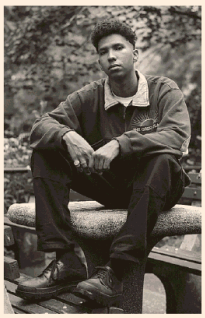
FT FINANCIAL TIMES

Visions of an American utopia

Tyler Mitchell | The photographer and filmmaker talks to *Enuma Okoro* about looking to the past and future in his first solo US gallery exhibition



Clockwise from above: the photographer Tyler Mitchell in New York; 'Impact' (2021); 'Nap' (2021); 'Connective Tissue' (2021)
Miranda Barnes/The New York Times/Redux/Eyevine. Tyler Mitchell/Jack Shainman Gallery

The young man walks through the arched opening of the café in West Chelsea, and glances about. He's tall and elegantly lean, wearing Bode designer shorts with an exquisitely crafted navy-blue boxy Bode button-down shirt with white zigzag lines. He could easily be a model, instead of the one usually behind the camera.

He catches my eye and a huge genuine smile spills over his youthful face. There's a sweet familiarity about the 26-year-old photographer and filmmaker Tyler Mitchell that catches you off guard.

We are meeting for tea right around the corner from the 20th Street Jack Shainman Gallery, where Mitchell's first US solo gallery exhibition, *Dreaming in Real Time*, will open in September. It's a show with some 20 photographs focusing on visual storytelling in a series of tableaux featuring family and friends in his home state of Georgia. A collection of older work, *I Can Make You Feel Good*, will be on exhibition simultaneously at the 24th Street gallery location.

The new exhibition marks a shift from the fashion and editorial work that has made Mitchell a recognisable name. It's just one of several pivotal moments in the past three years. In 2018, at 23, Mitchell shot Beyoncé for US Vogue's September issue, the first black photographer to shoot a cover in the magazine's 128-year history.

From that rocket launch, his career has included other magazine covers, fashion photography for top designers, and portraits of public figures, including the newly elected vice-president Kamala Harris, for another Vogue cover. He is also a 2020 recipient of the Gordon Parks Foundation fellowship.

Yet there's an aura of carefree humility and gentleness around him, attentive and observing, and picking up what he aligns with as he encounters life. And in his conversation, there's a quiet wisdom that belies his age.

"After all that was happening with that huge [Vogue cover] shift in my life [came the recognition] that it was more exposure but it wasn't a huge shift in terms of the work I wanted to make. There's a continuum and continuity. The assignments I took afterwards were about staying true to what my work was about."

The work in the upcoming exhibition — evocative photography of black men, women and children at leisure in a calm, stress-free existence — is magical. It haunts you with the ghosts of things that feel familiar: you recognise a sentiment, a mood, a feeling that has the potential to transport you easily to one of your own narratives, real or hoped for.

Part of this comes from Mitchell's awareness of the relationship between photographer and subject. Far from the dictatorial relationship many fashion photographers have with their models, collaboration is part of his working ethos. He allows people to show up in front of the camera in the expansiveness of their full selves, opening the possibility for good accidents, magic moments. Mitchell's models and subjects are sometimes cast but largely pooled from a network of family, friends and people he meets on social media.

"These images in the new show are to elicit relaxation, repose and reprieve from what we've seen and experienced over the past year," he says. "I wanted to show a multiplicity of fun, of different sorts of leisure, families, groupings of black life in one frame."

Mitchell, who grew up in a middle-class family in Marietta, a suburb of Atlanta, recounts how his love of images came through his father's enthusiasm for movies, giving him an early exposure to "classic style storytelling, films by Hitchcock and old murder mysteries". For Mitchell, it was his interest in skateboarding that propelled him into making films himself. The sport was seen as unconventional in the Southern communities of which he was part, but Mitchell, raised on Tumblr, discovered the skateboarding counterculture he needed online.

"I really got into it, and it was such a portal into filmmaking and photography, because there's a whole art form around skateboarding and filmmaking," he says. "There's a whole style and way of editing. I started to become obsessed with filming my friends. I followed the yellow brick road from there, and knew I wanted to pursue this as more than just with skating, as a filmmaker and image-maker."

Mitchell was accepted into the film programme at New York University. His first DSLR camera had both a video and a photo mode, so he was already thinking about film and photography as interchangeable media for him.

"I was in the film programme, but I was starting to get small commissions with magazines like the Fader and Wonderland, to photograph musicians. I found it so intriguing, because I could really speak to culture a lot quicker and collaborate with people that interested me, be it in music or fashion or politics or whatever, through photographing them."

It was on an NYU documentary photography trip to Cuba that Mitchell really dived into the art form. Taking candid photos of the skating culture in Cuba was the first time, he says, he really felt he could be a photographer.

The pictures in his upcoming exhibition are part of the same continuum. They frame communities that hold a commitment to foster and relish the freedom of expansive celebratory public life for black people. In the past, Mitchell has spoken of creating "visual utopias" of black life; now, he says, "the impulse was showing a mixture of black joy and repose in public space in one frame, but also how black people can also command a certain vastness of landscape — while at the same time being cognisant of certain spatial, historical and political realities.

"I hope to create a reference to the past, to the land we've lived on over generations, but also into the future, asking what that could look like, for black people to re-command this space and reinhabit it in a new way."

'I hope to create a reference to the past . . . but also into the future, asking what that could look like'

In one powerful and provocative image, "Georgia Hillside (Redlining)", Mitchell recreates the discriminatory practice of redlining zones in cities and towns based on racial or ethnic make-up, overpainting the landscape to section off more areas for black people to enjoy leisure time. A couple enjoys a picnic, a young woman in a flowy yellow dress lies on her back gazing up dreamily at the sky. A young man flies a kite in the distance. Ordinary, childlike activities such as hula-hooping and kite flying appear repeatedly in Mitchell's oeuvre, making an immediate connection with viewers.

"It's not just specifically about hula-hooping or flying a kite," he says. "It's also about where these images can transport you after viewing them."

In "Nap", Mitchell photographs a couple lying on a blanket on the grass, only showing us a portion of their intertwined legs. The boy is wearing jeans and penny loafers, and the young girl's bare calves extend to ankles in white socks, her feet in 1950s classic black and white saddle Oxfords. It suggests a nostalgic story of young playful love between teenagers who have nothing to fear if caught in public spaces: a very different narrative from what was likely for black youth in the Jim Crow era.

Such celebratory stories of black bodies, replete with intimate moments, continue with the beautiful close-up of "Connective Tissue", a young father lying bare-chested on his back in sand dunes with his toddler son cradled on his stomach, the child open-mouthed and filled with joy.

Mitchell articulates why a gallery exhibition is important to him. A new way of thinking about his work was catalysed by a 2019 show at the Foam Museum in Amsterdam, which travelled to the International Center for Photography in New York in 2020.

"The spaces that did inspire me, which were really the internet, screens, Tumblr and YouTube videos, provide an energy I want to bring into the gallery space," he says. "I've learnt to look at the white cube space as another venue to practise ideas instead of as a daunting formal space where I had to follow certain rules."

When I ask him what he thinks the "new black aesthetic" is, which he has referenced in the past, he replies with a mix of humility, genuine curiosity and quiet confidence. "Who knows? I find it always evolving. Rather, I find my work [in relation to it] always evolving. The beautiful thing about the multiplicity of black artistic production is that there is no way to pin it down into a singular thing. My voice is one contribution to the amazing conversation and cultural consciousness happening right now."

His pictures are evocative, soft, vulnerable and confident. A viewer can look and be enlarged and blessed by them. It is as though Mitchell makes his way through the world capturing playful but powerful images like fireflies in a jar, glimmering with light, and offering his jars up for us to make our way towards another future.

September 9-October 30
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Art in America

THE EPIC BANAL

BY: Amy Sherald, Tyler Mitchell
May 7, 2021 10:08am

Tyler Mitchell: *Untitled (Blue Laundry Line)*, 2019.

Amy Sherald (https://www.artnews.com/t/amy-sherald/): *A Midsummer Afternoon Dream*, 2020, oil on canvas, 106 by 101 inches.

Tyler Mitchell and Amy Sherald—two Atlanta-born, New York–based artists—both capture everyday joy in their images of Black Americans. Recurring motifs in Mitchell's photographs, installations, and videos include outdoor space and fashionable friends. Sherald, a painter, shares similar motifs: her colorful paintings with pastel palettes show Black people enjoying American moments, their skin painted in grayscale, the backgrounds and outfits flat. Both are best known for high-profile portrait commissions: in 2018 Mitchell became the first Black photographer to have a work grace the cover of *Vogue*. That shot of Beyoncé was followed, more recently, by a portrait of Kamala Harris for the same publication. Michelle Obama commissioned Amy Sherald to paint her portrait, and last year *Vanity Fair* asked Sherald to paint Breonna Taylor for a cover too. Below, the artists discuss the influence of the South on their work, and how they navigate art versus commercial projects. —*Eds.*

Amy Sherald: *Precious jewels by the sea*, 2019, oil on canvas, 120 by 108 inches.

TYLER MITCHELL: Amy, we spoke before about finding freedom and making your own moments of joy. I think of *Precious jewels by the sea* [2019]—your painting of two couples at the beach, showing the men standing with the women on their shoulders—as a moment that you constructed. My work is also constructed, but viewers don't necessarily know that when they see a boy flying a kite in a park [as in *Untitled (Kite)*, 2019]. You told me you made that beach image with a camera first and then painted it. Can you talk more about that process?

AMY SHERALD: For me, a painting starts in the viewfinder. It's embarrassing to admit it, but I don't really know how to use a camera: don't ask me about aperture or f-stops or whatever. I just put it on automatic, and try to shoot at eleven o'clock, or two o'clock, when I know the light will be good. The camera is basically my sketchbook; the photographs themselves aren't really special. If you saw them, you might say, "You're going to make a painting out of this?"

I do with a paintbrush what you do with a camera: in the end, I think we create a similar sensation. There's the weight of history, but mostly there's freshness and lightness. I'm not trying to replace the narrative of historical trauma, but I do want to shift into something different for us now. I want to make space for all the things our mothers didn't see themselves doing. I take my kids to Martha's Vineyard because I want them to see us living in these houses and walking on these beaches. For me, those are truly American moments, and that's exactly what I want to document, because [pictures of Black people doing these things are] what's missing in the American painting canon.

Tyler Mitchell: *Untitled (Kite)*, 2019, pigment print, 50 by 40 inches.

MITCHELL: We're both also thinking about outdoor space alongside interior worlds. I think of outdoor scenes as a way to explore Black folks simply existing in public space—that's what I was getting at with my installation *Idyllic Space* [2019], which included Astroturf, a white picket fence, and a video of Georgia boys enjoying the outdoors. The video is projected on the ceiling. I see it as a radical gesture to show young Black folks enjoying public space.

SHERALD: I wonder if being from the South has something to do with our shared interest in leisure.

MITCHELL: Our moms know each other in Atlanta!

SHERALD: Yeah! I don't think my work would be what it is had I not grown up in the South, then left Atlanta for grad school, and then moved back with more knowledge of who I am. Once I was home, I spent a year not making anything, trying to figure out what I wanted to make. The first five paintings I made after that period were almost like a journal: coming back as an adult, I realized how much the South influenced who I am—for good and for bad.

MITCHELL: I relate to that. The most clarifying times for me and my work occurred when I was abroad. That's when I started to think back on the complicated dimensions of the Southern

experience: it's easier to see it when you're not there. I made *Boys of Walthamstow* [2018] in England, but I was thinking of Georgia. . . . Those British marshes had willow trees that almost looked like Savannah willows.

My feelings toward the South aren't necessarily good or bad. The South involves this mix of welcoming and warmth, as well as estrangement. People will invite you onto their porch to have tea, but there's also a lot of gossiping around the neighborhood. I experienced feelings of alienation throughout my upbringing, but also feelings of amazing freedom as a middle-class person who grew up around lots of green space. Most people have a hyper urban image when they visualize Atlanta, though Atlanta is actually the US city with the most green space per person. So when I ask myself, "What does the South look like?" for me, it's very green.

How did you develop your signature style?

Tyler Mitchell: *Untitled (Walthamstow Frolick)*, 2018.

SHERALD: The story of why I paint my figures gray has evolved over the years. I'm not trying to take race out of the conversation, I'm just trying to highlight an interiority. In hindsight, I realize that I was avoiding painting people into a corner, where they'd have to exist in some universal way. I don't want the conversation around my work to be solely about identity.

At first, I considered my work fantastical. But later I realized, though I'm painting moments I constructed, they are moments that do exist: I'm not totally making it up.

I love seeing young people engage with your posts on Instagram: one comment read “have you ever frolicked before?” and it just made me smile. I don’t think my mom, who was born in 1935, was thinking about frolicking while growing up in Mobile, Alabama. She just wanted to make it home without getting snatched up by a Klan mob.

MITCHELL: And your mom’s story isn’t depicted in your paintings, but it’s definitely the backdrop of the work. We’re both out to reclaim these small moments of everyday joy, which is so important because generations before us weren’t necessarily able to.

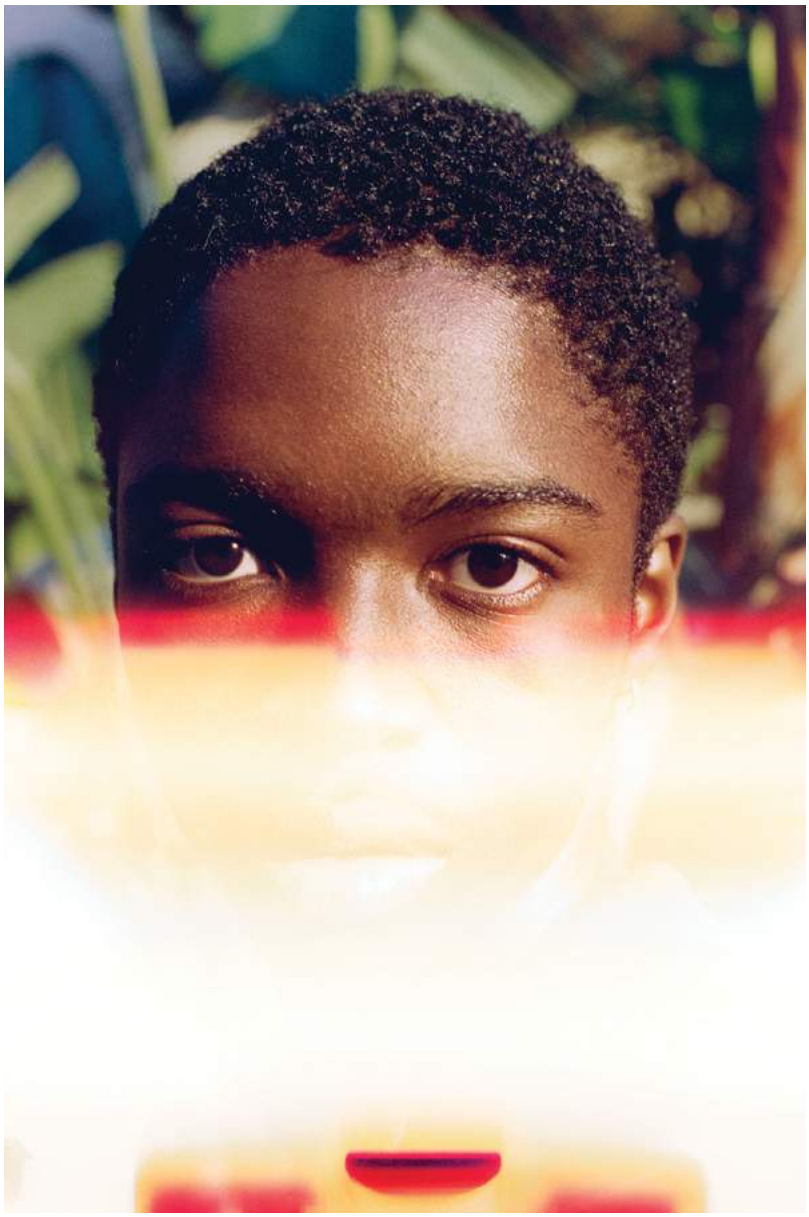
SHERALD: For me, it’s also about replacing the imagery that we see.

MITCHELL: I also find that both my pictures and your paintings leave so much open to viewers, who bring their own experience to the portrait. Often, your figures aren’t just individuals, but archetypes: they stand for something bigger.

In response to my work, especially the installation *Laundry Line* [2020], I get a lot of “I used to have that shirt!” or “teal used to be my favorite color!” I wonder if you have a fun story of someone enthusiastically identifying with your painting.

SHERALD: At an opening of mine in 2015, a young woman and her daughter came in—they were looking at one of the paintings and the daughter said, “I see my grandmother.” She had never seen a portrait of a Black person in a gallery before. I was reminded, this is why
I do what I do.

MITCHELL: We’re both depicting these moments that are devoid of the stereotypical narrative so often imposed on the Black figure in images. I’ve started to think about my work via this phrase I borrowed from my friend RaMell Ross, who made the amazing documentary *Hale County This Morning, This Evening* [2018], a loose, wandering, poetic film about a county in Alabama. Anyway, he uses this term “the epic banal,” and for me, epic banality is simply about existence—it’s about just being and finding those moments of joy.



Tyler Mitchell: *Untitled (Alton's Eyes)*, 2016.

SHERALD: I absolutely agree with that. You say "I can make you feel good" [the title of your show at the International Center of Photography in New York], and I say, come to the work to see a reflection of yourself. That is love; it's an embrace, and it has a positive psychological effect. Hopefully, it replaces some of those traumatic memories that we carry around. I didn't go through all the things that my mother went through, but I feel as though I absorbed some of it. And on social media, you see it all the time. That's just not healthy for any of us.

I've had conversations with artists who feel as if their work has to create teaching moments about history and our struggle. But I wonder, when do we breathe? There has to be room for a range of experiences, because if there isn't, how do we evolve? Your work touches on that as well.

SHERALD: Between us, we've made portraits of, arguably, the two most popular women in the world! [Painting Michelle Obama] was career defining, and I don't mind that. But I also don't want my previous work to be completely erased. My life didn't start the moment I painted Michelle, and

yours didn't start the moment you photographed Beyoncé. The media made it seem like nothing happened until I turned forty-two, but I'd been working really hard for a long time, and it's important to me that young artists hear about that struggle. These commissions didn't randomly land in our laps while we were sitting around doing nothing. How did you feel about just being more visible all of a sudden?

MITCHELL: I'm more of a behind-the-camera person, so I had to grapple with that attention. Photographing Beyoncé definitely gave me more resources to extend to my circle of collaborators. I have a background in filmmaking, and often think of myself as basically a director. It's not just capturing the images, but also creating a recipe, and bringing together the right team and things to make the image happen. This visibility has helped me form teams that I really want to keep around, and it's given me more tools to bring into the rest of my practice.

SHERALD: People often ask me if painting Michelle changed my work. And I tell them, Michelle is an extraordinary American and an extraordinary Black woman—as are many of the people in my paintings. The only difference is that she's well-known.

I received some criticism because so many people had their own vision of Michelle. I didn't respond to most of it, but one woman emailed me, saying, "I really wished that you had painted her brown." I felt snarky and replied, "when you become first lady, you can pick who you want to paint you. But Michelle Obama picked me."

MITCHELL: Right, we're still bringing our signature styles and our voices: these commissions are one part of a larger body of work. When I photographed Beyoncé, I decided to photograph her using the same techniques I would with any of my close friends.

SHERALD: For me, the visibility took some getting used to. It's easier living in New York than it was in Baltimore. Just the other day, my partner commented that it's really nice to be able to go to the grocery store and not be stopped five times. It did impact our day at times. . . . A lot of people wanted to take a picture or say hi.

All in all, it's been a blessing. And it's come with numerous opportunities. I especially adore the opportunity to be a role model for young kids who want to be an artist. Young Amy was guided by the art of white men. That's fine. I had the vision, and I was born to do this, regardless of whether or not I saw anybody like me painting. I'm happy that things will be different for the next generation. I'm really embracing that part of my role.

MITCHELL: Yeah, I've been hoping to take that magazine world visibility and shift it toward other parts of my work: experiencing a packed opening for my show at ICP was amazing.

Do you make distinctions between commercial work you've done for magazines and your artwork?

SHERALD: It depends. I don't think of my painting of Breonna Taylor as an art piece. It's not a piece of fine art that's dealing with conversations about figuration and composition: it's something that I made to codify this historical moment, and in honor of all the lives that were lost—specifically, the Black women we lost to police brutality. It belongs in a history museum as much as it does an art museum.

MITCHELL: Actually, I do think that there are conversations to be had about your formal decisions. The blue in that painting elicits so many emotions.

SHERALD: It's really the commodification of the Breonna Taylor painting that made me consider taking it away from the art world. In the end, it was jointly acquired by the National Museum of African American History and Culture and the Speed Art Museum in Louisville.

What about you, are you drawing distinctions?

MITCHELL: I actually started working in the editorial and commercial field first. I didn't go to art school, and [New York University] didn't really put an emphasis on museums or the art world. I just focused on making images that I wanted to make. But who's to say that those images can't operate in different contexts? When I see a large print, it has a different impact than when I see it in a magazine. Those distinctions are more specific to photography than painting.

