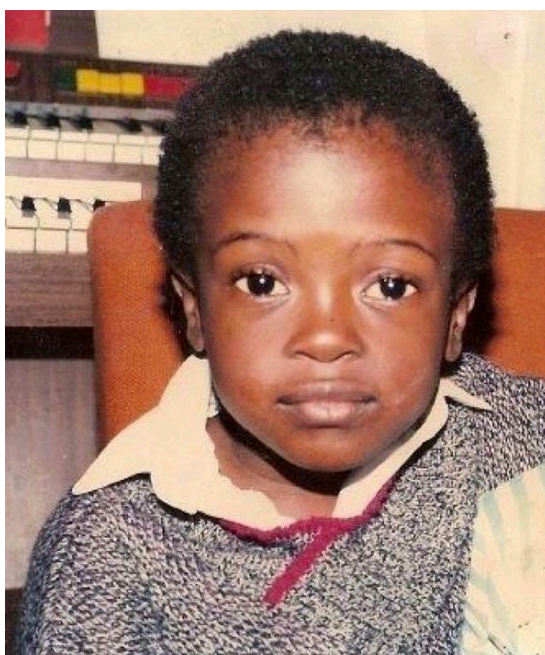


**\*scroll through to the bottom for artist CV.**

**HIS STORY IN HIS OWN WORDS:**

"I like to deal with the observational, I'm interested in people, I like people- I like things. I think it is important to see the beauty in everything- to see how even the unnecessary becomes necessary by virtue of no longer being needed- this is the beauty of process. I learned this as a director for theatre and law student - a sort of cross examination and researching, only this time with visuals, thus one becomes confident with what is left- you feel justified.

I have always loved the arts, from drawing to just making things... I would always make things at home. I grew up in a very spiritual/religious home and there was always music because the church choir would rehearse in our family home... I even ended up playing the drums this way, it was all 'second nature'.



me age five... or four

That said, the arts were not held in high regard in the home in the sense of a serious profession, what was upheld was academia eg maths, science and english. "be a Doctor" was a poetical and dogmatic phrase/statement in the home... My parents (mainly my father) saw the arts as a poor man's profession and there was an inherent fear that, being black, African and living in the west, one would always have to push and work harder than 'the white man' so... be a Doctor.

To be fair, my experience as a young man (who is black) growing up- held up to the latter testament of my father's, due to the discrimination I faced.. even in the arts. Disclaimer, I am no victim.

So how have I ended up being a 'full fledged' artist?

Well, I was lucky to find myself in one of the country's leading youth theatre groups , The National Youth Music Theatre (NYMT), whose alumni

include Jude Law, Idris Elba et al however, I only just managed this as I had to secretly audition behind my father's back at the age of fourteen...

I got in (to the surprise of many as I was not a 'stage school kid') and was allowed to continue with the company for the rest of my teenage years, performing in the west end, Tokyo, Edinburgh festival ... so many places, and worked with numerous creative people. The great thing about the NYMT - till this day, was community, we were a group of young people who came from all over the UK and would spend a few months like a family, rehearsing from the early hours of the day to the late evening, you were immersed in the craft of acting singing and dancing but in a way that encouraged individuality as well... I think this was key and integral to my love of making things. However, I cannot but mention (with the fear of pulling the 'race card') I did somehow always feel alone, being if not the only one but one of two ( a lot of the time) black kids. I have never allowed myself to be defined/objectified by my race or culture, however, if I'm brutally honest, friends (and a lot are still friends) would say things that were insensitive or just ill informed... the consequences of such things created an experience of me somehow looking inwards at what was happening during these times and not completely 'part of the group'. The irony is, if one was to ask members of the company whether they saw or felt this they would be oblivious to it, simply because no harm was meant, I guess one can equate it to... ignorance. That said, these were small but poignant moments as I feel they plant a seed of the question 'who am I?'... 'where do I really belong?'. That said, they were some of the best years of my life, let me be clear- there was no direct abuse or anything overt, I was loved... it was simply a reality check of how the world (unfortunately in many places) is.



'Wizard of Oz' Theatre Royal, Bath, NYMT

My parents, friends from school were all proud and encouraging, however, when I reached nineteen- thus, University time, it was time to (as my father put it) "get serious".

When I think back to this time, I always wonder, why did I give in, why did I not just do what I wanted to do, like so many of my friends would boast... I can't put my finger on it...

Yes, my father insisted that I left this acting "nonsense" now, and do something educational like... law. Arguments went back and forth and eventually I caved in, I was so against it that I remembering saying random things like I'll study, anthropology... he just laughed... true story.

