate a person? How is the subject involved in an image of her- or himself? How much does an artist consider that subject?

Artists today by definition work in the digital era, the age of social media, “fake news,” selfies, facial recognition, hoax photos, and vastly accelerated forms of both making and interpreting images. Society’s engagement with images through technologies such as photography, social media apps, and surveillance techniques has enforced and continued instances of stereotyping and swift judgment. “Fake news” has flooded the media, it has made hard-hitting and accurate headline news seem rare or untrustworthy. The creation of “fake news” has made headline news both a culprit of enforcing a widespread culture of taking statements at face value as well as an instigator of questioning information placed before us. As Susan Sontag writes in her essay “In Plato’s Cave,” “Photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but

doubt, seems proven when we’re shown a photograph of it.”¹ We are conditioned to believe what we see in photographs because we have been taught that the image encapsulates notions or statements we have heard before. Even after the countless revelations about the possibilities of trickery in photography, there is still the lingering trap of surface level understanding, ready to pounce on anyone who isn’t willing to question their perceptions.

The rapid pace at which information is absorbed or deduced from images today plays into our society’s lack of investigative focus and exposes our complacent sense to accept information placed before us. This is not to say that everything we come across is false but to understand that by being inquisitive we can live a life of depth and compassion. This places a responsibility on us to acknowledge the impact of what we share whether that is through a selfie, news article, or tweet. The artists in *Same Light, New Exposure*—Claire Beckett, Hannah Harley, Rae Clarke Hendel, Endia Beal, Zach Blas, and Amanda Elam—push back against this complacency by slowing down their artistic processes and by using the technologies available to them in order to establish a deeper exchange with their subjects. There is truth in Barbara Kruger’s idea that there is a brutality in

1 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* “In Plato’s Cave.” (New York: Picador, 1973), 15.

2 Edmund Husserl, *Phantasy, image consciousness, and memory (1898–1925)* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), 50.

3 Sara J. Northerner, *From Edmund Husserl’s Image consciousness to Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s Flesh and Chiasm: The Phenomenological Essence of Image* (Louisville: University of Louisville, 2010), 13.

taking or making a photo or image of someone: often, the photographer’s lack of consideration for the involvement of the subject leaves the story incomplete. The artists highlighted in this show aim to understand the violence that the photographic process can inflict on its subjects by engaging with them in a multitude of ways.

Same Light, New Exposure explores the relationships between creation and composition, artist and subject, self-perception and interpretation. Concerns with personal and cultural representation are apparent in the general makeup of humankind, whether they pertain to clothing, skin color, geographical location, hair, and many other details of ourselves. When given the opportunity to really have a say in how we appear, we are often quite particular in how we are presented. Minute changes to the placement of a tie, pin, or even a single hair can play a role in the way we are perceived. Meanwhile, contemporary technological advances have led to an ever more acute awareness of the perception of self. The overwhelming outflow of images through social media, digital news, the Internet, and worldwide databases today reaches ever more and wider audiences, leaving us with the understanding that how we present ourselves is more important now than ever before. There is an inherent understanding that today’s images have ever more power to derail our conversations and to be used as a dehumanizing tool rather than for proper representation and empowerment.

Our reactions to people’s faces play a crucial role in our responses to them as people—to our immediate assessments of them upon first meeting them, or on seeing them in the street. The photographs in *Same Light, New Exposure* ask us to consider the face as an object, and in doing so to consider our tendency to take images at face value,

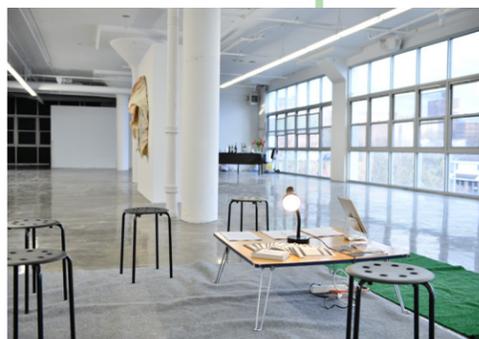


Installation view of *Same Light, New Exposure*, Image Courtesy of Birdie Piccininni

basing our assumptions and perceptions on preconceived notions. Husserl states “perception gives the characteristic of present reality and in understanding that our realities are built on our thought processes then we must act as phenomenologists and reconsider what we know.”² Reality isn’t all that it seems to be.

We can approach these artists’ work phenomenologically, through Husserl’s idea of “image consciousness,” which suggests how we can digest an image by determining what is presented to us and approaching it from all possible angles. Phenomenology teaches us to become aware of and reexamine our approach to objects and preconceived notions. As Sarah Northerner writes, “Husserl’s interest in how picturing apprehension, in regards to phantasy, memory and expectation, differs from the perception of an evidently given object.”³ The concept of image consciousness offers a phenomenological model of analysis that breaks down an image, the experience we have of it, and the way we perceive it. *Same Light, New Exposure* adopts this approach in analyzing its artists’ photographs. As Northerner further explains,

