

Lean on Me

Elladj Lincy Deloumeaux

Yagazie Emezi

Sesse Elangwe

Turiya Magadlela

Collins Obijiaku

Stephen Price

April 29-May 26, 2023

Curated by Brice Arsène Yonkeu

kó

Introduction

kó is pleased to present *Lean On Me*, a group exhibition curated by Brice Arsène Yonkeu which explores interpersonal relations and transnational connections in postcolonial Africa, featuring Elladj Lincy Deloumeaux, Yagazie Emezi, Sesse Elangwe, Turiya Magadlela, Collins Obijiaku, and Stephen Price.

Through the lens of six contemporary artists who provide substantial contributions to contemporary discourses, this exhibition aims to assess how the visual dialogue African artists participate in can ultimately unite us and become a tool to lean on. The exhibition reinforces the important role art has always played in connecting individuals and sharing history. Art and culture have the ability to shape our thinking, by penetrating our subconscious and revealing within us feelings that we have suppressed or long forgotten.

Taking its title from a poem written by the curator, *Lean On Me* is a visual representation and artistic continuation of postcolonial theories and ideas expressed by African thinkers and writers, mainly Chinua Achebe, Achille Mbembe and Leonora Miano. Through different forms of language, we can create a space that appears as the precursor to an achieved unity, “a mirror in which everyone would recognize their own face,” writes Leonara Miano in her Afrofuturistic novel *Rouge Impératrice* when describing the capital of a unified Africa a century from now.

*Lean On Me,
Because as a Brother I have your back.
Lean On Me,
Because as a Human I can feel your pain.
Lean On Me,
Because in this spirit of togetherness, your win is my win.*

“This stanza clouded my thoughts as I explored the works of the artists featured in this exhibition, forcing on me this title when I could have easily borrowed Achille Mbembe’s *Out of the Dark Nights*. In this book, which gathers Mbembe’s essays and thoughts on decolonization, he writes that ‘to free oneself once and for all from colonial alienation, and to heal the wounds inflicted by the law of race, one had to know oneself.’ The duality present in this statement led me to consider the division of the exhibition space into two parts. The first part focuses on identity and the knowing of oneself; and the second part depicts the warm embrace of renewed consciousness and identity.”

The exhibition opens with the works of Yagazie Emezi, Turiya Magadlela and Stephen Price to investigate the construction of identity in postcolonial Africa. Emezi contributes to this conversation with photographs from her series *Wayward*, which delves into the complexities of Igbo cosmology and ontology, with a keen focus on the duality between the spiritual world and the physical world we inhabit, questioning what may arise when *mmadu* is disconnected from their personal deity. In symbiosis with her chi — the spiritual force inextricably linked to her existence and residing in her according to Igbo cosmology and ontology — Emezi hand-makes masquerades and uses the pieces in recurring self-portraiture to explore the multiple layers of the spirit world. The series offers a transcendent lens into the consequences of dissonance from our own destinies. The artist’s personal quest, highlights contemporary conversations on the friction and coexistence in postcolonial Africa of imported religions, and native African religions or beliefs.

Continuing with the mixed media abstract works of Turiya Magadlela, who sews, embroiders, and manipulates found textiles such as pantyhose and stockings to explore themes of identity, gender and race, Magadlela draws inspiration from her own experiences as a woman living in South Africa. Through the irregular forms created by stretched pantyhose on stretcher bars, or the mosaic assemblage of textiles into tapestry, Magadlela creates distinct abstract works onto which viewers can project a myriad of thoughts, challenging the status quo while simultaneously perceiving its effects. Opposite Magadlela’s works are three human size nude portraits executed by Stephen Price using acrylic, charcoal, and soft pastels on canvas. Inspired by Edvard Munch 1908 painting titled *Youth* and guided by a quote of art critic John Berger stating that “to be naked is to be oneself... to be naked is to be without disguise,” Price attempts with these paintings to evoke the vulnerability and sincerity of his human subjects.

