

Ludovic Nkoth

# 작가약력



루도빅 은코스 (Ludovic Nkoth, 1994 년 출생)는 자신의 작업에서 위안을 찾는다. 2006 년, 만 13 세의 나이에 고향인 카메룬을 떠나 미국으로 이주하면서 그는 자신을 “낯선 땅에 선 낯선 사람 (a stranger in a strange land)”으로 느끼며 주체성과 문화를 새롭게 고찰하기 시작했다.

현재 그의 왕성한 예술적 작업은 이주와 여행의 경험에서 깊은 영향을 받았다. 이러한 경험은 자아와 정체성의 개념을 탐구하려는 그의 열망에 중요한 촉매 역할을 했다.

은코스의 작업은 개인적이며, 그는 가족과 고향의 재연결을 시도하며, 동시에 정체성에 대한 사회적이고 정치적인 의미를 반영한다. 기억과 경험에서 영감을 얻어 그는 “정직한 그림(honest paintings)”이라고 부르는 진실된 초상화를 그린다. 이 초상화 속 인물들은 과장이나 장식 없이 있는 그대로 그려진다. 추상과 구상의 경계에 서있는 그는 2019 년에 시작한 새로운 격자 초상화 (grid portraits) 시리즈를 최근 선보였으며, 이 시리즈는 도덕적 나침반을 찾기 위한 여정에서 탄생했으며, 선명한 색감과 기하학적으로 구조화된 반복적인 초상화들로 구성되어 있다. 이 작업은 “현대 사회에서 흑인 남성으로서, 그리고 예술가로서 내가 어디에 위치해 있는지를 스스로 이해하고자 하는 갈망”에서 시작되었다. 이 밝고 기하학적인 반복적인 초상화들은 그의 생각을 정리하고 도시 생활의 혼란 속에서 방향을 찾으려는 시도였다. 작업을 진행하면서 그는 이 격자들이 실제로 우리 사회를 형성하는 보이지 않는 사회적 격자들을 드러내고 있다는 것을 깨달았다. 실제로 아프리카 출신 이민자로서 미국에 정착한 그는 재빠르게 ‘표상’의 중요성을 이해하게 되었다.

카메룬에서 대부분의 어린 시절을 보낸 그에게 미국은 깊이 낯선 곳이었지만, 아프리카 이민자로서 그는 자연스럽게 아프리카계 미국인으로 인식되었다. 이처럼 자신의 카메룬 정체성과 미국에서 자신이 어떻게 인식되는지의 양면성은 그에게 불안한 면서도 깊은 흥미를 안겨주었다. 자신의 정체성에 대한 가까움과 거리감을 인식하며, 은코스는 이러한 모순을 그의 예술적 원동력으로 삼았다.

이중성과 모호성에 대한 인식을 놓지 않고, 은코스의 작업은 정체성과 소속감에 대한 독특한 시각을 제공한다. 그의 회화는 상반된 사회적, 정치적 시스템의 복잡성을 다루며, 그의 가족 역사와 전통을 통찰력 있게 기록한다.

현재 은코스는 파리에서 활동하며 2023 년에 아카데미 데 보자르(Académie des Beaux Arts)에서 1 년간의 레지던시 프로그램에 참여하였다. 그의 최근 개인전으로는 《Stopover》, 폰드 소사이어티(Pond Society), 상하이 (2022); 《Transferred Memories》, 마시모데카를로 (MASSIMODECARLO), 런던 (2022); 《Ludovic Nkoth》, 쿤스트 메란 미술관(Kunst Meran Museum), 루이지 파시(Luigi Fassi) 기획, 메라노 (2021); 《Don't Take This Too》, 프랑수아 게발리(Fran.ois Ghebaly), 로스앤젤레스 (2021) 등이 있다. 그의 작품은 미국 애틀랜타의 하이 미술관 (High Museum of Art), 마이애미의 현대미술관 (ICA Miami), 로스앤젤레스의 해머 미술관(The Hammer Museum), 파리의 루이 비통 재단 (Foundation Louis Vuitton), 베이루트의 아이쉬티 재단(Aishti Foundation), 상하이의 폰드 소사이어티 컬렉션(POND Society Collection) 등의 공공 컬렉션에 소장되어 있다.

# Biography

## Ludovic Nkoth



Ludovic Nkoth (b.1994) seeks solace in his practice: moving from his native Cameroon to the United States in 2006 - aged 13 - he promptly began to reconsider his subjectivity and culture, as he discovered himself feeling like “a stranger in a strange land”.

Today his flourishing artistic practice is profoundly informed by his experience of migration and travel, which became the catalysts in his desire to decipher the notion of self and identity.

Nkoth’s work is thus personal, as he reconnects with his family and his country of birth, and a reflection on the broader social and political implications of identification. Finding inspiration in memories and experiences, he paints truthful portraits, which he calls “honest paintings”, where his subjects are free from exaggeration and embellishment. On the verge of abstraction and figuration, Nkoth most recently developed a new series of grid portraits, which he began in 2019 as a search for a moral compass. These brightly-colored, geometrically structured repetitive portraits were ignited by his desire to “figure out where I personally stood, as a black man but also as an artist in our current time.” The portraits’ rational, geometric composition are a way to order his thoughts, and to seek a sense of direction amidst the confusion of urban life. As he was developing this body of work, he realized how much the grids in fact revealed the invisible social grids that structure our existences within society. Indeed as an African immigrant to America, he promptly grasped the importance of representation: the African American identity was attributed to

him by default. And yet having grown up in Cameroon for most of his childhood, America was deeply alien to him. The ambivalence of his Cameroonian identity on one hand, and the way he as an individual was perceived as an African American in the United States solely based on his appearance were both unsettling and deeply fascinating. The proximity and distance of his own identity became his driving force.

Holding on to his awareness of duality and ambiguity, Nkoth’s work thus offers a unique perspective, imbued with questions of identity and feelings of belonging. His paintings present an insightful documentation of a view of the complexity of opposing social and political systems as well as his own family history and traditions.

Nkoth currently lives and works in Paris, where he is undertaking a year-long residency at the Académie des Beaux Arts. His recent solo shows include *Stopover*, Pond Society, Shanghai (2022); *Transferred Memories*, MASSIMODECARLO, London, UK (2022); *Ludovic Nkoth*, Kunst Meran Museum, curated by Luigi Fassi, Merano, Italy (2021); *Don’t Take This Too*, François Ghebaly, Los Angeles, USA (2021). His work is held in the public collection of High Museum of Art, Atlanta, USA, ICA Miami, Miami, USA, The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, USA, Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris, Aishti Foundation, Beirut, Lebanon, POND Society Collection, Shanghai.

## Selected Artworks

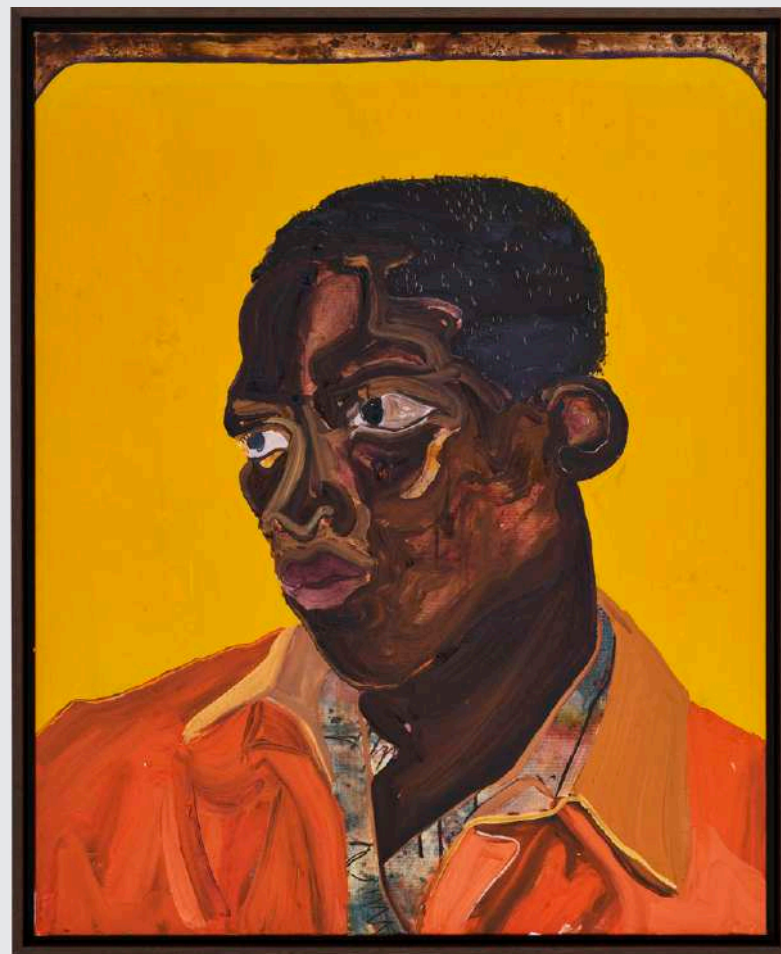
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**LUDOVIC NKOTH**

*Becoming*, 2023

Acrylic on canvas

100 × 80.5 × 2.5 cm / 39 3/8 × 31 2/3 × 1 inches







Ludovic Nkoth, *Becoming*, 2023 (detail)





