

Son of Kafui

Gabriel Selassie Tsagli

Thursday, 23rd July 2026

Gallery II, Accra



Gabriel Selassie Tsagli, *Rave*, 2026, Pastel, wall colour and oil on canvas, 240 x 360 cm.
Courtesy of the Artist and Gallery 1957.

Gallery 1957 is proud to present *Son of Kafui*, a solo exhibition by Gabriel Selassie Tsagli, opening in Accra on 23rd July 2026, curated by Marina Paulenka.

Following a five-month residency with the gallery in Accra, this new body of work marks the artist's first solo presentation in Ghana and unfolds as a deeply personal return—shaped by grief and carried forward through devotion. The title *Son of Kafui* holds the intimacy of the body's memory. Kafui, meaning love or son of God's own, was the name of Selassie's late mother, anchoring the exhibition within a lived lineage of loss, care, and inheritance.

Born in Accra and raised between Ghana and Germany, Selassie's practice is informed by displacement and return, and by the condition of belonging across multiple geographies without being fully contained by any. His return to Accra in 2025 marked a key turning point in his practice, where the act of making became inseparable from processes of remembrance. Working between the roles of son and father, and between memory and present, the artist positions painting as a space in which emotional states are not resolved, but held in productive tension.

At the core of Selassie's practice is an approach to painting that emerges from lived experience rather than pre-imagined form. Working with diverse tools and material registers, he builds surfaces through

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accumulation—layering, pressing, and scraping paint until it assumes a physical presence. Paint applied directly from the tube introduces a heightened material immediacy, foregrounding the body of the work itself. Within this process, colour becomes generative rather than descriptive: figures emerge through accumulation, as though remembered rather than constructed, while gesture moves fluidly between figuration and abstraction.

This layered approach extends beyond technique into a conceptual framework. Each figure carries within it the weight of everything that precedes its formation, reflecting Selassie's understanding of lived experience as inherently cumulative. In the studio, working in silence and attuned to the ambient rhythms of Accra, the artist constructs paintings that hold together states of intimacy and distance, rupture and coherence, memory and invention.

Within this visual language, colour operates as both structure and articulation. Orange suggests action and movement, while blue becomes a space of articulation and reflection. Held in tension, these chromatic forces generate an emotional architecture that resists closure, sustaining openness and ambiguity throughout the works.

Across the exhibition, figures appear as both presence and trace. Some are portraits of known and intimate subjects; others emerge as fragments of memory, sensation, or unconscious image-making. The figure of the mother recurs throughout, suspended between presence and absence, rendered not as likeness but as atmosphere, colour, and material trace. Around these central motifs, smaller forms accumulate and disperse, evoking the city as a living, shifting organism.

At points, narrative dissolves into abstraction. A city becomes gesture; a body becomes field; disparate elements converge into rhythmic continuity. In these moments, the works extend beyond representation, opening onto states in which emotion, sound, and image coexist.

Son of Kafui ultimately considers return not as resolution, but as ongoing negotiation. Installed in Accra, the exhibition is shaped by its relationship to the city that formed the artist, and by the responsibility of addressing that place directly. What the works propose is not interpretation, but presence—an invitation to remain with what resists closure, and to encounter meaning as it unfolds.

As Selassie reflects, we are not building new worlds, but new words to allow the old to pass perfectly. *Son of Kafui* is such a proposition—spoken through colour, material, and layered paint—addressed to a mother, a daughter, a city, and all those willing to engage with it in its entirety.

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***Son of Kafui*, Gabriel Selassie Tsagli by Marina Paulenka**

Son of Kafui begins where all serious work begins: in the body's memory of a specific place, a specific woman, a specific quality of light that falls through a particular doorway and does not leave. The title names this directly and tenderly. Kafui, meaning love or son of God's own, was the name of Selassie's late mother, and this exhibition, his first solo presentation in Ghana, is a homecoming conceived through grief and carried to completion through something that resembles, more than anything else, devotion.

