

Atanda Quadri Adebayo
(b. 1999, Lagos, Nigeria)

Son of the Badlands
June 19th - July 3rd, 2021
ONEROOM GALLERY
9 French Place, E1 6JB
London, United Kingdom

ONEROOM Gallery is pleased to present *Son of the Badlands*, the first solo-show by Nigerian artist Atanda Quadri Adebayo, curated by Samuele Visentin. The exhibition includes ten works on canvas and one work on paper.

For Atanda Quadri Adebayo, painting is a journey of self-discovery and realisation that allows him to acknowledge the past and project himself towards the future. The artist was born in the ancient coastal city of Badagry, on the outskirts of Lagos (Nigeria), once an important geographical crossroads in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. As a son of these lands, the brutal colonial past is part of his story, but he refuses to be solely defined by it - an aspect that shines through his paintings. The figures that populate his works represent unbroken men and women who burst with colour and hope, despite the sufferance embedded in their life. Portrayed in elegant poses, the facial expressions embody an empowered vulnerability, or the result of finding bliss amidst the struggle.

His first approach to art-making took place at an early age, when the mother used to bring home chunks of charcoal that she would sell in Lagos (Nigeria) to sustain the family. Atanda Quadri Adebayo gradually took an interest in them and started using them to draw. To this day, he uses charcoal to render the skin of his figures and elevate to work of art both his personal story and something as common, but as personally important, as a stick of charcoal.

Symbols of hope and resistance abound in the work by Atanda Quadri Adebayo. In *Am I Next?* (2021), the hat shows the Black Power fist, while the t-shirt reads "Police / I never won kpain!!!" - the pidgin interpretation of 'Police, I'm not ready to die!!!' to protest inhumane acts of police brutality against black people in Nigeria and around the world. More nuanced, but equally powerful is the reference in *Longing* (2021), where a young woman looks out of the picture and in tiny black letters, the acronym BLM can be read on the biggest diamond of her jewelled necklace.

However, the most powerful and personal symbol of resilience employed by Adebayo is the "artist soul" motif: the repetition of an abstract pattern created by blowing watercolour on the canvas using a straw. The simple act of painting using his breath becomes a powerful metaphor of life that allows him to infuse his art with parts of his soul. Reacting and reversing the utterance "I can't breathe", he artistically interprets the act of breathing as the ultimate symbol of both life and art.

Atanda Quadri Adebayo (b. 1999, Badagry, Nigeria) has obtained his diploma and higher diploma in painting at Yaba College of Technology, Lagos, Nigeria.