

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 milieu 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"