

A PASSION TO A PRINCIPLE

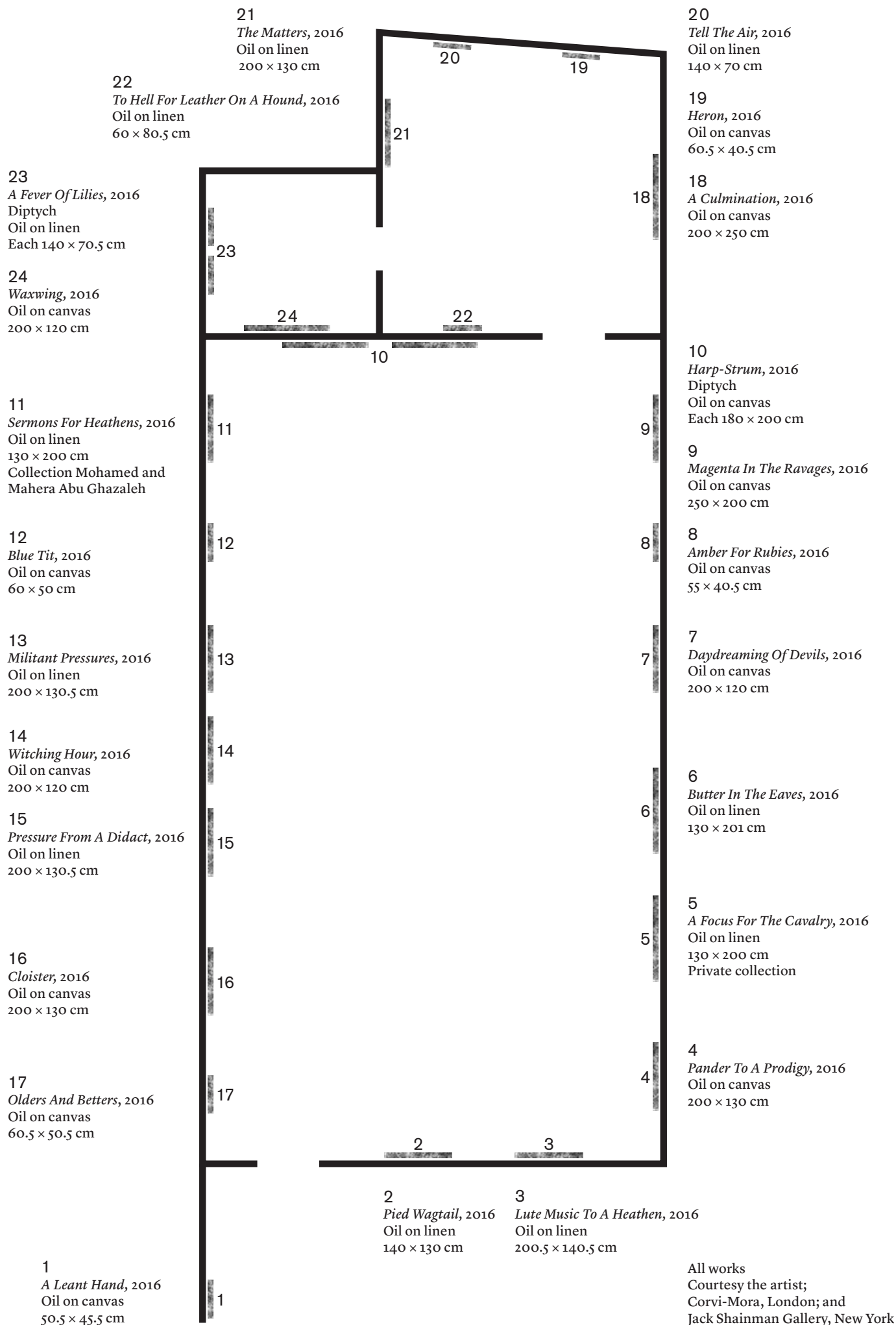
LYNETTE YIADOM-BOAKYE

18.11.2016 — 12.2.2017

KUNSTHALLE BASEL

EN The exhibition is filled with figures that gaze directly, almost defiantly, at you. Others stand with arms akimbo, averting their eyes, or look pensive as they lounge in the soft embrace of a couch or hammock. Still others hold extravagant birds (an owl in one, a peacock in another) as if the acts were as usual as holding the daily newspaper, or they tense their arms and legs with the poise of a well-trained dancer. They are all beautiful without being model-like, serious without seeming stern, and well dressed without appearing to have tried too hard. There are rarely any identifiers of an exact time or place in which they stand or lie or lean or sit. There is no context for them, you could say, except their very selves. And in those selves there is nonchalance, refinement, calm intelligence. Also intensity, human depth, and a justness (someone wearing those threads would lie back and gaze at you *just like that*) that makes them seem familiar. And what you suspect you don't already "know" about them, you try to conjure up. You almost cannot look at Lynette Yiadom-Boakye's paintings and not wonder about the people pictured in them—what they do, whom they love, how they think, what they desire. And yet the show is not an exhibition of portraits per se.

