

# ADA Contemporary The Sound of Our Souls

November 17–December 9, 2023

Opening Reception: Friday, November 17, 6–8 p.m.



Presented at UTA Artist Space, Beverly Hills

403 Foothill Rd, Beverly Hills, CA 90210

10 a.m.– 5 p.m. Tuesday through Friday and 11 a.m.–4 p.m. on Saturdays



**(Beverly Hills, CA–November 2, 2023) –**

**UTA Artist Space** is pleased to present “The Sound of Our Souls,” an exhibition curated by Adora Mba, Founder and Director of ADA Contemporary Art Gallery based in Accra, Ghana. This exhibition is an extension of UTA Artist Space Beverly Hills’ ongoing mission to provide a platform for paradigm-shifting gallerists who may not have a physical presence in Los Angeles.

On view from November 17– December 9, 2023, “The Sound of Our Souls” is comprised of 15 emerging artists from the African continent, all showing in California for the first time. At a time when the international gaze is excitedly looking upon these young creative talents, the exhibition aims to present their proud and unapologetic voices and stories.

“The Sound of Our Souls’ wants us to question what is beyond the canvas. What is the artist’s story? Who are they beyond the paint and their craft? What do they wish to share and impart? It is a vulnerable task for those who dare to create. So now that they have been seen, they demand to be heard and understood,” said Adora Mba, Curator and Founder and Director of ADA Contemporary Art Gallery based in Accra, Ghana.

A powerhouse in the international arts space, Mba is helping to foster the careers of the next generation of African artists. She became aware of the local creative industry’s undiscovered yet considerable potential to resonate with a global audience. In 2017, she launched The Afropolitan Collector, an art advisory platform specialized in acquiring, cultivating, and promoting contemporary art and design from Africa and its global diasporas. In parallel, Mba introduced The Collector Series, an initiative bringing together global collectors of contemporary African art eager to uncover new talent on the continent, before founding ADA in 2020.

“The Sound of Our Souls” includes **Barry Yusuf**, a Nigerian artist known for his rapid climb to success from his presentations with various galleries at 1-54 Contemporary Art Fair in New York and London, Frieze Art Fair, Untitled Miami Beach, and more. Yusuf works with charcoal drawing techniques and boldly colored acrylic paints to create works that reflect both a deep-rooted faith and an intense desire to elevate the image of African men and women in art, fostering an evolution of Africanness. Informed by a deep commitment to reimagining and re-orientating Black identity in the canons of history, religion, and Western art, **Boluwatife Oyediran’s** paintings question the human gaze and established norms around sexuality, identity, and power, injecting fresh perspectives and alternative narratives.

Artist and designer **Isaac Nana Akwasi Opoku** is influenced by Afrofuturism and Surrealism. His work combines diverse African philosophies and symbology to present new futurist spaces as an alternative to outdated knowledge. Nigerian artist, **Samuel Olayombo** is a lover of texture and works with oils, acrylics, charcoal, and pastels to create vibrant, dramatic, large-scale canvases of predominately male, non-gender normative portraits. Growing up with five sisters in a patriarchal society has had a profound impact on Olayombo’s choice of color tones preferring traditionally “female” colors, like rose and pastel pinks, to depict his seemingly “brute” masculine subjects like his notable Cowboy series. Tapping into topics of beauty, sensuality, and the relationship between the black female body and landscape **Zandile Tshabalala** draws on topics of representation, particularly the representation of Black women in historical paintings – challenging these ideas and giving back the Black women’s voice depicted in the background or placed in comprising situations that reinforce the idea that the black women is inferior and should be marginalized.

A complete list of exhibiting artists includes Ayobola Kekere-Ekun, Barry Yusufu, Boluwatife Oyediran, Deborah Segun, Eniwaye Oluwaseyi, Emeka Maduka, Ekene Abdur Rahman Muhammad, Gabriel Tendai Choto, Isaac Nana Akwasi Opoku, Ishmael Armah, Khia Poitier, Ousmane Bâ, Samuel Olayombo, Youssra Raouchi, and Zandile Tshabalala.