He grew up in Accra, raised by grandmothers and aunties in a family compound in Dansoman whose rhythms and textures have never left him, then moved to Germany at eleven, crossing into a cold that must have felt like a different kind of distance even as it closed another. His mother too lived between the two countries, her life distributed across Ghana and Germany the way that the lives of so many in the African diaspora are distributed, belonging fully to neither place and drawing sustenance from both. He returned to Accra last year, and it was here, back inside the city that first formed him, that he made the work now on these walls. And he made it holding two things simultaneously: the loss of the woman he came from, and the existence of the daughter he is now raising, her whole life still ahead of her. To stand between those two facts, to be son and father at once, grieving backward and responsible forward, is the emotional position from which every painting in this show was made. As Selassie has said, a lot of his freedom comes from grief. His mother's death taught him simply to do things, to not wait, to not avoid. He tries not to avoid crying, anger, chaos, or beauty. All of it, he believes, is necessary for balance, in the self and in the painting.

Belonging is not a theme Selassie has chosen for this exhibition. It is the condition he has lived in his own body for more than thirty years, and the paintings are the most honest record he knows how to make of what that costs and what it gives.

This biographical truth is inseparable from his painterly one. Selassie works with multiple tools, moving between instruments that produce soft undertones and others that drag rough, tactile surfaces into being, some pressing colour into the weave of the canvas until it breathes quietly, others leaving marks you can almost feel from across the room. Paint applied directly from the tube adds another register entirely, a density and physicality that makes the surface touchable, insisting on its own material existence. Displaced into a country whose language and logic he had to learn from the ground up, Selassie was forced to build his own philosophy of the world, and art became the primary instrument of that construction, more rigorous and more personal than any school or book could have offered. He paints from inside the moment rather than toward a conclusion already reached, trusting that each mark carries him somewhere he could not have seen from where he was standing. In the studio he works in silence, listening to the street outside, to how someone might be sheltering, to how animals move through the heat, to the natural sounds of a place that have always fed his sense of colour and rhythm. Colour does not fill form here but generates it, outlines pulse with their own charge independent of the bodies they trace, and line moves across the surface with the freedom of someone thinking out loud. Dense, accumulated marks build figures from texture rather than contour, so that a person emerges from the paint the way a person emerges from memory, gradually, incompletely, with a vividness that has nothing to do with precision.

These surfaces are built slowly, over long stretches of time. Selassie rarely finishes one painting before beginning another; he moves between several canvases at once, letting each evolve across weeks and months, every return adding new gestures, corrections, textures, traces of earlier decisions. Mistakes are never concealed. They are absorbed into the work, revised in the open until the correction itself

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becomes another layer of meaning, because for Selassie, correcting a mistake is far more interesting than painting without one. What remains on the canvas is not a fixed image but a record of lived time, of revision, reflection and care, the way a relationship carries the visible trace of every encounter. The layering, then, is not a technique so much as a philosophy: life itself is layered, and every person he encounters carries within them everything they have been through to arrive at the moment of meeting. He does not want to keep that depth out of the paintings.

And within the same canvas, figuration can give way without warning to passages of pure abstraction, a city dissolving into gesture, a body opening into colour field, as if the most intense emotional states simply exceed what representation can hold. He hopes this confuses the viewer productively, opening a space where chaos and beauty are not opposites but the same force moving at different speeds, where the audience is invited to find in themselves the same kind of balance the paintings are always working toward.

Selassie speaks of colour the way a musician speaks of composition: as something that can be calculated, structured, theorised, and yet, like jazz, always open to invention that no theory could have predicted. Every day, he believes, is a different note. He returns often to a correspondence that structures this thinking: seven colours in the spectrum, seven notes in the scale, seven chakras in the body, as if colour, sound and spirit were a single system perceived through different senses, and a painting could be tuned the way an instrument, or a body, is tuned. Orange and blue carry a private meaning throughout the work, orange the colour of doing, of action in the world, blue the colour of speaking, of finding the word for what the body already knows. They sit far apart in the spectrum, and it is precisely that distance, the same productive tension that red and purple carry, that gives the paintings their particular depth, two forces refusing to collapse into each other, generating something more alive in the space between them.

