

WB HEIRLOOM

Brad Ogbonna × Wales Bonner

CREATIVE STRATEGY & RESEARCH DOSSIER

INDEPENDENT SPECULATIVE CAMPAIGN RESEARCH AND STRATEGY

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THE CASE FOR THE PAIRING

The research behind the Heirloom treatment, built from published interviews on both sides rather than aesthetic impression. Meant to be read alongside the visual treatment.

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THE PHOTOGRAPHER

BRAD OGBONNA

Brad Ogbonna is a Nigerian-American photographer and director based in Brooklyn. He was raised in Saint Paul, Minnesota inside a tight-knit West African immigrant community, and moved to New York to study political science at Queens College. Photography started as a hobby during the post-2008 recession years and became his full-time work. He now shoots portraiture, documentary, fashion, and commercial jobs.

He is self-trained. His primary influence is Gordon Parks, who also came to fashion photography from outside the discipline. He shoots mostly on film. His personal series are named after the places they were made: Nigeria, Dakar, Lagos, Jamaica, Zanzibar, Kenya, Cuba, Togo. The place itself is the subject.

THE ORIGIN

When his father, George Ogbonna Sr., died, he left behind a photo album from his youth in Nigeria. Those faded 4x6s of a life Brad had never seen became the foundation of his practice. He returned to Nigeria with his brother to bury their father and brought a camera. That trip produced *JISIKE*, a memoir, photo book, and documentary, and became a major foundation for the personal work that followed.

STANDING

Editorial and commercial clients include Pyer Moss, The Elder Statesman, Nike, Adidas, Jordan Brand, J.Crew, Architectural Digest, The New York Times, The FADER, Document Journal, and HYPEBEAST. Institutional credits include *INWARD* at the International Center of Photography (2022). He worked as Kehinde Wiley's studio photographer before later appearing as a subject in Wiley's *Lamentation*, exhibited at the Walker Art Center.

I want it to feel real, genuine, not too contrived. I try to get real emotions out of people and real experiences. I try not to dress it up too much.

INTERVIEW MAGAZINE, 2016

THE HOUSE

Wales Bonner

Grace Wales Bonner founded the label in 2014 after graduating from Central Saint Martins. She is British-Jamaican. The milestones are familiar: Emerging Menswear Designer at the British Fashion Awards, the LVMH Young Designer Prize, the Dior Resort 2020 collaboration, the Serpentine exhibition *A Time for New Dreams*, MoMA Artist's Choice curator, and the ongoing Adidas Originals partnership.

She describes her work as research-based creative direction rather than design, and has called research a spiritual and artistic practice. She starts with literature, photographic archives, and fragments, and assembles them into a world before that world becomes clothing, film, or exhibition.

IMAGE-MAKING AS A PARALLEL PRACTICE

Antwaun Sargent identified a second project running alongside the fashion: the creation of an image archive of Black people. Grace confirmed it, describing her approach as closer to art direction than traditional design. She works continuously with photographic archives and research, then commissions photographers whose work can extend that larger image archive.

HOW SHE CHOOSES PHOTOGRAPHERS

Her word for it is curatorial. Rather than asking photographers to execute her vision, she wants Wales Bonner to enter theirs. She lets image-makers work inside their own worlds instead of handing them a brief, so the images belong to the photographer's language as much as the brand's.

By choosing to work with certain people, I want Wales Bonner to be part of their language.

GRACE WALES BONNER, ANTWAUN SARGENT CONVERSATION, 2024

THE HOUSE, CONTINUED

FILM AND TERRITORY

FILM AS A PRIMARY OUTPUT

Many of the house's major collections have been accompanied by a short film or campaign video. *Practice* (AW17) was directed by Harley Weir on 16mm and scored by Dev Hynes. *Thinkin' Home* (SS21) was directed by Jeano Edwards in Kingston for the Paris debut. The SS23 Adidas film was directed by the Durimel brothers on the coast of Jamaica. *Lovers Rock* (AW20) was shot by Liz Johnson Artur and released with a downloadable zine.

