

THE ART  
MOMENTUM

ART X  
LAGOS



Alexis Peskine  
Skoto Aghahowa  
Lulama 'Wolf' Mlambo  
Mous Lamrabat  
Adéqlá Olágúnjú  
David Alabo  
The Critics  
Niyi Okeowo  
MDD  
Idris Veitch  
Youssef El Idrissi  
Nyahan Tachie-Menson  
Linda Dounia Rebeiz  
Aye! and The Village Sound System  
Rendani Nemakhavhani AKA PR\$DNT HONEY  
Abdulrahman Adesola Yusuf AKA Arclight  
Moonsundiamond  
Samallie Kiyangi

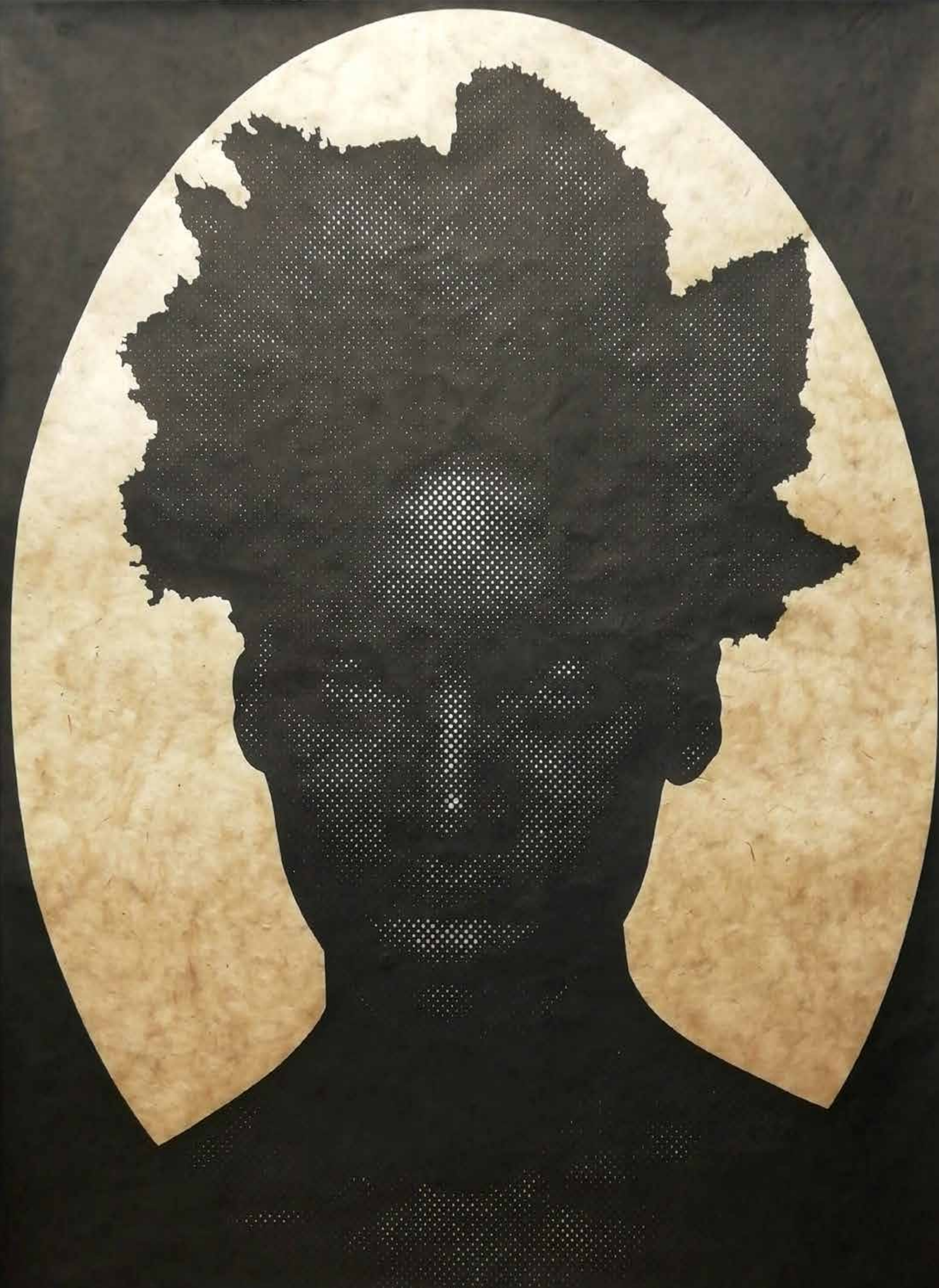
→ PR\$DNT HONEY (RENDANI NEMAKHAVHANI), OSU, 2020 | A1 STAMP POSTER | DIGITAL ARTWORK



# ALEXIS PESKINE COLLECTIVE AMBITION

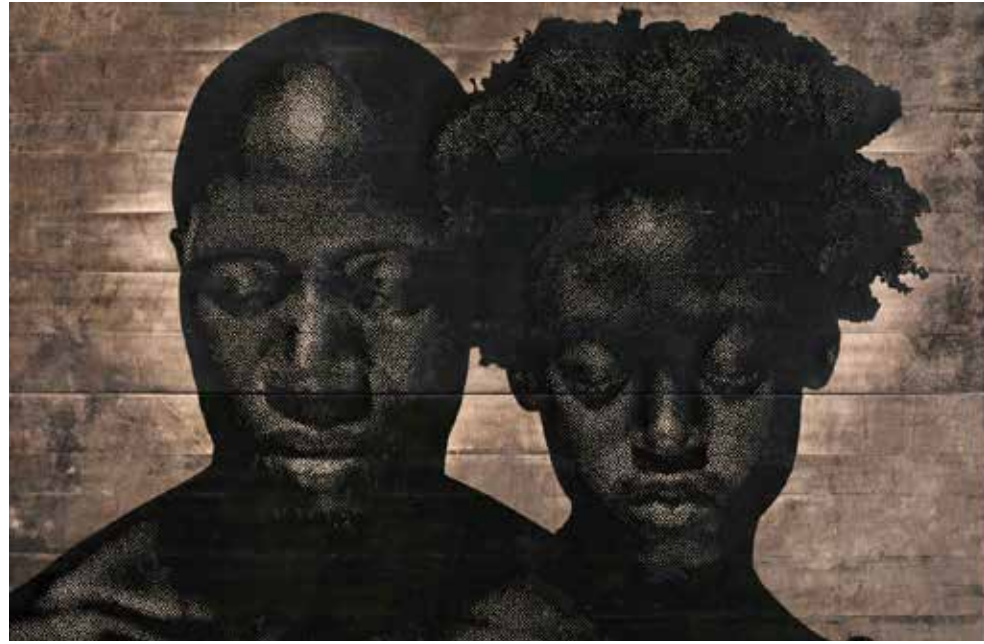
FAY JANET JACKSON

Building on his own heritage and personal experiences, Alexis Peskine's relief and multimedia work addresses the complexity of themes impacting people from Africa and its diasporas. His signature artworks, large-scale mixed media 'portraits' known as 'Power Figures' and 'Fire Figures', are rendered by hammering nails of different sizes into treated wooden planks, materials reminiscent of those handled by multiple generations throughout his family history. In this conversation with 'The Art Momentum', Alexis reflects on what it means to be a humanist, the collective ambition that the figures in his work represent, and the inherent superpowers present in the ways he expresses his distinctive visual language.





← PAGE BEFORE: ALEXIS PESKINE, MWASI LIKOLÔ, 2019 | COFFEE INFUSED INK, SCREEN PRINTED ON HANDMADE KHADI BHUTANESE TSASHO PAPER (100 GSM) WITH GOLD LEAF, 70 X 51 CM | EDITION OF 25



→ ALEXIS PESKINE, POWER, 2017 | MOON GOLD LEAF ON NAILS, EARTH, COFFEE, WATER AND ACRYLIC ON WOOD, 195 X 250 CM | COPYRIGHT THE ARTIST. COURTESY OCTOBER GALLERY, LONDON

"My ambition is collective. It's for us as Black people to rise up. It's for us to get justice. It's for us to prosper. It's for us to have abundance."



→ ALEXIS PESKINE, POWER FIGURES, 2017 | INSTALLATION VIEW | COURTESY OCTOBER GALLERY, LONDON

# COLLECTIVE / AMBITION

A CONVERSATION WITH ALEXIS PESKINE

As what one would call a global citizen — the idea that one's identity transcends geography or political borders and that responsibilities or rights are derived from our common humanity — what role has your heritage, upbringing, and subsequent travels played in your work?

My upbringing brought me values. There are two things with values; there is your character, who you are, then it's mixed with your family values, what your family brings you. I would say I'm a humanist. I like the term humanist because it talks about positive human traits. I don't know that being human is necessarily the most positive thing if you look at the planet and what we're doing to it and to other species but, from what I understand about being a humanist, it's wanting justice for all and being on the side of the oppressed. No matter what background or culture you are from, the idea is to be on the side of the oppressed and to study the situation and listen.

The fact is that I'm watching the world with many eyes, not only from traveling, but living in different places. When you live in a place and when you grow up in a place, you also have values from that place but you don't realise it because, in your mind, the whole world thinks that way. Living in different places actually shows you that and humbles you in that respect. You realise people think differently depending on the place that they're in or that they evolved in. That brings you perspective, and I think it's very important.

How do you believe your work responds to current events at a time when awareness about police violence and racial inequalities in the justice system is heightened? Does it form an extension of the ways in which you advocate for the oppressed?

These events are not new. These events, to me, are frustrations because they have influenced my life since I was a kid growing up in France, even being harassed by police myself. These events are not new and that frustration is not new. I have been talking about it for as long as I could express myself.

It affected my life. It affected people around me. It affected how I thought of myself, how I thought of the police, how I thought of our society, how I think of my country. It naturally came up in my art. When I did my solo show at the MoCADA in Brooklyn, *The French Evolution: Race, Politics, and the 2005 Riots* (2007), which was curated by Kim Gant, it talked about racial dynamics in France and created a bridge between what happens in the States and in France, because not that many people knew about what was going on in my country. I wanted to put a light on that, to create a bridge and see, on a Pan-African level, how we could have a bigger voice.

