

Ranti Bam: Common Ground

Curated by Raphael Guilbert

1 September — 8 October 2022

Catinca Tabacaru Gallery is thrilled to present British-Nigerian artist Ranti Bam's first solo exhibition *Common Ground*. Bringing together a new body of performance-based ceramic works, Bam's practice approaches clay as a material to investigate human inseparability from our environment.

Raised between Africa and Europe, Bam's work gives form to the pluralities of her personal history, inhabiting the visual and spiritual culture of two distinct worlds as they collide today.

These new sculptures are avatars for the body. They are vessels; vessels with exteriors that resemble skin or leather. They surrender to Bam's embrace as she prioritizes spirit before form. Imperfect, the sculptures pucker and crack, folded and faulted, their exteriors conceal pools of metallic yellow glaze that illuminate the interior – a sacred source.

Bam is searching for freedom from definitions. There is violence in definition. Here, traditions of making are approached as an antidote for violence. When turning her attention to her native Nigeria, she acknowledges the conflict upon its formation: an imposed state created by the Royal Niger Company in its pursuit of capital growth for the Crown. The forced shift from indigenous systems to wage labor, the privatization of communal land, the push into cash crops from subsistence farming, the indoctrination of Judeo-Christian beliefs, and the highly orchestrated assimilation of consumption culture and gender roles... are all acts of definition.

Bam's ongoing journey into the Nigerian Yoruba culture unfolds the semiotic aspects of the feminine (intimacy, care, vulnerability, the vessel) as vital in considering how a relationship to nature can break down ideological structures.

□□ There is an increasing amount of discourse today around what it means to be an African in globalized capitals. How does the neo-liberal West engage with pluralities of past, present and future African identity? Bam's work is an intimate form of this social exploration. Clay holds narrative and curative powers. It is malleable, fragile, erotic; clay remembers. Bam approaches the material for solace, for respite, for liberation. She embraces it, fulfilling a desire for intimacy and symbiosis – the Dutch word *Huidhonger* is the best descriptor she can conjure for the feeling. It means skin hunger: the feeling people develop when they are disconnected from one another.

In titling the sculptures *Ifa*, Bam signals their multiplicities. *Ifa* in Yoruba means both (*ifá*): divination and (*I – fàá*): to pull close. Maybe they are votive objects bringing one closer to the divine. As viewers, we are turned into witnesses to the performance of a ritual that has the artist transforming – a newfound willingness to share her intimate space – unadorned, raw, in process. It's a very African act to invite us into the commune; but, it's a universal act to invite us to be a community.