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BUSAYO LAWAL

Life in Asymmetry

August 7-26, 2021

Acknowledgements

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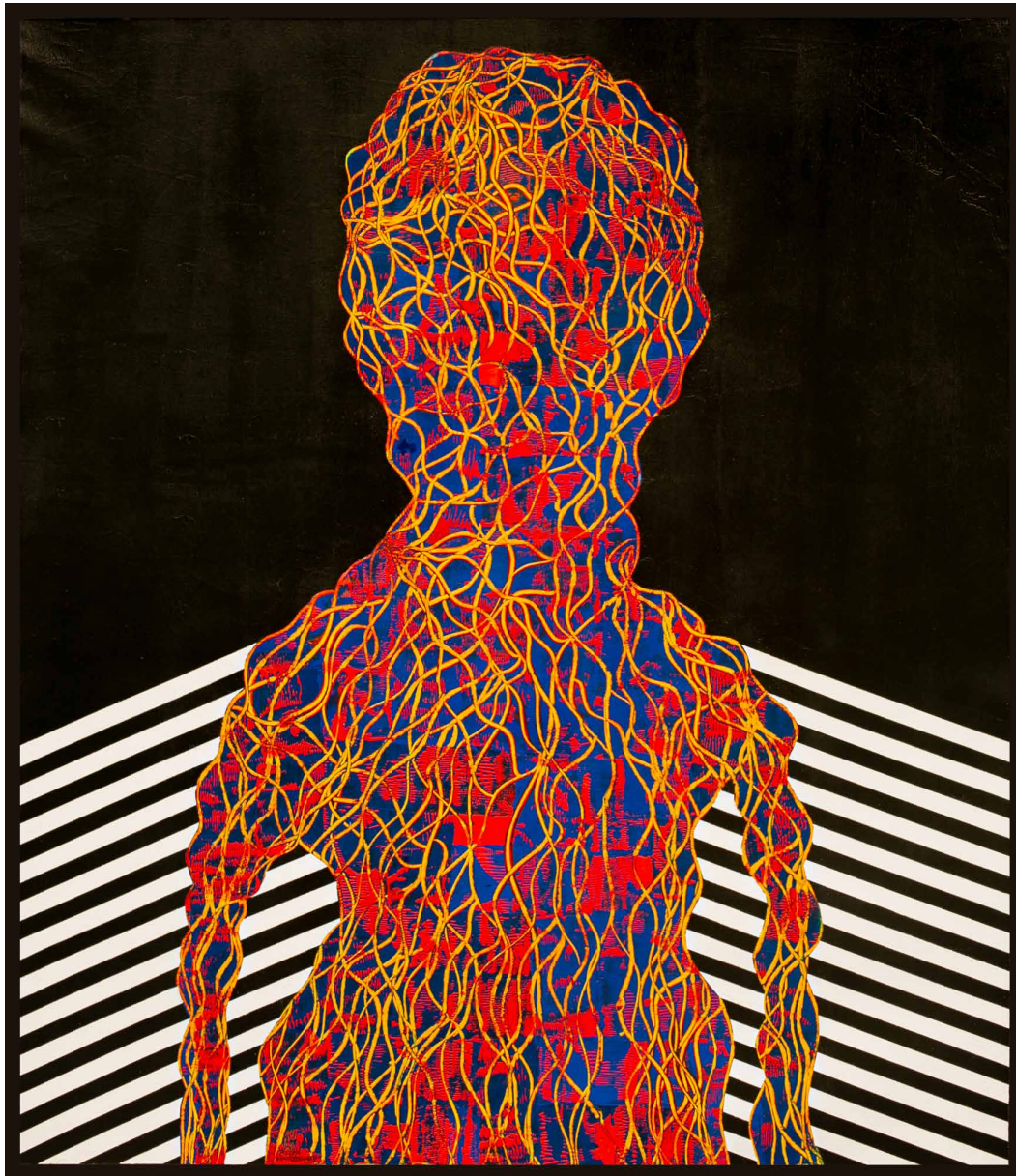
FRONT COVER: *The Surge No. 2*, 2021, Oil, acrylic, binder on canvas

FRONTISPIECE: Exhibition Installation view

BACK COVER: *The Surge No. 1*, 2021, Oil, acrylic, binder on canvas

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For more than two decades, Busayo Lawal (b. 1976) has interrogated the conventions of visual vocabularies to challenge received notions of the time-space continuum, migration and power.

In his first major exhibition in Nigeria titled *Life in Asymmetry* — after his debut exhibition at the Pan Atlantic University in 2014 — Lawal has created a seminal body of work that is premised on his lifelong obsession with the rich tapestries of aso oke, the ceremonial woven cloth that is unique to the Yoruba people of West Africa and its diaspora. From large scale paintings to drawings on paper, Lawal has repurposed in new and inventive forms the motifs and colour schemes that are central to an ageless tradition.

Lawal's committed interest in colour, light and composition is evident in the sheer exuberance of paint application and mark making found across his considerable body of work. Long established as the zenith of artistic freedom, Lawal injects into the master narrative and extensive field of abstraction his singular, systematised approach to painting. Multiplicity and diversity are codified in a naturalised manner that mirrors our increasingly trans-global world.

Life in Asymmetry is Lawal's artistic statement writ-large. The intricacies of woven cloth and the beguiling patterns that they form tell the stories of craft and purpose, dedication and cultural histories, fortitude and fate. "What makes the man is the story. What makes the story is the man" says the artist, a pithy maxim that conceals enormous complexities, as true in life as it is this new body of work.

- Sabo Kpade, Curator

Life in Asymmetry

By Sabo Kpade, Curator

Busayo Lawal makes some of his most riveting works on paper. Only a fraction of the current total of 10,000 works in pencil and ink are on show in *Life in Asymmetry*, the majority of which date from 2008 until today. Some are automatic drawings while others are predetermined compositions, typically the product of concerted effort but seldom as a distraction from other demanding activities.

Drawing frequently on sheets of paper as well as sketchpads, Lawal has perfected his use of continuous lines to coax shape and movement in his exploration of psychic and physical states. In these works, standing figures with differing gestures suggest protest, resignation and idleness inspired by people from all walks of life. Other works examine the natural laws of balance and harmony, as well as the manipulations of mechanical systems like the wheel axis. Dense and webbed circular structures — often with smaller ones orbiting around them — take the form of graphical reflections on weight, mass and energy

Lawal's lifelong obsession with the abstracted patterns on aso oke has engineered a recognisable visual signature -- if "style" is too frivolous a word -- but the meanings and interpretations differ from one work to another. The slim, flowing and densely packed lines in bold, opaque colours over jet-black underpaint could denote the mindless pursuit of wealth in one work. In a different work, a similar composition joyfully celebrates the ordinary and undistinguished.

Timeless Rush (2021) is a sweeping critique of the immense wealth and immense inequality created by the Portugese-led gold rush in West Africa between the 15th and 17th centuries. *The Monumental Man* (2020) is a tribute to the working class and those at the lower rungs of societal order who go through life uncelebrated. *Emerging Man* (2020) posits humankind is perpetually evolving into a better being. The implication is that we are forever in what the Yorubas call "oju dudu", an age of ignorance that is continuously negotiated by new discoveries.

The message is the aim rather than any selfish (or selfless) artistic goal to create abstraction for its own sake. Lawal insists that these works are not hybrid forms of figuration and abstraction even when a figure can be made out. "I employ abstract concepts in my work from conception to the finished piece" says the artist, "but

I push the boundaries of my paintings by employing distorted human characters or distorted human form or caricatures." These "distorted" figures signify the imperfections and limitations of humans. For Lawal the process is clear and simple. He employs form, texture, line, pattern and composition in order to create an engaged visual experience and abstraction is his preferred method.

One key series in *Life in Asymmetry* is titled *Portrait of Mr Say Something* (2020), a set of eight paintings in equal sizes (75 x 68 cm) and whose en face figures differ slightly in posture but widely in colour compositions. Each figure has a dense compaction that resembles dreadlocks which dominate the negative space on either side of the figure's face. In place of the anatomy of the face is Lawal's signature combination of geometry and colour; square and rectangular blocks with competing intensity which are webbed over with thick sinuous lines.

One of Lawal's intentions for the series is to encapsulate the idea of irrepressible truth and the brave who speak it out even to their detriment. "I see this on a daily basis in my homeland and many times it's usually painful and saddens the meekest of hearts" says the artist. "I see the face in the work momentarily in a state of flux in between the path to the truth and the opposite side."

The lavishly painted hair on the figures are loaded with the socio-political overlay of beauty and racial pride, amongst others. For Lawal, the hair is a crown and therefore carries allusions of attraction and power: "These elements are used interchangeably either to create, nurture or manipulate". This is also true of Lawal's visual signature which is used to reimagine a wide range of thematic concerns. The two components "signature" and "themes" are subject to continuous, independent investigations and discoveries.

As well as the finished works, Lawal's chosen materials carry weighty significance of their own. The lithographic paint or printer's ink represents the printing press throughout the history of mass communication, while the graphite with which he draws is a stand-in for erased or undocumented histories and knowledge on the continent. From global trade circuits to the evolution of thought to egalitarian concerns, Lawal's high minded thematic range is rendered through a well-refined process and visual signature.

