Arcadia Missa

Coumba Samba
Big Nation
6 November - 19 December 2026
Private view: 5 November 2026, 6-8 PM

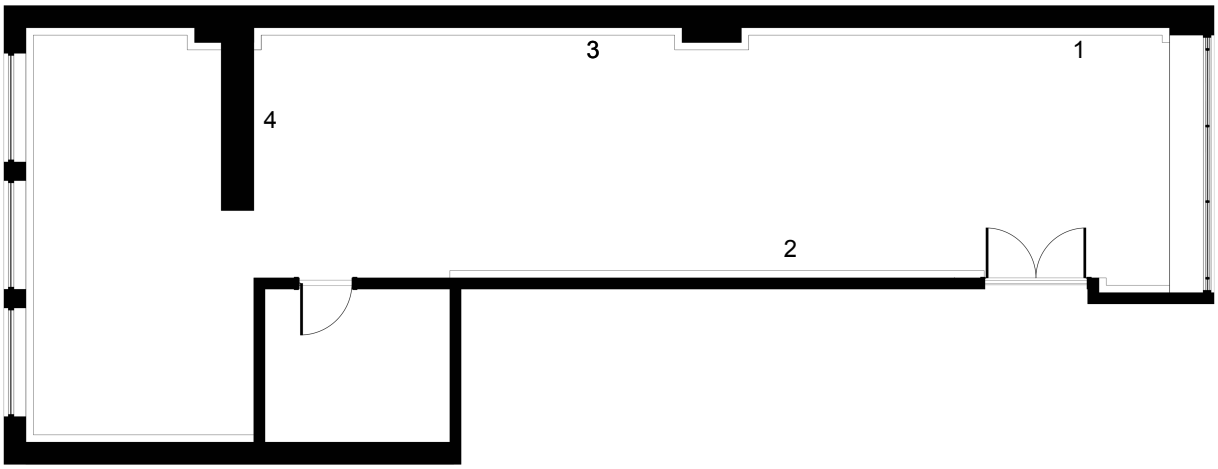
One of the clichés of abstract painting is the claim of ushering in genuine autonomy for the artwork, and by proxy the artist. Freed from the compulsion towards representation, the flipside of this is that avowals of autonomy can snuggle up quite happily with assertions of cultural sovereignty and supremacy, from the little artist to the Big Nation, just as easily as a painting of a king on a horse or a battle scene can. In this group of works by Coumba Samba, the imbrication of hard edged, post-war abstract painting with force, power and authority is turned into something like a caustic yet cute painterly joke, edges blurred but symbols all intact. Samba shifts our way of contending with the situation of abstract painting's sovereignty from Cold War cultural politics to the here and now, corresponding that moment with our own era of new imperialisms and authoritarianism. Yellow and orange diagonal stripes are recognisable here as the patterns emblazoned on the backs of British police vans, hazard stripes which visually mimic the auditory effects of a vehicle's siren. Samba's choice of this particular symbol as subject – this abstraction – continues her project of engaging the disasters of the present in ways which are both oblique and obvious, much like how a uniform, a flag, or military insignia is a stark statement of power as much as it is a trapdoor to a labyrinthine set of rules, procedures and judgments. As Steve Martinot and Jared Sexton write, "The truth is that the truth is on the surface, flat and repetitive, just as the law is made by the uniform." Or, turning to someone like the artist Frank Stella, whose mid-century geometric repetitions are echoed here by Samba, we could think of his explanation of what he thought his art was doing as similarly blunt: "What you see is what you see" and that "…regulated pattern was to keep the viewer from reading the painting." Pronounced under the sign of artistic sovereignty, such statements also act as containing devices, a little like a cordon or a police kettle. Our response could begin with "Under what power?" and end with something about the possibility of painting, or art making as a practice where hard-edged authority is always provisional, showing us that nothing is permanent, not even the police, not even the law.

Text by Larne Abse Gogarty

Coumba Samba (b. 2000, New York, US) engages with the impacts of institutional structures on both individual and collective identities through her multimedia and performative practice, questioning dominant cultural narratives. Her works address themes such as consumer culture, social dynamics, and the intersections of technology and identity, exploring the dynamics between mainstream culture and subversive practices. In doing so, she expands the gaze to the global web of power and the continuities of colonialism, highlighting how colonial structures and their legacies continue to shape contemporary social and political landscapes.

Selected solo exhibitions include Stars and Stripes, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, US (2026); 1100-651 Lisboa, Maumaus Lumiar Cité, Lisbon, PT (2025); The National Expo, ETH, Zurich, CH (2025); Wild Wild Wall, Kunsthalle Basel, Basel, CH (2025); deutschland, Kunstverein in Hamburg, Hamburg, DE (2025); Dress Code, empire, New York, US (2024); Red Gas, Arcadia Missa, London, UK (2024); Capital, Cell Project Space, London, UK (2024); and Couture, Galerina, London, UK (2023).

Recent group exhibitions include Fade, Studio Museum Harlem, New York, US (2026); Greater New York 2026, MoMA PS1, New York, US (2026); DFT 2025, Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery, Middletown, US (2025); Undermining the Immediacy, MMK, Frankfurt, DE (2025); Ensemble, The Perimeter, London, UK (2025); ZONE, Reena Spaulings, New York, US (2024); A Crooked World, Drei, Cologne, DE (2023); Slow Dance (3), Stadtgalerie, Bern, CH (2023); Ways of Living 3.0, Arcadia Missa, London, UK (2023); Hello, Galerina, London, UK (2022).



1. Coumba Samba
   Stripe 1, 2026
   Oil on linen
   150 x 200 x 2.5 cm (59 x 78 3/4 x 1 inches)

2. Coumba Samba
   Stripe 2, 2026
   Oil on linen
   150 x 200 x 2.5 cm (59 x 78 3/4 x 1 inches)

3. Coumba Samba
   Stripe 3, 2026
   Oil on linen
   200 x 150 x 2.5 cm (78 3/4 x 59 x 1 inches)

4. Coumba Samba
   Batons, 2026
   Plastic, metal and acrylic paint
   Each: 54.5 x 3 x 3 cm (21 1/2 x 1 1/8 x 1 1/8 inches)