ALMINE RECH

Otis Kwame Kye Quaicoe
BLACK RODEO: Cowboys of the 21st Century

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Almine Rech Brussels is pleased to present *BLACK RODEO: Cowboys of the 21st Century*, the European solo exhibition debut of Otis Kwame Kye Quaicoe. *BLACK RODEO: Cowboys of the 21st Century* features several new large format paintings from Quaicoe's Black Cowboy series that brings to the forefront the untold stories of the Black American cowboy.

Known primarily as a painter, Quaicoe will also presents for the first time in this exhibition, sculptures as an expansion of his work on the series. The works featured in *BLACK RODEO* are a result of rigorous cultural investigation and the continued experimentation with figurative forms accented with bold colors and rich texture that has become the signature of Quaicoe's artistic practice. Taking inspiration from his childhood affinity for cinema, in particular "Spaghetti Westerns," Quaicoe wanted to unearth the erased stories of Black American cowboys.

BLACK RODEO: Cowboys of the 21st Century serves as a forum for Quaicoe to pay homage to a community that has been pushed to the margins and whitewashed by history. Quaicoe over the past several years has cultivated an artistic practice centered on the desire to visually articulate stories that celebrate the beauty of Blackness with nuance and grace. He has made it his mission, with the Black Cowboy series, to fill in the knowledge gap, and debunk the myth that these figures didn't exist. Historians have concluded that, at one point in time, one in four cowboys were Black, yet the archetype propagated by the movie industry illustrated otherwise. Characters like John Wayne, who rose to popularity during Hollywood's Golden Age, became the quintessential role model for young boys and girls around the globe for generations.

Back in Ghana, Quaicoe was one of those young people whose understan-ding of cowboys, and those who encompassed that role, were devoid of indi-viduals who looked like him. It wasn't until 2020, catalyzed by the Black Lives Matter Movement and the unfortunate murder of George Floyd, that Quaicoe became aware of the contemporary Black Cowboy community in the United States. At the same time, encountering groups like the Compton Cowboys was not only enlightening, but it sparked a curiosity and need to tell contemporary cowboy stories of Black men and women. They are the protagonists of the Black Cowboy series.

Subsequently, Quaicoe was introduced to the world of the Black Rodeo, which is a competitive equestrian sport, popular across North America, via the photographs of fellow Portland-based artist Ivan Mcclellan. Mcclellan's work, much like some of Quaicoe's favourite Old Master painters, such as Rembrandt, served as a rich repository and source material to which Quaicoe responds in his own artistic practice. This new series of paintings, with its colourful pictorial planes, majestic horses ridden by men and women, and stoic portraits, rewrites the story of the contemporary Black Cowboy stories.

BLACK RODEO: Cowboys of the 21st Century juxtaposes memory, history, and artistic imagination in an effort to highlight a constellation of perspec-tives that unfurl questions of power, culture, heritage, and resilience. Through dynamic use of color, texture, and form, Quaicoe seeks to invite the viewer into a deep, but necessary, discourse debunking the myth that there were no Black Cowboys. This exhibition is a platform for Quaicoe to reshape the narrative and contradict the tropes in an effort to articulate a fresh perspective on American history through the prism of the contemporary Black Cowboy experience, which has rarely been told.

- Larry Ossei-Mensah, curator and co-founder of Artnoir.