

Press Release: May, 2024

ADÉBAYO BOLAJI : IN PRAISE OF BEAUTY

29 June to 29 September 2024



Adébayo Bolaji *No Beauty Without Struggle 2024*. Courtesy of Bolaji Studio.

For Summer 2024 Arnolfini welcome audiences into the kaleidoscopic and multidisciplinary world of Adébayo Bolaji, whose solo exhibition *In Praise of Beauty* will be taking over the first-floor galleries, exploring and questioning notions of beauty through painting, sculpture, film and writing.

‘Beauty, in one sense, is a narrative, an experience, and a value so powerful that it can transform even the most powerful among us into the weakest in a moment. *In Praise of Beauty* is creative questioning, a deliberate act of bringing beauty into focus, and an opportunity to explore, discover, and rediscover its essence.’ Adébayo Bolaji

Originating at New Art Exchange, Nottingham, in Spring 2024, *In Praise of Beauty* asks us to question our understanding of both collective and universal notions of beauty.

Based upon a new body of work (commissioned by New Art Exchange) *In Praise of Beauty* includes the monumental works in acrylic and oil pastel *The Vessel* (2024) and *No Beauty Without Struggle* (2024), mixed-media series *I Love You* (2024), drawings, and mythological-inspired sculpture with *The Head of Medusa* (2024). Showing alongside is *A Notebook on the Voice* (2023), a film which Bolaji describes as ‘a scrap-book, exploring ideas on what it can mean to have a voice, to use it, or to have it used...’

For its reimaging at Arnolfini, Bolaji will also be adding a small number of new paintings and collaged works, developed over the last four months as part of his ongoing philosophical enquiry into ideas of beauty.

Bolaji reflects that: ‘Ideals of beauty have existed in every culture and era, [and] attaining and sustaining these qualities sometimes becomes a cult-like status, but what are the driving forces that lead us to believe in a myth of universal beauty, despite its evolving nature?’

Working instinctively, and what he calls “visual curiosity”, Bolaji’s work often relies upon improvisation and play, drawing upon his background in theatre and film. Subsequently his exhibition’s often blur the lines between artwork and interior and exterior worlds. *In Praise of Beauty* is no exception, encompassing the artist’s words, image and voice, and inviting us into a dialogue with the artist and each other.

Animating his own suggestion that the titles of his shows can act like a 'gateway in to a bigger conversation' an accompanying poem by Bolaji winds throughout the galleries, reminding us that 'what you think remains crucial, since it is your experience... How powerful is that?'

Bolaji has exhibited internationally with artist residencies in New York, the PRAH Foundation, Margate, and Yinka Shonibare's Guest Projects, and has recently unveiled his first public art commission *The People's Throne* in Acton Gardens, London in 2023. He is represented by Beers, London.

In Praise of Beauty is an exhibition originated at New Art Exchange. Nottingham.



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For further information please contact Sara Blair | sara.blair@arnolfini.org.uk

Additional images are available here <https://bit.ly/AdebayoBolajiArnolfini>

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www.arnolfini.org.uk

LISTING:

Adébayo Bolaji : *In Praise of Beauty* | 29 June to 29 September 2024

For summer 2024 Arnolfini will be welcoming audiences into the kaleidoscopic and multidisciplinary world of Adébayo Bolaji with his solo exhibition, *In Praise of Beauty*. First originating at New Art Exchange, Nottingham, and reimagined for Arnolfini, *In Praise of Beauty*, will be taking over the first-floor galleries and accompanied by a programme of live events and workshops.

Arnolfini, 16 Narrow Quay, Bristol BS1 4QA 0117 917 2300

Tuesday to Sunday, 11am to 6pm. Free entry, donations welcome.

<https://arnolfini.org.uk/whatson/adebayobolaji> @ArnolfiniArts

Images here: <https://bit.ly/AdebayoBolajiArnolfini>

NOTES TO EDITORS

About Adébayo Bolaji

Adébayo Bolaji, is a multi-disciplinary artist living and working in London, England. At the centre of his practice is the dialogue of change and the focus of the individual within a connecting society :

"Avoiding ourselves, being able to confront who we are can be hard. So, it can there be easier to throw oneself into a cause - and I think this would also easier to also talk about as an artist. On the face of it, this is admirable but makes for an interesting exploration when it is done at the expense of truly avoiding who one truly is...and so my work is about us, it is about facing who we are" [Bolaji].

The use of the vibrant and metaphorical language, is a crucial element in his work, helping to narrate a different story within each painting, film or sculpture... allowing for the viewer to take an active role in the works.

