

Kwesi Botchway

The Sun Must Come Down

Curated by Azu Nwagbogu

7th to 12th October 2024

French Protestant Church

8-9 Soho Square, London W1D 3QD, UK



Apostle of the Sun (One), Oil on Canvas, 83 x 110 cm.
Image courtesy of the artist and Gallery 1957.

For an exceptional one-week special presentation in London this autumn, Ghanaian visual artist Kwesi Botchway (b.1994) presents new paintings entitled *The Sun Must Come Down*. The interdisciplinary experience will take place over one week in a French Protestant Church, invoking a sense of fellowship and community with a harmonising performance by London Community Gospel Choir at 7:30pm on the opening night on Monday 7th October. The exhibition is accompanied by a curatorial text by Azu Nwagbogu (attached below).

Renowned for his seamless fusion of French impressionism and African realism that exalts the Black portraiture, Botchway's poignant yet intense figures emerge from mountainous and mystical vistas. For the artist, the sun is omnipresent: an entity that unifies humanity and our experience of each passing day. His deeper concerns with his immediate environment are underwritten by sunset hues, potent yellows and earth tones which ground us in a universal encounter. Colours, Botchway believes, are characters much like the subjects of his paintings, and so each pigment is chosen with precise and calculated intention.

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Gallery 1957, I, II and III Accra
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& Galleria Mall
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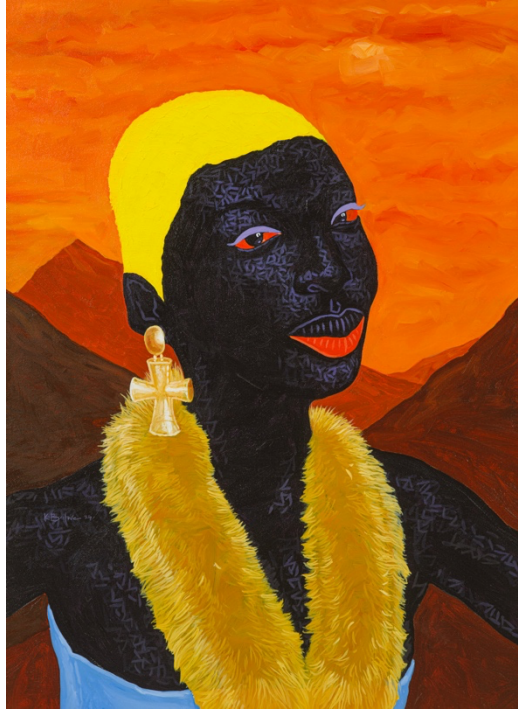
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The spatial undertones are an obvious evolution in Botchway's approach to composition and in this new body of work, we see a palpable shift in his schematics of the portrait tradition that summons poetic landscapes. Looking at religion through a more humanitarian, less nationalistic lens, Botchway invites his audiences to redefine divinity and reflect upon the duality of art and faith, iconography and identity, and an uncharted ethereal nature.



Cast the first Stone (Junia), Oil on Canvas, 83 x 110 cm.
Image courtesy of the artist and Gallery 1957.

***The Sun Must Come Down - Kwesi Botchway's new paintings* By Azu Nwagbogu**

Together, we rise from the ashes,
Under the sun's fierce and tender gaze.
Its heat sears, yet it gives life,
A force both terrible and rejuvenating.
In the crucible of its fire, we are forged,
Our pain melting into resilience,
Scars cauterized by its brilliant glow.
The burdens we carry grow lighter
As we share them beneath its radiant warmth.
The sun's radiance burns away despair,
And in its light, we find our strength.
Tears we've shed become rivers,
Flowing into an ocean of renewal,
Where hearts are ignited by unity,
And the warmth of collective healing.
As the sun rises, so do we,
Its light a beacon, guiding us home—
Reborn, we cast new shadows,
Together, we heal in the brilliance of a new dawn.

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The Sun Must Come Down marks a pivotal moment in the ongoing evolution of Kwesi Botchway's meteoric career, where his signature fusion of portraiture, storytelling, and celestial imagery takes on new layers of meaning. In this latest series, Botchway continues to explore the deep connection between individuals, communities, and the cosmic forces that shape our shared existence. His work speaks not only to personal narratives but also to the broader human condition, particularly in a world grappling with crisis, division, and turmoil.

At the heart of *The Sun Must Come Down* is the artist's poignant meditation on the sun as a symbol of life's cyclical and quotidian nature. The sun rises and sets, offering both light and darkness, but it is in the setting—the coming down—that Botchway finds profound significance. The sun's descent signals the time for rest, reflection, and respite from the intensity of daily life, a necessary pause for healing and renewal. Through this celestial metaphor, Botchway delves into the ways in which we, as individuals and as a collective, are often caught in cycles of judgment, prejudice, and persecution, while also longing for moments of peace, acceptance, and unity.

In this series, Botchway challenges these cycles, inviting us to consider our own roles in the systems that perpetuate bias and division. His works engage with themes of judgment and redemption, drawing on the enduring wisdom of religious and philosophical teachings. One of the most striking references in the exhibition comes from Botchway's piece *Cast the First Stone*, which pays homage and draws from the biblical narrative from the Gospel of John, chapter 8, where Jesus deflects the frenzied desire to condemn, castigate and murder by challenging those without sin to cast the first stone. This story serves as a reminder of the danger of self-righteousness and the importance of humility and compassion in the face of others' flaws. Botchway introduces a sharp yet playful commentary on contemporary religious practices with the larger scale canvases. *Holy Ground Crusade* is a satirical and humorously sardonic reflection on the proliferation of Pentecostal religious experiences in his home country, Ghana. The crusades promise an abundance of rewards both on Earth and in the afterlife to the faithful. Rather than adopting a cynical tone, Botchway rapturously engages with the subject, embracing the spectacle and fervour of these movements while also encouraging reflection on the nature of belief, community, and the commodification of salvation.

