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Osaru Obaseki
THE RESIDENCY OUTCOME

Osaru Obaseki
Artist in residence 2024
Venezia



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Solo exhibition by Osaru Obaseki
June 13- Sept 18, 2024

The exhibition is the result of
Osaru Obaseki artistic residency in 2024

AKKA Project
Contemporary African Art Gallery
Ca' del Duca Sforza 3052
Venezia, Italy

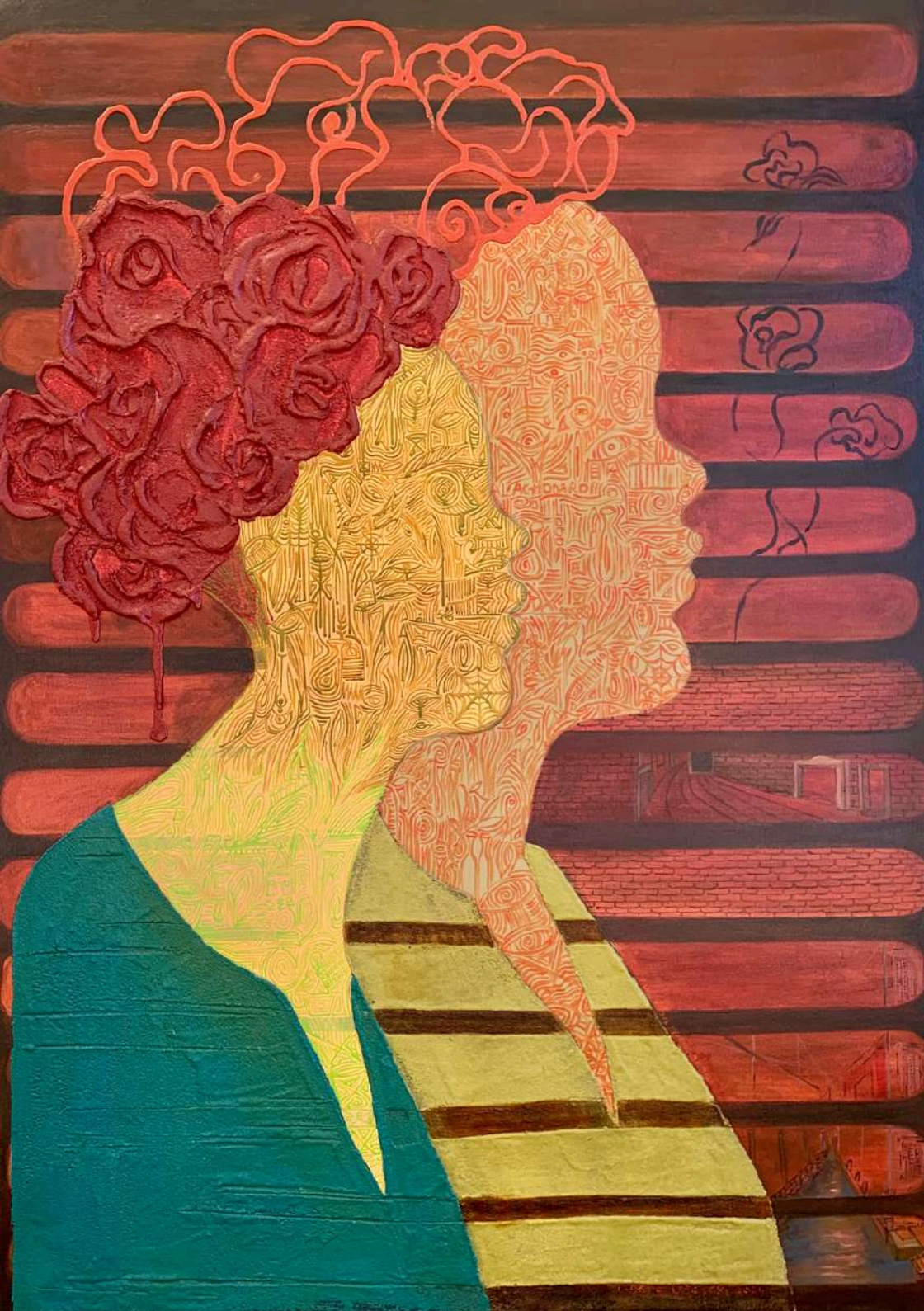


About

Osaru Obaseki

Osaru Obaseki, born in 1993 in Edo State, Nigeria, stands as a burgeoning force in the realm of multidisciplinary visual art. Residing within the heart of the African Continent, Osaru has intricately woven herself into the contemporary art tapestry, embarking on her professional journey in 2017. She currently shuffles working between Benin City and Lagos. Her artistic endeavors delve into the realms of materiality, history, cultural identity, and societal dynamics, as well as the intricacies of colonial and post-colonial narratives. With a distinctive approach, Osaru melds sand and acrylics, fusing two distinct epochs - the ancient and the modern. Notably, her artistic repertoire extends to the domain of bronze casting, where she masterfully channels the storied heritage of this ancient technique, to bring innovative contemporary forms to life.

