

ARTAFRICA

Buried Roots Up In The Air.

INTERVIEW

Nigerian artist Eniwaye Oluwaseyi navigates memory, migration, and the mutable idea of home through layered, psychologically charged interiors at Zidoun-Bossuyt Gallery.

In *Buried Roots Up in the Air*, Eniwaye Oluwaseyi transforms personal archives into evocative painterly worlds where memory is neither fixed nor faithful, but constantly reworked. Drawing on family photographs, domestic spaces, and his experience between Nigeria and the Netherlands, his compositions unfold as intimate yet unstable terrains—where figures hover between presence and absence, and interiors become sites of emotional and cultural negotiation. In conversation with *ART AFRICA*, Oluwaseyi reflects on painting as a process of reconstruction, where identity, history, and belonging remain in flux.



Eniwaye Oluwaseyi, *Eunice's time*, 2026, Oil on canvas, 180 x 200 cm. Photo courtesy of Zidoun-Bossuyt.

ART AFRICA: Your paintings draw on images from personal archives and family photographs. How do these memories shape the scenes you create?

Eniwaye Oluwaseyi: I draw from family photos, friends, and Nigerian media. These images are more than nostalgic—they're tools for self-reflection. I use these not as documentaries but as materials for painterly recomposition. Memory is layered, edited, and considered on canvas, dictating what's preserved, changed, or erased. Thus, painting becomes archival not by preserving the past, but by reconstructing it.

Domestic interiors are central to this body of work. What draws you to these intimate spaces?

These interiors provide a framework for figures and viewers. Interiors act as thresholds to reconstructed realities, mediating inside and outside. Elements such as doorways, windows, floors, curtains, and gardens organise how figures move, allowing viewers to navigate layers of memory and presence.



Eniwaye Oluwaseyi, *The Story of Space and Time*, 2026, Oil on canvas, 180 x 200 cm. Photo courtesy of Zidoun-Bossuyt.

How do memory and lived experience interact in shaping the identities of the figures you paint?

Memory in my work is not a record of the past but seen as a working surface. The figures often begin with photographs of family and friends, but the paintings move beyond intimate connections. They are shaped by the

unreliability of memory as it edits and reshapes our experience.

Living between Nigeria and the Netherlands has made my memory more selective. Here, lived experience is filtered through time, migration, and emotional proximity. In the paintings, these spaces and figures are reassembled, and the figures' identities are no longer fixed portraits but constantly evolving.

