



RETRO AFRICA

For The Love of African Art

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Nigerian-American Artist Victor Ehikhamenor Makes New York Debut with Retro Africa

Nigeria-Based Gallery to Mount its First U.S. Exhibition In Collaboration with Lehmann Maupin at its West 22nd St. Location

July 8 – August 15, 2021

Abuja, Nigeria – June 15, 2021 – Retro Africa announced today that it will make its U.S. debut this summer with a solo exhibition of new work by Nigerian-American artist and writer Victor Ehikhamenor, also marking his first show in New York. Building on Ehikhamenor's practice of exploring resonances and divergences between African and African American art, *Do This in Memory of Us* examines the relationship between the ancient African kingdom of Benin and the trajectory of the African diaspora in the New World. Featuring new works that reflect the artist's dual cultural identity, the exhibition transcends borders and creates a through line that expresses the cultural connections between African heritage and the African American diaspora. *Do This in Memory of Us* is being presented by Retro Africa in collaboration with Lehmann Maupin at its West 22nd Street gallery (536 West 22nd St) from July 8 through August 15, 2021.

Known for creating immersive installations exploring universal themes of history, nostalgia, home, and spirituality, Ehikhamenor draws upon motifs from his childhood in the Nigerian village of Udomi-Uwessan and his studio practice in the United States, reflecting distinct artistic traditions and subverting assumptions of each tradition by expanding the art historical canon. He represented Nigeria in its first-ever pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2017, and, currently, four newly commissioned 60-foot sculptures are installed on the columns in front of the Pinakothek der Moderne Museum in Munich as part of *LOOK AT THIS!*, a group exhibition that opens in June 2021. Alongside his artistic practice, Ehikhamenor is an active advocate for African art and culture, calling for its just recognition and addressing such critical issues as the repatriation of the Benin Bronzes in editorials that have been published in the [New York Times](#), [The Guardian](#), and [The Art Newspaper](#).

Ehikhamenor's first show in New York will showcase a series of new works that allude to Nigeria's royal and colonial past and the forces shaping its future. The exhibition's eponymous centerpiece, a 30 by 15-foot "tapestry," made from over 10,500 plastic rosaries meticulously sewn together, evokes the Middle Passage, the forced voyage of enslaved Africans across the Atlantic Ocean to the New World. Storytelling is an important element of the artist's practice as a writer. The exhibition also features the artist's perforated series that speaks to royal intrigues, the magical realism of memory as well as sharp criticisms of history and politics. Collectively, these works connect the past with the present and speak to Ehikhamenor's pursuit of finding new meanings for ancient African inherited beliefs in today's world.



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“We are honored to present Victor Ehikhamenor for Retro Africa’s first show in the U.S. and I’d like to thank Lehmann Maupin for all of their support in helping make this possible, stated Retro Africa founder Dolly Kola-Balogun. “Ehikhamenor’s practice embodies the flow and exchange between African and Western tradition and his keen sense of materiality makes his work especially visceral. As he assumes the role of witness and storyteller, integrating specific references from his own life in his work, he exemplifies Retro Africa’s mission to advance contemporary African art by showcasing work that expands the multitude of African expressions throughout the continent and abroad.”

“*Do This in Memory of Us* is a way to bear witness to history, using the Benin Kingdom as a point of departure and giving voice to those that came before me,” says Victor Ehikhamenor. “The works in the show are inspired by history, humankind, and current events and speak to my experience managing the complex duality of Africa and America, a place I’ve called home for two decades. In the way luminaries like David Driskell, Louis Mailou Jones, John Biggers, or even younger artists working in the United States would look towards Africa and reference its culture and cosmologies in their practice is the same way I look at America and the new culture of my people there for references in some of my works.”

“Rachel and I are excited to welcome Retro Africa for the gallery's debut in the United States and the first solo exhibition of Victor Ehikhamenor in New York,” says David Maupin, co-founder of Lehmann Maupin. “A prolific artist and writer, Victor maintains a rigorous multi-disciplinary practice that explores what it means to be a global citizen in the world today. His concerns and his experience of cross-cultural exchange are shared with many of the artists in Lehmann Maupin’s program such as Kader Attia, Mandy El-Sayegh, and Do Ho Suh. We look forward to engaging with his work and for New York-based audiences to hear from leading voices in Nigeria in both Dolly and Victor.”

Institute of Contemporary African Art and Film

Kola-Balogun is also spearheading the creation of the Institute of Contemporary African Art and Film (ICAAF) in Ilorin, Nigeria’s first international contemporary art and film center that will become a premiere art destination, welcoming visitors near and far. The ICAAF will house a world-class collection of African Art, on-site artist studios for Nigerian and International artists, and a full film production studio to continue the rich tradition of Nollywood filmmaking. It is slated for completion by September 2022.

About Victor Ehikhamenor

Victor Ehikhamenor (b.1970) is a Nigerian-American multimedia artist, photographer, and writer. He has been prolific in producing abstract, symbolic, and political works that are at once reflective of his Nigerian upbringing and his studies and experiences in the United States as a global citizen.

A trustee of the Nigeria-based Legacy Restoration Trust, Ehikhamenor has been a leading advocate for the establishment of the Edo Museum of West African Art, a David Adjaye-designed museum that will house returned looted artifacts as well as showcase modern and contemporary art practice from the region. Reflecting his continued commitment to institution-building and the future of African art, Ehikhamenor is the founder of [Angels and Muse](#), a Lagos-based residency program and workspace dedicated to fostering creative voices in contemporary art and literature, hosting workshops and cultural programming to connect the local community with leading Nigerian and international innovators.

In April 2021, Ehikhamenor debuted a commission for Facebook’s Dubai headquarters titled *Say Your Mind*, which grew out of his participation in Facebook’s Artist-in-Residence program. His work has been featured in the 57th Venice Biennale as part of the Nigerian Pavilion (2017), 5th

Mediations Biennale in Poznan, Poland (2016), The 12th Dak'Art Biennale in Dakar, Senegal (2016), and Biennale Jogja XIII, Indonesia (2015).

A 2020 National Artist in Residence at the Neon Museum, Las Vegas, Nevada, Ehikhamenor was also a 2016 Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Fellow. As a writer, he has published fiction and critical essays with academic journals, magazines, and newspapers around the world including the *New York Times*, *Guernica Magazine*, *BBC*, *CNN Online*, *Washington Post*, among others.

About Retro Africa

Since its founding in 2015, Retro Africa has served Nigeria's capital city of Abuja and the broader African art community as a hub of contemporary art and culture. With its international program of exhibitions, art fair presentations, and intra-gallery curatorial collaborations, Retro Africa seeks to explore emerging and historically overlooked narratives. Dedicated to encouraging growth within the visual arts, the gallery and community center provides a platform for established and emerging artists, organizing public programs, workshops, and residencies to foster learning and highlight the breadth and depth of the contemporary African art scene.

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