**LUDOVIC NKOTH**

*A day's weight, 2023*

Acrylic on canvas

80 × 145 × 2 cm / 31 1/2 × 17 3/4 × 1 inches





Ludovic Nkoth, *A day's weight*, 2023 (detail)



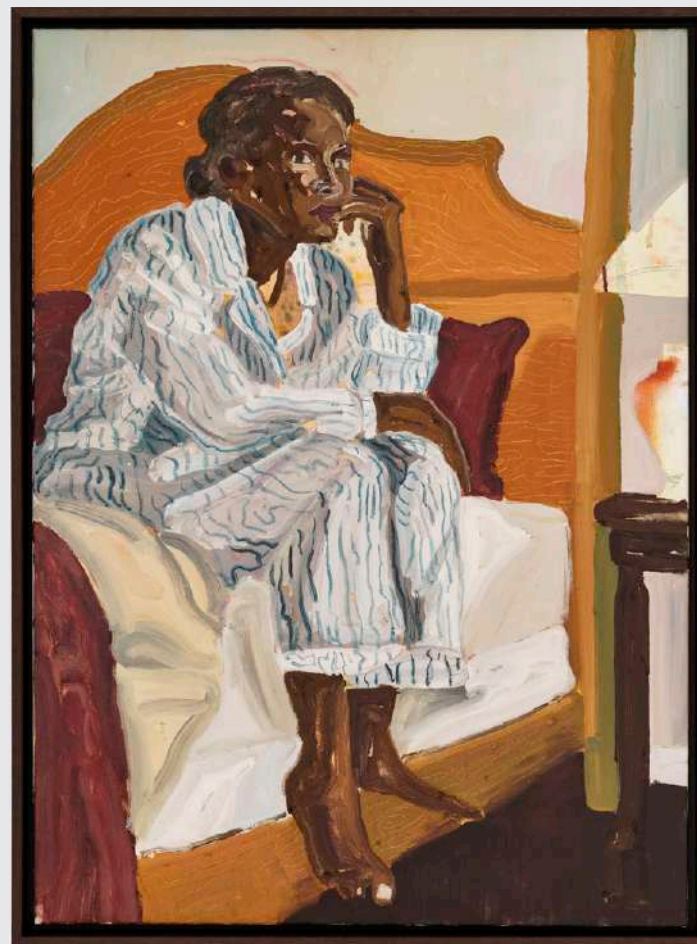
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**LUDOVIC NKOTH**

*Invented Truth*, 2023

Acrylic on canvas

100 × 73 cm / 48 × 28 3/4 inches







Ludovic Nkoth, *Invented Truth*, 2023 (detail)

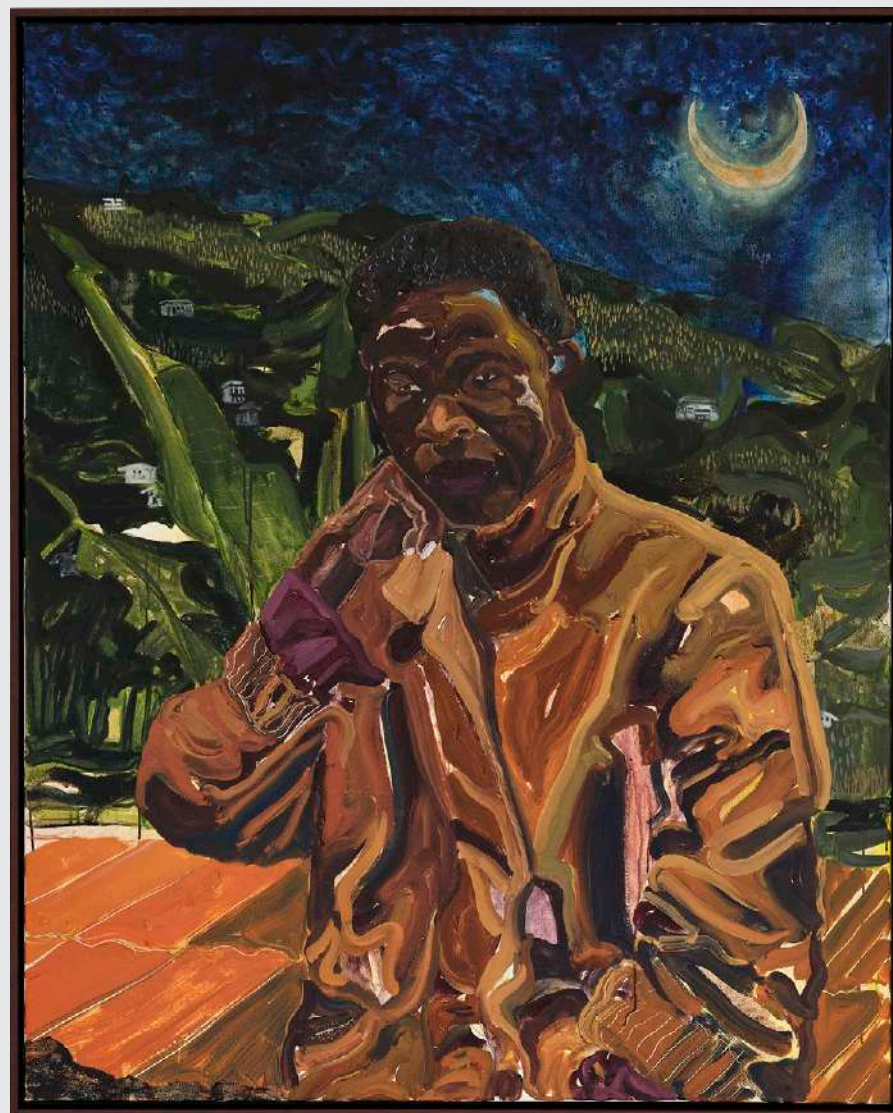


**LUDOVIC NKOTH**

*The Moon Whispered...I'm ready, 2023*

Acrilico su tela / Acrylic on canvas

162 × 130 × 4 cm / 63 2/3 × 51 × 1 3/8 inches







Ludovic Nkoth, *The Moon Whispered...I'm ready*, 2023 (detail)

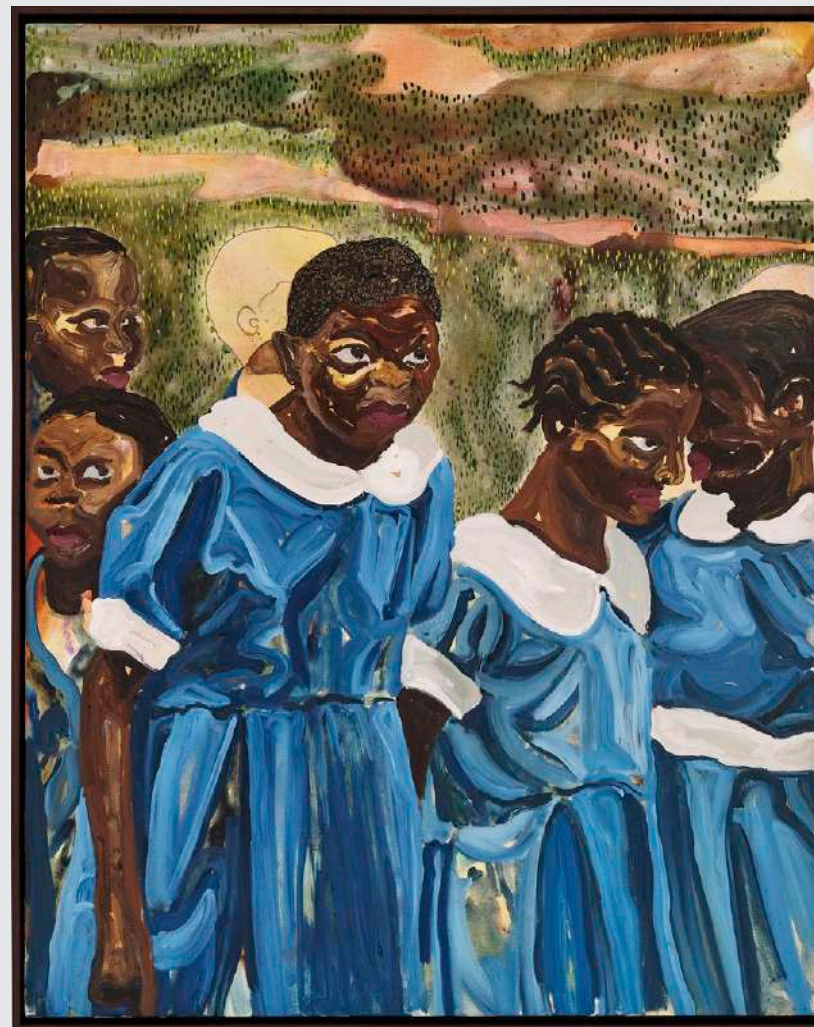


**LUDOVIC NKOTH**

*Francophone/ Anglophone (school girls), 2023*

Acrilico su tela / Acrylic on canvas

152 × 121 cm / 59 3/4 × 47 5/8 inches







Ludovic Nkoth, *Francophone/ Anglophone (school girls)*, 2023 (detail)

