

Toyin Ojih Odutola: *A Countervailing Theory*

The Curve, Barbican Centre

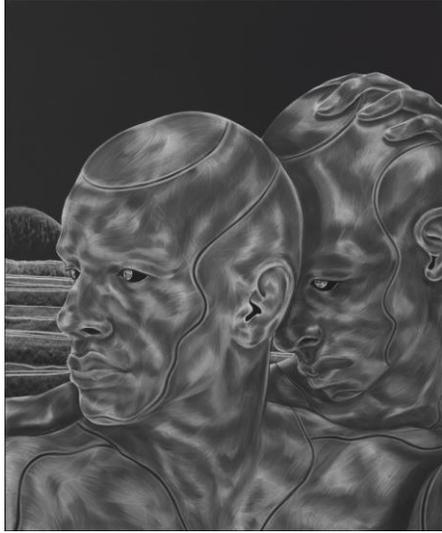
11 August 2020 – 24 January 2021

Information on Media View to follow

Free Admission - There will be no entry fee charged for this exhibition, though tickets will need to be booked [online](#) in advance of visiting. Ticketing information will be announced nearer the time.

#ToyinOjihOdutola @barbicancentre

The exhibition has been commissioned by the Barbican, London. Supported by Arts Council England and Jack Shainman Gallery.



Toyin Ojih Odutola, *Seizure of Certainty* from *A Countervailing Theory*, (2019), © Toyin Ojih Odutola. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York; Toyin Ojih Odutola, *The Ruling Class (Eshu)* from *A Countervailing Theory*, (2019), © Toyin Ojih Odutola. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Barbican Art Gallery presents *A Countervailing Theory*, a site-specific installation for The Curve and the first-ever UK commission by Nigerian-American artist **Toyin Ojih Odutola**. An epic cycle of new work unfurls across the 90-metre long gallery, exploring an imagined ancient myth conceived by the artist. An immersive soundscape by renowned conceptual sound artist **Peter Adjaye** fills the space in response to Ojih Odutola's work. The exhibition will be accompanied by a publication featuring a new text by acclaimed writer **Zadie Smith** and an interview with the artist.

Executed in pastel, charcoal and chalk, the installation features a series of 40 drawings, each work acting as an individual episode within an overarching narrative. Ojih Odutola encourages the viewer to piece together the fragments of the stories she presents. Set within a surreal landscape inspired by the rock formations of Plateau State in central Nigeria, the works depict the tale of a fictional prehistoric civilisation, dominated by female rulers and served by male labourers. Drawing on an eclectic range of sources, from ancient history to popular culture, Ojih Odutola investigates the power dynamics at play within this community.

Toyin Ojih Odutola said: *"Walking into 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 and I cannot wait to share that feeling of enchantment with everyone 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 potential art-making gifts us."*

Working exclusively with drawing materials, Ojih Odutola's works often take the form of monumental portraits, which retain a remarkable intimacy despite their scale. Her work is concerned with drawing as a process of storytelling. She weaves speculative tales, which question familiar histories and pose alternative realities. Approaching her practice as an

investigation, she intensely engages with the process of mark-making to explore its potential to create new meaning. Ojih Odutola recognises that the pen is 'a writing tool first'; she works akin to an author, often spending months crafting extensive narratives that play out through a series of works to suggest a structure of episodes or chapters.

Ojih Odutola's previous work has addressed the malleable nature of identity and the role of place in shaping this concept throughout history, in series including *Tell Me A Story, I Don't Care If It's True* (2020), *Scenes of Exchange* (2018) and *The Treatment* (2015-17). Her works have shown a persistent attention to the texture of skin, achieving extraordinary luminous effects through her distinctive techniques of building and blending her drawing materials. The topography of the flesh, as well as that of landscape and domestic interiors in recent series, conveys the nuanced histories of her subjects. Ojih Odutola's works play with the grand tradition of portrait painting by elevating the medium of drawing. Investigating images through the lens of aesthetic, conceptual and emotional principles, her works create an intimate viewing experience.

