ALMINE RECH

'Behind This Wall'

Sep 9, 2021 — Feb 28, 2022 | Longlati Foundation, Shanghai

Longlati Foundation is delighted to present “Behind This Wall”, a joint exhibition of works by Derrick Adams (b. 1970, Baltimore, Maryland), Amoako Boafo (b. 1984, Osu Accra, Ghana), and Vaughn Spann (b. 1992, Orlando, Florida) who each explore and redefine the idea of Blackness through portraiture-making. Bringing together signature pieces and new commissions, the group show celebrates one of the major themes of the Foundation’s longstanding Collection and Patronage Program: to promote the cultures of minorities while manifesting how different vectors of identity crisscross and interweave.

The title of the exhibition, “Behind This Wall”, echoes the contributions of African American painter Kerry James Marshall (b.1955, Birmingham, Alabama). Marshall assumes a thoughtful and elaborate approach to challenging the marginalization of Black figures in the Western canon. In a similar vein, with their own distinct modes of expression, Adams, Boafo, and Spann disabuse the audience of the white delusion that has been traditionally perpetuated by the walls of museums, extending the movement for justice and liberation to the art historical realm. “Behind This Wall” aligns with a deliberate plan to integrate identity politics into the art institution, which reflects the unique social agenda of the Longlati Foundation among its counterparts in the city. Showcasing the practices of these preeminent painters who reclaim minority subject positions, the exhibition registers that Blackness is never simple or absolute but rather multifaceted and dynamic.

First shown in China, this selection of 15 portraits composes a cast for an active theater against which the perception of the Black body is processed as universal rather than automatically limited to experiences relevant to Black people. “Behind This Wall” thus is a performative installation on its own wherein lucid figuration blurs into dreamlike symbolism. It embodies the struggles of Adams, Boafo, and Spann to place both personal history and collective memory in mundane spectacles. Derrick Adams incorporates formal consideration of solid colors and geometric shapes into his vibrant depictions of Black faces at ease. Amoako Boafo characterizes the self-assertion of his community by using his fingers to fabricate Black skin. Vaughn Spann portrays two-headed Black figures to enact a conscious form of vigilance. All three artists question the necessary boundaries and ever-changing realities of Blackness.

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