Tell me about your new work.

SHERALD: I always feel like it's hard to talk about my work right after I finish it. But I named [my latest Hauser & Wirth] show "The Great American Fact," after a nineteenth-century essay by a Black educator named Anna Julia Cooper. *As American as apple pie* [2020] is an image of a Black couple in front of a house in the suburbs with a white picket fence. They're hanging out near their convertible. The woman has on a Barbie T-shirt, a pink skirt, doorknocker earrings, and these rainbow flamingo sunglasses. The gentleman has on a denim jacket, a white T-shirt, khaki pants, and Chuck Taylors.

When I first saw the model I used, I knew immediately that I wanted her to be a Barbie and with her Ken: I wanted to replace that iconic imagerwy with something else. It's not a teaching moment, it's a more covert statement about leisure and pleasure. It's a very American moment, something every child needs to see. That epic banality you mentioned is a perfect way to describe it.

MITCHELL: I appreciate all the thought you put into their outfits. Clothing choices are definitely a big part of both our bodies of work.

SHERALD: Sometimes I lie in bed at night just looking at clothes for my paintings, whether on eBay or the runway.

MITCHELL: Black folks definitely understand the importance of wearing our finest clothes to any photo shoot. I think about that rich understanding of fashion a lot.

SHERALD: It was really photography that brought me into portraiture, more so than painting. Deborah Willis's book *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History* [2002], and later the documentary *Through a Lens Darkly: Black Photographers and the Emergence of a People* [2014], reaffirmed everything that I was thinking and doing. I don't see images like mine coming from the lineage of European painting: when the camera was invented, we eventually were able to become authors of our own narratives and, like you said, show up all dressed up. We got to say, "this is how I want to be represented and this is how I want to be seen."

Tell me about your new work too!

MITCHELL: Every year, the Gordon Parks Foundation selects two fellows to have exhibitions at their gallery Upstate. This time they chose me and [painter] Nina Chanel Abney. My show is drawing on Parks's legacy: I've been researching his images of the South and of family life. My exhibition will be all new work in response to that.

The New York Times

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

It's My Job to Watch. With George Floyd's Death, I Had to Look Away.

Devastated by the Rodney King verdict decades ago, our critic refused to view the video of Floyd's murder. But she found solace in the art it inspired.

By Salamishah Tillet

May 20, 2021 Updated 12:18 p.m. ET

I've never watched the video of George Floyd's murder. My decision wasn't premeditated or preordained, but rather an improvised refusal. I did not want to be another spectator of that oldest of American rituals: the killing of a Black person in public.

My resistance was not heroic; I've just learned not to trust what I see. My doubt started 30 years ago when I, like much of the country, saw another recording, this time a videotape in which four white officers of the Los Angeles Police Department mercilessly beat Rodney King on the side of a San Fernando Valley street. During my senior year of high school, my mainly white classmates and I argued about the case. I believed the grainy black and white footage, shot on a home video camera by George Holliday, a 31-year-old white plumber, to be incontrovertible evidence, and that a guilty verdict was inevitable.

But, when, on April 29, 1992, on their seventh day of deliberations, the predominantly white jury acquitted the four men on nearly all charges in the beating of King, their decision taught me a vital lesson: To be Black in this country is to be gaslit almost all the time.

What I deemed with my own eyes to be truth or fact would always be unequal to the power of the white gaze that dominates most aspects of American life.

This was a horrible lesson for a child to learn. But I find it far crueler to see it pass down to my children, a 5-year-old Black boy named after Sidney Poitier, and an 8-year-old Black girl named after the 19th-century Black abolitionist community Seneca Village. They already know how vulnerable their bodies are in public, and how at any given moment a random police siren might be our demise.

But, even as I refused to watch the footage of George Floyd's death, bravely recorded by Darnella Frazier when she was 17, I did bear vigilant witness to what it reignited: the Black Lives Matter movement the world over. I too came out of quarantine to march, chant and paint All Black Lives Matter and Abolish White Supremacy murals on the streets of Newark. "Those dead bodies are our bodies," we all knew deep down. "Their flesh, our flesh."

I thought back to watching the King video, how it made me feel frustrated and defenseless as a young African-American citizen. But the trial also shaped my career as a Black critic. The defense broke the 81-second video down frame by frame so its experts could dissect each detail. By doing so, they neutralized its impact. That strategy — focusing on still shots, playing with point of view and emphasizing multiple interpretations — made me realize how important it was for me to be able to make sense of cultural objects, even one as amateur as Holliday's video, for myself.

When I started college a few months after that verdict, I decided that I no longer wanted to be a lawyer but an academic trained in the tools of cultural criticism, someone who could teach others how to interpret and contextualize the narratives that shape our understanding of the past and how we relate to one another in the present.

So, decades later, even as I avoided watching the replay of Floyd's murder, I grappled with the tragedy of his death. Not only in my conversations with friends or in my online classes with my students, but also as a critic who found herself immersed in the groundswell of African-American art that anticipated, responded to and intervened in our racial reckoning.

I saw Black artists, filmmakers, fashion designers, musicians and poets take on the white gatekeepers in their industries and institutional homes. I identified the new conversations Black artists are having with one another across generations and disciplines. I wanted my own writing to match the immediacy with which these artists shared messages of rejecting white privilege, re-centering our collective humanity and demanding a world in which Black people are truly free.

In the short film "Two Distant Strangers," Officer Merk (Andrew Howard) kills Carter (Joey Bada$$) over and over again. Netflix

Appearing over the past year, four works in particular were so arresting that even as I stopped watching real-life racial violence against even more Black people, these artists made it impossible for me to look away fully: "Two Distant Strangers," a short film by Travon Free and Martin Desmond Roe; "A Love Song for Latasha," a short documentary by Sophia Nahli Allison; a painting of Breonna Taylor by the artist Amy Sherald; and the video installation "Chasing Pink, Found Red" by Tyler Mitchell.

“Two Distant Strangers,” which just won an Oscar and is streaming on Netflix, tells the story of Carter, a young Black man (played by the rapper Joey Bada$$) who keeps reliving the day a white police officer kills him. Reminiscent of the 1993 movie “Groundhog Day,” Carter wakes up each morning conscious of the day before, and spends the bulk of the film trying to change his ending. Nothing works. After Carter’s 99th failed attempt, he realizes that Officer Merk (Andrew Howard) is also aware of the time loop and derives great pleasure from repeatedly killing him. Despite this horrific revelation, I’m always surprised and inspired by the ending, in which Carter doubles down on his plan of outlasting and defeating this trap of white supremacy.

In the short film “A Love Song for Latasha,” about the shooting death of Latasha Harlins in Los Angeles in 1991, Shinese Harlins remembers her cousin. Netflix

“A Love Song for Latasha” (also on Netflix) uses absence to recover the story of Latasha Harlins, the 15-year-old Black girl who was killed by a Korean-American grocer in 1991. Allison chose not to include the footage of Harlins’s death taken by the store’s camera, which was shown on national news and was later used in the trial of the woman who shot her. Instead she actively memorializes Harlins through the memories of her loved ones, her childhood mementos and lushly lit re-enactments of her life. After first writing about the movie in June, I’ve come back to it again and again, haunted by its moving portrait of Black death. By reminding us that the public outcry after Harlins’s shooting also helped spark the Los Angeles riots in 1992, Allison puts Black girls front and center in our racial justice movement.

Such inclusivity also drew me to Amy Sherald’s portrait of Breonna Taylor, which appeared on the cover of the September issue of Vanity Fair guest-edited by Ta-Nehisi Coates. Now the painting is the signature piece in “Promise, Witness, Remembrance,” an art exhibition in honor of Taylor at the Speed Art Museum in Louisville, Ky. Sherald, who captures the daily beauty and dignity of Black people, is best known for her portrait of Michelle Obama for the National Portrait Gallery in 2018.

Amy Sherald's portrait of Breonna Taylor is the signature piece in the exhibition "Promise, Witness, Remembrance" at the Speed Museum in Louisville, Ky. Amy Sherald and Hauser & Wirth

Sherald's bold choice of turquoise and tender recreation of Taylor's glamour is an aesthetic protest of the horror of Taylor being shot to death in her own home. Ultimately, its large size (54 by 43 inches) provides a narrative justice of sorts, as it partly fills in the empty spaces of the nearly blank incident report that followed her death with an expansive remembering of Taylor's life.

I came late to Tyler Mitchell's exhibition "I Can Make You Feel Good" at the International Center of Photography, which opened in January 2020 and brings together his fashion photography, staged portraits and experimental filmmaking. But by the time I saw the show in December, his thematic emphasis on joy, utopia and Black leisure took on a heightened urgency after spending the year overwhelmed by the twin pandemics of the coronavirus and systemic racism.

In the book inspired by the show, the photographic stills from “Chasing Pink, Found Red” depict young Black men and women dressed in shades of white, brown and black relaxing on top of a red and white checkered picnic blanket barefoot and with their eyes closed, suggesting (as I’ve written before) a communal gathering as group rest. But, as a film, mounted on three large screens, with voice-overs that Mitchell crowdsourced from his friends and social media followers, it reveals a formative encounter: the moment that Black people become aware of how they are seen in the eyes of others. Overlaid with this litany of racial microaggressions, the young Black bodies in relief appear united in death, a slippage caused by the ongoing tragedies and overwhelming ubiquity of such images today.

A still from “Chasing Pink, Found Red’ by Tyler Mitchell. Tyler Mitchell and Jack Shainman Gallery

I was reminded of how much this art sustained me over the past year as I listened to Derek Chauvin’s trial last month. In my car, I heard witness after witness relive the worst minutes of their lives, sometimes watching new footage from before, during and after Floyd’s final moments. But, as palpable and searing as that trauma was, I was never certain of the trial’s outcome. “Believe your eyes,” the prosecutor Steve Schleicher had repeatedly insisted to the jury in the courtroom. “What you saw, you saw.”

Would the young people who watched the Floyd video feel as gaslit by a verdict as I did nearly 30 years ago?

For the first time since then, I felt a slight sense of hope that the lens through which Black people see our lives (and too often our deaths) had also empowered these anonymous jurors to do what was just and right. And to be honest, I’m not sure what I would have told my daughter, who watched the guilty verdict being announced with me, if that strategy hadn’t worked. Either way, I did what I believe is the job of a mother and a critic to do. I stayed present with her, I helped her hold her feelings, and I helped her turn what she witnessed into a story that could account for the difficult history of our country without stripping her of the life-affirming hope that she will need to navigate these troubled waters.

As for me, I will continue to find solace in the art that sustains, expresses and saves our Black lives.

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aperture

Tyler Mitchell's Love for a Common Way of Life

By showing Black life as leisure, repose, and outdoor play, Mitchell expands our visual vocabulary of race and space.

By Salamishah Tillet

"In nature, nothing is perfect. . . . Trees can be contorted, bent in weird ways, and they're still beautiful."
—Alice Walker

Two bare-chested young Black men on playground swings. Staring slightly down at the camera, the first young man, with twisted hair and striped boxers peeking out of his jeans, clasps the swing's chains. Next to him, another young man, swinging in his ripped denim, with his eyes closed. His hands grab the chains in preparation for flight or, perhaps, a return to rest.

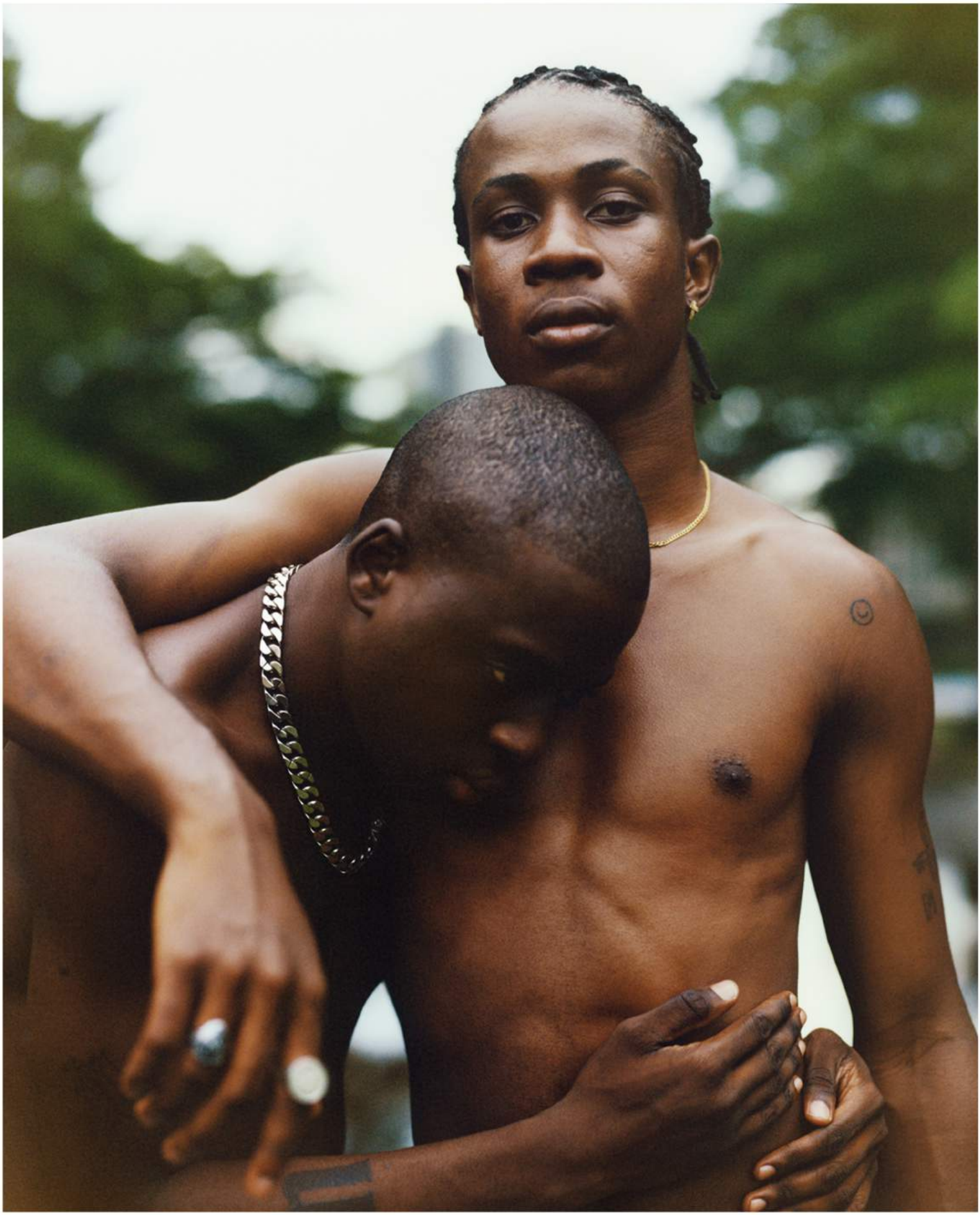
In Tyler Mitchell's photobook *I Can Make You Feel Good* (2020), a debut monograph based on his first solo exhibition at Foam, in Amsterdam, in 2019, and at the International Center of Photography, in New York, in 2020, the depiction of these young men, partly naturally lit and in leisure themes, is in many ways a definitive aspect of his aesthetic.

Recently Mitchell has photographed a wide range of Black subjects, from the hip-hop artist Vince Staples to skaters in Havana, to take on an even more ambitious project: Black utopia. "People say utopia is never achievable," he states in the foreword to his book, "but I love photography's possibility of allowing me to dream and make that dream become very real."

Tyler Mitchell, Still from *Idyllic Space*, 2019

The result: young Black men in bright blue jeans, with dark brown to even deeper and richer brown skin tones, taking center stage with a beauty so brilliantly lit by the sun and caught by Mitchell's eye that the allée of trees behind them all but disappears. Their freeness is intriguing, mainly because it depends on their being outside, making the outdoor backdrop relevant for what is there and what is not. Absent are those racial tragedies that inform my seeing and exist just beyond the photograph's frame. Rekia Boyd: shot in the head by a white off -duty police officer in Chicago's Douglas Park in 2012. Tamir Rice: shot in the chest by a white police officer at a Cleveland playground in 2014. Walter Scott: shot in the back while fleeing a white police officer in a North Charleston park in 2015. Among those calamities and, of course, our more recent ones, Mitchell's insistence on seeing Black people at peace and in play in public is a profoundly radical act.

In this moment of Black Lives Matter, Mitchell's films and photographs provide counternarratives to those viral recordings, such as Darnella Frazier's ten-minute video of George Floyd's murder. But, as his work reminds us of the long history of racism in the United States, it also reveals an alternative. "The African-American ties to this land, unfairly seized from Indigenous people, are ugly and thick," the historian Tiya Miles wrote in her 2019 *New York Times* essay on race and environmental justice. "But even in that long, dark tunnel of suffering, African-Americans recognized the capacity of nature to function as a resource—better still, an ally—in the fight for physical and psychological freedom."



Tyler Mitchell, *Untitled (Warm Embrace)*, 2019

By showing us Black life as leisure, as repose, as outdoor play, Mitchell continually expands our visual vocabulary of race and space. I search his photographs for more geographic clues. Yet with those young men on the swings, their hairstyles and sartorial details convey only their nowness, not their place. The playground swings tell me something, but not enough. The trees, blurred into a lush mise-en-scène, could be a field, a forest, a farm, or a park. Each potential site has its own racial history, each choice would pose different types of threats for their swinging Black bodies. But in Mitchell's freedom dreaming, these trees are not used for harm.

With their heads and chests arched forward, their loosely picked-out coils, and the way their jeans hang just so, his Black male models use the trees as a canvas onto which they, not us, can project the artist's versions of themselves far into the future.

Tyler Mitchell, *Untitled (Family Time in the Park)*, 2019

When Mitchell and I spoke on Zoom this August, a week after his book's release, he was in London, while I chatted from Newark. He was backdropped by potted plants and arching trees that transformed the backyard patio where he sat into a small garden. Knowing that he spent the majority of New York's pandemic lockdown in his Brooklyn apartment, I thought that any attempt he made to establish a temporary life in another country, and in fresh air, was well-earned.

And yet nature has a way of interrupting our best intentions. Not long into our conversation, a bee started circling him, eventually disturbing him, so that he had to go back inside. Looking back, Mitchell's desire to remain outside was not just happenstance but fundamental to his autobiography, his aesthetic, and his redefining of Black life.

Two young Black men sitting on the grass. The one at left in a rose T-shirt, eyes down, smile bright. Beside him, his friend, or lover, cousin, or brother, an ambiguity suggested by the unknowable meaning of their near touch. What is clear are their smiles. The young man in the unbuttoned, blue shirt, revealing his bare chest, is mid-turn, hands clutched underneath the ball about to drop. Another man, in a pink, blue, and white striped shirt, zips by them. We see only his back and legs in stride, and his locks swaying, trailed by his matching kite.

Tyler Mitchell, *Untitled (Boy in Blue Jacket on Horse)*, 2019

Another image. A young Black boy, dressed up in a royal-blue military jacket, his dusty-brown skin quieting the gold braids and buttons adorning the uniform. The white sheet that hangs as a backdrop is reminiscent of Mitchell's famed September 2018 cover for *Vogue*, when, at twenty-three years old, he became the first African American artist to shoot the magazine's cover in its 125-year history, photographing a minimally made-up Beyoncé outside, with only white sheets as backdrops and props. While his clothing and fancy rocking chair intimate an aristocratic flair, the white sheet and outdoor pavement indicate everydayness. Here, these stylized juxtapositions work together to convey Mitchell's refusal of spatial and sartorial hierarchies.

Inspired by Spike Jonze's skate videos, Mitchell, in his early work, used his friends and fellow skateboarders as subjects. He documented their aerials and slide tricks with a digital SLR Canon, whose flip switch enabled him to toggle between photography and video. As a result, play was inseparable from the visual languages he was teaching himself. "Of course, there's the surface level cool and rebel spirit about skateboarding," Mitchell told *Vogue* in 2018, "but the thing that makes skaters like artists runs deeper than that: It's not a sport that's built on competition, it's one that thrives on community."

Much has been made about how Jonze's work, along with the casual snapshot style of Ryan McGinley and the gritty youth-culture focus of Larry Clark, has informed Mitchell's approach. In his own narration, he mentions them, but he also speaks about how Tumblr not only introduced him to creative photography but helped to shape an egalitarian aesthetic. "I think the link for me to Tumblr growing up was a lot more significant than even I realize, in a way," he tells me. "There, images come to you in a swarm of decontextualization. One thing is next to the next, and they might have nothing to do with one another, but your mind creates a link between two images." He goes on, "It could be a Rococo painting next to a highly conceptual image of a performance artist. And then it could be next to a very chic modern interior."

After reading as much as I could about Mitchell, I noticed one crucial aspect of his life that he returns to but that most writers overlook: the role that growing up in the Black South has played in birthing his sense of place and play. "Atlanta, and being from Georgia, frames how I approach my own autobiographical ideas of utopia," he muses. "Being middle-class, having leisure time in the summers, gave me the opportunity to think about it as a site of utopia, or a potential utopia." Mitchell notes his aesthetic came out of "that free time and those memories of playing in fields or in parks in Georgia."

