

NEWS RELEASE

Exhibition: Keisha Scarville: *Passports*, 2012 - 2025
Dates: February 19 - May 3, 2025
Opening: Wednesday, February 19, 5pm – 8pm
Address: 45 Main Street, #723, Brooklyn, NY 11201

Higher Pictures presents more than 300 images from Keisha Scarville's ongoing *Passports* portraits. This is the most comprehensive exhibition of the series since its inception in 2012.

Working with reproductions of her Guyanese immigrant father's earliest passport photograph at age 16, Scarville moves beyond their conversations to visually explore what it means to *become* American. The quotidian identification or ID photograph is a cultural calling card that becomes a powerful seed for understanding the complex strata of a life uprooted, replicated, and replanted a world away from where it began.

Again and again, Scarville transforms his youthful likeness into enigmatic, almost sacred icons of a boy, a man, and a spirit. Alternately playful, unsettling, loving, and irreverent, these haptic, palm-sized objects are *memento mori* of imagined identities, harkening back to 19th century vernacular methods of hand-coloring and assemblage to turn simple photographic prints into elaborated talismanic pictures. Historically rooted in form but grounded in contemporary meaning, Scarville's interventions on her father's image evoke disparate personal modes of remembrance, everything from the physically intimate contact of photographic jewelry to playfully scribbled love doodles on an adolescent's Pee Chee folder.

The *Passports* move beyond sight into multidimensional sensory perception which calls to mind historian Geoffrey Batchen's description of the daguerreotype in its case, "an object that continuously collapses sight and touch...into the same perceptual experience." While her markings both obfuscate and enhance the image, "the [resulting] portrait we witness continues to be supported by the truth-value of its photographic base," Batchen writes, "the epistemological presence of the photograph is strengthened by its perceptual absence."

Scarville's application of pigment and collage elements does more than transform the appearance of the photograph. Her temporal handwork—at times minimal, at others painstakingly detailed—results in sensory-charged objects which require the viewer to spend more time with them in order to access meaning beyond the surface. As novelist Milan Kundera has written, "The degree of slowness is directly proportional to the intensity of memory; the degree of speed is directly proportional to the intensity of forgetting."

In this moment when the immigrant experience is a divisively contested space, Scarville's *Passports* are both poignant and political, foregrounding the individual experience and self-definition within a world of possibilities.

-Carla Williams, 2025