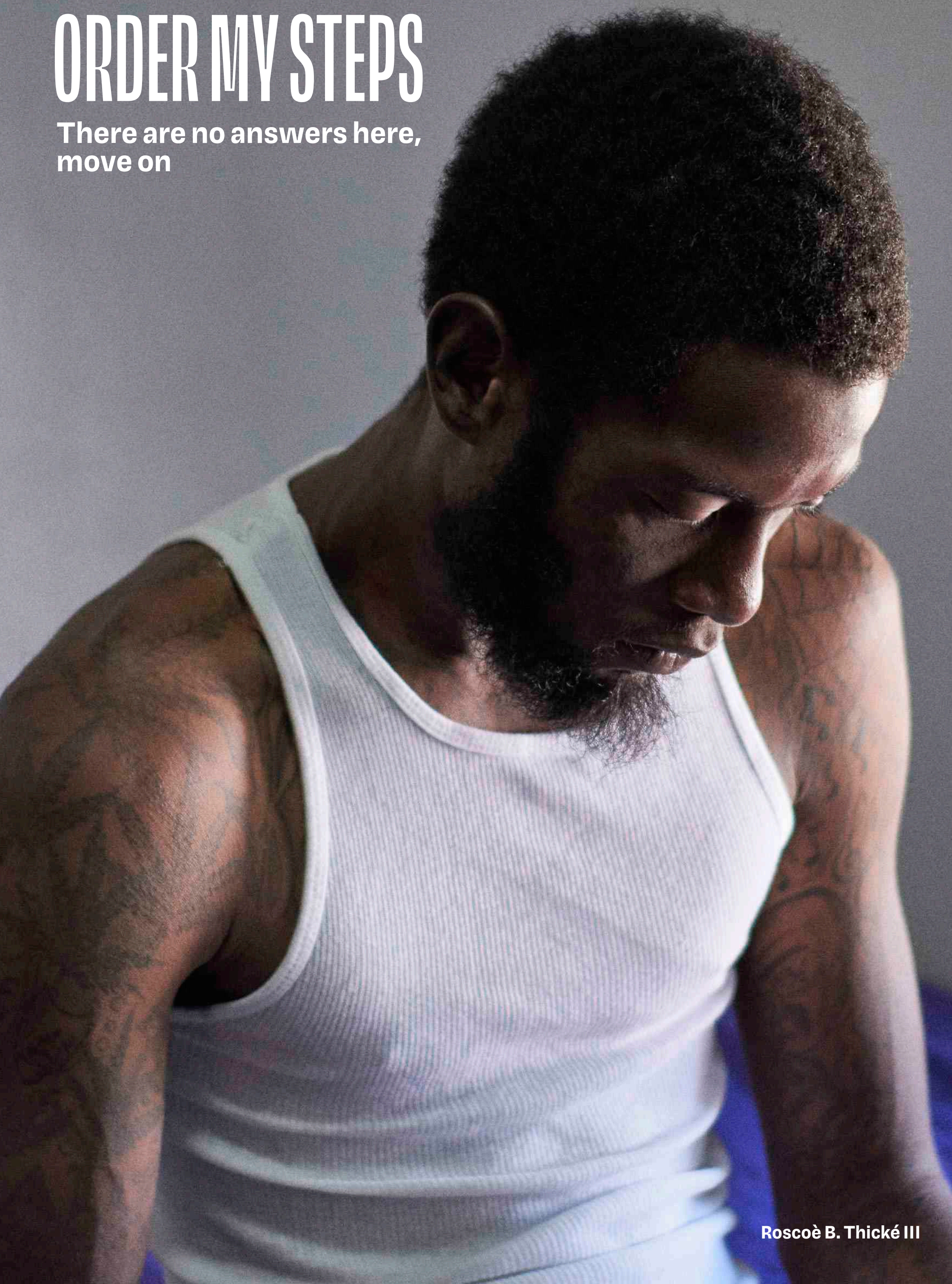


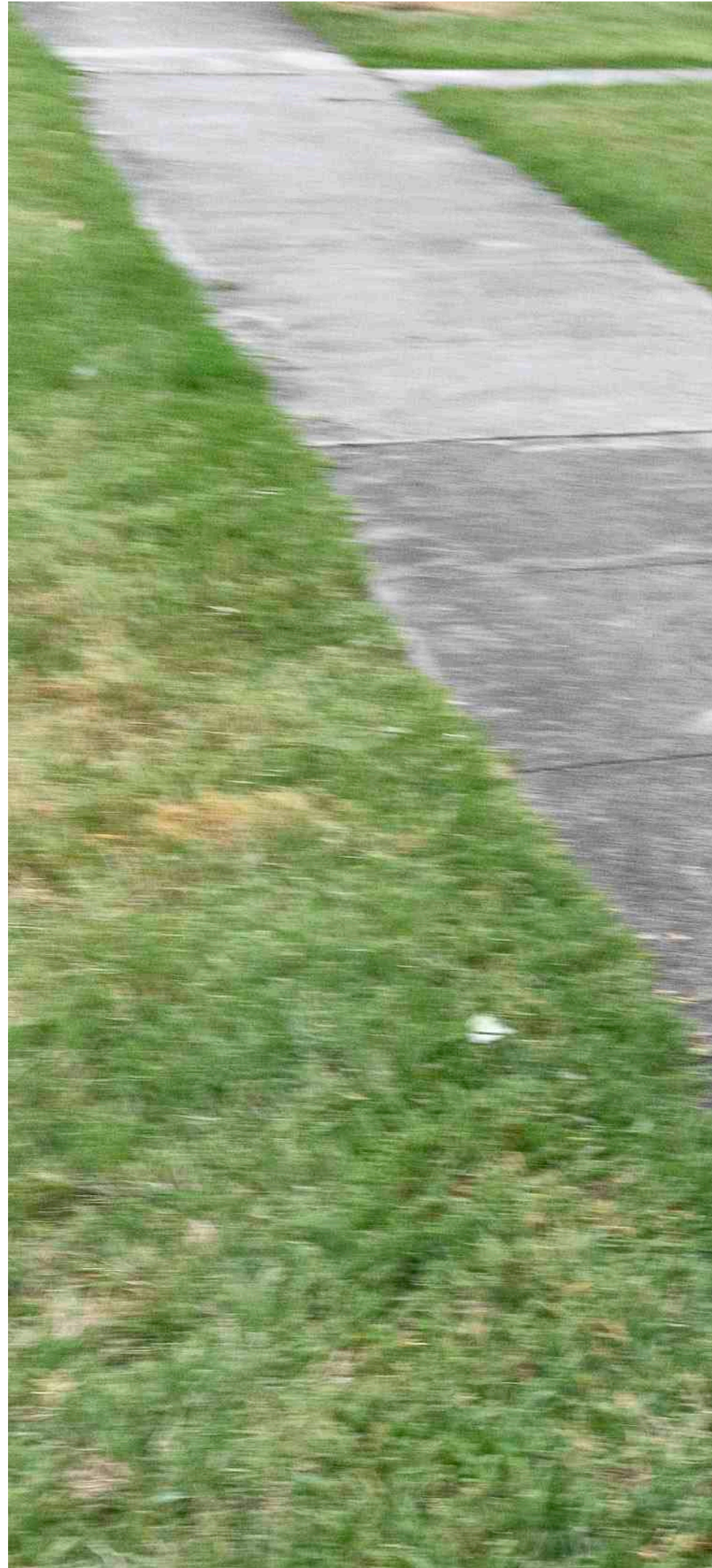
ORDER MY STEPS

There are no answers here,
move on



Roscoë B. Thicke III

1402 Pork N Bean Blue





Life Between Memories and the Present

Rosie Gordon-Wallace

Several years in the making—and as important as it is timely—this personal photographic narrative of Roscoë B. Thické III chronicles years of nurture and family at the “Pork ‘n’ Beans” housing complex in Miami’s Liberty City neighborhood. These photographs cement the deliberate, creative, and upfront planning, or maybe spontaneous, intuitive reactions to what revealed itself in front of his camera. Thické is determined to share the raw beauty of his family. Some images are improvised and instructive; others show, as Thické says, “what he sees.” He first picked up a camera in the Army while on duty in South Korea. There, he documented a landscape that was foreign to him and fascinating. The camera became his friend. He used it to preserve his experiences, many of which he could not retell. This was Thické’s first journey overseas and, as he says, his first view of the world. While away, he learned more about Miami than he had experienced while living in Pork ‘n’ Beans and Miami Gardens.

This exhibition presents three projects: *1402 Pork N Bean Blue* tells the personal tale of Thické’s life in his grandmother’s house, sharing the end of her legacy and the end of the Liberty Square housing project as they know it. The second, *Recovery*, shows the life of his sister as Roscoë affirms her beauty as a woman despite physical scarring and suffering. The third, *Absolute*, expresses the power and beauty of the artist’s pregnant friend in a stylized photo shoot.

Thické is determined to depict the time living with his grandmother in her home. He employs his skill as a photographer to capture the end of her era, and the end of the *Pork N Bean Blue* era. Pork ‘n’ Beans residents were promised housing and a better life in concrete high-rise buildings. Yet it is the hardship, loss, pain, suffering, and death that are chronicled by the artist using the power of photography. Also, hope, belief, and rituals affirmed by Black lives when memorializing loved ones.

