

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, "LaToya Ruby Frazier," *Artforum*, January 14, 2018

ARTFORUM

LaToya Ruby Frazier

GAVIN BROWN'S ENTERPRISE | HARLEM
439 W 127th St
January 14–February 25

LaToya Ruby Frazier's first show here is expansive, tenderhearted, and so cleverly slotted across three large floors of ascending exhibition space that you might actually laugh out loud when you arrive at the uppermost landing and realize the paces you've been put through to get there.

On the ground floor, the looking is tough and requires real work. Frazier's "Flint Is Family," 2016–17, made up of twenty-four photographs, follows three generations of women—mother Renée, daughter Shea, and granddaughter Zion—as they course through the horrors of the Michigan water crisis, in which a toxic combination of government disregard, corporate greed, and crumbling infrastructure exposed the residents of a largely poor, black town to devastatingly high levels of lead in their drinking water. The pictures wind through the gallery alongside a twelve-minute video (also titled *Flint Is Family*, 2016) and *1,364+ Days Undrinkable*, 2016–17, a mural made up of twenty-five prints.



View of "LaToya Ruby Frazier," 2018.

Your reward for all that is the more familiar territory of the second floor, where twenty-eight images from Frazier's best-known series, "The Notion of Family," 2001–14, line the walls. Here, moments of extreme intimacy tangle into another story of industrial failure and economy in free fall. And then, the top-floor finale, "*A Pilgrimage to Noah Purifoy's Desert Art Museum*," 2016–17: thirteen gorgeous, large-scale photographs of the late artist's outdoor museum in Joshua Tree, California, all of them majestic portraits of his incredible junkyard assemblages. Frazier once described her own work as a spiral, spinning out from the home to the street and beyond. In this show, her work takes on a different shape, that of an almost spiritual elevation, suggesting that the path to enlightenment runs, by necessity, from community service and a commitment to social justice, through extremely empathic observation, until you reach a roomful of wondrous art that is all the more gratifying for the climb.

— Kaelen Wilson-Goldie