

Milan Davis

As a black woman growing up where few people looked like me, I have always felt that there were unspoken (but not really) expectations for me. I was expected to make people feel comfortable with the way that I presented myself. But for as long as I can remember, I have been a more reserved person. My reservedness is a defense mechanism to avoid negative attention, but it is often interpreted as coldness or disinterest. My whole life people have told me that I am intimidating or that they think I don't like them. I feel like I have been pre-judged because of my outward expression, as well as perceived and treated like a racist stereotype of a black woman. I feel as though people around me are looking for me to fulfill a role, because it's easier than accepting the complex being that each one of us is. I have learned that if you don't appear a certain way, people feel threatened. I have also learned that a lot of people are insecure and try to control the people or things that threaten them. There is privilege in being palatable, and consequences for authenticity. In this project, I express the pressure I feel to perform in ways that are acceptable by society's standards and the uncomfortable positions it puts me in. Making these photographs is a way to convey how unnatural and wrong it feels when I try to conform to how people want me to be or appear, and the ways I contort my face in these photographs looks and feels as unnatural as when I do it in real life. I want the audience to be able to feel what I am feeling physically to express what I am feeling internally.

*Untitled #1, 2022*

Inkjet print

40" x 60"

*Untitled #2, 2022*

Inkjet print

28" x 18"

*Untitled #3, 2022*

Inkjet print

40" x 60"

*Untitled #4, 2022*

Inkjet print

28" x 18"

*Untitled #5, 2022*

Inkjet print

40" x 60"

*Untitled #6, 2022*

Inkjet print

28" x 18"

Image: *Untitled* (detail)