A Passion To A Principle contains nothing but figurative images, yet none portray an actual person, either historical or contemporary. And this is important. In Yiadom-Boakye's hands, color is structural and brushwork comes in vivid rushes—a reflection on painting as a medium drives her work, but fiction is its other propelling force. She builds her cast of figures from the haze of memory and a collage of sources, borrowing a sweater from a shop window and a pose from a nudist magazine. And through paint she *writes* her characters, as a novelist might. The quality of that "writing" keeps them from appearing as stereotypes or one-dimensional fantasies. Thus it is perhaps not surprising that in addition to being a painter, the artist—born in London and of Ghanaian descent—is also a poet and a writer, even if her favored mode for materializing her depictions is art history's most traditional of mediums.



Yiadam-Boakye studied painting at that bastion of the medium, the Royal Academy of Arts in London. But her real education came in museums, where Edgar Degas, Édouard Manet, Walter Sickert, and others were her teachers. She learned any number of techniques from them, she says, including lessons about the layering of color and economy of means (why use four brushstrokes when one will do?). It was with them, too, that she learned to find her own style, indebted to the past but operating wholly on her own.

Her paintings are in equal measures dark and luminous, painted with palpable brushstrokes that give her figures vivid presence, even when they stand in inky darkness, and even when the painter has left areas deliberately unresolved. There is something unabashedly classical about them, borrowing from traditional portrait compositions (the three-quarter bust, the head shot, the grouping of figures), but she also deliberately deploys modernist cropping (the tips of a dancer's fingers in *Tell The Air*, the edge of a foot in *A Focus For The Cavalry*).

Here and there patches of bare canvas show through, and Yiadam-Boakye's mark-making is sometimes so loose, so willfully imperfect, that her paintings act as an apt pendant to the utter humanity of her (nevertheless unreal) figures—for what is human if not the fact of being flawed? Her titles, full of casual but enigmatic poetry (*Daydreaming Of Devils*, *Sermons For Heathens*, *To Hell For Leather On A Hound*) suggest as much: they allude to temptation, damnation, defiance. Even when they point in another direction, as in *A Culmination* or *Militant Pressures*, they still act as a layer, like an underpainting of deep vermillion that seeps through everything on top of it and subtly but inevitably imbues the whole with a mood or tone.

Yiadam-Boakye originally considered becoming an optician. But science was a problem, she admits, so she became instead another kind of observer of visual perception. And although her figures sit in a no-man's-land of place and time, few

figurative painters diagnose their present as percussively as she does. *A Passion To A Principle*, Yiadam-Boakye's first institutional solo exhibition in Switzerland, comprised of all newly painted works, uses one of art history's oldest and most venerated genres to make portraits in another sense, ones in which the true subject is both the medium of painting as such, and our own selves—right here and right now—as beings in the world.

This happens—paradoxically, powerfully—through her particular deployment of fiction. Speaking about the writing of James Baldwin, a critic once asked, “How do people come to know themselves? One way is by reading fiction. The profound act of empathy demanded by a novel, forcing the reader to suspend disbelief and embody a stranger's skin, prompts reflection and self-questioning.” This is what Yiadam-Boakye asks of us.

And what better moment to be so prompted? Her paintings make clear: our museums and our histories of art, like power structures of all sorts, are full of representations of and by white people. Depictions of black people by black artists are astoundingly few. Hers, then, is a social portraiture, picturing a whole segment of the population—a reality—that remains still so little accounted for in either art history or politics. Yiadam-Boakye's insertions of (fictive) black figures into the canon, into discourse, into our exhibition spaces, are quietly subversive, not combatively arguing for anything, but simply rendering black lives visible—literally giving them matter and thus showing *that* they matter—always with quiet grace. She could have presented them otherwise, the burden of their history weighing on their shoulders. But, as she has explained, “They are recognizably human, but they are not real. They do not share our anxieties or woes. Nor do they need to be celebratory. In the painting is where they exist, and that makes them omnipotent. Painting gives them power.”

Lynette Yiadam-Boakye was born 1977 in London; she lives and works in London.

In loving memory of Mr. Ibrahim Yiadom-Boakye.

