



modupeola fadugba

presents

The Artist's Algorithm: *Why Nations Win*

November 2- 6, 2021

ALÁRA | 12A Akin Olugbade Street | Victoria Island, Lagos

ALÁRA

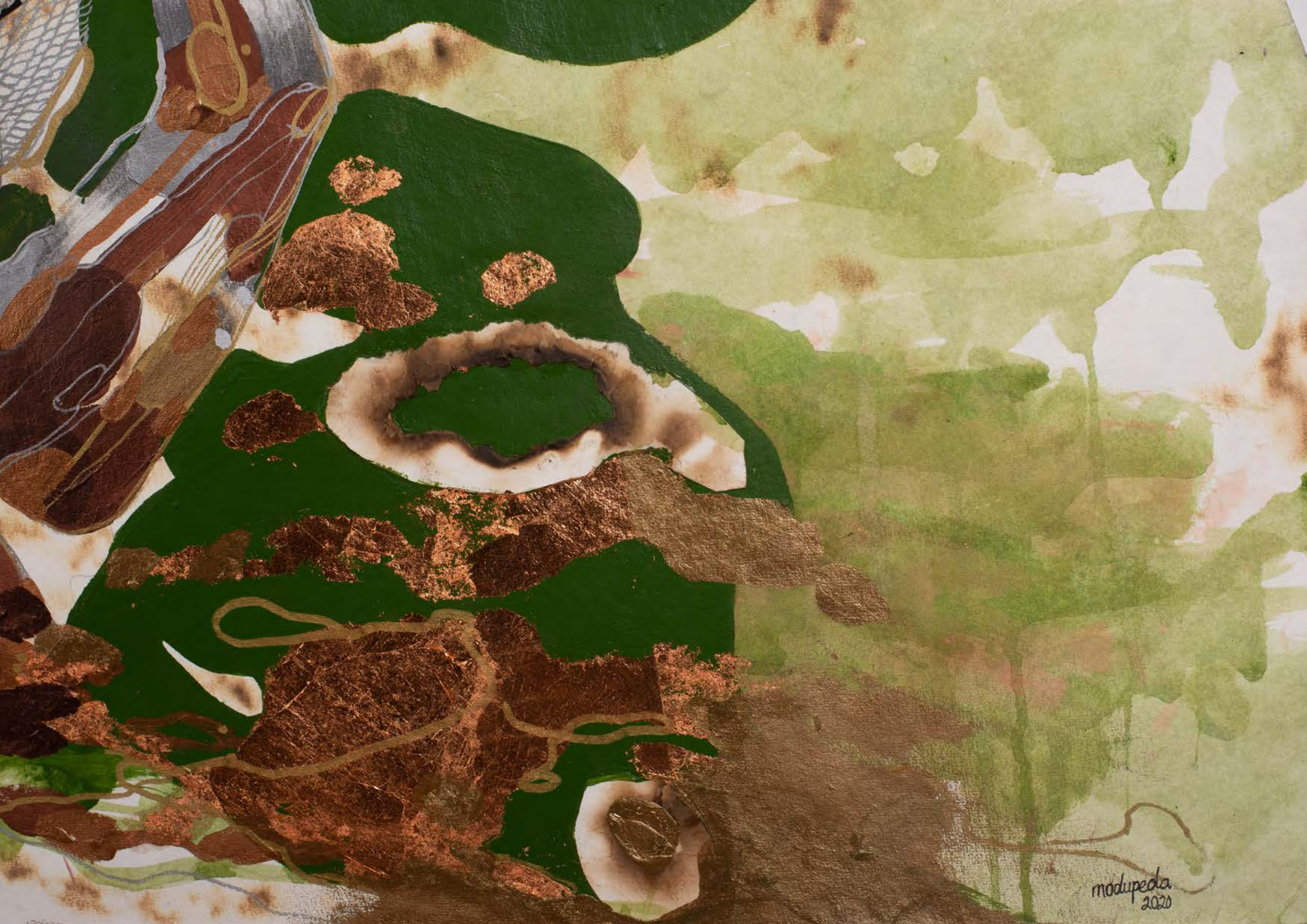
 **Tangerine**

ZIRCON
MARINE 

Whispering Angel

BELVEDERE
VODKA


ART 
LAGOS



modupeba
2020

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"Have you ever wondered who made the rules in the game of life, who established the hierarchies between men and women, rich and poor, young and old, a government and its citizens, love and fear? If you were the ultimate creator, how would you make the universe? As an artist, how would you reimagine the future?"

modupeola
2021

The Artist's Algorithm

The Artist's Algorithm is an artist-led initiative comprising exhibitions, essays, talks, games, performances, mentorship programs, murals, and videos that aims to shed light on challenges in education and governance through creative collaboration and art.

Why Nations Win is the inaugural exhibition in Modupeola's The Artist's Algorithm Series. It serves as an overview for a long term, multimedia project activating the past three years of Fadugba's socially engaged research, evolving studio practice, and resulting artworks. For its first presentation at ALÁRA before travelling to Senegal in 2022 and Harlem in 2023, the exhibition will embrace an introductory, open-studio context including works on paper and canvas, a video, and game installation accompanied by a live programme. The interdisciplinary and interactive elements all adhere to Fadugba's interests in global expression – rooted in her upbringing across East and West Africa, Europe, and America – and foster collaborative thought leadership across countries while empowering the continent. Key references for Fadugba whilst developing this ambitious first presentation include 'Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty' (2012) by economists Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson and 'The Infinite Game' (2019) by Simon Sinek, establishing how colonialism's legacy in determining a nation's prosperity can be overcome by centering cultural collaboration, sustainable leadership, and a redefinition of what it means to win. Finally, the artist is greatly inspired by the 'African Renaissance Theory' – a belief in the cultural, scientific, and economic renewal of post-colonial African nations – endowing The Artist's Algorithm

project with a mission to promote interdisciplinary, educational, and economically sustainable creative initiatives in Africa.

This project is also a place for dreams, games, and the provocative power of play to initiate dialogues about African artists, materials, and history. The pieces of Fadugba's algorithm – her rules to win by – include different symbolic motifs: synchronised swimmers, game theory, geographic wonders, national heroes, monuments, and more. These strategies aim to create and celebrate stories, both personal and national, born out of places of learning: pools, schools, museums, or home. Seven years later after becoming a full-time artist, the central question of Fadugba's artistic investigations still remains. Why do nations win? To answer this, the artist creates sites of celebration and spaces for play, where individuals, communities, and nations can develop together. It is a proposal for the future: a dream to create immersive, collaborative, and multi-layered art experiences that offer new interpretations of Africa-centered futures, taking the fear out of learning by making it active, beautiful, and fun. This new way to play gives us new ways to win.







“

“An algorithm, by definition, is a process or set of rules to be solved. It's like a riddle. The question for society is who controls the algorithm? How do artists win? What is the algorithm for love?”



The Artist's Algorithm: Start With Love, Play Forever video



The Artist's Algorithm

Start With Love, Play Forever video

While at the National Museum of African Art as a 2020 Smithsonian Artist Research Fellow, Fadugba found herself locked inside the National Museum of African Art overnight. As she walked through several rooms encountering paintings, sculptures and artefacts, she encountered hidden histories amongst dreams for the future...

I envisioned the rising and falling apart of African nations and civilisations – and where we stand now. But what was most humbling about that encounter, was the realisation of how little I knew about African culture. As a child, I was always startled by differences in outcomes in each of the first and third world countries. I've always wondered : "Why do some nations win and others lose?" Even now, as an artist, I still wonder why some stories are more dominant than others, and how do we redefine what it means to win, to be celebrated, and have enduring representation? I ended up dumping out all of the things from my bag, rearranging them, and reimagining them, and I think that was the beginning of creating what I'm calling the artist's algorithm. It is the way that I would reimagine how art can be used to solve problems through education, using what I already know.

An algorithm, by definition, is a process or set of rules to be solved. It's like a riddle. The question for society is who controls the algorithm? How do artists win? What is the algorithm for love? Alone in the museum, Fadugba kept thinking about love and fear, and the hierarchy between these polarities: how can love triumph over fear? For the artist, an avid lifelong swimmer and student,

Fadugba has created swimming as a key narrative and visual tool for education and storytelling. "For me, swimming and painting swimmers is an act of love in the face of fear for many, who face tragedy and erasure when navigating contested waters. My love language is learning and teaching, and thus the swim stories I create through art are rooted in education – my synchronised swimmers become role models of what's possible. Seeing is believing. My synchronised swimmers represent a sort of ideal, about rationality, order, and harmony in the world. But the truth is, things fall apart. So, what algorithm can we use to restructure our stories – what would it take for us all to swim, to win?"



