

Larry Amponsah

*Mastery might be a long way off, but the flow state induced by floristry is profoundly rewarding*

Curated by Katherine Finerty

14<sup>th</sup> December 2023 – 25<sup>th</sup> January 2024, Gallery II, Accra



'Mastery might be a long way off', 2023, 150cm x 200cm, Oil paint, oil pastel, acrylic paint and print on canvas.  
Image courtesy of the artist and Gallery 1957.

Gallery 1957 is excited to present 'Mastery might be a long way off, but the flow state induced by floristry is profoundly rewarding,' a new solo exhibition by Larry Amponsah. This new body of work is curated by Katherine Finerty and follows a four-month residency with the gallery in the artist's hometown of Accra.

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“Maybe it is a good thing for us to keep a few dreams of a house that we shall live in later, always later, so much later, in fact, that we shall not have time to achieve it. For a house that was final, one that stood in symmetrical relation to the house we were born in, would lead to thoughts – serious, sad thoughts – and not to dreams. It is better to live in a state of impermanence than in one of finality.”

—Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (1958)

Through the practice of image-making as architectural horticulture, Larry Amponsah cultivates new interior worlds by collecting and combining found imagery that grows from collages into paintings. This new body of work for the artist’s first solo show in his hometown explores ideas of habitability and hospitality, whereby one may fertilise their surroundings in order to not just survive, but thrive.

The paintings on display are camouflaged, appearing to be multi-media in form like the magazines and archival books that Amponsah has been collecting since moving to London for his Painting Masters at the Royal College of Art. In keeping with the artist’s enduring search for ever-evolving technical mastery and metamorphoses, we see painting reinvent itself. His practice is akin to farming or gardening, creating and tenderly nurturing spaces for people and ideas to grow. “The practice of painting is a vast one,” Amponsah contends, “it’s like going into a house with billions of rooms filled with infinite possibilities (some meaningful, and others not). Therefore, to establish a solid practice full of ideas and meaning, one must be willing to travel and to excavate the hard floors of painting in order to encounter the hidden treasures of surprise and wonder.”

In Amponsah’s surreal yet familiar domestic treasure troves, the interior and exterior exist in the same plane, blurring the lines of private and public. Inspired by the gallery’s location in a luxury lifestyle hotel, these interior design dreamscapes conjure somewhere you know, or somewhere you want to be, ranging from the quietness of everyday life to the drama of a soap opera. Whether alone in a hot bath, or laughing with friends in the living room, we can imagine ourselves held in layered, luscious surroundings where anything is possible. In one entrance interior, above the fireplace we find a gilded frame depicting a young man gently holding a chicken – is it a picture of the resident farmer, or a mirror reflecting us? In these paintings inside always meets outside, like the composition of ourselves, extending each home into the Garden of Eden.

In addition to the 18 new oil paintings on display, Amponsah will create an ambitious sculptural installation of four figures relaxing in a bedroom, centring the vitality of leisure, dreams, and birth at the heart of a home. Reminiscent of Tracey Emin’s *My Bed* (1998) and *To Meet My Past* (2002), this intimate mattress sculpture becomes a space for unexpected domestic interrogations. We are welcome to engage in this family affair, relating to either the parents resting on the bed, their young child watching TV, or the young man – brother, Uncle, friend, stranger, ghost? – looking into the artist’s vintage family mirror that they’ve had for over 30 years. As with all homes, portals abound, propelling us from the past into the future and back, in a forever flow state. Viewers will be encouraged to relax and take their time in this intimate space, enjoying original collage studies that have been transfigured into the works on display, as well as the artist’s research library specialising in contemporary Black culture and identity politics.

