

Tunji Adeniyi-Jones

*“The language of dance
and performance transcends
all cultural boundaries.”*

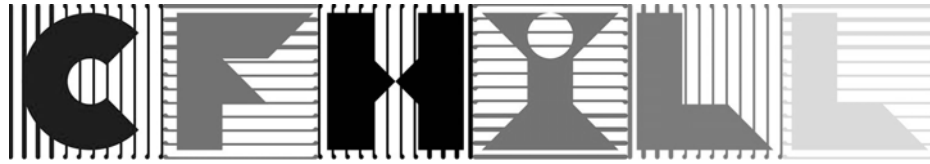
Tunji Adeniyi-Jones uses figurative painting as a means to explore West African history and its associated mythology. Adeniyi-Jones renders colourful and vibrant bodies that are larger than life, taking inspiration from both his Yoruba heritage and his British upbringing.

Where in the world are you right now and what are you doing?

— Right now I’m trying to read in my apartment in Brooklyn. I say ‘trying’ because it’s been incredibly hard to concentrate with all that’s been going on recently! We’re entering into our third week of self-isolation/social distancing in New York. I know it varies from place to place. Other areas have been under citywide self-isolation protocols for months now.

What can you tell us about the work you have made for the exhibition?

— I’m really excited about the works I’m showing because they highlight the early stages of my ideas before they go on to become paintings. It’s a pretty special insight into how I come up with the compositions, shapes and colours for my paintings. The monotype is one of the most painter-friendly printmaking mediums, I think. It’s a really quick and expressive form of image-making, and I’ve been working with this medium for several years now. Usually, when I get stuck in the studio, I’m able to work through the mental blocks by making some monotype prints.



Why do you think you are an artist?

— I've always known that I would dedicate my life to the creative arts in some shape or form. I was a very keen and studious musician when I was younger, and I was completely obsessed with drawing. I think it was really important to have the support of my parents and school faculty during these formative years. That encouragement and reinforcement were so crucial.

How would you describe the type of work you do?

— I definitely strive to make paintings that are bold and authoritative. I like to use colour, line and form as my tools to achieve this.

What themes do you pursue in your art?

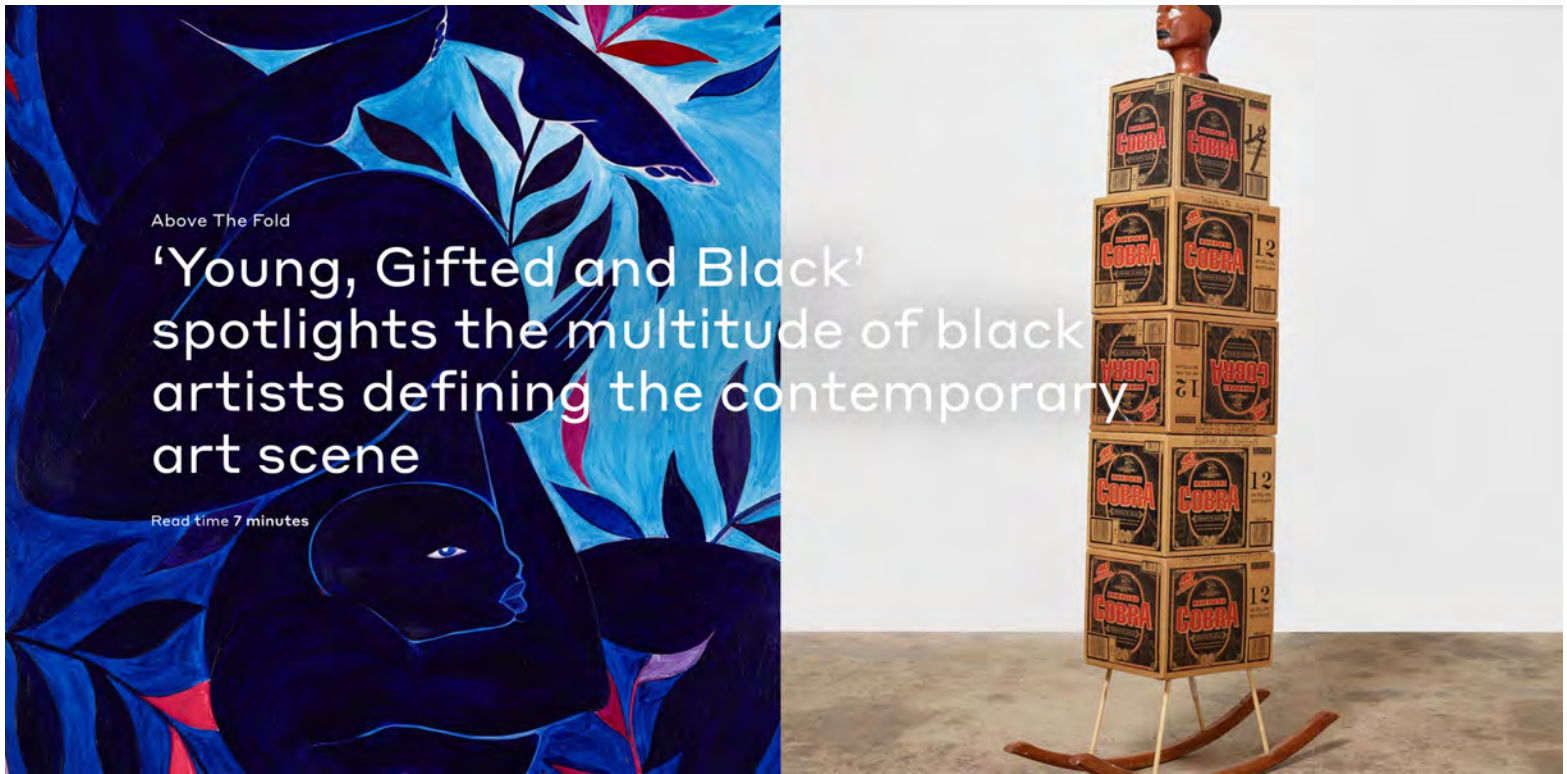
— I'm really interested in West African history and mythology. I draw a great deal of inspiration from my Yoruba heritage, and I try to incorporate as many of these traditional customs as possible into my work. I'm fascinated by the ways in which longstanding traditions can still bear relevance to the present day, and I want my paintings to be a visual account of this investigation.

