

Graphomania Samson Kambalu

Dec 5, 2017–Jan 13, 2018

Exhibition &
Performance

Graphomania
Samson Kambalu

The James Gallery
The Graduate Center, CUNY
365 Fifth Avenue at 35th Street

centerforthehumanities.org/james-gallery

Hours:
Tue-Thu, 12-7pm
Fri-Sat, 12-6pm

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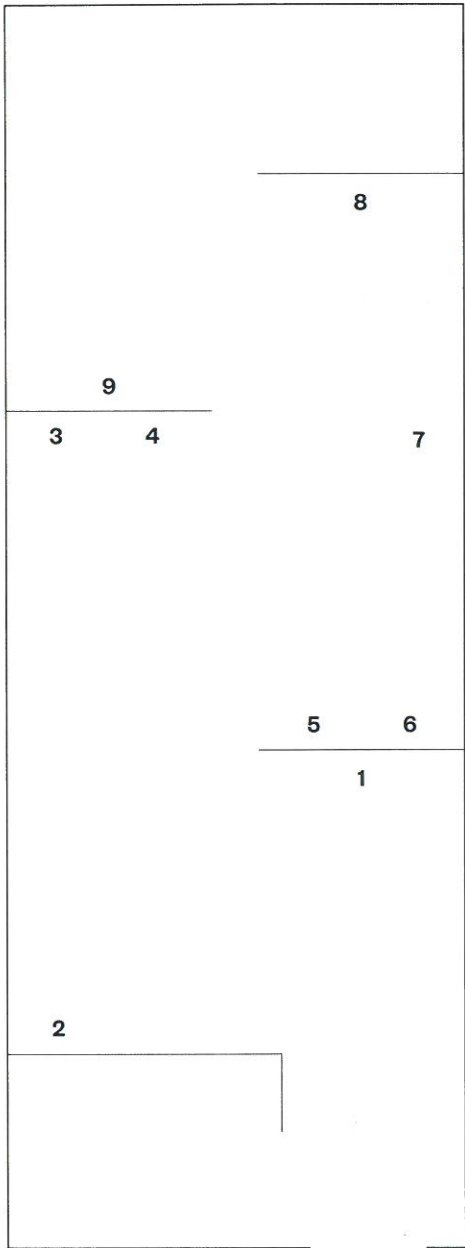
For the James Gallery and his first exhibition in New York, London-based artist Samson Kambalu has devised a meditative and spirited installation of nine films concerned with traditional artistic drawing. Their form and imagery are haunted by social taboos that have persisted through history and have gathered to take shape again today. These new films in his oeuvre of Nyau Cinema prompt hand-made responses to the current obsession with expressions of “fast talking” through digital means. Visitors to the gallery are welcomed with bright colored chalk to express on the walls questions on their mind and responses to the films. The ongoing process of accumulating words and images on the gallery’s chalkboard walls performs one rhythm, while the Sisyphean repetition of useless absurdism that Kambalu acts out in the old-time silent films forms a syncopated pacing with a handmade feel.

Kambalu has created Nyau Cinema as a dialogue between Nyau masking practice in his home country of Malawi and early film practices. The format and presentation of Nyau Cinema adheres to specific rules inflected by an unlikely range of influences from Situationism, Nyau masking, and early and silent film. For example the artist’s performance in the film should be spontaneous and site-specific to found architecture, landscape, or objects, and must be subtle and otherworldly, transgressive, and playful. Also the films must encourage active participation from audience.

Kambalu has been fascinated throughout his oeuvre with the ways that masking rituals and artmaking upend the rules of exchange value in Western-dominated global financial contexts to instead place more emphasis on imbuing a gift with meaning that is agreed to between the people involved. This meaning may be uneven, not one-to-one; it may be excessive, leisurely, and playful with no intended goals. Forming specific locales, gestures, and accepted rules for interaction practiced in rituals, like masking, and in avant-grade art practice, like Situationism, Kambalu propels the

reasons for making art into the sheer joy of improvisation. Nevertheless the tension of contemporary political struggles occupy a weighty presence in Kambalu’s films through his imagery recalling slavery and racial stereotypes. Drawing on and with art history, Kambalu expresses this imagery through his character of the western pioneer cowboy, who is an amalgam of histories, attempting to re-inscribe new meaning, yet never escaping acting out the legacy imposed by colonialism.

—Katherine Carl



Exhibition Checklist

All films by Samson Kambalu

1. *Drawing in the 18th Century*, 2017, HD video

2. *Revelator*, 2017, HD video

3. *I Walk Through a Photograph*, 2016, HD video

4. *I Rehearse a Crucifixion*, 2017, HD video

5. *Angler*, 2016, HD video

6. *St. Andrew*, 2017, HD video

7. *Fast Talker*, 2017, HD video

8. *Going Bananas in 1956*, 2017, HD video

9. *I Return the Pram Back to the 19th Century*, 2017, HD video

Graphomania

Samson Kambalu, artist and Nolan Tsang, musician.

Join artist Samson Kambalu with musician Nolan Tsang for an evening of cinematic and jazz improvisation. Playing out visions of exchange value that diverge from the usual rules of transaction and consumerism, Kambalu will screen excerpts of his Nyau Cinema. Followed by a reception in the gallery to celebrate the exhibition "Graphomania" on view.

Samson Kambalu, is a London-based artist and author who was born in Malawi. His work has been shown internationally at such institutions as Whitechapel Art Gallery, London; Seoul Museum of Art, South Korea; Venice Biennale; Museum of Contemporary African Art, Capetown, South Africa; Yale Center for British Art. He participated in the Dakar Biennale, Liverpool Biennial, and the Venice Biennale curated by Okwui Enwezor. Kambalu holds an undergraduate degree in ethnomusicology, and a Ph.D. in Fine Art. He is a professor in fine art at Oxford University.

Nolan Tsang is an improviser, trumpet player and composer based in NYC, who draws influence equally from contemporary classical and jazz pioneers alike, bringing cohesive spontaneity and excitement to every musical setting. Nolan's projects include Trumpetcello and Body Bag. As a soloist, Nolan has recently performed at Carnegie Hall and National Sawdust with the Eco Music Big Band, a politically minded ensemble, and was featured in an epic jazz opera commenting on the European Debt Crisis produced by Kabir Sehgal.

Cosponsored by Institute for Research on the African Diaspora in the Americas and the Caribbean (IRADAC) and the Certificate in Africana Studies.

James Gallery Curator: Katherine Carl
Production: LanningSmith Studio
Design: Yve Ludwig

Special thanks to Chris Lowery, Sissi Liu, Sampson Starkweather, the Center for the Humanities, Robert Reid-Pharr, Zee Dempster, Robin McGinty, and Allison Guess.

The Amie and Tony James Gallery, located in midtown Manhattan at the nexus of the academy, contemporary art, and the city, is dedicated to exhibition-making as a form of advanced research embedded in the scholarly work of the Graduate Center across multiple disciplines. The gallery creates and presents artwork to the public in a variety of formats. While some exhibitions remain on view for extended contemplation, other activities such as performances, workshops, reading groups, roundtable discussions, salons, and screenings have a short duration. The gallery works with scholars, students, artists, and the public to explore working methods that may lie outside usual disciplinary boundaries.

The James Gallery