Photographs of the black female body are fraught with otherness, from the photographer’s gaze to the viewer’s, from ethnographic documentation to colonial postcards. Studied, sexualized, manipulated, sold. In response to this sordid but lingering past, Ciara Elle Bryant places herself in front of the viewer, as subject and photographer, reclaiming a place of power as a black woman. And queer, a label and a likeness that bears the weight of its own dehumanizing history. But Bryant doesn’t overtly make this claim; you have to know her. And through her photographs, we can.

Because in this case, we are allowed to stare— instructed to, even. Through installations of still and moving images, sound, and text that resonate like a metronomic confession, we witness both a softness and a firm resolve, an openness that reveals Bryant’s everyday as she turns the camera on herself and her surroundings, controlling the camera’s gaze and directing the viewer’s attention— on her own terms. We see that which we are shown, be it deconstructed truths about “the ghetto” as Bryant sits on the quiet porch of a forgotten house— holding endless eye contact with the viewer— or reconstructed depictions of the physical body as she enwraps her own naked self. Whether through formal portraiture, urban landscape, or an amalgamation of the two, Bryant rewrites the narratives of inequality and, ultimately, removes the exoticism we’ve accepted in the depiction and visual dissection of the black female body especially, daring us to see her, and then daring us again to see ourselves.

– S. Diane Durant, PhD.
TITLE
STRUGGLE MEAL

MEDIUM
DIGITAL ARCHIVAL PRINT

YEAR
2019

SIZE
36X24V
DIVISION OF ART M.F.A.
QUALIFYING EXHIBITION

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