Osaru Obaseki, an alumna of the ITP-International Training Programme with the British Museum and a member of the British Art Network, has left a significant mark in the art world. She has exhibited her work in esteemed galleries like Rele Gallery, Saboart Advisory, and others. Notable among her accomplishments is her participation in the "Re-entanglement" exhibition in 2019, collaborating with the University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology and Nosona Studios. Osaru's commitment to nurturing the artistic community is evident through her involvement in initiatives like the Back to Base workshop with the Goethe Institute and the Rele Arts Foundation in Lagos. Her influence has earned recognition from renowned media outlets such as the New York Times, BBC, Document Women, DW Documentary, TedEx and ARTE.



Shared Reflections, 2024
Murano glass powder and
acrylics on canvas
110 x 80 cm

Shared Reflections

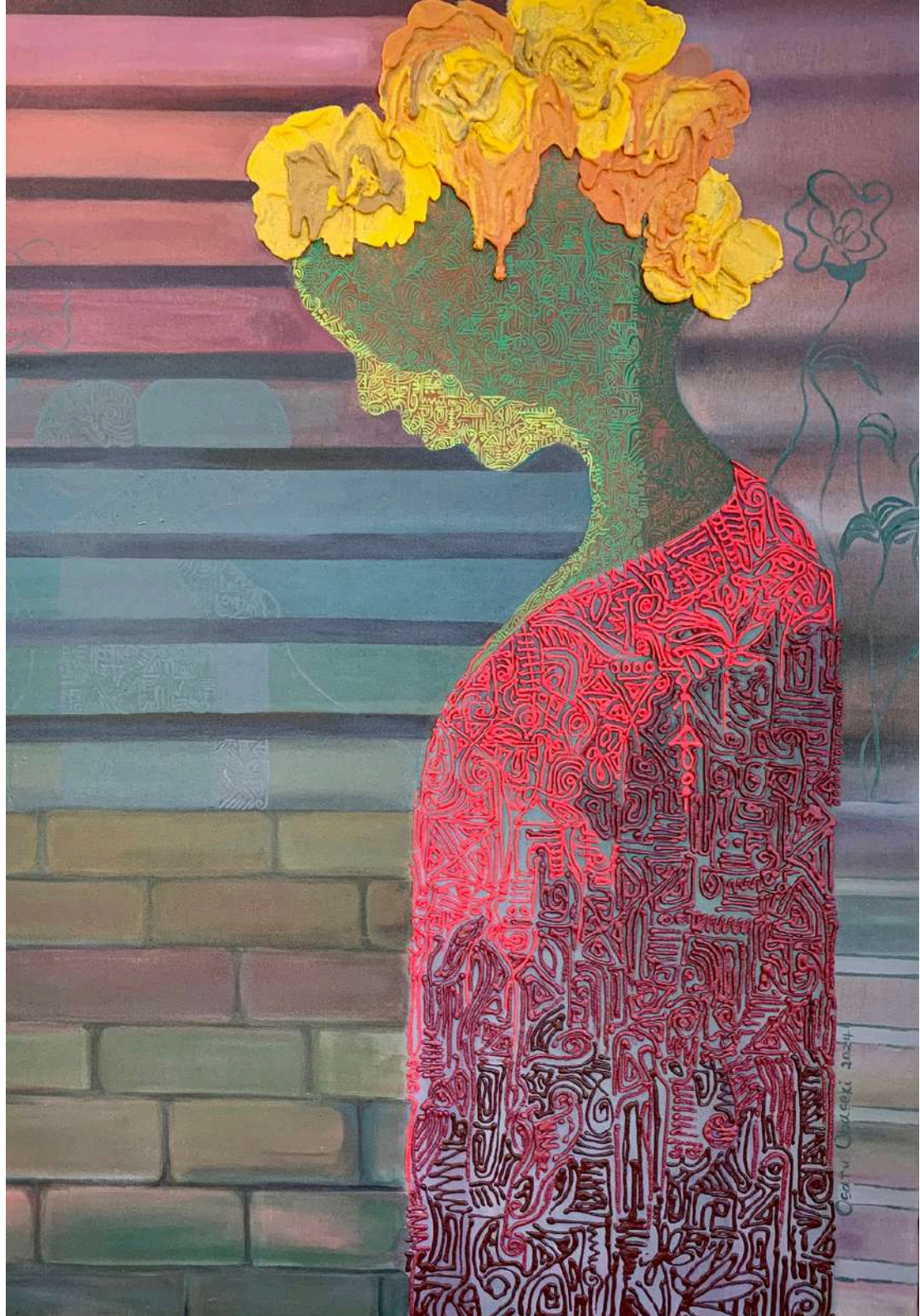
'Shared Reflections' is a captivating painting that delves into the intricacies of identity and experience, intertwining the worlds of Venice and Benin in a mesmerising tapestry of motifs and meanings.

