

MARTOS GALLERY

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS



Arnold J. Kemp, *LET HIS BODY BECOME A LIVING LETTER*, 2013, handmade leather shoes, seashells, welded steel, 7 1/2 x 20 x 20".

PORTLAND

Arnold J. Kemp

PDX CONTEMPORARY ART

925 NW Flanders Street

January 22–March 2, 2013

Portland, Oregon–based artist Arnold J. Kemp's newest body of sculptures, photographs, and works on paper weave a poignant story of belonging and loss. The title of the exhibition, "WHEN WILL MY LOVE BE RIGHT," is taken from a 1980s soul number by Robert Winters and Fall. It connects Kemp's poetics of desire and vulnerability to larger social and political concerns, while illuminating the coming-of-age story (perhaps also a coming-out story) that lingers, sweetly, within the work.

At the center of Kemp's project are four sculptures containing meticulously crafted wearable objects: a group of handmade belts with cast brass buckles bearing the word SHY, and two exquisite pairs of men's shoes—one formal, one casual. Kemp made the shoes himself. The work *LET HIS BODY BECOME A LIVING LETTER*, 2013, features lustrous black oxfords sitting alongside a pair of exotic seashells. Both objects possess aesthetic beauty far in excess of their practical function to provide shelter and mobility for two different species whose bodies are absent. Quietly, Kemp's alliterative nature morte draws our attention to the relationship between nature and culture, and nature and nurture. The belt pieces elicit similar musings: What does it mean to wear one's shyness on one's waist, so to speak?

Like an ocean crashing softly in a shell, Kemp's work whispers its politics. The artist's portrayal of black male subjectivity is playful, tender, and artisanal. Once during the run of the show, Kemp, who is a poet as well as an author, will perform a play composed of found and original material, giving human voice to the work's symbolic chorus.

— Stephanie Synder