Thanks to
Tommaso Corvi-Mora, Beate Engel,
Tamsen Green, Peter Handschin, Pernilla Holmes,
Sonja Junkers, Laurene Marcheal, Angus McCrum,
Lorenzo Montagnani, Suhair Nino, Jack Shainman,
Jackson Tang, Charity Yiadom-Boakye,
and all the lenders

GUIDED TOURS THROUGH THE EXHIBITION

Every Sunday at 3 pm guided tour, in German
27.11.2016, Sunday, 3 pm
curator's tour, in English and French
5.1.2017, Thursday, 6:30 pm
guided tour, in English

EDUCATION / PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Lynette Yiadom-Boakye in conversation
with Josef Helfenstein
19.11.2016, Saturday, 3 pm
Public conversation between the painter
Lynette Yiadom-Boakye and
Kunstmuseum Basel Director
Josef Helfenstein, moderated by
Elena Filipovic, in English

Children's tour *I Spy with My Little Eye!*
27.11.2016, Sunday, 3 pm
12.2.2017, Sunday, 3 pm
A tour and workshop for children,
from 5—10 yrs., in German,
by reservation only:
kunstvermittlung@kunsthallebasel.ch

Writer's workshop with Simone Lappert
13.12.2016, Tuesday, 1—5 pm
Workshop with writer Simone Lappert
for young people 14—20 years in cooperation
with Lyrix – Deutscher Bundeswettbewerb
für junge Lyrik, by reservation only:
kunstvermittlung@kunsthallebasel.ch

Basel Museums Night
20.1.2017, Friday, 6 pm—2 am
Featuring shadow play in all colors for
children and adults;
Who are you? A quiz about the
history of portraits; and
Trinken nach Farben, colorfully mixed drinks
by the artist Sebastian Mundwiler.
Poetic tours through the exhibition
with writer Simone Lappert take place
at 7:30 pm, 8:30 pm, and 9:30 pm

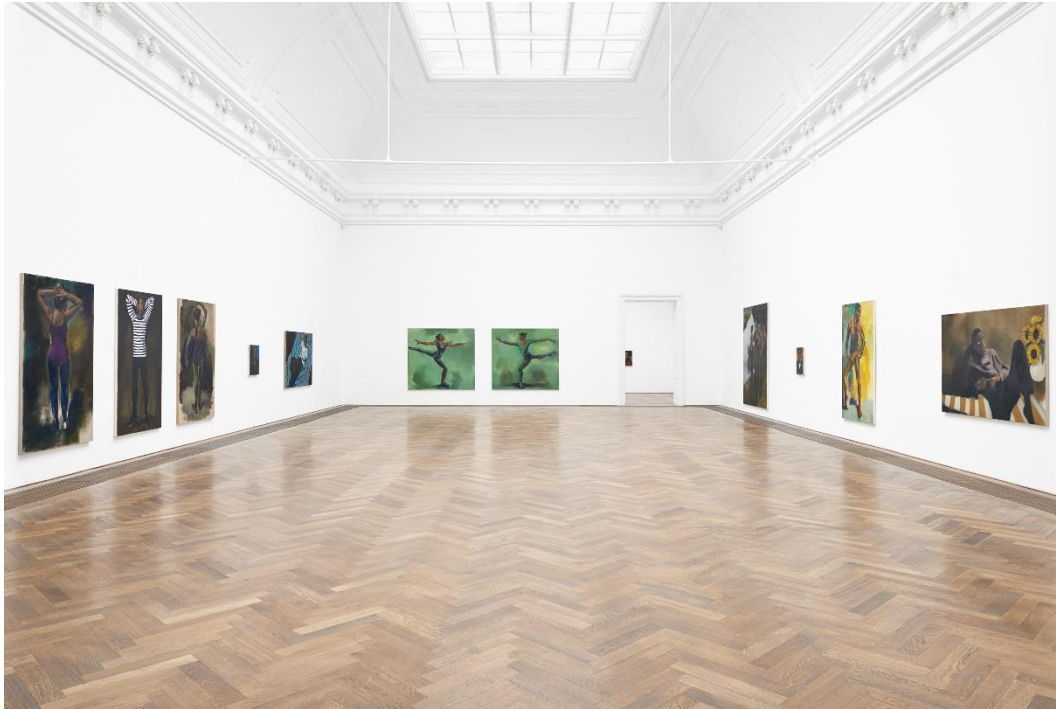
In the Kunsthalle Basel library you will find an
associative selection of publications related to
Lynette Yiadom-Boakye and her artistic practice.

More information at kunsthallebasel.ch

The exhibition is generously supported by
Peter Handschin and Jackson Tang, with additional
support from the Stanley Thomas Johnson Foundation.