“Within the idea of intentionality, my directed awareness constitutes not



Installation view of *Same Light, New Exposure*, Image Courtesy of Birdie Piccininni

only this external object but also my reflection upon each of my mental processes. This reflective awareness deepens the intentional structure of my perception of the object. By entering into a reflection on my perception on this object, I shift my awareness from a straightforward intentionality to a reflective intentionality. I adopt a phenomenological attitude by re-focusing my attention to reflecting upon the act of perceiving the object. As Husserl explains, “Natural reflection alters the previously naive subjective process quite essentially; this process loses its original mode, ‘straightforward,’ by the very fact that reflection makes an object out of what was previously a subjective process but not objective. The proper task of reflection, however, is not to repeat the original process, but to consider it and explicate what can be found within it.”⁴

We have understood the medium of photography as promising that technology can provide valid, accurate information and objective perception, but it has advanced biases about people. Those biases have grown just as much as the hope that the promises the audience quietly came with were fulfilled. Photography came with the promise of producing likenesses so severe that they had to be interpreted as truthful, there could be no denial. Recent technologies such as biometrics have committed to similar ideals, by promising to streamline security and make it unbreakable.

In technical terms, a photograph, whether analog or digital, is no more than a formulation of light on a surface. By slowing their practice, by engaging with their subjects, and through their complex understanding of the technologies they use, the artists in *Same Light, New Exposure* transform those patterns of light into vehicles of meaning. The connection they work to make is one to aspire to: The images produced demonstrate how we can connect with others through open conversation. These artists strive for a deeper understanding of their subjects; indeed, the show proposes a model for future interactions between those in positions of power and those considered the “other.”

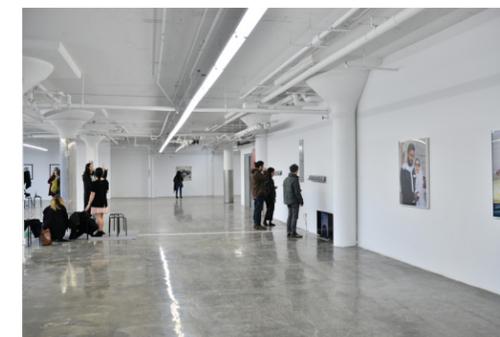
A culture of restrictive conversations and damning comments currently manifests throughout the world. The current U.S. president’s superficial sound-bites, deeply rooted in stereotypes and targeting a variety of individuals, communities, and entire countries, are prolific demonstrations of the problem, but end up no more than symptoms of a larger alienation that we witness in the news and experience in our daily lives. This is a culture that favors preying on the suffering of others for one’s own financial benefit or for higher television ratings. It is a culture

4 Ibid., 6-7.

5 Susan Sontag. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003.)

that highlights injustices with headlines, images, tweets, and “breaking news” but does no more than scratch the surface of these narratives—all too soon, the next nightmarish story comes along, and the spotlight is removed elsewhere.

This poisonous culture has stirred and inspired many of us to band together to combat it, for example in the newly empowered *Times Up* movement, created as a platform and support system for women speaking out against any form of harassment, abuse, or oppression. It is time to go beyond the surface and create a more understanding world with depth and meaning. And as this new atmosphere emerges, it must be represented honestly and genuinely by the media attempting to capture that moment. We witness pain in images and are thankful for what we have, or for not having to deal with what the subject of the image is going through. As Sontag writes in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, “No ‘we’ should be taken for granted when the subject is looking at other people’s pain... The photographs are a means of making ‘real’ (or ‘more real’) matters that the privileged and the merely safe might prefer to ignore.”⁵ We judge a person or situation in a photograph with no concern for how the subject might feel about it, or whether it was representative of him or her, or of what is occurring. In this instance, photography is accused of claiming positions of falsehoods and objectifying its subjects, but this isn’t always that case. Biometrics, another visual technological tool, has been born with the promises of objective fact collecting, which is reminiscent of photography’s beginning. Biometrics collects information from provided imagery in order to create objective categorizations and interpretations, but this technology has become another tool of judgment. This dictatorial method of jumping from image to conclusion is part of the larger problem. Instead, the image needs to



Installation view of *Same Light, New Exposure*, Image Courtesy of Birdie Piccininni

have a stronger voice.

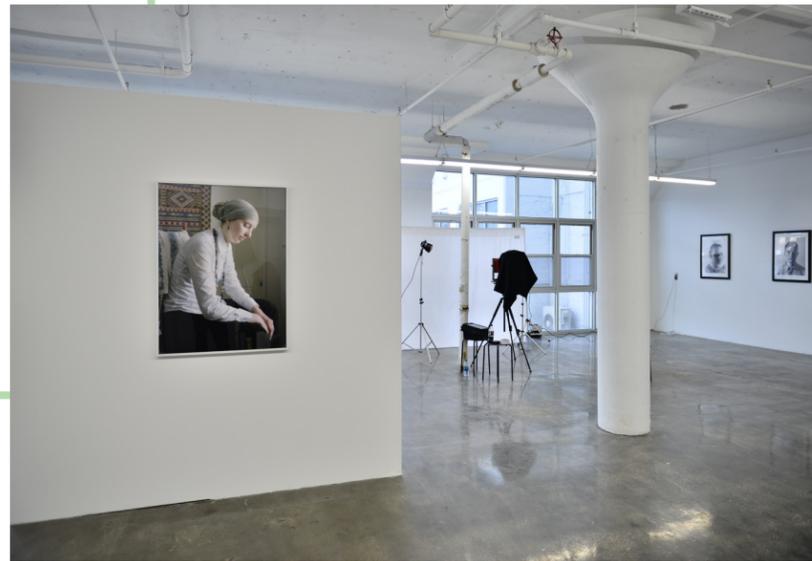
Same Light, New Exposure sets out to suggest that instead of this limiting relationship between artist and subject, the individual should have a say in his or her own photograph. The image should represent an experience, a collaboration, and an investment that the artist and the individual share. This is not to discredit snapshots or selfies, which have their value, but to show an appreciation for artists who invest time in their subjects. The exhibition is an opportunity to challenge the audience’s sense of what an image or a face can portray, and of how we perceive ourselves and others. It is also an invitation to consider not just the final outcome of an image, but the purpose of its creation. In a fast-paced world, these photographers’ attention to detail, process, composition, and—in particular—their relationship with their subject is balanced, profound, and thought-provoking. Artists may analyze, present, and question different topics, but they are held together by the common significance of making visible what was once invisible.