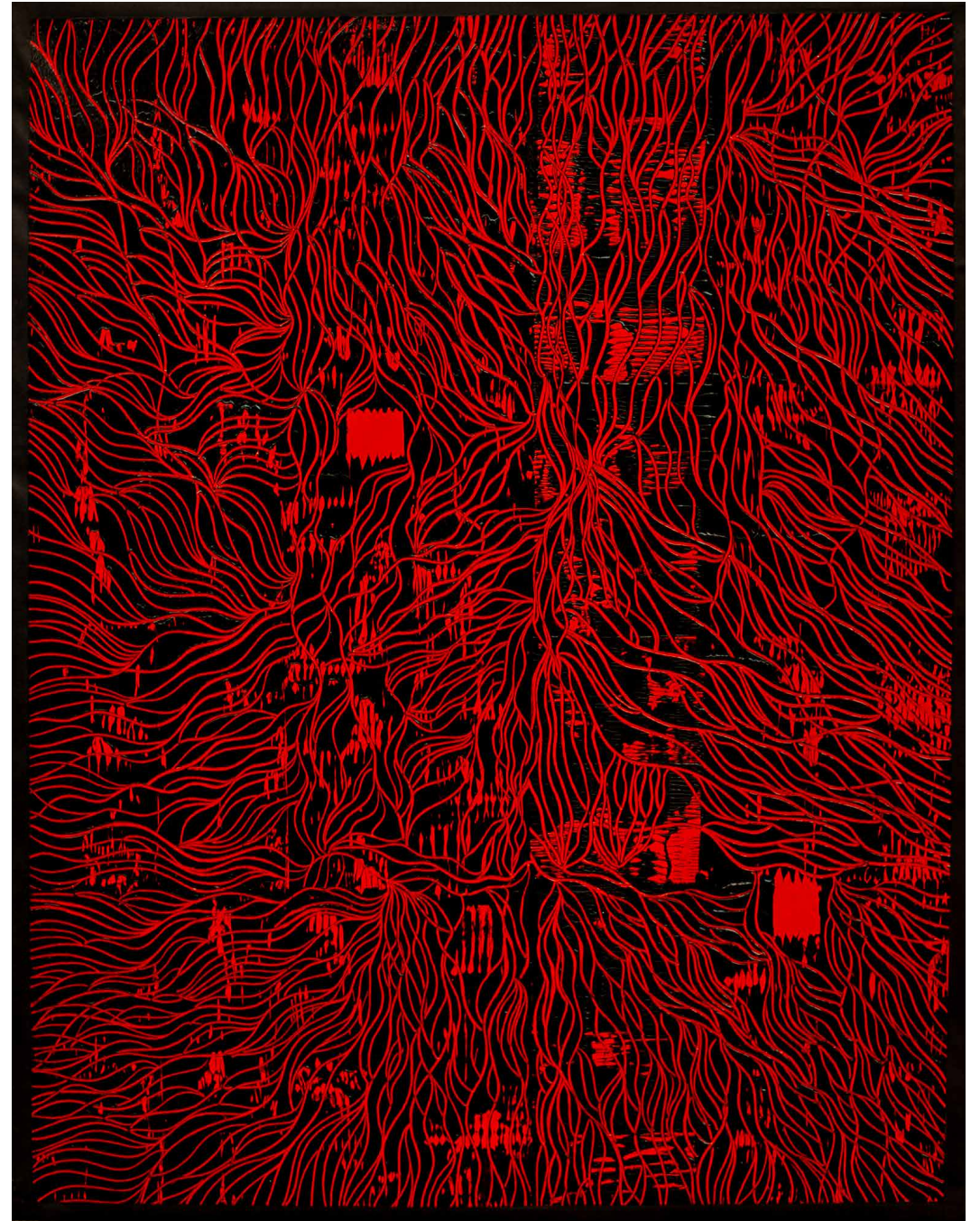
Busayo Lawal
Timeless Rush
Acrylic, binder on canvas
2021
130 x 168 cm. (51.1 x 66.1 in.)



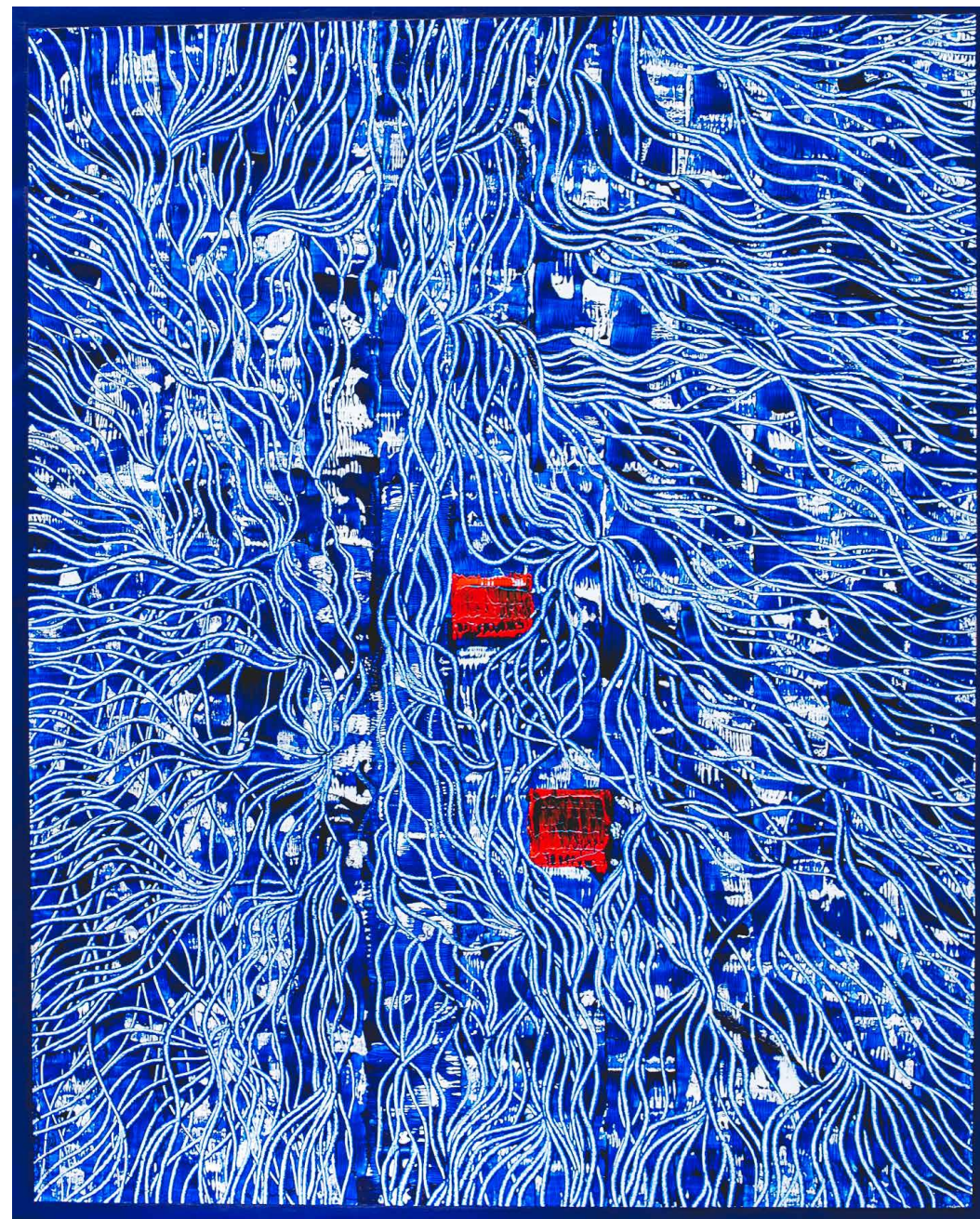
Busayo Lawal
The Surge No. 1
Oil, acrylic, binder on canvas
2021
130 x 168 cm. (51.1 x 66.1 in.)

