

**SIGNATURE** African Art.

# A HISTORY UNTOLD

*Presented by* Maro Itoje

*Curated by* Lisa Anderson

*Featuring* Adelaide Damoah, Peter Adjaye, Djakou Kassi Nathalie, Steve Ekpenisi, Giggs Kgole and Damilola Okhoya





## **PRESENTER**

*Maro Itoje*

The African history that was taught, it focused around the transatlantic slave trade, a little bit on colonialism, and a little bit on Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement in America and whilst all those areas are important parts of history, they tell a single story with regards to Africa and African history and a story that only paints not even a quarter of the picture. In all those stories, Africans are the victims. And it makes it seem as if African history literally started with European invasion. What we aspire to do through this exhibition is to tell a different story.

Towards the latter end of my school years, about the age of 18, I started thinking that I actually don't know as much as I would like to know about the continent which I'm originally from. I'd always had an interest, but as you get older you're able to articulate it and understand it a bit more.

'Those who control the words and images control the minds of the people.' And I think the words and images that we have consumed as a society have led to us having a single narrative around the African continent that is... not holistic.

This benefits everybody, if I have a greater understanding of my neighbour, their contribution to the world, then naturally I have more respect for that person. And secondly, it helps fix some of the unconscious biases we all have, some of them docile, and some of them harmful.



## FOREWORD

*Lisa Anderson, Curator*

This exhibition aims to inspire and educate audiences about the vast history of Africa's contributions to the development of civilisation. A History Untold. It adopts two crucial perspectives that powerfully connect the past to the present. The first perspective is explored through the eyes of four African artists living on the continent, each expressing different themes of intellectual knowledge developed across Africa from 40 BC to the modern era. The second is through the eyes of two artists, both Black British descendants of Ghana, collaboratively interrogating the history and cultural heritage that fuels the African Diaspora's undeniable contribution to the development of modern western society. Together, they address the misrepresented legacy of colonialism by embracing a post-colonial lens that commemorates the voices of colonised Ghanaian ancestors, for too long obscured from the records of our shared past.

Histories spanning the upper palaeolithic era of the Congo to the ancient kingdoms of Kush, Nigeria, right up to apartheid South Africa are explored on the upper floor of the exhibition. South African artist Giggs Kgole, known for his engaging, multimedia, 3D collages confronts the African roots of jazz with reference to the formative role it played in mobilising communities such as the Black cultural hub Sophiatown, which was destroyed under apartheid and eventually rebuilt. Through four artworks made for the show, Kgole transports viewers to the Johannesburg suburb, creating a 3D scenes that celebrate the spirit of resilience, political activism and the incredible lives of South African jazz legends Oliver Mtukudzi and Hugh Masekela.

Multidisciplinary Nigerian artist Damilola Okhoya explores the power of written communication through a series of illustrative figurative paintings. Okhoya's work examines the conquest of Queen Amanirenas against the Roman Empire, thought to have been captured in Meriotic script – one of the oldest writing systems in Africa. He also tells the story of Timbuktu, the ancient Malian city, famed as a centre of learning and education in the 14th century, which brought students from across the region to its universities and libraries.

Contemporary Nigerian sculptor Steve Ekpenisi signals the immense impact of African metallurgy which is believed to have forged the path for the Industrial Revolution. His artwork, entitled 'Ojo-Ogun, is a 4-foot-tall sculpture of an African blacksmith in the process of making iron. Finally Cameroonian artist, Djakou Kassi Nathalie delves into the story of Africa's contribution to mathematics, drawing inspiration from the history of the Ishango bone, one of the oldest mathematical artifacts to be discovered, which dates back to the Upper Palaeolithic Period of human history over 20,000 years ago. A skilled ceramicist, Nathalie has created a clay sculpture of the bone comprising traditional African masks and surrounded by dice for this exhibition.

On the second floor of the exhibition, Adelaide Damoah and Peter Adjaye's collaborative work represents an Black British, African Diasporic perspective that pays tribute to their shared Ghanaian ancestry. Their low-lit, multi-media sculptural installation and soundscape takes over the entire ground floor of the gallery to provide an immersive experience. The sculpture is formed of a 4.2 metre canvas featuring repeated imagery of an unnamed African soldier, representing Adelaide's paternal ancestor who lived during the colonial era of the British Gold Coast (present day Ghana) and fought during the 2nd World War. Wrapped around a supporting structure, the sculpture alludes to an ancestral tree, whilst evoking traditional Ghanaian, funerary attire. Adjaye's immersive six-channel soundscape, composed of ancient African percussion and recorded dialogue between Adelaide and her father, activates the structure. Combined, these elements powerfully reframe the history of Ghanaian colonialism and African diasporic experience through image and sound, on the artists' terms.

