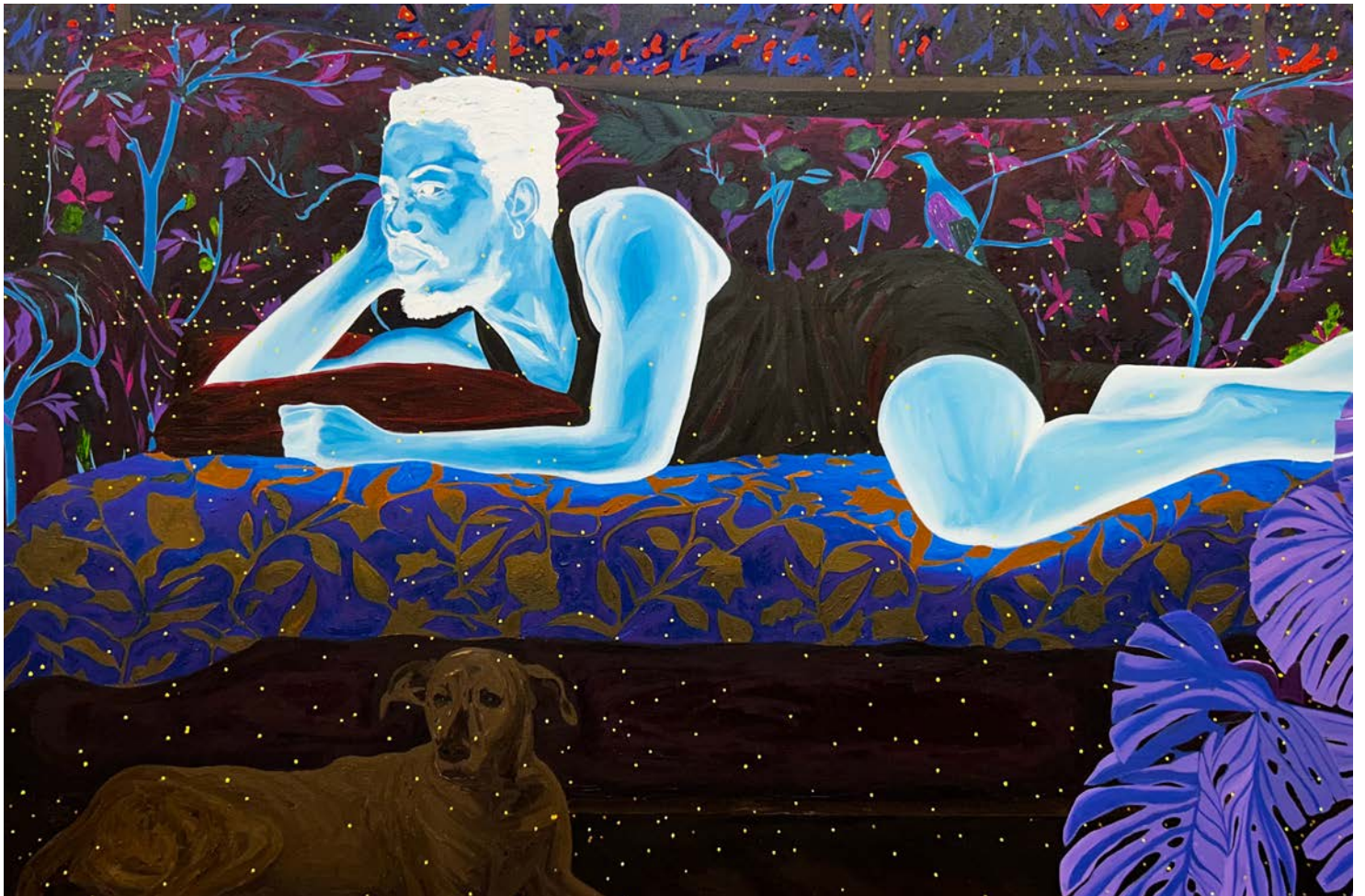


BOLUWATIFE OYEDIRAN

PORTFOLIO



BOLUWATIFE OYEDIRAN

BOLUWATIFE OYEDIRAN WAS BORN IN NIGERIA IN 1997. HE CURRENTLY LIVES AND WORKS IN RHODE ISLAND, USA.

After a period at the Noldor Residency in Accra in 2021-2022, Ghana, Boluwatife Oyediran pursued his artistic career at the Rhode Island School of Design, from which he recently graduated with a Master of Fine Arts degree in painting.

A contemporary figurative painter, Oyediran's practice reflects his deep commitment to exploring Black identity, which he reimagines and reorients within the canons of history, religion and Western art.

Oyediran's early works used cotton as a central symbol of his thinking. They encouraged reflection on historical systemic oppression, by questioning the links between the history of fashion, the history of cotton and the way in which these histories are linked to Black labour.

His ongoing conceptual research – which is a continuation of his previous body of work – led him to develop the concept of 'Inverted Blackness'. In these new portraits Black figures are painted in negative; their bodies are blue and luminous, as though going through a transformative and otherworldly experience. The people who populate his new paintings are immigrants and nonimmigrants who left the African continent to settle in the United States.

This new series will be the subject of a second solo exhibition at the AFIKARIS gallery in autumn 2024, entitled *Inverted Blackness* and accompanied by a publication of the same name.

Boluwatife Oyediran has had two solo gallery exhibitions: *Point of Correction* at AFIKARIS Gallery in Paris in January 2022 and *For Boiz Like Me Who've Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf* at 1957 Gallery in Accra in the summer of 2022. His work has also been shown at the Museum of Fine Arts in Krems, Austria, as part of the exhibition *The New African Portraiture*. *Shariat Collections* curated by Ekow Eshun.

BOLUWATIFE OYEDIRAN

b.1997

Ogbomosho, Nigeria

Lives and works in Providence, RI, United States



EDUCATION

2024 - MFA in Painting, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI, USA

2021 - B.A Literature-in-English, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

2016 - NCE in Fine and Applied Arts, Concentration in Painting, Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Oyo, Nigeria

SOLO SHOWS (SELECTED)

2024

Inverted Blackness, AFIKARIS Gallery, Paris, France

2022

For Boiz like me who contemplated suicide / When the rainbow is Enuf, Gallery 1957, Accra, Ghana

Correction Point, Afikaris Gallery, Paris, France

GROUP SHOWS (SELECTED)

2024

1-54 London, AFIKARIS Gallery, London, United Kingdom

RISD MFA Painting, FLAG Art Foundation, New York, United States

What Lovers Do, Twelve Gates, Philadelphia, United States

Annual Graduate Exhibition, Convention Center, Providence, United States

Black Biennial 2024, RISD Museum, Providence, United States

2023

The new African portrait, curated by Ekow Eshun, Kunsthalle Krems Museum, Krems, Austria

Contemporary redefined: Africa Today, Sotheby's Tel Aviv, Tel Aviv, Israel

The Sound of Our Souls, Ada Gallery x UTA Artist Space, Los Angeles, United States

Painting with Butter, Alumni Biennale, Sol Koffler Gallery, Providence, United States

2022

MFA Triennial Exhibition, Woods Gerry Gallery, Providence, United States

UNLIMITED, Gallery1957, Accra, Ghana

Classic!, AFIKARIS Gallery, Paris, France

1-54 NYC, New York, United States

A Place of One's Own, Andrea Festa Fine Art, Rome, Italy

2021

WOP Art Fair, Kutlesa Gallery, Exhibition Center Lugano, Lugano, Switzerland

AWARDS / PRIZES

2023 - Presidential Fellow, Rhode Island School of Design, United States

2022 - Artist-in-Residence, 1957 Gallery, Accra, Ghana

2021 - Junior Fellow, Noldor Artist Residency, Accra, Ghana

2017 - Independent Studio Practice, A.S. Ebenezer Studio, Ibadan, Nigeria

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Institute Museum of Ghana, Ghana

David Adjaye Collection, United Kingdom

New York Amir Shariat Collection, Austria

Marcus Gardley Collection, USA Olym Collection, Israel

Elliot Perry Art Collection, United States

Kutlesa Collection, Switzerland

Art Maisonmarios, Germany

Serge Tiroche Collection, Israel

INTERVIEWS AND PUBLICATIONS

Boluwatife Oyediran, Inverted Blackness. AFIKARIS Publishing, 2024

A Death in the Family. Transition Magazine (Issue T136). Indiana University Press, 2024. Harvard University.

The New African Portraiture: The Shariat Collections, Ekow Eshun and Amir Shariat. Kunsthalle Krems, 2022.

