

Njideka Akunyili Crosby
Coming Back to See Through, Again

September 14–October 28, 2023
519 West 19th Street, New York



Njideka Akunyili Crosby, *Ejuna na-aga, o kpulu nkpliko ya*; New Haven (Enugu) in New Haven (CT), 2022. © Njideka Akunyili Crosby. Courtesy the artist, Victoria Miro, and David Zwirner.

David Zwirner is pleased to present an exhibition of new and recent work by Njideka Akunyili Crosby at the gallery's 519 West 19th Street location in September 2023. The presentation, which debuted at David Zwirner Los Angeles in May 2023, will be Njideka Akunyili Crosby's first solo exhibition in New York, New York.

Born in Nigeria, Akunyili Crosby moved to the United States as a teenager in 1999, and her work reflects her hybrid cultural background and experiences. In her methodically layered compositions, Akunyili Crosby combines painted depictions of people, places, and subjects from her life with photographic transfers derived from her personal image archive as well as Nigerian magazines and other mass media sources. The resulting works are visual tapestries that vivify the personal and social dimensions of contemporary life while evocatively expressing the intricacies of African diasporic identity.

In the exhibition, multiple places and temporalities exist together within single compositions. In these works, Akunyili Crosby uses doorways, screens, posters, and windows as devices that open to other worlds, such as private interior spaces, lush external gardens, and bustling Nigerian markets. In *Still You Bloom in This Land of No Gardens* (2021), for example, which shows the artist with her young child on the back porch of their home surrounded by plants and vines, a sliding door reveals a domestic interior space, hinting at the private world within. Inside, an image of Akunyili Crosby's mother can be glimpsed, offering a powerful multigenerational representation of the tenderness, love, and beauty of motherhood. The treatment of paint and the layering of the photographic transfers in this work create a tension between depth and surface that optically and narratively affect how the viewer visually navigates the composition. This work first appeared in *Picturing Motherhood Now* at the Cleveland Museum of Art in 2021 and 2022.

Two new works from the artist's series *The Beautiful Ones*, which Akunyili Crosby first began in 2012, will also be on view. Several of the earlier works from this series were included in *The Hilton Als Series: Njideka Akunyili Crosby*, an exhibition that debuted at the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, in September 2022, and is currently on view at The Huntington, San Marino, California. As Als describes: "In her ongoing series *The Beautiful Ones*, artist Njideka Akunyili Crosby takes as her subject children she came across in family albums, or observed and photographed on trips to her native Nigeria. The paintings ... are framed by vulnerability, hope, and a certain self-awareness. Inspired by the Ghanaian author Ayi Kweh Armah's classic 1968 novel *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, which centers on political and personal idealism and corruption, Akunyili Crosby's vibrant canvases are alive with, and to, her understanding of her various subjects' layered, complex, and vulnerable lives.... Her paintings present a world that is literally layered, and deeply committed to the depth to be found on the surfaces that make up intimate and private spaces, including the body."¹

Several of the works in the exhibition, including *Still You Bloom in This Land of No Gardens*, were recently included in the artist's 2022 solo exhibition at the Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, and prominently feature vegetation and plant life. More than decorative motifs, plants—and their origins and migrations—have deep cultural and historical associations that naturally appeal to the artist. One of these works, *Potential, Displaced* (2021), served as the basis for a wallcovering commissioned by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, that is currently on view as part of the ongoing installation *Before Yesterday We Could Fly: An Afrofuturist Period Room*. In a number of these works the flora also overlay screen walls of the type that adorn many residences built in the 1970s and early 1980s in Nigeria. Individually striking, the plants and screens also create unique visual and formal lattices for Akunyili Crosby's complex organization of imagery and space. Alive with history and culture, these works are at once personal and individual, but also remain approachable and universal.

David Zwirner Books will publish a large scale monograph on the artist, which is scheduled to be released in 2024.

Njideka Akunyili Crosby was born in Enugu, Nigeria, in 1983 and currently lives and works in Los Angeles. The artist was awarded an honorary doctorate from Swarthmore College in May 2019. She is also the recipient of a 2017 MacArthur Fellowship and has received a number of awards and grants, including the Prix Canson, 2016; Next Generation Prize, New Museum, 2015; Joyce Alexander Wein Artist Prize, 2015; and the James Dicke Contemporary Artist Prize, The Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2014, among others. She was an Artist in Residence at The Studio Museum in Harlem from 2011 to 2012. Akunyili Crosby's work has been represented by David Zwirner since 2018.

In addition to the current and recent exhibitions mentioned above, Akunyili Crosby's work has been the subject of several solo exhibitions at prominent venues internationally, including at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas (2018–2019); National Portrait Gallery, London (2018–2019); Baltimore Museum of Art (2017–2018); Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, Florida (2016); and Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2015). In 2019, the artist participated in the 58th Venice Biennale.

Work by the artist is held in significant museum collections, including the Baltimore Museum of Art; Buffalo AKG Art Museum, New York; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles;

¹ Hilton Als, "Njideka Akunyili Crosby," in *The Hilton Als Series: Njideka Akunyili Crosby*. Exhibition pamphlet (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 2022), p. 1.

Nasher Museum of Art, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, Florida; Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia; Pérez Art Museum, Miami; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; National Museum of African Arts, Washington, DC; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Tate, UK; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven; and Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa, Cape Town.

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