

Review of
Photography Exhibit “The Sweet Breath of Life”
G.R. N’Namdi Gallery, Detroit

by Mohamad Bazzi
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In encountering the photographs that comprise this exhibit, I was struck by a raw, energetic, earthy power that permeates many of the images. There is a sense of narrative in these images that feels like the photographer is connected to the real experiences of people, and is not just a mere visitor who is transmitting back a record of his visit. Very little is staged and very little is pretentious. I felt the 1960's and 1970's of Black America, with all of its struggle, nostalgia, desperation, creative passion, gritty determination and humanist idealism drifting out of the images, as a result of the instant honesty that the photographers are able to convey through the work.

One such work was an untitled piece by Gerald Cyrus. It portrayed four men and a woman in what seems to be a back-stage setting. Two are involved in rehearsal, and the others are milling around with them. It is a jazzy environment, yet a moment of respite. All exude an ambiance of contemplation. Also, an important momentary anxiousness. They are three musicians in various moments of thoughtful transition. Other men and a woman join them in their space, yet they join them quietly. Some sit in an arrangement of rootedness while the others rise behind them, surrounding them as if they are columns of comrades. Is this momentary time a movement towards another place or a resolve to stay in this place? Is the drumming on the tabletop recreational play or occupational rehearsal? Lovely depth of space in this photo, a variety of clothes of different textures, fabrics and colors; a variety of bodies and beings, transmitted through the depths of the film.

“Stevie B” by Anthony Barboza is an image of a man lying in his bed, resting with a smile. The room interior is softness fuzz, keeping out the harsh light that attempts to permeate the window. Total relaxation, because he is innocent of any tyrannical despotic deeds. He has been kept down, close the Earth, and he knows her. He knows her sent. She smells as pure as these white sheets and pillows within which his nesting sinks. Textures, grains, falling lines into joy.

“Woman Bathing” by Beuford Smith is a sacred image of a slick black woman bathed by nature's life water. Her body, if I were to understand it completely, moves in quiet secret allure. She is in an industrial urban landscape, but the rain is still a misty ancient place. I can hear the loud soothing rhythms of the drops that she hears. It is the almost the closing of a day before evening comes. She is tired or just anxious for refreshment, so she finds this rooftop to quench her life thirst.