“Adora Mba is a trailblazer and has brought such innovation to the international contemporary art world. She has been a significant part of supporting the curation of my personal collection, and many others, so I’m thrilled we’re able to come together to spotlight these incredible and deserving young African artists. With UTA Artist Space’s ongoing mission to support those making an impact and ADA Contemporary’s great success in fostering emerging talent, this partnership was a natural fit,” says Arthur Lewis, Partner and Creative Director of UTA Fine Arts & UTA Artist Space.

## **ABOUT ADORA MBA**

As a Nigerian-Ghanaian raised in London, Accra, and Lagos; Adora Mba spent her formative years cultivating a dialogue between her African roots and British education. Her extensive travels across the continent and internationally to Europe, Asia, and the United States, led her to develop a keen interest in contemporary art. At a time when the African art scene was seldom exposed, she soon grew aware of the local creative industry’s undiscovered yet considerable potential to resonate with a global audience. An art advisor, collector and writer, Adora’s experience working in Africa’s creative industry has nurtured her expertise and discerning perspective on the continent’s artistic scene and associated market. Upon completing her Masters Degree at Columbia University, NY, she started her career in cultural journalism with a focus on African arts & culture (ARISE News, BBC Africa, TRACE, True Africa). Adora then moved on to work in public relations supporting contemporary artists in the UK and US. In 2017, she launched The Afropolitan Collector, an art advisory platform specialized in the acquisition, cultivation, and promotion of contemporary art and design from Africa and its global diasporas. In parallel, Adora introduced The Collector Series, an initiative bringing together global collectors of contemporary African art eager to

uncover new talent on the continent. Having relocated to Ghana, Adora acted as art consultant for various actors of the cultural sector, including from the Ghana Ministry of Culture, Ghana's Creative Arts Council and Adjaye Associates while supporting and promoting artists at their career infancy. Working with a range of clients and art organizations from government and non-profit, to auction houses, museums, galleries, and independent artists, she witnessed a striving yet bounded local artistic scene and market, lacking the infrastructure necessary to achieve its full potential. Born out of a necessity to respond to this need and her individual desire to support the artists who had inspired, and continued to, inspire her, Adora founded the ADA contemporary art gallery in 2020.

### **ABOUT ADA**

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; off-site projects and exhibitions; site-specific commissions; talks; creative partnerships and philanthropic activities with local actors; and international art fairs. Each exhibition also extends online, complementing the physical experience with a multifaceted digital immersion into each artist's personal practice. In parallel, ADA will develop a residency program, bringing together a local Ghanaian artist and an international artist whose practice is rooted in Africa and its legacy. Cultivating a dialogue between the local and the international artists, the residency is a manifest to ADA's engagement in strengthening these ties and to establishing Ghana's emerging artistic scene and market internationally.

### **ABOUT UTA ARTIST SPACE**

Since the establishment of its flagship Beverly Hills location in 2018, UTA Artist Space has been committed to showcasing art by globally recognized talent. With the opening of a new Atlanta office and gallery in spring 2023, UTA Artist Space has expanded its impressive vision and reach across the United States. Over the past few years, the gallery's original location has presented notable exhibitions with interdisciplinary artists and creatives, including The Estate of Ernie Barnes, Enrique Martínez Celaya, Mandy El-Sayegh, Nicholas Kontaxis, Arcmanoro Niles, Ferrari Sheppard, and more. UTA presented a series of pop-up exhibitions at Atlanta's historic Pullman Yards before inaugurating its permanent gallery space in March 2023 with a solo exhibition by Lonnie Holley.

**UTA Artist Space, Beverly Hills** is located at 403 Foothill Road and is open from 10am-5pm Tuesday through Friday and 11am-4pm on Saturday. **UTA Artist Space, Atlanta** is located at 1401 Peachtree Street and is open from 10am-5pm Tuesday through Friday and 11am-4pm on Saturday.

[UTAArtistSpace.com](http://UTAArtistSpace.com)

[@utaartistspace](https://www.instagram.com/utaartistspace)

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Image: Zandile Tshabalala, *Won't you dance for me? I'd dance for you, if you want me to.*, 2023. Courtesy of the artist and ADA contemporary art gallery.