Price's textured subjects are depicted standing in front of abstract landscapes, exuding a certain innocence that beckons the viewer's soft gaze into this space where existential questions are raised in hope of getting answers.

The conversation closes with a second part of the exhibition featuring the works of Elladj Lincy Deloumeaux, Sesse Elangwe, and Collins Obijiaku whose portraits embody a sense of new consciousness and display a sense of pride attached to an identity claim. In this regard, Deloumeaux's work plunges us into a pictorial narrative where anecdotes of a personal history and the chronicles of a plural world intermingle. The subjects represented in these works on paper emerge or seem to grow out of a clouded and blurry past, to embrace this new found understanding of oneself, which will henceforth constitute a core strength.

Sesse Elangwe's realistic acrylic portraits of women outdoors surrounded by picturesque landscapes call for a pause and act as a space to reflect. However, there is consideration and contemplation for a future together made possible by his signature large eye of enlightenment which draws the viewer in. His subjects' colorful natural plaited hair and their hyper-pigmented dark skins, represent the unapologetic acceptance of oneself, and the definite resolution to be seen and visible in any given space. Using oil and charcoal on canvas, Collins Obijiaku creates a highly detailed and realistic depiction of a woman wearing red lipstick. Obijiaku contours his subject's with thin charcoal lines to create intricate patterns imbued with a sense of storytelling and cultural richness that capture her spirit and vitality while accentuating her features. Staring straight ahead, she appears confident and victorious.

- Brice Arsène Yonkeu



Yagazie Emezi

Yagazie Emezi (born 1989) is a multidisciplinary artist using photography and sculpture to construct visual critiques of Nigeria's socio-political state and the roles media play in it, pulling from history and current events and focusing on unearthing global patterns of inequity from an indigenous point of view. The work she creates aims to address contemporary and widespread issues around corruption, environmental failure, and the extension of colonial policies into current international relations across the African continent. Yagazie's personal works are rooted in stories on identity and her self-portraiture stem from realities both familiar and unfamiliar by examining the function of her body in society but more importantly, the function of it to herself.

Yagazie Emezi

Untitled, Wayward

2021

Giclée fine art print on archival paper

43 x 62 in.

Edition of 5



Yagazie Emezi

Untitled, Wayward

2021

Giclée fine art print on archival paper

43 x 29 in.

