

Body Politic: Casey Cook, Wangechi Mutu, Shinique Smith, Tory Wright

November 8–December 22, 2007

Opening Reception, November 8, 5–8pm

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Branch Gallery is pleased to present *Body Politic: Casey Cook, Wangechi Mutu, Shinique Smith, Tory Wright*. The four artists in *Body Politic* consider the intersection of bodies, place, and space with the politics of globalism, consumerism, and image. Working in a range of media, each sees the body as a starting point for a larger conversation on the role of gender, race, and the location of self in a changing world landscape.

With their hidden text messages and muted palette, Casey Cook's paintings invite the viewer on a coded journey that is playful and mysterious. A sophisticated use of space and line draws in the viewer, meshing elements of trompe l'oeil, reiterated geometric forms, and organic abstractions to confuse notions of space. Her depiction of the body is fragmented and sexual—male and female intertwine in hedonistic camouflaged repetition. For this exhibition, Cook will create a site-specific wall drawing. Cook, who is based in Carrboro, North Carolina, received her MFA from the University of California, Los Angeles in 1997. She has had solo exhibitions at venues such as Lehmann Maupin, NY and Richard Heller Gallery, CA, and has participated in group exhibitions at venues including Deitch Projects, NY; Pat Hearn Gallery, NY; and Matthew Marks Gallery, NY.

Wangechi Mutu, born in Nairobi, Kenya and based in New York, is well known for her large scale collages and installations that explore the conflict-of-interest between the rampant consumerism of glamorous high fashion and western conceptions of responsibility in a global economy. Particularly concerned with the perverse notion of 'the other' as shaped through colonial histories, she cites the feminine form as the site upon which the scars of war and conflict are most readily visible. In *Body Politic*, Mutu will exhibit *Cleaning Earth*, a recent video work in which the artist, disguised in a nondescript long dress and head scarf, engages in the endurance exercise of repeatedly scrubbing the ground. The seemingly futile act of putting soap and water to the earth in an attempt to make it 'clean' might be a metaphor for the very nature of war, and the inability to erase the blood histories and scars that it leaves behind. Mutu received her MFA from Yale University in 2000, and has had solo exhibitions at numerous venues including San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA; the Miami Art Museum, FL; Power House, TN; and Sikkema Jenkins & Co., NY. She has participated in group shows at such institutions as the Royal College of Art, London, UK; the Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; and the Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporaneo, Sevilla, Spain.

Also based in New York, Shinique Smith's dynamic bales and bundles have a textual quality which underscores their anthropomorphic structures. Using discarded, personal, and found items of clothing as her primary resource, Smith's works transform unwanted and used objects into entropic sculptural forms. In doing so, her works explore the history of commodity exchange, globalism, and poverty. As Smith uses color, texture, and form to blur the line between abstraction and figuration, she disturbs the separation between the body and its trappings, or the consumer and the consumed. Smith received her MFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art in 2003. She has participated in group and solo exhibitions at venues including Cuchifritos, NY; The Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, CO; Scuola dell'Arte dei Tiraoro e Battioro, Venice, Italy; Franklin Artworks, Minneapolis, MN; and PS1, NY.

Tory Wright, based in Raleigh, North Carolina, explores the nexus of fashion and consumerism, using collage as a drawing tool. Wright uses Duratrans—the ubiquitous lightbox advertisements seen at department stores—as her primary source material, cutting them by hand to transform fashion editorials into ornate organic forms that could be female body parts, textile patterns, or links of dancing fashion logos. Her newest series of works on paper tease the viewer by revealing only hints of carefully crafted femininity: a red lipsticked mouth here, long fluttering eyelashes there. Distractions from the seductive messages of such advertisements are cut away, laying bare their architecture and leaving behind the very motivation they seek to elicit: desire. Wright is an MFA Candidate at the Maryland Institute College of Art (2008), and has participated in exhibitions at venues such as Art Space, Richmond, VA; the Rose Art Museum, Waltham, MA; and Space 1026, Pennsylvania PA. She is also a member of Team Lump, an artists collective based in Raleigh.

For more information, please contact Teka Selman or Chloë Seymore at info@branchgallery.com or 919.918.1116.

Gallery Hours: Wed–Sat 12–6 or by appt.

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