

## *The Journey*

Annan Affotey

Gallery 1957, London

October 12th – December 1st, 2022



Annan Affotey, *Three of a Kind*, 2022, Acrylic, charcoal pencil and modelling paste on canvas, 365.76 x 274.32cm, Copyright the Artist, Courtesy Gallery 1957.

Gallery 1957 is pleased to present *The Journey*, a new solo exhibition by Oxford-based Ghanaian artist Annan Affotey (b. 1985, Ghana), running October 12th – December 1st, 2022, at the gallery's UK location.

Following on from the artist's debut solo show *Ghanatta Strong* in Accra last year, this seminal exhibition expands upon Affotey's love of portraiture painting by looking back to past techniques that have made him into the artist he is today. This new, ambitious body of work figures itself as a kind of self-portrait, or early retrospective, bringing together creative practices and distinct people contributing to Affotey's journey as an artist, father, and storyteller. From found family to social media muses, the figures populating Affotey's canvases take us on a Journey through living rooms and lyrical landscapes, welcoming

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spaces with a touch of the uncanny. *The Journey* deftly employs the Ghanaian ideology of ‘Sankofa’ – looking back to move forward – by collecting past skill sets, characters, and settings to create new worlds that are at once profoundly personal yet belong to all. “*My journey has had many chapters,*” the artist reflects, “*All of which have shaped who I am today. All people face a journey no matter who they are. This new body of work celebrates the people, past and present, who are part of my journey and who have shaped my artistry.*”

Whilst Affotey practised art from a young age, he came to a particularly productive creative crossroads at the Ghanatta College of Art and Design in Accra, the recently closed and beloved art school where many illustrious Ghanaian artists have hailed from. This creative community provides a strong source of kinship and inspiration for the artist, who remains close to many of his influential peers alongside supporting emerging artists embarking upon their professional artistic journeys. In addition to the family Affotey established during his time at Ghanatta, a robust and comprehensive training profoundly informs his evolving visual vernacular.

Affotey’s portraits call out to you with profound familiarity. There are four key elements that comprise his signature style: a cool, teal-tinted black skin tone; tenderly applied textures of modelling paste with a palette knife and personal comb; penetrating, saturated eyes ranging from light pink to deep red; and a white, unpainted element. Affotey always starts and finishes a painting with the eyes, their distinctive hues harking back to the artist’s experience of having his identity and lifestyle misinterpreted when moving to the States – a legacy of looking different. Whilst these penetrating orbs serve as tools that invite viewers to engage deeply with his subjects, it is ultimately the unfinished elements of his works, the voids, through which Affotey asks us a question, enabling us to be a part of and complete the painting.

Turning back to his Ghanatta roots, however, this current body of work also employs the breadth of technical art and design training the artist and his fellow peers mastered, including landscapes, abstract, semi-abstract, still lives, calligraphy, and graphics alongside the popularly admired representative qualities of portraiture. Affotey relishes in bringing all these styles together alongside newfound techniques, creating flat backgrounds where figurative subjects are outlined by embellished wallpaper-like stencils – physical depth making space for psychological possibilities. For the artist, this is a practice of holding himself creatively accountable, turning to the past to evolve the present and pave way for what’s next.

The closer we look the more stylistic secrets we’ll find, from abstract sections hiding behind windows and under couches to ubiquitous unfinished limbs – connected through a united abyss. The tenderness employed to depict this community of portraits in Affotey’s *Journey* carries a distinctly corporeal element, as he literally combs through the paint – taking care of loved ones through texture. The artist renders his family as familiar. In the painting *Chloe* we are transported into the physical space of Gallery 1957 London where, in addition to housing *The Journey*, Affotey recently exhibited in the group show *The Storytellers* this past summer. It was at this exhibition that the artist met a young Ghanaian finance analyst based

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in the UK. In a materially meta gesture, we are now greeted by the stylish, serene Chloe, leaning against the gallery door amongst other admired guests including artist Dr. Mimi Adu-Serwaah, comfortably deep in conversation. In keeping with his community-orientated conviviality, Affotey reunited with Chloe during his recent residency in Accra, where he asked his new friend to wear the same striking dress. For those attending the opening reception, this aesthetic echo will not just be a visual treat, but also an ironically inclusive inside joke.

By personalising his process, Affotey creates art that effortlessly imitates life, enabling life to genuinely imitate art. This sense of fantasy born out of reality is also embodied by the presence of the artist's largest canvas to date: a landscape painting featuring the artist's friend Paul from Wisconsin and his pet dog alongside a muse from Instagram with rose tinted tips and internet-sourced cats. The two free-standing figures, at once apart and allied in their stances, look straight out at us, complacent on their path, forming the artist's intimate yet enigmatic Journey. This poignant, make-believe meeting of men is set in a lush, imagined landscape standing at 12 by 7.5 feet – the exact measurements of the wall in Affotey's studio in Oxford. This scale is a gesture to bring his house into the gallery, and thereby us into the artist's home.

Annan Affotey's personal and creative Journey is thus not only a visual narrative, but moreover a personal and communal collection. It is a collection of people he loves intimately and those he's clicked with digitally; folklore he grew up hearing and stories he enduringly fabricates; landscapes from Accra, Oxford, and hybrids in-between, all born out of the artist's imaginations through time and place. In this new body of work, techniques from Affotey's early art school days amalgamate with brand-new multimedia experiments, creating a visual language familiar yet in flux. His techniques, as in his experiences, herald from home and away. By summoning the textures, characters, passages, and possibilities from his past, Annan shares with us a Journey that we're invited to embark upon together, paving ways for what's to come.

Text by Curator Katherine Finerty

## About the Artist

Born in Accra, Ghana to an artist father who inspired an early interest in creative expression, Affotey spent his early life in this city before moving to Milwaukee, USA to live there for five years before setting up a more permanent abode in Oxford, UK. Deeply affected by the people he observed around him as well as the social reactions to these figures, Affotey took to art to represent the complexity of the worlds he observed. After graduating from Ghanatta College of Art and Design, in Accra, where he won the Best Student of Still Life, Best Imagination and Composition, and Best Abstract Drawing awards, Affotey devoted himself to the life of a professional artist. He has had solo exhibitions at venues such as Ronchini Gallery, UK, The Cabin, USA, Gallery 1957, Ghana, and DeBuck Gallery, France, as well as being included in numerous group shows internationally. Most recently, Affotey was approached by Tommy Hilfiger to collaborate on the TommyXRomeo Mural Project in London, UK.

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## About Gallery 1957

Based in Accra, with a London outpost opened in 2020, Gallery 1957 has a curatorial focus on Africa and its diaspora. Presenting a programme of exhibitions, installations, and performances by the continent's most significant artists, the gallery serves as a vital platform for promoting Africa's presence within the art scene by hosting ambitious exhibitions, providing resources for residencies, launching the Yaa Asantewaa Prize to support women artists in Ghana and its diaspora, and participating in international art fairs. Founded by Marwan Zakhem in 2016 with an initial focus on supporting the West African arts scene, Gallery 1957 has since expanded to collaborate with leading artists globally, and now operates three spaces in Accra – one in the Kempinski Hotel and two in Galleria Mall – and a London gallery in Hyde Park Gate.

**Title:** *The Journey*

**Artist:** Annan Affotey

**Dates:** October 12<sup>th</sup> – November 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022

**Opening Reception:** Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> October, 2022

Walkthrough with artist and curator Katherine Finerty at 5:30pm

Drinks from 6-9 pm

**Address:**

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