



Thebe Phetogo

8 Propositions for the Origin of a blackbody

20 January - 25 February 2024

Washington, DC: von ammon co is pleased to announce the opening of *8 Propositions for the Origin of a blackbody*, a solo exhibition by Gaborone-based artist Thebe Phetogo. This is Phetogo's second solo show with von ammon co and the gallery's twenty-ninth project in its current location.

The fourteen paintings on view share a formal commonality: Phetogo's signature acid-green as the dominant color. This continuous field evokes the null backdrop of the green screen of film and television, and serves as a neutral ground for Phetogo's analysis of figurative painting.

Titled *8 Propositions for the Origin of a blackbody*, the exhibition's paintings serve as a visual rubric: two or three paintings communally represent one assertion in the development of Phetogo's painterly thesis. The «blackbody», which borrows its name from the concept of dark matter in physics, is the artist's subject in every work. The blackbody, however, never manifests itself directly, and exists—like in astrophysics—as a conceptual heuristic, an uncanny, ill-defined logical hole that allows the experimenter to arrive at a solution to a problem.

Each set of paintings in this index explores a certain manifestation or disposition of the blackbody subject. In *Proposition 1: Autogenia*, figures seem to emanate from nothing, or are in the process of bringing themselves to life. In *Proposition 2: Material Need and Practical Effects*, the figures depicted are affixed using magnets to their null backdrop and can literally be peeled out of context: *Proposition 5: Zombie Figuration* borrows the art press' disparaging label for contemporary figurative painting and combines highly conspicuous styles from the genre with a more literal take on reanimated human tissue. *Proposition 6: Composites* sees the Black body forming from disparate elements, a visceral game of exquisite corpse. A new proposition, the eighth so far, is called *The Subject Position*: in these paintings, Phetogo depicts himself, and subjects his own image to the same rules, conditions and mutations as in other works.

Phetogo approaches figuration not as an end, but as a means for analysis. The sole subject of the work, the *blackbody*, is a theoretical endpoint that can only ever be approached, like the journey of an asymptote. This exhibition's paintings represent a set of new experiments upon which the artist plans to extrapolate in subsequent exhibitions.

Thebe Phetogo (b. 1993, Serowe, Botswana) is a painter living and working in Botswana. Phetogo holds a 2017 University of Cape Town postgraduate diploma in fine art and a 2019 masters in fine art from the same. Recent institutional and biennial exhibitions include *Africa Supernova* at Kunsthall KAdE (Amersfoort), *When We See Us: A Century of Black Figuration in Painting* at Zeitz MOCA (Cape Town), and The Lofoten International Art Festival (Lofoten). He is a founding member of The Botswana Pavilion arts collective. Phetogo is represented by von ammon co in the United States.

von ammon co was founded in 2019 in its current Georgetown location. Gallery hours are Saturdays and Sundays, 12-6pm, and by appointment. For more information and image requests, please visit www.vonammon.co or email info@vonammon.co.

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