Medalion Woman: Dr. Stella Ameyo Adadevoh



“

“The
coin-cum-medallion
represents victory and
commemoration.”

Medallion Woman

Dr. Stella Ameyo Adadevoh

This special medallion is for Nigerian national hero Dr. Stella Ameyo Adadevoh (1956-2014), who risked her life to stop the spread of the deadly Ebola disease in 2014. In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, from which the world continues to recover, we may even better understand the value of such a sacrifice today. A sacrifice which restored hope and years later, continues to serve as the pillar of strength for the nation, even in the face of the current global struggle.

This monumental work also draws on the connection between medallions and coins, first explored in Modupeola Fadugba's series *Heads or Tails* (2014-2017). In the series, the artist uses currency as a symbol of disruption and a metaphor for probing themes of value and worth, particularly as they relate to wider gender structures in Nigeria. Since coins are seldom in use in many African nations, the artist paints women on paper with patches and holes – she lets the paper burn reflecting upon the ever-declining value of currency and re-examination of economic and cultural value. In this alternative universe, braids replace tiaras and black women are always represented as people of value – reversing social hierarchies that historically have portrayed only men on monetary objects. In this wake a new idea of value and honour emerges, countering stereotypes and centring notions of celebration. The coin-cum-medallion represents victory and commemoration.

Dr. Stella was deeply committed to the idea of the “greater public good” – a cherished rarity in a nation struggling with corruption and ominous accumulations of wealth. Dr. Stella is our own Sheroin, our Amazon, the symbol of African struggle against ignorance and disease. She is our Matriarch, the bearer of our renaissance, the bearer of hopes of our Mother Africa. Her legacy embodies *Eko o ni baje*, which translates directly to Lagos will not spoil, embodying the mantra of resilience and life beyond Lagos to the whole of Nigeria.



Medallion Girls

Golden Train

Golden Formation

Silver Circle

Silver Chain

Bronze Show-off

Indigo Star

Indigo Praise

Green Circle

Green Flower

Pink Flower

Swim School

Lifeguard Lookout



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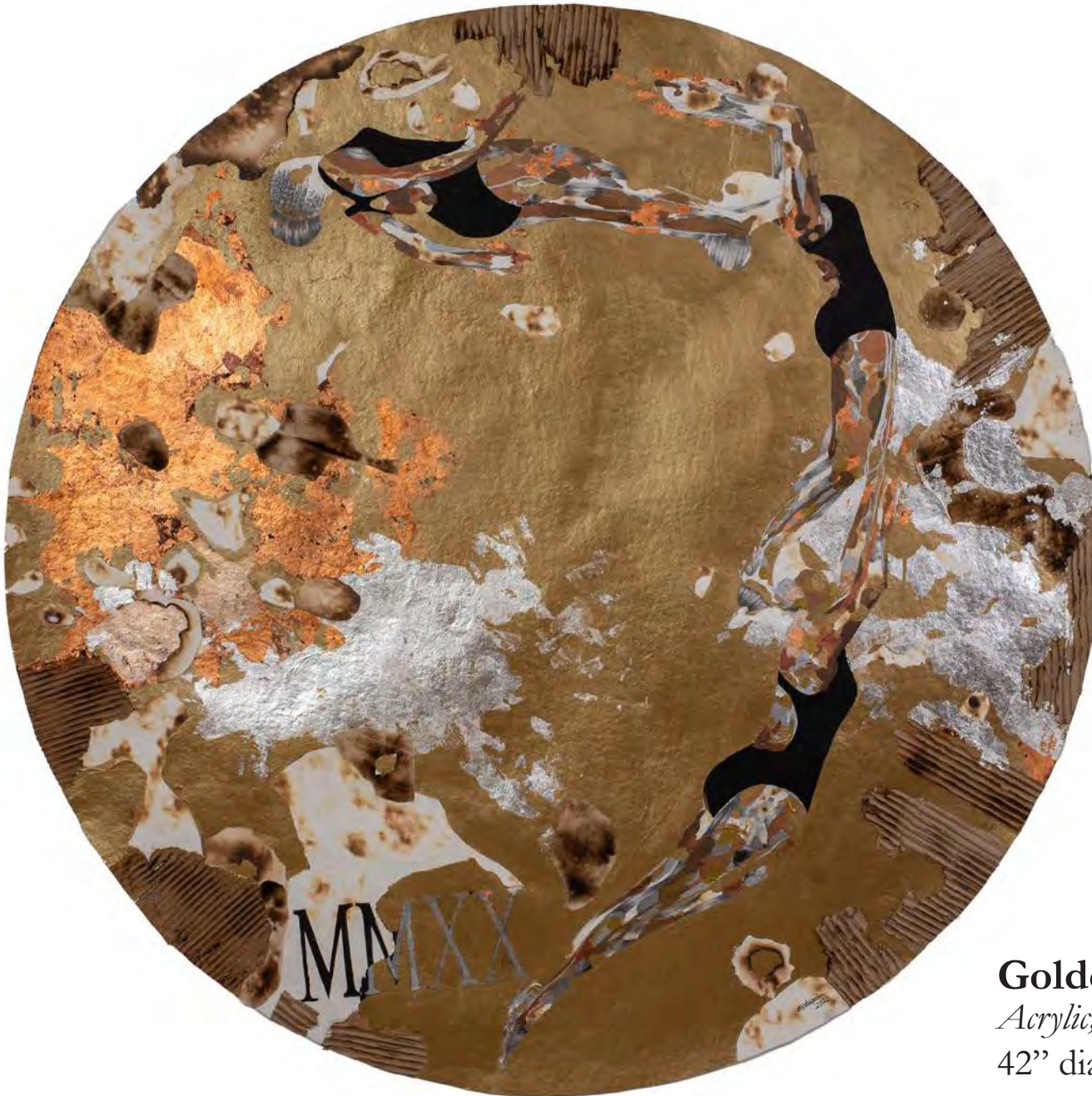
"What would it take for us all to
swim to win?"

Medallion Girls

As an avid and lifelong swimmer, artist Modupeola Fadugba has created swimming as a key narrative and visual tool for her storytelling. This new series emerges from an ongoing body of work which explores the meanings and possibilities behind powerful black figures in water – the fear of drowning alongside the hope of learning, thriving, and working together. Fadugba first depicted bodies in water in 2015 with the series, *Tagged*. In the series, the swimmers sometimes alone; yet often together, are submerged into the watery worlds of oceans and swimming pools – dynamic landscapes where we find ourselves in constant flux. A body may be floating, swimming, sinking, or even drowning, depending on her level of confidence, skill, or luck. In this context, the swimmer has served as a visual vocabulary for Fadugba to represent artists: active figures constantly creating in an ever-changing terrain. Moreover, there is a deep spectrum of associations with this visceral realm, from feelings of calm and luxury to fatigue and risk. Yet when joined by others, synchronised, these swimmers transcend the original rules of the game and activate stories of friendship, teamwork, and unity, giving voice to the infrequent representation of young black women in water together.

In this new series, the artist employs medallion-style swim imagery to explore what it means to win. The motif of a medallion ties to awards of great acknowledgment, memorialising legacy, and the medal collections of some of the artist's swimming subjects. These triumphant and intricate compositions – larger-than-life medallions hanging from colourful, undulating ribbons – create a new visual

