

Beyond Skin Colour, What Defines Us?



NUTOPIA

A Solo Exhibition Of Works From
The Black Identity And Renaissance Project by
Olorunyemi Kolapo Obadih
Curated By Susa Rodriguez-Garrido

Triveni Gallery, Triveni Kala Sangam Centre, India
11th February to 19th February 2025

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A Catalogue of Exhibition

Agama Art Publishing & Agency

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AGAMA ART PUBLISHING AND AGENCY

Agama Art Publishing and Agency Ltd. has been founded by Susa R. Garrido, in 2018, to promote African artists and to encourage them to express their enormous talent and creativity.

Agama is an independent art publishing and agency that represents artists and publishes books, e-Books and catalogues about African art, photography, architecture, sculpture, design and fashion.

We select and publish the most brilliant African artists, bringing them to life in dynamic ways, print and digital, for readers all around the world.

PURPOSE

Our intention is to represent artists through exhibitions, events, talks, etc. and to create books, e-Books and catalogues that enhance and promote the huge African art talent in order to bring them to all audiences.

We want to use art as a social weapon to bring awareness about difficult topics. We want to discuss and explore themes such as child abuse, war, slavery, drugs, rape, misogyny, etc. We want to capture people's attention with these subjects, stories and ideas that have a massive impact on their lives and dreams. It is essential to listen carefully to how human beings today interpret their voices, especially through art.

We want to publish books, e-Books and catalogues about the current established artists that we work with and the new ones that we have trained and encouraged.

Our purpose is also to celebrate and publish young and old/long established African artists that have never been recorded in order to create an art legacy.

CULTURE

We believe in these artists and their ideas and therefore we think that what we do matters.

It takes a lot of hard work and research to represent artists and publish these books, e-Books and catalogues, and we care about these artists, their ideas and talent. We are committed to make a difference and work with these artists in order to achieve this.

FOREWORD

The creative journey between an artist and a curator is a unique and evolving partnership, one that grows richer with each new creative project. As a curator, artist, writer, publisher, and art project manager, I know how important it is to have a strong artistic bond and a close understanding of the artist's work.

My collaboration with Nigerian artist Olorunyemi Kolapo Obadiah began as the curator of his first solo exhibition, *Responsive Eye* in Abuja. It has since blossomed through various projects, such as a residency, collective exhibitions, a duet exhibition called *Afrotopia*, in Abuja alongside Olawuyi Oluwole, his first international exhibition *Beyond the Obvious* in Vigo, Spain, and a collective in London, titled *Art in Mind*. Now, our journey brings us to *Nutopia: Beyond Skin Colour, What Defines Us?* in New Delhi, India.

Nutopia, a fusion of two concepts—'new' and 'utopia'— is the culmination of years of artistic and conceptual exploration. It is deeply rooted in the dreams Kolapo experienced during the *Beyond the Obvious* exhibition. These dreams sparked the vision of *Nutopia: Beyond Skin Colour, What Defines Us?*, a place where the past and future converge, blending African traditions with the imaginative possibilities of *Afrofuturism*.

This exhibition is also a continuation of the work started in the *Afrotopia* exhibition and features 15 paintings and two sculptures. In these thought-provoking works, Kolapo masterfully blends elements of tradition with the visionary scope of *Afrofuturism*. Each piece is a testament to Kolapo's mastery and his relentless pursuit of understanding African identity through art. The works are more than just visual expressions; they are profound meditations on what it means to be African in a world where cultural identity is continually reshaped by history, technology, and the future.

Kolapo's exploration is not merely artistic; it is deeply rooted in a personal quest for understanding and a desire to reconnect with the ancestral ties that bind us. His travels across Africa have enriched his perspective, allowing him to portray a nuanced narrative that is both a reflection of the past and an aspiration for what could be.

Through *Nutopia: Beyond Skin Colour, What Defines Us?*, Kolapo challenges us to reconsider what defines us, to see beyond the surface, and to envision a world where identity is a source of strength and pride. It is a world where the echoes of history are woven into the fabric of tomorrow, creating a tapestry that is as vibrant as it is inspiring.

The Resilient Spirits: Awelewa Awakens series, for instance, vividly portrays the resilience of African women, depicted with elongated necks that symbolise grace and strength. These figures wear futuristic masks that conceal their faces, representing both the hidden struggles and the deep



connection to cultural heritage, as seen through elements inspired by traditional African artefacts.

In ***Yellow Saviour***, Kolapo creates a striking image of a yellow-tinged shepherd robot guarding a flock of sheep. This painting is a powerful metaphor for the balance between technology and nature, where the robot, inspired by African design, offers protection and hope in a future where these forces coexist harmoniously.