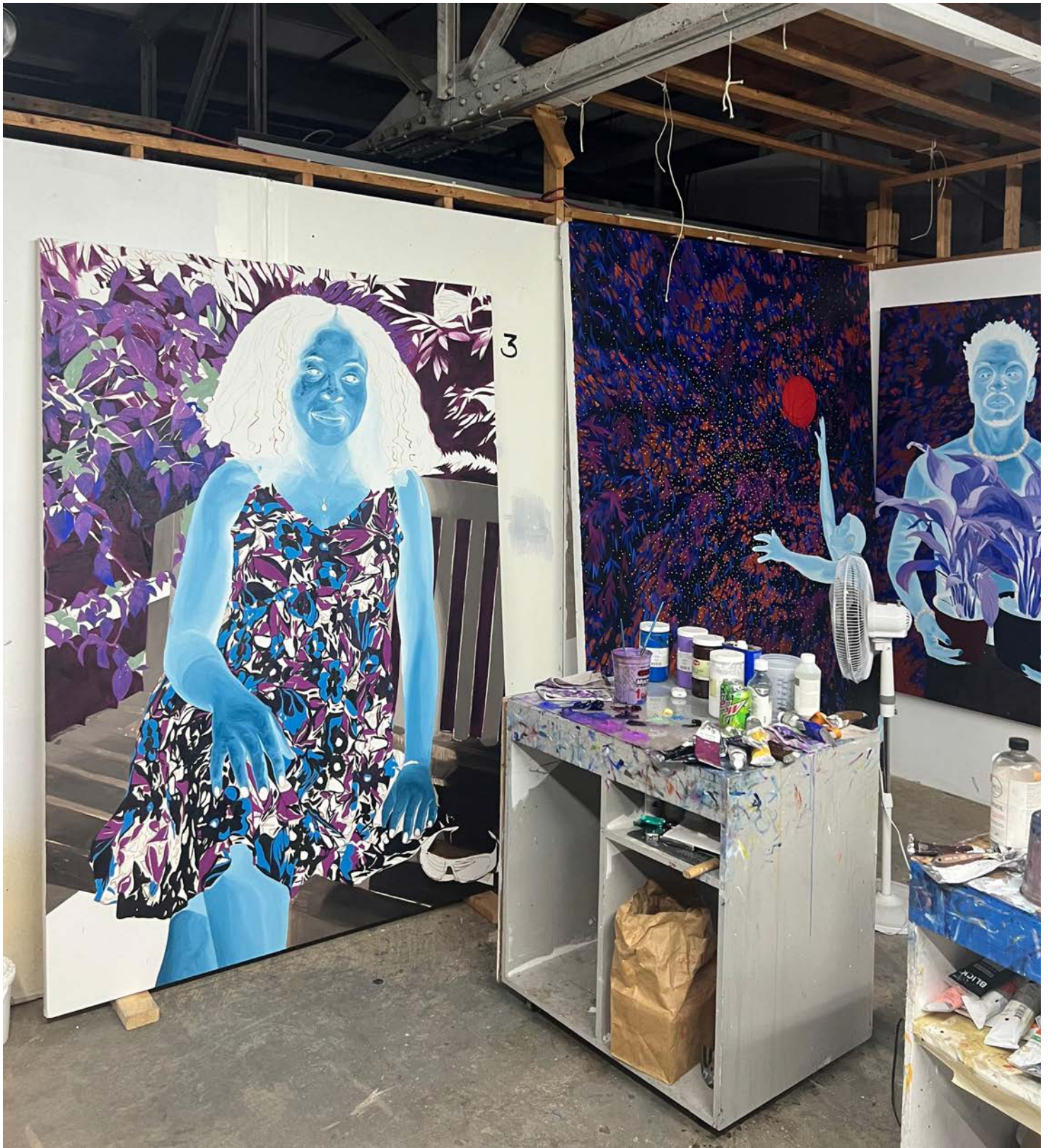
Boluwatife Oyediran.

The Trial. The Best of Isele Anthology. Iskanchi Press, 2022.

“Boluwatife Oyediran Has the Art of Questioning the Western Vision of Political and Religious Power”, Yong Chim and Valériane Gauthier. France 24, 2021.

At the Afikaris Gallery, Boluwatife Oyediran Offers a Rereading of History, Olivier Herviaux. Le Monde Africa, 2021.

Individuals, Filters and Reality: The Exhibition in Andrea Festa's Home Gallery in Rome. Giorgia Basili. "Atribune", 2021.



“How else would I visualize the effect of complication, mutation, and inversion of identity, the alienation and otherness of the Black immigrant living in colored America, if not by using what is available and recognizable by everyone—the inversion filter?”

