

NUEVA LUZ

photographic journal

GERARD H. GASKIN
MUEMA LOMBE & LORIE CAVAL
PRADEEP DALAL
ELIA ALBA
RYAN JOSEPH
GUEST EDITED BY EDWIN RAMORAN
INTERCAMBIO:
Changing the Art World BY LISA HENRY

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NUEVA LUZ

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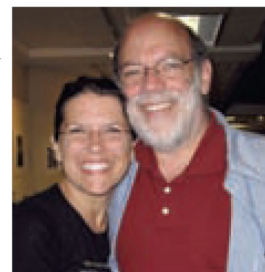
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Editorial



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Miriam Romais with Steve Cagan, a mentor whose early influence changed the way she views the world.

It is often said that change does not come easily. I suppose some people embrace the unknown with a sense of adventure, while others are happy to remain conservative in their explorations.

You'll find plenty of change in the pages of this guest edited issue—from the fluid, transformative, proud and sometimes challenging work itself, to being asked to consider other senses and art forms while looking at the images and reading the commentary—to having moved the Spanish translations online. While we have felt strongly that the translations should be printed in these pages, our most recent reader survey indicated that the vast majority read English, and those that read the sections in Spanish expressed a preference for additional space for imagery instead.

As we self-assess, we also instigate change elsewhere. This past summer we were interviewed by *PDN* magazine,¹ to discuss the lack of diversity in the photo world at large and the educational systems that perpetuate that cycle. That *lack...* that myopia, forces us to miss out on a big piece of humanity. Diversity clues us into human rights issues; it can clue us into our world in a way that creates understanding.

We are further developing these ideas by co-chairing the 2010 national conference for the Society for Photographic Education, with the conference theme of *Facing Diversity: Leveling the Playing Field in the Photographic Arts*.² To date, some of the speakers include Dawoud Bey, Kip Fulbeck, Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie, Elizabeth Ferrer, Deborah Willis, Renee Mussai and other powerful minds. It is our hope that the topic expands and recreates definitions of diversity as times change, borders and taboos collapse, and conventional descriptors no longer apply—otherwise we can't surpass the myopia.

In a recent interview with *Utlne Reader*, an editor commented on how the artists in *Nueva Luz* create an opportunity for us to learn about the world. The stories that appear within these pages teach us about different communities and offer glimpses that go beyond our day to day realities. They can also exquisitely validate our own stories. Having been selected as a finalist for the 2009 Lucie Award support category of "Photography Magazine of the Year" for the third consecutive year, is also a sign that change can be good.

Miriam Romais, Editor

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Nueva Luz will make accommodations under ADA guidelines for those needing large print.

Cover: Gerard H. Gaskin, *Untitled, A Walk in the Park* series, 1995. Gelatin silver print, 20x16"

¹ *Confronting the Photo Industry's Lack of Diversity*, by Holly Stuart Hughes, June 9, 2009

² The 47th National Conference will take place in Philadelphia, March 4–7, 2010. Attention students: scholarships to attend are available—be sure to apply by November 1, 2009. Details at www.spenational.org



Pradeep Dalal, *Tushar & Shyamal*, *Malabar Hill* series, 2006-8. Digital C-print, 20x16"

Artist Statement

"In the series *Malabar Hill*, the record sleeve motif in the collages underscores the primary importance of music in our lives: albums were handled like precious cargo, borrowed, taped, played for friends, and returned carefully.

Ideas travel via books and music across all manner of divides—geography, culture, time. How then to bring some sense of motion to a still photograph? Are photographs as real as words? These questions make me reappraise long-held assumptions and make photographs using a variety of photo genres, multiple moments, time periods, and a range of textures within the frame of a single montaged image.

There is a party going on. Dancers are smiling, singing along, arms flailing, butts swaying, dancing real close, warm-breath-in-the-ear close, crotch-to-crotch close, hand-on-shoulder close. A long way from these freedoms, *I look for this party*.

Release Yourself is comprised of imagery made on a digital scanner in real time. I use my fingers, palms, knuckles and arms to grab, place, hold, nudge, jog, sweep, and shake the different components of the photomontage. The discordant friction between the separate bits of the montage, and the moments when the seams dissolve and the juxtaposed bits come together are both desirable."

