

For Immediate Release:

Paul Mpagi Sepuya  
*Dark Room*  
17 September – 22 October 2017  
306 Windward Avenue

Team (bungalow) is pleased to announce a show by L.A. photographer Paul Mpagi Sepuya. Entitled *Dark Room*, the exhibition will run from 17 September through 22 October 2017. The Bungalow is located at 306 Windward Avenue in Venice, CA.

For this exhibition, Sepuya has produced a series of new images that interrogate and challenge the history and nature of photographic portraiture from a queer, black perspective. For Sepuya, his medium is as much about disclosure as concealment, the role of the photographer ultimately one of control. Central to his practice is the undisguised and frequently experimental use of mirrors, which draws the viewer's attention to the images' photographic artifice, complicating the experience of looking at a subject, while also engendering a mystifying effect.

A number of the photos on view feature draped black or brown velvet. This particular material – loaded with cultural associations of sensuousness, femininity and blackness – appears alternatively as backdrop and foreground, in the latter instances hiding the photo's ostensible subject – its "portrait-sitter." Frequently, that subject is Sepuya himself, although his face is always at least partly obscured. The artist cites Manet's *Olympia* as a template for his own practice – a painting in which a pulled back curtain reveals a reclining nude white woman gazing confrontationally, even carnivorously, at the viewer, while a barely visible black woman, ostensibly a servant, presents her with flowers. Like that Modernist masterpiece, these photographs explore the possibility that control might stem from a marginalized position, that the role of the pictorially objectified, the consumed image, might in fact possess power.

The space of the studio occupies a powerful and multifaceted position in Sepuya's work. It serves not only as the exposed site of his artistic production, but also as a vehicle for both literal and metaphorical self-reflection, as well as a complex, even confounding temporal index, through which the artist distills multiple discrete moments in time into a single image. Several photos show his studio with collages hanging from its ceiling, obscuring all but a sliver of the space itself. The two-dimensional assemblages' constituent materials are mostly historic pictures by the likes of Cecil Batton, Carl Van Vechten and Richard Bruce Nugent – images that originally adorned the walls of Sepuya's previous studio space. Other works are constructed by placing a mirror in front of a dark background; this technique has the effect of setting into stark relief the otherwise latent accumulation of handprints and dust on the mirror's surface, these markings appearing as obscuring, smoke-like abstract forms. All of these works conflate multiple tenses, using the photographic medium to flatten and controvert our perceptions of the passage of time.

The men in Sepuya's photographs are always intimate relations: friends, lovers and peers. This creates a powerful, even discomfiting sense of familiarity, effecting the partial erasure of the division between personal and public realms of knowledge. Institutions do not privilege so-called gossip and its effects on artists' work and lives – a fact lamented in the art historian Gavin Butt's 2005 treatise on the subject *Between You and Me: Queer Disclosures in the New York Art World, 1948-1963*. Sepuya, too, combats this notion, using his private life as the raw material for his practice, exploring the overlapping and intersecting roles of desire, friendship and creative collaboration in his relationships, inviting the viewer into his own queer erotic subjectivity.

Paul Mpagi Sepuya was born in 1982 outside Los Angeles. He lived in New York for fourteen years before returning to LA in 2014. He has shown extensively both stateside and abroad.

Team Bungalow's hours are Wednesday through Sunday, noon to 6pm.