

# GALERIE CATHERINE & ANDRÉ HUG

## Endia Beal

"Am I What You're Looking For?"



Taylor © Endia Beal

For the Paris Photo New York 2020 edition, Catherine and André Hug would like to present “Am I What You’re Looking For?”, an exhibition from Endia Beal whose work was supported with funds provided by the Magnum Foundation. This work focuses on young women of color who are transitioning from the academic world to the corporate setting, capturing their struggles and uncertainties on how to best present themselves in the professional workspace. As the young women pose in front of an office backdrop in the home, they recall conversations during interviews.

The women explain how employers would tell them that their natural hair was unprofessional or their name was too difficult to pronounce, suggesting they alter themselves for the job. This project provides an in-depth investigation into the experiences and fears of being a woman of color in corporate America. "Am I What You're Looking For?" honors a constellation of black women's aesthetics, a topic Beal has documented in the past. Her 2013 photo series "Can I Touch It?"—an eye-catching project depicting middle-aged white women in traditionally black hairstyles in corporate attire—went viral.

The range of emotions depicted in Beal's work belies the experience of workplace discrimination. Some of the women look defiantly into the camera; others are less certain of themselves. The women are of some privilege, which is clear from their middle-class family homes, but the relative privilege they enjoy is not enough to shield them from the universality of "misogynoir". Beal, who received an MFA from Yale, offers a bittersweet reflection on black women's reality as professionals—perhaps a proxy documentation of her own experience in the very office that serves as the backdrop of the series. The artist was inspired in part by the young women in her classroom. "I found that my students were coming to me with the same concerns that I experienced in a corporate setting." Generations of black women have experienced the same thing in the workplace; Beal wants to interrupt the cycle. "I had the women stand in front of the same office hallway I walked down every day, feeling like I was "the other" in that space," she said. "I use art as a vehicle to deal with what I'm going through emotionally." Beal hopes that the experience will help the young women to feel emotionally supported. "When you make something together, it brings you closer."



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