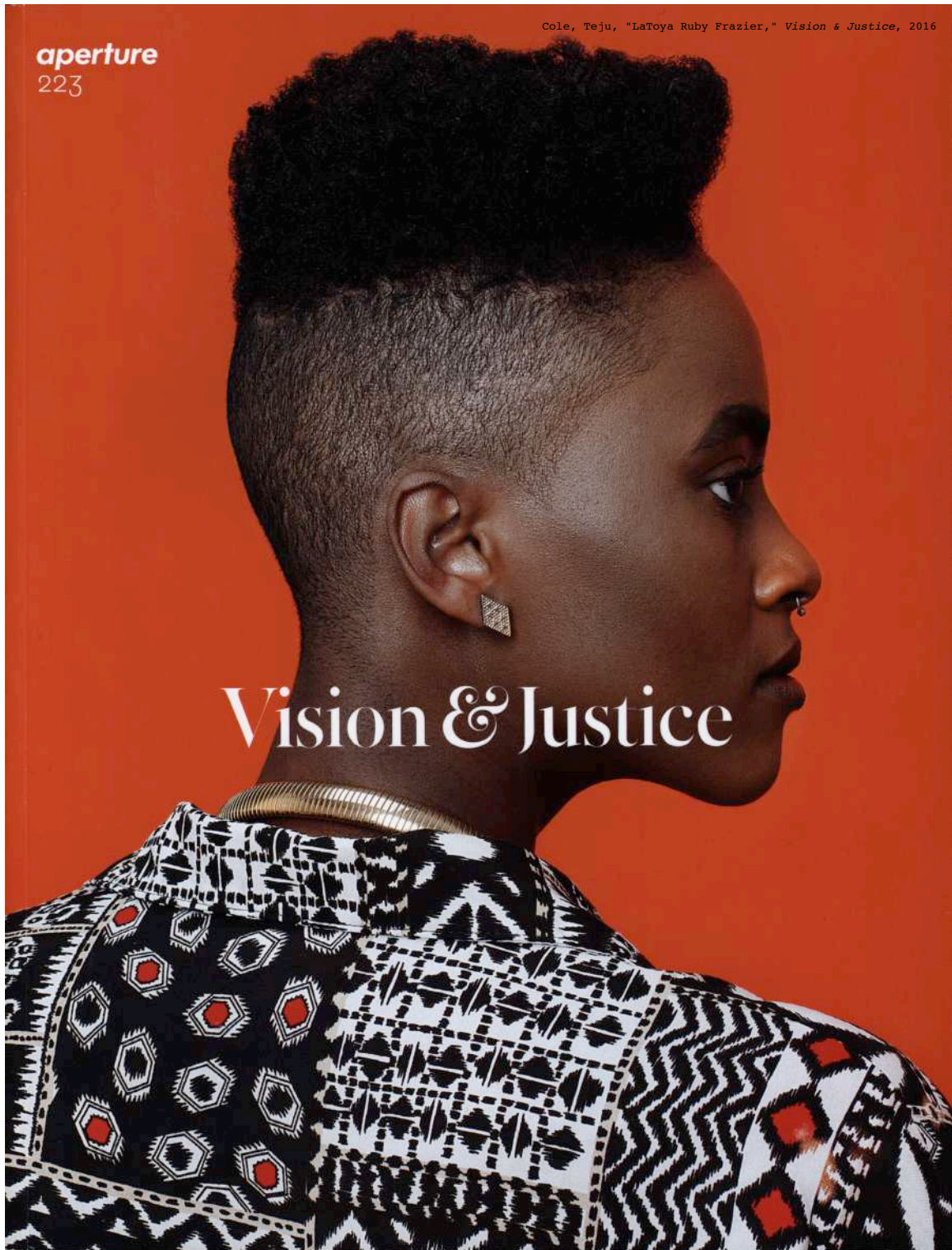
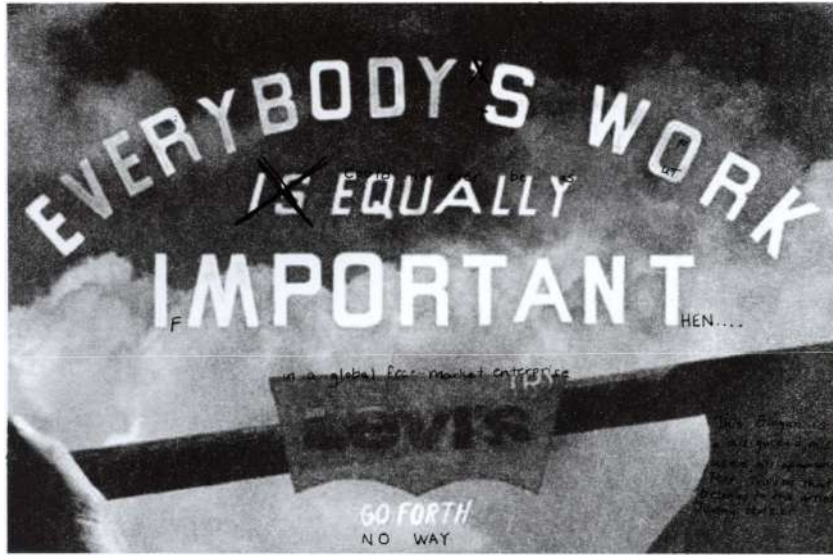


# GLADSTONE GALLERY

Teju Cole, "LaToya Ruby Frazier," *Aperture*, 2016



# GLADSTONE GALLERY



IF Everyone's Work IS Equally Important Then why weren't local residents and Small businesses allowed a share in the profits from the demolition process of the aluminium, bricks, and windows from UPMC Braddock?