At its heart, the painting features two profile female figures, each representing a facet of the artist's identity: one is the self as she is, rooted in her own experiences and perspectives, while the other embodies a new version of herself, poised to embark on fresh journeys and discoveries. Within a backdrop of impressions from Venice — the layout of the city, and the texture of its bricks — there are elements from Benin such as the ancient historical walls, creating a dynamic visual dialogue between cultures and histories.

Throughout the composition, motifs from the Benin tradition, including floral patterns and symbols, repeat and intertwine, creating an intricate tapestry that adorns the figures and connects them to their heritage. Among them, the word 'Alaghodaro' emerges, meaning progress or looking forward and serving as a poignant reminder of the artist's journey of self-discovery and the constant evolution of identity.

'Shared Reflections' invite viewers to contemplate the interconnectedness of past and present, self and other, tradition and innovation. Through its rich symbolism and evocative imagery, the painting celebrates the beauty of diversity and the transformative power of shared experiences.

Ada, 2024
Murano glass powder and
acrylics on canvas
120 x 100 cm





Ada

The very first sketch of 'Ada' dates back to Osaru's first trip to Venice, in September 2023, but it assumed its final form only at the beginning of her residency at AKKA Project in 2024.

As the artist delicately crafted the canvas, she found herself immersed in a profound journey of emotional discovery. Each stroke of her brush carried with it a piece of her own introspection, a reflection of personal experiences woven into the very fabric of the canvas. Ada, to Osaru, is more than just a subject; she embodied the depth and complexity of the human condition. In this woman portrayal, she sought to capture the raw essence of loss and resilience, to depict the intricate interplay between sorrow and renewal.

As Ada took form on the canvas, she became a vessel for Obaseki's own emotions, a conduit through which she navigated the tumultuous terrain of grief and healing.

The symbolism embedded within the painting - the sturdy bricks representing resilience, the intricate motifs and symbols evoking a sense of belonging - spoke volumes about her own journey and struggles. Through this figure's silent presence, the artist invites the viewer to join her in this sacred space of contemplation, where emotions run deep and the human spirit is laid bare.

Obaseki strove not just to portray Ada, but to capture the essence of what it means to be human, to grapple with loss, to find solace in the midst of pain, and to emerge stronger, albeit scarred, on the other side. Through this canvas, Osaru hoped to offer a glimpse into the complexities of our shared humanity, exhorting the viewer to delve deeper into their own emotional landscapes and find resonance within the depths of the painting.



"My purpose is to engage with the walls. I'd like to experience the exterior essence of Venice architecture through windows, plants and doors. It's mind blowing knowing that there is just one banana tree on the entire island. It would be interesting to capture it through art" - said Osaru when interrogated about her artistic plans at the beginning of the residency.





