

Christina Leslie

Pinhole Portraits and Places

Opening Reception: Saturday, May 10, 2-5 pm

Guided Tour of the Exhibition with Christina Leslie: Saturday, May 10, 3:00 pm

Exhibition Dates: May 10 – July 5, 2025

Stephen Bulger Gallery is pleased to present *Pinhole Portraits and Places*, our first solo exhibition of work by Christina Leslie (Canadian-Jamaican, b. 1983). *Pinhole Portraits and Places* brings together several bodies of work produced from including *Pinhole Remix* (2017–2020), *Pinhole Places* (2022–2025), and *Pinhole Parishes* (2023–2025). *Pinhole Portraits and Places* expands on Leslie's recurring themes of decolonization, identity, migration, marginalization, and heritage, while combining historical photographic techniques and contemporary methodologies.

As a response to the constant and rapid advancements of digital photography, Leslie began exploring historical photographic techniques in 2016. Her desire to reflect on and re-engage with the roots of analog photography, produced a body of work that highlighted early photographic practices, particularly the pinhole camera. After extensive experimentation, and several unsuccessful attempts, she successfully transformed her DSLR into a functional pinhole camera in early 2017.

Pinhole Remix, the first series using her adapted camera, came to fruition after noticing the glaring absence of Black representation in historical European art, where depictions often reflected a colonial, white-dominant perspective. Her pinhole portraits of Black community members challenge this exclusion and reframe early art history and photography. Utilizing long exposures, her work evokes the grandeur of commissioned paintings. The resulting images, with their rich colour and warm lighting, draw inspiration from Renaissance and Rembrandt-style techniques. By adopting practices traditionally reserved for portraying nobility and hierarchy, *Pinhole Remix* provokes conversations about race, representation, and the narratives embedded in art history.

The visual language of *Pinhole Places* emerged from Leslie's desire to connect the spontaneity of street photography and focus on the medium of photography itself. Inspired by Uta Barth, whose ethereal work explores perception, light and the act of seeing, Leslie captures spaces in an evocative and unconventional way. Using makeshift pinhole lenses crafted out of materials found at each location, she photographed a variety of places – both iconic and obscure, inviting viewers to reflect on their own sense of familiarity, memory and perception of place.

Pinhole Parishes focuses on several parishes in Jamaica, inspired by Leslie's family stories before immigrating to Canada. Stories of her relatives from the late 1960s and early 1970s were recalled with deep fondness – a period marked by Jamaica's post-independence optimism, the rise of reggae and ska, along with burgeoning technological and cultural shifts. At the time, very few had access to photography; few owned cameras and developing film often required travelling to Kingston. As a result, their memories are primarily preserved through oral storytelling, creating a poignant mix of presence and absence. To bridge the gap between time and her own experience, Leslie devised a pinhole camera to create photographs that echo the aesthetic of the area (building a pinhole lens from a tea bag, tape and gauze), while drawing on locations from her own experiences visiting Jamaica and connecting with its people.

Christina Leslie is an artist based in Pickering, Ontario. She earned her BFA in 2006 at OCAU in Toronto and her MFA at the Savannah College of Art and Design in Georgia, USA, in 2022. Currently, she serves as the Interim Assistant Curator at the McMaster Museum of Art in Hamilton, Ontario.

Leslie's work has been featured in numerous publications worldwide and exhibited both nationally and internationally at venues including The Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), Ontario, Museum of Contemporary Art, Toronto, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, The McMaster Museum of Art, Hamilton, Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, Halifax, Art Windsor-Essex, Windsor, GAMU, Prague, Caribbean Fine Art Fair, Kingston, and Paris Photo, Paris. She is a noted public speaker having been invited for speaking engagements at conferences nationally and internationally including the ROM, McMaster Museum of Art, and the Caribbean Art Meet-Up. Her work is in private, corporate and public collections, including The Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.