The setting of these portraits allows us to see and feel the intimacy of the subjects, isolated in light. Thické wants the viewer to see and feel “Black Lives” as lived, existing within family. Although the plot of land and surroundings of Pork ‘n’ Beans are all-consuming of the lives “trapped” inside, there is magic in the image he has

highlighted as the entrance to his exhibition. What seems like sadness is explained as normal resolve to the conditions of life. The photographs show his ability to capture a sense of isolation. The private moments and deep thoughts that consume this particular family member are evident, trapped behind the window grills of the five-bedroom house in *1402 Pork N Bean Blue*.

A passion for Pork ‘n’ Beans is the driving force of this body of work. The time Thické spent on this series opens up to us, the audience, the reality of a landmark—a fading reality for everyday audiences making their daily commute on 62nd Street in Liberty City, but an indelible depiction of reality and a long-standing memory from the artist’s life. He is grateful to his family, who allowed him to take these images and share the narrative with us. Many were created with ambient light and are candid snapshots of everyday life. Thické’s idea is to change the scene, the external memory—to erase the stain, make the reality of his Black family match their skin tones, the background located in window frames that boxed the family in, and the deep sense of loss and yearning for more, which the artist hopes to make us feel when looking at these images.

Miami is one of the most vibrant and trendsetting cities in the U.S. South, boosted by the establishment of high-rises, art, technology, fashion, and design. Pork ‘n’ Beans will not be featured on any GPS map of what’s happening next. No new museums will open there, no new schools, no new liquor stores (well, just maybe), and for now we await the Starbucks that will be the ultimate definer of gentrification and change. This centrally located neighborhood is twenty-six feet above sea level, with its terracotta that is coveted for its newly attained value and the seeming safety from rising seas. The neighborhood is changing. Thické wants us to peek into his life story and memories. Never you mind who you now see riding their bikes past Pork ‘n’ Beans.

We know these images are from life itself. For those who don’t know, this is Pork ‘n’ Beans.

Roscoë B. Thické III is not a photographer by profession but rather an artist who has found a way to express his art through these captured images.

He believes photography saved his life.









Roscoè B. Thické III Pays Attentive Homage to Life in Liberty Square

Elisa Turner

An acute irony underlies the photographs of Roscoè B. Thické III in his first solo show, *Order My Steps: There Are No Answers Here, Move On*. At once succinct and meditative, the images reflect upon his life growing up in Liberty Square, a formerly segregated housing project in the Miami neighborhood of Liberty City.

Only by leaving home and country could he return with the vision to pay attentive homage to his experiences in Liberty Square, so notorious for its violent crime that the *Miami Herald* once dubbed it “Murder Square” in a 2014 headline. Scenes of its rectangular, one-story housing units in pastel shades, interspersed with wide lawns and trees, functioned almost like another character in the dazzling, Oscar-winning film *Moonlight* (2016), filmed for the most part in the project’s immediate surroundings.

As Thické explains, it was a lengthy process for him to understand the deeply felt sense of home now permeating these photographs of Liberty Square, nicknamed “Pork ‘n’ Beans,” and nearby Miami Gardens after being transplanted as a high school graduate to places radically different from the tightly knit community of family and friends he had known since childhood.

His departure from Miami and return were transformative. “Going away made me realize I am from a beautiful place. It’s what I call home. It’s what resonates in my soul,” he says.

Stationed in South Korea with the U.S. Army, Thické bought his first camera in Seoul, where he took photography classes. The ability to document unfamiliar surroundings ignited his passion to record people and places from his own curious point of view. When he returned to Miami from the military and a stint with the State Department in Washington, DC, he studied with the internationally exhibited photographer and installation artist Teresa Diehl at Broward College.

These experiences prepared him to portray his home turf as it now undergoes a dramatic reset. A multimillion-dollar plan is bringing new economic life to Liberty City, transforming Liberty Square with upgraded, affordable apartments.

The once praiseworthy and later troubled history of Liberty Square is embedded in his photography. Built in 1937 as part of President Franklin Roosevelt’s “New Deal,” Liberty Square occupies twenty acres in central Miami. With over 700 identical housing units, it was initially designed for middle-class Blacks as a nexus for upward mobility. But many residents fled in the 1970s and ‘80s following extreme violence.

Order My Steps invites us inside a persevering yet fragile Black community that Thické fears could be seriously diminished in gentrifying Miami. On a more compact scale, he is working in the tradition of artists like LaToya Ruby Frazier, combining his art with an activist spirit.

Several of Thické’s photographs document places in Miami Gardens and Liberty Square that he now sees as a trap, enclosing residents with few opportunities to grow and accumulate sustainable wealth while staying in Miami. Throughout these images are signs of a

confining infrastructure: barely opened doors, windows covered with bars, and electric fans, signifying the lack of air conditioning for many during Miami’s stifling summer season. Glimpses of sunshine and greenery are distorted from being photographed from inside darkened interiors.

The claustrophobic quality in some images is leavened by the grace and resilience in others. Altogether, these vignettes unfold a nuanced tale of Thické’s made-only-in-Miami past and present.

