



PIPPY HOULDSWORTH GALLERY

Nengi Omuku

Frieze London 2024 | Artist-to-Artist Booth AA6

Preview: 9-10 October 2024 | Public Days: 11-13 October 2024

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The Regent's Park London

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For the 2024 edition of Frieze London's curated Artist-to-Artist section, Nigerian artist Nengi Omuku has been nominated by Yinka Shonibare to present a solo project at the fair. Comprising three new paintings made on sanyan, an Aso-oke fabric traditionally crafted by the Yoruba people, Omuku's work will be suspended within the booth so visitors can view the works in the round, thereby experiencing both the artist's painting and the handspun quality of the cloth that is so integral to its meaning. The presentation immediately follows Omuku's first solo institutional exhibition, *The Dance of People and the Natural World* at Hastings Contemporary and Arnolfini, and is co-organised by Pippy Houldsworth Gallery, London and Kasmin, New York.

Omuku's new paintings abound with references to the natural world and horticulture, featuring portrayals of individuals and social groups set in spectacular landscapes. Merging representations of the world around her with expressions of her innermost thoughts, Omuku's mesmerising perspectival shifts, instinctive brushwork, and luscious colours affirm the imaginative power of belief, reverie, and empathy. Inspired in part by the scenery of Perugia, Italy, where she undertook a residency at Civitella Ranieri earlier this year, Omuku's works expand on the solace to be found in nature and its connection to themes of rest and sanctuary. The landscape has long proved to be a grounding force for Omuku, who attributes her embrace of plants as a primary subject in her paintings to her formative experience working as a gardener.

The works on view represent a place of natural co-existence where hierarchies of subject and habitat are deconstructed. The figures that appear blend seamlessly into their environs, freed from perceptions of otherness or division. The universal resonance of Omuku's works spills into their facture, expanding both oil painting and sanyan weaving traditions. As the artist has said: 'Even when working with oils on sanyan, I'm aware that I'm bringing together western and West African heritage. I really enjoy being in the middle. It helps me have a broader view of the world'.

About the artist

Nengi Omuku (b. 1987, Nigeria) lives and works in Lagos, Nigeria and London, UK. She received her BA (2010) and MA (2012) from the Slade School of Art, University College London. Omuku's first solo institutional exhibition, *The Dance of People and the Natural World* was first mounted at Hastings Contemporary, before travelling to Arnolfini, Bristol (2024). Forthcoming and current exhibitions include *Wild Things and Perennials*, Kasmin, New York, NY; *Exchanges*, The Whitworth, Manchester; *The Poetics of Dimensions*, curated by Larry Ossei-Mensah, Institute of Contemporary Art San Francisco and the 15th Dakar Biennale. In 2023, she was awarded the Civitella Ranieri Residency in Italy (2024), which followed a 2022-23 residency at Black Rock Senegal.

Recent solo and group exhibitions include *Soulscapes* at Dulwich Picture Gallery, London (2023-24); *Aso Oke: Prestige Cloth from Nigeria*, Saint Louis Art Museum, MO (2023-24); *As Water Never Touched*, Kristin Hjellegjerde, West Palm Beach, FL, (2023); *Free The Wind, The Spirit, and The Sun*, curated by Yinka Shonibare, Stephen Friedman Gallery, London (2023); *Rites of Passage*, curated by Péjú Oshin, Gagolian, London (2023); Bangkok Art Biennale (2022-2023); *Parables of Joy*, Pippy Houldsworth Gallery, London (2022); *Dissolving Realms*, curated by Katy Hessel, Kasmin, NY (2022); *What Lies Beneath: Women, Politics, Textile*, The Women's Art Collection, Murray Edwards College, University of Cambridge (2022); and *Dancing in Dark Times*, Pippy Houldsworth Gallery, London (2021).

Collections include Baltimore Museum of Art, MD; The Whitworth, Manchester; Women's Art Collection, Murray Edwards College, Cambridge; Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, FL; Government Art Collection, UK; and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, FL.



Nengi Omuku, *Rabble Rousers*, 2024, oil on sanyan, 163 x 121 cm, 64 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 47 $\frac{3}{4}$ in (PH12114)

