

Mythologies, Proverbs and Fables

A solo exhibition by Godfried Donkor

Gallery 1957, London, UK

30 September – 28 November



Godfried Donkor, *Harder they come* (2022). Acrylic, oil and gold leaf on canvas 200 x 200 cm.
Image courtesy of the artist and Gallery 1957.

Godfried Donkor's new exhibition at Gallery 1957 brings together paintings, embroideries on paper and a large-scale installation, spanning works from the past and the present, animated by the artist's own constellation of passions: comic books and Marvel superheroes, popular culture, music, mythology, storytelling and science fiction. Moving between Financial Times pages, archival photographs and auction catalogues, Donkor treats history as material to play with - cropping, enlarging, recoloring and recombining inherited images with humor and irony rather than accepting them as fixed.

On entering the gallery, visitors are immersed in *In the line*, the large-scale installation on the wall to their right. First made for It's a Numbers Game at Firstsite, Colchester, in 2026, it gathers an army of figures enlarged from auction-house catalogues. Lifted from the publications that photographed, classified and priced them, the statuettes reassemble as a collective presence, a cast of characters rather than a sequence of lots. They start small and grow ever larger as they descend the wall, creating a play of perspective that turns the catalogue's rigid order into a playful crowd.

The paintings draw on archival photographs, popular culture, military and ceremonial imagery, portraiture and masquerade. Using the logic of collage, Donkor brings different narratives onto a single

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surface, releasing historical figures from the fixed categories of the archive and making them newly present through paint - protagonists again, in stories of his own telling.

Harder They Come (2022) - acrylic, oil and gold leaf on canvas - is the first work visitors meet on entering the exhibition, and a case in point, condensing this method into a single charged image. Against an enlarged pink field of Financial Times market listings, a long-haired figure in a pale cap and pinstriped flared suit stands wide-legged, a pistol extended in each hand: an anti-hero caught in an almost Elvis Presley pose, half outlaw, half superstar, a gold-leaf disc rising behind his head and white birds descending into the upper corners. The title borrows the soundtrack of Jimmy Cliff's 1972 film, whose hero, Ivanhoe Martin, is Jamaica's own anti-hero, an outlaw turned national hero. Beneath Donkor's figure, the diagram of a ship is transformed into something closer to a futuristic aircraft straight out of a comic, while the financial index behind him carries the past's trading routes into the commerce of the present.

Alongside the paintings, the exhibition brings a second, slower medium: embroidery on Financial Times pages, connecting Ghanaian textile traditions with European heraldic imagery. Threads in bright, pop colors are machine-stitched directly into the printed newspaper - one mechanical process layered over another, the sewing machine's dense repetition interrupting the rigid order of the press. Some pages are left unaltered; on others, Donkor first screen-prints names from popular culture - Beyoncé, Michael Jackson - before the needle begins its work. Black profiles, ships, heraldic emblems and Ghanaian symbols appear across its salmon-pink pages, the daily language of markets meeting older emblems of lineage and seafaring. Single-page works sit alongside compositions of multiples; in the smaller pieces, European heraldry is reimagined as African coats of arms - insignia for new mythologies.

The largest and most majestic of all the embroideries, *Parts Beyond The Seas* (2025) presents the altered page at its fullest: a monumental grid of Financial Times pages, transformed by screen-printing. Two rows of coats of arms alternate across the grid - the first in bright pop orange, the second in black - and this whole rhythm of repetition is thrown into contrast by vibrant motion: three rows of blue waves run straight across the entire work, carrying an iconic sailing ship back and forth, an image that recalls Columbus's caravel and the great age of navigation and trade routes.

Across the exhibition, images move from archive to canvas, newspaper to thread and catalogue page to gallery wall. This call and response between media continue the enquiry of *It's a Numbers Game*, Donkor's first solo exhibition in a UK public institution, and follows his inclusion in *In Minor Keys*, the main exhibition of the 61st Venice Biennale, conceived by the late Koyo Kouoh. Rearranging inherited images and formats, Donkor sets playfulness against the idea of fixed histories: his works stay in motion, open to new heroes, new stories and new connections.

Notes to editors:

Exhibition Details

Venue: Gallery 1957, London

Address: 1 Hyde Park Gate, SW7 5EW, London

Dates: 30 September – 28 November

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About Godfried Donkor

Godfried Donkor is a British-Ghanaian mixed-media and multidisciplinary artist whose practice explores the sociohistorical relationships between Africa, Europe and the Caribbean. Working across collage, painting and sculpture, he examines histories of trade, migration, sport, power and cultural exchange, often combining archival imagery, newspaper and gold leaf with references to religious iconography and Ghanaian Adinkra symbolism. Donkor studied Fine Art at Central Saint Martins and African Art History at SOAS, London.

Recent presentations include *It's a Numbers Game* at Firstsite, Colchester (2026), *In Minor Keys* (2026), *Battle Royale II: Pantheon of Champions* at Gallery 1957, London (2023), and *People of Colour: Black Portraiture Now*, curated by Ekow Eshun, at the National Portrait Gallery (2024). His work has also been shown at the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, Tate Modern and the Design Museum. Donkor was awarded the Prix de la Révélation at the Dakar Biennale in 1998 and became a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellow in 2023.

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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