Visually, Botchway's paintings employ colour in ways that reflect the diversity and unity of community. Each shade and tone serves as a metaphor for individual identity, yet they blend together harmoniously, underscoring the notion that, despite our differences, we are all part of a greater whole. His use of vibrant, celestial hues suggests a cosmic connection between us, as though we are all under the same sun, subject to the same universal laws.

In *The Sun Must Come Down*, Botchway expands the scope of his previous works, which often centred around empowered Black subjects situated in mythological or fantastical settings. Here, his figures traverse a cosmic landscape, traveling between the Earth's surface and the outer reaches of the exosphere. The journey is both physical and metaphysical, as these ethereal beings ascend and descend, embodying the dualities of light and dark, elevation and grounding, action and stillness. Their movements are accompanied by a celestial symphony, a rhythmic pulse that binds them together through the braids of their hair—natural antennas that facilitate communion across space and time.

This cosmic pilgrimage speaks to the universality of human experience, reminding us that, like the sun, we too are part of a greater, interconnected cycle. Botchway's figures are not static; they are in constant motion, evolving and transforming as they move through the phases of life. Their ascension and descent mirror the ebb and flow of time, a reminder that we are all in a state of flux, yet bound together by our shared humanity.

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Botchway's work also engages with art history, offering a pointed commentary on how we, as a society, have historically treated moments of cosmic significance. While artists like Marc Chagall in *Joshua Stops the Sun* (1958) and John Martin in *Joshua Commanding the Sun to Stand Still upon Gibeon* (1816) depicted the halting of the sun to prolong acts of violence and conquest, Botchway subverts this narrative. In his vision, the sun is not a tool for war but a harbinger of peace. Its descent signals the end of conflict and the beginning of a new dawn, one in which rest and reflection take precedence over action and aggression.

Ultimately, *The Sun Must Come Down* is a call for unity, compassion, and introspection. It asks us to examine not only the world around us but also the worlds within us—the biases, judgments, and fears that shape our interactions with others. Through his visionary portraiture and celestial allegory, Kwesi Botchway offers a powerful message of hope and healing, reminding us that even as the sun sets, it also rises again, bringing with it the possibility of renewal and transformation.

- curatorial text by Azu Nwagbogu

About the Artist Kwesi Botchway

(b. 1994, Lives and works in Accra)

Kwesi Botchway lives and works in his city of birth which inspires his artistic representations of Black beauty, joy, and futurity. Botchway locates himself firmly in the Black Art genealogy, using his work to respond to anti-Blackness as experienced by Africans as well as those in far-flung African diasporas. Resonant across his work is the mission to represent Blackness beyond the limits of dominant narratives, representing its loveliness, vitality, and expansiveness.

Kwesi Botchway is the Founder of WorldFaze Art Studio in Accra, a studio and residency space focusing on supporting young local artists. This support for emerging talent is deeply inflected by his own introduction to painting through apprenticing with a Ghanaian street artist at a young age. He studied art at the Ghanatta College of Art and Design in Accra before enrolling at the Academy of Visual Arts in Frankfurt, Germany. He has held solo exhibitions in Denmark, Ghana, the UK, and Belgium, some resulting from his residency at Gallery 1957 in Ghana in 2020. Group exhibitions have featured his work across Ghana, South Africa, the UK, Germany, Denmark, Belgium, while he has been exhibited at fairs such as Art Brussel Week in 2021. Botchway was nominated for the GUBA Awards USA as an Influential Artist in 2019, and has received significant press attention, profiled by publications such as Vogue, Financial Times, Flash Art, The Art Newspaper, Stylist, ArtNews, and Frieze.

About Gallery 1957

Gallery 1957 is a contemporary art gallery with spaces across Accra, Ghana and London, UK.

It dedicates its programme to spearheading international exchanges between art practices from these communities and the rest of the world, presenting artists who interrogate concepts of belonging and identity, cultural exchange, and social history beyond Western narratives.

Launched by Marwan Zakhem in 2016 on Ghanaian Independence Day, Gallery 1957 has since expanded across three gallery spaces in Accra. Originally set up to promote Ghana and West Africa's presence in the arts scene, it now encompasses the Global South and its diaspora. Gallery 1957's London

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Gallery

space opened in October 2020, providing a further platform for artists to build dialogues with its growing network of international collaborators.

Gallery 1957 presents exhibitions, installations, and performances by celebrated artists, fostering connections between local and international audiences. The Gallery's global gallery partnerships and ongoing artist residency program have attracted numerous international artists and arts professionals to Ghana. The Gallery's annual Cultural Week in September serves as a platform for encouraging deeper engagement with Ghana's vibrant contemporary art scene.

In 2021, Gallery 1957 launched the Yaa Asantewaa Art Prize for female Ghanaian artists, the first ever dedicated art prize of its kind. The prize aims to further strengthen the gallery's commitment to supporting and promoting emerging and established artists.

Gallery 1957's work expands beyond the gallery walls through a public programme that includes local and international art fairs, talks, off-site projects, and site-specific installations as well as the publication of books and catalogues – continuously supporting cultural initiatives in Ghana, Africa and beyond.

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