

PHOEBE BOSWELL

FOR EVERY REAL WORD SPOKEN

10 March – 22 April 2017

Private view: 9th March 2017, 6.30 – 8.30 PM



Phoebe Boswell, *Pieces of a (Wo)Man*, 2017, pencil on paper

“For every real word spoken, for every attempt I had ever made to speak those truths for which I am still seeking, I had made contact with other women while we examined the words to fit a world in which we all believed, bridging our differences.” – Audre Lorde

Tiwani Contemporary is pleased to present ‘For Every Real Word Spoken’, a forthcoming solo exhibition of the work of Phoebe Boswell. Boswell is known for combining traditional craftsmanship and digital technology to create drawings, animations and installations, and with ‘For Every Real Word Spoken’, Boswell will continue her exploration of this expanded field of drawing.

The exhibition gathers a series of new, near-life-size nude pencil portraits of the artist’s friends, fellow artists, curators and acquaintances, most of whom had responded to a previous call Boswell placed on social media when working on her interactive installation ‘Mutumia’ (2016), a salute to those in history who have used their bodies in protest when not permitted to use their voices.

These new portraits show women standing up, holding their mobile phones to their chests, showing the devices’ screens to the viewer. The pose is inspired by Adrian Piper’s ‘Food for the Spirit’, a series in which Piper periodically photographed herself over the month of July 1971, in front of a mirror, variously clothed and unclothed.

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In each of the phone screens, Boswell has hand-drawn a code; when scanned with a mobile device, it will link online, revealing an article, image, thought, personal truth or observation directly chosen by the woman whose portrait is being observed to be communicated to the viewer. Drawing on a lineage of black female literary and artistic ancestry, Boswell's works will tell the stories of a networked community that cannot be easily contained within a single image.

'For Every Real Word Spoken' will demonstrate that a body is never just a body, but a sign which is read according to categories –of gender, family, race and so on - through which connections between groups are inevitably inferred. Varied societal approaches to the body, and the similarities, or more significantly, conflicts amongst them, therefore carries critical power in the way we relate and respond to one another.

The female body, and, especially the black female body, has a persistent stereotyped portrayal: of frailty, naivety, primitivism, vulnerability, victimhood, a body to be dominated or, indeed, a body to be ignored, one lacking in portrayal or visibility at all. The trans body tends to situate even further outside these margins. In acknowledgement, Boswell's portraits will highlight the materiality of the body, its composition as flesh and bone, its outline and contours, its weight, its individuality and history, revealing scars and marks, flaws and alterations.

In "For Every Real Word Spoken', bodies are things that one inhabits, objects that others look at, and signifiers that must bear the interpretation of others' subjective standpoints. The relationship between viewer and model will be radically re-negotiated: standing in the presence of these women, the audience will be expected to acknowledge them fully by activating their speech. The women in the drawings are not passive models, but will confront the viewer, both with their bodies and their speech, as participants reclaiming their voice. The exhibition will thus strive to address and undermine the currency of the silent muse in art history: a woman typically shown as an object rather than possessor of the gaze.

Surrounding the viewer, the work becomes an inversion of the Panopticon; these women, standing together and gazing inwards, will imbue the installation with the power of women's activism, collectivism and collaboration. Boswell writes: "so many incredible women (artists, thinkers, etc.) came forward to be involved, and their participation has inevitably become part of the work". 'For Every Real Word Spoken' will therefore shift the emphasis from the silent labelling of surveillance and the gaze, to the groupings that can be built through action, solidarity and speech.

– ENDS –

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About Phoebe Boswell

Phoebe Boswell lives and works in London. Born in Nairobi to black and white Kenyan parents, and brought up in the Middle East, her history is rooted in transient middle points and passages of migration. She combines traditional draftswomanship and digital technology to create drawings, animations and installations; layered visual languages through which she explores and communicates the complexities and multiple readings of our diasporic, fragmented narratives. Boswell studied Painting at the Slade School of Art and 2D Animation at Central St Martins, London. She was shortlisted for the Art Foundation's Animation Fellowship 2012, was the first recipient of the Sky Academy Arts Scholarship, and has exhibited with galleries including Carroll / Fletcher, Kristin Hjellegjerde, The Fine Art Society and InIVA, and at Art15 and 1:54 art fairs. She participated in the Gothenburg International Biennial of Contemporary Art 2015 and the Biennial of Moving Images 2016 at the Centre d'Art Contemporain in Geneva and is currently a Somerset House artist-in-residence. She is shortlisted for the 2017 Future Generation prize and her British Council-commissioned film 'Dear Mr. Shakespeare', directed by Shola Amoo, was selected for the Sundance Film Festival earlier this year.

About Tiwani Contemporary

Tiwani Contemporary exhibits and represents international artists, focussing on Africa and its diaspora. The gallery presents work through its exhibition programme and participation in art fairs. In addition to its commercial activities, Tiwani Contemporary runs a public programme, Art Connect, supported by the A.G. Leventis Foundation. This provides a platform for discussing contemporary artistic practice through publications, talks and projects.

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