



## Sheree Hovsepien and Paul Mpagi Sepuya Take Over Venice Beach

The two artists "engage transcendent abstractions of the body" in their new show.

Haley Mellin | March 25, 2019

In Team Bungalow's backyard space in Venice Beach, a two-person exhibition of wall works by Sheree Hovsepien and Paul Mpagi Sepuya engage transcendent abstractions of the body. Stepping off the residential street, into the yard of a bungalow, I found a poignant show located between the ginkgo and pine trees. In a series of aptly sequenced wall works, both artists engage the photograph in a self-aware manner, using the camera as an apparatus of reflexivity. There's no hiding how the work was made. The show is exquisitely selected, as though these two artists had been in a long conversation while making the works. Mutual interests crop up throughout the exhibition as Hovsepien and Sepuya share the denial of the traditional photograph.

Both artists ground their photography in the studio. For Hovsepien, the studio locates a place for her to interact with the materiality of silver gelatin photographic paper, and to form photographic prints into a wall based montage. At times, she photographs her sister as a physical proxy for herself and the studio is the location for this experimentation and manipulation. In Sepuya's work, he uses the studio as a character of his narrative and invites people to interact with his physical self and his proxy, the camera.



Sheree Hovsepien, *\_Keeper\_*, 2018, Silver gelatin photograph and photogram, nylon, artist frame, 31.25 x 25.25 x 6 inches\_ 79 x 65 x 15 cm (1).jpg

Hovsepien's silver gelatin photographs and photograms, both analog methods of photography, are held in place by the tension of stretched nylon, culminating in bas relief curves. The layered material surfaces of the work parallel the very interfaces that constitute photography and corporeality. Hovsepien's prints are imbued with aspects of performance and drawing as the light-sensitive paper records her movements in the

darkroom into the final photograph. Her body is mapped within the space of the darkroom when making the photographs, the images revealing a visually recorded performance. She positions the abstract photograms alongside black and white photos of portions of the body, and these are both obscured and revealed throughout the scrims of nylon and encased in a walnut frame.



Paul Mpagi Sepuya, \_Portrait Study (\_1980812),\_ 2016, Archival pigment print, 10 x 13 in\_ 25 x 33 cm (1).jpg

Underlining his reflexive practice, Sepuya drapes a backdrop of traditional dark velvet to create the intimacy and atmosphere of the darkroom. In examining the historical tropes and ambiance of the studio portrait, Sepuya references the homoerotic photograph in his composition of cameras, mirrors, bodies, and fabric. The historical positions of the body in photography are looked at, swapped, and played with in a way that is both serious and coy. Framing the camera with a mirror, his compositions delineate a space of portraiture and the encounter between lens and subject. Like Hovsepian, his methods illustrate the photographic process and its byproducts.

Exposure occupies an assertive position, literally and figuratively, within both artists' practices. The works alternate between concealing and revealing aspects of their construction and locate vulnerability and empowerment in the layers of information. Hovsepian explained, "I've always been interested in finding myself within a space. I grew up as an immigrant in Ohio, I was always very aware of my body, myself and my person." She told GARAGE, "Sometimes I felt like I would try to minimize myself or I would try to hide. A lot of my practice is about regaining space and finding a space for myself and defining that."

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Sheree Hovsepian, \_Navel Gaze,\_ 2018, Silver gelatin photograph and photogram, nylon, artist frame, 25 x 21 x 4 inches\_ 64 x 53 x 10 cm (1).jpg