



GALLERY OF AFRICAN ART
LONDON

Press Release

Ade “Àsikò” Okelarin

CONVERSATIONS + THE WOMAN CODE

27th April – 9th June 2018

The Gallery of African Art (GAFRA) is pleased to present **CONVERSATIONS + THE WOMAN CODE**, a solo exhibition featuring two series of stunning photographs by the Nigerian artist **Àsikò**.

Àsikò's conceptual photographs sensitize the viewer to the consequences of violence against women. The first half of the exhibition, '**Conversations**', is comprised of entrancing, but ominous portraits that depict differing types of violence and their impact on the female form. The second half, '**The Woman Code**', is a unique exploration into classic Adire indigo textiles of the Yoruba people of south-western Nigeria, and their female creators, by symbolically transposing Adire patterns onto human forms. Both projects showcase the parallel but contrasting impacts of patriarchal systems and womanhood in African societies.

To create '**Conversations**', Àsikò devoted two years to observation and research of violence against women and its confluence with West African culture. As he rediscovered these aspects of his heritage, Àsikò was impacted by a patriarchal system that uses culture as a tool to ensure its durability, by suppressing female expression and sexuality. In his images, flowers and plants serve as symbolic expressions of culture, representing beauty, fragility and destructive power, likened by Àsikò to the role of culture in other male-dominated societies.

Each image in both series is a symbolic representation of violence directed at women, its intersection with culture, while concurrently exploring its physical and psychological contours. Belying its artistic beauty, Àsikò's work contains undercurrents of repulsive acts of female gender violence and repression – genital mutilation, breast ironing, forced marriage, sexual slavery. Dancers and performance artists symbolize movement and disposition in his portrayals

of culture and how these influences intersect with these controlling rites and practices of patriarchal societies.

Àsikò introduces ‘**Conversations**’ thus:

“I used photography as my form of exploration, in conjunction with digital body painting to emphasise the effects of gender violence.”

The second collection, ‘**The Woman Code**’, contains conceptual images that transfer the complex motifs of the Adire textiles of Nigeria’s Yoruba community onto the female form, reflecting women’s stories, their beliefs and their pleasures.

Over time, Adire patterns have evolved as primary symbols of the resistance of Yoruba women to patriarchal rule. Traditionally, women in this society have not been allowed to express themselves in public, and some might argue that the status of many of them has not changed appreciably in modern Nigeria.

Through his images, Àsikò aims to restore the symbols to their truest origin, stripping them from the indigo fabric and projecting them onto the female form. The Yoruba women in his images wear their secrets openly and express them as they deem appropriate. Through the portraits in ‘**The Woman Code**’, Àsikò helps to demonstrate how the ingenuity of the Yoruba community has created both internationally-renowned artistic designs and a social movement.

About the Artist:

Born in London, in 1978, of Nigerian parents, **Ade “Àsikò” Okelarin** is a self-taught visual artist who expresses his ideas through photography and mixed media.

Following his birth, Àsikò spent his childhood years in Lagos and migrated back to London in 1995 as an adolescent. He attended Brighton University, graduating with a degree in chemistry. These days, he lives and works in London. The resulting mixture of cultures and disciplines continues to influence his work and helps inform his decisions as an artist.

Àsikò’s work straddles a middle ground between fantasy and reality, in response to his heritage and personal identity, and the combination of these traits with culture. His photographs resonate with emotions and elements of his past, exploring his roots as an African and his connection to the contemporary world he lives in.

“Photography for me is about inspiring conversation, on how I see myself in the world and how I interpret my African heritage”.

– Àsikò

His project, **'Layers'**, exhibited at London's Southbank Centre in March 2016, was featured on BBC television and in the Huffington Post. Àsikò's photographs have also been featured at the Truman Brewery (London), the Brunei Gallery (London) and many others. Another of his recent collections, **'Looks Like Me (Black Panther Portraits)'**, was profiled on Britain's Channel 4 television, and in Essence and Vogue magazines earlier this year. It was also exhibited at the British Film Institute.

Àsikò lives and works in London.

Credits:

Special thanks to Àsikò's team who helped create these works:

Muses: Anna Kay-Gayle, Abi Efunshile, Esie Mensah, Symara Templemen, Jess Louise, Kae Mae and Jاليا.

Make-up artist: Keisha Des Vignes, Halima Bepo and Neonvelvet

Floral artist: Cyril Tronchet

Styling: Nana and Afi Boateng

Assistant: Sandjena Barnes, Ola Demiji, and Adaeze Ihebom

Special thanks to:

Chief (Mrs.) Nike Davies-Okundaye whose Adire fabric is on display.

Àsikò would also like to thank Allyson-Aina Davies for her assistance.

Exhibition Information:

Private View: Thursday, 26th April 2018 | 6 – 8:30pm

Artist Talk: Saturday, 28th April 2018 | 2 - 4pm at GAFRA
'In conversation with Eliza Anyangwe and Sharon Obuobi

Exhibition: 27th April - 9th June 2018

Visitor Information:

Opening times: Monday – Friday, 10am - 6pm and Saturday, 11am - 5pm

Admission: FREE

Gallery of African Art (GAFRA)

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Nearest Underground Station: Green Park (Jubilee, Piccadilly and Victoria lines)

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