Where Things Fall

Osaru immediately set to work sketching the iconic banana tree outside AKKA Project gallery space in Corte del Duca. Drawing inspiration from the city's scarce natural greenery, its rich history, and distinctive artistic techniques like Murano glass craftsmanship, the artist had a rare opportunity to refine her artistic skills and vocabulary. Amid Venice's enchanting atmosphere, she found herself fascinated by the intricate details of its centuries-old buildings and the vibrant colours of Murano glass pieces, each of them echoing generations of artisanal tradition. Immersed in this captivating environment, Osaru Obaseki's art underwent a metamorphosis, infused with the essence of Venice as she absorbed its spirit and integrated it into her own creative expression.





Where Things Fall, 2024

Murano glass powder and acrylics on canvas

95 x 130 cm

Upon arriving in Venice, Osaru was immediately confronted with the peculiarities of Venetian life - from navigating the intricate network of bridges to braving the often gloomy weather. However, amidst the rain and mist, she claimed to find a profound source of inspiration. In fact, Osaru wasted no time in forming connections with individuals who would prove instrumental in guiding and inspiring her along her artistic journey.

Through chance encounters and newfound friendships, she discovered a supportive community that not only aided her in practical matters but also fueled her creative spirit with their own unique perspectives and experiences.

In the midst of Venice's timeless beauty and vibrant culture, Osaru found herself embarking on a transformative path, enriched by the city's quirks and the camaraderie of kindred spirits.

The Window

Talking to Osaru about her stay in Venice, it emerged her excited reminiscence of one of her first cultural tours: the Museum of Natural History. Here, she had the privilege of immersing herself in the ethnographic collection of Giovanni Miani, including many pieces from the African Continent. Among artefacts and specimens from around the world, she was captivated by the intricate stories woven into each object, which sparked ideas for her artistic endeavours. It was on this occasion that Osaru came into contact with an unexpected inspiration.





Through the Window, 2024
Murano glass powder and acrylics on canvas
145 x 175 cm

She describes it as follows: "I am stunned by old architectural styles, doorways, city patterns, and the details they carry, as much as I am fascinated by windows and the views they hold or capture. Like the beginning of a journey, what lies beyond a window or door leads to a new and unexpected reality. The power of perception is what has inspired this piece. On February 23, 2024, I visited the Natural History Museum in Venice particularly to see the African collection of Giovanni Miani not expecting to bump into this intriguing circular window on my way out. This window had a view that pictured a portion of Venice but in some weird way captured also its entire essence. It immortalized the architectural style of its buildings, its iron bars design, its windows, pillars with very deteriorated stone designs, and of course the Venetian water canals".



Myth of the Cave

Seeking I & II

'Myth of the Cave' was born as Osaru first delved into the depths of philosophical concepts, particularly drawing from Plato's allegory of the cave: a man emerges from the confines of a cave, symbolising the journey from ignorance to enlightenment. In fact, in each canvas, Osaru portrays the experiences of female figures navigating the intricate tapestry of African history and heritage, particularly rooted in Benin City, her own hometown. On the left, Osaru visually represents a female authority figure imparting wisdom to a younger generation through a book devoid of titles or specific cover styles; she meant to highlight the oral tradition of passing down histories through generations via folklore and storytelling. In contrast, on the adjacent canvas, Osaru portrays herself as a grown-up woman, seating on the footstool of her ancestors.

"I want to state the deep-rooted connection to my homeland" - says the artist - "but at the same time here in Venice I keep delving into Africa's history and my engagement with the book 'African Venice' echoes this exploration".

The juxtaposition of past and present, tradition and modernity, is, as Osaru articulates, a reflection of her personal journey in exploring African identity even in a new environment as Venice.

For the composition, the artist was deeply influenced by her visit to Gallerie dell'Accademia, drawing inspiration from its famous and stunning collection. This, she notes, underscores the rich cultural exchange across different historical periods and geographical locations.

"I want viewers to join me in contemplating the intricate layers of African identity, history, and the relentless pursuit of knowledge in an ever-interconnected world" - concludes Osaru.







"The people depicted here are holding a book, which also represents what I am doing here in Venice. I am putting a lot of emphasis on literature as a source of inspiration. I think that this piece is like an ensemble of everything I have experienced in Venice" - Osaru points out when talking about the last of the works she made at AKKA Project Venice.



