

**YOUR
MOM**

**THE
ARMORY
SHOW**

MARCH 3–6, 2016

**SPECIAL PROJECT
ED YOUNG**

Presented by:

smac

Pier 94

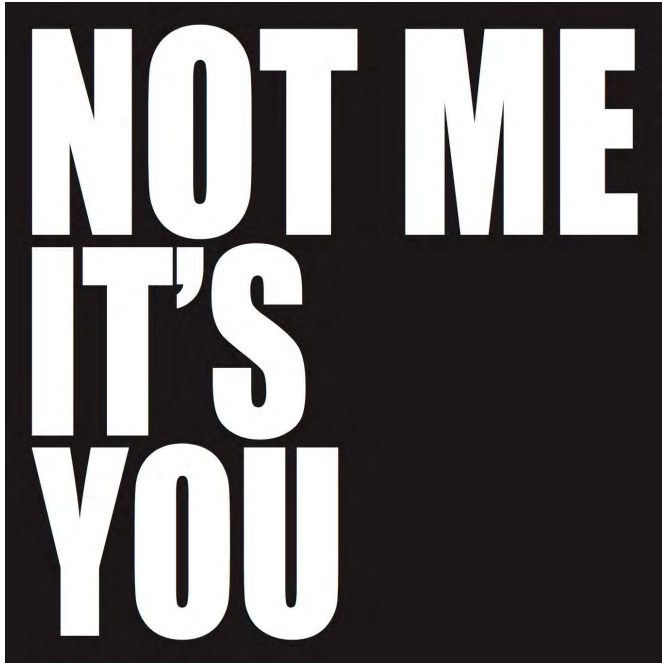
Special Project

ALL SO FUCKING AFRICAN

2016

Two-part site-specific installation:

Double sided Oil on Board, 240 x 250 cm; Faux Fur Traditional Teddy Bear, 56 cm (h); Printed Helium Balloons



Not Me It's You | 2016 | Oil on Board | 250 x 240 cm



All So Fucking African | 2016 | Oil on Board | 250 x 240 cm



Delroy | 2016 | Faux Fur Traditional Teddy Bear | 50cm (height of bear)

His work has been shown in various group exhibitions locally and abroad including: *T1 – The Pantagruel Syndrome* in 2005 during the Triennale Turin at Castello di Rivoli d'arte Contemporanea di Torino in Turin, Italy; *How Contemporary Video Artists See the USA (Part I)* at the Figge von Rossen Galerie in Cologne in 2006 and *The Art of Failure* at Kunsthau Baselland, Basel in 2007. In 2008, his work featured in *Hollywood Remix* at the Hayward Gallery in London and *Here Once Again: Where Art and Cinema Interact*, The Gallery Loop / Museum of Art, Seoul National University in South Korea. Young showed his video *It's Not Easy* at the Iziko South African National Gallery in Cape Town in the same year. He also exhibited in *Dada South?* and *1910 to 2010: From Pieterneef to Gugulective* exhibitions in 2009 and 2010 respectively at the Iziko South African National Gallery in Cape Town.

Young presented a solo installation at VOLTA9 in Basel in 2013, followed by a solo exhibition *ARCH* in Cape Town. He was awarded the *AiR Rote Fabrik* residency facilitated by Pro Helvetia in Zurich, Switzerland that same year. In 2014, his work was included in *Brave New World...20 Years of Democracy* at the Iziko South African National Gallery, *KULTURPALAST* in Berlin, Germany and *Analogue Eye – Video Art Africa* at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, South Africa and later in 2015 at the Wiener Festwochen in Vienna, Austria. Young also exhibited in *Towards Intersections: Negotiating Subjects, Objects and Contexts* at the UNISA (University of South Africa) Art Gallery in Pretoria and Museum Africa in Johannesburg, South Africa. In November 2015, Ed Young was a featured artist for SMAC Gallery's presentation at Artissima in Torino, Italy.

Ed Young presents *ALL SO FUCKING AFRICAN* (2016), a multifarious site-specific installation combining text and objects that elicit an initially comical absurdity, but lastingly sinister impression, while still articulating a far more contentious issue. Threaded throughout the work is a biting wit, which becomes all the more disarming when coupled with Young's cynical solemnity. The piece offers a multitude of layers with various double, even triple, *entendres* for the viewer to explore, while simultaneously critiquing the current automatic 'pimping' of extrinsic cultures for the benefit of appearing as all-inclusive or alternative.

The installation wields a popular and sub-culture based visual language, making it immediately accessible. This slew of innuendo and the undermining of perceived meaning, displays Young's manipulation of symbolism alongside the relativity of visual and linguistic understanding. Young's work implies a pseudo-ambiguity, yet offers audiences the opportunity for introspection, should they be willing to accept initial discomfort at the perturbing presentation.

Ed Young is not afraid to take risks. His seemingly flippant approach to contemporary art and culture, often projected via supposedly simple quips, aims to taunt. Through the frank and explicit nature of his work, Young aims to reveal many of society's paradoxes and indifferences. He is best known for his various irreverent and, at times deliberately, politically incorrect and provocative pieces. Refraining from using 'traditional' media, Young's practice remains challenging and varied. This may (or may not) include; found objects, text based works, video, performances, neon-lights, installations and sculpture – and sometimes painting.

Ed Young was born in 1978 Welkom, Free State and currently lives and works in Cape Town, South Africa. He holds a Masters Degree in Fine Art from the Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town. Since 2003, Young has presented solo exhibitions in Cape Town, Durban, Miami, Zurich and Basel. His latest video work, *Agnus Dei* (2015), was screened at SMAC Gallery in Cape Town.