Here we find Gaston Bachelard’s *Poetics of Space* (which informed the artist’s interest in architectural phenomenology, based on lived human experiences, historical reflections, and ethical interpretations in relation to one’s surroundings) alongside popular lifestyle magazines and the book manifesto *Diversify* by British-Ghanaian author and advocate June Sarpong. These different publications all suggest a spectrum of compositions: of the self, of space, and how one might endlessly activate the other. Turning towards his characteristic practice of physical and conceptual collage (emerging from an early fascination with stacked Ghanaian calendars that you may find in a modest home or market stall), Amponsah creates in-between spaces: canvases caught between a tear and a mark. A clean slick line

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results from slowly pulling tape, a photorealistic rip from gentle plucking. These gestures illuminate how Amponsah tenderly grooms his paintings as he would his own young children. And through this pruning process, painted surfaces become topographical landscapes enduring shifts both soft and seismic, from magazine to collage, delineated borders to home sweet home. “Memories can be raw,” the artist reflects, “but imaginations... They remain more exciting, fresh, and fundamentally closer to us, more so than our very scars. This is why I’m drawn to fiction and imagination: they allow me to pull complex images out of almost anything, and in doing so, they have a say in shaping our reality.”

And in this uncannily multi-layered reality, architectures are never static, and identities are never stable – nothing on the surface is ever quite what it seems. As one magazine cut-out aptly – yet incongruously, when out of context – declares: “Mastery might be a long way off, but the flow state induced by floristry is profoundly rewarding, albeit with a few decapitations en route.” In the nearly eponymous work, Mastery might be a long way off, we find a bathing beauty, looking directly at us, placed above the start of this sentence torn out from a page – trimmed, spliced, decapitated. This potentially violent gesture, however, is ultimately one of imagination and agency: a pruning that leads to growth, as a cleansing ritual leads to rebirth.

Through these gestures of inflorescent care and radical hospitality, the artist invites us to imagine our dream house within this room within a room – an exhibition within a gallery within a hotel – and the greater ecosystems in which we may collectively flourish. For in both art and life, at the end of the day it is not so much about Mastery as it is about the state of flow. We invite you to get in the zone.

- Excerpt from curatorial text by Katherine Finerty

## About the Artist

### Larry Amponsah

(b. 1989, Accra, Ghana. Lives and works in London, UK)

Larry Amponsah is an artist whose practice questions the orthodoxy of traditional approaches to image-making, unfolding the ways in which modes of production construct the contemporary politics of imagery. Intellectually trained as a painter, Amponsah creates collage paintings with archival images, objects, and stories sampled from various cultures to refigure systems of power while embracing new realities and new possibilities. He transforms prints and cuts into archival images, which are assembled in collages that are further worked upon using mechanical processes and his honed skills as a painter. In this succession of strategic moves about image-making techniques, dynamic compositions emerge, as well as compelling narratives or portraits that reference his own upbringing and culture within a global context.

Amponsah is an Associate Lecturer at the Camberwell College of Art – University of the Arts London. He obtained his MA in Painting from the Royal College of Art in London, United Kingdom in 2018 after studying at Jiangsu University China in 2016 and completing his BFA at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi, Ghana in 2015. From 2018-2020 he was a Trustee of The Kuenyehia Art Trust in Ghana. He was shortlisted for the 2019 Dentons Art Prize and won the Be Smart About Art Award in 2019. His works are held in public and private collections including The Wellcome Collection in London.

Select solo exhibitions by the artist include: ‘The Soil Form Which We Came’, Lawrie Shabibi Gallery, Dubai (2023); ‘Genesis, The Plan & The Promise’, The Breeder Gallery, Athens (2022); ‘When A Stone Cracks, We Don’t Stitch’, 50 Golborne, London (2019); ‘The Open City of Many Gods’ Billboard, Bloc Projects, Sheffield (2019) and ‘Imaginary Direction of Time’, The Fine Art Gallery, CSU-Pueblo Hoag Hall, Colorado (2018).

