



AUSTERE IMAGINARY

TAIYE IDAHOR, MARRYAM MONA, & NOBOLAJI OGUNROSOYE

kó

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CAIYE IDAROR, NAURRYAM NUNYA, & NIBOLADI OGBENROGBOYE

Austere Imaginary explores the precision and thoughtfulness of paper
sculpting through the works of three Nigerian women artists. The collage
exhibitions feature structured compositions of meticulously manipulated, free-
wheeling, whimsical and abstract, contemporary miniature sculptures in the series.
Flowing, calm and arrangements as composed in precision sculpted inside the
eternity of the limited space between figures and abstracts, and their and
beats are treated with a non-linear aesthetic, consistent with Africanism.

Guest Curator, Lovers' Day Series



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FRONT COVER: Mobolaji Ogunrosoye, PORTRAITS | Toyin, Observant

FRONTISPIECE: *Exhibition installation view*

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Message from the Gallerist



Austere Imaginary is an important show in two ways. Firstly, because collage is a visionary and imaginary way of propelling us into the future and visualising our own realities. Secondly, this exhibition features only women, which is important because for millennia, art has been dominated by men. Yet this medium is championed by women, as they often mood board and present their ideas visually, collecting existing parameters and using sheer imagination to assemble a new and novel creation into existence.

This show has been curated by guest curator Lauren Tate Baeza, the Fred and Rita Richman Curator of Africa Art for the High Museum of Art, who has effectively drawn parallels between women and the practice of using different elements to create a new image in a powerful way. Drawing inspiration from literature and including artists featured in *Black Collagists: The Book*, she has ventured to curate a conceptually strong exhibition and draws attention to medium and gender in paper assemblage. I am proud to have this exhibition at Kó because, being a female owner of a gallery, I have always set out to uplift women and the mediums they champion.

Kavita Chellaram
Owner, Kó Gallery



Curatorial Statement



Austere Imaginary explores the precision and thoughtfulness of paper assemblage through the works of three Nigerian women artists. This collage exhibition features structured compositions of meticulous minimalism that, while whimsical and emotive, communicate measured pathways to the surreal. Exacting cuts and arrangements are employed to produce sculptural results that arrive at the liminal space between figuration and abstraction, and flesh and florals are treated with a mechanized aesthetic conversant with Afrofuturism.

Austere Imaginary features themes of life and decomposition that mirror the process of collage making itself. The exhibit also aims to challenge conventional notions of masculine and feminine production, intentionally centering contradictions and presenting works that are at once disciplined and fantastical, extractive and additive. It is in dialogue with growing scholarship on collage tradition and its applications in contemporary fine art, but is distinct in its exclusive display of collage works on and of paper. Ephemeral and transient even when highly processed, paper's qualities elevate the exhibition thesis, and calculated manipulations of the figure foreground techniques evocative of the artists' professional and academic training in architecture and sculpture.

Guest Curator, Lauren Tate Baeza



Collage and the Aesthetic of Multiplying Forms

Collage is, at its roots, a cutting, tearing, layering, and pasting process. Printed ephemera from disparate sources are brought together on a single substrate resulting in a composition that defies preconceived notions of what makes a complete picture. The collaged material may be original. That is to say, created by the artist via paint, photography, drawing, or mechanical reproduction, or it may be found through a process of ritualistic scavenging or happenstance. Regardless of the origin of the materials, the artist employs a series of critical decisions in the precise selection of imagery, while often leaning on chance and coincidence as tools of deception or confirmation. It is a dance. An approach that is both deliberate and resourceful in nature and often results in a finished, or unfinished, work of art containing various components that blur the lines of history and origin. In this way, collage is also narrative making, adding to conceptual understandings of place and space and making way for the personal to enter a historical conversation. Archival documents mingle with advertisements and modern, mass-produced media production. Through this back and forth, an abstraction of the representational is made possible. Text is rendered illegible and photographic elements obscured. The aesthetic of collage is one of multiplying forms that expand beyond our conventional understanding of contradiction and duality, invites us into jarring juxtapositions, and conjures reverence for the previously forgotten and misrepresented.

Maryam Moma celebrates a re-presentation of the Black female in her visually arresting collages. Photographs of gilded, Black, pregnant women are adorned with collaged foliage and flowers. In her works, there is an inherent and simultaneous power and grace that play out in an environment of nature coupled with visual representations of nurture. It is Moma's collage method, nodding to black fashion movements and pop culture icons, that challenges stereotypical representations of Blackness. Her figures are emersed in natural elements which mirror their beauty and perseverance, offering the viewer a chance to embrace them as strong and soft all at once.