Edition of 5



Yagazie Emezi

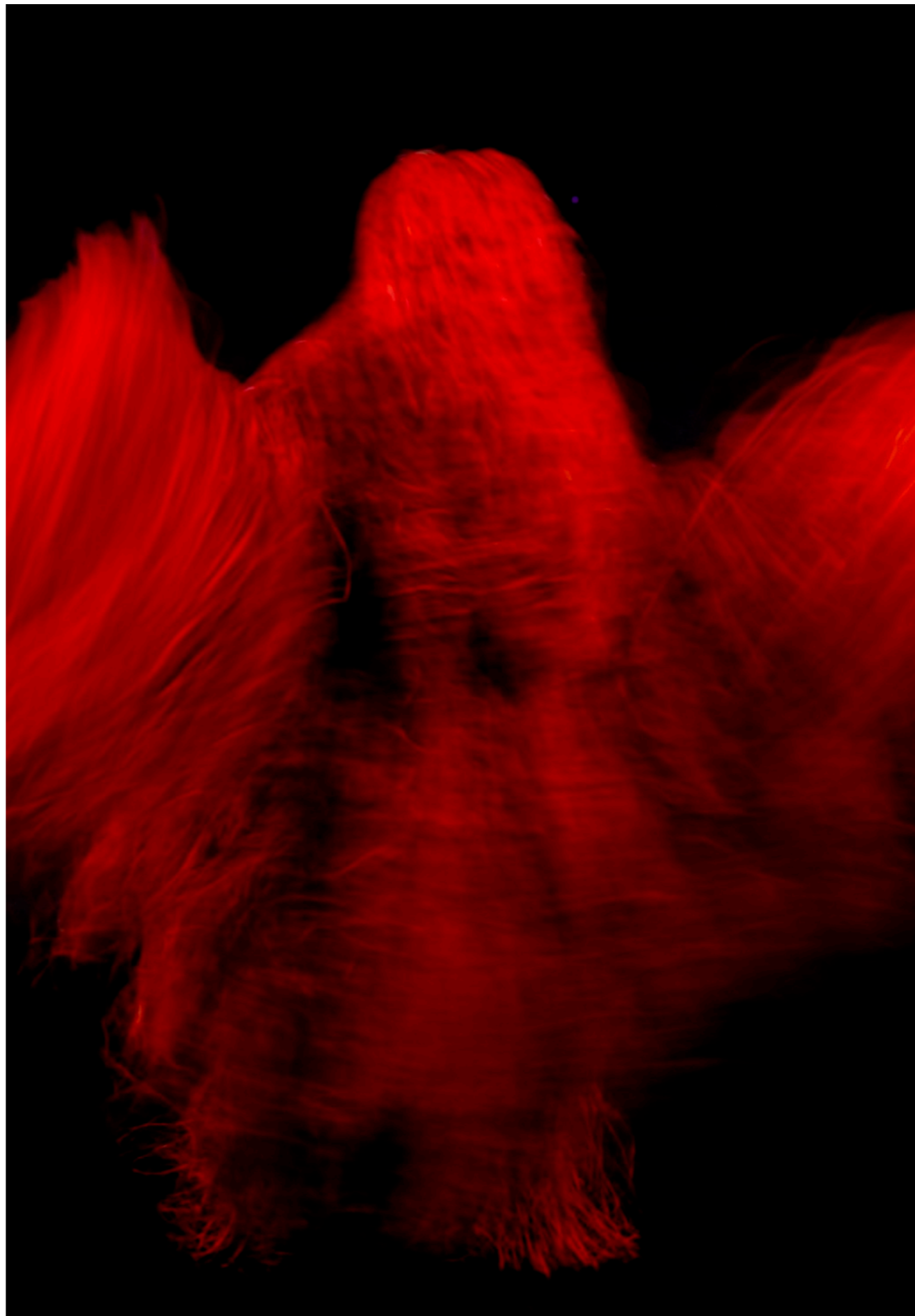
Untitled, Wayward

2021

Giclée fine art print on archival paper

43 x 62 in.

Edition of 5





Sesse Elangwe

Sesse Elangwe is a Cameroonian visual artist from the region of Buea. Born in 1994, he currently lives and works in San Antonio, Texas. Sesse creates compelling paintings based on his digested response to personal and communal encounters that reflect his cultural and sociopolitical environment. Drawing aesthetics from realism, pop-art and surrealism, Sesse employs portraiture to critically document some of the conditions experienced by the Black community. The artist's focus is on topics that include identity, community development, and personal growth. His signature use of asymmetry in the eyes of his subjects symbolize enlightenment. The large eye encourages his viewers to ask themselves challenging questions, to be more aware of their innate wisdom, and mobilize in the pursuit of a better tomorrow.



Sesse Elangwe
Rumours of Change
2023
Acrylic on canvas
60 x 60 in.

