

GUNS & RAIN

Ayobola Kekere-Ekun

High Stakes

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High Stakes

In her alluring 'High Stakes' series, Ayobola Kekere-Ekun finds an analogy for Nigeria's electoral processes and, by extension, the reality of its leadership in a "never-ending card game". In a country with over 190 million citizens, pandering, corruption, rigging, and violence have been the highlight of Nigeria's democracy every four years for over two decades. Commenting on how skewed and performative the "democratic" process has become, Kekere-Ekun's glamorous card characters represent a handful of individuals who transform every election cycle into "an extended sequence of high stakes poker games straight out of a Hollywood blockbuster". Her series seeks to highlight how this state of affairs continues to mutate, dooming its citizens to an unending card game, where the players might change but the game stays the same - and the stakes only get higher. In 2020, of course, Kekere-Ekun's work finds resonance elsewhere too.

Kekere-Ekun's work has been exhibited in several group shows in Lagos and Johannesburg, as well as at ArtX Lagos 2018 and Turbine Art Fair Johannesburg 2019. Her work will be presented at UNTITLED, ART Miami Beach OVR in December 2020. Recent exhibitions in 2019 include her first solo exhibition, "Resilient Lines" at Rele Gallery, Lagos and "Suffrage", an all-women group show at Guns & Rain, Johannesburg. Her solo exhibition was supported by a grant awarded by the Dean Collection, a contemporary art collection created by Alicia Keys and Swizz Beatz (Kasseem Dean). Kekere-Ekun holds a BA (Hons) in Visual Arts and an MA (Hons) in Graphic Design from University of Lagos. She is currently pursuing a PhD in Art and Design at the University of Johannesburg, examining advertising campaigns, place-branding and visual codes deployed by the Lagos state government.

Artist Statement | Ayobola Kekere-Ekun

“The core of my artistic practice rests on three foundational pillars. The first is an attraction to lines. I have always had a genuine fascination with lines. I think it’s interesting how the primary component of all complex forms can be ambiguously loaded with meaning. A line can connect and separate, enclose and exclude, direct and misdirect, all at the same time. To a large extent, my work is a three-dimensional manifestation of lines. I amplify their complexity by enabling them to catch pockets of light and cast subtle shadows. This becomes an avenue to tease out smaller stories within wider narratives visually. The second pillar is the seeming neutrality of paper. I view paper as a conceptual Trojan horse. It’s a basic, unassuming material that exists in the backgrounds of our lives; bland, reliable and ordinary. By making paper the visual centrepiece of my art, I encourage my audience to reconsider the material’s value and potential. This re-examination also underscores a running theme in my practice, which is that things are rarely what they appear to be.”

“The use of fabrics in Yoruba, Nigerian society is my third pillar. Across my practice, I use fabrics as a reference to the practice of Aso Ebi in Nigerian society. Aso Ebi, which translates to “family cloth” refers to the selection of a fabric that serves as a “uniform” worn by families and friends alike during communal ceremonies such as weddings, birthdays and funerals. It is intended to be a show of love, support and camaraderie. The practice has, however, been corrupted in contemporary times, becoming a common source of disputes when prices are excessively inflated to turn a profit and community members are unable or unwilling to acquire the fabric. My use of fabrics references how the positive can quickly mutate to take on negative connotations. It is also a visual representation of societal pressure and expectations.”

“I enjoy exploring themes related to gender, memory, mythology and identity. My work involves placing strips of paper on their edges to create forms. It is a rather labour-intensive process as each strip must be manually measured, manipulated and secured. I approach paper as a means of painting without pigments. The visual complexity of my art becomes a visual metaphor for the difficulty of the themes I tackle. My art is often visually playful and engaging, characterised by intricacy and bright colours. I think of the visual accessibility of my work as a “trap” of sorts. It lures an audience into engaging before revealing the darker subject matter the work deals with; a constant reminder of the fallacy of face value.”



High Stakes. Suit 1. No 12
2020

Mixed Media (Paper and acrylic on canvas)
51 x 41 cm / 20 x 16 inches (unframed)
65 x 54,5 x 5 cm / 25.5 x 21.4 x 2 inches (framed)



High Stakes. Suit 1. No 12 (detail)



High Stakes. Suit 1. No 7
2020

Mixed Media (Paper, fabric and acrylic on canvas)
51 x 41 cm / 20 x 16 inches (unframed)
65 x 54,5 x 5 cm / 25.5 x 21.4 x 2 inches (framed)



High Stakes. Suit 1. No 11
2020

Mixed Media (Paper and acrylic on canvas)
51 x 41 cm / 20 x 16 inches (unframed)
65 x 54,5 x 5 cm / 25.5 x 21.4 x 2 inches (framed)





High Stakes. Suit 4. No 13
2020

Mixed Media (Paper, fabric and acrylic on canvas)
51 x 41 cm / 20 x 16 inches (unframed)
65 x 54,5 x 5 cm / 25.5 x 21.4 x 2 inches (framed)



High Stakes. Suit 4. No 8
2020

Mixed Media (Paper and acrylic on canvas)
51 x 41 cm / 20 x 16 inches (unframed)
65 x 54,5 x 5 cm / 25.5 x 21.4 x 2 inches (framed)



High Stakes. Suit 4. No 7
2020

Mixed Media (Paper and acrylic on canvas)
51 x 41 cm / 20 x 16 inches (unframed)
65 x 54,5 x 5 cm / 25.5 x 21.4 x 2 inches (framed)





High Stakes. Suit 2. No 13
2020

Mixed Media (Paper and acrylic on canvas)
51 x 41 cm / 20 x 16 inches (unframed)
65 x 54,5 x 5 cm / 25.5 x 21.4 x 2 inches (framed)



