

About the artist:

Paul Mpagi Sepuya (b. 1984, San Bernadino, CA) is a Los Angeles-based photographer with a number of solo and group shows under his belt including at the Studio Museum Harlem, Yancey Richardson Gallery, NYC, Marianne Boesky Gallery, NYC, and Document in Chicago. Sepuya's work is in the collection of the Guggenheim Museum, the Studio Museum in Harlem, and the Center for Photography at Woodstock. He received a BFA from New York University Tisch School of the Arts and an MFA in photography at University of California, Los Angeles.

Exhibition Reception

Sunday, June 19
3:00 - 5:00 pm

Meet the artist and celebrate *Paul Mpagi Sepuya: Some Recent Pictures (Chicago)* along with concurrent exhibitions.

At 3:30 pm, join Sepuya and artist Ivan Lozano, whose portrait is featured in the exhibition, for a walk-through of the show.

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Paul Mpagi Sepuya *Some Recent Pictures (Chicago)*

Cleve E. Carney Gallery
June 19, 2016 - August 27, 2016



Desktop, April 2, 2014,
archival pigment print,
24 x 32 images

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The studio is photographer Paul Mpagi Sepuya's anchor. And, for several weeks in 2014, Hyde Park Art Center provided that anchor, as Sepuya spent an especially frosty Chicago winter in the Jackman Goldwasser Residency. It was an important period in his professional and personal life, as Sepuya had packed up his Brooklyn studio—including a decade's worth of his photo-based work—in preparation to relocate to Los Angeles to complete an MFA in Photography at UCLA. During this transition, Sepuya spent eight weeks in Chicago, his first visit, to connect his unique photographic practice to this city entirely new to him, pushing it to see what might happen. *Some Recent Pictures (Chicago)* shows the results of that experiment.



Ivan, March 29, 2014, archival pigment print, 24 x 32 inches

As an artist Sepuya is an avid collector, and the studio houses an expanding collection: literature, camera equipment, poetry, photographs (mainly his own) and people, all of whom move fluidly through the space to pose or be posed for a picture. Sepuya assembles these various elements together to create new photos: portraits of friends, lovers and acquaintances amidst the rest. Carefully composed photos appear happenstance; their sense of informality belies their precision.

The studio is also a space where Sepuya fosters a community. He is part of an expanding bi-coastal cohort of like-minded artists and others, which now includes Chicago. This scene of young, queer intellectuals can be understood as both rooted and roving, supported by the network itself. While new to Chicago, Sepuya quickly linked with friends of friends, inviting them into his studio for conversation and to sit for a picture.

Ivan, March 29 is in many ways a traditional portrait, not of a sitter unknown to the artist, but of another artist, friend and conversational partner during Sepuya's time in Chicago. Ivan, bearded with a piercing gaze, sits on a folding chair, one hand resting on a knee. Behind him, we see Sepuya's studio wall with a row of his photos laser printed on standard copy paper, some taken inside that very studio, others carried with him to Chicago, which act as a backdrop for Ivan's portrait. This resulting image (composed of several other images) has been printed and temporally capturing yet bearing the process and accumulation of previous photo sessions. Likely, Ivan's image will hang again on a studio wall, providing backdrop and historical texture for another photograph yet to be taken.

The exhibition also features several more complex photographic constructions. *Desktop, April 2* portrays a jumble of Sepuya's photo print-outs, again on inexpensive copy paper, which allows him to easily sort through and edit images at his desk or bulletin board-style, taped or pinned to the wall. These laser prints get shuffled, un-taped and re-pinned in different configurations, notated sometimes with pencil, selected and un-selected with post-it notes and binder clips. They are itinerant entities inside Sepuya's studio, carrying on their surfaces the marks of his thinking process. Then, those prints (masking tape and all) are scanned, enlarged and reprinted as the final form in the exhibition.

The work *D.* presents a half-nude male torso in movement, perhaps dancing; the figure is turned revealing a muscular back to the viewer. The image is both anonymous yet specific. The large scale of the photo makes visible the creases and pixels inherent to the original paper print-out. Rather than damage and imperfection, these are the traces of the artist's hand and working methodology, magnified and manifested in the gallery.

Inside the studio, Sepuya shuffles and collages such laser prints with other snapshots and whatever materials are present to create and recreate relationships among images and subjects across time. Photos taken years ago mix with new work, creating a new story for the present. And, the exhibition is just that – one moment in the life span of Sepuya's dynamic collection. Like an individual photographic image such as *Desktop, April 2*, the exhibition is a manifestation of the activity that takes place inside Sepuya's studio: pixels, grain and all. Ultimately, it is a snapshot of the artist himself. To paraphrase Brian O'Doherty, the gallery frames the studio, which in turn frames the way the artist lives and works, which in turn frames the artist's implements, which in turn frames the artist.¹

Unlike the documentary photograph, which captures a fixed moment in time or a traditional photographic portrait, in which the image reveals a universal idea of the sitter's qualities or characteristics, Sepuya's photos present something less determined. They depict a temporal moment that exists within a series of moments. Embedded within each photo is the evolution of a conversation, a culture or a social milieu in formation.

An individual photo bears the traces of those which came before. These are not ghosts, however, but breathing evidence of an artist's life inside the studio. Furthermore, Sepuya's photo arrangements are as particular as they are precise, revealing a relationship among individuals, literature, poetry or philosophy (regular reference points for Sepuya), captured for the moment of the exhibition, though still dynamic and ever-evolving.

Within the space of his studio, there is a sense of proximity of people to people and people to ideas. It's a space safe for debate, flirtation, work, complicity. While technically private, within the Hyde Park Art Center, Sepuya's studio was also semi-public, meant to be open and content shared.

This is exactly Sepuya's style; in his studio he builds a space where things come together, even if only briefly, to find proximity toward one another and explore common ground. His practice supports the structure of a social sphere in a constant state of becoming. He is both part of and building a community of peers, colleagues, interlocutors who, in his space, find the capacity to congregate – both physically and perhaps spiritually—to be together, sharing and struggling, affirming their social selves alongside others who are on a similar journey.

¹ O'Doherty, Brian. *Studio and Cube: On The Relationship Between Where Art is Made and Where Art is Displayed* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 2012), 5.