

*On John*

Durga Chew-Bose

While I can't recall where it happened—where online that is—I first encountered John Edmonds' photography in 2013. I chanced upon his work only to feel somehow formerly familiar with it. Not the imagery, necessarily, but the pull of it. How it grazed on my consciousness, prompting me to immediately email my friend Sarah, a one-line dispatch with two links to his portraits. The subject: his name in all lowercase—"john edmonds."

If memory serves, I was suggesting his work for the second issue of *Adult* magazine, which Sarah founded. What struck me was how John's approach felt plain, in the same way natural light can feel all at once holy and plain. The everyday. The glorious, too. A church. Your high school gym. *That* light. Or the patch of light on your floor that you witness every afternoon. And yet, every afternoon, that patch of light temporizes you. It insists on what's least insistent: delay.

The nude. How when disposed to natural light, the nude, as depicted by John, becomes statuary but not still. Living; having lived. Will live so much, and so much more. The diffusing nature of shadows, and the strange, compelling, way shadows come alive like moving images projected on the muscles of a back. On the sharp and secret sail of a pelvic bone. The attitude of an elbow. The peaceful sides of a face. Her heavy lids; his tattoos. A scar's pulpy proof. On the lightning sheen of a du-rag. The rippled elegance of a knuckle. A diamond stud, out of focus. His palms; her underwear line; a bum, bare and black, in bed. The worn edges of a green towel, like moss draped on a naked lap. A person's profile suddenly made planetary, as if rotating on its axis—absorbing the sun only to live in its dimmed wake, occupying space as only silhouettes can, *suggestively*.

Six or so months after emailing Sarah, six of John's photographs were published in the summer 2014 issue of *Adult*, in a spread titled, "You Stay on My Mind." The words were, and still are, the very sentiment of John's work. Possessive and teasing. Impossible to forget. *Bringing to mind*. An invitation to return. The door left open or ajar.

His photographs are hospitable. You feel the draft. You stay a while. There's quiet. Repose. Memory in the angles of a stranger's posture. The slope of what happens when you give into another body's slope. You make eye contact with a pair of closed eyelids. You latch onto what's available: a neck, a hood, a blue. You accept and even more so, lose yourself to what's available: a neck, a hood, a blue. What I now see as John-blue. Or John-yellow. John-red. John-lit. What I've come to recognize as the effect of John's work. Seeing one of his photographs for the first time isn't new—not only new—but reminiscent.

I've said before of John's photographs that he doesn't simply capture light, or seize the romance of its spectacle, but he seems to *quote* light. The grief and strength evoked from it, and how it ropes together sensitives. How if you stare too long into the light: tears, speckled ghosts. John cites the wisdom of light as it shines on his subjects. But also, as it leverages the body. Whole, half-seen, intimate, introducing. It haunts. It says hello.