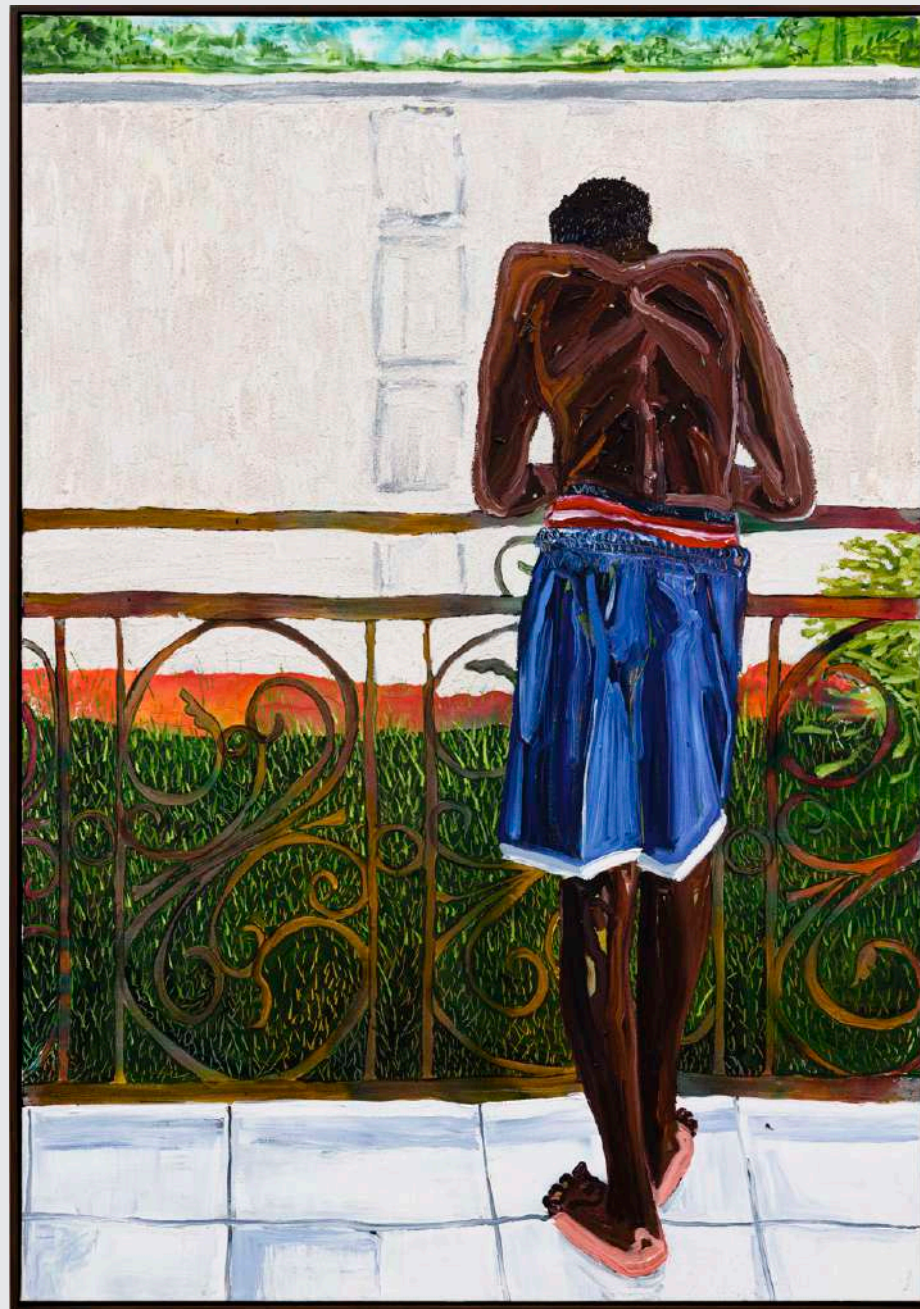


**LUDOVIC NKOTH**

*Trouble Sleep Yanga Wake, 2022*

Acrylic and sand on canvas

203.2 × 142.2 cm / 80 × 56 inches



**LUDOVIC NKOTH**

*Hot Feet, 2022*

Acrylic on canvas

183 × 152.4 cm / 72 × 60 inches







Ludovic Nkoth, *Hot Feet*, 2022 (detail)



“My work attempts to regain the things that were taken away from my people, things such as power, culture, the idea of self, and the idea of being black and proud.”

Ludovic Nkoth

Nkoth’s work has been gaining critical and curatorial attention in recent years, with comparisons made to Kerry James Marshall, who similarly taps into art history to enliven present-day subjects; Noah Davis, whose work is also sophisticated and subtle; and Alex Katz, who maintained a long career and a unique sense of artistic vision amid rapidly changing fashions.

“Studio Visit”, Artnet News, December 6th, 2022



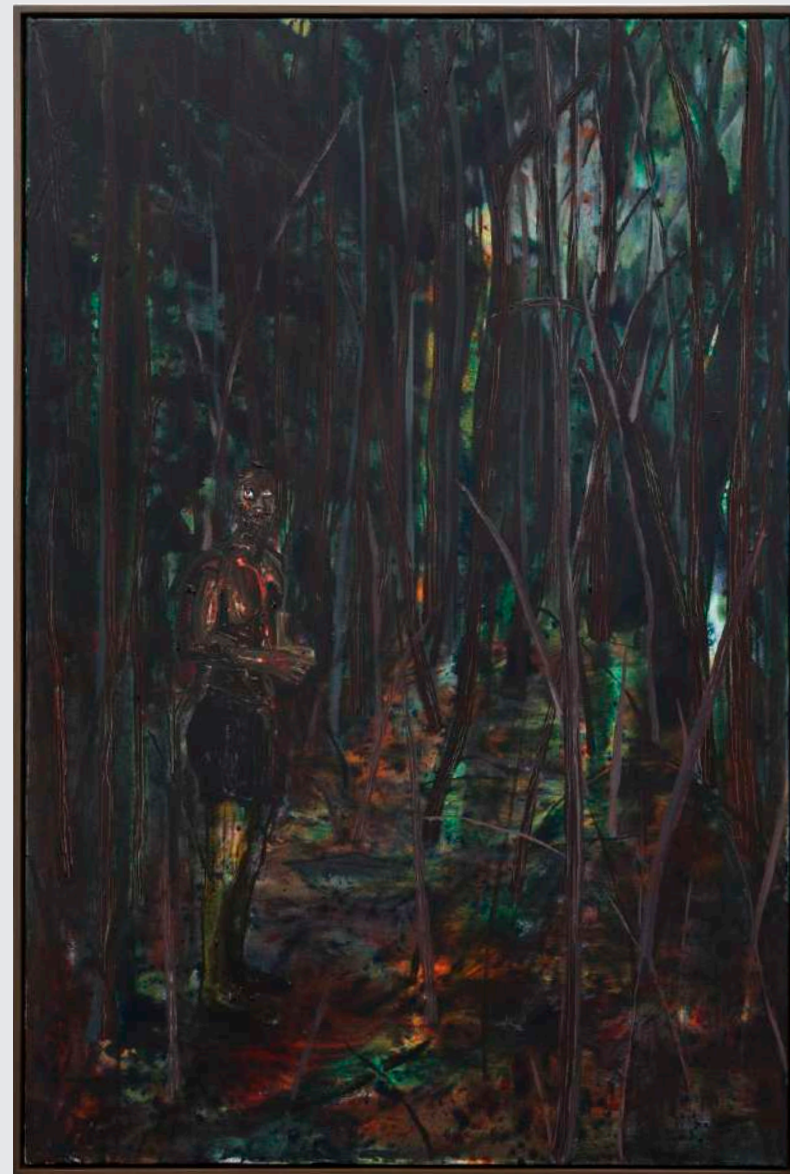
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**LUDOVIC NKOTH**

*Invisible Man*, 2022

Acrylic on canvas

183 × 122 cm / 72 × 48 inches







Ludovic Nkoth, *Invisible Man*, 2022 (detail)



“In my own research, I’ve been very interested in the relationship of African American artists to the concepts and traditions of Africa from the 1960s onwards. Artists travelled to newly independent states and sometimes had to confront the difference between the myths they had of Africa, the romance they had, and the reality there. Many artists don’t know those traditions in a direct way, but only through research. For me is quite different, I grew up in Cameroon and I had a sort of lived experience of those traditions and those spiritual, mystical rituals. And that comes into some of my works”.

“With these paintings, I’m actually recollecting memories of myself being in these ceremonies or in these traditions and what it meant to me, and also how that has impacted me and allowed me to see the world differently”.



**LUDOVIC NKOTH**

*System (Red I)*, 2022

Acrylic on canvas

152.4 × 122 cm / 60 × 48 inches





“The grids are touching on so many different levels, not only the art history, but also on the human condition. The grid can be seen as the system that a lot of people of colour and just everyone in the United States wrestle with on a daily basis”.

“There are many musicians, artists, filmmakers who are somehow making an expression of something that’s against the system in a very obvious way or a portrayal of how the system works. These works are powerful because they’re very mysterious and they don’t let you read them easily.”

Conversation between Ludovic Nkoth and Mark Godfrey, POND Society



“By focusing on my memories and comparing it with today’s reality, I hope viewers see my paintings as mirrors that allows them to see themselves, question themselves and our social systems”.

