

## ***Embodied Politic***

Curated by Anastasia Karpova Tinari

May 25 - July 6, 2018

Opening Friday, June 1, 5-7:30pm



*Embodied Politic* brings together eight figurative artists who depict diverse bodies, partaking in a larger impetus to broaden representation within the art historical canon. *Body politic*, an ancient metaphor likening society to the human body, was used by autocratic governments to insist on social hierarchies: the body functions best when all parts perform assigned roles. Fighting against this antiquated notion through manifold modes of representation, Mequitta Ahuja, Mike Cloud, Natalie Frank, Arnold J. Kemp, Deana Lawson, Ebony G. Patterson, Athi-Patra Ruga, and Nicola Tyson portray our complex, rich nation.

**Mequitta Ahuja** performs as both maker and model in her classically grounded paintings. As a female artist of color, Mequitta Ahuja employs her own body to shift the male-centric narrative of historical painting and to create space for broader expectations in figuration.

**Mike Cloud, Natalie Frank, and Nicola Tyson** work in an amorphous field oscillating between abstraction and figuration. The painters' ambiguous forms refuse a clear narrative and invite viewers' participation in defining the body. Working intuitively and taking possession of the Gaze, Nicola Tyson creates surreal, "psycho-figuration" compositions that resist a prescribed gender. Natalie Frank layers gouache and pastel in jewel-like tones to create a kaleidoscope of female sexuality in her *Strangler* series. Mike Cloud's gestural paintings may seem purely abstract but function as a body, stretched on shaped canvases positioned directly on the ground. Multi-disciplinary artist **Arnold J. Kemp** creates space for viewers to envision diverse bodies through omission. His reverently crafted leather shoes sit on a low metal plinth, a sculptural void for an archetypal male figure.

For Jamaican artist **Ebony G. Patterson** and South African artist **Athi-Patra Ruga**, textile tactility, baroque decoration, and performance are the means through which to explore identity. An embellished portrait of an androgynous male from Jamaica's dancehall culture, Ebony G. Patterson's *Gangstas for Life* series is delicate in rendering yet confrontational in its size and ornamentation. Similar complexity between decoration and intricate detailing in Athi-Patra Ruga's tapestries draws the viewer to explore Ruga's *Azania*, a utopian space the artist invented to combat the trauma of South Africa's colonial history. Rich materiality and color are also important in Deana Lawson's carefully-staged, highly detailed photographs depicting family, relationships, and love in contemporary black communities across the African Diaspora. In this group exhibition, multiple approaches to figuration embody artists' yearning for diverse representation, aptly summarized by Deana Lawson's words: "with a history of certain voices not being included in the history of art, I think it is time to claim that space, to have bodies who might not have been celebrated within the institution."