

Uthman Wahaab

16 Aug — 20 Sep 2017 at the Sapar Contemporary in New York, United States

9 SEPTEMBER 2017



Uthman Wahaab. Courtesy of Sapar Contemporary

Sapar Contemporary is pleased to present Uthman Wahaab: Phenomenal Woman, a solo exhibition of work from the Languishing series. Exhibition will be open from August 16 to September 20, 2017. Opening hours in August are Tue, Wed, Thur. and in September Tue- Sat (11-6 pm).

Taking its name from Maya Angelou's celebratory poem, Phenomenal Woman, Wahaab's exhibition is an exploration of the conventions of beauty imposed upon the female body. In part, this collection of mixed media paintings and drawings is a celebration of body, form, and beauty beyond the accepted understanding of what is contemporarily considered physically ideal. In this show, Wahaab confronts and questions the subjectivity of beauty; his goal through this work is to critique the ever-shifting social paradigm around the female form and to challenge the dominant standards of the attractiveness.

The pieces in this exhibition depict a population of heavy women in various states of repose and relaxation. The figures are nothing short of resplendent in rotundness- rolls of fat gracefully spilling over themselves, limbs draped over chairs, hands placidly playing on cellphones or with beads or with fruit. This sense of quietude that flavors the works should not be interpreted as a portrayal laziness; but rather, with luxury and beauty.

Viewers, particularly in the West, may be apt to associate these figures with art historical references such as the Venus of Willendorf or Ruben's fleshy nudes. However, while Wahaab acknowledges the existence of this work, he is not inspired by the canonical portrayal of plump women. He is concerned with the phenomenon of body image in the modern Nigerian context. Historically, heaviness has been correlated with wealth. Wahaab references the Nigerian term 'Orobo'- a term that loosely means 'fat in a sexy way' in the context of marriage. He speaks of an old tradition of 'plumping' a bride-to-be prior to her wedding as a demonstration of affluence and comfort. In talking about the work, he speaks of how that tradition is gradually being erased, due in part to the narrowing scope of beauty standards due to social media exposure to contemporary Western beauty ideals.

As with much of his work, the pieces in Phenomenal Woman originate from the artist's own life experiences. The Languishing series was inspired by an encounter that the artist had with a woman of larger than 'normal' stature. He was struck by her lack of confidence, her anxiety in navigating a world in which big may not be considered beautiful. In response to this sentiment, Wahaab created worlds in which full figured is phenomenal- a harkening back to the luxury of being able to languish.

Small details within the paintings and drawings are cues to the conflation of corpulence, success, and beauty. The figures have delicate feet that are uncalloused and unadorned with signs of strenuous work. Some of the figures even frolic across the canvas in silky toe shoes- leaping with a an untroubled abandon. The subjects of these works are unconcerned with the imposition of contemporary Western beauty ideals. They are unapologetically phenomenal, saying 'Phenomenal woman. That's me.'

Multidisciplinary artist Uthman Wahaab was born in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria in 1983, and raised in Lagos. He received a degree in Fine Art from the School of Art, Design and Printing, Yaba College of Technology, Lagos.

Wahaab is an artist who possesses an overarching interest in social phenomenon; yet, he is not concerned with a consistent use of medium or even singular aesthetic style. Utilizing the disciplines of painting, graphics design, film, photography, sculpture and installation, Wahaab's work positions a critical lens at social phenomenon not only within Africa; but also, globally. He is keenly critical of the impact of technology on shifting cultural structures, and the complex conundrum of navigating traditional values and social and economic progress. Each series is an in depth analysis of a new sociological study, and an exciting study manipulating new material. Wahaab's range in style, medium, and process is vast and impressive; he is an artist who both welcomes and successfully wrangles new ideas and modes of artmaking.

Wahaab's work has been shown internationally to wide acclaim in Africa and Europe. This is his first show in North America. Uthman Wahaab currently works and lives in Lagos.

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Location
New York, United States

Founded in
2014







1. Uthman Wahaab. Courtesy of Sapar Contemporary
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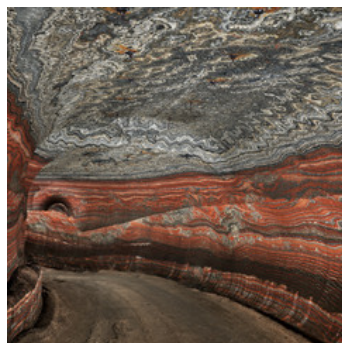


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