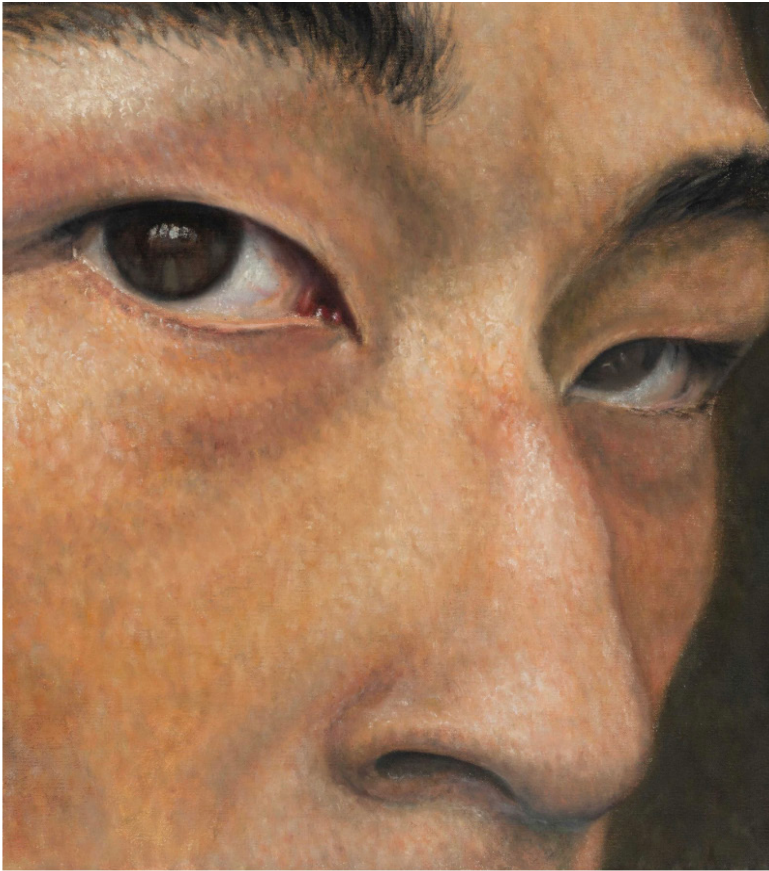


Ebun Sodipo,
Press



Inside the Exhibition Spotlighting Britain's Artists of Tomorrow

As an ambitious group show of British art opens at Hauser & Wirth Somerset, five artists – Victoria Cantons, Joseph Yaeger, Ebun Sodipo, George Rouy, and Sang Woo Kim – represent the

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TEXT Violet Conroy

LEAD IMAGE Sang Woo Kim, *You're looking at me*, 2023. Courtesy the artist. Photo: Damian Griffiths

What does the zeitgeist of British art look like at the moment? A bold, eclectic new group show at Hauser & Wirth Somerset, ***Present Tense***, aims to answer this question, showcasing the work of 23 artists both emerging and mid-career. With a mix of sculpture, painting, drawing, collage, video, and installation, there's much to take in: fresh from his ICA solo show at the end of last year, there's the uncanny, colourful sculptures of Gray Wielebinski; glitchy, tumultuous compositions by George Rouy; sensual collages by Ebun Sodipo, vast, cinema-inspired painting by Joseph Yaeger; a series of hallucinatory pigment dye transfers by Sang Woo Kim depicting glowing figures in nature; and much more.

Although there's a fair amount of sculpture in the show, painting reigns supreme here, ranging from the abstract, angsty canvases of Daisy Parris, all the way to the figurative, confrontational work of Victoria Cantons, which deals with the artist's lived experience as a transgender woman (Parris's work draws obvious parallels to Tracey Emin, and Cantons to Jenny Saville – two titans of British art). As a contemporary survey of emerging British artists, in theory, the 'next' Emin and Saville are in this Hauser & Wirth show, too.

AnOther, 2024

Speaking a few days after the opening, Isabella Bornholt, the show's curator, says she's noticed a real return to skill and craft in the art of recent years. "All the artists in the show have real conceptual gravitas to their works, but they also execute it with a skill," she says, "which I think is very much indicative of what's happening in the art world right now." Another key theme that emerged, she believes, is self-reflection. "In a world where we consume so much imagery and information on a day-to-day basis via our phones and our laptops, it's a really new, hyperactive way to live," she says. "And so many of these artists are looking inwards and self-reflecting to pose and answer questions."

As a mega-gallery with locations in London, New York, Paris, Zurich, LA, Hong Kong and more, *Present Tense* offers an exciting opportunity for younger artists to show at Hauser & Wirth – none of whom are currently on their roster – and a refreshing chance to show outside of London, where most of the UK's art-world action usually takes place. Located in the picturesque town of Bruton, which boasts top-quality restaurants and hotels (Rochelle Canteen's Margot Henderson does the food at The Three Horseshoes, a 17th-century pub opened by Phoebe Philo's husband, Max Wigram, last year), a weekend trip down to Somerset to see the show is well worth the journey.

