



Jackie Nickerson, *Ruth*, 2012. Digital c-print, 48 x 38½ inches. © Jackie Nickerson. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

## **JACKIE NICKERSON: AUGUST**

NATIONAL UNDERGROUND RAILROAD FREEDOM CENTER  
October 1, 2016–January 23, 2017

## JACKIE NICKERSON: AUGUST

British artist Jackie Nickerson (b. 1960) has been photographing in southern Africa for almost 20 years, beginning with a stay in rural Zimbabwe, where she lived for six years. Her monumental portraits of African farm workers are alive with perceptions of the physical and psychological impact of the agricultural landscape. She observes the ways in which repetitive labor “sculpts” the bodies of her subjects, the under-recognized human force at the heart of international agribusiness. Aware of her “Western global North perspective,” Nickerson avoids image clichés associated with Africans—as impoverished, exotic others—forwarding instead an idea of them as individualized, resourceful, and modern. Playing with scale, manipulated color, and evident staging, Nickerson investigates and questions her own European, classically formed visual tendencies in relation to her dignified subjects.

The exhibition title, *August*, carries multiple references: from harvest season; to the name of a particular sitter in Nickerson’s *Farm* series; to the dictionary definition of august as “distinguished, respected, venerable.” In the last sense, *August* calls to mind the title of Walker Evans’ classic book of photographs, produced with writer James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, published in 1941. Based on a form of “immersive journalism,” the book was much admired as a sensitive and interpretive documentary study of the lives of impoverished sharecroppers during the Great Depression.

Just as Evans opened for questioning the notion of a photographic document as absolute “fact” by posing his subjects serenely in their modest homes, thus projecting his own sense of their innate dignity, Nickerson works collaboratively with sitters, subordinating her role as photographer to their act of self-presentation. Of particular interest are the subjects’ clothes, layered and homemade ensembles of soft, muted colors, which Nickerson renders with the Baroque elegance of Old Master paintings.

*August* draws from two distinct bodies of work: *Farm* (published in 2002) concentrates on how individual identity is improvised through clothing, expression, and attitude. *Terrain* (published in 2013) takes a more abstracted view, focusing on laborers in relation to their environment and the raw materials cultivated there. The obscured faces of the subjects, buried in their tools or harvest, lends them a sculptural air while calling attention, metaphorically, to the facelessness of labor. Nickerson describes her work as being “about us in the landscape, how we change the world we inhabit at every moment of our being human, and how, for better and for worse, the world that we make...changes who we are.”



Jackie Nickerson, *Chipo*, 1997. Lambda photograph, 55 x 43 inches. © Jackie Nickerson. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York



*Oscar*, 2012  
Digital c-print  
86 $\frac{5}{8}$  x 70 $\frac{7}{8}$  inches



*Makanyara*, 2013  
Digital c-print  
87 x 70 inches



*Ernest*, 2012  
Digital c-print  
60 x 48 inches



*Anna*, 2001  
Lambda photograph  
60 x 48 inches



*David*, 2012  
Digital c-print  
87 x 70 inches



*Tifonia*, 1998  
Lambda photograph  
60 x 48 inches



*Mutema*, 2012  
Digital c-print  
48 x 38 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches  
Courtesy of Lawrence Saterfield and Michael Ward, Brooklyn, NY



*Lumberjack*, 1999  
Lambda photograph  
61 x 49 inches



*Chipo*, 1997  
Lambda photograph  
55 x 43 inches  
Courtesy of Lawrence Saterfield and Michael Ward, Brooklyn, NY



*Ruth*, 2012  
Digital c-print  
48 x 38½ inches



*Paul II*, 1999  
Lambda photograph  
47 x 39 inches



*Paul*, 1999  
Lambda photograph  
47 x 39 inches

## FILMS

*Table*, 2013  
Video  
Duration: 26 seconds

*Cook*, 2013  
Video  
Duration: 33 seconds

*Green Bananas*, 2012  
Video  
Duration: 1 minute, 27 seconds

*Green Beans*, 2013  
Video  
Duration: 1 minute, 44 seconds

All Works © Jackie Nickerson. Courtesy of the Artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, unless otherwise noted.

FOTOFOCUS BIENNIAL  
PHOTOGRAPHY,  
THE UN-  
DOCUMENT  
OCTOBER  
2016

**JACKIE NICKERSON: AUGUST**

CURATED BY FOTOFOCUS

Kevin Moore, Artistic Director and Curator

The FotoFocus Biennial 2016, themed *Photography, the Undocument*, features over 60 exhibitions at Participating Venues and eight exhibitions curated by FotoFocus Artistic Director and Curator Kevin Moore. These eight exhibitions bear diverse and nuanced, yet interconnected, relationships to the theme, which seeks to break apart assumptions about photography's documentary character by emphasizing the medium's natural tendency to distort, edit, and reshape the visible world.

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