



# In Cece Philips's Surreal Paintings, Women of Color Reclaim the Night

Ayanna Dozier – Nov 7, 2022



Night bears a history of great magnetic wonder that few women have had the chance to tap into due to the threat of gender-based violence that shrouds evening activity. In Cece Philips's paintings, however, nighttime is full of illustrious cinematic wonder where women of color come alive in streetlight-drenched rendezvous.

The 26-year-old Philips has already made a strong impression in the art world just two years into her career. Born and based in London, the self-taught artist has already received dual representation from Peres Projects and Post Gallery Zurich, been the subject of several solo exhibitions, and garnered noteworthy press since leaving her job in advertising in the spring of 2020.

The rising artist's second solo show this year, "The Night has a Thousand Eyes," is on view at Peres Projects in Berlin through November 11th. The exhibition is a collaboration with playwright Lucy McIlgorm, who helped Philips build her sprawling narrative of after-dark cityscapes. Audiences can read McIlgorm's text on this world in the accompanying exhibition booklet.

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Saddled with interiority, the women in Philips's paintings wander isolated streets and interiors. Sometimes, they are alone. Other times, these women exist in a pack. In each scenario, however, men are absent from the frame and Philips's nocturnal world at large.



In *Night Walks* (2022), a woman with a cigarette lightly gripped between her fingers leans against a wall. With her back facing the viewer, she stares down a passageway into the street. The work's predominantly blue color palette is disrupted by the woman's crimson pantsuit and the black-and-white diamond-tiled floor. The painting is bathed in ambiguity: The audience is unclear of time period or circumstance, leaving only the melancholic dreamscape tone as the indicator of this woman's feelings.

Philips's paintings of alienated women in the city strongly evoke the work of Edward Hopper. The subject of his own current solo exhibition, "Edward Hopper's New York," at the Whitney Museum of American Art, the 20th-century artist is renowned for his ability to capture the cinematic appeal of a woman standing alone at night.

With Philips, though, race and gender are reimagined in the cosmopolitan setting. The social dynamics that shroud the very real dangers faced by women of color walking alone at night cease to exist in her fantastical narratives. Here, women of color are permitted to simply live and get lost in the solitude of the city after the sun goes down. Nighttime does, in fact, become our time.