

EVERYBODY



IS LOOKING AT US

LEY MBORAMWE NEDIA WERE OLORUNTOBI AINA IBIM COOKEY
EBUKA PASCAL AGUDIEGWU ALUU PROSPER CHIGOZIE
RESTONE MAAMBO BOB NOSA ALADEJARE AYODEJI
LATEEF OLAJUMOKE MPHOFENI

At no point in the history of painting has the black body been so exalted, fetishized, or scrutinised. I believed the matter to be one driven by colonial guilt, the attrition of white mythological power, and, in lieu of a more hybrid and global grasp of humanity, the need for revisionism. This greater inclusivity is certainly the case, but so is the on-going commodification of black life. Black portraiture, today, is a double-edged sword, as promising and inspiring as it remains inextricably bonded to centuries of othering and exclusion. That racism is on the rise at precisely the point at which we enshrine a globally inclusive humanity should alert us to a persistently perverse paradox. Blackness is now revered and valued, true, but it is also still feared, its economy and exchange idolatrous.

I, however, err on the side of optimism. As the director of Eclectica, Shamiela Tyer, notes – ‘Everybody is looking at us’ – that is, at black bodies. Then again, we have always been spectacularised and objectified. The difference concerns the ethics of seeing – Are black bodies being seen differently? And, in the case of black art and black artists, can we declare that a new world is upon us? Certainly, the prevailing view is that Contemporary African Art has assumed centre stage as a globally viable asset. As the leading patron in the arts, Lady Linda Wong Davies, has noted, China too is following the new tastemakers in the West. Given that blackness is primarily an Atlantic matter – the triadic interface of Africa, Europe, and the Americas – this interest from and across the East is salutary.

The dominant iteration in Contemporary African Art is portraiture, a genre and tradition primarily the province of white men in power. Its ubiquity today is immensely instructive, because now it is no longer power – the economy of patronage – which dictates portraiture, but a democratic instinct and desire to embrace the lives of others – black lives in particular. Moreover, as Tyer notes, it is not the classical genre of portraiture that prevails but its distinctive morphing, notably, ‘the freshness or boldness of the palettes’. Today, in African and diasporic paintings by black artists, there is undoubtedly a marked colour saturation – ‘something different in the way the black body is rendered’.

What is Tyer inferring? What constitutes the difference? Is bold colour blocking a peculiarly African phenomenon? Is it not, rather, a symptom of the dominant Pop aesthetic? In other words, isn’t it better to understand the bold usage of colours, and the flattened iconographic depiction of bodies, as the inevitable by-product of a globalised art movement, one in which African artists have inserted a distinctive quality? In the works on show at Eclectica, this distinctive trait is impossible to unsee. Ley Mboramwe recovers an electric blue inside of black skin, then offsets this with mustard eyeballs and lips the palest pink. This strategy is not unique. Bodies are never the colours we think them to be. Objectification is a surreal, and dangerous, enterprise, which Mboramwe, in a seductive palette that echoes Tretchikoff’s Chinese Lady, reminds us of. If black skin, like oriental skin, is exotic, it is also the site for painterly innovation.

Aluu Prosper, on the other hand, counterpoints muted and loud tones. Preoccupied with spatial design – how a black body, loudly dressed, inhabits a muted urban context – the paintings exude both degrees of comfort and discomfort in situ, which is principally signalled through disproportionate small head. This distortion is not merely the artist’s signature, but the clue to an existential examination of being and belonging, and arrest. Unsettlement and irresolution are pervasive in these paintings.

The case of Nedie Were, Ley Mboramwe, Ibim Cookey and Aina Olorunubi, is perhaps better known. Like Kerry James Marshall, a key precursor and influence, she has deepened black skin, thus flattening contours, shutting out light, and amplifying the void which, according to Ralph Ellison and Frantz Fanon, defines the precarity of black existence. As Ellison famously observed – black bodies are invisible. In Were’s case it is not this pathology that dominates, but its attenuation within a more enabling visualisation of blackness – the way a black body complements and disappears into night, the way illumined detail in the eyes and clothing break from night. It is the tension between disappearance and appearance, invisibility and visibility, that is vital. As for Boris Anje, the overall affect is decorative, the body a continuation of an urban and a bucolic design, in which fashion meets nature, commodification the elemental, with the black body as the playful join between worlds.