The beauty of this exhibition is its celebration of inclusive, post-colonial historical education; history told from multiple African and African Diaspora perspectives. It does this by consciously bridging revelations about ancient African knowledge with modern historical realities of how Africa's descendants were subjugated through systems of colonial oppression that used mis-education as a central tool. It's a story of the liberatory force of education.

### *About Lisa Anderson*

Lisa Anderson is an independent curator, consultant and champion for Black British Art. She is founder of [@blackbritishart](#); a curatorial platform dedicated to celebrating the range and depth of this evergreen arts territory.



## ARTIST

*Adelaide Damoah*

*'All of my performances have at their core the principle of Sankofa- ancient Akan (Ghanaian) idea which tells us to learn from our past in order to live a better present and future.'*

British-Ghanaian artist Adelaide Damoah is a London based multidisciplinary artist, using investigative practices which currently span painting, performance, collage, image transfer and photographic processes. Key areas of interest for interrogation are colonialism, spirituality and intersectional feminism. After studying applied biology (BA Hons, Kingston University, Surrey, her subsequent career in the pharmaceutical industry was cut short following a diagnosis of the debilitating chronic illness endometriosis. While convalescing, she dedicated herself to art.

Since her debut exhibition 'Black Brits' in 2006 (Charlie Allen's Boutique, London, UK), Damoah has exhibited in myriad group shows including Opera Gallery, Budapest, Hungary (2009); Bargehouse Gallery, London (2015) as part of the AACDD Festival; 'A Seat at the Table', 198 Gallery, London, 'Dispersed', Nubuke Foundation (+Chale Wote), Ghana; UNFOLD Festival, London; Article 10, Amnesty International, London, ACDF Festival, Lagos, Nigeria, and in 2018 at 'We Face Forward' Bonhams, London, Little Africa Des Gosses, Marrakesh, (Off the Tracks) as part of an artist residency. In 2019, Damoah was selected for 'No Room for Fear' with SMO Contemporary, BBFA Collective and Smithsonian in London, 'Under the Skin' (Royal College of Physicians Museum, London), ArtX Lagos with Tafeta Gallery, 1:54 Art fair with Boogie Wall Gallery and Sakhile & Me and Small is Beautiful with Flowers Gallery.

She has performed internationally including her ongoing 'Confronting Colonisation' project (Into The Mind Of The Coloniser performance), Reanimating Shadow Projections of the Real (Black Shade Projects Morocco), '#MYFACE' Visual Diet, Cannes Lions Festival, Cannes, 'This is Me: The Inconsistency of the Self II' Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration, Paris, Adidas 'Calling all Creators' performance Portland Oregon, USA. Past solo exhibitions include 'Supermodels', Nolia's Gallery, London (2008); 'Domestic Violence', Mayfair, London (2009); 'This is Us', Camden Image Gallery, London (2015) and 'Genesis', 1 Bedford Avenue, London (2018), her first solo exhibition as an academician at the RWA in Bristol (2020) and her most recent solo exhibition, Reembodying The Real at Boogie Wall Gallery in Mayfair.

Damoah has works in private collections nationally and internationally. She is a founding member of the Black British Female artist (BBFA) Collective which is represented by Tafeta Gallery, London and a co-founder of the Intersectional Feminist (INFEMS) Art Collective. In 2019, Damoah became the first black artist to be appointed an academician of the Royal West of England Academy (RWA) and was an invited artist and selector at their open exhibition in Bristol.





## ARTIST

*Peter Adjaye*

Peter Adjaye is a contemporary conceptual sound artist, specialising in cross-disciplinary collaborations. He is an accomplished composer, producer and musician with a Masters Degree in Mathematics. His unique set of skills and vast experience have enabled him to work closely with his brother, the award winning architect, Sir David Adjaye OBE, for over 15 years. This work has culminated in the publication, 'Dialogues' on MusicforArchitecture Records in association with Vinyl Factory Records. 'Dialogues' is available as a gatefold limited edition vinyl record.

