

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Umar Rashid**  
*En Garde / On God*

**Blum & Poe, Los Angeles**  
**November 6–December 18, 2021**

Los Angeles, CA, October 22, 2021—Blum & Poe is pleased to present *En Garde / On God*, Umar Rashid's first solo exhibition with the gallery. In new paintings, drawings, and sculptural work, Rashid presents a new chapter in his fifteen-year-long project of documenting the fictitious history of the Frenglish Empire (1648-1880). Informed by the storylines that are encoded into the canonical narratives of empires and their colonies, and even more so by those that are marginalized and omitted from the historical record, Rashid conjures a world replete with complex iconographic languages that use classifying systems, maps, and cosmological diagrams. Channeling the visual lexicons of hip hop, ancient and modern pop culture, gang and prison life, and revolutionary movements throughout time, in these works Rashid seeks to underline the roles of race, gender, class, and power in the problematic history of recounting history.

*In his one-paragraph story "On Exactitude in Science," Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges evokes an unnamed, unlocated empire so taken with precision in the art of mapmaking that its cartographers eventually produced "a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it." Later generations did not share this taste for exactitude and, failing to see the point of such a map, abandoned it: "In the Deserts of the West, still today," the story ends, "there are Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in all the Land there is no other Relic of the Disciplines of Geography." Goodbye geography: a discipline gone so awry it managed, if only for an instant, to let the map take over the territory.*

*Consider this ruined map: an onion-skin paper copy of a whole empire, crumbled, ripped and torn to garlands, reduced to strings of origami mausoleums to the real world. All so uncanny and grotesque until, perhaps, following the trail of Borges's facetious clues, we come to ponder precisely what in an empire is tangible beyond words. Sure, the land that empires claim can be captured, dug into, turned over, occupied, and marched upon. But empires are also made of stuff less concrete than land—myths, lies, dreams propped up or trampled, stories sweetly whispered into some ears and loudly hammered into others. Empires are built on mountains of corpses, but the real issue is that corpses will speak if you let them. Empires may glory in, or turn away in shame from, blood spilled; either way they get, and write, over it, tying together true accounts with golden strings of make believe. This is also the way imperial maps are made. They are designed to cover endless expanses in a slick veneer of words, the better to hide the endlessly overlapping layers of lives and waves of deeds, each round covering the last, building monuments here and eroding them there, shaping the landscape beneath.*

*Still, every corpse has a story, though imperial narratives may require such tales be discarded. They poke through, punch holes, always a challenge to the official story, always threatening to ruin the purported totalizing exactitude of imperial cartography. In 1834, the poet Lydia Sigourney Huntley prefaced her "Indian Names" with the following question: "How can the red men be forgotten, while so many of our states and territories, bays, lakes, and rivers, are indelibly stamped by names of their giving?" Huntley was playing coy: Native Americans did not give these names so much as Europeans exacted and repurposed them to hide*

*their violent deeds. Behold this feat of cold alchemy: words summoning a nation into being, cooking up countries out of carnage, and vanishing people into thin air. Imperial maps do not lay literally over any land; they do it figuratively, and their “tattered ruins” are everywhere, in names marking the land in permanent ink.*

*What if you set out to reverse the process?*

\*\*\*

*Umar Rashid once went by Frohawk Two Feathers—a nom de plume he gave himself and has now given up. This shedding mirrors the enormous task on which he set out years ago: to uncover and represent what lies underneath the names on the tattered map we so often mistake for history. Rashid’s work reverses that of Borges’ cartographers: wherever he goes, he raises lost, unborn provinces and empires out of the relics of their dreams. Rashid’s work does not dabble in the pretend exactitude of Borges’s uncanny cartography; it excavates the states buried in the margins of unread history books. It summons the truth that lurks between their lines.*

*Before it was the thirty-first state in the union, California was an independent republic for less than a month; it had been two provinces of the First Mexican Empire, once independence stripped it of its former name of New Spain. In Alta and Baja California, provinces the size of a continent, European power resided in a network of Jesuit missions that doubled as military forts, sites of temporal and secular oppression all in one: so many names of saints strung on maps like the beads of a rosary. Before the monks raised their crosses, conquistadores had drawn the path and, again, always given names. Faced for the first time with the gigantic region, they glued the territory to a dream map: Montalvo’s sixteenth-century bestseller, *The Adventures of Esplandian*, depicts the island of California, populated only by strong Black women, tamers of bloodthirsty griffons, and ruled by Queen Calafia. The heathen Amazons hear of Europe’s religious wars and see a chance for the world to learn of their courage, but the California girls, their griffons, and their queen are subsumed into European storytelling. Calafia marries a knight and comes back to California. Game over, says the narrator: “We decline to say more about what became of them because, if we wished to do so, it would be a never-ending story.” There must be a beginning and an end; borders in place and time—however arbitrary—that reinforce fables of uniqueness and hide how much of history is made of the same mistakes.*