I studied law, I hated it , I hated it so much that (again true story) I cannot remember one person's name from my three years of doing that degree.... isn't that strange? I literally would just clock in and out. And forget about any idea of acting again... I put on weight, became really quiet, wouldn't go out (this was very opposite to who I normally was) and I became a recluse.

Looking back, a few crucial things did happen... Law does not allow you to escape reading- so I read loads, read all the time - for leisure (I hated this as a kid) and I found that my body adapted naturally, very naturally to this, of course I was in denial because I didn't want to be there.

I also became obsessed with three things, one was writing thoughts and ideas down religiously, I started writing screenplays, plays, social essays, but would hide these under my bed because I didn't want anyone to see... again strange. Two, I became transfixed with cinema, particularly four film makers, Woody Allen, Martin Scorsese , Ingmar Bergman and Spike Lee. The latter particularly due to Ernest Dickerson, Lee's cinematographer. His work (the vivid visuals- particularly the bright red wall) in *Do The Right Thing* was hypnotic, I've watched that film so many times. And thirdly, walking through and just... sitting and 'being', in museums like the National Gallery.

The third always offered a sense of serenity, and I'd constantly got a sense of urgency as well, I understand what it means now, but then I was clueless, it was just a very emotional experience being in a place like that even though it's atmosphere with its great pillars and overbearing paintings and frames could potentially give the impression that a ripped jeans youngster like me was in the wrong place, I never felt this.



Photo by Chris Mann. London.

Law ended, I graduated, I worked in the city and as I like to describe it 'played that game'... only this game didn't last too long. due to a burn out.

Unable to walk, and having a heated body with (literal) pains that would scratch my head if I tried to think of anything, you know- things that needed to be done, I became bed-ridden. Blood was checked and all the necessary things doctor's do but ... nothing was wrong with me, well at least not biologically. In other words, I had hit a high stress level. A friend of mine once said, listen to your body, your body knows who you are, what it wants.. and if you don't listen, eventually you'll fall sick - you won't be able to cope... and in a sense, I guess this is what happened.

So with my parents clearly realising that this law thing and city thing wasn't me, there was a sense that everyone just 'let me be', in fact my mother's words were just this "*I just want my son to be happy*".

So, I ended up working in a bookshop that sold theology and philosophy... this was a real healing time. The shop was a small charity type shop, and I know those who knew me and walked past the shop thought 'what is Ade doing in there?' but I didn't care, I was at peace, real peace - at least compared to where I was before.

During these times I'd make short films around the south acton estate (where I was now living) 'guerrilla type' (do it yourself- low budget) short films. I directed community plays, and started to draw again too...

something I hadn't really properly done since I was a kid. However, this time my drawings were very abstract like, obscure, very emotionally and psychologically led but their aim was always part of self meditation notes that I made for myself... kind of like a diary, never to the end of 'showing a piece of art', I mean why would they be I was never allowed to see art (drawing) this way, at least for myself.

Thinking back, my room in south acton was piled with note books that were full of poetry, drawings and doodles after doodles, scribbles, legs, faces and strange looking creatures, some were clearly impressive since I remember my sister walking past me , I was holding a page open and she shouted "who drew that?"... I closed the book immediately- don't ask me why.

Working in a tiny, independent bookstore provided for me something the big city jobs didn't... thinking time, healthy, meditative thinking time. Consequently, one day, going into my second year at the store I all of a sudden saw a clear road in front of me and realised that nothing was in my way, I'll never forget that day, very clear - bright and hopeful.



Photo by Chris Mann. London circa 2011

I decided to take sometime out (a fast), to figure things out and during this time/break (seven days fast to be exact), on the fourth day a wave of a thought hit me, bringing to my remembrance that I used to perform- I use to act.

I'd also paid the price, you know, satisfied my parent's wishes... so I felt no guilt whatsoever, they'd also 'created the beast' since now, I could argue my way out of anything. Eloquence is a weapon.