High Stakes. Suit 2. No 13 (detail)



High Stakes. Suit 2. No 6
2020

Mixed Media (Paper and acrylic on canvas)
51 x 41 cm / 20 x 16 inches (unframed)
65 x 54,5 x 5 cm / 25.5 x 21.4 x 2 inches (framed)



High Stakes. Suit 2. No 7
2020

Mixed Media (Paper, fabric and acrylic on canvas)
51 x 41 cm / 20 x 16 inches (unframed)
65 x 54,5 x 5 cm / 25.5 x 21.4 x 2 inches (framed)



High Stakes. Suit 2. No 9
2020

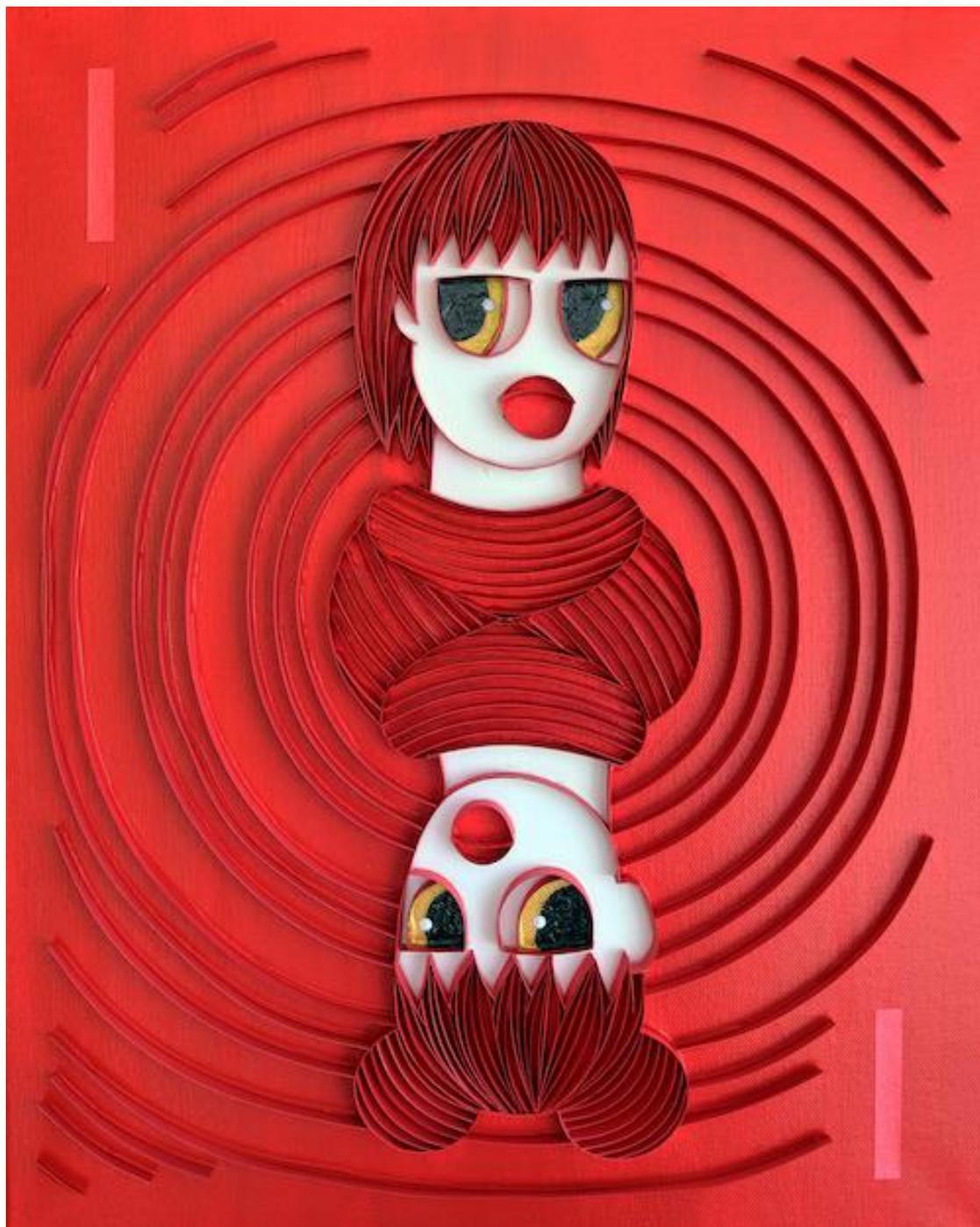
Mixed Media (Paper, fabric and acrylic on canvas)
51 x 41 cm / 20 x 16 inches (unframed)
65 x 54,5 x 5 cm / 25.5 x 21.4 x 2 inches (framed)





High Stakes. Suit 3. No 2
2020

Mixed Media (Paper and acrylic on canvas)
51 x 41 cm / 20 x 16 inches (unframed)
65 x 54,5 x 5 cm / 25.5 x 21.4 x 2 inches (framed)



High Stakes. Suit 3. No 1
2020

Mixed Media (Paper and acrylic on canvas)
51 x 41 cm / 20 x 16 inches (unframed)
65 x 54,5 x 5 cm / 25.5 x 21.4 x 2 inches (framed)



High Stakes. Suit 3. No 11
2020

Mixed Media (Paper and acrylic on canvas)
51 x 41 cm / 20 x 16 inches (unframed)
65 x 54,5 x 5 cm / 25.5 x 21.4 x 2 inches (framed)



High Stakes. Suit 3. No 11 (detail)



High Stakes. Suit 3. No 9
2020

Mixed Media (Paper and acrylic on canvas)
51 x 41 cm / 20 x 16 inches (unframed)
65 x 54,5 x 5 cm / 25.5 x 21.4 x 2 inches (framed)