Tyler Mitchell, *Untitled (Curls)*, 2019

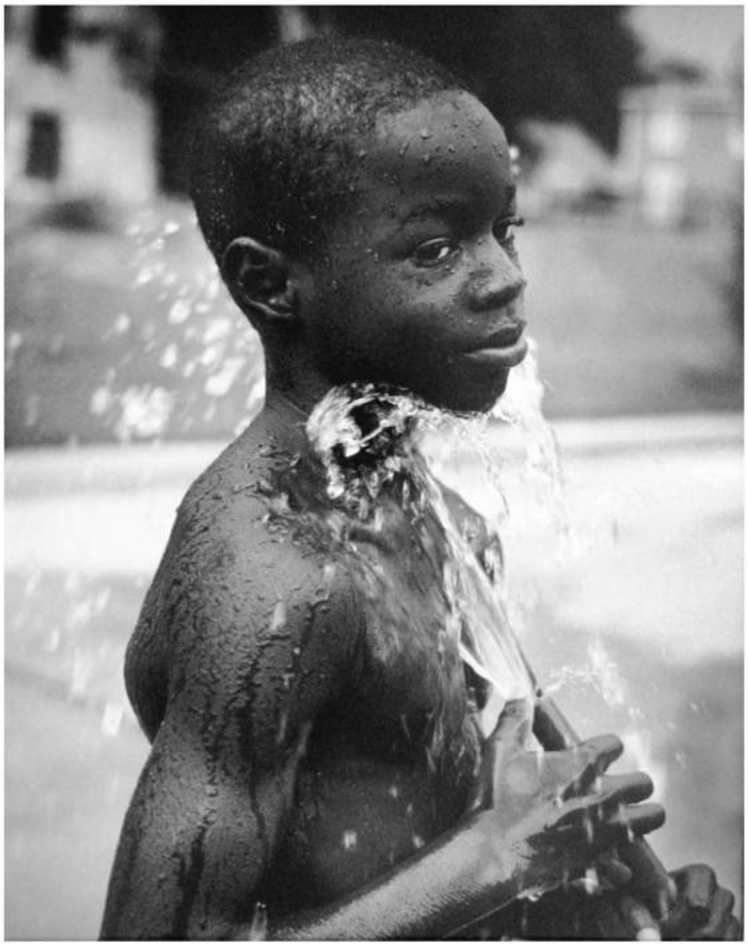
In other words, Mitchell's Black utopianism comes from his nondifferentiation. Taking Tumblr, with its nonhierarchical format, as a political and photographic practice, Mitchell not only toggles between visual mediums but normalizes the celebrity and exalts the everyday citizen. "One of the biggest things I've been reflecting on these days is the whole idea of the hierarchy between photographer and subject. I have a tool and a camera that I'm using to convey something or someone," Mitchell says to me. "And inherent to photography, especially when you think of it historically, is a strong hierarchy, where the photographer is the one with all the power, the one who is seeing. And the person being seen has almost no power. So, for me personally as a photographer, I ask myself, 'What are the things I can do to lessen these inherent hierarchies in the photography-shoot structure of seeing and being seen?'"

At the same time, his radical flattening of divisions is also a reflection of his expansive worldview, much like the poetry and novels of his fellow Georgia native Alice Walker that seek to celebrate and canonize the diversity innate to nature. "When you see an aerial shot of Atlanta, which I'm really interested in, it's full of trees," he says about growing up right outside Atlanta, a city with more green space per resident than any other U.S. metropolis. "You're in a city whose skyline is really weird. That's what I grew up around, being surrounded by nature constantly, and near a city with a Black core. A strong Black inner core."

Tyler Mitchell, *Still from Chasing Pink, Found Red*, 2019

Another image. In the book it is fixed, but it is an excerpt from his 2019 film *Chasing Pink, Found Red*. Here, young Black men and women, eyes closed, bodies dressed in whites, khakis, and browns, nearly touch as they lie together on a red-and-white-checkered picnic blanket. Their stillness recalls the 2015 die-in protests in the early years of Black Lives Matter; their stillness also insists that they rest among each other as a form of self-care and self-protection. While Mitchell's extolling of Black leisure might be new to some, it is familiar to those of us who have turned to play as both a testament to our humanity and a form of resistance in a world in which our Black lives still don't matter.

In this way, Mitchell is a student, as he quite earnestly told me, of Earlie Hudnall Jr., a Mississippi-born African American photographer who has spent the majority of his career documenting Houston's historically Black Third Ward neighborhood. Hudnall's black-and-white photograph *Flipping Boy, 4th Ward* (1983), featuring a young Black boy, mid-backflip, in the middle of a Houston street, anticipated Mitchell's own skateboard montages and Hula-Hoop close-ups. *Hudnall's Cooling Down, 3rd Ward* (1997) of a little Black boy gleefully splashing himself with a hose conjures up the joy seen in Mitchell's images of young Black men flying kites or on swings. And, finally, his *Rascals, 3rd Ward* (1991), depicting a group of little Black boys proudly standing in front of their bikes, made four years before Mitchell was born, reminds me of the pride of Mitchell's own regal portrait of the young boy on a play horse.



Earlie Hudnall Jr., *Cooling Down, 3rd Ward*, Houston, Texas, 1997

Courtesy the artist and PDNB Gallery, Dallas

Earlie Hudnall Jr., *Flipping Boy, 4th Ward,*, Houston, Texas, 1983

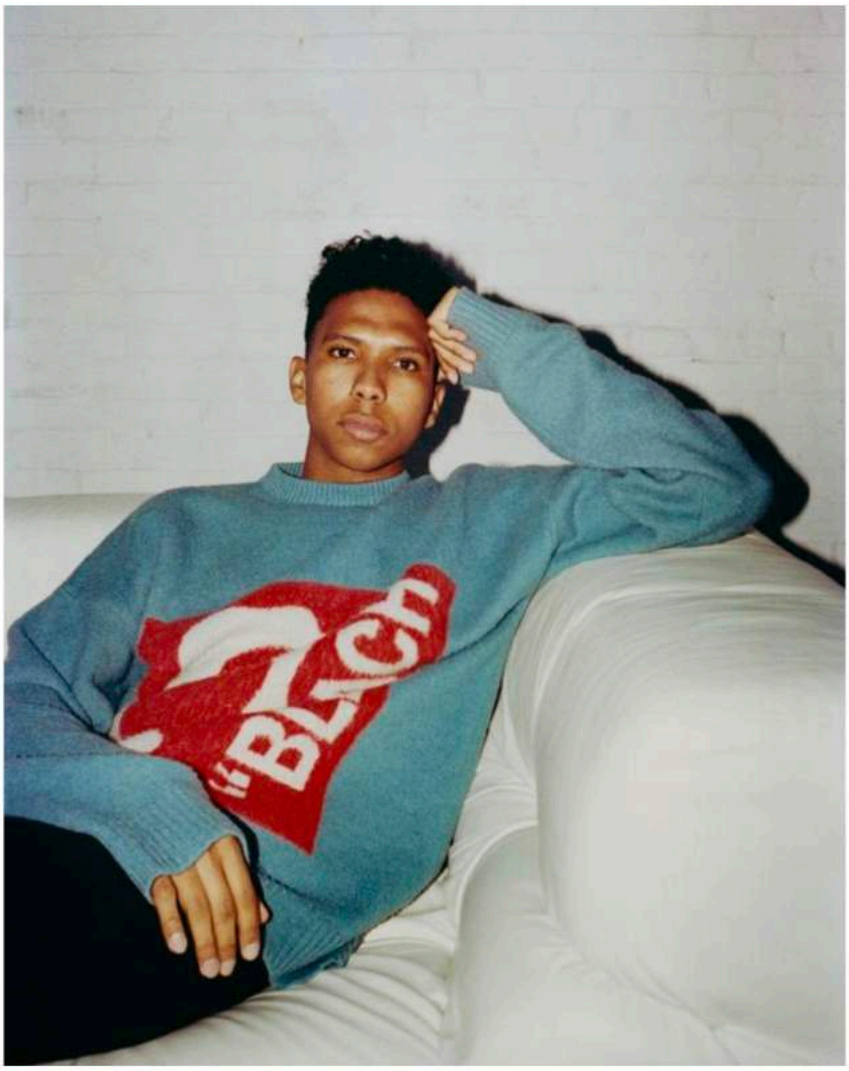
In a statement about his work, Hudnall said that, in addition to his father, who was an amateur photographer, it was his grandmother's use of a photo-album to record their community's history that inspired his own interest in documenting quotidian moments rarely seen outside the community. "The love for this common way of life and the memories of those times," Hudnall recalled, "provided me with the inspiration to become a photographer, just as Grandmother used the photo-album and the family Bible." Crisscrossing fashion, art photography, and avant-garde filmmaking, Mitchell offers us a Black utopia in which the couture and the common sit next to each other, and in which Black people in London, Brooklyn, Atlanta, Los Angeles, and throughout the African diaspora find one another, as relief and community. And therein lies Mitchell's gift and genius, to reimagine our world with the possibilities and agency of Black life. "My images are made all over the place," Mitchell says. "The subjects and the geography just support this aesthetic universe of a utopia. It's not meant to be pinned down."

CULTURED

YOUNG ARTISTS 2021

TYLER MITCHELL CHALLENGES THE CANON WITH IMAGES OF BLACK JOY

KAYLEE WARREN



TYLER MITCHELL. SELF-PORTRAIT, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

If you have picked up a magazine in the past five years, you have likely seen one of Tyler Mitchell's images. The artist, who also makes films, has steadily risen as a photographer of a generation, with work that confronts a visual canon of Black people depicted in despair and anguish, challenging it with images wherein Black people are buoyant, suspended in unblushing bliss. His photographs have been commissioned by fashion houses, discussed in lectures at prestigious institutions such as Harvard University and accompany his title as the first Black photographer to shoot a cover of American Vogue. Tyler Mitchell is also twenty-five years old.

Naturally, we spoke about jumbo slides and trampolines in the middle of lakes, idyllic snapshots of leisure from Mitchell's summers growing up in Atlanta. "I grew up near a lake," he explains. "It wasn't fancy, more like a pond, but I remember fishing with my dad." Mitchell was in the middle of recalling this nostalgic portrait when a knock on the door interrupted—a delivery person dropping off a vase of flowers sent to his Brooklyn apartment. This serendipity of tangible romance is befitting of the prolific photographer, whose work serves as "an invite into visualizing Black folks at play, enjoying romantic scenes, whether that's at a picnic or hula hooping." It's utopic visions like these that shaped his celebrated 2019 exhibition-turn-monograph I Can Make You Feel Good.

Mitchell's practice uses the image as a vehicle to explore possibility, a curiosity he will be exercising further as a recent signee with Jack Shainman Gallery in New York. "With Jack, it's such a genuine relationship," says Mitchell. "For twenty plus years, [Jack] has been exhibiting rigorous [work by] Black artists who are exploring all kinds of concepts related to our identities." Joining an esteemed roster of gallery-mates such as Hank Willis Thomas and Carrie Mae Weems, among many others, Mitchell is in good company as he anticipates his first solo exhibition with the gallery in Fall 2021.

CNN style

Photographer Tyler Mitchell captures the joys of being young and Black in America

Published 10th September 2020

In photographer Tyler Mitchell's debut monograph "I Can Make You Feel Good," Black youths, beautiful and carefree, are shown at play. Bathed in perpetual sunshine, they dance, run, swing hula hoops and relax on the grass. They pose against intensely saturated backdrops of pastel and primary colors.

One scene depicts a boy lying bare-chested on a field of wildflowers. In another, two young men skateboard together, their arms linked. Mitchell photographs friends spread out together on a checkered picnic blanket. He takes a portrait of a young woman in a white leotard-shirt against patterned yellow fabric, her eyes gently closed.

Over the past few years, the Georgia-born photographer has made a name for himself through his delicate, varied expressions of Black life. His now legendary Vogue cover shoot of Beyoncé propelled him into the spotlight, and he's brought his distinct style of storytelling to labels including Marc Jacobs and Comme des Garçons, as well as publications such as i-D and GQ. He's also recently mounted solo exhibitions of "I Can Make You Feel Good" at the International Center of Photography (ICP) in New York and at Foam in Amsterdam.

In this presentation of his work, each image celebrates of Black bodies and identity. Together, they form a world of unbridled, unbothered freedom -- or, as Mitchell writes in his preface, "what a Black utopia looks like or could look like."

"I Can Make You Feel Good" is Tyler Mitchell's debut monograph that envisions the beauty of a carefree Black utopia.

Themes of leisure, intimacy and belonging underpin Mitchell's photography

"People say utopia is never achievable," the artist continues, "but I love photography's possibility of allowing me to dream and make that dream become very real."

A place to be

The vivid, lyrical portraits and tableau are a far-cry from the prevailing imagery of struggle and pain that's long been associated with Blackness in media images. But that's exactly what makes "I Can Make You Feel Good" a compelling collection.

"Tyler is creating a visual space for free-flowing Black joy," said Isolde Brielmaier, who curated Mitchell's New York exhibition, over the phone. "He's always said how growing up he would see a range of images of happy, gleeful White people partaking in activities of leisure, but hardly any showing African-American communities engaged in those same joyful moments. With 'I Can Make You Feel Good,' he's simply decided to finally give them a platform, as a means for positing a different reality that's also always been around, and that we (as Black people) have long been occupying and living."

The 25-year-old photographer, Brielmaier explained, isn't interested in framing his work "as a counter-narrative to a dominant narrative -- because that would only end up giving the latter more power," but rather as a declaration that Black people, too, have their own untroubled world. "It's a tender, loving celebration of Black community," she added.

"This visualization of Black men just enjoying hula hooping, bicycling and playing in the suburbs of Georgia is radical because we haven't always been given space to be that free, historically or politically," Mitchell said at his show opening at ICP. Credit: Tyler Mitchell

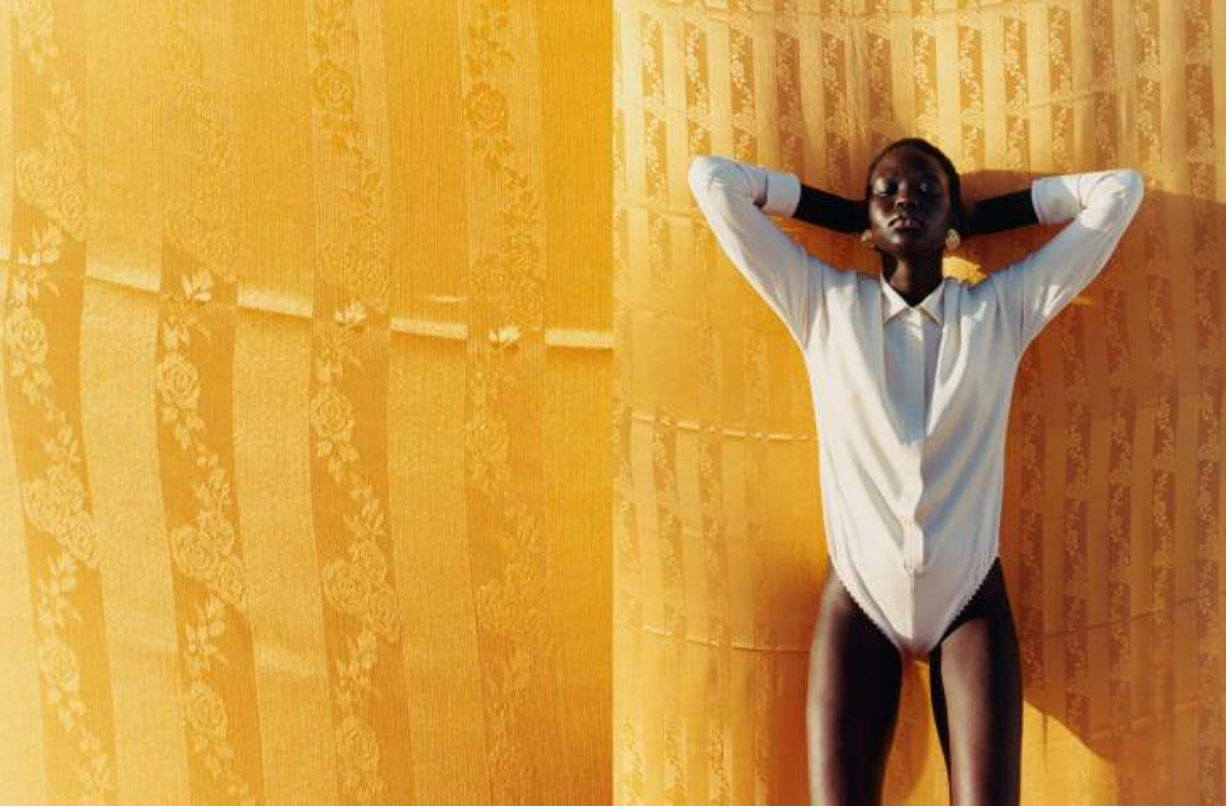
Foam curator Mirjam Kooiman agrees. “Historically speaking, there have been many artists who have made profound works on issues around the Black body, racism, and rewriting history,” she said in a phone interview. “Tyler often acknowledges those works, sometimes even referencing them in his own oeuvre. But his way of seeking attention from his audience is completely different. He’s shifting existing beauty ideals and visual narratives about being Black.”

An idiosyncratic vision

Since Mitchell emerged in the fashion and art world in his early 20s, he’s strove to create a single vision for the breadth of his work. “I view fashion as a space and opportunity to have clothes enhance my message about the Black body,” he writes in the book. “I make very little distinction between my commissioned and my personal works, using them both as an opportunity to create this utopian universe.”

“Tyler is creating a visual space for free-flowing Black joy,” said curator Isolde Brielmaie.

The technical way Mitchell reaches for that universe is also highly intentional. His photos are clear-focused, often tightly cropped and carefully composed. His color palette, too, is “incredibly important to him,” Brielmaier said. “The way he uses pastel hues -- incorporating things like cotton candy, ice creams, blue skies -- is directly related to this idea of litheness and lightness, of young Black people enjoying a constant state of summertime. There’s a unique emotive quality to the shades he picks.”



Mitchell carefully chooses color palettes that reflect the joyful nature of his work. Credit: Tyler Mitchell

“Tyler has a remarkable full control over the kind of imagery he creates, from the scenes to his models, who he often encounters on the streets or on social media” Kooiman said. “He manages to strike this perfect balance between the real life he experiences and the world as he’d like to see it.”

In the wake of the racial justice protest movement that has rocked the US this summer, “I Can Make You Feel Good” is an ode to humanity and sensitivity.

“Documented and real, or fictitious and staged, my images are characterized by an interest in purity and intimacy,” Mitchell writes. “In them, models recline, embrace each other closely and peer into the lens, leaving evidence of a public display of affirmation in Blackness and a unifying visual text of hope.”

CNN style

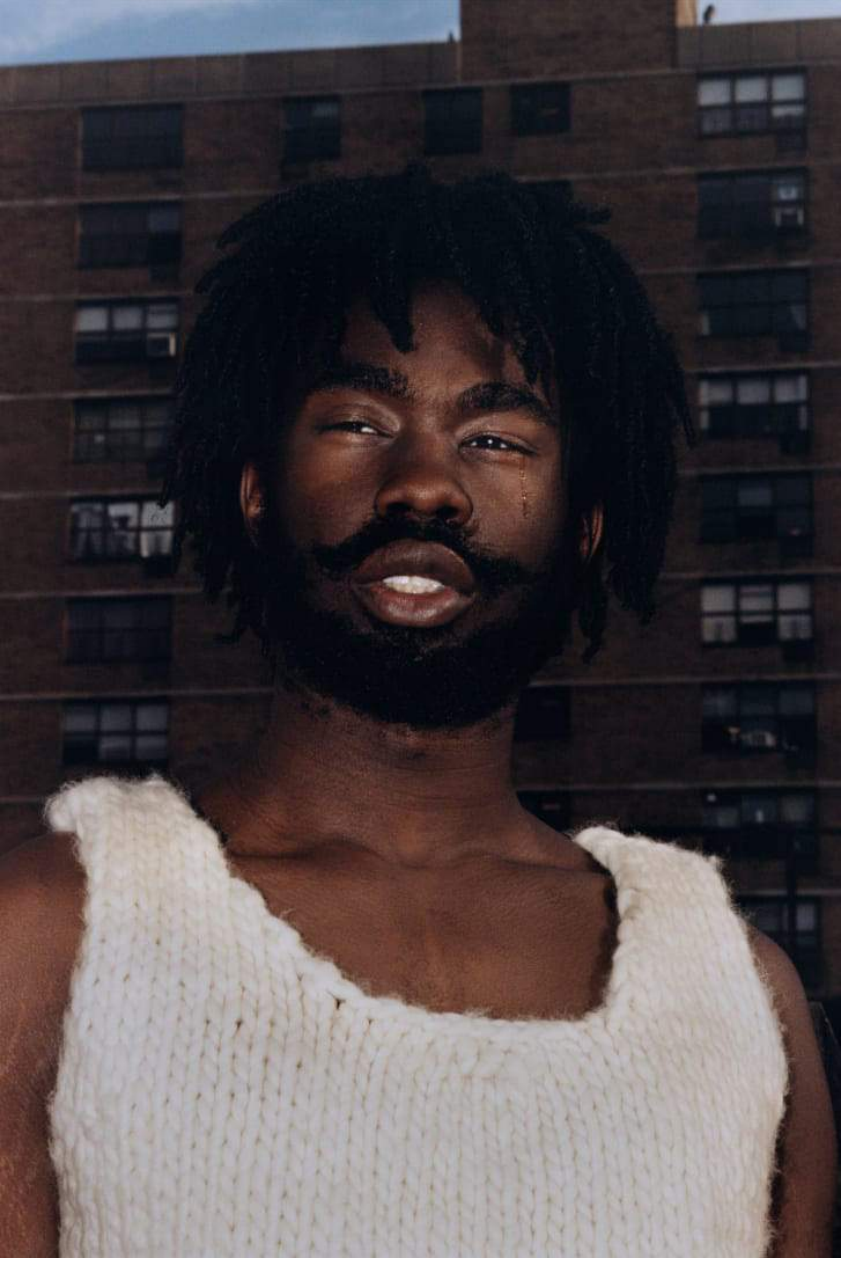
Beyoncé photographer Tyler Mitchell opens first solo show

Published 6th February 2020

Tyler Mitchell gained global attention in 2018 when he shot the cover of American Vogue -- featuring Beyoncé, no less -- making him the first black (and one of the youngest) photographers to have the honor.