There are many ways to understand blackness. This is Shamiela Tyer’s point. She too sees the vital influence of Pop Art, in the form of Warhol and Basquiat. She too cannot ignore the fact that the black body is the locus, par excellence, of consumerism. Does this mean that Contemporary African Art is now ‘mainstream’? Yes and no. Yes, because it is a greatly desired collectable. No, because it continues to occupy an uneasy place in a revisionist culture, which, in my view, is for the good.

‘What exactly is the dialogue? Tyer asks. Is that dialogue truly reciprocal? Are black lives truly being listened to? Notwithstanding the ubiquity of the Selfie culture, and the metastasized narcissism it endorses, or, more generally, social media as a ‘junkie culture’, can one still speak of Contemporary African Portraiture as a revolution in aesthetic practice? I believe that we can. And this, when all is said and done, is Shamiela Tyer’s point.

LEY MBORAMWE

Ley Mboramwe was born and raised in Kinshasa. He later went on to study at the Academie des Beaux Arts, known for its rich legacy of artists and cultural workers. Since moving to Cape Town, his work has evolved and he has focused on painting. His current work is imbued with these varied art practices and the traditions he immerses himself in. Present in the forms depicted and in his titling, Mboramwe locates his paintings in a conversation around nationhood, belonging and experience.

**LEY MBORAMWE**

Limbo, 2022

Acrylic on Canvas

100 × 100 cm

R47 000



LEY MBORAMWE
Limbo Deux, 2022
Acrylic on Canvas
122 × 91 cm
R47 000

NEDIA WERE

Born and raised in Kenya, self-taught artist Nedia Were currently lives and work in Nairobi city. Nedia Were has harnessed his creative practice with a specific focus on oil painting and portraiture. Were's artwork is a visual response to the discourse surrounding representation of African figures within the Visual Art realm especially within learning institutions and Art History.



Nedia Were
Mukhana
127cm x 112cm
Arcylic on canvas



Nedia Were
The Portrait of Kemunto
170cm x 140cm
Arcylic on canvas



Nedia Were
Woman I
122cm x 99cm
Arcylic on canvas



Nedia Were
 Woman II
 122cm x 102cm
 Arcylic on canvas



Nedia Were
 The Tall Boy
 152cm x 122cm
 Arcylic on canvas

OLORUNTOBI AINA

Oloruntobi Aina is a contemporary visual artist who lives and works in Ibadan, Nigeria. He obtained a National Certificate in Fine Arts from Federal College Of Education, Osiele, Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria, and later received a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the prestigious Obafemi Awolowo University. The artist is continually pursuing his creative practice as a painter, while his signature style displays branches and twigs onto figures as an attempt to reconcile with his subjects with nature.