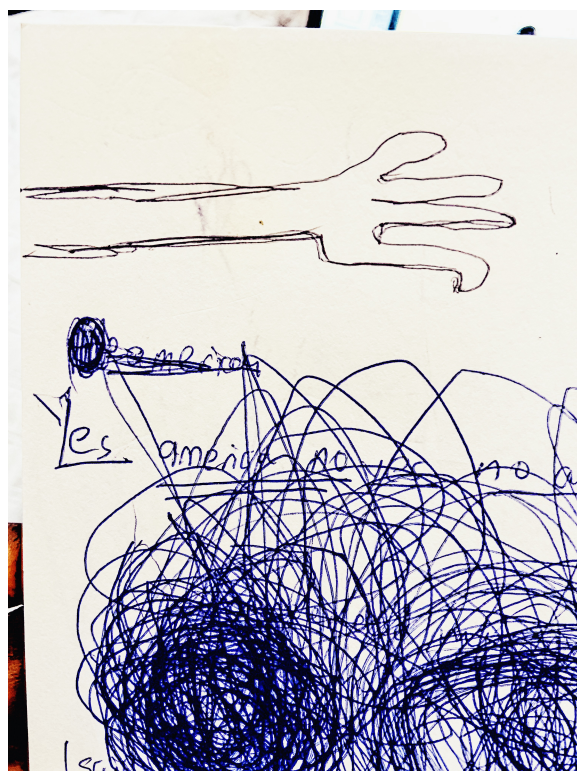


I thought I would never act again, but now everything seemed possible, I was encouraged by a former director not to go and spend three years doing what I already 'know' however to do an MA (Master's degree)... I ended up auditioning for one place only; The Central School of Speech and Drama. I got in, lost weight and finally began to feel like me again. I even got my first job before I graduated (a testament to my parents that their son was simply meant to be doing such things).

However, something was still not quite right.

Just before drama school, I started to get these unusual headaches- they would come intermittently, and they continued throughout, in fact they became sort of part of me so to the point that I never really gave them attention, they were actually the reason why I was sometimes late to lessons even my end of year performance...the headaches would just come and go.

My acting career was ( I guess one could say) thriving (depending on what that/success means to you) however, I still secretly felt like there was more I wanted to give- more I wanted to say. Between acting work, I formed a theatre company of my own, made my own work, you know so, wrote and directed plays, led workshops and taught some master classes too. Again, the frustration with lack of satisfaction grew and grew, and what also grew and grew were notepads upon notepads, in fact a common gift from friends, partners etc for me was always a notepad. And... the notepads were filled with what they have always been filled with... words and images, images and more doodles, scribbles and words.



The turning point came when what other actor friends would see as a great fulfilling job (and objectively it was), became pain... I became furiously bored during my times during the days. What also increased (to my displeasure) were these headaches, they could no longer be ignored, almost personified into a annoying ghost who hangs about and just prods at you, sounds dramatic but all very true and unpleasant at the time.

With all this, I thought it meant that I was to do something like... write a play, so I tried that, but whenever I tried to write I'd end up drawing - as if automatically, no words just eyes and heads, lots of faces ... true story. Of course, I was fighting against this because I wanted to write something meaningful but, what were these heads I kept drawing... why was I bloody drawing? I actually remember throwing a pad across the room... it was all too confusing... until the next morning.



Photo by Cat Couture. London.

I was so down, tired, near depressed with these headaches, with the need to release a big burden, feeling that it must be that I should write something, and that it wasn't being released when I was on stage in the evening... what was it, what was going on?

I'll never forget what felt like a clear, calm voice that I heard... I heard (since there is no other way to say this) the words, "go and buy paint". I also remember feeling like a calmness had been released once this idea, this instigation came into my head- like a "that's it".

I told my partner that once the play was over and I was back in London, that I'd go and buy paint... she thought it was sweet.

Now, ink was familiar to me, I used ink for my pads a lot, but paint... well, all I knew was that it couldn't be water colour, it had to be strong, heavy and dense and I wanted colour- like colour, strong and unapologetic... all this was purely instinctive, nothing conceptual- no academia, just a need to find out what was going on with me.

I bought the paint along with some fresh ink and drawing pads.... I drew non- stop on the bus back home, it felt effortless, like I knew what I wanted to say... and the image that appeared in front of me was bold and strong.

I then laid the paint out and the only way I can describe it was like someone had gripped or gotten hold of me, a confidence was there and assertiveness, I felt free, playful. I painted and painted and understood, understood how I wanted to compose, construct and ...'play', a sort of improvisation with a sense of guidance and constructivism (like