Since then the 24-year-old has been in high demand, shooting campaigns for Marc Jacobs and Comme des Garçons, a music video for Brockhampton, and earning the prestigious Gordon Parks Fellowship for photography.

Flashing a pink-nailed peace sign to journalists at New York's International Center for Photography (ICP), Mitchell, who is based in Brooklyn, recently opened his first solo US show, "I Can Make You Feel Good." The exhibition is the latest in a series of artistic endeavors that have seen him go from a Tumblr-obsessed teen to the face of his generation's black arts renaissance.



“I Can Make You Feel Good” includes photography and video installations focused on Mitchell’s recurring themes of blackness and gender. Behind thick black curtains, large photographs hung on stark, white walls, a showcase of works that have made him a star in both the art and fashion worlds.

Mitchell recounted his fascination with Patricia Collins and Harley Weir, whose meditative photographs depict white youth in carefree everyday lives. He wanted to do the same for black youth -- one of his images shows two young women in colorful sweaters gently embracing in quiet field. Another image demands a less idyllic reading: a young black man in baby blue sweats lies face down on the floor with his hands interlocked behind his back, a position American viewers are used to seeing in scenes of police brutality.

A video installation called “Idyllic Space” invites visitors to lay on lofty, ashen beanbag chairs on crisp faux grass and surrounded by white picket fencing: hallmarks of Americana. A ceiling-mounted screen shows black bodies running freely through a flowered field embracing each other. Recordings play in the distance -- a mix of voice messages from friends he met online and youth recounting tales of racist encounters and dreams of a more equitable future.

“I created this therapeutic video piece that begs you to lay down and let it wash over you,” Mitchell said during a preview tour of the exhibition. “This visualization of black men just enjoying hula hooping, bicycling and playing in the suburbs of Georgia is radical because we haven’t always been given space to be that free, historically or politically.”

Mitchell is part of a sprawling international community of photographers, dubbed “The New Black Vanguard” in a book by Antwaun Sargent, working to revolutionize depictions of blackness in fashion and art -- from highly conceptual shoots to intimate portraits of everyday life. Other photographers included in this group are British artist Campbell Addy, Swiss Guinean artist Namsa Leuba, Nigerian artist Stephen Tayo and American artist Arielle Bobb-Willis.

“I Can Make You Feel Good” ties into black vanguard themes of social equity, an appreciation for natural beauty and alternative visions of the future that see blackness beyond the legacies of slavery and colonialism.

The exhibition met with critical acclaim when it debuted at Amsterdam’s Foam photography museum in 2018. In Europe, Mitchell said, the topic of black radicalism and imagined utopias was more hypothetical -- a peek inside the struggles of other people in other places. In New York, it’s a glaring comment on the day-to-day lives of black people living in America.

“A lot of people in Europe don’t know about these very American ideas,” he said. “They have their own histories with colonialism and blackness, but it doesn’t compare.”

Now housed in the newly constructed ICP, a nondescript multistory facility on the city’s Lower East Side, the exhibition reflects the themes taking place in the rapidly gentrifying city around it.

Mitchell has had his own struggles with identity. Known for his bold wardrobe of colorful designer looks, prized ascots and flirtations with nail polish and makeup, it took the young creator time to be comfortable expressing himself in a world that he believes is “more comfortable with its narrowly assigned definitions of black masculinity.”

“I’m interested in opening up these issues of representation and allowing a man to be freer and sit in his own body,” he said. “There is so much self-policing that’s baked into the psyche of black folks, especially black men. It’s fight or flight survival sh*t. If you don’t act this way you think you’ll get killed or ridiculed. I’m trying to break down those swords and shields.”

“When you construct an image and put it out there in the real world it becomes part of the cultural zeitgeist or a piece of popular culture,” he continued. “You’re projecting a fantasy and bringing it to life. I want to make images that enable young men and women to feel more like themselves.”

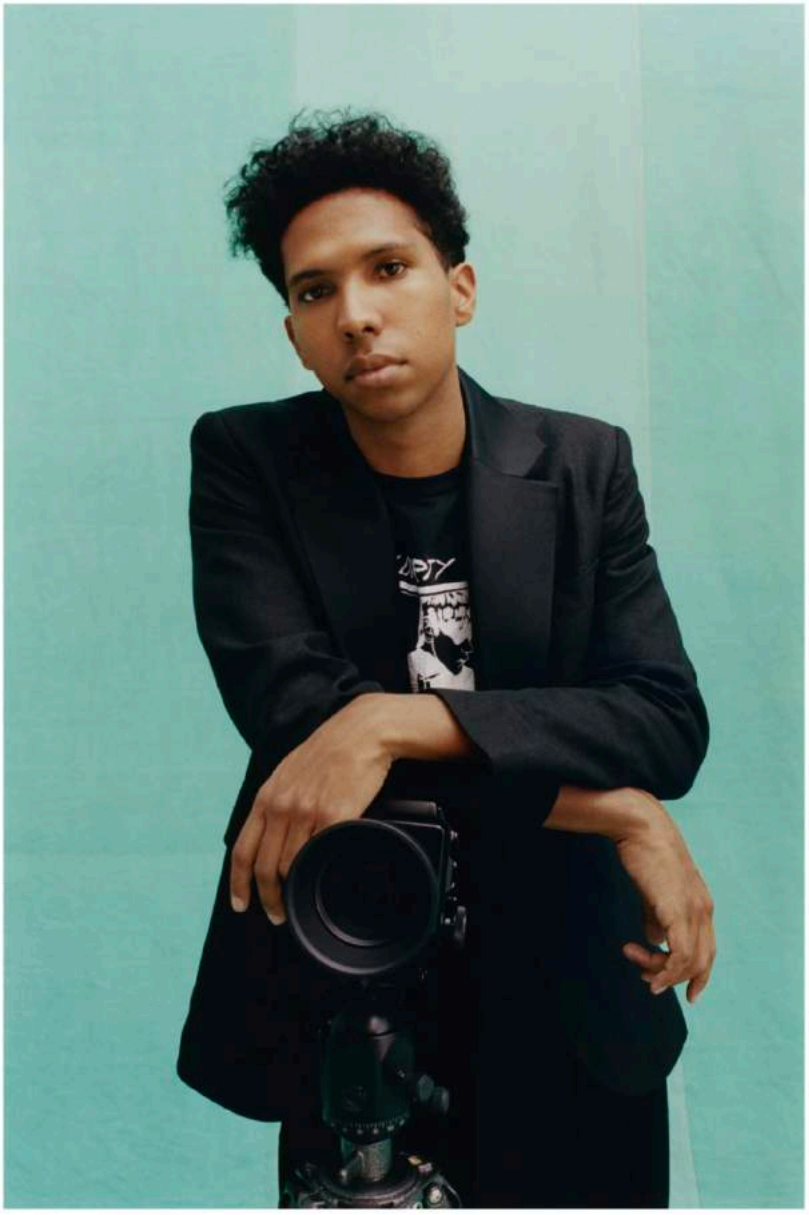
VOGUE

CULTURE

Photographer Tyler Mitchell's on His New Book and His Advice to Black Creatives: 'Don't Be Afraid to Say No'

BY ENI SUBAIR

July 31, 2020



Self Portrait, 2019 Photography Tyler Mitchell

Tyler Mitchell doesn't want his debut book to sit inanimately on your coffee table; he wants it to be "a beacon of what we hope Black lives will look like." Its 206 pages take us on a journey through grassy fields where a group of sun-drenched Black men and women lie serenely atop picnic blankets and through streets where young men are dressed in sky blue collared shirts playing with Hula-Hoops. Mitchell's work has perpetually encapsulated Black bodies as complex subjects while simultaneously eliminating the idea of the monolithic Black experience. His body of work thus far is a powerful exploration, taking the proposal of a Black utopia—a notion often dismissed—and not only materializing it but setting it ablaze.

Untitled (Boys of Walthamstow), 2018 Photography Tyler Mitchell

Sitting in the throng of the millennial generation and a by-product of the Tumblr pack, the 25-year-old Atlanta-born photographer has already hit many milestones. Initially a filmmaker, Mitchell thrived on creating homemade skate videos as a teen, later producing a book in 2015 titled El Paquete, which depicted the skate scene in Havana.

Fast-forward to 2018, and the trailblazer shot campaigns for the likes of Comme des Garçons and JW Anderson. A standout talent of his generation who takes storytelling to uncharted territory, Mitchell made history by photographing Beyoncé for Vogue's September 2018 cover—the first Black person to do so in the magazine's 128-year history—an image that now sits in the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery.

Untitled (Sosa with Orange Hula Hoop), 2019 Photography Tyler Mitchell

A beautiful exchange of contemplative art, I Can Make You Feel Good speaks for itself, although Mitchell says he would use the words “nuanced, intimate, self-contained, and immersive to describe it.” Using the title of his first solo 2019 exhibition, which was held at the Fotografiemuseum in Amsterdam, the book showcases images taken from 2016 to 2019. It unabashedly provides a deep dive into various states—outdoor, intimacy, and movement—of the Black body in all its glory, while using layered symbolism to subtly note the hardships of the Black American community, inherently plagued by white supremacy and systemic and covert racism.

Here, the renowned photographer supernova shares the stories behind I Can Make You Feel Good and the importance of representation in the fashion sphere.

I Can Make You Feel Good depicts unrestrained Black joy. What are your earliest memories of Black utopia?

I’m from the suburbs of Atlanta, so my upbringing was filled with pure nature and luscious green space. As an only child, I was thoughtful and reflective, so during school summers, I was content with going to summer camp and enjoyed simple but banal pleasures, like laying in a field of grass with friends—things we

The title of the book is the same as your debut solo exhibition in 2019. What drove you to create the book?

The exhibition is a fraction of the ideas brought to life in a physical space, [whereas] the book represents an entire body of work and a whole era of my photography and images. I'm a huge photo-book junkie, and they are the main way [photographers] want our work to be experienced and loved. It's about the crafting element and the extensive nature of a book—in this book, in particular, I chose to fluidly weave between my film, photography, and personal and commissioned work. As you're immersing yourself in the sequence, there is no distinguishing hierarchy between any of those areas for me, which is a beautiful thing.

The Boys of Walthamstow is the cover image of the book. What are your fondest memories from this shoot?

Without thinking too hard, the cover image was a beautiful depiction [of Black bodies]—I love its simplicity. Back in 2018, I came to London and wanted to just do a personal shoot, free of constraints, of boys in a marsh. I reached out to my casting director, Holly Cullen, who found a great group of boys. We shot in Walthamstow Marshes [in East London], and I remember feeling like the cover image in particular was magical.

Just before I took the photo, I told them to play tag, so the image is the aftermath of them running around shirtless, frolicking and embracing being near each other. But there are also heavy historical references woven in like chain gangs [a group of prisoners chained together to perform punitive labor, a system that mostly existed in the southern states]. The image is also bound with positivity, which I love. All of the characters within the book are friends and have a role within my personal life.

What is the most important thing for you when capturing the Black body?

All the images in the book were collaborative with the subjects. In the 1990s, a lot of photographers—especially in the fashion space—were more dictator-like in their relationship to the models. With my approach, in being more open to a subject's ideas, you automatically open up a conversation that is not supremacist, that is challenging the hierarchical infrastructures that photography enforces, and that is immediately more Black and brown. That is naturally the way I am—curious, collaborative, and wondering. I am not the be-all and end-all here but just one cog in the wheel. The onlooker is more important than any of us.

Photographer Deborah Willis first noticed you as an undergraduate student at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. In her essay in the book, she wrote: "I was fascinated with [Tyler's] work because I saw how deeply committed he was to understanding images and later changing existing visual narratives about being Black, male, creative, and young." How do you think your work has evolved since then?

I've gone through a transformation from a kid making skateboard videos—[my work] was sports and style based. I started to consider all of the autobiographical ideas about Blackness and the identity of Black men and women in my community. In terms of the language, there are probably evolutions in the images that are just from my subconscious. People such as Deborah have watched me grow, and maybe the essays illustrate that to an extent too.

What do you want the onlooker to feel when they see your images?

What I want has almost nothing to do with the onlooker and the book itself. It's about what the onlookers and viewers take from the book and what they bring to it. I hope that in experiencing the book, there is an appreciation of the swarm of images in which the Black body is reclining in quiet moments of contemplation but also in motion—in its very active state—and how all of those states of being can be freeing.

I Can Make You Feel Good / Untitled (Toni), 2009 Photography Tyler Mitchell

Representation in fashion is still a major issue. How can the industry effectively tackle inclusivity both behind and in front of the lens?

That's mainly for the fashion industry to figure out. It's less on the Black creatives to be teaching and guiding people through it. [Inclusivity] is about truly reflecting what the world looks like once you get out of this bubble of fashion—which isn't how the real world looks. That will create a more diverse and interesting conversation. It's not about shouting from the rooftops that you're more inclusive but about making it that way because that's how you genuinely want it to be.

For years, Black artists have asked: "Why would my work about my life, experiences, and the lives of those around me not be considered a part of the canon of historical art and photography?" And that question is going to continually be asked. We need to have a huge push for Black and brown folk in front of the camera. I feel as though we are reaching the apex of this conversation right now, and I hope it continues.

What advice would you give to young aspiring photographers of color?

Don't be afraid to say no. Often we're told opportunity only knocks once: "Take this now, and don't ask questions." This is how a lot of Black artists end up signing bad contracts and how white-supremacist systems continue to exist because of terms that don't serve artists. Ask a thousand questions, and be okay with walking away. I know that's hard to hear because sometimes there are opportunities we feel we need, but we don't need anything that is going to take advantage of our experiences and is not beneficial to us.

I Can Make You Feel Good Photography Tyler Mitchell / Prestel

The New York Times

Tyler Mitchell: ‘Black Beauty Is an Act of Justice’

His debut photography monograph, “I Can Make You Feel Good,” suggests an Edenic timeline for Black American life, but also shows its inherited traumas.

By Max Lakin

Published July 24, 2020 Updated July 28, 2020

A Black youth lies bare-chested in a field of wildflowers. Three others play double Dutch, framed from below, the blues of their jeans and tees fuzzing into the sky overhead. A woman sits on a placid beach, the sand-caked skin between her scoop-back swimsuit beating in the sun.

This world that Tyler Mitchell conjures in his debut photography monograph, “I Can Make You Feel Good,” is a handsome fantasy of permanent sunshine and lithe bodies, suffused in intense, saturated color. It surveys a body of work made from 2016 to 2019, some of which were exhibited earlier this year in Mr. Mitchell’s first U.S. solo show of the same name at the International Center of Photography in New York and earlier at the Fotografiemuseum Amsterdam. It is a world populated exclusively by Black youth in a state of perpetual summertime. Mr. Mitchell’s subjects swim, or fly kites, or engage, for reasons that are unimportant, in synchronized hula-hooping. They are all beautiful and beautifully lit and unbothered. Mr. Mitchell has photographed campaigns for fashion brands like Marc Jacobs and JW Anderson, and so some of his subjects inhabit the world of luxury commerce. That doesn’t bother them either.

Certainly Black Americans had lain in the park and let the sunshine wash over them before. Mr. Mitchell’s proposition is not that these mundane pursuits are particularly radical in themselves, but that picturing them is radical precisely because the experience of Blackness in the United States has for so long — forever, really — been keyed to the implicit threat of violence, which has made the prevailing image of Black people in the popular imagination one of struggle. In art historical terms, leisure time was rendered as the purview of the white gentry. The images in “I Can Make You Feel Good” meet the demands of the moment, each one its own “Le Déjeuner Sur l’herbe,” its levels optimized for our Instagram-primed consciousness.

In “ Untitled (Heart),” a woman sits on a placid beach, her sand-caked skin beating in the sun. Mr. Mitchell challenges the art historical renderings of leisure time as the purview of the white gentry. Tyler Mitchell

At times, an unease oozes into the frame, faint behind the picnic blankets, goldenrod satins and gossamer lace camp shirts. A young man aiming a plastic squirt gun splinters Mr. Mitchell's Eden. Tyler Mitchell

"My focus to some degree is autobiographical, thinking about certain desires and freedoms I wished for myself growing up in Georgia, in nature and the landscape of the South in general, places that can be, on the outside, inviting, but have a complex history where folk that look like me feel rejected," Mr. Mitchell said. His practice functions as a kind of corrective. Nearly every image in "I Can Make You Feel Good" is set outdoors, a gambit of visibility and a declaration of fearlessness.

Mr. Mitchell, who is 25 and rangy, grew up in Marietta, a largely white, conservative, middle class suburb of Atlanta. (His high school classmates voted for John McCain in a 2008 mock election.) He became interested in images as a teenager, around the time he began skateboarding, a pursuit that is as predicated on community as it is obsessive about self-documentation.

"It was pretty radical because that was just not a normal thing at all for kids like me in my area of Georgia," he said. He pored over the roughly-shot skate videos made by hobbyists and uploaded online, as well as more filmic versions by directors like Spike Jonze, eventually cultivating a following for his own interpretations that he posted to Tumblr.

That interest carried him to New York University, where he studied film and television with designs on cinematography, before an instructor identified fashion photography's verve in Mr. Mitchell's casual point-and-shoot images of friends.

"I was a bit taken aback by that," Mr. Mitchell said. "I didn't know necessarily the first thing about what it means to shoot for Gucci or Prada. I styled people out of my closet. I was like, 'this is a nice colored sweatshirt, wear this.'"

As he became more interested in ideas about identity, both his own and as a function of Blackness, he thought the fashion image could be slyly harnessed, "an interesting way to speak about my community, through dress," he said.