OLORUNTOBI AINA

Confidante , 2022

Acrylic on Canvas

127 × 101.6 cm

R89 000



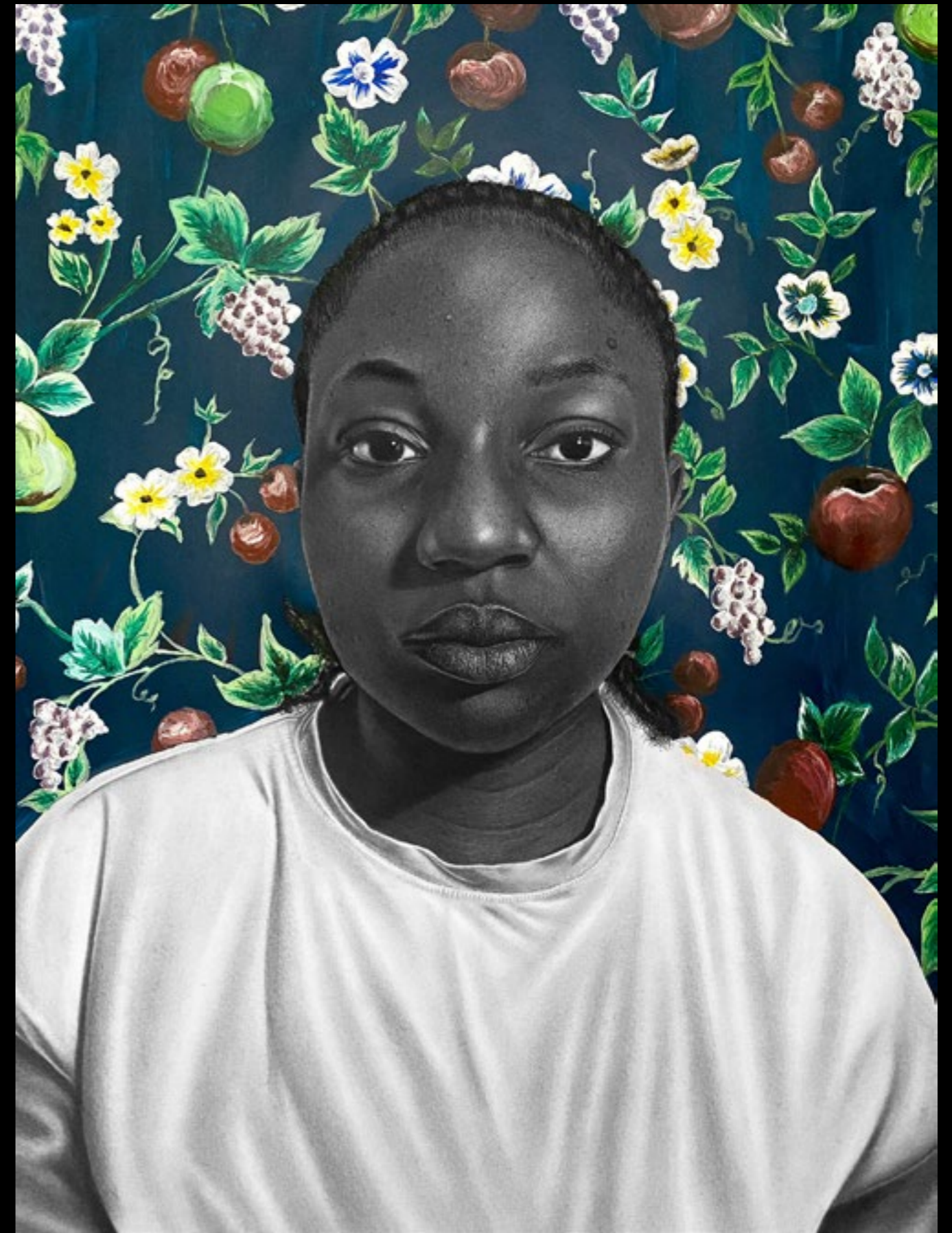
OLORUNTOBI AINA
 Self-worth I, 2022
 Acrylic on Canvas
 121.9 × 91.4 cm
 \$4800



OLORUNTOBI AINA
 Self-worth II, 2022
 Acrylic on Canvas
 121.9 × 91.4 cm
 \$4800

IBIM COOKEY

Ibim Cookey mainly produces charcoal portraits embellished with African motifs. The artist aims to change the stereotypical image of African people conveyed in our current society and wishes to give a voice to this community. The textile patterns depicted in his backgrounds, is called Ankara fabric that is also referred as African wax prints fabric, Holland wax, or Dutch wax. Ankara fabric is known for its colorful prints, and is deeply associated with African clothing and traditions.

