

HALSEY MCKAY GALLERY

LAYO BRIGHT - *HEARTWOOD*

August 17 - October 15, 2024 | 79 Newtown Lane, East Hampton, NY

For all further information please email contact@halseymckay.com



Halsey McKay Gallery is thrilled to present *Heartwood*, Layo Bright's first solo exhibition with the gallery. For the past few years Layo Bright has explored nature, feminism, migration and Nigerian culture and traditions through the medium of glass from a personal and collective lens. Drawing inspiration from the natural world, Bright's sculptures mirror the organic structure and delicate intricacies of flora and fauna and the human form. Bright bridges past and present by applying innovative contemporary techniques to the age-old materials of bronze and glass and lost wax casting techniques of life heads. Glass serves as the perfect medium for Bright's sculptures due to its unique ability to capture light, transparency, and liquid fluidity. Its versatility allows her to highlight the elegance and complexity of her delicate and intricate forms and imbue them with with a luminous glow.

In dendrology, the heartwood is the central, supporting pillar of a tree made of older wood that is denser, less permeable, and more durable than its surrounding sapwood. Symbolism plays a large role in Bright's work, and a more poetic interpretation of the show's title can be drawn to the values, beliefs, and life experiences that shape identity, with *Heartwood* as a cipher for one's essence. In both visual appearance and physical material, Bright's sculptures evoke the constant flux of becoming and unbecoming, repair and healing, inevitabilities of life, and the influence of the past on the present.

In addition to new glass and bronze sculptures, the exhibition includes a site-specific, hand-painted 'wall skin' rendered in osun. Derived from the heartwood and bark of the Camwood tree, osun is traditionally used in Yoruba culture for its curative abilities, and Bright applies this pigment on the gallery wall to imbue the space with a healing, regenerative aura. Her artworks celebrate the stories, struggles, and triumphs of women in her life, using the transparency and opacity of glass in service of the visibility, strength, and multifaceted nature of identity. Each visage is a tribute to the resilience and empowerment of women, woven with themes of solidarity, resistance, and self-love.

West African traditions, especially Nigerian, are interwoven and referenced throughout the exhibition: the practice of scarification, Nigerian lfe heads, African headdress and hairstyles are used as signifiers and methods of adornment. Bright particularly references the shuku hairstyle, an iconic and popular hairstyle in Nigeria that she regularly had made by hairdressers growing up. In three golden amber toned busts titled Shuku, the scale of the hairstyle is exaggerated into deftly formed towers of elaborate braids, and patterns. Bright constructs her subjects into architectural forms of resilience, resistance, and pride much like the powers that these hairstyles have held within Africa and the African diaspora in modern times. The reference appears again in the modern braid style of Bright's Braided Bun with Headwrap [Nuur], acknowledging the influence of the past on present.

Layo Bright was born in 1991 in Lagos, Nigeria and lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. She received a law degree from Babcock University in 2014 and an MFA from the Parsons School of Design in 2018. Bright currently has a solo exhibition on view through October 27 at the Aldrich Museum in Ridgefield, CT. Her work has appeared at venues including the Museum of Glass, Tacoma; moniquemeloche, Chicago; Sean Kelly Gallery, New York; Welancora Gallery, New York; Mike Adenuga Centre, Lagos, Nigeria; Parts & Labor, New York; Meyerhoff Gallery at MICA, Baltimore; Mana Contemporary, Chicago; Smack Mellon, New York, among others. She is the recipient of awards including the Ron Desmet Award for Imagination in Glass, UrbanGlass Visiting Artist and Designer Fellowship, the International Sculpture Center's 2018 Outstanding Student Achievement in Contemporary Sculpture Award (2018), and the Beyoncé Formation Finalist Scholarship (2017). She has attended residencies at Urban Glass, New York; Tyler School of Glass, Philadelphia; Art Cake, New York; NXTHVN, New Haven; Triangle, New York; Flux Factory, New York; The Studios at Mass MoCA, North Adams, MA; among others.