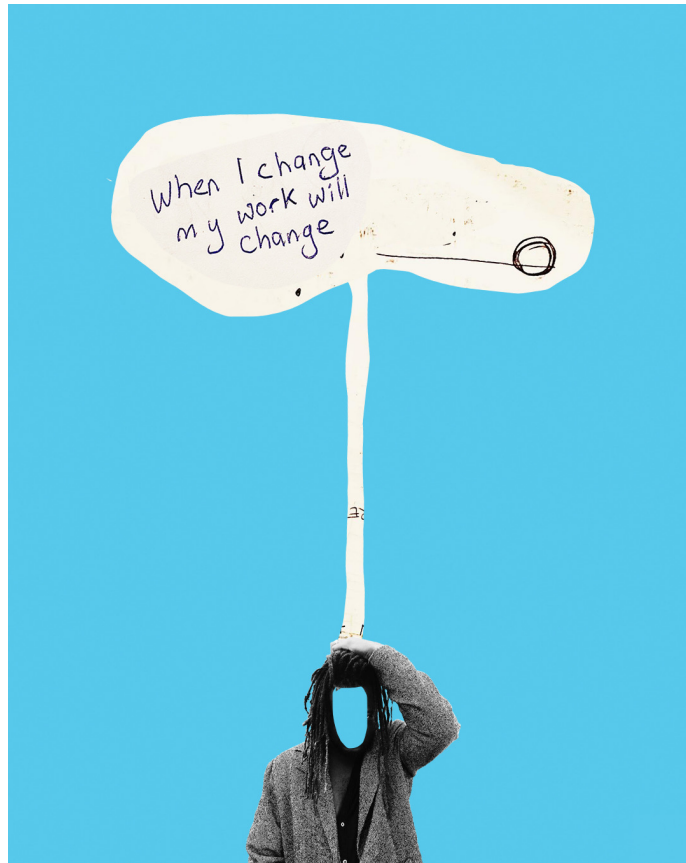
in theatre... and I think- when I examine it all critically now, even what I learned as a law student- you break things apart like an argument , to build up another one. More importantly, the headaches and feeling of frustration, ceased... totally. I'd go as far as to say, I felt awake , like I have been sleeping or something.

Just to say, looking back, studying acting offered something valuable to me as an artist... as an actor one is taught to be metaphorically naked, to leave oneself alone, to be in the moment and yet understand that a story needs to be told within a specific given space and time. One also understands process, especially in devising new work or creating a character, dealing with layers, understanding what is necessary and putting the story at the heart of the matter. These principles are so strong and valuable that they cross over to almost every art form, especially painting. Furthermore, at acting school, I was never taught to adhere to one school of thought however, to be aware of them but most importantly to be aware of myself. This informed and has, continually informed my 'style' of painting i.e. a combination of the abstract of expressionists and contemporary art meaning, it is whatever the artist says it is.

Again, as a law student, although I hated my time there, I fell secretly in love with Jurisprudence (the philosophy of law), and became obsessed with the realms of objectivity and subjectivity. Ian McCleod (the only name I can remember from my law years), taught legal method, and inspired my obsession with philosophical ideas... which, has also informed my art.

Like my friend once told me, my body was trying to inform me about myself, in one sense all these years and arguably (without sounding too spiritual) waiting until I could fully understand and appreciate what it was I really want to do and say... but through the medium of paint. Somehow, it had to be visceral for me, an emotional and 'sensational' act, however, not without insight or awareness, not judgement but one could say ... relevant self-knowledge. To see and be aware of how I see the world, my world, honestly... and in turn wholly respond to it, but not just respond technically or intellectually. For some reason, paint psychologically and physically satisfies the need or provides itself as the sufficient 'channel' I've instinctively been looking for. I don't think we can always explain why our bodies respond to one medium over another, I could give ' on the surface ' reasons, but even these do not suffice at least not now.





Bolaji Postcard 2020

I do know that it (for me) satisfies the emotional, psychological, physical and ... spiritual/ metaphysical, and so becomes a complete medium that feels effortless and enjoyable and in turn allows me to communicate fully, for that moment. Whereas, every other medium before had only went at the most, just over half way.

One of my favourite artists, Francis Bacon (also a self-taught artist) took a line from van Gogh's letters, the line: 'Real painters do not paint things as they are... they paint them as they themselves feel them to be.' And for me, this relates to consistently remaining truthful... Bacon himself said in a letter to French writer Michel Leiris: 'For me realism is the attempt to trap appearance with all the sensations that a particular appearance starts up in me.'



