

# Antipodes

17 May – 15 Jun 2019 at the Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery in London, United Kingdom

17 MAY 2019



Antipodes. Courtesy of Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery

Spectral silhouettes appear through a patchwork of colourful paint, often incomplete in form or disfigured with penetrating black holes for eyes. These are the protagonists of ‘Antipodes’, Dakar born and based artist Cheikhou Ba’s debut exhibition at Kristin Hjellegjerde London. Through an atmospheric collection of sixteen paintings, Ba explores the oppositions which exist within us, challenging the viewer to confront the uncomfortable question: what is to be human?

Through vibrant, energetic brushstrokes, Ba’s work portrays the tension and instability at the core of human identity. His tragicomic figures contain, or leak, a multitude of colours, representing the range of personalities, moods and energies within one being. Though some are more recognisably human than others, Ba’s characters resist one stable form, appearing instead to be in the process of constant transformation. ‘This the complexity and fragility of life. The primordial ego confronting itself,’ commented Ba. ‘My paintings consider fundamental existential questions. Who we are? When are we? How many identities are there in one self? What are the limits of our ignorances? What makes us who we are? Are we all immigrants since nobody is from here?’

The latter question gains new significance in the light of the artist’s recent rejection from the UK. Having applied for a visitor’s visa in order to attend his exhibition opening, Ba received a letter stating that the consulate were not satisfied with his ‘portrayal of his current personal and financial circumstances’, expressing concern that he might not leave at the end of his trip despite a history of travelling and working internationally. Demonstrating the inadequacy of the visa system, the response highlights the

dehumanisation of the other and begs the question: how can humans be reduced to information, symbols or indeed, brushstrokes? It is this tension between our inability and desire to express humanity that is captured in Ba's feverish, chaotic patterns of paint.

The central inspiration for this body of work comes from "Heureux les Heureux" the novel by Yasmina Reza which is told through the voices of eighteen interconnected characters. Drawn to the ideas of interconnectivity and overlap, Ba's own paintings depict scenes in which figures appear in groups, so close at times that their forms merge. For example, one painting shows four figures standing with one bicycle. There is no visible space between the bodies, indicating an intimacy which appears vaguely intimidating to the viewer. Furthermore, the lack of three bicycles presents the potential of conflict, creating an atmosphere of unease. This unease is transferred through the work and most keenly felt in the painting of three figures and a pair of legs. In this case, the missing torso evokes a sense of loss more than it does violence. It is as if the top half of the person has been smothered by a thick layer of peach-coloured paint. The effect is made more poignant by the backward gaze of the other characters.

Though the work explores a complex range of emotions, Ba is keen to emphasise: 'My bright, chromatic paintings magnify and celebrate life no matter what. There is light to draw from darkness, joy from sadness, hope from loss.' In this way, we might consider art itself to be an act of hopefulness, a desire to understand and create new visions.

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## Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery

