

MARIANNE BOESKY GALLERY

NEW YORK | ASPEN

SERGE ALAIN NITEGEKA

CONFIGURATIONS IN BLACK

On View: January 30 – March 8, 2025

Opening Reception: Thursday, January 30 | 6–8 PM
507 West 24th Street, New York, NY 10011

*“Or should one recognize that one becomes a foreigner in another country
because one is already a foreigner from within?”*

– Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*

New York, NY – Marianne Boesky Gallery is pleased to present *Configurations in Black*, an exhibition of new paintings and sculptures by South Africa-based artist Serge Alain Nitegeka (b. 1983; Rwanda). For his fifth solo exhibition in more than ten years with the gallery, Nitegeka imbues his newest body of work with symbolically and politically charged colors and forms.

Deploying the visual language of minimalism and geometric abstraction, Nitegeka reappropriates modernism’s formal preoccupations with color, line, and space to examine the lingering effects—both personal and political—of forced migration. Drawing on his own history as a refugee, Nitegeka erects—at times quite literally—barriers, obstacles, and borders both visual and physical for the viewer to traverse. Conjuring unsettling abstracted, obstruction-laden landscapes—in both two dimensions and three—Nitegeka evokes the psychological experience of political displacement and statelessness.

For *Configurations in Black*, Nitegeka debuts a new suite of paintings and sculptures—which he began working on more than two years ago, in a season of experimentation following a global pandemic. In the resulting paintings on plywood, Nitegeka conjures abstract landscapes defined by loose, organic planes of color—dark gray, bright orange, sunny yellow, vibrant teal. Heavy black lines run across the compositions at various angles while silhouetted figures—borrowed from the artist’s 2012 film *Black Subjects*—tumble through space, many of them balancing bundles on their backs or shoulders. On canvas, a material Nitegeka returns to for the first time since university, the heavy black lines that appear on plywood—and throughout the artist’s oeuvre—vanish, leaving the figures to float through the landscape with no sense of a horizon line, no sense of which way is up or down, no sense of where they’re coming from or where they’re going. With the painted wood sculptures, Nitegeka evokes the unnamed parcels that the figures in the paintings carry on their backs and shoulders, representing, perhaps the personal effects—and psychological burdens—that migrants carry along their journeys.

Nitegeka’s work has long been characterized by a stark, limited color palette. In early work, the artist exclusively used black, white, red, on the golden grain of exposed plywood. In the mid-2010s—on the heels of working on a pair of outdoor sculptures—sky blues and sunny yellows began to appear in his work, as if the open sky under which he was working found its way onto the surface itself. With *Configurations in Black*, Nitegeka incorporates new hues into his work: greens, blues, grays—and a startling neon orange laden with symbolic and metaphorical potential. Nitegeka borrows his new orange shade from the life vests commonly worn by migrants and refugees crossing the Mediterranean Sea en route to Europe. Piled high on the shores of the Greek island of Lesbos, the life vests represent mass migration as a crisis of human rights and global politics; they also represent each individual who has made the treacherous journey in search of safety. Throughout these works, Nitegeka once again

BOESKYGALLERY.COM

TELEPHONE 212.680.9889

FAX 347.296.3667

incorporates a series of motifs associated with movement—the raw plywood of shipping crates, bright red “fragile” stamps, and handling mark arrows—appear once again in these newest works.

Nitegeka’s paintings embody a liminal space—one both physical and psychological. With his work, Nitegeka creates space—and a sense of a landscape that must be traversed. Then—having created a space to enter, be it visually or physically—Nitegeka blocks the entrance with heavy black lines or renders the landscapes too dense to navigate. Silhouetted figures and viewers alike are left to move through space without any indication of where they are going—there is no up or down, no gravity or horizon line, no clear path. Instead, there is only searching, an endless journey with no origin and no destination, weighed down by the ever-growing bundles they carry.

With *Configurations in Black*, Nitegeka pushes his practice forward—both formally and conceptually. Nitegeka’s work speaks to his personal history and to the political, to crises of ceaseless war and famine, and to those who have no choice but to leave their homes in pursuit of another. “His art,” Allie Biswas wrote in 2015 “urges us to make connections with this global sphere of personal and collective disjuncture and trauma, where life is ruled by uncertainty and enforced readjustment. In doing so, his work becomes representative of a fundamental part of the present-day human condition. What Nitegeka ultimately reminds us is that the significance of a journey, whatever form it may take, lies in the process of allowing ourselves to enter into that which we cannot always control.” A decade later, as Nitegeka deepens his formal exploration of abstraction, expands his color palette, and further complicates his landscapes, *Configurations in Black* offers a stark reminder that migration is a journey begun but perhaps never ended, that the foreigner lives, perhaps, within, and that the burdens—physical and psychological—remain with us as the journey continues.

A sense of suspended movement permeates the journey alluded to throughout *Configurations in Black*—perhaps related to the artist’s own status: for nearly 10 years, Nitegeka has been stuck in South Africa, unable to travel outside the country as his citizenship proceedings continue. The artist exists, at present, in a state of limbo, suspended within his own liminal landscape, with no real sense of when it will be resolved. Unable to attend the opening of the exhibition, the artist’s absence is a presence all its own, felt deeply within the work on view.

ABOUT SERGE ALAIN NITEGEKA

Nitegeka’s work was the subject of a 2015 solo exhibition at the SCAD Museum of Art in Savannah, Georgia. He has been included in group exhibitions at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, CA; the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France; the Baltimore Museum of Art, Maryland; Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, NC; the Perez Art Museum Miami, FL; and the Jewish Museum, New York, NY. Nitegeka’s work was included in the South African Pavilion of the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015 and at the Göteborg International Biennial of Contemporary Art, Gothenburg, Sweden the same year. In 2019, Nitegeka received the Grant-Award from the Barnett and Annalee Newman Foundation, New York, NY and the Villa Extraordinary Award for Sculpture from the Claire & Edoardo Villa Will Trust, Johannesburg, South Africa in 2018. His work is in the collections of the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, MA; the Newark Museum, NJ; the Jewish Museum, New York, NY; the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY; and the Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, FL, among others. The artist lives and works in Johannesburg, South Africa.

###

MARIANNE BOESKY GALLERY

NEW YORK | ASPEN

For more information about the artist, please contact Director Savannah Downs at savannah@boeskygallery.com or 212-680-9889. For press inquiries, please contact Molly Krause, krause co., at molly@molly.nyc.

BOESKYGALLERY.COM

TELEPHONE 212.680.9889

FAX 347.296.3667