

Remi Ajani, Ofunne Azinge & Esiri Erheriene-Essi

The Greatest Source of My Longing

05.11.–17.12.2022

PV: 04.11.2022, 6–9pm

‘The Greatest Source of my Longing’ centres family experience.

The three exhibiting artists, Ofunne Azinge, Remi Ajani and Esiri Erheriene-Essi, explore nostalgia, memory and dialogue between chosen families.

The exhibited works echo ongoing themes of generation, social commentary and the home. With a focus on figuration, the artworks inspire nostalgia and invite stories. Viewers are invited as impartial onlookers to the domestic happenings. They do not directly belong, but observe the visual dynamics and relationships painted. Their place is to distinguish the experiences; the narrative; the space.

Azinge’s work delves into family narratives and her British-Nigerian heritage. She focuses on the traditional ‘male’ role in family life – both the pressures and hidden emotions. Ajani provides a glowing triad of familial love, responding to internal emotions stirred by a new addition to the family. Erheriene-Essi’s work explores a familiar family scene watched over by generations.

Each artist’s work begins with photography. Azinge transfers photographs; Ajani creates from images; Erheriene-Essi explores archives. They are each ‘image makers’. The works therefore present powerfully following the solo exhibition of iconic photographer: Carrie Mae Weems, in the gallery.

Ofunne Azinge’s work *For the Love we Share*, is centred around gender, relationships and the family. The figure is reminiscent as a reflection of Titian’s Venus of Urbino: here, powerful and commanding. Azinge encourages dialogue between the ‘traditional’ dichotomy of masculinities and femininities, noting that one is not present without the other, and that they are not exclusive to any gender. Her impressive life size works live and breathe in the space. They combine the use of her unique image transfer method: compilations of symbols from various generations. Here, the figure literally wears her family’s histories, with the collaged memories covering her chest.

Ajani’s work, *Untitled*, 2022, focusses on familial connection. Here, the artist portrays a triad of family: from baby to child to parent. There is warmth as the three envelope each other. The two younger figures lean on the parent – aglow from the sunshine yellow of her clothes. Their surroundings fade, with the viewer’s attention grasped by the three subjects. Delicate. Powerful. Sublime. Viewers lovingly observe the dynamic, and this shared emotional space. Ajani explores how she might communicate an internal feeling through the dialogue of the body. Almost as if to say, welcome to our family.

Esiri Erheriene-Essi presents us with a familiar scene: the cutting of a birthday cake. Complete with party hats

and balloons, a family surrounds the child with lips poised in a frozen ‘Happy Birthday’ tune. The viewer is directly observed by the smallest child who smiles back. Behind them, Xerox transfers plaster the wall. These feature found imagery and newspaper clippings. Painted in vibrant technicolour, the work encourages a recall of memories. This familiarity of the scene provides an entry point to the subject’s lives. Erheriene-Essi’s work is part of a larger series, entitled ‘The Inheritance (or Familiar Strangers)’. The series recalled real individuals, and gave prominence to untold, unknown or even neglected, narratives of the African diaspora. The richness of quiet histories.

Ofunne Azinge is a Nigerian-British painter currently based in Manchester, UK.

Since graduating from her BA in fine art, Azinge has exhibited in a variety of group exhibitions across London, as well as in the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition 2021. Her work was selected as the star of their post exhibition documentary, chosen for the Arts Club award and was Curator’s choice by Yinka Shonibare.

Ofunne’s work primarily focuses on the history of post-colonialism in Nigeria and its effects on black men across the diaspora and black masculinity in painting.

Remi Ajani is a London based artist. She recently graduated from the Slade School of Fine Art with a distinction. In 2022, she won the Almacantar Award, and exhibited with PM/AM and AMC Gallery.

Ajani’s works are brimming with colour and gesture. Equally inspired by artists such as Cy Twombly and Marlene Dumas, Ajani’s practice examines the self and identity. She explores dialogue, physicality and gesture. The works are curious. Emotional. Sensitive.

Ajani is fascinated by the human body. Particularly how the artist’s own movement creates mark making in works. Her unshown expressionist works translate into her representational works. Her curiosity means her practice oscillates between figuration and abstraction exploring her relationship to the world in relation to perception, reality, connection and disconnection. Painting is just one visual language that translates her experience and ideas.

Esiri Erheriene-Essi is an Amsterdam based artist. Erheriene-Essi has won the Dutch Royal Painting prize. In 2019 she was shortlisted for the Prix de Rome. She has previously had a solo exhibition at the Museum Arnhem. Erheriene-Essi’s works explore shared histories and societies. Beginning with an archive, her work seeks links between people and places.

She creates new scenarios based on told histories, retelling them in a liberating and humane narrative. This often questions the canonical history. Replacing it with

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humans.

Mollie E Barnes is an Independent Curator based in the UK. She has become a voice for equality and inclusion in the arts, working predominantly with underrepresented artists. Mollie is the Founder of @she_curates_ – a platform for championing the voices of artists.