I've been talking about racial injustice my whole life. The difference during the lockdowns was the fact that we were forced to watch not just George Floyd's murder, but also the death of Ahmaud Arbery at the hands of white men and countless others who were beaten or abused by police, simply because they were Black. We saw the way the police treated white people picnicking, distributing masks to them while beating Black people who were just getting air on their porches in their own communities. The double standards were crystal clear.

It really affected our mental health. The images are not even the most violent part. The violence is in the lies behind it, the system that lets off the police officers who commit these racially motivated injustices, or the comments that you hear in society — especially in France, in the French media. People try to minimise our experiences, try to trivialise or criminalise the people who are victims of police violence. It's constant. Théo Luhaka was beaten and raped by the police and the newspapers and "responsible" media are still asking questions about him and his family, trying to find illicit things on him, trying to show that maybe there is a link. There's no link. The police do this to us all the time.

In *Power Figures*, I wanted to show our transcendence. It was more still, more calm, showing our greatness throughout all the adversity, while *Fire Figures* demonstrated the fury I feel within. You have to exteriorise the violence. I'm striking back in my work. Either you punch back or you get even more calm, and you observe, and you're still, and you get deep and intellectual. There are many ways to react to the violence. Lately, I have felt like going violent in my expression. Why are you trying to be intellectual and not shock people? When, really, what you have seen is shocking.

Who are the figures in your portraits? Are they known to you, do they play significant roles in your life?

Whether it's me or other sitters whose spirits and physical traits I have borrowed to create the *Power* and *Fire Figures*, I believe we are only vectors of a bigger, more powerful expression that I don't even grasp or understand fully yet. As artists, we are also vectors of this broader expression, of something that is often spiritual, universal, or divinely inspired. The people who are in the work, it's not them. It's their spirit. It's the collective. My ambition is collective. It's for us as Black people to rise up. It's for us to get justice. It's for us to prosper. It's for us to have abundance.

They are not actually portraits because a portrait is a depiction of someone with that person's life story. They are not about the sitters. This is bigger than them. It's bigger than me. Some of them I know. Some of them I came across on social media and asked them if they would sit for my work. Some of them are friends. What's important is that they are not portraits of these people. They're for us, for Black people in general. What's important is that they come from all across the world. They're Black people of many different backgrounds because we're not a monolithic group.

You have people who are Afro-Brazilians, you have people who are Afropeans of Senegalese origin, you have Senegalese people, you have people who are Xhosa, you have people from the Caribbean. The only thing that I keep from them is their language, their maternal and paternal languages. I translate the title in their language. It's what I honour from their identity.

Can you tell us more about your multimedia, photography, and video work and how it expands on your distinctive visual language?

Ever since I was in college, I wanted to have my own visual language. I wanted to have a style that defined me, how I viewed things. That would be my language, my idiom, and I would be recognised for it. I played with different materials and got to the *Power Figures* and the *Fire Figures* with the nails, but even those images came from photography.

I minored in photography and I majored in painting at Howard University. Before painting, I did fashion merchandising, because that was also something that interested me, and all of this informs what I do. I might use paint, but it's not painterly. I had to learn how to paint flat and how to do pochoir and stencils. I always liked a graphic style of work. I liked bold, simple, poetic imagery. When I discovered print-making, I was heavily influenced by silkscreen pointillist techniques in which equally spaced dots of various sizes create an illusion of detailed images with tonal variations. I replaced those dots with nails in my *Power Figures* series, transforming the flat, detailed image into a photorealistic relief work made from raw and natural elements, including nails, gold leaf, wood, coffee, earth, and hibiscus, among others.



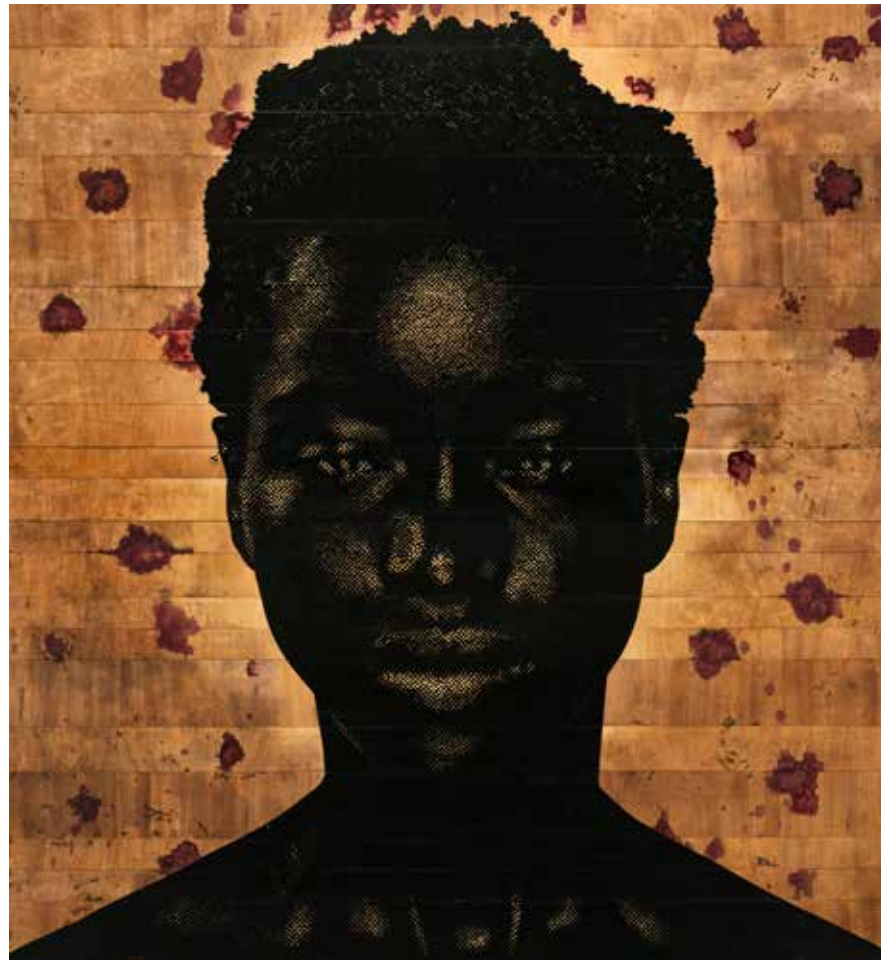
I spoke about originality and having my own language but, with photography, it's different. Every photographer takes photos. How do you create your own language? What differentiates you? You have an expression and you have things that you want to express. For me, it's the Black experience. How do I express my metaphors through photography?

What makes my work my own is the fashion in it or the metaphors I create using material and the clothes that people are wearing in my work. It's a recurring theme. For instance, in *Aljana Moons* (2015), I used the Dieg Bou Diar tomato cans that the Talibé children in Senegal beg with and the rice bags to make their clothes. In *Raft of Medusa* (2016), I used the little Eiffel Tower curios that the Senegalese Bana Bana<sup>1</sup> sell and made a crown of thorns with them. The Boubou attire of the main character and the sail of the raft are also made from recycled market bags. Basically, I create metaphors with objects and by incorporating those objects in clothing. That is how my visual language is expressed through the stillness of photography.

"There's this thing with metal and with wood and with being artists and artisans that runs in my family. That is the heritage of what I've received."



→ ALEXIS PESKINE IN HIS STUDIO, PARIS, 2020 | PHOTOGRAPH: SIMON GABOURG



→ ALEXIS PESKINE, SEQUITA, 2020 | RED GOLD LEAF, NAILS, HAVANA OCHRE, COFFEE, EARTH AND HIBISCUS ON LUMBER CORE WOOD, 220 X 198 CM | COURTESY THE ARTIST AND OCTOBER GALLERY, LONDON

How does your choice of materials inform your investigation of identity? Your grandfather was a carpenter — did this influence your selection of wood and nails as your primary medium?

I think, subconsciously, I realised that later. After doing it, I realised my great-grandmother on my father's side had a hardware store in Lithuania. Then, my grandfather on my mother's side was a carpenter. My grandmother on my mother's side was a seamstress. My grandfather on my father's side was an engineer, but he also did film and photography and worked with metal. There's this thing with metal and with wood and with being artists and artisans that runs in my family. That is the heritage of what I've received.

Film, photography, those are things that interested me and perhaps that I saw around me. Music is also a big aspect of my family's heritage on both sides. Both of my younger brothers, Adrien "Gystere" Peskine and Anthony Peskine, are musicians and visual artists who do video and photography. My father had a camcorder to film family things, and he would let us use it. I remember especially my brother, Adrien — it's funny because that's what he does now — the way he would do animations, cartoons, and stop motion using the camera when we were kids.

I would say that is the gene that was passed down to me and the heritage of what my people did. You have to use that power, that superpower that you got or not. A lot of us got these superpowers and we either use them or we don't.

<sup>1</sup> In Wolof, a language native to Senegal, "Bana Bana" means "business man" and describes modern African entrepreneurs.

→ @alexispeskine



→ ALEXIS PESKINE, RAFT OF MEDUSA - BANA BANALISES 1, 2018 | ARCHIVAL PIGMENT PRINT ON PHOTO RAG 308GSM PAPER ON DIBOND, 120 X 80 CM | COURTESY THE ARTIST AND OCTOBER GALLERY, LONDON



# SKOTO GALLERY

## THE DYNAMICS OF SUCCESS

CÉLINE SEROR

Born in Ahoada, River State, Nigeria, Skoto Aghahowa is the founder of New York-based Skoto Gallery. Since 1992, he and his wife, Alix du Serech, have been working consistently to promote the work of artists from Africa, while also opening their space to artists from other cultural backgrounds. During this Zoom conversation, conducted between New York and Amsterdam, Skoto speaks about key moments in the gallery's history, offers his perspective on what it takes for a gallery to survive in the New York art scene for nearly 30 years, and speaks about their upcoming inaugural participation in ART X Lagos.



