GNYP GALLERY



Idowu Oluwaseun



Installation view: *A Coloured Story* exhibition at GNYP Gallery in 2022

Idowu Oluwaseun

Idowu Oluwaseun's (b. 1982; Nigeria) genre is the portrait of people from his Nigerian homeland, both men and women, all at a young age. The way in which he portrays people is reminiscent of the portrait style of African photographers, in particular Seydou Keïta, who was born in Bamako, Mali, in 1923 and died in Paris in 2001. Idowu refers to his work as a source of inspiration, and parallels are indeed recognizable. Keïta also had his models pose in front of the camera in his studio with their belongings or accessories such as radios, watches or scooters. He also had them wear African outfits. Idowu adopted this idea. However, in contrast to Keïta's portraits, whose faces touch us emotionally and give us an idea of emotional states and life situations, Idowu primarily shows bodies without physiognomy in all their beauty.

He lends his models an anonymity that protects them from interrogation by covering their heads with patterned cloths, either completely or partially, so that only the nose and mouth are visible. To the extent that he hides everything that we usually associate with portraits, we can speak here of an anti-portrait in a certain sense. Neither names are mentioned, nor characteristics named. A look behind the outer appearance is thus made impossible. This prevents us from forming a concrete picture of the models. The facelessness is a concept, insofar as the reading of traces of life in the faces is not only pushed into the background, but is deliberately limited. "The faces," says Idowu, "are deliberately obscured to protect the bearers of my message. And to show how faceless the minority is."

His works have been exhibited at Kunsthalle Tübingen; Haus der Kunst, München; Ross Sutton Gallery, Miami; Kunsthaus Mettmann; Houston Museum of African American Culture, Houston and Nicodim Gallery, Los Angeles among others.

Idowu studied Art Design and Printing at the Yaba College of Technology in Lagos (2006) and holds an MFA from the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf (2013).

He currently lives and works in Houston, Texas.



Idowu Oluwaseun

Solo Exhibitions

2024
Poetic Culture
GNYP Gallery, Antwerp (Belgium)

A Coloured Story
Mazovian Centre Contemporary of Art „Elektrownia", Radom (Poland)

2023
A Coloured Story: Chapter II
Nicodim Gallery, Los Angeles (USA)

2022
A Coloured Story
GNYP Gallery, Berlin (Germany)

2021
Revolutions Per Minute: side B
Reiners Contemporary Art, Málaga (Spain)

2020
Revolutions Per Minute: a synthesis of time and sound
Galerie Voss, Düsseldorf (Germany)

2019
Irinisi: An Exhibition of Painting by Idowu Oluwaseun
Houston Museum of African American Culture (HMAAC), Texas (USA)

Group Exhibitions (selected)

2026
faces of mind
Haus. Kunst. Mitte, Berlin (Germany)

2025
MAYBE IT WAS MAGIC
Miettinen Collection, Berlin (DE)

Modern & Contemporary Autumn 2025
Galerie Kovacek & Zette, Vienna (AU)

2024
Modern & Contemporary Autumn 2024
Galerie Kovacek & Zette, Vienna (AU)

Modern & Contemporary Spring 2024
Galerie Kovacek & Zette, Vienna (AU)

ORIGIN
Galerie von Vertes & Destinee Ross-Sutton, Zurich (CH)

2023
People/Diversity 2.0
Galerie Kovacek & Zette, Vienna (Austria)

2022
SISTERS & BROTHERS. GESCHWISTER IN DER KUNST
Kunsthalle Tübingen (Germany)

2021
Black Excellence, Black Elegance
Ross-Sutton Gallery, Miami (USA)

2020
BLACK VOICES: Friend of My Mind
Ross-Sutton Gallery, New York (USA)

2018
Contemporary Portrait Exhibition
LHUCA Lubbock, Texas (USA)

2015
Gruppeneffekt
NRW Bank, Düsseldorf, (Germany)

2009
ITK goes ART
Haus der Kunst, München (Germany)

Berliner Morgenpost

Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung

DAS WOCHENEND-MAGAZIN

Sonnabend, 31. Januar 2026

Ein Titel der FUNKE Mediengruppe

Gesichter der Kunst

Die Ausstellung „faces of mind" im Haus. Kunst. Mitte.

Seiten 2/3



Idowu Oluwaseun, Uncrowned Queen, 2021. Acryl auf Leinwand.

