

## PRESS RELEASE

Daniel Arnan Quarshie

*Sympathetic Magic*

April 7th – May 19th, 2023, Gallery III, Accra, Ghana



*Lokko (detail)*, 2023, Charcoal and pastel on wood, 50.8 x 60.96cm.  
Image courtesy of the artist and Gallery 1957

Gallery 1957 is proud to present Daniel Arnan Quarshie's first solo exhibition *Sympathetic Magic*; a title that reflects in its dichotomy the dramatic beauty that is captured in Quarshie's artworks. Quarshie's artworks immortalise memories by creating a suspended space that holds yesterday together with today and tomorrow. In *Sympathy*, we find a melancholic portrait of intimacy and

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celebration of life. Quarshie's elaboration of old family photo albums narrate the tenderness of lives passing through time and space, captured through marriages, religious events, and ceremonial gatherings familiar to most Ghanaians. In *The Magical* is the artist's attempt to transform these memories into monuments. To convey, through his drawings, a cathartic experience of revival, of bringing back who was once lost and is to be found again.

In his renditions of time, past, present and future are merged over the surface through a signature use of dramatic chiaroscuro rendered in a hyper-contemporary use of charcoal. Charcoal -the artist's best companion and source of continuous experimentation- breathes into the work a life of its own, shines into the work a light of his own. The medium adopted by Quarshie is moving, captivating and charismatic. In the artist's own words, it "makes the work something other than just real". Through the use of black and white, Quarshie is able to set up the perfect stage for a personal interpretation of Italian baroque's biblical paintings, emulating a deep and dramatic Caravaggesque approach to light to complement the religious references in his work.

Quarshie's process starts from original, carefully selected, analogue photographs, scouted from his own family albums or borrowed from his friends' and family connection's archives. He is most interested in moments of "epic normality", snippets of ordinary lives following their course through small events, such as the domestic ritual of watching a movie at home or an attempt to immortalise a son taking his first steps.

He then alters the image digitally by playing with contrasts and levels to obtain the critical point between black and white he is looking for. Once edited, the image is drawn with charcoal onto the wooden surface, previously primed in bright white, or lately also in sepia. At last, Quarshie removes. He erases the charcoal's blackness to leave and model agitated marks all over the work. This subtraction, that the artist defines as a "sculptural approach to drawing", takes great inspiration from Robert Longo's practice. It is about finding a relation with the material that allows less control yet maintaining control. On this exploration of the brushworks Quarshie says: "I want to draw like I sign my name".

Quarshie's father was a Minister of the Ghanaian Church of Pentecost. The large tryptic *Benediction* exhibited in the show is dedicated to his life and duties as the artist depicts him in the act of blessing the newlywed couples of his district. Quarshie was only eight years old when his father passed. The mourning of this loss is manifested through every facet of the artist's making of art; from the extensive research for historical documents in the family and church's archives to the piecing back together of these images, in all their grandeur. The artist's choice to physically fragment many of the works exhibited -including this tryptic- by using many wood panels, alludes to a desire to piece together fragments of his own history and memory.

This idea of "collages of memories" takes a more surreal visual language in the ten large canvases exhibited in the show. Each work is dedicated to a single subject who has passed away, whom Quarshie captures in different episodes in the character's journey. The artist uses a recurrent compositional solution, like for instance *Auntie Yaa*, where the upper part of the work is inhabited by larger scale figures, while the bottom section sees the crowding of smaller characters. The collages of figures are a harmonious interplay of scale, transparencies and juxtapositions that makes the experience of the many subjects portrayed coherent and circular, never suffocated. Quarshie's abstraction develops further in the works *Uncle Joe* and *Breman Jamra*, where figures are not only subjected to plays of repetition and transparency but also overturned upside down in the composition.

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One cannot help but wonder if this series' aesthetic showcasing enlarged faces, isn't somewhat referencing the very recurrent use, in Ghanaian traditional culture, of posters hanged outside family houses to announce, and mourn, the loss of a family member to the neighbourhood.

The interior spaces drawn in Quarshie's backgrounds encourage the viewer to come and take a seat. These canvases, as for the entire body of work, are an invitation to a shared moment of intimacy. Quarshie offers an equally interactive and intimate way of experiencing the work through his installation, which re-creates old family photos displayed on the shelves of someone's home. Quarshie was inspired by the works of Dayanita Singh and Christian Boltanski when piling up his works on black shelves and demanding the viewer's participation.

In this series of smaller works begins the artist's alternation of black and white with sepia. The earthy and nostalgic tone of sepia that Quarshie uses is reminiscent of the shade that he and his family used a couple of years back to paint the exterior of their house in Cape Coast. It reminds him of clay, which in turn, reminds him of the biblical passage "From dust, we come and to dust, we shall return". Ashes to ashes; from God forming us with clay, to our bodies being buried back into that same clay, into the deep grounds of Earth.

This alternation of colour is also manifested in his second installation, a diptych exhibited on a large stand as we enter the second room in the gallery space. Whilst building this structure, Quarshie was inspired by the way tiles are typically displayed and sold in the streets of Kumasi on big triangular stands in geometrical patterns.

The work's strongly symbolic name *Efiekuma Newsite*, is the location in Takoradi where Quarshie's parents were married and encloses the work's core meaning. Both sides of the stand tell the tale of his parents' wedding, like vignettes in a story board. The couple is first captured sitting down, listening attentively to the minister's words of advice after having proclaimed their vows, and later, in the blasting moment of exiting church, led by the dancing flower girls and laughter of relief.

The artist's *sympathetic* attitude in drawing these figures and envisioning this exhibition is driven by his desire to meet his own lost ones again and generate a space of *magical* encounter that transcends the here and now. The making of these works is thus a process of healing and reparation in which Quarshie pushes drawing in new directions to preserve, hold, continue and immortalise these people's lives through memorialisation.

Thomas McEvelley defined *Sympathetic Magic*<sup>1</sup> as "an attempt to obtain something by ritually presenting something else that is in some way like the thing that is desired". The artist's desire to meet his lost ones is manifested in the act of drawing such to encounter.

The exhibition thus creates a space of suspension for the transfixed, a physical presence to a spiritual space. It is about the existence of an afterlife, about people existing in other forms, other realms. In all, *Sympathetic Magic* is an image of Ghana and its intrinsic cultural desire to celebrate all stages of life including "transitioning" into other places.

—Curatorial essay by Angelica Litta Modignani

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<sup>1</sup> Brian O' Doherty, *Inside the White Cube the Ideology of the Gallery Space*, The Lapis Press, 1986.

## About the artist

(b.1995, Ghana. Lives and works in between Accra and Kumasi)

Daniel Arnan Quarshie uses his artistic practice as an attempt to redefine the drawing medium such that it matches up to other media like painting and sculpture. Through the medium of charcoal on a variety of supports such as plywood, paper and canvas, Quarshie employs his personal memories, feelings and experiences as a point of departure in engaging social and political themes, and general questions in art. Quarshie completed a Bachelor's degree in Fine Art in KNUST (Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology), Kumasi, Ghana. He is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Fine Art. In 2022, the artist participated in Unlimited, Gallery 1957, Accra, Ghana alongside Amoako Bofo, Godfried Donkor, Joana Choumali, Araba Opoku, Gideon Appah and many others. In early 2023, the artist was awarded a residency with the gallery.

## 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 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: Daniel Arnan Quarshie

Title: *Sympathetic Magic*

Dates: 7th April – 19th May 2023

Opening Reception: Friday, 7th April, 2023, 6pm - 9pm

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