Below, five artists featured in the show – Victoria Cantons, Joseph Yaeger, Ebun Sodipo, George Rouy, and Sang Woo Kim – talk in their own words about their work.

Ebun Sodipo

"I pull the images for my collages from this archive I've been building since 2014. From 2014 – 2018, I would go on Tumblr for a certain amount of time every day, and I would collect anything that was posted by a Black person that came across my feed. I basically grew up online. Tumblr kind of determined what it meant for me to be Black. It informed my politics when I was younger, and it's a place where I found myself, so that context is really important.

"These collages are about trying to describe a particular emotion, thought or desire that I have. I also like to think about the ways that we use these images and the Internet to communicate with each other, and to determine who and what we are through this relationship that is mediated by images. These images impact you in a way that you can't describe. It's like pre-thought; you don't really think about them, you feel them.

"Water, the sea, and the Atlantic is a really important aspect of my practice. I started making this work thinking about what it means to be Black, and part of that has to do with the Atlantic, or now, in contemporary times, the Mediterranean and the Gulf. I am thinking about what happens when a body moves from Africa into a non-African space via the sea, and the kind of transformations that happen. The psychological phenomenon of looking at the shifting feel of light and water, the kind of meditative states that it can get into, is really interesting to me. There's a theory that one of the reasons why we are drawn to shiny and glittering surfaces is because they remind us of water on a deep instinctual, lizard-brain kind of level. Our body is trying to quench a thirst that has been with us for a very long time, but you can never actually quench the thirst, and the desire is deeply embedded in your body in your DNA. That suddenly becomes a metaphor for thinking about transness and transfemininity, and this desire to move the body or to follow the desire to a certain point. That's why I use the motif of water and reflective surfaces in shine and shimmer, to get your attention and draw you in."

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Frieze, 2021

LIVE 2021: A Programme of Performance Curated by Languid Hands

Frieze London's LIVE will feature performances by Rebecca Bellantoni, Ebun Sodipo and Ashley Holmes exploring themes of embodiment, transformation and grief



This year's LIVE programme is curated by **Languid Hands**, a London-based artistic and curatorial collaboration between **Rabz Lansiquot**, filmmaker, programmer and DJ, and **Imani Robinson**, interdisciplinary writer, editor and live artist.



Rebecca Bellantoni, *Untitled*, 2021. Courtesy of the artist

Frieze, 2021

The duo have been curatorial fellows at Cubitt Artists since January 2020, presenting *No Real Closure*, a platform for experimentation and development of black artistic practice across exhibitions, moving image, text, performance and public programming.

Their LIVE programme extends this method of inquiry, and will be available to view online, with performances by **Ebun Sodipo, Rebecca Bellantoni & Ashley Holmes**.

The performance programme will be hosted online on frieze.com from **Thursday 14 October**.

Metal, 2021



In her work visual and performing artist **Ebum Sodipo** takes us into her world of freedom and self-expression. Sodipo delves into the intricacies of her journey into confidence. She explores the fluid cosmological joy of being true to yourself. With themes surrounding gender, race and sexuality, Sodipo discusses safe art spaces and artistic symbolism as a means to extend conversation and spend more time together with artwork.

Hi Ebum, could you present yourself for our readers?

The most important things to know about me are that I am an artist and writer. Here are some less important things about me, in no particular order: I am a green fingered lover of anime and period dramas sets in imperial courts; I am a tall black trans woman living by the sea, enjoying the distance from the heart of an empire; I am Yoruba; a migrant with dual nationality; I consider myself a black abolitionist; I was raised in a middle class pentecostal Christian Nigerian household; I could stare at the sea for hours on end; I'm single, and I've had chicken pox twice.

Metal, 2021

Growing up did you always know you wanted to be an artist?

Not quite. My parents are both accountants, and in true post colonial middle class fashion wished for their children to go into STEM. They weren't into the arts either and didn't really have any friends who were creative. It wasn't until I was 16 or 17 that the desire for this path arose. I was quite good at drawing and painting and my art teachers at school persuaded me into doing an Art GCSE, and then an A-Level. After that it simply made sense for me, it felt like the best way to articulate myself.

I was always interested in storytelling from a very young age though. I devoured books from a very young age and started writing a novel when I was 9. I read constantly: in classes, on the bus on the way home (sometimes I'd be so engrossed in a book that I'd stay on the bus till its last stop hours from home). My parents tried, unsuccessfully, to confine my reading to the evenings, but obviously that didn't work. I think of my practice as storytelling, in different forms. There is always a narrative present in and between my works. Developing an artistic practice is in many ways simply learning different modes of

Your work depicts such a broad range of beautifully constructed, multi-disciplinary focuses. How do you come up with your varied projects?

I usually go with my body. So many of the things I've made were responses to things I was reading, watching, seeing. I might write something down somewhere and return to it in order to pull out ideas. Or an image forms and I flesh that out, seeing what is possible and realisable right now, and what will remain a dream, like what budget do I have, what's the best way to display it. Sometimes I isolate particular ideas, conduct some research and then build a performance, film or text around them. If its a text then, how should it be put out into the world: via sounding, or reading? If reading, a book, a website, a leaflet? Which form best guides the audience along the narrative I'm forming, which medium best lends itself to the affective terrain I want to explore? There are core ideas I have that ripple across different works, embedding themselves without my knowledge.

