

ADA \ CONTEMPORARY ART GALLERY PRESENTS  
*UNCHAINED: THE COTTON CANDY COWBOYS*  
February 10, 2022 – 20 March 2022

THE INAUGURAL SOLO EXHIBITION BY NIGERIAN ARTIST  
SAMUEL OLAYOMBO

Samuel Olayombo is a Nigerian figurative painter who creates vibrant, dramatic, large-scale canvases, of predominantly male portraits, that challenge gender normalcy and toxic masculinity.



[left] Samuel Olayombo in his studio, image courtesy Samuel Olayombo and ADA \ contemporary art gallery, [right], *Cherry Sheriff Django*, 84 x 60 inches, 2022, image courtesy Samuel Olayombo and ADA \ contemporary art gallery.

In Olayombo's inaugural exhibition titled *Unchained: The Cotton Candy Cowboys*, Black figures are clothed in an array of rose-coloured clothing and Stetsons, which the artist presents to discuss masculinity and societal gender assertions and associations. The pink clothing and background serve as an emblem of softness, kindness, nurturance, and compassion; qualities that are often thought of as feminine.

The works throughout the show build on crossing the boundaries of traditional masculinity. In sharp contrast to the dark skin, the pink colour scheme accentuates the figures and imagines the notion of men in pink from a fresh perspective. The Black male figures affirm the stoic strength of the Western cowboy archetype and yet unveils the sweet, delicate, and dynamic nature of masculinity. Even though the artist's figures appear to be posing and rigid, they seem carefree and light-hearted. Olayombo envisions his striking portraits as an effort to change representations of masculinity and shift ideas on what it means to be a man.

The dark palette-painted skin of Olayombo's cowboys pays homage to the body scarification culture of the Ife, a Yoruba tribe of Nigeria. In an attempt to reaffirm and replicate a controversial cultural ritual of diverse root explanations and spiritual significance.

*Unchained: The Cotton Candy Cowboys* positions the Black cowboy in our visual purview and assert visibility, grounded in the significant history that has gone underrepresented. The rich legacy of Black cowboys in the American West, according to historical literature, accounted for up to an estimated 25 percent of workers in the range-cattle industry from the 1860s to 1880s. The exhibition focuses on the cowboy hero as a Black gallant figure and subverts the early image of the American cowboy into one that is dynamically intersectional. Olayombo's robust manly subjects submerged in pink, foster freedom of expression, and translate into a staple of strength and confidence.

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## **Samuel Olayombo**

Samuel Olayombo (born 1991) is a Nigerian artist who studied fine and applied arts at the University of Benin. A lover of texture, Olayombo works with oils, acrylics, charcoal, and pastels to create vibrant, dramatic, large-scale canvases of predominately male, non-gender normative portraits. Using a palette knife to convey intricate, 3-dimensional skin textures, Olayombo pays homage to classic artists such as Vincent Van Gough and Arja Valimaki in his work. His fascination with 'scarring' prevalent in certain Yoruba cultures as well as toxic masculinity, macho male culture and constructs of sexuality, gender roles and gender equality are the key narratives Olayombo explores within his compositions.

### **About ADA \ contemporary art gallery:**

Based in Accra, Ghana, ADA \ contemporary art gallery specializes in the work of emerging artists across Africa and its diaspora. Established in 2020 by contemporary African art advisor Adora Mba, ADA is committed to nurturing Ghana and the continent's contemporary art community and to fostering its ties and influence amongst global audiences.

Highlighting individual early career artistic practices, the gallery's program includes dedicated solo exhibitions; offsite projects and exhibitions; site-specific commissions; talks; creative partnerships and philanthropic activities with local actors; and international art fairs.

Previous exhibitions include the sold-out solo shows of emerging Nigerian artists Collins Obijiaku (Gindin Mangoro: Under the Mango Tree, October 15 – November 19, 2020), Eniwaye Oluwaseyi (The Politics of Shared Spaces, November 27, 2020 – January 10, 2021); and rising South African star Zandile Tshabalala (Enter Paradise, March 4 – April 30, 2021).

ADA \ contemporary art gallery

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