

OUT

Artist Spotlight: Lyle Ashton Harris

By Albert Smith, February 10, 2015



We look back this month at the series, *The Complete Chocolate Portraits*, for their beauty and clarity.

Ever since he was born in the Bronx, N.Y., Lyle Ashton Harris has split his time between New York and some far-off land. As a boy, it was Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Now he lives and works in New York City and Accra, Ghana.



His work has been exhibited internationally, including at the Guggenheim Museum and the Whitney Museum of American Art. This spring new works will be on view at the David Castillo gallery in Miami. An openly gay artist, Harris's work is regularly featured in a wide range of publications, including the *New York Times Magazine*, *Vibe*, and *New York* magazine. During 2000 and 2001, he was a fellow at the American Academy in Rome, and now he serves as an assistant professor of art at New York University. *The Advocate* spoke with Harris before publishing *Lyle Ashton Harris, Excessive Exposure: The Complete Chocolate Portraits*, with an essay by Okwui Enwezor and foreword by Henry Louis Gates Jr. Here are some of the answers to the questions below:

***The Advocate:* Why are you a photographer?**

Harris: I've been photographing for many years now and still continue to take pleasure in making portraits.

What catches your eye?

Images that hold a certain amount of complexity and at the same time possess an amount of beauty and clarity.

How do you choose your subjects?

The subjects chosen for my new portrait book, *Excessive Exposure*, range from my grandmother to art world and cultural luminaries including Cindy Sherman, Kehinde Wiley, Yoko Ono, and Tony Kushner.

How do you describe your work?

This new series was photographed with the 20 x 24 Polaroid camera over a period of 10 years. I used chiaroscuro lighting to produce portraits that are both vulnerable and mysterious.

What makes a good photograph to you?

I like images that make me question and be curious about the subject.

Who are your favorite artists? And why?

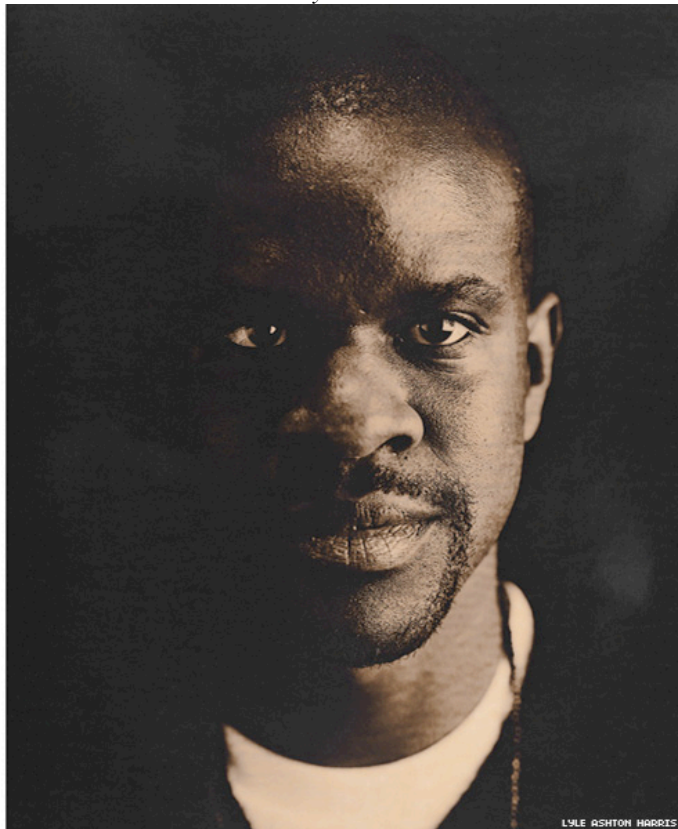
Caravaggio, Bacon, Mapplethorpe, Cindy Sherman, and Jean-Michel Basquiat —for their ability to explore complex ideas and emotions in their work.



