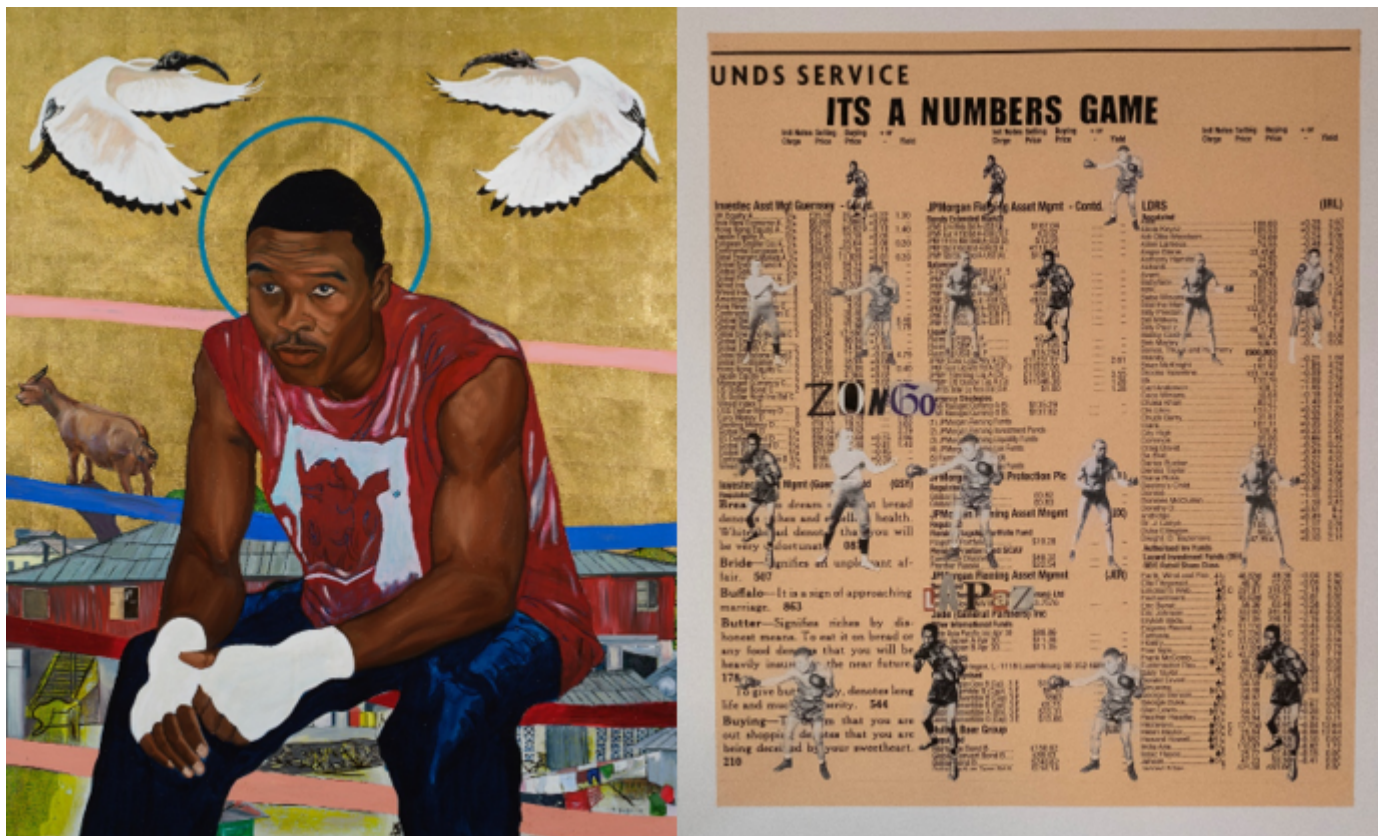


# Firstsite

## Godfried Donkor: It's a Numbers Game

23 May - 30 August 2026



Firstsite presents *It's a Number's Game*, the first UK institutional exhibition by artist Godfried Donkor. Through a powerful body of new and existing work, Donkor transforms the gallery into a space where histories of empire, resistance, commerce and identity collide and are reimagined through the artist's distinctive visual language.

Working across collage, painting, embroidery and installation, Donkor builds a vivid and layered world. A trained painter still in dialogue with the medium, he developed collage as a technique to study and build his paintings – a spontaneous way to blend narratives quickly.

Donkor's choice of materials reflects a deeper philosophy: that history is not fixed truth but a malleable narrative that can be told and retold through different lenses.

By combining archival photographs from a century ago with contemporary imagery, *Financial Times* pages with Ghanaian symbols, European heraldry with African textiles, Donkor embodies his conviction that 'everything is mixed' - that cultures blend, overlap and enrich each other. This layering – physically and metaphorically – invites viewers to think about history in entirely new ways, revealing how systems of

power – financial markets, heraldic traditions, Ghanaian Adinkra symbolism – shape the stories we tell and our experiences of place, identity and belonging.

In *It's a Numbers Game*, these elements come together in a dynamic 'call-and-response' between media, echoing musical structures while interweaving multiple perspectives on shared histories. The exhibition examines the relationships between Britain, West Africa and the Caribbean – what Donkor describes as a 'triangle of commerce' – and how these historical relationships continue to shape contemporary identity and culture.

At Firstsite, these global narratives are grounded in Colchester's own history. Donkor connects the resistance of Boudicca to that of Yaa Asantewaa, leader of the Ashanti War of the Golden Stool, creating a powerful dialogue between local and international struggles against imperial power. The exhibition also responds to the work of Colchester-born writer and illustrator Sarah Bowditch, whose 19th-century depictions of the Ashanti are reinterpreted by Donkor from a contemporary perspective.

