

Researcher Simone Browne coined the term “dark sousveillance” to describe how enslaved Black people disappeared themselves from racialized surveillance by creatively subverting their own hypervisibility. Negro Spirituals, for example, could be used to share information through coded lyrics. Black people understood the reductive way white people saw their actions and they used this knowledge to their own advantage.

Naming this phenomenon is an important part of contextualizing the development of racializing surveillance technologies; if the oppression can be named, the resistance should be as well. Today, it is important that we recognize that this talent for creative escape has not left us. There is power at the intersection of impassioned creativity and the awareness of being watched.

*Dark Sousveillance* examines the presence of this power within six individual artists. How do Black people respond to the tension

between wanting to be seen by each other and needing to hide from the violence of hypervisibility? This desire to be known without being objectified is especially pronounced when entering most art spaces, which are typically dominated by the white gaze. In response to this dilemma, the gallery space is staged like a party. After consulting with Atlanta-based event planner Darian Steward, the Common Space gallery and Black Box space now feature colorful lights, strategically placed furniture, and flairs of sleek decor. At a party, dynamics of visibility, power, and subversion are in flux. The layout of *Dark Sousveillance* exaggerates preexisting conditions of objectification.

The six artists, Kenyssa Evans, Danielle Morris, Ishtar Sr., NIC Kay, Cameron Jarvis, and Danny Giles, tell stories about the cities that they have called home: Philadelphia, New York, Chicago, Rotterdam, and Washington D.C. Their art emphasizes how geography affects the mind and body. These artists are

critical of how Blackness is portrayed in mass media and have produced candid works that celebrate the complexities of day-to-day life. Sometimes autobiographical, sometimes documentative, the artworks in *Dark Sousveillance* are generously genuine.

As a portrait photographer, Kenyssa Evans experiments with abstracting figures while still depicting their essence. In her series “Make Yourself at Home...” Evans experiments with using a thermal camera to capture her subjects. Although thermal imagery can be used to monitor people, Evans’ application of this technology renders her subjects undervisible; facial and distinctive body features blur into a warm glow.

Evans’ work follows a previous era of Black art in which representations of Black figures within gallery spaces was seen as significant racial progress. Evans, like many other contemporary Black artists, confronts the inherent limitations of art spaces as a location

for progression. She has engineered a method of imagery production that not only obscures her subjects, but also relates the micro-experience of viewership in an art gallery with the massive surveillance technologies levied against urban Black communities.

“Make Yourself at Home...” also consists of interviews with the people who are being photographed. Snippets of these interviews are transcribed and can be read in this zine. The interviewees speak with a range of emotions as they speak on the neighborhoods that they inhabit and share memories of home.

Cameron Jarvis also has conducted an interview that is published in the zine; the visual artist speaks with his mother and discusses her move from Antigua to Minnesota and asks her to reflect on the shift 30 years later. As an adult, Jarvis moved to Philadelphia and the change of environment greatly influenced his practice. His practice includes taking long walks throughout the city and regarding the

infrastructure with a curious eye. At times he collects the decay and makes artworks from the found objects. Sometimes he draws the portals that open into the ground, where unseen workers maintain the landscape. His drawings combine rapid gestures with perspective lines that articulate architectural space.

The work of Danielle Morris similarly documents Philadelphia through its most exposed qualities. Erosion is inevitable and for Morris, dilapidation is a sign of well use. Her photographs emphasize the places where humans make contact with their external environment. Morris captures moments of ritualistic interaction and celebrates objects even after their intimate time with humans has passed. Recognizing the beauty of a broken brick or the memory of time spent in the laundromat is a particularly urgent matter in neighborhoods that are being rapidly gentrified.

This aestheticization of decay opens an opportunity for people to love and grieve more

deeply. Similarly, the music of Ishtar Sr. (aka Savan DePaul) presents a spectrum of emotionality through cutting lyrics that express anxieties over the current state of our late-capitalistic society. Their songs are a blend of conscious hip-hop, alt R&B and club music; you can dance to these feelings. Her music is personal and anthemic, combining joyful noise with righteous anger.

How do Black people move? When do we see Black people on screens? Mediated representations of human behavior are never objective — lens quality, playback speed, camera movement, and other film stylizations all contribute to the instantaneous read of who is being filmed and what kind of person they are. Danny Giles pushes these preconceptions to the extreme in his video piece “Game.” His work implores the viewer to slowly deconstruct how certain imagery invokes reactions of fear and to critically question the way media can be utilized towards racist ends.

Artist and choreographer NIC Kay utilizes their body as an archive for the dances and movements that have been cultivated by Black people all over the world. NIC Kay's video piece "keep at it" was developed out of their research project titled, "#blackpeopledancingontheinternet," which ponders how the legacies of Black movement can be honored within digital spaces. "keep at it" features NIC Kay dancing on a hot Summer day in NYC. The video employs a carefully curated series of signifiers, a specific style of clothing, the locations in which they dance, the genre of music that is being played. Through this collection of qualities, NIC Kay's spirit emerges. They dance with peace.