

Atlanta Family Portraits

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It's incredibly difficult to photograph moments that feel unscripted and authentic while also creating something aesthetically pleasing and commercially valuable. In his newest shoot, photographer Willie Thomas approached this challenge by turning the lens on his own family, where no effort was needed to keep things real. This allowed him to focus purely on capturing the key moments and concepts that would be relevant to customers. Creating an intimate portrait of real life in the American South, the images are warm, welcoming, and are captured with a closeness that sings through each composition

Now based in Berlin, Willie traveled back to the US this summer for his mother's birthday, bringing his partner and son to join the festivities. After discussing his plans, I suggested that capturing his real family could be an excellent opportunity to create some powerful imagery about the warmth of family, and the results are magical. I am always confident that Willie can document real life with a sensitivity that really connects with an audience, but my guidance was to think ahead about the moments that will also work commercially for our clients – the moments that can act as visual metaphors in their communication. We discussed how to best capture the seemingly mundane things that happen during a typical family visit such as meals, visits to church and even day to day life activities like his mother taking her diabetes medicine.

Willie is an expert at encouraging his subjects and letting the activity unfold while he weaves through it, photographing beautifully real moments that capture a scene's emotion, making apparently ordinary moments shine. He was able to capture his family coming together for a big meal set up outdoors, and the result is a portrait rarely seen so authentically handled in commercial photography of a middle-class black family coming together for a traditional celebration lunch. The barbecue is on, there are mismatched chairs, and the shrimp are boiling as friends and family reconnect. There is nothing overly styled about these images, this is what family get-togethers really look like - it's an American summer scene at its finest. And what makes them so wonderful is the honest beauty of the characters being captured.