

## Scratch The Surface: **Tavon Taylor**

**Sarah:** What is the main subject or theme behind your current photography work?

**Tavon:** Overall, I would say my work has been about translating and building my black, queer, male identity through photography. My resources as a black queer man are few and far between, and I want to add to the building of my own community. I want black people and other minorities to be inspired to keep going, to create the spaces that you are wishing for, and find yourself in the spaces that are there for you.

For my most recent work, I've been focusing more on family and community. I'm navigating ways to include my family's political stance within Black-American culture. I've started with just portraits, then I got a little curious about photos from before. I came across a photo album at my granny's house. To me, it was so rich... the ceremonies, the fashion choices, the city, all the people I didn't know... It compelled me to dive more into that history.



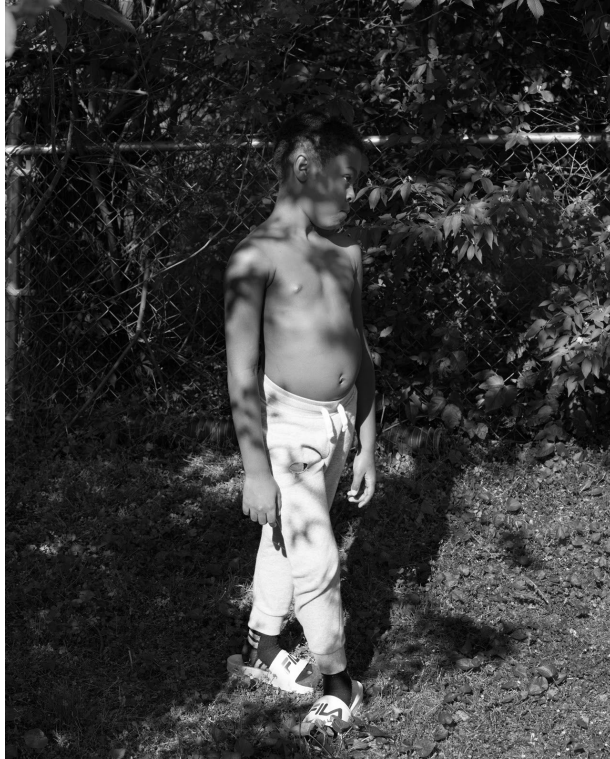


**S: You use self-portraits in your work often, how come? What part do you play in your work?**

**T:** *Self-portraits give me the ability to be in control of all aspects of an image. It's important that I have a comfortable space for people that I photograph. I know if I'm able to photograph myself with care, delicacy, and a certain type of openness; I'm sure I can do the same for someone else. So basically, my self-portraits are pictures of me testing the waters.*

*I want to add though, I'm continually learning so much about myself in the process. Self-portraiture pushes my limits of creativity and puts me in situations where I have to troubleshoot problems. It forces me to articulate and flesh out my thoughts artistically. When I'm sitting as the subject I'm asking myself 'what part of myself do I want to show this time?' In the bigger picture, I think it's important to be able to define myself because it's always been done for me in the media and in society. Photography gives me the chance to take control of my own image.*





**S: What makes you passionate about photography?**

**T:** *Photography is one of the main ways we record history. The possibilities both physically and metaphorically are endless with photographs, and that in itself really excites me. Photographs live on to tell stories about where they came from. Every day we're creating a legacy and validating our experiences for others to be inspired by later.*

*I think in a time like this for black people specifically, it's important. When I think about the thousands of black lives lost from a global pandemic, underlying health issues, social injustice, racism, and countless other reasons; I feel the urgency for pictures of black people by black people. We live in fear every day. It is important for us to see ourselves represented in every aspect. I think every black story should be shared.*







*Portrait of Glodelis*

**S: How long have you been interested in photography? Did you always know it was what you wanted to do?**

**T:** *I remember when I started taking photos. I would pick out some outfits with my little sisters and brothers and we'd take photos around the house. In those moments I really felt like we were showing pieces of our lives. We had control and that felt liberating to me. Since then, I knew I wanted to tell my own stories through photographs.*

*Even before then, like everyone else, family photo albums became a portal through time for me. Every time I'd look through old pictures of myself, my family, and the special moments we've shared together-and even ones that I've missed-the nostalgia is unmatched. I don't think I knew photography would be my calling at that time, but I believe it led me here.*



**S: Where do you want to go from here? In terms of this photographic project, and then in terms of a career path?**

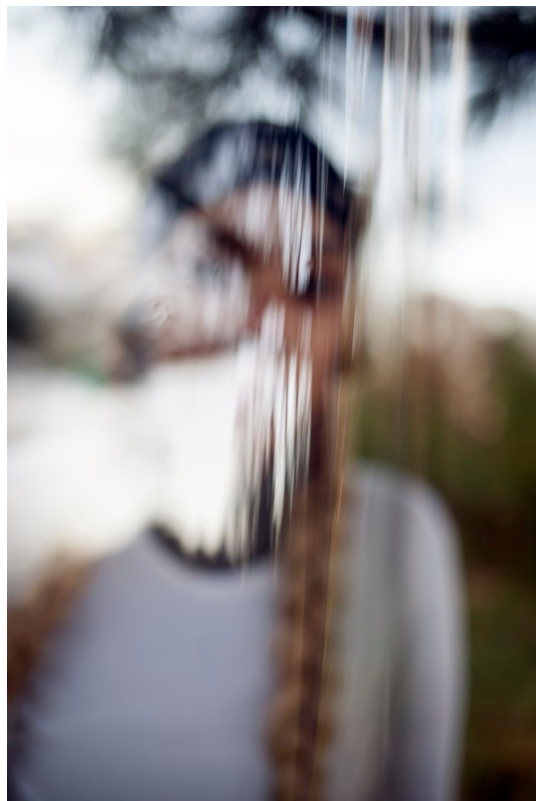
**T:** *I just want to keep learning and discovering, for myself, in different ways. In terms of projects, I want to continue to make work of my own family for a bit and continue my self-portrait work. As far as my career path, I think photography is the one for me. I do want to dive a little into videography. Whatever opportunities come my way that I feel fit me, I think that would lead my career.*

**S: Who are some of your inspirations?**

**T:** *First off, many of the women in my life are super inspirational to me. My mom, grandmother, aunts, friends, professors, cousins, sisters, and so many more. Music really keeps me on my toes creative wise. I love the imagery artists are about to create while putting words together.*

*Some of my favorite photographers would be, Deana Lawson, Liz Johnson Artur, Roy Decarva, Laura McPhee, Micaiah Carter, Kathya Landeros, Mickalene Thomas, Kerry James Marshall (painter), RaMell Ross, and so many more.*

*Daily life and observing what goes on in the world is inspirational and will always be.*







**S: Does your work have any political undertones?**

*Of course. I feel like my work is very aware of black and queer identity. Throughout history, and even now, black people have been mistreated and misrepresented. I want*

*to continue bring awareness to that and create space for more accurate representation. Our lives are precious and they matter.*



**S: Does your process change depending on your location? I.e. in the studio vs. environment? Which do you prefer to work in?**

**T:** *I try to keep connected with anyone I'm photographing in or out of the studio, so I think the process is the same in that aspect. I think in photography you can never get the same picture though, no matter how hard you try, so I would say that process changes often.*



*As far as my preference for workspace, outside feels better for me more. I feel like I have more freedom to move around.*



**S:** What connections do you see/make between the portraits and nature/landscape photos?

**T:** *Nature is the one thing that connects all of us, we're all here on this planet trying to figure out life. It's our responsibility to take care of each other. We are all part of nature and as we progress as a nation, we will see that more.*