Kunsthalle Basel
Lynette Yiadom-Boakye
A Passion To A Principle
18.11.2016–12.2.2017

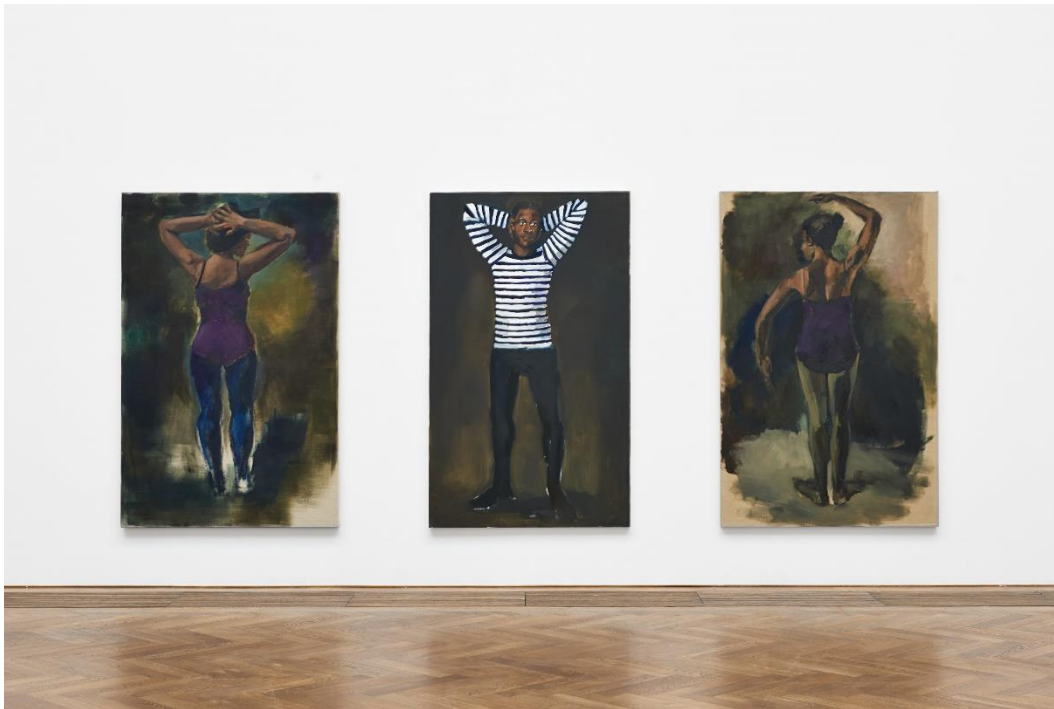
Pressebilder / Press Images



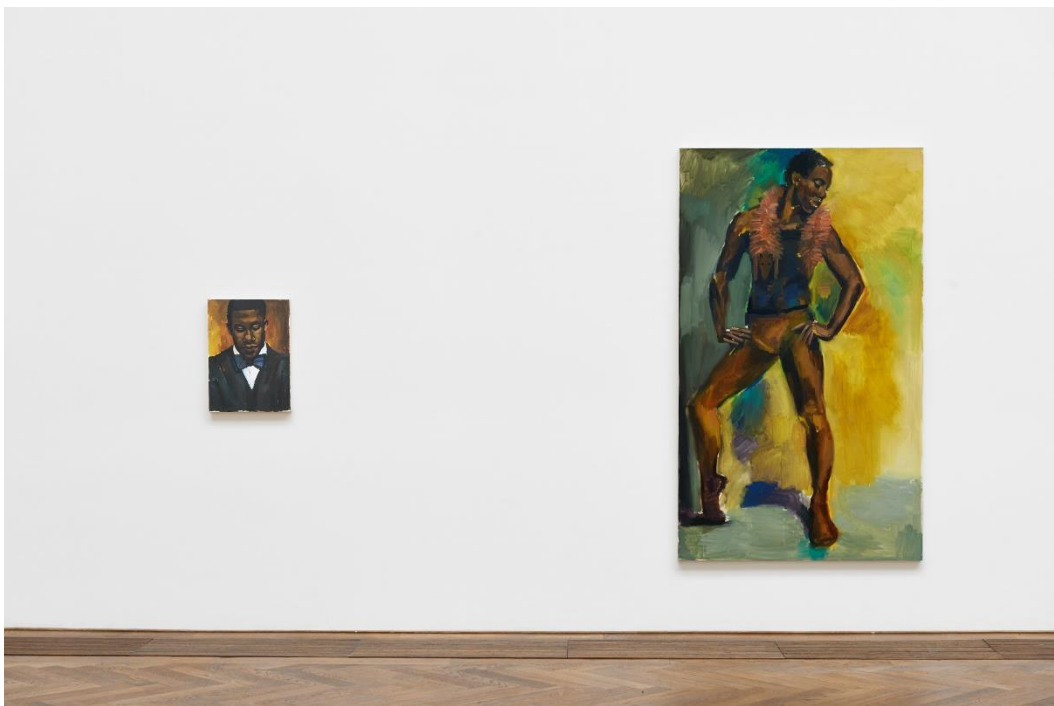
Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Installationsansicht *A Passion To A Principle*, Kunsthalle Basel, 2016. Foto: Philipp Hänger / Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Installation view *A Passion To A Principle*, Kunsthalle Basel, 2016. Photo: Philipp Hänger



Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Kunsthalle Basel, 2016. Foto/Photo: Philipp Hänger



Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Installationsansicht *A Passion To A Principle*, Kunsthalle Basel, 2016, Blick auf (v.l.n.r.) *Pressure From A Didact*, *Witching Hour*, *Militant Pressures* (alle 2016). Foto: Philipp Hänger / Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Installation view *A Passion To A Principle*, Kunsthalle Basel, 2016, view on (f.l.t.r.) *Pressure From A Didact*, *Witching Hour*, *Militant Pressures* (all 2016). Photo: Philipp Hänger



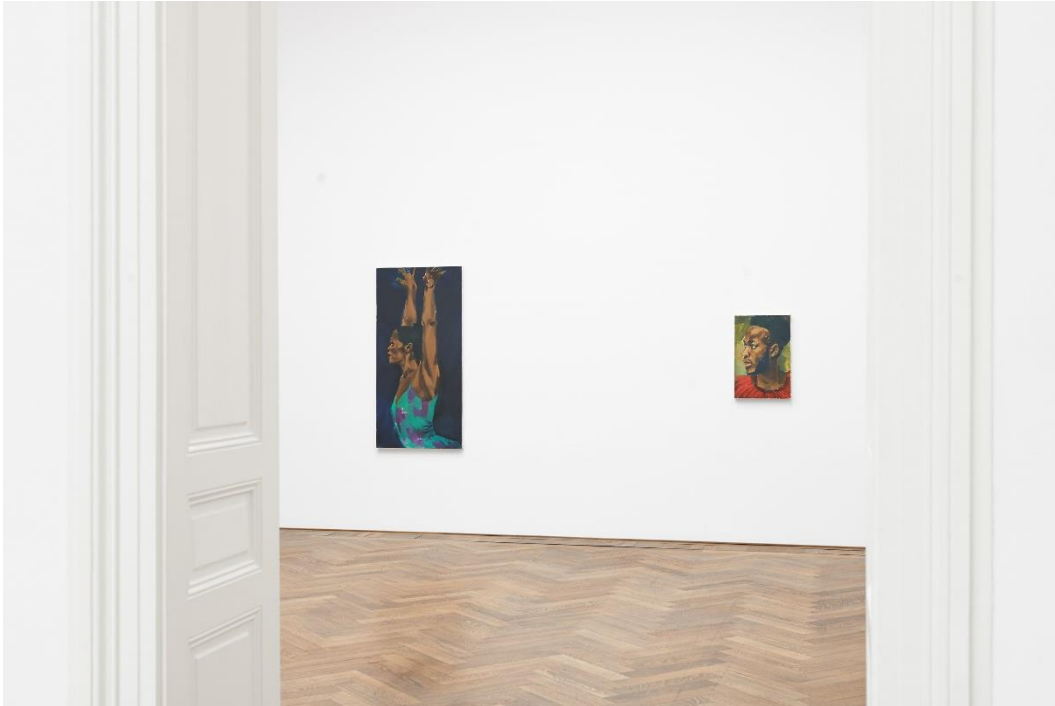
Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Installationsansicht *A Passion To A Principle*, Kunsthalle Basel, 2016, Blick auf (v.l.n.r.) *Amber For Rubies*, 2016, und *Daydreaming Of Devils*, 2016. Foto: Philipp Hänger / Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Installation view *A Passion To A Principle*, Kunsthalle Basel, 2016, view on (f.l.t.r.) *Amber For Rubies*, 2016, and *Daydreaming Of Devils*, 2016. Photo: Philipp Hänger



Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Installationsansicht *A Passion To A Principle*, Kunsthalle Basel, 2016, Blick auf *Harp-Strum*, 2016. Foto: Philipp Hänger / Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Installation view *A Passion To A Principle*, Kunsthalle Basel, 2016, view on *Harp-Strum*, 2016. Photo: Philipp Hänger



