

# JOHN MADU

## *Year of the Masque*

With a critic text by Oliver Enwonwu

### Opening:

Thursday 9 June, 6 pm

Fondazione Mudima is pleased to present the first solo exhibition of Nigerian artist John Madu in Milan, Italy, the exhibition will be on view from June 9 to July 8, 2022.



*Chivalry is Dead*, 2022  
Acrylic on canvas  
227 x 190 cm - 89.4 x 74.8 in

John Madu holds an increasingly significant position amongst a new vanguard of artists currently shaping the stylistic direction and narrative of contemporary art in Nigeria and the broader West African region. Collectively, through portraiture and figuration they interrogate identity and dismantle negative racial constructs by celebrating Black people in confident and assertive gaze. Distinctively, Madu examines critically, the historically unequal relationship between Africa and the West, as well as decolonisation and the transitional society.

15 monumentally-sized paintings mostly in acrylic are the subject of his fourth solo exhibition, *Year of the Masque*. Often incorporating other mediums like ink and pastel, they together serve as the best examples of the artist's current inquisitions. Presented by Fondazione Mudima in Milan, the title of the exhibition at first glance hints only to a special year set aside to remember and to celebrate the masque—a form of amateur dramatic entertainment, popular among the nobility in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century England. It embraced dancing and acting by masked actors. The title however, is more instructive and sets the tone for a deeper understanding of Madu's oeuvre.

*Year of the Masque* navigates seamlessly between tradition and modernity, continuing on Madu's reimagination of legendary and domestic encounters across Africa and the related global diaspora as evidenced by his use of satire, allegory, and a generous sampling of imagery from West art history, African mythology and popular culture.

(Excerpt from the exhibition text "The Artist as a Social Commentator" written by Oliver Enwonwu for the exhibition).

10 June – 8 July 2022

### Catalogue

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with a critic text by Oliver Enwonwu

### Press office

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### Fondazione Mudima

Opening hours:  
Monday to Friday  
1am - 1 pm / 3 - 7 pm

Free entrance

### About the artist

John Madu is a Nigerian multi-disciplinary artist born in Lagos, best known for his figurative symbolic style of paintings. His work can be described as eclectic because of how he derives ideas, from a various range of influences and sources based on popular culture, African history, art history and personal experiences. Symbolism is usually evident in his work, with reoccurring iconography such as books, paintings, and other recognizable items which convey a certain meaning in art, and act as metaphors to a subject. John Madu conveys personal narratives through allegories in his vibrant paintings. His subjects, usually depicted within

their intimate domestic spaces, seemingly pose or are caught in mid-reflection. John Madu pays careful attention to the symbolism of the objects in his portraits, finding hidden meanings in the routine decor of the house. Artworks are hung on the walls of bedrooms and living rooms using surreal colours including orange hair and pink walls. The quiet subtleties of his objects come out in the small details: the texture of the popular Ankara wax fabric, the pattern of a Ghana-must-go bag, the curved design of a table lamp...

With a B.sc in policy and strategic studies, John Madu has taught himself, how to follow a natural flow of research and idea development, exploring all possible concepts, until it is innovative and ready for high quality production, and above all to embrace his individual style, with a wide array of mediums such as acrylic paint, oil paint, spray paint, ink, burlap and collage. His multidisciplinary approach has guided his creative interest in design objects, sculpture, functional art, and even artistic fashion pieces. Madu's art has been featured in contemporary art exhibitions locally and internationally. He has collaborated with international brands such as DIESEL and Bombay Sapphire, and believes art should be perceived as a time continuum like the way we see nature and an instantaneous reflection of the creative part of ourselves being expressed, when a viewer comes in contact with his work.

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