METTINEN COLLECTION



Installation View: *A Coloured Story* at MCSW Elektrownia, Radom (Poland) in 2024





Installation View: *PEDESTAL* at Galerie Voss, Düsseldorf (Germany) in 2023/2024



Installation View: *SISTERS & BROTHERS. Geschwister in der Kunst* at Kunsthalle Tübingen, in 2022



Installation View: *Poetic Culture* at GNYP Gallery Antwerp in 2024

Idowu Oluwaseun
Poetic Culture

OCTOBER 19 - DECEMBER 1, 2024 / GNYP ANTWERP

In the 1970s, the Hip-Hop Movement emerged in New York City‘s South Bronx. A movement that sought to create safe public spaces (safe spaces) for Afro-American, Latin American, and Afro-Caribbean youth where individuals can be allowed to move freely and within which socio-political action can grow. This Hip-hop movement is an integral part of Black Culture. Black Culture is a peripheral cultural form that gives voice to the African-American community on the margins of urban America. Social action and political resistance are echoed in rap lyrics, graffiti,...The movement became a global phenomenon that now forms an integral part of our society. The lyrical aspect, such as rapping combined with musical beats and the visuals such as music videos, are the most well-known today.

Through its beats, poetic lyrics and powerful images, hip-hop offers a platform for cultural expression, holds up a mirror to society, and provides a description of the world and its sometimes bleak reality that African-Americans face, such as police brutality and discrimination. At the same time, hip-hop has given groups from the margins the opportunity to engage in identity formation and self-expression and has penetrated to the center of pop culture.

In Poetic Culture, Idowu Oluwaseun emphasizes that connecting side of the story, how Hip-Hop as a movement creates a sense of pride, belonging and solidarity for individuals. The title of the exhibition is also a nod to the core of the genre, the poetical. Oluwaseun grew up in Lagos, Nigeria in the late 1980s and 1990s. Hip-hop already was a global phenomenon at that time with artists like N.W.A and Eazy-E. Through the Nigerian rap duo Okechukwu Azike and Pretty Okafor, known as Junior & Pretty, he came in contact with the genre. The rap duo used the local pidgin-English as their vehicular language, anchoring the genre in Nigerian music.

After moving to the United States, his interest in the Hip-Hop Movement grew into a more intense experience of it.

In this series of paintings, Oluwaseun uses vibrant colours and dynamic compositions that meticulously reflect the rhythm and movement associated with Hip-Hop. This stylistic choice evokes the genre‘s power to express emotions and ideas visually, the way music does in an auditory way. The energy in his work reflects the rebellion and transformative power of Hip-Hop, which has long been a voice for the oppressed.

Oluwaseun’s canvases depict the typical looks, poses that feel well-known and familiar, instantly carrying a touch of nostalgia. As a viewer, you are catapulted back to the days of baggy jeans, oversized shirts, flashy sneakers, grillz, an array of gold jewellery, pimped cars, lowriders, and the ubiquitous bandana. His affinity for fabrics is thus closely intertwined in his paintings, making it again an essential element in this exhibition.

The faces of the subjects in these paintings are partially covered with bandanas, referencing the invisibility and marginalisation that African-Americans often face. This ‘facelessness’ emphasizes also how Black Culture and the Hip-Hop Movement are often commercialized and consumed without recognition of the individuality and humanity behind it. The image of hip-hop displayed by mainstream media today, black rappers surrounded by expensive cars, senseless violence and women reduced to sex symbols is far removed from how it once started in the South Bronx. Thus, Idowu’s paintings critique this commodification and commercialization and provide a complex exploration and refection of cultural ownership, appropriation and authenticity.

Amber-Luna Defauw

Idowu Oluwaseun
All Eyez On Me
2024

acrylic on canvas

213 x 170 cm



Magazine

30 october 2024, Yves Joris

The fluid boundary between body and text in the work of Idowu Oluwaseun



Idowu Oluwaseun, Poetic Culture, GNYP Gallery

On entering *Poetic Culture*, the new exhibition featuring work by Idowu Oluwaseun at GNYP Gallery, the viewer is immediately overwhelmed by a visual intensity that feels more like a physical experience than a purely intellectual encounter. The work on display is not just paintings or images, but spaces where the language of the body, the texture of stories and the poetry of culture blend into a vibrant whole. It's no accident that Oluwaseun, an artist born in Lagos, creates such layered work, as his art is deeply rooted in the hybrid space between individual and collective memory, between the physical body and invisible cultural narratives that shape it.

