

Adams and Ollman

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Will Rawls: *Amphigory*
October 29—December 3, 2022
Opening: Saturday, October 29 from 1—4pm

Adams and Ollman is pleased to announce *Amphigory*, a solo exhibition by American artist Will Rawls. This exhibition, his first at the gallery, builds upon Rawls' long-standing interests in the politics of movement and language with a large-scale, multi-panel installation of prints on paper and a sculpture. The exhibition opens on Saturday, October 29 and is on view through December 3, 2022.

For more than twenty years, Rawls has been creating performances that bring together dance, installation, text and video. Across his practice, Rawls grapples with language as an ever-evolving site of negotiation, drawing parallels between its fluctuating meanings and the human body as it dances, contorts, transforms, speaks, groans and repeats itself. The artist's work poetically embraces glitches and failures in communication—whether linguistic, gestural or visual. This resulting loss and retrieval of meaning signals Rawls' belief that precarity is fundamental to storytelling.

In his solo and group dance works, Rawls pushes against linear narratives by deconstructing the boundaries of coherence as performers vocalize, move and animate objects. In *Uncle Rebus*, performed at the High Line in New York, dancers manipulated large-scale letters in a critical retelling (and re-spelling) of *Tales of Brer Rabbit*, a compilation of African-American folklore based on a white author's written account. As sentences emerge



and come apart, and nonsense grips our attention, Rawls pressures the tension among the limits of standard English, black orality and the performers' personal expression within these fields. For *What Remains*, Rawls collaborated with Claudia Rankine to create an original performance drawing on the poet's texts on mental illness, bodily rupture and her keen observations of the American social fabric. With this project and others, Rawls addresses the inherent concealment and exposure of performance and by extension the thresholds where black presence meets the edge of erasure from abstraction.

Central to the exhibition is a suite of forty screen prints on paper that feature abstracted letters. Each letter or punctuation is uniquely marked with traces of the artist's body, scraping, dissolving and displacing the ink through the screen. This results in viscous pixelated images that call to mind a film frame, a photo flash, a fingerprint or a landscape in the distance. Their kinetic forms imply a pictorial language in flux. Evocative phrases occupy the room, divided into one or two letter passages that encourage non-linear, polysemous reading. "OO" might imply excitement, while "HA," is perhaps a nod to Rawls' wordplay. An isolated "GA" could be gay or Georgia, the state where the artist's paternal family was born and worked the land. As the viewer moves through the exhibition, meaning is formed and reformed in real time and space. As Rawls pulls language apart, he asks fundamental questions about one's agency to intervene into the very flesh of meaning.

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Rounding out the exhibition's key theme of "the printed body" will be a figurative sculpture printed from foam and resin, and lit from within. This free-standing figure is composed of rough, pixelated edges and liquid lines that fuse together anatomical synthesis and disjunction. The torqued sculpture calls to mind video game avatars while indexing racialized bodies that are transposed into data points, and hence subject to erasure and violence. Standing fugue-like in the show, this work accelerates the moment of interpretive breakdown that occurs when gesture, embodiment and abstraction meet, much as they do in the other work on view in *Amphigory*.

Will Rawls earned a BA in Art History from Williams College, Williamstown, MA. He is a recipient of a United States Artists Award, Creative Capital Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship, Foundation for Contemporary Arts grant, MacDowell Fellowship, Headlands Center for the Arts Residency, Robert Rauschenberg Residency, Hodder Fellowship at Princeton University, a "Bessie" (New York Dance and Performance Award), and Herb Alpert Award in the Arts. Rawls's choreographic work has appeared nationally and internationally at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; the Chocolate Factory Theater, Queens, NY; High Line Art, New York, NY; ICA Boston, MA; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Portland Institute of Contemporary Art, Portland, OR; and Tanzquartier Wien, Vienna, Austria, among others. His writing has been published by *Artforum*; *Dancing While Black Journal*; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA; and Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY. Rawls has been a guest artist at Bard College, Barnard College, Harvard University/Carpenter Center, Wesleyan University, and Williams College, and a mentor for Colorado College's Department of Theatre and Dance. He is Assistant Professor of Choreography in the Department of World Arts and Cultures / Dance at UCLA.

Above: Will Rawls, detail, *Untitled*, 2022. Photo: Area Array.