→ GEORGE AFEDZI HUGHES, BONES AND MUSCLES, 2017 | ACRYLICS, OILS ON CANVAS, 178 X 122 CM | COURTESY SKOTO GALLERY



# THE DYNAMICS / OF SUCCESS

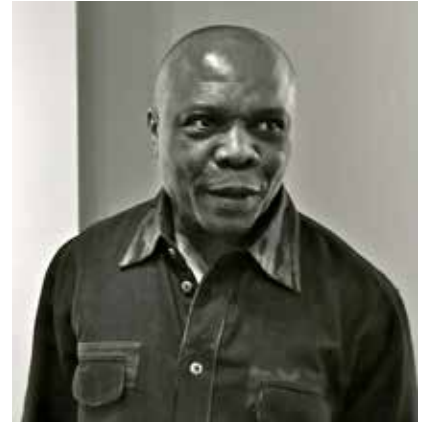
A CONVERSATION WITH SKOTO AGHAHOWA



→ AFI NAYO, MARIE, 2016 | MIXED MEDIA ON BOARD, 30X30CM | COURTESY SKOTO GALLERY

SKOTO AGHAHOWA |

PHOTOGRAPH: CARL HAZLEWOOD →



As one of the first galleries showing contemporary art from Africa in New York, can you tell us about the representation of African art in the city in 1990's and how it has evolved since?

I was interested in African art prior to launching the gallery. In 1990-91, I was in Paris, which was the best time for witnessing the rise of what you might call the contemporary African art scene. Nicole Guez AKA Madame Nicole had been putting together a guide, *l'Art Africain Contemporain*, a book that referenced artists, exhibition spaces, and art professionals from Africa. This was all before the internet. It was a very useful guide in which you could look at each artist and which country they came from.

That period in Paris was just the beginning. There was a lot going on before anything happening in the States. *Revue Noire*, a quarterly magazine dedicated to African contemporary art was first published during that time, there were a few galleries and alternative spaces showing works by mostly Francophone and North African artists, which further broadened my understanding of a larger contemporary African art scene.

Figures like Nicole or George Rodrigue were making things happen. Nicole with her guide and George with dinners, poetry, and conversations to which he would invite artists and writers from Angola, Mozambique, Senegal, and Cameroon, as well as people from different walks of life. They were creating very interesting dynamics, much different than in the US, although the questions asked were the same when people heard about contemporary African art; "Where do they get materials from? Where do they get canvas?" It was very hard for people to get their heads around it. Coming back to New York, when we decided to open the gallery in 1992, I was used to those kinds of questions.

I think the most frustrating thing back then was that those kinds of questions ended up taking away from people actually engaging with the art. They'd come in and ask all kinds of trivial questions that were totally unrelated to the art on display and, by the time they finished, they'd say: "I went to Ghana two years ago. My husband loved it." That's not what I'm about.

Those were some of the issues, but it's interesting though, because even someone like El Anatsui, when we were showing him back then in the 1990s, it was like, "How do you pronounce his name?" Then, all of a sudden, years later, when El Anatsui's work became valuable, then everybody knew how to pronounce his name. You start realising that it's actually the value of the work that matters to most of them. In other words, if you are going to spend \$500,000 to buy a piece, you'd better know the name of the artist or the joke is on you.

In the end, it's just self-interest. That's really the underlying principle in terms of how people understand what art is. We actually ended up going around those issues with various strategies. Our first show was curated by Ornette Coleman. Ornette is a highly regarded avant-garde jazz musician with a strong following. Right away, that made it clear to people that this gallery has set a high standard for itself. This was how we wanted the public to look at the kind of art that we presented.

We could say that you started with an empty canvas — almost to the point that you had to educate people during this very first period of showing African art in New York?

Exactly and, beyond that, we literally had to invent our audience because there was no audience to start with. For our first show, we wanted to send out invites for the reception and then realised that we did not have a mailing list. How do you get a mailing list? Most of the people we knew were artists, but that's not really what we were looking for. You are looking for support, people that will actually collect art, people that will come in and seriously engage with the work, art critics. We went to Artists' Space, a non-profit organisation in SoHo, and bought a mailing list from them before we were able to send out about 1,000 mails.

Of course, about 70 percent of those mails were returned to us within a week. It was

then that we realised that you have to build your own audience. There's no easy way around it, and part of building that audience depends on the quality of the shows you put together, especially in New York. There are so many galleries here. If you are not doing something interesting and original, it just doesn't make sense. At the same time, because of the quality of what we were showing, eventually, some critics took note.

Critics at the *New York Times* for example. In order to do that, we had to present shows that would attract a broad range of audiences. Sometimes, we did two-person shows, bringing an American artist and an African artist together. The first show we did was with Tom Otterness. He is a New York artist who has done public sculptures around the city. We proposed that he show his work with Bright Bimpong, an artist from Ghana. After that, we approached Sol LeWitt, the American minimalist conceptual artist, and showed his work with El Anatsui's. At that time, nobody knew who El Anatsui was, but we put those two shows together, well-curated, and drew the attention of the *New York Times* and *Art in America*.

We also did several historic shows that focused on earlier generations of African artists, such as Uche Okeke and Ibrahim El Salahi. Too many times, when you ask people who the contemporary African artists are, the most they can tell you is Yinka Shonibare or Chris Ofili. These shows make people realise that contemporary African art has historical roots.

Contemporary African art is what the gallery is known for but, at the same time, when you're in New York, you invariably have to engage with artists of the African diaspora. There is Africa in the Caribbean, Brazil, and the Americas. Over a period of time, if you follow the exhibition program of the gallery, you see that there's a clear line that runs through the aesthetics and the art that we present.

Let's talk about art fairs. How do you position your work and the gallery in this commercial context?

I'm very leery of what I see art fairs doing in the US and in Europe. They do not really suit the kind of programming that we do at the gallery, and oftentimes there is a lack of a discursive framework to engage with aspects of contemporary art that are not readily marketable.

However, art fairs have greatly expanded the audience for contemporary art in recent years. One hopes that museums and cultural institutions will build on this by strengthening their programs to incorporate ground-breaking exhibitions that aim to counter some of the challenges faced by non-Western artists from the diasporas.

What triggered your first-time participation in ART X Lagos this year?

I like what they are doing in terms of situating a fair right there in Lagos, in Africa. I thought it made sense to participate in it. It's a matter of giving support and seeing what comes of it. I like the spirit of the idea and wish them great success.

What artists and works will you be presenting at the fair?

We are showing five artists. One of them is Wosene Worke Kosrof from Ethiopia. He is a painter. He mainly paints abstract, inventively using the Amharic script, fidel, as a core element in his composition. The second artist is George Afedzi Hughes, also a painter. He teaches at the State University of New York (SUNY), in Buffalo, New York. He is originally from Ghana. We're also showing work by Afi Nayo from Togo. Very small tableaux, very intense. She uses pyrogravure on board. Her work explores themes of spirituality, cultural syncretism, and humanity's interconnectedness with nature. She lives in Paris and spends time in Lomé.

We are also showing the work of Uche Okeke, the influential Nigerian modernist. Five of his drawings were recently acquired by the Museum of Modern Art in New York



from the gallery when we did his solo show in 2015. Lastly, we are showing portraits by Aimé Mpane from the DR Congo.

What impact do you think an art event like ART X has on the local art scene?

Lagos is a very exciting city, a lot of artists with high energy. I think events like this help us to contextualise the very strong role that cities like Lagos, Dakar, Kinshasa, Nairobi, Cairo, and Johannesburg play in the development of the creative arts in Africa. These are key cities in terms of contemporary African art. Much like the Dakar Biennale in Senegal, ART X is definitely one of the events that one needs in order to build on an increasing global awareness of contemporary African art.

Skoto Gallery will be 30 years old in 2022 — what are the first thoughts that come to your mind, looking back? How will you celebrate this amazing achievement?

This is quite interesting. The thing with time is that it just keeps going on, and there is nothing you can do about it. With a gallery like this, you are more concerned with putting up a show, and then putting up another show. Typically, in a year, we do about six or seven shows. For our 30th anniversary, which is in February next year, we are going to do a solo show by Nigerian sculptor, Olu Amoda. He was a co-winner of the 2014 Grand Prix Léopold Sédar Senghor Prize at the 11th edition of the Dak'Art Biennial. He still deserves wider recognition.

Between then and now, 2021, would you say that there is a different interest from the public for artists from Africa?

The thing with New York is that it's New York. It is the proverbial belly of the beast with regards to capitalism. Increasingly, there is an investment component to the decision to buy art in the West. Does this work have value? If I buy it now, ten years from now, when my kids are ready to go to college, can I sell it? I think the good thing is that a lot of galleries are looking for artists of colour, mostly African American artists and a growing number of artists from the African diaspora. Now, everybody wants to have Black artists in their collection. Curatorial positions are opening up for curators of colour as well.

It's a very positive time, but we always need to go back to the quality of the work. That's a tough challenge because, too many times, artists don't fully understand the fact that your work has to be strong and original. They're coming up with repetitive work that does not meet the expectations of a very sophisticated audience. 15, 20 years ago, there were certain types of work that could easily pass for contemporary African art, but now, people have seen a variety of work and they know what quality work looks like. There is competition, especially in New York. It's not just African artists. Artists from Latin America, from South America, from Europe — everybody wants to have a show in New York.

The longer you stay in this business, the more people take you seriously, the more contacts you make. That is really the dynamics of success, and that's what we try to explain to the young artist; that they need to stick around.

→ [skotogallery.com](http://skotogallery.com)



→ AIME MPANE, ICI ON CREVE #22, 2006-2008 | MIXED MEDIA ON WOOD PANEL, 32X30 CM | COURTESY SKOTO GALLERY

"The longer you stay in this business, the more people take you seriously, the more contacts you make. That is really the dynamics of success, and that's what we try to explain to the young artist; that they need to stick around."