You find inspiration for your figurative paintings in West African history and mythology, as well as your Yoruba heritage. How can one see this in your art?

— The figures depicted in my paintings are very alluring and striking. Many of their poses invoke a sense of performance or dance. There are thousands of different dialects spoken across West Africa but one of the most unifying languages is communicated through the body. This language of dance and performance transcends all cultural boundaries and my intention is to charge the bodies in my paintings with this same vigour. Equally, one of the most impressive characteristics of any West African sculpture is the physical presence held by each object. Whether life-size or miniature, these sculptures convey a memorable sense of personality and spirit. So my hope is to translate a similar sense of physicality through my work.

Interview by Destinee Ross
BLACK VOICES/BLACK MICROCOSM
CFHILL, Stockholm, Sweden
April 8 – May 9, 2020

DOCUMENT



Text by Miss Rosen | March 17, 2020

Artist Tunji Adeniyi-Jones and collector Bernard Lumpkin discuss inclusivity and the evolving relationship between artists and institutions

Fifty years ago, Nina Simone released “To Be Young, Gifted and Black,” a song written in memory of her dear friend, the playwright Lorraine Hansberry who died in 1965 at the tender age of 34. It became an anthem of the Civil Rights Movement that soon found its way into a 1972 episode of Sesame Street. Simone sang, “We must begin to tell our young / There’s a world waiting for you / This is a quest that’s just begun” to Gen X babies, who took the message to heart and paid it forward to the children of Generation Z, who fearlessly stand at the forefront of a brave new world.

With the Black Lives Matter movement centering issues of race in the discourse, the historically exclusionary art world has finally made space for Black Art. A wealth of established, mid-career, and emerging artists are breaking new ground, be it at auction houses, major museum exhibitions, on magazine covers, or with new books. Yet Black Art is far from a trend; it has informed the world for thousands of years in various incarnations in Africa and across the diaspora.

DOCUMENT

This point is beautifully illustrated in the exhibition *Young Gifted and Black: The Lumpkin-Boccuzzi Family Collection of Contemporary Art*, which pairs collector Bernard Lumpkin with critic Antwaun Sargent to curate a masterful showcase of some of the most innovative and influential contemporary black artists. The exhibition is a symphony of voices and visions from across generations all around the globe, creating a mellifluous confluence of style, media, and subject matter. Culled from the Lumpkin-Boccuzzi Family Collection, *Young, Gifted and Black* features works by David Hammons, Glenn Ligon, Kerry James Marshall, Henry Taylor, Mickalene Thomas, Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Sadie Barnette, Jordan Casteel, Jonathan Lyndon Chase, Deana Lawson, Paul Mpagi Sepuya, and Tunji Adeniyi-Jones, whose work appears on the cover of the catalog. Here, Lumpkin and Adeniyi-Jones discuss how when the collector and artist work together, they can transform the narrative of identity, politics, education, and art history.

Tunji Adeniyi-Jones: [Black Art] is an incredible movement to be a part of and see it manifest. It makes me and several of my colleagues and friends feel validated and motivated to keep working. It's almost like we've been chosen for this moment. It's a wonderful thing to watch happen, to take part in, to collaborate with collectors like Bernard. We were introduced in a studio visit during my first year at Yale. From there we had a series of repeat visits and it's been a great relationship. It feels like you are working alongside each other towards something when you have that level of familiarity, comfort, learning, mutual interest, and confidence.

Bernard Lumpkin: It's exciting to see a conversation about diversity, equity, and inclusion, and how to better represent art history, how to tell a fuller, more inclusive story of contemporary art that has been brewing among curators and museum directors spill out. That conversation has resulted in the hiring of more curators of color, more women curators, the recruitment of more people of color to museum boards where the decisions around exhibitions and acquisitions happen. I always tell collectors that collecting work is the price of admission to something much larger if you want to embrace it. It's a community. There is work to be done that can make a difference to the life of artists now and in the future.

Tunji: It's important for people to understand the breadth and scope of blackness, the black identity, and the black experience. I think the tendency before this incredible, prolific moment has been to broadly categorize all Black Art as being one singular thing. What's cool when you have a collection like this on display is that it includes such a vast array of artists coming from different backgrounds in that space of blackness—it's amazing to see it all together in one place. That's similar to what I experienced during my residency in Senegal [as part of the inaugural year at Kehinde Wiley's Black Rock in Dakar]. It's a fuller understanding of the multiplicity of the experience.

DOCUMENT

Bernard: The strongest collections are ones that showcase the vision of the collector. For me, the focus comes from a personal place: my family and stories having to do with my father being African American and my mother being Sephardic Jewish from Morocco, as well as the experience of being mixed race. I had been collecting art but not with the focus on artists of color. Then my father became sick with cancer and I was spending a lot of time with him. He told me stories about his family, growing up in Watts, wanting to be a scientist and make his way in the world. I became interested in bringing that conversation back into my work, especially after my father had passed away.

