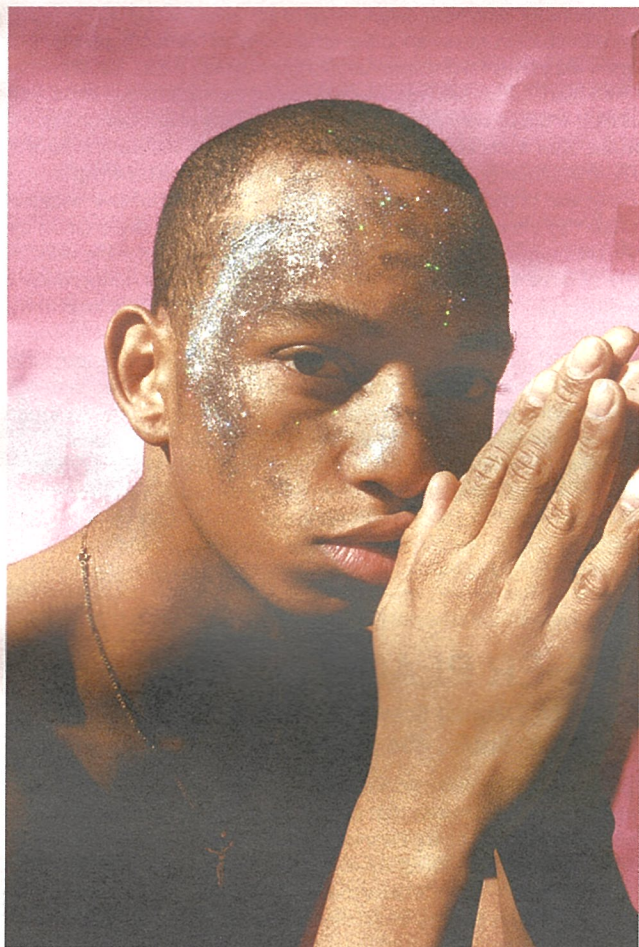


## THE NEW BLACK VANGUARD

Antwaun Sargent, Aperture, 304 PP., \$65

The fashion industry is incredibly powerful, producing overwhelming wealth and widespread cultural influence. Its images signify so much, from documenting cultural trends to reflecting attitudes of sexuality, politics and social structures. Viewed critically, fashion's aspirational qualities are bound to capitalist notions of exclusivity and luxury. Predominantly expressed using white models and photographers, the fashion industry's images do a great deal to alienate Black people and people of colour. *The New Black Vanguard: Photography between Art and Fashion*, by critic and writer Antwaun Sargent, profiles a loose collective of 15 Black photographers from all over the world who are documenting Blackness in fashion, and Black life more broadly, through their culturally specific perspectives. Sargent names them the New Black Vanguard, and positions the group not as something niche or countercultural, but original, at the forefront of cultural developments.

As I write this, conversations about white supremacy are increasing in mainstream media, with people demanding accountability from institutions and denouncing performative gestures of solidarity with the Black Lives Matter



Quil Lemons New York 2017  
COURTESY APERTURE © QUIL LEMONS

OPPOSITE: Nadine Ijewere *Untitled* 2018  
COURTESY APERTURE © NADINE IJEWERE  
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movement. Anna Wintour, *Vogue's* editor-in-chief since 1988, recently said that *Vogue* has not done enough to empower Black creatives, despite her being the very person who could have made it a priority all along. In June, Samira Nasr was named editor-in-chief of *Vogue's* competition, *Harper's Bazaar*, and is the first Black person in that position in the publication's history. Amid these high-ranking appointments and apologies, a cynical question lurks in the background: Given the fashion industry's inextricable relationship to capital, how progressive can its gatekeepers really be?

Through their own publishing platforms and networks, such as Campbell Addy's *Niijournal* and Jamal Nxedlana's Bubblegum Club casting agency, the artists of the New Black Vanguard try to sidestep the culture-vulturnism, fetishization and overt racism of mainstream outlets looking to capitalize on racial tropes and assimilation. The New Black Vanguard are intentional about references and influences—from Black portraiture in the 19th century to work by James Van Der Zee, Gordon Parks and, more recently, Carrie Mae Weems. Some photographers use their family members as models. There is obvious imagination, texture and love in their work that reflects real life and the multivalence of Blackness in a way that white cultural producers simply cannot replicate.

Ruth Ossai's signature painted studio backdrops create scenes of romantic gardens, pastoral fields and cityscapes, which situate her subjects in various historical and contemporary contexts. Stephen Tayo's series signifies how twins in Nigeria are revered in Yoruba culture for bestowing health and prosperity on their families, and recalls Jamel Shabazz's "deuce portraits" of identically dressed twins in Harlem. The work of this group delineates very particular aspects of Black art, culture and heritage that are often used by mainstream publications for creative cachet.

The July 2008 edition of Italian *Vogue*, known as the "all black" issue, was heralded by journalists as breaking the race barrier in fashion. There was, of course, something that seemed off about using Blackness as a special marketing tool for a single issue. The issue contained mostly light-skinned models, without natural hair, dressed in garments by European designers. To use Priyamvada Gopal's phrase in her *Guardian* column about the issue, also quoted in *The New Black Vanguard*, "this is black girls-as-white girls." Even an issue of *Vogue* with all Black models ultimately suggests whiteness has a monopoly on sophistication and glamour.

Ten years prior, Alek Wek, walking for Betsey Johnson's Fall/Winter 1998 collection, took off her stylist-mandated blond wig at the end of the runway and tossed it into the crowd. It was an iconic moment that indicated the rejection of fashion defaulting to whiteness, and it continues to emblemize the spirit of *The New Black Vanguard*. With more than 300 pages of profiles, portfolio selections and interviews, this book is a significant archival object of Black creativity in fashion on its own terms. —ANGEL CALLANDER

## THE OTOLITH GROUP

Berlinale Forum Expanded, Berlin

This year's Berlinale Forum Expanded (themed "Part of the Problem") featured the 52-minute, single-channel video installation *INFINITY minus Infinity* (2019), the newest work by Turner Prize-nominated UK artist duo the Otolith Group. Since forming the group in 2002, artists Anjalika Sagar and Kodwo Eshun have cemented a style that explores diasporic speculative futures through essayistic filmmaking and research-led projects.

Commissioned for the Sharjah Architecture Triennial, *INFINITY minus Infinity* is Black girl magic in a lightning storm. The title of the video refers to Denise Ferreira da Silva's theory of the physical matter of Black Lives Matter: "blackness as *matter* signals  $\infty$ , another world: namely, that which exists without time and out of space, in the plenum." In other words, Blackness is out of this world, a condition that cannot be contained in our earthly categories of race without creating an extremely dangerous situation for Black people. At the same time, if the Black subject can be equated with the nonhuman (and live to tell about it), then Blackness can be anything, which is perhaps the reason it needs to be destroyed. Thinking through this and Ferreira da Silva's other