

Making & Unmaking

Camden Arts Centre, London 19 June – 18 September

Among the 70 artists whose works are included in fashion designer Duro Olowu's *Making & Unmaking* is Anni Albers. In 1938 the pioneering Bauhaus artist published a text titled 'Work with Material', in which she wrote: 'Life today is very bewildering. We have no picture of it which is all-inclusive... We have to make a choice between concepts of great diversity. And as a common ground is wanting, we are baffled by them.' Almost 80 years later, those words and the anxieties they describe ring startlingly true in Britain's current political climate, as does the premise of Olowu's exhibition, which, through the diversity of its inclusions, both examines and celebrates individuation and difference with an all-embracing self-assurance.

Bringing together artists who have a multifaceted and rich affiliation to fabric and textiles, the exhibition includes works that originate from around the world and over a period of time that spans from the nineteenth to twenty-first centuries. While, for Olowu, the exhibition's title refers to the physical processes involved in artmaking – described as 'the personal ritual of the artist' – its repetitive back and forth could also evoke the mechanical operation of a weaving loom, as well as the continual evolution of identity that clothing and fashion can facilitate.

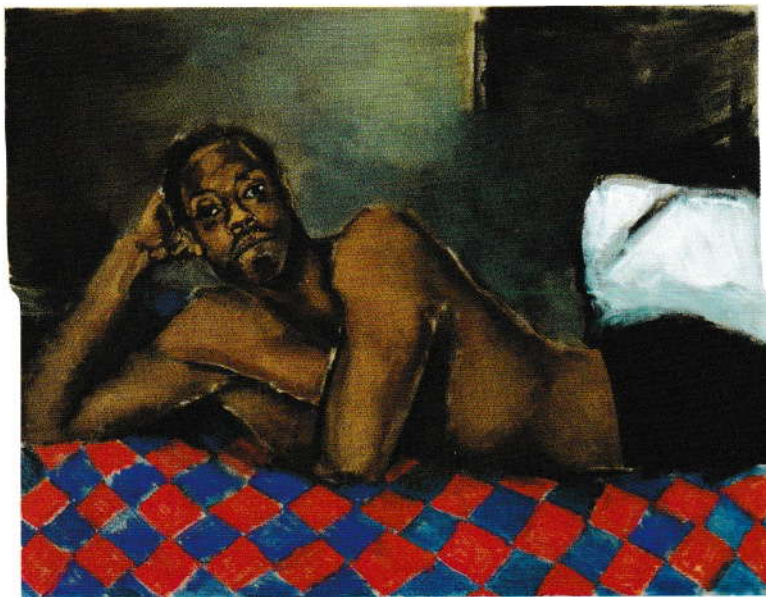
Executed in myriad media (textiles, painting, sculpture, photography, ceramics, jewellery), the works are arranged in a number

of sometimes surprising but consistently compelling groupings, addressing subjects such as cultural identity, sexuality and the representation of the body. The rhythmic repetition in the work by the aforementioned Albers, whose revolutionary practice repurposed textiles as an abstract artform, is both complemented and countered by artists working in the wake of her legacy today – for instance, Brent Wadden, whose wavelike tapestry *DREAMIN' (diptych)* (2016) sits strikingly above Polly Apfelbaum's *Compulsory Figures* (1996), an expanse of floor-based pairs of coloured velvet sheets whose two-dimensional simplicity belies the poollike depth they appear to possess and offsets the intricacy of the above weaves.

Ideas of camouflage and masquerade are also in abundance. Lorna Simpson's recent, acerbic collages – which combine photographs of African-American women taken from *Ebony* magazine with documentary images of (mainly Westernised) world history, ruthlessly examining the impact of culture and memory upon multiracial identity – feel more dangerous beside Dorothea Tanning's nightmarish painting *Glad Nude with Paws* (1978), or the photographs of Surrealist (and Second World War resistance-fighter) Claude Cahun. Cahun produced a series of self-portraits examining the performance of gender by the body, its clothing and its context, and famously declared

'under this mask, another mask. I will never be finished removing all these faces.' Elsewhere, a selection of Neil Kenlock's photographic portraits of the domestic life of African-Caribbean communities during the 1960s and 70s are accompanied, disconcertingly, by a 1949 drawing of some furred abstracted limbs by Louise Bourgeois, a pair of Chris Ofili's *Afro-Muses* (2005–6) and a beautifully ascetic portrait by Meredith Frampton. A number of Lynette Yiadom-Boakye's reclining males nonchalantly join this unexpected selection, hung, salon-style, over a series of densely patterned wallpapers.

Olowu's exhibition unpicks the function and position, within numerous socioeconomic circumstances, that clothing and textiles have had on the construction of history and identity (be that individual, national or international). The diversity and inclusivity of his choices engenders a powerful and eclectic collage with exuberant abundance. The exhibition invites a complicated but joyous journey of encounters, creating exchanges between the national and the international and between the past and the present. By emphasising connections across borders and histories, with equal reverence for artists regardless of their nationality, gender or sexuality, the exhibition feels, in times such as these, like a hopeful and redemptive step forward. *Laura Smith*



Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, *Tie The Temptress To The Trojan*, 2016, oil on linen, 120 × 160 × 4 cm.
Courtesy Corvi-Mora, London, and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York