

The Exhibit 'Black Women: Power and Grace' Shows the Timeless Strength and Beauty Within Us All



Veronica Webb

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6

15



Photo: Anthony Barboza (Kamoinge.org)

Long before social media liberated unadulterated images of black women's beauty, there was Kamoinge.

The Kamoinge photographers collective, founded in Harlem in 1963 under the direction of the venerable photographer Roy DeCarava, author of *The Sweet Flypaper of Life*, is officially opening its newest exhibition, "Black Women: Power and Grace," Thursday night at the National Arts Club in New York.

For Kamoinge, whose name comes from the Kenyan Gikuyu word meaning "people working together," addressing issues around the lack of black photographers, as well as counteracting damaging stereotypical images with positive images of our beauty and culture, are as pressing for today as they were when Kamoinge's first exhibition dedicated to the subject, "The Negro Woman," opened in 1965.

Elegant photographs of black women, powerfully poised while tackling the everyday struggles of life, like taking the bus, showed our grace and glory, with black women shining in some of our nation's darkest hours. For example, this photo of Betty Shabazz exiting Malcolm X's funeral—a regal vision of strength and beauty; crying, yet composed, in the face of unspeakable outrage, taken by Kamoinge veteran Adger Cowans—set the tone of the show.



Photo: Adger Cowans (Kamoinge.org)

That same spirit of defiance, self-invention and affirmation inspired the newest show, “Black Women: Power and Grace.”

“Tell a friend, anyone who loves art, teenagers, anyone struggling with identity, or someone who needs some artistic inspiration,” wrote co-organizer and Kamoinge Vice President Russell Frederick via email regarding the show. “This exhibit is one for all generations to appreciate.”

There’s a lot to celebrate here—namely, the four new female members of Kamoinge on exhibit.



Photo: Delphine Fawundu (Kamoinge.org)

Lola Flash explores LGBTQ themes. Delphine Diallo's 2017 *Women of New York* portrait of a young Muslim girl is a particular standout, as is Delphine Fawundu's self-portrait, *What Do They Call Me, My Name Is Aunt Sara*. Laylah Amatullah Barrayn's images of religious and spiritual life in Senegal won her a coveted place in the collective among other longtime members like Ming Smith, the first black woman to have work purchased and exhibited by New York City's Museum of Modern Art.

Barrayn told the *New York Times*: "I've been watching Kamoinge for most of my career, and I've seen its growth. I always felt being a part of Kamoinge was so far-fetched because there weren't many women in the group."



Photo: Layla Amatullah Barrayn (Kamoigne.org)

As a model with 30 years in the business, I can count on two hands the times I've worked with female photographers, and still have three fingers left over. For black female photographers, the opportunities are so ridiculously few and far between—a fact that makes seeing and supporting their work in this exhibit all the more powerful.



Photo: Jules Allen (Kamoinge.org)

The way black men see women in this collective is equally empowering—at turns tough, like a lone woman in Jules Allen's 2016 street scene of a smoking-hot sister standing at a bus stop titled, *One for Roy*, no doubt dedicated to Kamoinge spiritual leader emeritus DeCarava.

Seen from the back, standing statuesque next to a bulging suitcase, she's a woman striking out on her own, headed boldly into the unknown to make her own fortune.

But poignant and tender moments abound in Russell Frederick's *Blessed Brooklyn* from 2009, which depicts a goddess carrying the universe in her belly, about to create new life.



Photo: Russell Frederick (Kamoinge.org)

#MeToo No. 2 Brooklyn (2018) paints a picture in the joyous colors turned somber by shadows and the sadness—or is it rage across the beautiful face of the woman in Ruddy Roye's portrait, where everything that is seemingly familiar is both ominous and unknown?



Photo: Ruddy Roye (Kamoinge.org)

Anthony Barboza's fashion-focused photography (seen atop this article) zaps the senses with sharp silhouettes of black beauty. His photo of model Pat Evans, shot in black and white in 1971, serves as a stark statement of natural beauty and the divine gorgeousness of melanated skin, an early harbinger of a hard-won ideal of beauty that we celebrate in our culture today.

But even though this is an ideal of beauty that has come to the forefront, we still struggle with issues of cultural appropriation in the larger world of fashion, and within our own hearts and communities, as we black women continue to face struggles to affirm our physical womanhood on top of our cultural womanhood as black women in America.



Photo: Delphine Diallo (Kamoinge.org)

Photographer Cowans, 81, the co-founder and president of Kamoinge, who authored the image of Betty Shabazz at her husband's funeral, told the Times: "Nothing like that had been done in the community before. ... The black woman has been underrepresented. Here we are today, and we are still looking at black women negatively. We wanted to show their beauty and power."

A sentiment co-founder Frederick echoed via email: "[Our] sisters are valuable and needed work. I want to see more black women behind the camera. Especially in photojournalism. I support this immensely. This is why I pushed vigorously for Kamoinge to welcome the new sisters in the group. We need our sisters."

"Black Women: Power and Grace" will run at the National Arts Club from now through June 30.

For more information about Kamoinge membership and education, you can send email to kamoinge.russell@gmail.com.

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13

If we know anything about glow ups, it's that they come in all shapes, colors, sizes, styles and times of life. But the power of a good glow up is that indescribable feeling like the universe is conspiring to deliver you to the next phase in perfect timing.

That's why we got goosebumps listening to Danessa Myricks, makeup artist extraordinaire and creator of Danessa Myricks Beauty, an extensive line of highly-pigmented, multi-usage, professional-grade cosmetics that are a favorite of makeup artists but also totally accessible to amateurs—without the need for a professional discount.



Get That Glow: Danessa Myricks Teaches Us How to Get a Gorgeous Natural Glow Up

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After falling in love with Myricks' prismatic range of products, we initially invited her to our studio with the request that she demonstrate a super-wearable summer glow up for our on-camera model. She gave us that, and so much more. After meeting Myricks, we found her own glow even more gorgeous; she exudes a warmth and grace one can only attribute to living in her truth as a full-time creative, and truly loving what she does.

But it wasn't always this way; makeup is actually Myricks' second act, and one she was clearly destined for, based on her incredible eye for color and exceptional technique. Most importantly, whether it's makeup or a Master's

degree, Danessa Myrick's story is an important reminder that it's never too late to change course, pursue your dreams and live the life you were meant to.



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Maiysha Kai is Managing Editor of The Glow Up and your average Grammy-nominated goddess next door. Minneapolis born, Chicago bred, New York built. Nuance is my superpower.

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