



PRESS RELEASE

A Gentle Seed

New Works from Ghana

MARCH 8 - APRIL 20, 2023

OPENING RECEPTION: FRIDAY, MARCH 8, 6–9 PM

McLennon Pen Co. Gallery is thrilled to announce a group show of paintings by artists from Ghana, including **Selorm Amekorfia, Theresah Ankomah, Kwabena Fordjour, Salihu Mohammed, Daniel Tetteh Nartey, Amina-Toure, and Rufai Zakari.**

The story of how this show originated begins with how I first met Rufai Zakari. One of the leading artists in Ghana, Zakari graciously agreed to my request to visit his studio in Accra in the summer of 2021. It is worth noting he also has a second studio in Bawku, his hometown, because he goes back and forth between the two places— maintaining his roots and giving back to his community but also being an active participant in the rich art scene in the Nima neighborhood of Accra, the capital and largest city in Ghana.

The street facade of Zakari's Nima studio, housed in a former beauty salon, is adorned with colorful still advertisements of women posed wearing glamorous makeup and head wraps. This was a fun and engaging prelude to the eruption of color and personality found in Zakari's bold figurative artworks within the studio. His chosen materials of single-use plastics such as plastic bags, food packaging, and water sachets have been collected from the streets, washed, and flattened by a hot press and then neatly organized onto the studio shelves—a color palette entirely made from trash. Zakari aims to call attention to the implications of discarded plastics and to find beauty in what people think of as rubbish. Cutting and sewing together plastic sheets, Zakari forms colorful figurative artworks portraying members of his community. Often depicting strong female characters in confident postures, that some say are in “sassy” poses, Zakari described how his interest in making art about women began. Crediting his mother as being integral in making him who he is and encouraging him to pursue art, he added that he feels women are often unfairly undermined in society. That is one of the reasons he seeks to portray them with respect, viewing “all women as mothers.”

The prominence of water sachets as the backgrounds and clothing of these women in Zakari's art is often apparent. More readily available than water bottles in many parts of Africa, water sachets are plastic, heat-sealed bags of filtered water requiring immediate consumption and careful handling to prevent spillage. Once used, these wrappers are commonly littered into city streets and gutters, creating an environmental sanitation issue. Despite providing access to clean drinking water, the surge in sachet water consumption in Ghana underscores unintended social and ecological consequences. Zakari works hard to combat these issues symbolically in his artwork and through his charitable organization, the [Rujab Eco-Art Foundation](#), which encourages recycling, advocates for proper waste management, and supports climate change initiatives within his community.

I left the studio visit thoroughly inspired and wanting to see more artwork in Ghana. I see one more interesting thing though outside that is a makeshift garbage receptacle that Zakari has made out of recycled bottles. Immediately, it registers to me as a beautiful sculpture. It moves me that Zakari has taken it upon himself to essentially gift this gorgeous trashcan to the public and his street— just like the paintings and all of the ideas they express, it is planting a gentle seed for change.

I am very grateful to Rufai Zakari and Amina-Toure, who together curated this show and introduced me to the other participating Ghanaian artists. As I have been listening, researching, and learning more about the practices of each participant in the show, it has been inspiring to see common themes such as female empowerment, vibrant color palettes, and the use of recycled materials. Several artists focus on capturing everyday life through contemporary portraiture, where confident subjects gaze directly at the viewer. Another common thread between this group is that so many of them have had artistic mentors who took them under their wing in various ways, from welcoming them as trainees to hiring them as studio assistants. When I recently asked Zakari about this as a possible strength within the Accran artist community, his touching response was simple: “Yes, this is all cyclical.”