Jane Alison, Head of Visual Arts, Barbican said: *"I am delighted that we have commissioned Toyin Ojih Odutola to make a new body of work for our free programme of Curve installations. We were almost ready to open just as lockdown happened and now, thankfully, we are finally able to introduce this epic work to audiences in the Centre, as well as creating a video tour of the exhibition for those unable to attend in person. Ojih Odutola's engagement with the space as a canvas for her expansive narratives will undoubtedly be a revelation for many."*

In line with government guidelines, new safety measures are in place for this exhibition including operating at reduced capacity, timed entry slots to ensure a safe flow of visitors through the space, and tickets needing to be booked online at barbican.org.uk in advance of a visit. More information [here](#).

Toyin Ojih Odutola was born in 1985 in Ile-Ife, Nigeria, and currently lives and works in New York. Ojih 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. Ojih Odutola earned her BA from the University of Alabama in Huntsville and her MFA from California College of the Arts in San Francisco.

Peter Adjaye aka AJ Kwame is a contemporary conceptual sound artist, specialising in cross-disciplinary collaborations. He is a musicologist, composer, DJ-producer and musician with a PhD in Mathematics. His unique set of skills and vast experience have enabled him to work closely with his brother, the award-winning architect, Sir David Adjaye OBE, for over 15 years. This work has culminated in the publication of *Dialogues on Music for Architecture Records* in association with Vinyl Factory Records. Adjaye has exhibited his sound installations in venues including Tate Modern, the Design Museum, Art Institute of Chicago, Somerset House, Studio Museum Harlem, Whitechapel Gallery, Albion Gallery, the Science Museum and Nobel Institute and has given talks at MAXXI - National Museum of the 21st Century Arts, The Architecture Foundation, Design Miami, Rough Trade and Central St Martins, among others. A limited-edition vinyl album of the exhibition soundscape composed by artist Peter Adjaye, *Ceremonies Within*, released on Music for Architecture Records/The Vinyl Factory, will be available to buy in the Barbican Shops. The album cover features Toyin Ojih Odutola's work *Summons, To Witness One's Own* (2019-20).

ENDS

Notes to Editors

Press Information

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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/ToyinOjihOdutolaNews

Barbican Newsroom

All Barbican Centre press releases, news announcements and the Communication team's contact details are listed on our website at www.barbican.org.uk/news

Press tickets

To ensure the safe flow of visitors through the Barbican, all press tickets will need to be booked 48 hours in advance by contacting a member of the Barbican's Communications team. You will be unable to enter without a pre-booked ticket and so please do get in touch prior to your visit. We look forward to welcoming you back to the Barbican.

Public Information

The Curve, Barbican, London

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

There will be no entry fee charged for this exhibition, though tickets will need to be booked in advance of visiting. Ticketing information will be announced nearer the time.

For more information on Barbican membership please visit:

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

Safety measures in place when the Barbican reopens will include social distancing, limited visitor capacity, one-way routes through the building, sanitisation points and regular cleaning. Access to all venues will be via the main entrance on Silk Street with lifts available for those who need them.

Detailed visitor information will be available on the Barbican's [website](http://www.barbican.org.uk).

The Curve opening times

Monday – Friday: 12pm – 7pm

Saturday – Sunday: 11am – 7pm

Exhibition

The exhibition has been commissioned by the Barbican, London. Supported by Arts Council England and Jack Shainman Gallery.

The exhibition is produced in collaboration with Kunsten Museum of Modern Art in Aalborg, Denmark and Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington. The exhibition opens at

Barbican Art Gallery on 11 August 2020 – 24 January 2021. It will then tour to Kunsten Museum of Modern Art in Aalborg, Denmark from 18 February – 6 June 2021 and Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington July – December 2021.

Book

A fully illustrated catalogue to accompany the exhibition Toyin Ojih Odutola: *A Countervailing Theory* will be available. Featuring a commissioned text in response to Ojih Odutola's work by acclaimed writer Zadie Smith 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. Pre-order the catalogue in the Barbican Shop on Level G or online at www.barbican.org.uk/shop for £12.

Vinyl Album

A limited-edition vinyl album of the exhibition soundscape composed by artist Peter Adjaye, *Ceremonies Within*, released on Music for Architecture Records/The Vinyl Factory, will be available to buy in the Barbican Shops. The album cover features Toyin Ojih Odutola's work *Summons, To Witness One's Own* (2019-20).

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](http://www.barbican.org.uk) 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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To support the Barbican in reopening and offering the widest possible audience access to culture and creativity, donations can be made at <https://www.barbican.org.uk/join-support/support-us>