His series title *1402 Pork N Bean Blue* refers to the address of his late grandmother’s blue-painted, five-bedroom home in Liberty Square. We see his aging grandmother, whom Thické says was a revered community matriarch, in the cozy living room where the photographer fondly remembers gathering with his large extended family for years. And we see his relatives gathered once more for a remembrance ceremony a year after her death. We see the empty yellow chair where she sat on her porch to watch generations of children playing. This scene is a vivid witness to the passing of a tradition treasured by those living for years in a place little understood or valued by the rest of the city.

Powerfully evoking an absent bodily presence is a technique Thické repeats in *The Flea*, a work documenting a now-demolished landmark from his childhood—the Carol Mart flea market in Miami Gardens. The image shows the market shuttered at night, security lights blazing. No one is around, though a lone bicycle stands in the empty parking lot, centered just below the market’s signage. With its spare, geometric composition, *The Flea* creates a sense of urban loneliness amid a place once bustling with commerce that briefly recalls a classic Edward Hopper painting, *Early Sunday Morning*.

These photographs are textured with Thické’s ambivalence about the gentrification changing his childhood haunts. Are smaller, new apartments with shiny amenities really an improvement over larger homes? The artist is circumspect, his photographic homage an attempt to preserve time and feeling. “Communities are lost, back yards, front yards, being able to meet with your neighbor on your porch,” he says. “These apartments don’t have it.”

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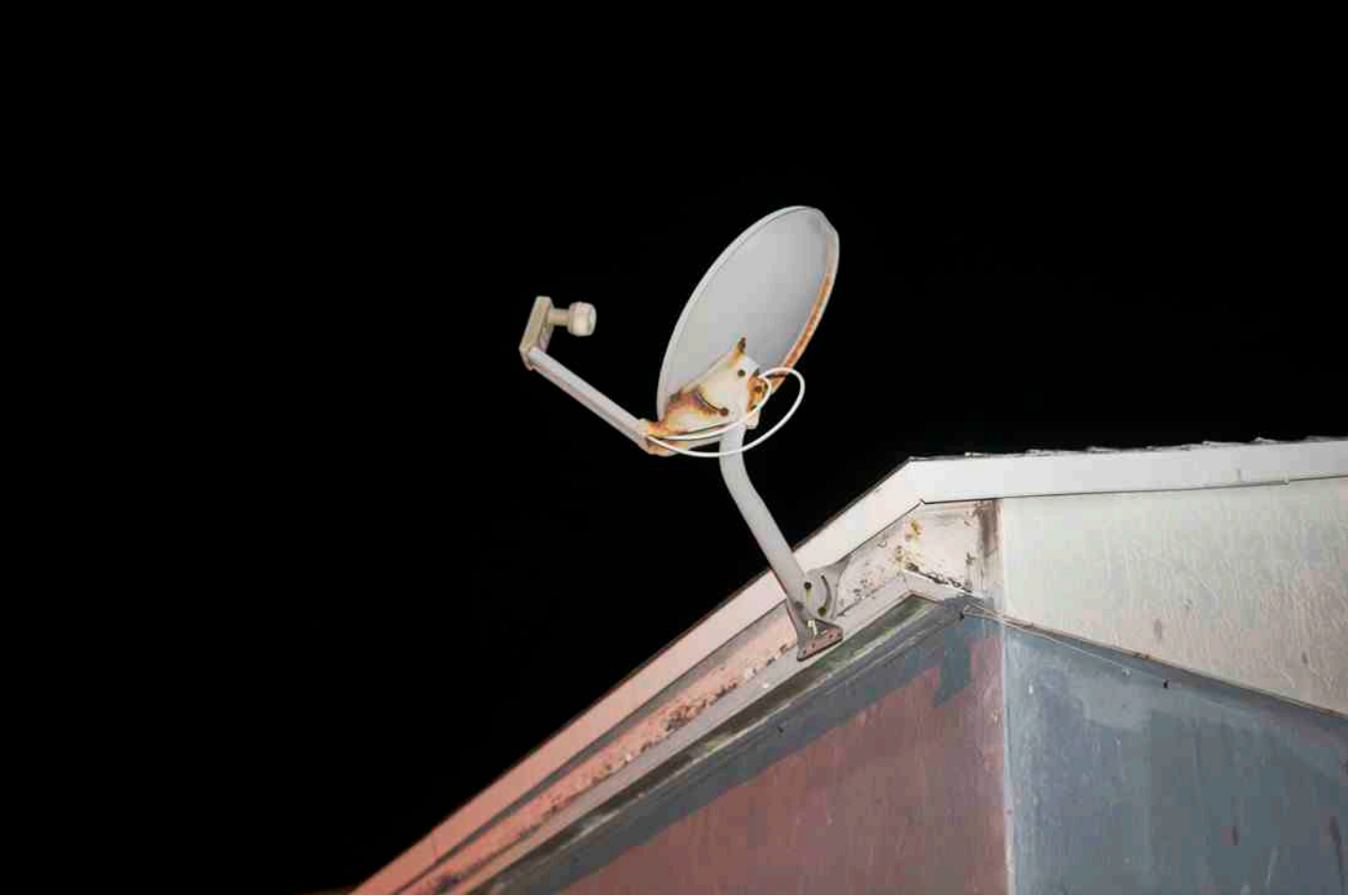
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Author studio visit with Roscoè B. Thické III, December 20, 2021.