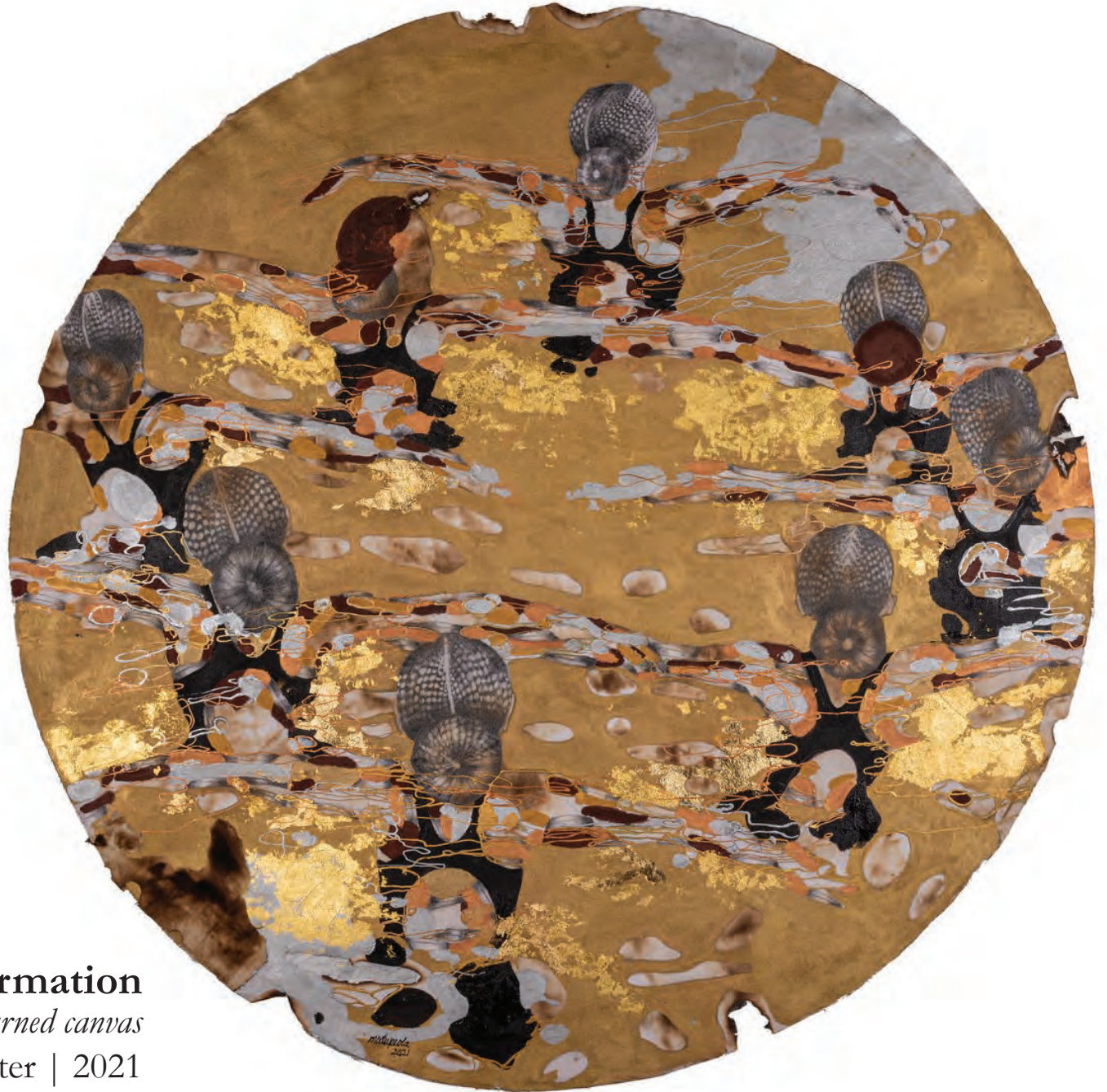
vocabulary of historical and cultural meaning. Fadugba references metals – gold, silver, and bronze – as a way to celebrate anniversaries, milestones, and victories. Due to the limited range of this metallic palette, the artist achieves contrast by focusing on the shape of the canvas, using multiple metals, burning, and fine lines. The color pink acts both as an unabashedly feminine and liquid ground on which her figures position themselves and make their decisions, as well as a reference to the mysterious Lake Retba (Pink Lake) in Senegal highlighting geographic wonders across the continent. White and green conjures the Nigerian flag: a symbol of peace, prosperity, and the freedom we all share as citizens to be duly celebrated and challenged. Deep blues references traditional indigo dyeing and the intergenerational transfer of knowledge across Nigerian creatives that must be preserved. These colours create a polychromatic world of resistance and resilience, a spectrum where triumphs are celebrated yet a call to action radiates.



