

Tunji Adeniyi-Jones

That Which Binds Us

19 November 2021 – 9 January 2022

White Cube Bermondsey

White Cube Bermondsey is pleased to present 'That Which Binds Us', an exhibition of new paintings by Tunji Adeniyi-Jones and his first with the gallery. Coinciding with the artist's inaugural UK museum presentation 'Astral Reflections' at Charleston in Sussex, the works focus on expressive figuration and, as the artist states, 'how the transformative nature of the Black experience is nourished by travel, movement and cultural hybridity'. Informed by his own Yoruba heritage, in his paintings Adeniyi-Jones fuses West African mythology and iconography with the seeming immutability of the Western art canon.

The diverse and disparate influences the artist draws upon include pioneering Nigerian artists such as Ben Enwonwu and Bruce Onobrakpeya, which ultimately reflect a desire to represent not just African subjects but the human form freed from the specifics of time and place. Focusing on the human form as a timeless instrument for storytelling, his luminous paintings are populated by muscular bodies engaged in ritual dance-like movements or classical posturing. Both 'The Youth' and 'The Virtues' series, for example, present groups of figures in a dark and rich palette; combining shades of deep purple with indigo and flashes of hot pink, their quality of movement reminisces both African performance masquerade dress and Léon Bakst's exuberant costume designs for Serge Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes* (1909–29).

Exploring the relationship between figure and ground, the artist builds his work through repetition, colour and form, to create a sense of proliferating energy. In a recent essay, art historian Camille Okhio has identified this technique of repetition in Adeniyi-Jones's paintings as being a process of catharsis and release; what she calls 'an investment in the ongoing process of self-realisation'. In some, the composition resolves into a single riotous energetic abstraction, while in others, the subjects are responsive to the shifting vegetal forms that crowd around them, so that each part is in communion with the whole. The interconnected nature of figure to ground is, however, consistently interrupted by the outward gaze. Each figure is made individual by the distinctive whites of their almond-shaped eyes.

Poetic Feet I, II and III, which combine rich pinks, reds and oranges, feature dancers engulfed by curling flame-like patterns, recalling the patterning of Lorenzo Monaco's

Renaissance illuminated manuscript *Last Judgment* (1406–07). Each an acutely subtle variation of the other, Adeniyi-Jones's figures and forms are doubled, invoking the repetition of ritualised acts that are integral to ceremonial processes. Androgynous in appearance, the figures result from an amalgamation of styles that includes the visual traditions of West African sculpture, specifically Benin and Ife bronze heads sometimes adorned with flowing lines, resembling those found in the practice of facial scarification. Equally, the artist capitalises upon the expressive potential of limbs, calling to mind Renaissance masterpieces where hands and feet are the primary vehicle for anguish and ecstasy.

Twin Virtues (Orange, Pink, and Blue and Orange) feature interlocking pairs of figures, which alludes to the reverence of twins within the Yoruba community, Nigeria having one of the highest incidences of twins in the world. The notion of doubling also speaks to the artist's personal recollections of his childhood; being an only child he used to conjure up fictional siblings, although growing-up he was surrounded by a wide community which became his extended family. In these works, individual bodies are layered and placed horizontally, in a manner reminiscent of the stylised figures of an Egyptian frieze. Across the flattened picture plane, they take on the appearance of an undulating landscape.

In $9 \times 9 \times 9$, a new monochrome sugar-lift aquatint entitled *Five Virtues* depicts five figures dancing and gesturing, each a personification of a moral attribute. Again calling to mind the sacred and sublime, as well as his own Catholic upbringing, the artist considers the value of self-identification and transcultural memory. As Adeniyi-Jones has remarked, these are 'large bodies that have weight and can also bear weight. It's about being heavy so that you can deal with the heaviness of ownership.'

BIOGRAPHY

Tunji Adeniyi-Jones was born in London in 1992 and lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. In 2014 he received his Bachelors in Fine Arts from The Ruskin School of Art, Oxford University, UK and in 2017 he was awarded an MFA in painting and printmaking from Yale School of Art, Connecticut, USA.

Recent solo exhibitions include Morán Morán, Los Angeles (2021); 39 Great Jones Street, New York (2020); 'Patterns and Rituals', Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York (2020); 'Dreams Through Seasons: New Paintings', The Cabin, Los Angeles (2018); and 'Flash of the Spirit', Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York (2017). Selected group exhibitions include 'Citizens of Memory', The Perimeter, London (2021); 'Forms of Life', Morán Morán, Los Angeles (2020); 'A Chance Encounter', (curated by Tunji Adeniyi-Jones), Parts & Labor, Beacon, New York; 'to dream a man', Clima, Milan (2020); 'Art on the Grid', Public Art Fund, New York (2020); 'Black voices, Black microcosm', CF HILL, Stockholm, Sweden (2020); 'Young, Gifted and Black: The Lumpkin-Bocuzzi Family Collection', OSilas Gallery at Concordia College, Bronxville, New York (2019); Lehman College Art Gallery, Bronx, New York (2020); and Go 'Figure!', Eric Firestone, East Hampton, New York (2019).

He currently has a solo exhibition 'Astral Reflections' on view at Charleston, East Sussex, UK, until 13 March 2022.

White Cube Bermondsey is open
Tuesday – Saturday, 10am – 6pm and Sunday, 12 – 6pm.
Admission is free.

Do not visit if you have any Covid-19 symptoms.
Please use hand sanitiser on entry.
Masks are required while you are inside the gallery.
Please adhere to social distancing.
Children must be kept in hand at all times.
For more information visit whitecube.com to read our COVID-19 FAQs.
For further information, please contact enquiries@whitecube.com or +44 (0)20 7930 5373.

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9×9×9

- 1 *Turbulent Youth*
2021
Oil on canvas
208.3 × 152.4 cm | 82 × 60 in.
- 2 *Prideful Youth*
2021
Oil on canvas
208.3 × 152.4 cm | 82 × 60 in.
- 3 *Five Virtues*
2021
Edition of 8
Sugar-lift aquatint on paper
101 × 74.2 × 4.5 cm | 39¾ × 29⅜ × 1¾ in.



NORTH GALLERY

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | <i>Twin Virtues in Orange</i>
2021
Oil on canvas
137.2 × 142.2 cm 54 × 56 in. | 6 | <i>Charm, Grace & Mercy</i>
2021
Oil on canvas
203.2 × 152.4 cm 80 × 60 in. |
| 2 | <i>Poetic Feet II</i>
2021
Oil on canvas
203.2 × 142.2 cm 80 × 56 in. | 7 | <i>Poetic Feet III</i>
2021
Oil on canvas
198.1 × 137.2 cm 78 × 54 in. |
| 3 | <i>Pride, Honour & Faith</i>
2021
Oil on canvas
198.1 × 152.4 cm 78 × 60 in. | 8 | <i>Poetic Feet</i>
2021
Oil on canvas
203.2 × 142.2 cm 80 × 56 in. |
| 4 | <i>Charm, Honour & Grace</i>
2021
Oil on canvas
203.2 × 152.4 cm 80 × 60 in. | 9 | <i>Twin Virtues in Blue & Orange</i>
2021
Oil on canvas
139.7 × 149.9 cm 55 × 59 in. |
| 5 | <i>Frolicking Youth</i>
2021
Oil on canvas
198.1 × 198.1 cm 78 × 78 in. | | |