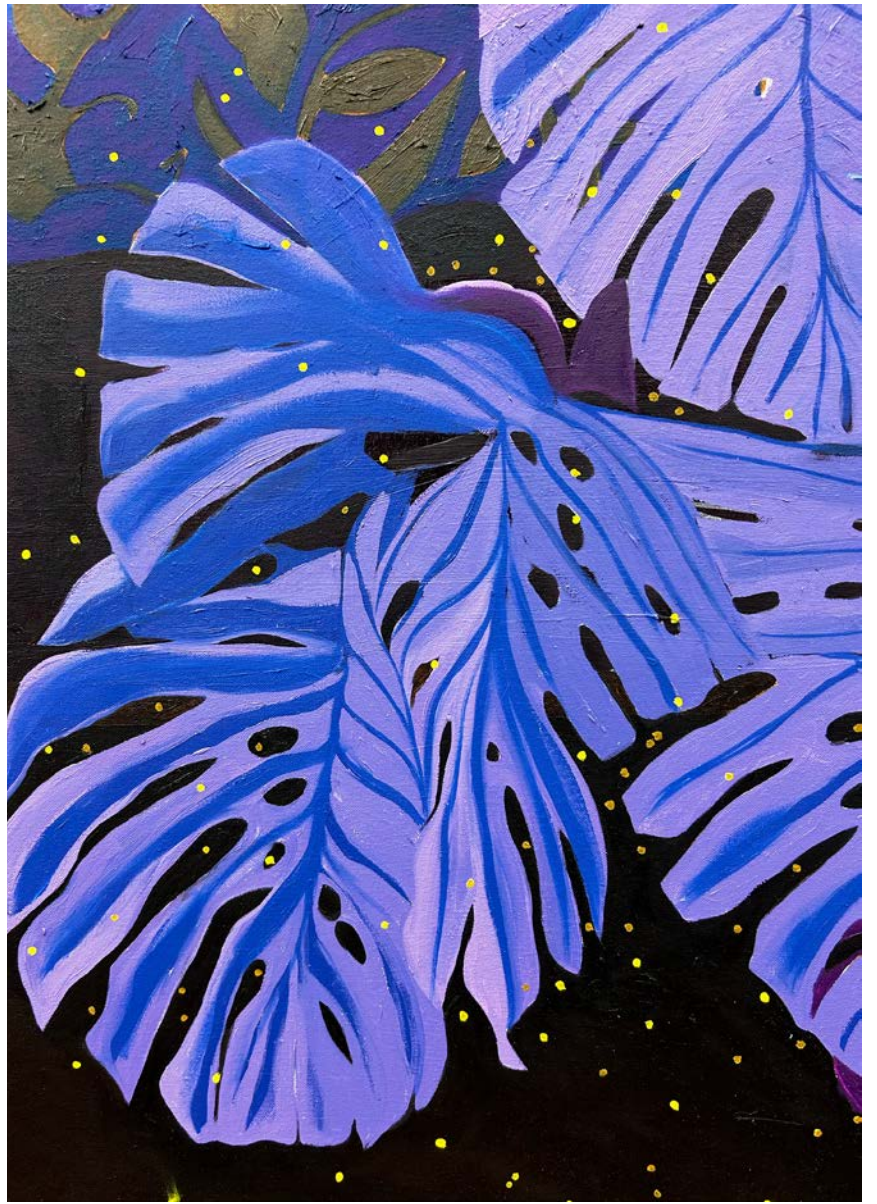


DAVID ON A COUCH, 2023-24

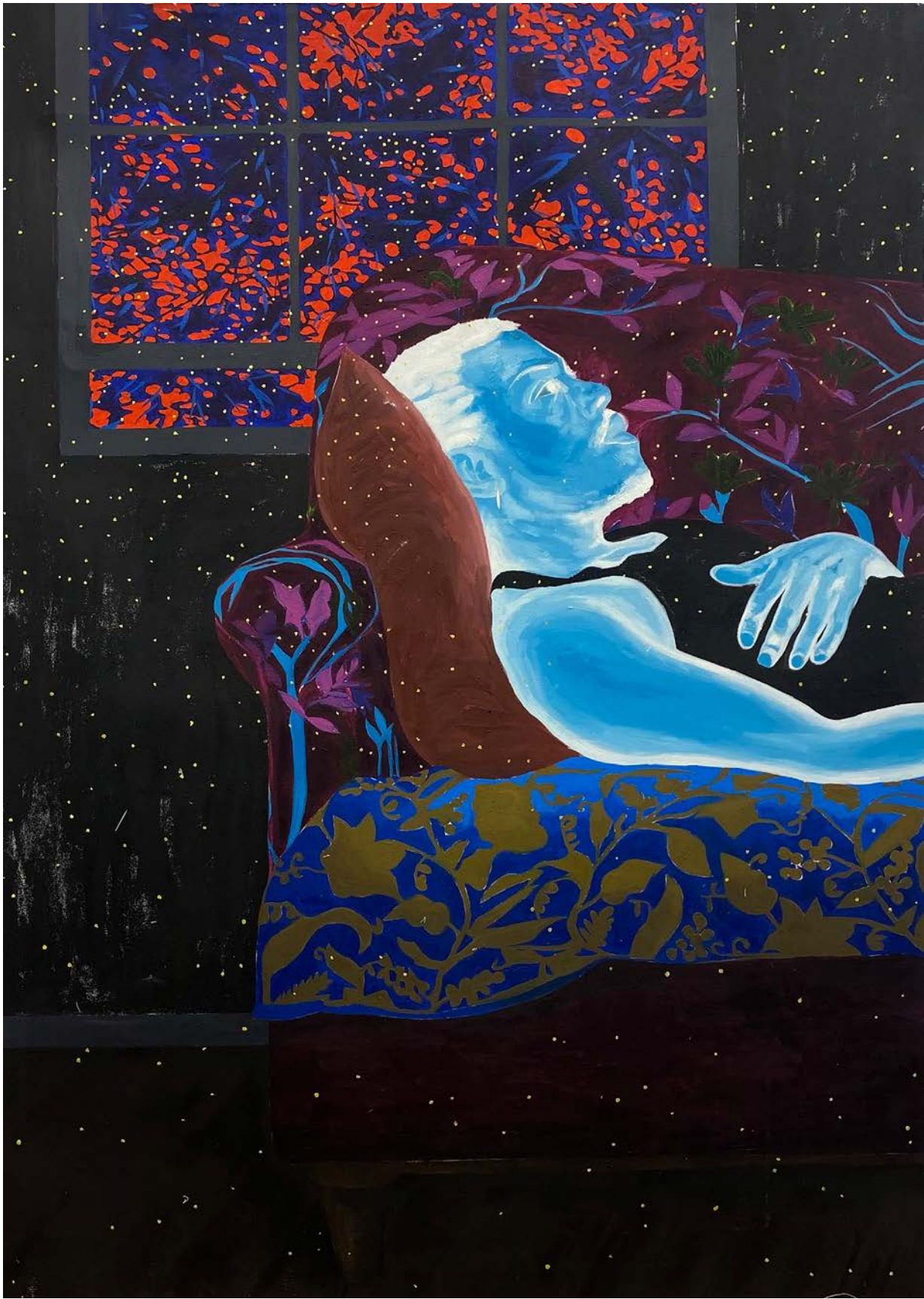
Oil and acrylic on canvas

183x244 cm / 72x96 in

The apparent blue bodies bathed in a luminescent halo are in reality the image of black bodies switched to their negative. This transformation, digitally operated and then reproduced onto the canvas, constitutes what Oyediran calls Inverted Blackness - the concept at the heart of his eponymous exhibition. Besides the colour inversion process, Oyediran engages with the denomination 'negative' itself, making a parallel with the stigmatisation and prejudices African immigrants face when they arrive in America.