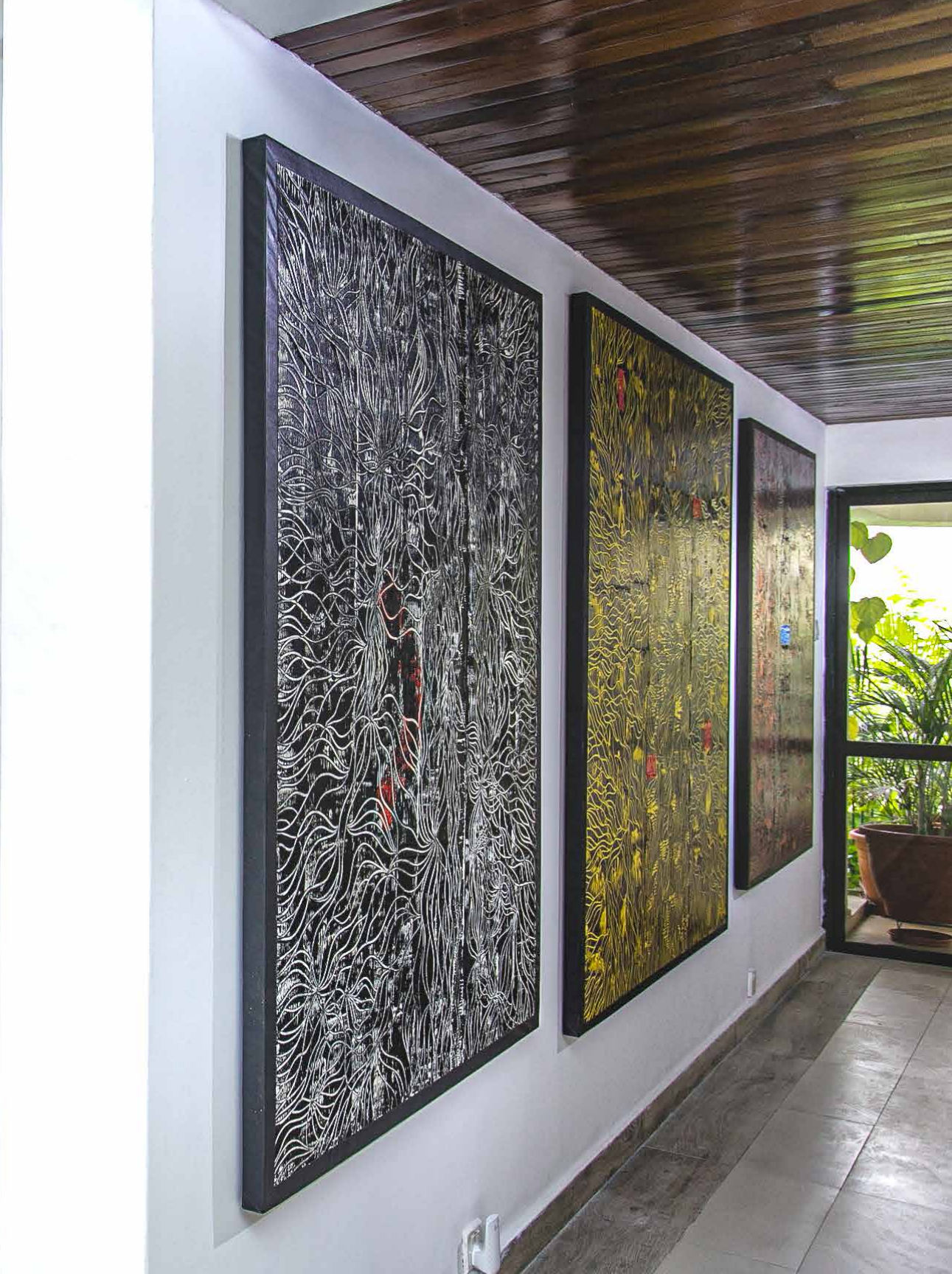


Busayo Lawal
The Surge No. 2
Oil, acrylic, binder on canvas
2021
130 x 168 cm. (51.1 x 66.1 in.)



Busayo Lawal
Serene Path
Acrylic, binder on canvas
2020
122 x 152.5 cm. (48 x 60 in.)





Busayo Lawal
Rising Powers
Oil, acrylic, binder on canvas
2020
122 x 152.5 cm. (48 x 60 in.)



Busayo Lawal
The Purge
Acrylic, binder on canvas
2020-2021
122 x 152.5 cm. (48 x 60 in.)

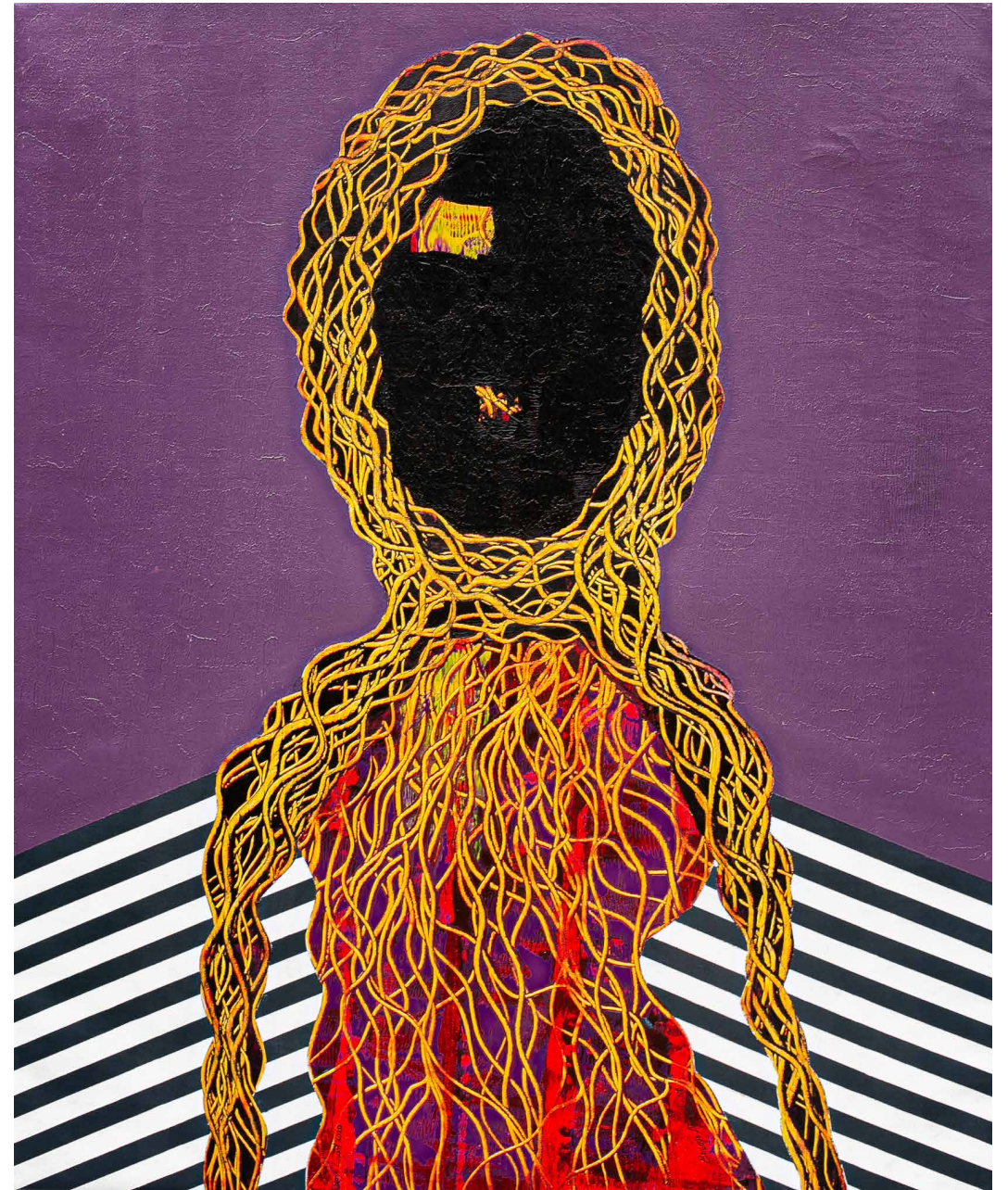


Busayo Lawal
Monumental Rise
Acrylic, binder on canvas
2021
152.5 x 168 cm. (60 x 66.1 in.)





