

## ABOUT Hairvolution

By Taiye Idahor

*\*\* Manthia Diawara: ...What does departure mean to you?*

*Édouard Glissant: It's the moment when one consents not to be a single being and attempts to be many beings at the same time.*

This project began through a simple but important question that I have been confronted with since I was a child, **Is this your hair?** This question is asked because my hair is black and wavy.

This perennial question has elicited a journey of self discovery of which the point of departure is a focus on my family history. It started with a series of meetings and conversations with my father and mother asking questions about *Ayie*, my paternal grandmother (arguably a Caucasian) from whom my hair characteristics seem to have originated.

I had the opportunity to meet only one of my four grandparents, which is my maternal grandmother, but there exist photo evidences of the others in the living room of our family house in Benin city Nigeria and I have also heard stories from family members who met and knew them. This cannot be said about *Ayie*, as there was no trace of her existence in our home. What was her full name, where was she from, where did she go, why did she leave, did she leave? These are some of the questions posed to my father. Yet her identity has remained elusive.

Through this new body of works, I sought to subsume her back into our family history; I began to explore the dislocation between memory and history based on *Ayie's* lost identity and the faded memories that exist of her through the partially hidden, washed and worn out portrait images that speak of her loss but at the same time her rebirth.

My hair is a signifier of *Ayie's* presence hence it is my path of navigation on this journey and simultaneously it heralds a reintegration. My father believes she reincarnated through me so I employ this concept of reincarnation, of being multiple; a belief strongly held within my Benin culture to subsume her. At the same time, my quest for self existence begins here. Through my eyes, these multiple images may also be my unconscious reaction to *Ayie's* disappearance as I create a memory of myself through this act of repetition. The blackness visible in most of the works speaks of the voids and uncertainly I encountered in the course of my search for *Ayie*. A certain temporality and fragility looms through the use of paper, canvas, inkjet prints and drawings as they emphasize the fragility of memory in itself.

As I reflect daily on the importance of my parent's memories, its fragility becomes increasingly more apparent. I question our ability to recall or reproduce memories that will eventually form a larger whole for future family and national archives. Instead our dependence on social media and its gadgets disassociate us from the experiential aspect of building memories in our minds. Although the modern day technologies of social media may afford us the opportunity to document, record and share life's events as they unfold, they have also made us complacent. In essence, experiential memory is becoming a disappearing influence in shaping tomorrow's archives; as we are left with blank objects and images void of essence and meaning.

A change of location or death is no longer a criterion for a disappearing history as is the case with Ayie. To exist has become a choice rather than a norm.

***Bini Proverb: Ovbokhan aiku yanmiowa***

***A child cannot play too much to forget the way home***

For more on the project visit

[www.taiyeidahor.blogspot.com](http://www.taiyeidahor.blogspot.com)