Film feels like a rich medium through which to expand my world.

GRACE WALES BONNER, HERO MAGAZINE

THEMATIC TERRITORY

The Black Atlantic, with Robert Farris Thompson's *Face of the Gods* as a foundational text. Research as spiritual practice. Call and response across generations, between historical archives and living contemporaries. A broader spectrum of Black masculinity, rendered with beauty and dignity. Sportswear as cultural memory, the logic behind the Adidas work. And translation: moving archival research into cloth without losing the source.

Sargent made the observation that connects directly to Brad. He said Wales Bonner's images recall the Black family photo album, the vernacular self-imaging that shaped Black style. Grace said she loves when people see their own family in the clothes. Brad's practice began with an actual inherited family photo album.

SECTION THREE

PARALLEL CANON

Seven parallels in how each of them builds the work, drawn from published interviews rather than inference. Read together, they show the pairing rests on shared method and shared geography, not on the images simply looking alike.

PARALLEL CANON

POINTS OF ALIGNMENT

01 The Archive as Origin

Brad's career grew from a literal inherited family album, his late father's photographs from Nigeria. Wales Bonner is built on the same principle. Grace works constantly from a photographic archive, and Sargent named the Black family photo album as the template for her image output. Wales Bonner draws from that tradition. Brad inherited it directly.

02 The Black Atlantic

Brad has documented Dakar, Zanzibar, Cuba, Haiti, Togo, Kenya, Lagos, and Nairobi, many of the same Black Atlantic geographies and cultural routes Wales Bonner returns to. Grace's foundational text is Thompson's *Face of the Gods*, on how spiritual practice travels from Africa across the Atlantic. Brad's travel work traces that same movement through images rather than clothing.

03 West African Studio Lineage

Wales Bonner's SS22 Volta Jazz collection drew directly on Sanlé Sory, the Burkinabé photographer of 1970s West African youth in studio. Brad's *INWARD* at ICP was shot explicitly in the tradition of Malick Sidibé, Seydou Keïta, and Meissa Gaye. Same photographic tradition, different generation, different medium.

04 Community Over Model Casting

Brad is most comfortable photographing people in their natural state, building rapport before opening the shutter. Grace began designing with friends, through fittings and conversation. The Durimels cast from Saint Models in Kingston, Jeano Edwards films his own neighborhood, Liz Johnson Artur photographs people she knows. Brad works the same way.

PARALLEL CANON, CONTINUED

POINTS OF ALIGNMENT

05

Research That Resists Trend

Grace calls her work a place to be rather than a trend, ongoing and expansive. Brad's personal work has stayed with the same places and communities for over a decade, regardless of what was current. Both keep going back.

06

The Father, The Return

Brad returned to Nigeria to bury his father and brought a camera. Grace structures collections as returns, to Jamaica, to London, to the seventies, to her father's family in Stockwell. She called the *Lovers Rock* trilogy a homecoming. Both bodies of work are built around going back.

07

Film and Photography as One

Grace often commissions stills and film as parts of the same project. Brad shoots and directs, so the stills and the film can come from the same eye.

Each point above traces to a primary source. The shared lineage of Sidibé, Keïta, and Sory appears in interviews on both sides, as does the language both use about real people, rapport, natural state, and the return to the archive.

THE CORE PROPOSITION

WHY BRAD, WHY NOW

Brad has spent more than a decade photographing many of the people, places, and histories that Wales Bonner returns to. His personal archive already shares many of the references and concerns that shape the Wales Bonner world, and the two have never met.

THE GEOGRAPHY NO ONE ELSE HOLDS

Tyler Mitchell brings ethereal beauty. The Durimels bring Caribbean intimacy. Liz Johnson Artur brings the living archive of Black Britain. Jeano Edwards brings a distinctly Jamaican cinematic language. Brad adds something different: a sustained body of documentary work across Senegal, Nigeria, Kenya, Togo, and the wider diaspora. When Wales Bonner turns toward West African geography and photographic history, as it did with Volta Jazz, Brad already holds a deep visual vocabulary for those places.

