I was once a freshman in college at a small school in the suburbs of Columbus, Ohio, close to where I grew up, but also in an entirely other universe from where I grew up. I came up on the East Side, a mostly all-black neighborhood that was, at points, deemed by the city as "too dangerous" for even the cops to slide through, which was a blessing for us, as we saw it, because it meant that we could take care of each other, outside of the confines of state surveillance. It meant that the drug dealers were also people who brought money back to the elders. It meant that the gang members protected the basketball courts from outsiders. Through my childhood, I was given a manual on how to love a place and a people.

A home for our affections, our heartbreaks and frustrations, our curiosities, and our survival

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Capital University is a small college, situated in a suburb to the west of where I grew up. I was there to play soccer. All of the black people who were there were there to play a sport. Our cars were used, and from the early 90s. Rap music spilled out of the open windows of our dorm rooms. At lunch, we all sat together, pulled to the same table like magnets, colluding with each other about the foreign nature of our circumstances, which often felt as if we were situated behind glass at a somewhat hostile museum. But through this, we were able to locate a deep love for each other, a language that became a kind of protective barrier, between us, and the spectacle of our presence.

Adraint Bereal's *As It Appears* is a beautiful manifestation of that language, as I understood it then, and as I understand it now. As an artist at any margin, I believe one central function of the work we're doing is to challenge the existing archive. One must challenge the existing archive because it wasn't made for them, or their history, or the people that they love. Bereal's work in this exhibit is, from a visual standpoint, incredibly tender and warm, and interested in the interior lives of black people at institutions where images of black people tend to exist, primarily, on brochures or in marketing materials. But, beyond that, the people in the photos are existing with a fullness and exuberance that turns towards each other, which does restore a sense of humanity to a people within an institution that can, often, render them as faceless. At my college, black students were often mistaken for other black students, one athlete for another, as if they could be minimized, reduced into a single body. The delight in Bereal's work is how alive with individuality the black people in the photos are. It is, of course, a manifestation of a simple reality for anyone who is black, or who loves black people. But to illuminate it in this way, black people mid-step show, a durag covering a head emerging from a sea of black faces, everyone expressing flyness on their own terms. I have gratitude for the depth of care and dignity that went into the making of these photos, which, I believe, return a people to their whole selves within the confines of a place that wants to limit them, or erase them. To challenge the archive is to say my people were here, even if you don't want them to be remembered.

The only way I survived my college experience was by finding a way to recreate the neighborhood I loved and came up in, which meant, simply, finding my people and building a corner of a place that was ours and only ours. A home for our affections, our heartbreaks and frustrations, our curiosities, and our survival. I didn't think there could be a visual language for that kind of feeling, until I saw these photos, and I once again returned home.

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Department of Art and Art History
College of Fine Arts