

PearlLam

Shanghai

ALIMI ADEWALE: Figuring Presence

Exhibition dates 19 March–30 June, 2026 Monday–Saturday, 10:30–19:00

Venue Pearl Lam, 2/F, 117 Xianggang Road, Shanghai, China



L: ALIMI ADEWALE b. 1974, **Spatial Reverie I**, 2025, Acrylic on kilim, 143 x 102 cm (56 1/4 x 40 1/8 in.)

R: ALIMI ADEWALE b. 1974, **Dance of the Spirit**, 2025, Acrylic on kilim, Diptych, 130 x 216 cm (51 1/8 x 85 in.)

Courtesy of Alimi Adewale and Pearl Lam

Shanghai—Pearl Lam, Shanghai is delighted to present *Figuring Presence*, the first solo exhibition in China of the Nigerian artist Alimi Adewale.

Bringing together emblematic works of recent date, this exhibition curated by Maria Rus Bojan describes a space of energy and visual complexity. The artist explores the intersection between ancestral African symbolism and iconography of the present, fostering a conceptual articulation that is both contemporary and universal.

Figuring Presence traces recurring subjects, privileging new readings of the rich influences contained in Adewale's oeuvre, while emphasising the artist's symbolic return to the originary "language of beauty" rooted in ancient African traditions.

Prioritising the depiction of spiritual and human essences over their literal realism, Adewale's figurative expression is just a pretext to build a transcendent symbolic imagery that fuses aesthetical categories, stylistic references, and media. The artist conflates African aesthetics with the emotional intensity of contrasting colour tones and figural distortion, translating his perceived reality into essentialised sculptural forms and gestural paintings.

Like in the ancient African tradition, Adewale blurs the boundary between painting and sculpture, surface and structure, using found objects, carpets and different organic materials to create rich, textured narratives.

Layering is therefore central to his work, both in the materiality of his paintings and sculptures and in his artistic process, which combines historical references and diverse influences into structured forms that are both physically present and visually rich.

By addressing the need to “rescue” those figurative elements of ancestral African symbolism, Adewale reaffirms his commitment to grounding his work in a holistic framework that is deeply spiritual, though not religious. He approaches painting and sculpture as conceptual and symbolic tools for expressing his own cultural, spiritual, and social values.

In terms of selected works, a distinctive material dimension runs through the exhibition: several works are painted on kilim rugs, whose woven patterns and earthy textures become active participants in each composition. The geometric motifs of the rugs resonate with the ancestral rhythms of the paintings, creating a layered dialogue between surface, heritage, and gesture. Works such as *Timeless Gaze*, painted on dhurrie rug, merge the tactile warmth of woven textile with the sculptural presence of African mask portraiture, while *Threads* weaves together female figures on kilim to celebrate unity, resilience, and shared strength.

The exhibited works span several thematic registers. Portraits including *Cubed Spirit* and the *Ancestral Gaze* series transform African mask traditions through fragmented planes and geometric abstraction, bridging spiritual presence with formal experimentation.

The *Strata* series evokes the layered memory of human and natural history through prehistoric painting motifs—hunters, wild animals, flora, and symbolic markings—while *Spatial Reverie* captures the vitality and rhythm of African dancers, translating the energy of the body into dynamic, abstracted choreography. *Collective Drift* and *The Living Water* address migration and humanity’s elemental relationship with nature, while the *Matriarchal Stance* and *Textured Being* series explore the poise, presence, and resilience of the human form through thick impasto and gestural marks.

Drawing upon his personal history and exposure to an array of transhistorical influences, Adewale’s work questions tradition but offers a vision of a possible future.

Across all works, *Figuring Presence* traces a visual and conceptual lineage: the marks we leave and the invisible threads that bind individuals, communities, and experience.

About Alimi Adewale

Alimi Adewale was born on 8 May, 1974 in Lagos, Nigeria. Although he studied mechanical engineering, he developed an interest in art by going to exhibitions. He furthered his extensive knowledge of art after graduating by attending various art workshops around the world.

Adewale uses the mediums of painting, sculpture and installation to explore urban issues and the lives of everyday people in cities. Some of his work examines the impact of excessive urbanisation, rapid modern development, and the growing global economy on society. His practice combines elements of minimalism and abstraction to evoke the dynamism and intensity of the cosmopolitan environment. Most of his work has a profusion of rich textures and oftentimes an uncommon sculptural finish, whether utilising photography and oil paint (*Owambe*, 2015) or thick lumps of oil mediums (*House of Assembly*, 2013).

The artist mines the endless possibilities of a particular material to introduce an additional dimension into the work: that of time. Imbued with their own mortality, his sculptures cultivate the experiential function of art compared to traditional African sculptures, creating an oeuvre that is distinctly current and as witty as it is macabre.

About the Curator

Maria Rus Bojan is a Romanian art critic and independent curator living and working in Amsterdam. During her 35-year career, she has organised projects and exhibitions with seminal figures of the international art scene and contributed to the debut of today's most successful Romanian artists, such as Victor Man, Adrian Ghenie, Ciprian Mureşan, and others.

Her long-term collaboration with German artist Ulay (1943–2020) led to the publication of the authoritative monograph *Whispers*, which was awarded the AICA Netherlands Prize in 2015. She curated Ulay's first international retrospective at Centro Parraga Murcia in 2005 and contributed as an expert to the recent retrospectives at Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt in 2016 and the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam in 2020.

Maria Rus Bojan was the co-curator of *Performing History*, the Romanian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2011. Between 2017–2020, she curated three retrospective exhibitions and was editor of several publications dedicated to the renowned Polish artist Magdalena Abakanowicz, including published research on her work in the UNESCO Art Collection.

Since 2008, she has been running MB Art Agency, a platform for curatorial projects and artistic consultancy dedicated to Eastern European art.

About Pearl Lam

Pearl Lam is a driving force within Asia's contemporary art scene. Founded in 2005, the gallery plays a vital role in stimulating international dialogue and cross-cultural exchange between the East and West.

Following a rigorous programme, Pearl Lam presents museum-quality exhibitions that re-evaluate and challenge perceptions of cultural practice in Asia. With a thoughtfully balanced roster of Chinese and international artists, the gallery is strategic in its curation, positioning itself as an educator.

The gallery maintains spaces in Hong Kong and Shanghai. With a team of international staff, Pearl Lam's reach is global, having presentations at major international art fairs including Art Cologne, Art Basel, Frieze Masters, and West Bund Art and Design.

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