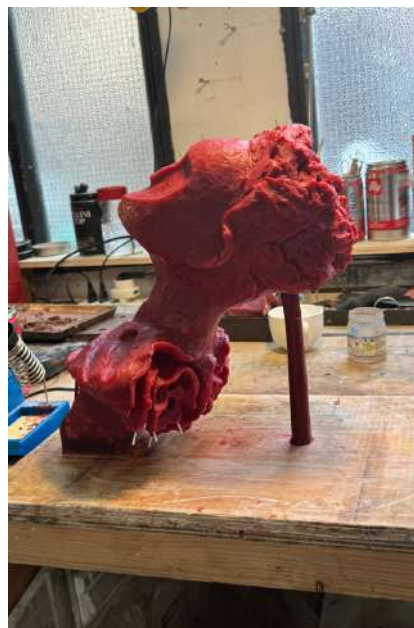


Osaru's journey took an enchanting turn when she ventured to Murano, the illustrious island celebrated for its centuries-old tradition of glass-making. From the moment she set foot on its storied shores, Osaru found herself enveloped in an atmosphere steeped in artistry and craftsmanship.

During her time at the Berengo Studio in Murano, Osaru embarked on an interesting path that combined tradition with innovation, casting her sculptures in the luminous medium of glass under the expert guidance of the studio's maestros. Initially, Osaru observed the meticulous process from beginning to end, starting from the creation of her clay model. As the first sculpture took shape, she witnessed the careful crafting of the mold that would eventually hold the molten glass. With each step, from firing the piece in the furnace to sandblasting and polishing, she gained a deeper appreciation for the intricacies of glass casting.

But Osaru's experience didn't stop at observation. Eager to immerse herself in the craft, she participated in every stage of the process, guided by the skilled hands of the studio's craftsmen, particularly finding a profound connection with the chief craftsman, Antonio, a true mentor for her. From sculpting the clay model to creating the mold for casting, she embraced the challenges and triumphs of each step with enthusiasm and determination.

Through her collaboration with the Berengo Foundation, Osaru found not only a platform for artistic expression but also the magic of the rich cultural heritage of Murano. As she breathed new life into ancient techniques, guided by Antonio's expertise, she forged a dialogue between past and present, creating works of art that resonated with a sense of timelessness and possibility.





Okp'okhuo, 2024
Murano glass
38 x 24 x 19 cm

Glasstress 8½ Fondazione Berengo

Osaru's journey at Berengo Studio culminates in the creation of a breathtaking glass sculpture that seamlessly blends Benin and Venetian traditions through the translucent medium of Murano glass. The chosen color palette, a subtle yet luminous gray, was carefully selected to enhance the brilliance and depth of the intricately engraved details. Connected to her Benin heritage, Osaru imbued the sculpture with precise symbols associated with the feminine figure and femininity itself. "The title 'Okp'okhuo' is the Edo language word for 'Embodiment of womanhood'" - explains Obaseki.

The fusion of Benin symbolism with the timeless elegance of Venetian glasswork resulted in a piece that transcended temporal and geographical boundaries, evoking a sense of harmony and interconnectedness.



The sculpture became a pivotal milestone in Osaru's career, as it was showcased at the prestigious international exhibition, **Glasstress 8½** in Murano, held at the exhibition space of Berengo Studio. This recognition marked a significant achievement for Osaru, as she acknowledges herself.



Upon My Gaze, 2024
Murano glass
38 x 22 x 22 cm





Flying Petals, 2024
Murano glass
38 x 24 x 16 cm

Jane Rushton

Fondazione Berengo

Jane Rushton, Director of Fondazione Berengo, has been a key connection between AKKA Project and Osaru Obaseki, with Adriano Berengo acting as the project's prime mover. We are delighted to share her contribution to the collaboration:

"I was introduced to Osaru Obaseki by AKKA Project through a BBC interview: Osaru was filmed in Nigeria casting a bronze sculpture of a woman's head, a Benin head, primitive but contemporary at the same time, in what appeared to be an open wood or coal fire. She explained that the Benin tradition of bronze casting had been forbidden to women in the past, and she was thankful to be able to do this work and to be a part of the centuries-old Benin culture. In fact, Osaru has been noted as one of the rising stars in the contemporary African art scene and was invited by AKKA Project as part of its residency program."