Tunji: Being in a collection like this gives me hope. As a first-generation British born Nigerian coming from London, you don't see as many close and invested collector-artist relationships as you do here. It's a special reassuring feeling that is incredibly encouraging, inspiring and very helpful. [I met gallerist Nicelle Beauchene through Bernard]. We all looked at each other like, 'We trust this other person so it will all work out very well.' Things rarely fall into place like that, and the results have been incredible.

Bernard: The art world has many different roles and people, and I always am reassured and gratified when an artist I believe in connects with a dealer, a curator, or another collector who will support the artist. That's a positive part of the Black Art moment that we're in. One of the things I have learned from Thelma Golden, Director of the Studio Museum where I'm on the board, is how for many years before museums, gallerists, curators, and auction houses were laying out the welcome mat to black artists, there was a network of collectors who took it upon themselves to steward and preserve the work, telling these artists' stories, and setting the stage for the moment we're in now. For many people, it's a Black Art moment but the reality is artists like Alma Thomas and Howardina Pindell have made work and had collectors for a long time; now the larger art world is coming to the party.

Tunji: Accessibility is a really important thing to address in the art world. To have that opportunity to see emerging artists in the early stage of their career in conversation with mid- and late-career artists—that curation and that dialogue has the potential to be life-changing. I would have loved to see a show like this in college.

Bernard: My father was a professor and my mother was a teacher, so education has always been a part of what people do in my family. It wasn't enough for me to be a collector and enjoy it for myself. The collection had to have a larger focus and impact. When it came down to planning this exhibition, I took it upon myself to say, 'Why don't I use this as an opportunity to bring the art to people in places that might not otherwise get to see it?' People can come and see themselves on the wall, whatever your background is.

Art Fairs

4 Sensational Painters Who Stole the Show at Independent New York 2020, Where Oil-on-Canvas Is Still the Cutting Edge

Galleries presented strong work by several new names to keep an eye on.

Artnet News, March 5, 2020

If New York art fairs were like the film industry, the Armory Show would be the big-studio blockbuster and the [Independent New York](#) would be the cool indie festival film: where the real critics go for substance and style.

It's also a great place to discover new talent young and old—something that's become nearly impossible at its blue-chip sibling on the piers. With that in mind, here are the best discoveries at this year's Independent, the 12th edition of the fair. A hint: painting stole the show.

Tunji Adeniyi-Jones at Nicelle Beauchene Gallery

On the Walls: Tunji Adeniyi-Jones's work has drawn comparisons to that of Henri Matisse in the past. With his spring garden color palette and curving, elongated figures, the reference is particularly apt at Independent, where the 27-year-old painter debuts a series of paintings and works on paper inspired by his time in Dakar, Senegal, at Kehinde Wiley's Black Rock residency program.

In a trio of complementary canvases that evoke West African rituals, scarred figures dance among birds and flowers before a monochromatic backdrop. In *Greeting Gifts* (2020), which depicts a more allegorical scene, a woman is offered a pair of masks by two men.

Price Range: \$3,000 for works on paper; \$25,000 for paintings



Tunji Adeniyi-Jones. *Greeting Gifts* (2020). Courtesy of Nicelle Beauchene Gallery.

Art Fairs

Looking for Fresh Talent? Here Are 7 Rising-Star Artists to Seek Out at Armory Week 2020 in New York

From the Armory Show to Independent to SPRING/BREAK, this week's New York fairs offer a sampling of exciting new talents.

Maria Vogel, March 2, 2020

The art world is preparing to descend on Manhattan this week for the 2020 edition of the Armory Show. What historically took place in individual rooms at the Gramercy Park Hotel now resides across two vast piers stretching out into the Hudson River. But of course, the Armory isn't the only show in town this week—no fewer than eight satellite fairs are taking place, too, offering something for every collector's taste and budget.

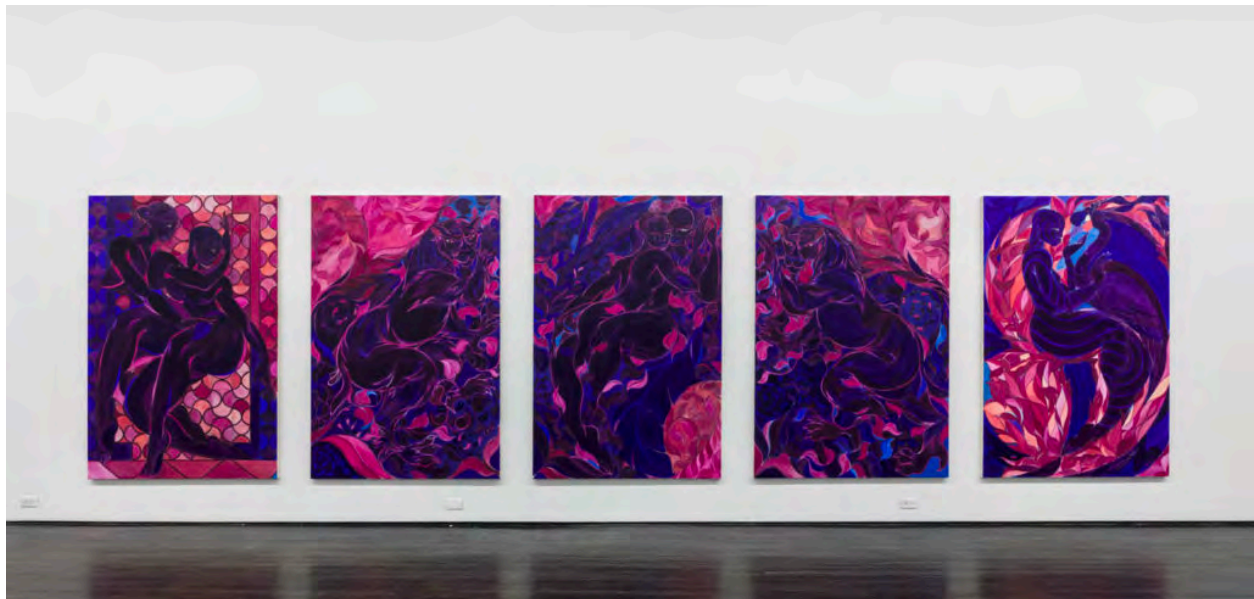
To help you navigate the influx of art, we've highlighted a group of up-and-coming talents to look out for—each with eye-catching work, critical and curatorial buzz, and a