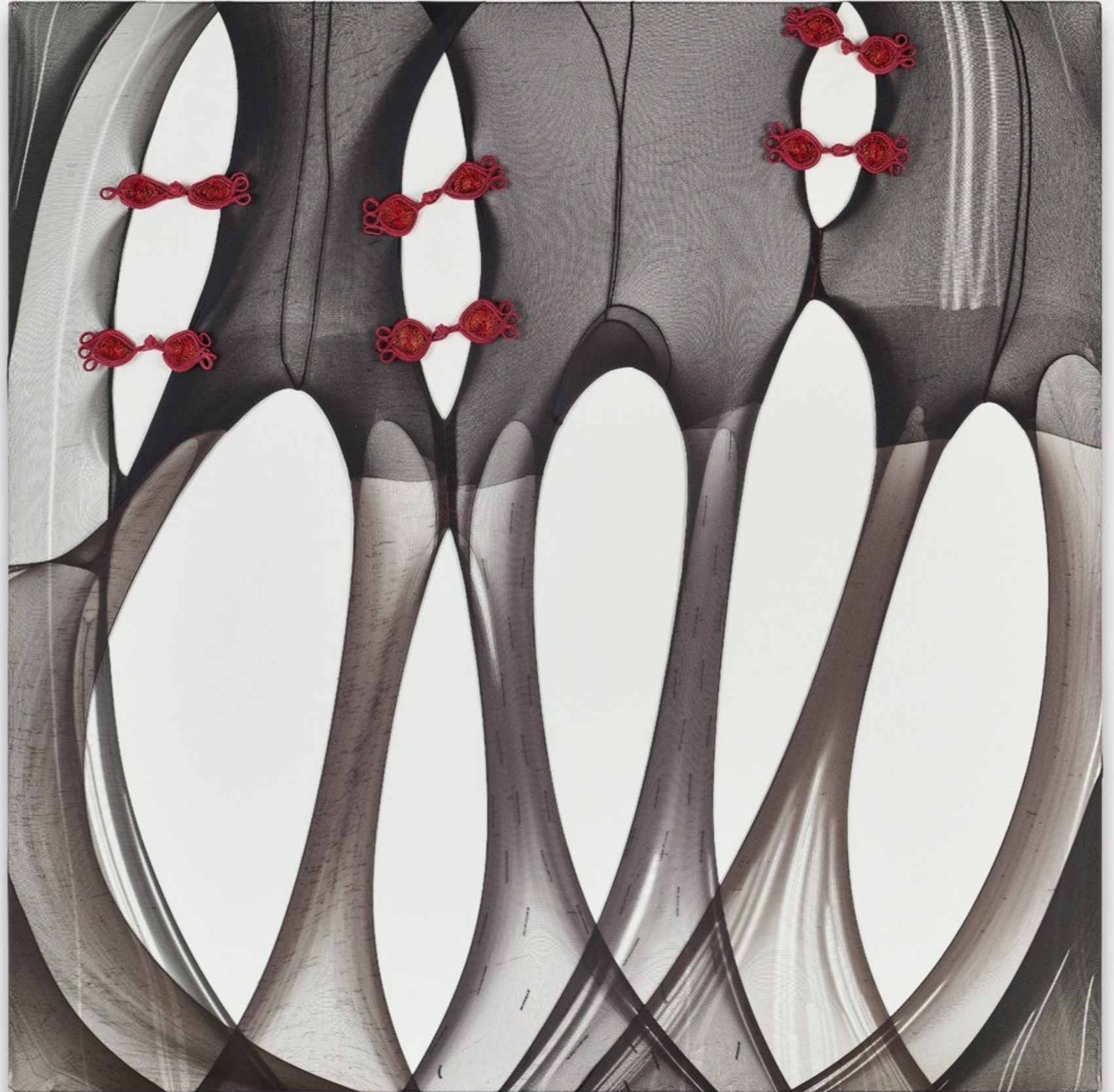
Sesse Elangwe
Waiting on you
2023
Acrylic on canvas
60 x 60 in.





Turiya Magadlela

Turiya Magadlela is a South African artist born in 1978, known for her mixed-media abstract installations and sculptures that incorporate found materials such as pantyhose, stockings, and other textiles. She has developed a unique approach working with these materials, often stretching and manipulating them to create unusual shapes and forms, to explore themes of identity, gender, race and the body, drawing inspiration from her own experiences as a woman living in South Africa.



Turiya Magadlela

East meets West, the womb, mother

Africa solidifies it all I

2022

Nylon pantyhose on canvas

39.4 x 39.4 in.