The point is not only to examine all the minute details of the image but to think about how those details came to be, to think beyond what is presented in front of us, and to expand to all aspects of the image, from start to finish. We are witnessing more than the final product; the image is the unfolding of

an experience. It is the documentation of the artist's and subject's shared time and passion. This relationship becomes even more important in portraiture because of the individual in front of the camera. Subject and photographer directly affect each other.

The techniques and means of the photographers in *Same Light, New Exposure* include Photoshop, paint, collage, props, backgrounds, facial-recognition software, metal-working, staging, and studio lighting as methods of manipulation and perception. Their use and mastery of the medium allows the focus to lean toward the subject and away from the creator. The photographer has worked closely one-on-one with the individual, often for days on end, and the viewer sees their intimacy unfold within the image. Each purposely placed hair or the fold of a garment is an act of the relationship and bond between artist and subject.

Same Light, New Exposure includes fourteen photographic works, a small technological lounge, and one video piece. The artists represented address each a range of subject matter, but all share a similar message through the way they approach making their images. The exhibition will also probe the role of light in photography—how it is a means to expose not only a negative, the paper of the print, or the face in front of the lens, but an experience and a reality. Light may be necessary to expose a negative or allow a digital capture, but within the genre of portraiture, these artists also use light to expose stories that would otherwise go unnoticed. Employing the history of photographic portraiture, these artists, working with the powerful techniques and tools available to them today, are creating works with the same light, resulting in a new exposure.



Installation view of *Same Light, New Exposure*
Image Courtesy of Birdie Piccininni

CLAIRE BECKETT

6 Claire Beckett, in Paulette Beete, "Art Talk with Claire Beckett," *Art Works Blog* (Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts), August 24, 2016. www.arts.gov/art-works/2016/art-talk-claire-beckett (accessed March 22, 2018).

7 Claire Beckett, telephone conversation with the author, Jan. 29, 2018.

Claire Beckett's interest in worlds outside her own began with her anthropological work at Kenyon College in Ohio, which lead to her work in the Peace Corps and onto her studies in photography. Before earning her MFA, Beckett volunteered in the Peace Corps and was placed in Benin, West Africa. Her time in West Africa, where she had to learn how to integrate herself into a new culture, gave her a real-world insight into the feeling of experiencing a culture from a viewer's perspective. Her relationship to photography has grown out of her desire to be a part of worldly conversations contributing new dialogues and ideas: "I always really wanted to be able to have my voice be heard and express my ideas about the world—not so much about myself, but bigger questions and ideas. I think photography was a way that I could do that, that I could show you something, or let you feel something... I did that through photography and I did that through studying anthropology, and I did that through serving in the Peace Corps, but it always kept coming back to making pictures as part of a conversation."⁶ She not only spends extensive time with the individuals she photographs but also takes the time to understand all aspects of their lives.

Beckett's projects *The Converts* (2012–present), *Simulating Iraq* (2008–9), and *In Training* (2006–7) are examples of her dedication to her work, the time and research she brings to her topics, and her determination to question what it means either to belong or be an outsider while also being an American. "When you have more familiarity with your subject you're going to have better pictures," Beckett says, because you become aware and take notice of small details in the subject's everyday life, and in the image, that you wouldn't have before.⁷

Same Light, New Exposure highlights Beckett's project *The Converts*, a profound portrayal of converts to Islam in America. The three images in the exhibition, *Mary 2012*, *Robby 2013*, and *Jafar and Yanira 2015*, are warm, subtle, sweet, expressive captures of a community facing social stigma and cruelty. In examining what it means to be Muslim in the United States, the series also offers insight into the relationship between artist and subject. The project began with Beckett joining Islam conversion classes for women in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She didn't start asking people if she could photograph them right away; instead, she took the time to research and learn about the religion, integrating herself into the community and learning about

the experience of converting to Islam in America. She herself is not Muslim, but she approached making art about Muslims in this conscientious way.

