

ULTRA VIVID DREAMING

Curator's note - Ashley Stull Meyers

Dreams are a trick of the conscious mind. Oft discussed as the product of sleep, in truth dreams are never better negotiated than by those who are only tenuously restful. Their ideas, coated in a full spectrum of possibilities, make evident the glorious weight of the ephemeral. Dream states shift and glimmer, neglecting any permanent shape. Yet, their manifestations stand so solidly—so opaque—that the mere whisper of their happening ricochets with a speed and force something ephemeral can't seem to possibly have.

The privilege of inhabiting an ultra vivid dream is a precarious one. Its temporal pendulum swings wildly—teasing the reaches of the realm of make-believe, but never failing to return to what we know is material—dependable. Its equilibrium is balanced between the tactile and the intangible. Ultra vivid dreaming is the courage to believe in ghosts. It's the disquieting nature of building castles from melting snow.

Artists Elliott Jerome Brown Jr. and Shikeith are ultra vivid dreamers in their construction of barely possible worlds. These worlds, neatly aestheticized but built on the fringes of agonizingly banal environments, at once affirm the private dreams of Blackness and the power in withholding the detail in those wants. The images they create offer glimpses of conversations in which the outside are not fully invited to participate. We peer through an intoxicated haze—viewing detail so subtle that its content is difficult to

describe, but concepts so palpable that they're impossible to disregard.

The subjects of these images coyly languish in domestic interiors and open-air yards composed to communicate nowhere. Their visages (or the concealment of) are a method of communicating false sedation. But, the key is the way these Black bodies are held—their postures betray their true confidences. The brilliance of Shikeith's light is at once gentle and bold. The vibrancy of Brown Jr.'s color is both candid and well orchestrated. Together, the portraits treat queerness and Blackness as a beautiful and unstoppable permeation of the conscious world. Ultra vivid dreams—at first small, but eventually growing so large it seems impossible they were not present all along—are the children of thinkers who navigate the real and subconscious simultaneously. They cultivate an understanding of where multiple, dimensional spaces meet. The multiplicity of dimensional space is never more apparent than in the treatment of Black subjects in portraiture. They also shift and glimmer. The things these subjects reveal, and hide, are in service of a narrative that deserves a non-linear approach. Their states of being are *mise en abyme*—they're present in flashes, appearing endless, before disappearing just as quickly.

Elliott Jerome Brown Jr. and Shikeith propagate an ultra vivid cosmos that defies the history and language of portrait-making.