Golden Train

Acrylic, graphite, and metal leaf on burned canvas

42" diameter | 2020



Golden Formation

Acrylic, graphite, and metal leaf on burned canvas

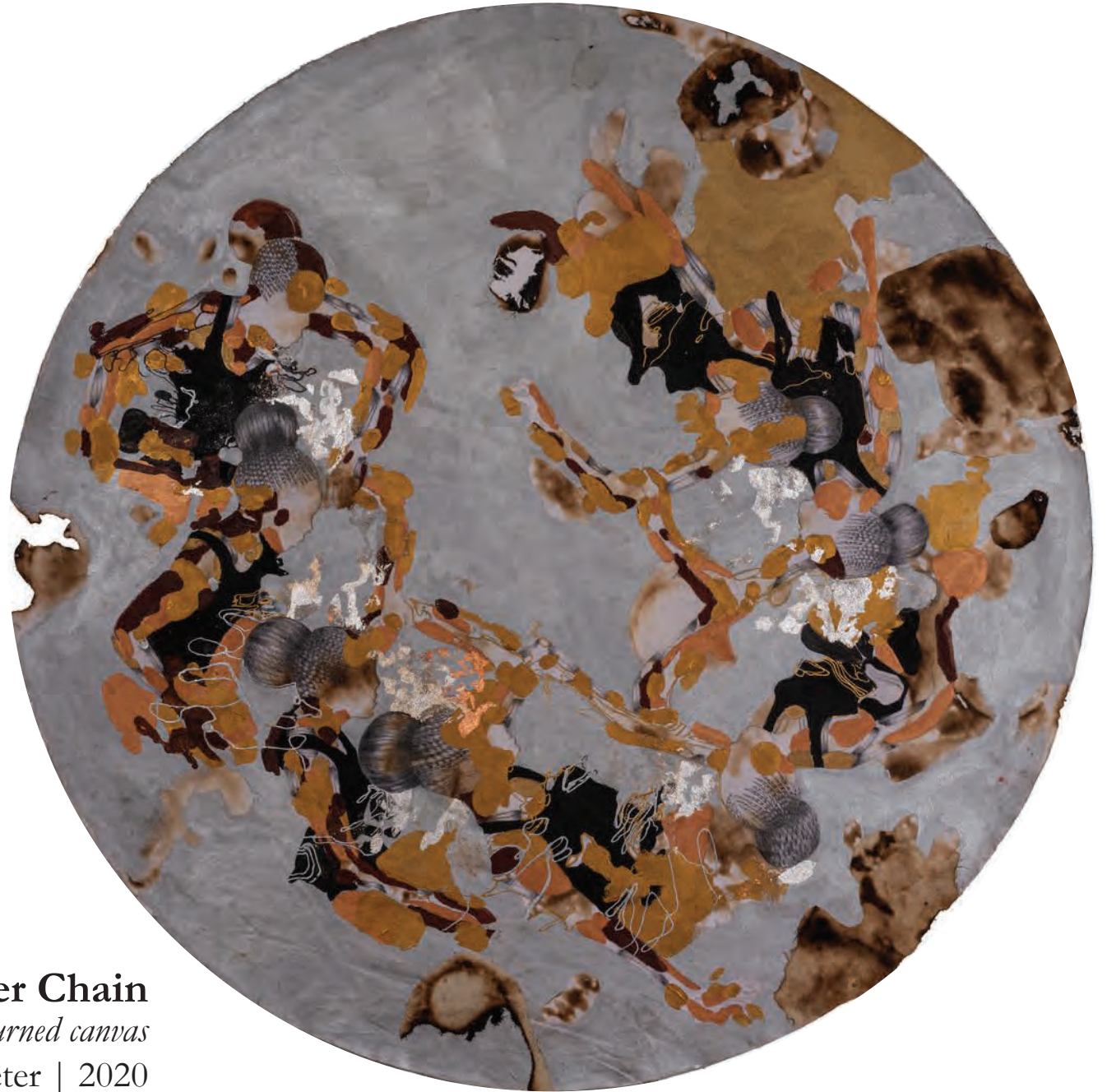
42" diameter | 2021



Silver Circle

Acrylic, graphite, and metal leaf on burned canvas
42" diameter | 2020





Silver Chain

Acrylic, graphite, and metal leaf on burned canvas

42" diameter | 2020



Bronze Show-off

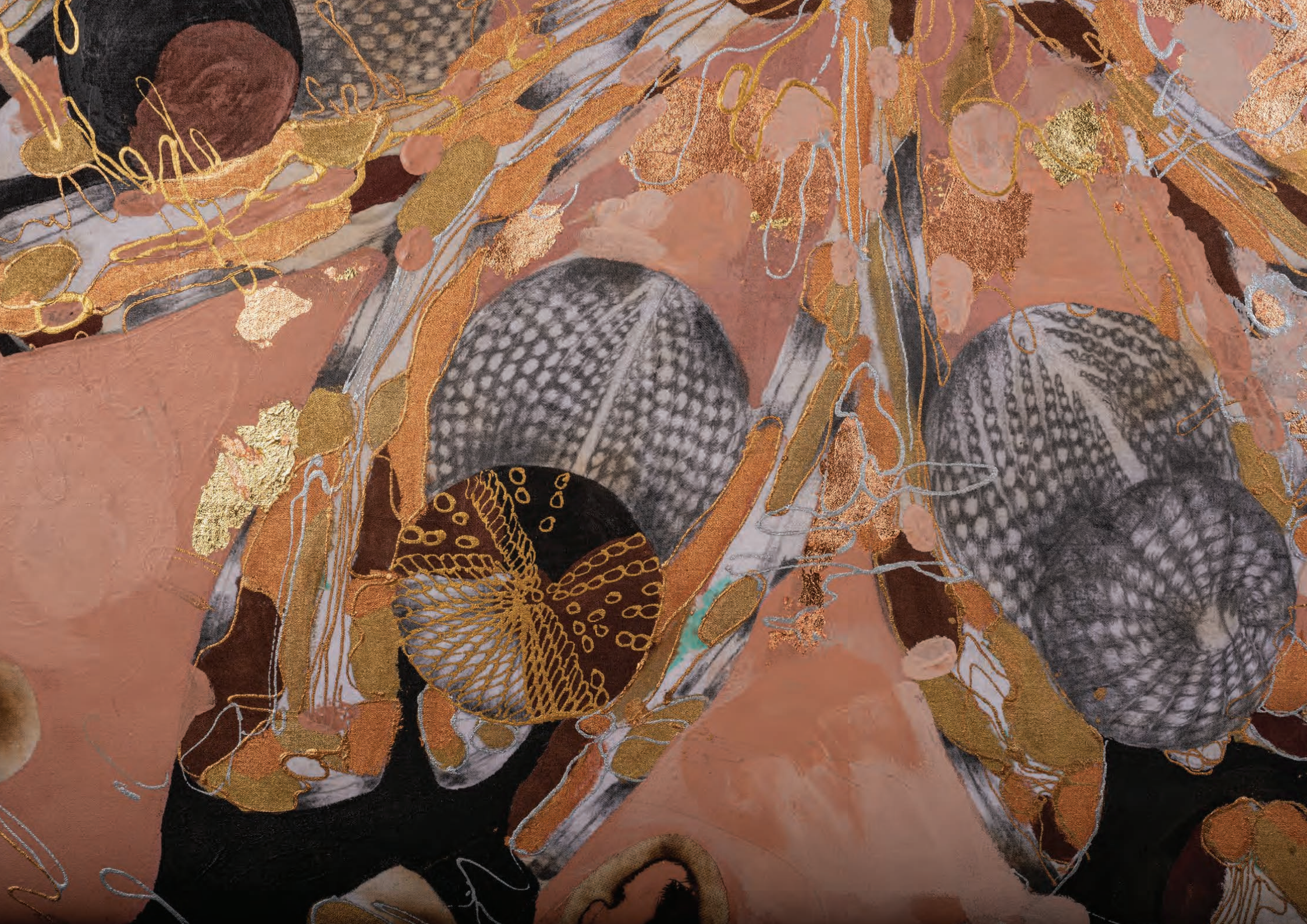
Acrylic, graphite, and metal leaf on burned canvas
42" diameter | 2020



Indigo Star

Acrylic, graphite, and metal leaf on burned canvas

42" diameter | 2020





Indigo Praise

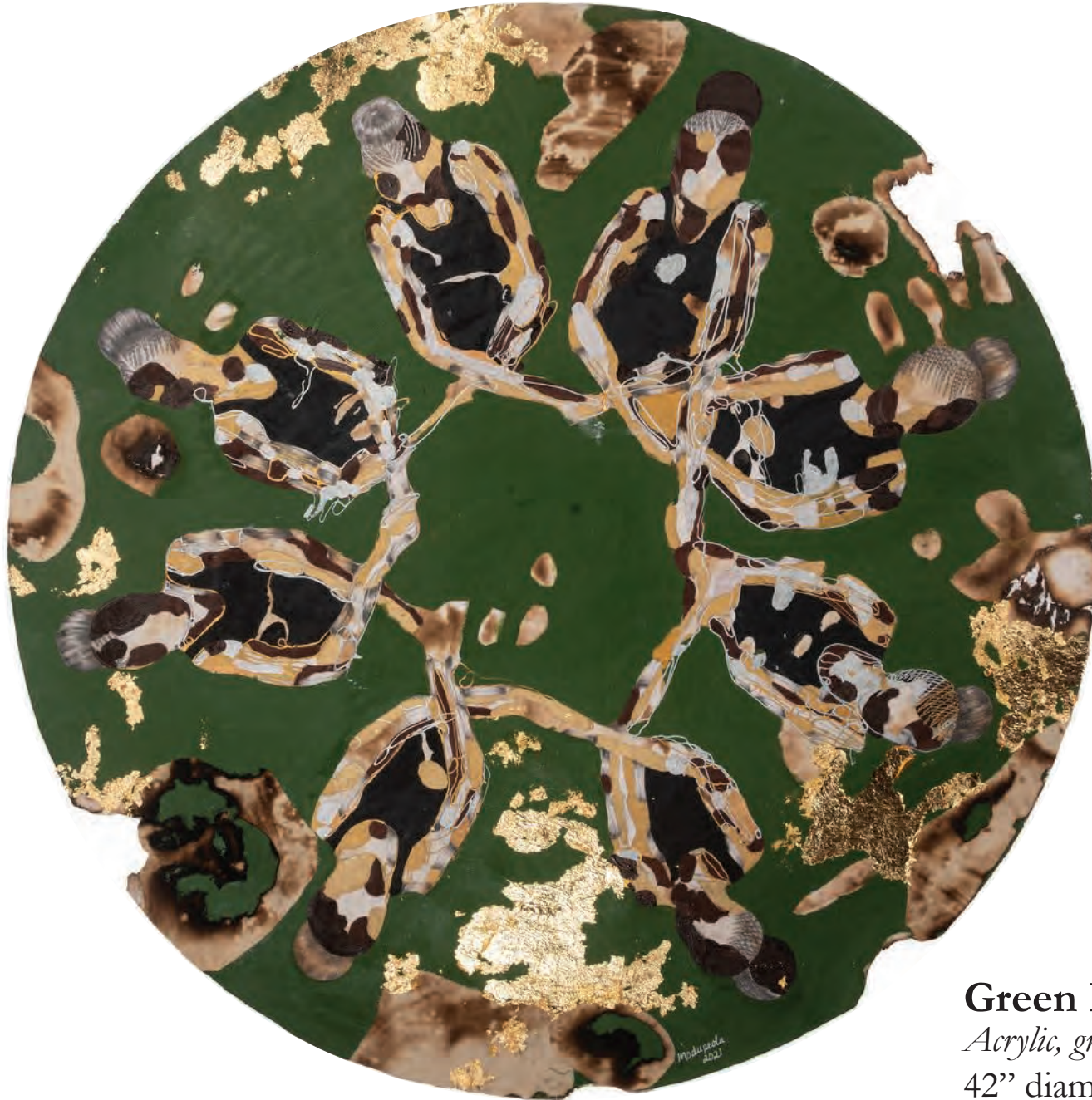
Acrylic, graphite, and metal leaf on burned canvas
42" diameter | 2020