The time Beckett spent taking these classes led to four-hour portrait sessions with each of her subjects. Her use of a traditional four-by-five camera also encourages and reflects her dedication. Each session is a process of careful staging and collaboration; they are meant to be the expression of the time spent between artist and subject. There is a purpose and a thought as Beckett sets up the camera, lights, and positions her subjects. From start to finish, her conversation with each subject includes consideration of where they want to be photographed, how they understand their experience, and who they feel themselves to be. The soft expressions of their faces, quiet embraces of each other, and the small details of their lives that surround them portray not only the subject but also the relationship between Beckett and her sitters. Through the prayer beads wrapped around the wrist or the embroidered cloth that hangs over the chair, there is a sense of home and intimacy. The solemn facial expressions and gentle rest of their arms reveal an almost resolution with the burden that Beckett's subjects face daily of being practicing Muslims in America. These images can act as a tool, exposing to viewers their own preconceived notions, prejudices, and approaches to identity. The stigmas and stereotypes that surround Beckett's subjects are always present, so the delicate poses and somewhat muted color palettes in her portraits are new representations for individuals who have their stories told by others. Beckett's commitment to her work, to her subjects, and to the dialogue between the two, and with the world, suggests how we can learn to be better. Being an outsider in a community can fade into the background and we all

can move forward. As the journalist Cate McQuaid writes, "Beckett asks her viewers to confront their own assumptions and biases, and that can be uncomfortable. She repudiates the 'us versus them' mentality of many. Then she invites us to get to know her subjects as we would any of our neighbors."⁸

⁸ Cate McQuaid, "Pious conversions, dazzling domesticity, and ghosts made tangible," *Boston Globe*, May 10, 2016. www.bostonglobe.com/arts/theater-art/2016/05/09/pious-conversions-dazzling-domesticity-and-ghosts-made-tangible/DXLH5mDuRC3eomlBPZ3y6H/story.html (accessed March 22, 2018).



Claire Beckett, *Mary*, 2012, Archival Inkjet Photograph. Photo Courtesy of Claire Beckett



Rae Clarke Hendel, *Itiola Jones and Her Poetry*, 2017.
Photo transfer, acrylic on canvas, Image Courtesy of the Artist

9 Hendel, email interview with the author, March 13, 2018.

RAE CLARKE HENDEL

Rae Clarke Hendel, originally from Oakland, California, is a Brooklyn-based artist who specializes in portraiture in a multitude of mediums. She received her BFA in painting and art history from Pratt Institute, New York, but has also explored photography, illustration, graphic design, embroidery, and other multimedia platforms. Hendel is also a member of the Daughters Collective, a female-founded and -driven community that strives to marry traditions with modernity. Hendel's background feeds into her practice as her work focuses on the work practices of her subjects' and furthermore, the themes of resilience and power of women in America; "I investigated the possible contemporary definitions of the term 'women's work' through the lens of women-identifying artists. Adopting a photojournalist's perspective, I documented them with their work and spaces. I drew from the traditional tactile practices learned at my mother's knee: embroidery, appliqué, and the provident use of every fabric scrap. Gathering linens dating from the late pioneer period of the west coast, worked by women in my matrilineal line, I created the majority of the works' surfaces."⁹

Hendel's project *Women Identified Work* (2017) combines photography with painting, embroidery, and cloth. Her subjects are fellow women in the arts whom she has gotten to know through her artist collective and various other connections. At the heart of the project is *Barbara Builds the Boat* (2017), a compilation of a found photograph transferred onto a tea towel that was embroidered by her grandmother with a cluster of staples in the center of the cloth. Even more fascinating is the fact that the staples are the staples her grandmother pulled from the wood we see her leaning on in the piece. *Barbara Builds the Boat* (2017) shows how detail-oriented and strategic Hendel's work can be with what she incorporates into each piece, and how she uses a photographic transfer technique as a base to build up the perceptions of her subject. We are all made up of stories, histories, and details, Hendel's technique focuses on visually expressing the layers of these hard-working women in her life, which are representative of all the trailblazing women we encounter daily.

Hendel collaborates with her subjects to combine and highlight certain elements of themselves with an incredibly textured and layered way. Her subjects are friends, colleagues, and some are members of the Daughters

Collective as well. Hendel employs found photographs or organizes portrait sessions with her subjects to gather information and build relationships in order to create and determine the layers that will make up the piece. The images are then transferred onto canvas, cloth, or various types of fabrics as the base for each work. Each piece is an accumulation of textures that are representational of each individual.

The pattern created with cloth, lace, embroidery, paint, and ink immediately attracts viewers to the canvas and pulls them into all the details of the piece. By manipulating the surface of a photograph Hendel has the opportunity to extract many aspects of her subjects. *Itolia Jones and Her Poetry* (2017) and *Ellen Winter with Her Words* (2017) make their debut at *Same Light, New Exposure*.

The subjects are both equally poets and story writers, whose work is piled on the canvases. Specifically in *Ellen Winter with Her Words* (2017), her notes flutter off the canvas with pages of her written word loosely attached to the fabric and strategically arranged to seem as if Ellen is holding her words.

By photo transferring the images, Hendel creates an extended photographic portrait. These portraits are an example of blending the photographic medium with other artistic forms as a way to enhance the representation of the subjects. All the different textures beckon also the viewer to involve themselves with the subject because there is a desire to know why each staple, thread, or paper was incorporated. The materiality of Hendel's work invites the audience to examine how and what can be used to represent ourselves.