Bolaji has exhibited internationally in London, Zurich, Berlin and New York, along with artist residencies in New York and Margate, including an Artist Residency with *Yinka Shonibare MBE Guest Projects* where Bolaji created a 7 metre painting pointing to the tragedy of the young girls in Nigeria kidnapped by Boko Haram.

Recently, Bolaji had a two-person exhibition at London's *Saatchi Gallery* and his work has been featured in prominent publications along with speaking engagements at renowned institutions such as *Mall Galleries London* and *Penn State University* [to name a few]. He is a published poet, a theatre director [*Park Theatre London*] and founder of *Ex Nihilo Theatre Group*, having a degree with the *Royal Central School of Speech and Drama*, and a Law degree from *London Guildhall*.

As an actor for the stage, Bolaji has performed at London's *Shakespeare's Globe*, *The Young Vic* and *Piccadilly Theatre-London's West-End*, along with *BBC*, *Channel Four* and Feature Film credits.

In 2021 Bolaji was commissioned to create a 3m x 3m permanent public sculpture for the new Central Plaza Park in Acton Gardens, London, that saw its unveiling in October 2023.

About Arnolfini

Woven into the fabric of Bristol since 1961, Arnolfini is an international centre of interdisciplinary contemporary arts, presenting an ambitious and wide-ranging programme of visual art, performance, dance, film, and music.

Housed in Bush House, a prominent 19th century former warehouse on the city's harbourside, Arnolfini is a pioneering, inspiring public space for arts and learning, offering an innovative, inclusive and engaging experience for all.

Arnolfini has welcomed artists from around world throughout its history – sharing works by Paula Rego, Jannis Kounellis, John Akomfrah, Grayson Perry, Rachel Whiteread, Peter Doig, Richard Long, Veronica Ryan, Chantal Joffe, Sonia Boyce, Alice Kettle and Frank Bowling, to name just a few - as well as supporting talent from in and around Bristol.

Alongside its main programme, Arnolfini is a centre of everyday creativity and learning, working with a wide range of community and artistic partners, while continuing to explore and develop new collaborations across the city and beyond. Spaces are used regularly by families, schools and colleges, health and wellbeing groups.

Through sharing a 63+ year archive of exhibition slides, publications and an extensive artist book collection, Arnolfini celebrates its heritage and the wide-reaching impact the organisation has had since its foundation.

Since 2019, the team at Arnolfini have sought to honour founder Jeremy Rees' principle to 'Enjoy Yourself', welcoming everyone into the accessible space, and inviting engagement, in any number of ways.

Arnolfini is part of the University of the West of England and a key element of their City Campus. An independent charity (CIO), Arnolfini is supported by Arts Council England and the Ashley Clinton Barker-Mills Trust. www.arnolfini.org.uk

About UWE Bristol

The University of the West of England (UWE Bristol) has a global and inclusive outlook, with approximately 36,000 students and strong industry networks and connections with over 1,000 employers. Research at UWE Bristol focuses on real world problems and the University plays a pivotal role in the regional economy. With over £300 million invested in infrastructure, buildings and facilities across all Campuses, UWE Bristol is creating a place for learning that is innovative, ambitious, connected, enabling and inclusive. UWE Bristol is ranked 43rd out of 122 institutions in The Guardian university league table. www.uwe.ac.uk

About Arts Council England

Arts Council England is the national development agency for creativity and culture. We have set out our strategic vision in Let's Create that by 2030 we want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish and where everyone of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences. From 2023 to 2026 we will invest over £440 million of public money from Government and an estimated £93 million from The National Lottery each year to help support the sector and to deliver this vision. www.artscouncil.org.uk.

About Ashley Clinton Barker-Mills Trust

Arnolfini has been supported by a linked charity, the Ashley Clinton Barker Mills Trust (ACBMT) for almost 60 years.

Arnolfini founders Jeremy and Annabel Rees were first introduced to the artists and benefactors Peter and Caroline Barker-Mill in 1963, by the London gallerist Lesley Waddington. It was a fortuitous meeting that was the catalyst in allowing Arnolfini to develop from a small volunteer-run private gallery into a major international arts centre.

The Ashley Clinton Barker-Mills Trust (ACBMT) principle is to work with Arnolfini, primarily by making annual grants from the income earned on its investments, as well as funding modest, one-off capital grants to help the Arnolfini transition to its current financial model. In more recent years members of the ACBMT have become more involved working with Arnolfini to help plan its future.
www.arnolfini.org.uk/about/ashley-clinton-barker-mills-trust