The practice of appropriating and sampling found objects allows viewers to locate familiar and recognizable portions of the former whole. On the other side of the spectrum is the practice of reimagining our engagement with a singular representation. Mobolaji Ogunrosaye slices, rearranges, and combines multiple photos of the same subject from different vantage points, challenging notions of perspective, identity, place, and the passage of time. Her collage portraits encourage exploration into multifaceted, intersectional identities and evoke intergenerational lineages within a single individual. There is emotional complexity to her subjects, foregrounding the parts that house variations of one personality.

Collage can function like a revolving door that churns viewers and spits them out on either side of violence or grace, harmony or tension, and presence or absence. The works of Taiye Idahor straddle the line between presence and absence. In her *Iv'e* series, for example, figurative yet enigmatic portraits rely on the viewer's ability to recognize human forms which aren't there. Beaded garments wrap around invisible people, alluding to the intangibility of the spirit, and are inhabited by braided textiles and hand-drawn, organic matter which breathe life into the voids. The presence of ancestors can be felt in this work to such a profound level that one might hear them speak if listening close enough.

Late painter and collage artist Si Lewen stated, "The artist working in collage, to an even greater extent than the painter, must develop a keen sense of esthetics as the only true guide if collage is not to degenerate into mere decoration or a gaudy assembly of meaningless material." The artists in this exhibition reshape perspectives of the collage medium and practice, propel it forward in new and exciting ways, and elevate their subjects to a realm of reverence and immortality.

Aaron Coleman
Professor of Art, University of Arizona

TAIYE IDAHOR



Taiye Idahor

Averted Gaze (Green), 2022

Hybrid series

Laser print collage; oil pastel, acrylic paint, acid free paper

74 x 56 cm. (29.5 x 22.22 in.)





Taiye Idahor
Averted Gaze (Red), 2022
Hybrid series
Laser print collage; oil pastel, acrylic paint, acid free paper
74 x 56 cm. (29.5 x 22.22 in.)

Taiye Idahor
Averted Gaze (Blue), 2022
Hybrid series
Laser print collage; oil pastel, acrylic paint, acid free paper
74 x 56 cm. (29.5 x 22.22 in.)





Taiye Idahor
2015 to ongoing, 2022
Hybrid series

Laser print collage; pen drawings, tracing paper
218 x 140 cm. (87 x 79 in. approx.) dimensions variable

MARYAM MOMA



Marryam Moma

Queen Mother, 2022

Mixed media collage; recycled paper, archival paper, wood, gold acrylic paint,
dried sea fan, black ink, watercolor markers, color pencils, dried florals
50 x 50 cm. (20 x 20 in.)





Marryam Moma
Sacred Ground, 2022
Mixed media collage; recycled paper, archival paper, wood, gold acrylic paint,
black ink, watercolor markers, color pencils, dried florals
50 x 50 cm. (20 x 20 in.)

Marryam Moma

Royal Chambers, 2022

Mixed media collage; recycled paper, archival paper, wood, gold acrylic paint,
black ink, watercolor markers, color pencils, dried florals

50 x 50 cm. (20 x 20 in.)





Marryam Moma
Mothers Milk, 2022

Mixed media collage; recycled paper, archival paper, wood, gold acrylic paint,
black ink, watercolor markers, color pencils, dried florals
240 x 240 cm. (96 x 96 in.)

Marryam Moma

Visionary II, 2022

Mixed media collage; recycled paper, archival paper, wood, gold acrylic paint,
dried sea fan, black ink, watercolor markers, color pencils, dried florals
50 x 50 cm. (20 x 20 in.)





Marryam Moma

Mother Superior, 2022

Mixed media collage; recycled paper, archival paper, wood, gold acrylic paint,
dried sea fan, black ink, watercolor markers, color pencils, dried florals
50 x 50 cm. (20 x 20 in.)

Marryam Moma
The Doula, 2022

Mixed media collage; recycled paper, archival paper, wood, gold acrylic paint,
black ink, watercolor markers, color pencils, dried florals
50 x 50 cm. (20 x 20 in.)





Marryam Moma

Sovereign, 2022

Mixed media collage; recycled paper, archival paper, wood, gold acrylic paint,
black ink, watercolor markers, color pencils, dried florals
75 x 75 cm. (30 x 30 in.)

Marryam Moma

Reborn, 2022

Mixed media collage; recycled paper, archival paper, wood, gold acrylic paint,
dried sea fan, black ink, watercolor markers, color pencils, dried florals
62.5 x 62.5 cm. (25 x 25 in.)



On Austere Imaginary and the Collage Works of Taiye Idahor, Marryam Moma, and Mobolaji Ogunrosoye

Historically collage, like quilting, cooking, and jazz, has allowed Black folks, without formal training or means to purchase expensive materials and equipment, the opportunity to make artwork that is inherently and undoubtedly valuable. For Black artists of the past and present, collage is generative, empowering, and liberating. The artists in *Austere Imaginary* further elevate the genre of collage, contributing to a movement working to ensure it's recognized as a distinct art form that deserves to be collected, revered, and respected.

Artists such as Lorna Simpson, Kara Walker, Tschabalala Self, Deborah Roberts, and Zoë Charlton are leading the collage vanguard in contemporary times. However, it is difficult to recite an exhaustive list of Black women who have engaged with collage or the collage aesthetic historically, owing to previous generations receiving less attention than their white male counterparts working in similar media. With this exhibition, Taiye Idahor, Marryam Moma, and Mobolaji Ogunrosoye present works that are reclamations of a past which sought to ignore the contributions of women and that further create pathways for future collage artists, especially and critically, Black women collage artists. Celebrated visual artist Mickalene Thomas states, “Dealing with the body and then dealing with the black body is already a rebellious act.” *Austere Imaginary* “deals with the Black body,” and as an exhibition comprised solely of women artists, is a further act of beautiful rebellion.

I have written about how collage practice is inherently and inextricably linked to Black cultural expression, reflecting a distinct resourcefulness and hybridity. Taiye Idahor, Marryam Moma, and Mobolaji Ogunrosoye embody the range of possibilities and infinite well of creative hope inherent in the artwork of global Black artists. While their processes are different and techniques and materials vary, each collage is deeply personal, reflective, and timely. Taiye Idahor's new *Hybrid* works reflect the beauty of Black

women and their hair, accompanied by jolts of vibrant colors. Against chalky black backgrounds, her figures do not face the viewer, but look away full of movement. Mobolaji Ogunrosoye offers new worlds on paper that extend from her ongoing *PORTRAITS* series, fusing collage and photography and exploring personal identity and representations of Nigerian women. Her subjects' heads appear layered, wavy, Black, feminine, sometimes distorted, and divine. Nigerian-Tanzanian artist Marryam Moma presents artworks punctuated by her signature wielding of flowers and paper. Moma appears as the subject — pregnant, creator, mother, and artist — in this series of vulnerable works that offer visual representations of her role as a creator of life and documentation of her journey to motherhood. For these artists, collage practice is how they embody and actively archive their narratives.

Austere Imaginary emerges as a radiant and delicately radical show. It is about the Black future and the power of collage to preserve Black women's legacies. In my location as a Black Southern American woman, it conjured profound reflection. I was able to access its resonance from across the Atlantic, as I saw myself represented in each woman's work. This type of universality is proof of art's capacity as a vehicle for liberatory practice. In *Austere Imaginary*, dream worlds are built and hope memorialized.

