

Samuel Olayombo *Lotus Bloom Ranchers*

04 September – 29 October 2023



Buried Treasure, 2022, Acrylic paint and gouache on aluminium mesh, 172.7 x 358.1 cm (68 x 141 in)

Zidoun-Bossuyt Dubai is thrilled to announce the opening of *Lotus Bloom Ranchers*, artist Samuel Olayombo's latest exhibition.

Zidoun-Bossuyt Gallery is pleased to announce artist Samuel Olayombo first solo exhibition in Dubai. Samuel Olayombo works with oils, acrylics, charcoal and pastels to create vibrant and large-scale canvases of predominately male, non-gender normative portraits. Using a palette knife to convey intricate, 3-dimensional skin textures, Samuel Olayombo pays homage to classic artists such as Vincent Van Gogh, Arja Valimaki, El Dragg Okwoju, Joshua Mensirionye, Barkley Hendricks and Vittu Samuel in his work. His fascination with 'scarring' prevalent in certain Yoruba cultures as well as toxic masculinity, macho male culture and constructs of sexuality, gender roles and gender equality are the key narratives he explores within his compositions. Growing up with five sisters in a patriarchal society has influenced his work in his choice of colour tones preferring traditionally "female" colours, like rose and pastel pinks, to depict his seemingly "brute" masculine subjects: "I saw a lot of unfairness. For me, regardless of gender, we are all equal and this is the major reason why I employ the colour pink in my paintings. I want to correct the notion that pink is feminine".

"I cross the boundaries of traditional masculinity, macho culture, societal gender assertions and associations. The pink clothing and background serve as an emblem of softness, kindness, nurturance, and compassion; qualities that are often thought of as feminine. The dark palette-painted skin pays homage to the body scarification culture of the Ife, a Yoruba tribe of Nigeria. The pink colour scheme accentuates the figures and imagines the notion of men in pink from a fresh perspective. I envision my portraits as an effort to change representations of masculinity, and shift ideas on what it means to be a man."

Commentary by Kezia Ouomoye Owusu-Ankomah |Art Practitioner|Mentor

Samuel Olayombo's artistic journey is an exploration of the intricate interplay between identity, culture, and masculinity. His portraits, bathed in the defiant hue of pink, challenge the conventional constructs of gender and masculinity. In doing so, he invites us to scrutinize and question the deeply ingrained

notions of Fatherhood and its effect on children. What it means to be a parent and the crucial role Fathers play in teaching, imparting, and nurturing the next generation. The juxtaposition of Western Cowboy archetypes with the embrace of their feminine side in Olayombo's work serves as a striking commentary on the fluidity of representation. The role of Black cowboys in the American West is often overlooked in popular films and literature that depict the Wild West. However, historians and scholars have inquired more about the integral role African Americans played in the settlement and development of the West. Oalayombo's paintings pay homage to the rich legacy of Black cowboys.

The vibrant use of pink, often associated with femininity in many cultures, becomes a symbol of the rejection of gender-specific colors, encouraging a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of the male figure; and alluding to the fact that color should be gender neutral. Beyond the probe of gender, Olayombo's work delves into the cultural tapestry of the Ife, a Yoruba tribe of Nigeria. Here, he honors the intricate practice of body scarification—a cultural ritual laden with diverse root explanations and spiritual significance. In an attempt to replicate and reaffirm this controversial practice, Olayombo employs thick acrylic pigment, applying it to the skins of his figures. The scarification ritual, both in its traditional form and Olayombo's reinterpretation, carries a profound message. It signifies the marks we bear, both seen and unseen, and the stories they tell about our cultural and individual identities.

Amidst the exploration of gender and cultural heritage, Olayombo's portraits emerge as symbols of rugged confidence, plainspoken wisdom, casual strength, and paternalistic love. In this exhibition, he underscores the significance of a healthy Father-son relationship, an oft-neglected dimension of masculinity. By depicting black cowboys bonding with their children while riding on horses against vibrant pink backgrounds, Olayombo unveils a profound narrative. Beyond being providers, the Father figures in his paintings, cling to their children, signifying emotional availability. The black cowboys are not afraid to show their nurturing habits, giving affection, affirmation, and attention to their children. These portraits capture the essence of breaking the cycle of generational trauma and toxic patterns. They serve as a powerful reminder of the transformative potential of positive role models, particularly fathers, in the lives of their children. In his solo exhibition *Lotus Bloom Ranchers*, Samuel Olayombo's portraits transcend the canvas and become windows into an exploration of family bonding, fostering new possibilities for the next generation. Through the interplay of colors, symbols, and narratives, he challenges us to rethink our preconceived notions, revel in fatherhood, and give credibility to positive role models. In a world where societal expectations often limit the expression of virility, Olayombo's work celebrates a multifaceted masculinity that embraces both vulnerability and strength. His art becomes a bridge between worlds, a conversation starter, and a testament to his practice.

Biography

Samuel Olayombo (born in 1991) is a Nigerian artist who studied fine and applied arts at the University of Benin. His work is part of collections including The Dean Collection, Los Angeles; Olym Collection, Brussels; Sir David Adjaye Collection, New York; Se Tinat Collection, Madrid; The Bentata Collection, Miami among others. He was a 2021 Visiting Fellow at the Noldor Artist Residency. He presented his first institutional solo exhibition curated by Fabiola Ondzounga at the Institute Museum of Ghana in March 2023.