

THE PINEAPPLE SHOW



FEATURING ARTISTS:

Elizabeth Colomba
Ian Deleon
Ayana Evans
Jowhor Ile
Odili Donald Odita
Perrin Oglafa & Dumnwii Fadeh
Temitayo Ogunbiyi
Zina Saro-Wiwa
Johnson Uwadinma
Arlene Wandera

Tiwani Contemporary is pleased to present *The Pineapple Show*. Curated by artist Zina Saro-Wiwa and featuring artists that originate from Nigeria, Kenya, Brazil, the Caribbean and the United States, the exhibition explores the semiotics of the iconic fruit, expanding the narratives surrounding the pineapple, re-casting its myths through brand new works of art created specially for exhibition.

The pineapple is a celebrated and eulogized fruit. But much of the literature around it is derived from the encounter between Western European colonial powers and the tropics from the 16th century onwards. *The Pineapple Show* seeks to add to the canon by mining, exposing and inventing new narratives from the perspectives of the tropics or the tropical other. This show is asking that we demand more from our understanding of the environment. That we do not merely accept ideas and meanings from times past, that we process and continually question. That we learn from the world around us by paying attention to how its fruits, flora and fauna pass through us, not only physically but intellectually, spiritually and emotionally. The resulting works explore issues of labour and luxury, power and powerlessness, flamboyance, femininity and masculinity, pain and masochism, romance, hair and cosmic travel.

The Pineapple Show exemplifies Saro-Wiwa's commitment to re-defining and re-imagining the relationship between self and environment through her Niger-Delta based gallery Boys' Quarters Project Space. We are grateful for the platform afforded by Tiwani to continue Boys' Quarters' investigations for a London audience.

The Pineapple Show emerged from a particular obsession with the pineapple on the part of artist-curator Zina Saro-Wiwa: “Over the last three years I have experienced a growing obsession with pineapples. I moved back to Nigeria and the Niger Delta in 2013 and started eating pineapple more simply because they are grown right there and are plentiful. I started to make video work about pineapples a year later and a year after that began the buying of objects that look like pineapples in the manner of a typical antiques collector. Looking back I feel as if eating the fruit so much in Nigeria had started a conversation within me. Almost like eating the fruit was speaking to me from within. When, in an attempt to understand my growing interest, I started to research what the meanings were behind the fruit, I found ideas and imagery that were fascinating but did not feel like the whole story. Indeed most of the literature surrounding pineapples is drawn from the encounter between Western imperial forces and the tropics from the 17th Century onwards. This show is an attempt to expand and expose newer cultural connections to the pineapple. To hear what it had to say to through me and other artists.”



