

TRUTH TELLERS

FEB 20 - APR 14, 2019
OPENING FEB 20, 6-8PM



Cheri Samba, *1er VTO (Premier voyage dans le temps de mes oeuvres)*, 2016, Acrylic on canvas, 53 x 78 1/2 in. (135 x 200 cm.)

To celebrate our fourth anniversary, RICHARD TAITTINGER GALLERY presents the provocative new exhibition **Truth Tellers**, featuring works by Omar Ba (1977), Ebony G. Patterson (1981), Cheri Samba (1956), and Ouattara Watts (1957). This group show calls back to one of our first exhibitions, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?* curated by Ugochukwu-Smooth C. Nzewi. *Truth Tellers* features work by four significant artists whose work offers a narrative influenced both by the nations of their birth, as well as by the new countries in which they have made lives.

The canons of art history have long told a one-sided story and relegated the art of non-Europeans to the categories of Other, traditional, handicraft, etc. In order to challenge the dominant Eurocentric art history narratives art institutions must create space to let the voices of artists who have historically been excluded from the conversation to speak. In 1989 the historic exhibition, *Magiciens de la Terre*, at the Centre Pompidou initiated this process by ensuring that 50% of the works displayed in the exhibition were from "non-Western" nations. While this exhibition was not without its own issues, it loudly declared to the art world that the status quo was no longer satisfactory. Thirty years later, the art world is still working to live up to the progress made by this landmark show. The political aspect of work by African and African American artists has been accepted by the art world within the category of "identity," or "minority" art. Paradoxically, it is the political dimension, rather than the aesthetic contribution, which is favored by the art world. Figurative representation of the black body provides a direct challenge to the normative art historical assumptions, and offers audiences from all cultural contexts a starting point from which they are able to begin to unlearn problematic art world conventions.

The title *Truth Tellers* comes from a quote by Samba who notes, "when I paint, my main concerns are to represent things as they are, to communicate with humor, to ask relevant questions and to tell the truth." Each of the works in this show presents a story, a narrative of an Other who confronts the viewer and challenges their notion of truth.

In the art world outdated narratives and canons of art history have dominated what is seen, what is talked about, and who participates. Each of these artists manages to challenge normative narratives about art, and truth through expressive use of color and a focus on figuration. The body plays a key role in narrative and communication. These works use humor, satire, and frankness to speak to social and political themes whose reach is nearly universal. The work of each of these artists is deeply connected to their community and history. Samba notes, "my art is part and parcel of my environment. It draws its inspiration from the people, it is concerned with the people, and it is meant for them." Patterson's work too, is tied up in the lived experiences of her community, "when you think about where black and brown bodies have ended up historically, then style becomes an important way for us to claim our identities. Consider that civil rights leaders would call the suits they wore armor."

This exhibition has been conceived of as a dialogue between the artists and between the works themselves. Watts suggests, "my vision is not bound to a country or a continent; it extends beyond borders and all that can be found on a map." The show is presented for an American audience whose relationship to the to the narratives and ideas presented is inevitably different than those of individuals living elsewhere in the world. Ba notes, "My work is not limited to a single point of view. However, I sometimes get the impression that critics also find it convenient to put me in a certain category, to classify me." These artists offer truths that re-examine and contravene inaccurate and harmful versions of narratives and histories that continue to exercise influence in contemporary culture. *Truth Tellers* reasserts Richard Taittinger Gallery's commitment to providing an artistic window to the world. These striking and beautiful works of art tell, often difficult, truths through an engaging and pleasing aesthetic experience.

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