

Gold Maria Akanbi

September 3 - 27

Gold Maria Akanbi returns to the gallery for a solo exhibition after having previously exhibited with us as part of last year's group show OUTPUT OPEN 2. Akanbi is a neurodiverse British-Nigerian multidisciplinary artist. She works from a foundation of intersectionality. Her work mainly focuses on Afro-futurism, Traditional African spirituality, and The Black Body and the physical land it is indigenous to. Her practice also considers neurodiversity and the neurological perception of reality, as well as sensory-stimulation and sensory overload. For this exhibition at OUTPUT gallery, there will be an abstract installation of drawing and painting based off of her thinking around these subjects. She writes, 'Art has kept me alive in the sense that it has enabled me to focus on the many intersections of my life, many of which have been used against me. Art has essentially allowed me to guide myself out of trauma and to navigate my mind towards a healthier landscape. A current recurring theme, much like in this exhibition, is the idea of being on a journey, which is why the larger blue works focus so heavily on the idea of finding an Oasis.'

Ways into thinking about the exhibition:

1. What inspires the work's aesthetic?
2. What do artists gain from art school?
3. How can funding support artists?

OUTPUT is a gallery working exclusively with creatives from or based in Merseyside. It is part of Invisible Wind Factory. The programme is supported using public funding by Arts Council England.

@outputgallery | outputgallery.com |
output@thekazimier.co.uk

OUTPUT gallery, 32 Seel St, Liverpool, L1 4BE
OPEN 11-5 THURS-SUN



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Answers from Gold Maria Akanbi:

1. What inspires your work visually? Any other artists, places or experiences?

'I would say some artists that were fundamental to having faith visually in my work are women such as Tamara Natalie Madden, Hilma Af Klint, Elizabeth Catlett, Nike Okundaye Davies, Yayoi Kusama and even Zaha Hadid who, even though she was considered just an architect, also painted.

Ultimately though most, if not all, of my work is inspired by very intense and vivid dreams, which is then somehow translated subconsciously when I paint. Coupled with symptoms of my ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) such as synesthesia and light sensitivity, it sometimes feels like my work just creates itself off the back of my subconscious. And then there's my hobbies like history and archaeological research, looking at architecture and eco-friendly aesthetically pleasing housing, watching anime and fantasy series' and exploring and searching online for nature landscapes.'

2. What have you learnt from studying art at university level?

'Well first of all, it's been one hell of an experience in every possible way, but I think what I really learnt is that it's really one thing to go to school to study art and it's really another to pursue being an artist in your own right. I educated myself a lot on Art before I went to University but I didn't think I would keep needing to once I actually began to attend. I've had to conduct my own research, stand my ground (both mentally and physically) and assert boundaries that I didn't know I needed. In many ways, Art School still has a lot of 'lad culture', some coming to discuss spirituality and the divine feminine, neurodiversity and even afro-futurism, wasn't something was particularly understood, let alone encouraged. There was a lot of pressure to emphasise my race in very stereotypical and reductive ways, which I also had to fight against, I think at one point I got a little disillusioned. Truth be told, I love academia, I've always been a nerd and I've always enjoyed doing research and writing a nice funky little essay but going to Art School isn't what made me an artist, it was the friends I made, the efforts I went to in order to find out about Nigerian art and meeting Nigerian artists and art collectors, it was creating work without the thought of deadlines and it was through meeting people like Gabrielle and going to places like Uclan, where I met Lubaina Himid, Zoe Whitley and especially Ego Ahaïwe Sowinski.'

3. How did it feel to receive the inaugural Black Artist Grant earlier this year?

'Well that was actually a crazy surprise and it was really weird to get that much attention online because I normally get anxiety from such things, however it was one of the most encouraging things that have happened since I started making art. The support was unbelievable and I felt so appreciated and seen as an artist, the money also helped fund numerous tools I needed in order to keep creating and improving my artistic practice. I've always hoped that one day artists could on full-time salaries for simply being artists without feeling exploited or run-through, as we too add to society and we help shape the very fibre it will be made of in the future, this is why I feel like The BAG is a step towards that goal, especially for Black Artists. In a time when many are taking a stand against racism, diversity quotas and blackploitation in industries worldwide, I feel like initiatives such as The BAG is what will propel us towards equity for all instead of the failing paradigms of equality.'

Instagram: @goldmakanbi

Twitter: @metallicnuance