Gilded Identity is another standout piece, depicting a Black man adorned with a golden mask that merges the traditional Benin Idia mask with futuristic elements. This artwork invites viewers to explore the complexities of identity, where tradition and modernity intersect, challenging us to consider how we define ourselves in an ever-changing world.

Finally, ***A Shared History*** reminds us of the unbreakable bonds that tie African nations together. The connected helmets in the painting symbolise the shared history and collective memory that transcend borders, linking the past with the future. The approaching robot in the painting is not just a symbol of technological advancement but a call to honour our heritage as we move forward.

The exhibition is an invitation in which Kolapo offers a vision of a world where African culture is not only celebrated but reimagined in the context of a 'new utopia'—one that honours the past while embracing the future with confidence, beauty, and creativity.

Our creative collaboration has been fruitful, evolving from ***Responsive Eye*** to this current exhibition, ***Nutopia: Beyond Skin Colour, What Defines Us?*** At each step of the journey, Kolapo has inspired me—and I believe all of us—to deepen our understanding of the fascinating themes of identity, resilience, and the interplay between past and future.

As you engage with this collection, I encourage you to embrace the stories it tells, to reflect on the themes it presents, and to imagine the possibilities it offers, considering how they all resonate with your own experiences.

Susa Rodriguez-Garrido
Artist, Curator, Writer, Publisher, and Art Project Manager
Curator of ***Nutopia: Beyond Skin Colour, What Defines Us?***

NUTOPIA



Gallery's Note

It is with great pride that Triveni Kala Sangam welcomes *Nutopia: Beyond Skin Colour, What Defines Us?*, an extraordinary exhibition by Nigerian artist Olorunyemi Kolapo Obadiah, curated by Susa Rodriguez-Garrido. This unique exhibition invites audiences to explore the rich confluence of Black identity, African heritage, and the futuristic world of *Afrofuturism* through Kolapo's visionary paintings and sculptures.

At Triveni, we believe in showcasing artistic expression that challenges perceptions and stimulates thoughtful conversations. Kolapo's work does precisely that, encouraging viewers to reflect on the many dimensions of identity and how tradition and innovation can merge to create new narratives for the future. Through his art, Kolapo offers a powerful exploration of what defines us as individuals and as a society, while Rodriguez-Garrido's thoughtful curation amplifies this journey, guiding the audience through a visually and conceptually immersive experience.

Nutopia: Beyond Skin Colour, What Defines Us? represents a fusion of the old and the new, the real and the imagined, celebrating not only African culture but the potential for a future shaped by inclusivity and vision. We are honoured to host this exhibition and invite you to engage with this compelling artistic exploration.

Rachit Jain
Incharge of Outreach
Triveni Kala Sangam

About the Artist

Driven by the complexities of human interaction, Nigerian artist Olorunyemi Kolapo utilises his art to explore the complexities of identity. His works delve into the various forms of connection, or lack thereof, that we weave through language, gestures, expressions, cultural values, and even physical proximity.

Born in Ilorin, Nigeria, Kolapo's artistic journey ignited as a teenager, fueled by the readily available charcoal and diverse surfaces that surrounded him. Despite pursuing a career in Physics, as per his parents' wishes, the pull of artistry proved irresistible. He embarked on his professional art journey in 2005, eventually earning their support after graduation.

Kolapo's unique perspective stems from his dual passions: art and science (specifically physics). This allows him to investigate and illustrate the nuances of identity and emotions through his captivating portraits, primarily rendered in oil and charcoal. Earning a B.Sc. in Applied Physics equipped him with an additional layer of understanding, which he seamlessly integrates into his artistic exploration.

Following participation in numerous international group exhibitions and few local solo exhibitions, Kolapo reached a significant milestone in 2022 with his debut international solo exhibition in Vigo, Spain. His dedication to artistic freedom extends beyond his own practice. In 2016, he established "Elbowroom," an art movement fostering creative expression among young realistic artists.

Kolapo's artistic footprint spans across Africa, Europe, the UK, Asia, and America, with five acclaimed solo exhibitions and countless group showcases under his belt. He is currently engrossed in a new body of work delving into Futurism's attempt to revolutionize cultural identity. This exploration juxtaposes the envisioned beauty of a modern life against the potential loss of African identity within this utopian ideal, questioning the boundaries between utopia and dystopia.