Turiya Magadlela

East meets West, the womb, mother

Africa solidifies it all II

2022

Nylon pantyhose on canvas

39.4 x 39.4 in.



Turiya Magadlela

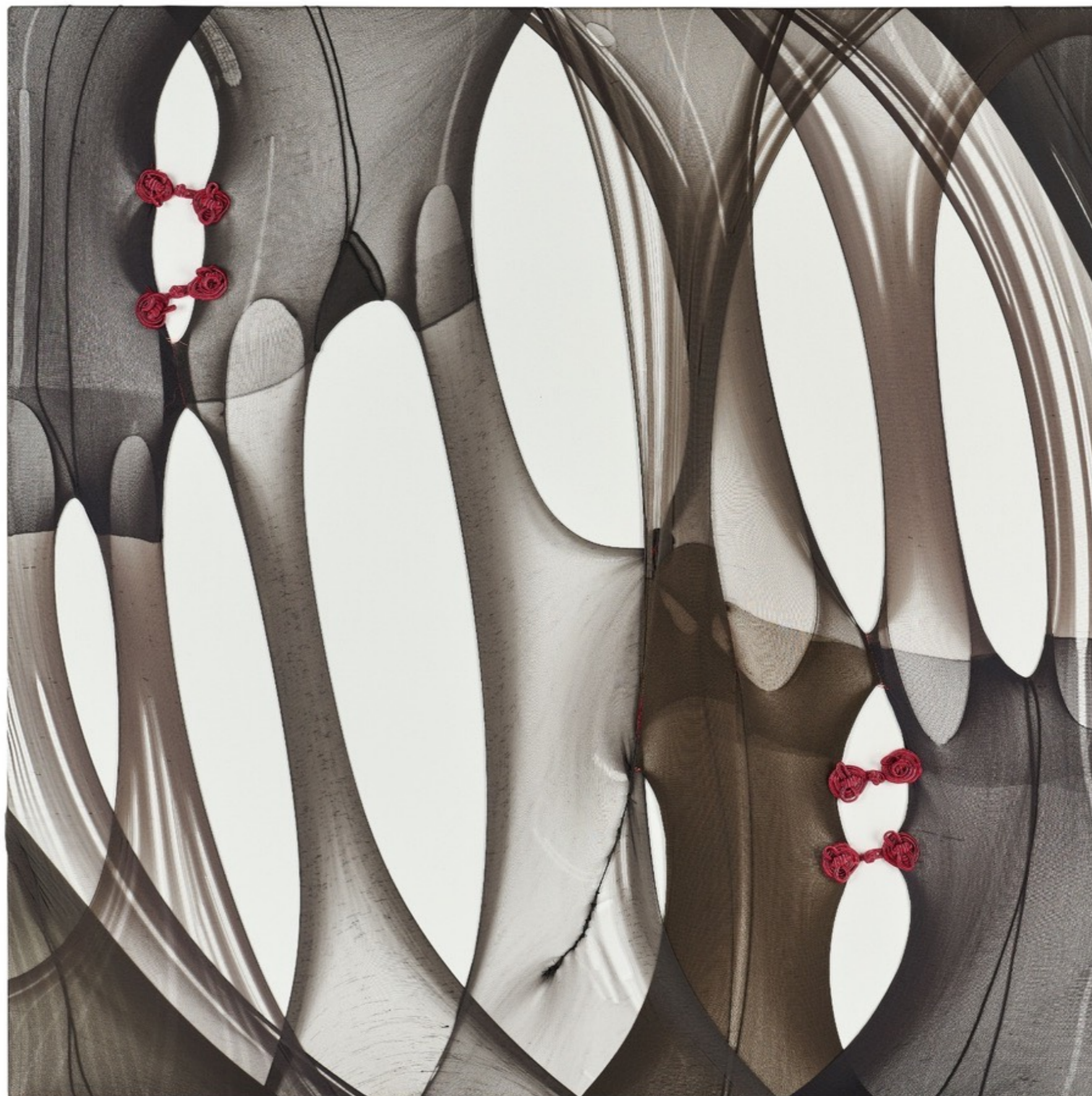
East meets West, the womb, mother

Africa solidifies it all III

2022

Nylon pantyhose on canvas

39.4 x 39.4 in.



