

Gallery



La Biennale di Venezia

61. Esposizione
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Partecipazioni Nazionali

Godfried Donkor announced for main exhibition at the 61st International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia

- Godfried Donkor presents eight works at the main exhibition at this year's La Biennale di Venezia, *In Minor Keys* curated by the late Koyo Kouoh, including four new paintings.
- Four of the selected works are collages made for Donkor's 2017 exhibition at Gallery 1957, curated by Koyo Kouoh.
- Donkor's participation at La Biennale di Venezia is part of a landmark year for the artist, which will also see his first institutional show at Firstsite, UK opening May 2026.



Godfried Donkor, *Queen Mother* (2017). Courtesy of the artist and Gallery 1957.

Gallery 1957 announces Godfried Donkor's participation in the main exhibition of the 61st International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia. Donkor reveals a commissioned painting for the Venice presentation and three new paintings, alongside four works on paper which were made for his 2017 exhibition curated by the late Koyo Kouoh, *The First Day of the Yam Custom: 1817* at Gallery 1957. The selection pays tribute to Donkor's long term friendship and professional collaboration with Kouoh.

Donkor's new commission, *Michael and the Dragon II* (2026), references mythological iconography to draw on the narrative of good conquering evil. Donkor layers this symbolism with historical resonance through the inclusion of a slave ship—a recurring motif in Donkor's practice reflecting his investigation

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into the legacies of transatlantic slavery. Moving across time and geography, Donkor brings together global references, such as the Chinese dragon and Brazilian slave ship, to resist fixed narratives. Central to the work, and Donkor's practice, is the use of Financial Times newspaper, transforming statistics into a visual language that questions how history and power, economics and trade are recorded and transferred.

Queen Mother (2017), *Anokye's Dance II* (2017), *Asafo II* (2017) and *FT Man* (2017) were created for Donkor's 2017 exhibition curated by Kouoh – Donkor's first exhibition at Gallery 1957. The works repatriate *The First Day of the Yam Custom*, an illustration by the 19th century English explorer Thomas Edward Bowdich, now held in the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London and thought to be the first recorded image of the visual aesthetic and culture of the Asante region of Ghana. By reimagining this image, Donkor combines historical and sociological accounts, asking viewers to reconsider this shared history between Africa and Europe.

2026 marks a landmark year for Godfried Donkor who will have his first UK solo show at **Firstsite, Colchester** (23 May – 30 August 2026) and will take part in a group exhibition at **Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW), Berlin** (21 March – 14 June 2026).

Donkor's **Firstsite** exhibition explores complexity through layered histories, reworking archival materials - from early photography to watercolours made in 1817 by Thomas Bowdich and his wife Sarah Bowdich - into contemporary forms that question authorship and power. Moving between painting, collage and embroidery, the show links Accra to Colchester, weaving together trade, empire, symbolism and global commerce. With immersive installations that range from rhythmic mural sequences and culminate in a boxing-ring installation, Donkor invites viewers into a space where identity remains layered, unsettled and insistently plural.

At **HKW** a selection of Donkor's most iconic boxer paintings will be shown as part of *Tirailleurs: Trials and Tribulations*. The group show will highlight the often-overlooked role of the Tirailleurs (a battalion of African soldiers) during the Second World War and how their efforts contributed to the liberation of Germany itself, and their impact on securing peace in Europe post-1945.

Donkor (b. 1964, Ghana) lives and works in Accra and London. A mixed-media and multidisciplinary artist, he is best known for his collages using newspaper and gold leaf. Donkor is interested in the socio-historical relationships between Africa, Europe and the Caribbean, with his works often exploring the correlations between the slave trade and boxing. Donkor has been the subject of several solo and group exhibitions internationally and in 1998, was awarded the Prix de la Revelation at the Dakar Biennale, and in 2023 he was awarded as a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellow. Donkor's work is included in numerous international collections such as: The Government Art Collection, UK, Gallery Oldham supported by the Contemporary Art Society, Tia Collection, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam and the Smithsonian Museum of African Art, Washington USA.

Godfried Donkor says: "Being invited to present my work at Venice is profoundly meaningful, not only for my practice but for the memory of my dear friend Koyo Kouoh. These works carry the conversations we shared over many years, and it is an honour to continue that dialogue on such a significant global stage."

-ENDS-

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Notes to editors:

Exhibition Details

Venue: 61st International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia

Dates: 9 May – 22 November 2026

For press information and images, please contact Vicky Newark or Rosie Lowit at Pelham Communications, Tel: +44 (0) 208 969 3959

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Please see the press kit [HERE](#).

About Godfried Donkor

(b. 1964, Ghana. Lives and works in Accra and London)

Godfried Donkor is a mixed-media and multidisciplinary artist, best known for collages that incorporate materials including newspaper, sheet music and gold leaf. Refusing easy categorisation, Donkor collapses temporal, geographic and cultural boundaries, layering histories of commerce, colonial encounter and representation within a richly figurative practice; juxtaposing archival images and modern visual culture, Donkor examines the representation of diaspora identities and global histories.

While rooted in his own lived experience, the artist tackles conversations with international import, his works focusing on themes such as the transatlantic slave trade and the commodification of Black athletes. Since rising to prominence in the 1990s, the artist has been included in international shows including *Pin Up: Contemporary Collage and Drawing* at the Tate Modern and the major travelling exhibition *The Time is Always Now: Artists Reframe the Black Figure* curated by Ekow Eshun, shown at the National Portrait Gallery (UK) and the Philadelphia Art Museum (US). In 2021 he created his first permanent public art commission at London's Denmark Hill train station.

Donkor's work is included in international collections such as: The Contemporary Arts Society, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Smithsonian Museum of African Art, Washington USA; Studio Museum, Harlem; Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester; Spanish Sports Council Collection; National Collection of Senegal; University of Helsinki; National Gallery of Botswana; The World Bank Collection; Washington D.C and The Unilever Collection.

Selected solo and group presentations include: *People of Colour: Black Portraiture Now* curated by Ekow Eshun, National Portrait Gallery, London and USA (2024); *David Adjaye: Making Memory*, Design Museum, London (2019); *The First Day of the Yam Custom: 1817*, Gallery 1957, Accra (2017); *Afriques Capitales*, Parc de la Villette, Paris (2017); *Still the Barbarians*, EVA International Ireland's Biennial, Limerick (2016).

Donkor completed a Bachelor of Arts in Fine Art at Central Saint Martins, London and a Master of Arts in African Art History at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London.

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About Gallery 1957

Gallery 1957 is a contemporary art gallery with spaces across Accra, Ghana and London, UK. The gallery is dedicated 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. Initially founded by Marwan Zakhem in 2016 to promote Ghana and West Africa's presence in the arts scene, the gallery's programming of exhibitions, installations and performances now encompasses emerging and established artists from the Global South and its diaspora. The gallery further supports artists with initiatives like its residency programme in Accra, which aims to create a free space that helps artists develop their practice and body of work, and the Yaa Asantewaa Art Prize for female artists. The gallery now hosts three spaces in Accra – one in the Kempinski Hotel and two in Galleria Mall – and a London outpost in Hyde Park Gate.

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