**IBIM COOKEY**

Vivian, 2022

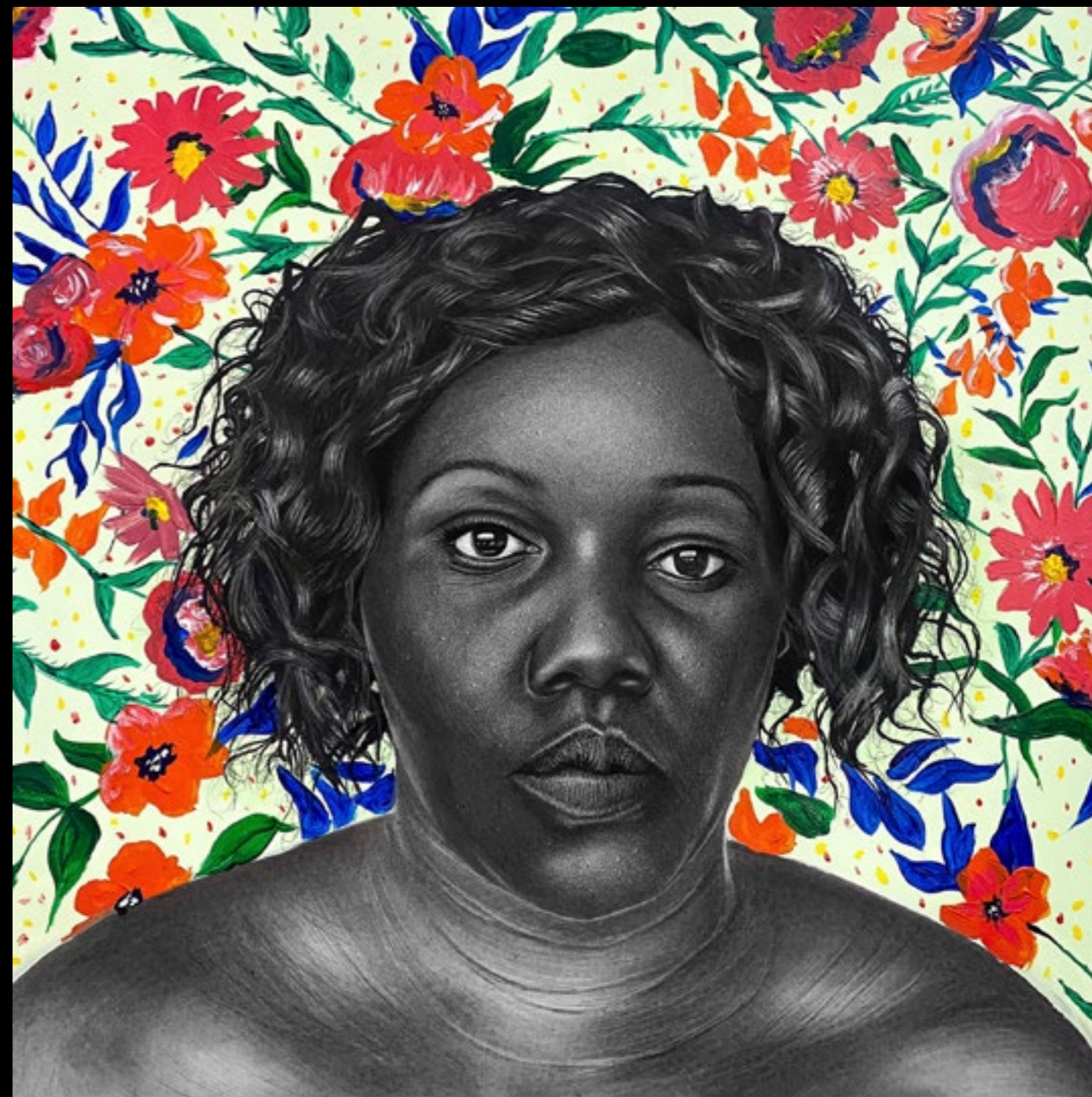
Charcoal and Acrylic on Paper

75 × 60 cm

\$4500



IBIM COOKEY
 Dormitory Girl, 2022
 Charcoal and Acrylic on Paper
 79 × 60 cm
 \$4300



IBIM COOKEY
 Aunty Janet, 2022
 Charcoal and Acrylic on Paper
 55 × 60 cm
 \$3500

EBUKA PASCAL AGUDIEGWU

Ebuka Pascal Agudiegwu (1997), is a self-taught artist and currently resides in Abuja, Nigeria. Ebuka's creative practice has enabled him carve a niche in the realm of figurative surrealism. The artist explores and challenges the critical life issues that questions norms and traditions. "I am deeply fascinated by the mutual relationship between man and plant, and that ignited in me a sense of consciousness towards my environment."