prominent presence at one of the week's fairs. Happy looking.



Tunji Adeniyi-Jones, *A Master's Secret* (2019). Courtesy of the artist and Nicelle Beachene Gallery.

Tunji Adeniyi-Jones



Who: With a few years to go before turning 30, Adeniyi-Jones has been forging a name for himself with his fiercely bold figurative paintings that explore West African history and mythology.

Based in: New York, New York

Where to See It: Nicelle Beauchene's presentation at Independent

What to Look Out for: For Independent, Adeniyi-Jones will debut large paintings and works on paper that he developed as one of 16 inaugural fellows at Kehinde Wiley's Black Rock residency in Dakar. A 2017 graduate of Yale's MFA program, the artist has also exhibited at Eric Firestone Gallery and Johannes Vogt Gallery, among others.

Prices: \$20,000 to \$25,000 for large-scale paintings; \$2,000 for works on paper

Fun Fact: He made [the 2020 edition of Forbes's 30 under 30 list](#) (for which Kehinde Wiley, not coincidentally, served as a judge).

Up Next: Adeniyi-Jones's work is currently on view in the traveling exhibition "Young, Gifted, and Black: the Lumpkin-Bocuzzi Family Collection of Contemporary Art," organized by Antwaun Sargent, as well as in the group show "All of Them Witches" at Deitch Projects in Los Angeles. He has a busy rest of the year as well: the artist will premiere new work at Morán Morán in Los Angeles in May, will be included in the Dakar Biennial this summer, and is slated to show in Ugo Rondinone's 39 Great Jones Street window series this fall.

EDITORIAL



Tunji Adeniyi-Jones' *Patterns & Rituals*

Patterns & Rituals marks Tunji Adeniyi-Jones' second solo exhibition at Nicelle Beauchene for the young British-Nigerian artist. Adeniyi-Jones' work feels at once fluid and solid. Liquid-like figures move through a tornado of pink and purple foliage, yet the work is flat, authoritative. In a way Adeniyi-Jones' work feels like music – pulsing, repeating, transporting us to another realm. The scale and uniformity of the paintings causes reverberations throughout the space. Visions of stain-glass come to mind, in this artist's place of worship. Inspired by classical West African folklore and the religious practices of Nigerian's Yoruba tradition, Adeniyi-Jones investigates methods of idolatry and myth. At the heart of Adeniyi-Jones' practice is the idea of ritualized repetition, also key to the maintenance of prayer and ceremony. *Patterns & Rituals* is on view at Nicelle Beauchene until January 26th.

– Claire Millbrath

January 24, 2020

Forbes

THE 2020



ART & STYLE

Creating and designing the future of fashion and the arts

Edited by Susan Adams, Samantha Sharf, Michael Solomon and Kristin Tablang
Judged by Tory Burch, Sarah Staudinger and Kehinde Wiley



Courtesy John C. Edmonds.

Tunji Adeniyi-Jones

Adeniyi-Jones finds inspiration for his figurative paintings in West African history and mythology and in his own Yoruban heritage. Artforum magazine has compared him to Matisse. The son of Nigerian immigrants, he was born and raised in London and earned an MFA from Yale. The Dallas Museum of Art owns one of his paintings and he has had solo shows in New York, London and Los Angeles.

9 Leading Advisors, Dealers, and Art-World Insiders Tell Us Which Artists They Think Are Poised to Break Out in 2020

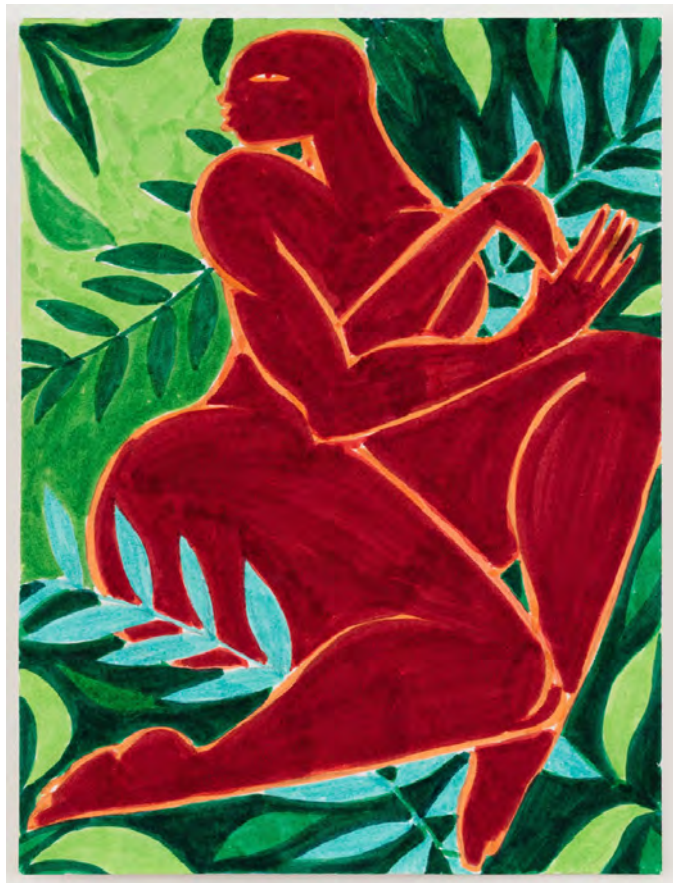
Keep your eye on these rising stars.