Jane describes the initial ideas for the collaboration:

"It was so intriguing to see this young woman creating such elegant contemporary Benin heads using the lost wax technique that I immediately shared the video with Adriano Berengo, President of Berengo Studio. Considering that it is a technique we have been using to create works of art in glass over the years, Adriano invited Osaru to work with us in our glass furnace in Murano during her stay at AKKA. Berengo Studio is an innovative glass studio that typically invites contemporary artists to use glass as a medium for their work with surprising results, as it happened with Osaru."

Reflecting on how the collaboration led to the Glasstress show, Jane says:

"At the time, we were planning the next exhibition of Glasstress, a show of the art created in our studio, which coincides with La Biennale di Venezia."



From left: Osaru Obaseki, artist
and Jane Rushton, Director of Fondazione Berengo

The yearly theme, 'Foreigners Everywhere,' had just been announced, and it seemed a perfect fit to include this young African artist in our international roster of artists from Europe, the United States, China, Japan, and the Middle East."

Jane Rushton spent considerable time with Osaru during her stay in Venice, guiding her through her initial steps at Berengo Studio. They got to know each other better, as Jane explains:

"Osaru was more than enthusiastic to add glass to her repertoire, which extended beyond bronze to include large figurative paintings with sand and acrylic. On her first visit to the casting studio, she asked if she could join the team and finish the clay molds herself, a task normally done by the glass technicians. She followed each step of the casting process and, days later, like an expectant parent, watched as her sculptures were removed from the kiln where they had been cooling for weeks. The sculptures in pale grey translucent glass were perfect, adding a new dimension to Osaru's work. These elegant sculptures of Benin women melded the traditions of the Murano glass world and African art, no longer strangers. Many thanks to AKKA Project for the introduction to Osaru Obaseki."

Venezia Africana African Venice

By a stroke of luck, Osaru's arrival in Venice coincided with the official announcement of the release of the book 'African Venice', authored by Paul Kaplan and Shaul Bassi and published by Wetlands. This highly anticipated book serves as a comprehensive tour of Venice, highlighting its rich historical and contemporary African presence. Notably, the book had already featured a collaboration with AKKA Project, which is prominently showcased in the itineraries, underscoring AKKA's commitment to fostering artistic residency programs. Osaru's presence thus created a perfect opportunity to delve deeper into the themes explored in the publication. This serendipitous timing led to an initial meeting between Osaru Obaseki and Professor Shaul Bassi at the gallery. During their engaging conversation, they discussed the book's various subjects

and themes, also encompassing her artistic practice, her vision, and her ambitious plans for her stay in Venice. In her quest to uncover African inspirations within the city, Shaul's insights and advices proved to be invaluable, guiding Osaru exploration and enriching her creative process.



Above from left: Osaru Obaseki, artist
and Professor Shaul Bassi in conversation

Following their fruitful meeting, Osaru was honoured with an invitation to attend one of the book's presentations on April 17, at the prestigious Ateneo Veneto in Venice. This significant event provided her with an excellent platform to share her creative journey with a broader audience. She spoke passionately about her artistic practice, focusing on the inspiration and personal growth she experienced during her residency at AKKA Project.

She captivated the audience, sparking curiosity and engaging the attendees in a lively discussion. This event not only highlighted the themes of 'African Venice/Venezia Africana' but also showcased Osaru's unique perspective and the profound impact of her artistic journey in Venice.

As a conclusion of this experience, the artist inserts the cover of the book as a collage on the final diptych she created during her stay at AKKA Project.

Below from left: Luca Cosentino, co-founder of Wetlands,
Lidija Kostic Khachatourian co-founder of AKKA Project,
Osaru Obaseki, artist
and Shaul Bassi, professor at Ca' Foscari University



The Portraits

In this small series of paintings, once again Osaru has sought to unite and overlap two realities: her Edo, Nigerian origins and her experience in Venice.

Many themes and specific conditions of the city of Venice, experienced for the first time by Osaru, are here addressed visually. One of her biggest questions, as she has often shared, is the issue of water: how can an entire island rely almost exclusively on canals and 'vaporetti'? What happens if someone has an emergency? And how do they get to the hospital? The notion of emergency, in fact, is also intricately tied to the city's fragility. The polluted waters of the lagoon and the relentless erosion of the ancient buildings by the frequent waves, altogether represented on canvas by Osaru, serve as poignant reminders of Venice's vulnerability.

As the artist articulates when discussing these paintings, they intricately weave together two distinct elements.