Pradeep Dalal

Pradeep Dalal



Pune Gang, Malabar Hill series, 2006-8. Digital C-print, 20x16"



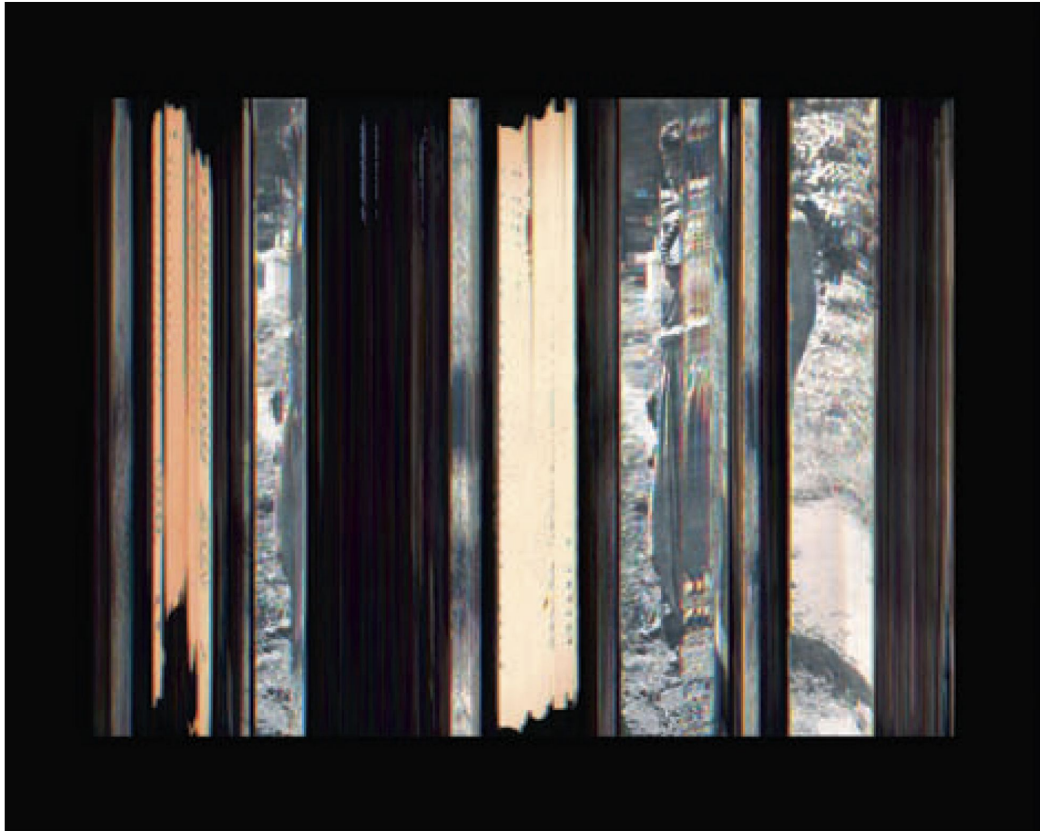
Pradeep Dalal

Mohit, Malabar Hill series, 2006-8. Digital C-print, 20x16"



Pradeep Dalal

Montblanc, Malabar Hill series, 2006-8. Digital C-print, 20x16"

