

NEW AFRICAN ART GALLERY OPENS WITH A SHOW BY OLUWOLE OMOFEMI



Omonalisa, oil and acrylic on canvas, 122 x 122 cm, 2019.

Oluwole Omafemi

The Way We Were

Exhibition Dates: 12 March – 9 April 2020

Private View: 11 March, 6:30 – 8:30pm

Signature African Art opens its new London space on 11 March 2020 with a presentation of new paintings by the celebrated Nigerian artist, Oluwole Omafemi.

Entitled *The Way We Were*, the exhibition will be arranged across the gallery's basement and ground floors, and is formed of 12 large-scale portraits of women and children, as well as a number of smaller works specially commissioned by the gallery.

In the words of the artist, each is a celebration of Afrocentric pride, as well as reflection on the post-colonial era. The British artist Claudette Johnson has talked of the 'fiction of blackness' that colo-

nialism left in its wake and of the need for people to assert their identity through their own stories. Omofemi embraces this idea, focussing on the importance of hair amongst black communities.

While it has always been a signifier of status and identity, Omofemi looks back to recent history, to The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and '70s, and the natural hair movement. This encouraged black people to eschew European styles for afros, a move that was championed by popular icons such as Jimi Hendrix and Diana Ross.

In Omofemi's work, hair stands as a metaphor for freedom — indeed, sometimes it literally spills over the edge of the canvas, as with *Root II*; while in others, such as *Omonalisa*, it dominates the composition, becoming larger than the subject itself. Rendered in oil and acrylic, these paintings sometimes have simple primary coloured backgrounds, which lend them a vivid Pop Art sensibility; in others, a darker mood is created, referencing the works of the Old Masters.

Located in Davies Street, Mayfair, Signature African Art was founded by Rahman Akar. Of its first show, he says: *'We are delighted to be opening a space in London, and thrilled that Oluwole Omofemi, one of Nigeria's most compelling young artists, is our first show. In addition to his mastery of composition, his works are at once both celebratory and deeply thought-provoking.'*

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Notes to Editors:

About the Artist

Oluwole Omofemi (b. 1988, Ibadan) is an artist living and working in Nigeria and received his National Diploma from the Polytechnic of Ibadan. Throughout his early life he experienced first-hand the hardship of poverty, working as a fishmonger and selling beer in markets, he used his earnings to purchase art supplies to develop his artistic skills. Following graduation Omofemi received a major exhibition at the National Museum, Ibadan, Nigeria. Since, the artist has been exhibited in Lagos, Italy, Belgium and Ghana. His work is in a number of international private collections.

About Signature African Art

Signature African Art is an international art gallery with locations in Lagos and London. Founded in 1992 by Rahman Akar the gallery specialises in contemporary African art. Signature has established itself as one of the leading galleries on the African continent, it has been pivotal in shaping contemporary West African art working with leading artists including El-Anatsui, Ablade Glover and Kolade Oshinowo. The gallery's London space based in the heart of Mayfair will introduce a new generation of African artists to UK and European audiences who have to date been underrepresented in the West.