Artnet News, December 20, 2019

Tunji Adeniyi-Jones

I think Tunji Adeniyi-Jones will be the breakout star of 2020. He's a young British-Nigerian artist who makes vibrant figurative paintings inspired by his Yoruba heritage. His second New York solo exhibition just opened at Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, and he is one of 16 artists, from over 700 applicants, to be selected for Kehinde Wiley's Black Rock Senegal residency.

—*Molly Krause, communications strategist*



Tunji Adeniyi-Jones, *Untitled* (2018). Courtesy of Nicelle Beauchene Gallery.

ARTFORUM

NEWS

ARTISTS SELECTED FOR KEHINDE WILEY'S INAUGURAL RESIDENCY PROGRAM IN SENEGAL

July 23, 2019



Black Rock Senegal, located on the coast in Yoff Virage, Dakar, 2019.

Black Rock Senegal, the residency program launched by artist Kehinde Wiley earlier this year, announced today that sixteen multidisciplinary artists have been invited to live and work in Dakar from August to April 2020. In addition to receiving room and board, the artists have access to individual studio space and will be given a stipend for supplies and other incidentals.

The participants were selected from more than seven hundred applicants by a committee comprising artist and producer Swizz Beatz; Thelma Golden, director and chief curator of the Studio Museum in Harlem; Thomas Lax, curator of performance and media art at the Museum of Modern Art in New York; Christine Riding, head of the curatorial department at the National Gallery in London; and artists Mickalene Thomas and Carrie Mae Weems.

“I discovered Dakar on a layover in 1997, back when Air Afrique was the sole provider of flights from the west to Nigeria,” Wiley said when he conceived of the program in March. “It was my first visit to Africa and I was immediately enraptured by Senegalese language, food, art, culture, and tradition.”

He added: “Black Rock stands as the direct answer to my desire to have an uncontested relationship with Africa, the filling in of a large void that I share with many African Americans. With this project I wanted to explore my own personal relationship with Africa while inviting artists to do the same and to galvanize the growing artistic and creative energies that exist in Africa in an increasing measure with the addition of diverse, international, creative possibility.”

The artists-in-residence are as follows:

Tunji Adeniyi-Jones (United Kingdom)

Laurence Bonvin (Switzerland)

Sonya Clark (United States)

Yagazie Emezi (Nigeria)

Nona Faustine (United States)

Devin B. Johnson (United States)

Heather Jones (United States)

Grace Lynne (United States)

Zanoxolo Sylvester Mqeku (South Africa)

Kelechi Njoku (Nigeria)

Chelsea Odufu (United States)

Kambui Olujimi (United States)

Zohra Opoku (Ghana)

Rafael RG (Brazil)

Tajh Rust (United States)

Ytasha Womack (United States)



Tunji Adeniyi-Jones: Cross Cultural Aesthetics, Hybridity And The History Of Painting

BY ADEOLUWA OLUWAJOBA | APRIL 15, 2019



New York City-based artist, Tunji Adeniyi-Jones received his Bachelors in Fine Arts from Oxford University and his MFA in painting/printmaking from Yale School of Art. Born in England to Nigerian parents, Adeniyi-Jones has spent a great deal of time between London and Lagos. This cultural duality is at the core of his practice and through painting, sculpture, printmaking, and collage, he attempts to articulate the contemporary aesthetic of the African diaspora through the lens of European history. In this interview with *Omenka*, he discusses his recent exhibition at the Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, *Work on Paper*; his interest in cross-cultural aesthetics and cultural hybridity, as well as the exploration of African mythology in his work.



Your exhibition *Work on Paper* is currently on view at Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York. Kindly tell us a bit about the exhibition and the works shown.

This show features an arrangement of small works on paper that are a very important part of my practice. I've been building this body of work over the past few years, so it felt like the right time to show them as a marker of how my ideas have gradually grown and matured. Each work is an experiment or a study that has then gone on to become a painting, so the exhibition gives the viewer an intimate insight into the thought process behind my larger works.

You were born in the UK, are of Nigerian descent, and currently live in the United States. How have your dual heritage and cultural experiences on three different continents influenced your work, and how do you reconcile them?

I am extremely proud of my Nigerian heritage and equally grateful for my British upbringing. The combination of these two cultures, each having its own rich and expansive art history, has influenced me from a very young age. Throughout my childhood, I was exposed to a vast array of West African sculpture and textiles, both in my household and during trips to Nigeria. This was instrumental to the development of my bright and vibrant colour palette. I also admired the work of British artists like Lucien Freud, David Hockney, and Francis Bacon. Through all of these formative encounters, I developed a love for painting and a tendency to represent the figure. There are so many compelling cultural crossovers between European art and West African art, and my work is an exploration of this exchange, especially seeing as I can claim ownership over both sides of this transaction. I'm interested in how cross-cultural aesthetics and cultural hybridity relate to the history of painting. European modernist movements like Cubism and Expressionism simply would not exist without the influence of West African sculpture. This kind of interrelation is often overlooked or discredited. Moving to America has added another layer of complexity to this perspective, and I've thoroughly enjoyed immersing myself in a new environment. I feel very fortunate to be able to travel between these continents and document my findings through painting.

