

# Self-Preservation

Photograph by **Whitley Isa** The Black Women Photographers collective presents a collection of self-preservation, because it is needed now more than ever.

Black Women Photographers aims to disrupt the notion that it is difficult to discover and commission Black creatives. It is dedicated to providing a resource for the industry's gatekeepers.

“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.” – Audre Lorde.

**PRESENTED BY**



**BLACK WOMEN  
PHOTOGRAPHERS**

**Featuring:** Aisha Bada, Daniella Almona, Elsie Kibue-Ngare, Esther Sweeney, Gesilayefa Azorbo, Nitashia Johnson, Whitley Isa, Yanissa X**Aisha Bada**

[www.aishabada.com](http://www.aishabada.com)

Health care workers work hard in order to care for their

patients. As an upcoming health care official, I can relate. Yet making photographs of other health care workers has led me to see the other sides of health care that I've been missing. It has also reminded me of some of the most important people I have lost—hence the project title *Lost Yet Again*.

### **Daniella Almona**

[daniellaalmona.com](http://daniellaalmona.com)

Almona is a multidisciplinary artist born and raised in Lagos, Nigeria. She has spent the past five years capturing portraits and fashion stills from different cultures and backgrounds. Her desire to connect her thoughts to her physical space as well as a need to tell stories inspires her work. She has exhibited work at the Kube Gallery, and worked with VSCO and Black Women Photographers as an artist-curator.

### **Elsie Kibue-Ngare**

[www.ek13photography.com](http://www.ek13photography.com)

I was born and raised in Kenya—a place known for its coffee, wildlife, and distance runners. I now live in London, and life here is a far cry from the memories I have growing up on a council estate in Nairobi. For me, the Khanga/Leso is a way of reminding and reconnecting with my Kenyan roots. The current global travel restrictions mean I am unable to visit Kenya, which makes me even more homesick. I miss my motherland. This photo is from a project I worked on earlier this year. While I enjoy taking portraits of others, I dislike turning the camera on myself. For me, a camera is an opportunity to connect and explore my relationships with other people. In this instance, I responded to the plethora of contemporary images that portrayed Black people, Africans, and Kenyans in ways that didn't connect with me. I wanted my children to see someone they knew represented in ways of which they never would have dreamed. This photo also represents an in-between moment, where I had a few minutes to myself before the duties of

motherhood and adulthood beckoned me.

### **Esther Sweeney A.K.A. Sweeney Queen**

<https://www.esthersweeney.com/home>

My work is primarily focused on Black women and people, identity, social issues, and the culture and spirit of Africa and its people. I use vibrant hues to reflect that. Often referencing African culture, my work explores the varying relationships between color, texture, culture, and everyday life. I aim to tell African stories with dignity, honor, and authenticity while highlighting daily life and social issues in contemporary Africa. Africa is my canvas, African women and Black people are my paint brushes, and culture is my paint.

I think of my work as an unfinished journal of sorts—a love letter to my people and my continent.

### **Gesilayefa Azorbo**

[www.gesilaazorbo.com](http://www.gesilaazorbo.com)

I am a Nigerian-born, Kenyan-raised, Toronto-settled creative (writer, photographer, filmmaker, and film festival multitasker) with an abiding love for music, film, television, and literature. I have a specific interest in portraiture through both photography and cinematography.

I am fascinated by faces and the human form – often in the way of portraiture, documentary photography of culturally important events, and street photography. In the last couple of years, I have begun to focus on creative self-portraiture—both staged and spontaneous—inspired by my personal explorations into bodywork as an art model and an emerging burlesque performer. I'm also inspired by the better parts of the body positivity movement.

I realize I am reaching for and creating the imagery that I have always wanted to see—that which reflects dark-skinned,

larger bodies like mine in the spaces of art and beauty.

**Nitashia Johnson (NJ)**

[nitashiajohnson.com](http://nitashiajohnson.com)

From a young age, I always created works to make others happy—to support them in one way or another. That way of thinking still manifests in me today. Whether I'm taking a portrait for someone to hang on their wall, or creating something magical with traditional art supplies, I want to help others share who they are. My creative practice is a combination of many things. That's the reason I love it so much.

The combination of art and design defines me. It makes up who I am. My studio practice ranges over the comprehensive creative platform. I've studied and worked as a graphic designer, and photographed topics that have dealt with educational, social, and environmental issues. I've also experimented with traditional art forms, such as figure drawing and mixed-media. Being able to communicate artistically is why I work with so many different mediums.

My work is my experimentation with life—it's how I explore the world. I've created a photographic book series that allows 14 participants each year to express themselves through written reflections called "The Self Publication" ([www.theseelfpublication.com](http://www.theseelfpublication.com)). There is something I find genuinely extraordinary about every one of them. The work aims to clean away the harsh stereotypes placed upon Black men and women in America as well as those who live in other parts of the world. I also created *The Beauty of South Dallas*, a project meant to document the voices and history of an area I grew up in, which is currently facing gentrification.

My passion has pushed me to form a creative youth program called The Smart Project. Inspired by those who have helped me

during my adolescent years, I created this innovative program to support the goals and dreams of young artists. I believe that my role as an artist is to share and tell stories—to capture and create moments that will stand the test of time. Art, design, and video give me the power to help others express who they are. These creative areas help me express myself, too. My creative practice is simply a self-portrait, which I have the opportunity to experiment and change every day.

### **Whitley Isa**

[www.whitleyisa.com](http://www.whitleyisa.com)

I'm a Nigerian-Belgian portrait and fashion photographer. Inspired by feminine strength, diversity, and unique beauty, I enjoy creating timeless and emotive imagery.

### **Yanissa X**

[yanissax.com](http://yanissax.com)

I'm a photographer from Canada. I have an eternal desire to create and uncover what I've rarely been exposed to. Freedom, authenticity, and boldness are captured by us—focusing on documenting the cultural diversity within the global Black community and witnessing our many unique expressions. My work is a reflection of my inner world. Although many will focus on technique, inspiring the right mood is what I'm most mindful of—a picture is only as beautiful as the emotion we capture. Launched by photographer Polly Irungu in July of 2020, Black Women Photographers has grown to a community of over 700 active members from around the world. The collective's mission is to help get Black women photographers hired, and supports its members through promoting their work in an active database distributed to photo editors and art buyers. The collective also features education and support for its members through the regular programming of webinars, workshops, trainings, and portfolio reviews.

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