

## AWODIYA TOLUWANI

*Mirrored City*

8 February - 16 March 2024



*Dawn Set*, 2023, Acrylic on Textured canvas, 122 x 183.5 cm (48 x 72 1/4 in)

Zidoun-Bossuyt Gallery is pleased to announce Awodiya Toluwani's upcoming solo exhibition in Paris, opening on Thursday 8 February 2024.

The use of African symbols in Toluwani's works refers to the scars commonly known as tribal marks. Inherited from slavery for identification purposes, yet considered a form of adornment and wealth, these physical and emotional scars should not be ignored but rather constitute an invaluable heritage for Africans. *Mirrored City* aims to unfold new meanings from these ancestral symbols, sometimes tinted with exaltation and transcendence.

"During my last visit to Ballyvaughan, Ireland, I sat by the village water side where I thought about cities: the geography, colors, shapes, attitude, character, religion, smell and culture. And as I thought about these things, I couldn't help but reminisce Makoko village in Lagos Nigeria.

Makoko is one of Africa's floating inner-city slums with a third of the community built on stilts in a lagoon off the Lagos mainland. This inspired 'The Mirrored City'. I once saw a statement from the *Invisible Cities* by Italo Calvino, a book that might have captured the very essence of 'the mirrored city'.

*Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules are absurd, their perspectives deceitful, and everything conceals something else* wrote Calvino.

Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears. Makoko is no exception, more than other cities, seems made of desires, grown and sustained on promises.

People observe cities differently. One looks from the ground up, another from the top down. I have decided to see the true essence of a city from within and from its reflections. When a river enables a city to mirror in its water, the city grows deep and profound, wise and thoughtful. The water, having adopted the city's reflection fills up with its secrets.

*On the shores of a lake, with houses all verandas one above the other, and high streets whose railed parapets look out over the water. Thus the traveler, arriving, sees two cities: one erect above the lake, and the other reflected, upside down. Nothing exists or happens in the one Valdrada that the other Valdrada does not repeat. [...] Invisible Cities, Valdrada. A city that doesn't have water to be seen in is not livable. A city without water is a city without bridges. Bridges make connections. A city without water mirrors is a city without depth. Grey as it gets, Makoko surrounded by water, still finds those magical breaks of light during a day to reflect its soul in the lagoon. To reflect my soul in the water. To pull me into the deep where the answers are."* Awodiya Toluwani

Awodiya Toluwani's technique draws from the South Nigerian Adire and Nsibidi traditions, as well as from the Adinkra (Ghana) and numerous other African traditions. Such high relief textures imitate scars of two major sources: one is from a place of physical pain, whereas the other is a cultural element that constitutes tribal marks. While the physical and emotional scars are a heritage of slavery – provoked by whips and lashes of canes – the tribal marks are scars that were intentionally given to Africans for several reasons, spanning from identification, faith, aesthetic and so on.

## Biography

Born in Nigeria in 1994, Toluwani grew up in Ogun State. He studied Fine and Applied Arts at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State and graduated in 2017. Awodiya Toluwani is a member of the Society of Nigerian Artists (SNA). Toluwani's works are privately collected in Nigeria and Abroad. He has been involved in various projects and exhibitions in Nigeria such as the *So Far Exhibition* (2014-2017), The Tribe Art Festival (2018), Art Soirée (2019), Society of Nigerian Artists Art Exhibition *October Rain* (2019), MyDrim Art Gallery Group Exhibition (2019) and Life in My City Art Foundation competition (LIMCAF) (2019) where he was one of the finalists. He is exclusively represented by Zidoun-Bossuyt Gallery and he presented his first solo exhibition at the gallery in Dubai in May 2022. His solo show *Interwoven Existences* was presented from 16 March to 27 May 2023 at Zidoun-Bossuyt Luxembourg.