AN ORIGIN THAT MIRRORS THE BRAND'S

Among the photographers on the roster, Brad has one of the clearest personal connections to the label's recurring themes of inheritance, return, and family history. The inherited photo album, the return to a homeland, the camera as a way of reckoning with family history. It maps directly onto the themes Grace built the label around. Brad also shoots and directs, which keeps stills and motion under one visual authorship and simplifies the production.

Plenty of photographers could shoot this brand. Brad's body of work already lives inside the world Wales Bonner has spent a decade building, and the two have never met. That is the story.

COMPETITIVE LANDSCAPE

THE ROSTER

Knowing who Grace has already worked with, and why, shows where Brad fits.

Liz Johnson Artur

RUSSIAN-GHANAIAN, LONDON

Has documented the African diaspora for over 30 years and shot *Lovers Rock* (AW20). Brings archival authority on Black British life, an ongoing living record.

Tyler Mitchell

AMERICAN

Dreamlike, color-saturated editorial. Brings aspirational beauty and a fine-art crossover audience, grounded more in a universal register of Black joy than in specific diaspora geographies.

Jalan & Jibril Durimel

FRENCH-GUADELOUPEAN

Shot multiple Adidas collaborations in Jamaica. Languid, sun-drenched, narrative. Bring Caribbean specificity and a tender, poetic register.

Jeano Edwards

JAMAICAN

Directed *Thinkin' Home* for SS21, cast from his own community through Saint Models in Kingston. Brings director-level Jamaican specificity and an insider's view of the locations Grace draws from.

Sepuya, Mack, Johnson

VISUAL ARTISTS

Contributed to the Serpentine exhibition and adjacent projects. Extend the brand into the art-institutional world rather than campaign work.

WHERE BRAD FITS

Brad brings the most sustained West African documentary focus among the photographers discussed here, particularly across Senegal, Nigeria, Togo, and Kenya. Few have a personal history this closely aligned with the label's themes of inheritance and return.

THE CAMPAIGN CONCEPT

HEIRLOOM

What we carry. What we pass forward.

The word carries three meanings at once: a physical object passed down (Brad's father's album), a cultural inheritance (the traditions Wales Bonner draws from), and a quality of being made to endure (the garments, luxury that lasts rather than luxury that trends). The concept treats luxury as something inherited and returned to, rather than bought.

A campaign that doesn't borrow from a culture. It borrows its camera.

HEIRLOOM, CONTINUED

HOW THE CAMPAIGN WORKS

Wales Bonner collections typically begin with research in literature, photography, and geography. Heirloom follows the same method. Instead of building a set or manufacturing a mood, the campaign follows Brad's existing practice of returning to the communities and landscapes the brand has always drawn from, and photographs the collection inside those worlds. The clothes are photographed in environments connected to the campaign's research, rather than placed against a manufactured backdrop.

CAMPAIGN EDITORIAL

8 to 12 images, film and digital, color and black and white, shot on location in West Africa.

HERO IMAGERY

3 to 5 definitive images for outdoor, digital, and in-store.

SHORT FILM

2 to 4 minutes, directed by Brad. 16mm and digital, with an original score, following the precedent of the house's films.

ARCHIVE PUBLICATION

A limited-edition printed zine, on the precedent of the *Lovers Rock* release.

LOCATIONS

Brad has shot in Dakar and Senegal, the Sahel, Lagos, Nairobi, and rural and coastal West Africa, and the portfolio shows it. Production contacts and permits would be confirmed in prep.

RISK & COUNTERARGUMENT

WHERE IT COULD BE QUESTIONED

“Brad isn't a fashion photographer.”