First, the backgrounds reveal a recurring motif of Venetian bricks seamlessly merging with the facial features of the depicted subjects who seem to be immersed in the lagoon's patterns.

Second, each painted woman proudly showcases details, hairstyles, and accessories that reflect Osaru's deep ties to Edo State, her birthplace. Above all, the coral bead jewelry, meticulously crafted by the artist using the glass powder technique, symbolizes the regal elegance and cultural richness of Benin City's traditional weddings, as brides use to adorn their bodies with this kind of crown and necklaces.

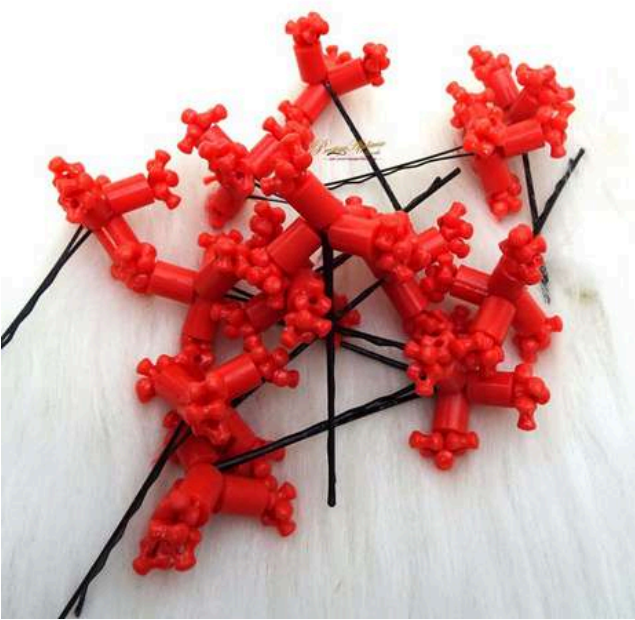
Emergency, 2024
Murano glass powder and acrylics on canvas
60 x 60 cm



Donna, 2024
Murano glass powder and acrylics on canvas
60 x 60 cm



Synced, 2024
Murano glass powder and acrylics on canvas
60 x 60 cm





Switzerland

Besides Venice

An artist residency is not just about toiling away in the studio and painting all day long! Osaru also had the chance to explore and enjoy some amazing places. Taking advantage of her time in Venice, she visited neighboring countries like Switzerland, particularly the city of Lugano. These visits were not only for fun but also served significant institutional and artistic purposes.

Her first trip to Lugano, Switzerland, was short yet invigorating and inspirational from a creative perspective. She arrived on March 23 at the train station, where she was warmly welcomed by Lidija, Co-Founder and Managing Director at AKKA Project, and her daughter. Osaru had the pleasure of staying at their home, situated atop a picturesque mountain.

Reflecting on the trip, Osaru highlights the visit to a local art fair at Villa Ciani, where numerous fascinating exhibits were displayed. However, the most fun part, as the artist fondly recalls, was embarking on what she describes as “a proper hike” with Lidija and her dog Snoopy. This was a novel adventure for her. Although initially daunting, the climb up and down the mountain became more enjoyable as she adapted to it. The breathtaking views of Lugano from the summit made the effort worthwhile. The artist also cherished the chance to recreate shadow pictures, a nostalgic activity she used to share with her sister back home.

Other memorable moments included enjoying the culinary experiences that were equally unforgettable. Overall, her stay in Lugano was filled with great moments, providing a refreshing break before returning to her work in Venice.



Rome and Milan Besides Venice

Osaru had some exciting opportunities in other major Italian cities, like Rome and Milan.

She received an invitation to Rome for the ICCROM annual meeting, marking her second attendance. Here, she reconnected with individuals she had met during her initial visit as a cultural entrepreneur invited to participate in Euro-African partnership conference as an active member of the youth heritage Africa with ICCROM. In September 2023, when she also exhibited one of her stunning canvases adorned with delicate floral motifs made with sand, earth, and acrylics. The focus of the meeting was the future of African heritage, fostering discussions and collaborations in this field.

Moreover, Osaru was chosen as a special speaker at the 33rd edition of FESCAAAL - Festival Cinema Africano, Asia e America Latina.



This event is titled 'Africa Talks 2024: Visual Africa. Creativity, Perspectives and Changes in Visual Arts', aimed to bring together a diverse range of experts and speakers in the visual arts.

