

Thebe Phetogo

blackbody Rogues' Gallery

13 November - 25 December 2021

Washington DC: von ammon co is pleased to announce its fourteenth project at 3330 Cady's Alley, *blackbody Rogues' Gallery*, a solo show by Botswana-based artist Thebe Phetogo.

A continuation of Phetogo's *blackbody* series of exhibitions, each painting in *Rogue's Gallery* employs a null backdrop: either the acid-green of a soundstage or the checkerboard of a transparent digital image. This painterly manifestation of a digital void is where Phetogo arranges disembodied segments of post-colonial African historical subjects. Mostly ensconced within an acid-green field, these figures appear on the brink of aqueous dissolution or oblivion. Vestiges of bodies—both central and peripheral—appear in modeled shades of green, and allude to a history that has just expired and remains only as an afterimage. The artist's use of modeled shoe polish to articulate faces and limbs alludes to the cross-cultural history of blackface, which happens to reside both within American (the minstrel show) and African (The Concert Party) ritual tradition. As a corollary to the green screen, Phetogo's *blackbody* figures are embodiments of concealment and disappearance..

Phetogo's allegorical band of subjects toggle between the political and the mystic, the benevolent and malign, the dominant and the oppressed. A real Tswana historical figure such as Mmanthatsi takes on the attributes of a female deity, evoking majesty and luridness simultaneously; inversely, a figure of folklore such as Mmamashia—the *night seducer* who lures drivers to car wreck—appears as a contemporary revolutionary in sunglasses and head garb. The hacking of discourse throughout the exhibition can be as subtle as sartorial adjustments: a portrait of activist Roy Sesana adorns the radical in resplendent leopard pelts, the most common marker of conservative government in Botswana. A *rogues' gallery* is typically associated with the collection of photographs in detective offices that represents prime suspects; in comic books, the term refers to the cast of villains and deviants often used as foils in superhero stories. In the context of postcolonial Sub-Saharan Africa, myth and reality often cross-pollinate: the impartial and often unjust levers of historical discourse have distorted real figures into chimerae while mythical beings inhabit the bodies of historical subjects. *blackbody Rogues' Gallery* continues Phetogo's examination of the *blackbody*—the free-radical, removable, discontinuous subject of Setswana history, both specific and general—but through the perspective of the historical genre painting.

Thebe Phetogo (b. 1993, Serowe, Botswana) is a painter based in Gaborone, Botswana. He earned a Postgraduate Diploma in Fine Art and a Masters in Fine Art from the University of Cape Town, and a Bachelor's Degree in Media Studies from the University of Botswana. He has exhibited widely in Nigeria, South Africa and Botswana. *blackbody Rogues' Gallery* marks Phetogo's first solo exhibition in Washington DC and with von ammon co.

von ammon co is a contemporary art gallery based in Georgetown, Washington DC and founded in 2019. One of the only privately-run contemporary art spaces in the US capitol, the gallery's agenda is the presentation of important exhibitions on a project basis by international artists. *blackbody Rogues' Gallery* is the eleventh project in its current location. The gallery is open Friday through Sunday, 12pm to 6pm and by appointment. Please email info@vonammon.co for additional information.

