

Toyin Ojih Odutola: *A Countervailing Theory*

The Curve, Barbican Centre

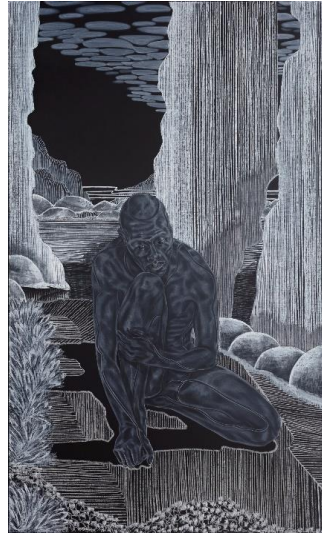
26 March – 26 July 2020

Media View: Wednesday 25 March 2020, 10am – 1pm

Free Admission

#ToyinOjihOdutola @barbicancentre

Supported by Jack Shainman Gallery and using public funding from Arts Council England



Toyin Ojih Odutola, *Semblance of Certainty* from *A Countervailing Theory*, (2019), © Toyin Ojih Odutola. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York; Toyin Ojih Odutola, *Introductions: Early Embodiment* from *A Countervailing Theory*, (2019), © Toyin Ojih Odutola. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Opening spring 2020, Barbican Art Gallery presents the first-ever UK commission by Nigerian-American artist **Toyin Ojih Odutola**, a site-specific installation for The Curve. An epic cycle of new work unfurls across the 90-metre long gallery, exploring an imagined ancient myth conceived by the artist. ***Toyin Ojih Odutola: A Countervailing Theory* opens in The Curve on Thursday 26 March 2020.**

Working exclusively with drawing materials, including pencil, pastel, ballpoint pen and charcoal, Ojih Odutola's works often take the form of monumental portraits, which retain a remarkable intimacy despite their scale. She approaches the process of drawing as an investigative practice, through which to explore an intense engagement with mark-making and its potential for meaning. Ojih Odutola recognises that the pen is 'a writing tool first', playing with the idea that drawing can be a form of storytelling. She proposes speculative fictions through her practice, inviting the viewer to enter her vision of an uncannily familiar, yet fantastical world. Working akin to an author or poet, she often spends months creating extensive imaginary narratives, which play out through a series of works to suggest a structure of episodes or chapters. Drawing on an eclectic range of references, from ancient history to popular culture to contemporary politics, Ojih Odutola encourages the viewer to piece together the fragments of the stories that she presents.

Toyin Ojih Odutola said: *"Walking into Barbican Centre's The Curve for the first time was an enchanting experience of having a space unfold as you travel through it, not quite knowing what will come around the corner. The feeling of possibility it provides to create and exhibit a story one can meander through in real-time gifted so much promise in how to engage with an audience. The opportunity to share a new project with the Barbican in London is a huge honour of which I am most excited to partake and I cannot wait to share that feeling of enchantment with every viewer who visits. I hope in the process of experiencing A Countervailing Theory, one finds new ways of engaging with The Curve space, with eclectic forms of storytelling, and all the potentials art-making gifts us."*

Ojii Odutola's previous work has addressed the malleable nature of identity and the role of place in shaping this concept throughout history. She has explored the socio-political construct of skin colour to question what is understood by 'blackness', scrutinising this notion through the lens of aesthetic, historical, political, conceptual and emotional principles. Her works manifest a persistent attention to the texture of skin, achieving extraordinary luminous effects; the topography of the flesh conveys the nuanced histories of her subjects. Ojii Odutola's meticulously executed works subvert the grand tradition of portraiture and painting, deftly elevating the medium of drawing.

Jane Alison, Head of Visual Arts, Barbican said: *"I am delighted that we are commissioning Toyin Ojii Odutola for her first-ever UK exhibition. The Curve continues programming the most exciting contemporary artists, and Ojii Odutola's engagement with the space as a canvas for her compelling narratives, told through different modes of drawing, will undoubtedly be a revelatory experience for the viewer."*

Toyin Ojii Odutola was born in 1985 in Ile-Ife, Nigeria, and currently lives and works in New York. Ojii Odutola has exhibited at various institutions, including The Drawing Center, New York (2018–19); Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2017–18); Brooklyn Museum, New York (2016); Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis (2015); Studio Museum Harlem, New York (2015, 2012); Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield (2013); and Menil Collection, Houston, (2012). Her work is in major permanent collections, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Birmingham Museum of Art; Baltimore Museum of Art; New Orleans Museum of Art; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Princeton University Art Museum, New Jersey; Spencer Museum of Art; Honolulu Museum of Art; and the National Museum of African Art (Smithsonian, Washington, DC). She was featured in Manifesta in 2018, winner of the Rees Visionary Award in 2018 and shortlisted for the Pinchuk Foundation Future Generation Prize in 2019. Ojii Odutola earned her BA from the University of Alabama in Huntsville and her MFA from California College of the Arts in San Francisco.

