

What Stains, What Stays

Cornelius Annor

Thursday, 24th September 2026

Gallery II, Accra



Cornelius Annor, *Asa Fie (The Dancing House)*, Fabric collage, fabric transfer, and acrylic on canvas, 2026, 212 x 151 cm. Courtesy of the Artist and Gallery 1957.

Gallery 1957 is proud to present *What Stains, What Stays*, a solo exhibition by Ghanaian artist Cornelius Annor, opening in Accra on 24 September, curated by Ato Jackson.

This new body of work explores the intersections of memory, the archive and inheritance through Annor's deeply personal engagement with photography, painting, textiles and objects. Drawing from family photographic albums, archival and found images of everyday life, Annor transforms fleeting moments of joy, intimacy, care and gathering into layered painted recollections. The exhibition considers what remains when a moment has passed, and how images, materials and objects carry traces of lives into the present.

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At the core of Annor's practice is the photographic archive as a space of personal and collective memory. Family albums, portraits, domestic interiors, and scenes of companionship become points of departure for paintings that exist between documentation and imagination. Rather than reproducing photographs, Annor translates them through the slower, material process of painting, allowing gestures, faces and domestic scenes to acquire new emotional and material lives. The photographs become starting points rather than fixed records, with painting opening up what they leave unseen or unspoken.

Annor's approach to painting is deeply material. Through an experimental process of transferring pigments from African textiles onto painted canvas, patterns migrate from one surface to another, leaving behind translucent stains that merge with figures, interiors, and scenes of communal life. The textile relinquishes its colour while retaining its physical form, while the pigment survives elsewhere as an imprint. This process becomes a meditation on how memory and cultural identity are transmitted—not through exact preservation, but through movement, transformation, and traces.

Within this visual language, the stain becomes both material and metaphor. It marks a surface, resists complete erasure, and records an encounter between one material and another. For Annor, the stain speaks to inheritance: the ways histories, identities, traditions, and memories travel across generations while inevitably changing form. African textiles become more than visual elements within the paintings; they carry histories of craftsmanship, communication, identity, and belonging, collapsing the distinction between personal memory and collective cultural experience.

Across the exhibition, Annor turns his attention to the overlooked rhythms of everyday life. Gatherings, domestic spaces, gestures of care and moments of companionship become records of lives lived together. By giving these experiences the dignity traditionally associated with historical imagery, Annor proposes everyday life itself as a form of archive—one in which ordinary moments can become carriers of cultural memory.

The exhibition extends this enquiry beyond painting through furniture, mirrors and sculpture. Central tables, mirrored vanities and drawers become objects of memory, holding traces of use, touch and time. Annor's understanding of these objects is closely connected to his experience of revisiting photographic albums and noticing the furniture and domestic objects within them as "frames or containers of a certain moment" and "witnesses." In this expanded understanding of the archive, memory resides not only in photographs and documents, but also in the objects and spaces through which everyday life is experienced.

This enquiry into inheritance also extends to Annor's relationship with his late father, who carved expressive figures from timber. A small number of his father's sculptures are included in the exhibition, creating a quiet dialogue between two generations of artistic practice. Their relationship points to an understanding of inheritance not as a direct transfer, but as something carried through observation, proximity and repetition, leaving traces that take new forms.

What Stains, What Stays ultimately reflects on the enduring presence of memory: how images, objects, materials and relationships carry traces of lives lived. Through painting, textiles, furniture and sculpture, Annor considers how the past continues to inhabit the present, and how what we inherit is continually transformed into what remains.

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What Stains, What Stays, Cornelius Annor by Ato Jackson

Memory rarely announces itself through monumental events. More often, it resides in the unnoticed rhythms of ordinary life. These rhythms quietly construct the architecture of our lives, yet they are also the most vulnerable to disappearance. *What Stains, What Stays* begins precisely here. The exhibition asks: what remains after the moment has passed? What remains when the people, gestures, relationships and circumstances that once constituted an experience are no longer physically present, leaving only memories to be reconstructed? What do photographs preserve beyond likeness? And how do we carry the presence of those who came before us? Perhaps memory does not preserve the past as a complete image. Perhaps it preserves fragments: a face, a gesture, a room, a colour, a particular arrangement of bodies, or the emotional residue of an encounter. These fragments become traces through which the past continues to return. Certain moments fade, while others persist with an unexpected intensity. Some experiences remain as images; others survive as stories, and objects. They leave something behind. The exhibition considers this persistence—not as a faithful preservation of what once was, but as an ongoing process of reconstruction, repetition and transformation.

