



Untitled (self, extended), from the series Black Alchemy Vol. 3

Date

2020

Primary Maker

Aaron R. Turner

Medium

Archival inkjet print

Description

From Light Work: At the turn of the century, W.E.B. Du Bois compiled a series of photographs for the Exhibit of American Negroes at the World's Fair in Paris. At the time, he was a professor of sociology at Atlanta University, committed to combating racism with empirical evidence of African Americans' economic, social, and cultural conditions. He believed that a clear presentation of the facts of African American life and culture would challenge the claims of biological race scientists at the time, which proposed that African Americans were inherently inferior to Anglo-Americans. I first appear in my work in Untitled (self) (2015), in which I combine the Black artist in studio with references to geometric abstraction. In the mirror, we see an image of an

African American man from the Dubois Materials at the Library of Congress-- this image stood out to me because it functions as a stand-in for myself and other Black men in my life. I searched the archive for other photos of the same man and found a left-facing profile. This was exciting for me because I find the idea of multiples satisfying, especially pictorially. The remaining images comprise recent self-portraits and the rephotographing of myself via projected images. Here, I revisit Untitled (self) in a new studio installation, while still reflecting on identity via Du Bois's notion of double consciousness-- the "two-ness" of the African American-- and an abstracted Blackness that insists on multiplicity. In my series Black Alchemy, I respond to internal questions about identity, representation, ontology, discursive enterprise, and the artist's role in the studio space. How does the past portrait compare to the present one? Where do the dualities lie in space, theory, and real time? How do these depictions lean in to modern-day representations? How do images turn us to humanity-- to joy, pain, power, understanding, freedom, and the ability to keep moving from day to day with very little change in the world we live in?

Dimensions

Image: 13 3/4 x 11 in. (34.9 x 27.9 cm) Sheet: 15 1/8 x 12 7/8 in. (38.4 x 32.7 cm)