Ludovic Nkoth





**LUDOVIC NKOTH**

*Night Watch, 2022*

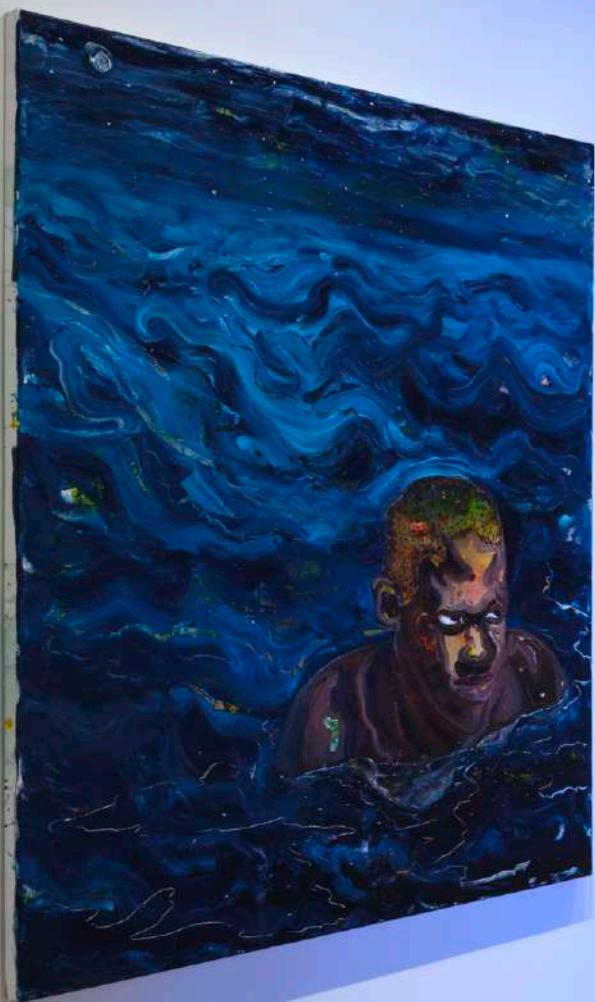
Acrylic on canvas

121.9 × 182.9 cm / 48 × 72 inches



## Selected Installation Views

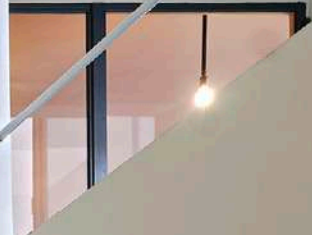
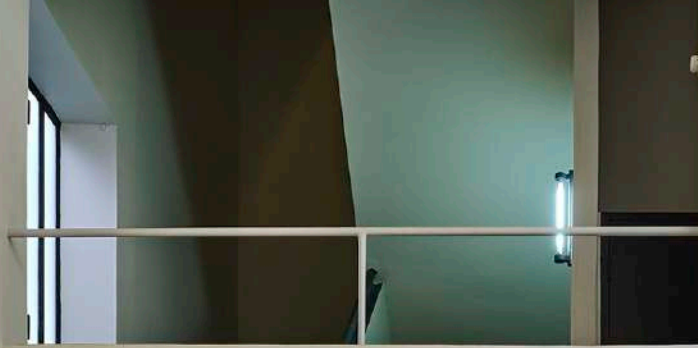








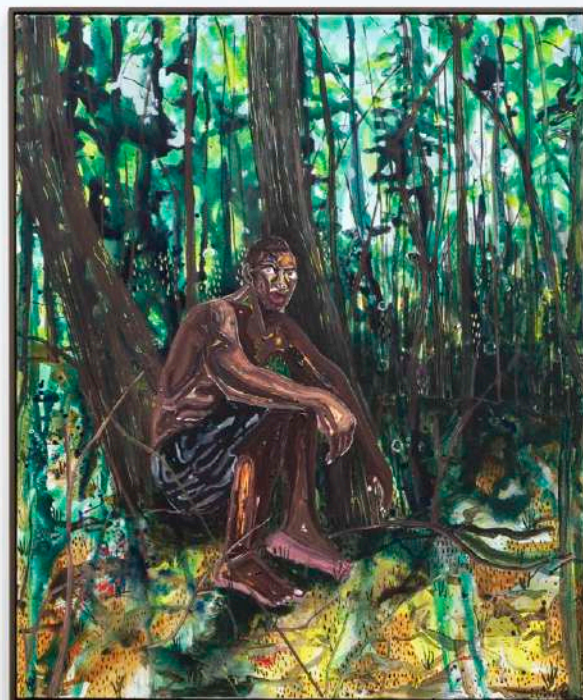
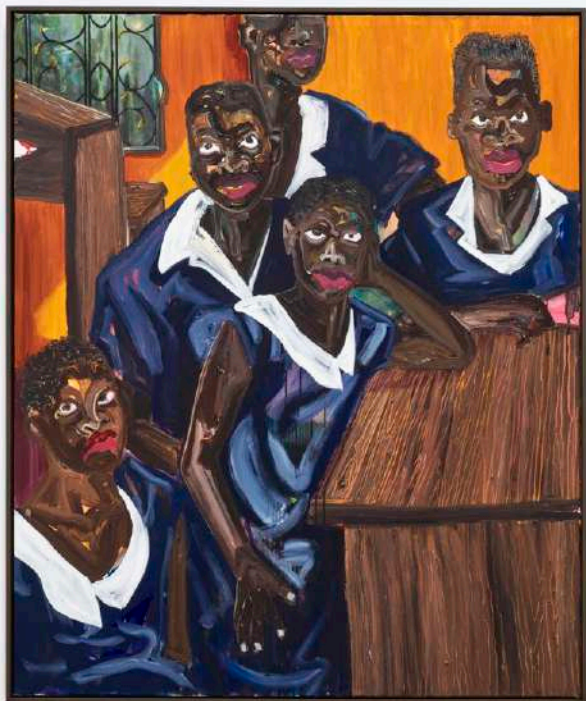
