EBUKA PASCAL AGUDIEGWU

Comfort in the middle of nowhere , ca. 2022

Acrylic on Canvas

122 × 122 cm

\$3000

**EBUKA PASCAL AGUDIEGWU**

Cheers to none of your business, 2022

Acrylic on Canvas

122 × 109 cm

\$3000

ALUU PROSPER CHIGOZIE

“I once had a conversation with a friend and he said there is a difference between black and what our skin color looks like. He questioned binaries which was preached to us through Christianity. The devil is identified in most books with black apparel and God with a white apparel. This painting is meant to show what the color black looks like against the color of the subject’s skin. The figures are hugged by a nimbus or halo which is used iconographically to indicate holiness. “



ALUU PROSPER CHIGOZIE

Why called blacks?, 2022

Oil on Canvas

62 × 65 cm

\$2050

RESTONE MAAMBO

Restone Maambo (Zambian) was chosen at an early age to become a spiritual healer and yet he followed his calling as a visual artist instead. Symbols from everyday life interact with the sacred traditions and ceremonies of his ancestors creating an interpretation of his life in Zambia and what lies beyond it. His artworks are created using acrylic impasto paint, varnish layering and collage.



RESTONE MAAMBO

Umamelo, 2022

Pastels, spray paint and acrylic on canvas.

120 × 90 cm

R78 000



RESTONE MAAMBO

Msuthu II, 2022

Pastels, spray paint, acrylic and collage on canvas.

