

# *En omsorgsfull strejk\**

## *A Careful Strike\**

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\* *Precarias a la deriva*, 2005

## Interview with Diana Agunbiade-Kolawole by Michele Masucci

Michele Masucci: Could you describe how this series of photographs came to be, how did the process look like?

Diana Agunbiade-Kolawole: It was a tough time for me; I wasn't so keen on going out. The studio felt too far to go; however, I still wanted to do some work. Therefore, I started to make some sketches at home to not feel completely redundant and lazy. I began in late November early December when it was dark. I did the works when my cohabitant would be out late in the evening or on the night shift to not be disturbed by him or become an inconvenience to him. They were made in the bathroom, which had only a small window; the rest of the lights in the flat were turned off. My mobile phone touch light was the light source for exposure, and the toilet seat acted as the baseboard. The jars of fluorescent paint that I was using for another project lit the stations to know where to put the paper after exposure. I used whatever container I could get from the trash room to develop the prints. The shapes in all the images were the same apart from the eyes. The eyes were the only thing that changed; they were sets - one was wine bottle caps and the other edges of cardboard where I cut out the silhouette for the figure. The cardboard was a Rice Krispies box, so it was based on what was at hand and a whole load of improvisation. The materials were the same; although the combinations yielded multiple expressions, these changes led me to continue working with them.

MM: These faces that stare directly at you give an uncanny feeling of being watched. There is a gaze behind these masks that keeps staring at you. In the august room in front of Ruben Nilson's *The History of the Worker's Movement*, we have them all surrounding the visitor. I come to think of historical oppression, haunted souls that remind us of what they have seen, and with a watchful eye in the present.

DAK: Yes, my soul felt haunted at the time. I don't believe the intentions began with that; however, once the first few stared back at me, they communicated and became the visual personification of my state of mind. From there on, they just became what came out. However, the unease was something I picked up relatively early on, and that was what engaged me with the works. I have shown them in a tight grid positioned in the passageway in two connecting rooms to intensify the emotional burden. It becomes something one has no choice but to engage with.



MM: You have managed to capture a strong emotion. The seriality of the montages and the repetitive artistic labour behind them connects the emotional conditions in contemporary life and work. Could you expand a bit on what art can do for you in coping, managing life in general?

DAK: The masks shown in *A Careful Strike\** belong to a group of camera-less photographic works made starting in the Autumn, 2019 titled *A Body of Works*. Amongst the body of work is a group of works called Action is the enemy of thought. I did some sort of art therapy. I was just putting together strips of photo paper together to create something that has balance and equilibrium. I needed to do something physically with my hand to balance what thoughts were in my head. With the masks, I feel incredibly exposed. As the works haunt the viewer now, they haunted me whilst seducing me. It was essential to create something on the other end at the same time to balance this out. I have often used my practice to make sense of the world. I decided pretty early on in my career as an artist to work with my surroundings and the things that I know and are familiar to me. Later on, I have come to depend on my artistic practice to navigate the world. I realised that I did not want my artistic expression to feel like a burden or work I had to do, for example, homework that had to be done to pass a class. I had to earn an income to support myself and enjoy the social aspects of life such as family time, friendship and romantic relationships; hence these became the focus of my art. I have produced works about my daily commute, place of employment, family members, ex-partners and my circles of friends. More specifically, in recent times, my art has become an emotional outlet. They allow me to communicate when Diana is not permitted to speak, whilst Diana, the artist, does not require permission to communicate.

*A Body of Work – Masks* (2019–2020) is a series of photograms produced during a few months of work-related conflict. The masks are part of a collection of photographic works made without a camera created in the autumn of 2019 and winter of 2020, titled *A Body of Works*. Each photogram was produced at the end of the working day at home using found materials and the conditions of a private household. The work had a therapeutic effect during a difficult time, providing an outlet for a need to create without any outside demands or orders. The masks evoke an eeriness in the room, surrounding the viewer with frightening gazes. Perhaps they bear witness to crimes from the past, or perhaps they reveal our present shortcomings. The mask also serves as a symbol of the psychosocial conditions of a mediated contemporary public life.

Diana Agunbiade-Kolawole (b. 1988, Nigeria) works with both lens and non-lens based photography presented as installations, performance, prints and moving images. Her work is based on the conditions of everyday life. At the heart of Agunbiade-Kolawole's practice is an investigation of processes that explore new forms within the framework of established techniques.