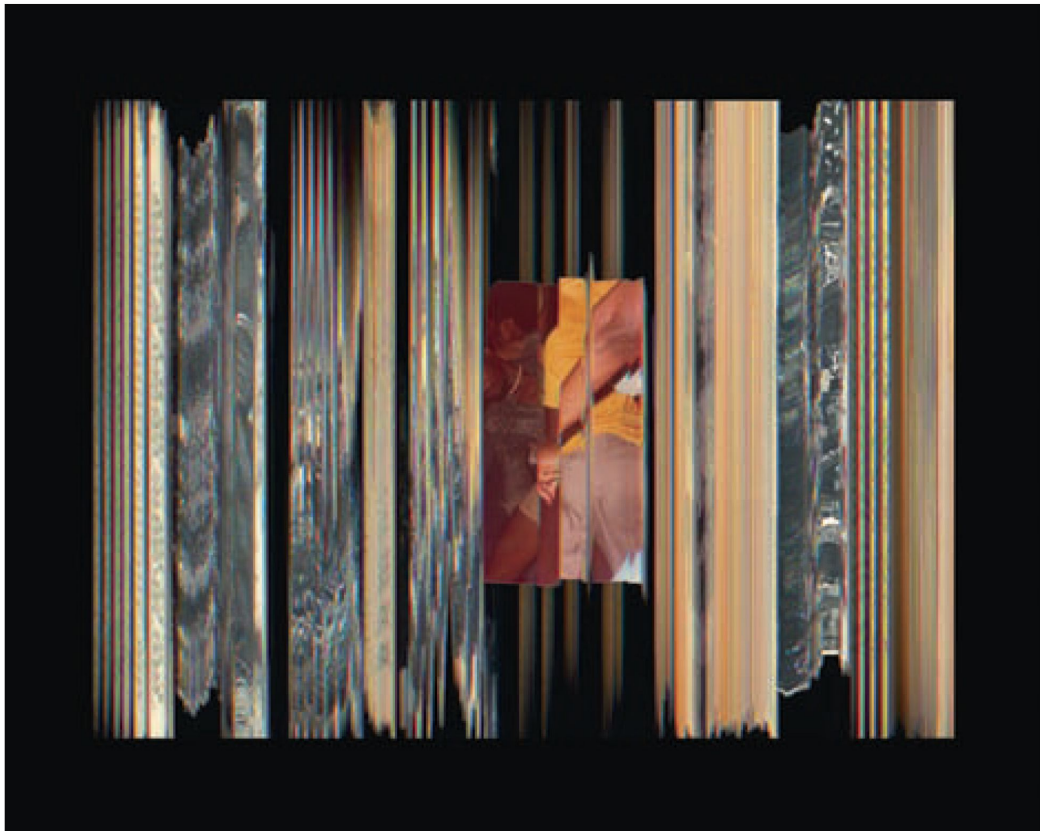
Pradeep Dalal

Pradeep, Release Yourself series, 2006-8. Digital C-print, 16x20"



Pradeep Dalal

John 2, Release Yourself series, 2006-8. Digital C-print, 16x20"



Pradeep Dalal

Clubhouse, Release Yourself series, 2006-8. Digital C-print, 16x20"



Pradeep Dalal

John 1, Release Yourself series, 2006-8. Digital C-print, 16x20"

SOUNDTRACK AND IMAGE: WHAT CAN YOU HEAR IN THESE PHOTOGRAPHS?

by Edwin Ramoran

Moved by creative interdisciplinary practices revolving in and around nightclub experiences, I present this work as an attempt to break the barriers between the discotheque and the gallery. I have wondered, how can photography and dance music/club culture be discussed as part of one thought? Where do they intersect? Where are their contradictions? What influences, if any, exist between these ostensibly distinct yet creatively dynamic areas? What can you hear in these photographs?

The advent of house music in the 1980s and its influence on contemporary art and culture in the United States and abroad, led me to organize *The B Sides*¹, a major group exhibition which introduced established and emerging artists who have been inspired by dance music and themes such as the body, race, spirituality, gender, and sexual orientation.

Living and working in the greater New York and New Jersey metropolitan areas, contemporary artists **Elia Alba**, **Pradeep Dalal**, **Gerard H. Gaskin**, **Ryan Joseph**, and the collaborative duo **Muema Lombe** and **Lorie Caval**, have all produced photography and/or photo-based works of art that provide a variety of visual examples that support a corollary between dance music and visual art. Their work explores interdependent topics such as traditional portraiture and identity politics, fashion and popular culture, anonymity and community, and even more profoundly, on the realities and possibilities of hybridity and transcendence.

Personally, I can't help but be stimulated as I look at these images. While photographs are obviously static, they have the capacity to capture an indelible moment of rapture. This is where great artistry lies, leading the viewer to bridge life with artistic disciplines. As a deejay, music has been a great influence in my life and I can't help but hear the sounds as I journey among their work. So with a soundtrack in mind, this essay presents these six artists in three breaks, including titles of important dance songs heard during various house music parties. It's a soundtrack that, like a unifying thread or beat, should accompany these words.²

1

Gerard H. Gaskin is a premier photographer of the multifarious and tight-knit house-ball community³ comprised predominantly of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people of color in New York City. Enamored by the pageantry, Gaskin has described the balls as “enormous fashion masquerades and vogue contests.” His black and white photographs from the series *A Walk in the Park* were taken at various balls over a period of ten years. It includes portraits of stylish, well-groomed ball legends, members, and harbingers from the various houses and onlookers who attend these spirited and themed events. This vital series has captured the authentic energy and air of dignity present at the balls, in portraits of individuals and groups in regal pose and contoured silhouettes, candid moments on and off the runway, action shots of femme queens impressing upon a panel of judges, and flexible dancers dropping their bodies to the floor and voguing to percussive house beats.

