PHOTOGRAPHY

Introducing the Inaugural Silver List, Featuring 47 Exciting Contemporary Photographers Whose Work You Just Have to See

The Silver List aims to do for photography what the Black List did for screenwriters, bringing broader recognition to the most exciting up-and-coming talents in their field.

BY KATEY RICH

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Aaron Turner, *Fredrick & Jules*, 2019

For more than 15 years the Black List, founded by *Vanity Fair* contributor **Franklin Leonard,** has featured the most-loved unproduced screenplays in Hollywood, and put spotlights on future hits like *The King's Speech, Juno, Looper,* and many more. But can the Black List model of encouraging up-and-coming talent be recreated outside of Hollywood?

The inaugural Silver List is ready to find out. Launched this year by the Silver Eye Center for Photography, in partnership with Carnegie Mellon University and the Black List, the Silver List features 47 extraordinary photographers, selected by 500 nonprofit photography curators, educators, scholars, publishers, and critics. The criteria were simple, but deeply personal for each respondent: who is a living, early-career photographer whose work deserves to be seen by more people?

"We thought it would be, if nothing else, interesting to see how people approached the question," said **David Oresick,** Silver Eye's executive director. "It wasn't until I started to see how people were completing their surveys that I understood that this project was really meaningful for people. People are dealing with an endless feeling pandemic, reckoning with systemic racial injustice, struggling with reduced budgets, layoffs, and furloughs, and really thinking about what all this means for our field. I think many of the artists on the Silver List reflect how curators and scholars are processing this moment."

According to Oresick, art institutions can take a lot of time to respond to current events, but "the Silver List is different. People can just point to the artists they love, and the work they believe in." Many of the selected artists are people of color who deal explicitly with race and identity in the work. Oresick points to **Zora J. Murff,** whose work "looks at the Black experience in America, redlining and systemic racism, the power and terror of images, and so much more." On his website the Silver List photographer **Shikeith** writes that his work "investigates the experiences of black men within and around concepts of psychic space."

Though the Silver List has made its debut in the wake of both the pandemic and 2020's global protests for racial justice, Oresick emphasized that all of the selected artists have been dealing with these larger ideas in their work for years. "This is work that critiques white supremacy, celebrates marginalized voices, and tells stories from perspectives that most people never get to hear," he said.

The pandemic has made opportunities for up-and-coming photographers even more scarce than before, Oresick said. "The Silver List can't solve these problems, but I think it gives curators and scholars a way to reflect, to ask themselves what work they really care about, without constraints," he continued. "Our goal is for the list to be examined widely and thoughtfully by people inside and outside of our field. I think the methodology of this project proves that these voices resonate, and should be heard. I hope the Silver List gets these artists a lot of seats at a lot of tables where they may not have been welcomed before, because they have always deserved to be there."

Find the full inaugural Silver List here.

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Katey Rich is *Vanity Fair*'s awards and audio editor. She has been with *Vanity Fair* since 2013, launching the HWD section as well as the Vanities section. She also founded the *Little Gold Men* awards-season podcast, which she cohosts weekly. She saw *Titanic* seven times in theaters. You can follow … Read more