

MATTHEW BROWN

Chemu Ng'ok
Still waters Run
633 N La Brea Ave
February 12 – March 19, 2022

Matthew Brown is pleased to present *Still waters Run*, Chemu Ng'ok's first solo exhibition in Los Angeles. The works are teeming with energy with lines appearing to drip off the surface of the paintings. Fresh tints of color create complex compositions that are open spaces for dialogue. They collapse dichotomies and offer different possibilities for interpretation. Ng'ok's work is inspired by political and social events as well as personal experiences. The paintings fall within the context of decolonial practice, feminism, power, justice, and agency.

The exhibition's title is arresting. It implies a simmering underneath the surface in which, at any given point, an eruption can occur. Regarding the inspiration behind the work, Ng'ok states, "I was searching for justice— attempting to depict it in the form of a painting. But it proved elusive. I ended up depicting institutions that attempt to carry out a justice that is not always guaranteed." The fourteen paintings included in the exhibition are populated with soldiers, politicians, lawyers, and judges, often alongside a faceless, anonymous public that bears witness to their dealings. Each painting presents a kind of power play, in which authority figures assert their dominion. Interested in the symbolic and abstract nature of power, Ng'ok has devised a unique, pictorial language that makes visible the arcane institutional structures and hidden psychological conflicts that govern contemporary life.

Swathes of color and wavering lines hover above thin washes of oil paint; bodies multiply and shift in scale; the boundaries between figures and their surroundings fluctuate and collapse. The painterly flair of Ng'ok's line rises to the fore. For Ng'ok, the line can become a language of its own, rife with metaphor and ever-shifting meaning.

At times, the line functions to articulate the scene. At others, it serves to conceal it from the viewer, as in *Whirlwind and Tempest* (2022), in which figures in the background are completely covered by frenetically intersecting lines of forest green and ochre. Ng'ok's lines also become a stand-in for that which cannot be seen: they can represent an affective state or a surge of energy, or invent a mirage that forges into a tempest. They can just as easily ensnare, decreasing mobility for the characters. At certain times the lines suggest thought, and at others, they serve as a coded language that Ng'ok's characters use to negotiate space.

Negotiation is a central theme throughout the exhibition. Ng'ok's lawyers, justices, soldiers, and politicians negotiate with one another, with the public, with themselves, or with the institutional forces from which their power is derived. In doing so, the hidden sources of their power are made visible for examination.

Chemu Ng'ok (b.1989, Nairobi) lives and works in Nairobi. She received her MFA from Rhodes University, Grahamstown in 2017 and was the recipient of the Mellon Foundation's Visual and Performing Arts of Africa Masters Bursary in 2016.

Solo exhibitions include *Still waters Run*, Matthew Brown, Los Angeles (2022) and *An Enigma*, at Central Fine Gallery, Miami Beach, FL (2021).

Selected group exhibitions include *Aletheia*, Central Fine Gallery, Miami Beach (2021); *Love your symptom, but not too much*, Blank Projects, Capetown (2020); *The head the hand*, Blank Projects, Capetown (2019); *My Kind of Protest*, Pippy Houldsworth Gallery, London (2019); *Songs for Sabotage*, New Museum Biennial, curated by Alex Gartenfeld, New Museum, New York (2018); *Carrion-murayari*, New Museum, New York (2018); *Sister Sister*, Grahamstown

MATTHEW BROWN

National Arts Festival Grahamstown, South Africa (2018); *African Voices*, National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Harare (2017); *Summer Show '16*, SMAC Gallery, Stellenbosch, South Africa (2016); *FNB Joburg Art Fair*, SMAC Gallery, Sandton Convention Centre, Johannesburg, South Africa (2016); *Surface Tension*, GUS Gallery, Stellenbosch, South Africa (2016); *Upstart/Startup*, SMAC Gallery, Johannesburg (2016); *Cape Town Art Fair*, SMAC Gallery, CTICC, Cape Town (2016); *FNB Joburg Art Fair*, SMAC Gallery, Sandton Convention Centre, Johannesburg (2015); *Emerging Painters: The Graduate Show, Turbine Art Fair*, Johannesburg (2015); *Speaking Back*, Goodman Gallery, Cape Town (2015); *1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair*, SMAC Gallery, Pioneer Works, New York (2015); *Pooling our Secrets*, SMAC Gallery, Stellenbosch, South Africa (2015); *LUSH*, SMAC Gallery, Stellenbosch, South Africa (2015); and *Social Revolution*, Rhodes Graduate Solo Exhibition, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa (2014). In 2021, Ng'ok was shortlisted for the Henrike Gross Art Prize.