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Recent group exhibitions by the artist include: Hold The Line (Outdoor Project with The World Reimagined), The National Maritime Museum, London (2023); The 63<sup>rd</sup> Thessaloniki International Film Festival - The Metropolitan organisation of Museums of Visual Art – MOMus, Thessaloniki (2022); Reconstruction – Thessaloniki Film Festival, The Project Gallery, Athens (2022); Frieze London, The Breeder Gallery, London (2022); The World Reimagined, TWR, London & Leeds (2022); A Collective Intimacy (within Theaster Gates’s installation Black Image Corporation) presented by Prada, The Vinyl Factory & The Showroom, 180 The Strand, London, UK; ‘DEAR’, Dyson Gallery, RCA Battersea, London (2019); ‘DAMNED IF I DO... DAMNED IF I DON’T’ for Open Space’s: Of Hosts & Guests, Pushkin House, London (2019); ‘FBA Futures Exhibition’, Mall Galleries, London (2019); ‘SURGE’, East Wing Biennial 13, Courtauld Institute of Art, London (2018); ‘YOUNG GUNS’, Sulger-Buel Lovell Gallery, London (2018); ‘Open House CCA’, Delfina Foundation, London (2017); ‘What is your local word for ‘Smile?’’, ArtXanady’s Pop-up Gallery, Labone, Ghana (2016); and ‘The Gown Must Go To Town’, Museum of Science and Technology, Accra (2015).

## About the Curator Katherine Finerty

(b. New York City, lives and works in London)

Katherine Finerty is an Independent Curator, Writer, and Educator focusing on research-based and socially engaged practices, trans-local identity politics, and global contemporary art. She is currently Project Curator in International Partnerships at Tate. Recent work experiences include Strategic Partnerships Consultant for Pace Gallery, Curator & Communications Manager at the The Showroom, London, and Curatorial Assistant to Elvira Dysngani Ose for GIBCA 2015 (Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art). Finerty has a Curating Masters from the Royal College of Art, London; and received a BA in History of Art studying at Cornell University, New York, and University of Cambridge. Her independent curatorial projects focus on immersive installations and audience participation that connect art to everyday life, as exhibited in previous Gallery 1957 solo shows by artists Modupeola Fadugba, Gideon Appah, and Araba Opoku.

## About Gallery 1957

Gallery 1957 is a contemporary art gallery with spaces across Accra, Ghana and London, UK.

It dedicates its programme to spearheading international exchanges between art practices from these communities and the rest of the world, presenting artists who interrogate concepts of belonging and identity, cultural exchange, and social history beyond Western narratives.

Launched by Marwan Zakhem in 2016 on Ghanaian Independence Day, Gallery 1957 has since expanded across three gallery spaces in Accra. Originally set up to promote Ghana and West Africa’s presence in the arts scene, it now encompasses the Global South and its diaspora. Gallery 1957’s London space opened in October 2020, providing a further platform for artists to build dialogues with its growing network of international collaborators.

Gallery 1957 presents exhibitions, installations, and performances by celebrated artists, fostering connections between local and international audiences. The Gallery’s global gallery partnerships and ongoing artist residency program have attracted numerous international artists and arts professionals to Ghana. The Gallery’s annual Cultural Week in September serves as a platform for encouraging deeper engagement with Ghana’s vibrant contemporary art scene.

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# Gallery

In 2021, Gallery 1957 launched the Yaa Asantewaa Art Prize for female Ghanaian artists, the first ever dedicated art prize of its kind. The prize aims to further strengthen the gallery's commitment to supporting and promoting emerging and established artists.

Gallery 1957's work expands beyond the gallery walls through a public programme that includes local and international art fairs, talks, off-site projects, and site-specific installations as well as the publication of books and catalogues – continuously supporting cultural initiatives in Ghana, Africa and beyond.

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Title: Mastery might be a long way off, but the flow state induced by floristry is profoundly rewarding

Dates: 14<sup>th</sup> December 2023 – 25<sup>th</sup> January 2024

Opening Reception: 14<sup>th</sup> December 2023, 6pm-9pm

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