

BLUM & POE

Los Angeles, New York, Tokyo

Tony Lewis

Charlatan and Ultimately A Boring Man

Blum & Poe, Los Angeles

June 1-July 6, 2019

Opening reception: Saturday, June 1, 6-8pm

Discussion with Tony Lewis & curator Hamza Walker

Blum & Poe, Los Angeles

Saturday, June 29, 2-4pm

"What is dangerous here is a turning away from...the turning away from...anything any white American says. ... But I don't know, and neither does Martin Luther King—none of us know—how to deal with those other people...who don't believe anything the white world says, and don't entirely believe anything I or Martin say."
—James Baldwin

Blum & Poe is pleased to present the gallery's second solo exhibition with Chicago-based artist Tony Lewis, entitled *Charlatan And Ultimately A Boring Man*. This exhibition showcases disparate facets of Lewis' practice, harnessed here together to confront a fraught milestone in contemporary intellectual history that the artist has long grappled with—William F. Buckley's argument in the historic 1965 debate with James Baldwin on the motion "the American dream is at the expense of the American Negro."

This exhibition conceptually and formally responds to work Lewis began as far back as 2011—the transcript and video documentation of the Baldwin v. Buckley debate is source material the artist revisits cyclically. Prompted by the words of Baldwin, Lewis engages with the notion of "turning away from" by actively challenging his natural feelings of repulsion and anger registered when analyzing Buckley's language, thesis, and rhetorical strategies. Endeavoring to confront the greater apparatus of racism and white conservative psychology, here Lewis meditates on the entirety of Buckley's argument, and more specifically on one pivotal line from which he has extracted his exhibition title:

"There is no instant cure for the race problem in America, and anyone who tells you that there is ... is a charlatan and ultimately a boring man—a boring man precisely because he is then speaking in the kind of abstractions that do not relate to the human experience."

Buckley's words echo throughout the exhibition, his likeness is projected directly on the gallery wall. This demanding subject matter carries forward Lewis' established practice of utilizing the medium of graphite to investigate language linked to structures of power and their inherent systems of exclusion, and to puncture such social and political issues as race, communication, and labor. With *Charlatan And Ultimately A Boring Man*, the viewer first encounters the artist's shorthand drawings—a visual and gestural lexicon adopted from the John R. Gregg shorthand glyph system of dictation—the works all share the graphite phonemes for the word "boring." The following gallery houses Lewis' original site-specific floor drawing from 2011, a graphite-coated sculptural work on paper, with a new collage poem entitled "Man." As a conceptual refuge in an adjacent room, a labor-intensive drawing rendered in black screws threaded with graphite-soaked rubber bands takes its shape from the shorthand gesture for the name "James." Beyond a projection of

Buckley's monologue, we encounter another floor drawing from 2014, this time erected and haunting, alongside another shorthand drawing handwritten directly on the gallery wall, "charlatan." Finally, a second new collage poem created exclusively for this exhibition—the longest of the artist's to date, a very personal and emotional response to Buckley's argument.

Tony Lewis (b. 1986, Los Angeles) lives and works in Chicago. His work has been the subject of recent solo exhibitions including *Anthology 2014-2016*, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C. (2018); *Plunder*, Rose Art Museum, Waltham, MA (2017); *Alms, Comity and Plunder*, Museo Marino Marini, Florence, Italy (2016); and *nomenclature movement free pressure power weight*, Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland, OH (2015). His work has been featured in numerous museum group exhibitions including *The Revolution Will Not Be Gray*, Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, CO (2016); *Walls and Words*, Museum at Eldridge Street, New York, NY (2014); LUMP Projects, organized by John Neff, Raleigh, NC (2013); *People of Color*, Gene Siskel Film Center, Chicago, IL (2012); and *Ground Floor*, Hyde Park Art Center, Chicago, IL (2012). Tony Lewis participated in the 2014 iteration of the Whitney Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, and was the recipient of the 2017-2018 Ruth Ann and Nathan Perlmutter Artist-in-Residence Award at the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University. His work is represented in notable public collections including the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY; Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C.; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, Washington D.C.; and the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY.