



## ***Optics***

September 23-November 5, 2023

Opening Reception: Saturday, September 23, 5-8 PM

**Tofo Bardi**

**Jonathan Chambalin**

**Damilola Ilori**

**Chinezim Moghalu**

**Mobolaji Ogunrosoye**

**Laura Tolen**

**Suleyman Wellings-Longmore**

kó is pleased to present *Optics*, a group exhibition that examines the psychological, archival, and imaginary realms of portraiture. These artists explore the complex layering of identity through techniques of image manipulation, distortion, and collage, offering alternative perspectives on personhood. Featured artists include Tofo Bardi, Jonathan Chambalin, Damilola Ilori, Chinezim Moghalu, Mobolaji Ogunrosoye, Laura Tolen, and Suleyman Wellings-Longmore.

The title “Optics” draws inspiration from its multiple meanings. Optics may refer to the scientific study of sight; it may also refer to an individual’s perception and worldview. These artists craft portraits that intersect the personal and the cultural, drawing subjects from archival imagery and the collective imagination. Their portraits capture both the uniqueness of individual experiences and the universality of the human condition. Further, they contemplate the psychological impact of architecture, geometry, and space. Alternating the interplay of flatness and depth, these artists weave surreal narratives and conjure optical illusions that are simultaneously fantastical and emotionally resonant.

**Tofo Bardi** (b. 2001, Nigeria) draws inspiration from the liminal space of the human mind and the innate fear of the unknown. In her paintings, Bardi focuses on states of altered consciousness, rites of passage, and the representation of the intangible, blurring the boundaries between reality and the imaginary. Her practice is informed by her personal experiences with fear and loss. In her paintings, ghost-like figures take center stage. These spectral entities symbolize the intricate tapestry of human consciousness, imagined beings that reside within the depths of every individual's mind. These ethereal figures interact and engage with one another, inhabiting a realm entirely their own. Bardi is a graduate of the University of Benin, specializing in painting, and currently lives and works in Lagos.

**Jonathan Chambalin** (b. 1995, Nigeria) harnesses painting as a therapeutic medium and a form of escapism. His artistic journey is rooted in his own struggles with survivor's guilt

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and the personal challenges he has experienced with his mental health. Chambalin's creative process typically begins with small sketches, often created during challenging periods in his life. These initial visual expressions serve as poignant reference points. In his latest body of work, Chambalin presents himself as a futuristic character, projected onto the canvas through a holographic beam. Against the backdrop of surreal and isolated architectural settings, which he refers to "emotional spaces," Chambalin portrays himself as a futuristic entity who has weathered the trials and tribulations shared by others. He returns back to these spaces to reflect but also encourage others to persevere during these difficult times. Chambalin is a graduate of the University of Benin and currently lives and works in Lagos.

**Damilola Ilori** (b. 1995, Nigeria) defines his approach to portraiture as "semi-realist," a technique that navigates the interplay between flatness and depth within his subjects. He often features young female figures characterized by highly realistic facial features and deeply personal expressions. These lifelike faces stand in juxtaposition to the portrayal of their clothing, rendered with a flattened perspective that accentuates intricate patterns in the fabrics. Ilori's subjects possess an enigmatic allure, their gaze directed towards the viewer with a blend of curiosity and quiet contemplation, shrouding their narratives in unspoken stories. Through the utilization of muted, low-saturation colors, Ilori strikes a delicate balance between revealing overt details and leaving just enough to the imagination. Ilori is a graduate of the Federal College of Education (SP) Oyo, and he currently lives and works in Ibadan.

**Chinezim Mogahalu** (b.1992, Nigeria) explores the intricate facets of the human condition within his portraiture, examining how his subjects become a canvas for exploring issues spanning social class, gender, religion, and the realities of daily life. Employing an expressive and minimalist style, Mogahalu's artistry takes form through abstract renderings, resulting in anonymous portraits where silhouettes emerge from the realm of abstraction. While many of his subjects are products of imagination, they often represent individuals to whom he shares a personal attachment or encounter. Often depicted in pairs, these figures highlight the emblematic nature of human relationships, emphasizing their complexity and significance. Mogahalu points to emotive gestures captured within these semi-abstract figures, which often turn inward in introspection. His canvases feature highly textured backgrounds, the result of his non-traditional approach to the palette knife and unconventional tools. His choice of titles for his artworks is suggestive and playful, pointing the viewer to an unfolding story. Mogahalu is a graduate of the University of Benin, majoring in art history, and he currently lives and works in Lagos.

**Mobolaji Ogunrosoye** (b. 1991, Nigeria) uses the distortion of photography and collage to explore ideas around perception. Her practice is centered around the concept of ideation and the myriad ways in which images of the female body can be manipulated and

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reshaped. In the *Portraits* series, Ogunrosoye creates multi-layer collages that involve a transformative process of burning and cutting. This technique adds depth and dimension, revealing underlying layers of images. The series addresses selfhood, body image, and the impact of societal influences on personal identity as it is related to Nigerian women. Ogunrosoye received a Masters of Architecture from University of Lincoln and a Masters Degree in Architectural Engineering from University of Bath. She lives and works in Lagos.

**Laura Tolen** (b. 1997, Cameroon) investigates memory, intertwining archival images of her family with imaginative narratives that bridge intergenerational connections. Using old family photographs, Tolen unites family members from different times and spaces, most of whom have never physically interacted. Through this amalgamation, she weaves together a semi-fictional family history, breathing life into her familial legacy. Tolen's drawings serve as maps connecting the landscapes of Cameroon, France, and other locales. Her compositions incorporate the visual juxtapositions of old colonial buildings, nature's reclamation of ruins, and fallen statues. Central to her exploration is the notion of how memory is constructed, modified, and passed down through generations. In her quest to reclaim and reconstruct the family narrative, Tolen transforms from a passive subject into the director of her family's story, offering viewers a personal perspective on the dynamic interplay of history, memory, and familial bonds. Originally from Douala, Cameroon, Tolen graduated from the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. She currently lives and works in Paris.

**Suleyman Wellings-Longmore** (b. 1991, UK) combines figurative art with geometric and illusory abstraction to celebrate the multifaceted Black experience and investigate human rights issues. His artistic approach involves concealing figures, objects, and text within optical illusions, employing masking tape stencils to craft distortion and depth. Wellings-Longmore's creative process begins with a digital design and gradually unfolds through meticulous layering. His objective is to bypass the viewer's neurological processing, compelling them to confront the art in its visual complexity. As a British visual artist of Nigerian-Jamaican descent, his works often serve as explorations of migration and identity and trace personal journeys of self-reflection. Trained as a human rights lawyer, Wellings-Longmore received a Master of Laws from Harvard Law School, and he is currently pursuing his Master's degree in painting at the Royal College of Art. Wellings-Longmore lives and works in London.

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kó is an art space based in Lagos, Nigeria, that is dedicated to promoting modern and contemporary art. kó has a dual focus in championing Nigeria's leading artists from the modern period and celebrating emerging and established contemporary artists across Africa and the Diaspora.

The Opening Reception is supported by **Le Connoisseur**.