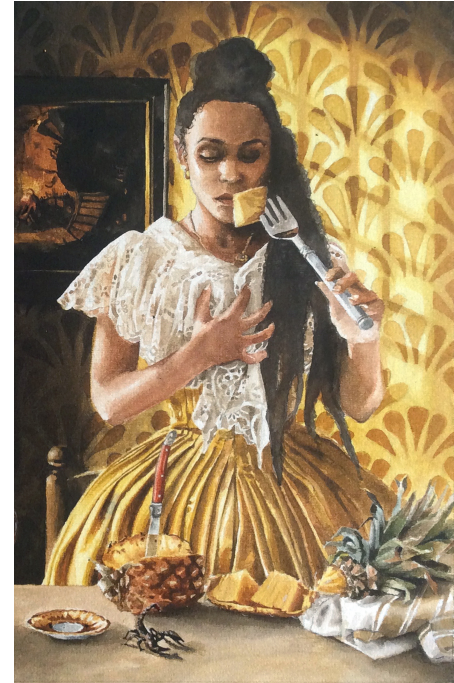
Pineapples, the leading edible member of the *Bromeliaceae* family, have had a profound impact on those that have encountered them. A potent status symbol in 17th and 18th Century Europe, it symbolized a successful expedition to a new Eden, and gave evidence to the mysterious bounty that lay in the New World that was just being discovered and colonised. The fruit propelled imaginations and tantalized palates that were not accustomed to sweetness like it. Pineapples fueled the desire to conquer the New World. It assuaged and flattered kings, queens and the powerful, persuading them to fund yet more New World expeditions. Pineapples became a symbol of welcome and hospitality because in the European houses of the 17th and 18th Century to present a pineapple at a banquet was the ultimate status symbol. An act of generosity (if not ostentation). Pineapples did not travel across the Atlantic well. Therefore to have in one's possession a fruit that made the trip was a rare gift and one that mostly royalty and the very highest echelons of society were able to enjoy in the early days. The power of the striking visuals of the pineapple with its hexagonal scales that conformed to the Fibonacci sequence and its preposterously glorious spiky crown was overwhelming. To wit, pineapples were rented out to become the centrepiece of banqueting tables of those that could afford it, often till they rotted. They were not even eaten. With the development of hothouses in the 18th and 19th century, growing the fruit in the UK and the Netherlands became the ultimate goal. Attempts to grow the fruit took place over decades. To produce a fruit was a sign of prestige and an indicator of great wealth. The expense was extortionate, with the costs of producing a single pineapple matching that of a new coach. (Beauman). The mania soon spread to the Atlantic, to be adopted with zest by colonial American gentleman anxious to copy fashions back in the UK. (Beauman). An exalted fruit, it appeared on architecture and in paintings of the time. A totem of power and success. There was also resistance. The pineapple was seen as a symbol of inequality and excess. Groups be they Lutheran in the UK or anti-Monarchist Republicans in America would extol the humble virtues of the apple as the sedate and more natural domestic counterpoint to the dangerously flamboyant, decadent foreign fruit.

In the 20th century the dominant ideas surrounding the, now mass-produced, often canned pineapple emerged from industrialists with plantations in Hawaii and Malaysia. Ideas about hospitality are still very much present and the fruit continues to have a hold on the design and fashion world making appearances on all manner of clothing and design items. This season in particular you can witness pineapples in stores everywhere.

Today's ideas about the pineapple symbolism are rooted in this encounter of the 16th-20th Century. But what of the 21st Century? We at Boys' Quarters believe it is time to re-examine this symbolism and reroute our thinking. By allowing the fruit to speak through the bodies of artists, a new understanding of the fruit can emerge. By re-appropriating this symbol of the tropics and releasing new narratives into the world, we are experimenting with the power of cultural narrative to affect our relationship with our environment and even ourselves. The show is propelled by the belief that the pineapple has something to tell us. It finds its way into our imaginations. We ingest it into our bodies physically but it affects us on a cellular level. Even looking at it - ingesting it visually - has a profound impact on us. This show wants to break down and explore this power. To investigate this message, filtered as it is, through the artists in this show who have felt ineluctably drawn to this subject matter. In *The Pineapple Show* we are creating our own mythologies, examining our own memories, giving life to the emotions evoked by the pineapple, playing with its flavors, paying homage to its sacred geometry - allowing the pineapple to speak through us. Although Niger Delta-based, as a gallery we are committed to drawing international artists into the conversations to create dialogues, connections and productive tensions. Nigeria, Kenya, Caribbean, Brazil, the UK and the US - where the artists have

come from are part of this “Pineapple Diaspora”, so to speak. The exhibition filters ideas around the fruit through the bodies and practises of these participating artists:

Elizabeth Colomba is a Harlem-based artist who was born in France and whose parentage is from Martinique. She is a unique artist in that she creates works in the period and style of 18th and 19th century paintings but features women of colour prominently in them. The women in her paintings are remarkable for their potent stares and for the feeling that though they are drawn in corsets and crinolined dresses, they are seemingly not of that time. They are alien invaders and agents within that constructed historical space. No longer slaves or supplicants. For *The Pineapple Show* Colomba presents “Through The Heart” painted specially for the show. This exquisite watercolour bears the hallmark of her practise: the window casting light into an interior, the painting within a painting in the background and the black woman protagonist. The woman in the painting is Colomba herself. A lover of pineapples she always keeps one in her Harlem apartment. Colomba is painting in a style belonging to the time when the pineapple was king. It was the fruit of royalty. The black or brown body was rarely depicted in such works of art unless these bodies were peripheral. Colomba’s painting centralizes the black body in a space in which it was never included - either in real life or in paintings. Her insistence upon this placement of the black female body in the centre of the frame, in the main house, savoring this fruit, indeed closing her eyes and expressing a relationship with the fruit that is personal and all her own, exemplifies the remit of this show: highlighting the highly personal and often mysterious relationship to the fruit experienced by the Tropical Other.