All installation Photos Courtesy of Birdie Piccininni



Hannah Harley, *Statecraft* (2017) Image Courtesy of the Artist

10 Hannah Harley, Email from Author, February 28, 2018.

HANNAH HARLEY

Hannah Harley is a New York-based visual and conceptual artist strongly concerned with contemporary culture and politics. She received her BFA in photography from Point Park University in Pittsburgh and is currently an MFA candidate at the Parsons School of Design, New York, where she continues to practice photography. Harley focuses on the spectacle of American politics and on the cultural shifts surrounding them. She is a research and conceptual based artist who uses her art to understand and document her topics, which include such subjects as the millennial generation's perceptions of intimacy. Her practice has fostered relationships with creative communities such as the Fix, a fine-art magazine in Pittsburgh, and the 66 Collective in New York.

Harley's recent works come at an important moment in political and social history. The past year and a half has seen a shocking political climate develop, not only in the United States but throughout the world. Festering tension, anger, and aggression have pushed ignored issues to the forefront. Individuals, communities, and movements have grown in strength and numbers, sexual harassment has a stronger opposition than ever before, the #MeToo movement has a fierce voice, the *Time's Up* movement has

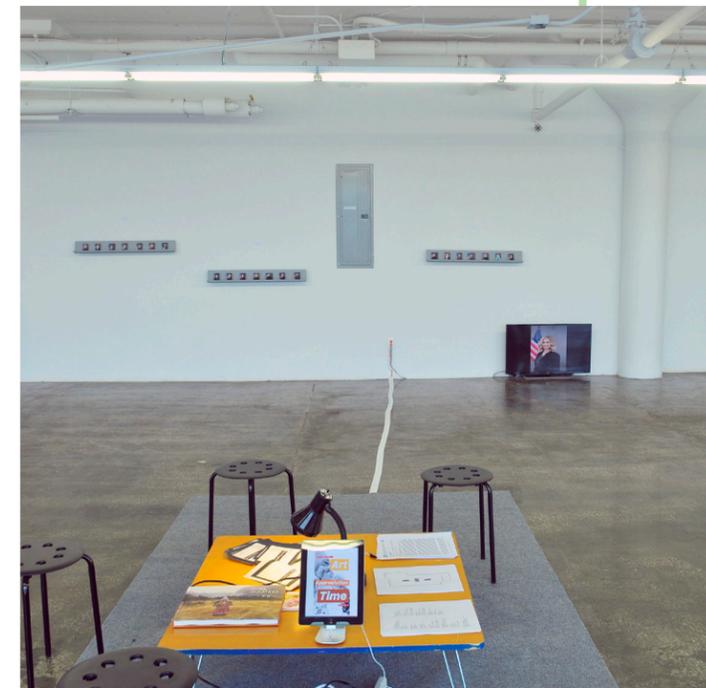
showcased itself, and women's voices are echoing loudly throughout the world. It is time to reassess and examine our perception of everything we encounter.

Statecraft (2017), a photographic portrait series, is an examination of the visual personas that women in politics have to don in order to simply do their job. For Harley the project "explores the politicization of the physical self, dissecting how an individual's presentation of their physical appearance is a political act. Using photography to document the performance of specific characters, I manipulate my appearance to highlight society's standards for the politician's physical appearance."¹⁰ Using herself as a blank canvas for repetitious self-portraits, Harley examines the relationship between political presentation and visual perception, specifically related to the female body. She expresses that the female body is already a political statement to begin with because of the continuing history of women fighting for what they deserve. The portraits also represent the concept of different protective facades women adorn themselves with in the hopes that the world will be satisfied. Harley points out the strain of conventions with the multitude of portraits and the accompanying video of each session.

The iteration of the project in *Same Light, New Exposure* includes a participatory aspect, a sort of voting process: the photographs in *Statecraft* are shown in the form of two-by-three-inch prints, roughly the size of a baseball card, and viewers are allowed to pick up and keep any image of their choosing, “This installation allows the viewers to select the art objects that depict individuals that they are visually intrigued by and disregard the ones that they are not. It leaves holes in the installation, representing the ones that were never selected.”¹¹ This selection process is a way for the audience to witness and examine their own perceptions of choice.

11 Ibid.

Installation view, *Statecraft*
Photo Courtesy of Birdie Piccininni



Installation view, *Statecraft*
Photo Courtesy of Birdie Piccininni



Installation view of *Am I What You're Looking For?*
Photo Courtesy of Birdie Piccininni

12 Endia Beal, "Am I What You're Looking For?" Artist statement, <http://endiabeal.com/#/upcoming-projects> (accessed March 14, 2018).

ENDIA BEAL

The North Carolina-based artist Endia Beal is internationally known for her photographic and video work, which examines stories of marginalized communities and individuals. Before receiving her MFA in photography from the Yale School of Art, she worked with ArtTable, a program designed to promote women in the visual arts, and used her time there as a platform to advocate for opportunities to be directed towards minorities working in the arts. She works towards redefining the way communities interact with the arts. Beal's interest in exposing imbalance and the unfair struggles minorities face daily leads her to question the conformity that plagues our societies. There can often be pressure placed on people for choices made about hairstyle, clothing, makeup, hair color, or any other individualized characteristic. Beal is part of the dialogue that is bridging racial, professional, and financial gaps. Her work and words continue to raise awareness of what we need to discuss as a society so that we can move forward.