You hold a BFA from The Ruskin School of Art, University of Oxford, and an MFA in painting from Yale School of Art, Yale University, but your work increasingly explores the history and mythology of the ancient West African kingdoms. How do you successfully fuse these African themes with your Western education and conventions?

I often think back to the Greek mythology and ancient Roman history that I was exposed to as a student, and I try to look at ancient West African history through the same lens. These ancient kingdoms all ran parallel to each other, but because of reductive concepts like primitivism, we rarely see ancient West African history being taught outside of the continent. Every notable Greek myth and fable that we know of has an equally compelling African counterpart. These cultural equivalents have been brilliantly detailed through the literary works of Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and many others, but there is still much room left for visual representation.

Your highly stylised figures are usually shown in acrobatic, floating, sensuous poses. What is your underlying philosophy?

I want the figures depicted in my paintings to be alluring, authoritative, and striking. Many of their poses invoke a sense of physical performance or dance. There are thousands of different dialects spoken across



West Africa, but the most powerful language is communicated through the body. This language of dance and performance transcends all cultural boundaries, and my intention is to charge the bodies in my paintings with this same vigour. One of the most impressive characteristics of any West African sculpture is the physical presence held by each object. Whether life-size or miniature, these sculptures convey a memorable sense of personality and spirit, so I strive to capture physical expression.

Is there an additional significance to their frequent depiction among lush vegetation?

I often try to place my figures in environments that are complementary. So, most of my compositions consist of a body situated in a large field of colour. I like to use this colour space to emphasise motion flowing in and around the figure. I've found that foliage also works particularly well for this because leaves and vines can be used to emulate the curves and shape of the body. I've also taken a lot of inspiration from authors like Amos Tutuola and Octavia Butler. In their wonderfully articulated universes, the jungle space represents a site of infinite possibility. So I try to give animation to nature in the same way.

Your figures also vaguely recall Ben Enwonwu's famous 'Negritude' series, which actively celebrate the Black race. Are you inspired by his work, and what are your points of departure?

I consider Ben Enwonwu to be a pioneer of West African modernism. His work serves as an extensive guide for me as I develop my artistic language. His figures are so effortlessly fluid and expressive. This is definitely something that I am conscious of whenever I paint or draw. I feel honoured to be able to expand upon the themes that he originated throughout the 20th century, and I hope to carry them further forward throughout my own practice.

Traditional African art has always been intertwined with the religion of the people. Is there a religious aspect to your work?

Yes, I draw a great deal of inspiration from my Yoruba ancestry and heritage. Although I don't practise the religion, there are many religious aspects to my paintings. I spend a lot of time familiarising myself with traditional Yoruba customs and try to incorporate as much of it as possible into my work. For example, I've given a few of my paintings very specific titles, such as *Eshu* and *Iyalawo*. I enjoy using popular themes and beliefs surrounding iconic Yoruba deities as a starting point in my work. I'm also captivated by ritual masks from all across the West Africa region. The Yoruba Egungun mask has featured in my work, and also masks from the Bwa and Baule. So, I make a point of researching other religious practices too. Ultimately I want there to be an equal allocation of specificity and accessibility to the subject matter in my work.

What forthcoming project would you like to share with us?

I am currently working towards a solo exhibition at Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, which will take place early in 2020.

Tunji Adeniyi-Jones

NICELLE BEAUCHENE GALLERY

327 Broome Street

November 16–December 23

In all but one of the eight large paintings on view in Tunji Adeniyi-Jones's assured solo debut, a curvaceous, androgynous figure, or pair, floats in space, twisting and turning ethereally through dense vegetation, the coils of a serpent, or gentle foliage that may well be underwater. Adeniyi-Jones's compositions pack everything into a shallow plane. What appears at first to be rougher, more gestural brushwork—in, say, the upper right corner of an otherwise super-smooth canvas such as *Blue Dancer*, 2017—becomes, with a closer look, an almost divine source of light filtering into the picture, adding depth, enhancing color, and deepening the mystery of who, what, and when we are seeing.

Paintings such as *Red Twins*, 2016, owe an obvious debt to Matisse. The two *Blue Dancer* paintings included here, both 2017, seem inconceivable without the dramatic turn in Chris Ofili's career to the blue paintings he began making in

Trinidad twelve years ago. But the real engine of influence is the book giving this exhibition its name—Robert Farris Thompson's *Flash of the Spirit* (1984), a magisterial study of how the visual arts and philosophies of five ancient African civilizations traveled from the old world to the new, with everything from cosmograms and ideographs to praise-chants and divination literature taking on radically new forms and purposes as they entered the cultural milieus of Mexico, Brazil, the Caribbean, and the American South.

Flash of the Spirit was first published not quite a decade before Adeniyi-Jones was born in London to a Yoruba family from Nigeria. Filled with drawings, photographic reproductions of priceless artifacts, and irresistible passages on notions of paradise and mystic coolness, Thompson's book also provides a generous framework for the artist's stylized vocabulary and playfulness with time.



Tunji Adeniyi-Jones, *Blue Dancer*, 2017, oil on canvas, 68 x 54".