Cuban-Brazilian-American performance artist **Ian Deleón** has long had a fascination with pineapples and has used it regularly in his performance work. His interest lies in examining the role of slavery and forced labour in the farming of this fruit. For the pineapple show Deleon presents a reproduction of the remnants of his 2013 Fluxus performance titled *The Overseer in Paradise*. The performance was inspired by a scene in the remarkable 1976 Cuban film by Tomas Gutiérrez Alea *The Last Supper* in which a colonial-era slave master, with Christian delusions of grandeur, "allows" his slaves to join him for dinner one evening. What begins as a self-aggrandizing gesture aimed at getting the slaves to accept and even take pleasure in their "god-given", subjugated roles, ends with an allegorical Yoruba tale delivered by one of the black slaves about the nature of oppression often appearing in the guise of truth.



“When Olofi created the world, he made both day and night. He made things that were beautiful and things that were ugly. Olofi made good things and bad. He also made Truth and a Lie. He made Truth very, very pretty and the Lie, ugly. The Lie was skinny, as if it were sick. Olofi therefore felt sorry for the Lie and gave it a machete. But everybody loved Truth and scorned the Lie. One day Truth and the Lie met and started to fight. Truth was stronger, but the Lie had a machete, and when the Truth wasn't looking the Lie cut off its head. So truth had no eyes, no head. With its hand it looked for its head. And touched the head of the Lie. He wrenched off the Lie's head and put it on its own neck. Ever since, Truth has been tricking people with the Body of Truth but the Head of the Lie.”



At the end of this clip the slave places the head of a pig over his face. Using this as his inspiration, and in a parallel gesture, for his performance Deleón placed a pineapple over his face in an attempt to draw upon the historic relationship between Caribbean colonization and the exportation of tropical agriculture, specifically the pineapple, as the ultimate symbol of power and decadence amongst the British elite.

For the pineapple show we present a triptych of images featuring Deleón with his crudely fixed mask. The audio of Ian performing the speech in Spanish accompanies the triptych. [See translation above].

Issues of exploitation are further considered in the video triptych *Parasol* created by American performance artist **Ayana Evans** and **Zina Saro-Wiwa**. The work, speaks to the fetishization of this tropical fruit connecting it with the fetishizing of a certain type of black female body and the psychological pain produced from this gaze. The work features the gloved hand of a black woman exploring and harming itself on a pineapple crown on the outer channels, whilst the middle channel features Evans dressed in a provocative skin-tight tiger-print catsuit - a costume she uses for performance pieces in the art world of New York - standing on a crochet pineapple doily, performing sexy poses



awkwardly for the camera and being – for all intents and purposes – the embodiment of the pineapple as Exotic Other. The work is a commentary on black women's bodies as bodies for multiple kinds of labour. Physical labour as well as the labour of performing as fetishized outsider bodies. The counter current of gentility, propriety and obedience is also expressed through the gloved hand. White gloves on a black

body has loaded symbolism in the African American context. It symbolizes servitude and gentility. A required deracination. The fact that the gloves are lace heightens the sense of vulnerability to the spikes and is a sarcastic nod to ideas of femininity and elegance. The masochistic self-harming aspect of the performance speaks of the pain involved in farming the fruit and the emotional pain involved in being an fetishized object. The torment of being consumed and gazed upon yet simultaneously rejected. The pineapple embodies a certain flamboyance that is at once venerated and ridiculed, expressing one of the layers of the relationship between tropical and Western sensibilities. The work choreographs the luxury associated with the fruit that is undercut by the very painful labour endured to farm it. *Parasol* brings embodies and performs the inherent tensions within the fruit: its spikiness, sweetness, corrosive acidity, resplendent beauty and melancholy.