Idowu Oluwaseun grew up in the city of Lagos, a melting pot of influences, styles and rhythms. The scents of the markets, the bustle of the streets and the intimate domestic spaces of Nigeria subtly make their way into his work. From an early age, Oluwaseun was aware of how the physical environment, with its visible and invisible forces, deeply influences human identity. His journey into art was both introspective and observational; he looks outward towards the world, but always returns inward towards himself.

Oluwaseun's journey: art as a translation of identity

Oluwaseun graduated from the University of Lagos and later earned an MFA at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. He began his career by focusing on painting and mixed media, emphasising texture and material. His work is more than visual; it invites a tactile approach, inviting the viewer to 'feel' with their eyes. This idea of feeling through sight is fundamental to his aesthetics and emerges strongly in *Poetic Culture*. In this exhibition, he blends elements of African history, identity and modern culture into an aesthetic fabric that is as inviting as it is unsettling.

The impact of Oluwaseun's work is amplified by his connection to the hip-hop movement, which emerged in the 1970s in the South Bronx borough of New York City. What started as a way for African American and Latino youth to create a safe space for self-expression became a global phenomenon that is now an integral part of contemporary culture. Through poetic texts, powerful images and rhythmic beats, hip-hop became a platform for social activism, political resistance and cultural expression. This movement played a crucial role in shaping Oluwaseun's own artistic identity, something that is clearly evident in his work.





Idowu Oluwaseun
Sittin' on Chrome
2024

acrylic on canvas

213 x 162 cm



Installation View: *Poetic Culture* at GNYP Gallery Antwerp in 2024

Idowu Oluwaseun
Recognize
2024

acrylic on canvas

213 x 170 cm





Installation View: *Poetic Culture* at GNYP Gallery Antwerp in 2024



Installation view: *A Coloured Story* exhibition at GNYP Gallery in 2022

Idowu Oluwaseun
A Coloured Story

MARCH 17 - APRIL 23, 2022 / GNYP BERLIN

A Coloured Story, a solo exhibition, by painter Idowu Oluwaseun explores Black intimacy across a spectrum of skin colours. In our ongoing racialized modernity, the taboo or the stigmata of being in possession of more or less melanin shows up in the pervasiveness of colorism—an inheritance of the violence of slavery and colonialism—that continues to organize intraracial sociality today.

Colorism is the prejudice or discrimination against darker skin tones typically among people of the same ethnic or racial group. Oluwaseun writes: "The truth still remains that black people discriminate against each other based on skin tone, facial structure and hair texture." In Pigmented (2022) an elegant femme figure draped in creamy silk and white-grey fur poses in near-profile so that we notice the fullness of the figure's lips. The figure's forehead, hair, and eyes are veiled (a signature detail of the artist)—protected by a gold lace covering. The figure's skin is painted in a rosy-beige hue with burgundy undertones and has noticeable splotching--conveying the impossibility of indexing the multitudinous varieties of Black skin tones to any particular color on any particular color wheel.

How are the bodily features and skin tones we see in the world always departing from the habits of racialized conditioning that continue to teach us to pair people's appearance to a color especially given that the social history of racialization and self-formation is far more complex? Prejudice based on skin tone, is what experts call a 'colour complex' [or what was once referred to in African-American communities as being 'color struck']." However, the 'colour complex' may also refer to the way that dark-skinned Black people spurn those with lighter skin in retaliation (in spite of crisscrossing resemblances in hair texture and bodily shape betwixt and between racial categories) for not being "black enough"—a sentiment captured by the phrase: 'the blacker the berry the sweeter the juice.'

