

# APALAZZOGALLERY

## *Fragments of a World After Its Own Image*

Curated by Kwasi Ohene-Ayeh

29 March - 17 May 2025

APALAZZOGALLERY presents *Fragments of a World After Its Own Image*: a group show featuring twelve artists, most of whom are members of the **blaxTARLINES KUMASI** coalition—the transgenerational, transcultural and sharing community founded in 2015 at the Department of Painting and Sculpture, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi, Ghana. The exhibition is **curated by Kwasi Ohene-Ayeh**, with curatorial assistance by Maria Olivia Nakato and Zitoni Kayonga Tristan Tani, and features **Felicia Abban** (née Ansah), **Dennis Ankamah Addo** (niiankama), **James Barnor**, **Afrane Akwasi Bediako**, **Ernestina Mansa Doku**, **Isshaq Ismail**, **Samuel Baah Kortey**, **Tegene Kunbi**, **Maame Adjoa Ohemeng**, **Jeffrey Otoo**, **Edward Prah** and **Naomi Boahemaa Sakyi Jr.**

Over the past two decades, the Ghanaian contemporary art scene has grown and expanded significantly, gaining traction and recognition in international art circles. This momentum finds its epicentre in the city of Kumasi, where it gravitates around blaxTARLINES KUMASI: a community of artists, curators, thinkers, faculty, and students dedicated to developing collaborative, collective, and experimental practices that raise critical questions about art today. The impetus for this open-source collective dates back to the early 1990s, peaking in 2003 when artist-intellectual kaŕî'kachä seid'ou implemented his *Emancipatory Art Teaching Project* at the KNUST Department of Painting and Sculpture. seid'ou's project could be said to have sought to reveal and transcend the 'official', 'hidden', and 'missing' curricular of the KNUST Painting programme—which, since the 1920s, had been underpinned by the Euro-Western canon of Beaux Arts and atelier norms and skillsets—while at the same time attempting to transform art from the status of commodity to gift. This curatorial-pedagogical project is what laid out the terms for new egalitarian conditions out of which the exponents of blaxTARLINES and their allies conceive of art as a site of multiplicity while developing the intellectual and material substructure of international contemporary art in Africa and abroad by co-developing curricula, publicly accessible art spaces, cultural platforms, residencies, studios, and much more.

The title of the exhibition at APALAZZOGALLERY alludes to passages in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's *Communist Manifesto* (1848) which critique the globalised market system as a construct of bourgeois hegemony, designed to "create a world after its own image." Contesting this false universalism, and affirming the blaxTARLINES spirit of intergenerational conversation, *Fragments of a World After Its Own Image* also politicises aesthetics by way of a materialist analysis of the 'image', engaging it as an affect of the forces of production, distribution, consumption, and so on. This summarises the spirit by which the coalition restitutes universalism—the space for *none in particular*—from its monogenetic (imperialist-capitalist-colonialist) schema to radical inclusivity that embraces pre-emptive equality.

As the curator explains: "The artists do not take their chosen media and vantage points for granted, and are invested in unveiling beyond what their respective forms—photography, painting, sculpture, mixed media, installation, digital drawing, interactive media (gaming) technologies and other experimental approaches—have to offer. *Fragments of a World After Its Own Image* comes to terms with the egalitarian thrust of multiplicity and politicises aesthetics by analysing the 'image' as a co-present affect immanent to the forces of production, distribution and consumption. The show also affirms blaxTARLINES's model of intergenerational conversations with a tactical indifference to time. Such principles serve as the conditions in which the participating artists' and curatorial visions collide, giving rise to situations that confront the quotidian, the fantastical, the naturalistic, the artificial, the anthropocentric, the virtual, the uncanny and beyond. By so doing, not only are we questioning what is already known about art today, we are also probing the relationships between artwork, exhibition space, the spectator, and the artists' and curator's role in all of this. Besides these individual perspectives, there is collective contribution to a position which articulates art as a universality, à la blaxTARLINES, as an inherently inclusive entity without prejudice to any particular skill, process, genre, medium, content, material or trend, and so on."

Special thanks to Galerie Clémentine de la Féronnière.