With **Jowhor Ile** we come to an exploration of the relationship between literature, psychology and the pineapple with a presentation of his short story simply titled “Pineapple”.

Ile is a young and up-and-coming author who hails from the Niger Delta and once worked for a very brief period at Boys’ Quarters Project Space. His meditation on the pineapple produced a short story that points to the mythic but also outsider properties of the fruit. He brings to life the fruit’s associations with fertility and magic.



Twin is a piece by celebrated Nigerian-American artist **Odili Donald Odita**. The diptych relates to a specific experience he encountered on a rare trip back to Nigeria when he was a child and highlights the potent relationship between food, smell, taste and memory. *Twin* recounts the story of a simple yet searing memory of him as a child visiting Nigeria and encountering the fruit in the care of his charismatic, dapper, motorcycle-riding twin uncles who impressed him on his rare childhood visits to the motherland. On one visit he recalls his twin uncles appearing on the family compound on their motorbikes, sweeping up Odili and his sibling. Odili talks of the uncles showing their nephews around the town and the memory of their slowing down near a place where pineapples were growing. The uncles disembarked and cut them fresh fruit and handed the segments to their young relatives. Odili remembers how being in the place where pineapples actually grew, and having the Uncles cut the fruit directly from the plant heightened his experience of eating the sharp, sweet fruit.



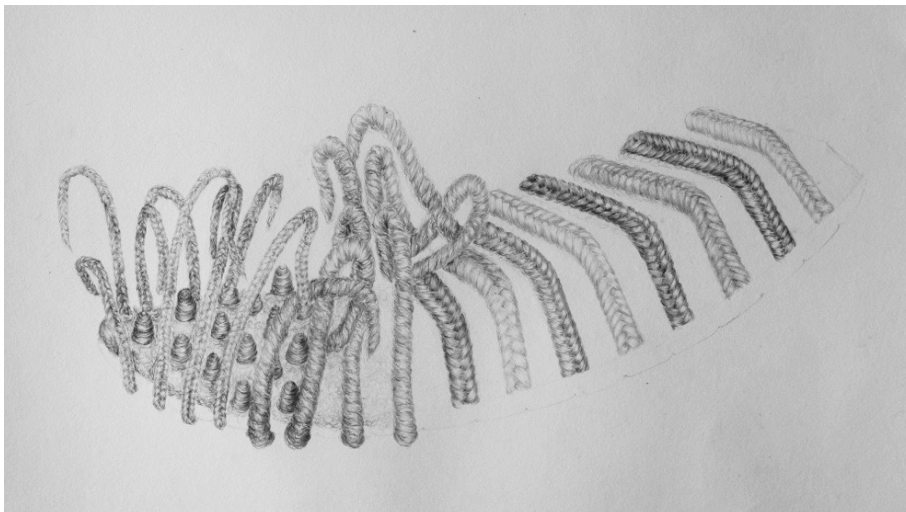
Twin is a small and potent work, it draws the eye in the gallery not only to the paintings but the pronounced space between the works. The colors used within the two paintings are conceptual and complimentary reflections of each other.

Pineapple of My Eye is a photographic sculptural piece created by **Zina Saro-Wiwa** with **Dumnwii Fadeh**, in-house photographer and manager at Boys' Quarters and **Perrin Oglafa**, artist. The piece is a taut exploration of the ways in which the pineapple is understood as the fruit of love in one particular corner of the Niger Delta. The sculpture is comprised of plastic magnifying insect boxes. The boxes offer a different lens into the Niger Delta. Whereas such scientific tools are used to examine life scientifically, this box exists to magnify the emotional life of the Niger Delta which is invisible to the naked eye. Each box alternates between images and text. The texts are excerpts from the emailed reports Fadeh sent to Saro-Wiwa after his fraught journeys into Ogoniland and the village of Umuapu in Imo State in order to take photos and gather information about the cultural role of the pineapple.