Visitors will encounter large-scale collages showing African figures emerging from fields of *Financial Times* text, revealing how global economics and human stories are intertwined. Intricate embroideries become a cultural bridge, with European heraldic traditions merging with Ghanaian Adinkra symbols to explore symbolism and power. Monumental paintings revisit historical scenes through a contemporary lens. A dedicated gallery space is transformed into a boxing ring, drawing on Donkor's long-standing interest in the sport as a metaphor for migration, resilience and cultural exchange.

Godfried Donkor says, "*Histories are layered, repeated and reinterpreted over time. Through combining different visual languages, materials and archives, I explore how history and power are not fixed, but entwined and shaped through exchange, memory and perspective. At Firstsite, this is grounded in Colchester's own story—connecting Boudicca's resistance to that of Yaa Asantewaa, and to Sarah Bowditch's 19th-century documentation of the Ashanti. These histories are not separate, but part of the same ongoing conversation—continuing to shift, overlap and reveal new meanings as they are seen again.*"

Following the critically acclaimed presentation of Sue Webster, *It's a Numbers Game* marks a further step in Firstsite's long-term commitment to ambitious, rigorous programming that repositions contemporary art within wider cultural, historical and social conversations. Visually striking and conceptually challenging, the exhibition offers a compelling re-reading of British history through a global lens, affirming Donkor as a vital voice in contemporary art.

The exhibition also forms part of Firstsite's wider enquiry into Why Humans Make Art, a developing programme that considers how creative practice helps us interpret complexity, navigate difference and imagine shared futures.

Sally Shaw MBE, Director of Firstsite, says: "*It's a Numbers Game is exactly the kind of bold, impactful programming Firstsite exists to support. Through intricate collages, embroideries and paintings, Godfried demonstrates how art can hold multiple histories in tension, revealing connections between seemingly separate systems and stories.*

*"In a moment of unprecedented global complexity, this exhibition asks vital questions about how we understand power and history – and how creative practice can help us imagine new ways forward.*

*“At Firstsite, we're committed to amplifying artists whose work demands deeper attention and Godfried exemplifies why this matters. His practice has shaped contemporary discourse on history and power – yet his contribution remains undervalued in the UK. This year – with his first major institutional exhibition here and his presentation at the Venice Biennale – is a landmark moment that finally reflects his true significance.”*

The exhibition coincides with a significant year for Godfried Donkor, who will also participate in the main exhibition of the 61st International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia. For the Venice presentation, Donkor will unveil a newly commissioned painting alongside three new paintings, as well as four works on paper originally produced for his 2017 exhibition *The First Day of the Yam Custom: 1817*, curated by the late Koyo Kouoh at Gallery 1957 in 2017.

*It's a Numbers Game* is made possible through the support of Trevor Fenwick, Lead Partner.

Godfried Donkor is represented by Gallery 1957.

The logo for Gallery 1957, featuring the word "Gallery" in a bold, black, serif font, followed by "1957" in a larger, bold, black, serif font.

## **NOTES FOR EDITORS**

### **Images:**

GODFRIED DONKOR, *St Ike Quartey*, 2023. Courtesy of the Artist, Gallery 1957 and Tia Collection

GODFRIED DONKOR, *IT'S A NUMBERS GAME V*, 2019, Collage on paper, 70 x 100 cm. Courtesy of the Artist and Gallery 1957

## **HIGH RESOLUTION IMAGES FOR MEDIA USE CAN BE DOWNLOADED HERE**

**Firstsite** is a public contemporary art gallery in Colchester, making and showing exceptional art and culture that celebrates the diverse and radical people of East Anglia to empower all communities to be creative together and lead healthier and happier lives. In 2021, Firstsite celebrated the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its spectacular crescent-shaped building, designed by award-winning Uruguayan architect Rafael Viñoly, with a year of celebration projects and commissions – which kicked off with [The Great Big Art Exhibition](#). For over a decade, Firstsite has built a strong reputation for presenting ambitious and thought-provoking work in a fun and inclusive environment. This commitment to creativity and accessibility was recognised in 2021 when Firstsite was named *Art Fund Museum of the Year*, a milestone that continues to shape its innovative programming today. Firstsite is a partner of Plus Tate, which uses Tate's resources to contribute to a network of art organisations across the country, and to increase public access. Firstsite's exhibitions are free and open to anyone. **Access information:** We may request sensitivity around timings and the provision of access support such as captions or different interview options for interviewees supplied by Firstsite, please contact us for more information. Please note we believe in and follow the social model of understanding disability and the language we use is aligned with the social model of disability.

**Godfried Donkor** (b. 1964, Ghana) is a mixed-media and multidisciplinary artist interested in the socio-historical relationships of Africa, Europe and the Caribbean. Known for his collages utilising newspaper and gold leaf in a religious-like imagery. As well as paintings which explore the relationship between slave trade and boxing, and sculptures which offer a new take on the traditional adinkra symbolism of Ghana. Adinkras offer a short-hand, often humorous representation of shared lessons, proverbs, and philosophies. They have the potential to encapsulate collective values and reflect on the health of our communities in these unprecedented times.

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. Selected solo and group presentations include: *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); *Conversations: African and African American artworks in Dialogue*, Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, Washington, USA (2016-2014); *28 days: Reimagining Black History Month*, J M. Barnicke gallery and Georgia Scherman projects, Toronto, Canada (2012); *Space and Currencies*, Museum of Africa, Johannesburg, South Africa (2010) and *Pin Up*, Tate Modern, London, UK (2004).

In 1998, the artist was awarded the Prix de la Revelation at the Dakar Biennale. Donkor's work is included in international collections such as: 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. The artist was commissioned by the Camberwell Society to create a public art piece for Denmark Hill Station, London, which was unveiled in 2022

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, INTERVIEWS AND IMAGES**

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