DAVID ON A COUCH, 2023-24
Detail



DAVID ON A COUCH, 2023-24
Oil and acrylic on canvas
177x120 cm / 69x47 in



UNTITLED (LANDSCAPE I), 2023-24

Oil on canvas

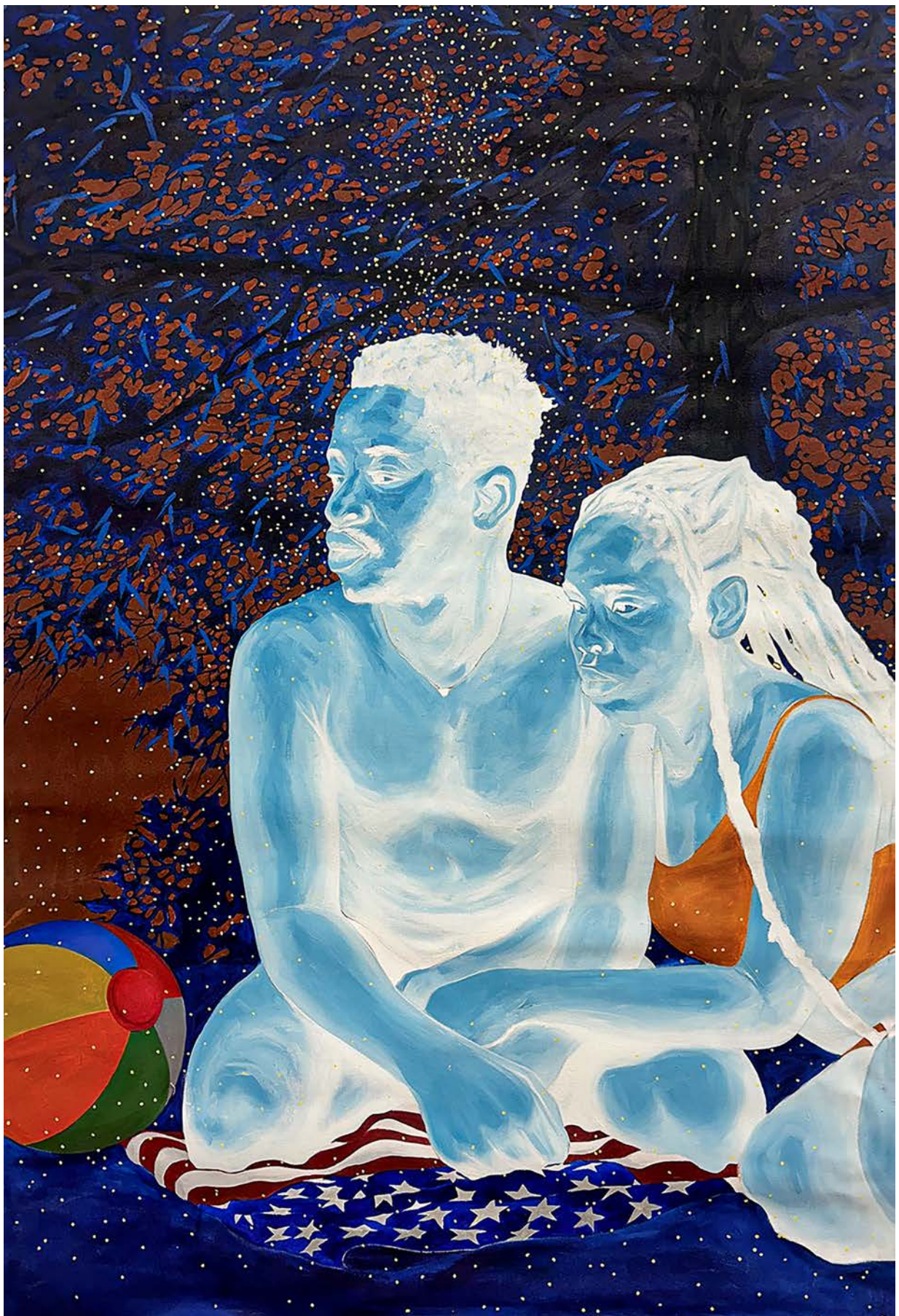
152x92 cm / 59x36 in



FAITH, 2024
Oil and acrylic on canvas
213x152 cm / 84x60 in



PLANTS OF AMERICA, 2023-24
Oil and acrylic on canvas
183x122 cm / 72x48 in

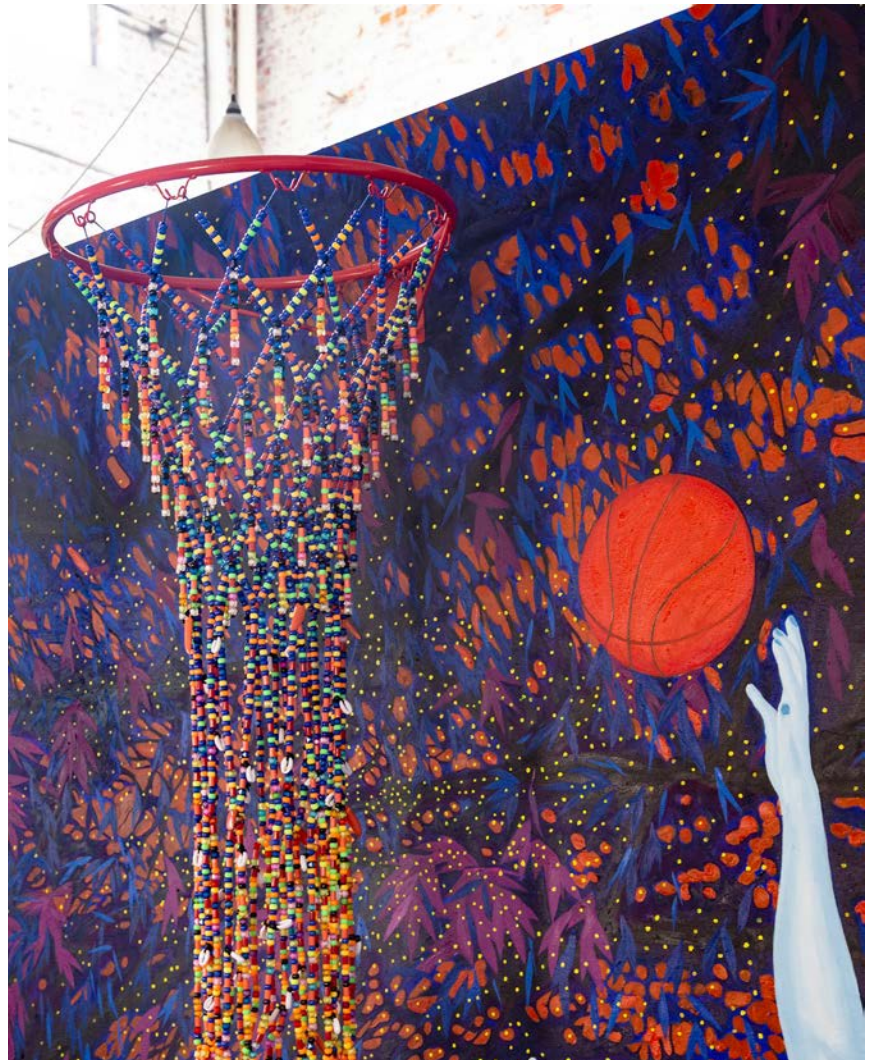


DAMI AND OBASI I, 2024
Oil and acrylic on canvas
183x122 cm / 72x48 in

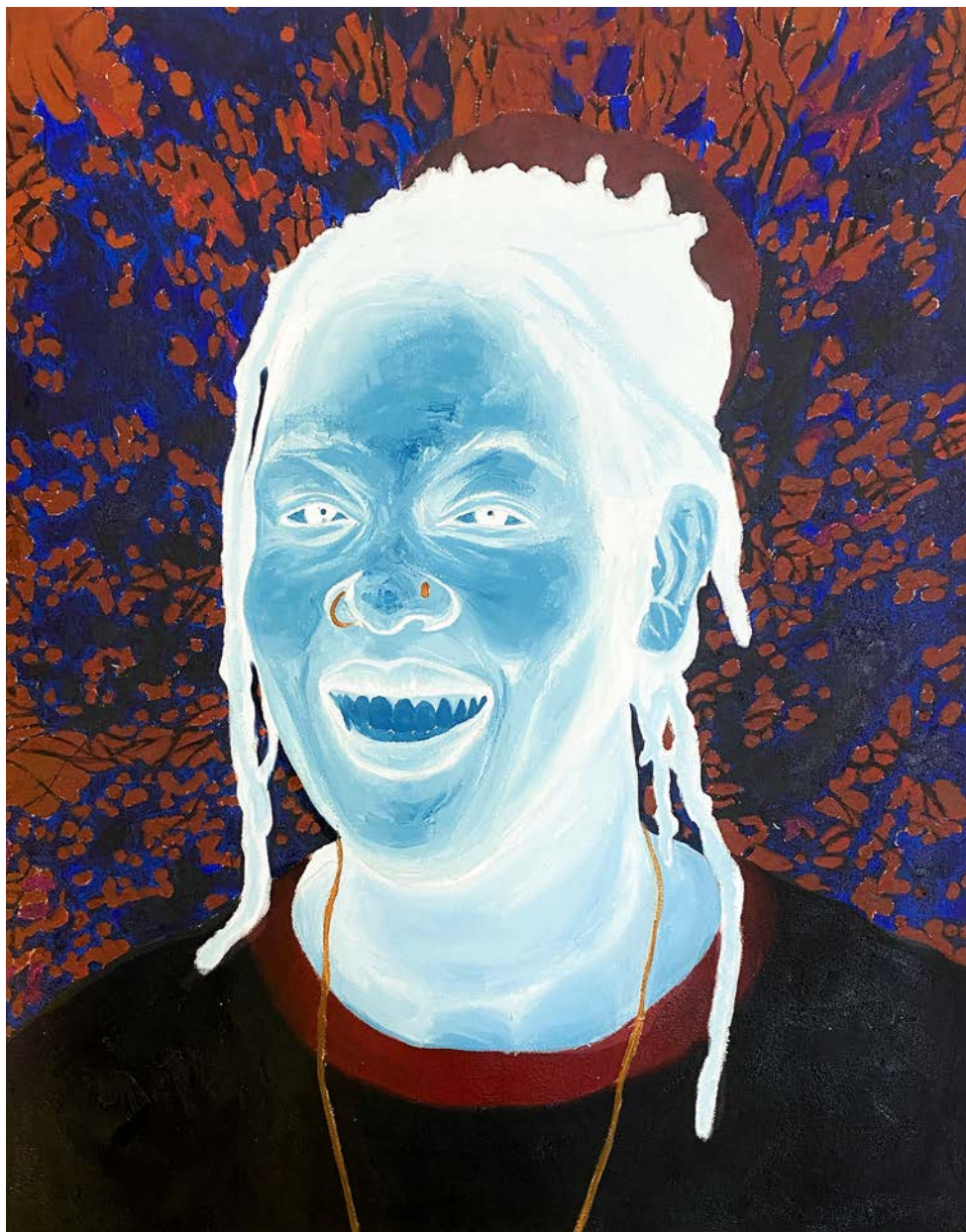
“I want to make works that deeply communicate the human experience, vis-à-vis the experience of the African immigrant adjusting to life in America, one who constantly finds themselves in opposition, disillusion, agreement and disagreement with the tenets of this country.”



HIGHER GOALS (AFTER HAMMONS), 2024
Oil and basketball hoop with beaded net on canvas
244x183 cm / 96x72 in

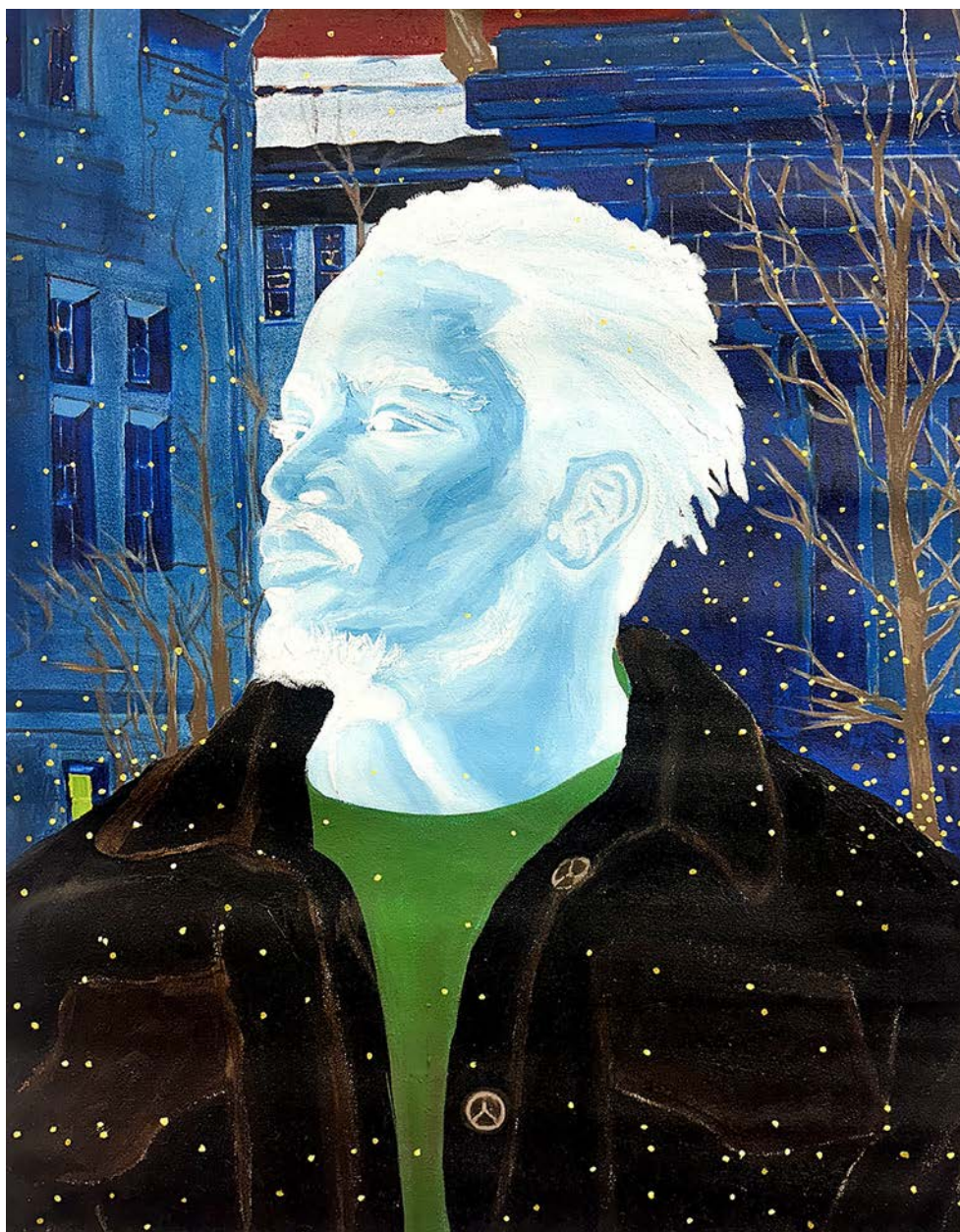


The canvas Higher Goals (After Hammons), 2024 - a self-portrait of the artist playing basketball, displays three-dimensional objects that combine American culture - the hoop - and Nigerian culture - the beaded net. A reference to David Hammons's work - five basketball poles so high that it is impossible to throw balls in - it represents the aspirations of the immigrants, and it projects the image of America most of them grew up with: "a paradise on a distant planet. A place of shine and glitter and fast life", as Oyediran described a few months after he arrived in the USA in a short story called *Jupiter in Bad Conditions* - where fiction and autobiographical details mingle in a very close dance.



