

Gallery 1957

Godfried Donkor

***Working title: Battle Royale: Last Man Standing-
Part I***

24 August - 5 October 2019



Godfried Donkor: *Battle Royale*, collage work in progress (2019) and *S.t Bill Richmond - The Black Terror*, oil on canvas (2010), both courtesy the artist and Gallery 1957

This August, Gallery 1957, Accra presents a solo exhibition from British-Ghanaian mixed-media artist Godfried Donkor, following a seven month residency with the gallery. Showing completely new works, the exhibition marks the culmination of over 20 years of research by Donkor into colonialism, slavery and intercontinental trade relationships.

Using the history of pugilism as the cornerstone of his extensive research, Donkor explores the relationship between boxing and the slave trade within the UK, US and Ghana, citing events such as “battles royal”, where white men would force black slaves to fight to the death until there was only one man standing. From aristocrats fighting peasants in the UK, to plantation owners staging matches for slaves in the US, Donkor’s work examines the social-historical relevance of boxing as ‘the art of self-defence’.

For his exhibition at Gallery 1957, the artist reimagines a screen from 1801 owned by Lord Byron, depicting portraits of several well-known boxers of the time. Byron’s fascination with pugilism stemmed from sparring sessions with bare-knuckle prize-fighting champion John “Gentleman” Jackson. Donkor also presents a series of new paintings on canvas and board as well as his collages, which explore the figure of both the male and female (amateur) boxer across time. He revisits iconography used in previous works including that of Bill Richmond, the British boxer born a slave in New York in 1763, and his peer Tom Molineux.

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Interested in the origin of boxing within Ghana, Donkor's work explores how amateur boxers within the British Army brought the sport to the 'Gold Coast' in the 18th century. As part of his residency, Donkor also visited contemporary boxing gyms in Jamestown, Accra - a place known as the home to an unprecedented number of world boxing champions, and also the first port of settlement by the British in Ghana.

Donkor's exhibition at Gallery 1957 coincides with Ghana's "Year of Return" - a year-long initiative encouraging members of the African diaspora to visit Ghana; the event marks 400 years since the beginning of the 'Middle Passage' - the voyage that transported Africans against their will to work as slaves in the West.

About Godfried Donkor

Godfried Donkor is a British-Ghanaian mixed-media artist interested in the socio-historical relationships of Africa and Europe.

Born in Kumasi, Ghana in 1964, Donkor left at the age of eight, growing up between Spain and England before completing a BA in Fine Art at Central Saint Martins, London and an MA in African Art History at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London.

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

Selected group and solo exhibitions 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); and Still the Barbarians, EVA International Ireland's Biennial, Limerick (2016).

He lives and works across London, UK and Accra, Ghana.

About Gallery 1957

Based in Accra and working internationally, Gallery 1957 has a curatorial focus on West Africa. The gallery presents a programme of exhibitions, installations and performances by the region's most significant artists currently bridging the gap between local and international practices. Founded by Marwan Zakhem in 2016, Gallery 1957 has evolved from over 15 years of private collecting. Opened in 2017, Gallery 1957 II is the gallery's second space, situated in Accra's Galleria Mall. The gallery serves as a vital platform, promoting West Africa's presence within the art scene by hosting ambitious exhibitions, providing resources for residencies and participating in international art fairs.

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Exhibition (working title): Godfried Donkor: *'Battle Royale: Last Man Standing - Part I'*

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