

Gallery 1957

Publication Name: OmenkaOnline.com

Circulation: 3,660 unique users per month

Date: 6 April 2017



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STANDING OVATION



BY NEWS

April 06, 2017

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From April 21 to May 25, 2017, Gallery 1957 will present *Standing Ovation* by Nigerian artist Gerald Chukwuma. The exhibition is a new body of work spanning painting, sculpture and collage, as well as explores migration as a constant process of transformation.

Working with his signature wood carvings, Chukwuma reflects on the interwoven histories of Nigerian culture and language. The title of the exhibition is taken from the work *Standing Ovation, 2017*, a tribute to the resilience of the artistic spirit against the personal challenges faced throughout his career. The title also refers to the necessity of optimism even in dark times, considering Africa's political and economic struggles in the aftermath of sustained periods of post-colonialism, violence, and corruption. Shining a light on his personal memories of growing up in Nigeria, Chukwuma creates works that reflect the joys and struggles of his culture through richly illustrated depictions of stories, myths and legends. Laden with personal and symbolic meaning, they speak to our human desire to communicate with each other and share stories about who we are, where we have come from, and most importantly, where we are going.

Using a multitude of techniques, his unique approach to burning, chiseling, and painting common materials captures a multi-layered history imbedded with personal and political meaning. As families began to move away to seek new economic opportunities elsewhere, a myriad of traditions and languages began to disappear. The notion of community as a collage of collective experience can also be found in *Akuko Ifo* (Folk Tale, 2017), where various fragments of symbols, bodies and letters come together to form a tapestry of infinite patterns. Working with discarded objects such as found aluminium sheets and wooden planks, Chukwuma's painstakingly etched carvings undergo a laborious process. The artist explains; "The use of wood in my work is symbolic – it gives me the freedom to pierce, to cut, to attach and to interact, cultivating an aesthetic characterised by the pre-eminence and solidity of the material. My work also explores the relationship between the structural, architectural and organic qualities of the medium and image."

In Chukwuma's practice, the use of traditional Uli and Nsibidi symbols links his work to the Nsukka art tradition which expanded and modernised the Igbo cultural aesthetic. In the work *Worth Two in the Bush*, 2017, a large figure looms over the surface of the painting while 3 small birds sit upon an outstretched hand. The work refers to the Nigerian traditions of wall drawings commonly found on rural houses to symbolise the home owner's individual spirit and family history. The use of symbolism is important, but only when it serves to illuminate the story of the individual or community it represents. Figures can often be seen moving through these symbols, as if they are in search of something, pointing towards man's constant search of meaning and knowledge in the world. Typical of the artist's detail driven approach, these works interweave a personal intimacy, the artist hand-crafted each object specifically to be shown in the gallery space, but they also refer to the global context of time, trade and travel.

Drawn from his personal experiences of moving between cities and villages, *Standing Ovation* presents a selection of works inspired by the artist's deep connection to his homeland. Looking across the shimmering landscape of houses in the impressive work, *Where We Live*, 2017, it is easy to see where the artist draws his inspiration. Based on the slum neighbourhood of Makoko, it reflects one of the most urgent issues facing African communities, which is the question of housing and infrastructure for the growing population. With each house stacked neatly on top of the other, the golden orange and silver-lit blue tones suggest the elemental relationship of land and ocean. Filled with an unrelenting sense of joy, even in light of issues of systemic poverty and homelessness, Chukwuma seeks to demonstrate the resilience of communities in Africa and around the world. His works are proof that it is possible to build matter out of nothing, to take the woeful struggles of many and turn them into artistic triumphs for all to see.

Gerald Chukwuma, born 1973, is a fast rising Nigerian artist. He graduated with a bachelor degree in fine and applied art from the University of Nsukka. His work explores migration as a constant process of transformation. Considering the implications of globalisation on his immediate environment, Chukwuma manipulates common materials to render new stories of Nigeria's social and political history. He has exhibited severally in Nigeria and internationally. He participated at Heden Daagse Afrikaanse Kunst Galerie 23 Amsterdam and *Music Lesson* an exhibition of wood panels Alexis Galleries Lagos.

www.gallery1957.com