

DREAMING OF IDENTITY

10 June – 17 July

KOJO MARFO'S DEBUT SOLO EXHIBITION AT JD MALAT GALLERY



Kojo Marfo, *Noble*, 2021, acrylic on canvas, 73 1/8 x 82 1/4 in, 185.5 x 209 cm

Dreaming of Identity presents a vibrant new body of paintings by London-based Ghanaian artist Kojo Marfo, marking his debut solo show in the UK.

Born in Ghana, Marfo developed his interest in art and visual culture through the traditional Akan artifacts, sculptures and carvings that he was exposed to as a child. Akan art remains a vital influence for Marfo in his work today. The distinctive figures in his paintings are inspired by the forms of Akan fertility dolls as well as other African carvings. In addition, his work contains strong visual references to his Ghanaian childhood. The country's flowers, textiles and colours, he says, flood his memory on a daily basis.

After travelling to New York in the 1990s, Marfo moved to London in 1999 making the city his home ever since. London brought him into contact with a multitude of people from different cultures, making him more conscious of his own. "I want people to see my work as a reflection of my Akan culture and my struggles living in the West." He says. As a consequence, he developed a unique style that is drawing a great deal of attention in the London art world.

Dreaming of Identity presents fifteen new paintings created in the past year. A series of nine portraits entitled 'Strangers' is based on casual encounters with Londoners, and six large-scale figurative paintings that depict families, animals and social gatherings, inspired by people he has met. Through these works, the exhibition unveils Marfo's rich observations on the different people and cultures he has encountered. For example, startling works such as *Dowager* depict the social stigma attached to single parenting, and *Noble* presents Kojo's observations on the huge importance of cows in society – in the areas of diet, family life, livelihood, economy, impact on sustainability, social status as well as their ritual significance – on a cross-cultural basis.

For Marfo, art is not simply a creative outlet, it acts as a vehicle to inspire connection between different cultures and societies. He says that his work aims to highlight social issues, such as inequalities, religion, politics, and spiritualism. "I want my artwork to create a connection with people, to be a symbol for everyone to relate to. No matter what you are going through, or where you live, I want my art to help people think and reflect on their inner lives and how it relates to the wider world."

Dreaming of Identity marks a year since Gallery Founder, Jean-David Malat, discovered Marfo's work through the open-call exhibition *Isolation Mastered* which took place after the UK's first lockdown in an effort to support aspiring artists. Jean-David, as well as an impressive committee of judges, which included the art historian and Programme Director at Sotheby's Institute of Art, Dr. David Bellingham, were captivated by his work. Since working with the gallery, Marfo's work has been acquired by top international collectors.

Dr. Bellingham has written the accompanying essay for Marfo's debut solo show. The text provides a deeper engagement with Marfo's multi-layered imagery and interrogates the profound connections between Marfo's Akan traditions and his experiences in the West. Dr. Bellingham also retraces Marfo's influences, from his upbringing in Ghana, to the range of his artistic influences, such as Zdzisław Beksiński, Wifredo Lam, Pablo Picasso, and the Old Masters, further highlighting the cultural melting pot which Marfo continues to question and challenge.

For more information, images and comment, please contact: press@jdmalat.com

Exhibition opening hours; Monday – Friday, 10am – 6pm Saturday, 12pm – 6pm