



AWOL ERIZKU New Flower | Images of the Reclining Venus

Exhibition Dates: September 17 – December 12, 2015

Opening Reception: Thursday, September 17, 6-8PM

NEW YORK, NY – The FLAG Art Foundation presents **Awol Erizku: *New Flower | Images of the Reclining Venus*** from **September 17 – December 12, 2015**, on FLAG’s 10th floor gallery. The exhibition marks the first presentation of the artist’s series of photographs taken in Ethiopia’s capital city of Addis Ababa in 2013. This compelling body of portraiture challenges the mythologized art historical role of the Venus and the odalisque¹ in Western painting, setting these tropes against the reality of one of the largest concentrations of sex workers in Africa².

A ‘Conceptual Mixtape’ by Erizku, produced in collaboration with Los Angeles-based DJ SOSUPERSAM, will be released alongside *New Flower | Images of the Reclining Venus*, featuring music, recorded conversations, and spoken word expanding on the ideas of the exhibitions.

Awol Erizku has created several bodies of work re-contextualizing iconic art historical images through his cross-disciplinary approach to sculpture, photography, music, video installation, and social media channels, to discuss identity and the politics of representation. Erizku states “Growing up going to the MoMA or the Met, and not seeing enough people of color (in the art or in the museum)...I felt that there was something missing. So when I was ready to make work as art, I wanted to comment and critique the art history, and make art that reflected the environment I grew up around...”

The exhibition’s title *New Flower* is the English translation of Addis Ababa, where Erizku created the series, made possible by the Alice Kimball Fellowship Award from Yale University, where he received his MFA. In *New Flower | Images of the Reclining Venus*, Erizku sought to create “a new reclining Venus, one with darker skin” that dismisses the mythologizing of the Venus and the romanticism of the odalisque featured in Jean-August-Dominique Ingres’s *La Grande Odalisque* (1814) and Édouard Manet’s *Olympia* (1863)³.

In an effort to create a more realistic and contemporary odalisque, Manet painted “a lower-class girl rather than a goddess, a prostitute rather than a courtesan, *Olympia*’s status was uncompromisingly degenerate, albeit heroically rehabilitated through modernism.”⁴ Similarly, Erizku wanted to represent the reality of prostitution, and asked each of his subjects (sex-workers paid to sit for him) to reinterpret the poses of the renowned paintings by Ingres and Manet. Gone are the opulent and idealized settings; each woman in *New Flower* is photographed in the beds of anonymous hotel rooms across Addis Ababa, staring directly at viewers, challenging our gaze as did previous depictions of Venus. In Erizku’s portraits, the peripheral black servant is now Venus, front and center but alone, stripped of everything but her self-preservation in these narrow circumstances.

¹ “Odalisque” is a French word of Turkish origin, which refers to a concubine or female slave. In Western art history and particularly popular in 19th century France, the odalisque became a common motif in painting, representing a European standard of beauty. The visual language of the odalisque includes a recumbent nude lying across a bed or divan, often surrounded by attendants, lush fabrics, pillows, and elaborate interiors. These luxurious and exotic settings and their subject matter were endemic of Orientalism¹, which mitigated the eroticism of the nude female figure, distancing desire and sensuality within a non-Western context.

² U.S. Department of State. “Ethiopia.” Accessed July 29, 2015. <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/countries/2014/226721.htm>

³ According to the Musée D’Orsay, which holds Edouard Manet’s (1832-1883) *Olympia*, 1863, in its permanent collection: “Even though Manet quoted numerous formal and iconographic references, such as Titian’s *Venus of Urbino* (1538), Goya’s *Maja Desnuda* (c.1797-1800), and the theme of the odalisque with her black slave, already handled by Ingres among others, the picture portrays the cold and prosaic reality of a truly contemporary subject. Venus has become a prostitute, challenging the viewer with her calculating look.”

⁴ Warren, Sarah. Spent Gypsies and Fallen Venuses: Mikhail Larionov’s Modernist Primitivism. *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2003), pp 27-44.

Coinciding with the exhibition at FLAG, Erizku will also present a solo exhibition of new sculpture and painting, *Bad II the Bone*, at a roaming space the artist titled [Duchamp Detox Clinic](#), in downtown Los Angeles, CA.

About:

Awol Erizku (b. 1988) is a conceptual artist based in New York, NY, and Los Angeles, CA. Erizku works in several mediums, including photography, sculpture, and video installation. He also uses his personal Tumblr and other social media channels to generate content in and around his studio practice. Erizku received a BFA from The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, New York, NY, in 2010, and an MFA in Photography from Yale University School of Art, New Haven, CT, in 2014. Erizku has been the subject of recent solo exhibitions, including *PopRally Presents Awol Erizku: Serendipity*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY (2015); *The Only Way is Up*, Hasted Kraeutler, New York, NY (2014); *Thank You, Come Again!*, Rivington Design House Gallery, New York, NY (2012); and *Black & Gold*, Hasted Kraeutler, New York, NY (2012). His work has been included in numerous group exhibitions, including *Cookie Gate*, Ellis King Gallery, Dublin, Ireland (2015); *Deep End: Yale MFA Photography Thesis Exhibition*, Diane Rosenstein Fine Arts, Los Angeles (2014); *personal, political, mysterious*, The FLAG Art Foundation, New York, NY (2013); among others. Alongside his artistic practice, Erizku has curated several exhibitions, including *13 Artists*, Yale School of Art, New Haven, CT (2014); *Deep End: Yale MFA Photography Thesis Exhibition*, Diane Rosenstein Fine Art, Los Angeles, CA (2014); and *Images of Venus from Wayne Lawrence's Orchard Beach: The Bronx Riviera*, The FLAG Art Foundation, New York, NY (2013). He has been the subject of reviews and articles in *BLOUIN Artinfo*, *Vulture*, *i-D Magazine*, *Whitehot Magazine*, *Vogue*, and *Complex* among others.

The FLAG Art Foundation is a non-profit contemporary arts institution, founded by art patron Glenn Fuhrman in 2008. Its objective is to encourage the appreciation of contemporary art among a diverse audience. FLAG organizes four to six exhibitions a year, each with a different curator, as well as producing public programs and catalogues. Past curators have included Chuck Close, Lisa Dennison, Eric Fischl, Louis Grachos, Prabal Gurung, Jim Hodges, Shaquille O'Neal, Linda Yablonsky, among others. To date, FLAG has hosted over 35 curated exhibitions, providing a platform for over 350 international established and emerging artists.

FLAG provides a unique educational environment in which visitors can view, contemplate, and engage in active dialogue with the artworks. FLAG is also a resource that facilitates loans of contemporary artworks to museums around the world. An extensive database of available works is maintained and made available to curators.

We are on the 9th and 10th floors of the Chelsea Arts Tower, located in the heart of New York's art district on 25th Street between 10th and 11th Avenues. Its state-of-the-art exhibition space was designed by noted architect Richard Gluckman.

Join the conversation online and follow FLAG's Instagram (@flagartfoundation) and Twitter (@FLAGartNYC), and use the #AwolErizkuNewFlower hashtag when posting. This exhibition is Snapchat friendly; please use the 'New Flower' filter.