

## Chris Ofili: *Joyful Sorrow*

Victoria Miro Venice, 26 October–14 December 2024

David Zwirner Paris, 14 October–30 November 2024



Chris Ofili, *Othello – Reflection*, 2018–2024  
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Courtesy the artist and Victoria Miro

***Joyful Sorrow* is a two-site exhibition by the acclaimed British painter Chris Ofili. New paintings at David Zwirner Paris and works on paper at Victoria Miro Venice continue the artist’s exploration of William Shakespeare’s *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice* (1603–04). The exhibition is accompanied by a new publication in collaboration with poet and writer Jason Allen-Paisant.**

Renowned for his rich, multilayered paintings, Ofili here expands his engagement with Othello in works that ask us to contemplate metamorphosis, love, the bearing of outside influences on our inner selves, and the force we exercise on the world.

On view at Victoria Miro Venice is a series of watercolours titled *Othello – Reflection*, begun while the artist was in Venice. Their transmuting colours and forms reflect the character’s complex interiority – his vulnerabilities and his joyful sorrows. ‘Othello’ is inscribed along the bottom of each watercolour, the letters accompanied by diving and scrolling interlinked figures.

That the artist considers these works to be partly self-portraits does not imply that he somehow sought to cast himself as Othello as he made them. Instead, self-portraiture here is explored as a movement of imaginative empathy – an open-ended impulse to turn towards the other in the mind’s eye, in the fullness of one’s own subjectivity. This project of approaching the other through the self is, however, undertaken in the knowledge that acts of representation can never fully capture either self or other.

Each watercolour is encased within an artist’s frame of carved and charred wooden shutter doors that have mirrored interior surfaces, which in their opening bring into being moments of protection, reflection and revelation, and a play between inner and outer selves.

Published on the occasion of this two-site exhibition staged by David Zwirner Paris and Victoria Miro Venice, the joint publication *Joyful Sorrow* includes a text from Ofili’s studio and a selection of poems by Jason Allen-Paisant from his 2023 collection *Self-Portrait as Othello*.

**Chris Ofili** explores the intersection of desire, identity, and representation in his work, which merges abstraction and figuration; vibrant, symbolic, and often mysterious, his paintings and works on paper incorporate a range of aesthetic and cultural sources. Solo exhibitions of his work have been presented at venues including the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami (2017–2019); National Gallery, London (2017); New Museum, New York (2014–2015); The Arts Club of Chicago (2010); Tate Britain, London (2010 and 2005); Kestner Gesellschaft, Hannover (2006); The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (2005); and Serpentine Gallery, London (1998). Ofili represented Britain in the 50th Venice Biennale in 2003 and won the Turner Prize in 1998. He lives and works in Trinidad.

**Jason Allen-Paisant** is a scholar, an award-winning poet, and a writer. His work explores how Afro-diasporic artists and communities shape their futures through embodied philosophies, focusing on the intersections of poetry and philosophy. His debut poetry collection, *Thinking with Trees*, won the 2022 OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature. His second book, *Self-Portrait as Othello*, has earned significant accolades, including the 2023 Forward Prize for Best Collection and the T.S. Eliot Prize. He is a professor of critical theory and creative writing at the University of Manchester.

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