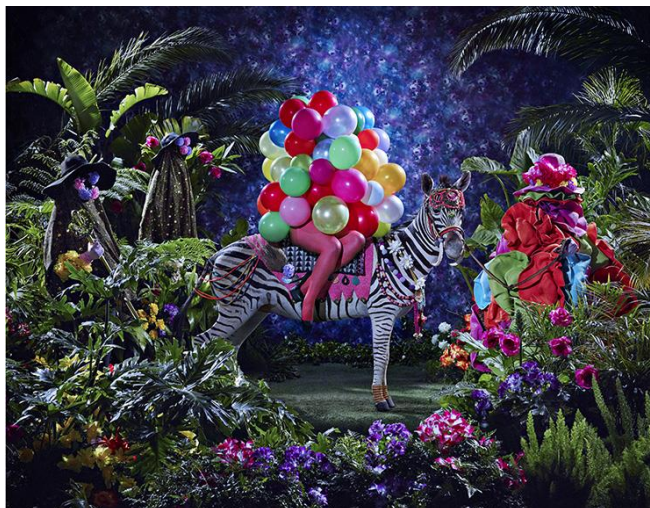


PRESS RELEASE

ATHI-PATRA RUGA: OF GODS, RAINBOWS AND OMISSIONS

4 October 2018 – 6 January 2019



**PART OF THE CHARLES RUSSELL SPEECHLYS TERRACE ROOM SERIES
TERRACE ROOMS, SOMERSET HOUSE, LONDON**

FREE

This October, Somerset House and 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair are proud to present **new and rarely seen works** from internationally renowned **South African artist Athi-Patra Ruga**. In his **first major solo UK exhibition**, Ruga reveals a mythical world which challenges perceptions of cultural identity, and parodies the construction of the South African nation state, in the post-apartheid era. The exhibition continues beyond 1-54 as a standalone show throughout Somerset House's winter season.

For the first time, Ruga brings together three seminal bodies of work – *The Future White Women of Azania* (2012-15), *Queens in Exile* (2015-17), and *The Beatification of Feral Benga* (2017-present) – immersing visitors in his vibrant world filled with powerful and striking characters.

Through the exhibition, Ruga creates an allegorical vision of utopia to explore the post-apartheid political, cultural and social systems of South Africa, forming a critique of Desmond Tutu's declaration of South Africa as a 'Rainbow Nation'. Showcasing his diverse practice that spans film, photography, sculpture and beautiful hand-crafted petit point tapestry, Ruga creates a counter narrative for those who have been forgotten or marginalised from South Africa's national imagination.

Born in Umtata, South Africa, and now based in Cape Town, Ruga is the figurehead for a new generation of South African artists, using myth and alternate realities as a contemporary response to the post-apartheid era. Throughout his career, Ruga has adopted avatars and created characters through whom he addresses ideologies, social and state structures, and the politics of gender

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inequality. By adopting these characters, Ruga has been empowered to confront the complex truths of his nation's colonial history, post-colonial present, and his own personal experiences as a queer Xhosa man.

Ruga's signature use of kaleidoscopic colour characterises his African utopia of Azania, as seen in the first body of work exhibited, *The Future White Women of Azania*. Addressing the place of queerness in society, the characters that inhabit this world are in a state of transformation, seen most strikingly in the figure of the Future White Woman whose cocoon of multi-coloured balloons challenges concepts of race and identity.

In *Queens in Exile*, Ruga further explores this land where the once-exiled now reign, their fate beautifully stitched into his large-scale tapestry canvases, and depicted in *Over the Rainbow*, a short film piece which will be screened in the exhibition.

New works in *Of Gods, Rainbows and Omissions* will feature from Ruga's ongoing project, *The Beatification of Feral Benga*, a tribute to the Senegalese dancer as a queer icon. To illustrate Ruga's embodied knowledge of the subject, the series will debut an ornate sculpture, created using 3D scans of his own body memorialised in appliqué, artificial flowers and jewels.

A number of public events will accompany the exhibition including a FORUM talk with Ruga curated by writer and broadcaster **Ekow Eshun** as part of 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair. Ruga's **new monograph** will be published by Ruga's gallery, WHATIFTHEWORLD, to coincide with the opening of this exhibition and will be **exclusively available** from Somerset House for one month. Somerset House Shop, in partnership with 1-54, will also bring together a **bespoke collection** of products dedicated to contemporary art and culture from Africa and its diaspora, on sale throughout the fair and Ruga's exhibition.