Peter was recently commissioned to compose and produce an installation for the exhibition 'A Countervailing Theory', in collaboration with celebrated Nigerian American Artist Toyin Ojih Odutola, for the unique 90 metre Barbican Curve Gallery. This 12 channel immersive soundscape 'Ceremonies Within' combines the authentic sounds of ancient African instrumentation with modern contemporary synths and strings. The sound installation allows the multitude of sounds to 'bleed' into each other as an organic movement within the space and has already received critical acclaim.

Peter's work is currently exhibiting at Greenwich Maritime Museum. A new immersive 6 channel sound installation 'A Proposal for Radical Hospitality' was created in response to 'The Armada Portrait', the work traces the painting's legacy of empire and the roots of the transatlantic slave trade. Previous examples of work have also included a permanent interactive sound installation for the Nobel Peace Centre in Oslo, in the Laureate's gallery known as the 'Noble Field'. An interactive 7.1 surround sound installation in the Tate Modern, East Tanks, in response to the Lichtenstein retrospective. This innovative immersive collaboration with award winning architectural practice Adjaye Associates, mapped out a 3D version of Lichtenstein's Interior with Waterlilies, in association Bowers and Wilkins.

'Making Memory' at The Design Museum London commissioned Peter to create and implement a unique sound scape for each of the exhibition spaces inspired by each of the following buildings; Gwangju Pavilion, The National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC), The UK holocaust memorial and learning centre, Sclera Pavilion, Ghana national Cathedral and MEMO project (Mass extinction monitoring observatory).

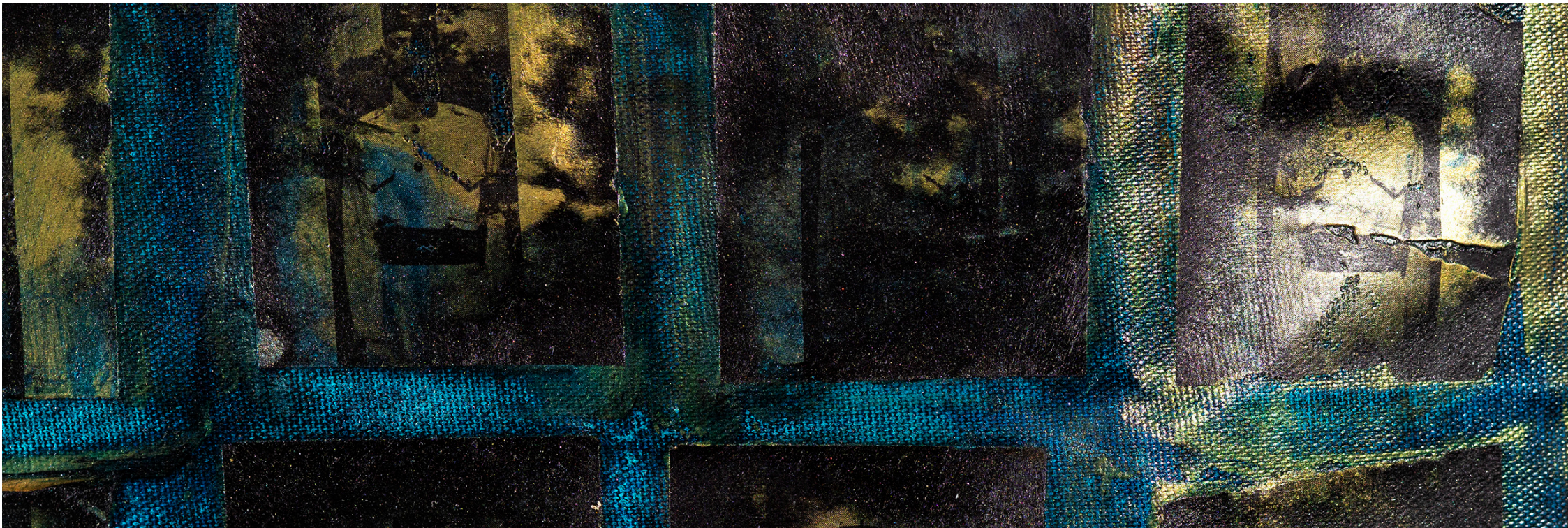
He has also exhibited his unique sound art installations in many other prestigious locations, including, Art Institute of Chicago, Somerset House, Studio Museum Harlem, Whitechapel Gallery, Albion Gallery, The Science Museum and given talks at places such as Maaxi National Museum of the 21st Century Arts, The Architecture Foundation, Design Miami, Rough Trade to St Martins Art College.