140 X 110 cm

R100 000



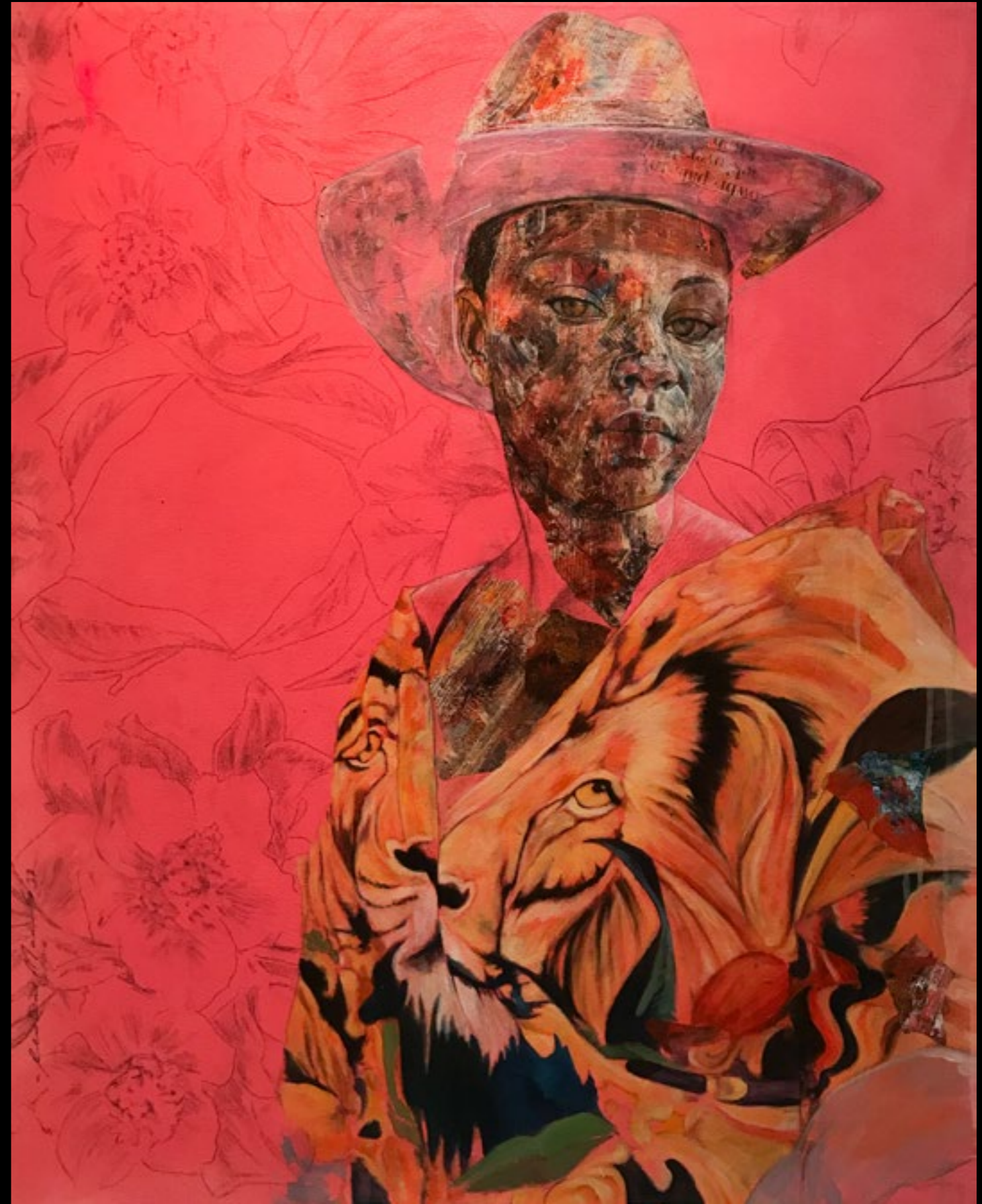
RESTONE MAAMBO

Msuthu, 2022

Pastels, spray water based oil and collage on canvas.

140 x 110 cm

R110 000

**RESTONE MAAMBO**

Fashioned, 2022

Pastels, spray paint, acrylic and collage on canvas.

113 × 90 cm

R78 000

BOB NOSA

Bob-Nosa Uwagboe (1974) is from the ancient city of Benin Kingdom, rich in cultural and artistic heritage, Edo State, Nigeria. He received his professional education at the famous colorist school, Auchi Polytechnic, where he specialized in painting. He often succeeds in provoking varied interpretations mostly concerned with issues of falsehood, and deception. The poor leadership in Africa and high level of inhumanity practices among men that has become the norm is his primary interest in art.



BOB-NOSA

Inhumanity to men by men, 2017

Acrylic on Watercolor paper

29.7 × 42 cm

\$1720



BOB-NOSA
The Victor, 2017
Acrylic on Canvas
29.7 × 42 cm
\$1720



BOB-NOSA
Inhumanity to Africa by an african, 2017
Acrylic on Watercolor paper
29.7 × 42 cm
\$1720

**BOB-NOSA**

Marching to Freedom, 2021

Acrylic, spray paint, fabric, collage on textured canvas

168 X 122 cm

\$10 800

ALADEJARE AYODEJI

Aladejare Ayodeji (1995) is a contemporary painter whose hyper realistic portraits amplify methodologies and intuitions of the African diaspora. The artist was born Ekiti state, and currently lives and works in Lagos Nigeria. He is a Graduate of Yaba college of Technology where he obtained his degree in Visual Art and where he became known as the spherical Artist. With this approach the artist blends two contradictory ideologies namely modernity and tradition with the use of the gazing ball.



ALADEJARE AYODEJI

Recurrence, 2022

Acrylic on Canvas

122 × 100 cm

\$3000



ALADEJARE AYODEJI
 Door of my Mind, 2022
 Acrylic on Canvas
 122 × 100 cm
 \$4000



ALADEJARE AYODEJI
 Nightly culture, 2022
 Acrylic on Canvas
 122 × 100 cm
 \$4000

LATEEF OLAJUMOKE

Lateef Olajumoke (1982) was born in Lagos and is a graduate of Town and Regional planning from Lagos State polytechnic, Nigeria. He is concerned with using lines to create representational art. Primarily, Olajumoke is interested in exploring emotions and reactions of people in his immediate cosmopolitan environment with the aim to suggest solution through his visual rendering. His process is experimental with exploration of media such as paint, discarded paper egg create and rubber.



LATEEF OLAJUMOKE

Reflection II, 2022

Acrylic on Canvas

120 × 105 cm

\$5000



LATEEF OLAJUMOKE
Reflection III, 2022
Acrylic on Canvas
120 × 105 cm
\$5000

MPHO FENI

The artist's series of work channel self-realisation and defeating his own suppression by means of "labour". Through the artist subconscious journey in his labour, he developed ideas which he decided to utilise in his concept of creativity and innovation. The paper bag on his face simply signifies the obsession of the artist-to him conforming to labour, emphasising that there was nothing broader besides his job, which led the artist forget about his creativity.



MPHO FENI

Where have you been?, 2022

Acrylic on Canvas

119 × 84 cm

R40 000



MPHO FENI
 Where have they been I, 2022
 Acrylic on Canvas
 127 × 90 cm
 R35 000



MPHO FENI
 Where have they been II, 2022
 Acrylic on Canvas
 130 × 90 cm
 R35 000

