

Press Release: 'STASIS' Exhibition Opening:

How three contemporary artists provide new insight into the meaning of equilibrium vs. stagnation.

(Lagos, Nigeria, August 31, 2019) To kick off the busy Fall art season in Lagos, *STASIS*, a group exhibition showcasing 47 paintings, drawings and ceramic works by three contemporary artists from Nigeria and Cameroon, opens to the public at Temple Muse, on Monday, September 2nd. Curated by SMO Contemporary Art, the exhibition features recent works by Djakou Kassi Nathalie, Olawunmi Banjo, and Kelechi Nwaneri, who explore the meaning of balance and belonging in surreal physical and emotional landscapes.

The three artists originating from different parts of West Africa, one classically trained and two self-taught, with an age difference spanning almost twenty years, draw us into a complex dialogue from three radically different viewpoints. Through detailed paintings, layered and complex drawings, and experimental ceramic works, each artist explores the tension between the conscious and subconscious mind. Each artwork questions how to achieve balance despite societal pressures, mental health challenges, and the effects of climate change on our well-being.

Djakou Kassi Nathalie is a well respected mid-career ceramic artist and the most senior of the three. She studied at the 'Institut Samba Superieur' in Yaounde, Cameroon, on a full scholarship and has taken part in numerous exhibitions in Europe and the United States. She won the first Africa Prize at the International Fair of Ouagadougou (SIAO) in 2012 and eventually moved to Nigeria in 2015, where she has become an active member of the Society of Nigerian Artists (SNA).

Djakou Kassi's works are earth centered, reflecting a fascination with the grandeur of nature in relation to humanity's miniscule scale, yet hugely destructive impact on the planet. The red laterite earth of her childhood in Cameroon, is reflected in her rugged earthen vessels, wall hangings, and sculptures. Her sculpted pots, bowls, and plates are covered with symbols and masks, inspired by shared African communal values, and a quintessential tension between modernity and tradition.

In contrast, the self-taught painter, Olawunmi Banjo presents her latest series of portraits of lone figures, rendered in twisted, intertwined, and tightly woven wires and ropes. Banjo's hyper-realistic elegant style embraces a primarily blue color palette and exhibits a deep sense of symmetry by creating a pathway to a deepened sense of self awareness and identity through her acrobatic figures. She has showcased her work at international exhibitions and art fairs including at *Re-Art Meets Africa*, Ihlienworth, Germany (2018), *Press for Progress International Women Arts Exhibition* in Dubai (2018), *24th Pan African Film & Art Festival (PAFF)* in Los Angeles, USA (2016), and at the Heinrich Heine University's *10th Afrika Tage* in Dusseldorf, Germany (2015). She was a finalist at the *Global Art Awards for Painting* at the Armani Hotel in Dubai (2017). Her works analyze the effects of restrictive social norms, and the constant need for external validation and the intense pressure from technology on modern society.

Emerging artist Kelechi Nwaneri's charcoal and acrylic drawings on paper and canvas are a complex creative counterpoint to the works by the two older, female artists. Nwaneri is in his early twenties and is a graduate of Agriculture from the University of Nigeria Nsukka. His multi-layered, charged landscapes populated by masked mythical figures covered with uli, nsibidi, adinkra and adire symbols, portray an emotional depth beyond his years. Nwaneri is inspired by pencil

realism and is heavily influenced by West African iconography and allegory. Through a world rich in mythological expressions he tackles issues surrounding mental health. His muscled, male forms in combat, touch on the emotional and psychological wrestling we do to achieve balance and self-awareness.

“STASIS provides a creative platform for three artists with very different styles and philosophies to examine the concept of equilibrium and counter-balance,” commented Sandra Mbanefo Obiago, the exhibition curator and Founder of SMO Contemporary Art. “Kassi’s voluminous sculptural ceramics provide a fantastic counter-point to Banjo’s finely painted self-portraits and Nwaneri’s mythological, surreal landscapes.”

“The diversity of media and artistic viewpoints are a refreshing start to our fall season,” commented Avinash Wadhvani, Director of Temple Muse. “STASIS touches on important global issues and we are delighted to provide a platform for artists to tell their stories from a contemporary African point of view.”

Stasis runs from August 31 to October 18, 2019.

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