



Africanus Okokon

Touch Products

22 June - 04 August 2024

Washington, DC: von ammon co is pleased to announce the first major solo exhibition by Africanus Okokon. This is the artist's first show with the gallery, and will include sculpture, video, prints, and large scale billboard collage. The exhibition will extend through Summer 2024.

Okokon's practice, which darts between most known artmaking techniques, examines the ghostly connections that form between disparate societies under the auspices of consumer culture. In this exhibition, the artist conjures a limbo-like space between the United States and Africa (mostly the Gulf of Guinea coastline, his family's place of origin), employing disposable goods that have the tendency to linger in one's home, forgotten storage, or in one's memory, despite their proneness to obsolescence. These key objects—plastic basketball trophies, tourist souvenirs, recently outmoded televisions, reclaimed colonial-era sea chests, billboard fragments, and television commercial clips—crackle with murmurs of an erstwhile era of material culture, long supplanted by newer, faster technologies. These relics usually take residence in the spandrels and crypts of contemporary culture: in the donation bin, or on VHS tapes stored in the attic.

Using the tactics shared by The Pictures Generation and Afro-diasporic cultural production—of quotation, excerption, sampling, framing, remix and staging—Okokon's assemblage and bricolage works seek to imbricate shared experiences of longing and loss from the two places where the artist claims birthright. While many of these objects will strike resonant emotional chords in either American or West African viewers, the end result of each finished object involves the clashing of elements from antipodal sources: the basketball trophy segmented and rebuilt using African souvenir figurines; printed cyanotype images borrowed from West African media printed on curbside-dumped plasma display televisions; the clean-cut models of a barbershop advertisement scarified with collotype printmaking; or the hyper-familiar Ghanaian billboard advertisement reconstructed using a blend of keepsake photography and folktale allusions. The emotional common-denominator is a disjointedness, somewhere lost in the transatlantic abyss, or in the wraithlike, invisible ether of wireless communication. Girded by the (albeit mass-produced) keepsake, Okokon's art draws the critique of late-stage capitalism towards one's private life, one's home, one's marrow.

Touch Products is a brand name for some of Ghana's most popular household cleaning products—somewhat akin to titling a show Lysol in Accra. Out of its native context—and for consumer ears unfamiliar to its daily use—this brand name is a synecdoche for the wide array of elements in Okokon's multimedia practice: it is an artwork that traces the contours of longing in a material culture that struggles to persist: the feel of carved wood, the weight of a hollow trophy, or the downy sting of television static on one's cheek.

von ammon co was founded in 2019 in its current Georgetown location. Gallery hours are Saturdays and Sundays, 12-6pm, and by appointment. For more information and image requests, please visit www.vonammon.co or email info@vonammon.co.

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