– Jill McLennon, founder of McLennon Pen Co. Gallery

About the Artists:

Selorm Amekorfia (b. 1991) is a multidisciplinary artist from Accra, Ghana. Amekorfia was mentored by the same artist as Rufai Zakari, a man named Hashim Hussein that has been nicknamed “Mozzay,” or the “grandpa of art.” Amekorfia draws inspiration from personal and societal experiences through his unique medium of broken mirrors and acrylic paints. He believes art is a tool for healing and communication, each vibrant color represents people going through things they find difficult to overcome. His works delve into identity and reincarnation. Amekorfia describes his inspiration saying “sometimes we fail and cry, sometimes we feel lonely and sad. But don’t ever forget there is beauty and value behind your broken self. Be strong, pick up the pieces and reshape it into a greater version of yourself”.

Amekorfia's work has been included in recent group exhibitions in 2023 including *Afforestation* at the UAE Ambassador's Residence in Accra; *This is Not Make Believe*, at Osu castle in Accra; and *Polarities ke ehe saji* at Ussher Fort in Accra. He was rewarded in 2023 with a Societe Generale Artivity Award.

Theresah Ankomah (b. 1989) is a Ghanaian artist born in Kokomlemle who lives and works in Accra. She works in various mediums ranging from painting, printmaking, installation, performance, fashion, and weaving. Many of her projects begin with basket weaving, used as a viewfinder to investigate the complexities of craft by abstracting and experimenting with memory-holding objects and materials. Ankomah has a socially engaged practice and purposefully focuses on issues of labor and consumerism. Her practice observes, defies, conflates, and interrogates everyday objects to explore moments of transformation, community, intimacy, and family.

Ankomah graduated with a Masters of Fine Art in Sculpture from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in 2017. She was the recipient of the 2021 second runner-up prize of the Inaugural Yaa Asantewaa Art Prize in Africa by Gallery 1957 and also the recipient of the 2017 first runner-up prize of the prestigious Kuenyehia Art Prize for Contemporary Art in Ghana. Her work, *The Shrine*, is in the permanent collections of the Kuenyehia Trust, and *Connecting the Why and the Not* is in the permanent collections of the European Union Delegation to Ghana. Her work has been included in many publications such as the MasterCard Foundation's *Art Book on Hope, Energy and Ingenuity: Voices of African Youth*, 2018; "Ten Best of 2021" in December issue of *Artforum*; "How I Made This: Theresah Ankomah's Repurposed Produce Baskets," in *ARTnews*, 2021. She has exhibited work internationally in shows including *Wheels of Time*, 2022, Gallery Brulhart, Geneva, Switzerland; *That Those Beings Be Not Being*, 2022, Alpha Nova Gallery, Berlin, Germany. In April 2024 she has an upcoming exhibition that will take place at Kunstmuseum Bochum, Germany.

Kwabena Fordjour (b. 1990) is an artist who currently resides at La in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. His research centers on the transportation culture prevalent among his community, exploring its multifaceted impact on time management, individual productivity, and Ghana's economic landscape. He delves into a range of transportation queue systems, monologues, dialogues, and human interactions observed within the movement of vehicles. Through these narratives, he crafts stories depicting the everyday Ghanaian's utilization of time during their commutes from one place to another. He draws inspiration from commuting, vehicular motions, and human attitudes. His acrylic vibrant color dab and patch technique works are inspired by great masters like Vincent Van Gogh and Claude Monet.

Fordjour first graduated with a Higher National Diploma in Commercial Art from the Takoradi Technical University in 2011 and later pursued a Bachelor of Art Education at the University of Education, Winneba, graduating in 2015. The artist now lives and works from his home studio at La in Accra, and manages an art and skill learning studio that is open to the public, where he nurtures the creative abilities of both children and adults. He also works as a part-time tutor in creative art and illustration at the Child Bilingual Institute and Gensheila Fashion Academy, both in Accra. His most recent group exhibition was *The Beautiful Nonsense* at the Ghana National Museum in November 2023 in Accra. Some notable art events he participated in are *The Creative Arts Show* in the years 2015, 2017, and 2018; and

the *Black Art Street Festival* in 2016, 2017, and 2018. He also collaborated with Little Big Souls for the *Art for Preemies Charitable Auction* held at Movenpick Ambassador Hotel in 2018.

