

# BLINK

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by Juan Bonilla

**Hello Awol. Introduce yourself.**

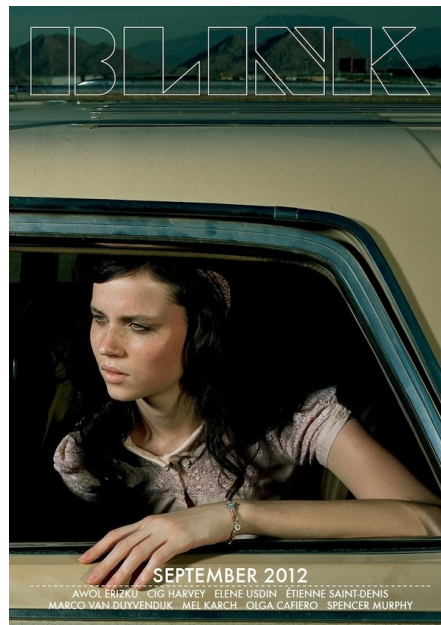
Hi, I'm Awol Erizku, an artist, living in New York City. I like to wear a lot of black (not so much during the summer though).

**When did you decide to become a photographer?**

When I was real young I had the moment while I was sitting in front of a photograph of Lil' Kim by David LaChapelle.

**Can you talk a bit about some of your work over the years?**

I guess you can say my work is like one big puzzle. I make photos, videos, sculptures, and even paint on occasion. They all have this underlining theme, a critique, if you will on the lack of people of color in Art History. Most importantly, it's a celebration of beauty and youth. My work is still growing as I am growing and being exposed to new people and lifestyles, but all in all, I think it will all come together to form one big picture.



**You have held your first solo show which opened last June, at Hasted Kraeutler Gallery in Chelsea. How's the exhibition?**  
The show was great! The opening night was crazy! I got to work with my good friend DJ Melo-X to make it probably the best opening of the year. We managed to pack the gallery wall to wall. I think people just came to see Melo-X perform, haha.

**Congrats again! Who are the people in the photos exhibited at the show?**

They're now people I consider friends, but at one point they were all strangers I came across on the street, blogs, and Facebook. They're all cool as I've come to realize; Joshua Kissi and Travis Gumbs of Street Etiquette, Ruqayyah Albaari, AV Rockwell, and Meriem Erizku, are amongst the hand full in the show.

**What made you mix traditional Renaissance with urban chic?**

As a New Yorker, I thinking I was drawn to make work about the people who I saw on the regular basis. I'm only filling in the blanks in art history where I feel like it's missing color.

**What types of people inspire you to take their photograph?**

People who have that undeniable beauty the ones you can't look away from. The same ones who ask you to "take a picture it will last longer" hahaha.

**How do you conduct the relationship with your subjects?**

I usually introduce myself at first, complement them, and ask if they would like to be photographed. They usually ask for work and I direct them to my website, or show them on the spot if I have my iPad. Once they agree to it, we exchange numbers, and I follow up with them. We'll hang out a few times and I get to know what they're really like so I can determine how to photograph them. Throughout this process, we become close which allows me to collaborate with them on almost any level.

**Can you tell me an interesting story about any of the images featured?**

The pigeon in 'The Girl with a Pigeon' is real. My sister Feruz and I happened to be walking to our parents house in the Bronx one afternoon when we came across a slaughter house that sold chickens, ducks, turkeys, sheep, goats, and strangely pigeons which are ubiquitous in New York. Around that same time, I was in the process of finalizing the last bit of detail for a photograph I was working on with Ruqayyah (the model for the photograph). In passing I mentioned it to my sister that I was somewhat stuck on one last detail for an image. A few days later, my sister showed up to my studio with two live pigeons, a white one and a grey one. She said they don't sell them alive, had to pay extra for them to be alive but I think you can use them as one of your signifiers. Not knowing if Ruqayyah would be up for holding a live pigeon, my friend Adrian and I tested shooting the pigeons on a green screen, during this process, the white one refused to eat or even fly. We let him go and convinced Ruqayyah to hold the other, the rest is history.

**What equipment do you use?**

I use 4x5 and Medium format film cameras to make pictures, usually one strobe as a light source, and I use Photoshop to prepare my images for print.



**What is your greatest source of inspiration?**

As corny as it sounds, my family is the greatest source of inspiration.

**Are there any photographers you admire, or artists that inspire your work?**

I like the works of Jeff Wall, Richard Prince, Philip-Lorca diCorcia, and David Hammons.

**What is your art theory?**

Good art can change the world.

**What would you do if you could not make art?**

I seriously have no idea! I hope this art thing works out, hahaha!

**What are your plans for the future?**

Launch big ships in deep water

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