ED YOUNG by Ed Young

by Lwandile Fikeni

The art world hates black people. It hates them as cultural producers, as subjects of art, and seems to only willingly engage with them as objects of consumption. This is, in essence, what Ed Young was alluding to with his text based piece *BLACK PUSSY*, which, fortunately or not, won't be shown at The Armory Show this year. The piece, intended to be part of the Special Projects for the Focus: African Perspectives section - or, what Ed Young seems to be criticising with *BLACK PUSSY*, as some kind of ghetto section - the Harlem of Baldwin's years, where well-off white men go to find black pussy, in the literal sense of the term. However, the piece was rejected by the curators for, one imagines, its vulgarity - a vulgarity meant to operate as a language with which to speak about the; "auto-exoticisation and the whoring of 'our blacks' in the art world". Ed's words, not mine.

Now, of course, as much as we don't wish to show *BLACK PUSSY* we must attend to matters of whitewashing and censorship. I, personally, could care less if Ed Young got his way and showed his *BLACK PUSSY* in his signature minimalist text at the entrance of the ghetto - I mean the 'Africa Section' at The Armory Show. Why should anyone care about this particular image when black artists have suffered more humiliation at the feet of a pompously, self-gazing and patronizing, 'white' art world? A world that has, throughout history, deliberately erased black artists and their contribution to form? Why should anyone really care about an art world which gleefully celebrates European Masters who misappropriated, or downright stole, African cultural aesthetics, imbued them into new forms of painting and then claimed them as their own? It is strange that this art world can speak of European Modernist movements of the mid-20th century without mentioning South African born Ernest Mancoba (1904 - 2002). "Why has he not been canonized?", one is forced to ask. The answer lies somewhere in this ghetto, where Ed Young's *BLACK PUSSY* ought to be found.

Of course, Young's work is always a performance for the liberal, middle-aged, white man. While derisive in content, it nonetheless speaks to the interior lives of polite society. In this case, while the censorship is absolutely anti-art, it is disingenuous of the curators to 'shield' The Armory Show visitors from what they consider as an object, naturally for their consumption. *BLACK PUSSY* as an object, one might add, is aligned precisely with their tastes and proclivities. The censorship of Ed Young's work is only but a glimpse into a system of privileging certain forms of expression, and of art, while negating others. Furthermore, I think *BLACK PUSSY* is a kind of anti-narrative about the African diaspora, and doesn't fit comfortably with what the First World wants to see, engage with, and ultimately, digest.

It is also notable that Ed Young doesn't attempt to subvert the white-male gaze in his work, but instead, makes it transparent and unpalatable. *ALL SO FUCKING AFRICAN* reads like a text gleaned directly from the prevalent attitudes of middle class, white suburbia who worship the likes of American painter Jackson Pollock. A reverence I do not, particularly, share.

In some way, such 'brash' texts reveal the deep prejudices held behind indifferent, pasty-white faces who will look at the work, nod, and move on without so much as a flinch. It is with this indifference that I find cause to have his work on exhibition. We've already established that Ed Young's work panders to white-male prejudices, but behind that performative veneer, there is a critical non-performative stance. There's a portion of truth that in the post- '*Black Lives Matter*' capitalist moment, of late, it is fashionable to embrace 'black' forms of expression. It is fashionable to be - to reference another of Ed Young's earlier pieces; *BLACK IN FIVE MINUTES*. In this way, white-guilt is assuaged in a singular superficial stroke of allegiance, as if historic vexations around racism and exclusion could be alleviated by the spectacle of an event. As if that ghetto to which black lives have been subjected to by the firm-fist of global, racist, white-supremacist and cis-hetero patriarchy, could be transformed by some 'art ghetto' in an international art show which is set up to further the visions and goals of the same system.



Black Pussy (Concept Piece)

It would be a joke if it were funny. I guess that is where one finds the poignancy of some of Ed Young's work, which reads like trailer-trash rhetoric. In fact, it speaks to the deeply-held, superiority complex of a confident, deliberately obtuse, 'white' art world, who chooses self-negation as opposed to reflexivity. It would, actually, be a triumph for the Focus: African Perspectives corner if *BLACK PUSSY* were to gobble-up all the media attention, simply because it is what that space is set up to achieve. It would be the equivalent of 'NGO' work in the art world, complete with a benevolent, white benefactor - wouldn't it? I'd sooner have Ed Young's offensive work put up there with the rest and let the world crucify him, than pretend that this art world and its history of violence toward black artists is a long forgotten phenomenon. When, in reality, this art world continues to create these 'ghettoes' for 'black' work.

Young had to change *BLACK PUSSY* to *NOT ME, IT'S YOU* - a subtle, yet jarring indictment of the establishment - that has propped-up his artistic career- for it's white and privileged identity. In the piece; *NOT ME, IT'S YOU* one finds an artist both bitter and cynical, lamenting the establishment's exploitation of the black artist, while himself mocking the very idea of 'the black conceptual artist'. Although the work obviously betrays Ed Young's own prejudices, in the execution it exposes those of his art world. In this way Young's work is self-referential, even when he says '*YOUR MOM*'.

Lwandile Fikeni is an essayist, art critic and award winning arts journalist.

smac

ED YOUNG

NOT ME IT'S YOU

2016

Oil on Canvas

140 x 140 cm

Edition of 3

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1st Floor, De Wet Centre

Church Street

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AFRICAN

ED YOUNG

DELROY

2016

Faux Fur Traditional Teddy Bear with Printed Latex Helium Balloons
50cm (height of bear), dimensions of string variable
Edition of 3 + 1 AP

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