Early home studio. London. Circa 2015

Bolaji

SEE CV BELOW

## **ADÉBAYO BOLAJI: ARTIST CV/BIOG.**

### EXHIBITIONS & ARTIST RESIDENCIES

-*Artist Residency*/ YINKA SHONIBARE MBE GUEST PROJECTS SPACE./London./  
[Oct 2016]

-*NEW CONTEMPORARY V OLD* . Group Show /Adébayo Bolaji, Le Corbusier, Sam Francis, Nancy Guggenheim, Gottfried Honegger, Brad Howe , Alexej Jawlensky, Paul Jenkins, Robert Rauschenberg, Sergio Tappa/ GALERIE PROARTA, Zürich/ [Dec 2016-Jan 2017]

- *Artist Residency and Solo Show*/ GALERIE PROARTA, Zürich/ [March 2017]

- *DIALOGUE SHOW: BOLAJI & OYELAMI*/ Tafeta Gallery, London [April-May 2017]

-*'ORIGIN AND FLOW'*/artist residency & solo show/Art Cafe Brooklyn, New York, [May-July 2017]

-*Artist Residency*/ PRAH FOUNDATION, Margate/ [Oct 2017]

- *Book launch and art installation*/ CONCEPT LONDON, London / [Dec 2017]

-*'Transitions'*/Solo Show/SOMETHING CONTEMPORARY GALLERY, London/ [Feb-March 2018]

- *Artist Residency with solo show*/GALERIE PROARTA, Zürich/ [March 2018]

-*Group Show*/Adébayo Bolaji, Francis Bacon, Sonia Delaunay, Kazumasa Mizokami, Paul Jenkins, Karina Wisniewska/ GALERIE PROARTA, Zürich/ [April-May 2018]

- *Group Show 'THE POWER OF NOW'*/SERENA MORTON GALLERY,/London/[July 2018 ]

- *'Rituals Of Colour'* /Solo Show/ PUBLIC GALLERY/London/[September 2018]

- *'BABEL'*/Solo Show/ GALERIE PROARTA, Zürich/[March-April 2019]

- *'Topia'*/ Solo Show/ SERENA MORTON GALLERY/London/[September-October 2019]

### UPCOMING.

- ART KARLSRUHE , GERMANY , 13-16 FEB 2020

- NEW YORK, BEERS CONTEMPORARY, MAY 2020

- ISTANBUL , NOVEMBER 2020 (MORE NEWS TO FOLLOW)

## THE WORK.

"At the centre of Bolaji's practice is a dialogue between the internal and external world; by responding honestly to the world around him the artist subsequently engages in an intuitive exploration of himself.

Bolaji describes his style of painting as a form of psychoanalysis. Rich with references to personal history, as well as cultural notes from his Nigerian heritage and home city, London, Bolaji's colourful and animated canvases unfold organically from within. His process can be characterised as a kind of liberating play in which his emphasis on following and trusting the line as well as his instinctual choice of colour is fundamental. Sigmund Freud cited play as a means of healing: it allows for the expression and reconciliation of unconscious emotions and anxieties. It is an apt metaphor for Bolaji's paintings, for play transgresses the barrier between the individual's inner world and the world outside.

The subject of Bolaji's work varies, from the seemingly aesthetic to a direct commentary on the state of the human condition. The closer you look at the paintings the more you discover; faces may sometimes loom from dark hidden corners as well as almost illegible words of poetry appearing beneath layers of bold primary colours.

Bolaji enjoys engaging with both ritualistic and mystical imagery; depicting struggles both internal and external between the old and new, these images acting as metaphors for the conflict we all experience whilst establishing our own emotional identities. The use of the same vibrant language is a constant element narrating a different story within each painting. Visually, the works have layers of bold colours and as the texture thickens the velocity builds up. Colours are placed on top of each other, without being blended, as sometimes they come straight from the tube. The conscious choice of acrylic paint, which dries fast, preserves the energy and tempo of the piece.

Through an instinctive process of creation in which colour holds court, Bolaji looks inward in order to comment on the external world. Possessing an almost prophetic quality and mirroring the power of ritual, his cathartic practice provides a therapeutic function for both artist and viewer; on the one hand, the viewer explores the painting alone, on the other, there is a strong feeling that you are devouring a part of the artist himself"

## BIOG

London Born Adébayo Bolaji, is a self taught artist with a background in the performing arts as an actor, writer and director. He trained at the Central School of Speech and Drama, in London.

With a successful career in London's Westend, touring internationally, performing and London's Young Vic and Shakespeare's Globe.

Bolaji, also has a law degree and has published a poetry book along with original drawings.

Bolaji's story of "surrendering" (as he calls it), to his life as an artist is one of success, finding its roots in obstacles, family trials and cultural questionings.

*"painting for me - and say drawing, became the ultimate expression... I always felt blocked as a performer as if walking with a metaphorical limp. Art, was always bugging me however, cultural implications and my surroundings was not allowing me to fully embrace or even be aware of this side of myself. Eventually, it made itself known... and now I can't stop, it is the totality of what I am- if I can put it that way, and I'm thankful for it... it's more than a job".*

-Bolaji