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**Felicia Abban** (née Felicia Gyasiwa Ewuraesi Ansah, 1936–2024) was the only daughter among five children born to eminent Gold Coast photographer J. E. Ansah and Theresa Yankey, a textile trader. Her work in studio photography, photojournalism, and event photography began in the 1950s and spanned over six decades of practice. Throughout her illustrious and industrious career Abban chalked many firsts: she was generally regarded as Ghana's first known professional woman photographer; she was the first woman president of the Ghana Union of Photographers (GUP) and was also the first woman to have joined Ghana's presidential team of photographers in the First Republic (1960–1966). After her marriage to Richard Bonso Abban in 1956, she moved from Sekondi to Accra where she set up her own photo studio in the central business district. During the Republic, she documented many significant political events as a member of the official team of presidential photographers, all the while maintaining her studio practice. Abban's legacy transcends photography into cinema as she played a vital early role in mentoring seminal filmmaker Kwaw Ansah (one of her younger siblings) in lens-based practice. She completely retired from her practice in 2017. Her photographic work made its first public appearance in an exhibition in the group show *Accra: Portraits of a City* (2017) at the ANO gallery in Accra. Abban was also one of six artists – alongside El Anatsui, Lynette Yiadom Boakye, Ibrahim Mahama, Selasi Awusi Sosu, and John Akomfrah – selected to feature at the first-ever Ghana pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale 2019. In the same year, her photographs were exhibited at the 12th edition of Bamako Encounters: Biennale of African Photography.

**Dennis Ankamah Addo (niiankama)** is a Ghanaian visual artist living and working in Accra and Kumasi. niiankama is a member of blaxTARLINES and is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Fine Art and Curatorial Practice at the Department of Painting and Sculpture, KNUST. His works explore the notion of ubiquity with objects that revel in histories and memories that traverse into deep time. He also explores themes of individuality, hybridity and poetic narratives. niiankama explores objecthood into its newness and expresses himself through colour, texture, material and forms that manifest in paintings, sculptures, films, installations and drawings and much more.

**Afrane Akwasi Bediako** (b. 1990, Kumasi, Ghana) lives and works in Kumasi, Ghana. He is an artist and a PhD student at the department of Painting and Sculpture of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). Akwasi Bediako's work explores the idea of augmentation and extensions between technological gadgets, humans, and the environment. He works with electronic gadgets which he refers to as 'amputees'. The artist refashions and repurposes these amputees into machines and micro-organisms he describes as *TRONS*. These *TRONS* become potential platforms and media for reflection, engagement and interaction. Stripped bare of their familiar housing, they become mechanical gizmos subsumed with the consciousness of previous owners of these gadgets and himself.

**James Barnor** (b. 1929, Ghana) lives and works in the United Kingdom. He opened his renowned Ever Young studio in Accra, where he immortalised a nation at the moment of its independence. He was one of the first photojournalists to collaborate with 'The Daily Graphic', a newspaper published in Ghana by London's Daily Mirror Group. In 1959, two years after Ghana's independence, Barnor moved to London to deepen his technical knowledge of the medium. He discovered colour photography at the Medway College of Art and his pictures were published on the front page of 'Drum', an important magazine

founded in South Africa in 1951 and symbol of the anti-apartheid movement. He eloquently captured the spirit of 'Swinging London' and the experiences of the African diaspora in the British capital. In the late 1960s, he was recruited by Agfa-Gevaert and returned to Ghana to set up the country's first colour laboratory. He stayed there for the next twenty years, working in his new Studio X23 as a freelance photographer and for state agencies in Accra. Today he devotes most of his time to his work, in a spirit of transmission. Barnor's work has been included in several exhibitions and publications, including a touring retrospective curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist, shown at the Serpentine in London (2021), MASI Lugano, Switzerland (2022) and the Detroit Institute of Art, MI, US (2023). The show James Barnor: Stories, Pictures from the Archive (1947–1987), curated by Matthieu Humery, opened at LUMA Arles, France in 2022, and was marked by the launch of the James Barnor Prize, dedicated to African photographers. In October 2023, James Barnor, Studio of Life opened at FOMU Antwerp, in Belgium.