The event included an in-depth roundtable discussion followed by the screening of an original film selected from the extensive FESCAAAL program. Osaru's presentation centered around the theme 'Beyond Being an Artist: Community and Engagement', where she shared insights into her artistic process and her experiences as a resident artist, sparking meaningful conversations and reflections within the artistic community.







Bio

Osaru Obaseki

Osaru Obaseki was born in 1993 in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria, and she currently lives and works between Benin City and Lagos.

Her artistic endeavors delve into the realms of materiality, history, cultural identity, societal dynamics, as well as the intricacies of colonial and post-colonial narratives. With a distinctive approach, Osaru melds sand and acrylics, fusing together two distinct epochs - the ancient and the modern.

Notably, her artistic repertoire extends to the domain of bronze casting, where she masterfully channels the storied heritage of this ancient technique, to bring innovative contemporary forms to life.

Most recently, she is an active part of the Youth heritage Africa programme being hosted by ICCROM- International Centre for the study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property, this led to her participation in the ICCROM General Assembly 2023. In 2024, she is a resident artist with AKKA project, Venezia Italy in collaboration with Berengo Foundation, Murano Italy.

Selected solo exhibitions:

- 2024** • The Residency Outcome, AKKA Project Venezia, Venice, Italy
- 2023** • Osaru Obaseki: Petals of Identity, The Intersection of Nature and Culture, AKKA Project Venezia, Venice, Italy

Selected group exhibitions:

- 2024** • Glasstress 8 ½, Berengo Studio by Berengo Foundation, Murano, Venice, Italy
- 2023** • General Assembly roll up exhibition, ICCROM, Rome, Italy
 - Incantations, Eclectica Contemporary, Cape Town, South Africa
 - The Natural / Kiribaku Art, Coningsby Gallery, Tottenham, London, UK
- 2021** • Artepedia: A Tale of Shared Experiences, Lagos, Nigeria
 - Sabo Art Advisory: I Am Not A Goddess... Unless I Say I Am, Alliance Française, Lagos, Nigeria
- 2020** • Young Contemporaries Alumni Exhibition, National Museum, Lagos, Nigeria
 - Re-entanglement Project Benin city: Colonial archives, creative collaborations, Northcote Thoma's 1909-10 anthropological survey of Edo speaking communities in Southern, Nigeria
- 2019** • Young contemporaries 2019, Rele Art Gallery, Lagos, Nigeria

Art fairs:

- 2023** • RMB Latitude Art Fair, Eclectica Contemporary, Shepstone Gardens, Johannesburg, South Africa

Residencies:

- 2024** • AKKA Project Venice
- 2019-22** • Edo Global Art Foundation, Benin City, Nigeria

Selected projects

- 2022** • Deciphering the Ba-Bird, Egypt and Sudan collection, "Object in focus display project", British Museum International Training Programme, London, UK
- 2020** • The Journey Amidst Time, Re-entanglement Project Benin city: Colonial collection in De-colonial times Museum of Archeology and Anthropology, London, UK

A.R.P.

The Concept

The AKKA Project Venice **Artist Residency Program** is dedicated to young artists from Africa, providing them with an enriching experience at AKKA Project Venice, located in the cultural and artistic heart of the Venetian lagoon. Each year, the residency program invites 2-3 innovative artists to elevate their artistic practice in this vibrant international setting.

This residency complements the artistic and cultural schedule of AKKA Project, a gallery promoting contemporary art from Africa through its venues in Venice, Dubai, and Lugano. By supporting artists in their artistic and personal growth, the residency allows them to experiment with their creative processes in an international context. Artists have the opportunity to immerse themselves in the rich cultural heritage of Venice and Italy, creating new points of encounter and interaction with both the local and international art scenes.

AKKA Project organizes a tailored educational program built according to the ambitions, interests, and techniques of the hosted artist. This approach fosters a greater connection between the artist and the local environment, offering a comprehensive overview of the cultural landscape. In addition to visits to cultural sites in Venice and Italy, artists are invited to participate in talks and workshops with local artists, enhancing their exposure and engagement.

During the residency, artists create a dedicated portfolio of works rooted in their current practice, enriched by their experiences in Venice. This portfolio is then showcased in a solo exhibition at AKKA Project Venice at the end of the residency, highlighting the growth and development achieved during their stay.



