

IKON

Ikon Gallery
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free entry / donations welcome
Registered charity no. 528892

Abdulrazaq Awofeso *OUT OF FRAME* 10 June – 29 August 2022



Abdulrazaq Awofeso, *A Thousand Men Cannot Build a City* (2017)
Mixed media. Installation dimensions variable. Image courtesy the artist.

This summer Ikon presents a solo exhibition, *OUT OF FRAME*, by Nigerian artist Abdulrazaq Awofeso. Having recently arrived in Birmingham from Lagos, Awofeso shows all new work as part of Ikon's *Arrivals* programme (June - August), concerned with the international movement of people and ideas and organised to coincide with the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games.

Awofeso's work for Ikon is made entirely from discarded wooden pallets. Used to transport goods around the world, this widely used material forms a metaphor of human migration, as well as the artist's own frequent journeys between Nigeria, South Africa and Europe.

His figures take the form of wall reliefs, freestanding sculptures and installations. Each figure is individually carved and painted by hand. Their physical traits and vibrant colours are inspired by the people he meets on his travels and subcultures such as the

social movement *La Sape*. Prevalent in Kinshasa and Brazzaville (Democratic Republic of the Congo and Republic of Congo respectively), the colourful, sartorial style of *La Sape* originated as a response to colonial rule and western 'dandy' fashion. The artist's reference to collective identities give his figures the quality of universal portraits. Their individualised forms, however, resist cultural or racial categorisation.

Do You Know Who I Am (2022) represents people who Awofeso met on a visit to the UK from Nigeria in 2021. During the trip he and fellow travellers were held in Amsterdam, as the UK government imposed a swift ban on arrivals from Nigeria due to the country's then rising cases of Covid-19. A number of the sculptural portraits depict people wearing masks, reminding us how much face coverings have become part of our physical and social identity. Another portrait shows a man in sunglasses playing a saxophone, symbolising the jazz musicians and communities encountered by Awofeso in Birmingham and Nigeria. Resembling wall reliefs, these profile portraits are in fact freestanding sculptures displayed on floating shelves. A large portrait accompanies these works, its relief format reflecting the quasi-flat sculptures.

Several works in the exhibition respond to the gallery's architecture. A shaped doorway mirrors the rectangular forms of *Boujee* (2021–22), a series of figures displayed on custom-made plinths at different heights. An installation of 3,000 individually-carved figures, *Avalanche of Calm* (2021–22), fills the floor of an entire gallery. They embody the modern city, where people from all walks of life come together. Suspended above the miniature figures are wooden clouds, their subdued hues recalling the overcast British weather. In life, passing clouds often remind us of the ephemerality of human existence. Awofeso's installation evokes this and the relative smallness of people in relation to the cosmos – at the same time as humanity's collective strength.

A fully-illustrated catalogue accompanies the exhibition. Designed by Laura Jaunzems, it features an essay on Awofeso's work by writer and art historian Aurella Yussuf and a conversation between the artist and Linzi Stauvers, Head of Learning, Ikon.

Abdulrazaq Awofeso's exhibition is supported by the Ikon Investment Fund.

Ikon's *Arrivals* programme also includes an exhibition of new work by three artists – Yhonnie Scarce, Salote Tawale and Osman Yousefzada – presented together in Ikon's first floor galleries; *Rumah Berkaki* (*Legged House*) by Malaysian artist Haffendi Anuar in the Tower Room; and the fourth iteration of *The Migrant Festival* (14 – 17 July). A full press release for *Arrivals* is also available.

For more information, high-res images and to request interviews please contact Rebecca Small or Muskeen Liddar on 0121 248 0708 or email r.small@ikon-gallery.org or m.liddar@ikon-gallery.org

Social Media - Instagram, Twitter and Facebook: @ikongallery #IkonGallery
Links: ikon-gallery.org;

Note to Editors:

1. Recent exhibitions by Abdulrazaq Awofeso include Dakar Biennale (2016), STEVENSON, Cape Town (2016), Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil (2017–18), MAXXI, the National Museum of 21st Century Arts Rome (2018), and Museum Arnhem (2020).
2. Ikon is an internationally acclaimed contemporary art venue situated in central Birmingham. Established in 1964 by a group of artists, Ikon is an educational charity and works to encourage public engagement with contemporary art through exhibiting new work in a context of debate and participation. The gallery programme features artists from around the world and a variety of media is represented, including sound, film, mixed media, photography, painting, sculpture and installation. Ikon's off-site programme develops dynamic relationships between art, artists and audiences outside the gallery. Projects vary enormously in scale, duration and location, challenging expectations of where art can be seen and by whom. Education is at the heart of Ikon's activities, stimulating public interest in and understanding of contemporary visual art. Through a variety of talks, tours, workshops and seminars, Ikon's Learning Team aims to build dynamic relationships with audiences, enabling visitors to engage with, discuss and reflect on contemporary art. ikon-gallery.org
3. Ikon Gallery is supported using public funding from Arts Council England and Birmingham City Council.
4. Arts Council England is the national development body for arts and culture across England, working to enrich people's lives. ACE support a range of activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to visual art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections. Great art and culture inspires us, brings us together and teaches us about ourselves and the world around us. In short, it makes life better. Between 2018 and 2022, ACE will invest £1.45 billion of public money from government and an estimated £860 million from the National Lottery to help create these experiences for as many people as possible across the country. artscouncil.org.uk