Neither is Liz Johnson Artur. Neither is Jeano Edwards. The brand consistently picks photographers for cultural fit over fashion credentials, and Grace has said she wants image-makers working inside their own worlds. Brad's documentary and portrait register is the look these campaigns already use, and his Elder Statesman and Pyer Moss work shows he can shoot fashion when the job calls for it.

“He hasn't worked with a brand at this level.”

His commercial clients include Nike, Adidas, Jordan Brand, J.Crew, and Architectural Digest, and the ICP exhibition and Kehinde Wiley history carry institutional weight. The Durimels weren't widely known when Grace first worked with them either. The eye came first. The same logic applies here.

“Wales Bonner already has photographers for Africa.”

Not with Brad's depth of West African work. The Durimels bring the Caribbean, Liz Johnson Artur brings Black Britain, and Jeano Edwards brings Jamaica. Brad would add a more sustained record of Senegal, Nigeria, Togo, Kenya, and the Sahel.

“The overlap could feel forced.”

The overlap is documented in primary sources from both sides. Both cite the same lineage of Sidibé, Keïta, and Sory. Their interviews repeatedly return to the same language: real people, rapport, archives, return. Both repeatedly return to inheritance, archive, place, and family history. This dossier lays out that evidence.

SOURCED QUOTATIONS

CITED AND READY TO USE

All quotations verified against primary sources and tagged for attribution in the treatment.

BRAD OGBONNA

I want it to feel real, genuine, not too contrived. I try to get real emotions out of people and real experiences.

INTERVIEW MAGAZINE, WITH WILL JOHNSON, 2016

Photographing subjects in their natural state with little interference on my end is when I am most comfortable.

DAZED DIGITAL, 2011

Since I primarily shoot film there is less of an opportunity for them to direct my style on the spot.

DAZED DIGITAL, 2011

My favorite photographer, Gordon Parks, got his start shooting fashion. That has been what has inspired me to shoot more of it.

DAZED DIGITAL, 2011

GRACE WALES BONNER

I consider it like a spiritual and artistic practice which is very grounding for me.

ANTWAUN SARGENT, VISIONS AND VISIONARIES, 2024

I need to create in a space where there is a little bit of ambiguity or where I have the license to build a world through fragments.

ANTWAUN SARGENT, VISIONS AND VISIONARIES, 2024

There is a very active process of ensuring that what I'm doing can be part of an archive.

ANTWAUN SARGENT, VISIONS AND VISIONARIES, 2024

I almost feel like it's slightly curatorial the way I work with different photographers.

I'm very specific about who I work with.

ANTWAUN SARGENT, VISIONS AND VISIONARIES, 2024

It's not a trend, it's like a place to be, looking at luxury from a Black cultural perspective. It's ongoing and expansive.

CHRISTINE CHECINSKA, YALE CENTER FOR BRITISH ART, 2020

My entry point often is real people. It comes back to the archive. It comes back to photographic records of people.

ANTWAUN SARGENT, VISIONS AND VISIONARIES, 2024

WHAT WE CARRY. WHAT WE PASS FORWARD.

This pairing doesn't require inventing anything. Brad's archive already shares the references Wales Bonner has been building from for a decade. Heirloom puts the two in the same frame.

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Sources consulted: Grace Wales Bonner in conversation with Christine Checinska, Yale Center for British Art, 2020. Grace Wales Bonner in conversation with Antwaun Sargent, Visions and Visionaries, 2024. Serpentine Galleries, Grace Wales Bonner: A Time for New Dreams, exhibition documentation, 2019. Brad Ogbonna, Interview Magazine, with Will Johnson, 2016. Brad Ogbonna, Dazed Digital, 2011. OkayAfrica, Vintage Nigeria: A Memoir by Brad Ogbonna, 2017. Architectural Digest, Splurge Worthy, 2024. Wales Bonner archive (walesbonner.com). Additional coverage in AnOther Magazine, PAPER, Culture Type, Hero Magazine, and WePresent.