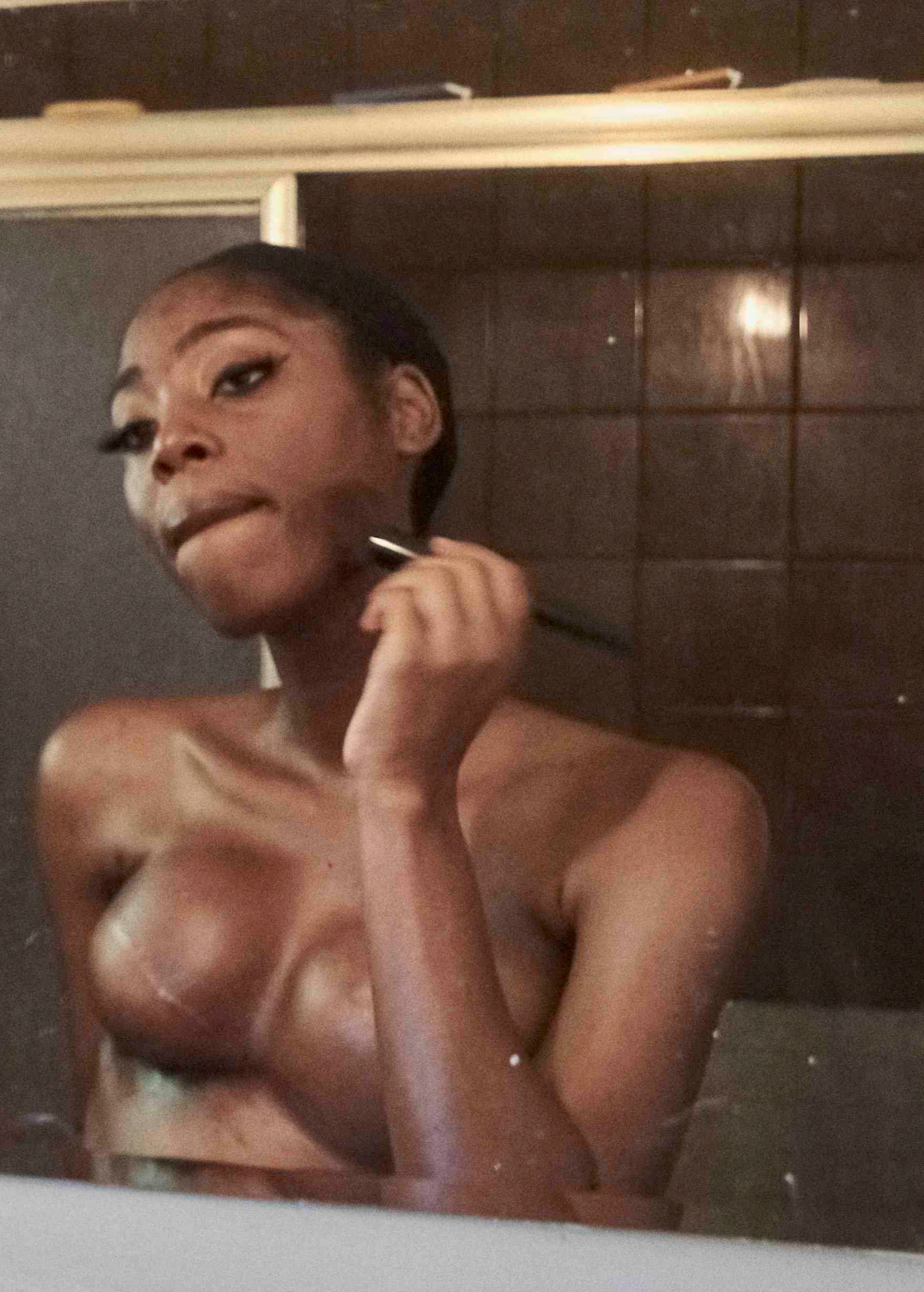




The Resurrection of Reese

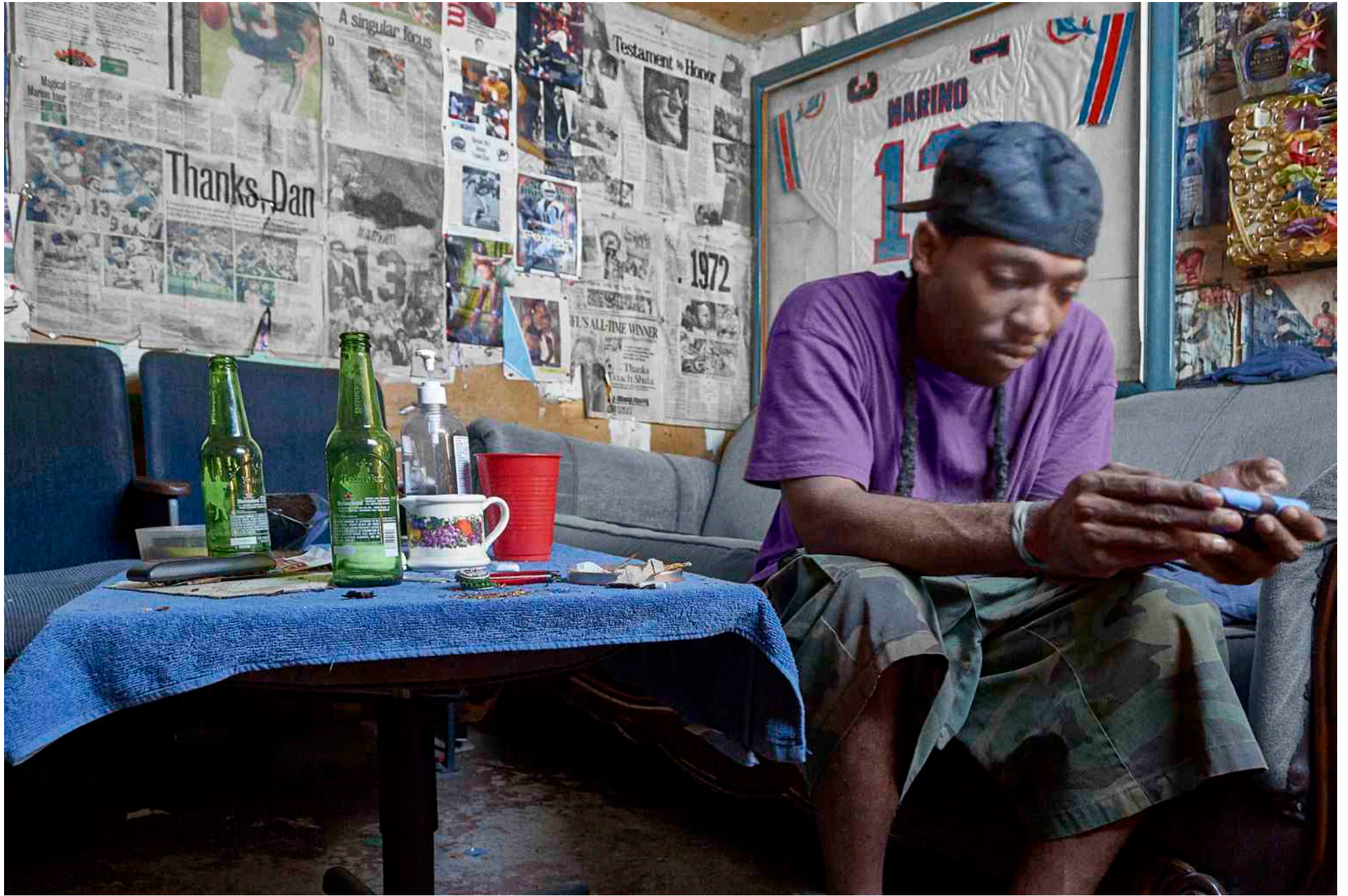


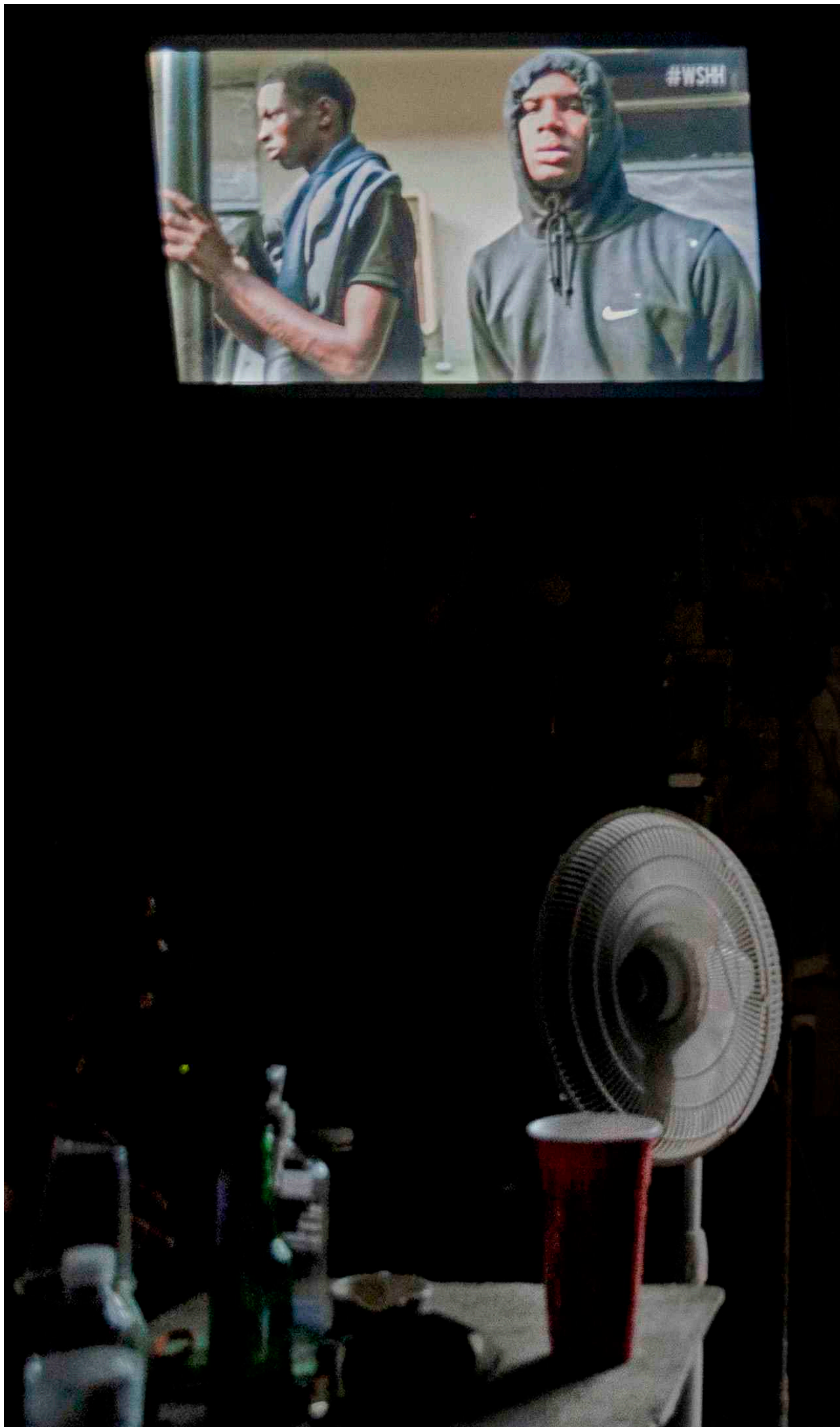




A Box is a Trap





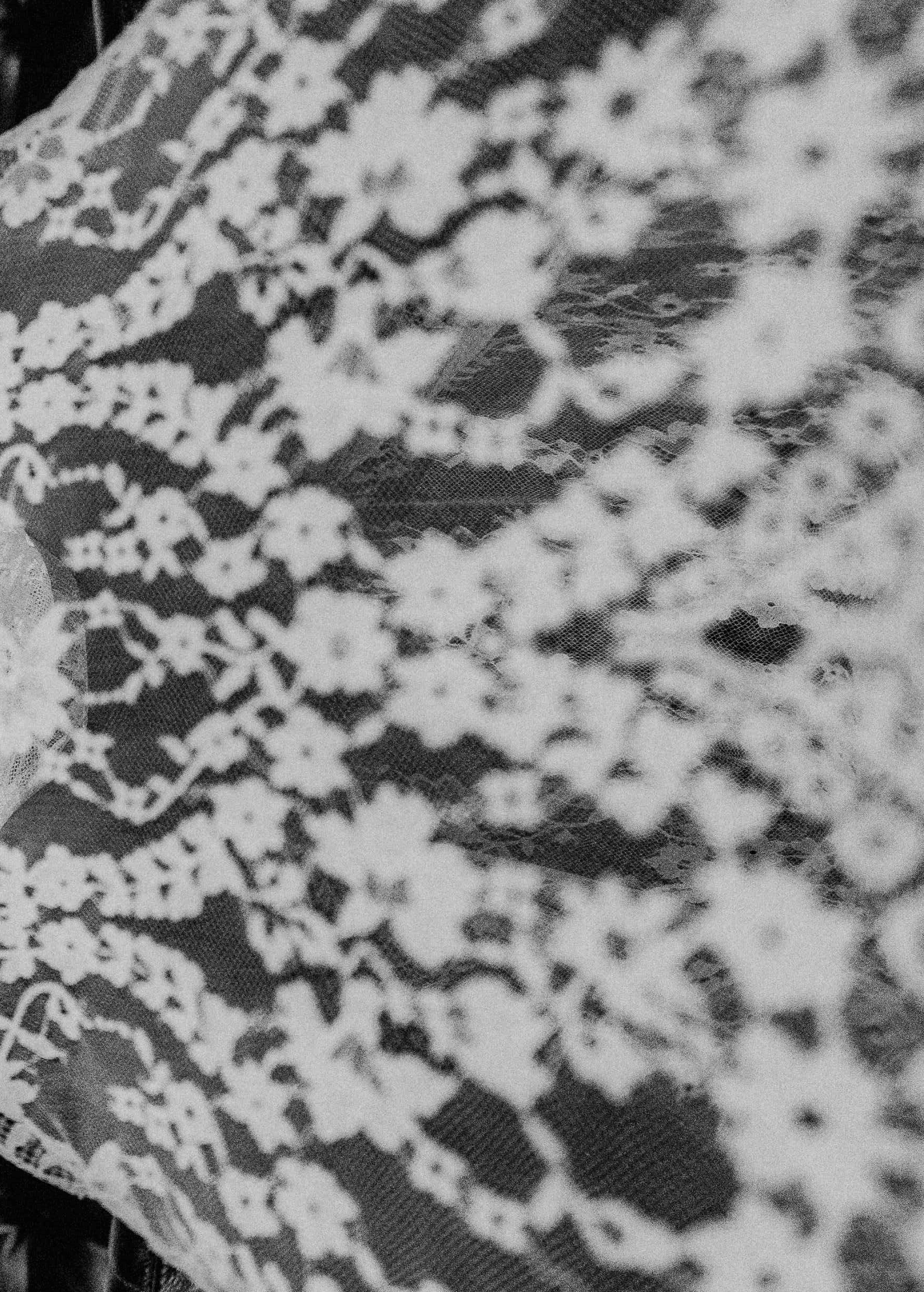




ABSOLUTE

**There are Certain Large Cardinals that
Cannot Exist in the Constructible Universe**







Roscoë B. Thicke III is an artist who sees the world through the lens of his family and community. This exhibition collects the time, people and places that have built the world that Thicke navigates, with his images leading us to consider what came before with just as much weight as considering what comes next. Using photography as a tool to honor, remember and document, he transforms the temporal nature of an instance into archives that we can revisit.

We are honored to present his first solo exhibition curated by Rosie Gordon-Wallace, founder of Diaspora Vibe Culture Arts Incubator (DVCAI), which serves as a local and global laboratory dedicated to promoting, nurturing and cultivating the vision and diverse talents of emerging artists from the Caribbean Diaspora, artists of color and immigrant artists. We are thankful to Rosie for her vision, guidance and long standing support in an endless number of ways to artists in our community. We would also like to extend a thank you to Elisa Turner for contributing a thoughtful essay about Thicke’s work for this broadsheet.

Our mission at Oolite Arts is—as our founder, Ellie Schneiderman, said, “to help artists help themselves.” We foster the growth of artists through exhibitions, public programs, short- and long-term residencies, professional development, direct funding, and publications.

This exhibition and publication was made possible by contributions from many talented individuals. Many thanks to Amanda Bradley, Oolite Arts Programs Manager, for coordinating all facets of this publication and exhibition and Samantha Ganter, Oolite Arts Programs Coordinator, for her support in organizing the exhibition. I also want to express my gratitude to all the Oolite Arts staff who bring their passion and talents to our organization every day—along with our Board, whose members embrace and champion the dynamic vision for Miami arts that drives our work.

Lastly, I would like to thank Rebecca Sylvers and Miko McGinty for designing this publication. We hope that this broadsheet will continue to serve the artist well beyond the length of the exhibition and push his practice forward in critical and thoughtful ways.

Dennis Scholl
Oolite Arts

Cover: *Down*, 2020
pp. 4–5: From the series *Time*, 2021
p. 7: From the series *Contrast*, 2021
pp. 8–9: *Irene*, 2019
p. 10: *Hear No Evil*, 2021
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p. 22: *The Office*, 2016
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pp. 24–25: *The Box*, 2016
pp. 28–29: *Untitled II (ABSOLUTE)*, 2020
p. 30: *What Remains*, 2021
Back cover: *Missing Matriarch*, 2021

All images courtesy the artist

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Exhibitions and programs at Oolite Arts are made possible with support from the Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs, the Cultural Affairs Council, the Miami-Dade Mayor and Board of County Commissioners; the City of Miami Beach Department of Tourism and Cultural Development, Office of Cultural Affairs, and the Miami Beach Mayor and City Commissioners; the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Arts and Culture and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture; the National Endowment for the Arts; the Lynn & Louis Wolfson II Family Foundation, The Jorge M. Pérez Family Foundation at The Miami Foundation; the Al & Jane Nahmad Family Foundation, and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. Additional support provided by Walgreens Company.

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