JOANNA, 2024
Oil and acrylic canvas
76x61 cm / 30x24 in

Facing the canvases, the viewers can read *Inverted Blackness* as if they were going through Oyediran's diary. The cerulean hues imbuing the bodies reflect an internalised process of metamorphosis, witnessing the journey of African citizens moving to the USA - in echo with the artist's path. He proposes an aesthetic of the hybrid in the lineage of post-colonial theories.



DAMI, 2024
Oil and acrylic on canvas
76x61 cm / 30x24 in

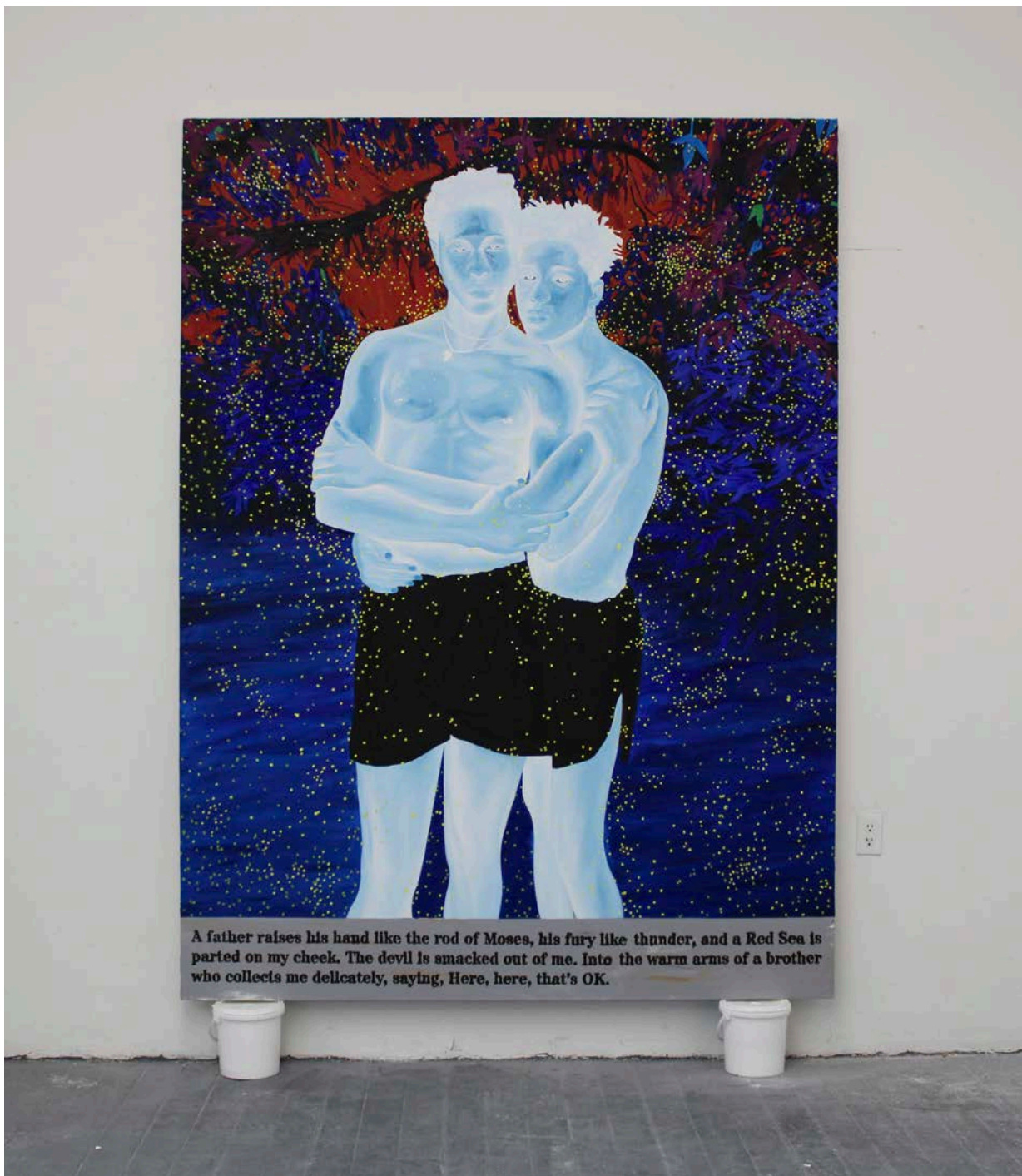


A father raises his hand like the rod of Moses, his fury like thunder, and a Red Sea is parted on my cheek. The devil is smacked out of me. Into the warm arms of a brother who collects me delicately, saying, Here, here, that's OK.

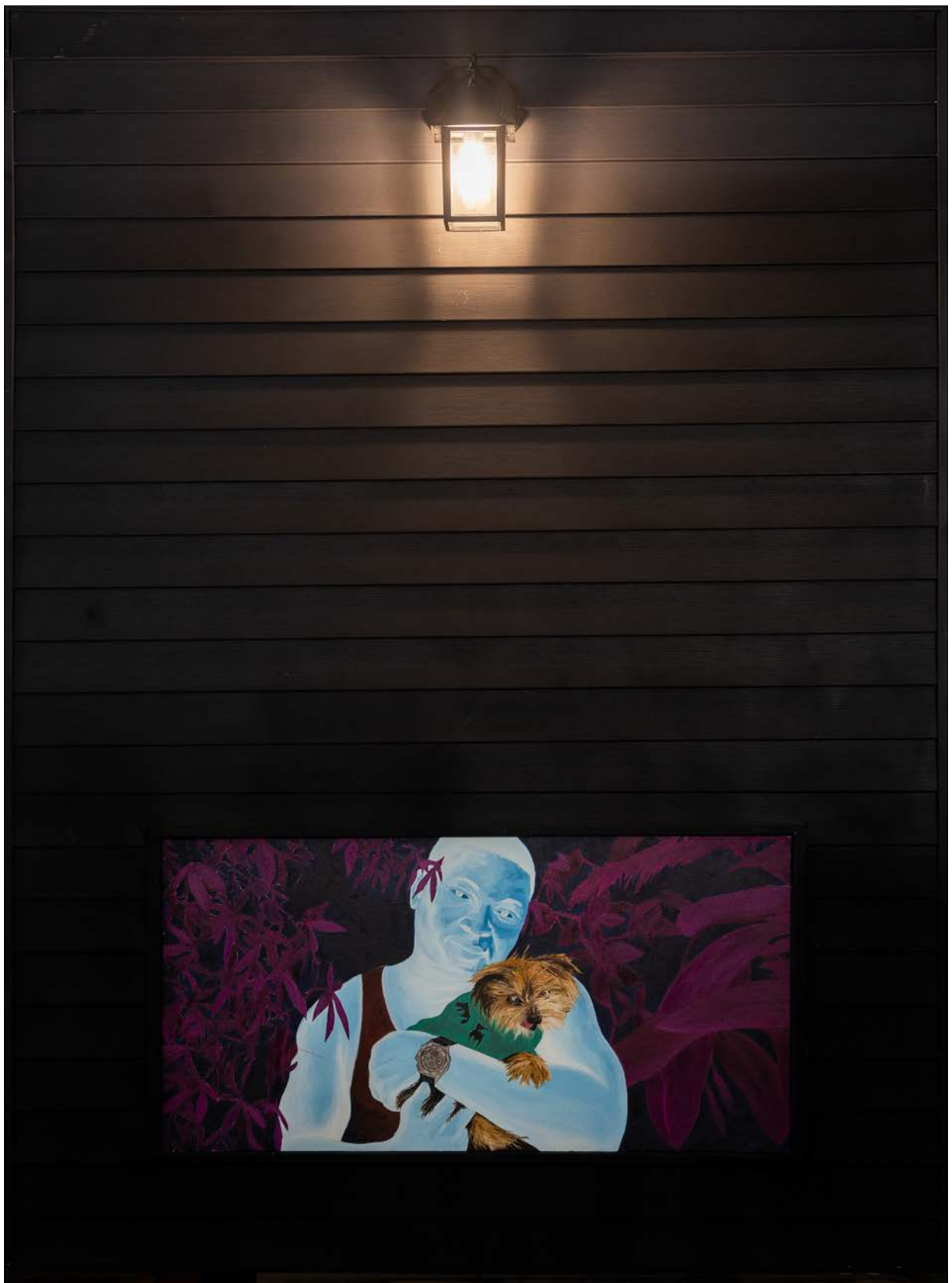
A FINE SPRAY OF LOVE AND CRUELTY, 2023

Oil, acrylic and oil stick on canvas

244x183 cm / 96x72 in



At the artist's studio
Providence, Rhode Island, USA



MY BASEMENT WINDOW (AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE I), 2024