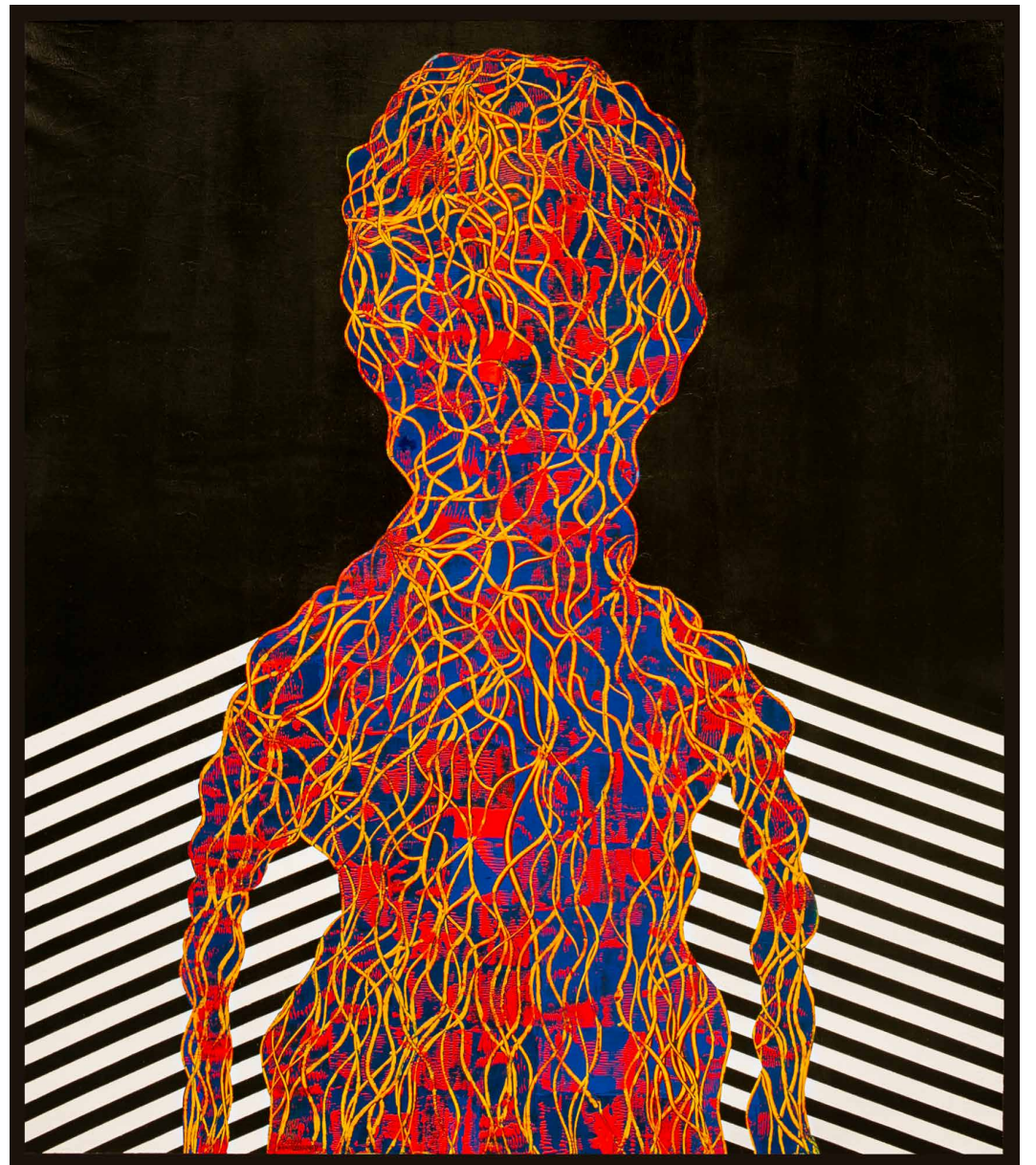
Busayo Lawal
Emerging Man
Acrylic, binder on canvas
2019 - 2020
107 x 132 cm. (42.1 x 52 in.)



Busayo Lawal
Man Alone
Oil, acrylic, binder on canvas
2020
110 x 150 cm. (43.3 x 59 in.)

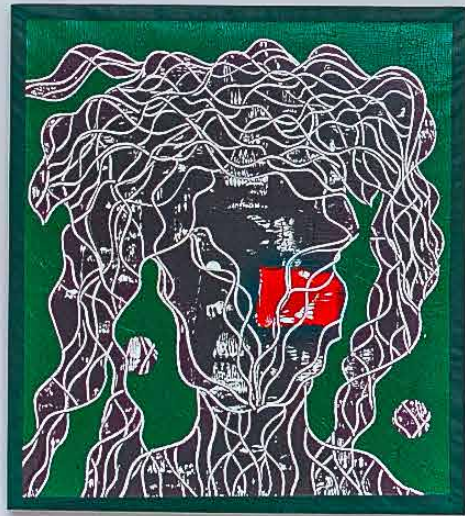


Busayo Lawal
The Monumental Man
Acrylic, binder on canvas
2020
140 x 160 cm. (55.1 x 63 in.)

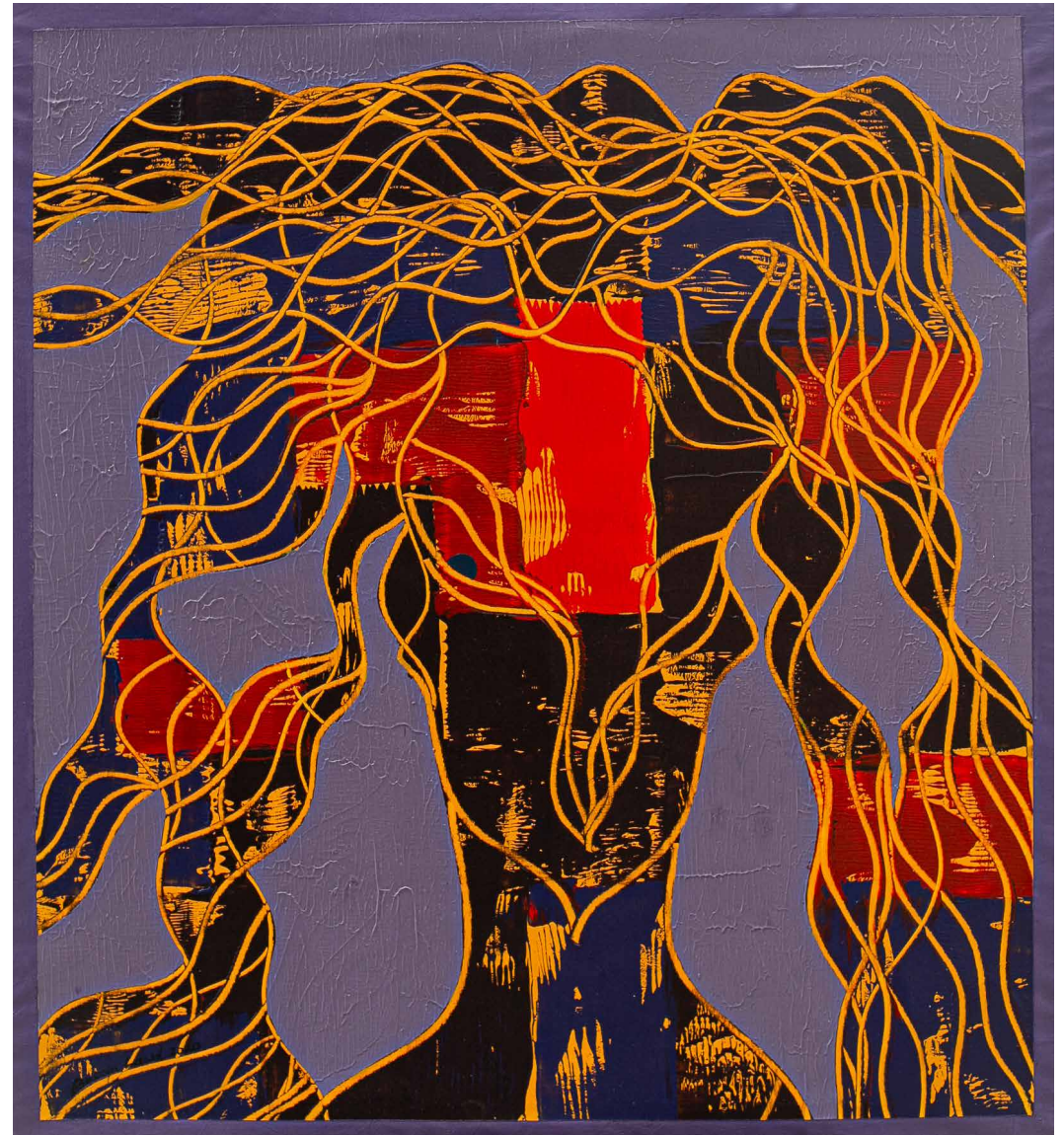


Busayo Lawal
Noble Dreamer
Acrylic, binder, spray paint on canvas
2020
122 x 152.5 cm. (48 x 60 in.)





Busayo Lawal
Portrait of Mr Say Something no. 1
Acrylic, binder on canvas
2020
75 x 68 cm. (29.5 x 26.7 in.)