The figures that populate these canvases move between registers of intimacy and distance. Some are specific people, known and loved, painted with the kind of attention that only comes from long proximity, their presence in paint as irreplaceable as it is in life. Among them, his mother appears blue against pure black, her figure barely separating itself from the darkness, present through paint alone, as if being called back into visibility. Other figures are not portraits of the living or the dead. They are dreams, moments, memories of how things used to feel, compositions that arrange themselves the way old photographs do in the mind, half-remembered, luminous, more true to an emotional reality than any document could be. Around all of them, smaller figures swarm in near abstraction, the anonymous pulse of community, the city as organism rather than backdrop. And in one of the most expansive works in the show, a piano meets water and a body, the boundary between instrument, sea, and human form softening into a single sustained note that seems to ask whether music and grief and love are not, finally, the same thing.

Son of Kafui is this artist's first solo exhibition in Ghana, and showing here, on home ground, before any other audience, is itself a position, a choice to be judged first by the city and the people who formed him. What the work asks of anyone who stands before it is not interpretation but presence, not the comfort of recognition but the willingness to stay long enough to be moved, to let something operate on the body before the mind has organised its response, to return, even briefly, to a way of knowing that precedes the habit of knowing.

As Selassie himself has said: *we are not building new worlds. We are building new words to allow the old to pass perfectly.* *Son of Kafui* is such a word, spoken in colour and layered paint, addressed to a mother, a daughter, a city, and anyone willing to listen with their whole self.

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About the Artist

Gabriel Selassie Tsagli

(b. 1988, Accra, Ghana. Lives and works in Berlin and Accra)

Gabriel Selassie Tsagli is a multidisciplinary artist and musician living between Accra and Berlin. Working across painting, music, performance, video, and movement, his practice explores belonging, emotional intelligence, and the potential of creative expression as a form of healing. Shaped by experiences of migration between Africa and Europe, Selassie approaches art as a holistic process that reconnects reason and emotion, body and mind, and the individual with the collective.

Dancing and painting became Selassie's earliest forms of expression, later expanding into music where sound, movement, memory, and colour converge. As he writes, "My home is where colours are found, where music is played, where the body just moves and feelings have meanings." His paintings, performances, and sound works explore self-healing, emotional landscapes, and collective reflection through his philosophy of "Sound Mind in a Sound Body."

His genre-fluid music combines African sensibilities, soulful electronic textures, intuitive rhythms, spoken word, and melodic fragments. Since releasing his first EP in 2019, including *Hidden Identities* (2021) with producer Leon Weinhold, he has continued to develop immersive sound works centred on self-exploration and acceptance. Listening becomes a participatory experience, inviting audiences to move through shifting emotional states rather than consume fixed narratives.

Recent projects include *Pursuit of Happiness* at Bunker k101, an immersive exhibition exploring healing, memory, and emotional transformation. His long term project, the Emotional Intelligence Agency, extends this focus on emotional awareness through creative practice. Selassie has presented solo exhibitions at Mahalla, Berlin, VRB Gallery Berlin, and Galerie Monica Ruppert, Frankfurt, and collaborated with brands such as Nike, MCM, and Asics. His instinct-driven practice uses art as a space for connection beyond boundaries of origin and identity. As he states, "My art reflects the way I want to be loved."

About the Curator

Marina Paulenka

Marina Paulenka is a Berlin-based curator, artistic director, and cultural strategist from Croatia with over 18 years of experience across contemporary visual, digital, and performing arts. Specialising in photography and new media, her practice explores feminism, identity, human rights, social justice, and the politics of the body and digital culture. Rooted in her post-Yugoslav heritage and informed by non-Western epistemologies, she foregrounds voices from African, Asian, Latin American, Indigenous, and diasporic communities. Her curatorial work emphasizes collaboration, care, sustainability, and participatory practices, bringing together artists, institutions, and the public across diverse cultural contexts. Her research on the Non-Aligned Movement further informs her engagement with decolonial and postcolonial perspectives and the transformative potential of art.

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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. On the occasion of the 2026 edition of the prize, it was extended to Senegal, marking an important expansion of its scope within West Africa.

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.

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PRACTICAL INFORMATION

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