

# Traces of Identity

Curated by  
Simon Njami

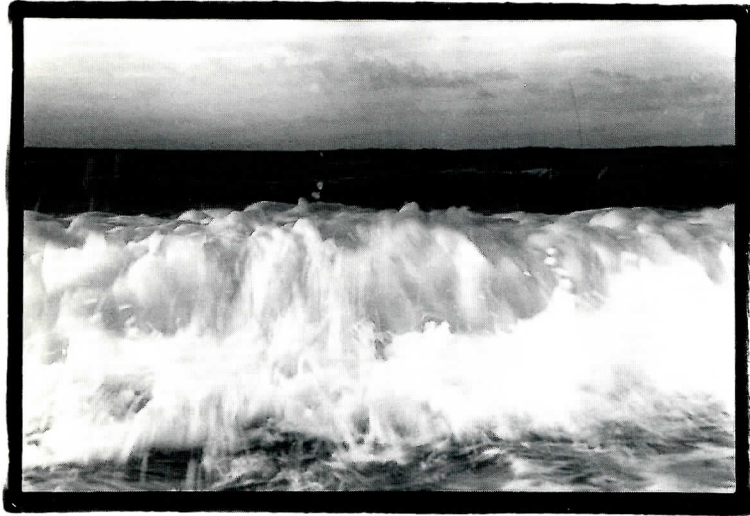


**Gallery 44**  
Centre for Contemporary  
Photography

July 10 – August 9, 1997

Opening events: Thursday, July 10

Reception from 5 to 7 PM, Curator's talk from 7 to 8 PM



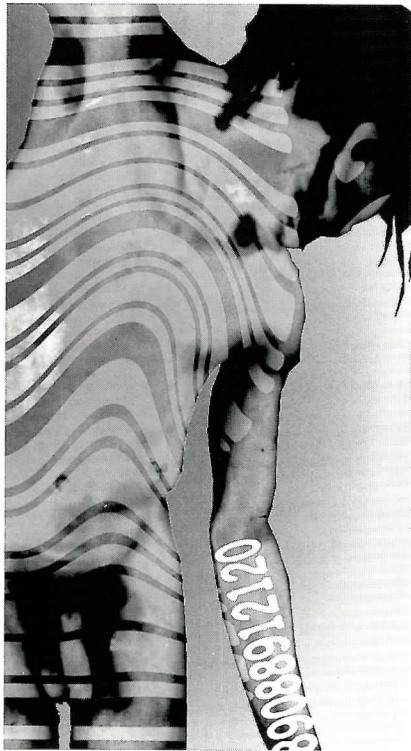
In essence, Canada is emblematic of the notion of the New World. And Toronto, lying at the heart of this vast expanse, is surely the archetype of this mix, this cohabitation of people from five continents, with histories and trajectories that are sometimes contradictory. What kind of relations can be established between the Greek, the Jamaican and the Vietnamese; the South African and the North African; the anglophone and the francophone? And from there, what reality can encompass Canadian identity if not a kaleidoscopic concept in which images gather and mix? Facing this selection of photographers, one stands at the heart of the problem. Writers like Kobena Mercer, Stuart Hall and George Lipsitz have confronted the question at the crux of any given African Diaspora, particularly Canadian: the redefinition of self. The invention of a hybrid identity that mixes, without pain or conflict (other than that encountered in creating), the relationship to the past, to origins, to the memory of the body and the sense that makes us all the fruit of a long and complex process, with that of the present. From the places where we live, our friendships and loves, and

our positioning relative to a society where we have become, by force of circumstances, engaged.

Indeed, one of the miracles of inner shifts and ruptures is that they necessarily lead to original solutions and to arrangements which, here more than elsewhere, are indispensable to survival. Belonging and the appropriation of a given space become, from then on, the only guarantees of our citizenship. Because above all, the concept of citizenship, which leads to participation, is the only one upon which we can exercise our free will. The trap of any integration into a group is the inevitable distancing of the self. The feeling of betraying, forgetting or, better still, of losing oneself is what results from all experiences of the Diaspora. It is interesting to note here that photography, as image and representation, is the area in which this tension is expressed in a privileged fashion. But what is revealed is not simply the particular elements recorded by the film. A picture always tells us more. The selection of object, the placement of the lens, the contrast of the print inevitably brings us back to the photographer, to the subjective eye that made the choices which express an underlying message. If until recently in Africa, photography has been testimonial, a restitution of the relation of being in its everyday nature or its fantasies, it has rapidly become, for Africans of the Diaspora, the place for exploring identity. Because if Hegel told us that "it is through words that we think," we are obliged to recognize that the photographer thinks with and through his images. And this thinking—obsessive, self-centred and narcissistic—necessarily brings him back to the author. The mission or destiny of the African of the Diaspora is to make the link between all of the elements that constitute his being. A schizophrenic

Above left: Serge Emmanuel Jongué, from the triptych *Surrender*, 1995, black-and-white baryt print, 11 x 16 cm

research where the goal is to unite opposites. To bring together in one place contemporary consciousness, history, tradition and exile. When the word *exile* is used here, it should not suggest the romantic and vaguely ethnographic vision made up of suffering and longing, of nostalgia. The Diasporic individual is often—more and more for the younger generations—born in the country where he lives. By exile, we bring to bear notions other than that of the immediately perceptible, of a truncated reality. The memory of the body mentioned earlier is the only valid impetus of this exile. An exile of self, in a sense,



that pushes us unflinchingly back. The self we seek is often a heterogeneous assemblage of images, clichés and memories. A hallucinated concept of the world, of self and its environment. The challenge of the artist is to create a richness from this chaos, to organize this disorder in every conceivable way. Derrida would not refute me if I affirm that, in our postmodern world, a well-founded construction necessarily passes through a violent process of deconstruction, of destruction and the dismantling of unquestioned truths. Truth is always the

domain of others, and the creators of the Diaspora are no longer satisfied. If millennial Africa had the misfortune of arguing with the certainties of belonging and legitimacy,

Kirk Moses, *Indoctrination*, 1996, colour print, 62.5 x 52 cm



the Diaspora,  
necessarily suspect,  
wounded in its flesh  
and in its past, called  
into doubt in its  
present, had no other  
way out than the  
genius of refusal.