Mixed media (acrylic and black 4.0 spray painted on vinyl siding structure affixed with outdoor lamp, lamp wire connected to light source)

244x183 cm / 96x72 in



MY BASEMENT WINDOW (AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE I), 2024

Detail



COTTON FLOWERS III, 2024
Oil, acrylic and cotton on canvas
150x120 cm / 59x57 in



COTTON FLOWERS III, 2024

Details



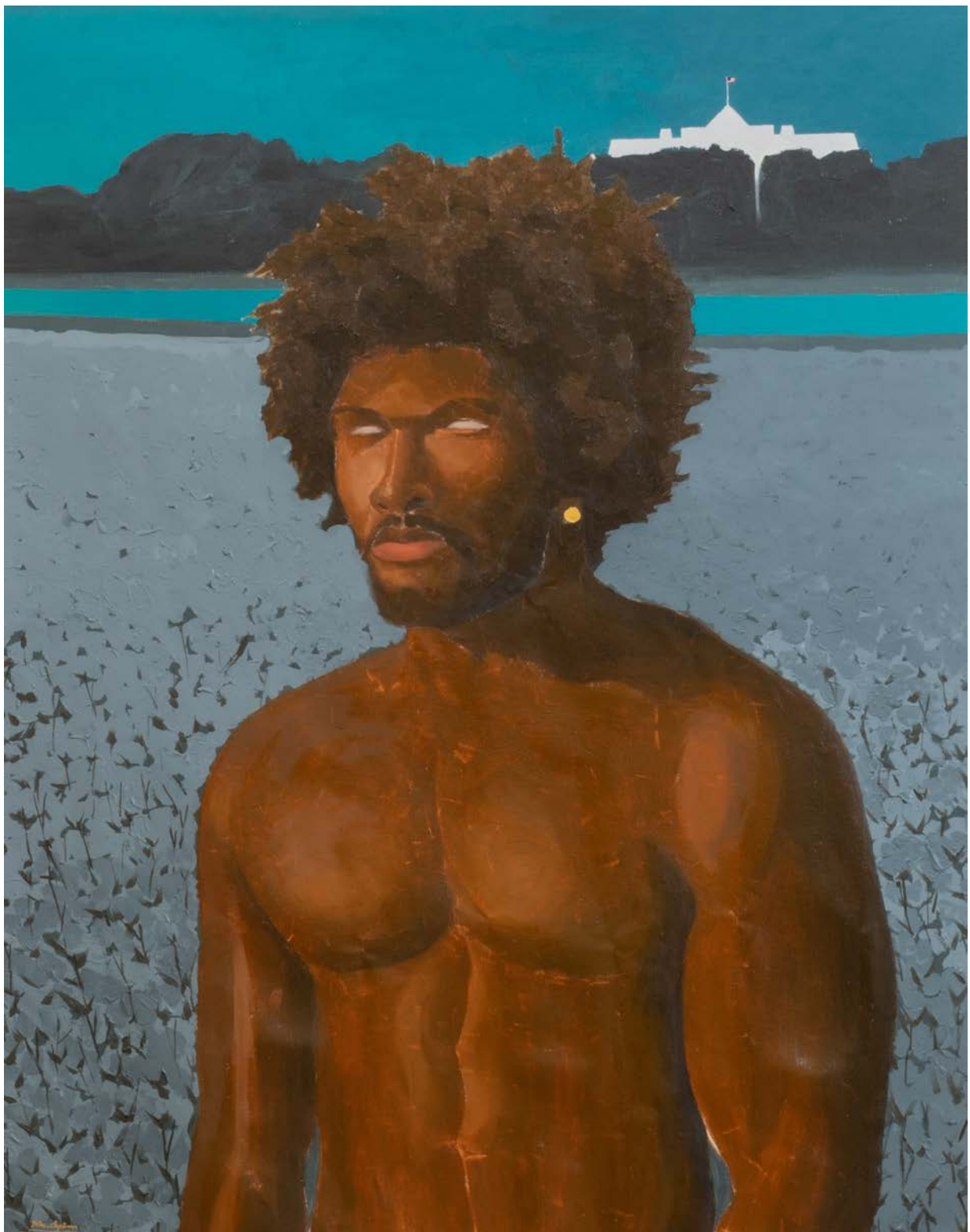
See the girl. The black one in red. The one with the parted hairdo and beaded hair ties. See her legs. Long and supple and black like tar. Fola's her name. /For-lah/ She's from Nigeria. Nigeria's a country in East Africa. Not far from Sudan. Came here to study in America. Extremely smart girl. Smarter than Amanda and Louise. To think that there are no libraries in Nigeria. Did you know If you Google Sudan the first images you see are of starving masses? And Nigeria is not far from Sudan? See her ass cheeks. Softer than jelly. Should we approach her? Stop laughing! I just want to talk to her. Like hey Forlah I'm your classmate Brian.

THE TRANSFIGURATION , 2023/24

Oil, acrylic and oil stick on canvas

244x183 cm / 96x72 in

“The figures that populate my paintings are immigrants like me who have come to live, work, or study in the United States, particularly from Nigeria. I paint us this way to visualize the mutative identity of the African immigrant living in America, and to capture the changes the immigrant body goes through when subjected to a strange, new environment.”



TO BECOME A MAN, 2021
Acrylic on canvas
109x83 cm / 43x33 in



ONE OF Y'ALL FOLKS GON BETRAY ME, 2021

Acrylic and gold leaf on canvas

200x300 cm / 79x118 in

Oyediran takes over another 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. The attraction is as strong as sharp, with a contrast emerging with the men surrounding him. Their skin melts in a colourful mix, erasing their identity.



UNTITLED (PORTRAIT OF QUEEN ELIZABETH II), 2021
Acrylic, silver leaf and gold leaf on canvas
214x200 cm / 84x79 in

Through strong images challenging the representation of traditional icons, he establishes new models and conveys hope. Far from a fatalistic view, he suggests new possible paths and claims that every voice counts. Boluwatife Oyediran borrows the codes of ethnocentric occidental art to preach in favour of a better representation of black persons and questions the conception of power and norms. He replaces the usual heroes of religious and political imagery with those who have been historically discarded or made invisible from the spheres of power.



SELF PORTRAIT AS NAPOLEON, 2021
Oil, acrylic and gold leaf on canvas
223x175 cm / 88x69 in



MAN IN RED COAT, 2021
Acrylic on canvas
210x172 cm / 83x68 in



DREAMSCAPE, 2021
Acrylic on canvas
168x117 cm / 66x46 in



BLACK BOY FLORAL, 2022
Acrylic on canvas
198x151 cm / 78x59 in



THE SCIENTIST, 2022
Acrylic on canvas
198x152 cm / 78x60 in

If he imitates the codes of classic painting from Leonardo da Vinci to Rubens, Oyedirán quotes the surrealist movement as the main source of his inspiration. Born between the two world wars, Surrealism opposed the rigour imposed during the Renaissance and invited viewers to free their unconscious by pushing back any rational barriers. The cotton fields in the background of Oyedirán's canvases thus recall a collective unconscious history. While the central solitary figure seems lost in the immensity and infinity of their environment, the work reveals the weight of history on the construction of one's identity.

CONVERSATION WITH THE ARTIST

HOW DID YOUR ARTISTIC JOURNEY BEGIN, AND WHEN DID YOU REALIZE YOU WANTED TO BECOME AN ARTIST?

I think I've been an artist for most of my life, since when I was a child. Everybody has that story of them making stick drawings while they were very young, before they got better at drawing, and then moved on to something else. But, professionally, I became an artist during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was then I could say that I discovered what it is that artists do. And since then, I've been on a journey to finding my style and voice as a visual artist.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR ARTISTIC STYLE AND HOW HAS YOUR CREATIVE PROCESS EVOLVED?

Currently, I make figurative paintings, mostly. But I write short stories on the side; I dabble in fiction. During my MFA program at RISD I tried to incorporate some of my short fictions into my paintings, which led to works like *The Transfiguration* (2023-24) which is part of my latest exhibition *Inverted Blackness*.

My creative process has evolved over these last few years partly because I'm still discovering myself as an artist. I think I have the potential to do more than what I'm doing, and the more I discover about myself, the more I evolve. For instance, in my next series I have plans to make some landscape paintings, in connection to my experience as an African immigrant living in America. So, I've been studying a lot of Monet and Van Gogh. I don't believe there's one medium to say something, so at times I'm looking for another medium to say what I'm saying in my paintings or writings. As Lynette Yiadom-Boakye famously said: "I write the things I cannot paint and paint the things I cannot write."

WHAT INSPIRED YOUR EXHIBITION, INVERTED BLACKNESS, AND HOW DOES IT FIT INTO YOUR ARTISTIC VISION?

