

Rowan Renee

*My image is a lens*

04.11 - 05.10.2025

island is pleased to present *My image is a lens*, a solo exhibition by Rowan Renee.

Renee transforms the gallery into a photographic darkroom, paying homage to the process of analog photography as a metaphor for personal development and healing. Drawing from their decade-long archive of self-portraits, many of which have never been seen, Renee has created a series of photographic prints from handmade stained glass negatives. These are presented within an immersive environment that poetically reinterprets darkroom tools – development trays, negative carriers and enlargers – through light, water and sound.

In *Slipping, count the seconds*, a fragment of their body emanates within the layered composition between splashes of darkroom chemistry and streaks of kiln-fused glass. Renee sees life-affirming potential in artifacts of the photographic process. Each print is a signpost on a journey. In the gallery, the prints are presented on a room-sized metal armature that echoes the drying racks used by analog photographers. Curling and overlapping each other, the physical presence of the print ruptures the surface of the image. The photograph is not just a single frame, but a whole world.

*My image is a lens* foregrounds the rituals of image-making as a new way of seeing within an ongoing practice of healing. When Renee made these images ten years ago, they represented a desire for trauma to be seen and acknowledged. In this iteration, the deliberate distortion of the original portraits mirrors the perceptual changes we undergo as the traumatic memory recedes. Through shifting tints, streaks and wisps, what remains of our past selves is not bound to endless repetition. Their approach to the photographic medium as a site for exploration and play suggests that the unpredictable entanglements between the body and perception can offer us a pathway to freedom.

Rowan Renee (b. 1985, West Palm Beach, Florida) creates site-specific installations through immersion in communities, landscapes or archives. They conceptualize the labor-intensive processes they use, including printmaking, photography, weaving, and kiln-fused glass, as care-work that transforms trauma.

Renee has presented solo exhibitions at The Green-Wood Cemetery, Brooklyn, NY, 2023; Smack Mellon, Brooklyn, NY, 2021; FiveMyles, Brooklyn, NY, 2021; Aperture Foundation, New York, NY, 2017; and Pioneer Works, Brooklyn, NY, 2015;. They have received awards from the New York Foundation for the Arts, the Harpo Foundation, the Jerome Hill Foundation, and the Art for Justice Fund. Their installation, *No Spirit For Me*, was included in *Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration* at MoMA PS1, Queens, NY, 2020. Rowan Renee is a founder of the KODA x Stilt City Retreat, a livable sculpture, conceptual art project and future experimental artist residency in Rockaway Beach.