Cornelius Annor transforms frozen moments of everyday life into richly layered paintings where portraiture, transferred textiles, objects and memory converge. Annor's work engages memory, the personal archive, everyday experience and the material traces through which the past continues to inhabit the present. His engagement with old family photographic albums collected from friends and relatives and archival images of everyday life on the internet establishes a dialogue between the photographic archive and the painted image, between documentation and invention, and between what has been recorded and what is remembered. The photograph may appear to offer evidence of a particular moment, but when that image is transferred into another medium, it begins to acquire another life. Painting becomes an act of return: a way of approaching an image that already exists while simultaneously altering its meaning, materiality and presence. Annor also collects African textile fabric from the market as a way of engaging the cabinet of the ordinary Ghanaian mother. Titled *Who be You*, this painting depicts a woman standing beside a car, dressed in distinctive fabric named “odehye nsu” (“a royal does not cry”). The clothing holds deep personal significance, as the fabric was selected directly from the wardrobe of Eno Aboagyewaa, a woman closely related to Annor. Annor engages the African fabric as material of cultural history and of inheritance. Through collaging and transferring the pigments of African fabric onto painted canvas with acrylic paint, the work becomes both an image and an imprint—a meditation on what we inherit, what we remember, and what endures.

The point of departure for this exhibition is the family photographic archive, perhaps the most democratic form of portraiture. They record birthdays and gatherings, celebrations and companionship, moments of intimacy and routine. They testify to lives lived together rather than lives made exceptional. For Annor, these photographs are not simply references for painting; they are repositories of social and cultural memory. This approach shines through in paintings like *Ahwedee Abena* and *Asa fie (The Dancing House)*; the latter recreates an archived internet image to evoke the energetic, communal spirit of the 1980s and 90s disco scene. Migrated from their original contexts, these portraits begin to speak beyond individual biography. They become collective memories, inviting viewers to recognize fragments of their own histories within unfamiliar faces.

In Annor's painting, the mechanical image of photography is slowed into the deliberate labour of the painted surface. Every brushstroke becomes an act of attention. Rather than reproducing the photograph, Annor reanimates it, allowing each portrait to exist between documentation and imagination. The paintings neither restore the past nor attempt to freeze it. Instead, they reveal

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memory as something living, constantly reconstructed through acts of looking and remembering. Yet the paintings do not end there. Across these portraits, Annor introduces fragments of African textiles through an experimental transfer process. In this process, he allows pigments from textiles to migrate onto the painted surface. The fabric relinquishes colour while retaining its physical form. Its patterns survive elsewhere, reappearing as translucent stains that merge with painted figures, domestic interiors, and scenes of communal life. This gesture is central to the exhibition. The transfer is not merely a technical procedure but a conceptual proposition. It demonstrates that materials, like memories, do not remain fixed. They travel. They migrate. They leave traces. What moves from one surface to another is not only pigment but identity, history, and presence. The stain becomes a metaphor. A stain is often understood as permanent. It marks a surface irreversibly, resisting complete erasure.

The transferred textile appears faded, mimicking fabric that has been washed repeatedly with chemicals and bleached by the sun. In *Ahwedee Abena*, this transferred texture blankets nearly the entire surface, encompassing the bodies, objects, and background. Conversely, in *Asa fie*, the staining materializes behind the singers, serving as a backdrop for a past that is slowly slipping away. Select figures receive this same treatment, acting as a metaphor for an era that left an indelible mark on those who lived through the 1980s. Ultimately, this transfer technique invites us to reimagine the paintings in a new light, drawing a direct line to our contemporary disco and social life.

Cultural identity persists not through permanence but through continual adaptation. Annor's portraits perform precisely this kind of cultural labour. The African textiles and their patterns evoke systems of communication, identity, craftsmanship, and social belonging that have circulated across generations. By allowing these textiles to stain the painted image rather than simply decorate it, Annor collapses distinctions between personal memory and collective history.

Throughout the exhibition, viewers encounter scenes of everyday joy. In *Chacha*, a group of friends gathers in a bar, playing cards, drinking, smoking, and sharing smiles. The large-scale painting, named after an actual disco in Accra New Town where Annor used to live, *Terrisco Inn*, expands on this communal energy, depicting people deep in conversation and others dancing with uninhibited joy. Meanwhile, *Abusua Nkuraa seree* captures a lighter, more intimate moment, showing four children smiling and laughing as they pose warmly for the camera. There is no spectacle here. No heroic narrative. Instead, Annor insists that everyday life deserves the same dignity traditionally reserved for history painting.

Annor's works do not romanticize the past. Rather, they affirm that ordinary experiences possess extraordinary historical value. Joy itself becomes an archival practice. To gather with friends, to dance, to laugh, to care for children, to inhabit domestic space—these are not insignificant moments. They are the foundations upon which communities are built.

"Revisiting my old works and the photographic albums again, I became interested in the objects that are seen in the composition of the image. The centre tables, room dividers, chairs, drawers, etc. I began to see them as objects of memories. They are like frames or containers of a certain moment. They are witnesses."