Turiya Magadlela

East meets West, the womb, mother

Africa solidifies it all IV

2022

Nylon pantyhose on canvas

39.4 x 39.4 in.





Collins Obijiaku

Collins Obijiaku is a Nigerian-based artist born in Kaduna, Nigeria. Born in 1995, he is based in Abuja. His elegant portraits gaze directly at the viewer. The artist uses various materials, often mixing oil, acrylic, and charcoal to achieve soft gradients, seductive texture, and beguiling line-work; seen up close, the arrangements of his brushstrokes are almost cartographical in appearance. The artist's subjects are both people close to him and strangers he meets on the street, which allows Obijiaku to create intimate records of his home and surrounding community. Obijiaku has exhibited internationally, including New York, London, Lagos, and Accra. He was an artist-in-residence at Black Rock Senegal, a multidisciplinary residency program founded in 2019 by Kehinde Wiley in Dakar, Senegal.

Collins Obijiaku
Makeup (red lipstick)
2023
Oil and charcoal on canvas
31.5 x 39.4 in.





Stephen Price

Stephen Price is a visual artist born in Palermo Italy in 1995. He moved to the United Kingdom with his family in 2014, where he obtained a BFA in Painting and Drawing from the University of Northampton. Drawing inspiration from the notion of temporality, Price's paintings offer a poetic encounter and marriage between abstraction and figuration. Using a mixed media technique consisting of charcoal, pastels and acrylic on canvas, Price paints intimate and psychological-like narratives on his canvas. His visual language pushes beyond pure replication of the photographic images and deviates from physical images by combining his imagination and memories.

