

## AT AFIKARIS GALLERY, MATTHEW EGUAVOEN TESTIFIES ON HIS ROLE AS A FATHER THROUGH A GALLERY OF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PORTRAITS

*Fed by his experience as a young father, the first solo show devoted to Matthew Eguavoen in France – Egbé Okpá, which means « One Family » in Benin language – a language spoken in the artist's native Edo region of southwestern Nigeria – questions parenthood and the impact of this upheaval on the couple. From April 2nd to May 3rd, the dozen new works on canvas by the Nigerian artist unveils intimate portraits by plunging the viewers into the intimacy of moments of sharing and family.*

**2 April — 3 May, 2022**



Left. Matthew Eguavoen, *She came with additional pounds*, 2021. 120x120 cm. Acrylic and oil on canvas. Courtesy of AFIKARIS Gallery.

À droite. Matthew Eguavoen, *Yaniwura (Mother is as precious as gold)*, 2022. 130x100 cm. Acrylic and oil on canvas. Courtesy of AFIKARIS Gallery.

21 March, 2022 (Paris, France) – AFIKARIS Gallery maintains its support to the African contemporary emerging art scene by hosting Matthew Eguavoen's (b.1988, Nigeria) first solo show in France. This exhibition is in the continuity of the presentation of the artist's work by the gallery in South Africa during the Investec Cape Town art fair (17 – 20 February 2022) and Switzerland at artgenève (2 – 6 March 2022). In parallel with the exhibition, three works will be showcased at Christie's in Paris in the framework of the 1-54 Paris art fair from April 7 to 10.

In *Egbé Okpá* (2 April – 3 May), through a dozen of new works on canvas, Matthew Eguavoen deals with the topic of parenthood. He projects into his canvases his own experience as a young father. The narrative echoes the birth of his first child. Matthew Eguavoen exposes a frank and personal vision of parenthood. His portraits featuring neutral expressions and piercing gazes leave room for interpretation. Although they are tinged with tenderness, they sometimes bear witness to a certain baby blues where parenthood is accompanied by its share of questioning and doubts.

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Matthew Eguavoen's portraits stage his thoughts on Nigerian society. He explores social, economic and political issues through the eyes of his models. Himself brought to address the essence of his work, he responds:

*"With my work, I want to address the societal, political, and economic issues that surround me in Nigerian society and in Africa in general. I try to create awareness, to address all sorts of issues related to my home country Nigeria, and to Africa."*

Matthew Eguavoen's paintings recall the challenges and impact of parenthood. To be a parent is to decentre oneself, to think of one's child before thinking of oneself. Matthew Eguavoen stages and highlights the different duos that emerge within the family relationship, the complicities that are created as well as the ties that bind them.

Through *Egbé Okpá*, Matthew Eguavoen perpetuates the tradition of family portraits. Historically, family portraits were used to depict historical figures, politicians, members of the aristocracy, and the bourgeoisie. They anchor the family in history and bring forward its social and economical success.

In the same vein, by immersing his figures in the comfort of a domestic setting, Eguavoen highlights the central position of the child in this new trio. He illustrates how the harmony of the couple is changed, how the offspring becomes a new pillar of the family balance. It is now this little girl who attracts attention in the foreground. She is the one who now rules the family life.



Above. Matthew Eguavoen, *I was my parents' flower girl*, 2021. 180x155 cm. Acrylic and oil on canvas. Courtesy of AFIKARIS Gallery.

It is in that way that the gallery of crypto-portraits of Matthew Eguavoen is articulated around the arrival of his child. By reflecting on his feelings about his new fatherhood, he instills the idea that becoming a father has changed his conception of the world and his relationship with his partner. The paintings follow the stages that Matthew Eguavoen himself faced in his journey: from the difficulties he finally overcame to his pride in being a father. The titles of his works - *Behind Every successful Adam*; *Iyaniwura (Mother is as precious as gold)* - reflect the importance of the female figure: companion and mother - as precious as gold.

While the traditional family portrait has been gradually abandoned for photography, democratizing it by making it accessible to all - notably through studio photography - Matthew Eguavoen himself draws his inspiration from fashion shots and changes the context. In this way, he creates certain proximity between his models and the public and recalls the moments of sharing and pride captured in the photo studios that spread and made the reputation of African photography.

With *Egbé Okpá*, Matthew Eguavoen proposes a personal and intimate collection, bringing his viewers into the heart of his emotions, in the footsteps of his own experience.

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## **PRESS CONTACT:**

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## **NOTES TO EDITORS:**

About Matthew Eguavoen:

Matthew Eguavoen (b. 1988, Edo State, Nigeria) is a painter who works and lives in Lagos. A self-taught artist, Eguavoen is part of the Black Vanguard movement, this figuration that claims its origins and culture; influenced by the fashion industry.

Eguavoen's portraits reflect his gaze on the society in which he evolves, specifically through a reflection on family, immigration, and consequences of the colonial past. He gives an overview of social and political issues and mainly focuses on humans.

Matthew Eguavoen's work has been featured in different international art fairs such as Investec Cape Town art fair (Cape Town) and artgenève (Geneva). His work will be showcased at 1-54 Paris (7 — 10 April) and 1-54 New York (19 — 22 May).

About AFIKARIS Gallery, Paris :

Founded in 2018 by Florian Azzopardi, to promote emerging and established artists from Africa and its diaspora, AFIKARIS Gallery opened a dedicated Paris-based gallery space in 2021. Engaged in promoting cross-cultural and disciplinary exchange, AFIKARIS acts as a platform for artists to engage with the wider public. A mirror onto and space for reflection on the contemporary African art scene, it provides artists with a space to address the topical local and international issues at the heart of their art.

AFIKARIS's curated program includes group and solo exhibitions; art fairs; publications; as well as institutional partnerships.

Matthew Eguavoen, *Egbé Okpá* | 2 Avril — 3 May 2022

**PRESS OPENING: Friday, 1 April, 14h — 19h**

**PUBLIC OPENING: Saturday, 2 April, 14h — 21h**

AFIKARIS gallery  
38 rue Quincampoix  
75004 Paris, France

Tuesday - Saturday : 11h — 19h

Sunday : 14h — 18h

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