I was inspired by my new life in America. I had assumptions about this country before I came, especially concerning how I'd be treated as a Black person from Africa, because I came two years after George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery were murdered. But along the line I realized that I was experiencing a peculiar kind of blackness, one that was quite different from that of Black/African Americans. So, I decided to make work about that, to highlight my experience, my Africanness, and how it is a distinct classification of blackness in America.

THE EXHIBITION PRESENTS WORKS IN WHICH THE COLOURS HAVE BEEN REVERSED, LIKE IN A PHOTOGRAPHIC NEGATIVE. HOW DID YOU COME TO USE THIS EFFECT?

I came to the negative filter by accident. A year ago, I was working on Photoshop when I mistakenly pressed the wrong command, and the picture I was working on, of a group of African boys, suddenly turned negative, resulting in a glow of luminous blue figures. I froze. Their black bodies had transformed into something otherworldly, emitting white light, like in some bioluminescent planktons found in deep oceans. The darker parts of the image, as well as the shadows, had taken on light as well. The parts of their bodies with lighter values took on shades of cerulean and phthalo blue. The inverted image rendered the features of the boys alienlike: their nails were dark blue; their pupils and irises were white, appearing in their heads as tiny bulbs like the robotic eyes of a cyborg. Their blackness was maintained, but their hairs were gray. Their arms and legs looked like tubes of cathode light. What I stumbled on was a filter that allowed for the inversion of digital images

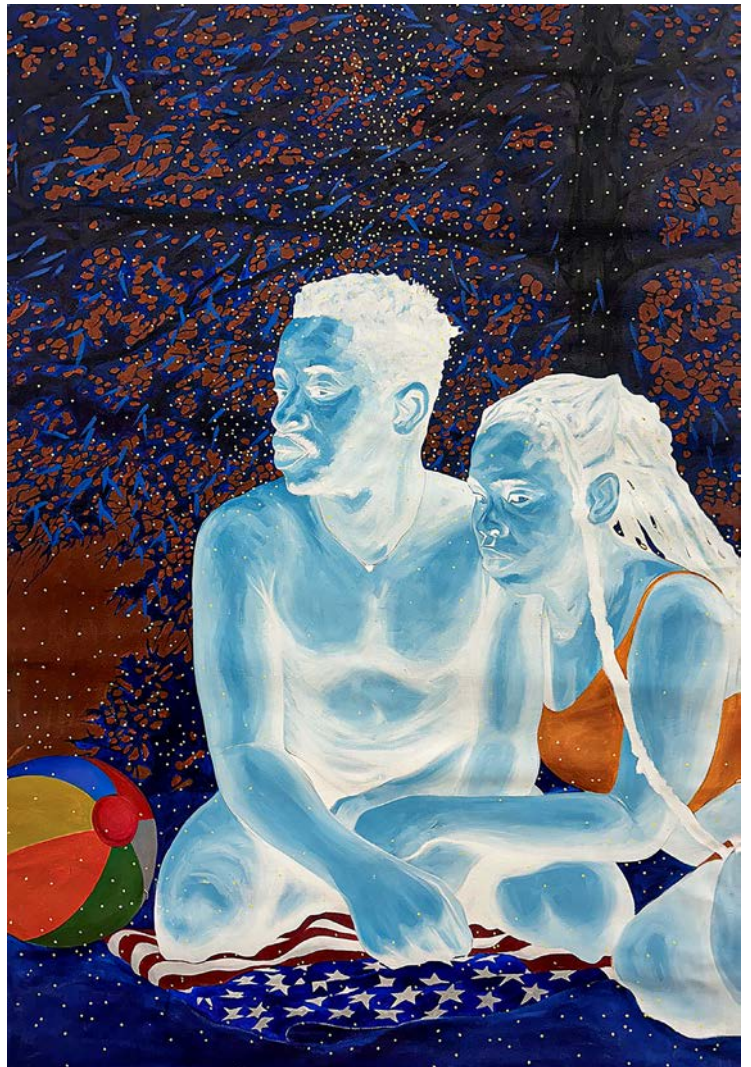
from positive to negative. On the surface, there appeared to be nothing fascinating about it.

But that simple process of photographic manipulation visualized something I was experiencing: a change in the way that I'd been perceiving myself, an alien body, since arrival in America. However, I did not develop the link between the inverted image and my immigrant experience immediately, not until months later, when I came up with a concept I called "inverted blackness". This concept explains that living in America as an African immigrant has manipulated my identity in ways that I cannot fully comprehend, and that using the inverted filter, a photographic manipulation of digital images, is fitting of the visual description of my experience.

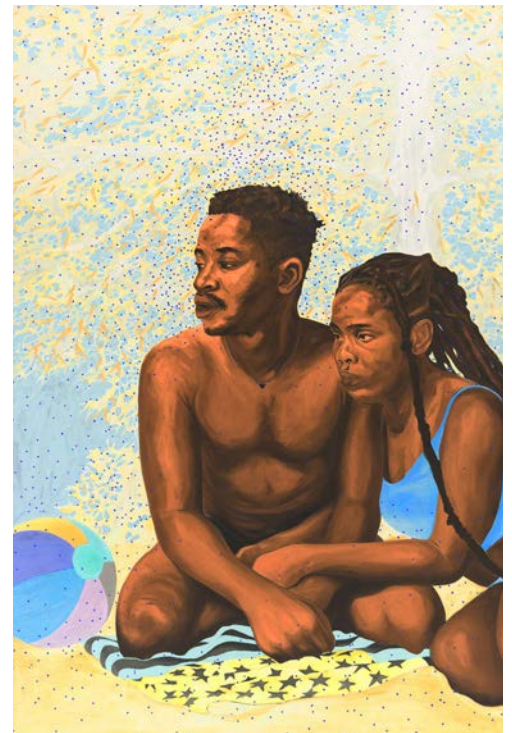
WHILE IN AFRICA, HOW DID YOUR WORK EXPLORE AMERICA FROM THE POINT-OF VIEW OF AN OUTSIDER?

In 2019, while still an undergraduate student in Nigeria, I had studied a course called "American Literature". We read the works of Toni Morrison, Phyllis Wheatley, and Zora Neale Hurston, amongst many others. But what engaged my curiosity was the history of the forced migrations of Africans to America via the transatlantic slave trade, a history that, until then, I half-believed was a myth, a history that was barely taught in Nigerian schools. I read a few books and saw several movies about this history, notably *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or Gustavus Vassa, The African* (1789); *Roots* (1977); *Twelve Years a Slave* (2013); *The Birth of a Nation* (2016); and *Harriet* (2019).

When I arrived in the US in 2022, I became a part of the vast Black population in America. I did not think of myself as African any longer. I could not. This was two years following the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, incidents that in part shaped my artistic practice while I was still in Ghana, incidents that instilled in me the consciousness of my blackness in the wider world. Up until that point, my practice had been about



