

Jackie Nickerson, Ruth, 2012. Digital c-print, $48 \times 38 \%$ 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."





Oscar, 2012 Digital c-print 86% x 70% 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 38½ 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



Paul II, 1999 Lambda photograph 47 x 39 inches



Ruth, 2012 Digital c-print 48 x 38½ 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

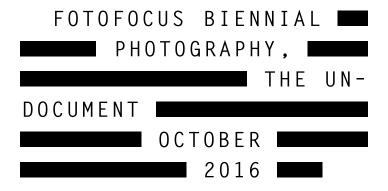
Duration: 1 minute, 27 seconds

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.



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.