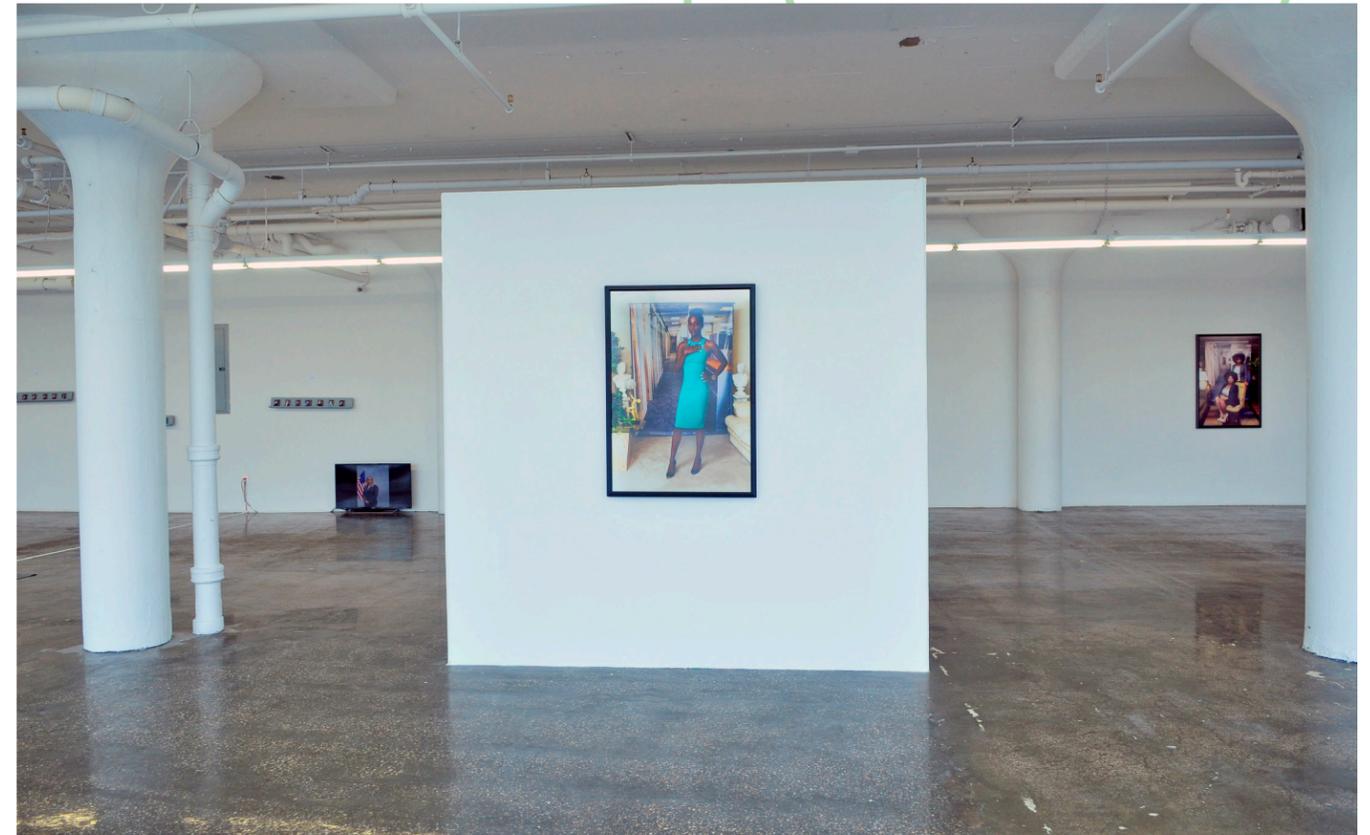
Am I What You're Looking For? (2016) is a series focused on young, educated women of color transitioning from academia to the corporate world. Each image has a woman or two who strike a powerful pose in front of an office hallway backdrop that has been constructed in the individual's

home. This juxtaposition creates a space for Beal's subjects to reveal their struggles and uncertainties on how to present themselves in the professional workspace. Each portrait session is also an opportunity for Beal to interact with and hear her subject's stories about what is and what they think it will be like to work in corporate America as a black woman, "As the young women pose in front of an office backdrop in the home, they recall conversations during interviews. The women explained how employers would tell that their natural hair was unprofessional or their name was too difficult to pronounce, suggesting they alter themselves for the job."¹²

Beal's portraits magnify the predicament women of color face in the corporate workforce and the delicate balance of identity and conformity. For *Am I What You're Looking For?* she asked her subjects, all women, to stand in front of a generic corporate-hallway backdrop, surrounded them with trinkets from their family life, and interviewed them. The combination of home and work is an expression of the tension that can exist between identity and public representation. Beal offers the viewer a chance to confront the realities of alienation and imbalance these women face in the workplace. The women in the photos show a range of

emotion in how they present themselves to Beal's camera. Some stare down the lens rebelliously, others have a glimmer of hope and optimism with raised eyebrows and gentle smirks, and there is certainly a few where there are hints of concern. Beal describes the work as "capturing their struggles and uncertainties on how to best present themselves in the professional workspace."¹³ Though Beal knows the subjectivity and personal nature of experience she uses her art as a way to express and connect these individuals. A meaningful link between her and her subject is the backdrop because it is, in fact, an image of a hallway she once worked in, "I had the women stand in front of the same office hallway I walked down every day, feeling like I was the other in that space."¹⁴ The project is a tool to investigate the experiences and fears women of color face daily in corporate America. It is a beacon of empowerment and defiance in exposing the harsh realities of what it is to be the "other" in a community, workspace, or society in general.