Green Circle

Acrylic, graphite, and metal leaf on burned canvas

42" diameter | 2020

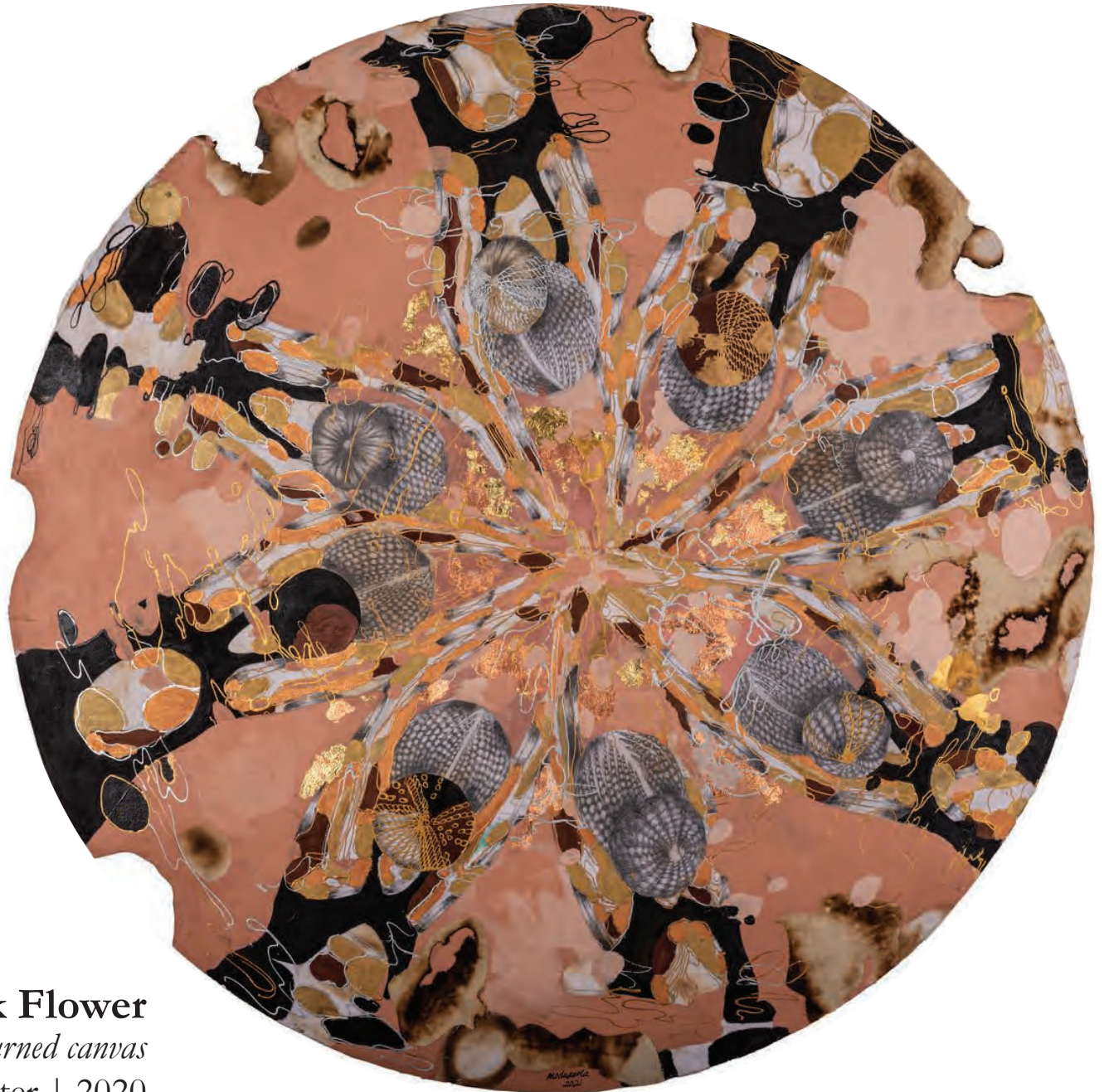


Green Flower

Acrylic, graphite, and metal leaf on burned canvas

42" diameter | 2020





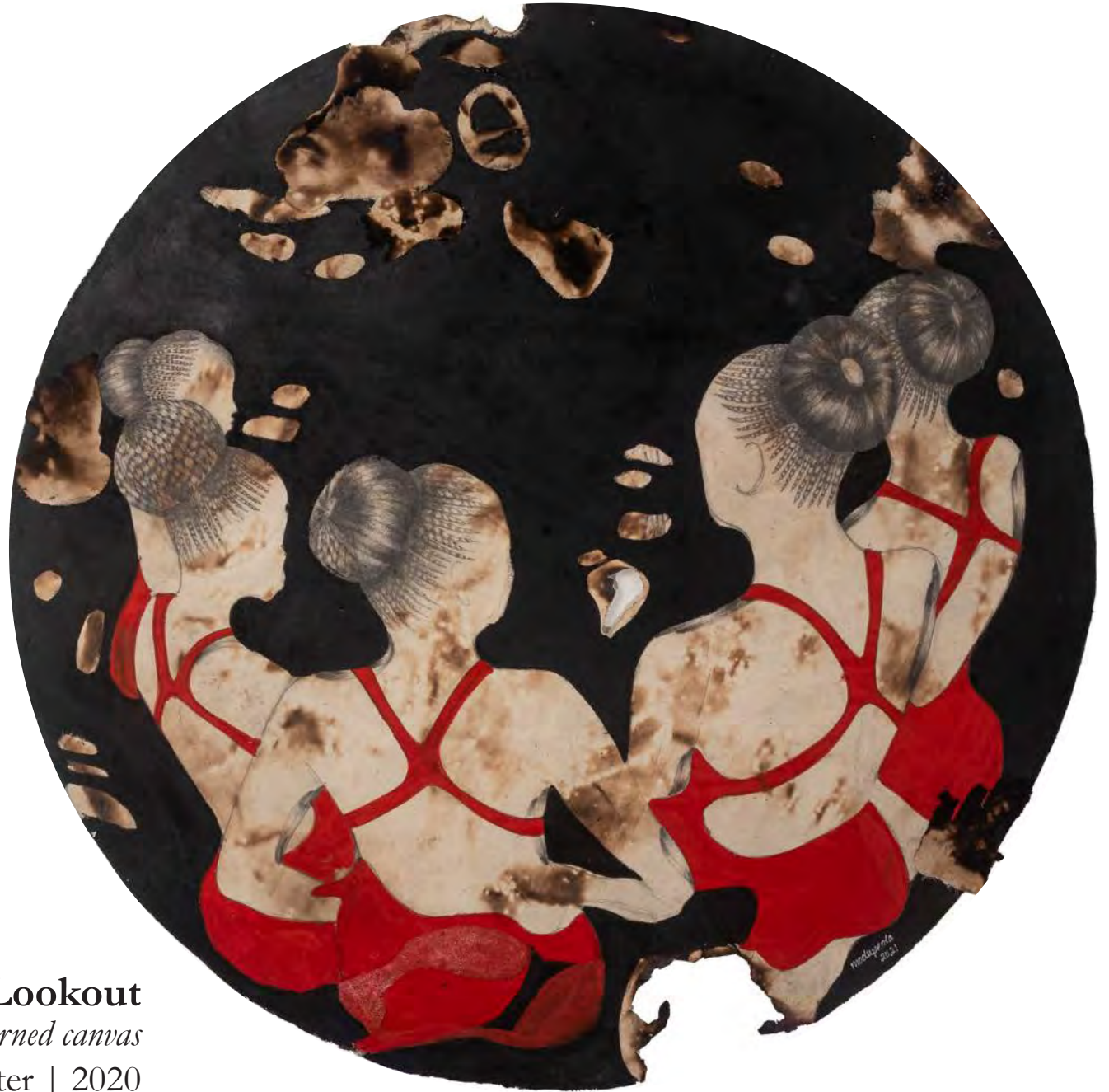
Pink Flower

Acrylic, graphite, and metal leaf on burned canvas
42" diameter | 2020



Swim School

Acrylic, graphite, and metal leaf on burned canvas
42" diameter | 2020



Lifeguard Lookout

Acrylic, graphite, and metal leaf on burned canvas

42" diameter | 2020





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"These triumphant and intricate compositions – larger-than-life medallions hanging from colourful, undulating ribbons – create a new visual vocabulary of historical and cultural meaning."

Black Still Waters

Father and Son

Black Beaded Lift

Black Water Pillars

Still Black Waters (Bronze)

Still Black Waters (Gold)

Still Black Waters (Silver)

Swim Baby Swim

Tagged Baby



Black Still Waters

The swimmer has served as a visual vocabulary for Modupeola Fadugba to represent artists: active figures constantly creating in an ever-changing terrain. The omnipresent, if omnipotent, red circles allude to spheres of status. In particular, the red dot sticker enigmatically marking art world success, a symbol where capital investment and cultural confirmation at once collude and conflict. Fadugba offers a different kind of relationship and agency to this looming object through her poem and eponymous mentorship program called Dear Young Artist. This piece offers personal and professional advice to a young artist and was inspired by the writings of Kenyan artist Wangechi Mutu and Letters to a Young Poet by the German writer Rainer Maria Rilke. It teaches us to remember that in this game, there are only two rules:

1. *Stay in the pool.*
2. *(Pretend to) ignore the red ball*

Yet in these new black waters with the artist's figure in gold, silver, and bronze; a buoyant baby; father and son; and our beloved synchronized swimmers bedazzled in beads, the context turns more personal, didactic, and hopeful. Here, Fadugba invites viewers into her own head, heart, and imagination, reflecting upon the valuable lessons she learned as a child. Furthermore, these floating figures represent Fadugba's revisitation of her younger artist self. The deep black waters – in contrast to the artist's characteristic blues, pinks, and greens – are an absorption of all the colours. They represent the beginning, the black box: birth.



