

Godfried Donkor

The First Day of the Yam Custom: 1817

Curated by Koyo Kouoh

20 August - 30 October 2017



Thomas Bowdich, *The First Day of the Yam Custom*, 1818, Coloured Aquatint, 215 x 725 mm, © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.

This summer, Gallery 1957 hosts a major solo exhibition by Godfried Donkor featuring a new body of work created in Ghana, and curated by Koyo Kouoh. With a career spanning almost three decades, Donkor's complex and multi-layered portrayals of historical events combine reality and fiction through collage, painting, drawing and photography.

Born in Ghana, Donkor studied across Europe before settling in the UK. Working across continents and cultures, his sociological explorations consider the shared histories of Africans and Europeans. Donkor has exhibited widely at museums and biennials internationally, including most recently at *Afriques Capitales* - curated by Simon Njami at La Villette, Paris, 2017 - and EVA International - Ireland's Biennial curated by Koyo Kouoh, Limerick, 2016.

The artist's new body of work reimagines an illustration by the 19th century English explorer Thomas Bowdich, now held in the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London and thought to be the first recorded image of the visual aesthetic and culture of the Asante region of Ghana. Created in 1818, *The First Day of the Yam Custom* depicts a procession from the annual Asante yam festival in Kumasi, an event held to mark the first harvest of yams during the autumn season. Sent to West Africa by the Royal African Company - a British commerce

corporation - Bowdich was employed to negotiate a treaty with the king of the Asante region: Osei Bonsu. Bowdich's image, and verbal description of the 1817 procession, was documented in his resulting publication, *Mission From Cape Coast Castle to Asantee*.

Using installation, painting and collage on board, Donkor's exhibition will reinterpret this scene on a life-size scale. The exhibition follows the artist's 4 month residency in Ghana with Gallery 1957.

About Godfried Donkor

Born in 1964 in Kumasi, Ghana, Godfried Donkor grew up in Europe and studied at Central St Martins and SOAS in London and Escolla Massana in Barcelona, earning his B.A. in 1989 and M.A. in 1995.

Since the 1990s, Donkor has exhibited widely throughout the world especially in Africa, Europe and the United States. Selected group and solo exhibitions include: *Afriques Capitales*, La Villette, Paris (2017); EVA International - Ireland's Biennial (2016); *Conversations: African and African American Artworks in Dialogue*, Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, Washington D.C. (2014-16); *Speaking of People: Ebony, Jet and Contemporary Art*, Studio Museum, Harlem (2014 -15); *How far how near*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2014 -15); *Hollandaise*, Raw Material Company, Dakar (2013); *Black Germany*, Haus de Kunst, Munich (2012); *Trade and Empire: Remembering Slavery*, Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester (2007-08); *Abolition 07*, Hackney Museum, London (2007); *Around the World in 80 days*, ICA, London (2006); *Concerto in Light and Darkness no 1*, National Museum, Ghana (2005); *Pin Up*, Tate Modern, London (2004); Financial Times, Ecole Regionale des beaux Artes, Nantes (2004); *Whose Africa*, Horniman Museum, London (2000); 7th Havana Biennale, Havana (2000); *Wrestling and Mysticism*, Dak'Art 2000, Dakar (2000); and *Slave to Champ*, EMACA Visual Arts, Nottingham (1999).

Museum collections which hold works by the artist include The Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester; Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, Washington D.C.; National Collection of Senegal; World Bank collection, Washington D.C.; Art Omi, Ghent, New York; Unilever collection; University of Helsinki; and National Gallery of Botswana.

He has taught and lectured widely as universities globally including: University of the Arts London; Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi; University of Lancaster; Nottingham Trent University; Otis College of Art and Design, California; Art Center College of Design, California; U.C.L.A, California and Mills Collage, Oakland.

The artist has been awarded the Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio centre artist in residency fellowship for February 2018.

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For press information and images please contact:

Sophie Campos or Francesca Meale at Pelham Communications

Tel: +44 (0) 208 969 3959

Email: sophie@pelhamcommunications.com or
francesca@pelhamcommunications.com

Exhibition: Godfried Donkor, *The First Day of the Yam Custom: 1817*

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Address: Gallery 1957, Kempinski Hotel Gold Coast City, PMB 66 — Ministries,
Gamel Abdul Nasser Avenue, Ridge — Accra, Ghana