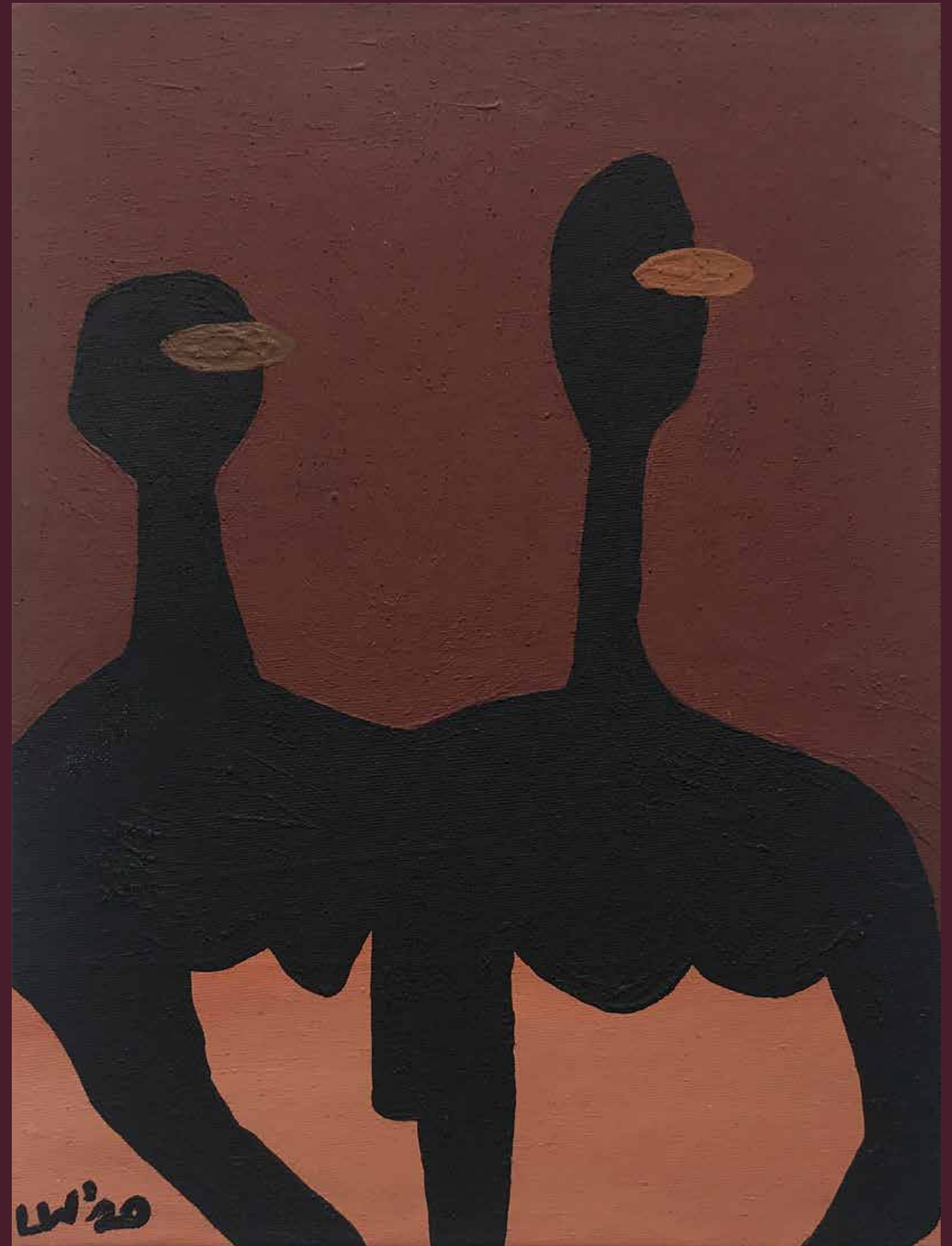
LULAMA WOLF

UNDULATING  
CURVES  
THAT CREATE  
LITHE BODIES  
IN SPACE

NKGOPOLENG MOLOI

“Not only did bodies tend to indicate a world beyond themselves, but this movement beyond their own boundaries, a movement of boundary itself, appeared to be quite central to what bodies are.<sup>1</sup>”

— Judith Butler



→ LULAMA WOLF, THE EXCURSIONISTS, 2020 | ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 37X28CM | COURTESY THK GALLERY



# UNDULATING CURVES / THAT CREATE LITHE BODIES IN SPACE

AN INTERPRETATION OF  
LULAMA WOLF'S WORK

Lulama Wolf's practice is formulated by lines that rise and fall smoothly to create lithe bodies in space – bending, contorting, carrying, standing, and moving. As per Judith Butler, Wolf's depicted bodies indicate a world beyond themselves and signal towards broader themes and processes. Traversing both the personal and the political, the Johannesburg-based artist engages themes of African spirituality within a contemporary context and merges that with colour theory influenced by traditional South African architecture and indigenous rock art. In addition to her studio practice, Wolf is known for her profound interest in fashion and design, fields that weave themselves into her sensibility of creating meticulously bold yet minimal paintings.

For her latest body of work, Wolf focuses on rest as a narrative spine around which her figures bend themselves. She considers rest as a way to think through practices of care, taking care of oneself and taking care of each other, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually. The work seeks to reimagine varying possibilities of how rest is conceived – an impulse brought on by the slower

pace as a result of the global pandemic – and pays attention to a new grammar of deep rest and deep care.

In *Capturing Looseness* (2020), a figure with elongated arms is twisted elegantly. There is a suggestion of ease, aided by the sensuality of a stretched eye painted in deep blue. The work is simple but remains sapid, with an intentional sparseness motioned through broad gestures and strokes that oscillate between abstraction and figuration.

Within her artistic practice, Wolf is influenced by both spiritual and art historical forerunners, citing the late Zulu diviner and author, Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa, and South African visual artists, Helen Sebidi and Ernest Mancoba, as key influences. The effect of Mancoba's lucid abstraction and Sebidi's intricate storytelling are visible in her work as demonstrated in the painting, *Raised by The Bottle* (2020). Made with acrylic and sand, the work is a nod to head-carrying practices ubiquitous in many parts of the world, and more specifically in parts of Africa, where women carry and transport heavy loads (of water, fruit, etc.) on their heads,



→ LULAMA WOLF, 'HO FETISA NAKO' – TO PASS TIME, 2020 | ACRYLIC AND SAND ON CANVAS, 90X120CM | COURTESY THK GALLERY

supported by a small folded cloth for stability. The use of sand brings an element of tactility to the works and motions to Wolf's interest in traditional mediums and symbolism through materiality.

A common thread throughout Wolf's practice is what the artist refers to as "formless femininity," which animates the intricacies of being a Black woman in the world, where notions of femininity are allowed to morph, transmute, and evolve over time. In her seminal book, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* with the apt chapter title, 'Formless Femininity', Judith Butler examines Plato's idea of the female form in relation to materiality. Plato suggests that the feminine is "a permanent and, hence, non-living, shapeless non-thing which cannot be named... synecdochally collapsed into a set of figural functions."

Unlike Plato's females, who are not permitted to exist as human forms, Wolf's depictions of femininity are fluid and self-determining. Through her practice, she presents us with possibilities of womanhood in various states. Her figures are not fixed but instead transition freely between practices of affective

labour and conditions of rest when necessary, shifting the boundaries of what is expected from the female body as they take shape and – perhaps more importantly – take up space.

1 Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. Routledge; 1st edition (April 4, 2011)

→ @lulamawolf



→ LULAMA WOLF, INSTIMBI, 2021 | ACRYLIC AND SAND ON CANVAS, 60X60CM | COURTESY THK GALLERY

"Wolf's depictions of femininity are fluid and self-determining. Through her practice, she presents us with possibilities of womanhood in various states."



MOUS LAMRABAT

# PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE MIDDLE OF EVERYWHERE

QUTOUF YAHIA

We are no strangers to the sometimes-nameless photographs that surge the internet, those images that invite collective awe and depart from the exclusive realms of fine art to make their way to the very public domains of the world wide web. You may not know photographer Mous Lamrabat by name, but you know his images by distinction. From the photograph of South Sudanese model, Atheic Chol Malel, wrapped in blue tulle to the distortions and reappropriations of brand logos like the McDonald's golden arches and the Nike swoosh, Lamrabat's distinct style and interpretations crowd the internet with excitement.



MOUS LAMRABAT, SUGAR, WATER, PURPLE, 2019 | PHOTOGRAPHY, 120 X 80 CM | COURTESY OF LOFT ART GALLERY





→ MOUS LAMRABAT, BRANDED, 2019 | PHOTOGRAPHY, 75 X 50 CM | COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND LOFT ART GALLERY

# PHOTOGRAPHS

## FROM THE MIDDLE OF EVERYWHERE

AN INTERPRETATION OF MOUS LAMRABAT'S WORK

What seems to be the attraction to Lamrabat's work is the overwhelming depiction of the third culture experience, marrying the ubiquitous West with the very specific contexts of the Middle East and North Africa. His work positions itself alongside the cultural experiences of those who come from many places at once. It replaces inner conflict and cultural turmoil with an outward expression of duality and multitude. Where many see contradiction and a crisis of identities, Lamrabat sees an opportunity for beauty.

His work introduces an absurdity to the mundane and everyday of Moroccan and Middle Eastern culture, over exaggerating aesthetics and traditions and juxtaposing them against universal logos and brands. Lamrabat navigates fashion and commercial photography by producing art that functions beyond the exhibition of a product or garment. His appeal to brands does not commercialize his work but instead elevates the brands and brings to their table a level of cultural influence, accommodation, and depth. While his visual treatment of trends and popular culture treads the fine line between promotion and critique, what is impressive is his ability to engage these major brands in this commentary on consumption and production.

"[Lamrabat's] work positions itself alongside the cultural experiences of those who come from many places at once."

Through his portrayal of the fashionable and the branded, Lamrabat's images urge us to ask questions about the nature of belonging; of positions in the world, both within and outside of geography. We reminisce on the traditions and places we belong to and that belong to us but wonder, through the logos superimposed over our heritage and culture, whether the brands belong to us also – or if we belong to them.

It is palpable through the photographs what is familiar to Lamrabat: Morocco, hip-hop, Islam, fashion, the desert. While his influences are plentiful and apparent in his work, as is the symptom of third culture, their perforations are not territorial. His work does not lay claim to them but only pulls them into the conversation. Representation and inclusivity seem to be at the core of Lamrabat's work, featuring and even centering different communities engaged in their own culture and in world culture simultaneously. His work offers spaces for Muslim representation; Moroccan representation; female, Amazigh, Black, contemporary, young representation. His work makes us all members.

When asked what drove him to switch from creating spaces as an interior designer to creating images, Lamrabat said that what appealed to him about photography was the ability "to be creative every day."<sup>1</sup> To say Lamrabat has moved from creating spaces would be a disservice. Through his work, he is able to make room and create worlds altogether – worlds of middle grounds, commonalities, and global communities. Worlds that are deeply rooted in their personal cultures and histories but pull from and participate in popular culture on a global scale.

<sup>1</sup> Mous Lamrabat, 'Coexisting Cultures'. Interview with Tamar Gerrits for Metal Magazine.

