

# ABE ODEDINA: JUST LOOKING



ART X  
LAGOS

ED CROSS FINE ART (Stand 1)

VIP Preview: Friday 1 November, 2pm-10pm

Public Days: 2-3 November, 10am-8pm

The Federal Palace, Victoria Island, Lagos

Ed Cross Fine Art is proud to exhibit new works by Abe Odedina for the ART X Lagos 2019.

This solo presentation of new paintings by Nigerian artist Abe Odedina welcome us all to take a breath, a beat, and 'just look'. It is a gesture at once playful and grievous – an invitation full of generosity.

Odedina's paintings speak through a highly legible allegorical vernacular, warmly hailed as 'Brixton Baroque', referencing the culturally eclectic and community-focused London neighbourhood he has called home for over 3 decades. His work is bold and mythical whilst always accessible – their readability is paramount. Odedina describes himself as a folk artist and his practice is inspired by the rich figurative and oral traditions of African art, infused with a trace of magic realism. *'The struggle is to reconcile bold imagery with ideas about ambiguity or indeterminacy. My intention is to arouse the imagination and heart of the viewer and to detonate ideas in another realm.'*

This invitation to come in and 'just look' is thus as much about the everyday, accessibility, and ownership as it is about magic. Odedina's oeuvre focuses on communicating things in this world, for he believes the magic is all here and all of ours for the taking. His paintings explore the magic in the mechanics – of living, of making, of looking – they ask: what can you bring to the table, to the party? Furthermore, this new body of work draws empowering attention to the fact that it is indeed impossible to 'just look': humans are judgemental, subjective, moderated by our own personal cultures, and the styles in which we perceive the world around us. Yet these characteristics are our strengths, enabling us to create nuanced languages of looking. By stripping away the dismissive or flippant nature of this phrase, Odedina ironically fills it with power, poignancy, and play.

We find these languages of looking pulsing through two particularly iconic paintings on display: in *Love Play* and *Making Waves*. These sister paintings exist in parallel worlds, as if one is orchestrating the other's crescendo and climax. In *Love Play* we see two figures 'just looking' at each other, whereas *Making Waves* directs our gaze boundlessly upwards, the act of looking having no end and no limit. Whilst these paintings take place in our own reality, they have inexplicably magical properties: the music becomes resonant waves, the waves become tides of change, the change becomes an act of love – the love of breathing, the love of moving, the love of looking. These gestures are all connected, and connect us to each other. All we have to do is look.

This special presentation for ART X departs from Abe Odedina's first large-scale solo show *EYE TO EYE* (2016) at Copeland Gallery in London, whereby the artist focused on empowering the viewer, the gaze, and audience interpretation, 'acknowledging the role of the spectator in completing each work, each armed with their own unique point of view'. As with this new body of work it is not just about looking, or agreeing, but rather about communicating and connecting. This ethos expands to conjuring ideas of belief, ritual, and equality to form simultaneously spiritual and sustainable representations of humanity. For Odedina is influenced by a diverse range of creators – Voodoo practitioners from Haiti, the Painters of the Sacred Heart, anonymous African craftsman – championing those who choose to be makers. His practice seeks to revive and deconstruct quintessential classical themes spanning from ancient Greek to Yoruba mythologies to create a charged dialogue between epochs, cultures, and peoples. The stories breaking through the surface of his paintings surpass physical borders. They activate a uniquely contemporary conversation that oscillates between life and art, and in the folk tradition, life trumps art.

In a celebration of life and looking, Odedina offers us a spectrum of faces: one glancing sideways, gold jewellery blowing in the wind in; another with his head tilted backwards, basking in the light of looking up; and some staring out straight ahead, beckoning us to look closer, feel deeper, and reach further. These faces foresee a future where the past meets the present, where change is possible, and where we are not afraid to just look.

**Text by Katherine Finerty**



**Abe Odedina** (b. 1960, Ibadan, Nigeria, lives in London and Salvador Bahia) is a trained architect who started painting on a trip to Brazil in 2007. Now a full-time painter, Odedina works with acrylic on plywood, making flat surfaces with vibrant, stylised subjects that delight in the use of colour and celebrate the power of both the everyday and the mythical. Solo exhibitions: *Birds of Paradise*, Copeland Gallery (2019), *True Love*, The Department Store Brixton (2018); *Body Language*, 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair, Somerset House (2017); *EYE TO EYE*, Copeland Gallery (2016), *HI-LIFE*, Brixton East (2014); and *Under the Influence*, Aldeburgh Beach Lookout (2013). Group exhibitions: *Get Up, Stand Up Now: Generations Of Black Creative Pioneers*, Somerset House (2019); *Talisman in the Age of Difference*, Stephen Friedman (2018); *Summer Exhibition*, Royal Academy (2017), *Brixton Design Trail*, Street Gallery (2015); *Global Artists Consortium*, Knight Webb Gallery (2013); and *BP Portrait Award*, National Portrait Gallery (2013). The artist, together with The Underground Museum, Los Angeles, was awarded the 2017 *Ellsworth Kelly Award* from the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, New York. His works are in major collections internationally, including The British Government Art Collection. Portrait by Claudia Leisinger

**Ed Cross Fine Art** is based in London and was established in 2009, although Cross has been a 'pioneer' in the field of Contemporary African Art since 2006. The gallery works with leading emerging curators and represents international artists, in particular those of African descent, whose practices engage in significant global conversations today.

**Katherine Finerty** (b. New York City, lives and works in London) is an independent curator focusing on socially engaged practices, translocal identity politics, and contemporary African art. She holds an MA in Curating from the Royal College of Art and studied History of Art at Cornell and Cambridge Universities.



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