

## The Backstory of Janna Ireland's 'True Story Index'

Two Santa Barbara Institutions – SBMA and MCASB – Collaborate on Exhibition and Artist Talk



By **Leslie Dinaberg**

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(L-R) Frederick Janka, Charles Wylie, and Janna Ireland at the reception for 'Janna Ireland: True Story Index' at SBMA and MCASB | Photo: Ingrid Bostrom

"A lot of my work deals with family," said artist Janna Ireland, whose photographs currently grace the walls of both Santa Barbara Museum of Art and Museum of Contemporary Art in the dual exhibition *True Story Index*, which will remain on view through June 2.

Curated by Charles Wylie, SBMA Curator of Photography and New Media, and Frederick Janka, MCASB Board President, this exhibition – see Josef Woodard's *Santa Barbara Independent* cover story [here](#) – is a mid-career survey and the largest presentation of Ireland's photographs and installations to date, consisting of newly commissioned works and works from the artist's collection, the Santa Barbara Museum of Art's permanent collection, and private collections.

Last weekend's discussion between Ireland, Wylie, and Janka – held at SBMA and followed by a reception at MCASB – focused primarily on Ireland's newer work, including *Pauline 2023*, a series of 21 individual gelatin silver prints themed around her recently deceased grandmother Pauline's life, created in a darkroom, using various techniques and

photographs of Pauline from her archive, some of Ireland's photographs of her grandparents and family, jewelry, and fresh flowers.

"When she passed away in 2020, I inherited her photographs, because I'm the one in my family that cares about them," said Ireland. Every element of this thoughtful series has deep meaning behind it. For example, Ireland explained, "[The number of prints] 21 is not arbitrary. When each of her grandchildren turned 21, she would give them each a special gift" – though she confided that originally she really wanted to do 100 images because Pauline would have turned 100 this year.

"I rediscovered a love of working in the darkroom as a result of this work, Pauline," said Ireland. She also recently had a darkroom built at Occidental College, where she is an assistant professor in the Department of Art and Art History.



*Janna Ireland discusses 'Janna Ireland: True Story Index' at SBMA and MCASB | Photo: Ingrid Bostrom*

Reflecting back on her photographic practice, which is primarily concerned with the themes of family, home, and the expression of Black identity in American culture, Ireland said, "I think when I realized I could construct images and not just point at what was there ... then I began to study the history of images and painting."

Much of her work evokes and comments on classic paintings and works of art and her children, who are still young, and in terms of having their photographs on display at museums, at this point "I don't think they really see it as an experience that other children don't have," said Ireland.

Also on view in a separate gallery at SBMA is a collection of Ireland's work photographing structures designed by legendary Black architect Paul R. Williams. "I worked on Paul Williams's work for seven years, which is a life cycle," said Ireland. "The time it takes for all of the cells in your body to regenerate is seven years."

*Janna Ireland: True Story Index* is on view at Santa Barbara Museum of Art and Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara through June 2. See [sbma.net](http://sbma.net) and [mcasantabarbara.org](http://mcasantabarbara.org).



*Photographer Ingrid Bostrom, left, and Janna Ireland at the Reception for 'Janna Ireland: True Story Index' at SBMA and MCASB / Photo: Ingrid Bostrom*

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<https://www.independent.com/2024/03/02/the-backstory-of-janna-irelands-true-story-index/>