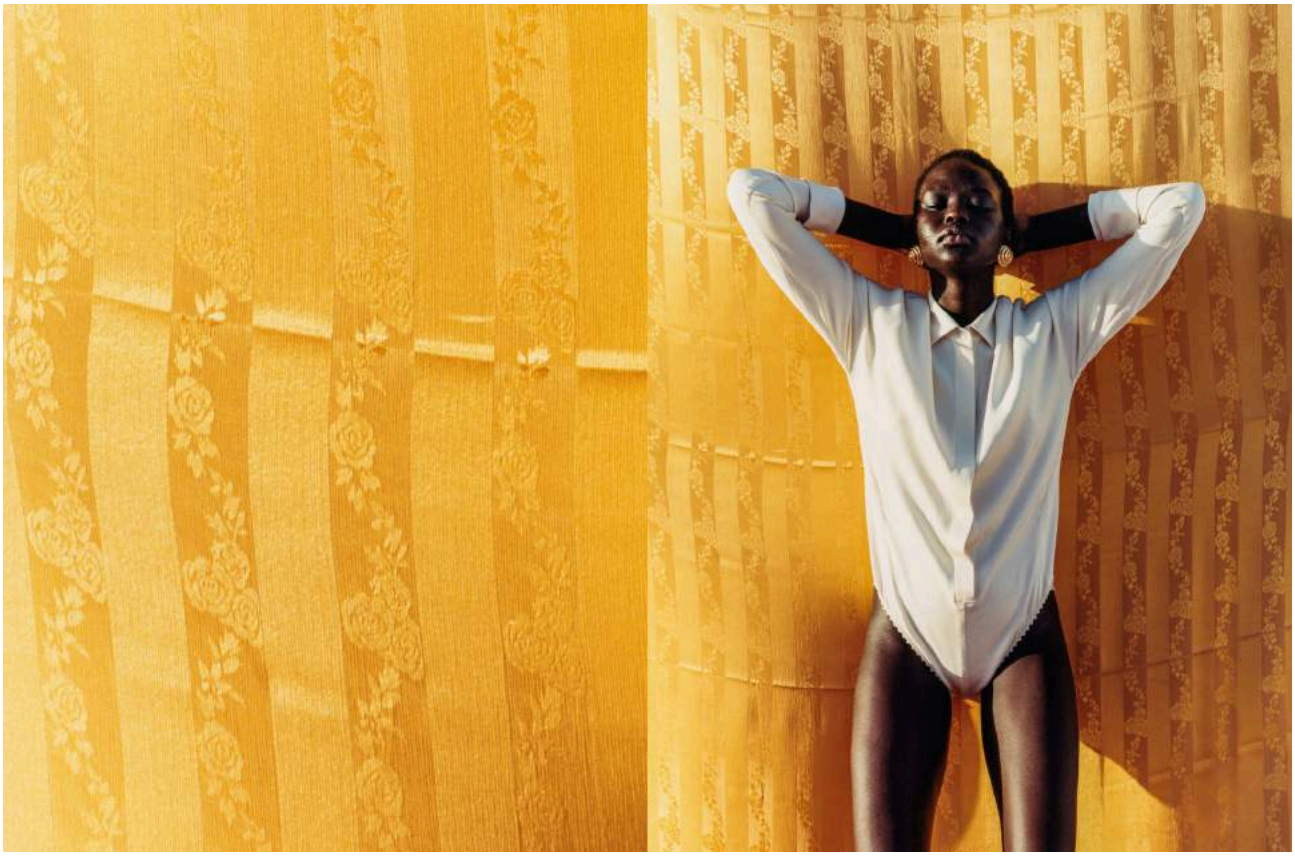
"I don't think there will be a place or a time when things are perfect, but I do have to make these images and have this conversation and hope," Mr. Mitchell said. Miranda Barnes for The New York Times

Mr. Mitchell began picking up commissions while still in school, eschewing traditional channels such as hiring an agent or landing an apprenticeship with an established photographer. Instead, he did what most people of his generation are preternaturally adept at, which is parlaying connections made through social media. His early jobs were of rising music world figures shot for independent magazines: Kevin Abstract of Brockhampton for The Fader in 2016, and the rapper Lil Uzi Vert for that magazine's cover the following year. He became known for making tender portraits that teased out their subject's inner lives, placing him among a cohort of emerging photographers like Nadine Ijewere, Dana Scruggs, and Campbell Addy who focus on nuanced expressions of Black life.

In 2018, a year out of N.Y.U., Mr. Mitchell photographed Beyoncé Knowles for the cover of Vogue, one of the youngest, and the first-ever Black photographer to do so, which says more about Vogue than it does about Mr. Mitchell. The near-blinding wattage of the assignment and its historical context, combined with the planetary gravitational pull of Beyoncé's celebrity, hurled Mr. Mitchell into the symbiotic consciousness of the art and fashion worlds.

Mr. Mitchell cites Ryan McGinley and Larry Clark as early influences, and there are elements in his work of those photographers' preoccupation with nihilistic youth, unmoored and often in varying states of undress. But the pictures in "I Can Make You Feel Good" are more informed by what those artists' images lack, namely, Black people.

Mr. Mitchell's sitters, in their multiplicity of leisure and sumptuous knits, suggest a kind of photographic negative of Dana Lixenberg's monumental "Imperial Courts" series, humanistic black-and-white portraits of the residents of a Watts housing project rived by cycles of poverty and violence, made from 1993 to 2015 in the shadow of the Rodney King riots. Mr. Mitchell's world — self-assured, calm — suggests an alternate timeline for Black American life, one not waylaid by the constant grinding of racism and recrimination.



“Untitled (Aweng in Morocco).” His work suggests an alternate timeline for Black American life, one not waylaid by the constant grinding of racism and recrimination. Tyler Mitchell

“Untitled (Girls at Play),” is typical of Mr. Mitchell’s interest in merging fashion imagery with utopic vision. Tyler Mitchell

“Untitled (Sinking).” A youth in a pool of red alludes enigmatically to a possible history of violence. Tyler Mitchell

Fashion photography, a discipline defined by artifice, is perhaps not the most immediate venue for politics. But inasmuch as Mr. Mitchell’s images conjure fantasy, they’re an update of fashion imagery’s prevailing one, based on an idiom of thin white bodies. His use of a fashion vernacular becomes a kind of Trojan horse. As he puts it, “Black beauty is an act of justice.” In 2017, he was approached to shoot a campaign for Marc Jacobs. Recalling the debacle of Mr. Jacobs’s use of rainbow dreadlocks wigs on white models the previous season, Mr. Mitchell reoriented the commission as cultural reclamation, casting Black nonprofessional models to wear Mr. Jacobs’s collection of tracksuits, high-rise bucket hats, and oversized gold jewelry, signifiers gleaned from ’80s-era hip-hop.

“Honestly it’s less about the look than what the look means when a protagonist that looks like this takes it on,” Mr. Mitchell said. “It becomes about how we present ourselves culturally. The clothes kind of become this other thing.”

In the Vogue shoot, Mr. Mitchell photographed Beyoncé as regent, perched on a throne in rococo crowns of spilling flowers, tropes of Renaissance portraiture and white European aristocracy. It’s a now-familiar subversion seen in Kehinde Wiley’s paintings, and, to a varying degree, the 1980s street portraiture of Jamel Shabazz, who assembled Black and brown youth into elaborate tableaux as a counterbalance to degrading and superficial media portrayals. (Mr. Shabazz was, in turn, inspired by James Van Der Zee, who captured the private dignity of the Harlem Renaissance Black community.) The images in “I Can Make You Feel Good” speak in a fashion vernacular, but their thrust is the same.

"Untitled (Reaching)" — perhaps for a golf ball — from "Tyler Mitchell: I Can Make You Feel Good." Tyler Mitchell

Still, Mr. Mitchell refers to his practice as a "Black utopic vision," a concession to their own paradoxical quality. "I don't think there will be a place or a time when things are perfect, but I do have to make these images and have this conversation and hope," he said. "That's what my life's work is about: presenting these images in which the young Black men and women around me look dignified, are presented as a community, and also ask the tough questions in terms of: what are the things we've been historically denied?"

As a book, "I Can Make You Feel Good," can be inscrutable. Printed in full bleed and without identifying titles, it eludes easy delineation between Mr. Mitchell's commercial and fine art photography. The lack of white space is both an aesthetic choice — plunging the viewer inside Mitchell's totalizing field of vision — and also a psychic state. The project's universe is one where Black life is centered and no outside perspective encroaches, though that's different from being hermetically sealed. The perniciousness of racism seeps in subtle ways.

Tyler Mitchell, “I Can Make You Feel Good” (Prestel, 2020). There’s an element of fraternity, but the heavy chain necklace places the image within the continuum of Black American subjugation. Tyler Mitchell

The book’s cover image is taken from Mr. Mitchell’s series “Boys of Walthamstow”: young Black men stand bare-chested in a field, their heads bowed. There’s an element of fraternity, but one of the youths’ heavy chain necklace places the image within the continuum of Black American subjugation, from slavery to sharecropping to the prison labor of the chain gang. The images of young people lazing on picnic blankets and eating dripping ice cream cones are haunted by inherited traumas: a young man in a hoodie, face down on the floor with his hands locked behind his back, and another aiming a plastic squirt gun, echo the killings of Trayvon Martin and Tamir Rice, splintering Mr. Mitchell’s Eden.

The title, “I Can Make You Feel Good,” sounds like a cure or a come-on, but really its meaning is less obtuse. “I literally heard it in the Atlanta airport, man,” Mr. Mitchell said of the 1982 Shalamar song. “I was with my mom traveling to Amsterdam, thinking about the FOAM [Fotografiemuseum Amsterdam] show, not sure if I was going to take it, like, ‘nah, I’m not a fine art photographer, why would a museum be offering me a show?’ And I’m sitting there and I’m like, damn, this song is good. And the words kept ringing in my head and I was like: that’s the name of the show. That’s the declaration.”

The museum was interested in a more veiled or academic title, worried that the vaguely sexual entreaty of an ’80s R&B group was too direct. “I was like, no, ” Mr. Mitchell said. “That’s exactly what this time should be about: being as direct as possible.”

culture type

Fast-Rising Photographer Tyler Mitchell is Now Represented by Jack Shainman Gallery

by VICTORIA L. VALENTINE *on* Sep 29, 2020 • 6:58 pm

PHOTOGRAPHER AND FILMMAKER **Tyler Mitchell** has joined Jack Shainman Gallery. Mitchell's practice explores a new vision of the beauty and power of Blackness. Defined by a sense of optimism and aesthetic creativity, his images imagine a Black utopia.

A closely watched talent, Mitchell experienced a meteoric rise in 2018 when he photographed Beyoncé for American Vogue's September fall fashion issue. It was a historic assignment, he became the first Black photographer to shoot a cover for the magazine. He was 23. Subsequently, the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery acquired one of Mitchell's portraits of Beyoncé for its permanent collection.

TYLER MITCHELL, "Untitled (Group Hula Hoop)," 2019. | © Tyler Mitchell, Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery

As the gallery notes, Mitchell works across many genres and his work is regularly published in avant-garde magazines, commissioned by prominent brands and fashion houses, and displayed in major museums.

“I am thrilled to join Jack Shainman Gallery and be in the company of some of the artists who I’ve admired for a long time, such as Kerry James Marshall, whose work and legacy is central to my practice today,” Mitchell said in a statement. “I am very much looking forward to the incredible range of opportunities that I know the Gallery, with its respected roster, program and vision, will bring to my career.”

At 25, Mitchell is the youngest artist on the gallery’s roster. The representation was announced yesterday, coinciding with a new group exhibition opening online at Jack Shainman.

“Black Joy” reflects the overarching theme that courses through Mitchell’s images and showcases works by the gallery’s diverse slate of artists. The presentation features Barkley L. Hendricks, Kerry James Marshall, Carrie Mae Weems, and Nina Chanel Abney, putting two photographs by Mitchell in conversation with works by other gallery artists.

> *“I am thrilled to join Jack Shainman Gallery and be in the company of some of the artists who I’ve admired for a long time…I am very much looking forward to the incredible range of opportunities that I know the Gallery, with its respected roster, program and vision, will bring to my career.”*
> *— Tyler Mitchell*

BROOKLYN-BASED MITCHELL grew up in Marietta, Ga., a suburb of Atlanta. Early on, his image-making concentrated on music, fashion, and youth culture, and filming skateboarding videos with his friends. He earned a BFA in film and television from New York University’s Tisch School (2017), where Deborah Willis was among his instructors.

While he was still in school, Mitchell visited Cuba and documented the experience with a self-published photo book. “El Paquete” (2015) focuses on Cuba’s architecture and emerging skateboard culture. Two more volumes feature his work. A striking portrait by Mitchell covers “The New Black Vanguard: Photography Between Art and Fashion” and the newly published “Tyler Mitchell: I Can Make You Feel Good” accompanies his first solo exhibition.

“I Can Make You Feel Good” opened in 2019 at Fotografiemuseum (FOAM) in Amsterdam and traveled to the International Center of Photography (ICP) in New York, debuting in January of this year. After the run of the show was interrupted by ICP’s closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the exhibition has been extended and will be on view from Oct. 1-Dec. 31, 2020.

“I feel an urgency to visualize Black people as free, expressive, effortless, and sensitive,” Mitchell wrote introducing the exhibition. “I aim to visualize what a Black utopia looks like or could look like. People say utopia is never achievable, but I love the possibility that photography brings. It allows me to dream and make that dream become very real.”

The images featured in “I Can Make You Feel Good” document outdoor scenes. Mitchell’s subjects are swimming, soaring into the air on a swing, and lounging on grassy landscapes. They are also hula hooping on a city sidewalk.

“Untitled (Group Hula Hoop)” (2019) is also presented in “Black Joy” at Jack Shainman, along with Mitchell’s “Untitled (Still from Idyllic Space) (2019). The latter image captures a young man, up close, perched on a some kind of playground equipment, eating an ice cream cone. Evoking sheer delight, the composition is embellished with what appear to be spheres of pink spray paint.

A portrait by Hendricks is presented adjacent to the image. “Victory at 23” (1981) conjures a similar feel in another era with a dose of cool. In the painting, Hendricks’s female subject sports a white pantsuit with a bandeau top beneath her jacket. She has close-cropped hair. Star Trek-style sunglasses rest on her forehead and the broach on her chest is a slice of watermelon. She’s holding a black ballon and blowing a round pink bubble with her gum that matches the hue of her nail polish.

Quotes from professor and author Brittney Cooper’s book “Eloquent Rage: A Black Feminist Discovers Her Superpower” begin and end the presentation (“When we lack joy, we have a diminished capacity for self-love and

self-valuing and for empathy. If political struggle is exercise for the soul, joy is the endorphin rush such struggle brings.").

A brief essay by Mitchell provides context for the selected images in "Black Joy" and shares his "first moments of photographic joy," early in his training. He wrote:

> My first moments of photographic joy were sneaking into the photo lab on the 8th floor of NYU Tisch and scanning my film negatives, usually casual portraits of friends. As a film major, it was against the rules to go into the labs. Students needed a password to get in. I was always sneaking in after students who cracked the code until Deborah Willis told me in the hallway, "You know you could just take a class in the department with me and you can access the lab all you want?"
>
> So I did. And through Professor Willis, I immersed myself in the worlds of many of the beautiful artists featured in this very viewing room. People like Kerry James Marshall, Malick Sidibé, Carrie Mae Weems, Gordon Parks, Barkley L. Hendricks, and many more.

Mitchell is a 2020 Gordon Parks Foundation Fellow. In spring 2021, he will present a selection of new works at the foundation in Pleasantville, N.Y. Mitchell's first solo exhibition with Jack Shainman will also debut a new body of work and be on view at the gallery's West 20th street location in September 2021. **CT**

IMAGE: Above left, Tyler Mitchell. | Photo © Owen Smith-Clark

TYLER MITCHELL, "Boys of Walthamstow," 2018. This image appears on the cover of his exhibition catalog "I Can Make You Feel Good." | © Tyler Mitchell, Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery

FIND MORE about Tyler Mitchell on his website

BOOKSHELF

Newly published "Tyler Mitchell: I Can Make You Feel Good" accompanies his first solo exhibition presented at FOAM in Amsterdam and the International Center of Photography in New York. Tyler Mitchell is also featured in "The New Black Vanguard: Photography Between Art and Fashion." In 2015, Mitchell self-published "El Paquete," documenting his experience in Cuba. The limited-edition of 200 copies is now out of print.

artnet news

People (https://news.artnet.com/art-world/people)

Meet the New Innovators: 8 Artists Who Are Disrupting the Traditional Way of Buying, Selling, and Valuing Art

These eight individuals are working outside the bounds of traditional institutions and shaking up the status quo for the better.

Artnet News (https://news.artnet.com/about/artnet-news-39), October 19, 2020

Clockwise from left: Tyler Mitchell, Alice Hattrick, Lizzy Rose, Leah Clements, Ryotaro Muramatsu, Emeka Ogboh, Lauren Halsey, and Solange.

Ryotaro Muramatsu, 49, Artist, CEO of Naked, Inc., Tokyo

Ryotaro Muramatsu, artist, CEO of NAKED, INC. Courtesy of NAKED, INC.

“In the near future, there will be more uncategorizable artists like me,” says Ryotaro Muramatsu. The Japanese creator works in the vein of teamLab and Meow Wolf, entrepreneurial collectives known for bringing immersive art to the masses. He has the expansive vision of an artist unafraid to become a brand. As CEO of creative enterprise Naked, Inc., which he founded in 1997, Muramatsu masterminds large-scale, immersive, experiential art shows that stimulate the senses with advanced technology, projection mapping, sound, scent, and live performance. In addition to art events, Naked, Inc., is also involved in filmmaking, restaurants, local revitalization projects, and education. “It is becoming easier for artists to be independent in the way they create and do business,” Muramatsu says. “Being truly entrepreneurial and independent is tough, but we are free.”

–Vivienne Chow

Solange Knowles, 34, Artist, Musician, and Choreographer, Los Angeles

Solange performing in Austin, Texas. (Photo by Erika Goldring/FilmMagic)

A creative multi-hyphenate who traverses the worlds of music, dance, design, and visual art, Solange Knowles has always been interested in the spaces between: between genres, between identities, and perhaps most of all, between the viewer and the performer. With collaborators like improvisational jazz composer Cooper-Moore and the artist duo Brennan Gerard and Ryan Kelly, she creates site-specific performances in spaces heavy with art-historical baggage, from the Getty Center to Marfa, Texas.

Solange debuts a new site-specific performance “Bridge-s” at Getty Center Museum on Nov. 11, 2019, in Los Angeles, California. (Photo by Ryan Miller/Capture Imaging)

“Her practice as a Grammy Award-winning musician and visual artist is part of the same continuum where radical ideas and complex social issues are confronted in both conceptual and distinct ways,” says Aaron Cezar, the director of the Delfina Foundation, who commissioned Solange to stage the closing performance at the 2019 Venice Biennale. “It was no surprise to me that at a recent Black Lives Matter protest in London, I saw signs with the title of her song ‘Don’t Touch My Hair’ being used as a rallying call. This is just one example of how Solange’s finger is on the pulse of what makes this generation tick.”

–Noor Brara

Lauren Halsey, 33, Artist and Founder of Summaeverythang, Los Angeles

Lauren Halsey. Photo: Rikki Wright.

As monuments are coming down worldwide, Lauren Halsey is putting up new ones that pay tribute to her community. For a project at last year’s Frieze New York, she carved hieroglyphics referencing the late Los Angeles-based rapper Nipsey Hussle’s lyrics into plaster columns. Her recent solo exhibition at David Kordansky Gallery in LA comprised large structures plastered with vivid Afrocentric signage—“Shampoo Flatiron or Kurls $29.99 & up,” “Lokks or Twist,” “Black ’n Beautiful”—to memorialize the aesthetics of Black life in her hometown of South Central LA.

Halsey’s investment in her neighborhood (https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/made-in-la-2018-1301702) informs nearly everything she does: last year, she founded the community center Summaeverythang, which provides fresh produce to local residents, and as part of her commitment to funneling her “resources back into South Central,” she hopes to begin offering art classes and academic support to young people.

Installation view of Lauren Halsey at David Kordansky. Courtesy of David Kordansky Gallery, LA. Photo: Jeff McLane.

Seeing the potential for her work to fall into the wrong hands (and pushing against an art-market system that is inhospitable to outsiders), she also stipulated that only Black collectors and public institutions could buy certain pieces from her recent show. In doing so, she showed how artists can take control of their own market and ensured that her work continues to support her community—the Black community.

–Melissa Smith

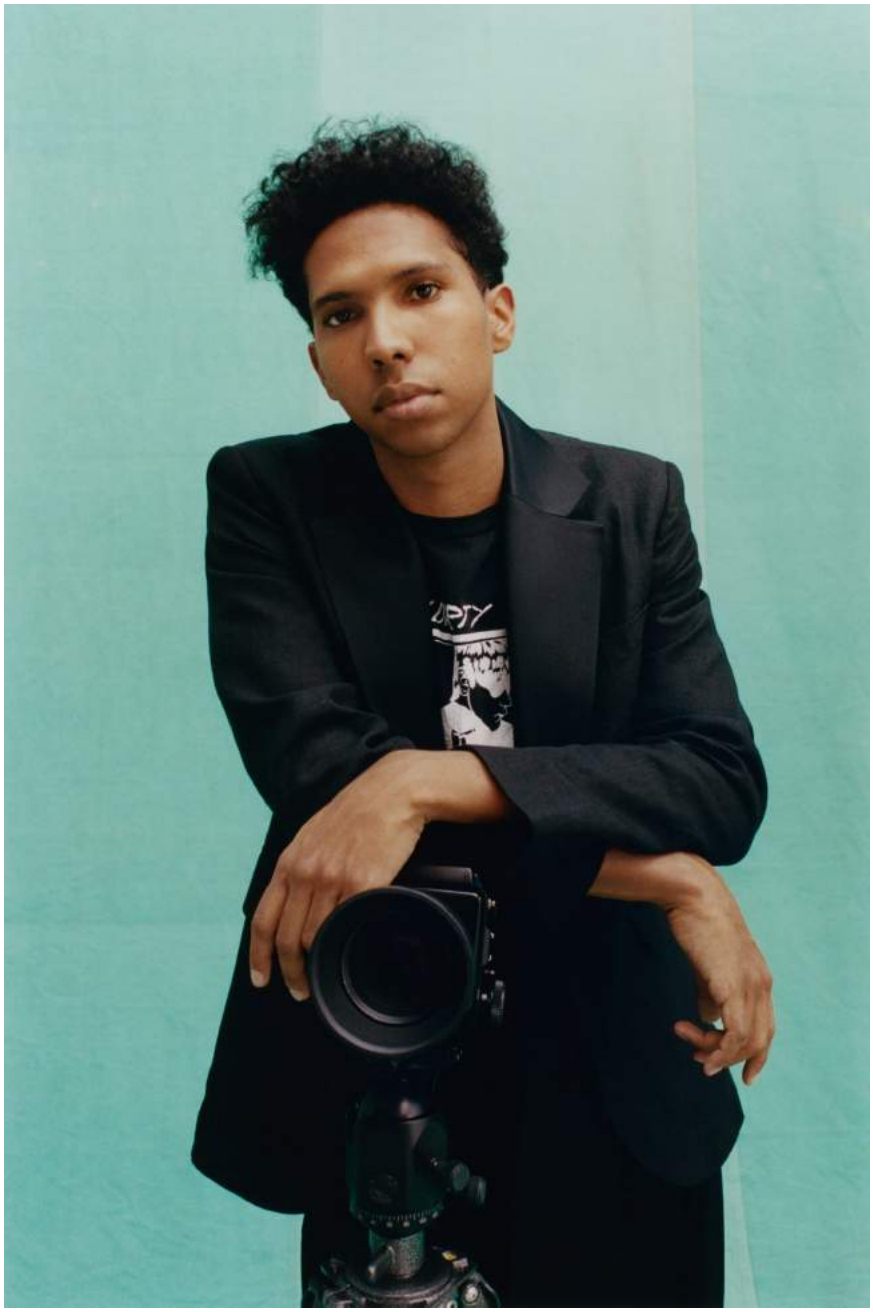
Emeka Ogboh, 43, Artist, Berlin

Emeka Ogboh. Photo: Jean Picon.