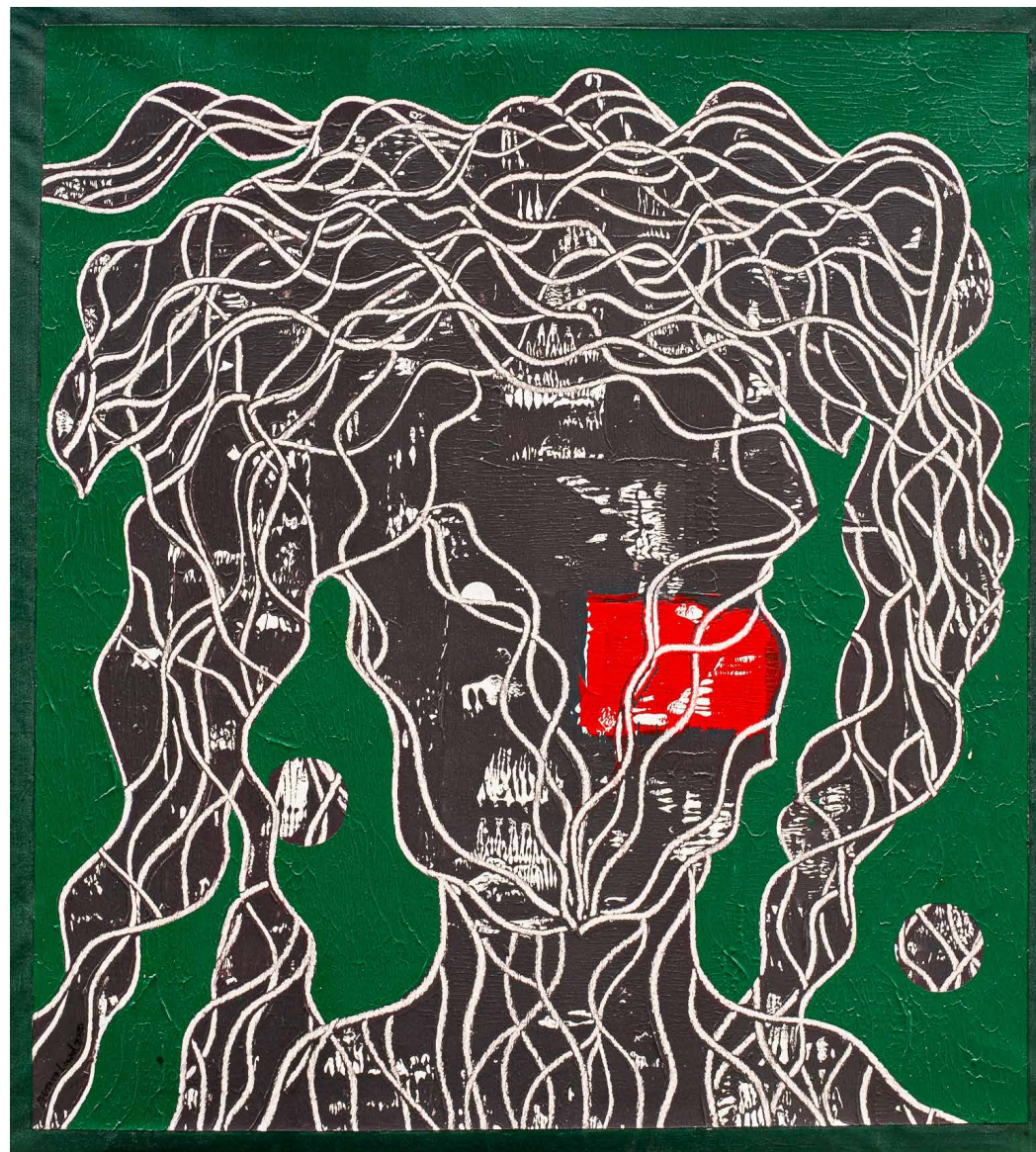
Busayo Lawal
Portrait of Mr Say Something no. 2
Acrylic, binder on canvas
2020
75 x 68 cm. (29.5 x 26.7 in.)

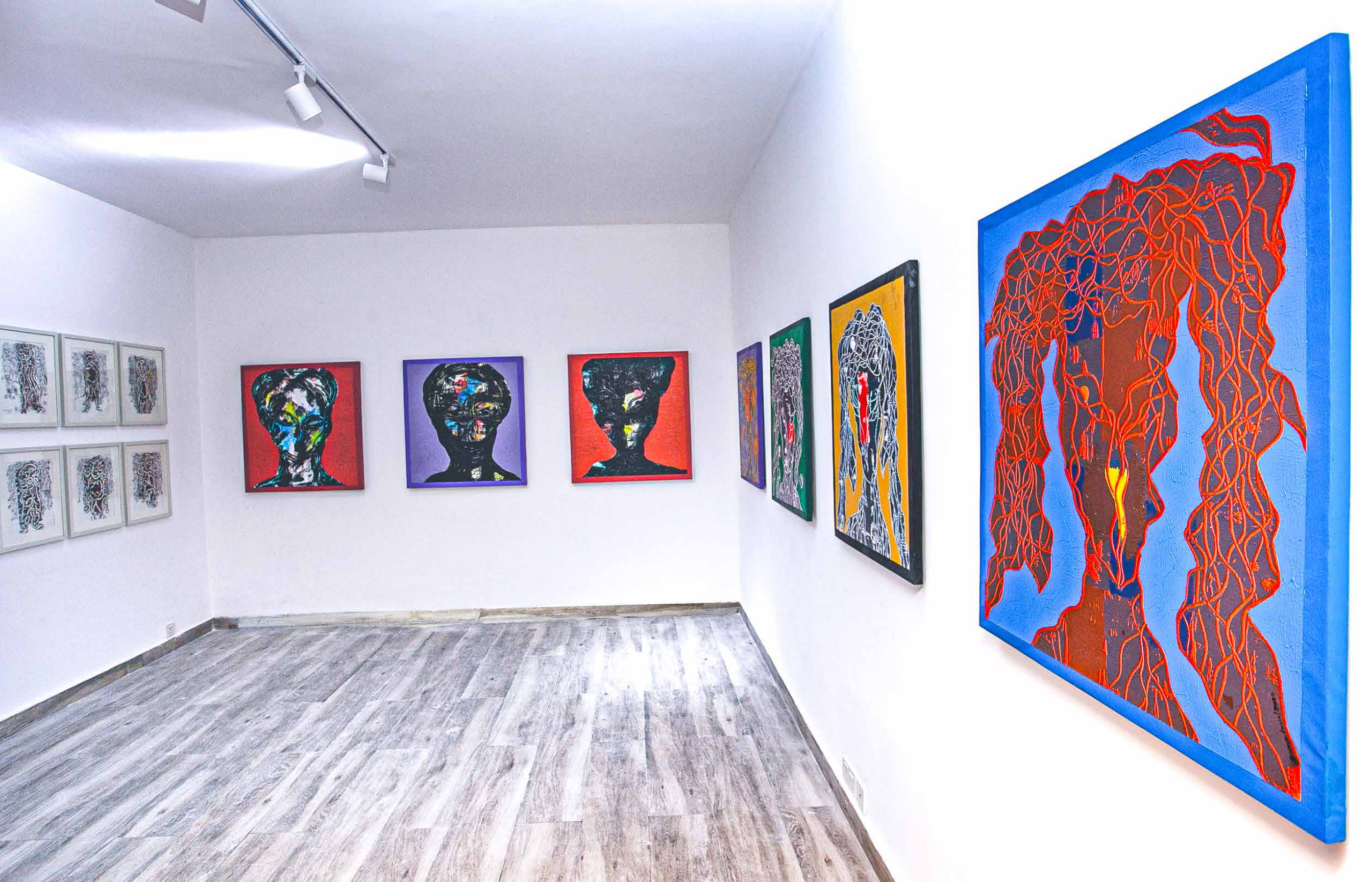


Busayo Lawal
Portrait of Mr Say Something no. 3
Acrylic, binder on canvas
2020
75 x 68 cm. (29.5 x 26.7 in.)

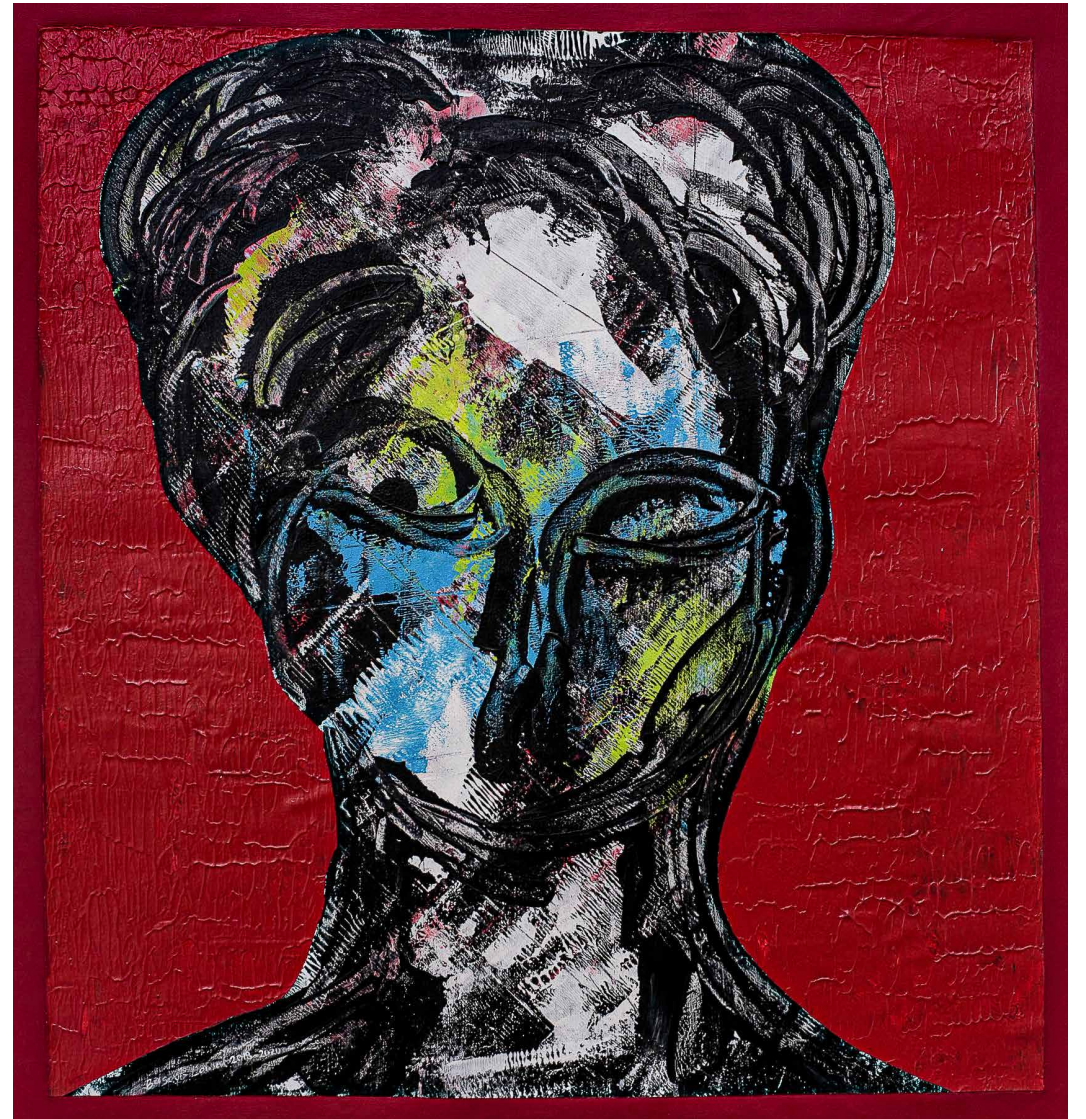


Busayo Lawal
Portrait of Mr Say Something no. 4
Acrylic, binder on canvas
2020
75 x 68 cm. (29.5 x 26.7 in.)