→ @mouslamrabat



→ MOUS LAMRABAT, MADE AMERIKKA GREAT AGAIN, 2018 | PHOTOGRAPHY | COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND LOFT ART GALLERY

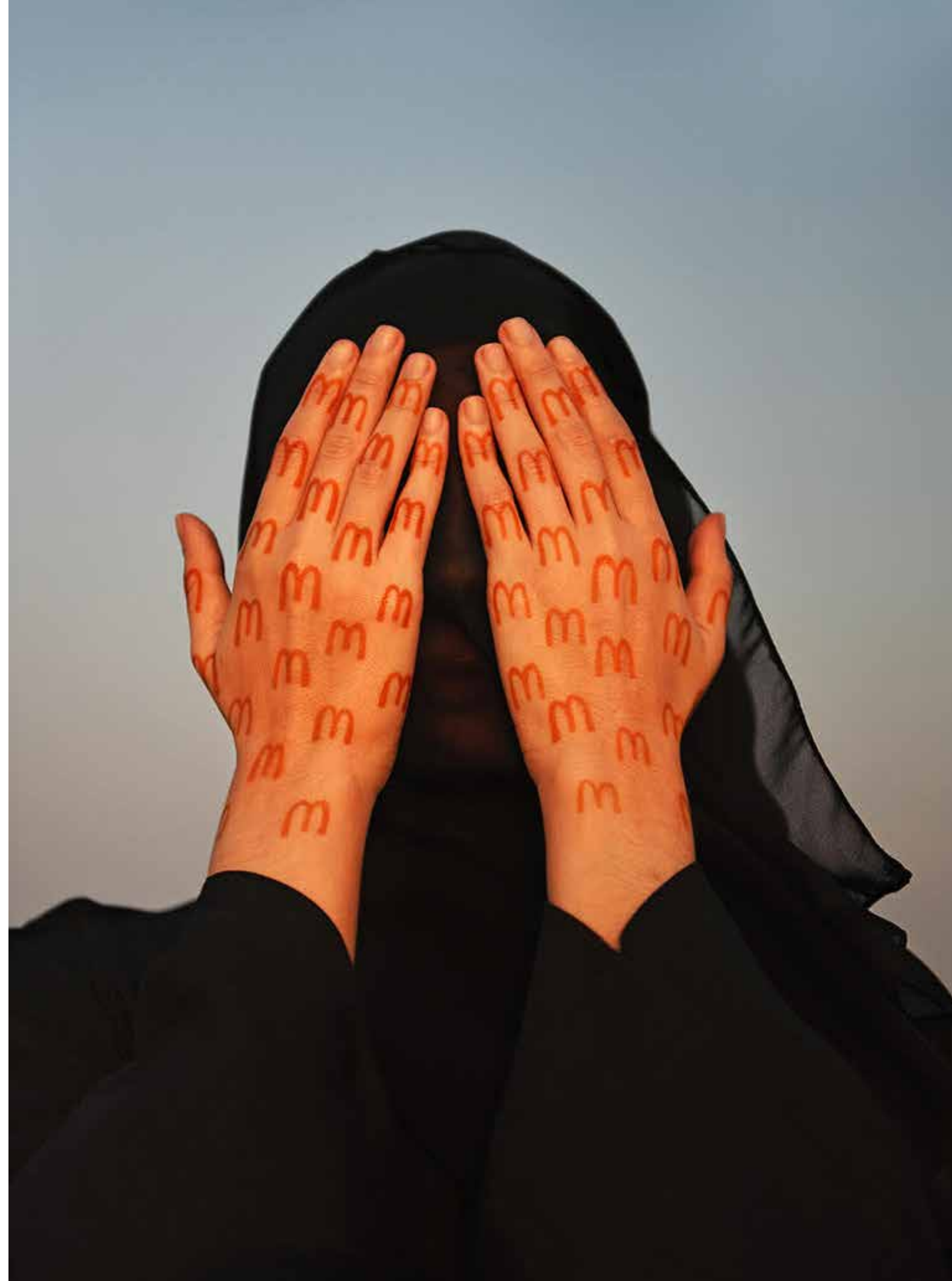
"We reminisce on the traditions and places we belong to and that belong to us but wonder, through the logos superimposed over our heritage and culture, whether the brands belong to us also – or if we belong to them."



→ MOUS LAMRABAT, DO YOU WANT FRIES WITH THAT, 2019 | PHOTOGRAPHY,  
75 X 50 CM | COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND LOFT ART GALLERY



→ MOUS LAMRABAT, IF THE SHOES FITS, 2019 | PHOTOGRAPHY, 120 X 80 CM | COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND  
LOFT ART GALLERY.





# ART X LAGOS THE AFRICAN DIGITAL REVOLUTION

JAREH DAS

Over the past 18 months of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the art world has engaged widely with digital platforms in ways that have created more visibility for artists, art professionals, institutions, and even a boom in innovative online exhibitions and viewing rooms. The art world evolved and was delivered to our screens in ways that were unpredictable, exciting, and at times overwhelming.

→ DAVID ALABO, HIGHPRIESTESS | DIGITAL ARTWORK





# THE AFRICAN / DIGITAL REVOLUTION

ART X LAGOS

Non-fungible tokens (NFTs) emerged as a head-scratching (and some argue, less climate-conscious) new way of dealing and collecting art, with some emerging African artists benefiting from its early boom. Importantly, social and political causes shaping our present moment came to the forefront on these digital platforms. In the context of Nigeria and its celebrated art fair, ART X Lagos, a year has passed since the #EndSARS protests and the devastating loss of life that resulted as young protesters called for the abolition of the country's notoriously brutal police unit, SARS, and for wider socioeconomic reform.

ART X responded by putting a pause on its hybrid online and in-person model, opening a month later in December 2020 with a scaled-back program of talks connecting Nigerian resistance to the global momentum of the Black Lives Matter movement alongside an impressive visual archive of the nationwide protests in Nigeria – spotlighting the work of 100 artists, filmmakers, protesters, and photographers at the forefront of documenting #EndSARS in a curated digital exhibition titled *New Nigeria Studios*.

The 2021 edition of ART X Lagos is no doubt as reflective as it is optimistic about the future, as is evidenced by the digital programming proposed alongside its physical edition. *We Are Here*, curated by A Whitespace Creative Agency and led by architect, innovator, and activist, Papa Omatayo, brings together two artist collectives – Kaduna-based film collective, The Critics, and Lagos-based sound artist, AYE! and The Village Sound System – while *Future Africa* presents two solo exhibitions by David Alabo and Adéolá Olágúnjú and hypothesises on the future of the continent. Rooted in futurity and speculative fiction, Alabo and Olágúnjú respond to the conceptual framework of the 2021 theme for the fair: The restful ones are not yet born.

Utilising video mapping, the immersive installation, *One Africa, Three Futures*, presents three unique representations of a future Africa where Alabo addresses limiting ideas of growth by incorporating socio-cultural and environmental concerns, centred around themes of traditional knowledge, pan-Africanism, and isolation. Conversely, in *IYÁBO*, Olágúnjú explores the idea of re-birthing the self through the medium of allegory with a three-channel video that considers chaos, catastrophe, and destruction as tools of evolution and production. As Olágúnjú draws from African folklore and myth to create a lateral interpretation of life from pre-birth to old age, she implodes the idea of time as linear, choosing instead to explore the past, present, and future as intersecting planes.

Organised in partnership with leading NFT platform, SuperRare, 'Reloading' is co-curated by NFT superstar, Osinachi; creative director, filmmaker, and set designer, Ayo Lawson; and French cultural entrepreneur and curator, Maurice Chapot. Featured are artists based in Africa and beyond, including Moonsundiamond, Linda Dounia, PRSDNT HONEY, Abdulrahman Adesola Yusuf AKA Arclight.jpg, Youssef El Idrissi, Thapelo Keetile, Niyi Okeowo, Idris Veitch, and Nyahan Tachie-Menson, all of whom speak to the innovative and phenomenal breakthrough of NFTs over the past year.

With an emphasis on a robust digital platform for its 2021 edition, ART X Lagos gives vigour to an exciting and innovative African digital art scene with immense potential as we continue to come to terms with a blended future model for art, both on and off-line. The future of African art may not be televised – but it will be digitised.



→ MDD, THE REDLOW DISPERSION, 2020 | DIGITAL COLLAGE



# AYE! AND THE VILLAGE SOUND SYSTEM



"The Village Sound-system is a state of being - embracing the union of dualities ; local x foreign, organic x electronic, African x Western. It lives in Lagos, Nigeria and is for the world."

Aye! identifies as an urban artist, maintaining the essence of city life in his work. Born and raised in Lagos, Nigeria, Aye! has been DJ-ing in Lagos since 2014. His belief that all ideas are unified creates a desire to express love through a marriage of art and science. Aye!'s urban art mediums to date include Music, Set Design, and Graphic Design.