- 13 Whitney Richardson, "Young, Black, Female, and Envisioning Corporate Life," *New York Times Lens Blog*, September 24, 2015, https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/09/24/young-black-female-and-envisioning-corporate/?_r=0
- 14 Muna Mire, "Am I What You're Looking For?" *Vice*, August 18, 2016. https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/8gemd5/photographer-endia-beal-captures-the-experience-of-job-interviewing-while-black-endia-beal-v23n5



Installation view of *Am I What You're Looking For?*
Photo Courtesy of Birdie Piccininni

ZACH BLAS

Zach Blas is an internationally known digital artist, writer, and lecturer currently teaching in the Department of Visual Culture at Goldsmiths, University of London. His visual and conceptual art engages in topics such as technology, queerness, and politics through moving images, installation, sculpture, and performance.

Blas' *Face Cages* (2013–16) project adds new technology to *Same Light, New Exposure*'s conversation. Blas collaborates with Micha Cárdenas, Elle Mehrmand, and Paul Mpagi Sepuya to bring attention to the standardization of biometrics by wearing painful metal cages on their faces that are in fact based on specific biometric algorithms individualized to each performer's face. *Same Light, New Exposure* focuses on the performative video portraits of each artist wearing their mask. The videos are head-on captures of the individual performers wearing the cages for an extended amount of time, with every twitch, eye blink, and visual muscle strain emanating from the screen. The cages are generated biometric diagrams of each individual's face that are then fabricated as metal cages. Blas' purpose of making the cages out of metal is to provoke a connection between the metal with handcuffs, prison bars, and medieval torture devices.

Like the exhibition as a whole, *Face Cages* challenges our knowledge and inquiry into the effect technology has on our perceptions. It also adds a layer to the conversation about where and how our faces fit into the world of the information society. Blas's performative portrait videos are interventions into the harsh realities of new technology and "a dramatization of the abstract violence of the biometric diagram."¹⁵

Biometric technology is littered throughout the world, promising streamlined progress in facial recognition, criminology, security, and with collecting massive amounts of information from images today. Blas also connects the contemporary situation with biometrics with the ever-growing capitalistic society we reside in, "The success of today's booming biometrics industry resides in its promise to rapidly measure an objective, truthful, and core identity from the surface of a human body, often for a mixture of commercial, state, and military interests."¹⁶ The debate on surveillance and privacy rights in our society most certainly involves biases, stereotypes, racism, homophobia, classism, and sexism. In using biometrics, the project uncovers the grim limitations of gathering data through facial recognition. We are

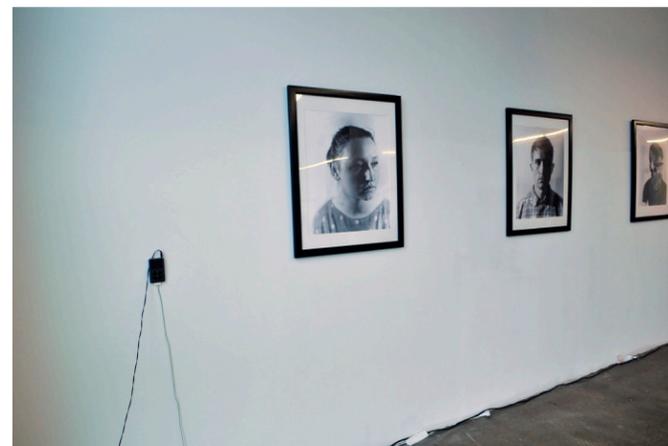
¹⁵ Zach Blas, "Face Cages," Artist Statement, <http://www.zachblas.info/works/face-cages/> (accessed March 8, 2018).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

dehumanized by the technologies in which our governments, corporations, and communities have placed their trust into.

Blas exposes how biometrics can act as a different kind of cage, categorizing people in such a way as to make minorities face discrimination and false criminalization. *Face Cages* offers its viewers a way to reassess how they understand the points and details of the face. The painful endurance quality of the work is another opening for the audience to understand how attempts to derive standardized information from the face do not help our society but harm it. With this project Blas explains how "the computational biometric diagram, a supposedly perfect measuring and accounting of the face, once materialized as a physical object, transforms into a cage that does not easily fit the human head, that is extremely painful to wear. These cages exaggerate and perform the irreconcilability of the biometric diagram with the materiality of the human face itself—and the violence that occurs when the two are forced to coincide."¹⁷



Installation and Performance Images of Amanda Elam, *I remember it, but I can't be sure it happened*, Images courtesy of Birdie Piccininni

AMANDA ELAM

Amanda Elam is an artist and photographer dealing with the complexities of mental health, illness, and well-being in her work. Through a hybrid photographic/painting/sculptural practice she investigates the psychological space of a person to create abstract portraits that represent the emotional intricacies of the human mind. Studying various alternative processes while preparing her Master's degree at the School of Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, Elam began to experiment in the representation of memory in portraiture. Her series *I remember it, but I can't be sure it happened* (2015) is an examination of how the face can represent histories or memories. The images are made with x-ray film and accompanied by recorded audio interviews and stories.