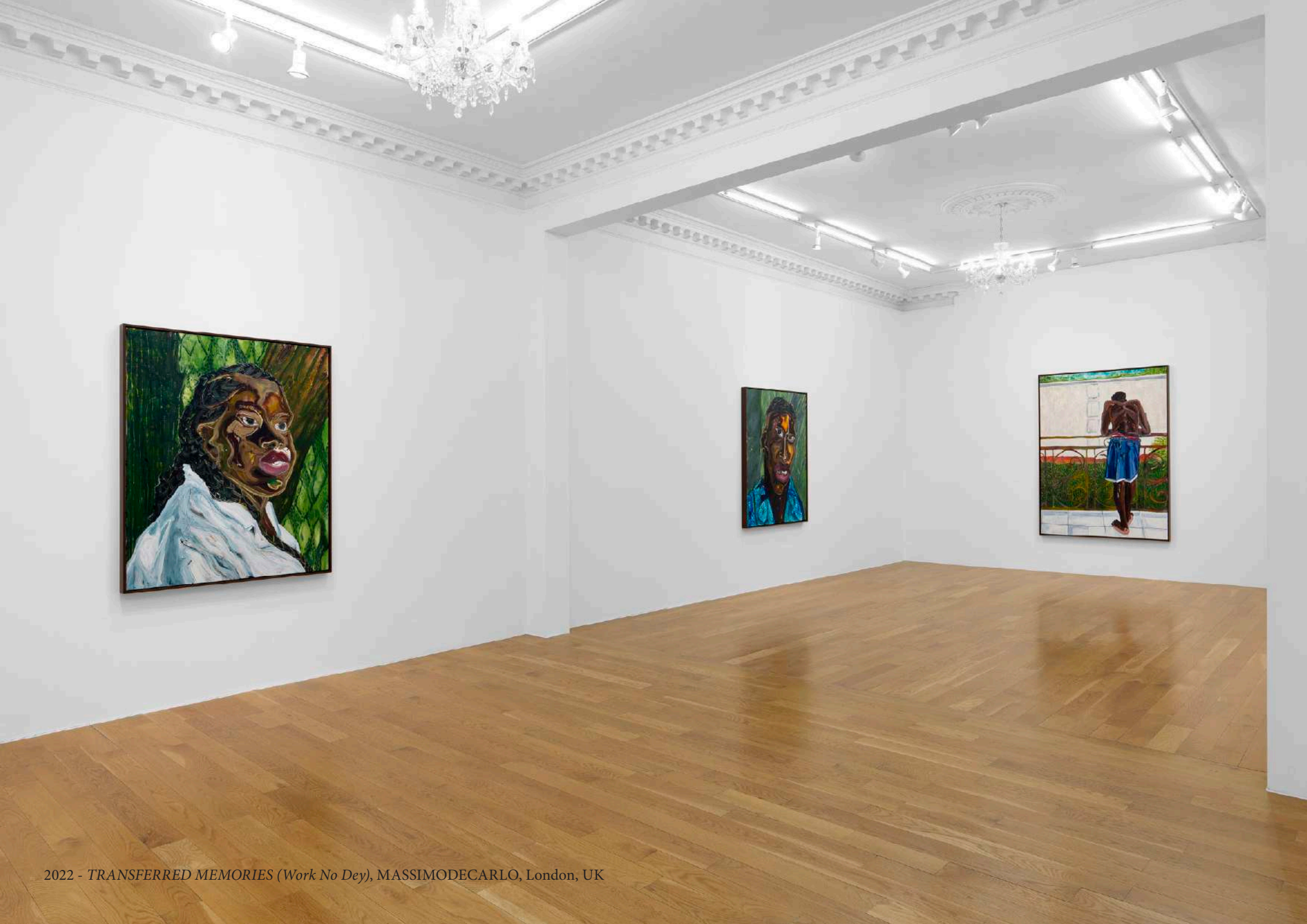




























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## Selected Press





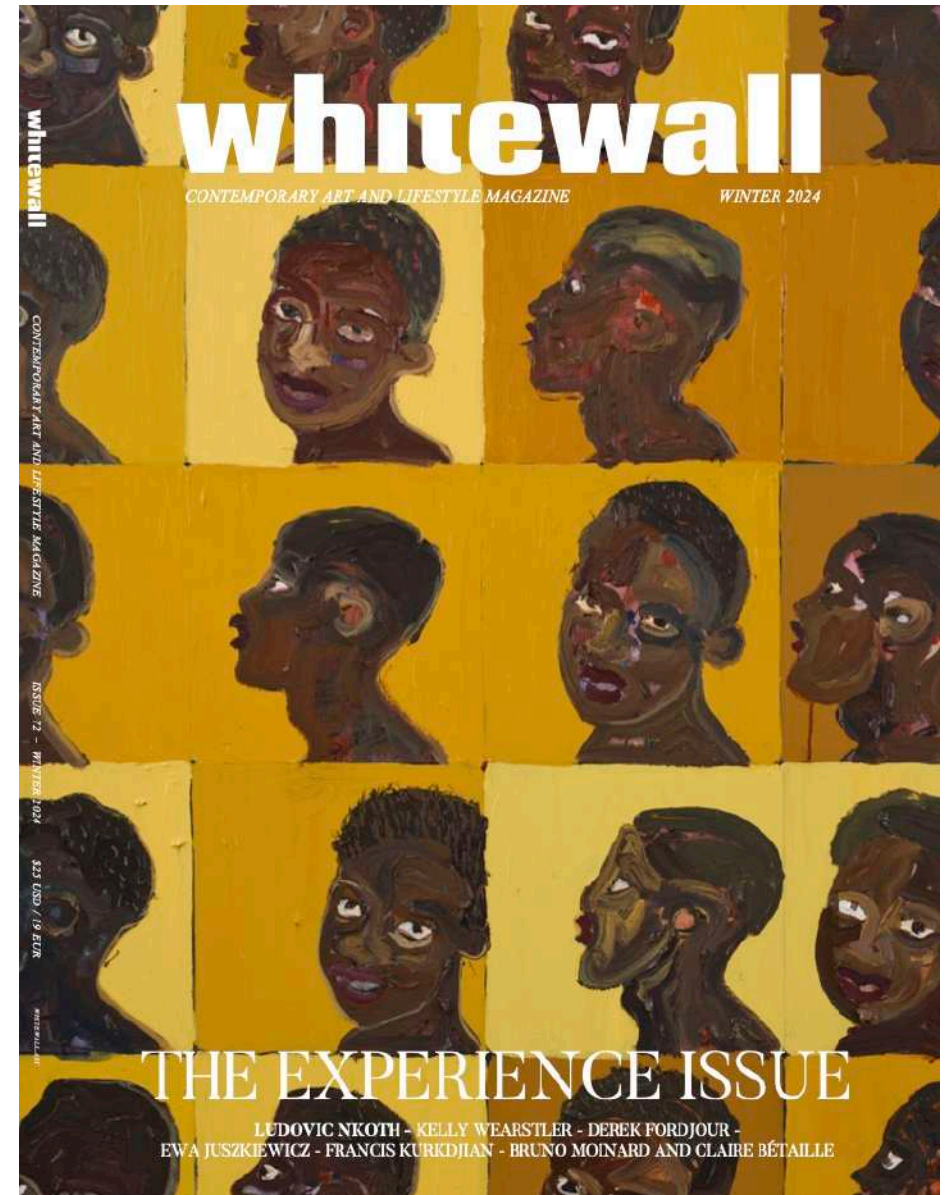
## Ludovic Nkoth Searches for Home and Harmony After a Year-Long Residency in Paris

Whitewall's Winter 2024 cover story illuminates the exploratory process of visionary New York-based artist Ludovic Nkoth. His experience of living within the African, then African American, and later European African context has been profound, relating back to the theme of what it means to call a place home.

Ludovic Nkoth has always made work in search of the idea of home. As he has moved from place to place from adolescence to adulthood, the one constant for him has been art, and his practice and desire to be present within a place reflects that. The artist grew up in Cameroon before moving to South Carolina at the age of 13. After attending undergrad at the **University of South Carolina**, he moved to New York to pursue his MFA. And after living and working in New York, he has spent the past year or so in Paris in a residency with L'Académie des Beaux-Arts. His experience of living within the African, then African American, and later European African context has been profound, relating back to the theme of what it means to call a place home.

In Paris, he was drawn to the Château Rouge neighborhood, with its large concentration of people from the African diaspora in Paris. He spent time at cafés, restaurants, barbershops, and markets—listening to people, stories, and music. Many of his resulting paintings from the year long stint in Paris reference the feeling and memory of what he absorbed there. Those works were on view at François Ghebaly in the solo show “The Is of It,” on view recently from October 7 to November 11, 2023. As Nkoth described it, his work in Paris was not only informed by the people he was present with, but by the intense focus he put on developing his relationship to harmony in color and express mark-making. These new figurative paintings no longer ask permission of the viewer to exist. They hold their own it.

Whitewall spoke with Nkoth just as his time in Paris was wrapping up. He described the past year as an exercise in how creative one can be in a year, with an excitement to see how it all translates to his studio back in New York.



Whitewall Winter 2024 cover; Ludovic Nkoth, "System (Yellow) II," 2023; photo by Paul Salvesson, courtesy of the artist and François Ghebaly.



**WHITEWALL:** You're in Paris right now as part of an artist residency with L'Académie des Beaux-Arts. What has that been like?

**LUDOVIC NKOTH:** I've been here since September of last year. I'm based in New York and had just moved into a new studio. What really got me sold to the idea was the culture here is a bit slower than New York. I knew that even if I was in Paris working, I was still going to be able to have a slower pace of life compared to New York.

It's been unlike every other residency that I've heard of or done. It doesn't require much from the artist. You don't have a show at the end, you don't give the venue works, they just want to be able to fund a space for you to create, a space for you to research, or even just a space for you to contemplate as an artist. They understand that as an artist, the making process is not the only time that you're working.

So going into this space, I knew what I was going to do, but I didn't understand how that energy was going to travel through me. It was fascinating to walk around a place **Le Moulin Rouge**, seeing these buildings that were painted by these artists that growing up I've seen in museums, and now I'm walking on the same soil.

## Ludovic Nkoth Discovers Balance in Art and Life in Paris

**WW:** So how has this residency compared to the way in which you work in New York?

**LN:** In New York, I usually try to have a separation of my work space and my living space. But here, it was living and work space joined, so it was a first for me. I embraced it, and it was hard a bit to find a balance. Because you wake up having your tea, the first thing you think about is mixing colors. You go to sleep and the last thing you think about is what you did or what you can fix in the painting you worked on for the last eight hours. I think that allowed me to grow at such a rapid pace, which I don't think I would have grown at if I stayed in New York.

It's almost felt like I've been in this time capsule for a year, where I am reading, painting, going to see museums, inviting people to have conversations around the works, doing that every day and discovering so many things I didn't know about my practice, my process, but also myself. I think my work now is a direct byproduct of my way of living and my life and my journey across this world.

**WW:** So how did that all result in the two shows you have this fall at Francois Ghebaly in Los Angeles and Maison La Roche in Paris?

**LN:** I wanted to be able to show what I was up to here. I thought it could be a beautiful way of closing such a beautiful chapter in such a new place. It felt like a yearlong meditation upon the self, in a way. It's been very fruitful, I would say. I think I grew so much as a person and also as an artist. I've been loving living in Paris.



Ludovic Nkoth, "A meditation upon the nothing," 2023; photo by Paul Salvesson, courtesy of the artist and François Ghebaly.

**WW: What is Paris like for you? Did you have any expectations going in?**

**LN:** I didn't have any big expectations. Sometimes when you go into things with raised expectations, you are a bit disappointed, or you want things to go the way you planned them to go. You're not fully accepting life and things to happen and the place to inform your everyday life and movement.

Growing up, I moved around a lot. I grew up in Cameroon, left Cameroon at the age of 13 to move to South Carolina, where I knew only a few people, barely knew the language. I had to figure out the space for myself, and after my undergrad, I got up again and left for New York where, again, I barely knew anyone. I did my master's there and then created a sense of a home and a family there for myself.

Then again, I got the call from Paris for this residency and decided, "What could possibly go wrong?" For me, that excites me. The idea of diving into the unknown and trusting your instincts, trusting the fact that you've done this before, and your gut will never fail you.

Paris has been so giving. A lot of times, it's hard to be present in the moment because I'm always thinking of the past or future. The present is something that happens, and I realize it after it happens. So Paris has been a good way to go to a café with a friend and sit over a cup of coffee for two hours. Things are happening because they need to happen, not because I wanted them to happen. I was trusting.

My practice shifted a lot here, and I'm in a space where I'm trying to go where the work wants me to go and just listen to that. Here I was not only productive, but I was very open to growth, to new experiences. I love the way I feel mentally and physically here.