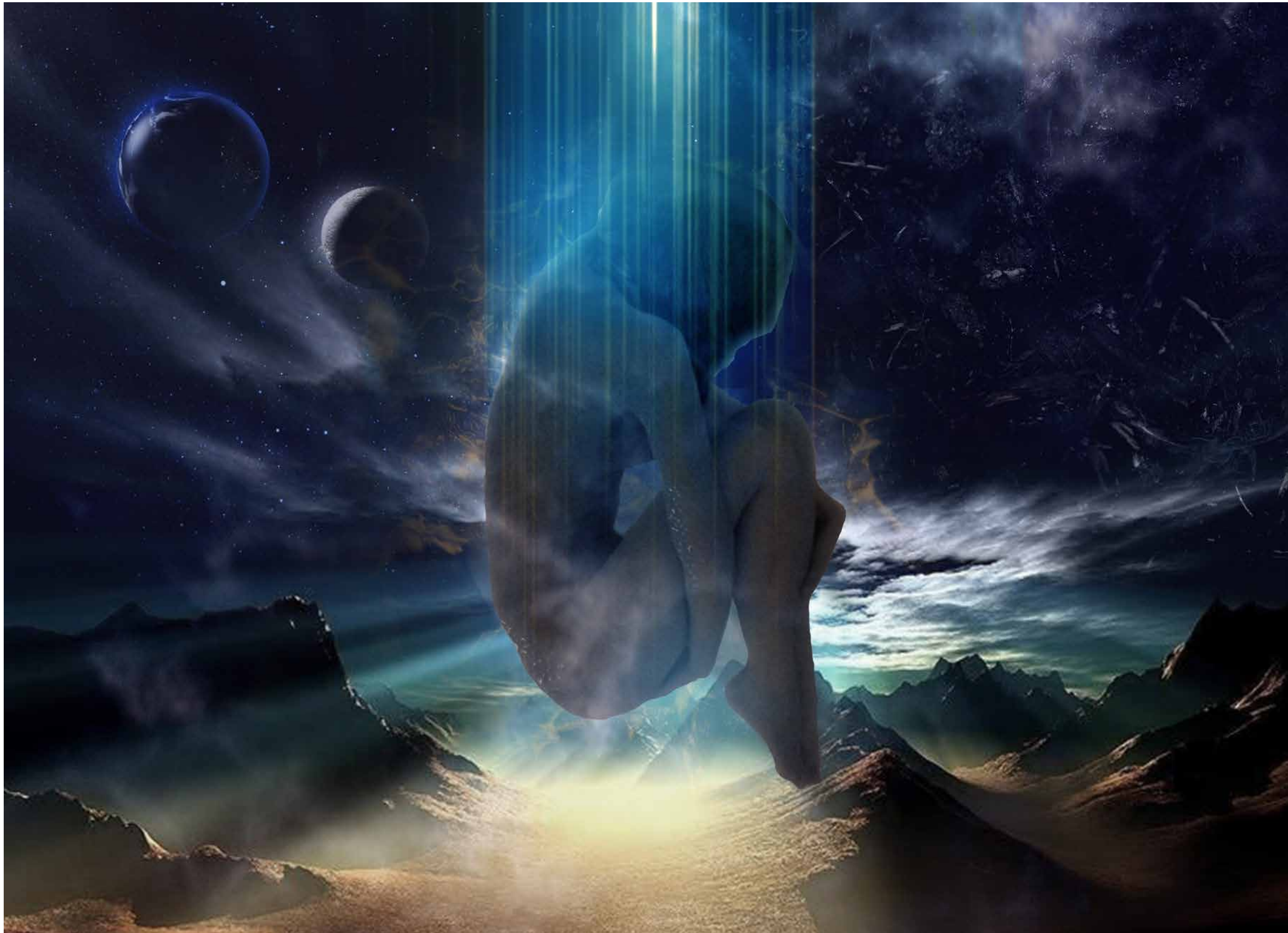
→ [villagesoundsystem.bandcamp.com](https://villagesoundsystem.bandcamp.com)



→ ADÉOLÁ OLÁGÚNJÚ, ÌYÁB (STILL), 2021 | THREE CHANNEL VIDEO | COURTESY THE ARTIST

# ADÉOLÁ OLÁGÚNJÚ

→ [adeolaolagunju.com](http://adeolaolagunju.com)



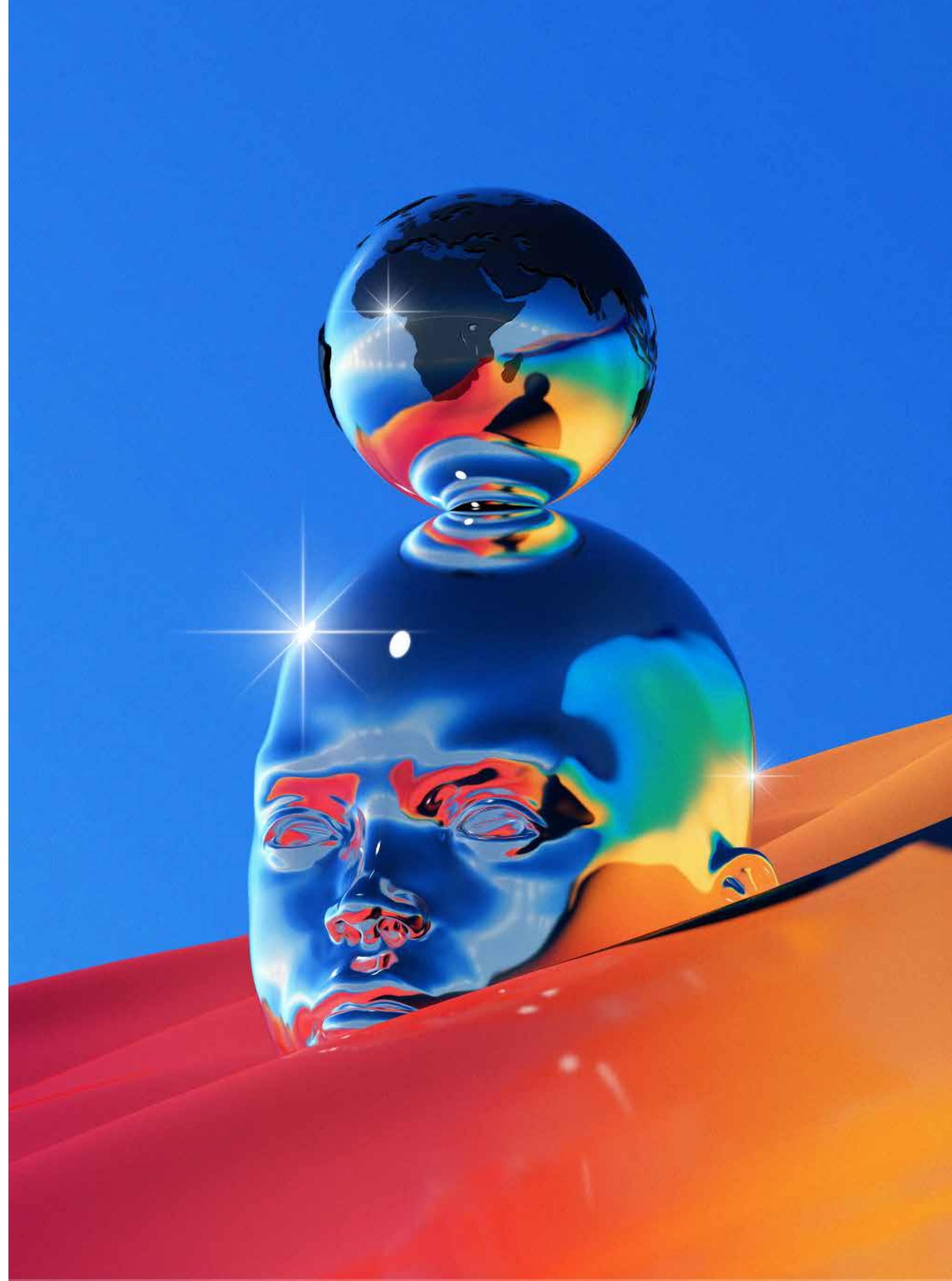


→ DAVID ALABO, BOY WITH THE WORLD ON HIS HEAD | DIGITAL ARTWORK



→ DAVID ALABO, BONSAI | DIGITAL ARTWORK

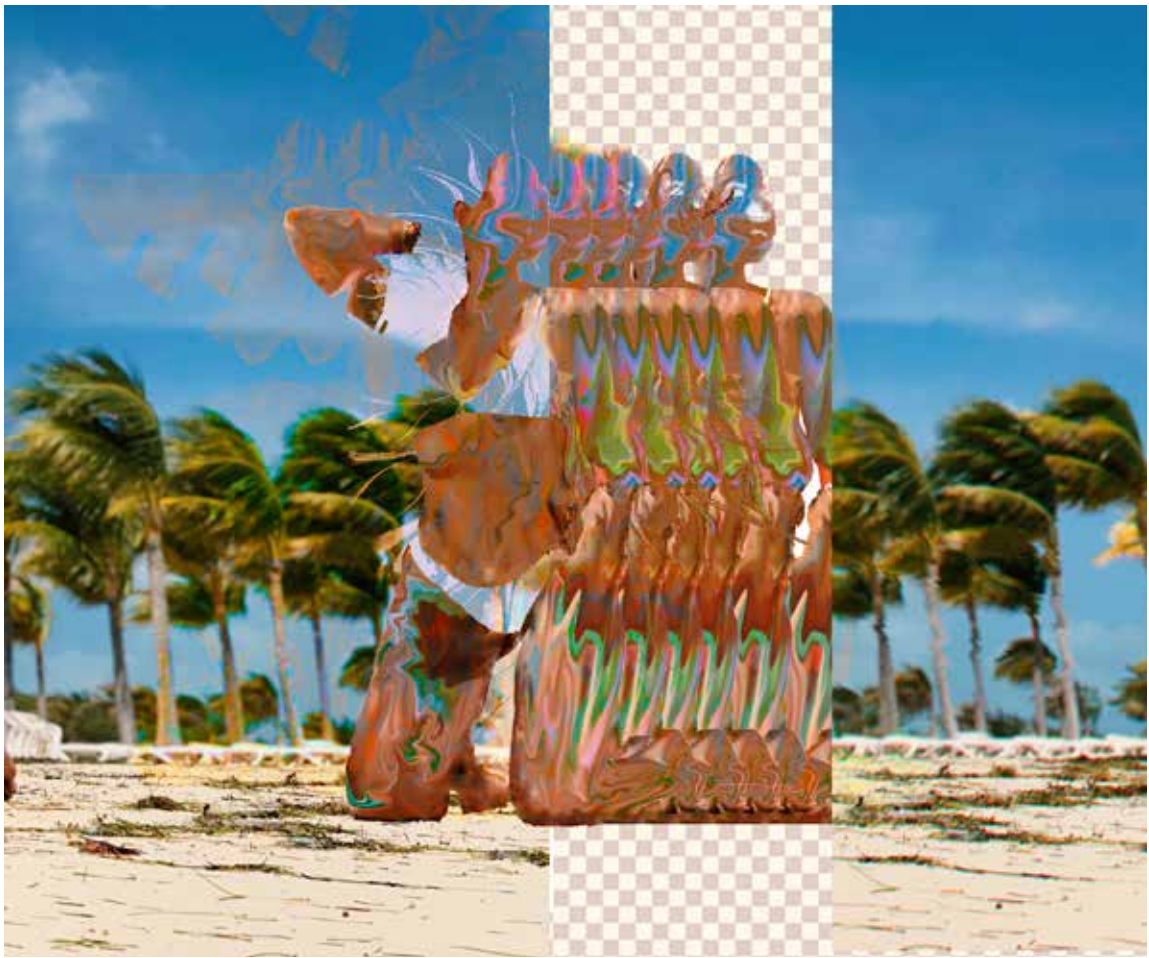
→ [davidalabo.com](http://davidalabo.com)