**Ernestina Mansa Doku** (b. 2001, Kumasi, Ghana) lives and works between Accra and Kumasi, Ghana. She holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the department of Painting and Sculpture, KNUST, Kumasi, and is currently pursuing her Master's in Fine Art. She is a member of the blaxTARLINES KUMASI collective. As part of the 2024–2025 winter semester exchange programme, she studied at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, as an Art School Alliance (ASA) exchange student. Her practice reflects her view on nature and how natural forms adapt to any given environment, squeezing through crevices, attaching themselves to surfaces, intertwining with other objects and adapting to any given circumstance. Through painting, sculpture, photography, animation and video, she is poised to challenge the anthropocentric notion of human experiences to embrace and open spaces for the post human experience. She describes her working process as a surgical treatment using distortion, reorganising, reshaping, multiplying or even dividing to change the appearance of form to create something new.

**Ishaq Ismail** (b. 1989, Accra, Ghana) lives and works in Accra, Ghana. He studied Paintings at the Ghanatta College of Art and Design, Accra, Ghana (2012). He is a visual artist known for his distinctive abstract style and unique approach to figurative painting. His paintings demonstrate a fidelity to what he has termed 'infantile semi-abstract', a style that performs a technically and conceptually rich form of childish abandon. Marked by the liberal use of impasto, gestural lines and a vibrant colour palette, his works speak to the human condition in postmodernity. Ismail notes that his technique of painting mimics how a sculptor manipulates clay, which intimates a tacitly to how the artist brings these subjects into being. The figures themselves are a surreal imagining of the human. Ismail explores the grotesque as an aesthetic form, asking what it means to confront the ugly and misshapen in a world, especially an artwork, that is fixated on beauty. The emotions and moods of subjects suffering from our angst-inducing social, cultural and political contemporary reality are captured far more vividly and effectively by his distortions than by a more 'realistic' rendering.

**Samuel Baah Kortey** (b. 1994 Aseesewa, Ghana) is a multi-sensory artist, thinker, and visual researcher from Ghana. Samuel has a BFA and MFA from the KNUST- Department of Painting and Sculpture (2013-2022) in Kumasi-Ghana. After, he graduated from Hochschule für Bildende Künste Städtelschule, Fine Art (Klasse de Willem de Rooij), Frankfurt, Germany. His source materials start with historical archives, daily happenings, and moments referencing death, decay, and struggles, which carefully materialize into objects or thought-provoking adventures. As an

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observationist, Samuel investigates and highlights post-colonial traces of modern societies' ways of life through documentation of daily happenings, recordings, and access to the street visual culture of cities. Samuel has a BFA and MFA from the KNUST-Department of Painting and Sculpture (2013-2022) in Kumasi-Ghana. After, he graduated from Hochschule für Bildende Künste Städtelschule, Fine Art (Klasse de Willem de Rooij), Frankfurt, Germany. His installations have explored, archived, and examined the hyper-visible expressions that characterize cities, particularly in Kumasi, where he lives and works. The artist is a member of two collectives, blaxTARLINES, and a co-founder of the Asafo Black Collective.

**Tegene Kunbi** (b. 1980, Abeba, Ethiopia) lives and works in Berlin, Germany. Kunbi holds a degree in Painting and Art Education from the Fine Arts School at the University of Addis Ababa (2024) and then at Kotebe University of Education. Kunbi's art draws from his African heritage while engaging with global artistic movements, fusing traditional African aesthetics with contemporary forms of expression. His artworks are colourful and balanced at the same time. Each hue is chosen and painted in conversation with the others on the canvas. From a structural point of view, the visual harmony is conveyed through the rectilinear grid, which is the ever-evolving element in the artist's production. Depending on the tonality, density and the grid chosen, each canvas is invaded by dynamism and details. Kunbi is the winner of the Main Prize Grand Prix Léopold Sédar Senghor at the Dak'Art Biennial 2022.

**Maame Adjoa Ohemeng** (b. 2000, Accra/ Kumasi, Ghana) is a Ghanaian artist currently pursuing Master of Fine Art and Curatorial Practice, majoring in painting, at the Kwame Nkrumah University of science and Technology (KNUST). She is a member of blaxTARLINES. Ohemeng uses the technique of mixed media painting to depict playful and utopian scenes mostly crafted from spontaneous events and stories sourced from her local vicinity and beyond. Her mixed media paintings borrow ideas from what is commonly known as children's stories (bedtime stories and fairytales), animated books, Japanese animation (Anime) and comic (Manga). She also tells stories by creating fictional characters based on issues such as gender and sexuality while exploring post-humanism from a feminist perspective.