Portrait of Ludovic Nkoth by Chandler Kennedy.

**Ludovic Nkoth Focuses on His Use of Color in a New Way****WW: Is there something in your practice that you can pinpoint that has shifted?**

**LN:** So much. When I got here, the residency invited us for a private walk-through of the "Monet - Mitchell" [October 5, 2022-February 27, 2023] show at [Fondation Louis Vuitton](#). It was mesmerizing to see two amazing artists of their time looking at the same things but at different times of their lives, having a crazy output, and seeing what they saw through different lenses. You have **Monet**, who was a bit more suave with his approach and created such harmony and such a jazzy flow with his color combination and his mark-making. And then you have **Mitchell**, who was a bit more gestural, had a bit more power with her brushstrokes. I paid attention to the way both were using color. I thought, "Wow, okay, I've been doing this whole thing wrong."

Luckily, this was at the beginning of the residency! So it was a bit easy to pivot from the way I thought of color and the way I was using color throughout my works. I went to the exhibition maybe three times and just sat in front of these works for



hours looking and filling up my cup. I went back to the studio and started breaking down everything. I wanted to have this harmony that existed in Monet's work, but then I wanted to have this force that Mitchell had whenever she was making her marks as well. I think my work somewhat exists within these two, but then a bit figurative.

There's a bit more confidence in the new works. There's a greater understanding of color theory or color relationship. There is a willingness to explore things that I hadn't yet fully explored within my practice. Being here, I've understood that it's not about what you paint but how you paint it. I see that in the work so vividly now. Within my practice mobility is such an important aspect and every time I move to a new space it has a way of informing me. Something always shifts and grows whenever I move myself.



Ludovic Nkoth, "Bearing the impossible," 2023; photo by Paul Salveson, courtesy of the artist and François Ghebaly.

**WW: It's interesting that you are open to letting that experience come into the work. There has to be intention there in letting yourself open up, no?**

**LN:** I'm trying to tell the story of the human condition, but also the story of the

**WW: It's interesting that you are open to letting that experience come into the work. There has to be intention there in letting yourself open up, no?**

**LN:** I'm trying to tell the story of the human condition, but also the story of the world. So it's important that I process the world, that I allow myself to be a sponge wherever I go and regurgitate whatever I see or feel in these new spaces. Within the works, too, whenever I don't know what I'm doing is when I discover the most. If I always approach the works with a full understanding of what needs to happen, it closes me off from a discovery.

**WW: There is so much movement in your mark-making, it reminds me of rhythm and music. Does music play a role in your painting?**

**LN:** Yes, definitely. I love to dance, so movement is such a big idea for whenever I'm trying to make these marks. I paint sometimes with such huge brushes you can't fully control. You have to fully submit to the movement and let the music be a vehicle to follow. Whenever I'm listening to **Miles Davis's** *Kind of Blue*, a favorite album of all time, I just follow the saxophone. He'll have these long notes, and I'll try to follow as far the notes go. As soon as he lets go, I let go of the brush.

I think if there is color harmony plus harmony of movement, it makes for something greater. This is where music comes.

**"I'm trying to tell the story of the human condition, but also the story of the world," —Ludovic Nkoth**

**WW: What kind of paintings will be at Francois Ghebaly in Los Angeles?**

**LN:** For the show at Francois Ghebaly, I wanted to investigate the relationship that exists between Cameroon, my home country, and France, because we were a French colony. We gained our independence in 1961, but we were still influenced greatly by the space. I wanted to see how these immigrants are coming from Cameroon to find an idea of home or an idea of place of solitude in this new world that colonized them. Within my practice, home has always also been a huge idea because I've always searched for home. What does home mean for different people around the world?

At the residency in Montmartre, I was close to this little square called Château Rouge which is one of the biggest concentrations of African immigrants in Paris. You have your African markets, your barbershops, your African restaurants, and everyone there is part of the African diaspora. I spent a lot of time there seeing how people were living, speaking with them trying to understand their stories, how they got here, how their families got here, or how their families live back home.

I wanted to be present with these people. They helped me understand where I was because I come from a space where, living in the U.S., I was existing within the context of the African American history. Before arriving to the U.S., I was an African. And now I arrive in Paris as an African European. So there is a dynamic that exists and a bit of nuance where I've been living in both worlds and am able to codeswitch. I was very interested to also see how that would affect me as a person.



Ludovic Nkoth, "What is a window if not the air framed by right angles," 2023; photo by Paul Salvesson, courtesy of the artist and François Ghebaly.

With these paintings there are moments of intimacy, movements of discovery, and movements of me going through things I didn't fully understand in that moment. With the paintings I was able to crystallize a lot of those moments and investigate them deeper. It also takes some forms of storytelling and tries to give ideas of narrative, almost like mystery solving. My past paintings were somewhat asking for permission to exist from the viewer. They required the gaze of the viewer to be activated. With these paintings, they exist within their own world and they hold their own space. They don't require us or the gaze of the viewer to exist.

**WW:** That kind of desire to live in the present in a space makes me think of a past interview where you talked about how when you first came to the U.S. there was a language gap, so you found yourself at this young age forced into a quietness. You spent a lot of time with yourself before you were able to really engage others after moving to South Carolina. I wonder if there is a parallel there, going from New York to Paris, finding again a quietness to be with yourself and the work.

**LN:** I hadn't even fully noticed that, but I think, yes, quietness has been a big part of my life. Being in touch with the self, I would say. And having to fully understand the landscape that I existed within and the context of things. I think this is where art has been such a big part of my life because within these times of quietness and solitude and not fully understanding where I was, art was the one thing that made sense to me and the one thing I kept using as a moral compass and a social compass to navigate within the spaces and to understand where exactly I'm meant to be.

When I look back, those were very challenging times, but without those times I also wouldn't be the person that I am right now. We have to be shaped some way or another, and for me, this is how I know that I was put in this place to create. I was put in this place to feel and create things that ask people, "Hey this is what I see, this is how I feel. Do you feel the same? Do you see the same?" My story and my trajectory in life, it's been so that I don't think I could have a different output in life, other than just creating. Nothing else would make sense. Nothing else has ever made sense. I fully think I was put here to create.



artnet

## At His Paris Residency, Art-World Wunderkind Ludovic Nkoth Is Transforming ‘Moments of Being’ Into Moving Figurative Portraits

This month, the artist is opening exhibitions at François Ghebaly Gallery in Los Angeles, and Le Corbusier's Maison La Roche in Paris.

Katie White, October 6, 2023



Ludovic Nkoth, 2023.

*“For a long time, I didn’t feel like I fit into certain narratives of history, but after a while, I started understanding why so many artists came to Monmartre. It’s very inspiring as a space and the energy is very pure,” said artist Ludovic Nkoth from a studio he’d rented for the summer in Paris.*

The city was in the middle of a heatwave and Nkoth, who is typically based in New York, had just run out to buy a fan, but his spirits were high. He’d just completed a 10-month residency at Académie des Beaux-Arts and had decided to stay on in the city a few more weeks, finishing up a new body of the gestural figurative paintings for which he is celebrated.

These works weren’t destined for any old gallery wall but Paris’s famed Maison La Roche, a villa designed by Le Corbusier and his cousin Pierre Jeanneret in the 1920s, where Nkoth will open his solo exhibition “What If.” Nkoth will be the only second living artist to show work in the house—famously the only project where Le Corbusier was given free rein of design—and the youngest (the exhibition opens October 16, coinciding with Paris+).



Ludovic Nkoth, 2023.

“I’m the first Black artist to be given Maison La Roche,” said Nkoth, “This isn’t a traditional white cube gallery, but a home. This home, Maison La Roche, has been the site of a lot of white, European history. I decided I wanted to fill the space with Black people. I think of the home as a place of rest. It’s rare that we associate the Black body with quietness and solitude, leisure, and rest and so I leaned into that with these new works. Even though, I admit, rest challenges my worldview, too. I struggle not to work constantly.”

The 28-year-old Cameroonian-born artist, who emigrated to South Carolina at the age of 13, has become something of an art-world wunderkind. His works are already in the collections of the Studio Museum in Harlem in New York; the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles; the ICA Miami, and the High Museum of Art in Atlanta. In June of this year, his painting *Identity of the Moment* sold for over \$80,000 at Phillips.

But for Nkoth, the journey has been a whirlwind of constant labor, dating back to his high school years in South Carolina, as a teenager in an immigrant household. “I come from a place where making art for a living or being an artist was not considered a possibility. I literally did everything in my power to allow me to be where I am

today. I remember I handed out business cards. I was passing them out everywhere,” he said with a laugh.

Nkoth moved to New York when he was accepted into the M.F.A. at Hunter University. “I have no idea how I got in. I look back at my life and there have been so checkpoints already. I’ve gone from one life to another to another and had to figure out how to recreate myself in the different places, I feel like I’ve lived so many lives already,” he explained.

The time spent in France has been an opportunity for Nkoth to slow life down a bit and has allowed him to reflect on his multifaceted identity and the history of French colonialism in Cameroon. “In Cameroon, tensions and conflict exist between the Francophone and Anglophone populations that are byproducts of these colonial histories. There are still links that exist between Cameroon and France. Being here has given me a new perspective on myself as an African European,” he said “Moving to the States, I slowly became part of African American history, but here I exist in a different context.”