DAMI AND OBASI, 2024
Oil and acrylic on canvas
183x122 cm / 72x48 in

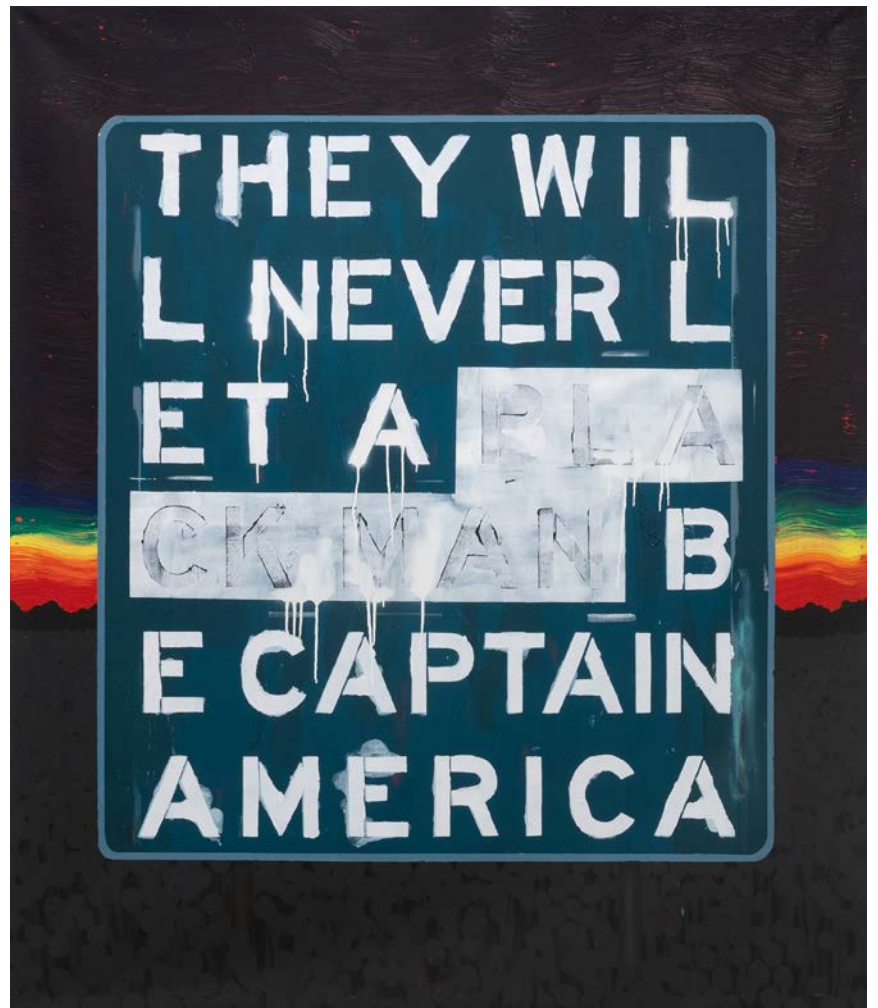


Inverted version of the painting
using the negative filter on Photo-
shop

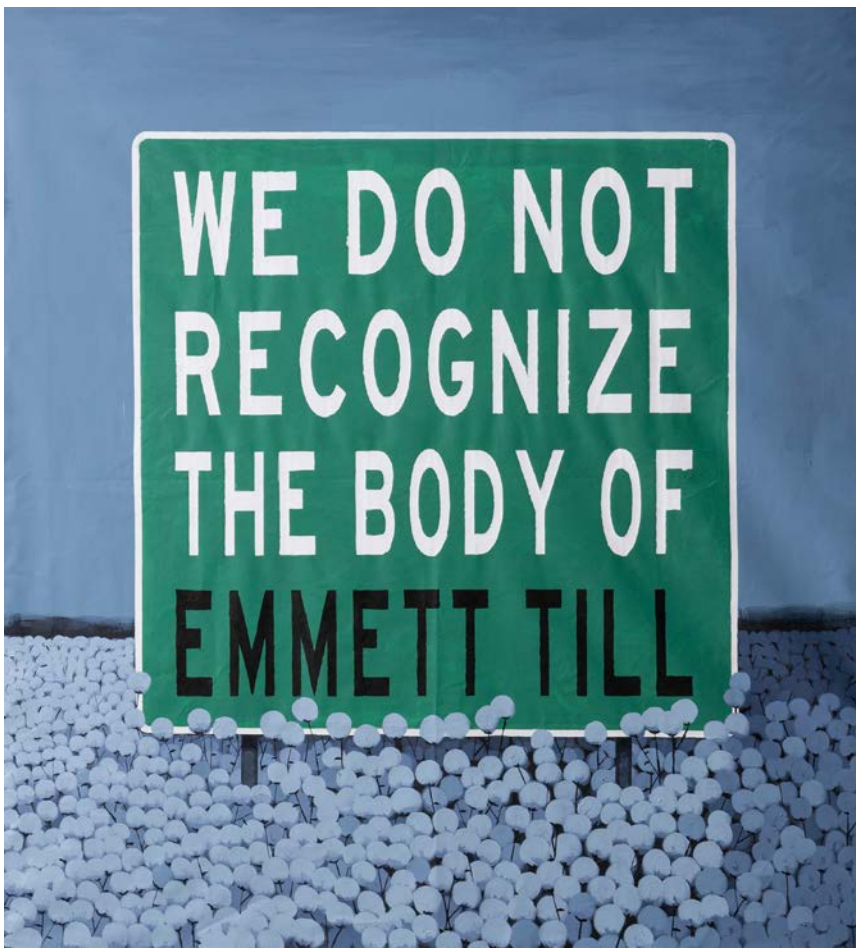
(and the experiences of African Americans) from the point of view of an outsider. In Ghana, I had made paintings of random Black people standing in cotton fields. I also made text paintings, some of which said, in stenciled texts: “WE DO NOT RECOGNIZE THE BODY OF EMMETT TILL”; “DEAR WHITE AMERICA”; and “THEY WILL NEVER LET A BLACK MAN BE CAPTAIN AMERICA”. I was never bothered that none of the experiences that contextualized these phrases had anything to do with me as an African. Black people were being victimized in America, the country I longed to go. Their experiences were presages of what could happen to me when I got there. I made works about my presumed future in the context of what presently happened to them.

HOW HAS YOUR EXPERIENCE AS A BLACK IMMIGRANT IN THE UNITED STATES INFLUENCED YOUR VIEW OF BLACK REPRESENTATION IN ART AND YOUR OWN ARTISTIC PRACTICE?

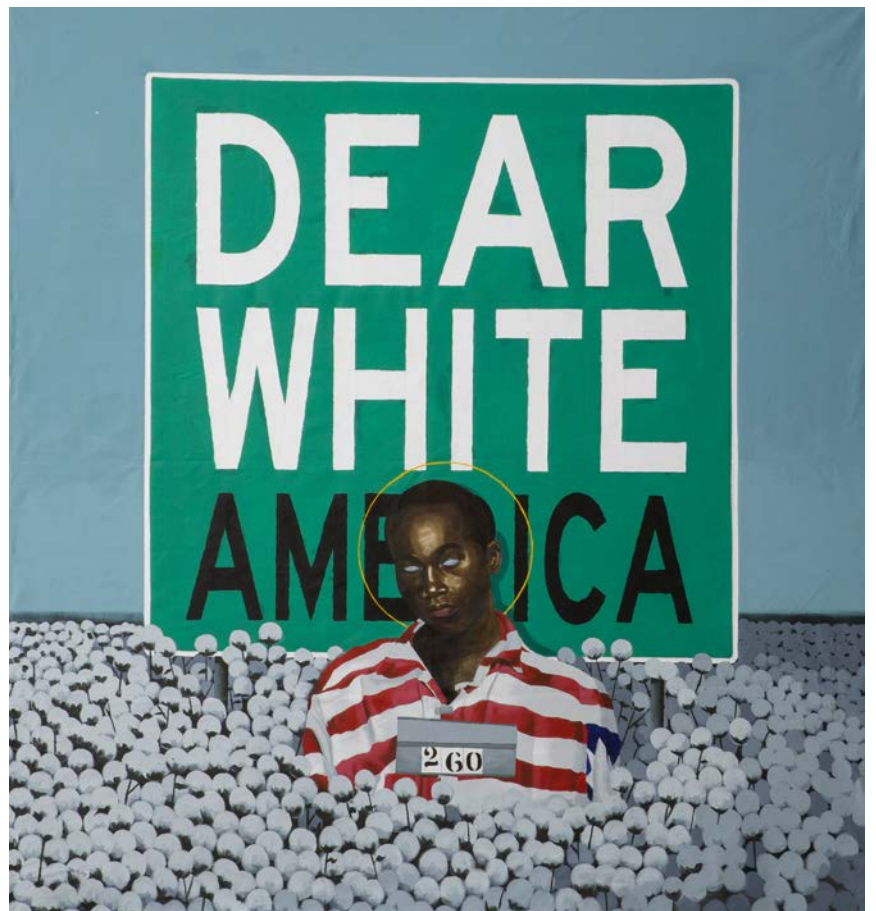
As time passed, during my stay in the United States, I realized two things: that I was not Black in America in the African American sense, and that majority of the individuals depicted in the canon of Black figuration,



THEY'LL NEVER LET A BLACK MAN BE CAPTAIN AMERICA,
2022
Acrylic and spray on canvas
200x170 cm / 79x67 in



31 AUGUST, 2021
Oil and acrylic on canvas
200x200 cm / 79x79 in



LETTER TO AMERICA, 2021
Oil and acrylic on canvas
200x200 cm / 79x79 in

which served as a template for my artistic practice, only looked like me, they were not me. When I look at a Kerry James Marshall painting, for example, I see people with whom I share the same skin color. But the general and peculiar experiences of the figures depicted, the nationality and culture that raised them, barely correlate with mine. In fact, when Marshall began to depict black people in literal black, he did not particularly have people like me—Africans who had never felt reduced by the white gaze to “a shade, a shadow, a pigmentation”—in mind.

I began to wonder if there was ever going to be a distinct and unique way to represent people like me—Black immigrants who have come to America by way of selective mobility and who find themselves constantly struggling to adjust to life here, socially, economically, and culturally.

WHAT MESSAGE(S) DO YOU HOPE TO CONVEY THROUGH YOUR ART?

Human experience. I want to make works that deeply communicate the human experience, vis-à-vis the experience of the African immigrant adjusting to life in America, one who constantly finds themselves in opposition, disillusion, agreement and disagreement with the tenets of this country.

AS AN ARTIST, WHAT DO YOU AIM TO ACHIEVE BOTH IN TERMS OF PERSONAL GROWTH AND LEFT THE INFLUENCE YOU WISH TO HAVE ON THE ART WORLD OR SOCIETY THROUGH YOUR CREATIONS?

My long-term goal is to be able to make work about the African experience in America as much and

as deeply as I can. My intention is to document this experience, making use of all the medium that I'm capable of, including painting, sculpting, photographing, writing—even film. Until I've curated my own Schindler's List of African immigrants in America. I am deeply inspired by the work of American rapper Kendrick Lamar who has successfully made music about the Black experience in America and whose work and artistry is deeply felt and highly revered in his culture and community of Compton, California. When I study someone like Lamar, I tell myself that that's the kind of stue I would like to make in my practice.