

ADA CONTEMPORARY ART GALLERY PRESENTS
THE POWER OF PLAY AND BORDERLINE BATTLES
A SOLO EXHIBITION BY AYOBOLA KEKERE-EKUN
11 AUGUST – 01 October 2023

ADA contemporary art gallery is pleased to present *The Power of Play and Borderline Battles*, a solo exhibition by Nigerian artist, Ayobola Kekere-Ekun (b.1993).



Ayobola Kekere-Ekun, *Nightmare Fuel*, mixed media, 2023

“This body of work signifies a personal deliverance for me. There is a Yoruba proverb that I find myself clinging onto more and more over the years, “Tí wọn bá bí ẹ, iwọ na ma tún ara ẹ bí” which is translated as: “You are born, but you also have to give birth to yourself.”

It is these words that have helped me to understand that we are dealt the cards we are dealt, however, there is a crucial point where we must decide how to live our lives in spite of all that has happened. A big part of my reclamation process has been bravery, in a very literal sense, and these artworks continue to remind me that I am strong by still being here.”

- Ayobola Kekere-Ekun

On view from 11 August 2023, Ayobola Kekere-Ekun presents 14 intricately quilled compositions that examine and tackle childhood traumas emerging victorious. She plays with notions of concealment and empowerment with her use of Ankara fabrics while clean lines and bright, pastel colours reference the illumination of her nightmares. Ayobola's pieces also refer to gender, mythology, power and the human condition in a multi-layered way.

In *The Power of Play and Borderline Battles*, the artist pays homage to mythological tales of fantasy such as the *Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Lord of the Rings* novels connecting her audience to a glimpse of her personal escapism during her darkest days. Ayobola's early art education and childhood trauma are inextricably intertwined: the duality of harm and fear with freedom and salvation add a distinct emotional depth to her practice. Each work is a testament to Ayobola's skill in the laborious method of quilling as hundreds of meticulously cut, folded and rolled strips of paper, fabric and canvas form the striking, large-eyed, child-like subjects.

The body of work is a series of validations to Ayobola's aptitude for subverting expectations. The physicality and visual nature of her work draws the audience into the glossy imagery and it is only after intentionally engaging with it that one understands the heavy subject matter. The material equally compels the audience to dig deeper to make sense of the work, to view a mundane universal substance such as paper, in a new light. This triggers the reconsideration of what we think we know, and how we think we know it, much like entering a closet expecting only clothing but emerging in another world.

Ayobola's refusal to compromise her creative vision is evident in her consistently playful and maximalist approach to crafting personal visual narratives. The youthful exuberance from her days of epic sprawling play battles with her brother still linger; the audience experiences it in the signature glint in the eye of every character. This is the final touch that activates the magic, and gives the animated figures life and personality.

As Ayobola has matured, the monsters under her bed have faded yet she remains dauntless in the pursuit of telling of her life story. *The Power of Play and Borderline Battles* was made for such a time as this; it invites the audience to take solace in the knowledge that the nightmares have lost their power, find mutual vulnerability in the captivating eyes of her characters and leave emboldened.

The exhibition is on view until 01 October 2023.

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ABOUT AYOBOLA KEKERE-EKUN

Ayobola Kekere-Ekun (b. 1993) is a contemporary visual artist. She was born in Lagos, Nigeria. Her B.A. and M.A. in Visual Arts were received from the Department of Creative Arts, University of Lagos; where she majored in Graphic Design. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Art and Design at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa.

Her work explores subjects connected to gender, mythology, power and the human condition in a multi-layered way; creating work through labour-intensive processes. Ayobola works predominantly with a technique known as quilling, in which strips of paper are individually shaped to create forms. She tends to quill with a variety of materials. Ayobola views the technique as a three-dimensional manifestation of lines, creating pockets of light and shadow. For her, the intricacy of her work is a visual metaphor of the complexity of the subject matter she engages with. Her artistic practice is heavily informed by personal experiences and observations.

ABOUT ADA CONTEMPORARY ART GALLERY

ADA contemporary art gallery, based in Accra, Ghana, specialises in the work of emerging artists across Africa and its diaspora. Established in 2020 by modern African art advisor Adora Mba, ADA is committed to nurturing Ghana and the continent's contemporary art community and 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; philanthropic activities with local actors; and international art fairs.

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