More intimately, Gaskin produced studio portraits of a select group of ball attendees and members from various houses. By shooting in black and white and not titling the photographs with the names of those photographed, Gaskin bolsters the nostalgia and glamour inherent in the balls as well as preserves their timelessness, integrity, mystique, and allure. These photographs go beyond fashion. They are portraits of individuals who embody the congregational nature of the house ball circuit and the houses as communal networks—both safe havens for LGBTI’s to express themselves freely. For Gaskin, the balls may be “about fashion and prestige, but really they’re about building family and manifesting a selfhood.”

Honing in on the construction of sexual and gender identity in the house ball community, **Ryan Joseph**’s color portraits from the series *House/Ball Culture* were taken specifically at The House of Latex Ball at Roseland Ballroom in Manhattan and The House of Mizrahi Ball and The House of Jourdan Ball in Newark, New Jersey. Defining himself as an “anthropologist,” Joseph is interested in focusing on “marginalized, disenfranchised, and misunderstood communities.” In this series, he makes use of straightforward poses and bright hues to reinforce the subject’s quirky individuality, ostentatious dress, and gender-bending countenance.

Suggesting a new taxonomy based on articles of clothing or costume accessories, he at times has playfully given photographs provocative titles such as *Hot Pants* and *Erector Man*. Unlike Gaskin’s discreet documentary style, Joseph offers a more playful yet political message. In another image, by having a ball participant stand in front of a Roseland Ballroom ticket counter sign that reads “TOKENS”, Joseph suggests the ball itself merely represents one night of expansive gender expression and sexual liberation for LGBTI’s who face discrimination on a regular basis.⁴

“Trommeltantz” (“Din Daa Daa”) / George Krantz
“Deep in Vogue” / Malcolm McLaren and The Bootzilla Orchestra
“The Ha Dance” / Masters At Work
“It’s A Cold World” / Frankie Knuckles featuring Jamie Principle
“Hot” / Willi Ninja
“Cunty (The Feeling)” / Kevin Aviance
“In the Dark We Live” / Aphrohead
“Fly Life” / Bassment Jaxx

2

While both Gaskin and Joseph are largely invested in documentary photography, **Pradeep Dalal** has produced a body of work that consistently challenges traditional documentary conventions that rely on pure observation. In his photographs from the series *Malabar Hill* and *Release Yourself*, Dalal uses a digital scanner as camera. His introduction of personal narratives into these two different series has been facilitated by what can be described as methods and formal elements related to dance music culture.

For the series *Release Yourself*, he works in real time on a flatbed scanner to make digital collages. Not unlike a deejay using a sampler to drop in selected sounds or to loop a driving repetitive beat, he juggles personal snapshots of gay dance parties at The ClubHouse in Washington, DC, early self-portraits, and pages from books given to him to create his imagery. Deliberately embracing chance, he describes the physical actions on the scanner: "I use my fingers, palms, knuckles, and arms to grab, place, hold, nudge, jog, sweep, and shake the different components of the photomontage." The resulting photographs are abstracted, striated images, like compressed filmstrips or perhaps grooves on a vinyl record, that also closely resemble the spines of 12-inch album covers in a record library.

In *Malabar Hill*, Dalal places personal photographs of himself and his friends taken over 25 years ago in Mumbai, India, into the large openings of cardboard 12-inch singles' sleeves. The result is hybrid, minimalist images that quietly contemplate tender moments of "magnetic male friendship."

