

PRESS RELEASE

Boluwatife Oyediran

For Boiz Like Me

Who've Considered Suicide/ When the Rainbow is Enuf

11th August – 7th September, 2022, Accra, Ghana, Gallery II



Boluwatife Oyediran "Swimming Lesson", 2022, Oil and acrylic on canvas, 150 x 200cm, Copyright the artist, image courtesy of Gallery 1957.

Gallery 1957, Accra, is proud to present "*For Boiz Like Me Who've Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf*", a solo exhibition of works by artist Boluwatife Oyediran, adduced from Ntozake Shange's 1975 choreopoem, "For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/ When the Rainbow is Enuf". The exhibition will run from 11th August, 2022- 7th September, 2022.

"...Black men are expected to be high achievers, to make it at all costs, to be bread-winners. When it's tough they must not cry, break down or show vulnerability. It almost reads like the opposite of that part of Chimamanda Adichie's essay Beyoncé quotes in "Flawless". What the society does not understand is that these expectations are consuming the 21st century black male..."

-Boluwatife Oyediran

For his second solo show, Boluwatife Oyediran draws inspiration from multiple sources. While his mission to use figuration to correct and add nuanced representations of non-white characters remains intact, in this new body of works titled "For Boiz Like Me Who've

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Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow is Enuf”, the writer and painter explores Black Masculinity through three key notions/symbols: suicide, rainbow and cotton.

The artist preferred the term “Boiz” to the too common and heavily charged phrase “Black Men”. The choice of the word ‘Boiz’ rather than Men could be indicative of a longing for a long gone childhood and feelings associated with that period: innocence, thoughtlessness, lightness and softness. Feelings that emanate and radiate from some of the artworks. Here, the protagonists seem to have freed themselves from any judgmental gaze, daring to endorse flamboyant outfits and shimmering imposing gold-leaf jewellery, staring boldly but not defiantly at the viewer. “Boiz”, used in many slangs over the world, becomes a federator term that erases borders and creates community. A community of Black men worldwide ‘who’ve considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf’. The men who seem to have it all and struggle emotionally, the Black men who seem (on the outside) to be alright when anxiety and suicidal thoughts are overwhelming and debilitating. As it reads on one of the canvases, “soft men never cry, they consider suicide”, most likely because the most common representations, reduce Black men to very few archetypes – macho man, violent man, silent man brewed in patriarchy and racism.

Oyediran’s works shift the fallacious narrative that presents economically developed countries as self-made countries to a new more accurate one, centred on the crucial role Black people played in the world’s industrialisation and development as well as the traumatic experience it constitutes. A physical and psychological trauma that transcends time, geographies and generations. This visually translates as subtle greyish touches of paint, minuscule fluffy cotton buds, quasi imperceptible backgrounds of cotton fields. As elusive as it may appear on some canvases, the cotton is actually omnipresent as an allegory of trauma and abuse of the Black body, contrasting with the inherent softness of cotton itself.

The rainbows are omnipresent. Depicted with thick coarse layers of acrylic paint, they contrast with the sophisticatedly, gently applied thin layers of oil paint used for the bodies. The characters’ skin colour is obtained by applying several layers of paint, including a first layer of dripping blood-like vermillion paint, imperceptible by the viewer, as an analogy of the trauma boiz carry around, a trauma buried deep down, invisible to the outside world. The delicate characters seem affixed to the background, ready to jump out of the frame and start a new life, the life they chose. A new start, that is what the rainbow may suggest, symbol of the sun rising after a rainy day. Interestingly here the rainbows are not accompanied by clear skies, but rather starless moonless deep blue skies as a reminder that hope thrives even through the darkest of times.

In definitive, Oyediran’s work celebrates Blackness, Black bodies, Black skin and Black identity in all their diversity, not only making a strong statement by diffusing feeling of pride but also producing new representations, new canons, for the Black man, by the Black man, of the multifaceted and unrestricted identities Black men can embrace.

-Extract from curatorial essay by Esse Dabla-Attikpo.

About the Artist

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Boluwatife Oyediran (b. 1997 Ogbomoso, Nigeria) is a contemporary painter working primarily with figuration and text. His practice is informed by a deep commitment to reimagining and reorienting black identity in the canons of history, religion and Western art, using cotton as an essential symbol of interrogation. His works prompt reflection on long-standing systemic oppressions, particularly through his interrogation of the connecting link between the history of fashion, the history of cotton, and how these histories are related to black people—most recently black men. This informs his signature approach of placing black people dressed in high fashion in cotton fields, as well as his installation of black people in spheres of power that are hostile to them, rebuilding them with the inclusion of black possibilities and representation. Bolu studied Literature-in-English at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. He is currently a Presidential Fellow and an MFA in Painting candidate at the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, USA. His works have been exhibited in Paris, Rome, New York and Switzerland. His latest writing published by Iskanchi Press in the United States is forthcoming in “The Best of Isele Anthology”, in fall 2022.

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: Boluwatife Oyediran

Title: For Boiz Like Me Who’ve Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow is Enuf

Dates: 11th August, 2022- 7th September, 2022.

Opening Reception: Thursday, 11th August, 2022.

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