# DAVID ALABO



→ ARCLIGHT, AFTER SHE SPOKE, 2021 | DIGITAL COLLAGE



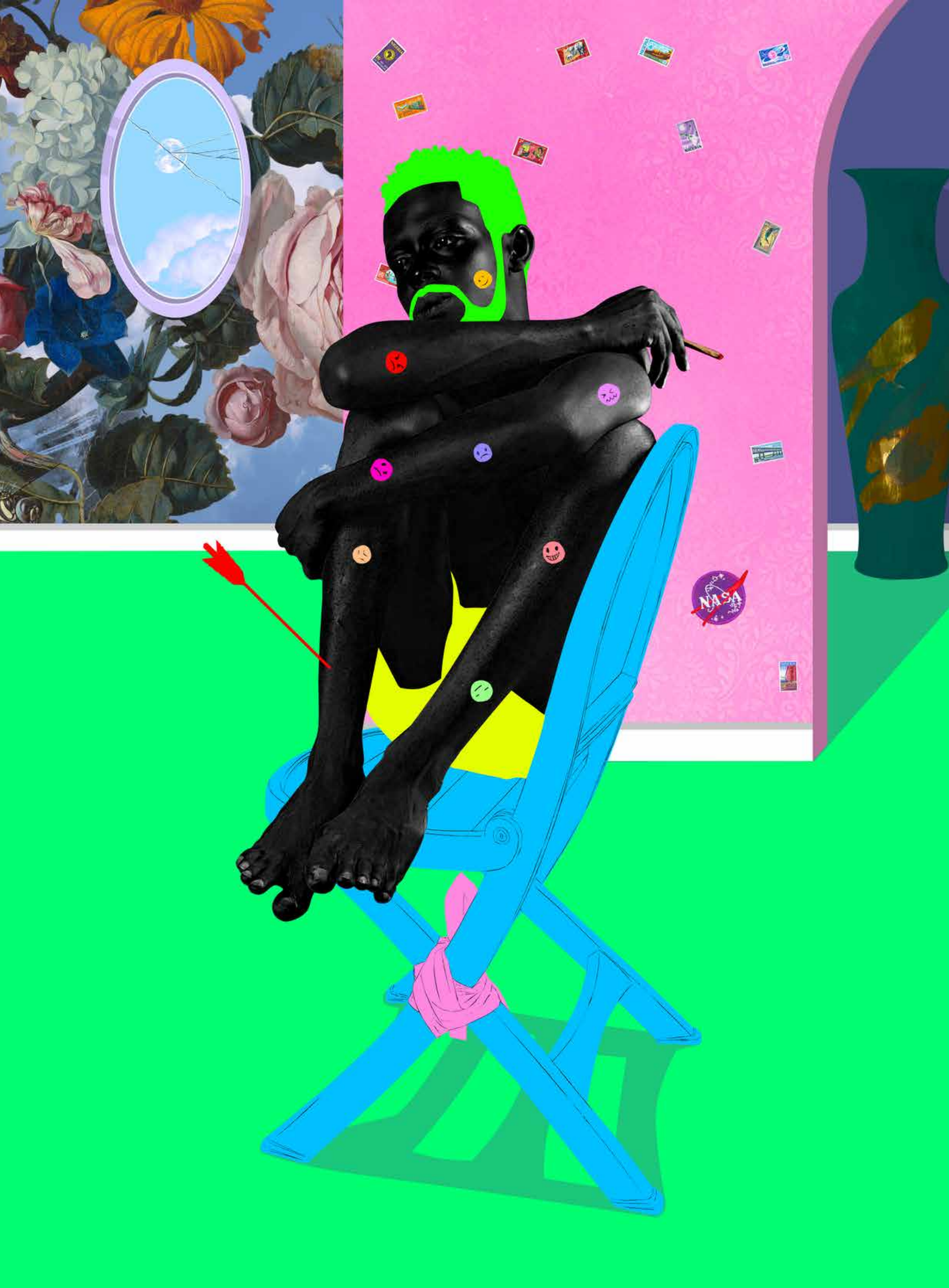
→ YOUSSEF EL IDRISSE, ROUGH | DIGITAL ARTWORK



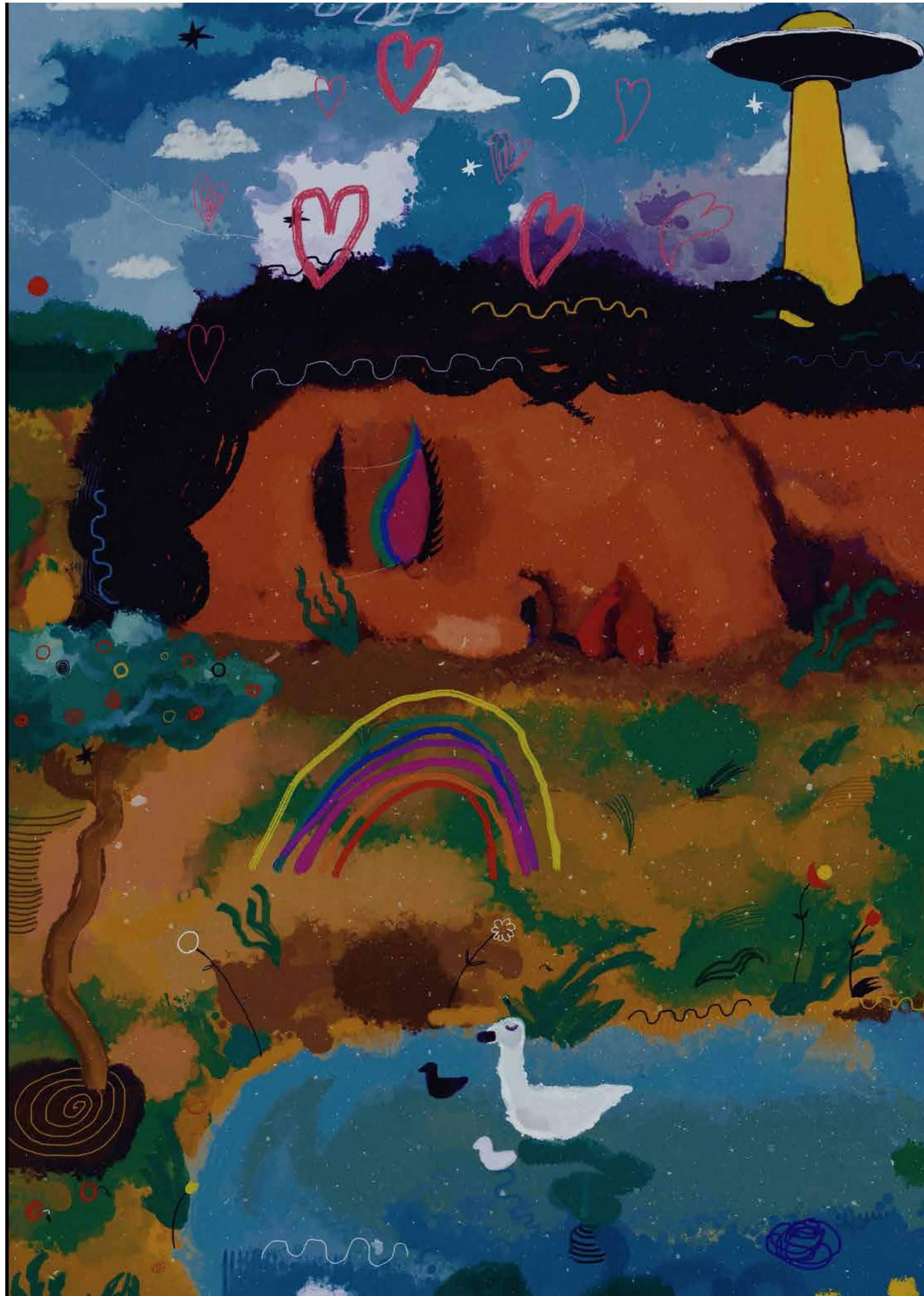
→ LINDA DOUNIA REBEIZ, JOY | DIGITAL ARTWORK

ARTIST STATEMENT

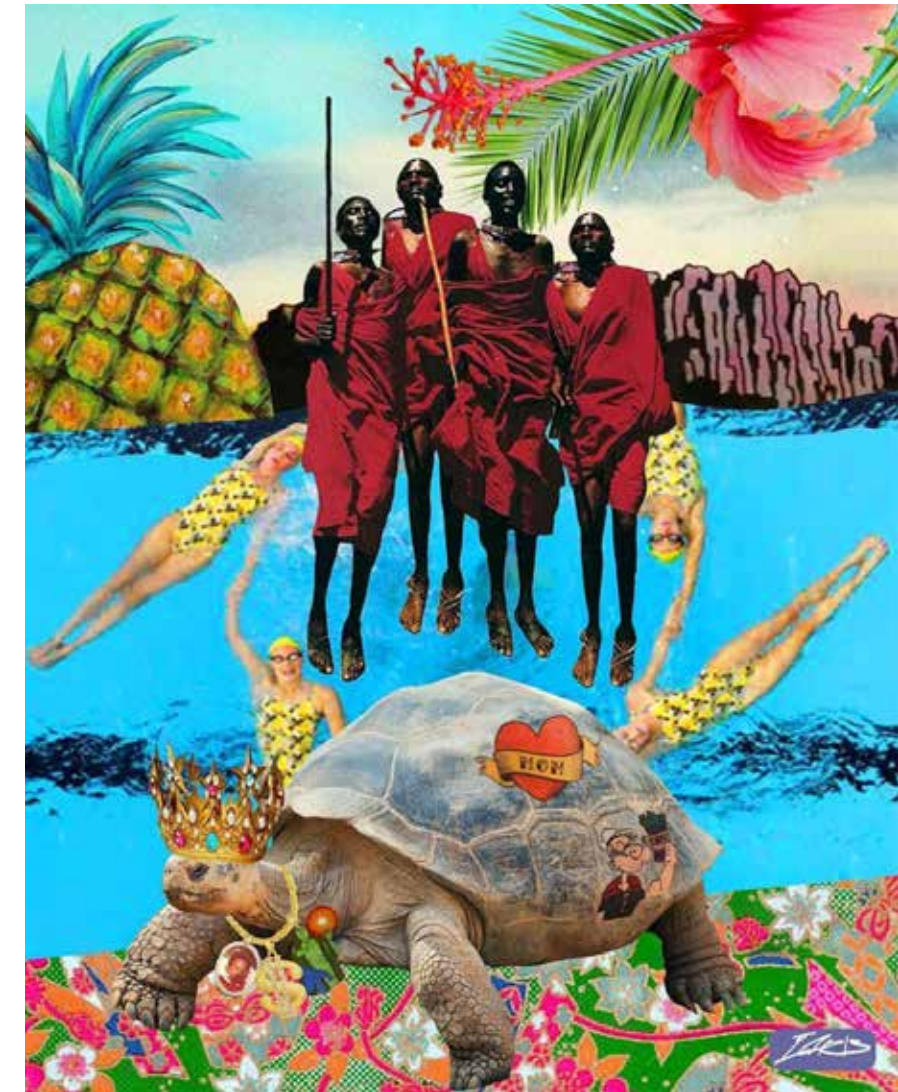
→ [superrare.com/features/art-lagos](https://superrare.com/features/art-lagos)







