

THE NEW PORTRAIT

A conversation between Elle Pérez and Nina Strand.

*One of my personal highlights of the year was seeing Elle Pérez's exhibition *Diablo* at MoMA PS1 this June. The exhibition consisted of nine large-scale photographs and a collage board of images and written notes. Pérez's way of portraying others clearly demonstrates that a respectful deal has been made with the sitter. In the words of the press release: 'With a gaze privileging care and particularity over documentary distance, they suggest how an image might reflect, rather than stifle, the shifting nature of identity and desire.'*

Nina Strand: Let's start with the thoughts behind the collage board in *Diablo*. You've previously stated that it was made with the thought of being in your studio?

Elle Pérez: The collage at MoMA PS1 was an opportunity to do something less edited. The nine photographs are there as works in themselves, and the board is a place for all the surrounding texts, thoughts and images to come together. I've been trying to get it all in one image, and it was good to find a way to expose a lot of the subject matter. I made a couple of things in school that I've never shown, that never became individual works. This was a place for those images, which couldn't be viewed on their own, and I pulled out other images that I was thinking about. The room was designed so that you see the collage last. I placed it sort of in a separate chamber, so if you want to see it, you must go all the way into the room. What was interesting for me is that this was a place where my writing could go. The text was done without pressure, away from the press release.

NS I like the idea of text without pressure.

EP Text is different to exhibit. People tend to get caught up in the text in the end. I wanted them to see it after they'd seen the images, so it gave context to the images, and not a preparation for them. I didn't want the text to be an exclamation mark either.

I'm excited about showing the images and text in this magazine. The smaller frame offers an opportunity to give readings that I can't control. But we can use the text in a way that's more specific, and come to it in an order. I can still tune the seriality.

NS Your show *In Bloom* at 47 Canal this April

opens with the quote 'Photography is also an act of love' by Hervé Guibert from 1981. Could you talk a little about your relationship with photography?

EP What I've been thinking a lot about is the notion of extended looking. With the trans body and other bodies, there's constant evaluation: how you look, how you see; these things overlap. I was trying to figure out how to construct a picture by taking apart everything I'd thought about before, and then trying to put it back together.

NS The current issue of *Kaleidoskope* has your portrait *Hobbes* 2015/2018 on the cover. This was in *Diablo* and made a great impact on me.

EP She's also an artist. The image is from 2015. I'd been showing another portrait of her for a few years – one that I immediately resonated with after we'd done the shoot – but it had never been a portrait I was super happy with. Recently I found this one, while I was going through the images I've taken in the past few years. I wanted to look back at the work I was making, work that I didn't really look at as work. And when I saw it again, I thought this was more my image – this was much more what I wanted the portrait to be.

NS It's taken with great respect: you're at eye level with the sitter. You seem to have made a contract of care with each person you photograph.

EP Yes. You meet the picture at her eye level; it doesn't go beyond her. Her presence as a person is also very much there. It's a portrait of someone with a strong sense of presence. She does a lot of self-portraiture so I'd be curious to hear what she thinks of this.

NS We have another strong portrait on our cover: *Nicole*.

EP She's also someone I'd call an artist. She talks about her artistic work in the past tense, but I believe she'll make more work. We've been friends for seven years, and when my show at 47 Canal was almost ready this winter, I felt that something was missing. So I asked her to do this. The deadline helped the portrait along, but I liked that it took a long time. And I sent her proofs to see which resonated with her.

NS Do you send proofs to everyone?

EP Yes, it needs to be discussed.

NS This issue of *Objectiv* looks at exhibition practices. What have you seen lately that's stayed on your mind?

EP Not much! I've been in the woods for the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture for the past nine weeks. They have a very strong faculty this year. It was good to see how they work – artists

like Josephine Halvorson, Henry Taylor and Simon Leung, who's a critic, theorist and also an artist. He was the one I could really connect with. It was a privilege to be surrounded by such people.

