

# AFIKARIS

## AFIKARIS GALLERY MAINTAINS ITS SUPPORT TO THE EMERGING AFRICAN ART SCENE AND MARKS THE BEGINNING OF ITS COLLABORATION WITH NIGERIAN ARTIST BOLUWATIFE OYEDIRAN BY HOSTING HIS FIRST SOLO SHOW DURING HIS RESIDENCY IN GHANA

*The very first solo show devoted to Boluwatife Oyediran – Point of Correction – questions the Occidental vision of political and religious power. From January 22 — February 22, 2022, the dozen of new canvases by the Nigerian artist plunges into cotton fields historical characters - from Napoleon to Queen Elizabeth II - and religious icons, whose he shifted the color of their skin. Through strong images challenging the representation of traditional icons, he establishes new models and conveys hope.*

22 January – 22 February, 2022



Left. Boluwatife Oyediran, *Self Portrait as Napoleon*, 2021. 225x175 cm. Acrylic on canvas. Courtesy of AFIKARIS Gallery and Noldor Residency.

Right. Boluwatife Oyediran, *Untitled (Portrait of Queen Elizabeth II)*, 2021. 200x214 cm. Acrylic on canvas. Courtesy of AFIKARIS Gallery and Noldor Residency.

January 11, 2022 (Paris, France) – Mirroring its will to promote young talents from the African continent, AFIKARIS Gallery hosts for its first exhibition of 2022, the very first solo show of the Nigerian artist Boluwatife Oyediran (b.1997, Oyo, Nigeria). *Point of Correction* (22 January – 22 February) marks the beginning of their collaboration, which will also result in the presentation of new works by the artist at the 1-54 Paris fair next April (7 – 10 April 2022). Through the dozen canvases gathered in *Point of Correction*, Boluwatife Oyediran draws his inspiration from European painting of the Renaissance era and proposes an alternative narrative where he sheds light on historical figures - from Queen Elizabeth II to Pope John Paul II and Napoleon - whom he changed the complexion. The canvases featured in the exhibition aim to correct the very notions of black identity, power, fashion and monarchy, whilst anchoring his compositions in the history of cotton-growing.

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Through pure and sharp aesthetic, Boluwatife Oyediran shows that the brutality of racial hierarchy and power structures established in the past can be subverted and pulled down.

Oyediran does not sink into an accusative speech. On the contrary, he speaks up for a better future without reproducing past mistakes. He proposes to rethink the pre-existing hierarchy and the patterns of power by bringing historical correction. His art is a call for the inclusion of black persons who have been historically marginalized, exploited, excluded and under-represented, by reversing this under-representation and giving them back their share of power. Thus, his self-portrait as Napoleon is a strong symbol in itself. By adopting the features and posture of the man who seized power during the *Coup* of 18 Brumaire (9 November 1799), he takes the power back.



Above. Boluwatife Oyediran, *One of Y'all Folks Gon Betray Me*, 2021. 200x300 cm. Acrylic on canvas. Courtesy of AFIKARIS Gallery and Noldor Residency.

If he changes the white skin color of historical persons, he denounces the imagery and the Christian ideology in the vein of Harmonia Rosales. Boluwatife Oyediran takes over an emblematic artwork from Christian iconography: *The Last Supper*. While the composition is identical to Philippe de Champaigne's work nicknamed '*The Little Last Supper*' (1648), itself inspired by Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* (1495-1498), Oyediran operates a twist in the depiction of the skin. He represents Jesus as a black man crowned with a golden halo. A central figure, both the gazes of the apostles and the viewers lead toward him. Furthermore, Oyediran inspires new icons by adorning his characters with a halo. In this way, he aims to question the European interpretation of the Bible, the games of power, as well as the hierarchy within religion.

For his first exhibition in Paris - the Fashion capital - Oyediran the similarities between the history of fashion and cotton-growing through the role played by black persons. Through the cotton fields, he refers to the Transatlantic Slave Trade that participated in the prosperity and lushness of the colonial Empire, as well as the industrial revolution. In this way, he puts forward these hidden figures who were fundamental to the economic success. He frees them from the weight of the past and empowers them. He explains:

*"In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, cotton as a cash crop was America's greatest export; following the Civil War of 1861 – 65, America exported 3 million bales of cotton, the U.S.A single-handedly supplying half of the world's cotton, which helped fuel the century's Industrial Revolution in both the United States and Great Britain. This cotton was all massively produced by the sweat, toil and suffering of black people, for the realization of some people's inordinate quest to accumulate wealth and/or capital, but no one talks about that."*

Brought to express his artistic approach and the deeper meaning of his painting, Boluwatife Oyediran concludes: *"I met someone who once told me that my figures appear to be phoenixes rising out of their own ashes (the cotton fields), in glory and splendour. I quite agree with that."*

Ultimately, Boluwatife Oyediran does not rewrite History, but invites viewers to reflect on it. It is not about forgetting the past but rather about building the future. If *Point of Correction* showcases historical figures,

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the exhibition talks above all about representation. It affirms that every person's speech matters and that everyone can achieve their dreams regardless of the color of their skin. Oyediran seeks to inspire and encourage new generations by erecting new models to prove anything is possible.

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## **NOTES TO EDITORS:**

### **About Boluwatife Oyediran:**

Boluwatife Oyediran (b.1997, Oyo, Nigeria) is a painter currently working in Ghana where he is a fellow at the Noldor Residency. Oyediran is a contemporary painter working primarily with figuration and text. His practice is informed by a deep commitment to reimagining and reorientating black identity in the canons of history, religion and Western art, using cotton as an essential symbol of interrogation.

His works prompt reflection on long-standing systemic oppressions, particularly through his interrogation of the connecting link between the history of fashion, the history of cotton, and how these histories are related to black people. This informs his signature approach of placing black people dressed in high fashion in cotton fields, as well as his installation of black people in spheres of power that are hostile to them, rebuilding them with the inclusion of black possibilities and representation. His works ask questions about looking, while injecting fresh perspectives and alternative narratives into ways of seeing. They reach into established norms, probe and question European constructs of biblical origin, characterization and identity, as well as power plays and representation in organized Christianity.

Boluwatife Oyediran's artworks will be showcased in 2022 during international art fairs such as Artgenève (Geneva) and 1-54 Paris (Paris). *Point of Correction* is the very solo show of the artist and marks the first time his work is on view in France.

### **About AFIKARIS Gallery, Paris :**

Founded in 2018 by Florian Azzopardi, AFIKARIS Gallery started as an online platform and showroom specialized in the work of both emerging and established artists from African and its diaspora, before opening 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.

Boluwatife Oyediran, *Point of Correction* | 22 January — 22 February, 2022

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