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Press Release

Soimadou Ibrahim

A time separating the beloved from those they love

1 - 30 April 2022

Galerie Marguo, 4 rue des Minimes 75003 Paris



Galerie Marguo is pleased to present *A time separating the beloved from those they love*, a solo exhibition of new and recent paintings by London-based artist Soimadou Ibrahim, on view at the gallery from 1 - 30 April 2022.

Soimadou Ibrahim was born in Paris but spent the formative years of his childhood in Comoros, a small archipelagic nation off the east coast of Africa. With much of his family still in Itsinkoudi, a remote village on the archipelago's largest island, Ibrahim's first forays into painting offered the artist a means of collapsing the distance between himself and his loved ones. However, the experience of returning to France at the age of nine forged in the artist a critical perspective around racial, cultural, national identity. Likewise, in his paintings, Ibrahim works from the personal and familial outwards, to engage with the colonial history and enduring geopolitical ties that bind the two continents.

A time separating the beloved from those they love, the artist's first exhibition in France, addresses the hypocrisies inherent to the universalist ideals of a homogenous national identity in a country that accounts for fifty percent of the African Diaspora in all of Europe. This intention is signaled to viewers before even entering the space. Visible through the gallery's glass-paned facade is *Les Misérables* (2022), a human-scale canvas depicting a demonstration for undocumented workers' rights on the Place du Trocadero, where the Eiffel Tower is positioned as a focal point in the background. Like a Gothic spire, it draws our attention upwards, conveying its status as a beacon of human progress while simultaneously evoking the keychains and figurines hawked by street vendors. The symbolic irony extends to the predicament of these individuals who, despite being forced to make themselves conspicuous at risk of arrest or deportation in order to earn a living, frequently go unnoticed by the throngs of tourists and locals who pass them by.

The questions of visibility, representation, and the important role these play in the production of empathy, are recurrent throughout Ibrahim's work. His paintings often feature loved ones and scenes of everyday life. Drawn from family albums, the artist's memories, or his imagination, paintings such as *l'Uniforme*, *One day it'll all make sense*, or *Soul Power* evoke the importance of kinship and community. Nearby, portraits of low-wage workers, such as in *Ciggy Break* or *Mind on the Job*, reinforce the individual humanity of these anonymous migrants, without whom the infrastructure of society would collapse.

The paintings are warm and inviting, their subtle critique embedded beneath thick layers of paint applied in broad, straight strokes. For example, there is no indication that *Ancient town*, an anodyne painting of a sun-drenched house with brick lintels and a towering leafy tree, is taken from a photo in Grand-Bassam, the former French capital of the Ivory Coast, which in the 19th century became the starting base for colonizers exploring West Africa. In this way the artist lures in the viewer, juxtaposing the formally abstracted depictions of his subjects with their politicized, if unspoken, contexts.

The socio-economic circumstances of those faced with the decision to join the African Diaspora are evoked in *Le bon côté de la Méditerranée* and *So Far to Go*, in which Caspar David Friedrich's famous *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (c.1818) is recast with a young African man staring out across a placid ocean toward the pale horizon. Friedrich's painting is considered an emblem of Romanticism in its portrayal of a young man contemplating his self-determined existence on the

edge of a cliff before the great sublime, represented by the thrashing ocean below. In Ibrahim's version, the contemplative, romantic atmosphere of the composition is subverted by the harsh reality that faces the majority of young people in Comoros: the decision to pursue better opportunities for themselves and their family, with the knowledge of the danger and adversity this entails. Opening at a moment when the devastating reality of dispossession and migration are being intensely felt and experienced across Europe on a massive scale, the works presented here challenge the erasure of the marginalized. In the words of the artist:

"This collection of works represents the forced movement of people who have had to leave their country and their loved ones in order to make a better life for themselves and for those they left behind...Many have faced perilous journeys and have risked everything just to make it to Europe, only to be met with financial hardship, prejudice and distrust. These paintings therefore pay homage to the diaspora in France. Moreover, it highlights the power that simple acts of kindness can have and encourages us to reflect on what it actually means to be French, because without difference...it would not be France as we know it."

About the Artist

Soimadou Ibrahim was born in France in 1989, and lives and works in London. He holds an MA in Graphic Design and Art Direction from the Campus Fonderie de l'Image, Paris (2016) and an MA in Graphic Design and Digital Art from Rennes-II University, Rennes (2015). Solo exhibitions include 'For life is not eternal', SFA Advisory (New York, 2021); 'Farewell Savane', Kotaro Nukaga (Tokyo, 2021); 'Distant Relatives', Bill Brady Gallery (Los Angeles, 2021); and 'My thoughts tell me tales', ATM Gallery (New York, 2021). Ibrahim's work has been included in the group exhibitions 'Ridiculous Sublime', SFA Advisory (New York, 2021); and 'Isolation Mastered', JD Malat Gallery (London, 2020).

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Soimadou Ibrahim
Les Misérables, 2022
Acrylic on canvas
230 x 160 cm / 90 x 63 in