Metal, 2021

A lot of your work touches on themes surrounding race, sexuality and gender. How have your own personal experiences influenced the outcome of your work?

My experiences have led me to seek and answer questions, for example: what are black gestures; what is the place of imagination in self-fashioning; where do I begin and where do I end; how can you communicate the simultaneity of trauma and joy, the history that hurts and heals? Most of my works attempt to answer these questions, with long meandering answers, a drawing out and dwelling in the sensations of answering, using bodily sensations to take my audience somewhere: the feeling of being in the black mass, or an encounter with an image that sparks gender euphoria and realisation.

My work is motivated by a desire to give to others, particularly Black trans kids, what I didn't have growing up. This is why I try to speak about trans desire using black images, writing about the sensations of having little history. I make work for others to have and build on, answer questions others will no doubt ask, tell stories that haven't yet been told, construct a past that acts as a mirror for black trans people.

You tend to depict striking and evocative visuals that communicate these themes in a way that isn't always so literal. How did you get into this symbolic visual exploration?

In part the world taught me this. Like how so much of visual culture - i.e. images, films, adverts - subliminally communicate ideas about good and bad, the right type of people and life, and the bad kind: a brightly lit suburbia vs a dark and orange toned ghetto; lighting with a silky texture and the most pleasant of sounds when a muscular able bodied white man comes into frame makes us know him as attractive; unthinking, uncaring bad lighting transform a black man into a monstrous hulking shadow; multi hued lighting that reflects off sheening dark skin triggering erotic and nonerotic hunger. For me, film and video can be spaces to resist these techniques, to construct new ways of being impacted by seeing and listening, to upend ways of connecting with the world: can a disharmonious staccato burst of images and sound feel tender and calming?

Metal, 2021

Some of your projects include set designs such as The Black House, where you create warm familiar spaces that engage with those who visit. What encourages you to create these types of spaces?

I wanted really to replicate the space I'd found myself in as I leaned into my blackness and queerness. Myself, Heidi Sincuba, and Kefloe Siwisa wanted very much to counteract the emotions and thoughts that can arrive in one's body in mostly white spaces. I had just finished university and was still recovering from the pervasive whiteness and anti-blackness of that space, grappling with the gentrification I could see happening where I lived in Camberwell, and in Elephant and Castle, in Brixton, a pushing out of poor black folk. We knew that so many spaces made by black people had been closed down so we wanted to mitigate that in some way, build and work towards a permanent space that held black creativity, aided respite, laughter and joy, healing, learning.

Over the past few months, we've been in and out of lockdown. How did this affect the way you work?

The pandemic really slowed things down for me. I was blessed to have a hospitality job at the time of the initial lockdown so I was furloughed. This gave me the opportunity to focus almost solely on my creative practice. I started revisiting and reworking old work, taking things apart and pulling out the golden kernels. I thought and experimented with my moving image work, trying to bring a heavier trace of my presence. I wrote a lot: more poetry, essays, fiction (which I hadn't done since my fanfiction days more than a decade ago), and it's upped my confidence there... I'm far more playful with text and language than ever before. I think I was also able to look more at other people's work, and speak to people (so many Zooms!) which developed my own visual practice.

A lot of your work focuses on the much-needed representation of the LGBTQ+ community. What are you looking forward to the most in the art industry as a queer artist?

I'm looking forward to the art industry being made more accessible, and to new networks that prioritise marginalised people. And perhaps less engagement with established institutions in favour of newer, small collectives and individuals. There are so many questions in need of answering like, how do you make an art career a realistic and sustainable option for young people from non-white, working class backgrounds?

Metal, 2021

You've displayed an amazing array of projects thus far, so what can we look forward to from you in the future?

I just started a series of performance works titled *my body reminds us of water*, that have taken place at different venues around the UK, at small and major institutions: Kings College, Porthmeor Studios in St Ives, Frieze, Camden Arts Center in November. There are a couple more iterations coming up: Oxford in December and at Auto Italia. These performances think through image culture, desire production, the body as an archive, gender as ancestral communication. I've started work on a large scale project called *Following The Gourd*, which thinks through astronomical knowledge, cosmologies, archival practices, and will have multiple outcomes and realisations. One of these is a web based interactive map of a fictional night sky that also doubles as an archive of trans existence, created with a small group of Black Trans youth, with FACT Liverpool and VISUAL Carlow, in Ireland. I'm also writing a small collection of poetry to come out in 2022.



Illustrations for Libatons, Attestations, Affirmations. 2020. Performance, video.

Metal, 2021



Atlantic Cruises. Embassy Gallery with Rosa Johan Uddoh - 2010. Performance.



She tore fire from the sky

and

Sent it lashing to the ground

She tore fire from the sky.

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