A show that has stayed on my mind is *Peter Hujar: Speed of Life* at The Morgan Library & Museum here in NYC this spring. It rocked my world. That space is really not big, so the installing has to be done super-smart. They really had no space, but having no space became a good space. I went twice. People were allowed to stay for a long time. The Zoe Leonard show at the Whitney was also gorgeous – so much space! Just think about what they could have done with Hujar's work there.

NS What do you think about the *New Photography*

show at MoMA? Carmen Winant's work is still on my mind from that one.

EP I agree. I worked with Carmen last year. The show is like her studio – she's been so true to what she does. It was a tough decision to add more people into the show, as they have done in the latest editions. Maybe people get lost in all the artists. They could have made more room for each. That said, *Ocean of Images* had more artists, but that made sense with the theme.

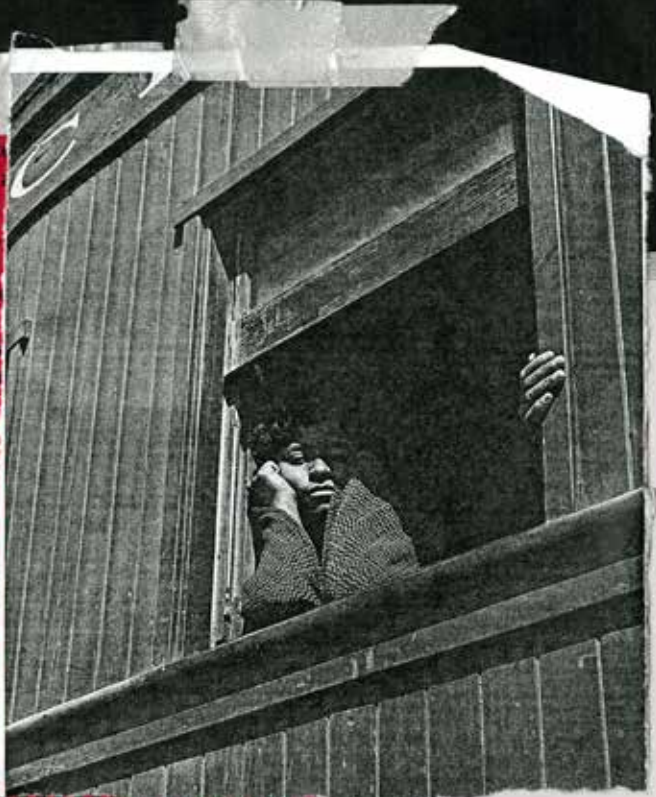
I was really excited about the David Wojnarowicz show at the Whitney, but it didn't feel as dynamic it should have. His work seems so urgent in these times. The Hujar show was exactly what needed to be seen – so dynamic – a real sense of urgency.

Elle Pérez is an artist from the Bronx, NY who works primarily in photography. Pérez has held solo exhibitions at MoMA PS1, New York and 47 Canal, New York. Their work has been exhibited at The Stonewall National Museum & Archives, Ft. Lauderdale, and the Bronx Documentary Center, New York, among other venues. Pérez is a founding member of *Junte*, a local and international artist collective and visual art project based out of Adjuntas, Puerto Rico. They are currently a Visiting Assistant Professor of Visual and Environmental Studies at Harvard University, and a Dean at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. Pérez is represented by 47 Canal.

p11 *Jose de Jesus*, 2018, **p12** *untitled*, 2018, **p13** *Barceloneta*, 2018, **p14** *Dick*, 2018, **p15** *untitled*, 2018, **p16** *bound body*, 2018.



off.
 loved the taste
 nursing like
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 on top of him.
 he was in a
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 them together
 feel his big co
 mine. I remem
 was. He was
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 my chest. H
 spread his leg
 humped ove
 brushing ove
 and put his
 kissed me ar
 against me. F
 it on his cock
 as he stroked
 and grabbed



**STRAIGHT
 TO HELL**

"I WAS"

1. rust red
2. geryon red
3. sinner red but I
 dont carry that shame
 anymore
4. shame red
5. blood red
6. catholic red
7. sunburn

X I . R I C H T

Are there many little boys who think they are a
 Monster? But in my case I am right said Geryon to the
 Dog they were sitting on the bluffs The dog regarded him
 joyfully