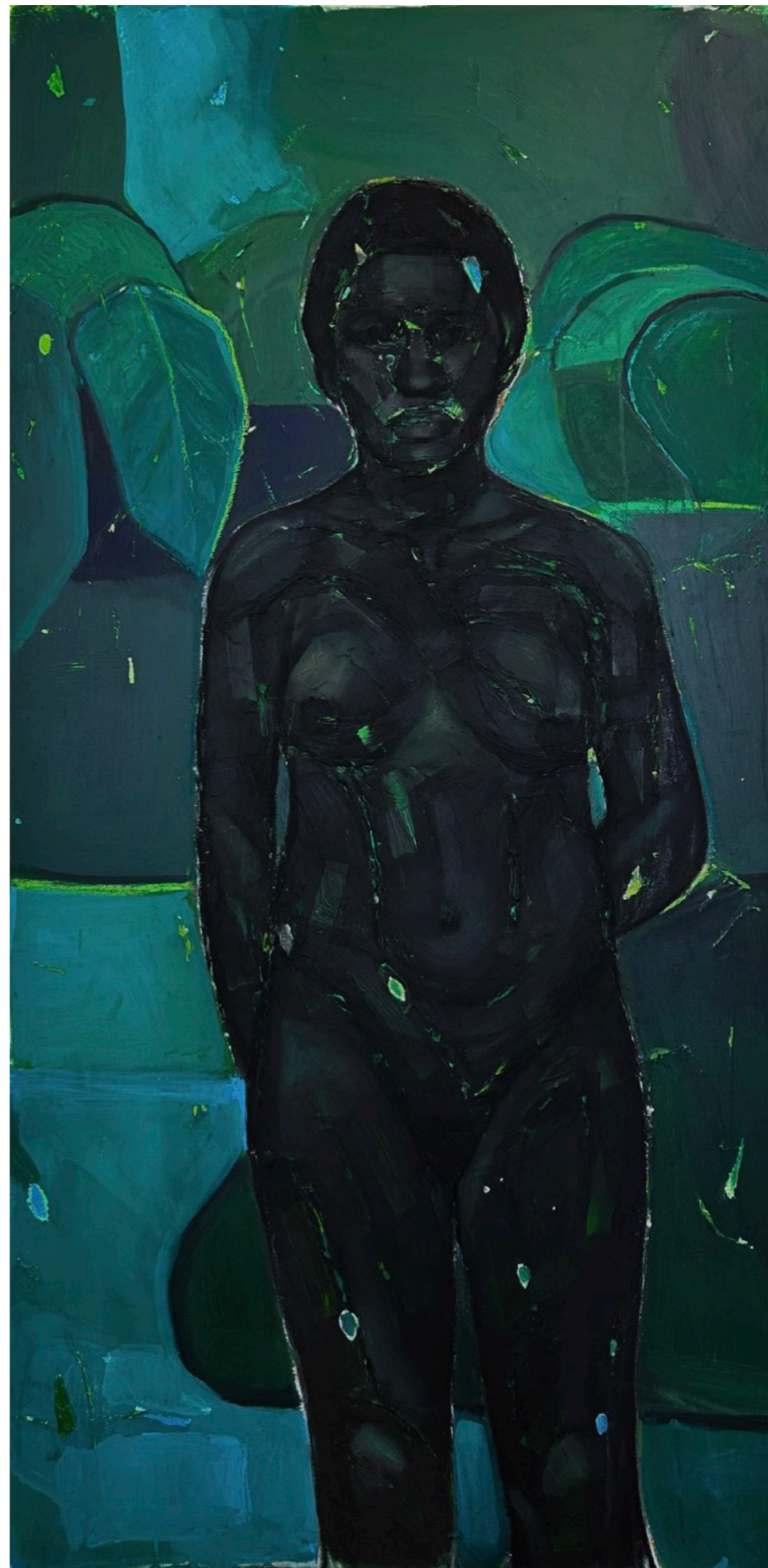
Stephen Price

Between the teal leaves

2023

Charcoal, soft pastels and acrylic on canvas

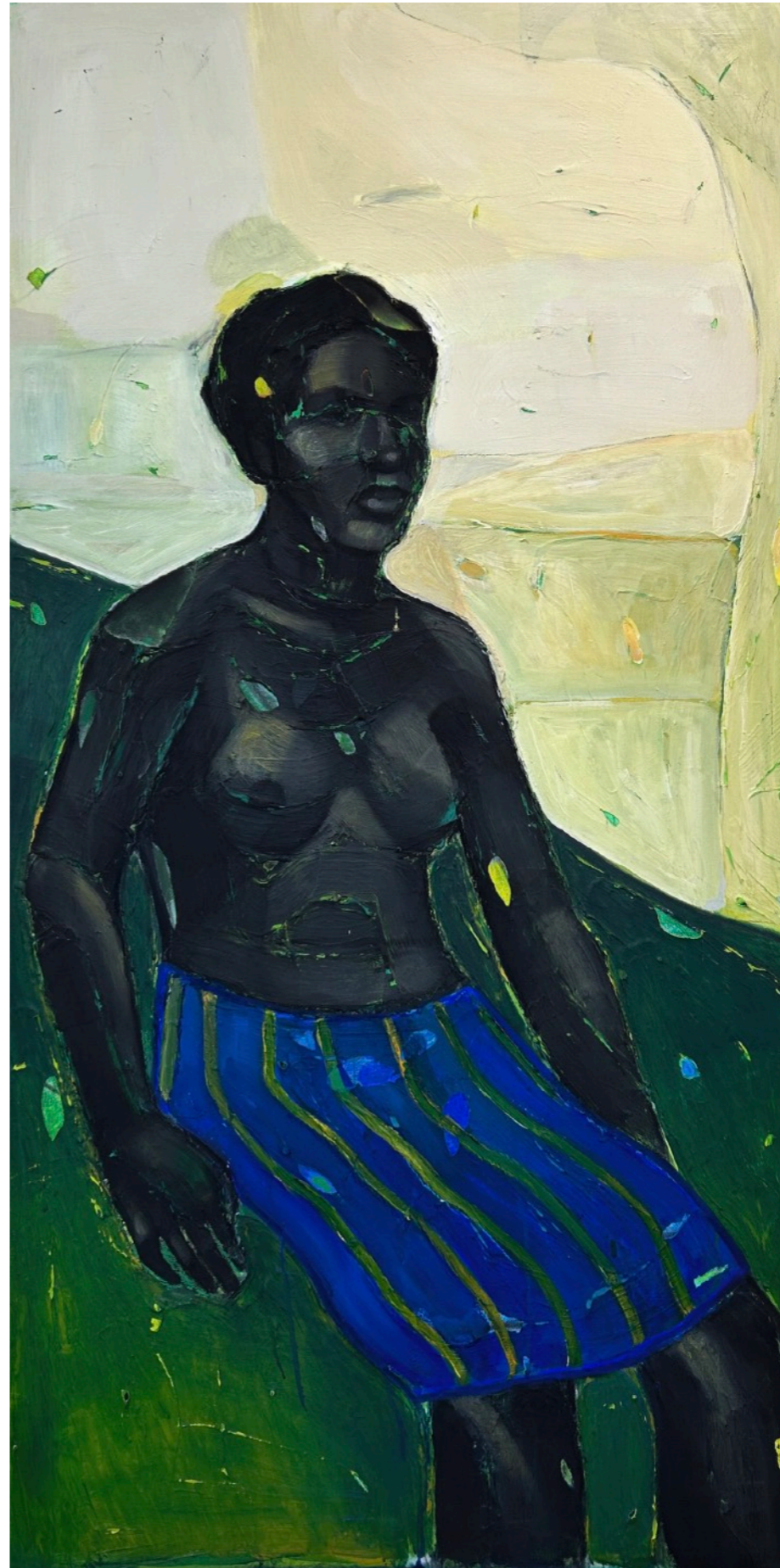
60 x 29 in.



Stephen Price
Bright Landscape

2023

Charcoal, soft pastels and acrylic on canvas
60 x 29 in.



Stephen Price

Solitude #3

2023

Charcoal, soft pastels and acrylic on canvas

60 x 29 in.





Elladj Lincy

Elladj Lincy Deloumeaux lives and works in Paris, France. He is currently a fifth-year student at the Beaux-arts de Paris. Deloumeaux was born in 1995 in the West Indies on the island of Guadeloupe. At the age of eight, he left his native island for the metropolis with his family. He operates a work of experimentation and documentation, focusing on matrimonial, symbolic and spiritual images. He reappropriates the places and spaces he has crossed through a gallery of portraits, fragments mixed with an intimate story and the larger story of a unique territory, that of the West Indies.

Elladj Lincy Deloumeaux
Untitled
2023
Marker and oil on paper
25.6 x 19.7 in.



Elladj Lincy Deloumeaux
Untitled
2023
Marker and oil on paper
25.6 x 19.7 in.



Elladj Lincy Deloumeaux
Untitled
2023
Marker and oil on paper
25.6 x 19.7 in.



About the Curator

Brice Arsène Yonkeu is a Paris-based independent curator and art advisor with a focus on contemporary African art. Raised between France and Cameroon, Yonkeu is a passionate storyteller dedicated to bridging cultural divides and promoting cross-cultural dialogues through the arts. Yonkeu's most recent exhibitions include Still I Rise group show commissioned by Google France in 2022 and exhibited at their headquarters, as well as Traits To Remember at 193 Gallery in Venice in parallel of the 59th Venice Biennale. Yonkeu received a BA in African Studies and Political Sciences, and a Master's degree in Economic Law, both from prestigious French university Sciences Po Paris.



