

# Lloyd Foster

## *Double Double*

Nicole Acheampong

Lloyd Foster's sculptures don't immediately reveal their full faces, which is typical of things that haunt. Last spring, at his solo exhibition at Anton Kern Gallery, in Midtown Manhattan, I had to tiptoe in some corners, crouch in others, to see the undersides of the sculptures that were floating closest to the rafters or the walls. The works are coy, but they're not too precious. They're made of insulation foam embellished with thick streaks of acrylic paint. One is draped in a mosquito net. Each has an inkjet print pasted to one side of the foam, photographs Foster took primarily in Ghana, his family's home country, a place that the artist—who was born in Washington, DC, and raised in Maryland—had never seen until his midtwenties.

Foster takes photographs for a simple reason: to document what he's observed, then return to it later. Before that first trip to Ghana, in 2015, he made street portraits in DC that are much like the ones he now uses for his mixed-media sculptures, black-and-white snapshots that don't differentiate between friends and strangers. Most depict young people posing casually or going about their daily lives. They squint or frown, or they stare beatifically. On their opposite side are crude painted faces, unnervingly gleeful. This series, titled *Double Double* (2023) and adapted for publication in this issue, is a scrapbook of scrambled memories, with images of disparate neighborhoods overlapping one another, and Foster's hand-painted intrusions sprouting from taxicabs, palm leaves, and the brow bones of watchful teenage boys. When installed, the sculptures dangle from the ceiling by thin strands of fishing wire. When you move among them, they move with you.

"I started to think of them as angels," Foster told me recently when we spoke at his studio in Queens, "people you meet in life and may, or may not, see again." That sense of a fragile encounter recalls the project's origin story: Foster's 2015 visit to Ghana was for the funeral of an uncle he didn't know well. Being introduced to Ghana via a traditional homegoing service means being immediately seeped in a unique brew of grief and jubilation. The artist's immersive installations, populated with photographs made on that trip and the many others he's taken since, are of a similar concoction. A gallery of his sculptures, text-filled drawings, and photographs most immediately recalls a busy Accra street, with youths, mothers, and motorcycles clumped in every corner. But it also has the frenzied gloom of a peroxide-bright shrine—not least because several of the artist's two-faced creatures have wings.

On his first Ghana trip, Foster had multiple uncanny encounters. He saw strangers passing by who looked like people he'd known growing up in Maryland. He went to the hometown of his mother, who had passed away when he was a child, and drove along the paths she'd walked when she was young. He took photographs of scenes that gave him déjà vu. "A mom holding her child's hand at the beach might remind me of me and my mom at the lake," he says. Certain silhouettes resonate in his work: the shape of a boy, a baby being cradled or held aloft.

One particular child reappears in multiple iterations, and his image seems like a totem: a small boy, lifted up by an obscure, painted-over figure. Moving through Foster's installation, you find this sculpture again and again. Sometimes, the figure that holds the boy is faceless; sometimes, it smiles mischievously. The boy is always wailing. The juxtaposition is as fragmentary, teasing, and intimate as a memory you can't shake, a place you keep returning to, the kind that moves with you.



All works from the series  
*Double Double*, 2023.  
Mixed media  
Installation photographs by  
Jason Mandella for *Aperture*.  
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Nicole Acheampong is a writer and editor  
whose work has appeared in *Aperture*,  
*The Atlantic*, and the *New York Review*  
of Books.





