

## PRESS RELEASE

Peter Ojingiri

*Encountering the Disrupted*

2nd March – 14th April, 2022 Accra, Ghana, Gallery III



This exhibition is a space of encounter. It is where and when we encounter the human figures that Peter Ojingiri defined in painting as *The Disrupted*. They are the daughters and sons of those, in the context of slavery and colonisation of Nigeria, who remained home, as opposed to *The Departed*, forced to abandon the motherland. Ojingiri dedicates his practice to them, in the strong quest to make *the one who stayed* as much part of today's post-colonial conversation as *the one who had gone*. Neither of them, he believes, should be the protagonist in the complex operation of puzzling back together a fragmented society, whose belief systems and identity have been, in his own words: “in a state of disruption ever since the colonial encounter”.

# 1957

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*The Disrupted* are painted across a series of large-scale full body portraits in oil and acrylic on canvas. They appear as *meta-humans* standing at the crossroad between metaphors and reality; between a real Nigerian person and the idea of who that person could be. Their bodies appear as *meta-bodies*, sculpted with realistic attention yet with a metallic rendering of the skin that allows them to shine in the moonlight. Their faces carry tribal marks that reference Ife Bronze Heads. Reminiscent of African masks, these hybrid figures traverse metaverses and resist a fixed designation, serving the sole purpose of this meeting, of this encounter with us in a *meta-garden*. Ojingiri's magenta garden is of an uncertain kind, glowing under the light of dawn, or perhaps sunset, it features vegetation characteristic to Nigeria, whereby the artist nudges the nation's uniqueness.

Among all the components that distinguish Ojingiri's visual language, the most particular is that of the facial holes. At first, one might be reminded of steel bolts, given the quasi-metallic rendering of the body. In reality, this is a consequence of Ojingiri's study of the Ife Bronze Heads and their tribal marks, which he studied so deeply that they are now an integral part of his discourse. He references these ancient artifacts used to commemorate royalty and divinity in the city-state of Ife between the 11<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> century, by reproducing on his characters' faces the same holes and signs of scarifications present on the Bronzes. The holes attach multiple layers of meaning to the artist's aesthetic of *The Disrupted*. They appear as neither a mask nor a human, but rather a "human reminiscent of a mask", as a dichotomy between the old and the new, the real human and the idealised representation of him or her as a Disrupted. Here, the artist is mindful of the same ambivalence that the bronzes had in celebrating historical characters that were yet also considered deities, *Orishas*.

This aesthetic message is interwoven with a political one that uses the Ife Heads to affirm a viewing of Africa as a continent of civilisation with sophisticated cultures and a history of technical knowledge, like the lost wax casting method used to produce the Ife bronzes. Such a view is countering a Eurocentric ideology that commonly underrepresents the continent as being "uncivilised".

In *Encountering the Disrupted*, the artist creates an intimate space in which we can enter and meet the vulnerability of these figures that are simply captured in a moment of peace and stillness. However simple this encounter may be, these characters are the result of Ojingiri's long introspective and conceptual journey manifested in the paintings' formulation of *The Disrupteds'* skin, tribal marks, poses and uncanny empty gaze. A journey in which the artist attempts to paint a state of being, to make a marked aesthetic statement and carry forward a strong socio-political reference to the traumatic loss of identity that Nigerians have experienced and still experience today, and how that can be transformed into a new definition and conception of Self, one that is freed from western notions of primitiveness and empowered with an awareness of its infinite potential.

These images, Ojingiri explains, are about "what we could be", or even more so, about "how we could perceive ourselves differently... unchained from the constrictions of the past".

**Extract from text by Angelica Litta Modignani**

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## About the Artist

**Peter Ojingiri (b.1997)** is a self-taught artist based in Nigeria. He studied Biology at the Kogi State University and began his art practice in 2017. His most recent body of work centers on West African Folklore and Post-Colonial Theory within the realm of Blackness, unpacking critical themes that refer to a time in Africa before the colonial encounter. Ojingiri brings a new and exciting depth to the figure, creating mask-like visages instead of hyperrealist faces and bodies that objectify Blackness. He renders the bodily features of his subjects referring to traditional African masks, focusing on expression beyond the materiality of skin's colour. Ojingiri had his work shown in the collective exhibition COLLECTIVE REFLECTION curated by Danny Dunson at Gallery 1957 (2021) and this is his first solo exhibition with Gallery 1957.

## About Gallery 1957

Based in Accra, with a London outpost opened in 2020, Gallery 1957 has a curatorial focus on West Africa. Presenting a programme of exhibitions, installations and performances by the region's most significant artists, 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. Founded by Marwan Zakhem in 2016, Gallery 1957 has evolved from over 15 years of private collecting. The gallery now hosts three spaces in Accra – one in the Kempinski Hotel and two in the Galleria Mall – and a London outpost in Hyde Park Gate.

Artist: Peter Ojingiri

Title: Encountering the Disrupted

Dates: 2nd March – 14th April

Opening Reception: 2nd March, 2022 - 6pm-9pm

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