

# Thomas Erben Gallery



## **Oladélé Ajiboyé Bamgboyé** **Works from the '90s**

October 26 – December 16, 2023

Opens Thursday, October 26, 6 - 8:30pm

Thomas Erben Gallery is thrilled to present historically significant works from the '90s by British artist **Oladélé Ajiboyé Bamgboyé**.

The lens-based artist (b. 1963, Odo-Eku, Nigeria) is part of a group of Nigerian/ British artists - including Rotimi Fani-Kayode, Yinka Shonibare, Chris Ofili and the theoretician Olu Oguibe - who made their mark in London during that decade. Critically supported, Bamgboyé's work was included in Catherine David's *Documenta X* (1997) as well as many exhibitions foundational to the now central discourse around our relationship to "the Other", the history and lingering effects of colonialism, and a more expansive reading of Modernism. These include, among others, *In/Sight - African Photographers 1940 - Present*, Guggenheim (1996); *Johannesburg Biennale* (1997); *Die Anderen Modernen, Haus der Kulturen der Welt*, Berlin (1997); and *The Short Century*, MCA Chicago and traveling (2001).

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The exhibition is organized around three distinct yet interrelated bodies of work. A group of seven, large scale, silver gelatin photographs collectively titled *Defining Self Sufficiency* (1993) portrays the artist in his Glasgow kitchen. Unprecedented within the history of African self-portraiture, Bamgboyé comfortably photographs himself in the nude, multiple times present in his images with the use of overlaid exposures. Surrounded by his quotidian domesticity, the artist exudes a level of ease and content, countering our usual projections onto the “black male body”, while his manifold presence points towards a multiplicity of selves.

Similarly in *Celebrate* (1994), Bamgboyé choreographs his body in a series of eight, multiple exposed color photographs. Extending his movements using flowing bands of red, white and golden fabric, the artist creates fluid images of sensuality, joy and celebration, liquifying static ideas pertaining to social hierarchies, masculinity and blackness.

The video *The Hair or the Man* (1994) addresses our often subtle and benevolent attempts at defining an Other. *Niggers are Scared of Revolution*, a song by Umar Bin Hassan, opens “*Hair*” and continues throughout, interspersed with pulsating electronic sounds and the artist talking in German/English. We watch Bamgboyé undressing on a bed, stirring his dreadlocks – often read as a sign of sexual and physical prowess – or moving nakedly about in lush nature. Alternating scenes, shot in b/w, portray him closely, head shaven. Several text-blocks such as “Why Did I Shed the Sexy Locks” or “Self Recognition Can Equate Progression” point to the work’s content: “I experienced deep awakenings and resolution of identity when I visited home the first time since emigrating, which resulted in my cutting off the locks”, the artist states.

The gallery first included Bamgboyé in an exhibition in 1998, and presented solo shows in 2000 and 2002 with subsequent inclusions in group shows. After a self-imposed hiatus by the artist, we are now very excited to revisit Bamgboyé’s important contributions to contemporary postcolonial theory and criticism as it pertains to cultural, ethnographic, political, and economic processes and social conflicts.