

How the Past Shapes Modern Photography

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Girl with the Bamboo Earring, 2009



Portrait of a Muslim Boy, 2014

Memory, it could be said, is central to the practice of making images. And images that create tension between conceptualizing and producing work about the past are especially exciting for me. As a curator, one of the most powerful experiences I have had has been finding photographers who embrace the idea of memory in their explorations of the complexities of everyday life. Indeed, to me, many of the best contemporary photographers use art history and social history to explore the political, social, and historical framed by moral responsibility.

I'd like to look how today's photographers take their inspiration from varied sources and rework themes by using collective memory, new media, and old technologies that appear unrelated but are filtered through the modern sensibility of these photographers' lens.

Inspired by Dutch artist Johannes Vermeer's celebrated 1665 painting *Girl with the Pearl Earring*, Ethiopian photographer Awol Erizku pays homage to the classic beauty by repositioning a contemporary Black model as *Girl with the Bamboo Earring* (2011). Erizku's stunning *Portrait of a Muslim Boy* (2014), set off against an alluring, red painted brick wall, resonates primarily because of the intensity of his subject's self conscious yet self assured gaze.

This is an excerpt taken from the original article. Read more at www.lightbox.time.com