

Ayo Akingbade

Show Me The World Mister

18 November 2023 – 14 April 2024

Ayo Akingbade's films tell stories about people and places and their relationship to power, history, legacy and labour. *Show Me The World Mister* is a major new commission that includes two new films shot on location in Nigeria, *The Fist* and *Faluyi*, displayed within an aluminium, steel and polycarbonate installation. Known for her work considering place, architecture and the physical environment and exploring gentrification in London, Akingbade's new commission puts Nigeria at its centre.

The title of the exhibition *Show Me The World Mister* suggests power, spectacle, travel, humour and possibility, while who holds that power remains ambiguous. According to Akingbade, in the context of the exhibition, 'the world' referred to in the title is 'very much Nigeria'.

The Fist, shot on 35mm film, is a portrait of the first Guinness brewery built outside Ireland and the UK, 12 miles from the centre of Lagos. A modernist style factory, it was completed in 1962, after Nigeria's independence from Britain. The film follows the rhythm of a working day, the comings and goings of workers and the activity on the assembly and packing lines. *The Fist* highlights the interwoven histories of industrialization and labour and the deep-rooted politics of Guinness production in Nigeria.

In 2019, Akingbade's visit to Nigeria inspired *The Fist*. While driving through the industrial parts of Lagos, she spotted a Guinness sign lit-up against the night sky. Intrigued, she wanted to understand the relationship between the Guinness drink and the workers at the Guinness factory. During her research, Akingbade discovered that Guinness had been exporting to Europe since the 19th century, with its original distribution network based on established colonial shipping routes around West Africa. By the time the plant was built, Guinness Extra Foreign Stout was cherished in Nigeria as its own.

The film takes its title from the powerful gesture of making a fist and from the

actions made by workers during the manufacturing process. It is also the title of a 1986 Derek Walcott poem about love, which captures something of the energy of the workers in the factory who were happy to be filmed.

The Fist starts with the worker's arrival; they sign in, wash their hands, pray and have a briefing before work starts. Whilst these are not personal or private moments, the film creates a feeling of quiet intimacy with the congregation of workers as they go about their day-to-day.

Time is central to the film, which captures the precision movement, flow and meditative qualities of the worker's tasks. The rhythms of the day are registered in the textures of the film from the light changing to earthy purple blue hues as the sun rises, the heat and steam coming off the machinery, to smashed bottles being swept away. The atmosphere of the vast interior is explored through overlaid sound. In common with some of Akingbade's influences – from Jacques Rivette, Agnès Varda, Chantal Akerman, Djibril Diop Mambéty to Ousmane Sembène – the film is restrained, but vast, capturing a worldview from a singular point of view.

The Fist and the second film *Faluyi* are shown on either side of the gallery divided by a structure made of aluminium, steel and polycarbonate that resembles the infrastructure of the Guinness factory itself. Light and shadows move through its translucent surfaces creating reflections and distortions. On one side of the structure, the enclosed factory, industry and labour, and on the other the expansive landscape, grief and legacy.

The second film, *Faluyi*, considers the artist's own relationship with Nigeria. It follows the character Ife as she begins a journey after her father's death, tracing her family's legacy in their ancestral land. The film was shot on 16mm film around the birthplace of the artist's parents in the Idanre Hills, a UNESCO World Heritage site in Ondo State. Panoramic views of bouldering hills surrounded by thick groves form the backdrop to a tale of loss and longing, that turns to hope and celebration.

The film's title, *Faluyi*, connects to the artist's own personal history. It is her family name that was changed to Akingbade, most likely due to colonialism

and Christianity. The film's setting also has personal connections for the artist. On her journey to attend a burial in Idoani, in Ondo state, Akingbade was fascinated by the black bouldering mountains, which she thought look almost fake. The narrative of the film is set within these ever-present, enveloping and protective Idanre hills, which lend the film its rich colour of saturated reds, browns, and greens. She describes it as an 'alluring landscape, which makes you feel slightly out of place, it's both peculiar and beautiful at the same time.'

A coming-of-age tale, *Faluyi* takes a similar approach to Akingbade's 2018 film *A for Artist* to exploring the space for hope and rebirth in the face of grief. In *Faluyi*, the character Ife experiences a spiritual journey from hearing the news of her father's death to the film's climax.

The light and atmosphere in the gallery echo the themes of the film. It captures the Harmattan season in West Africa, which runs from the end of November to mid-March, when a dusty wind blows in from the Sahara and signals a time of change. The playwright, novelist, and poet Wole Soyinka described it as something nostalgic, familiar, something that has the power to dissolve the past – a time of momentous change.

List of works

The Fist 2022

35mm film transferred to digital, with 3.1 surround sound

24 minutes

Faluyi 2022

16mm film transferred to digital, with 3.1 surround sound

14 minutes

Credits

Show Me The World Mister is co-produced by Chisenhale Gallery, London, and Spike Island, Bristol, and commissioned by Chisenhale Gallery; Spike Island; the Whitworth, The University of Manchester; Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead; and John Hansard Gallery, Southampton.

The commission and its acquisition by the Whitworth, The University of Manchester collection, are made possible with Art Fund support. With additional support from the Chisenhale Gallery.

Ayo Akingbade's first artist publication, co-published by Book Works and Chisenhale Gallery, with support from John Hansard Gallery and Ms. Ebele Okobi is available from Baltic Shop.