*The Frenglish Empire, whose history Rashid’s works chronicle in every corner of the known world, may have never actually existed; yet you will recognize the missions, the warring factions, snippets of colonies and empires reshaped as global tides of war and trade meet numberless individual trajectories. You will hear familiar accents in its tales of heroism and petty opportunism; in its portraits of heroes and villains—bloodthirsty, gold-hungry colonizers and the religious officials who absolve them; former imperial soldiers finding in alliances with indigenous rebels the true meaning of freedom; peasant women forced into lives of vengeance and violence; hapless rulers killed in their sleep and the nameless masses who cheer the deed. The artifacts, the battle-worn flags, the ancient maps: the remains of days that, though they never were, will make you wonder how much you actually know about those that have been. And why.*

*En garde: walk in armed and ready. Though playful and humorous, Rashid’s work should not be taken lightly. It comes bearing a challenge: when you dare to look through the tears in the map, whose history do you see?*

*Which of these nations would claim you?*

— Gregory Pierrot, Associate Professor of English at the University of Connecticut at Stamford

# BLUM & POE

Los Angeles, New York, Tokyo

**Umar Rashid** (b. 1976, Chicago, IL), also known as Frohawk Two Feathers, received his BA in cinema and photography from Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL. This past year, his work was featured at The Huntington and the Hammer Museum as part of the biennial *Made in LA 2020: a version*. Recent institutional solo exhibitions include *What is the color when black is burned? (The Gold War Part 1)*, University of Arizona Museum of Art, Tucson, AZ (2018); and *The Belhaven Republic (A Delta Blues)*, University of Memphis Galleries A and B, Memphis, TN (2017). Rashid's work is represented in the public collections of the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY; Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, NY; Jorge Pérez Collection, Miami, FL; Mount Holyoke Art Museum, South Hadley, MA; Nevada Museum of Art, Reno, NV; Ruth and Elmer Wellin Museum of Art at Hamilton College, Clinton, NY; Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, CA; Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT; and the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa, Cape Town, South Africa, among others.

## About Blum & Poe

Blum & Poe was founded by Tim Blum and Jeff Poe in Santa Monica in September of 1994 as a space to show local and international contemporary art in all media. Blum's extensive experience in the Japanese art world combined with Poe's keen knowledge of emerging artists in Los Angeles resulted in an international program of influential artists. Throughout a twenty-seven-year history, Blum & Poe has shaped the trajectory of contemporary art by championing artists at all stages of their careers—cultivating the lineages that run between emerging and established practices, and working with artist estates to generate new discourse surrounding historical work. Currently, Blum & Poe represents forty-eight artists and eight estates from sixteen countries worldwide.

In 2003 the gallery moved to a larger space in Culver City, and in 2009 Blum & Poe purchased and renovated its current 22,000 square foot complex on La Cienega Boulevard. In this location the gallery has since staged museum-caliber surveys, examining the historical work of such movements as the Japanese Mono-ha school (2012); the Korean Dansaekhwa monochrome painters (2014); the European postwar movement CoBrA (2015); Japanese art of 1980s and '90s (2019); a rereading of Brazilian Modernism (2019); and a revisionist take on the 1959 MoMA exhibition, *New Images of Man* (2020). To produce these exhibitions, Blum & Poe has worked with celebrated curators such as Alison M. Gingeras, Sofia Gotti, Joan Kee, and Mika Yoshitake.

In 2014, Blum & Poe opened galleries in New York and Tokyo to focus on intimately scaled projects in new contexts. These expansions tie into the gallery's wide-reaching program that includes exhibitions, lectures, performance series, screenings, and an annual art book fair at its base in Los Angeles. Blum & Poe's publishing division democratically circulates its program through original scholarship and accessible media ranging from academic monographs, audio series, magazines, to artists' books. In 2020, the gallery launched Blum & Poe Broadcasts, an online platform showcasing artists' projects in conjunction with physical installations or as standalone digital endeavors.

Across the three global locations, Blum & Poe prioritizes environmental and community stewardship in all operations. In 2015, Blum & Poe was certified as an Arts:Earth Partnership (AEP) green art gallery in Los Angeles and consequently became one of the first green certified galleries in the United States. The gallery is also a member of the Gallery Climate Coalition, which works to facilitate a more sustainable commercial art world and reduce the industry's collective carbon footprint. Blum & Poe is committed to fostering inclusive and equitable communities both in their physical and online spaces and believes that everybody should have equal access to creating and engaging with contemporary art.

# BLUM & POE


Los Angeles, New York, Tokyo

## Press Inquiries

Nicoletta Beyer  
Communications and Editorial Director, Los Angeles  
nicoletta@blumandpoe.com

Naz Cuguoğlu  
Communications and Media Editor, Los Angeles  
naz@blumandpoe.com

## Follow Blum & Poe

 @blumandpoe

 @blumandpoe

 @blumandpoe