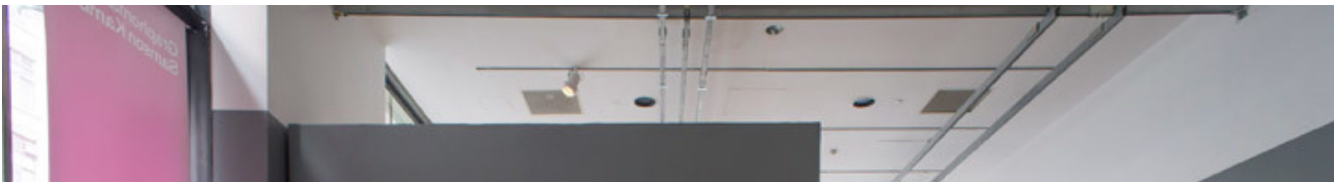


# *BOMB*

## Serious Play: Samson Kambalu's *Graphomania* by Louis Bury

*Films as fast as an eye blink.*



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Honoring GEORGE CONDO, JAMES  
KEITH BROWN & ERIC G.

DIEFENBACH, and ANN TEMKIN. April  
30 at Capitale, New York City.

The title of London-based Malawian artist Samson Kambalu's first New York City exhibition, *Graphomania*, is something of a red herring. The beautifully curated show consists of nine short films, each "no longer than a minute," projected onto the smoke-gray walls of the CUNY Graduate Center's James Gallery. In the entryway, visitors encounter a table containing a bright rainbow of chalk pieces, which they are encouraged to use on the gallery walls; nearby is *Drawing in the 18th Century*, 2017, which depicts Kambalu rubbing by hand a large sheet of blank white paper on an architectural drafting table. The exhibition title, the offered chalk, and this opening film all seem to



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visitors to “exercise and exorcise” with them, Kambalu has a knack for making work that looks like it’s doing one thing when it’s actually doing something else. His recent oeuvre of very short films, which he calls “Nyau Cinema” after Malawian masking practices, achieves such effects through a series of self-imposed rules—“Audio must be used sparingly”; “Costume must be from everyday life”—that recall the enumerated Dogme 95 manifesto of Danish filmmakers Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg. But where the Dogme “vow of chastity” pursued an austere vérité aesthetic, even if the actual films sometimes broke the rules, Kambalu’s prankish sensibility is evident in the way he numbers his “Nyau Cinema Rules” from one to ten but purposefully omits number four.

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Samson Kambalu, *Fast Talker*, 2017. Digital film still. Image courtesy of the James Gallery, The Graduate Center, CUNY.

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that comprise the “crucifix” —one planted vertical in the ground, the other held horizontal in Kambalu’s hands—are not attached to one another or to Kambalu. This allows him to begin the film in a squatting position, back facing the camera and post resting on his shoulders, as he slowly rises to stand with his arms and the post at full stretch overhead. This squat-to-stand movement sequence evokes nothing so much as a weightlifter’s press, an incongruous, if also unexpectedly apposite, association in a film about crucifixion.

Because each film passes rapid as an eye blink—some are only fifteen seconds long—it can be easy to overlook such subtleties. For example, the sped-up frame rate of *Fast Talker*, 2017—in which

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*Cross a Photograph, 2016*—test how elongated a brief time interval can appear.

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face incongruities of his Biblical soccer balls. But unlike some other artworks with a prankish spirit, such as Erwin Wurm's sadistic one-minute sculptures, Kambalu's Nyau films are more than mere highbrow gags. The audience, encouraged to respond, feels in on the joke rather than the butt of it.

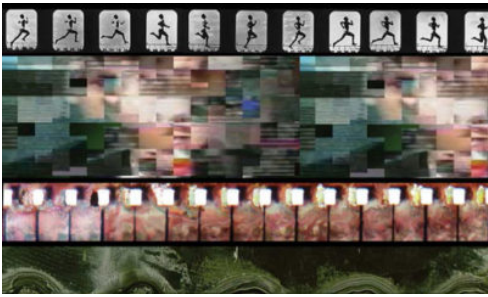
*Samson Kambalu's Graphomania is on view at the James Gallery, The Graduate Center, CUNY, in New York until January 13, 2018.*

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