

Bouncer in silhouette

Roger Robinson, the poet I've been working with, and our designer Tom Etherington, we all really wanted to use this image as the front cover of the book, but we really didn't get a good response from people we trusted and, and showed it to.

So many people said that it wasn't a welcoming image or that it was somehow intimidating, which I actually think speaks to the way people see Black men in this country. But this is a photograph no doubt of a big man who was working as a bouncer. And I don't see anything intimidating at all about him. In fact, I see something quite gentle, yet solid, and he reminds me a bit of my own dad, Richie, who passed away in 2019.

A secret faux pas for lots of street photographers is photographing the back of someone's head. And in many ways, the whole photograph is anti-photography. Like, you know, the framing being slightly off kilter. But I actually like these little transgressions. They seem to, in my opinion, draw from the visual cues of other Black visual artists, such as, Aaron Douglas, who made paintings of the Black community during the Harlem Renaissance, you know, in the 1920s. And they were in similar poses as my bouncer, drawing upon ancient sort, ironic culture. And, the work also of the African-American photographer, George Leary Love was important. He moved to Brazil in the 1960s and spent the next 30 years documenting the country with this haunting colour photography.

Shoair Mavlian, the director of Photoworks, who was one of the few champions of this photograph of the bouncer, put me onto George Lee Love's work and he now ranks as one of my all-time favourites. He uses colour, I think, in a way that is very different to, like William Eggleston or Martin Parr and his compositions are strange, and in my opinion, very compelling.