Awkward at first glance, the masked figures in **Elia Alba's** black and white photographs seem rather ominous and ambiguous. They look like odd disproportionate living dolls wearing wigs, hoods, and hats as well as stoic masks of mustached male faces placed on feminine bodies. These photographs are dark, nighttime street shots of veiled people in frontal poses. They are fully aware of the camera. Who are they? Where are these undisclosed urban locations? The portraits are performative, undeniably constructed from the start. The artist has described the figures in these recent photographs as those you would happen to come across "in the streets and underground clubs of New York City in the 1980s." Alba's photography is a hybrid, both portraiture and conceptual. The reference to sexual ambiguity also suggests the artist's awareness of and sensitivity to transgender and intersex communities, as a lone figure wears a shirt declaring "I'm a Good Catholic Girl." In *Whaa!*, the artist provides a visual acknowledgement to Club Shelter, one of the most well-known and respected Saturday night dance parties during the 1990s to early 2000s, by including a fall-out shelter sign in the image.

These photographs are consistent with Alba's previous work. In *Larry Levan Live*, friends and invited guests wore masks bearing the face of the late Larry Levan for a dance video performance. Levan was the resident deejay at the Paradise Garage, the legendary nightclub in New York, from 1977 to 1987 and is credited for helping raise the profile of deejays to celebrity status in the development of club culture.

"Funky Sensation" / Gwen McCrae

"Release Yourself" / Aleem

"Put Your Body In It" / Stephanie Mills

"Heartbeat" / Taana Gardner

"Go Bang" / Dinosaur L

3

The interdisciplinary team of **Muema Lombe** and **Lorie Caval** combines photography with drawing and painting. Lombe, who is one of the foremost photographic and video-based documentarians of club culture, has produced a large body of work dedicated to discotheques and dance events worldwide. Caval is a spoken word artist and self-taught visual artist who makes figurative paintings and drawings in a symbolist mode. Coincidentally, Lombe and Caval have separately recorded their own house music tracks and met on the house music scene.

For the series appropriately titled *Mashup*, Caval etches and paints directly onto Lombe's photographs which were taken at two of New York's long-running monthly dance parties: 718 Sessions at Club Deep, and Fresh Fruit at Cielo. Her white engraved marks and colorful acrylic shapes, forms, and lines work together to highlight the linear perspectives of the original images, as well as accentuate the energy of the central figures' ecstatic dancing bodies. Caval paints a beach setting for a male house dancer, and in another photograph she outlines the muscular back of another dancer.

Their collaboration through *Mashup* may be the strongest example to support a corollary between dance music and photography. The title of the series refers to a recent trend in making music for which songs are remixed, audibly and seamlessly layered onto each other, to produce a new hybrid song. Here, two artists that have a working relationship with the house music industry have decided to reinscribe an existing term for their own use. In the transfiguration of words, "mashup" can now be a new way to describe both a musical and visual innovation.

"Music Is The Answer" / Colonel Abrams

"Move Your Body" / Marshall Jefferson

"House Is A Feeling" / Sunday Shoutin'

"We Can Do It (In the Mix)" / Diversity featuring Muema

"He Broke My Heart" / Lorie Caval

Altogether, the photography and photo-based works discussed here provide salient instances of contemporary art by artists of color who go beyond traditional creative practices to support openness and postcolonial liberation. Gaskin and Joseph bring a respectful, non-exploitive perspective to the LGBTI's in their portraits. Dalal abstracts personal images to complicate static constructions of identities. Alba's hybrid/transgendered models perform new overt, in-your-face identities. For Lombe and Caval, their decision to combine their disparate media not only makes new hybrid work, but offers the hope for a collaborative future and productive ways to transcend differences.

Spanish translation available at www.enfoco.org/nuevaluz

¹ *The B Sides* featured 30 artists and took place at Aljira, a Center for Contemporary Art in Newark, NJ, from November 22, 2008 - March 7, 2009. Further unifying visual art with the club scene, Aljira and the House of Jourdan-Zion presented *The Art Ball: La Vie en Rose*, in February of 2009.

² Lombe's website, <http://bouncefm.com>, provides an introduction to the house music scene and other related links, and is devoted to chronicling underground art, music and culture.