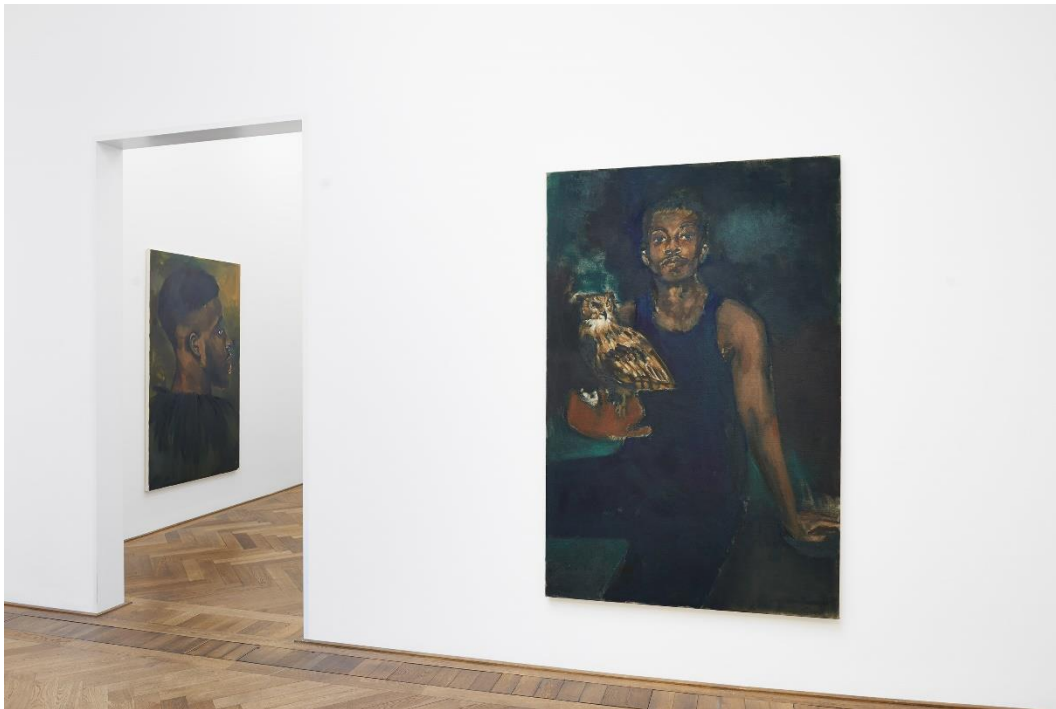
Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Installationsansicht *A Passion To A Principle*, Kunsthalle Basel, 2016, Blick auf (v.l.n.r.) *A Culmination*, 2016, und *Magenta In The Ravages*, 2016. Foto: Philipp Hänger / Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Installation view *A Passion To A Principle*, Kunsthalle Basel, 2016, view on (f.l.t.r.) *A Culmination*, 2016, and *Magenta In The Ravages*, 2016. Photo: Philipp Hänger



Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Installationsansicht *A Passion To A Principle*, Kunsthalle Basel, 2016, Blick auf (v.l.n.r.) *Tell The Air*, 2016, und *Heron*, 2016. Foto: Philipp Hänger / Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Installation view *A Passion To A Principle*, Kunsthalle Basel, 2016, view on (f.l.t.r.) *Tell The Air*, 2016, and *Heron*, 2016. Photo: Philipp Hänger



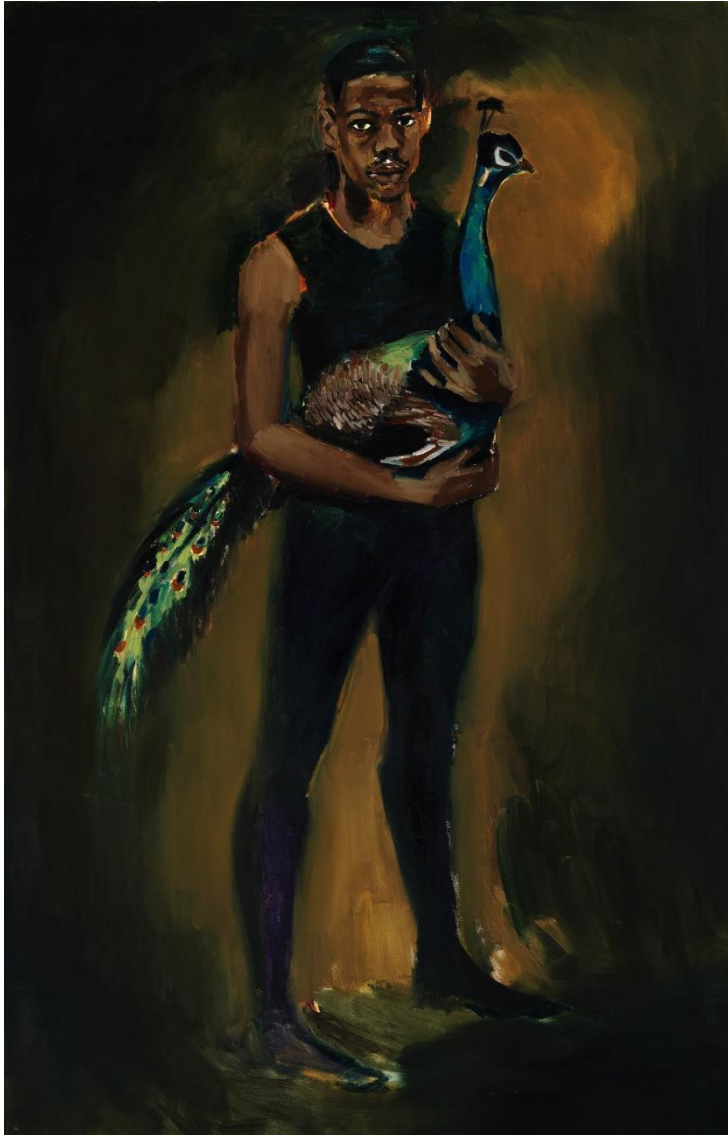
Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Installationsansicht *A Passion To A Principle*, Kunsthalle Basel, 2016, Blick auf (v.l.n.r.) *A Culmination*, 2016, und *Magenta In The Ravages*, 2016. Foto: Philipp Hänger / Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Installation view *A Passion To A Principle*, Kunsthalle Basel, 2016, view on (f.l.t.r.) *A Culmination*, 2016, and *Magenta In The Ravages*, 2016. Photo: Philipp Hänger



Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Installationsansicht *A Passion To A Principle*, Kunsthalle Basel, 2016, Blick auf (v.l.n.r.) *Waxwing*, 2016, und *The Matters*, 2016. Foto: Philipp Hänger / Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Installation view *A Passion To A Principle*, Kunsthalle Basel, 2016, view on (f.l.t.r.) *Waxwing*, 2016, and *The Matters*, 2016. Photo: Philipp Hänger



Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, *A Culmination*, 2016



Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, *Pander To A Prodigy*, 2016

Alle Werke Courtesy die Künstlerin; Corvi-Mora, London, und Jack Shainman Gallery, New York /
All works courtesy the artist; Corvi-Mora, London, and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Download-Link

www.kunsthallebasel.ch/presse/

Pressekontakt / Press Contact

Claudio Vogt, Kunsthalle Basel, Steinenberg 7, CH-4051 Basel
Tel. +41 61 206 99 11, press@kunsthallebasel.ch

Lynette Yiadom-Boakye ist 1977 in London geboren; lebt und arbeitet in London /
Lynette Yiadom-Boakye is born in 1977 in London, lives and works in London

Ausbildung / Education

2000–2003 Royal Academy Schools, London
1997–2000 Falmouth College of Art, London
1996–1997 St Martins School of Art and Design, London

Einzelausstellungen (Auswahl) / Solo presentations (selection)

2015 - *Capsule Exhibition: Lynette Yiadom-Boakye*, Haus der Kunst, München
 - *Lynette Yiadom-Boakye: Verses After Dusk*, Serpentine Gallery, London
2014 - *Lynette Yiadom-Boakye*, 32 Edgewood Gallery, Yale School of Art, New Haven (USA)
2013 - *Salt 7: Lynette Yiadom-Boakye*, Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Salt Lake City (USA)
 - *Future Generation Art Prize Exhibition*, Pinchuk Art Centre, Kiev
2012 - *Lynette Yiadom-Boakye*, Chisenhale Gallery, London
2011 - *Lynette Yiadom-Boakye: Any Number of Preoccupations*, The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (USA)

Gruppenausstellungen (Auswahl) / Group presentations (selection)

2016 - *Stranger!* Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland (USA)
 - *Taguchi Art Collection – Correlation Diagram of Happiness*, Mitsubishi-jisho ARTIUM, Fukuoka City (JP)
2015-2017 - *British Art Show 8*, A Hayward Touring exhibition, Leeds Art Gallery, Leeds (UK)
2015 - *Sharjah Biennial 12: The past, the present, and the possible*, Sharjah (UAE)
 - *Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art (GIBCA): A Story Within a Story*, Röda Sten Konsthall, Gothenburg (SE)
2014 - *In the Near Future. The Collection of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw*, Museum of Modern Art, Warschau
 - *MIRRORCITY: London artists on fiction and reality*, Hayward Gallery, London
 - *Queensize – Female Artists from the Olbricht Collection*, Me Collectors Room, Berlin
2013 - *Turner Prize 2013*, Ebrington, Derry-Londonderry (IRE)
 - *The Encyclopedic Palace*, 55th Venice Biennale, Venedig (IT)
 - *Fiction as Fiction (or, a Ninth Johannesburg Biennale)*, Stevenson Gallery, Capetown (SA)
 - *The Progress of Love*, The Menil Collection, Houston (USA)
2012 - *The Ungovernables: 2012 New Museum Triennial*, New Museum, New York (USA)
 - *Restless: Recent Acquisitions from the MAM Collection*, Miami Art Museum, Miami (USA)
2011 - *11th Lyon Biennial of Contemporary Art*, Lyon (FR)
2008 - *7th Gwangju Biennale*, Gwangju (KOR)
2006 - *2nd Seville Biennale*, Sevilla (ES)

Lieblingsautorinnen und -autoren und Bücher von Lynette Yiadom-Boakye /
Favorite Authors and Books of Lynette Yiadom-Boakye

Baldwin, James:

The Amen Corner, Erstaufführung 1955

(dt. Buchausgabe Blues für Mr. Charlie / Amen Corner, 1971)

Giovanni's Room, 1956

(dt. Giovanni Zimmer, übersetzt von Axel Kaun und Hans-Heinrich Wellmann, Rowohlt, Reinbek 1963, Neuauflage 2015))

The Fire Next Time, 1962

(dt. Hundert Jahre Freiheit ohne Gleichberechtigung, 1964)

Jimmy's Blues. Selected Poems, 1983

(dt. Jimmys Blues. Gedichte. Zweisprachig, 1984)

Just Above My Head, 1979

(dt. Zum Greifen nah, 1981)

Hughes, Ted:

Crow: From the Life and the Songs of the Crow, 1970

(dt. Krähe: Aus dem Leben und den Gesängen der Krähe. Zweisprachig.