Nutopia: *Beyond Skin Colour, What Defines Us?*

is an exhibition by Nigerian artist Olurunyemi Kolapo Obadijah, curated by artist, curator, and writer Susa Rodriguez-Garrido. The project is an exploration of the intersection of Black identity, culture, and tradition with the futuristic and imaginative world of Afrofuturism. The name Nutopia is derived from the words "new" and "utopia". The project is a collection of Kolapo's paintings and writings on the subject, inspired by a series of dreams about Afrofuturism.

In his dreams, Kolapo envisioned a series of Afrofuturistic scenes where Black people in the future bore traditional African tribal marks and tattoos, among other forms of identity, and were taking over the world. These dreams inspired Kolapo to create a series of paintings that depict this vision of the future, in which the glory of Black culture is restored and celebrated.

To further explore these ideas, Kolapo also travelled to Zambia, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Kenya, and other parts of Africa to research the lost identities and traditions of these cultures. Through his travels, he gained a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing Black nations today, and he used this knowledge to inform his paintings. The resulting works depict a range of subjects, from traditional African rituals and customs to futuristic technology and science fiction.

Through his artwork, Kolapo seeks to challenge traditional notions of Black identity and explore the possibilities of a new, Afrofuturist future. By blending the past and the future, he creates a unique and imaginative vision of the Black present and its potential.

In addition to his artwork, Kolapo also includes essays and other writings in the form of an art book, where he discusses the ideas and themes that inspired his work. In these writings, he explores the impact of colonial rule on African identity, culture, and tradition, and how this impact continues to shape the continent today. For example, the suppression of traditional practices, such as tribal markings and tattoos, was a blow to African identity, as they represented a connection to the continent's rich cultural heritage. However, in recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in these practices among young Africans, as they seek to reclaim their cultural heritage and assert their identity in the face of ongoing globalisation and Westernisation.



A SHARED HISTORY

Oil on canvas, 118cm x 150cm, 2023/2024

As an artist who is rooted in the essence of African heritage, I've always sought to explore the strong connections that bind us across time and space. **A Shared History** embodies this vision—a celebration of our collective past and a contemplation of our shared future as Africans.

This painting speaks to the unbreakable bond that ties us to our ancestors. The connected helmets are a metaphor for the shared history that we, as Africans, carry within us—a history that transcends borders, linking Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, and every other nation on our continent. Despite our diverse cultures, languages, and traditions, our histories are entwined, reflecting common struggles, triumphs, and hopes.

The flying robot approaching the couple is not just a symbol of the future, but a reminder that as we move forward, the essence of who we are—our identity and culture—remains a vital part of our journey. It challenges us to preserve what is unique to us as Africans while embracing the innovations of tomorrow.

Through this work, I aim to inspire a dialogue about the balance between honouring our past and navigating the future. As we continue to evolve, it is this shared history that will illuminate our path, ensuring that our identities remain resilient and our cultures, ever vibrant.



YELLOW SAVIOUR, Oil on canvas
130cm x 160cm, 2023

The painting depicts a scene of pastoral beauty, with a magnificent, yellow-hued robot shepherd standing at the centre of a sprawling flock of sheep. The Africa-inspired machine is striking with intricate details etched into its metallic form. The robot's powerful presence is juxtaposed with the docile, gentle nature of the surrounding sheep, who cluster around it calmly and peacefully with a colourful cloud.

In the robot's hand, it holds a lamb, cradling it with a gentle touch that belies its mechanical nature. The painting captures a sense of safety and security, with the robot shepherd acting as a watchful guardian over its flock. Its yellow glow illuminates the landscape, imbuing the scene with a warm and inviting atmosphere.

In total, this painting represents a remarkable example of the harmonious interplay between technology and nature. It presents a glimpse of the future where robots and organic life can coexist in perfect balance, with robotic saviours representing hope and protection for all who live within its territory.





THE RESILIENT SPIRITS: AWELEWA AWAKENS, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10
Oil on canvas, 30cm x 90cm, 2023

The Resilient Spirits: Awelewa Awakens is a captivating painting series that explores the decolonisation of Nigeria's history through the depiction of African women with exceptionally long necks. These women symbolise the strength, grace, and resilience of the African spirit, transcending the confines of colonial narratives and embracing a powerful identity.

In this series, each woman's face, from the nose up, is concealed by a futuristic mask. These masks represent the dualities faced by African women—their hidden struggles, the silencing of their voices, and the preservation of their cultural heritage. Incorporated into the upper part of each mask are elements inspired by African artefact mask sculptures, emphasising a connection to the ancestral past and the importance of cultural memory.





VISION TOMORROW 1, 2, 3, 4

Oil and acrylic on canvas

30cm x 40cm

2024

Imagine a world where people embrace technology without losing their culture and tradition.