Salihu Mohammed (b. 1998) is an artist from Accra, Ghana. In his painting practice he navigates the intersection of the known and the unknown, delving into themes of identity and self-exploration using symbolism and visual metaphors. Mohammed values narratives that illuminate overlooked individuals and their stories, often people in his community ranging from women he admires to children filled with curiosity. His body of work often wrestles with the intricate challenge of harmonizing cultural identity with the constantly shifting demands of contemporary life.

Recent exhibitions Mohammed has participated include a group show titled *Return to the Future* at The Secret Garden, Cantonments, Accra; the *Automania* group exhibition at RangRover 2023 Launch; as well as *The Art Collection Exhibition*, a group exhibition curated by the Antique Lemonade Gallery in July 2023.

Daniel Tetteh Nartey (b.1991) is a Ghanaian pop-surrealist artist who juxtaposes the human body in fragments, incorporating heads, hands, and legs as recurring motifs that emphasize the multifaceted nature of human relationships and communalism. Utilizing acrylics and oils on canvas, he skillfully distorts the human form, employing it as a powerful symbol for societal frameworks and individualism. This prompts discussions about the importance of embracing personal uniqueness within the framework of collective unity, encouraging viewers to ponder the harmonious coexistence of diverse identities. In his artwork, the color blue emerges as a recurring visual thread, symbolizing peace, universality, and fluidity. This pigment infuses his subjects with a meditative sense of tranquility, serving as a poignant reminder of our shared humanity. Nartey's artistic journey began with formal training at the Ghanatta College of Art & Design, the same university which produced world class artists such as Amoako Boafo, Otis Qwaku, Kwesibotwey, among others. His works have graced the walls of prestigious institutions and galleries, including the Arushi Gallery in Los Angeles, the GR Gallery in New York, the Band of Vices in Los Angeles, Christopher Moller in Cape Town, and the Bill Brady Gallery in Miami.

Amina-Toure (b. 1990) is a Ghanaian-born and raised figurative painter who currently lives and works in Columbus, Ohio, USA. She has an MFA in Painting and Drawing from Ohio University. Toure's work is grounded in community engagements as she is fascinated by human interactions and relationships. She seeks to explore and visually represent stories around the coping behaviors of African diaspora populations in the United States. She paints people from her local African immigrant community in Columbus as she seeks to shed light on their efforts and struggles to create a sense of home and belonging in their new environments. Amina works primarily with oils and acrylics. She also employs image transfers and collages of "Ghana must go Bags" which have for long been used as a symbol of immigration and transition. Toure's work has been exhibited most recently in the group show *HOME IS HERE, TOO* at the Beeler Gallery at Columbus College of Art & Design in 2023, and in *Behind the Scenes; Tales of a Dreamer* at T293 gallery in Rome in January 2023. Her

work is included in the collection of the Ohio University as a promised gift to the Kennedy Museum of Art.

Rufai Zakari (b. 1990) splits his time between Accra and Bawku, Ghana. His figurative works are made from discarded single-use plastics gathered from the streets of his home country of Ghana. In crafting his loving portraits from trash, Zakari seeks to examine the roles that consumerism, pollution, labor, and industrialization play in contemporary Ghanaian society.

Zakari graduated from Ghanatta College of Art and Design in Accra in 2011, the same school where some of his esteemed Ghanaian peers, including Amoako Boafo, Otis Kwame Kye Quaicoe, and Kwesi Botchway, also studied. He apprenticed under the Accra-based street artist known as "Mozzay." His practice has garnered widespread acclaim, resulting in his work appearing at exhibitions in London, Accra, Mexico City, Rotterdam, New York, Miami, Dakar, and Dubai, among other cities. His work has been acquired by the Arthur Lewis Collection, the Beth Rudin DeWoody Collection, and the Ditau Collection, among others.