The work also touches on the fact that it is in fact, the apple that is seen as the fruit of love in Port Harcourt. Though perceived as a more humble and everyday fruit in the West, the apple, in Nigeria, is an exotic fruit. Furthermore its connotations with the Old Testament story of Adam and Eve ensures its value amongst some of the very Christian population. The apple and the pineapple are both symbols of "Eden". Although tropical and lush, the Niger Delta is rarely seen or understood as a tropical paradise. Far from it. The tension of the apple versus the pineapple occupying symbolism as the fruit of love in this contested, post-colonial space exposes a complex relationship to environment in the Niger Delta. A relationship that is determined by religious belief systems, international trade, the physical demands of farming and local political warfare, resulting in a compromised Eden.

A black woman's afro is her crown, so the saying goes. There is a relationship between the vertical-growing spiky crown of the pineapple and the vertical growing afro crowns of Nigerian and sub-Saharan African women. Indeed, beyond this, the pineapple has inspired everyday hairstyles on the African continent and in the Diaspora. For Europeans the crowns growing upwards out of the fruit was a source of fascination and sometimes comedy. Similarly, Afro hair and Afro hairstyles that defy gravity have incited fascination, ridicule and also resistance when encountered by non-black peoples. The African approach to the visuals of the pineapple may be affected by the fact we are accustomed to crowns emerging from our skulls. It is not so exotic. And in a sense this is what is most striking about the work of Lagos-based artist **Temitayo Ogunbiyi** who responded to the pineapple show with a series of drawings that combine her love of pineapples and hair.

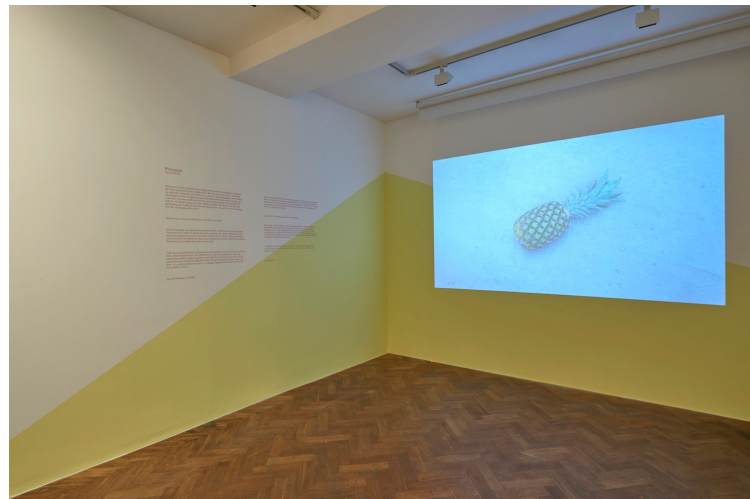


The focus is not the crown of the pineapple as many might expect but rather each drawing is a meditation and prayer on the process of selecting and cutting a pineapple which Ogunbiyi does daily (most often the long green varieties with sweet white flesh from Cotonou, Benin that are sold in Lagos) and its relationship with the practice of hair-braiding in Nigeria.

For *The Pineapple Show* Ogunbiyi presents a series of five drawings that obsessively describe a range of surprising varieties of interrelationship between pineapples and Nigerian hair braiding practises. For example the outer hexagons of the pineapple look like the small segments of Afro hair that have been pulled and twisted. When you take off the skin of the pineapple, the hard eyelets that will also eventually come off look like the bases of a bantu knot hair style. The shape of the pineapple when it is bifurcated through the middle from the crown to the base is connected to Fulani hairstyles of Northern Nigeria. Furthermore the freehand skill with which Ogunbiyi renders her highly detailed drawings mirrors the meticulousness and time-consuming work of the hair braiders.

Beginning with the phrase “*You Will*”, the title of each drawing is a prayer that highlights the composition and references in the drawing. According to Ogunbiyi “*You Will is culled from a format of prayer that is popular in Nigeria. The phrase is simultaneously the beginning of a prayer and the effectuation of the prayed request. There is no doubt. This body of work aims to situate human ability in this certainty, with the pineapple’s geometry being an apt unit of measure.*” These drawings are organisms that have been willed and prayed into being. They are new entities. Each are alive and speak of the powerful cosmic inspiration of this fruit.