## THEME

### *Colonisation and the Burma war*

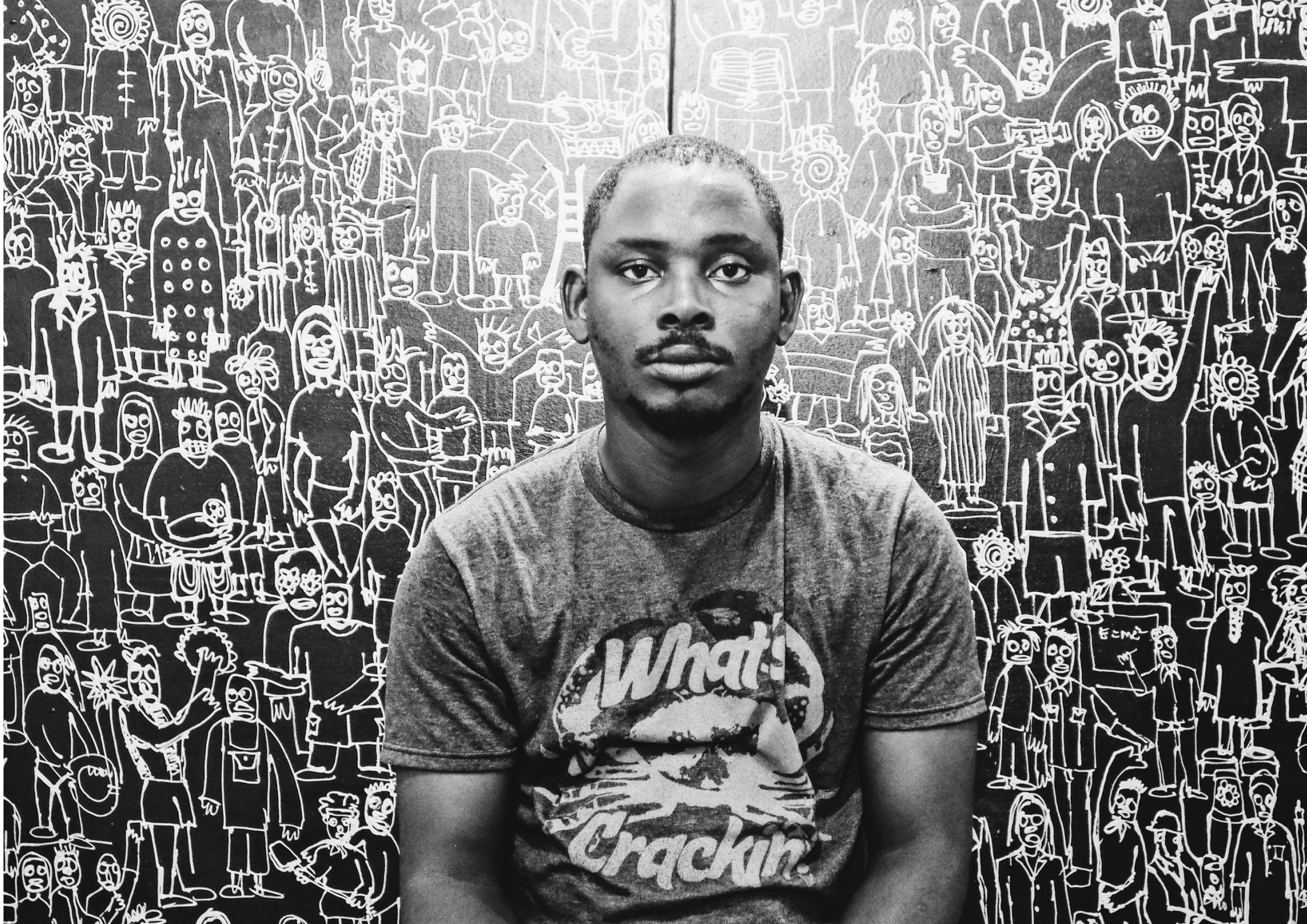
Adelaide Damoah and Peter Adjaye's collaborative work represents an African Diasporic perspective that pays tribute to their shared Ghanaian ancestry. Their multi-media sculptural installation and soundscape takes over the entire ground floor of the gallery. The sculpture is formed of a 4.7 metre canvas featuring repeated imagery of an unnamed African soldier who served during World War II. This image represents one of her paternal ancestors, who lived during the colonial era of the British Gold Coast (present day Ghana) and fought during World War II. Wrapped around a supporting structure, the sculpture alludes to an ancestral tree, whilst evoking traditional Ghanaian, funerary attire. Peter Adjaye's immersive six channel soundscape, a cinematic journey of intrigue and drama featuring ancient west African percussion and dialogue between Adelaide and her father, activates the structure. Combined, these elements powerfully reframe the history of Ghanaian colonialism and African diasporic experience through image and sound, on the artists' terms.

