

Gallery 1957

Oliver Okolo

I Forgot to Tell You, Now Listen

Open 29 October - 27 November, 2021. Gallery I Accra, Ghana.
Opening Reception & Talks Programme 28 October, 2021.



OLIVER OKOLO, *Masquerade*, 2021. Oil, charcoal and collage on canvas, 48 x 60 in. Copyright the artist, courtesy Gallery 1957.

Gallery 1957 is delighted to present a new body of work by Oliver Okolo titled *I Forgot to Tell You, Now Listen*. Okolo, born in Suleja, Nigeria and now living and working in Abuja, Nigeria uses oil paint and charcoal and employs techniques of collage in his portraits. Okolo has been working alongside fellow artist and writer Oliver Enwonwu as curator of this exhibition.

Oliver Okolo has emerged as one of the most exciting artists working out of Nigeria today and is a central figure in a new vanguard whose portrayal of Black people in confident and assertive gaze, challenges and dismantles negative racial constructs and knowledge systems. The 20 mixed media works presented in *I Forgot to Tell You, Now Listen*—the title of Okolo's first solo exhibition at Gallery 1957 in Accra, Ghana—lend voice to this assertion. Individually powerful, they collectively form the thrust of the artist's "psychological introspection"¹, underscoring his present exploration of identity, ethnicity, status and the human condition. Significantly, they also build upon his earlier body of work 'Portraits of the Life

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Elizabeth Freeman', featured as part of a recent large-themed group exhibition with 15 other artists at the same gallery, to mark another milestone in its contributions to contemporary art developments on the continent.

I Forgot to Tell You, Now Listen, is strongly personal and of an intimate nature. In many ways, this series may be construed as revisionist, serving as a vehicle to articulate Okolo's notion of ethnicity and to include previously unknown but significant aspects of the artist's life and more importantly, his use of memorialisation as a tool for socio-cultural and political mediation. The artist summarises his aims for the exhibition as:

A need to reveal important details of my existence. I forgot to tell you that my Igbo heritage is interwoven with my contemporary way of life and consequently impacts on my thinking and creative process. Growing up, in Enu Avomini, Anambra, I questioned some of the cultural and socio-political norms and beliefs of *ndi* Igbo, accepting only a few. These personal opinions have moulded me into who I am today. I also forgot to share with you my perspective on the role tradition has played in shaping our mentality as Black people today and how culture has defined us as good or bad by improving or diminishing morality and humanity.²

Against this background, the exhibition can be interpreted clearly as Okolo's search for empirical truth in defining his reality. The title of the exhibition therefore becomes apt. It describes markedly, an increasing reflection upon his early childhood and how these formative years influenced his evolution as an artist.

This exhibition opens with an artist talk and reception at 6pm on 28th of October, 2021 in Gallery I, at Gallery 1957 Accra, Ghana. Open to the public from the 28th, the exhibition runs through 27th November, 2021.

About the artist

Oliver Okolo (b.1992) is intrigued by mysteries of the human figure as a unique work of nature. Oliver Okolo uses the human form to create artworks that talk about his opinions and views, and about the things he feels are neglected or not spoken about in his society. Continuing to feel the desire for artist growth, in 2016, he studied and worked in the atelier of Clement Nwafor, a master in painting and drawing.

About Oliver Enwonwu

Oliver Enwonwu is the president of the Society of Nigerian Artists, the umbrella professional body for all practising visual artists in Nigeria. Enwonwu holds a Master's degree with distinction from the University of Lagos, Nigeria. He comes from a long line of artists; his grandfather was a reputable traditional sculptor and his father Ben, widely celebrated as Africa's pioneer modernist. In his work, Oliver Enwonwu elevates Black culture to challenge racial injustice and systemic racism by celebrating the cultural, political and socio-economic achievements of Africans through an examination of African spirituality, Black identity and migration, contemporary African politics, Pan Africanism and the global Africa empowerment movement.

About Gallery 1957

Based in Accra, with a London outpost opened in 2020, Gallery 1957 has a curatorial focus on West Africa. Presenting a programme of exhibitions, installations and performances by the region's most significant artists, the gallery serves as a vital platform, promoting West Africa's presence within the art scene by hosting ambitious exhibitions, providing resources for residencies and participating in international art

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fairs. Founded by Marwan Zakhem in 2016, Gallery 1957 has evolved from over 15 years of private collecting. The gallery now hosts three spaces in Accra – one in the Kempinski Hotel and two in the Galleria Mall – and a London outpost in Hyde Park Gate.

Artist: Oliver Okolo

Title: *I Forgot to Tell You, Now Listen*

Dates: 29 October - 27th November, 2021

Artist Talk and Opening Reception: 28th October, 2021 - 6pm

Address: Gallery 1957, space I

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