

MUSÉE

VANGUARD OF PHOTOGRAPHY CULTURE



Shikeith, Phantasmatic Apparatus, 2025, Archival Inkjet Print on Photo Rag Baryta Paper. 48" x 60" (122 x 152.5 cm).

Sep 4 | Shikeith: People Who Die Bad Don't Stay in the Ground

TILT Institute for the Contemporary Image

Reviews | Written by Ellen Corry

Inspired by a line from Toni Morrison's novel, "Beloved," "Shikeith: People Who Die Bad Don't Stay in the Ground" delves into the hauntological experiences of Black men and boys. The exhibition follows a multidisciplinary practice (photography, video and installation) as the work chronicles the legacy of historical traumas and their pervasive nature. Unpacking the reverberations of generational trauma, Shikeith resists 'historical amnesia'. The pain that is passed down to successive generations cannot be erased. The exhibition places the ongoing impacts of injustice at the forefront, calling attention to the narratives that have been silenced yet long to be unearthed.



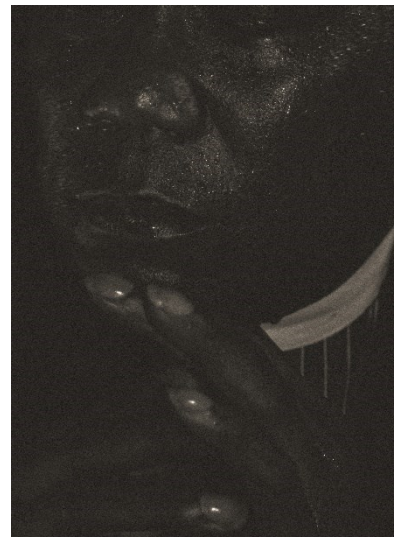
Shikeith, Still from People Who Die Bad Don't Stay in the Ground, 2025, Two-Channel Video.

Shikeith is a multidisciplinary artist who seeks to interrogate existing sociopolitical structures and how they permeate the psychological landscapes of marginalized communities. Drawing on his interest in hauntology (an enduring, ghostly presence of the past or unrealized futures within the present), his artwork engages with the invisible forces that shape our own perception of self. “People Who Die Bad Don’t Stay in the Ground” refers to Toni Morrison’s writing because it claims that a victim who was wrongfully murdered or killed will wander the earth as ghosts, as “Beloved” does. But the ghost is much larger. Generations of the Black community are haunted by one incomprehensible horror after another.

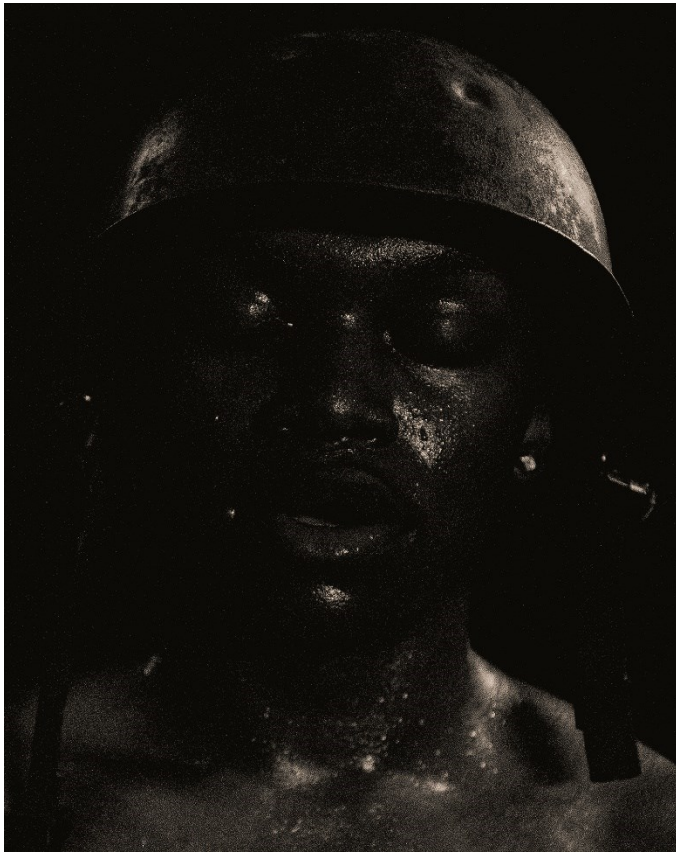
“Visiting Hours” (2022) presents the artist’s clear connection to haunting. A Black man lies peacefully on the surface. The surface is covered in a sheet, making the surface appear as a bed and a wake table. Behind the man, a shrouded figure clutches his torso—the torsion of the figure’s hand imprints on the sheet, coloring the embrace in violence. Yet, the shrouded figure rests their head on the man’s shoulder. The grip could be a result of aggression or desperate longing. The work interplays with its own title, defying expectations of a visit to a body. Instead, the deceased seeming to visit, haunting him as he lies.



Shikeith, Visiting Hours, 2022, Archival Inkjet Print on Photo Rag Baryta Paper, 49" x 60" (124.5 x 152.5 cm), Framed: 49 15/16' x 60 7/8"



Shikeith, don't weep, don't you mourn, 2022, Archival Inkjet Print on Photo Rag Baryta Paper, 50" x 33"



Shikeith, Mercy Mercy Me, 2025, Archival Inkjet Print, 37" x 30"

In “Mercy Mercy Me” (2025), Shikeith draws on historical hallmarks as the figure closes his eyes under a combat helmet. The young man’s face is covered in sweat, catching light as it drips across his cheeks and down his chest. With eyes closed, the figure seems to be in prayer—or in an agonizing state of pause. Due to the helmet, the photograph calls on the historical context of the Vietnam War, where Black soldiers were disproportionately forced to fight and die in a war for a country that did not give them equal rights.

Shikeith crafts a series that chronicles a legacy of historical trauma, while imbuing his work with a deep emotional quality. The portraits contain rich layers that form dialogues with the past and the present. An intimate understanding of pain is presented, although some of the photographs call on histories that may feel distant to others. His

work can compound time, allowing past narratives to sing out from modern work. The series engages with the sociopolitical and institutionalized systems of oppression through meticulously cared-for work.

See “Shikeith: People Who Die Bad Don’t Stay in the Ground” at TILT Institute for the Contemporary Image in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The exhibition opens on September 11th and will be on view until November 22nd.