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Notes to Editors

Press Information

For further information, images or to arrange interviews, please contact:

Lily Booth, Acting Senior Communications Manager +44 207 382 6162,
lily.booth@barbican.org.uk

Jemima Yong, Communications Assistant +44 207 638 4141 ext 8280,
jemima.yong@barbican.org.uk

Daisy Robinson-Smyth, Communications Assistant +44 207 382 7254,
daisy.robinson@barbican.org.uk

Press images available online from the Barbican Newsroom

A link to the image sheets can be found in the 'Downloads' box on the top right-hand side of the page from: www.barbican.org.uk/ToyinOjiiOdutolaNews

Barbican Newsroom

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Public Information

The Curve, Barbican, London

Public information: 0845 120 7550 / www.barbican.org.uk/artgallery

Free admission

For more information on Barbican membership please visit:

<https://www.barbican.org.uk/membership>

The Curve opening times

Saturday – Wednesday 11am–8pm

Thursday & Friday 11am–9pm

Bank Holidays 12pm–8pm

Exhibition

The exhibition has been commissioned by the Barbican, London, and is supported by Jack Shainman Gallery and using public funding from Arts Council England.

The exhibition is produced in collaboration with Kunsten Museum of Modern Art in Aalborg, Denmark and Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington. The exhibition will be shown at Kunsten Museum of Modern Art in autumn 2020 and at Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in spring 2021.

Events

To find out more about specific events as they are confirmed, check the website for full listings: www.barbican.org.uk/artgallery

Book

A fully illustrated catalogue to accompany the installation Toyin Ojih Odutola: *A Countervailing Theory* will be available. Featuring a commissioned text, and an interview with the artist by curator Lotte Johnson, this title is the eleventh in a publication series by Barbican Art Gallery that focuses on The Curve exhibition programme. Buy the catalogue in the Barbican Shop on Level G or online at www.barbican.org.uk/shop for £12.

The Curve

The Curve is the Barbican's free exhibition space that wraps around the back of the Concert Hall. Launched in May 2006, Curve Art is a series of new commissions in which contemporary artists respond to the distinctive architecture of the space. Artists who have previously made new commissions for The Curve are Tomas Saraceno (Argentina); Richard Wilson (Britain); Jeppe Hein (Denmark); Marjetica Potrč (Slovenia); Shirana Shahbazi (Switzerland/Iran); Hans Schabus (Austria); Huang Yong Ping (France/China); Rafael Lozano-Hemmer (Canada/Mexico); Peter Coffin (USA); Clemens von Wedemeyer (Germany); Robert Kusmirowski (Poland); Céleste Boursier-Mougenot (France); John Bock (Germany); Damián Ortega (Mexico); Cory Arcangel (USA); Junya Ishigami (Japan); Song Dong (China); rAndom International (Britain); Geoffrey Farmer (Canada); Ayşe Erkmen (Germany/Turkey); United Visual Artists (Britain); Walead Beshty (USA/Britain); Roman Signer (Switzerland); Eddie Peake (Britain); Imran Qureshi (Pakistan); Bedwyr Williams (Wales); Richard Mosse (Ireland); John Akomfrah (Britain); Yto Barrada (Morocco); Francis Upritchard (New Zealand); Daria Martin (USA), and most recently Trevor Paglen (USA).

Barbican Art Gallery and The Curve

Our visual arts programme embraces art, architecture, design, fashion, photography and film. Many of our exhibitions explore the interconnections between disciplines, periods and cultures, and aim to imagine the world in new ways. Designers, artists and architects are our collaborators in this process.

We invest in the artists of today and tomorrow; The Curve is one of the few galleries in London devoted to the commissioning of new work. Through our activities we aim to inspire more people to discover and love the arts. Entrance to The Curve is free. Through Young Barbican we offer £5 tickets to 14–25 year olds for our paid exhibitions, children under 14 attend for free.

Our exhibitions are complemented by comprehensively researched catalogues and a full range of public events. We develop engaging online content for audiences and offer special tours for schools. In partnership with renowned museums and art galleries, many of our exhibitions travel to reach both national and international audiences.

About the Barbican

A world-class arts and learning organisation, the [Barbican](#) pushes the boundaries of all major art forms including dance, film, music, theatre and visual arts. Its creative learning programme further underpins everything it does. Over a million people attend events annually, hundreds of artists and performers are featured, and more than 300 [staff](#) work onsite. The architecturally renowned centre opened in 1982 and comprises the Barbican Hall, the Barbican Theatre, The Pit, Cinemas 1, 2 and 3, Barbican Art Gallery, a second gallery The Curve, public spaces, a library, the Lakeside Terrace, [a glasshouse conservatory](#), conference facilities and three restaurants. The City of London Corporation is the founder and principal funder of the Barbican Centre.

The Barbican is home to Resident Orchestra, [London Symphony Orchestra](#); Associate Orchestra, [BBC Symphony Orchestra](#); Associate Ensembles the [Academy of Ancient Music](#) and [Britten Sinfonia](#), Associate Producer [Serious](#), and Artistic Partner [Create](#). Our Artistic Associates include [Boy Blue](#), [Cheek by Jowl](#), Deborah Warner, [Drum Works](#) and [Michael Clark Company](#). The [Los Angeles Philharmonic](#) are the Barbican's International Orchestral Partner, the [Australian Chamber Orchestra](#) are International Associate Ensemble at Milton Court, and [Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra](#) are International Associate Ensemble.

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