*Adelaide Damoah & Peter Adjaye Vocies from the Silence, Kwame, Kwaku, Yaw 2021. Mixed Media on Canvas, 4.7m x 2.1m canvas wrapped around supporting structure and 4 channel soundscape*





*Adelaide Damoah & Peter Adjaye Vocies from the Silence, Kwame, Kwaku, Yaw 2021. Mixed Media on Canvas, 4.7m x 2.1m canvas wrapped around supporting structure and 4 channel soundscape*



## **ARTIST**

*Damiola Okhoya 'DAOK'*

Damilola Okhoya (Daok) is a self-taught Visual Artist. After graduating with a B.Sc. in Physics from Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife, he briefly had an apprenticeship in sculpting, working with metals and fiberglass. His use of mediums ranges from photography, digital art, sculpting and painting with oil and acrylic. What drives his practice is experimentation (propelled by his background in physics), an openness to possibilities and happy accidents, a willingness to take on new challenges and engage creatively as often and in as many ways as he can. His works are inspired by the human experience, the workings of the mind, existence, belief systems, causes and effects of technological innovations, it is a non-exhaustive list.

## **THEME**

*The Power Of Paper*

Daok focused on the power of paper in two ways: Queen Amanirenas and Timbuktu. The former was the ruling queen for the Nubian people (present day Sudan) as they defeated the Roman empire in battle. Her people were in war against the Romans for 5 years, until a peace treaty was signed which hugely favoured the Nubian people. She wrote all her exploits on the Meroitic script, which is still not yet fully deciphered to this day.

In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Timbuktu in Mali was the strongest and richest country in the world. It is believed to be the richest empire to have ever existed. The empire prioritised education above all else and built the largest educational institutions and libraries in the world.



Damilola Okhoya, *Power of Paper: Queen Amanirenas*, Acrylic on Canvas, 2021



Damilola Okhoya, Acrylic on Canvas, 2021, Top left to bottom right: *Queen Warrior I*, *Queen Warrior II*, *Nubian Archer*, *The Scribe*



Damilola Okhoya, *Power of Paper: Queen Amanirenas*, Acrylic on Canvas, 2021



Damilola Okhoya, Acrylic on Canvas, 2021, Top left to bottom right: *Scholars of Timbuktu I*, *Scholars of Timbuktu II*, *Scholars of Timbuktu III*, *Scholars of Timbuktu IV*





## **ARTIST**

### *Giggs Kgole*

Giggs Kgonamotse Kgole, formally known as Kgole, was born in Kutupu Village in Limpopo in 1997 and grew up in Tembisa, Johannesburg. Kgole's work is an exposition of the interplay between the identities of people living in rural Limpopo, his ancestors and the world he inhabits. The artist grew up in a Limpopo village, South Africa and tells vivid human stories about the experiences of people who live there. They are stories that are untold to an urban audience, to whom rural South Africa is a hidden landscape.

They tell tales of struggle, of abandonment, of promises broken and dreams deferred. They speak of resilience in the face of everyday injustice, of resistance through the simple act of living. Resilience of which he goes through daily as a young village boy maturing in the world's different metropolises. These stories are told through his visions or the locations where these people live out their lives – the landscapes upon which the all too human residue of life settles.

Kgole's work is typified by his use of Anaglyphs, whereby two versions of his composite photographic images are printed in different colours (typically blue and red) onto canvas. He then applies collage and paint to the printed work. The viewer is then asked to view the work through glasses with a red filter and a blue filter as lenses, creating a dramatic 3D effect.

The glasses play the role of enhancing the viewer's experience and relationship to the work, as it helps you interact with the work more at a more intimate level.