-Kaelen Wilson-Goldie

HYPERALLERGIC

ART

When Beauty Is a Draw and a Diversion

Tunji Adeniyi-Jones has discovered the benefits of unique stylization: objects and figures can be made in such a mannered way that they become visual metaphors, flexible in their vagueness.

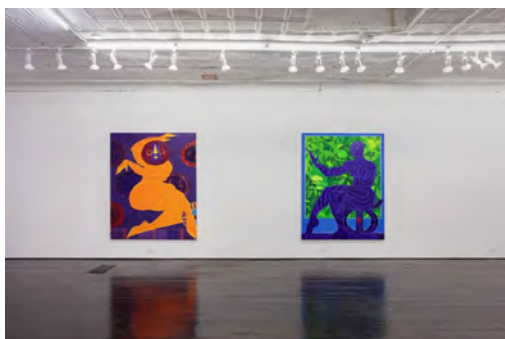
Seph Rodney | 2 days ago



Tunji Adeniyi-Jones "Blue Dancer" (2017) oil on canvas, 68 x 54 inches (all images courtesy the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery)

Most of the figures in [Tunji Adeniyi-Jones's](#) exhibition at [Nicelle Beauchene gallery](#) seem shaped by the slow pull of a gravitational field that insists on everything assembling at its spiraling center; or, conversely, shaped by release from that field, in the process of resuming a more Euclidian form. Their thick, sloping thighs, curvilinear arms, cinched torsos, and tapered feet and hands are all stylized as if based on the template of a voluptuous falling leaf. Some of these leaves provide the backdrop for the foreshortened contexts in which the artist's figures are placed. These foreshortened

backgrounds, and the restricted palette of only two or three dominant colors in each piece — often hues of the primary pigmentation colors and primary additive colors for light, such as dark blue to deep indigo; the varied greens of foliage; or reds including tangerine and maroon — make these curvaceous figures feel like they come from fables.



Installation view of *Flash of the Spirit* at Nicelle Beauchene

Nichelle Beauchene released a press release for [*Flash of the Spirit*](#) that explains the figures as representations of “ancient royalty as well as deities of the Yoruba, called orisha.” But this seems only half possible. With his washy brush strokes Adeniyi-Jones has made figures that are so stylized they exist outside of time. Divine beings can do so (if you believe in Horus how possible is it to imagine a time when the god did not exist?), but aristocrats

are typically defined by their historical contexts. Adeniyi-Jones has discovered the benefits of unique stylization: objects and figures can be made in such a mannered way that they become visual metaphors, flexible in their vagueness. Because they aren’t associated with any specific set of narratives, they also become figures which we can project into our own stories. Coincidentally, they also become representative of their maker. Here the figures attach to something that I can identify, that is the painter’s ambitions and his vision, such as with Matisse’s cutouts in the [*Jazz series*](#). This all means that there isn’t much spirit for me to find here. There is lovely painting and ample fascinating style, and I’m left to wonder how far style can carry me and whether it will be to a worthwhile place.



Tunji Adeniyi-Jones “Red Twins” (2016) oil on canvas, 60 x 56 inches

[Tunji Adeniyi-Jones’s exhibition for *Flash of the Spirit* continues at Nicelle Beauchene gallery](#) (327 Broome Street, Lower East Side, Manhattan) through December 23.

on exhibit

FASCINATING ART DISPLAYS by Terry Trucco

Artful Giving

Who wouldn't love to find a work of art under the tree? Jam-packed with galleries, New York offers something at almost any price for the art enthusiast on your list (or for yourself). Besides, it doesn't cost anything to look.

(1) With over 50 works, "Ardent Nature: Arshile Gorky Landscapes, 1943-47" is a gift for aficionados of the groundbreaking artist, whose enigmatic Surrealism prefigured Abstract Expressionism. Inspired by summers spent on a farm, lyrical paintings like "Pastoral" (1947) show how Gorky (1904-1948) liberated himself from artistic conventions. **Hauser & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St., 212.794.4970, thru Dec. 23**

(2) Can't spring for a grand-scale flower sculpture by art's indomitable 88-year-old Japanese polymath Yayoi Kusama (pictured in her studio)? Join the line for a selfie with or without a friend in her hallucinatory "Infinity Mirror Rooms" during the

exhibit "Festival of Life," which spills through two Chelsea galleries. **David Zwirner, 525 & 533 W. 19th sts., thru Dec. 16**

(3) Collecting work by younger artists lets you watch a career develop and often sidestep stratospheric prices. In "HotSpots," his first New York solo show, Los Angeles artist Brian Rochefort unveils irresistibly tactile ceramic "craters," including "Chumbe" (2017). Rochefort's travels to volcanoes, rain forests and barrier reefs inspired these bold sculptures that blast past traditional ceramics. **Van Doren Waxter, 195 Chrystie St., 212.982.1930, thru Dec. 22**

(4) Born into a Yoruba family in London, Tunji Adeniyi-Jones is fascinated by the enduring influence of ancient West African aesthetic traditions on present-day diasporic communities. In "Flash of the Spirit," the 25-year-old New York artist creates his own mythologies of ancient royalty and Yoruba deities in vibrant, color-field paintings like "Red Twins" (2016). **Nicelle Beauchene, 327 Broome St., 212.375.8043, thru Dec. 17**



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PHOTOS: ARSHILE GORKY, "PASTORAL," COURTESY THE ARSHILE GORKY FOUNDATION AND HAUSER & WIRTH, NEW YORK; YAYOI KUSAMA, "PASTORAL," COURTESY THE ARSHILE GORKY FOUNDATION AND HAUSER & WIRTH, NEW YORK; BRIAN ROCHEFORT, "CHUMBE," 2017, COURTESY THE ARTIST AND VAN DOREN WAXTER; TUNJI ADENIYI-JONES, "RED TWINS," 2016, COURTESY THE ARTIST