I remember it, but I can't be sure it happened (2015) is turned into a live performance piece in *Same Light, New Exposure* as an opportunity for the audience to collaborate with and experience a portrait session with the artist. Elam will collect memories from subjects about identity, representation, mental illness, and the "other." Capturing false memories is another way for Elam to examine the problems and quirks of the mind. Mental health is yet another area that can segregate people within society. The admittance of

false memory is a way for her subjects to confront not only parts of their possible past but also to consider the impact of how malleable memory can be. Elam's use of x-ray film is another connection to the fragility of the mind due to the delicate nature of the film, which is easily scratched, smudged, and damaged. *I remember it, but I can't be sure it happened* and its new iteration will be an experiment and chance for participants to share and connect with the show.

Same Light, New Exposure highlights forms of alienation and situations of the "other." The exhibition is a created space for conversation, confrontation, and progress.

Let us continue to move forward.



Amanda Elam, *Mark*, Image Courtesy of the Artist

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ARTWORK CHECKLIST

Claire Beckett
Mary, 2012
Archival inkjet photograph
40" x 30"
Courtesy of Claire Beckett and Carroll and Sons Art Gallery

Claire Beckett
Robby, 2013
Archival Inkjet Photograph
40" x 30"
Courtesy of Claire Beckett and Carroll and Sons Art

Claire Beckett
Jafar and Yanira, 2015
Archival Inkjet Photograph
40" x 30"
Courtesy of Claire Beckett and Carroll and Sons Art

Rae Clarke Hendel
Ellen Winter with Her Words, 2017
Photo transfer, acrylic, ink on canvas
41" x 60"

Rae Clarke Hendel
Barbara Builds the Boat, 2017
Photo transfer, staples on tea towel
30" x 34"

Rae Clarke Hendel
Itiola Jones and Her Poetry, 2017
Photo transfer, acrylic on canvas
55" x 72"

Amanda Elam
Mark, 2015
Archival Inkjet Print
24" x 30"

Amanda Elam
Christina, 2015
Archival Inkjet Print
24" x 30"

Amanda Elam
Brian, 2015
Archival Inkjet Print
24" x 30"

Hannah Harley
Statecraft, 2017
Archival Pigment Print
3.3" x 2.16"

Endia Beal
Kyandra and Shakiya, 2015
Pigment Print
30" x 40"
Courtesy of the Artist

Endia Beal
Melanie, 2016
Pigment Print
28" x 40"
Courtesy of the Artist

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my family, friends, mentors, and colleagues who had a hand in helping me make *Same Light, New Exposure* a reality.

I'm immensely grateful to the instructors, mentors, and staff at MACP who helped me push and produce my ideas, including David Frankel, Steven Henry Madoff, Michael Severance, Deirdre Nolan, John Heida, and the student workers in the Visual Futures Lab at SVA. It has been an incredible journey over the past two years in this program, and I feel so privileged to have had the chance to meet and work with so many amazing professionals and artists. A special thanks to Becky Senf for a memorable experience in Arizona at the Center Creative Photography and guidance with *Same Light, New Exposure*.

Thank you to Jeff Rosenblum, Megg Alvizo, all the Acumen Capital Partners staff, and our installers Evan and Kevin who graciously lent their time, space, and knowledge to my colleagues and me. Another big thank you to Andreas Wu for all of his time, patience, and help throughout everything.

I'm indebted to my family for their love and support. Kitty, Tom, and Tara you have kept me alive over the past two years, and I love you so much. Thank you for moping the gallery while I ran around, taking photos of not only my show but also of all of my colleague's exhibitions, and for telling me over and over how much you love me.

Last, but certainly not least, thank you to my MACPack. You are all strong, empowering women who inspire me daily. I love you all, thank you for coming into my life.

Cheers to the future!

Same Light, New Exposure will provide a concentrated look at a handful of contemporary artists who use various styles and techniques to unfold the lives of their subjects. As a society, we are inundated with enormous amounts of images with fake news, hoax photos, data mining, surveillance, and selfies, which run amok in the press and social media. *Same Light, New Exposure* will allow for imagery involving identity, social reform, and craftsmanship to uncover the brutality of proposed perceptions. The dialogue between artist and subject that was necessary in creating these images is a prime example of how we can and should approach the “others” in our perceived societies. This exhibition will be a reminder and space for the audience to question what is told to them, what they know, and continue the conversation of equality and inclusivity.

Same Light, New Exposure

Opening reception: April 19, 2018, 6-9 pm

April 19 - May 4, 2018

Pfizer Building, 3rd floor

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