→ MOONSUNDIAMOND, I THINK IT'S BEEN AN ETERNITY, 2021 | DIGITAL PAINTING



→ IDRIS VEITCH, BUSTED, PUMPING TURTLE HEART, 2021 | DIGITAL COLLAGE



→ NYAHAN TAHCIE-MENSON, YOU MADE ME ANGRY (PART 2), 2020 | ACRYLIC ON WOOD PANEL | DIGITAL ARTWORK



"The moral arc of the universe is  
long but it bends towards justice."  
– The Critics

SCIFI  
FILM



→ THE CRITICS, TIMOTHEE (STILL), 2021 | SCI-FI SHORT FILM



# SAMALLIE KIYINGI

## THE UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE OF CONTEMPORARY ART

THE ART MOMENTUM EDITORIAL TEAM

Samallie Kiyingi is a lawyer by training and an art collector by passion. Her collection focuses on elevating the work of African artists, which she achieves not only through her support for institutions but by directly supporting the artists themselves. As the founder of Artnaka, a private members' platform focused on art from Africa and its diasporas, and a founding member of Tate Modern's African Art Acquisition Committee, Samallie Kiyingi demonstrates her firm commitment to progressing the rapidly growing field of contemporary art from the continent. In this Collector Q&A, she shares her perspective on the convening power of art fairs, the ways in which collectors can contribute to creating sustainable careers for artists, and the universal language of contemporary art that (re)connects us with our common humanity.



→ EVERLYN NICODEMUS, SILENT STRENGTH 37, 1990 | OIL ON CANVAS, 65 x 75 CM | IMAGE COURTESY OF RICHARD SALTOUN GALLERY, LONDON



# THE UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE / OF CONTEMPORARY ART

A CONVERSATION WITH SAMALLIE KIYINGI

Reflecting on the 2021 curatorial theme for ART X Lagos, 'The restful ones are not yet born', what role do you believe art fairs — and the galleries, collectors, and visitors that participate in them — play in (re)imagining a future for the continent?

The thing I love the most about art fairs is that they are amazing spaces for learning and discovery. While probably not the best place to experience art, fairs provide a unique setting which brings together artists, curators, historians, gallerists, and art enthusiasts to engage with, learn about, and support art. It is this convening power that makes art fairs such a significant part of the art ecosystem.

This is particularly important in the African context, where critical art infrastructure such as gallery networks and museums are sometimes lacking. Not only do art fairs make art more accessible to the general public, they are also at the forefront of driving much needed conversations across the continent around art, culture, history, and identity.

How will you be engaging and participating in this year's hybrid offering at ART X Lagos?

Sadly, I won't be able to attend in person this year, but the ART X team has done an amazing job of developing their online profile, not just in terms of promoting the fair, but promoting the artists as well. That is something that I have noticed is core to the ART X approach; it is very much artist-centric, which I appreciate.

While physical events are always better — there's nothing like seeing artwork in person — having a digital program is phenomenal. I live in Cairo and there are often international art events I want to go to that I am unable to attend due to work commitments or travel restrictions. Having the ability to engage digitally has been fantastic. I didn't attend ART X Lagos last year because of COVID, but I was able to participate virtually, which was the next best thing. I believe hybrid programming is the future and I hope that ART X Lagos will continue with their digital offering, even when things go back to "normal."

To borrow from the theme of 'The Collector as Catalyst', a talk moderated by Tokini Peterside at ART X Lagos this year, how do you believe art collectors contribute to progressing the rapidly growing field of contemporary art from Africa and its diasporas?

I've never been entirely comfortable with the word 'collector' in the art context as it seems to only focus on one side of the equation. For me, it's all about the artists. I see the process of collecting as one of facilitating the development of an artist and their practice. The concept of the collector as catalyst is important because one of the things that I've observed is that, for quite some time, the vast majority of collectors of contemporary African art weren't from the continent.

While it is fantastic that there is an increasing amount of international interest in African artists, it is so important that we grow the number of collectors from Africa and its diasporas. I very much hope that what is happening in the global market with regards to the growing interest in art from Africa is not a passing fad. However, in order to ensure that it's not, there is a critical role that collectors, particularly collectors from Africa, must play in continuing to support these artists, as this will help secure sustainable careers for even more artists from the continent.

Prior to moving to Cairo, I ran Artnaka, a platform designed — among other things — to encourage more individuals from Africa to collect and support African artists. It feeds into that narrative of making artists' careers sustainable, supporting their practices, and raising their profile globally. The idea for the members' platform was born when I lived in London. I would travel to art events across the world and managed to develop a good network.



→ SAMALLIE KIYINGI | PHOTOGRAPHER: OTHELLO DE'SOUZA HARTLEY

"Contemporary art is a universal language that allows me to reflect on issues beyond the everyday and, in a strange way, (re)connect with our common humanity."

The art world can at times be quite intimidating, so the idea was to make that environment far more accessible and, by making it accessible, make it easier for people who had the means and the ability to collect art to start collecting. We organised intimate dinners or lunches and invited artists like Yinka Shonibare MBE to talk or host. We also organised out-of-hours exhibition tours led by curators and artists. Ibrahim Mahama very graciously led one such tour for his first exhibition at the White Cube. Sadly, Artnaka took a hiatus due to COVID but I hope to resume it once things get back to normal.

It was important to me to demystify the art world and ensure that people had access to curators, artists, and gallerists, so that it would become easier over time for them to build a collection. Again, I strongly believe that increasing the number of collectors from Africa and the diaspora is critical for the sustainability of artists' careers.



→ SHERIN GUIRGIS, HERE I HAVE RETURNED, 2019–2020 | SITE-SPECIFIC INSTALLATION: FOREVER IS NOW, GIZA PYRAMIDS, EGYPT | PHOTOGRAPHER: SARAH FAWZY GRAYDON

How do your law and finance careers inform your decisions as an art collector?

Law and finance are what I do but not who I am. My passion for art (and music) predate my professional career. Contemporary art is a universal language that allows me to reflect on issues beyond the everyday and, in a strange way, (re)connect with our common humanity. While I am drawn to artists who in some way touch on the issue of justice, my decisions are very much informed by my engagement with artists and curators.

Who, in your opinion, are the artists to watch in 2022?

Three amazing artists from East Africa: Phoebe Boswell, Leilah Babirye, and Everlyn Nicodemus. I'm a huge fan of Phoebe Boswell, and I've been following her work for quite a while. The works that I tend to collect are her drawings on paper, which capture raw emotion in such a visceral way. Even though the emotions captured are sometimes quite challenging, the beauty of her work brings me joy and I love living with it.

Leilah Babirye is an artist who I first came across in 2014. She has a very distinctive aesthetic language that she developed very early on in her career. She wasn't afraid to take risks. I have one of her works on paper, a painting, and also a magnificent sculpture. Her work deals with identity and her position as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community within the Ugandan context and how that relates to history, culture, and belonging. Her work is defiant but beautiful, while also actively reclaiming space, which I really admire.

Everlyn Nicodemus is an artist who I was only introduced to this year. Even though Everlyn has been producing work for decades, her work has historically been overlooked by the art world. I am so happy that she is now being recognised. Her powerful work explores what it means to be a woman in the world and is based not only on her experiences but the experiences of many women across the world who she has collaborated with over the years.

Can you tell us about your move to support artists more directly, in addition to the ways in which you support art institutions like Gasworks or the Ugandan Arts Trust?

Artists need so much support before their work even reaches the market, which is why I believe that it's important that art institutions are supported. Sometimes, they fall under the radar but, without these institutions, you wouldn't have many of the artists that have become big names today. That remains something that I'm passionate about, but I've also recognised that there is an incredible need to support artists more directly.

I won't say that Leilah Babirye was the catalyst for this decision, but her work forms part of the story. As I mentioned, I've been following her work for some time and I knew she had done an artists' residency at 32° East, the Ugandans Arts Trust, an organisation that I support, but I had never actively collected her work. When I bought the first work that I have of hers, I reconnected with her and she told me that I was her first Ugandan collector. I couldn't believe that was true. It made me think about the role that I play, particularly as an African woman collector, in supporting the practices of contemporary African artists first hand.

→ @SamallieKiyingi





THE ART MOMENTUM | ART X LAGOS

→ [theartmomentum.com](http://theartmomentum.com)  
→ [artxlagos.com](http://artxlagos.com)

#### EDITORIAL TEAM

Céline Seror – Nadine Hounkpatin – Fay Janet Jackson

#### GUEST AUTHORS

**Outouf Yahia** is a poet and a writer. She is also one of the Cofounders of Locale, a Sudanese platform for the development of creative efforts and local talent through cultural advocacy.

**Nkgopoleng Moloi** is a writer and an MA student in contemporary curatorial practices at Wits University. Using archives and exhibition histories, her research explores womxn's mobility. She attempts to understand and draw attention to factors that enhance or inhibit womxn's freedom of movement. Writing is a tool Moloi employs to understand the world around her and to explore the things she is excited and intrigued by, particularly history, art, language, and architecture.

**Jareh Das** is a researcher, writer and curator. She currently moves between Nigeria and the UK working on diverse visual arts projects independently with artists, arts institutions and non-profits. Her current research focuses on Contemporary Performance Art in West Africa which has taken on explorative visits to major cities and off-the-beaten-track interrogating liveness, community, performativity and place-making.

#### GRAPHIC DESIGN

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