Emeka Ogboh proves that you don't need a commercial gallery to become one of the most sought-after artists of the moment. The Lagos-born, Berlin-based artist achieved the art-world equivalent of an EGOT (https://news.artnet.com/art-world/emekah-ogboh-hkw-1385746) by being included in documenta 14, Skulptur Projekte Münster, and the Venice Biennale in the space of three years—all without the support of a dealer. When he did eventually sign with a gallery, in 2018, he opted for a small outfit, Imane Farès in Paris, rather than a brand name. "I really like to work in my own way," Ogboh says. Best known for his "sound portraits"—speakers housed in painted, striped boxes that emit sonic portraits of Lagos—he recently began producing consumable art in the form of beer. He is currently formulating a new recipe using uda, a smoky, pepper-like spice popular in Igbo cooking. "For people who know the spices, the beer will trigger certain memories," he says.

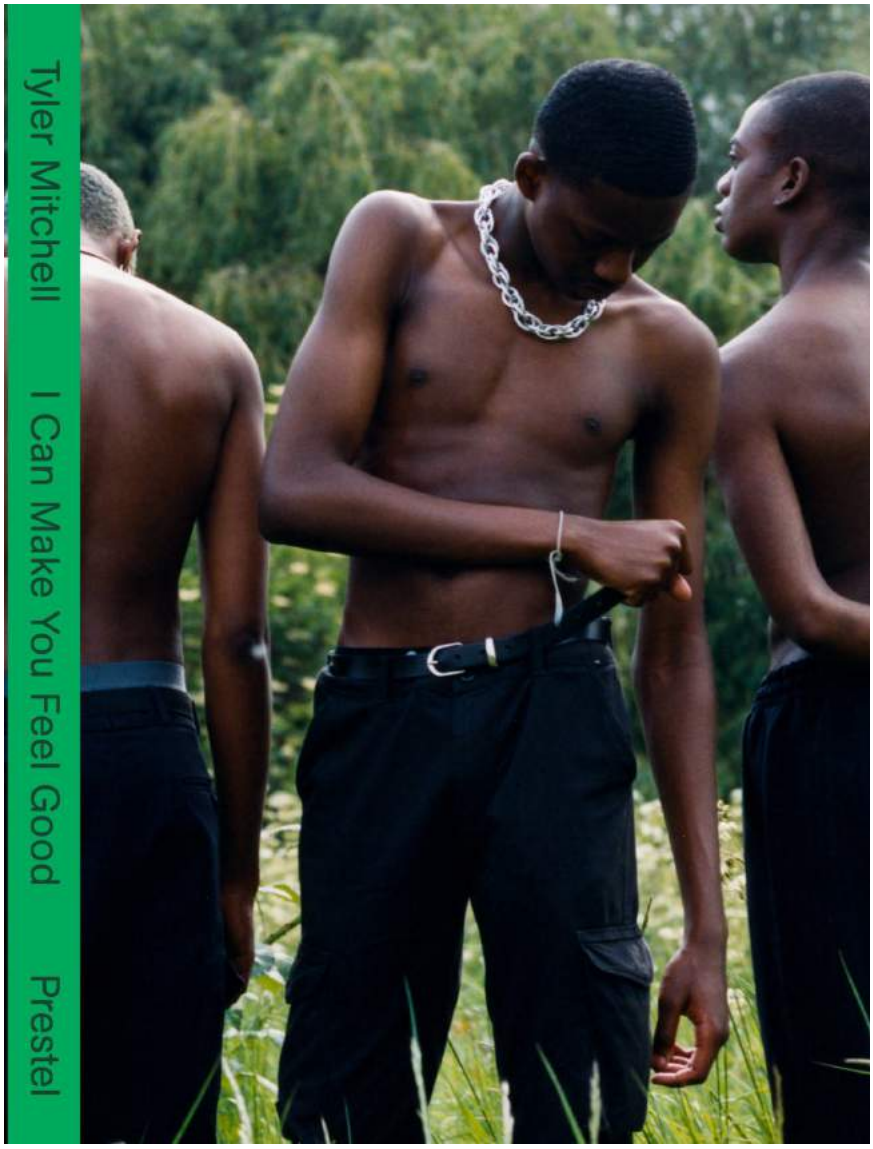
–Kate Brown

Tyler Mitchell, 25, Photographer and Filmmaker, New York



Tyler Mitchell, Self Portrait 2019. Courtesy of the artist.

At the tender age of 23, Tyler Mitchell was hand-selected by none other than Beyoncé to photograph the September 2018 issue of *Vogue*, making him the first Black photographer (https://news.artnet.com/art-world/tyler-mitchell-beyonce-vogue-1326308) to shoot a cover for the American heritage publication. Mitchell went on to blur the boundaries between fine-art and fashion (https://news.artnet.com/art-world/tyler-mitchell-interview-1765059) photography through his charged, elegantly composed depictions of Black life, which appear in art museums, luxury-ad campaigns, and style publications alike.



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Tyler Mitchell, *I Can Make You Feel Good* (2020). Photo courtesy of Prestel.

"My main focus and life's work are fairly simple: to highlight the vitality, beauty, and vast range of the Black experience through images," he says. This summer, Mitchell released *I Can Make You Feel Good*—a catalogue drawn from his recent solo exhibition (https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/international-center-photography-announces-inaugural-exhibitions-new-flagship-1751379) at the International Center of Photography. In the book and the show alike, Mitchell explores his vision for a Black utopia. "I hope the art world of the future looks more like how the actual world looks," he says. "And that's to say, Black, brown, queer, Indigenous, trans, and representative of people of all social classes, sizes, abilities, and so on."

–Noor Brara

Leah Clements, Alice Hattrick, and Lizzy Rose, Co-creators of Access Docs for Artists, Margate and London

Clockwise from left:Alice Hattrick, Leah Clements, and Lizzy Rose.

Artists Leah Clements and Lizzy Rose teamed up with writer Alice Hattrick to develop Access Docs for Artists (https://www.accessdocsforartists.com/homepage), an online tool that went live in March, to make it easier for disabled creatives to navigate the art world. The website outlines how to make an "access doc," a form—like a rider for musicians—that artists provide to a gallery or institution to explain how their disability might affect a project and how they can work together to ensure equal opportunity. At a time when the art world is on a steep learning curve with respect to access, the tool offers an efficient form of communication, which has been used by such institutions as the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, and Wysing Arts Centre. "We haven't solved any systemic issues yet, these things take time," the trio say. "But we do feel that disability and access are issues that are being considered more frequently and taken more seriously now."

–Kate Brown

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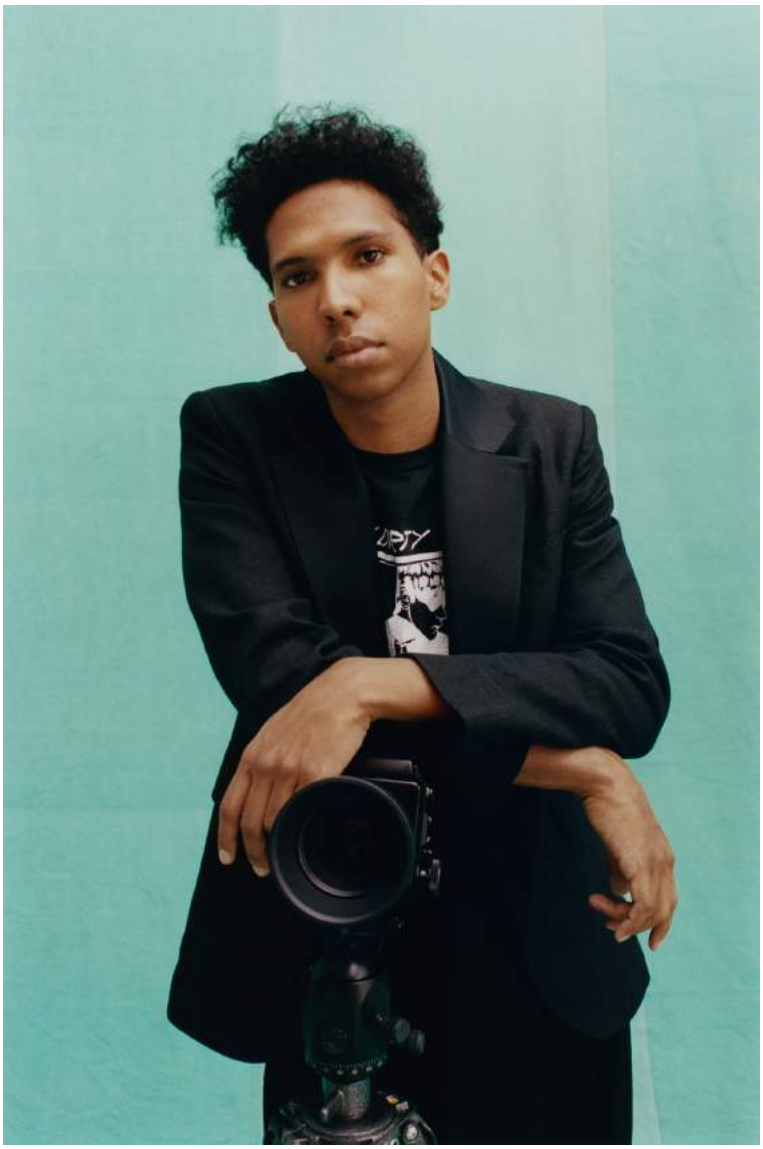
ARTnews

Tyler Mitchell, Closely Watched Photographer Who Shot Beyoncé Vogue Cover, Joins Jack Shainman Gallery

BY MAXIMILÍANO DURÓN

September 28, 2020 11:47am



Tyler Mitchell.
©TYLER MITCHELL/COURTESY JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK

One of today's most sought-after and closely watched image makers has new gallery representation. Photographer Tyler Mitchell, who is best known for his September 2018 cover shoot of Beyoncé for *Vogue* magazine, is now represented by New York's **Jack Shainman Gallery (https://www.artnews.com/t/jack-shainman-gallery/)**.

In an email to *ARTnews*, Jack Shainman, the gallery's founder, said of Mitchell, "His work embodies a new visual language for Black life in contemporary America, one that is joyous and carefree, responding to a gap too often existing in our image-led culture."

Mitchell's star has been on the rise in the art world over the past two years. His first institutional solo show, titled "I Can Make You Feel Good," opened in 2019 at the Fotografiemuseum in Amsterdam and then traveled to New York, where it was staged at the International Center of Photography's new location in the Lower East Side and has been extended until the end of the year. That same year, the Beyoncé portrait that appeared in *Vogue* was acquired by the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery.

He was also featured in Antwaun Sargent's important photo book ***The New Black Vanguard: Photography Between Art and Fashion*** **(https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/antwaun-sargent-the-new-black-vanguard-interview-13334/)**, which was published by Aperture last October. "In these images shot with what [Mitchell]

characterizes as 'an honest gaze,' his subjects are free from the insult of racism and discrimination and often engage in mundane activity," Sargent wrote of Mitchell.

[**Beyoncé and Sargent were featured on *ARTnews*'s 2020 Art World Deciders list. (https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/shaping-art-2020s-1202674913/)**]

Most recently, Mitchell was named a recipient of the Gordon Parks Fellowship, which will result in a solo show of new works at the late photographer's foundation in Upstate New York next spring.

Shainman described Mitchell as "a natural fit" within the gallery's program, which places an emphasis on Black, African, and African disaporic artists, and includes Kerry James Marshall, Gordon Parks, and Carrie Mae Weems, all of whom are important influences to Mitchell, on its roster. At 25, Mitchell is the youngest artist in the gallery's stable.

"In my days learning photography at NYU under Deborah Willis, I discovered the vast diversity and dynamism of Black artists and photographers, many of whom … are represented by Jack Shainman Gallery," Mitchell told *ARTnews* in an email. "These deeply thoughtful artists have punctuated my own education and are a continuous source of inspiration within my work."

Tyler Mitchell, *Untitled (Group Hula Hoop)*, 2019.
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN, NEW YORK

Mitchell's first collaboration with Jack Shainman is through a virtual exhibition, titled "Black Joy," that launches on the gallery's website today, and will include work by Marshall, Parks, and Weems, as well as Nina Chanel Abney, Barkley L. Hendricks, Malick Sidibé, Radcliffe Bailey, Odili Donald Odita, and Paul Anthony Smith.

He will also be featured in the gallery's online viewing room for the virtual edition of Frieze London next month, which Shainman said will explore "constructed documentary images, featuring works that may look like photojournalism at first, but are in reality staged images."

Mitchell will have his first solo show at the gallery next year. Though he didn't provide specifics about what will go on view, the artist said, "I'm excited about this first opportunity to present work which centers Black joy. This show marks the next step in my exploration of the infinite possibilities of my work, my craft, and my imagination."

Interview

COFFEE TABLE CURATOR

Coffee Table Curator: Ballet, Basquiat, and Tyler Mitchell's Arcadia of Black Beauty

By Mitchell Nugent

Published August 17, 2020

***Coffee Table Curator** is a monthly series showing—no, telling—you which art and culture books to add to your living room repertoire; your remote control and beer-stained coasters will look chic by association. Here's what we have to recommend for the month of August for when you've proposed marriage to your coffee table and you only want to give her the nicest of things.*

———

I Can Make You Feel Good, Prestel, $60.00

Some may say 25 is too young to publish a monograph, but in Tyler Mitchell's case, it couldn't have come at a riper age. The Brooklyn-based photographer is a wunderkind; the whiz-kid that simultaneously became the first Black photographer, and one of the youngest, to shoot the cover of American *Vogue* when he shot Beyoncé for the 2018 September issue. That shoot cemented Mitchell as one of the most in-demand photographers working today. In *I Can Make You Feel Good*, the photographer conceives an arcadia of Black beauty, a poetic paradise that unfurls like a marching band traipsing through a secret garden that only blooms happiness and joy.

the Stranger

Currently Hanging: *Black Joy* by Tyler Mitchell at Jack Shainman Gallery

by Jasmyne Keimig • Sep 29, 2020 at 5:10pm

Barkley L. Hendricks's "Victory at 23" is one of the works featured in photographer Tyler Mitchell's *Black Joy* online viewing room. COURTESY OF JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

This week, New York-based "rising star" and photographer Tyler Mitchell **joined** Jack Shainman Gallery's vaunted list of artists. And as a sort of welcome, Mitchell—who recently shot the **JW Anderson x Moncler campaign**—participated in a small virtual exhibition called ***Black Joy*** composed of works that have influenced him and speak to his conception of "Black joy." The show incorporates painters like Kerry James Marshall and Barkley L. Hendricks and photographers like Gordon Parks and Malick Sidibé.

While each work presented deserves a close and considered viewing on its own merit, the foremost pleasure *Black Joy* provides is an exciting look into the brain of one of the most sought-after young photographers of our time, an artist who **grew up online**. Here's some of what Mitchell had to say about the pieces presented in the show:

When I think about the works in this show and their joy, I think about their inherent limitlessness. I think about unlimited Black imagination. And I think about these works' unique ability to suggest a collection of global Black moments of introspection and peace that are taking place around the world right now. You simply can't contain it. Right this second there's a whole swath of collective moments happening. Only a few of which can be depicted here.

"Untitled (Group Hula Hoop)" by Tyler Mitchell. COURTESY OF JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

GQ Style

From *I Can Make You Feel Good: Tyler Mitchell*

Style

Inside Photographer Tyler Mitchell's Radical Vision of Personal Style

The photographer's new book *I Can Make You Feel Good* presents a new kind of utopia.

BY RACHEL TASHJIAN

August 20, 2020

Why is it so hard to take a great fashion photograph?

To start, there's just the logistical challenge, says Tyler Mitchell, the 25-year-old wunderkind who became the first Black photographer to shoot a *Vogue* cover when he captured a flower-crowned Beyoncé in 2018. "It's a real fine game of negotiating needs in a fashion commission," Mitchell said in a recent Zoom call from London, where he is living for the summer, "because the function of an editorial is to please advertisers. That's why it was designed, and that's why it was invented. There're mind games you have to play."

But making a great fashion picture also poses a larger existential query. For the past ten years, as Instagram made images both a global language and currency, and digital media seemed to edge out print, commercial fashion photography felt in some ways stuck in a rut: head-to-toe runway looks, shot on a static model, often captured in midair. Mitchell is part of a new generation of Black photographers—first codified in *GQ* contributor Antwaun Sargent's 2019 monograph *The New Black Vanguard*—including Dana Scruggs, Micaiah Carter, Nadine Ijewere, and others, who are imbuing a new life into fashion photography.

Next week, Mitchell releases *I Can Make You Feel Good*, a book of photographs first exhibited in a 2019 show of the same name that demonstrate the ambition of his vision of Black figures in relaxation. "It's about proposing a future," Mitchell said. "It's about suggesting the idea that visualizing Black bodies enjoying leisure time, and just existing as they want to be, is a very special thing when you think about denied histories."

Mitchell, who also captured Kanye West for the *GQ*'s May cover, first honed his eye on Tumblr. The impact of that platform's endless waterfall of imagery—its refusal to distinguish between fine art and vernacular, its divorcing of decades and fads from chronology—is evident on his work. Photographs conjure the macrame curtained interiors of a midcentury Harlem home as easily as they summon the flaneur physicality of skateboarding. "All that's floated in there," Mitchell said, "and it's meant to present the breath of beauty and dignity of the Black experience."

I Can Make You Feel Good, Tyler Mitchell's new book. From *I Can Make You Feel Good: Tyler Mitchell*

Mitchell studied filmmaking at New York University, and grew up particularly admiring the work of photographers like Ryan McGinley and Larry Clark, both of whom advanced the provocative meld of fashion and art photography that was first established in the 1970s and ’80s by photographers like Helmut Newton, Deborah Turbeville, Richard Avedon, and Guy Bourdin. Mitchell recalls coming across a book Clark created for Jonathan Anderson’s eponymous brand in 2015: “It’s this whole day of them just running around Paris together,” he said. He liked how it rejected the cold commercial eye of other contemporary advertising and editorial. “It was something that was fashion,” Mitchell said, “but it wasn't overtly fashion, at least to my eyes as a newcomer to that world.”

From *I Can Make You Feel Good: Tyler Mitchell*

What makes Mitchell's images, and those of this new generation of photographers, so powerful are their majestically intimate representations of Black people, who weren't often in the kinds of images he grew up admiring on Tumblr. In a period where the larger fashion industry is still struggling to shake its attachment to a white Eurocentric fantasy, Mitchell's images signal a new concept of utopia, one where Black bodies relaxing, playing, and enjoying themselves are a manifestation of luxury.

The shift Mitchell signals is aesthetic as well as representational. As fashion has become a global phenomenon over the past 15 years, with millions tuning into watch fashion show livestreams and celebrities becoming something like high-fashion interpreters, clothes have become frustratingly two-dimensional, flat objects engaged with through a screen. (Rei Kawakubo memorably tweaked the idea in her Fall 2012 Comme des Garcons collection.) Elsewhere, the evolution of the stylist into a celebrity and dealmaker has made fashion something to be placed on the body rather than a vessel for expression: clothing is borrowed for an evening and literally put on a figure, the look the result of an entire team and an agenda in pursuit of a single photograph to be widely circulated. Many of the clothes we've seen on celebrities or talked about on social media over the past decade are not meant for living in. Personal style has been overshadowed by the carefully calculated and curated image in the quest to make fashion a keystone of pop culture.

From *I Can Make You Feel Good: Tyler Mitchell*

Mitchell's images provide a welcome, human alternative. They epitomize the covenant of body and cloth that defines style and, over time, come to create biography. A boy with a dripping pink ice cream cone wears a slubby polo that feels sensuously textural, lived in, *sweated in*. Two men on skateboards, their arms locked together, wear knitwear and denim with the easy shagginess of true skaters.