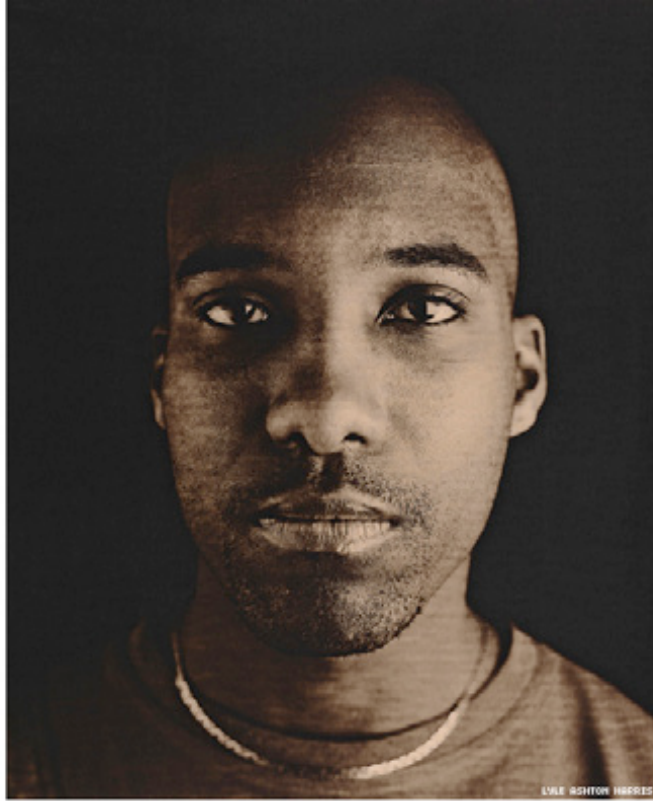
DJ Spooky



Cindy Sherman



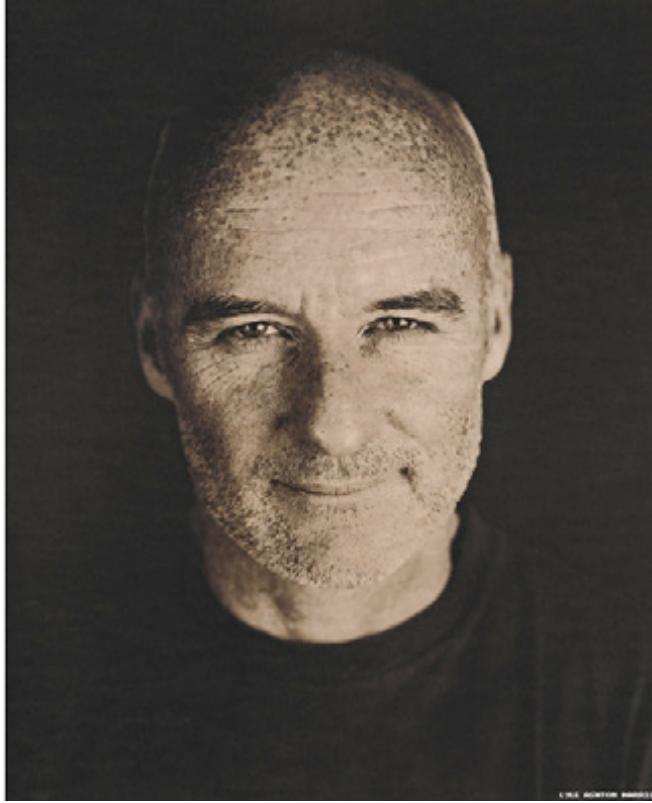
Thomas Allen Harris



Dorian



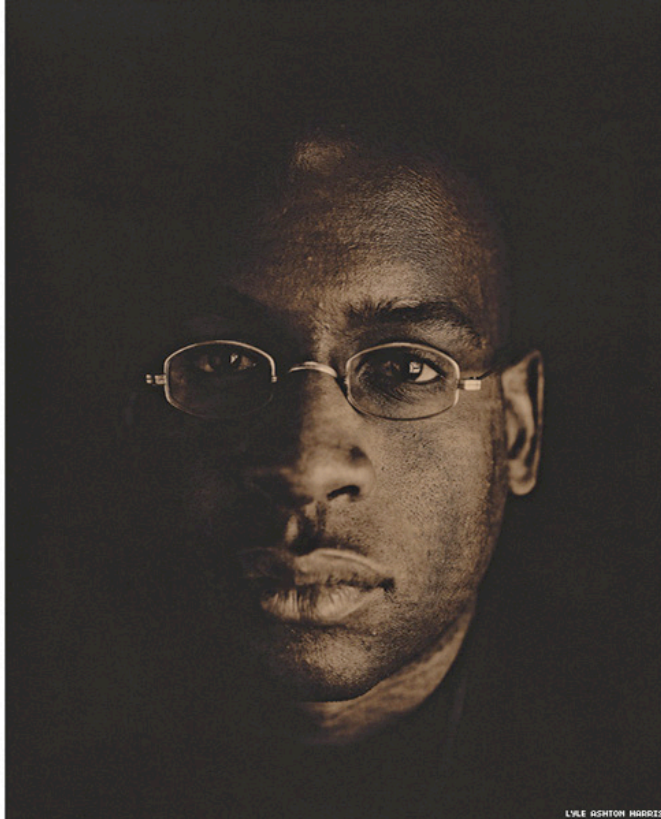
Rudean Leinaeng, Harris' Mother



Jim Hodges



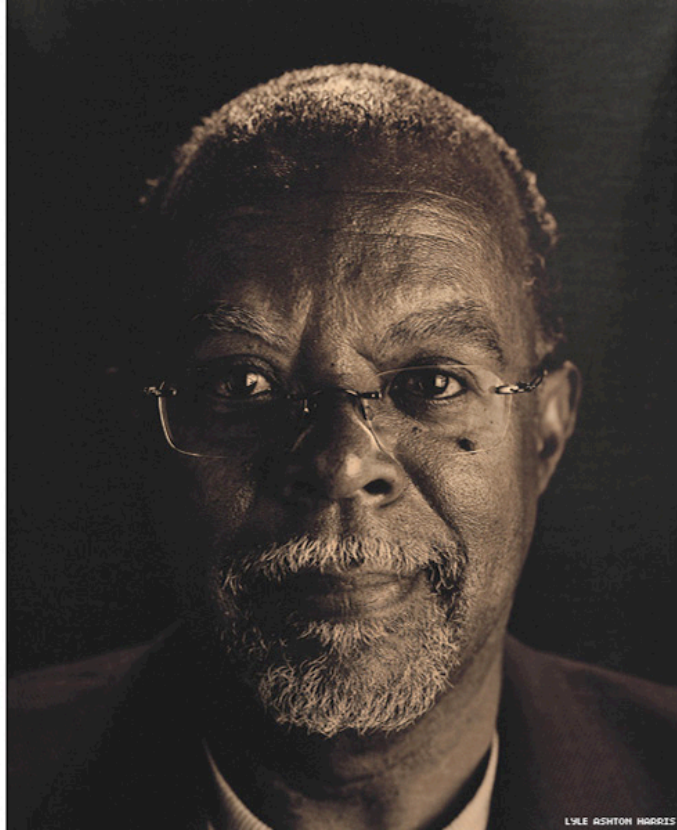
Catherine Gund



Glenn Ligon



Anthony Hegarty



Henry Louis Gates Jr.



Self Portrait