³ Ball culture, the house system, the ballroom community and similar terms, describe the underground LGBT culture in the United States, in which people "walk" (ie, compete) for trophies and prizes at events known as balls. [Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ball_culture]. For additional resources, visit www.myballroomlife.com and www.walk4mewednesdays.com

⁴ This image can be viewed in the Photographer's section of En Foco's website, www.enfoco.org

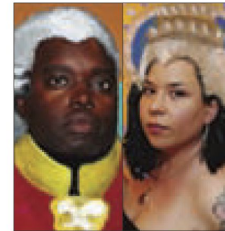
Gerard H. Gaskin was born in Trinidad and Tobago. He earned a B.A. in Liberal Arts from Hunter College in 1994. His work has been shown at The Brooklyn Museum and The Queens Museum of Art in NY; Aljira in Newark, NJ; Galvanize in Port of Spain, Trinidad; Fototeca de Cuba in Habana Vieja, Cuba, among others. In 2005 he received the Queens Council on the Arts Individual Artists Initiative Award, and in 2002 he was awarded a Fellowship for Photography from the New York Foundation for the Arts. His work appears in publications such as *Black: A Celebration of A Culture* (Hylas Publishing: 2004) and *Committed To The Image: Contemporary Black Photographers* (Brooklyn Museum of Art and Merrell Publishers: 2001) and is included in many collections, including The Museum of the City of New York and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. He lives in Queens, NY. www.gerardhgaskin.com



© Robert Taylor

GERARD H. GASKIN

Muema Lombe, a self-taught photographer, has lived in Kenya, Paris, Moscow and now resides in New York City. His work has been exhibited at Multi-Kulti, and Dancers for Dancers in New York, NY. His photo essay *House Music is American Music – House Dance is American Dance* was published in the *Bulletin of the Society for American Music* (Vol 321, Winter 2006). **Lorie Caval** is a self-taught visual artist, and a songwriter and spoken-word writer/recording artist. Her work has been shown at Melting Pot in New York City and the Bronx Academy of Art and Dance (BAAD), among others. In the mid 1990s, she co-founded Bang The Party, an underground house music, art and dance party that spawned various projects including the compilation album *Bang The Party: Volume One* (Jellybean Recordings/Sony). Their collaborative series *Mashups* has been shown at Aljira in Newark, NJ. www.muemaandlorie.com



© Muema Lombe © Lorie Caval

MUEMA LOMBE & LORIE CAVAL

Pradeep Dalal was born in Mumbai, India and lives in New York City. In 2005, he received a M.F.A. from the International Center of Photography/Bard College. Originally trained as an architect, he holds a M.S. from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He has exhibited at the New York Public Library, and ps122 Gallery in New York, NY; Aljira in Newark, NJ; the Vadhera Gallery in New Delhi and London, among others. He is a recipient of the Tierney Fellowship for emerging photographers and is on the faculty at the International Center of Photography in New York.



© John Eddy

PRADEEP DALAL

Elia Alba was born and raised in New York City. She received a B.A. from Hunter College in 1994 and completed the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program in 2001. Her work has been shown at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco, CA; El Museo del Barrio in New York, NY; Aljira in Newark, NJ; The RISD Museum in Providence, RI; Valencia Institute of Modern Art in Valencia, Spain; the Science Museum in London, UK; the 10th Havana Biennial in Cuba, among others. She was the recipient of the Pollack-Krasner Foundation Grant in 2002, two New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowships (Crafts in 2002 and Photography in 2008), and the Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant in 2002 and 2008. She lives and works in Queens, NY. www.eliaalba.com



© Manuel Acevedo

ELIA ALBA

Ryan Joseph was born in Trinidad and Tobago and now resides in Newark, NJ. He earned a B.A. from Lehman College, Bronx, NY in 2003 and is currently pursuing an M.F.A. at Hunter College, in NYC. Ryan's work has been exhibited at Aljira and Newark Art Supply in Newark, NJ, and the John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore, MD. www.ryanjosephportfolio.com



© self-portrait

RYAN JOSEPH

Edwin Ramoran is the Director of Exhibitions & Programs at Aljira, a Center for Contemporary Art in Newark, NJ. He is a recipient of the Curatorial Research Fellowship from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. Recent curatorial projects include the *The B Sides*, an exhibition focusing on house music culture and contemporary art—the inspiration for this guest edited issue of *Nueva Luz*; and the forthcoming *Me Love You Long Time*, a group exhibition on Asian and Pacific Islander sexuality and gender expression. In 2007, he received an Apex Art Outbound residency to Athens, Greece. From 2002-2007, he was director and curator for Longwood Arts Project, the contemporary art center of the Bronx Council on the Arts. Ramoran received a B.A. in Art History from the University of California, Riverside, and is an M.A. candidate in Art History at Hunter College.



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EDWIN RAMORAN