WHERE DO DREAMS LEAD US 3

Oil on canvas, 60cm x 80cm, 2024

Are we merely waking from dreams, or are we waking into them?

In this piece, I step into the liminal space where dreams merge with waking life, capturing a moment of profound reflection and renewal. A dark-skinned woman, gently poised on the edge of awakening, sits on her bed, not confined by walls but embraced by the open air, bathed in the soft glow of the setting sun. The sky, tinted with hues of orange and gold, speaks of closure yet promises a dawn of new beginnings.

Around her, bluebirds flutter in graceful arcs—symbols of freedom, wisdom, and the mysteries that lie between dreams and reality. Their presence is a reminder that she is not alone; they are guardians, guiding her as she transcends the boundaries of the conscious and subconscious mind.

Upon her face rests a futuristic mask, sleek and advanced, yet it bears the ancient artistry of an African mask within its design. This fusion of past and future embodies her dual existence—a soul rooted in the rich traditions of her ancestors, yet embracing the uncertainties and promises of the future. The mask shields her eyes, symbolising a vision that transcends mere sight, an insight that peers beyond the visible world, into the hidden truths of both past wisdom and futuristic potential.

This work is an ode to identity, transformation, and the timeless journey of self discovery, where the spirit of the past walks hand in hand with the possibilities of tomorrow.

WHERE DO DREAMS LEAD US 2
Oil on canvas, 60cm x 80cm, 2024



WHERE DO DREAMS LEAD US 1
Oil on canvas, 60cm x 80cm, 2024



VEIL OF PAST, PRESENT AND POSSIBILITY

Oil on canvas
80cm x 190cm
2023/2024

As I work towards depicting the fusion of tradition and futurism, encapsulating the essence of identity and the evolving narrative of cultural heritage, I have decided to paint a dream I had long ago.

At its heart stands an African woman, her enigmatic gaze veiled behind an Igala mask intricately intertwined with futuristic elements. This juxtaposition symbolises the complex dance between the past and the future, where the rich indigenous cultures intersect with the possibilities of technologies advancement.

Clad in the vibrant attire of the Zulu tribe, adorned with beads that speak of ancestral stories, the woman becomes a living embodiment of resilience and continuity. The Zulu cloth serves as a testament to the enduring spirit of African tribes, rooted in tradition yet resilient in the face of modernity. Through her presence, the painting bridges the gap between generations and depicts the timeless beauty of heritage in an ever-changing world.





GILDED IDENTITY

Oil on canvas, 90cm x 250cm, 2023

Gilded Identity tells the story of a Black man adorned with a resplendent golden mask, blending the aesthetics of both futuristic technology and the traditional Benin Idia mask. It captures the essence of cultural heritage, modernity, and the complex layers of personal identity.

His dark skin emanates strength and resilience, while the golden mask, positioned high on his face, conceals the eyes, symbolising a veiled mystery and a hidden aspect of his identity. The fusion of the futuristic design with the echoes of the Benin Idia mask signifies a harmonious interplay between tradition and progress, inviting the viewers to contemplate the interconnection of the past, present, and future.

The golden mask itself represents more than just an ornament but also a value. It is a metaphorical shield that protects and empowers the individual. It embodies the transformative power of technology, which enables individuals to shape and redefine their identities in an ever-evolving world. Through this mask, the man gains a new perspective on the world, embracing both his heritage and the possibilities of the future.

It invites viewers to reflect on themes of identity, self-discovery, and the impact of technology on our lives as I take you through a new series of

paintings on the past, present, and future of our identity as Africans. It challenges preconceived notions and encourages a deeper understanding of the complexity of individuality, emphasising that our identities are not fixed but continuously influenced by our cultural roots and the ever-changing modern landscape.

As viewers engage with **Gilded Identity**, they are compelled to ponder the significance of personal masks and the power they hold in shaping our perception of ourselves and others. The artwork ultimately calls for introspection, encouraging viewers to embrace their multifaceted identities, celebrate their heritage, and navigate the uncharted territories of the future with confidence and authenticity.

NEXT GEN BETA

Oil on canvas, 60cm x 80cm, 2024

A boy stands still, beneath the sky,
Where past and future intertwine,
A cow, the earth, with steady grace,
Carries a rider out of time.

The robot gleams with silver light,
A bridge between the old and new,
In fields where whispers of the past,
Meet dreams of all that's yet to bloom.
Together, they walk side by side,
In quiet peace, no clash, no fight,
Tradition hums through wires and gears,
As stars ignite the coming light.





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