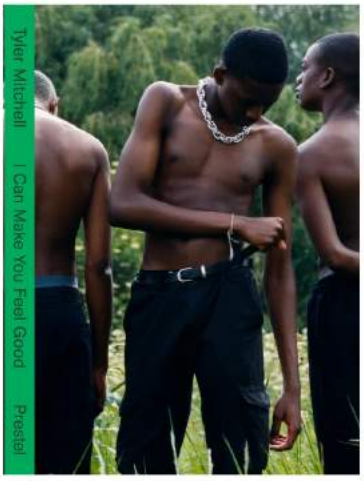
One photograph shows a shirtless man swinging from beneath, his jeans slung low. "You really feel the sense of this boy breaking out of whatever kind of psychic shackles may exist," Mitchell said, in large part because of his exposed back. He took a cue from McGinley, who often photographs shirtless youths: "As much as clothes and fashion play a role, it's also the removal of those and the importance of being free and breaking out of those symbolically is important."

From *I Can Make You Feel Good: Tyler Mitchell*

Black men have long been a driving force in fashion and style, but they were long pushed to the fringe. Now it seems that through photographers like Mitchell; designers like Grace Wales Bonner, Telfar, and Pyer Moss; and musicians like Young Thug and Lil Uzi Vert, Black masculinity is at the center of fashion and culture. “For me, there have been several revelations,” Mitchell said. “Living inside [my] Black male body, this is something that I move through the world and experience every day. So there are certain things that I couldn’t tell you because I’m inside my body, and this is my life, and I'm speaking about autobiographical experience.”

From *I Can Make You Feel Good: Tyler Mitchell*

Still, Mitchell registers a watershed in the broader understanding of Black masculinity, sparked for him by Barry Jenkins's 2016 film *Moonlight*. "The conversation that that movie sparked, I think, was a revelation for me and for the world. Beyond that, when we think about the wider cultural implications of how folks view Black men, it's just past time. It's past due to revise those old world understandings of Black men and their bodies. I think there's just been this large push en masse across a lot of art forms to revise what that looks like and to understand more widely that a Black man is what a black man is. A Black man dresses however that Black man dresses, and that has nothing to do with any of these kinds of stereotypes."



I Can Make You Feel Good: Tyler Mitchell

whitewall

Jordan Casteel, Noah Davis, Tyler Mitchell and More Must-See New York Shows

ART, FEBRUARY 20, 2020

By Pearl Fontaine

Tyler Mitchell: I Can Make You Feel Good

Tyler Mitchell
Untitled (Group Hula Hoop)
2019
© Tyler Mitchell
Courtesy of the artist.

Inernational Center of Photography
Now—May 18
The International Center of Photography (ICP) recently opened a new location at Manhattan's Essex Crossing, inaugurated by four new shows, including Tyler Mitchell's exhibition "I Can Make You Feel Good." The show, curated by ICP's new Curator-at-Large Isolde Brielmaier, includes works like an installation of photographs printed on fabric and hung on a clothesline, trailing down the museum's 60-foot hallway, as well as videos like Idyllic Space and Chasing Pink, Found Red. In his practice, Mitchell represents the people of his community through a lens of joy and pride, which he executes with natural light and candy-colored hues.

REFINERY29

Tyler Mitchell's Debut Photography Book Showcases Black Joy

ELIZA HUBER
LAST UPDATED JULY 27, 2020, 12:17 PM

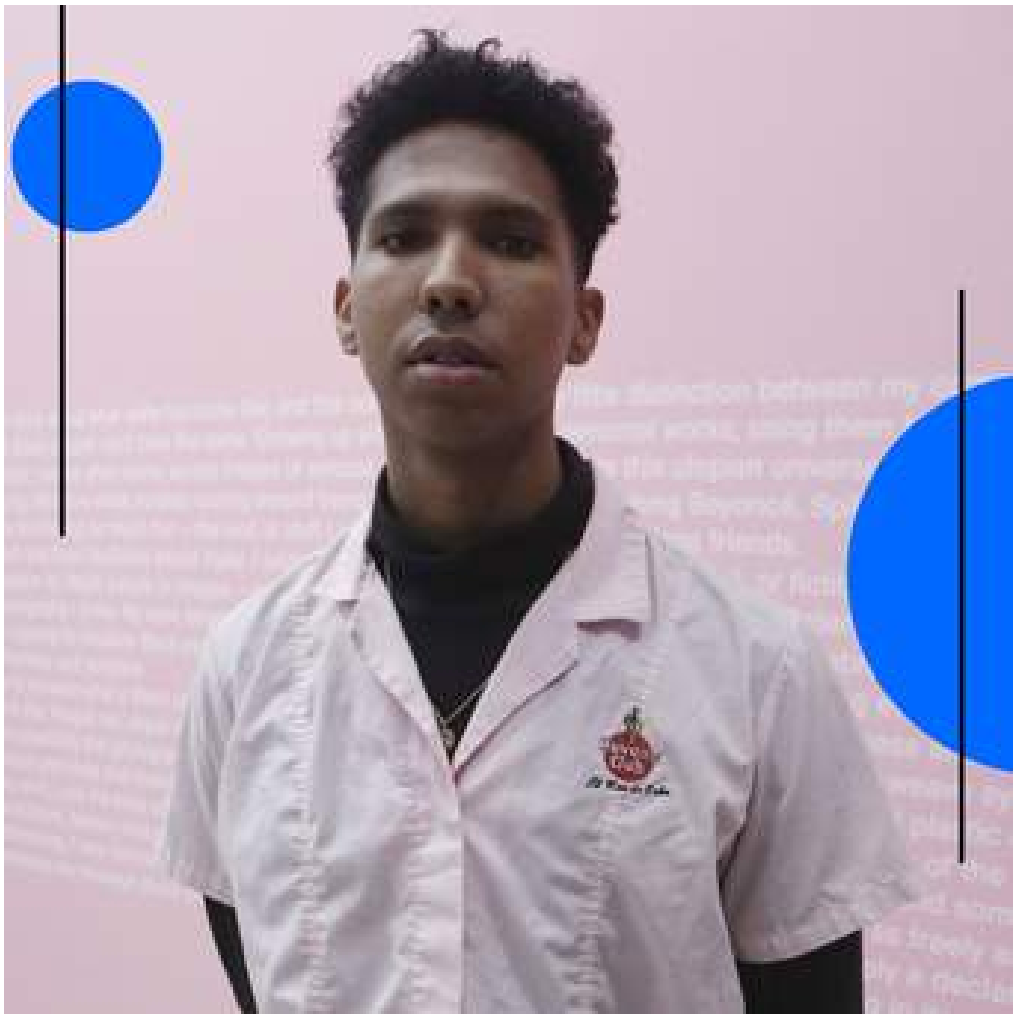


PHOTO: MPI43/MEDIAPUNCH/IPX.

In June of last year, photographer Tyler Mitchell premiered his latest work for an exhibition at the Fotografiemuseum Amsterdam (FOAM) in the Netherlands. For the show, Mitchell — who made history in August of 2018 when he was chosen by Beyoncé to become the first-ever Black photographer to shoot the cover of *Vogue* — showcased a handful of images taken between 2016 and 2019, each portraying Black youth in the summertime. Mitchell's show then traveled to New York City, where he put on his first-ever solo exhibition in the U.S. And now, the full breadth of his portfolio is about to become available no matter where you are.

Today, Mitchell announced the release of *I Can Make You Feel Good*, the 25-year-old Brooklyn-based photographer's first book. And while each of the photographs on its pages was taken prior to 2020, what they represent has never felt more important to showcase: Black joy. "I would very often come across sensual, young, attractive white models running around being free and having so much fun — the kind of stuff Larry Clark and Ryan McGinley would make," Mitchell told FOAM at the time of his exhibition. "I very seldom saw the same for Black people in images — or at least in the photography I knew of then."

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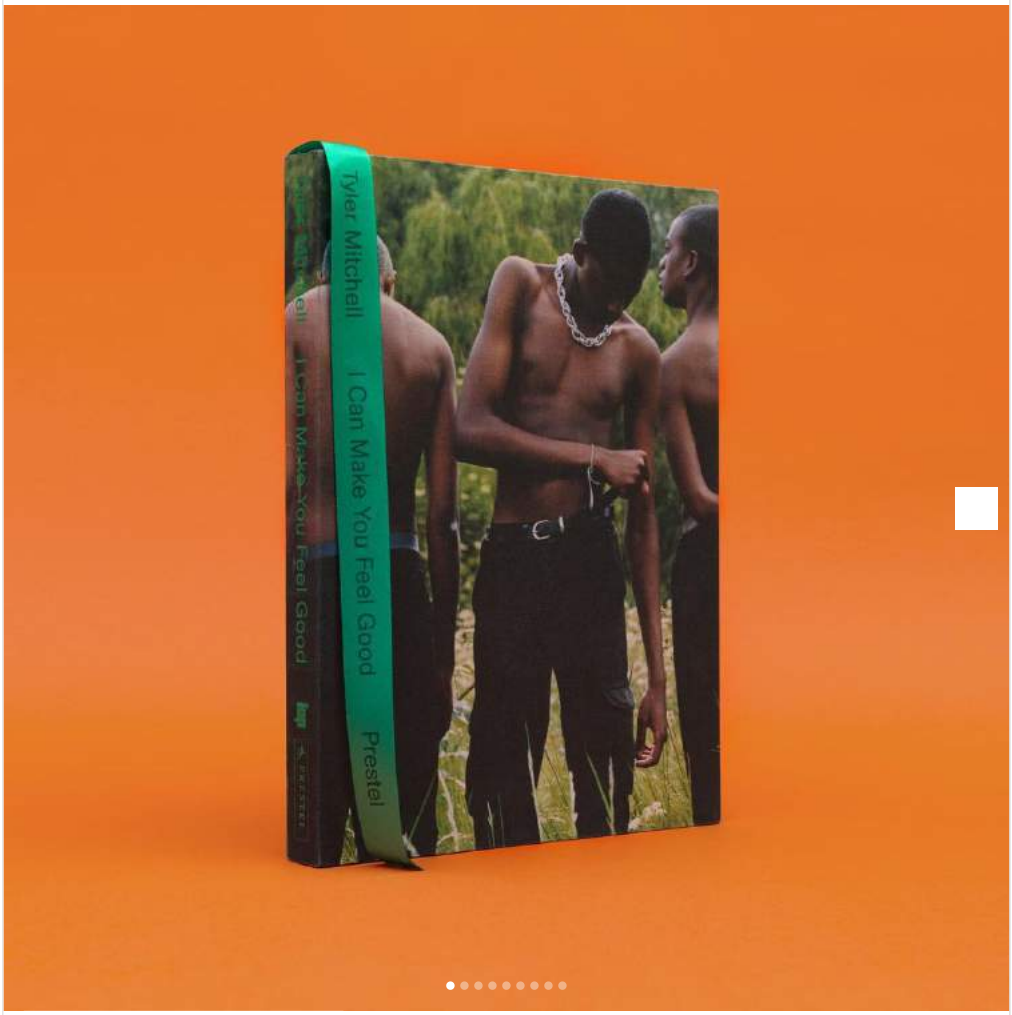

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Can't believe I'm finally sharing this. As a photographer, your first published monograph is a moment you dream of. So happy with how it came out. 206 pages of Black life in immersive full bleed with amazing essays/contributions by Hans Ulrich Obrist, Deborah Willis, Isolde Brielmaier (Curator-at-Large, ICP), and Mirjam Kooiman (Curator, FOAM).

Out in the world August 25th. Pre-order now at the link in my bio.

view all 1,179 comments

Add a comment...

In the book, you can expect to find stunningly lit photographs of young Black people, some fashion models and some not. “I make very little distinction between my commissioned and my personal works, using them both as an opportunity to create this utopian universe,” Mitchell is quoted saying in *The Guardian*. Most of the images are taken outside. One photo shows two men lounging on a billiards table surrounded by gummy bears, while another series of images shows a group enjoying a picnic. Friends are seen Double Dutching, playing on a swing set, and hula-hooping. In a submission titled “Untitled (Heart),” a woman, wearing an electric blue low-back one-piece, is shot at the beach.

Of the 206-page book, which you can pre-order now before its official release on August 25, Mitchell calls it a “declaration,” one that is “gut punching in its optimism,” according to *The Guardian*. “It feels important at a time like this to declare such a thing.”

Art in America

MERGING FASHION PHOTOGRAPHY AND INSTALLATION ART, TYLER MITCHELL CRAFTS A VISION OF FREEDOM FOR BLACK YOUTH

By Wendy Vogel

April 3, 2020 10:27am

Tyler Mitchell's installation *Laundry Line*, 2020, dye-sublimation prints on fabric.
PHOTO JOHN HALPERN.

Born in 1995, Tyler Mitchell is a Gen Z phenom. Just a year after earning a bachelor's degree in film and television from New York University, he made history by shooting Beyoncé for the September 2018 cover of *Vogue*—becoming the first black photographer to have his work grace the publication's front. While growing up in Marietta, Georgia, a largely white suburb of Atlanta, Mitchell gravitated to alt-fashion magazines like *i-D* and *Dazed*. He was inspired by Ryan McGinley and Larry Clark's stylized images of teen life, but says he really received his photography education from social media. At thirteen, he picked up a camera and amassed an early Tumblr following with his skateboarding videos. Using a palette that responds to the heightened reality of aspirational online content—cotton-candy pink, baby blue, sunny yellow—his portraits and short films conjure tender innocence. Importantly, Mitchell creates this fantasy for and with people of color, reimagining what freedom might look like for black youth.

On a study-abroad trip to Cuba after Mitchell's sophomore year at NYU, a documentary photography instructor told him that his portraits of chic friends were a type of fashion imagery—a realization that piqued the young artist's interest. His early work responds critically to the conventions of fashion ads. In the short film *Wish This Was Real* (2016), young, stylish black men play with water guns and plastic chains against bright seamless backgrounds—a poignant rejoinder to the death of twelve-year-old Tamir Rice, who was killed in 2014 by a police officer, while holding a toy weapon. The playful scenes are cut between an unsettling sequence showing one actor lying with plastic wrap over his face, hinting at the danger that black men face even in ordinary jest. In 2016, Mitchell cemented his fashion ascent with a commission for *Dazed* that depicted a vision of black utopia: models pose in magic-hour light, sometimes with toys, sometimes casually embracing each other.

Mitchell's first US museum exhibition, "I Can Make You Feel Good," is on view at the International Center of Photography (ICP) through mid-May. Curated by Isolde Brielmaier, this expanded version of the show (which debuted at Amsterdam's photography museum Foam) brings together video installations, life-size photographic prints, and a new work in fabric that pays homage to black domestic labor. Opposite the show's entrance, the three-channel video *Chasing Pink, Found Red* (2019) tempers visual fantasy with an acrid dose of reality. Projected onto walls that form a triangle, the work shows lush images of picnicking black youths. Offscreen, various individuals describe racial microaggressions. "Feeling obligated to control people's perception of you is an everyday black experience," says one voice. Mitchell crowdsourced the stories from his social media accounts, receiving voice memos from followers located around the world: from Nigeria to the Caribbean.

Tyler Mitchell: *Boys of Walthamstow*, 2018, inkjet print, 40 by 50 inches.

The installation *Laundry Line* (2020), which debuted at ICP, takes its inspiration in part from African American photographer Gordon Parks's image of two Alabama women at a wire fence loaded with clothes, part of the full-color series "A Segregation Story" (1956). Mitchell's *Laundry Line* includes portraits of models, influencers, and friends printed using dye-sublimation processes onto a variety of textiles: blue terrycloth, a vintage floral Pierre Cardin scarf, and diaphanous materials that recall crinkly plastic. Mitchell's engagement with Parks's diverse oeuvre is ongoing; he is currently working on a commission based on the late artist's fashion photography for the Parks Foundation in Pleasantville, New York, where it will be on view this fall.

Galerie

How the New ICP Is Shaping the Future of Photography

A powerful new exhibition of work by photographer Tyler Mitchell shines light on black America

BY STEFANIE LI (HTTPS://WWW.GALERIEMAGAZINE.COM/AUTHOR/STEFANIELI/)

FEBRUARY 21, 2020

Tyler Mitchell and Isolde Brielmaier.
PHOTO: RICHARD BURROWES FOR ICP

Twenty years in the making, the International Center of Photography's (ICP) highly anticipate building opened earlier this year in Manhattan's Lower East Side, unifying the center's exhibition and education spaces under one roof. It is the fourth location for the museum since its founding in 1974. Designed by renowned architecture firm Gensler, the new 40,000-square-foot space houses galleries, darkrooms, classrooms, and community spaces—all with the mission to promote photography, video, and new media as a vehicle for social change.

Continuing its commitment to showcasing emerging lens-based artists, the center's activities kick off with an exhibition of 25-year-old photographer Tyler Mitchell. (https://www.galeriemagazine.com/vogue-beyonce-tyler-mitchell/) The American photographer shot to stardom two years ago when he became the first black photographer—and one of the youngest—to shoot the cover of Vogue magazine featuring Beyoncé.

Titled "I Can Make You Feel Good," the exhibition was first shown at Foam Museum Amsterdam, and this edition marks his U.S. solo debut. e visual wonderland of Mitchell's dreamy portraits transports viewers through a candy-colored utopia of young black figures whilst simultaneously shedding light on the dissonant realities of the black experience.

"I often think about what white fun looks like, and this notion that Black people can't have the same," Mitchell wrote in a statement. "I aim to visualize what a Black utopia looks like or could look like…I love the possibility that photography brings. It allows me to dream and make that dream become very real."

Tyler Mitchell, *Untitled (Group Hula Hoop),* 2019.
PHOTO: TYLER MITCHELL

ICP's newly appointed Curator-at-Large, Isolde Brielmaier, brings life to the exhibition with the addition of an immersive installation by Mitchell where a maze of photographs printed on gauzy fabrics are delicately hung on a laundry line, nodding to the iconic photographs of Gordon Parks.

Recommended: Meet the 23-Year-Old Photographer Behind Beyoncé's Historic Vogue Cover (https://www.galeriemagazine.com/vogue-beyonce-tyler-mitchell/)

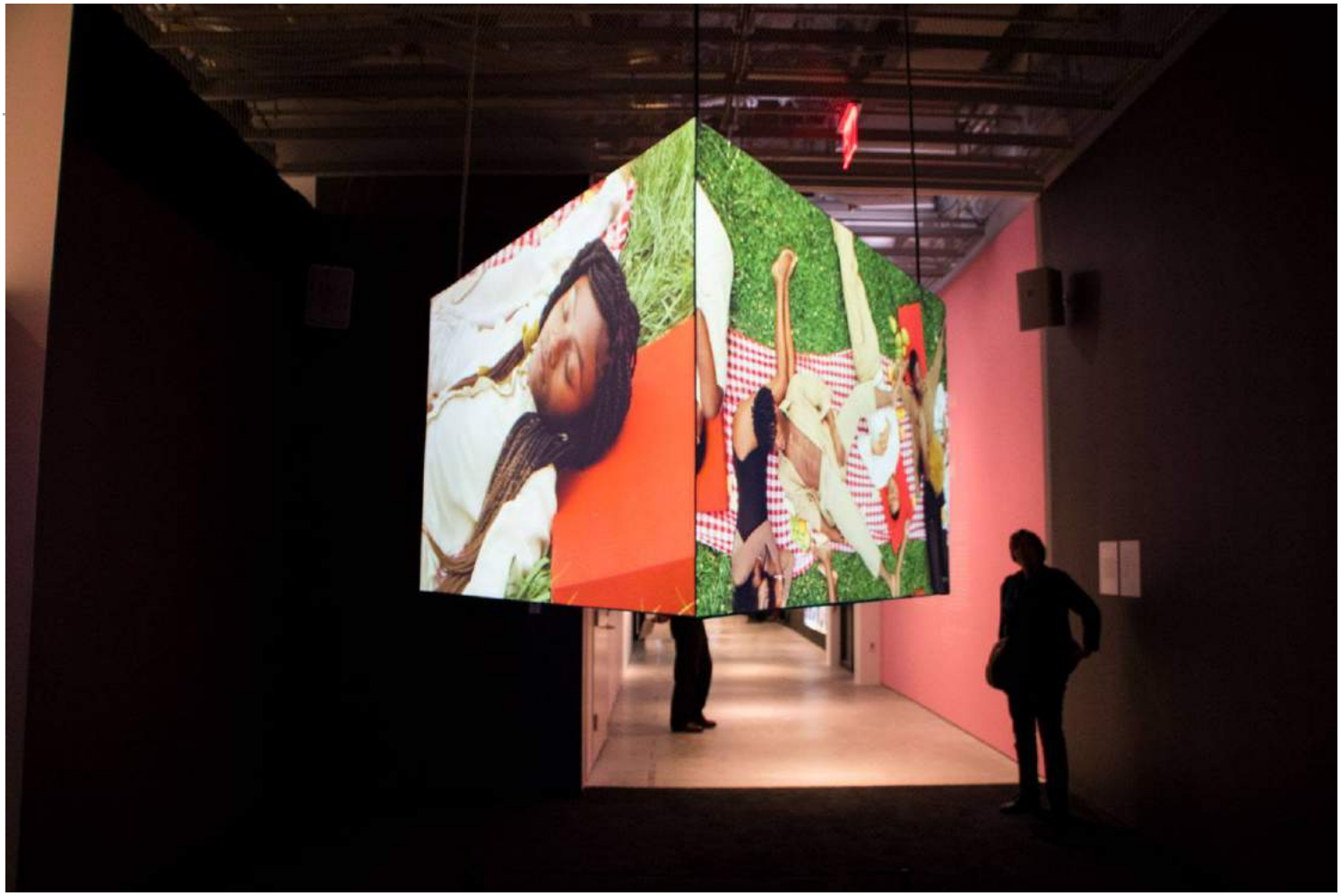
Here, Brielmaier speaks to *Galerie* about the trending photographer, the future of photography, and her vision for the world's leading institution of photography and visual culture.

