

EL LOKO
RANDOMÉ STANLEY
KWESI OYUSU-ANKOMAH
GODFRIED DONKOR
OMAKUELA SAMBO
HAVING TRAVELLED FAR





Having Travelled Far is next in a series of well-received and ambitious exhibitions organized by Omenka Gallery this year to contribute to Lagos' increasing status as a major cultural destination by showcasing some of the biggest names in contemporary African art. Though living and working outside the continent, the featured artists remain true to their roots. This initiative is supported further by the Omenka's increased, yearly participation in international art fairs around the world, including the *FNB Joburg Art Fair* and recently, the *1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair* in London.

The exhibition builds upon these successes and aims to encourage cross-fertilization of ideas between African artists who define their practices on the continent and those in diaspora. Held in collaboration with German-based gallery, ARTCO, it features 5 internationally renowned contemporary African artists, all of whom have been based in Germany for many years; Kwesi Owusu-Ankomah (b. 1956), Godfried Donkor (b. 1964), Manuela Sambo (b. 1964), EL Loko (b. 1950), and Ransome Stanley (b. 1953); who bears the singular distinction of being born in the diaspora to a Nigerian father and a German mother.

The majority of the 32 works featuring in this show are paintings. This may be an

indication that most African artists continue to embrace painting as their principal medium, in contrast to many contemporary artists in other parts of the world. This situation is accentuated as all the artists included in this show have studied, traveled and exhibited extensively across Europe, and gained exposure to more contemporary forms of artistic expression prevalent in the West.

Among the five artists presented, only Godfried Donkor from Ghana, focuses entirely on mixed-media collages. He combines symbols of 18th century slave trade with images of Trinidadian girls placed on backgrounds fashioned from the pages of the *Financial Times* – a metaphor for the commercialization of people, a theme that runs through his oeuvre.

Ransome Stanley does not stray far from his peer in his use of collage and in reflecting on colonial clichés of exoticism and images of Africa rooted in Western concepts of rusticness and innocence. In his collages and oils, he creates planar pictorial spaces whose stark narrative painting style, he then disrupts by contrasting it with the two-dimensional.

Manuela Sambo is well known for her depictions of nude figures. Her work employs stylistic elements of the body

painting traditions from her home country, Angola. Sambo's recent work adopts this strategy as well as integrates European elements dating back to the Medieval Ages.

Similarly, Onwusu-Ankomah's figures are naked, bold, and powerful but differ from Sambo's figures by a covering of complex symbols in a manner that renders them almost invisible. Owusu-Ankomah is influenced by the full-bodied muscular figures of Renaissance artist, Michaelangelo and the *adinkra* symbols of his Akan-speaking people of Ghana.

Another artist that employs the use of symbols is Togolese artist, EL Loko, who successfully develops a unique visual language through the use of his own personal pictorial alphabet. Each alphabet embraces ornamental colour blends, figurations, primeval symbols and cryptic signs to form a homogenous whole.

In all, the works are strongly individual. Collectively, we experience first hand the complex and shared relationships between the arts of Africa and Europe. We hope that Nigerian audiences will approach them with openness to a different world view, one rooted in an ancient and distinctive cultural heritage yet shared by exposure to other artistic expressions of the world.

EL LOKO RANSOME STANLEY KWESI OWUSU-ANKOMAH GODFRIED DONKOR MANUELA SAMBO

HAVING TRAVELLED FAR

Private View: Friday November 8, 2013, 5pm to 8pm

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runs till November 10 - 29, 2013

OMENKA GALLERY
24, Ikoyi Crescent Ikoyi, Lagos

The exhibition catalogue is available on pre-order
92 pages, lavishly illustrated in hardcover with a contribution by Bronwyn Law-Viljoen

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The Omenka Gallery was established by The Ben Enwonwu Foundation to preserve and build on the life and work of celebrated Nigerian artist, Professor Ben Enwonwu MBE, NNOM (1917-94), while increasing the visibility and appreciation of Nigerian visual art and culture.

Omenka is a leading art gallery in Nigeria and represents a fine selection of established and emerging contemporary Nigerian and international artists working in diverse media. Through its vigorous programme of solo, group and large themed exhibitions accompanied by exquisitely produced catalogues, the gallery stimulates critical thought and discourse centered on contemporary art developments in Nigeria.

The Omenka Gallery is located within Enwonwu's home in Lagos, which lends to its historical and cultural significance and consists of an exhibition area and a second space, housing one of the finest collections of the artist's works.

Front: Godfred Dankor, detail of *Gaming Room at Devonshire House*, 2001, collage, 30 x 24cm

Left: Kwesi Owusu-Ankomah, detail of *Prelude to the Micron*, 2012, acrylic on canvas, 140x135cm

Inside: Top: Ransome Stanley, detail of *Calyпсо*, 2009, mixed media on cardboard, 90 x 60cm
 Middle: Manuela Sambo, *YA*, 2012, oil on canvas, 100x80cm
 Bottom: EL Loko, detail of *Alphabet 7*, 2013, mixed media on nettle, 40 x 32cm