Diane Rosenstein Fine Art

ART SY

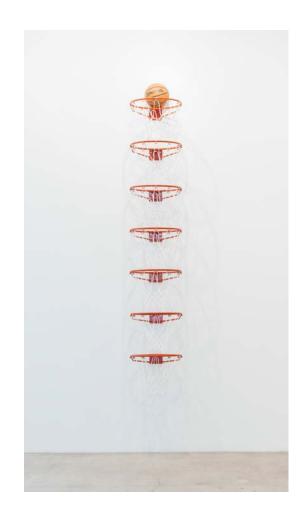## Yale MFA Photography Grads Go Off the Deep End, Led by Awol Erizku

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The annual series of exhibitions put on by graduates of Yale's MFA program is generally considered something of a litmus test for contemporary art, exposing the public to the developing practices of the country's brightest up-and-comers. This year's presentation of work by photography grads, on view now in its third and final iteration at Los Angeles gallery Diane Rosenstein Fine Art, is no exception. Titled "Deep End" and curated by New York artist and fellow Yale grad Awol Erizku, the show features photography, video, sound installation, textiles, sculpture, performance, and mixed media by five men and five women who are testing the limits of their chosen medium.
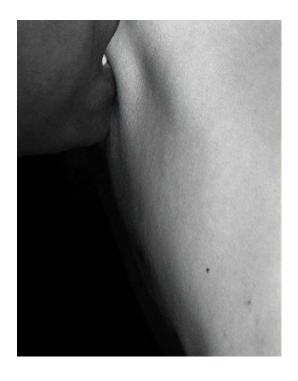
Born in Ethiopia and raised in the Bronx, Erizku is best known for a powerful series of photographic portraits that reimagine classical artworks by replacing their historical protagonists with contemporary models of color. He has since expanded his purview to include sculpture and installation, and his contribution to this exhibition embodies a wry allusion to Donald Judd's series of "Stacks"—

those iconic iron boxes that climb the wall vertically like the rungs of a ladder. Erizku has substituted Judd's sleek, minimalist objects for basketball hoops, effectively supplanting a canonized symbol of art history with a reference to the urban street culture of his youth.

Works by his colleagues similarly feature items that seem to function as stand-ins for a living, individual presence—shoes, trophies, rumpled sheets—offering compelling explorations into the ways modern bodies engage with communal space, both literal and conceptual. Erin Desmond captures the physicality of romantic relationships by casting body parts as landscapes; tangles of lips, necks, and chests evoke Edward Weston's famed expanses of sand. Stark photographs by Billie Stultz feature ostensibly appealing environments whose potentially seductive visual impressions are destabilized by her emphasis of the cold and impersonal. In *Sloperoof* (2013), an idyllic vision of a suburban street corner pictures the exterior of a quaint family abode—but its sun-drenched walls and the newly swept sidewalk are overtaken by shadowy, shifting forms, crawling with the encroaching peaks and barbs of surrounding greenery. *Skiing Mountain* (2014), an aerial view of a snow-capped mountain, is similarly grim. Flattened by filters that crush any intimations of form or softly modulated gray into sharp creases of dark and light, this international symbol of leisure and sport has been abstracted beyond the point of human association.

- Emily Nathan