Father and Son

Acrylic on canvas | 35.5" x 46.5" | 2020



Black Beaded Lift

Acrylic, graphite, ink, and beads on burned canvas

69" x 51" | 2018 - 2021



Black Water Pillars

Acrylic, graphite, and ink on burned canvas

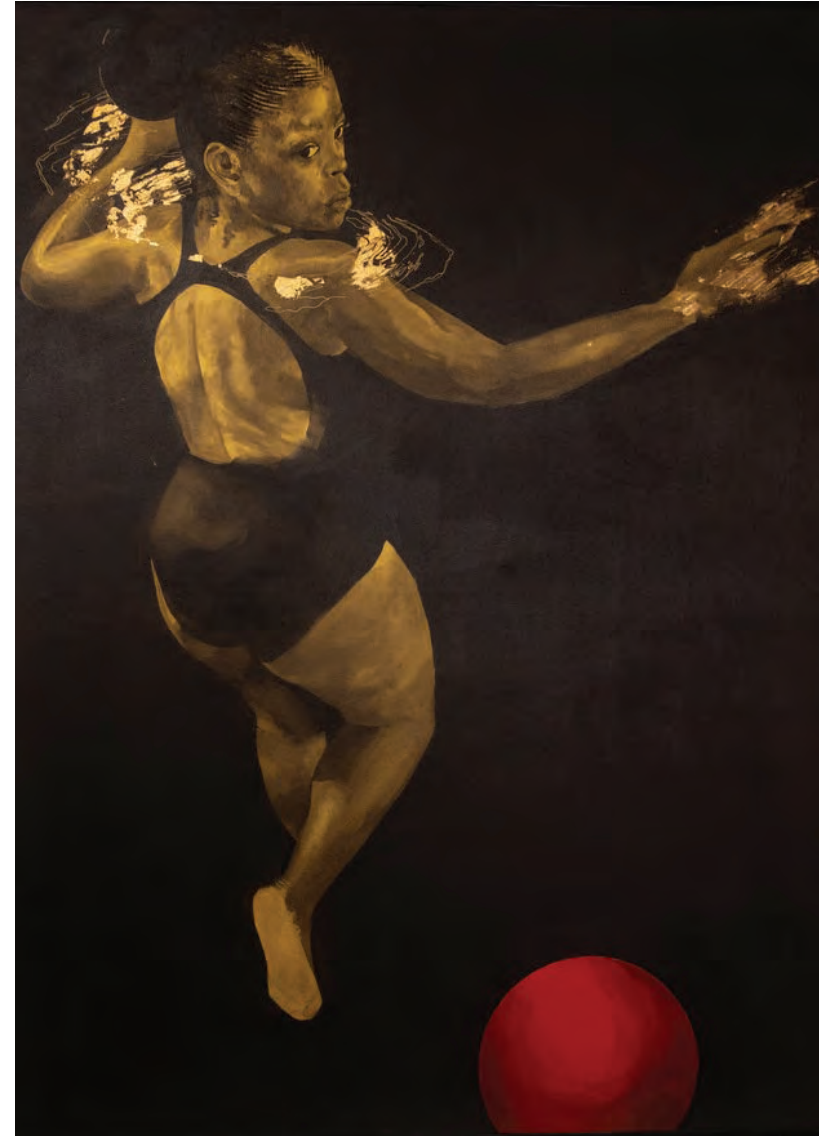
36" x 45" | 2020



Still Black Waters (Bronze)

Acrylic and bronze leaf on canvas

60" x 72" | 2019



Still Black Waters (Gold)

Acrylic and gold leaf on canvas

60" x 72" | 2019



Still Black Waters (Silver)

Acrylic and silver leaf on canvas

60" x 72" | 2019



Swim, Baby, Swim

Acrylic on canvas

60" x 72" | 2020



Tagged: Baby

Acrylic on canvas

48" x 48" | 2019

The People's Algorithm

Game Installation



The People's Algorithm

The Artist's Algorithm initiative builds on the core tenets of Fadugba's award winning debut work, *The People's Algorithm* – an interactive game installation in which players explore ways to win within the framework of Nigeria's pressing unemployment and educational crisis. Growing up, the artist's family placed an emphasis on educational fun, and Fadugba has kept her amused with self-made trivia games and game theory ever since, establishing a belief in the importance of education as integral to her practice. This is the fourth iteration of the project, which premiered in 2014 and was awarded El Anatsui's Outstanding Production Prize; followed by a Grand Prize from the Minister of Culture and Communication at Dak'Art (2016) and most recent edition in Simon Njami's Afrique Capitales in Lille (2017). Influenced by six years spent working in research, policy, and administration within Nigeria's education sector, this participatory game installation invites audience members to confront statistical realities faced by Nigerian students, teachers, and policy makers. With the staggering number of out-of-school children, mass examination failure and rising unemployment, far too much is being left to chance. In this game installation, players are given a chance to work some of these issues out. Nigeria, let us play to win!





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“And so, I call myself a multi-disciplinary artist, though I have a penchant for drawing, colorfully... When I began my art career six years ago, I started by investigating the structure of Nigeria’s educational system in art form, with the belief that in order to do things differently, we must see them differently on a macro level.”