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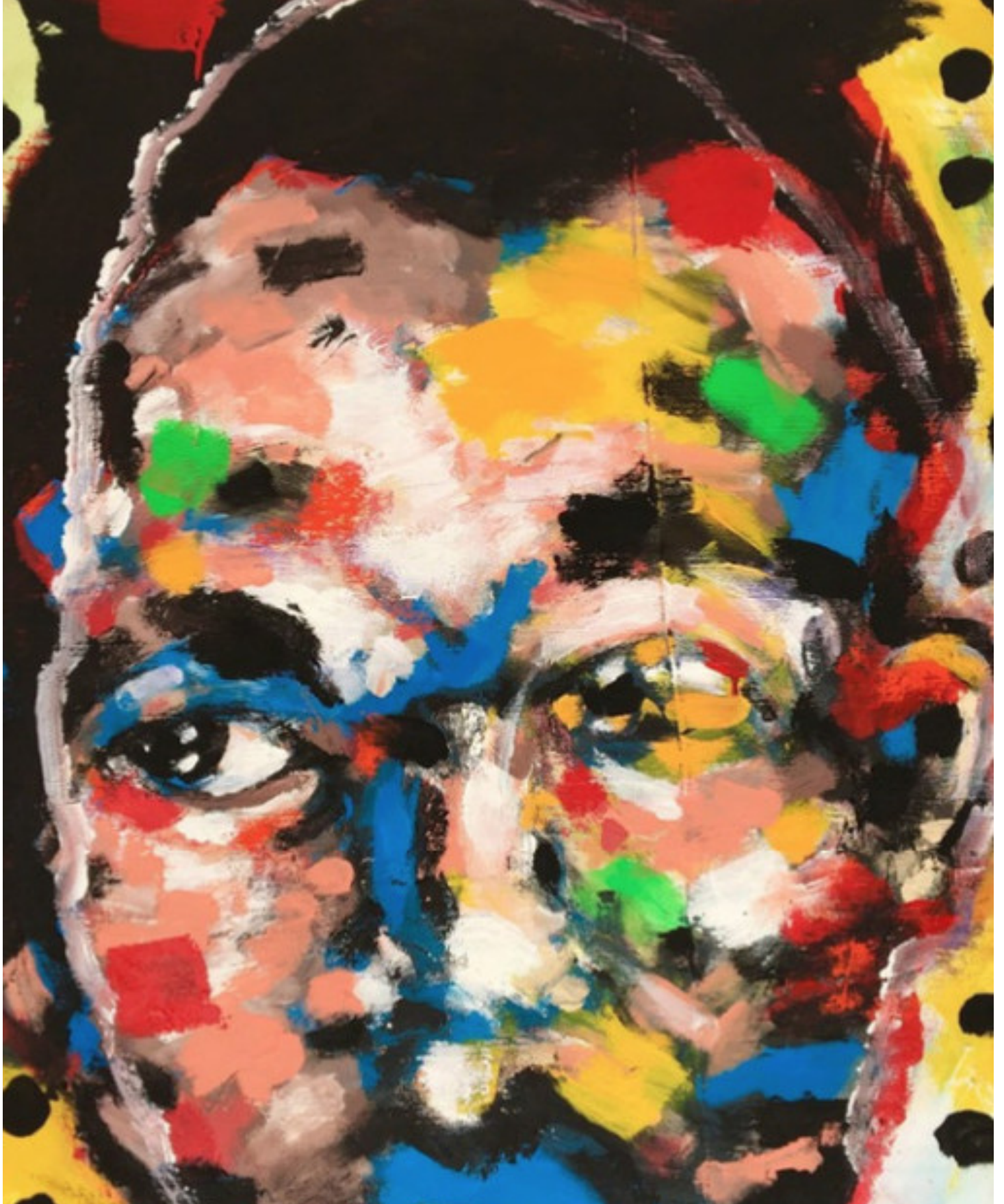
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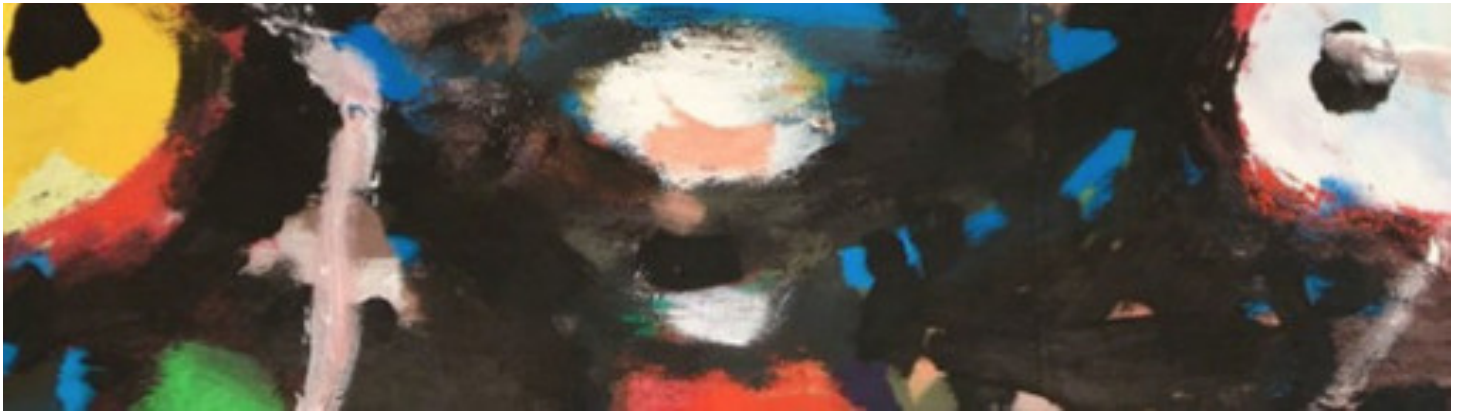
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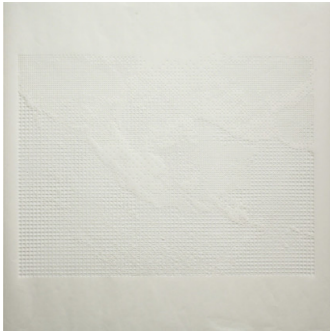






1. Antipodes. Courtesy of Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery
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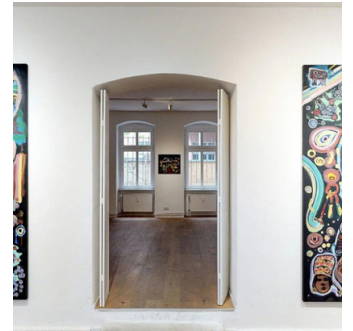
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