**Jeffrey Otoo** (b. 1994, Accra, Ghana) lives and works in Accra, Ghana. He explores themes of power, technology, hierarchy, religion, life and death and the human existence as whole. In the paintings and installations, he makes, he employs the use of cryptic symbols and animal iconography developed from imitated medallions and chains sold by merchants to create a narrative of mystery and danger which is prevalent in today's world. His work in totality takes from excerpts of his day-to-day life and what he experiences which he translates it back in his work as paintings of fantasy and imagination. In his work he brings elements from other spaces which ideally wouldn't work together in reality into a composed piece which tells a different story and provokes thought to an audience.

**Edward Prah** (b. 1997, Takoradi, Ghana) lives and works in Kumasi, Ghana and London, United Kingdom. He holds a Master in Fine Arts from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi (2024). He studied Painting and Sculpture at the University of Education, Winneba (2020). Prah is interested in the materiality of imaging substances is explored through various methods, including sculptural, theatrical and light projections using reflective materials. These approaches delve into themes of identity, intimacy, belonging and decolonial thought. Prah's work explores how photographic objects

deteriorate and accumulate in time, challenging the possibilities of archival materials. His work integrates archival and everyday elements through photo transfer techniques, weaving fictional narratives that invite public engagement.

**Naomi Boahemaa Sakyi Jnr.** (b. 1999, Kumasi, Ghana) is a Ghanaian artist and member of blaxTARLINES who lives and works in Kumasi, Ghana. With a keen eye for detail and a passion for genre painting, Sakyi draws inspiration from the vibrant energy of the open markets and farms in her locale. She skillfully merges them in her artwork, creating captivating compositions that highlight the essence of the quotidian within these places. She brings her vision to life through a unique blend of painting, photo transfers, and collages, infusing her works with a dynamic fusion of colour and texture. Sakyi's creations often feature intricate market scenes and farming landscapes. Her work invites viewers to ponder the significance of these environments in shaping our daily experiences.

**Kwasi Ohene-Ayeh**, Ph.D., is a curator and critic based in Kumasi, Ghana. He is a key member of blaxTARLINES KUMASI whose work is inspired by the radical hope to "transform art from the status of commodity to that of gift." His curatorial work and criticism often explore themes related to emancipatory politics, and the intersection between curatorship and pedagogy. He is a teacher at the Department of Painting & Sculpture, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), in Kumasi. Ohene-Ayeh's curatorial projects include *TRANSFER(S)*, Ibrahim Mahama's solo exhibition in Germany and Ghana in 2023; *Ghana 1957: Art After Independence* (2024–25); the 12th edition of Bamako Encounters: Biennale of African Photography (2019–20); *Akutia: Blindfolding the Sun and the Poetics of Peace (A Retrospective of Agyeman Ossei 'Dota')* (2020–21); *Orderly Disorderly* (2017) organised by blaxTARLINES; and the 35th edition of the Ljubljana Graphic Arts Biennale as a member of Exit Frame Collective (2023–24). His edited publications include *TRANSFER(S)* (2024), Mahama's recent monograph published by Distanz, and *From the void came gifts of the cosmos: a reader* (2023) the official reader for the 35th Ljubljana Biennial. His published essays have been featured in ArtReview, E-flux Architecture, African Arts journal, and several others.

**APALAZZOGALLERY** was founded by Francesca Migliorati and Chiara Rusconi in 2008 in Palazzo Cigola Fenaroli in Brescia, as a meeting and conversation place to promote contemporary art in all its manifold manifestations. The gallery offers an inclusive multidisciplinary and multicultural programme, supporting international and Italian, institutional and young emerging artists. Each project is designed and constructed through a long and careful dialogue between the space and the artist, the product of which is a solo or group exhibition that engages the space and its architecture innovatively. The gallery also supports this dialogue through art residencies and the promotion of artists through art fairs and international and local curatorial projects. The gallery represents Sonia Boyce, Ann Iren Buan, Edson Chagas, Giorgio Ciam, Raül De Nieves, Nathalie Du Pasquier, Em'kal Eyongakpa, Estate of Larry Stanton, Paolo Gonzato, Ibrahim Mahama, Eva & Franco Mattes, Olivier Mosset, Servane Mary, Estate of Jonas Mekas, Lucia Pescador, Marta Pierobon, Nathalie Provosty, Alan Reid, Olympia Scarry, Augustas Serapinas, Alexandra Sukhareva, The Reader, Francesco Vezzoli and Luc Ming Yan.

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