



Jason Hill
Lion King
2019



PORTLAND ART MUSEUM

Jason Hill (American, born 1976)

Lion King, from the series **A Day in Eugene**, 2019

Pigment-based inkjet print

25 x 31 inches, framed

Museum Purchase: Northwest Art Purchase Fund

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Jason Hill is a photographer, filmmaker, and educator currently living in Portland, Oregon. Hill is well known for his distinct lighting, giving his subjects rich tones to their skin, creating jewel-tone backdrops, and capturing moments of virtuosic movement by performers, athletes, and dancers. Before discovering photography, Hill was in nursing school and his years of studying anatomy and physiology helped further inform his understanding of how to light faces and bodies. In his work, Hill prioritizes his connection to his subjects and being in “rhythm” with them in a way that opens up possibilities for a great photographic moment. Hill emphasizes, “The bottom line is that if the connection’s not there, the emotion’s not there, then you might as well forget about the lighting.”

This photograph portrays cast members from the traveling production of *The Lion King* held in Eugene, Oregon, in 2019. This image truly captures Hill’s mastery of dynamic light and movement. He fondly recalls, “I work with all types of athletes and performers, but I am most amazed by the discipline, momentum, and grace of dancers... I knew when I saw them warming up that this was a once-in-a-lifetime shoot. These images are a testament to the power and beauty that these artists possess.”

Hill diminished the background to a minimal grayscale in order to emphasize the richness of tones and colors in the dancers’ bodies and clothing. The backdrop and ground serve to support the moving figures in light and shadow. Rather than directing the dancers, Hill simply encouraged movement and took the opportunity to shoot the dancers in action, rehearsing for *The Lion King*. The magic of the day remains with him: “That’s still probably one of the most epic photographs I’ve ever made.”

Hill’s relationship with photographic imagery began with his love of record album covers, and music remains a source of inspiration, evident both in his work with dancers and in his collaboration with local Afro-Pop recording artist I\$\$A. In 2020, I\$\$A asked Hill to create artwork for his song, “Pigments in My Skin.” Hill writes, “I wanted to create something distinct and cohesive to show the unique diversity of the Black Diaspora,” Africans and their descendants who left the continent voluntarily or involuntarily and now live around the world. The series he created, *In My Skin*, “celebrates Black cultural identity, African ancestry, and the contemporary lived experience of the community in Portland.”

The series *A Day in Eugene* and *In My Skin* were first presented at the Portland Art Museum by Community Partner-in-Residence The Numberz FM, Portland’s only Black-led radio station, in 2021. *Lion King* also appeared in the exhibition *Black Artists of Oregon* (2023 – 2024).



Discussion and Activities

1. Look closely at the figures in the photograph *Lion King*. What visual evidence can you find that the dancers are in motion? Use sticky notes on the poster or make a printout and mark it with a pen to show specific places in the image that indicate movement. Draw arrows to show the next movement that you imagine taking place, following the positions we see here.
2. What do you notice about light and shadow in the photograph? Where is light coming from? How does it affect the dancers’ appearance? How do the figures relate to the background?
3. How are these dancers working together? Find places in the photograph where you notice dancers supporting each other. What do you imagine the process would be like of participating in this dance?
4. Consider Hill’s photograph within the context of group portraits and compare it to two European paintings that are also featured in the Poster Project: Jean Michelin’s *A Peasant Family* and Gabriel Revel’s *Group Portrait*. How do figures relate to each other in each of these works? What are the relationships between individuals and the whole?
5. How does your interpretation of Hill’s photograph change when you learn that these dancers are rehearsing their performance of *The Lion King*? Can you see the story or characters of *The Lion King* expressed here?

Selected Sources

jasonhillphoto.com

Behind the Camera: Jason Hill, Pro Photo Supply
(prophotosupply.com/blogs/behind-the-camera/behind-the-camera-jason-hill)

AUX/MUTE Gallery (portlandartmuseum.org/event/aux-mute-gallery/#in-my-skin)

portlandartmuseum.org/the-poster-project
Go online for poster PDFs and additional resources.
Free admission for youth 17 and under.