

The Hammer Museum and Art + Practice present two concurrent exhibitions of Njideka Akunyili Crosby (b. 1983, Enugu, Nigeria), the first solo exhibitions of the artist's work in Los Angeles. Her large scale works on paper combine collage, drawing, painting, and printmaking, fusing African and American influences and creative traditions. Reflecting on her Nigerian heritage, contemporary postcolonial African cosmopolitanism, and her experiences as an expatriate in the United States where she has lived since 1999, Akunyili Crosby's paintings provide an important counter-narrative to the often-troubled representation of Africa's complex political and social conditions.

Curated by Hammer assistant curator Jamillah James, *Njideka Akunyili Crosby: The Beautiful Ones* will be on view September 12 – November 21, 2015 at Art + Practice in Leimert Park. *Hammer Projects: Njideka Akunyili Crosby* will be on view October 3, 2015 – January 10, 2016 at the Hammer Museum. Also on view concurrently with *The Beautiful Ones* is a presentation of two films by Akosua Adoma Owusu in the project room at Art + Practice. The program will include the award-winning film, *Kwaku Ananse* (2013), about a young American woman's travels to Ghana for a family emergency, and the experimental short *Intermittent Delight* (2007), which combines upbeat Ghanaian dance music with imagery of labor, domesticity, and leisure.

"Inspired by the success of our concurrent Charles Gaines exhibitions this past spring, we wanted to continue with a joint presentation of exhibitions at the Hammer and Art + Practice," said Hammer Museum Director Ann Philbin. "This selection of early and more recent paintings of Njideka Akunyili Crosby will resonate in both communities." Co-founder of Art + Practice Mark Bradford added, "Leimert Park is a rich cultural community that will welcome the opportunity to see the work of a young African contemporary artist."

*Hammer Projects: Njideka Akunyili Crosby* is comprised of a selection of the artist's early works that primarily focus on the figure. Often appearing as the subject of her paintings, Akunyili Crosby is shown amid family gatherings, in contemplation, or in private moments with her husband. She makes extensive use of Xerox transfer printing, a largely Western technique, to incorporate found photography into the works consisting of family photographs; images from Nigerian popular culture; clippings from political, fashion, and society magazines; and ornamental patterns from traditional textiles. These densely layered images cover most of the surfaces of her large-scale paintings; including the walls, furniture, and floors of the interiors and clothing and skin of the figures. Her visual sensibility recalls the work of the American artists Romare Bearden, Richard Yarde, and Mickalene Thomas, whose two-dimensional works are heavily textured through their use of color and pattern. However Akunyili Crosby casts off in a singular direction, fusing African, European, and American influences and creative traditions while pondering the personal effects of

living in an increasingly global, hybridized society.

“Njideka Akunyili Crosby’s complex work considers the tension between varied influences in her life,” remarks Hammer assistant curator Jamillah James. “Her earlier paintings in the Hammer Projects show and her new body of work in *The Beautiful Ones* are unified by their technical rigor and the confidence of their subjects.”

Taking its title from an ongoing series of paintings of the artist’s siblings as children, *The Beautiful Ones* at Art + Practice presents new works in which Akunyili Crosby further experiments with her compositions. In these works, she foregrounds the non-figurative elements in the paintings and introduces new materials and personal points of reference, such as commemorative fabric, also known as portrait cloth, with images of her family members. The patterned portrait cloth, which is widely available in West Africa, offers another layer of cultural distance, as the fabrics are commonly produced in Europe and serve as a reminder of Africa’s legacy of colonialism. The opening for Njideka Akunyili Crosby: *The Beautiful Ones* will take place on September 12 from 3 p.m. – 5 p.m. at 4339 Leimert Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90008.

Njideka Akunyili Crosby was born in Enugu, Nigeria in 1983. She currently lives and works in Los Angeles. In 2014, she received the Smithsonian American Art Museum's James Dicke Contemporary Art Prize. She has recently participated in exhibitions including *Surround Audience: New Museum Triennial 2015* at New Museum, New York; *Draped Down* at The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (2014); *Sound Vision* at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina (2014); *Meeting in Brooklyn*, curated by Monica Lenaers at the Landcommandery of Alden-Biesen, Bilzen, Belgium (2014); *Shakti* at Brand New Gallery, Milan (2014); *I Always Face You, Even When it Seems Otherwise* at Tiwani Contemporary, London (two-person show with Simone Leigh, 2013); *Domestic Experiences, Foreign Interiors* at Sensei Exchange, New York (two-person show with Doron Langberg, 2013); *I Still Face You* at Franklin Art Works, Minneapolis (solo show, 2013); *New Works* at Gallery Zidoun, Luxembourg (two-person show with Abigail DeVille, 2013); *Jump Cut* at Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York (2013); *Housewarming*, curated by Elizabeth Ferrer at BRIC, New York (2013); *Bronx Calling: The Second Bronx Biennial* at the Bronx Museum, New York (2013); *Primary Sources* at The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (2012); and *Lost and Found: Belief and Doubt in Contemporary Pictures* at the Museum of New Art Detroit (2012). Her work is in the collections of major museums including Yale University Art Gallery; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts; The Studio Museum in Harlem; The Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University; and The Tate Modern, London.

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