Of Gods, Rainbows and Omissions will be the next exhibition in the Charles Russell Speechlys Terrace Room Series, an ongoing partnership with the leading law firm to present a wide range of free exhibitions reflecting the broad interests of both organisations.

FOR PRESS ENQUIRIES, PLEASE CONTACT:

press@somersethouse.org.uk/0207 845 4624

ADDITIONAL LISTINGS INFORMATION

Address: Somerset House, Strand, London, WC2R 1LA

Transport: Underground: Temple, Embankment / Rail: Charing Cross, Waterloo, Blackfriars

Website: www.somersethouse.org.uk

Somerset House Facebook:

www.facebook.com/SomersetHouse

Somerset House Twitter: @SomersetHouse

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Athi-Patra Ruga also features in *Africa State of Mind* at New Art Exchange, Nottingham (29 September – 16 December 2018), a ground breaking group exhibition presenting new visions in contemporary African photography, curated by Ekow Eshun. It includes work by Emmanuelle Andrianjatfy, Sammy Baloji, Raphaël Barontini, Neil Beloufa, Girma Berta, Eric Gyamfi, Kiluanji Kia Henda, Lebohang Kganye, Namsa Leuba, Michael MacGarry, Sabelo Mlangeni, Mimi Cherono Ng'ok, Musa N Nxumalo, Ruth Ossai, Athi Patra Ruga and Michael Tsegaye. www.nae.org.uk

ABOUT SOMERSET HOUSE

Inspiring contemporary culture

One of the city's most spectacular and well-loved spaces, Somerset House is a new kind of arts centre in the heart of London, designed for today's audiences, artists and creatives – an inspirational community where contemporary culture is imagined, created and experienced.

From its 18th Century origins, Somerset House has played a central role in our society as a place where our culture and collective understanding of the world is shaped and defined. In 2000, it began its reinvention as a cultural powerhouse and home for arts and culture today, creating unique and stimulating experiences for the public, bringing them into direct contact with ideas from the greatest artists, makers and thinkers of our time. Our distinctive and dynamic year-round programme spans the contemporary arts in all its forms, from cutting-edge exhibitions and installations to annual festivals, seasonal events in the courtyard including Film4 Summer Screen, Summer Series and Skate, and an extensive learning and engagement programme.

As well as welcoming over 3million visitors annually, Somerset House houses the largest and most diverse creative communities in the country – from one-person start-ups to successful creative enterprises including MOBO, British Fashion Council, Dance Umbrella, Improbable Theatre, Hofesh Schecter Company, and Dartmouth Films.

In 2016 we launched Somerset House Studios – a new experimental workspace connecting artists, makers and thinkers with audiences. Currently housing over 80 artists and Makerversity (a community of over 250 emergent makers), the Studios are a platform for the development of new creative projects and collaboration, promoting work that pushes bold ideas, engages with urgent issues and pioneers new technologies. www.somersethouse.org.uk

ABOUT 1-54 CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN ART FAIR

With annual editions in London, New York and Marrakech, 1-54 is the leading international art fair dedicated to contemporary art from Africa and its diaspora. Drawing reference to the fifty-four countries that constitute the African continent, 1-54 is a sustainable and dynamic platform that is engaged in contemporary dialogue and exchange.

Initiated by Touria El Glaoui in 2013, October 2018 will mark its sixth consecutive edition at Somerset House, London, having returned from its fourth New York edition in May 2018. The fair was launched in Marrakech, Morocco in February 2018. Further information available at www.1-54.com

ABOUT CHARLES RUSSELL SPEECHLYS

Charles Russell Speechlys works with clients in the UK and throughout the world. Our lawyers are based in 11 locations across the UK, Europe, Asia and the Middle East and through each of these locations clients are able to access the full range of the firm's skills and expertise

We have a broad range of skills and experience across the full spectrum of business and personal needs. This gives us a wider perspective, clear insight and a strongly commercial long-term view.

It has made us a leader in the world of dynamic growth and family businesses, and among the world's leading creators and owners of private wealth and their families. Major corporates and institutions find our more considered and personal approach a refreshing alternative to conventional business law firms.