Zina Saro-Wiwa presents two videos that represent her own response to the pineapple. In *How to Cut A Pineapple or Untitled* we find a video that charges the space. It is the first pineapple video piece created by Saro-Wiwa that paved the way for this show. In part poking fun at the youtube videos that document street vendors or studio bound presenters cutting pineapples in deft ways, in this piece the pineapple is obliterated by a machete. You never see the arm of the perpetrator rather the focus is the pineapple’s disintegrating form and the concrete beneath it. The piece is not about murder and destruction but about passion and access. The desire find a story and to control it. In *Pineapple Pendulum (2010)* Saro-Wiwa asks us to consider the pineapple as powerful even though she/he is displaced. The pineapple performs for the camera. We are invited to admire its incredible form but also consider its potential for cosmic transformation. Though it is suspended in an industrial environment in which it is seemingly at odds - and perhaps even at the mercy of - we are asked to



consider the power of the pineapple as a visual object and its ability to transport the viewer. Some have seen death and imprisonment in this work. Saro-Wiwa sees escape. Ultimately the pendulum will take you wherever it is you personally need to go at the moment you view and relinquish yourself to the action.



Johnson Uwadinma is a Niger Delta artist primarily concerned with issues of morality and memory. Central to his practice is his desire to expose and remind the Nigerian population around him of their dangerous ability to forget and repeat history. For *The Pineapple Show* Uwadinma employs his techniques of pointillism and whitewashed newspaper to speak of the relationship between memory and taste. The pointillism a sublimated expression of the surface of the pineapple transferred to his canvas.

UK-based Kenyan artist **Arlene Wandera's** meditations on the pineapple have resulted in a sculpture/sound installation/performance piece titled *Centrepiece*.

On approaching the work the visitor senses a seductive, female voice emanating from the tin. In order to hear better what is being said, the visitor is required to approach, bend down and listen to what is being said. What is heard is a lament. A female voice recounting the thirteen cultivars of pineapple that have vanished in the past 150 years due to the pressures of standardization to meet global demand. The lament also reflects the pineapple's connection with an imperial past and the shift from masculine imagery to seductive femininity at certain moments in history i.e. from the "fruit of kings" to the "queen of fruits". The visitor becomes part of the sculpture as the position they are forced to assume to listen to the work properly is that of the position of pineapple plantation worker bending over the plant. The plinth is around the height of a full grown pineapple plant the like of which Wandera remembers from the Del Monte plantations of her native Kenya. Plantations that have been the subject of much debate, controversy, and negative publicity within the context of benefits to the local community.

The presentation of this work is an acerbic commentary on how the standardization and canning process has diminished not only the varieties of the pineapple but its very beauty for which it used to be worshipped. The pineapple was a lush, aesthetically engaging centrepiece at lavish dinners of the 18th and 19th Century echoing the decadence of a colonial past. But through canning the pineapple loses its skin and the seductive Fibonacci pattern that distinguishes it, it is cored and its iconic crown cut off. The stripped, denuded and diminished flesh encased in a metal tin. Then there is the fact that the bromelain, the fierce enzyme that gives the pineapples its sharp and corrosive life force is necessarily destroyed in the canning process. The severe clean lines and the lacquered polish of this new centrepiece is a manmade totem of destruction. A new centrepiece for a new century.



Back at Boys' Quarters Project Space in Port Harcourt resides a piece that we were unable to ship. We held a simultaneous opening on Saturday 9th July for the work and for the current exhibition that is near the end of its run. **Mavo** (real name Victor) is our caretaker in Boys' Quarters and it transpires that he has a great talent for making metal bottle tops. For the show he was commissioned to make a pineapple work from bottle tops and below is the work that emerged. The work relates to the theme of the relationship between the pineapple and the apple and the ways in which the pineapple is understood and experienced in the Niger Delta.

