

Famakan Magassa

Money Money Money

20th October – 1st December 2023, Gallery III, Accra



Mariage forcé, 2023, Acrylic on canvas, 216 x 155 cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Gallery 1957.

Gallery 1957 is proud to present ‘*Money Money Money*’, a new solo exhibition by Malian artist Famakan Magassa. The exhibition follows a residency with the gallery in Accra and each painting emphasises moments of irony. Contending the different levels of socioeconomic exchange, the 2023 Norval Sovereign African Art Prize winner reflects on art’s relationship to theft and violence, to privacy and togetherness and to the ways we engage with the most common unit of exchange- money.

It is said that women and money rule the world, the former through seduction, the latter because it has become the supreme religion, dominating individuals, states, and the planet. For Magassa, the subject is vast and inexhaustible. Consequently, he deploys humour as a common thread to deal with the dark side of wealth.

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Magassa's provocative social commentaries come to life through his distinct colour palette of blues and reds. His human caricatures depict cynical takes on the lengths that humans will go to get ahead in life. The painter, whose figurative works depict a comical look at the themes of gluttony and greed, is interested in how the value of money ends up supplanting that of people. Magassa has decided to take the audience on a journey through the contrasts and contradictions of the global economy.

With expressions across the spectrum of sarcasm and solace, Magassa's distorted forms speak to the obsession that society has with consumption. The compositions of his works include personas who have been forced into marriage, forced into labour, and volunteered for debauchery, some of them losing one shoe along the way. Magassa uses acrylic on canvas to represent his creatures with extended spines and protruding bellies in the homogenous colour blue which is used for all the artist's figures. The lips of his caricatures are exaggerated in a bright red, some of them with three teeth protruding in a smile or in a grimace.

One of the figures seems to have transplanted his brain for money in the painting '*Écervelé*,' rendered on a purple background which is reminiscent of an ornate silk. The suitably titled 'brainless' character gazes upwards towards the hundreds of thousands of dollars on its mind. Oblivious in its stride forward, the figure in '*Écervelé*' provokes the viewer to consider which direction society is moving in if our brains are so scattered?

Contrasting this single figure who has made its choice in '*Écervelé*,' are the single figures in '*L'innocent 1*' and '*L'innocent 2*.' While both oddities have their arms extended upwards, these gestures which can be read as an act of surrender invoke questions of what is sacrificed for the sake of money.

In the painting '*L'athlétisme monétaire*,' six of Magassa's anthropomorphic figures are suspended in an athletic race for money hanging from a string, depicting the competitive and endless struggle to get ahead financially. Further along in the race of financial security, in '*L'obsédé*' portrays five figures with their elongated spines bent from carrying the overbearing weight of the 1%. A larger figure in '*L'obsédé*' is being carried by the five figures, enjoying a glass of wine with his larger-than-life red lips and obsessive smile, resting his head on a briefcase with conspicuous contents.

Magassa builds his part-fictional realm in this series of paintings with a new technique of creating negative images of objects in his backgrounds. As seen in the work '*Les noctambules*,' three so-called 'night owls' are portrayed dancing in a moment of revelry. The repeated silhouette of paintbrushes in the background references the very act and process of painting. For Magassa, when the happiness of the few has been the misfortune of the majority for so long, it seemed logical and even useful to him that a visual artist should take hold of the issue.

Within the structures that maintain society's relationship to money, the artist sees shapes, feelings and aspects of the human condition that can only be represented through equal parts of wit and cynicism. '*Money Money Money*,' is concerned with what happens when the illusion of being rich comes face to face with the reality of everyday life.

About the Artist Famakan Magassa

(b. 1997, Mali)

Famakan Magassa received his BFA in 2018 from Conservatoire Arts et Metiers Multimedia Balla Fasséke Kouyaté in Bamako, Mali. Magassa often refers to the humanoid subjects that occupy his

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canvasses as 'kôredugaws' – members of a secret, non-religious society in Mali that follow a code of conduct that emphasizes community, righteousness, and humility.

He exhibited for the first time in 2019 with several institutional shows, including presentations at L'Institut Français du Mali, Bamako; La Fondation La Maison de l'Artiste in Assinie, Côte d'Ivoire; and Les Magasins Généraux, BETC, Paris. In 2020, he was included in 'L'exposition collective Jeunes Talents' at the residence of the Ambassador to the European Union, Mali and was one of the 2020 Laureates of the Cité Internationale des Arts Residency in Paris, France. He has presented two solo exhibitions at albertz benda, at the gallery in New York in 2022 and in Los Angeles in 2023.

Magassa was awarded the Norval Sovereign African Art Prize in 2023 and presented his first solo institutional exhibition 'Witness of My Time' at the foundation in Cape Town in August 2023. His work has been featured by *Artsy*, *Hyperallergic*, *Artnet*, *The Observer*, *L'Oeil* and *ArtsMagazine*.

About Gallery 1957

Gallery 1957 is a contemporary art gallery with spaces across Accra, Ghana and London, UK.

It dedicates its programme to spearheading international exchanges between art practices from these communities and the rest of the world, presenting artists who interrogate concepts of belonging and identity, cultural exchange, and social history beyond Western narratives.

Launched by Marwan Zakhem in 2016 on Ghanaian Independence Day, Gallery 1957 has since expanded across three gallery spaces in Accra. Originally set up to promote Ghana and West Africa's presence in the arts scene, it now encompasses the Global South and its diaspora. Gallery 1957's London space opened in October 2020, providing a further platform for artists to build dialogues with its growing network of international collaborators.

Gallery 1957 presents exhibitions, installations, and performances by celebrated artists, fostering connections between local and international audiences. The Gallery's global gallery partnerships and ongoing artist residency program have attracted numerous international artists and arts professionals to Ghana. The Gallery's annual Cultural Week in September serves as a platform for encouraging deeper engagement with Ghana's vibrant contemporary art scene.

In 2021, Gallery 1957 launched the Yaa Asantewaa Art Prize for female Ghanaian artists, the first ever dedicated art prize of its kind. The prize aims to further strengthen the gallery's commitment to supporting and promoting emerging and established artists.

Gallery 1957's work expands beyond the gallery walls through a public programme that includes local and international art fairs, talks, off-site projects, and site-specific installations as well as the publication of books and catalogues – continuously supporting cultural initiatives in Ghana, Africa and beyond.

Artist: Famakan Magassa
Title: Money Money Money
Dates: 20th October – 1st December 2023
Opening Reception: - 6pm-9pm
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