10 Art Events to Attend in New York City This Week

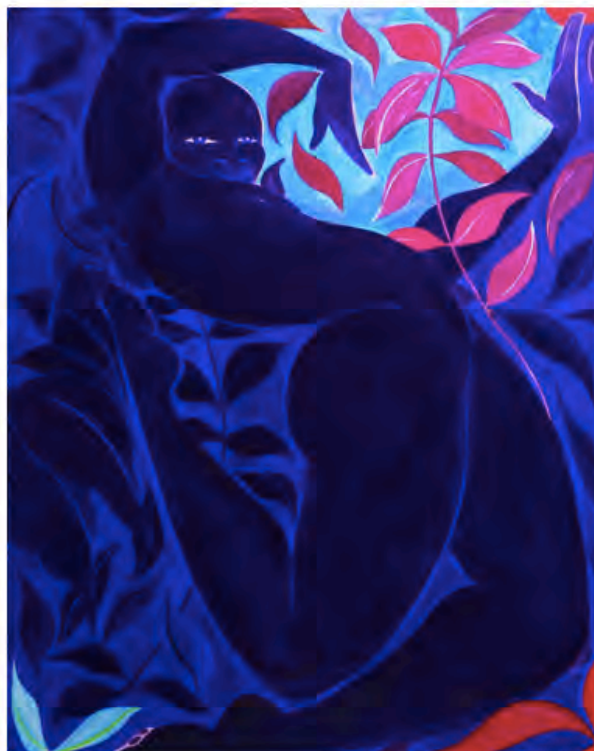
BY *The Editors of ARTnews* POSTED 11/13/17 1:58 PM

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 16

Opening: Tunji Adeniyi-Jones at Nicelle Beauchene Gallery

Robert Farris Thompson's 1984 book *Flash of the Spirit* investigated the influence of West African aesthetic traditions on diasporic communities. With that in mind, New York-based artist Tunji Adeniyi-Jones borrowed the book's title for his first exhibition at Nicelle Beauchene Gallery. Born into a Yoruba family and grew up in London, Adeniyi-Jones creates paintings that combine the traditions of English portraiture with abstract motifs and rich colors that reference objects and styles often associated with West African culture. This exhibition will feature a new series of work that centers around a mythological kingdom and its attendant heirs.

Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, 327 Broome Street, 6–8 p.m.



Tunji Adeniyi-Jones, *Blue Dancer*, 2017, oil on canvas.
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND NICELLE BEAUCHENE GALLERY

ARTE FUSE

Flash of the Spirit: Tunji Adeniyi-Jones at Nicelle Beauchene Gallery

by Ariana Akbari



Tunji Adeniyi-Jones: *Flash of the Spirit* – Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, Installation view, New York, 2017

I shot a few quick glances at the geometric designs hanging in the Jack Hanley Gallery on the first floor, threw a greeting to the two gallerists – in their office, busy rolling a canvas, and listened to the quiet knock-knock-knock of my Nike's as I tiptoed up the wooden staircase to the Nicelle Beauchene Gallery space. There, on the top floor, where there was still a view of the floor below, I felt an immediate sense of suspension, as if I was standing in the sky. From the white walls – clouds, if you will indulge this reviewer in extended metaphor – several large swaths of color beamed from their canvases, striking me like a veritable rainbow, and successfully ushering away the frost of the winter morning, ushering in a decidedly warm presence projected by the artist Tunji Adeniyi-Jones in his *Flash of the Spirit* exhibition.

Adeniyi-Jones draws influence from West African tradition and uses it to create his own world of captivating mythologies. The figures in the paintings alight from their surfaces, with voluptuous figures reminiscent of Matisse and colors reminiscent of those tropical flowers or butterflies that are so precious to rainforest landscapes. The characters on each canvas are at once regal, revolutionary, and filled with a near-animated spirit that cannot be named by the viewer. There is

a sense of power and mystique emanating from many of them – a result of their belonging to stories which we do not have the privilege of knowing.



Blue Dancer, 2017, oil on canvas, 68 x 54 inches.

Particularly striking are the *Blue Dancers*, displayed as a pseudo-diptych along one wall and bringing room for further comparison to Matisse and his *Blue Nudes*. In them, bright pinks forge their own paths amid an undulating sea of light-to-dark cobalt, and the bodies depicted are caught mid fluid-motion.



Resting Oryx, 2016, acrylic on paper, 80 x 80 inches.

The singular piece, *Resting Oryx*, of a depiction of an animal — an antelope species native to Africa — further contextualizes the fictionalized ancient mythological domain to which *Flash of the Spirit* makes its claim. Bright eyes eerily alight from a blue beast in a forest of bright green, projecting a wisdom more similar to that captured in the humanesque figures on the canvases it accompanies.

The world of Adeniyi-Jones is a world of glassy surfaces, delicate lines, and long strokes. The topographic quality of each makes them feel deeply personal in a way — as if you could imagine the hand tracing the lines. Although the mythologies depicted are largely unknown to the viewer, that is part of what makes them so intriguing. Along with imagining the physical creation of the pieces, one can imagine beyond them to the histories which prompted their creation.

Flash of the Spirit is not to be missed and is on view at the Nicelle Beauchene Gallery at 327 Broome St. until December 23, 2017.



The Magus, 2017, oil on canvas, 74 x 60 inches.