Übersetzt und mit einem Nachwort von Elmar Schenkel.

Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1986.)

Jackson, George:

Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson, 1970

(dt. In die Herzen ein Feuer, 1972)

Ligon, Glenn:

Yourself in the World: Selected Writings and Interviews, Whitney Museum of American Art, 2011

Lorde, Audre

Neale Hurston, Zora:

Their Eyes Were Watching God, 1937

(dt. Und ihre Augen schauten Gott, Zürich 1993; aktuell unter ISBN 3-250-10205-9;

Neuübersetzung unter dem Titel: "Vor ihren Augen sahen sie Gott", Üb. Hans-Ulrich Möhring, edition fünf, Gräffelfing 2011, ISBN 978-3-942374-12-5)

O'Conner, Flannery:

Wise Blood (1952)

A Good Man Is Hard to Find and Other Stories, 1955

(dt. Ein guter Mensch ist schwer zu finden. In: Ein Kreis im Feuer, 1958, Claasen Verlag, Hamburg,

1967 im Rowohlt Verlag, Reinbek bei Hamburg)

Everything That Rises Must Converge, 1965

Wilde, Oscar:

The Picture of Dorian Gray, 1891

(dt. Das Bildnis des Dorian Gray, 1901. Neuste Ausgabe: Insel-Verlag, übersetzt von Eike Schönfeld, 2014)

Ausführliche Bibliografie / Comprehensive bibliography

www.jackshainman.com/files/9914/7827/5796/Yiadam-Boakye_Bibliography.pdf

In der Kunsthalle Basel Bibliothek finden Sie eine kleine Auswahlbibliografie zur Künstlerin /

In the Kunsthalle Basel library you find a selection of books about the artist

From the catalogue published on the occasion of the exhibition:
Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, *Verses After Dusk*, Serpentine Gallery, London, 2015

On the Hour, On the Times

Glenn Ligon



An Afternoon on Wednesday, 2011

On the edge of his seat, or the edge of a bed or a bench, hands clasped and resting in his lap, he awaits someone just beyond our gaze (a man, I presume, but that's just me). He wears a black and white striped crew-neck shirt and pants of an indeterminate cut, an outfit reminiscent of James Baldwin, who wore similar attire in a photo taken circa 1965 while he awaited the Muses at his desk with a typewriter in a rented villa on the Bosphorus. And if a striped shirt doesn't conjure an image of Baldwin, perhaps it reminds you of James Dean or Jean Seberg or Edie Sedgwick or prisoners in early movies, sledgehammers swinging in unison at the edge of a country road, or sailors, who, if they have fallen overboard, are more easily spotted in stripes than navy solids. This one is not overboard, in that dark brown sea, but he is awaiting rescue.



11pm Friday, 2010

The figure in the striped top is warming up for tonight's performance, which, given the hour, is a late show. We are happy for him, finally at centre stage after being made to wait off to the side for so long, but he seems a bit tentative, as if now in the spotlight, he is unsure what show he is supposed to be starring in.

He has lost a little weight. More exercise, less sitting around. He has shed his trousers and donned skin-tight colour. He has shapely calves.

Sometimes he stands like his mother, one hand cradling his neck, one arm akimbo. And, having met the artist, this painting feels like a self-portrait, although I've never seen her in stripes, but to invent a figure you have to start somewhere, so she must have started with herself, from there building a scaffold on which to hang things like blackness or masculinity, things that are fugitive and subject to revision.



11pm Saturday, 2011

'What you looking at?'

I couldn't imagine that a black figure staring straight ahead wouldn't be staring hard. But he ain't staring hard. In fact, he ain't hard at all. But he ain't beat down, or under siege, or an endangered species either. No dignity, uplift, celebration, or positivity in this painting. No keeping it real or representing. He's just a black figure and that's that.



11pm Tuesday, 2010

Regrets? A dark brown taste. Hand covering the mouth to prevent bile from spewing out. Or maybe that gesture is about something just now remembered, some missed opportunity? Too late to start dwelling on the past. Go on. Get on with it.

He is up and dressed, as usual, in his striped top, although it's really more the idea of a top, a little something to cover his nakedness. Indeed, he is the idea of a black man. He is life-sized and anatomically correct, yes, but when we stare into the whites of his painted eyes or at the skin-tight colour of his thighs, what we see is an illustration accompanying many, many ideas about black men, bits and pieces of things, a mood board, brought together at this late hour, 11pm, which, although the day is nearly done, in fact feels like the beginning of something new.