

49. | Darkening Process



2014-2015, 20 pigment prints on Fine art, 26,5 x 40 cm.
View of Darkening Process, MMP+, 2016, Marrakech.
Courtesy of the artist and Ceysson & Bénétière, Paris.
Ed. of 5 + 2 A.P.

Darkening Process est une série de vingt photographies montrant différents moments et mouvement d'un cirreur de chaussures. Les photos ont été prises pendant le tournage du film expérimental éponyme de Mounir Fatmi, Darkening Process, les deux œuvres portant sur la vie de John Howard Griffin, un écrivain et militant des droits civiques américain qui était tellement indigné de l'injustice vécue par les Afro-américains dans les années 1950-1960 qu'il a pris des cachets et subi un traitement UV pour se noircir la peau. Quand Griffin a commencé à être pris pour un homme noir, le seul travail qu'il a pu trouver était de cirer des chaussures, malgré des études secondaires et une carrière dans l'armée. Il a aussi travaillé comme écrivain, et en tant que tel il s'est enfoncé, ainsi que sa famille, dans la pauvreté, incapable de surmonter les barrières qui lui étaient désormais imposées.

D'une certaine façon, Fatmi voit l'action de Griffin comme une performance en tant que telle. Sa décision de subir un traitement pour noircir sa peau, délaissant sa propre vie pour faire l'expérience de celle d'un autre, est d'une grande radicalité et fut poussée à l'extrême. Don Rutledge a pris de nombreuses photos de Griffin durant cette période et Griffin voulait que son expérience soit documentée, cela faisait partie du processus de cette conversion. Pour Fatmi, les photographies de Darkening Process sont comme une archive contemporaine de l'expérience de Griffin, une façon de faire revivre ce qu'il a traversé, et donc de relier son expérience à une réalité contemporaine dans laquelle le manque de compréhension de l'autre persiste toujours.

Les photographies à proprement parler sont des représentations sombres et au cadrage serré des mains d'un homme en train de cirer une chaussure. Elles sont sur fond noir, conférant un sentiment d'isolation et d'anonymat ; des

Darkening Process is a suite of twenty black and white photographs showing different moments and movements of a man shining shoes. The photographs were made during the filming of mounir fatmi's experimental film of the same name, Darkening Process, and both works are about the life of John Howard Griffin, an American writer and Civil Rights activist who was so frustrated by the injustice experienced by African Americans during the 1950s-1960s, that he took pills and had UV exposure to turn his skin black. When Griffin began to be taken for a black man, the only job he could find was as a shoeshine man, despite being college educated, having served in the US Army, and worked as a writer, and as such he sank himself and his family into poverty, unable to rise above the barriers now imposed upon him.

In some ways Fatmi sees Griffin's actions as a performance in and of itself. His decision to subject himself to treatments to make his skin black, forsaking his own life in order to experience the other is completely radical and was done to the extreme. Don Rutledge photographed much of Griffin's life during this time and Griffin wanted the experience documented, it was part of the process of this conversion. For fatmi, the photographs in Darkening Process are like a contemporary archive of Griffin's experience, a way to reenact what he went through, as such connecting it to a contemporary reality in which a lack of understanding for the other still persists.

The photographs themselves are dark, closely cropped scenes of a man's hands in the process of shining a shoe. They are set against a black background creating a feeling of isolation, anonymity; Images of the brush or a white shaggy cloth rubbing along the sides of the black leather shoe; an image of the shoe itself on the raised box; a hand touching

images de la brosse ou d'une peau de chamois blanche frottant les bords d'une chaussure de cuir noir ; une image de la chaussure elle-même sur la boîte du cireur ; une main touchant le cirage noir ; une image de mains se frottant l'une contre l'autre, le cirage noir semblant les rendre plus foncées.

Cette série de photos fait partie d'une œuvre plus vaste intitulée *The Journey into Shame*, que Fatmi a axée autour de la vie de John Howard Griffin. Cette série prolonge l'intérêt de Fatmi pour l'exploration des théories sur l'identité, la signification de l'idée de l'autre, ainsi que sa fascination de longue date pour les archives, particulièrement celles relatant des instants obscurs ou oubliés de l'histoire qui, une fois ravivés, entrent en résonance avec des thématiques contemporaines.

Blaire Dessent, Février 2016.

the black shoe polish; an image of hands rubbing together, the black polish seemingly making them darker.

This set of photographs is part of a larger series of work titled *The Journey into Shame*, which fatmi has made around the life of John Howard Griffin. The series continues fatmi's interest in exploring theories of identity, what is meant by the idea of the other, as well as his ongoing fascination with archives, particularly obscure or forgotten about moments in history that when revived, resonate with contemporary meaning.

Blaire Dessent, February, 2016.

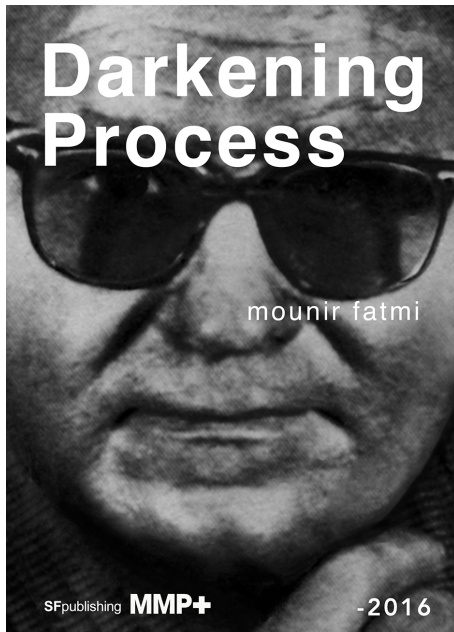
" Darkening Process turns around a closely cropped scene in black and white that shows a pair of hands intensely polishing and scrubbing a pair of black leather shoes. Both the shoes and the hands get increasingly darker as the film continues, the hands rubbing some of the black polish into the skin, our eyes witness to the change. "

Blaire Dessent, January 2016

exhibitions:

2016

Darkening Process - MMP+ - Solo show



Darkening Process, SFpublishing 2024

Darkening Process is based on three projects about the idea of the Other: towards literature, figures and scientific experiments. The first project The Journey into Shame is in honoring John Howard Griffin, the white American writer and journalist, born in 1920, known for his fight against racial discrimination and best known for his book 'Black like Me'.

Mostafa Aghrib, January 2016



Darkening Process is a suite of twenty black and white photographs showing different moments and movements of a man shining shoes. The photographs were made during the filming of mounir fatmi's experimental film of the same name, Darkening Process, and both works are about the life of John Howard Griffin, an American writer and Civil Rights activist who was so frustrated by the injustice experienced by African Americans during the 1950s-1960s, that he took pills and had UV exposure to turn his skin black.



When Griffin began to be taken for a black man, the only job he could find was as a shoeshine man, despite being college educated, having served in the US Army, and worked as a writer, and as such he sank himself and his family into poverty, unable to rise above the barriers now imposed upon him.

Darkening Process

The photographs themselves are dark, closely cropped scenes of a man's hands in the process of shining a shoe. They are set against a black background creating a feeling of isolation, anonymity; Images of the brush or a white shammy cloth rubbing along the sides of the black leather shoe; an image of the shoe itself on the raised box; a hand touching the black shoe polish; an image of hands rubbing together, the black polish seemingly making them darker.



The series continues fatmi's interest in exploring theories of identity, what is meant by the idea of the other, as well as his ongoing fascination with archives, particularly obscure or forgotten about moments in history that when revived, resonate with contemporary meaning.