

*Gatekeepers of Heritage*  
by Kojo Marfo

4 May – 4 June 2022  
507 West 27th Street, New York



Kojo Marfo, *Keeper #1*, 2022, acrylic on canvas, 73 3/8 x 63 1/8 in, 186.5 x 160.2 cm

JD Malat Gallery is proud to announce the solo exhibition *Gatekeepers of Heritage* by London-based Ghanaian artist Kojo Marfo. The show presents a vibrant new body of paintings, marking his return to the dynamic art scene in New York.

Born in Ghana, Marfo developed his interest in art and visual culture through the traditional Akan artifacts, sculptures and carvings that he was exposed to as a child. The distinctive figures in his paintings are inspired by the forms of Akan fertility dolls as well as other African carvings. The country's flowers, textiles and colours, he says, flood his memory on a daily basis. The new works in *Gatekeepers of Heritage* unveil Marfo's rich observations on his background and the different cultures he has encountered.

As a teenager in the 1990s, Marfo moved to Brooklyn, New York, where he studied and began his artistic career. *Gatekeepers of Heritage* acts as a mirror of his experiences from these years; the stylistic elements of Akan art are paired with his experiences in the West. Jumping between jobs and trying to find his place, Marfo dabbled in art and started spending time with members of a graffiti crew. In the 90s, the city of New York was vibrant and flourishing with new artistic

waves, giving Marfo the opportunity to spend time with people from a variety of different social circles. These social circles were rich with diverse cultural backgrounds which has ultimately inspired him to share their stories in his art. His aunt gave him 'the push' to move to London with other relatives in 1999 after she found an empty can of spray paint rolling in his room.

Ever since, London has been his home. Hungry for more experiences and ready to challenge the West and expand his artistic practice, Marfo indulged in the multiculturalism of the city, which made him more conscious of his own. "I want people to see my work as a reflection of my Akan culture and my struggles living in the West" he says. As a consequence, he developed a unique style that is drawing a great deal of attention across the globe.

*Gatekeepers of Heritage* gives us an insight into Marfo's imagination and his understanding of society and human nature. With block colours, strong shapes, and the archaic gazes of his figures, Marfo gives the viewers his vibrant interpretation of the diverse narratives of different people he has encountered throughout his life.

The large-scale figurative paintings that depict single figures, families, animals and social gatherings, are inspired by the diverse social map of New York and London. Stripping his figures of traditional body identifiers, Marfo builds a bridge between his colourful depictions and the reality of struggling to live in the West as a Ghanaian artist. For Marfo, art is not simply a creative outlet, it acts as a vehicle to inspire connection between different societies. He says that his work aims to highlight social issues, such as inequalities, religion, politics, and spiritualism.

After captivating a global audience with his first solo presentation 'Dreaming of Identity' in London, Marfo has become internationally recognised for his unique style. Last year, JD Malat Gallery and Marfo embarked on a journey filled with creative projects and collaborations. Beginning with a very successful collaboration with Aspinal of London, JD Malat Gallery released limited edition silk scarves with designs inspired by Marfo's work. The immediate participation at UNTITLED Miami in 2021 with a solo booth show was another successful endeavour, followed by a strong start of 2022 with the collaboration with public art platform W1 Curates London. The project resulted in a monumental display of Marfo's iconic paintings, presented on 8K LED screens across the façade of Flannels' flagship store on Oxford Street, London.

Jean-David Malat, founder of JD Malat Gallery, was thrilled when he discovered the work of Kojo Marfo – one of twenty-five artists in the gallery's mid-pandemic 2020 open-call exhibition *Isolation Mastered*: "When I saw Marfo's works, I saw raw beauty, especially in those colourful surreal portraits; it was as if a whole new vision of society was born, Kojo's work is all about diversity and inclusivity. I felt like I was facing the future of contemporary African art."

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