

Announcement, under strict embargo until 6 September 2022

ATTA KWAMI MARIA LASSNIG PRIZE MURAL

DZIDZO KPLE AMENUVEVE (JOY AND GRACE), 2021-22

Serpentine to present Atta Kwami's last mural at its North Gallery Garden, expanding its public art programme

The new work will be followed by the publication of the first monograph on the artist in 2023

Serpentine North Garden

The Magazine Terrace

6 September 2022 – 3 September 2023

Press View, Tuesday 6 September 2022, 9.30am to 12pm



Atta Kwami, *Dzidzokple amenuveve (Joy and Grace)*, 2021, Acrylic on canvas. Courtesy Estate of Atta Kwami. Photo: Sumiko Eadon.

This September, Serpentine will unveil the last mural commission from the late painter, printmaker, independent art historian and curator, Atta Kwami (1956 – 2021). The mural originates from a painting that Kwami was reworking in his studio in 2021 shortly before his death, making this the final, landmark public work of his pioneering oeuvre. The commission results from Kwami winning the 2021 Maria Lassnig Prize.

Dzidzɔ kple amenuveve (Joy and Grace), 2021-22, embodies Kwami's vibrant palette and abstract painting style. It characteristically plays with the colour and form improvisations that are distinctive of Ghanaian architecture and African strip-woven textiles, especially kente, made famous by the Ewe and Asante people of Ghana. Kwami was known for painting kiosks and archway sculptures that were conceived as expanded three-dimensional paintings within different landscapes. The mural dynamically connects with the surrounding garden designed by Arabella Lennox-Boyd by quoting the blues of the sky, the pinks, greens and browns from the foliage and simultaneously contrasts with its natural forms. It is a visionary response to the garden and it resonates with the planted landscape, each season and the wider environment of the park over the course of a year.

The work is painted on wood, the surface Kwami used for outdoor constructions, by the artist's widow Pamela Clarkson, who shared a studio with him for over 30 years, and his friend, designer, Andy Philpott who collaborated on Kwami's constructions in Amsterdam, Folkestone and Loughborough.

While in recent years public art at Serpentine has included recent projects by artists in the wider Park, including Sophia Al-Maria, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster and Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg, and collaborating with Christo on a floating sculpture on the Serpentine lake, the wall at Serpentine North Garden has been the site for artist projects by Jakob Kudsk Steensen and Pascale Marthine Tayou.

The mural will be accompanied by a major new book published in 2023 exploring Kwami's prolific career, his impact on art history and his lasting legacy. The publication will be designed by Mark El-khatib and will feature the artist's final interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist alongside new texts by Sir David Adjaye OBE, Clémentine Deliss, Ama Dogbe, Lisa Milroy and John Picton, amongst others and will be edited by Serpentine curator, Melissa Blanchflower. Serpentine worked closely with Kwami on the planning for this publication, including the selection of authors, its designer, and cover.

Atta Kwami, shortly before his passing, said of the project: “I’m delighted to receive this prestigious art prize from the Maria Lassnig Art Foundation and Serpentine. I never expected it. When somebody told me that I paint with my body, just like a violinist playing with their whole heart, body and soul, expressing themselves, I never believed it. But the expressions and emotions that I come up with are like Maria Lassnig, also painting with her body. In jazz there’s the body and soul balance that Charlie ‘Bird’ Parker and all these great Jazz musicians have, and I love Jazz music abstraction which is an influence along with the architecture of northern Ghana, textiles traditions of west Africa, Ghanaian kente and abstraction which I incorporate in my work. For many years now, I have been working without global acclaim, but I have made many things: two films, sculptures, architectonic constructions, paintings, prints, lithographs and I respond to Lassnig’s work very well. So, it’s an honour and thank you very much Serpentine for playing a part in this with the Maria Lassnig Foundation. I am happy to associate myself with you in this endeavour. Thank you.”

Bettina Korek, CEO, and Hans Ulrich Obrist, Artistic Director, Serpentine say: “Atta Kwami was a truly incredible artist and it is a privilege to bring into fruition his final mural and accompanying publication later next year, having worked closely with him on these before his death. We are also so pleased to be collaborating with the Maria Lassnig Foundation as their partner institution. This is an opportunity to celebrate the close friendship we had with Maria Lassnig, and to remember her landmark exhibition at Serpentine in 2008, her first in the UK”.

Melissa Blanchflower, Curator Exhibitions and Public Art, Serpentine says: “It is an honour to have worked with Atta on making the plans for this mural and forthcoming book and to realise this with artist Pamela Clarkson and Andy Philpott with support from a community of Atta’s friends, academics and artists who have been championing his work for decades. As part of the Maria Lassnig Prize 2021 jury, we recognised how his dynamic abstract paintings – often as part of sculptures, responded to and rifted with different landscapes. We are thankful to both designer Arabella Boyd and The Magazine for welcoming this mural to Serpentine North Garden.”

Peter Pakesch, Chairman of the Board of the Maria Lassnig Foundation, says: “The aim of the Maria Lassnig Prize is to honour an important artistic position that should be seen in a broader context. It is always exciting to meet the jury and take an amazing tour d’horizon through oeuvres that have not yet been celebrated in major museums and the mainstream artworld. After many presentations and discussions, the big question for the jury arises: which artist should have the opportunity to share their work with new audiences and would benefit from the challenge of a new commission at this stage of their career? On this occasion, painting, a medium close to Maria Lassnig, took centre stage. Atta Kwami was a highly prolific artist, whose core practice lies in

expanded notions of painting. In a unique way his work is both based in the visual world of Ghana and in reflections on modernism and its universality.”