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

If you look down toward the river from the upper section of Braddock Avenue, you see a landscape entirely altered by heavy industry. The Edgar Thomson Steelworks was Andrew Carnegie's first mill. With the other mills in the area now shut down, it is also his last. The industrial landscape on which it sits is interrupted by plumes of smoke and looks blasted and forlorn, like a medieval battlefield or futuristic dystopia. And right next to the mill, to the west and north, is the town of Braddock proper, a grid of single-family homes and empty plots, only a few miles away from downtown Pittsburgh.

Before I went to Braddock, I looked up recent news about the town in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. There was very little, and most of it was grim. "Braddock man's guilty plea in shooting death gets him 4-8 years in prison." "Braddock man charged with burglarizing Wilmerding home." But at the bottom of the page was an item from September 2015: "Braddock artist wins MacArthur Foundation 'genius' grant."

Until LaToya Ruby Frazier got hold of a disposable camera in high school, her great passion was drawing and watercolor. In the shadow of the Edgar Thomson Steelworks, Frazier began to take photographs. Her most sustained early subjects were herself, her mother, and her grandmother: unposed photographs of the family, double portraits, interior scenes. She portrayed, too, the vulnerability and ill health of her family members, unflinching images that convey that what is shameful is not the body that suffers but rather the systems that mete out violence.

"I spiraled out," Frazier said, when I reached her by phone in New York. Her voice was both confident and cautious, perhaps the voice of someone who has been misread in the past and is keen now to be precisely understood. Frazier left Braddock at sixteen and went to Edinboro University, in Pennsylvania, where she learned a great deal more about the technical possibilities of photography. In her book, *The Notion of Family* (2014), published when she was thirty-two, she used a number of different photographic approaches to create, among other things, a conversation with history. Subsequently, she has delved even deeper into photography's possibilities, using challenging and relatively rare techniques like photolithography.

Braddock's poorest section abuts the steel mill, the railroad, and the Monongahela River. This part of town, called the Bottom because of its low elevation within this undulating terrain, is where Frazier grew up. A century ago, about twenty thousand people lived there. Today, that number is closer to two thousand. There are revitalization efforts, but the town still bears its scars: empty plots, abandoned homes, shuttered businesses, frequent fires. Braddock is sometimes called a ghost town.

As her work developed, Frazier was especially alert to the history of the photographs that had been made in the Pittsburgh area. "There were these photographers, men like Lewis Hine, Walker Evans, W. Eugene Smith, and Lee Friedlander, who had made work about the steel mills. They were all men shooting from an outside point of view." But taking on the same material could never lead to the same results for her. So she "spiraled out," beginning at home, then moving out into the street and, finally, in a rented helicopter, up in the air. And in all these images, she established a continuity: a sense of surface complexity and crisp visual description. The work, when it came to its proper maturity, earned her museum exhibitions and a number of prestigious awards, including the grant from the MacArthur Foundation. But Frazier's success is not in these accolades; it is in the amplitude and intensity of her investigations.

"People call Braddock a ghost town," Frazier told me. "But I grew up there. People live there. We are not ghosts." Frazier's self-revealing photographs answer a nagging question from the history of the medium: What might photographs like the ones Dorothea Lange made in the 1930s about migrant farming families have looked like if they'd been taken by those people themselves? Frazier traces out a web of related concerns: the difficulty of family life in such a place, the imperishability of love, the injustice of a hospital closure, the exclusion of black history, the bonds among generations of women. The work is a riposte. It restores black life and the lives of women back into the narrative of this town: they are not ghosts.

## LaToya Ruby Frazier

Teju Cole

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Teju Cole is a photographer, essayist, and the author of *Open City* (2011) and *Every Day Is for the Thief* (2015).

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In 2008 the state gave UPMC a 413 million grant to maintain the facilities, but, only the working tax payers' money was used to build our new entrance in 2009. In 2010 + 2011 the exact same construction company that was hired to demolish our hospital simultaneously built the new UPMC East hospital in a nearby wealthy suburb; Monroeville PA.

Page 126 and this spread:  
**Campaign for Braddock  
Hospital (Save Our  
Community Hospital),  
2011. Photolithographs  
with silkscreen**

Texts, written by the  
artist, include messages,  
questions, and concerns  
from residents and a local  
activist group. Save Our  
Community Hospital

# GLADSTONE GALLERY



University of Pittsburgh Medical Center is an \$8 billion nonprofit that was paying the CEO 4.5 million in 2008. In 2009 a \$14 million Senior citizen Facility was built next to our hospital, but, on Jan 31, 2010 UPMC Braddock Closed

Overleaf:  
*Landscape of the Body*  
(Epilepsy Test), 2011

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*The Bunn Family Home  
between Talbot Avenue  
and Washington Avenue,  
2013*





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# GLADSTONE GALLERY

*The Bunn Family Home  
on Ninth Street, 2013*  
All works courtesy the  
artist and Michel Rein,  
Paris/Brussels



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