Nigerian Flag

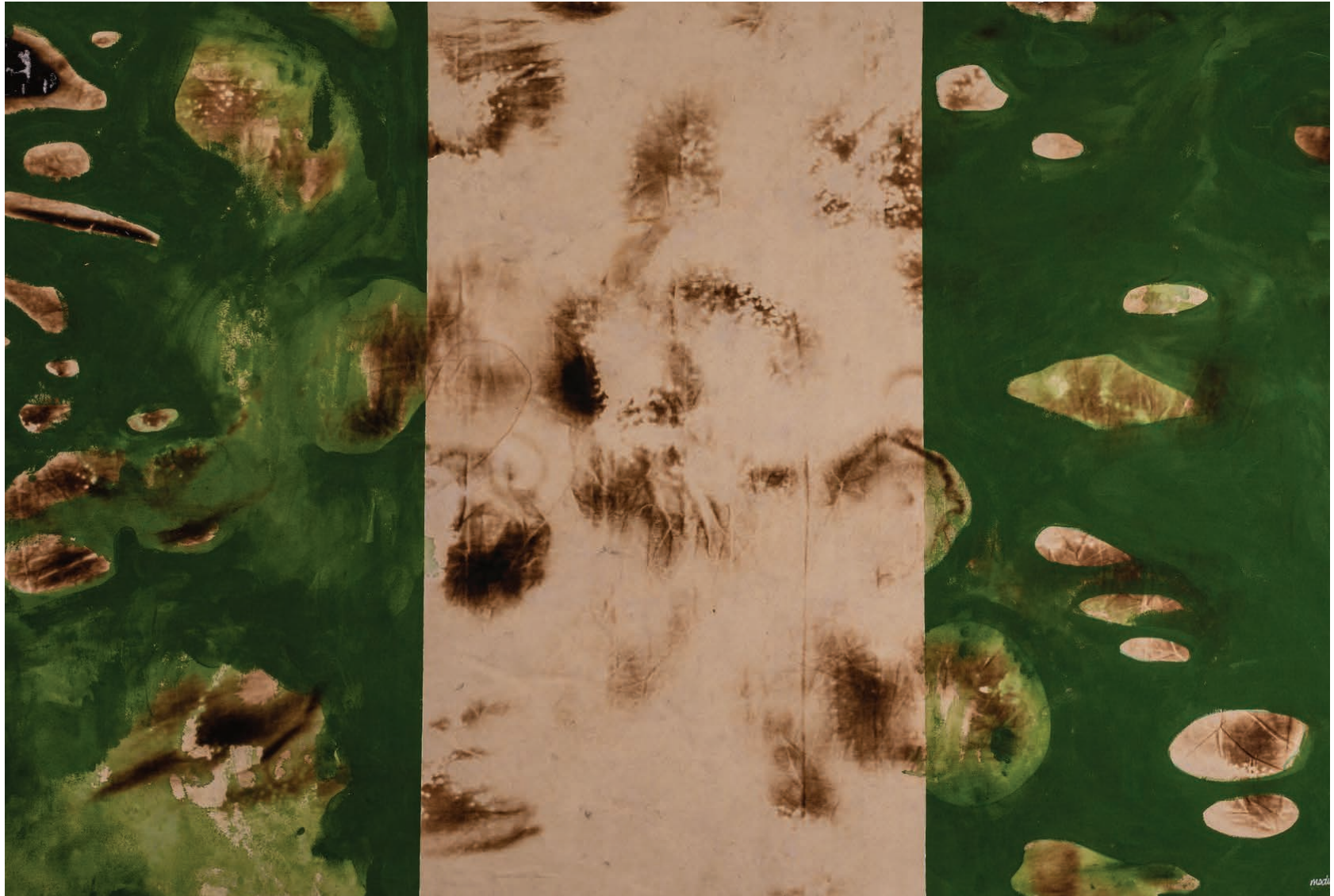
Swim, Nigeria

Bronze Lift

Together

Lift, Nigeria

Stadium Dreamer



Nigerian Flag
Acrylic on burned canvas
71" x 45" | 2021



Swim, Nigeria

Acrylic, graphite, ink, and metal leaf on burned paper

96''x 46'' | 2021



Bronze Lift

Acrylic, graphite, ink, and metal leaf on burned paper

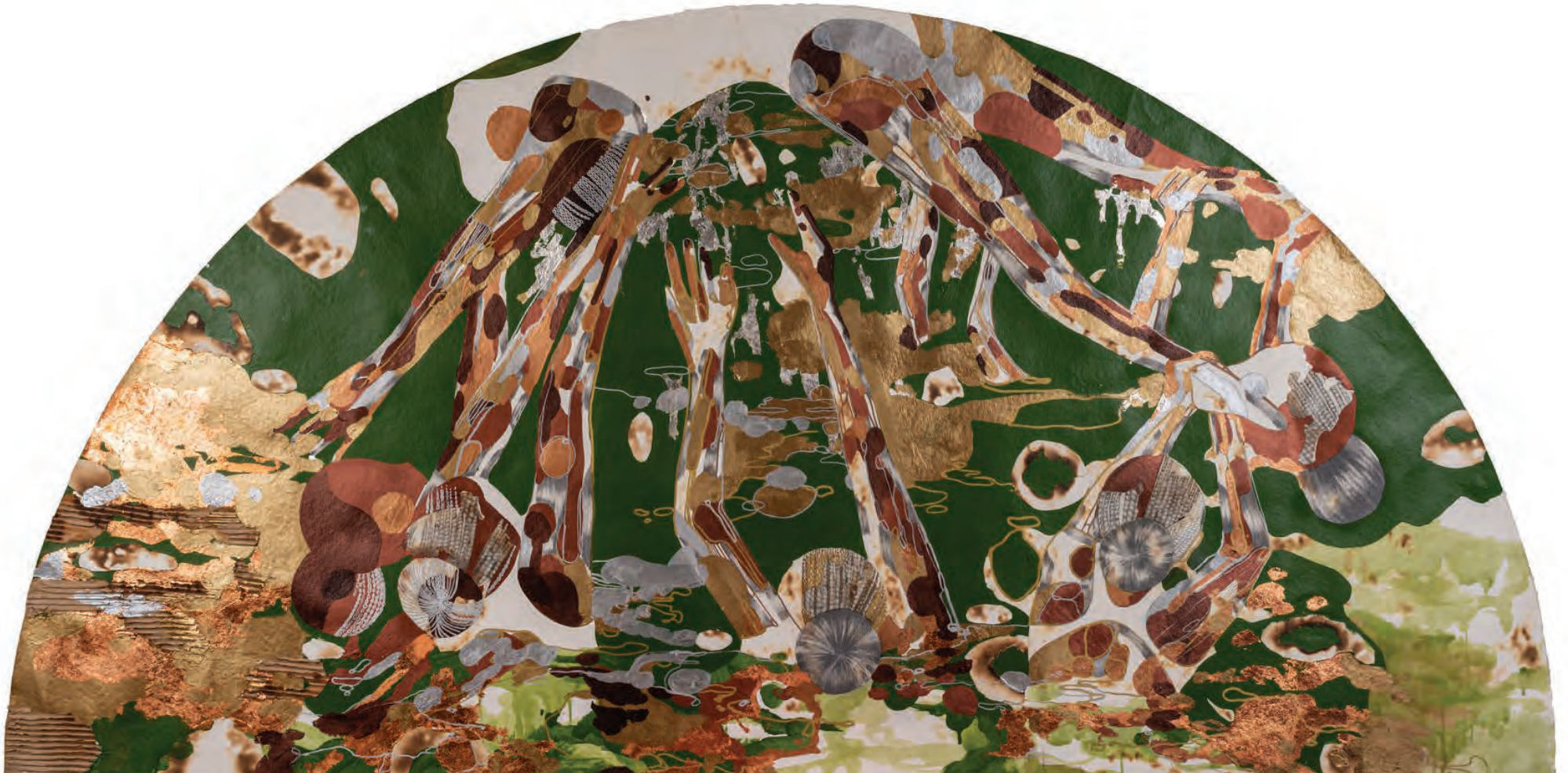
84" diameter | 2020



Together

Acrylic, graphite, ink, and metal leaf on burned paper

84" diameter | 2020



Lift, Nigeria

Acrylic, graphite, ink, and metal leaf on burned paper

84" diameter | 2020



Stadium Dreamer

Acrylic, graphite, ink, and metal leaf on burned paper

45" x 71.2" | 2020

The Artist's Studio

Morning Swim

Sketches

Miss Lettice



The Artist's Studio

Welcome to The Fadugba Studio! This behind-the-scenes room gives you an insight into Modupeola Fadugba's practice. The artist often finds herself on the floor – painting, burning paper, sketching, or scrapbooking research. She finds this journaling-like process at once visceral and meditative. Chairs are also important spaces for creativity: the lifeguard's chair by the pool for a hero; the desk chair in the office for an archivist; the director's chair on a set for a visionary; the sofa at home for a dreamer. The artist explores how any one individual can occupy these different types of furniture and their respective roles. Take a seat here to reflect, imagine, and create.

The works in this room reveal Fadugba's sketching process through her ongoing *Dreams from The Deep End* series since 2018, which sought to contextualise her focus on swimming within the greater context of visibility, access, and representation. Her research was greatly informed by Jeff Wiltse's publication *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools*, exploring the history of public pools and their privatisation, in relation to race politics and community life in America. In the artist's search to explore the visibility of black swimming bodies and consider elements of learning, collaboration, and competition, she found inspiration in *The Harlem Honeys and Bears* – a synchronised swimming team of senior citizens, who perform sensational water acrobatics and offer free swimming lessons to local children. One special member of this heroic team plays host in this space: the 100 year-old Ms. Lettice.

The sketches and paintings occupying the studio are a first look into Fadugba's *Miss Lettice's Centennial* project,



Morning Swim

Acrylic, graphite, and ink on burned canvas

35.5" x 45.5" | 2020





Mr. Larkner Gado
89, Hecallan Man

Includes the Troden
synchronized swimmer

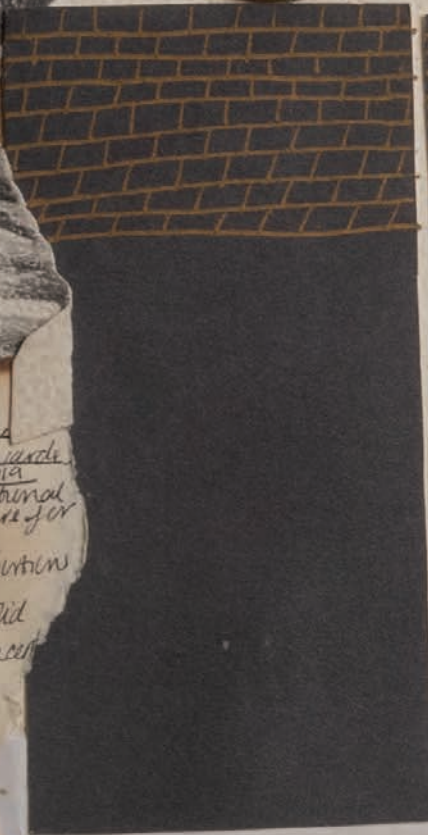


...he, designing...
...was an opportunity...
...question: what is the...
...of perfection & imperfection...
...the notion of beauty?
...exciting to transfer...
...idea to a smaller...
....