About Atta Kwami

Atta Kwami (1956 – 2021) was a painter, printmaker, independent art historian and curator, he was trained and taught at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana and the UK. He lived between Kumasi and Loughborough, keeping a studio in both countries.

Kwami is known for making paintings, prints, artist books and kiosk-sculptures that are conceived as expanded three-dimensional paintings within different landscapes, incorporating his signature use of colour and abstract painting style. His works play with the form and colour improvisations that are distinctive of Ghanaian architecture and African strip-woven textiles, especially Ewe and Asante kente and connects to his love of music.

He remains hugely influential as a scholar and teacher and he wrote a seminal publication on contemporary Ghanaian art titled *Kumasi Realism, 1951 – 2007: An African Modernism*, published by Hurst & Company, 2013. He was a Visiting Fellow at the Cambridge/Africa Collaborative Research Programme, Art and Museums in Africa (2012/2013). He was selected for the Folkestone Triennial 2020 (postponed to 2021) and the new sculptures he made for this are now on long-loan at Loughborough University, the town where he lived.

He received many awards including the Wolfson Fellowship, Cambridge; Howard Kestenbaum/Vijay Paramsothy International Fellowship, Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Maine, USA; Janet L. Stanley Travel Award: Fifteenth Triennial Symposium on African Art, University of California, Los Angeles; Artist in Residence, University of Michigan, Graduate School of Art & Design; Philip L. Ravenhill Fellowship, (UCLA); Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of African Art, Washington, DC and 1st Thoyer Distinguished Visiting Scholar, New York University, New York.

About Pamela Clarkson

Pamela Clarkson is a painter and printmaker. She trained at the Central School of Art and the Royal College of Art, London, and the Escuela de Bellas Artes, Santiago, Chile. In 1991 Clarkson travelled to Ghana to work at the University in Kumasi (KUNST) where she met Atta Kwami. They lived in Kumasi until 2009; subsequently they based themselves in the UK, travelling between the two countries.

About Andy Philpott

Andy Philpott trained as a ceramicist in Loughborough University. He works as a designer.

About Public Art at Serpentine

Public art at Serpentine presents an opportunity for visitors to the park and onsite programmes to encounter art outside the gallery walls. It focuses on Serpentine's immediate environment as a space for artists to engage with the natural landscape of Kensington Gardens. Public art and the activation of outdoor spaces and the lawn surrounding the gallery has been part of the Serpentine's activity since it was founded in 1970 – from exhibitions such as *Inside Out* (1996-7), a collection of Eduardo Paolozzi's sculptures (1987), and the permanent Ian Hamilton Finley stone circle and benches to Fischli/Weiss's *Rock On Top Of Another Rock* (2012). In 2010, Serpentine initiated the first exhibition of sculpture in Kensington Gardens in 35 years, Anish Kapoor *Turning the World Upside Down*, in collaboration with The Royal Parks, featuring four works including Kapoor's iconic sky mirrors. In 2018 Serpentine presented a survey exhibition by Christo and Jeanne-Claude, which was planned alongside *The London Mastaba* the artist's first major outdoor public work in the UK comprising 7,506 horizontally stacked, colourful barrels on a floating platform in the Serpentine Lake. In 2019 Sophia Al-Maria was selected for the Serpentine x Modern Forms Sculpture Commission, which opened in 2021.

The wall in the Garden at Serpentine North first featured an image by architect Zaha Hadid to mark the opening of the gallery and restaurant she designed in 2013. To accompany his 2015 exhibition, artist Pascale Marthine Tayou made an installation of colourful eggs across the wall. In 2020 Jakob Kudsk Steensen was invited to expand his Arts Technologies and public art collaboration with Serpentine as part of the global programme Connect BTS initiated by K-Pop band BTS, presenting *Catharsis* on a screen which could be also watched in real time online. In recent years, the public art programme has emerged as a central strand of Serpentine's work with artists who are constantly expanding the possibilities of what public art could be today.

About the Maria Lassnig Prize

Kwami was awarded the 2021 Maria Lassnig Prize, a major grant of 50,000 euros and a partnership with Serpentine, selected by a jury comprising Melissa Blanchflower, Curator Exhibitions and Public Art, Serpentine, Rebecca Lewin, Curator, Exhibitions and Design, Serpentine, Matthias Mühling, Director of Lenbachhaus, Munich and Member of the Board of the Maria Lassnig Foundation, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Artistic Director of the Serpentine, and Member of the Advisory Board of the Maria Lassnig Foundation, Albert Oehlen, Artist and Peter Pakesch, Chairman of the Board of the Maria Lassnig Foundation.

The Maria Lassnig Prize is awarded biennially to a mid-career artist in association with an international institutional partner. Atta Kwami is the third artist to be granted the Maria Lassnig

Prize, following Cathy Wilkes, in partnership with MoMA PS1, New York (2017), and Sheela Gowda, in partnership with Lenbachhaus, Munich (2019).

The Magazine Restaurant, Serpentine North

Set in the Zaha Hadid extension of Serpentine North, The Magazine offers a contemporary menu that puts sustainability and seasonality at the heart of the kitchen, ensuring maximum taste and minimum waste.

Working alongside Cooking Sections' CLIMAVORE project, food is utilised to follow the new seasonalities resulting from the climate emergency. CLIMAVORE proposes an adaptive, regenerative form of eating.

Dishes for Summer 2022 include Tomatoes on toast, YQ sourdough, heritage tomatoes, hemp seed pesto, micro chives; and Chickpea tabbouleh, summer squash, British chickpea, tomato, shallot, parsley, mint, fava bean umami paste.

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