

Marianne Boesky Gallery is pleased to present *Black Migrant*, Johannesburg-based artist Serge Alain Nitegeka's fourth solo exhibition with the gallery. Throughout his career, Nitegeka has sought to evoke the physical and emotional experiences of forced migration through abstract experimentations with color, form, and space. With his upcoming presentation, which will feature new paintings, a large-scale site-specific installation, and a voice recording, Nitegeka reasserts both the figural and the personal in his work. Together, the works examine the particulars of being a black migrant as distinct within the dialogues of the African refugee. *Black Migrant* will be on view at the gallery's 509 W. 24th Street location from February 25 through April 18, 2020. An opening reception will be held on March 5, from 6:00-8:00 PM, to coincide with Armory Art Week.

Underlying Nitegeka's practice is his own history with forced migration. Born in Rwanda, he and his family traversed several African countries to escape civil war. Through his paintings, drawings, and installations he has mined this experience, examining notions of barriers, both physical and psychological. With the upcoming exhibition, Nitegeka transitions from the broad exploration of these issues, which have occupied his work over the last several years, to a more intimate reflection of his time spent moving across land and borders. This is most deeply felt through a voice recording of Nitegeka reading an excerpt from a journal entry he wrote in 2012.

The exhibition will also feature a large-scale installation comprised of soil and handmade and found objects, such as pots, buckets, various containers, firewood and small personal effects. The installation captures the essential needs—the “tools of the trade” as Nitegeka refers to them—of one attempting a land crossing and also communicates the limitations of what one can bring when traveling by foot. For Nitegeka, this balance is an essential aspect of the black migrant experience, and the work speaks to the particular needs of moving across the African continent. While the individual is visually absent from the installation, the sense of human life is vividly active within the work, connoting the emotionality of leaving one's home for an unknown place by an equally unknown route.

The individual and the body take on their boldest presence in Nitegeka's newest paintings—a selection of which are included in the upcoming exhibition. This reintroduction of the figure is the first in Nitegeka's practice since his early career drawings. Disjointed, cut, and obscured by colorful geometric forms and bold lines, the figure appears trapped and restricted within the broader abstract field of the canvas. The tangle of representational and abstract elements amplifies the sensation of a body under stress, physically and psychological, and freshly reasserts the importance of the individual within Nitegeka's conceptual and formal explorations.

Together, all of the works in the exhibition convey a powerful tension between presence and absence and between movement and restriction. These dualities are all the more present in Nitegeka's own life. For several years now, he has been unable to travel out of the country, from his home base in Johannesburg. The artist's imposed absence from the opening of his upcoming show thus results in the most poignant driving theme within it, producing an incredibly personal study of a relentless figure that is the African refugee.

Serge Alain Nitegeka (b. 1983, Rwanda) creates paintings, sculpture, large-scale installations, and figurative drawings that repurpose modernist preoccupations with line and the picture plane to address larger cultural and political issues. Nitegeka's work has been shown throughout Europe, Senegal, South Africa, and the United States, including at the Baltimore Museum of Art, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive at University of California, Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Perez Art Museum Miami, and SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah, GA. Nitegeka was also included in the South African Pavilion at the 56th international Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale in 2015 and at the Göteborg International Biennial of Contemporary Art, Gothenburg, Sweden in the same year. His work is slated to be part of the group exhibition, *Ubuntu, A Lucid Dream*, at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, opening in June 2020. Nitegeka currently lives and works in Johannesburg.

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