Busayo Lawal
The Taker no. 1
Acrylic, binder on canvas
2018-2020
81 x 76 cm. (32 x 30 in.)



Busayo Lawal
The Taker no. 2
Acrylic, binder on canvas
2018-2020
81 x 76 cm. (32 x 30 in.)



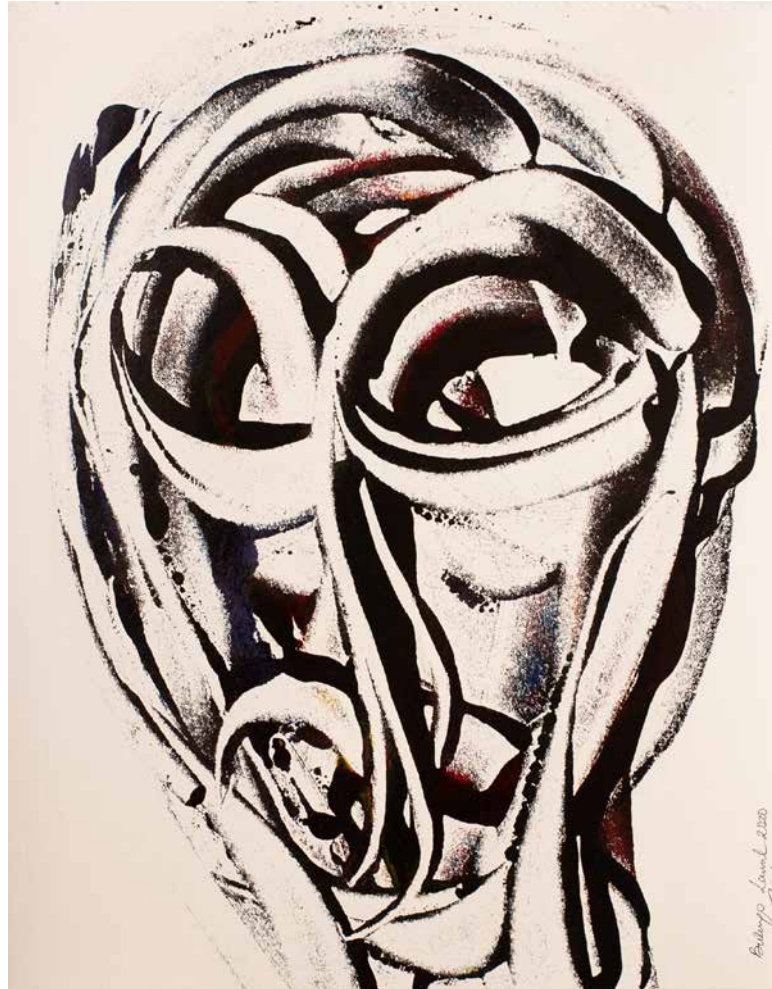
Busayo Lawal
The Taker no. 3
Acrylic, binder on canvas
2018-2020
81 x 76 cm. (32 x 30 in.)



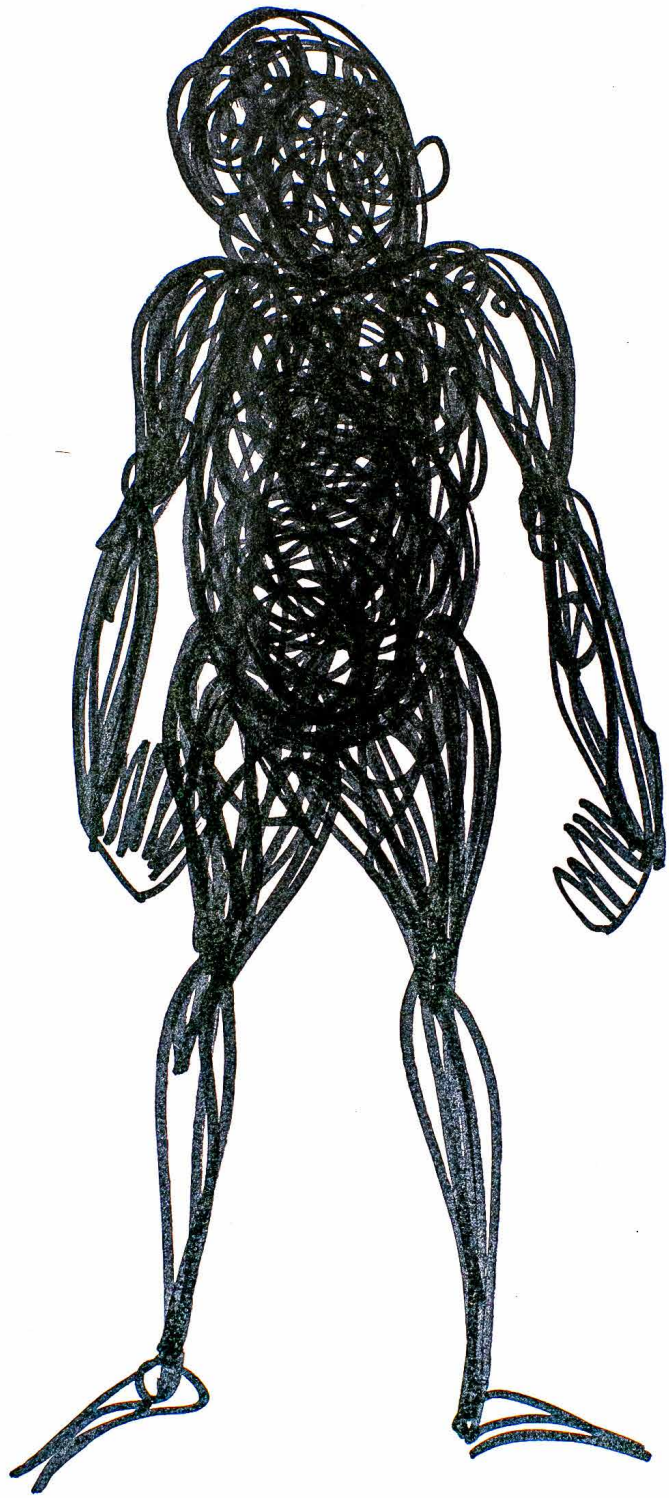
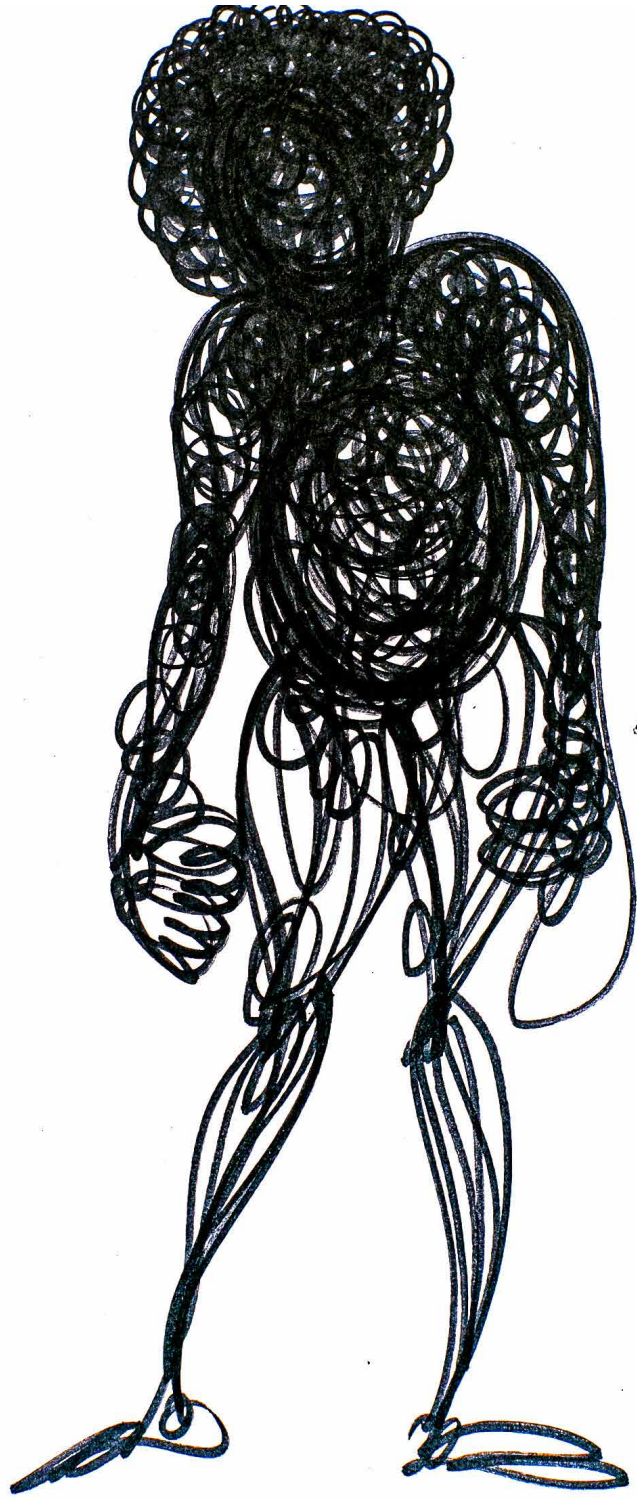