It is to that genius that  
the five photographers  
presented here testify. Pedro  
Alderete, Stella Fakiyesi, Serge  
Emmanuel Jongué, Kirk Moses and David Zapparoli all explore, in  
their own ways, the mysteries of memory and identity: some  
through a scrupulous, meticulous observation of their physical  
features which then become a portal to other stories; others  
through the memory of places, traditions and ancestral practices.  
On the one hand, the body as object, the body we reject, that we  
scorn, that we willingly deform as if to better reveal its true  
nature; on the other hand, objects and places which suddenly seem  
able to speak, which are, in a word, humanized.

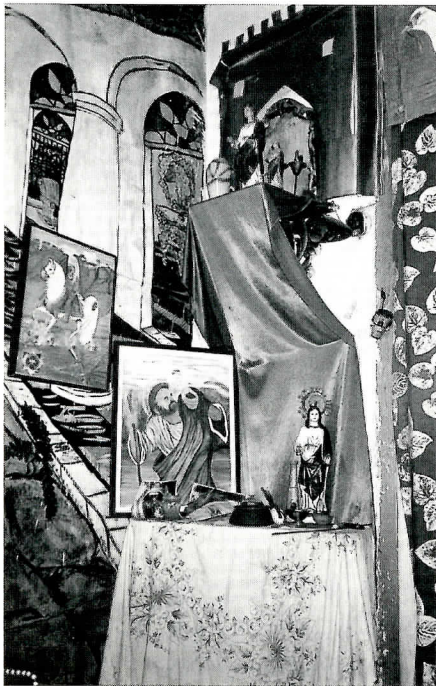
Bent over the emptiness of the world, the photographer is a being  
without a shadow, a Narcissus who has lost his reflection  
and who continues, despite everything, to contemplate  
himself in waters that nothing further can disturb. In a  
complex and painful psychoanalysis, all his work tends to  
recreate a universe, a world, a history that would  
reconcile him with History. With his story, and that of his  
people, of whom he seems to have become, suddenly, the  
sole survivor.

Simon Njami

Stella Fakiyesi, *Untitled*, 1996, hand-tinted photo-collage, 62.5 x 52 cm

Simon Njami was born in Lausanne, Switzerland. He holds doctoral degrees in modern literature and law, and is a visiting professor at the University of California at San Diego. A writer, producer and curator, he has produced many books, screenplays and television programs within the last fifteen years. He was the curator of several major art exhibitions featuring artists from Africa and the Diaspora, including *Ethnicolor* (Paris), *Another Country* (Barcelona) and *The Other Journey* (Vienna). Founder and editor-in-chief of the periodical *Revue Noire*, Njami lives and works in Paris.

Pedro Alderete was born and raised in Havana, Cuba and moved to Toronto in 1988. Since graduating from the Ontario College of Art and Design, he has been very active in the arts community; creating art, curating exhibitions, founding collectives, collaborating with artists from his homeland and developing a network with other communities and organizations. He also works as a scenic painter for film and television.



Stella Fakiyesi studied design, photography and film at the Ontario College of Art and Design. For several years, she has employed photography as a medium of artistic expression. While her photographs consist mainly of people and product shots used for magazine editorials, photo journalism, advertising and other commercial applications, her inspiration is derived from personal experience and the pure energy of everyday life. Fakiyesi lives and works in Toronto.

Pedro Alderete, *Untitled*, 1996, black-and-white photograph to be used in installation, 36.5 x 28.5 cm

**Serge Emmanuel Jongué** was born in Aix-en-Provence, France in 1951 and has lived in Montréal since 1974. He studied literature at the Université de Provence and the Université de Montréal. For the past ten years, his work has been exhibited extensively within Québec, and internationally. A resident of The Banff Centre for the Arts in 1994, he is also a recipient of the Barbara Spohr Award. Jongué works as a free-lance photographer and journalist.

**Kirk Moses** was born in Port of Spain, Trinidad and moved to Ottawa at the age of thirteen. He received his education at Carleton University (Ottawa) and the Technical University of Nova Scotia (Halifax). A technocrat by necessity of the times, he believes his art touches all aspects of expression. His current work attempts to illuminate the conflict between man, nature and technology. Moses works as a free-lance picture editor in Vancouver.

**David Zapparoli** lives and works in Toronto. Influenced by documentary, his main interest lies in revealing social elements that have been previously unexplored or misrepresented. Since 1992, his focus has included an examination of the effects of environmental and ancestral elements on the self.

Serge Emmanuel Jongué gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the Explorations Program of The Canada Council.

**Pedro Alderete**

**Stella Fakiyesi**

**Serge Emmanuel Jongué**

**Kirk Moses**

**David Zapparoli**

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Cover: David Zapparoli, *Where am I?*,  
1994, silver print with lino prints,  
52 x 41.5 cm

**Gallery hours:**

Tuesday – Saturday 11 AM – 5 PM  
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