Ludovic Nkoth, *Plié* (2023). Courtesy of the artist and Massimo De Carlo Gallery.

Over the months in Paris, Nkoth found himself spending time with other Cameroon immigrants in Paris, breaking bread together at times, and listening and playing music (a favorite respite for the artist).

"It has been very nourishing for my practice. I am always a search of this idea of home, ideas of belonging and fitting in," he said "When you relocate or are displaced, you find a new idea of home. I was fully interested in learning their stories, listening to them, and just documenting our time together."

These experiences oriented his residency, too. "The stories I have been investigating in these works are centered on immigrants, the way they live their lives, the idea of home for them," he explained "These paintings are snapshots of moments, personal moments of being."

The time has reshaped his understanding of art historical dialogue, too. Soon after arriving, Nkoth saw the exhibition "[Claude Monet – Joan Mitchell](#)" at Fondation Louis Vuitton. "Oh my goodness, the way that two artists from different times were looking at the same subjects and making these opposite visions just took me out," he said "Still, they were using color with such confidence and sophistication."

The exhibition also offered him a framework for engaging with Le Corbusier. "We associate Le Corbusier with his architectural practice, but he was also a painter and sculptor. He, Picasso, and so many artists of that time were looking at African art. I grew up on the continent watching these masks and works being made," he said. "The conversation is already there; it's all just an interesting playground of thought across time."



Ludovic Nkoth, *Soliloquy* (2023). Courtesy of the artist and François Ghebaly.

Nkoth thrives in this nexus of cultures, geographies, and interpersonal connections. Coinciding with the exhibition at Maison La Roche, he is also opening “The Is of It” a solo exhibition at François Ghebaly in downtown Los Angeles (October 7–November 11), featuring a suite of portraits he also created during the Paris residency. Nkoth says he was deeply influenced by Brazilian novelist Clarice Lispector’s 1973 novel *Água Viva*, a rhapsodic, stream-of-consciousness telling of a painter’s experience of life and time. “It made me want to grab hold of the present, to find a place in the moment” Nkoth explained. Lispector was a Ukrainian immigrant to Brazil, a shared experience he noted.

Still, the young artist has already found ways of maintaining stillness in the constant evolution of his career. Around his neck, he wears a necklace with the likeness of an African mask.

“When I moved to the States, my father had a few masks from the continent around the house. One mask just looked like it was full of history, it was even missing some parts. I spent 11 years in the

United States before going back, where there were my memories and my mother. That mask was a way for me to get to be in conversation with home,” he said. “At some point, I started signing this mask on the back of my work, like a logo ‘made in Africa.’ A few years ago, I made a friend who makes jewelry and I commissioned him to make a version of that mask for me in 2019. Now, everywhere I go, it goes.”



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# Artist Ludovic Nkoth takes on Le Corbusier


The Cameroon-born painter's new Paris show draws a link between the architect and Africa



Ludovic Nkoth in Maison La Roche, Paris, in front of his painting Becoming, 2022 © Manuel Obadia-Wills

Maison La Roche, a purist villa designed and built in the 1920s by Le Corbusier and his architect cousin Pierre Jeanneret, is an early example of what Le Corbusier would later call his “five points of new architecture” – a manifesto delineating pillars, a roof garden, an open floor plan, long windows and open façades. Commissioned by the banker and art collector Raoul La Roche, the house is divided into two parts: a gallery where he displayed his collection of works by the likes of Picasso, Braque and Léger, and private apartments.

Despite its openness and optimisation for natural light, its dual purpose still makes it complex to navigate. The artist Ludovic Nkoth is well aware of this as he welcomes me in. “Come with me, my friend,” says Nkoth, a warm, charismatic 28-year-old. “Let’s get lost together.”



Nkoth in Maison La Roche, in front of Traces de pas dans la nuit, 1957, by Le Corbusier, and The Moon Whispered... I'm Ready, 2023, by Nkoth © Manuel Obadia-Wills



Nkoth with Light's Shadow, 2023 © Manuel Obadia-Wills

Though Nkoth was only introduced to the villa recently, it already feels familiar to him. In October, he will unveil a solo show entitled *What If* – becoming only the second living artist and the first black artist to have an exhibition in the space. It is one of three that Nkoth is presenting this autumn, opening 10 days after his solo show *The Is Of It* at François Ghebaly in Los Angeles and also following a single-work presentation at Massimo De Carlo's *Pièce Unique* in the Marais. All feature new paintings Nkoth has completed since relocating, temporarily, to Paris from Brooklyn in September 2022 as the recipient of an inaugural residency run by the Académie des Beaux-arts and Cité Internationale des Arts. The residency came to an end in June, but Nkoth – raised first in Cameroon, then South Carolina – has decided to stay in Paris a little longer. “Although now my English is better than my French, it is still my first language and part of me feels French,” he says in his velvety accent, a melange of francophone and Charleston.



A Day's Weight, 2023 © Manuel Obadia-Wills



I follow Nkoth through the labyrinthine arteries of Maison La Roche. In one room, his painting *A Day's Weight*, depicting a figure reclining on a wooden day bed, is mounted on the wall. "I have been thinking about what life was like for people of colour when the house was built," he explains. "The work in the show contemplates how it would look if a family of colour lived here."

“

**I tried to find one place I could call home**

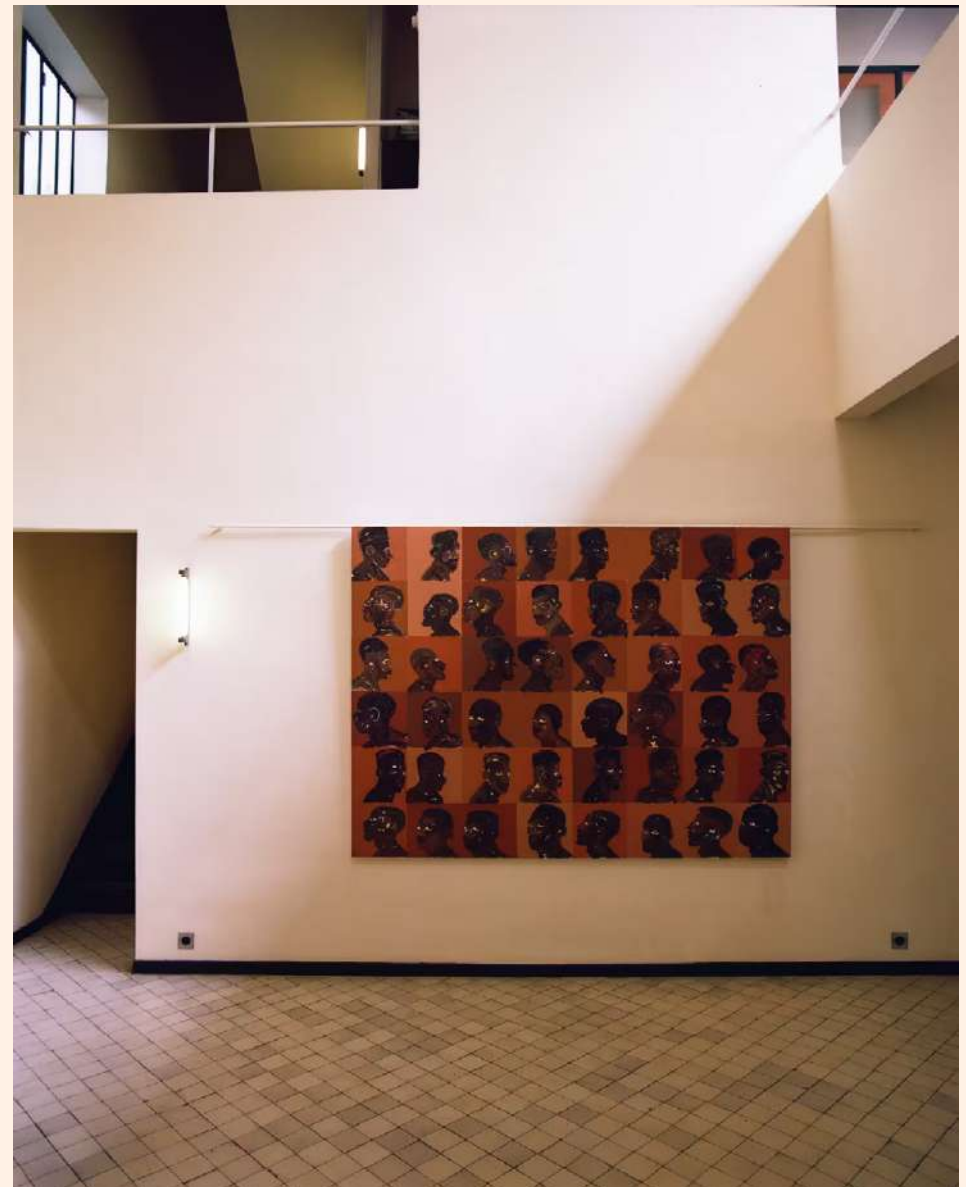
Ludovic Nkoth

There is also a small study of a smiling woman cradling a newborn; another shows an infant in a romper. Nkoth's subject matter often centres on reclaiming a sense of power, self and black pride. "I painted so many babies that when people

visit my studio they ask if I am thinking about having kids," he laughs. "When you arrive in a new place as an immigrant, you seek to establish real roots, you start a family and it forms this idea of hope – your children are going to pick up from where you left off. So these babies are symbols of hope."

