



## Paul Mpagi Sepuya

Yancey Richardson Gallery

525 West 22nd Street

February 2, 2017–March 18, 2017

Paul Mpagi Sepuya is self-consciously part of a deep lineage of queer cultural practice. His process journals reveal his engagement with Bruce Nugent and other gay writers from the past century, and his intimate color portraits call to mind earlier photographs by Lyle Ashton Harris, Peter Hujar, and Rotimi Fani-Kayode. The writer and critic Hilton Als included Sepuya in his 2016 exhibition on James Baldwin, poetically situating him as one of Baldwin's creative "children."

**Paul Mpagi Sepuya, *Mirror Study (Self-Portrait)\_Q5A2059, 2015*, archival pigment print, 32 x 24".**

This exhibition includes a handful of such portraits: black and white men, at times draped in rich fabric and posed in a formal studio setting, à la Baroque painting. But most of the pictures here are fragmented — collages of Sepuya's large-scale prints: torn, overlaid, and rephotographed. Works such as *Mirror Study (Self-Portrait)\_Q5A2059, 2015*, rather overtly suggests process—from the messiness and fractured nature of the self to the archival aspects of artmaking, down to saving and indexing files on a computer.

But for all their layering, Sepuya's photographs have a distinctive unity, derived from his shooting into a mirror and drawing his varied source materials together onto a single plane. In these studies, figures are never complete, and we are asked to consider the lineage of studio portraiture itself—its artifice and self-performance a form of analogy to the more quotidian masquerade of everyday life, of looking at our reflection and searching for a sense of cohesion. Sepuya's camera resists such cohesion and adds contemporary resonance to the traditional, canonical, and subcultural alike.

— Ian Bourland