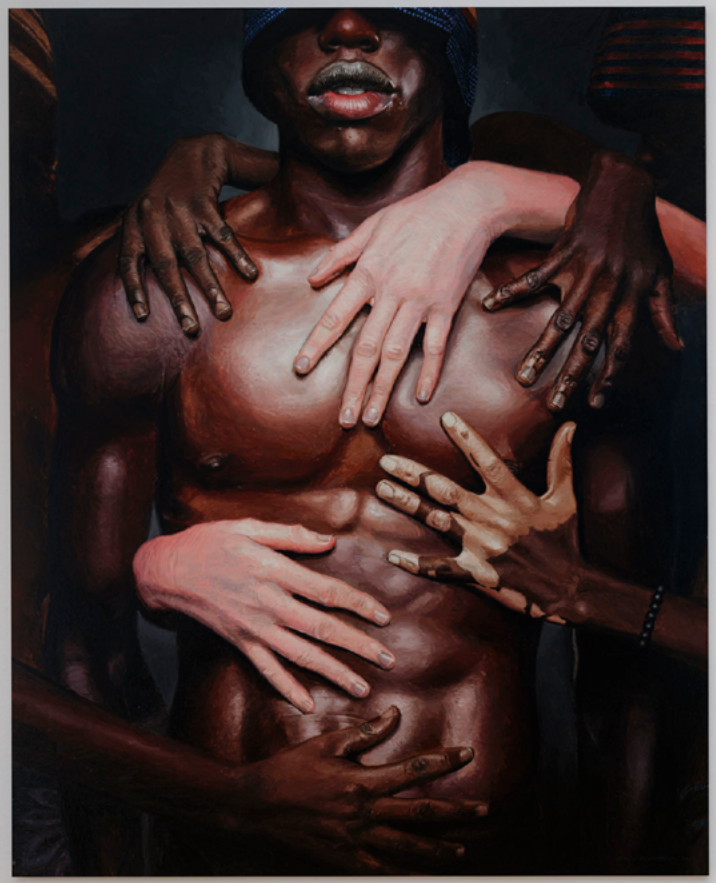
In the literary writer and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston's play Color Struck (1926) which was ignored during the Harlem Renaissance, Hurston's dark-skinned protagonist Emmaline goes mad with jealousy over a lover whom she fears will eventually leave her for a light-skin woman. Overall, skin colour continues to structure social currency--organizing the distribution of respect and resources in a top-down hierarchy from light to dark, but also across the gender-race nexus: "Oreo," "light-bright," "red-bone," and "pretty for a dark-skin" are all phrases exemplifying the colloquial cues tracking supposed differences in existential characteristics (such as being dark-complexioned on the surface, but "White-acting" on the inside) or the intersection of colorism with sexism and misogyny working to orient the repetition of white terror from within the Black gaze.

Oluwaseun juxtaposes Black bodies in close-knit contemporary scenes that contest the founding of modernity's color-obsession and paradigmatic violence thereby offering the possibility of un-learning the repetition of connecting the hues of appearing bodies to their expected social roles. The instability or variation of the value attached to different social groups organized according to racial schemas—from sources such as Immanuel Kant's Anthropology lectures or the apartheid system in South Africa, for example—means that there has never been a consistent system of delineating the differences across levels of melanin. The fact that we are able to recognize Black people as Black who could pass as non-Black or the fact that there are Black people living with the skin condition of albinism or vitiligo makes it clear that in our visuocentric racialized modernity, we are taught to repeat habits of discrimination that work towards maintaining the divide between and denial of humanity to ever present Others.

"The fact is that the racial categories that purport to designate any of us are too rigid and oversimplified to fit anyone accurately. But then, accuracy was never their purpose. Since we are almost all in fact racial hybrids, the "one-drop" rule of black racial designation, if consistently applied, would either narrow the scope of ancestral legitimacy so far that it would exclude most of those so-called whites whose social power is most deeply entrenched, or widen it to include most of those who have been severely disadvantaged by racism."

What responsibility do Black people have to one another towards overcoming the inherited structures of racial capitalism and the cultivation of anti-racist belonging and self-understanding? How do we heal the complex of cross generational wounds for the flourishing of Black life and the proliferation of our freedom? In A Coloured Story, Oluwaseun begins this process of healing by juxtaposing protective and loving relations among Black people to disrupt the repetition of social formations that maintain the divisive violence of colorism.

Darla Migan, Ph.D. is an art critic based in New York City.





Installation view: *A Coloured Story* exhibition at GNYP Gallery in 2022

Idowu Oluwaseun

WET NURSE, 2021

Acrylic on canvas

213 x 170 cm





Idowu Oluwaseun
CODEPENDENCY
2021

Acrylic on canvas

213 x 274 cm





Installation view: *A Coloured Story* exhibition at GNYP Gallery in 2022





Idowu Oluwaseun

Harmony

2022

Acrylic on canvas

213 x 170 cm

Idowu Oluwaseun
Black-body Variation
2022

Acrylic on canvas

213 x 274 cm



GNYP GALLERY

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