

# BEN BROWN FINE ARTS



Portrait of Awol Erizku. © Mark Wrice. Courtesy the artist.

## **Awol Erizku**

### **Make America Great Again**

**20 April – 2 June 2017**

**Private view: 20 April, 6-8pm**

Ben Brown Fine Arts is delighted to present *Make America Great Again*, the first solo exhibition by LA-based artist Awol Erizku in Europe. *Make America Great Again* marks a departure from Erizku's photographic work, bringing together new sculptures and paintings as well as a 'conceptual mix-tape' produced specifically for the exhibition.

Taking key political symbols and historical iconography whilst sampling from the urban fabric of his surroundings, Erizku combines 'high-art' references, such as the notion of the 'ready-made', with popular culture.

Central to the exhibition is *HOW THAT MAKE YOU FEEL?* (2017), a silkscreened American flag with a black panther printed heavily across the stars and stripes. Requiring no translation, the work stems directly from what the artist describes as the current 'political turmoil' and the atmosphere of 'racism and bigotry' that he feels has aggressively resurfaced in the US.

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Through a combination of assemblage and sound, Erizku re-appropriates what can at first appear as mundane. Writing or symbols painted illicitly on a wall in the street become emblems of a political struggle in works such as *Wave Brake* (2017) and *Wish the Worst* (2017). Street slang is translated directly onto plywood or corrugated metal in order to preserve the immediacy of such a form of expression. Spray-painted '12' numbers, slang for the police, become frighteningly potent when repeated over and over, themselves forming an inescapable part of the environment.

Throughout *Make America Great Again*, Erizku plays with the sense of creation and destruction and assimilates a diverse range of forms and colours. Blocks of heavy colour on corrugated metal evoke the endless cycle of street artists layering paint over myriad images hidden underneath, in the piece *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (2017), Nefertiti's plaster bust recalls a lost ancient civilisation repurposed for the current era, in the work *Tunnel Vision* (2017), a once pristine white picket fence - now a charged political symbol - becomes a metaphor for brutal division as red paint appears to bleed across it.

Adopting the political slogan that originated with the Ronald Reagan presidential campaign of 1980 but is more recently associated with the current US president's 2016 campaign, the exhibition 'Make America Great Again', offers a commentary on ideas of politics and power as well as identity and belonging.

## About the artist

Awol Erizku was born in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and grew up in New York's south Bronx. He graduated from Cooper Union, New York, with a BFA in 2010 and received an MFA from Yale's Visual Arts programme in 2014. Erizku then worked under photographers David LaChapelle, Lorna Simpson, Margaret Morton, and Christine Osinski. In 2015, in collaboration with MoMA PopRally, Erizku's work was the focus of an event held at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. His work is included in numerous international collections including The FLAG Art Foundation in New York.

## Ben Brown Fine Arts

Ben Brown Fine Arts opened its first location on Cork Street in the heart of Mayfair, London, in 2004. The gallery has prominently positioned itself on the contemporary art scene with the sole UK representation of artists such as Ron Arad, Tony Bevan, Ori Gersht, Candida Höfer, Claude & François-Xavier Lalanne, Heinz Mack, Vik Muniz, Gavin Turk and Not Vital. Also renowned for its strong expertise in 20th century Italian art, the gallery has been exhibiting the work of Alighiero Boetti and Lucio Fontana, amongst others, since its inception. In 2008, Ben Brown Fine Arts opened a new exhibition space on Brook's Mews, also in Mayfair, designed by architect Alexander Maybank. The office and viewing room are conveniently located across from the gallery space. In 2009, the gallery took its first step in an international expansion with the opening of an exhibition space in Hong Kong designed by André Fu.

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