Teri Henderson
Author, Black Collagists: The Book

MOBOLAJI OGUNROSOYE



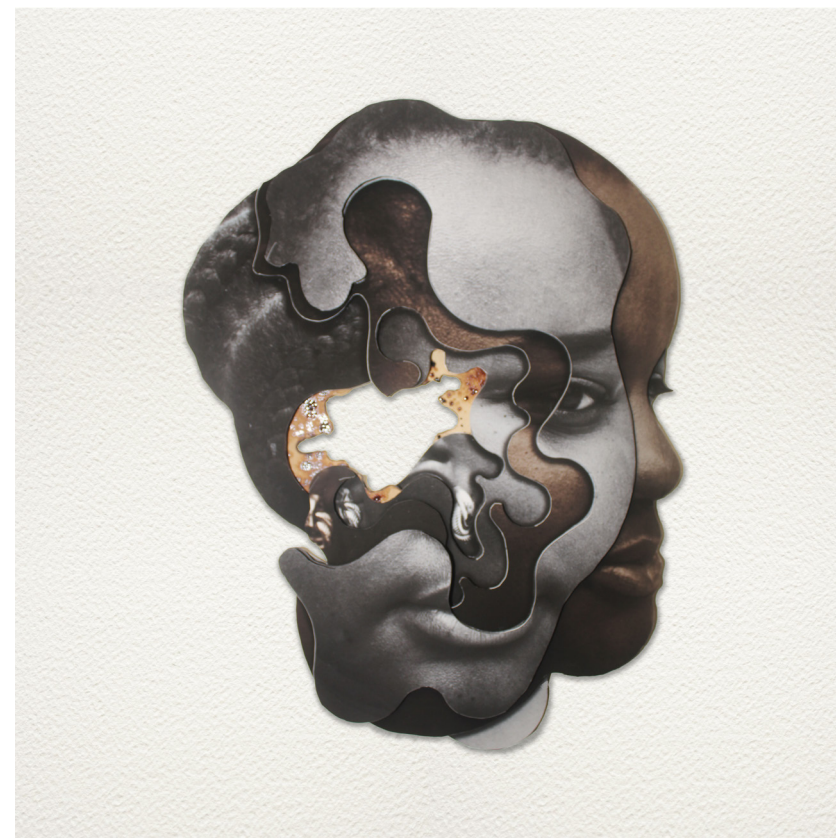
Mobolaji Ogunrosoye

PORTRAITS | *Khadija*, 2022

Photo collage; archival paper, burnt Fabriano paper, rough textured Fabriano paper

66 x 66 cm. (26.5 x 26.5 in.)

78 x 78 cm. (31 x 31 in.) framed





Mobolaji Ogunrosoye
PORTRAITS | Toyin, Observant, 2022
Photo collage; archival paper, burnt Fabriano paper, rough textured Fabriano paper
66 x 121 cm. (26.5 x 48.5 in.)
78 x 133 cm. (31 x 53 in.) framed
Diptych

Mobolaji Ogunrosoye

PORTRAITS | Beauty, Smiling, 2022

Photo collage; archival paper, burnt Fabriano paper, rough textured Fabriano paper

66 x 66 cm. (26.5 x 26.5 in.)

78 x 78 cm. (31 x 31 in.) framed





Mobolaji Ogunrosoye
PORTRAITS | Anita, 2022
Photo collage; archival paper, burnt Fabriano paper, rough textured Fabriano paper
66 x 176.5 cm. (26.5 x 70.5 in.)
78 x 188 cm. (31 x 75 in.) framed
Triptych

Mobolaji Ogunrosoye

PORTRAITS | Beauty, Observant, 2022

Photo collage; archival paper, burnt Fabriano paper, rough textured Fabriano paper

66 x 66 cm. (26.5 x 26.5 in.)

78 x 78 cm. (31 x 31 in.) framed



Artists Biographies



Taiye Idahor

Living and working in Lagos, Nigeria, draftswoman, multimedia collagist, and sculptor Taiye Idahor explores women’s issues using hair as a visual language. Drawing from the aesthetics of traditional forms and engaging personal memories and family histories, she documents the confluence of the past and modernity while seeking to examine how identities are formed, particularly those of women. Idahor employs digital imagery and uses found objects and mass-produced materials, such as newsprint, wire wool, and hair posters in her practice. She has exhibited both locally and abroad, with works in the permanent collections of Zeitz MOCAA, Princeton University Art Museum, and the Brooklyn Museum, among others. She studied Fine Art at the Yaba College of Technology in Lagos, where she graduated with a Higher National Diploma (HND) in Sculpture.



Marryam Moma

Nigerian-Tanzanian collage artist Marryam Moma melds repurposed hand-cut pieces of paper and other media to create layered imagery with new associations, deconstructing and reintegrating images to create visual experiments in color, texture, balance, shape, and space. Moma explores the intersections of spirituality, gender, race, sexuality, and reproductive health to celebrate the human form, especially the Black female body, and reinforce self-love. Her work is in the permanent collections of multinational corporations such as Microsoft and Starbucks and has been featured on popular television programs such as Cherish the Day and Blackish. Moma has exhibited widely and created collage works for Pop Science, Create!, and XXL magazines. She holds a degree in Architecture from the Tyler School of Art, Temple University.



Mobolaji Ogunrosoye

Mobolaji Ogunrosoye is a conceptual and collage artist born and based in Lagos, Nigeria. She uses analog and digital collage, along with photography, to explore and document the ways in which society, culture, and tradition influence identity, sexuality, and physicality as it relates to Nigerian women. Her practice focuses on expanding a technique that centers distortion and abstraction within collage. Ogunrosoye produced a solo exhibition called Loose Woman, curated by A White Space Creative Agency; was selected to be part of the inaugural virtual residency at Window, Winnipeg; and was among 5 finalists for the Art X Prize, 2021. She possesses master’s degrees from both the University of Bath and the University of Lincoln in Architectural Engineering and Architecture, respectively; and holds a bachelor’s degree from Covenant University.

About kó

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. Through exhibitions, publications, public programming, and participation in art fairs, kó aims to expand conversations about contemporary art in Africa to local and global audiences.

www.ko-artspace.com

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