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Contemporary Art  
Museum St. Louis

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Liz Johnson Artur's intimate photographs of the African diaspora come to CAM**



Liz Johnson Artur, *Untitled*. Chromogenic photograph, 20 x 24 inches. Courtesy the artist.  
© Liz Johnson Artur

**October 16, 2019 (St. Louis, MO)** - The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis (CAM) presents *Liz Johnson Artur: Dusha*, an exhibition organized by the Brooklyn Museum, featuring iconic images from the past thirty years of the London-based artist's practice. Drawn from Johnson Artur's ongoing *Black Balloon Archive*, more than sixty photographs, two videos, and a selection of sketchbooks will be on view. In addition, photographs of the monthly East London club night PDA—a non-binary space of self-expression where DJs, collectives, and artists are invited to perform for their peers—highlight some of Johnson Artur's most recent work. *Liz Johnson Artur: Dusha* is part of CAM's spring exhibitions, on view January 17 through April 19, 2020.

Johnson Artur describes herself as “a product of migration.” The daughter of a Russian mother and Ghanaian father, she grew up in Bulgaria, Germany, and Russia, with little contact with black communities. In 1986 she visited Brooklyn, staying with a Russian family in a predominantly black neighborhood. Her photographs became driven by a desire for connection, a link to other people across the African diaspora. She shoots exclusively on film, which in part led to the creation of her collection of photographic representations, *Black Balloon Archive*. The archive's name is derived from a lyric sung by the American soul singer Sylvester “Syl” Johnson, describing a black balloon against a snow-white sky. “Dusha” is the Russian word for soul, and Johnson Artur's intimate pictures record, the artist says, “the normality of black lives and black culture, which is something that isn't often reflected in the mainstream media.” She captures “a sense of pride in how people display themselves,” as she encounters people on streets, in restaurants and clubs, or at public gatherings during her travels to Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, and North America.

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Two videos and a sound installation will highlight the unique voices and stories of some of Johnson Artur's subjects. *Real ... Times* (2018) weaves together various narratives from London's black communities—from Black Lives Matter rallies to the Born N Bread collective, the makers of an influential zine. *AfroRussians* (2010) documents the stories of other Russians of African descent. Like the artist, most were born to Russian mothers and African or Caribbean fathers who were offered a free university education in the Soviet Union during the Cold War, then later expelled from the country. Johnson Artur also pays homage to the legendary Ghanaian photographer James Barnor, through portraiture and accompanying audio interviews.



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**Liz Johnson Artur** (b. 1964, Sofia, Bulgaria) has been based in London since 1991. Her monograph with Bierre Verlag was included in the *New York Times* Best Photo Books of 2016, and her work was recently included in the 10th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art. She was a nominee for the 2017 Aimia | AGO (Art Gallery of Ontario) Photography Prize and a finalist for the Jane Lombard Prize for Art and Social Justice in 2018. Johnson Artur holds an MA in photography from the Royal Academy of Arts in London.

The exhibition is generously supported by the Whitaker Foundation.

*Liz Johnson Artur: Dusha* is curated by Drew Sawyer, Phillip Leonian and Edith Rosenbaum Leonian Curator of Photography, Brooklyn Museum. The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis exhibition is organized by Wassan Al-Khudhairi, Chief Curator.

## Related Events

### Press & Patron Preview

Friday, January 17, 10:00–11:00 am

Join artists and curators for an exclusive introduction to the exhibitions. RSVP to Eddie Silva at 314.535.0770 x313 or [esilva@camstl.org](mailto:esilva@camstl.org)

### Opening Night

Friday, January 17

Member Preview 6:00–7:00 pm  
Public Reception 7:00–9:00 pm

### Artist Talk: Liz Johnson Artur

Saturday, January 18, 11:00 am

**All programs, dates, and times are subject to change.**

## About the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis

The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis presents, supports, and celebrates the art of our time. It is the premier museum in St. Louis dedicated to contemporary art. Focused on a dynamic array of changing exhibitions, CAM provides a thought-provoking program that reflects and contributes to the global cultural landscape. Through the diverse perspectives offered in its exhibitions, public programs, and educational initiatives, CAM actively engages a range of audiences to challenge their perceptions. It is a site for discovery, a gathering place in which to experience and enjoy contemporary visual culture. CAM is located in the Grand Center Arts District.

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