An installation view of "Tyler Mitchell I Can Make You Feel Good" at ICP in New York.

PHOTO: STEFANIE LI

On the Power of Tyler Mitchell's Art

"Like so many young artists working today, Tyler occupies multiple spaces at once and maintains both an editorial and art practice. For him, the two are intimately connected. ICP has such a rich history of amplifying the voices of concerned image-makers. This is central to our mission. Tyler's critical focus is on visualizing black joy and positing questions about what comprises 'idyllic spaces.' What might a black utopia look like within the context of the long and often problematic history of representation of black people? The synergy for us was undeniable."



An installation view of *Chasing Pink, Found Red* by Tyler Mitchell at ICP.
PHOTO: STEFANIE LI

On the Future of Photography

"With an acknowledgement of the history and groundwork by earlier artists like Gordon Parks, Lorna Simpson, Carrie Mae Weems etc., there are few boundaries for this younger generation of image-makers. Today, they are in a position to not have to see a box…to think outside of, so to speak — they think and work fluidly."

Artists on Her Radar

"I'm always keeping an eye on artists and doing studio visits. Recently, I've seen some wonderful work by the young Colombian artist Ivan Argote, the New York-based fashion photographer Shaniqwa Jarvis, the Uguandan photographer Zarina Bhimji, and many others!"

THE NEW YORKER

Photographs by Tyler Mitchell

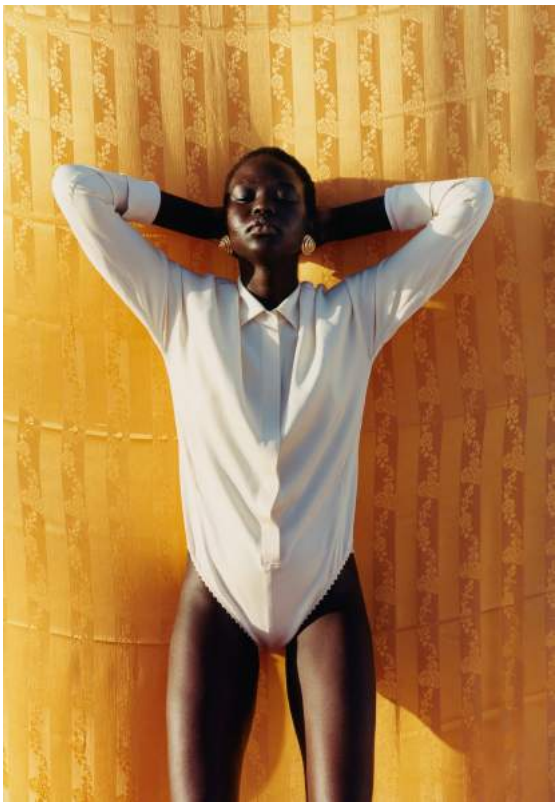
PHOTO BOOTH

TYLER MITCHELL'S REDEFINING PORTRAITS

By **Deborah Willis**
August 1, 2020

In 2018, Tyler Mitchell photographed Beyoncé for *Vogue's* September issue, and the art and fashion worlds took notice. Mitchell was the first Black photographer hired to shoot a cover for the magazine—a hundred and twenty-six years after *Vogue's* début. Currently based in Brooklyn, Mitchell is a skateboarder, filmmaker, video artist, and photographer. I first noticed his critical eye when he was an undergraduate student at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. I was fascinated with his work because I saw how deeply committed he was to changing existing visual narratives about being Black, male, creative, and young.

Absence was a key motivator for Mitchell in becoming a photographer and filmmaker. "I felt there was actually a lack of imagery that reflected myself, and that I could see myself in," he has said. Social media played a critical role in Mitchell's image-making. Born in 1995, he grew up in Atlanta, where Tumblr was an outlet to youth culture and creative expression. As a teen-ager, he purchased his first camera, a Canon digital S.L.R. Inspired by Spike Jonze's early skate videos, he also learned how to make videos. Mitchell's Beyoncé cover-shoot video focussed on the performer wearing designer gowns in a contemporary imagined home environment (actually a dilapidated English country house), with children playing, a lush green garden with trees, and the music of Curtis Mayfield, harkening back to the home-movie aesthetics of the nineteen-fifties. I consider Mitchell's photographic style to be revolutionary because of his commitment to collaboration, which he ties to the tight-knit skateboarding world. ("The thing that makes skaters like artists," he said, is that each discipline "thrives on community.") Mitchell's posing of Beyoncé draws on art-historical references: models in Paris salons in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; the stylized studio portraits of the twentieth century in Paris and New York. He introduces a dazzling new narrative about Black beauty and desire, embracing themes of the past and creating fictionalized moments of the imagined future.



How the Black body has been imagined in the past has been important to Mitchell. By making photographs of his artist friends and designers, musicians and filmmakers, models and others who are self-fashioning through the lens of history, he redefines and transforms the reception of such imagery. What emerges is a revised visual representation of the Black subject, one that emphasizes empowerment and play. One model with blond curly hair sits in the middle of a road with her lace blouse hanging partly off her shoulder. Another wears a pink dress that appears torn, exposing her thigh as she rests her hands on top of her head. Another leans against a pastel-colored stucco wall wearing a prize ribbon across her yellow pleated dress, with full sleeves and Nike tube socks, looking away from the camera. The composition of the image is overshadowed by the imagined narratives that Mitchell and his subjects create. His images of a picnic, where young men and women run, play, sit on swings and blankets looking freely at a blue sky, reflect a sense of belonging.

Mitchell challenges conventional perspectives on beauty, telegraphing an affirmed confidence through bold colors, styled shirts and dresses. Mitchell's brown-skinned models are wearing colorful ribbons, white lace, pink mesh and bows, flowy gowns made with taffeta and cotton. He combines stripes and plaids with solid colors; hand-painted dresses with capes and floral wallpaper; ruffles and polka dots. His images call to mind those of the twentieth-century Malian photographer Seydou Keïta; to sit for Keïta, as the scholar Manthia Diawara has written, was "to be transformed as an urbane subject even if one has no power in the market or at the train station."

The writer and curator Antwaun Sargent has identified a New Black Vanguard in fashion photography, one that is "rethinking how the fashion image can be less censorious and more reflective of real life." Mitchell's images are encoded with this new language of representation, which broadens our understanding of desire for the consumer, the viewer, and the model alike. As a fashion photographer, he says, "I'm thinking of conveying black beauty as an act of justice."

The camera, for Mitchell, enables the projected dreams of his sitters. An image of three figures seated in front of a painted, tree-lined wall implies land and ownership, the models carefree in pastel pin-stripes, white shoes, and wrapped sandals. Luxury is implied in images of two men, possibly twins, with beads lining their sculpted hairlines, or of two men wearing fur jackets, shorts, and designer sneakers, holding a basketball and sitting on the hood of a white Mercedes-Benz, or of young women in trendy sweaters and large gold hoop earrings. All inform the notion, in Mitchell's work, of a self-conscious consumer.

This piece was drawn from an essay in "I Can Make You Feel Good," by Tyler Mitchell, which is out in August, from Prestel.

08.20.2020

Photographer Tyler Mitchell on the Role of Race in His Work

In 2018, at the remarkable age of 23, Tyler Mitchell became the first Black cover photographer in the 126-year history of Vogue Magazine. His cover girl? None other than Beyoncé. Now at the grand old age of 25, he has released a new book entitled “I Can Make You Feel Good.” Mitchell sits down with Christiane to discuss his sources of inspiration, and the role of racial identity in his work.

CHRISTIANE AMANPOUR: I’m fascinated by what you say that photographing black people at leisure is radical. Not the fact that they’re at leisure, but photographing them is radical. Why is that?

TYLER MITCHELL, PHOTOGRAPHER, “I CAN MAKE YOU FEEL GOOD”: Yes. Well, you know, it has to do with denied histories, right, and this idea that visualizing, and making images and projecting those and stating visualizing black folks enjoying their lives is important, right? What is central to

that in my work is that existing in a public space for black folks in America has been denied psychically in our minds at any moment that, you know, freedom or that enjoyment that we're having or that pleasure could be taken away or shipped away. So, to me this book, you know, stands for a beacon of that.

AMANPOUR: This is all "I Can Make You Feel Good"?

MITCHELL: Yes.

AMANPOUR: What does that mean? Who are you saying it to?

MITCHELL: It's the title of a Shalimar song, really. I heard it from a soul song. And I heard it in the Atlanta Airport when I was travelling to Amsterdam for my show, and I thought, that's the title. I love this idea of it being a really simple, unacademic statement about feeling good, about optimism, but it also has a gut punch, it's very direct, it's from me to you, from the photographer to the viewer. So, simply —

AMANPOUR: And in your opening statement here, you have some pretty, you know, pointed and poignant messages. So, I'm going to read a bit from the state. I often think about what white fun looks like and this notion that black people can't have the same. My work comes from a place of wanting to pushback against this slack. I feel an urgency to create a body of images where black people are visualized as free, expressive, effortless and sensitive. I feel like you're trying to correct a balance.

MITCHELL: Maybe.

AMANPOUR: An imbalance.

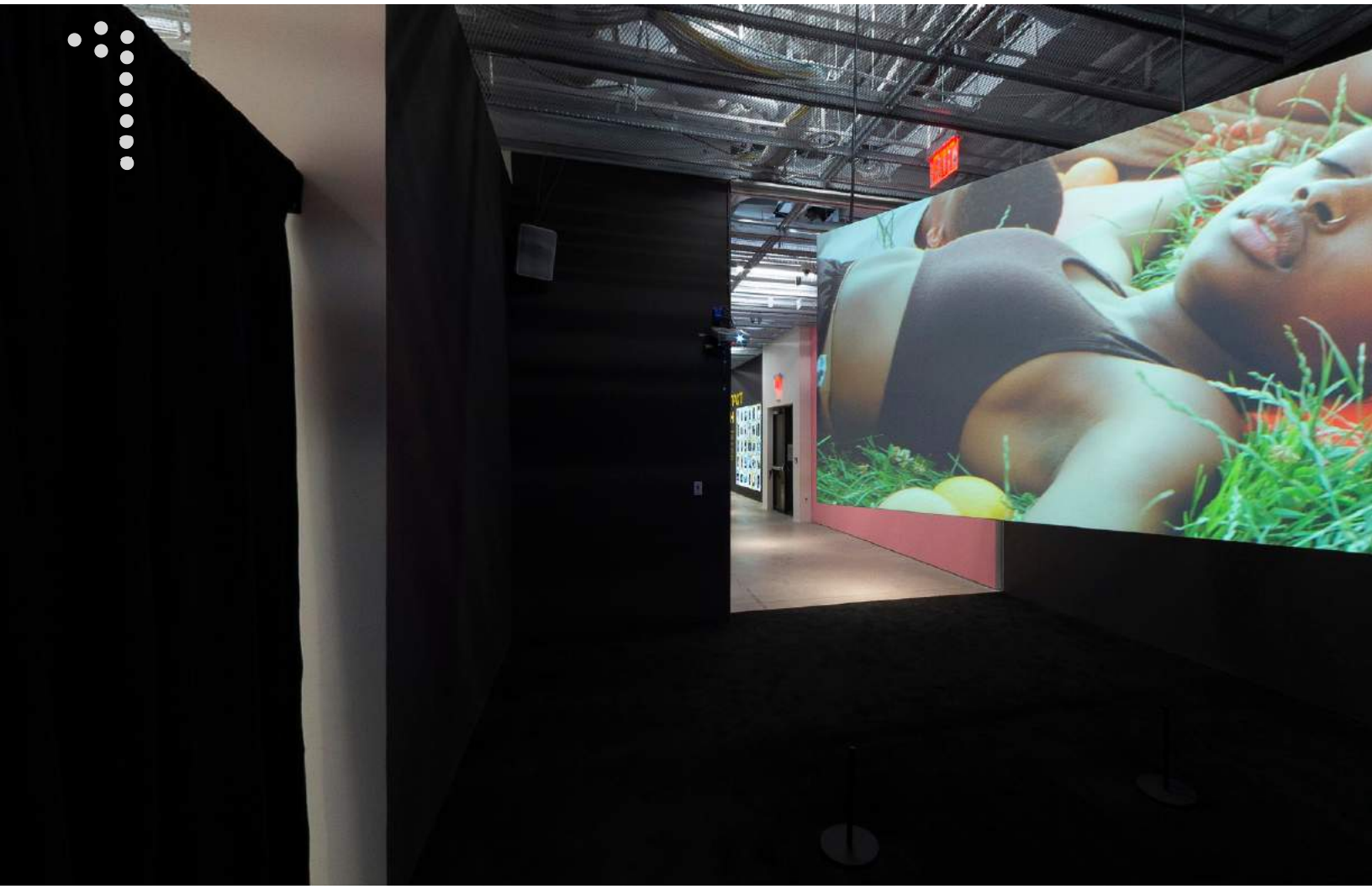
MITCHELL: Maybe. I'm mainly trying to create like a self-contained utopia, a self-contained world. And yes, it was about bringing my own autobiographical experience to my instinctive response to those images. So —

AMANPOUR: You know, some of them — well, they're all just kind of normal, stuff that you would see. The famous (INAUDIBLE) iconography of white people in a painting at leisure.

MITCHELL: Yes.

AMANPOUR: And you have the red gingham matt or tablecloth where you got some people lying down. You've got people at fun in a park. What are they saying to you, those particular pictures?

MITCHELL: I think about people like Kerry James Marshall who has been making amazing work for years about the black experience. I think about what he said when he was trying to bring together with his vignette paintings, rococo paintings, right, owery or kind of over the top just luxurious enjoyments of life, right? Scenes — rococo paintings were essentially frivolous, they're all about frivolity and I love that he was trying to bring together that with some of the social kind of our political feelings and statements that he wanted to kind of unify in one painting. So, I think these pictures respond to that.



Tyler Mitchell: I Can Make You Feel Good

International Center of Photography
(https://www.galleriesnow.net/gallery/international-center-of-photography/)
New York

Thu 1 Oct 2020 to Thu 31 Dec 2020
Thu-Sun 11am-7pm with advance booking

Artist : Tyler Mitchell (/artist/tyler-mitchell/)
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The International Center of Photography (ICP) opens its new integrated center at Essex Crossing on Manhattan's Lower East Side with *Tyler Mitchell: I Can Make You Feel Good,* one of four inaugural exhibitions.

Mitchell, a 24-year-old photographer and filmmaker based in Brooklyn, aims to revitalize and elevate the Black body in his work by representing people in his own community as joyful and proud. Characterized by a use of natural light and candy-color palettes, his work visualizes a Black utopia contrasting with representations and experiences of reality, while offering a powerful and hopeful counternarrative.

Over the course of the exhibition, Mitchell will lead a number of multidisciplinary public programs and events which will activate the galleries. In addition, Mitchell will unveil a series of retail products via his new product design endeavor *Items from the Studio* which will be available for sale in ICP's new shop. More details will be announced in the coming weeks.

"*I Can Make You Feel Good* is simply a declaration. And one that I feel is gut punching in its optimism. It feels important at a time like this to declare such a thing," said Mitchell.

Curated by ICP's new Curator-at-Large Isolde Brielmaier, PhD, with support from Assistant Curator Susan Carlson, this is Mitchell's rst US solo exhibition and the US premiere of several prints, video, and installation works focusing on the artist's ideas of a "Black visual utopia."

"We are thrilled to present Tyler's solo show at the launch of our new home, a center integrating our museum and school for the rst time in decades. Opening a new home on the Lower East Side, a dynamic neighborhood with a rich photographic history, is an opportunity to explore ideas about community and representation in new ways, much like Tyler's work challenges us to re-think depictions of everyday life," said ICP's Executive Director Mark Lubell.

Brielmaier notes, "Tyler's exhibition comes at a critical time in our visual culture when so many are challenging pre-existing representations and taking ownership of their own imaging. His poetic images and videos offer our visitors a wonderful opportunity to re-envision how they see the world around them and all that is possible."

Idyllic Space, a video installation complete with AstroTurf and white picket fences, invites viewers to lie down and watch scenes of Black youths enjoying simple pleasures in suburban settings where they appear sensitive, free, and effortless. It highlights the seemingly mundane activities many of us take for granted, as a bold visual reminder that moments of leisure, play, and delight have historically been denied to Black people, in lived experience as well as in representation.

An earlier video work, *Chasing Pink, Found Red*, combines images of Black youths relaxing amongst a lush picnic scene contrasted by crowdsourced narratives of small daily traumas of Black life recorded by Mitchell's friends, family, and social media followers.

Also included in the exhibition is a new installation of photographs printed on fabric and hung as a laundry line down a 60-foot hallway of the museum. With this installation, Mitchell takes inspiration from photographers and artists like Gordon Parks who have used laundry lines in their work as a poetic symbol. Mitchell often uses laundry lines as a reference to proverbial domestic space and the working Black body.

Referring to himself as a concerned photographer, he has previously said that "conveying Black beauty is an act of justice." He utilizes the tools of documentary reportage, portraiture, fashion photography, art photography, and lmmaking to explore new ways of interpreting culture today.

Mitchell began by making music videos when he was still a freshman in lm school at New York University and made history at age 23 as the rst Black photographer to shoot the cover of Vogue in its then 126-year history. Mitchell's groundbreaking portrait of Beyoncé has since been acquired by the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery for its permanent collection.

About Tyler Mitchell
Tyler Mitchell (American, b. 1995) is a photographer and lmmaker based in Brooklyn, working across many genres to explore and document a new aesthetic of Blackness. His career started at an early age: lming skate videos and documenting the music, fashion, and youth culture scenes in Atlanta. In 2017, he graduated from NYU Tisch School of the Arts with a BFA in lm and television. By that time, he had already self-published his rst photo book, *El Paquete* (2015), in which he captured the architecture and emerging skateboard culture in Havana, Cuba. At school, he started making videos for musicians and shot campaigns for Givenchy, American Eagle, and Marc Jacobs, among others. Mitchell is now regularly published in avant-garde magazines and commissioned by prominent fashion houses. In 2018, he made history as the rst Black photographer to shoot a cover of American *Vogue*, for Beyoncé's appearance in the September issue. In 2019, a portrait from this series was acquired by the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery for its permanent collection. Mitchell is the 2020 recipient of the Gordon Parks Fellowship. He has lectured at Harvard University, the International Center of Photography, and numerous other institutions on the politics of imagemaking.

Images: Dan Bradica

The Guardian

The big picture: happiness is a hula hoop with Tyler Mitchell

Rising star Tyler Mitchell imagines a black utopia for young Americans

Untitled (Group Hula Hoop), 2019. © Tyler Mitchell

Sun 19 Jul 2020 02.00 EDT

Few photographers in recent years have emerged with quite the acclaim of Tyler Mitchell. Now 25, Mitchell made history two years ago when he became the first black photographer in the 125-year history of American *Vogue* to shoot a cover image - his pictures of Beyoncé, with a halo of flowers, in natural light, were full of the joy and stylish exuberance he had made his own.

A book and exhibition of his work is called, pointedly, *I Can Make You Feel Good*. This staged picture of hula hoopers in Brooklyn is typical, he says, of "the conversations that I and other black artists around me want to have. All the pictures propose what our world should look like - if we are allowed all the freedoms we have been historically denied."

Mitchell grew up in a suburb of Atlanta, Georgia, making skateboard films. One jumping-off point for him as a photographer was the work of people such as Larry Clark and Ryan McGinley, with "their fixations on youth and freedom - though invariably the protagonists in that work were white... I used to feel that was my kind of experience," Mitchell says, "but I didn't see myself in the picture."

He went to film school in New York, but began to see photography as a quicker way to tell stories. His images invariably suggest a narrative: what happened before the hula hooping? How did these kids come to be here?

Though Mitchell has been to a few protests recently, he doesn't see himself as an activist, except in a kind of subconscious way. "When people hear the word 'radical' they have a certain notion in their mind," he says. "I'm interested in the idea that radical can be more quiet. I am proposing the idea that feeling good in our community, picturing a self-contained utopia, can be radical in its own way."

I Can Make You Feel Good by Tyler Mitchell is published on 28 July (Prestel, £45)