- Cornelius Annor

The exhibition expands beyond painting through the inclusion of new bodies of work integrated into functional wooden furniture. Crafted to resemble the nostalgic center tables found in many 20th-century and early 2000s homes, this newly built furniture piece—alongside mirrored vanity drawers—acts as a unique frame for the painting. Annor refers to these structures as "objects of

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memory." Much like traditional domestic containers that store everyday family items, they function here as literal and symbolic vessels for archival photographs.

The inclusion of these objects therefore expands the exhibition's understanding of the archive. The archive does not have to be a museum, library or collection of documents. It can exist within the home. It can exist in furniture, photographs, paintings, sculptures, clothing, rooms, gestures and stories. Personal history is often preserved through things that were never deliberately designed to become historical records.

Wood as a material introduces another important dialogue. Before Annor became a painter, he observed his father carve portraits from timber. His father's sculptures, expressive depictions of traditional African figures, form an essential part of this exhibition. The father's sculptures stand not as historical footnotes but as living interlocutors. They remind us that artistic knowledge is rarely inherited through instruction alone. It passes through observation, proximity, repetition, and care. This inheritance is perhaps the exhibition's deepest stain. The son continues the same commitment to portraiture, memory, and cultural continuity through different materials and methods. The exhibition therefore proposes a broader understanding of artistic lineage. Influence is neither linear nor hierarchical. It moves like transferred pigment, leaving traces without reproducing itself exactly.

The title *What Stains, What Stays* encapsulates this entire movement. Some things stain physically. Dye migrates from cloth to canvas. Paint settles into woven fibers. Wood bears the marks of carving. Furniture accumulates the touch of generations. Other things stay without leaving visible evidence. The sound of a father's workshop. The rituals of gathering. The warmth of shared meals. A family photograph tucked inside an album. The memory of a face whose name has been forgotten but whose presence continues to matter. In Cornelius Annor's practice, painting becomes less an act of representation than an act of preservation. Portraiture becomes an ethics of remembrance.

What stays is not always what we intended to preserve. What stains is not always what we intended to leave behind. But between the two lies the continuing life of memory—the place where images, objects, relationships and experiences refuse to disappear completely. What remains is not simply the image. What remains is the life that continues to echo through it.

What stays, stains.

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About the Artist

Cornelius Annor

(b. 1990, Ghana. Lives and works in Accra)

Working in the figurative and portrait tradition, Cornelius Annor depicts familial scenes in intimate, domestic settings, offering glimpses of Ghanaian life in states of gathering, repose, and leisure. The scenes depicted arise from recollections of his childhood as well as family photographs, rendering his work visual commentaries on memory and archives. The artist uses mixed-media to comment on the exchange between past and present, tradition and modernity that saturates everyday life in Ghana. His paintings are meant to inspire time travel, whisking the viewer away from the immediacy of the present to inhabit a memory from the past. For, while he depicts scenes from his personal life, Annor wants his work to tap into a universal quality that allows the viewer to see their family set within it. There is a warmth to the familial moments he represents which allows for such resonance across time and space, the way figures turn towards each other or touch in an easy familiarity that indexes the intimacy of kinship. Annor uses fabric lavishly in his paintings to evoke the domesticity and texturedness of family. His use of traditional Ghanaian textiles adds rich detail to the paintings, conveying the sensory environment of the home. Using a unique fabric transfer style, which entails imposing fabric onto canvas for several hours, he executes faded patterns onto the backgrounds of his work, which invokes the layered quality of memory as well as its disintegration over time.

Selected solo exhibitions include *Everywhere and Now Here*, Galerie Hübner & Hübner, Frankfurt, Germany (2026); *Memories We Share*, Maruani Mercier Gallery, Knokke, Belgium (2022); *A Family Affair*, Gallery 1957 Accra, Ghana (2021) and *Lost But Found*, Venus Over Manhattan, New York, USA (2021). Group shows include *Echoes of Her*, Maruani Mercier Gallery, Brussels, Belgium (2025); *UNLIMITED III: The African Family*, Gallery 1957, Accra, Ghana (2024), *When We See Us: A Century of Black Figuration in Painting*, Zeitz MOCAA, South Africa (2022-2023); *The New African Portraiture*, The Shariat Collections, curated by Ekow Eshun, Kunsthalle Krems, Austria (2022); *The Interior*, Venus Over Manhattan, New York, NY, USA (2021); *SANKOFA*, Gallery 2622, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, USA (2019); *Atelier 2017*, Alliance Française - Absa Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa, *Let's Talk Sh*t*, Alliance Française, UNICEF Art Project, Accra, Ghana (2016) and Silver Star Tower; African Regent Hotel, Accra, Ghana (2015). Annor has participated in the following fairs: The Armory Show; Dallas Art Fair; Luxembourg Art Week; Art Basel, OVR; 1-54 New York; 1-54 London; Art Paris; FIAC, Grand Palais éphémère and Art Basel Miami Beach.

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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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Title: *What Stains, What Stays*

Exhibition Dates: 24th September - 7th November 2026

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