

Paul Mpagi Sepuya

March 28, 2019

Through April 13. Team Gallery, 83 Grand Street, Manhattan; 212-279-9219, teamgal.com.



Paul Mpagi Sepuya's "Darkroom Mirror" (2017) in his show "The Conditions" at Team Gallery.

Paul Mpagi Sepuya, via Team (Gallery, Inc.)

Paul Mpagi Sepuya is experiencing a flush of success right now, and his new show — "[The Conditions](#)," at [Team Gallery](#) — demonstrates that it is well deserved. His work appears on the cover of Artforum's March issue and will be included in the [2019 Whitney Biennial](#). Mr. Sepuya is not an overnight sensation, however; over a decade of working, exhibiting and returning to art school to study with the great photographer Catherine Opie at the University of California, Los Angeles helped him to arrive at a distinctive and timely amalgam of portraiture and conceptual photography.

Mr. Sepuya's photographs are like visual puzzles. He appears in many of them, but in fragmented form and usually with a camera in hand. Some of the works show multiple hands holding cameras, suggesting that authorship is always some sort of collaboration. Pushing that out further, you, the viewer are reflected against the dark backdrops in the picture and if you photograph Mr. Sepuya's works (as I of course did), your hand and camera end up nestled surprisingly amid the gesturing fingers of him and his subjects.

"The Conditions" could refer to lighting, studio setups, or social conditions. Mr. Sepuya's photographs have often been categorized as "queer" (that is, within the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender cosmos), but they feel more universal to me: Multifarious shades of melanin are represented, and he has included images of women in this show. And while the history of representing bodies in photography — particularly nude ones — is fraught, Mr. Sepuya charges intrepidly into the mire, offering what feel like new, smart conclusions on how to represent power or vulnerability, as well as the unwavering desire to look at such images. *MARTHA SCHWENDENER*