

## Yaw Owusu: *All That Glitters*

Curated by Osei Bonsu

10 June - 31 July



Yaw Owusu, © the artist, courtesy Gallery 1957, Accra, photo by Nii Odzenma

Gallery 1957 is proud to present an exhibition of new works by Ghanaian artist Yaw Owusu from 1 June - 31 July, marking the artist's first solo exhibition. Through his socially engaged and visually rich practice, Owusu questions the failures of Ghana's ongoing infrastructural development.

Owusu creates sculptural installations that repurpose found objects, shifting the value of otherwise worthless materials into things of beauty. Built from countless pieces of loose change known as "pesewa" coins, his work activates urgent questions around economic and political independence in contemporary Ghana. First introduced as an attempt to cure the country's economy's inflation in 2007, these small copper coins have almost no value in today's financial climate, enabling the artist to use them as a primary material. Typical of Owusu's approach to working with local agencies to develop his work, the artist has acquired the coins by negotiating with The Central Bank of Ghana - the only bank to still distribute the pesewa - a bureaucratic process that is important to the artist's practice.

In this new body of work, Owusu transforms devalued coins into detailed map-like surfaces. These works oscillate between notions of past and present, simultaneously referencing old colonial maps - a nod towards the economic power structures drawn by history - whilst also suggesting alternative typographies for potential resourceful futures. Although the material itself is inseparable from the failure of socio-economic structures in Ghana, the artist's playful approach

is rooted in a sense of alchemy that embraces the complexity of notions of value, exchange and locality in an increasingly global environment.

Owusu's sculptures can incorporate as many as 24,000 coins. The bronzed coins undergo various natural and chemical treatments related to the types of commerce prevalent across Ghana, a process enacted by the artist to mimic the effects of trade and time which would usually alter the appearance of exchanged currency; Owusu treats the coins with salt, for example, to reflect the south coast's fishing industry, or vinegar to reference the agricultural industries of the mid and eastern regions of Ghana. Fixed onto wooden panels, draped over walls or loosely hanging onto surfaces to form a camouflage, the installations reflect on the complex processes that demarcate Ghana's social and political systems. Like the economy itself, the sculptures are seemingly robust, however the coins are in fact in a continual state of flux, reacting or moving with their surroundings.

Yaw Owusu (b.1992) lives and works in Accra. He studied at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi, graduating with a BA Fine Arts degree in 2016. His works have been included in exhibitions including: *16:16 The Collection*, Gallery 1957 (2016); *Cornfields in Accra*, Museum of Science and Technology, Accra (2016); *Spirit Robot*, Chale Wote Street Art Festival, Jamestown, Accra (2016); *Silence Between the Lines*, Prime Motors Showroom, Kumasi (2015); *The Gown Must Go To Town*, Museum of Science and Technology, Accra (2015). In 2016, Owusu undertook a three month residency at Galerie 102, Berlin. His work is the permanent collection of Musée d'Art Contemporain Africain Al Maaden (MACAAL), Marrakech.

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**Exhibition:** Yaw Owusu: *All that Glitters*

**Dates:** 10 June - 31 July 2017

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