

The Becoming

September 15 – October 28, 2023

Opening Friday, September 15, 6–9PM

Peres Projects is pleased to present *The Becoming: A Window of the Self*, curated by British-Ghanaian artist Joseph Awuah-Darko. Presented in our Berlin gallery, this group exhibition brings together works by Mobolaji Ogunrosoye, Maku Azu, Ousmane Bâ, and Joseph Awuah-Darko.

Across a range of media including painting, photography, collage, sculpture, and tapestry, *The Becoming* unfurls a multifarious exploration of the self, that extends far beyond the traditional bounds of self-portraiture. Whether engaging with abstraction, figuration, Surrealism, or Afro-futurism, the artists approach self-examination from perspectives infused with ubuntu. Encapsulated in the phrase “I am because you are,” this key concept of Sub-Saharan philosophy acknowledges the interdependence between individuals and communities as the seat of humanness, positing that the fulfillment of one’s subjectivity depends on a group. Throughout the exhibition, the artists address the fluidity of selfhood and the multiplicity of identity by interlacing personal histories and cultural legacies. In *The Becoming*, reflection on one’s life and experiences does not equate to self-absorption. More often than not, in the exhibited body of work, self-discovery occurs through encountering the other, appropriating ancestral or nonnative techniques, and grappling with wider societal constructs.

Multicolor loops of thick paint, applied by a meticulous hand, make up the impastoed surfaces of Maku Azu’s (b. 1986 in Accra, Ghana; based between Bangkok and Paris) effervescent and kaleidoscopic portraits and self-portraits. Upon closer inspection, the figurative bodies we see from a distance reveal themselves to be an intricate mesh of brushstrokes that translate the turmoil of our inner lives into a magmatic substance. Engaged in a cathartic process of self-examination that embraces vulnerability, Azu explores the tension between one’s true self and the external social forces exerted on us; which she renders in bronze in the bicephalous self-portrait *Untitled (twin self sculpture)* (2023).

Mobolaji Ogunrosoye’s (b. 1991 in Lagos, Nigeria; based in Lagos) artistic practice comprises photography and collage that she combines in multilayered portraits. In her hands, photographs morph into sculptures as she carves black-and-white and color prints, creating sinuous cutouts that materialize distortions and contortions of the self. By fragmenting and reassembling depictions of her female peers, Ogunrosoye investigates the representation of female bodies in contemporary African society and excavates her own multifaceted experience as a Nigerian woman.

Tokyo-based artist Ousmane Bâ (b. 1988 in Strasbourg, France) deploys a syncretic practice that merges Japanese printmaking (*mokuhanga*) and dyeing (*katazome*) techniques with references to his Senegalese Fulani heritage, in particular as it relates to nomadism. Captured mid-dance, mid-fall, mid-embrace, or mid-fight, Bâ’s silhouettes evoke movement, agency, and self-determination. His cutouts represent bodies traditionally underrepresented in the arts; collaged on primed white canvas, at times adorned with pieces of dyed fabric, they appear in a state of weightlessness that channels the artist’s search for serenity and harmony.

Inspired by *kente*, a traditional Ghanaian loincloth, the striking tapestries of Joseph Awuah-Darko (b. 1996 in London, UK; based between Accra and London) delve deep into the artist’s psyche. Drawing on Surrealism, they exhume subconscious meanderings; producing an embodied experience of the passing of time, the act of weaving itself serves as a healing process. While giving shape to a contemporary language through traditional materials and techniques, Awuah-Darko creates a lexicon made up of both universal and personal symbols, laced with animism. Each experience is woven into a tapestry—both tangible and metaphorical—that conveys a sense of nonlinear growth towards becoming.

The ideas of community and interconnectedness that permeate the exhibition have informed this project from its inception, as *The Becoming* brings together fellows of the Noldor Artist Residency, Ghana's first institutional artist residency, founded by Awuah-Darko in order to support contemporary African artists, within the continent and across the diaspora. As stated by Joseph Awuah-Darko in his curatorial statement: "In *The Becoming*, the artists celebrate the rich cultural tapestry of Africa, while simultaneously expanding its borders. They advocate for a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of the African experience, one that rejects stereotypes and embraces the myriad narratives that shape individual and collective identities."

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