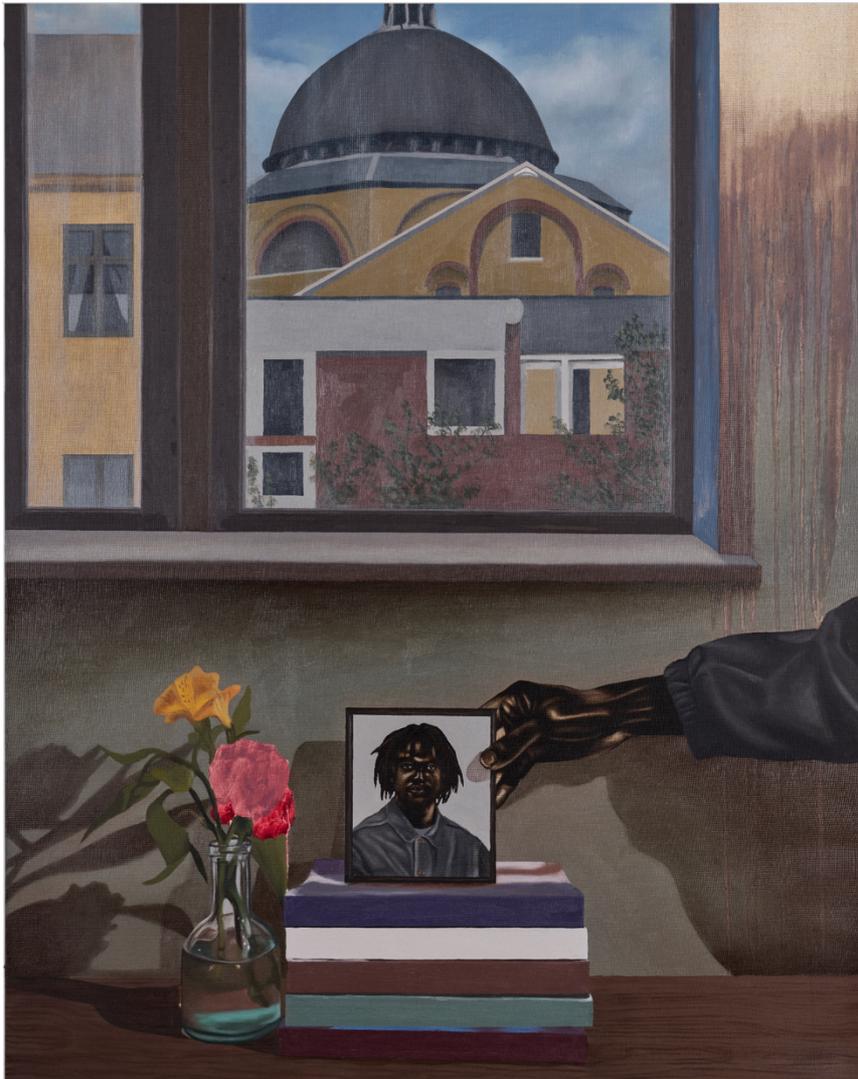


Eniwaye Oluwaseyi, *Spare me a glance*, 2026, Oil on canvas, 130 x 100 cm. Photo courtesy of Zidoun-Bossuyt.

Your work references mid-twentieth-century studio photography. How does this visual tradition influence your compositions?

Contrary to mid-twentieth-century studio photography, which offers self-fashioning within a constrained regime of visibility, my painting reopens this through material transformation, in which the presence of my figures is constructed. Photographers like Seydou Keita and Malick Sidibé created controlled environments in which their sitters assert their presence through posture, dress, and overall composure under colonial and

post-colonial conditions. I translated this compositional clarity into my paintings to destabilise what earlier photography had made fixed.



Eniwaye Oluwaseyi, *The eye of the day*, 2026, Oil on canvas, 130 x 100 cm. Photo courtesy of Zidoun-Bossuyt.

How has living between Nigeria and the Netherlands influenced your understanding of home and belonging?

Living between Nigeria and the Netherlands complicated my sense of home and identity. Distance alters memory, so people, objects, and spaces from Nigeria aren't neutral or fixed. Instead, they're filtered through time and reflection, becoming materials to reconstruct in painting. The work becomes a site where memory and identity are re-examined and reconfigured.

In my paintings, domestic interiors become the spaces where these ideas are made visible. Certain objects are intentionally made to carry emotional and symbolic weight, while manipulated perspectives introduce spatial tension. The figures appear suspended within these environments, yet remain deeply connected to them. For me, home is provisional and continually changing.



Eniwaye Oluwaseyi, *Mama Dee*, 2026, Oil on canvas, 180 x 160 cm. Photo courtesy of Zidoun-Bossuyt.

Your paintings combine figuration with expressive colour and gesture. How do these elements shape the emotional atmosphere of your work?

My works are painterly attempts to bridge modes of figuration and expression without collapsing one into the other. Since my figures are based on real people that I am emotionally connected to, colour and gesture are used to break that realism. Expressive brushwork and intuitive colour are also used to destabilise the entire scene, intensifying the intimacy that resonates not just between the figures and their environment but also between the viewers and the paintings.

The interiors in your paintings feel layered and psychological. How do you construct these spaces?

Interiors function as projections into the subconscious, where spatial tension is created by manipulating perspective to evoke intimacy or unease. I paint in layers of thin and opaque applications, like a palimpsest, allowing memory and time to accumulate on the surface. I anchor the figures with symbolic elements in the foreground, generating a

multi-layered visual field in which meaning unfolds across the foreground, midground, and background.



Eniwaye Oluwaseyi, *House of Honey*, 2026, Oil on canvas, 180 x 160 cm. Photo courtesy of Zidoun-Bossuyt.

The title *Buried Roots Up in the Air* suggests both grounding and displacement. What does this idea mean within your practice?

Roots suggest continuity; air, instability. In my practice, domestic spaces are where these meet. My paintings maintain this tension rather than resolve it, letting the viewer inhabit uncertainty. Having lived the majority of my life in Nigeria, where my studio, family, and friends are based, and where many of the figures in my paintings originate, the movement into a new terrain with a different culture and new modes of adaptation has deeply shaped my work. The presence–absence quality of my figures within these interiors reflects how I navigate life between these two distinct countries.

The exhibition is on view until 25 April 2026 at [Zidoun-Bossuyt](#), Luxembourg, and from 19 March to 2 May 2026 at [Zidoun-Bossuyt](#) Paris. The exhibition follows a period of significant international recognition for the artist, who recently completed a residency at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam. In 2025, Oluwaseyi was awarded the prestigious Royal Award for Modern Painting, presented by King Willem–Alexander of the Netherlands. He lives and works in Amsterdam.