Nkoth was raised in Yaoundé, Cameroon, by his young mother; his father moved to Spartanburg, South Carolina, when Nkoth was an infant. When he was 13, his parents decided he should go to live with his father; overnight he went from being an only child to the eldest of four, with a new stepmother, and from being African to African-American. "No one cares where in Africa you are from in South Carolina. You're just African-American," he says. "My journey has seen me go from one home to another, and from one family to another, and create my own ideal chosen family along the way."

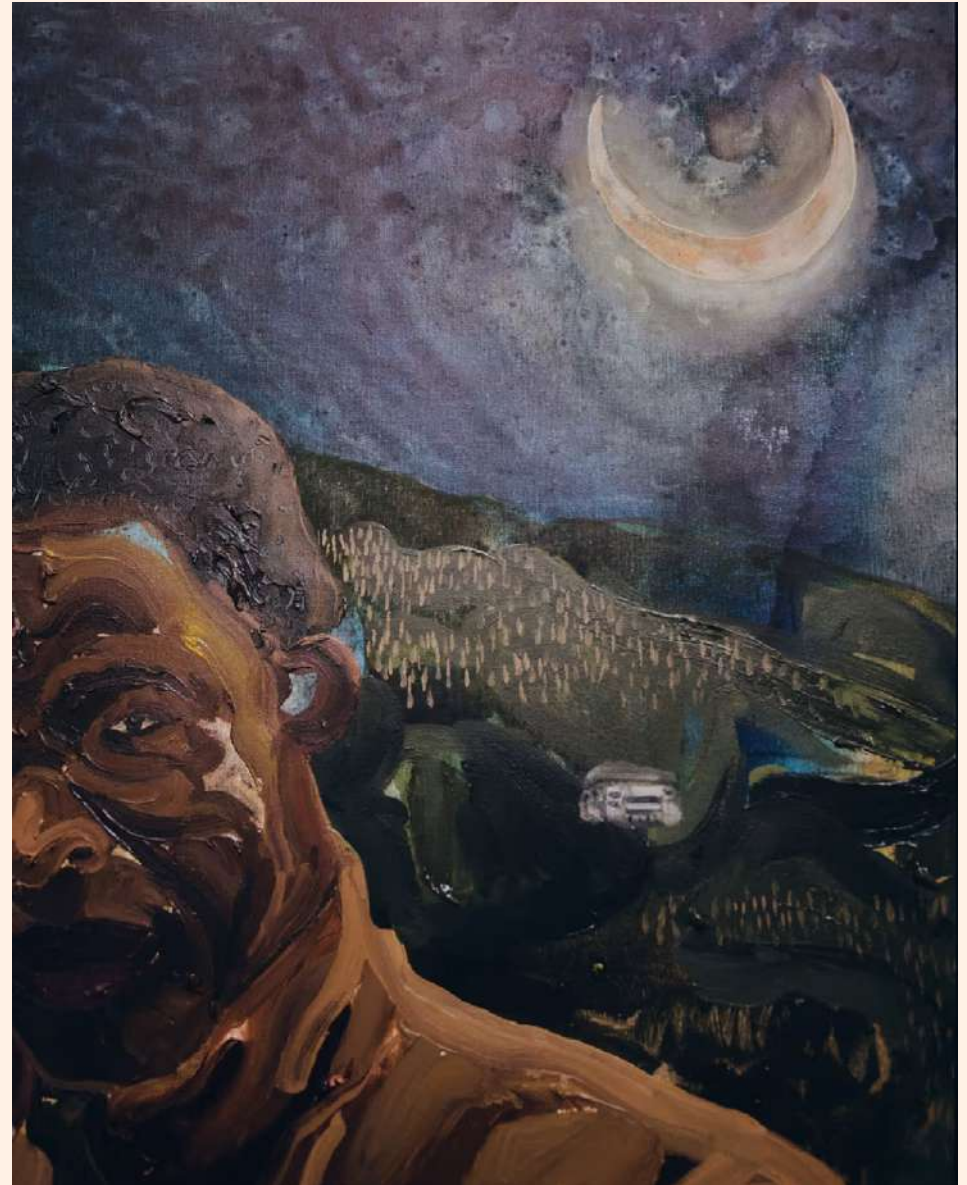
Nkoth met many of the subjects in his recent paintings while frequenting Château Rouge, an area known by many Parisians as "le quartier africain"; it reminded him of his West African roots. "We talk, we share meals and ideas," he reflects on encounters with street performers, barbers or restaurant owners. "It's not easy to come to a country such as France or the US as an immigrant."



System (Orange), 2023, by Nkoth in Maison La Roche © Manuel Obadia-Wills



Nkoth in Maison La Roche © Manuel Obadia-Wills



A detail from The Moon Whispered... I'm Ready, 2023 © Manuel Obadia-Wills



He has melded these observations with the research from the Le Corbusier archives, which comprise some 400,000 items including plans, photographs and drawings, with many of the documents stored adjacent to Maison La Roche at Maison Jeanneret. Although Le Corbusier never cited West Africa in his writings, scholars have made the case that a number of the architect's projects epitomise Afrocentric architecture. As he pored over the archival materials, Nkoth was drawn to any possible precolonial African influences in [Le Corbusier's](#) work, while the colour-coordinated documents informed his palette. The architect's politics were notoriously controversial, but Nkoth prefers to focus on his own story. "I don't see the exhibition as reclaiming the space, but rather shining light on the direct link between Le Corbusier's whole practice and Africa. As an African man with a direct history with the continent, it is important for me to highlight my traditions."

According to the artist [Kehinde Wiley](#), "Ludovic's work achieves a dual feat by pointing at the beautiful and terrible parts of the world, but also pointing within the self to address personal vulnerabilities and aspirations." Wiley and Nkoth met in 2019, when Nkoth was in the final year of his MFA at Hunter College. Since then their friendship has grown and Wiley has introduced Nkoth's work to new fans such as supermodel Naomi Campbell. "When I look at Ludovic's work, I instantly understand what I am looking at and feeling," says Campbell. "I want to jump into the canvas!"

Nkoth's artistic growth is mirrored in the market's appetite for his work. The price bracket for the autumn shows is between \$12,000 and \$70,000; however, in June, his painting *Identity of the Moment* sold at the Phillips 20th Century to Now auction in London for \$80,500 – 27 per cent above mid-estimate. Lebanese entrepreneur Tony Salamé has bought several of Nkoth's paintings that now hang at his Aïshti Foundation on the outskirts of Beirut. "What struck me about Ludovic's work when I first saw it was the texture, the vivid colours, the technique," he says. "The brushstrokes are very delicate."



Nkoth with Suddenly..., 2023 © Manuel Obadia-Wills

# Biography

## Ludovic Nkoth

### Selected Solo Exhibitions

#### 2023

*What If*, Maison La Roche, Paris, F  
*What If*, MASSIMODECARLO Pièce Unique, Paris, F  
*The Is of It*, François Ghebaly, Los Angeles, US  
*Ludovic Nkoth*, Luce Gallery, Turin, I

#### 2022

*Stopover*, Pond Society Foundation, Shanghai, PRC  
*TRANSFERRED MEMORIES (Work No Dey)*, MASSIMODECARLO, London, UK  
*STOPOVER*, Pond Society, Hong Kong, HK

#### 2021

*You Sea Us*, Luce Gallery, Turin, I  
*Don't Take This Too*, François Ghebaly, Los Angeles, US

#### 2018

*Roots*, West Main Artists Co-op, Spartanburg, US

### Selected Group Exhibitions

#### 2024

*The Swimmer*, The FLAG Art Foundation, New York, US  
*Fifteen Years*, Luce Gallery, Turin, I  
*Come One, Come All*, Anthony Gallery, Chicago, USA

#### 2023

*The Speed of Grace*, Simões de Assis, São Paulo, BR  
Rhinoceros Gallery and François Ghebaly, Rome, I

#### 2022

*Dark Light, Realism in the Age of Post truth*, Aishti Foundation, Beirut, LB

#### 2021

*Portraiture One Century Apart*, MASSIMODECARLO, London, UK  
*Portraiture One Century Apart*, MASSIMODECARLO Pièce Unique, Paris, F  
*KUNST IST. 25 anni di Merano Arte Curated by Luigi Fassi*, Kunst Meran Museum, Merano, I  
*Something about Us*, Anthony Gallery, Chicago, US  
*Four Walls*, Ross+Kramer, New York, US

#### 2020

*How 'Bout Them Apples*, Ross+Kramer, New York, US  
*Black Voices/Black Microcosms*, CFHILL Art Space, Stockholm, S  
*Figurative Summer*, Jenkins Johnson Gallery, Digital Exhibition

#### 2019

*Mostly fine Adults*, Pfizer Building, New York, US  
*Knock on Wood*, Hunter College, New York, US  
*Parallels and Peripheries*, VisArts, Rockville, US

#### 2017

*Altered Realism*, Upstair Gallery, Tryon, US



# Selected Public Collections

## Ludovic Nkoth

### FRANCE

Foundation Louis Vuitton, Paris

### LEBANON

Aïshti Foundation, Jal El Dib

### UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

High Museum of Art, Atlanta

ICA Miami, Miami

The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles

