

CENTRAL FINE

Chemu Ng'ok, *An Enigma*

October 24th-November 24th, 2021. Opening: October 24th 5-7 pm.

The title of this presentation, might allude to everything: The enigma of art, of violence, of behaviors, of the subconscious, etc. We know that when antagonistic forces intersect the body, pain reveals a type of speech that arises from oppression.

In Chemu Ng'ok's work there's a dialectical engagement with power through an internal source that acts and responds to the frictions that aim to subjugate it. When re-presenting oppression, it is possible to extract the material that becomes productive despite the calcification of trauma, through an exegesis of brushstrokes, lines, lines of thoughts, etc.

What follows, are notes written by Chemu Ng'ok.

Psychological Riot

In the Psychological Riot I am rioting against the patriarchal and racist system I find myself in, as a Black woman, while working towards my own liberation in society. For instance, by proposing that the Psychological Riot happens in the psyche, I can approach an examination of the ways in which systemic violence occurs: It can exhibit itself in the body, but at the same time be hidden. And, it is both personal and communal. By making the Psychological Riot tangible, it's easier to disarm the mechanisms of systemic violence, through my prism of the world.

The riot that I speak of happens in the psyche. It differs from the notion of protest, but it can contribute to an understanding of protest, as it delves into the possible mental machinations of a protestor before they decide to protest. The Psychological Riot is ambiguous. It provides a fertile ground for different interpretations and theories, which include black feminism, revolution, protest, blackness, existentialism, the body, and the theory of affect.

One way in which I present the Psychological Riot is within the representation of the psyche as a world constructed by Painting. In this painterly world, the psyche is black oil paint. The constituents of this paint are hues of burnt umber and phthalo blue, with touches of green and sometimes speckles of red. And although the black paint itself is oil, it represents a void with endless possibilities. However, for the purpose of clarity I focus on two types of psyches. One psyche is the painterly psyche, and the other is that of the 'collective unconscious'. The former is painterly, and it can zoom into the personal, but can also integrate into the latter, which exists as a public and communal psyche; constantly interrogated by systems such as colonialism and imperialism.

In painting the body, I show a psychological disjuncture. The flexibility of flesh offers me painterly ammunition. Lines hint at the unfinished aspects of thought...There is an anxiety depicted by the growths of a head. Imagine the distress one feels in a dream/fantasy of many heads growing out of one's neck; the sheer psychological horror of being left alone in the dark with many heads on one's body.

But then again in another moment, the lines morph and become a type of coding that hovers in "the air" of Painting. These transmutations are endless They refer to language, memory, ritual, absence, a future that is yet to be determined, things left unsaid, and bodies on the verge of eruption.

Chemu Ng'ok (b. Nairobi, Kenya) completed her MFA in Painting at Rhodes University (2017) and is a recipient of the Mellon Foundation's Visual and Performing Arts of Africa Masters Bursary (2016). Solo presentations include her MFA thesis show, *Riot* (2017); her graduate solo exhibition *Social Revolution* (2014); and a solo booth at the FNB Joburg Art Fair titled *Self Esteem for Girls* (2017).

In 2018, Ng'ok was included in the New Museum Triennial, *Songs for Sabotage*, curated by Alex Gartenfeld and Gary Carrion-Murayari. Other group exhibitions include *Speaking back* at the Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg (2015); *LUSH*, Smac Gallery, Stellenbosch, South Africa (2015); *Surface Tension* at the GUS Gallery, Stellenbosch (2016); *My Kind of Protest* at Pippy Houldsworth Gallery (2019), "*Aletheia*", at CENTRAL FINE (2021).

Ng'ok was an artist resident at the Fountainhead Residency in Miami, FL in collaboration with the Africa Centre, Capetown, South Africa (2019). *An Enigma* is Chemu Ng'ok's first solo exhibition in the United States, and at CENTRAL FINE.

Chemu Ng'ok in Arial italics. Diego Singh in Arial normal
Nairobi-Miami Beach (2017-2021)

CENTRAL FINE

CHEMU NG'OK. *AN ENIGMA*



Chemu Ng'ok
An Enigma
Oil on canvas
62.5 x 70.5 inches
2021



Chemu Ng'ok
Convolution
Oil on canvas
62.5 x 70.5 inches
2021



Chemu Ng'ok
Court Appearance
Oil on canvas
62.5 x 70.5 inches
2021



Chemu Ng'ok
Discernment
Oil on canvas
47 x 39,5 inches
2021



Chemu Ng'ok
Scope
55 x 39,5 inches
Oil on canvas
2020



Chemu Ng'ok
Trace
Oil on canvas
32.5 x 23.7 inches
2021



Chemu Ng'ok
Abstraction
Oil on canvas
47 x 39,5 inches
2020