\$60,000



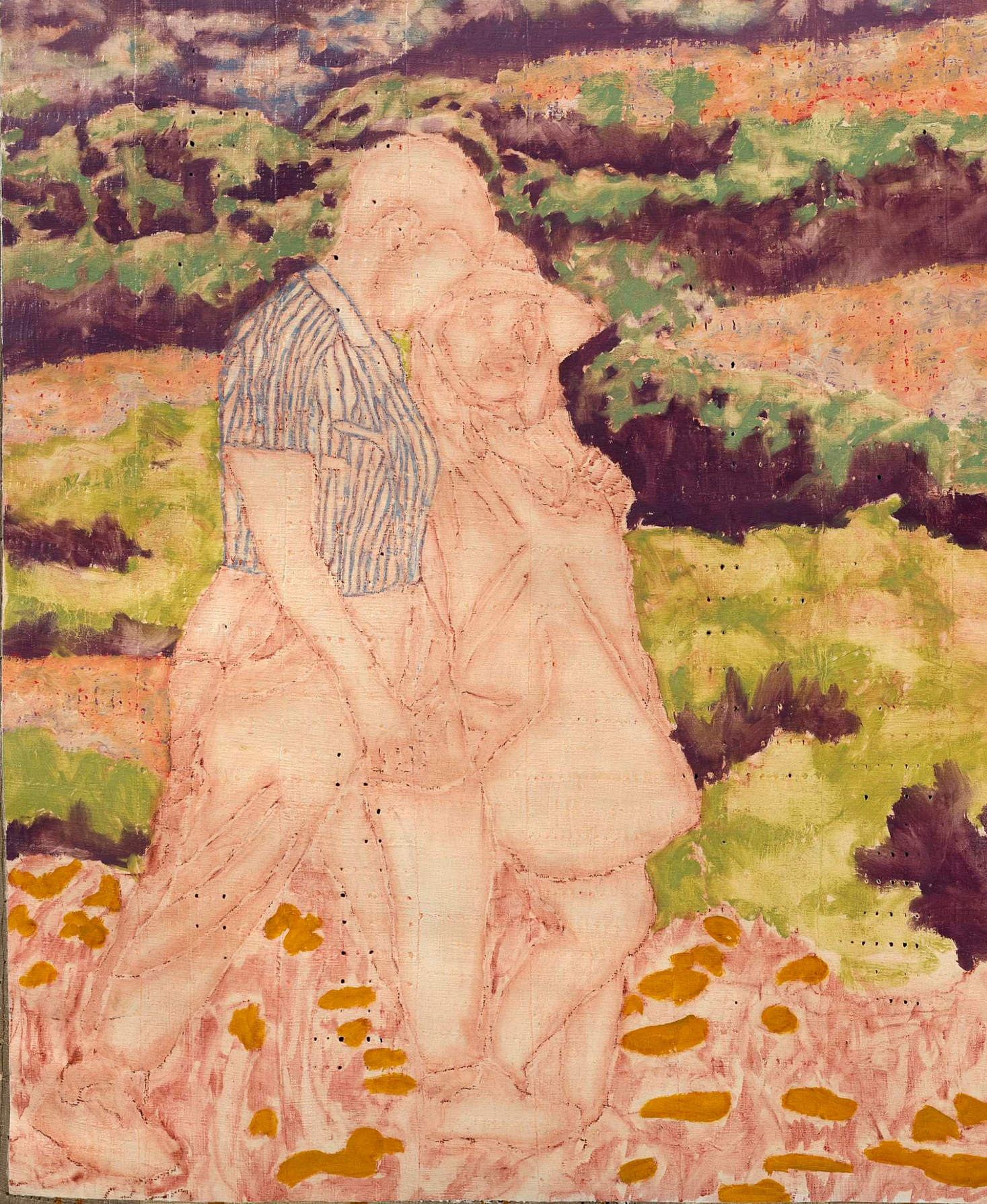
During her residency at Civitella Ranieri, Nengi Omuku took walks through the landscapes of Perugia, where she found herself deeply moved by the way vines intertwined with trees, as if engaged in a silent conversation. Yet, even in this serene environment, she was haunted by flashbacks of conflict, war, and terror that linger in our collective memory.

In the painting's foreground, a group of individuals appears to clash violently, their animated gestures suggesting an attempt to inflict harm. Surrounding them are onlookers—some passively watching, others turning away. In the bottom left corner, a figure drags a tire, a powerful symbol of impending violence and lynching in many cultures. Meanwhile, a group of witnesses stands on the middle left, observing the chaos unfold before them.



Nengi Omuku, *Swing Low*, 2024, oil on sanyan, 219 x 195 cm, 86 ¼ x 76 ¾ in, (PH12112)

\$90,000



The painting draws inspiration from Nengi Omuku's recent residency at Civitella Ranieri in Italy, where morning walks revealed breathtaking landscapes that felt almost heavenly. The serene environment juxtaposed with the awareness of our current troubled times globally, influenced the composition of the painting. In the foreground, figures rest and move through nature, absorbing their surroundings while in the middle right corner, a scene from a political rally unfolds, capturing a moment of chaos as the crowd tumbles over itself. This tumultuous energy transforms within the painting into an abstract mark that spirals off to the right, extending beyond the canvas. The title, inspired by an African-American spiritual, references the low-hanging sky in the painting, which looms ominously close to the ground, suggesting an impending apocalyptic event.



Nengi Omuku, *Nzogbu Nzogbu*, 2024, oil on sanyan, 130 x 120 cm, 51 ¼ x 47 ¼ in (PH12113)

\$50,000



In this painting, a group of people on the left appear to chant fervently, as if charging into battle, while a solitary figure reclines listlessly in the landscape at the bottom right. The scene is set against a night sky painted in deep purples, which meet the ground, illuminated by vibrant neon orange and fuchsia flowers that surround the figures.

The title, derived from an Igbo war chant which can translate to 'run over', as though an elephant marching over its prey, reflects our current troubled political climate, where war and death overshadow the tranquility and harmony found in nature.

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