Busayo Lawal
The Taker no. 3
Acrylic, binder on canvas
2018-2020
81 x 76 cm. (32 x 30 in.)

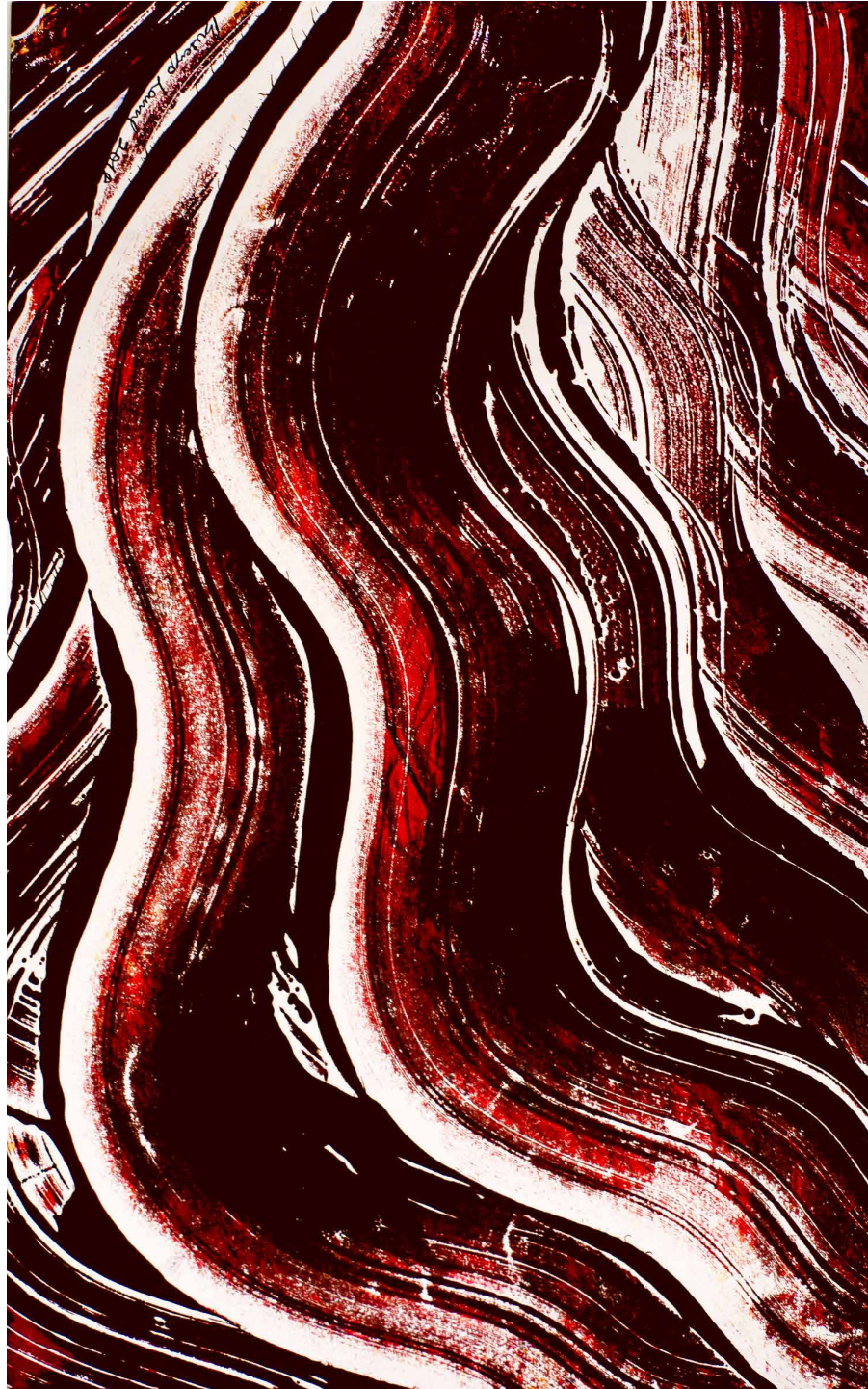




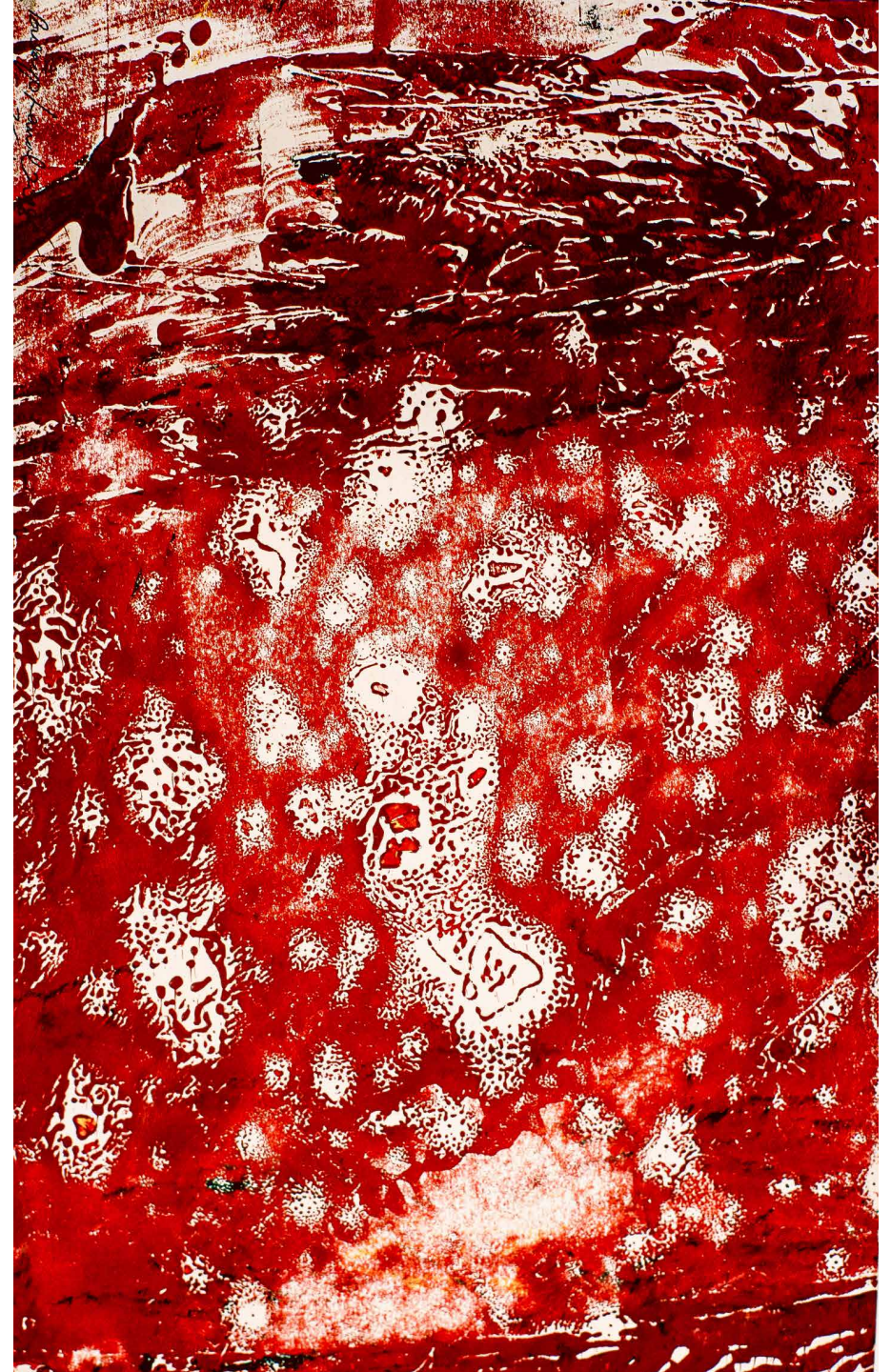
Busey Laval 2015

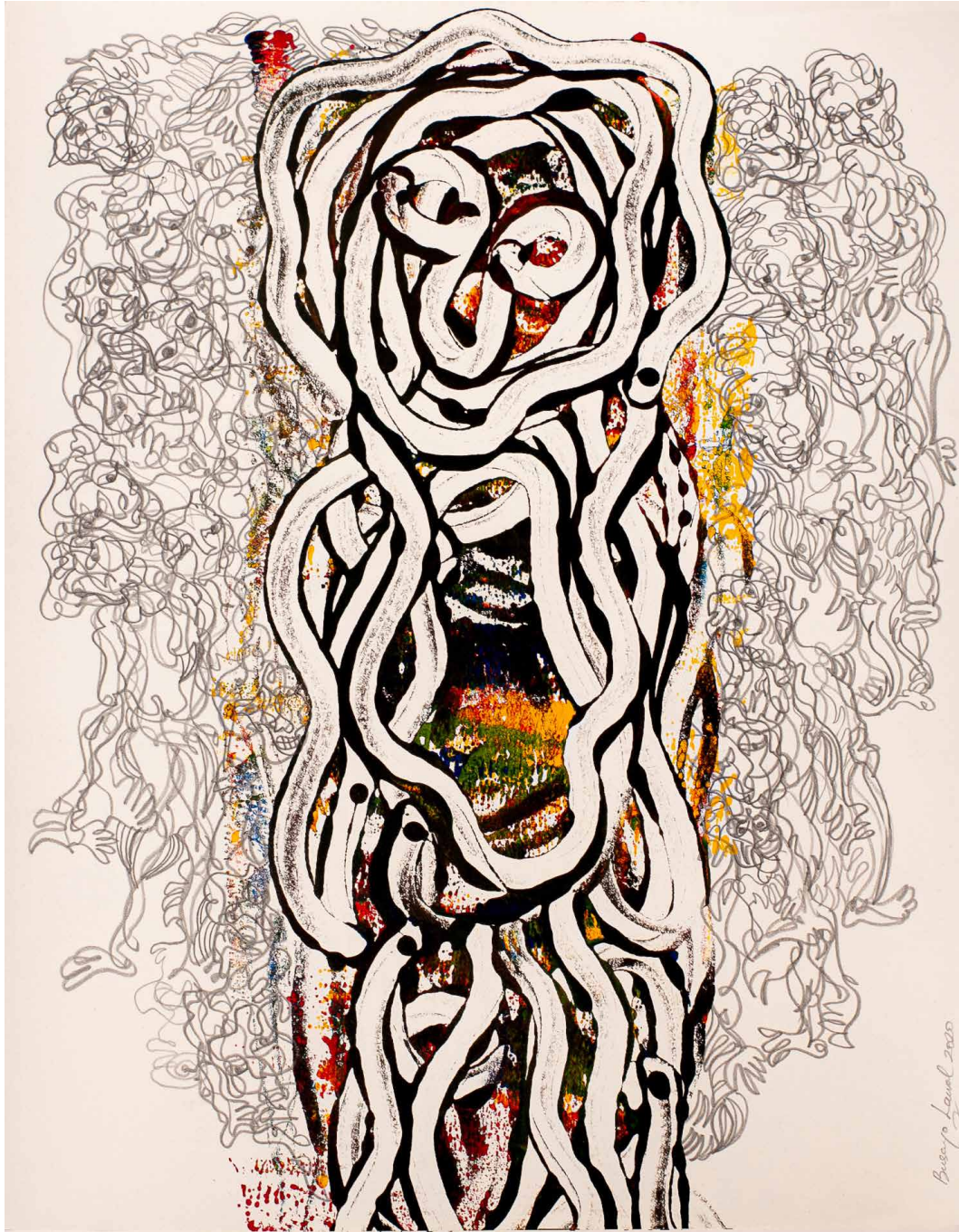


Busey Laval 2015 (2015)





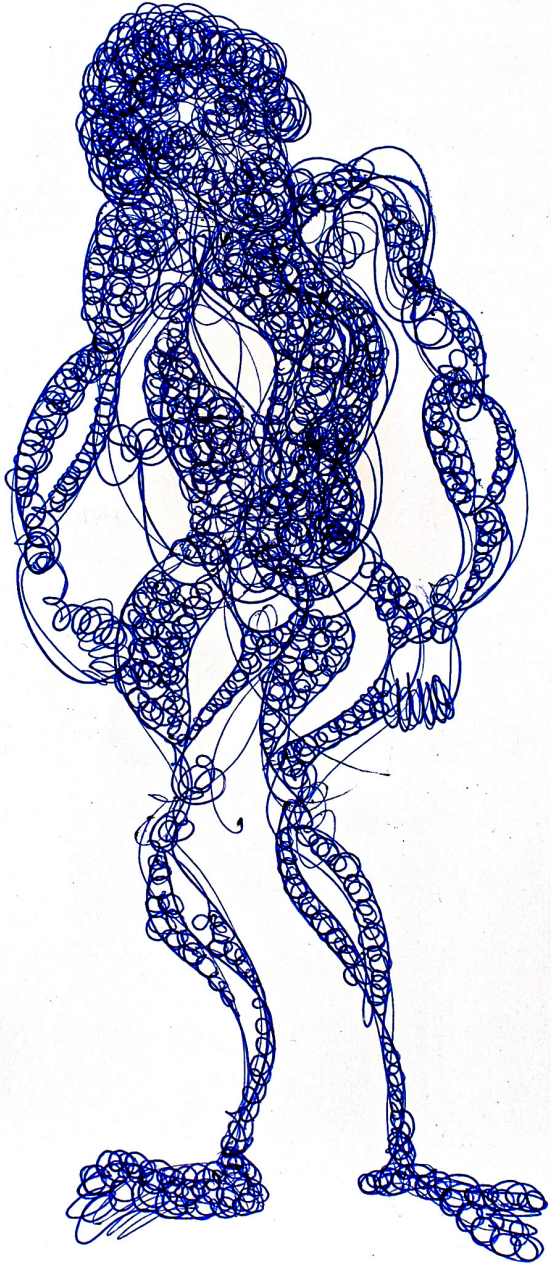




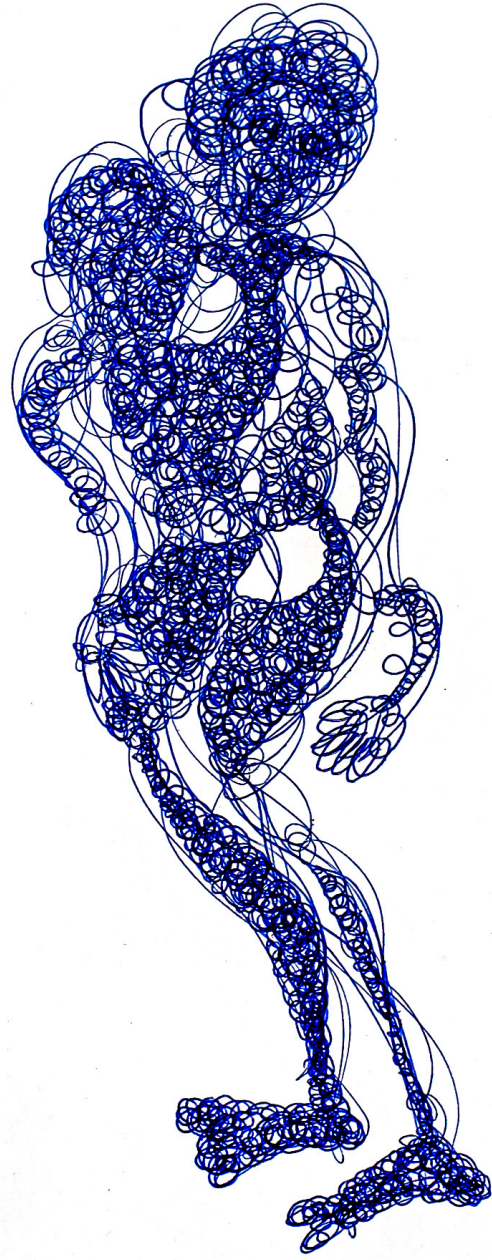
Buseyo Luvial 2020



Buseyo Luvial 2020



Burtony Linnel 2015



Burtony Linnel 2015



About Busayo Lawal

Life in Asymmetry is Busayo Lawal's second solo exhibition since his 2014 show at the Pan Atlantic University, Lagos. Lawal has participated in group projects helmed by the Bruce Onobrakpeya Foundation and Ford Foundation. His works have featured in numerous group exhibitions in Lagos organised by the National Gallery of Art, Alliance Francaise, United Nations Information Centre, the National Council for Art and Culture and the Ben Enwonwu Foundation. His other group shows were in Abuja at the Greece and Italian embassies. Lawal has also taken part in notable art fairs that include Art X Lagos and the Impart International Artist's Fair at Eko Atlantic, Lagos. He lives and works in Lagos, Nigeria.



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 a local and global audience.

www.ko-artspace.com



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