St David Adjuja
designs for Brit Awards
2019
- Evokes traditional
- figurative figure of
- a figure with
- unique proportions
- Trophies cast in solid
- glass, finished
- with a translucent
- frosted effect.

Take the form of
Britannia, the
female personification
of Britain - with
an alternative to
Britannia's slender
form.

"Mistake on the Brit trophy
is the manifestation of
a great maternal forged
in fire and shaped
into the body of
a woman. She
is unique &
proportionally



Abby
At the Nation
Stacks
at the Red Bull
sum in Sakon





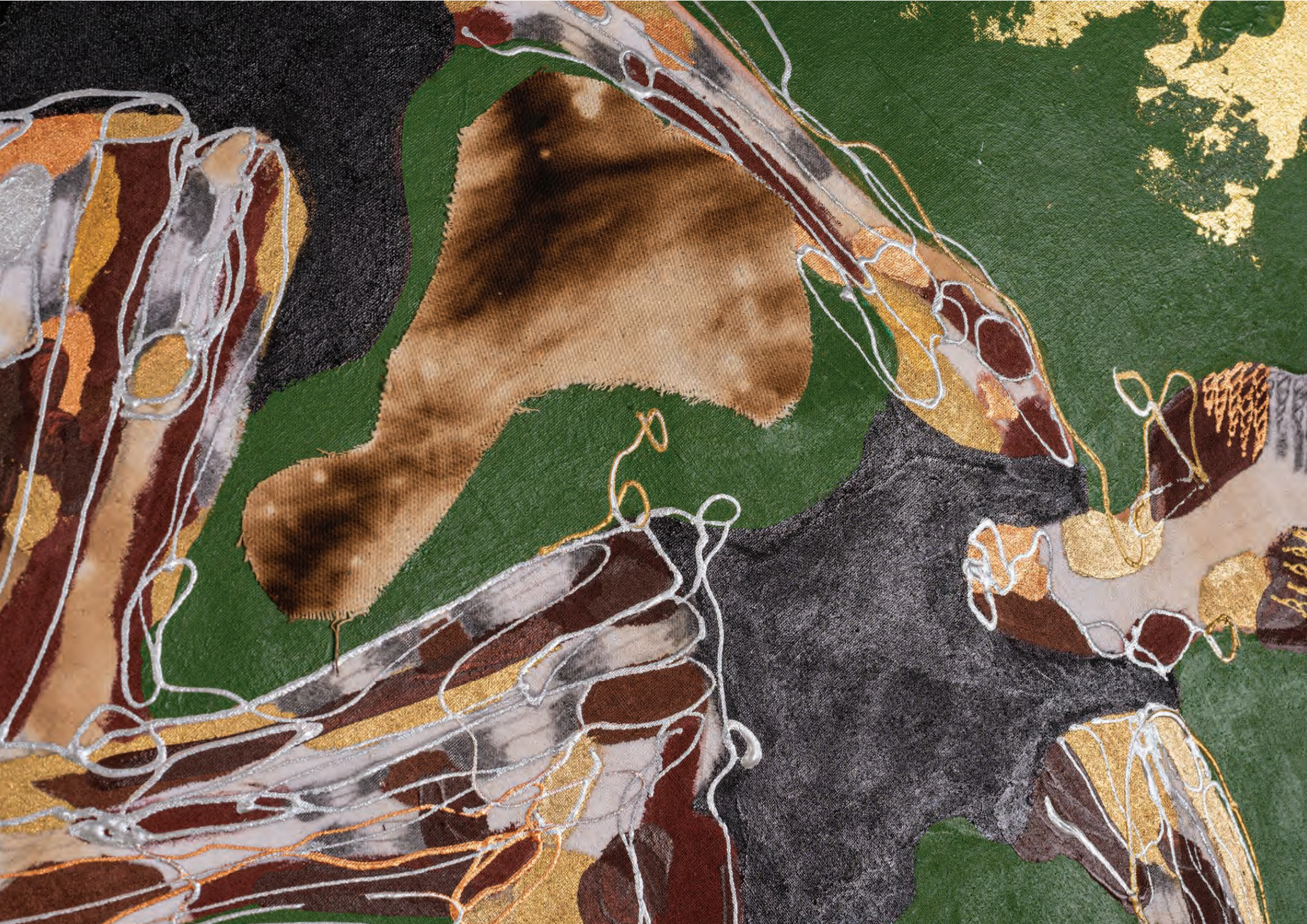
Miss Lettice

Acrylic and graphite on burned canvas

52" x 70" | Work in progress

embarking upon a historically-based chronological narrative following the and addressing race, gender and age within the contexts of competitive sports, service industries, and American Beauty Pageantry. The modes of research on display here seek to serve as a model for the documentation, narration and dissemination of untold life histories through art. In order to tell a visual memoir of our protagonist Miss Lettice – an elder black woman and synchronised swimmer who lives in Harlem and didn't learn how to swim until her mid 60s – Fadugba uses existing oral transcripts, personal photo archives, and historical records of the time. Miss Lettice's Centennial will embody a visual reflection of her life history within artworks using photo transfers, a monochrome gold color palette, beading and other experimentation with materials. Informed by multidisciplinary collaborations, these multimedia works capturing her life education in her own words and images, will be disseminated broadly and beyond traditional art spaces. This ongoing project, ambitious in both its personal and historical scope, builds connections between the individual (one woman's story – hero, muse); the national (contested and complicated histories of racial exclusion, gender rights, privatisation of the public, the American Dream); and the global (how bodies of water serve as a sites for both nightmares and dreams). Yet every epic scope starts somewhere: a story, a sketch: a start...

As part of the process of creating the painting 1922, I sketched a series of studies. One of the studies focused on the position of the sitter. Unlike Medalion Man, where the reference image of the subject was taken at a swimming pool, I was unable to stage a similar shoot for Ms. Lettice, due to strict regulations from New York City Parks and Recs. This led me to Ms. Lettice's home, where I captured an image of her sitting on a box, in her bedroom. Other parts of the study focused on materials / texture (for ex., using Golden Paints mica flakes for the grout in between the tiles) and composition (for ex., the shape of the ladder and the visibility of the wedding band).









The Artist's Statement

Everyone has a swim story. Yet too often, those told by the black protagonist usually end in tragedy. Without the requisite access and teachers, many simply never learned. And when tested, the only outcome is to pass or fail, swim or sink.

In the last seven years of my artistic practice, I've had the privilege to excavate a different type of swim story. Triumphant stories of swimmers and lifeguards from Accra, Abuja, Lagos, Dakar, Philadelphia and Harlem. Stories beyond survival -- stories of community, learning, teaching, togetherness and play. In my attempt to capture the representative group and individual portraits, my paintings have moved from abstraction to realism, spilled over into poems and performance, and been experienced through documentary film and immersive installation. Each perspective adds to the complete story.

And so, I call myself a multi-disciplinary artist, though I have a penchant for drawing, colorfully. I often lay on the floor, ink pen pressed to paper, and I feel like I'm journaling. As I torch sections of my canvas with fire, I reminisce of childhood memories in post-genocide Rwanda. I think of how much Rwanda's story has changed, just in my lifetime. In the portraits of my muses, I project my own histories, hopes and reminders. I often think of the story of my own country. In fact, much of my artistic practice is focused on what Chinese artist and activist Ai Wei Wei refers to as "patriotic worrying" about Nigeria. In *Synchronized Swimmers*, the aesthetics of orientation and alignment— or lack thereof— reflect the musings of my mind. I think of Chinua Achebe's "falling apart" of structures. The tension between order and entropy, the past and future of a nation.

As Nigeria 'reclaims' the post-colonial, post-war narrative, I wonder, do we revert to ancestral culture or do we borrow wisdom from other countries?

When I began my art career six years ago, I started by investigating the structure of Nigeria's educational system in art form, with the belief that in order to do things differently, we must see them differently on a macro level. On a microlevel, my works often revisit the story I create about my own educational journey- whether I am creating the change I wish to see, in myself and in my broader community of artists, national citizens, and diasporan family. Using the swimming ideology for personal education and personal education as a conceptual pillar for community building, my works continue to ask, what would it take for us all to swim, to win?

Modupeola Fadugba, 2020.



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www.zirconmarine.com



nv@zirconmarine.com



+234 (0) 8093942235, +234 (0) 8093942276

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MADE WITH NATURE

POLSKA RYE & PURIFIED WATER
DISTILLED BY FIRE



Please drink responsibly.





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2021