## **THEME**

### *Jazz & Sophiatown*

Giggs Kgole goes really personal with the history of Sophiatown during apartheid South Africa as he recalls his parents stories of attending live jazz performances as Black South Africans. He teaches us about the six o'clock curfew imposed on Black South Africans and the fact they were not allowed to own land during this incredibly dark period.



Giggs Kgole, *Phinda Le Number*, Mixed Media, 100cm x 100cm, 2021



Giggs Kgole, *Creeping back from Sophiatown*, Mixed Media, 85cm x 155cm, 2021



Gigs Kgole, *Viva Sax*, Mixed Media, 100cm x 125cm, 2021



Gigs Kgole, *A Crime Against Humanity*, Mixed Media, 97cm x 110cm, 2021



## **ARTIST**

*Djakou Kassi Nathalie*

Djakou kassi nathalie is a ceramicist from Cameroon. She has been inspired by art since her childhood. She started studio practice very early after her university studies in 1998. The same year, she was also an instructor in the only art school of central Africa in Mbalmayo in Cameroon where she succeeded to introduce the “Material Technology” course. In 2004 she was employed in Centre d’Art Appliqué of mbalmayo in Cameroon as ceramist and also as chief manager of the ceramic studio. In 2011 she was vice president of the craft Association of her local government for 3 years. She worked for a long time in her studio and also worked with many renowned artists in their studios and obtained many distinctions, awards and prizes in and out of Cameroon including the first African prize of creativity of international salon of art craft of Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso in 2012. In 2013 she created the ceramic group DECERAM with whom she realised a lot of commissions and specials works.

She moved to Nigeria in 2015 and has participated in many exhibitions. She was also one of the 100 winners of the Union Bank art competition for their 100 years anniversary, she also did and collective exhibition during women international day in March 2018 at the Wheatbaker hotel. In June 2019 she was the artist of the month at Thought Pyramid Art Center Lagos for” Mentoring Moments”.

## **THEME**

*Mathematics and the Ishango Bone*

Djakou examines the history of mathematics by focusing on the Ishango bone, found in present day Congo. The Ishango bone is the oldest known mathematical instrument and is believed to be used by women to monitor their menstrual cycles. The artist shapes the cubes in the form of dice to further the mathematical element in her design, and she incorporates numerical symbols in her pieces.



*Djakou Kassi Nathalie, Shape of Numbers, Glazed Clay, 20cm x 18cm x 17cm, 2021*



Djakou Kassi Nathalie, *The Mathematician*, Glazed Clay, 51cm x 34cm x 22cm, 2021



Djakou Kassi Nathalie, *Eternity*, Glazed Clay, 67cm x 15cm, 2021





## **ARTIST**

*Steve Ekpenisi*

Steve Ekpenisi was born 13th of August 1978 in Abavo, Ika south local government of Delta State, Nigeria. Had his primary education in Nkwo Primary School, Udomi, Abavo and post primary in St. Charles College, Abavo. Studied sculpture in Federal polytechnic Auchi Edo State where he graduated as the overall best student with distinction in 2007/2008 academic session.

Over the years, he has taken metal as his medium of expression. He meticulously work with discarded metal plates, rods, stainless steel, mild steel, scrap metal and disposed cans of different products. His sculpture is usually life size or larger than life in both figurative, imaginative, animal and semi-abstract. His creations are of global contemporary standards.

Watching Steve work in his Studio is a delightful theatre. He wrestles with metal, cuts, bends and weaves it into artistic precision then the sparks from the welding machine. It is evident he derives the utmost satisfaction when the creative drama progresses.

His sculptures in all forms of metal medium has evolved with regard to the socio-economic determining factors because we live in an ever-changing society. Yet his works have maintained constant perfect craftsmanship which emits power, strength and wealth. One may say that Steve's general inspiration comes from pleasant shock viewers receive while viewing his finished pieces.

The common denominator in his works over the years have been the strict attention to intricate details and elegant features which lead to perfect treasures.

## **THEME**

*Metallurgy*

Steve examines the history of Metallurgy in West Africa. Mankind went from the stone age, through to the bronze age, and finally reached the iron age; apart from West Africa. Present day Nigeria and Ghana amongst other countries, skipped the bronze age and discovered iron before anyone else in the entire world. The artist represents this with his sculpture titled: Ojo-Ogun, which translates to blacksmith.



*Steve Ekpenisi, Ojo-Ogun, Mild Steel, 167cm x 110cm x 50cm, 2021*



# **S I G N A T U R E** African Art.

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