



ESIRI ERHERIENE-ESSI  
THE FUTURE ISN'T  
WHAT IT USED TO BE

OPENING AUGUST 7, 2021 - 16:00 to 19:00

in the presence of the artist

with artist talk at 17:00

KUSTLAAN 90 - 8300 KNOCKE

MARUANI MERCIER GALLERY



### The Excursion

2021

oil, ink and xerox transfer on linen

135 x 135 cm

53 1/8 x 53 1/8 in





## Things I Imagined

2021

oil, ink and xerox transfer on linen

175 x 145 cm

68 7/8 x 57 1/8 in





## A Conflict of Interest

2021

oil, ink and xerox transfer on linen

135 x 135 cm

53 1/8 x 53 1/8 in



## The Future Isn't What it Used to Be

2021

oil, ink and xerox transfer on linen

150 x 232 cm

59 1/8 x 91 3/8 in





## A Few Minutes Early Is Right on Time

2021

oil, ink and xerox transfer on linen

145 x 195 cm

57 1/8 x 76 3/4 in



Forever Isn't For Everyone

2021  
oil, ink and xerox transfer on linen  
150 x 150 cm  
59 1/8 x 59 1/8 in



And for the Purposes of Any Potential Lawsuits,  
That Is Just My Opinion,  
Not a Statement of Fact

2021  
oil, ink and xerox transfer on linen  
135 x 135 cm  
53 1/8 x 53 1/8 in



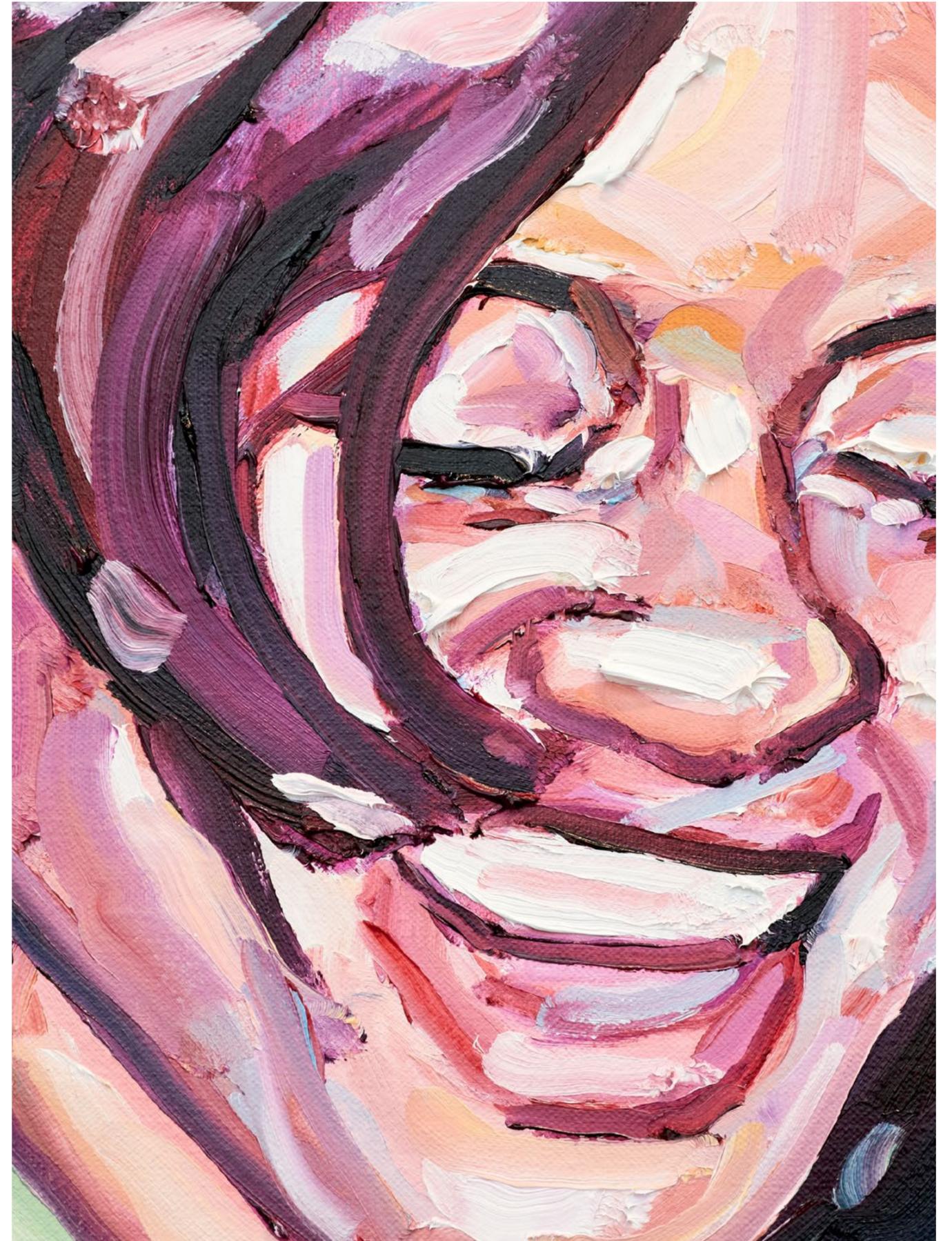
The Adults Are Talking

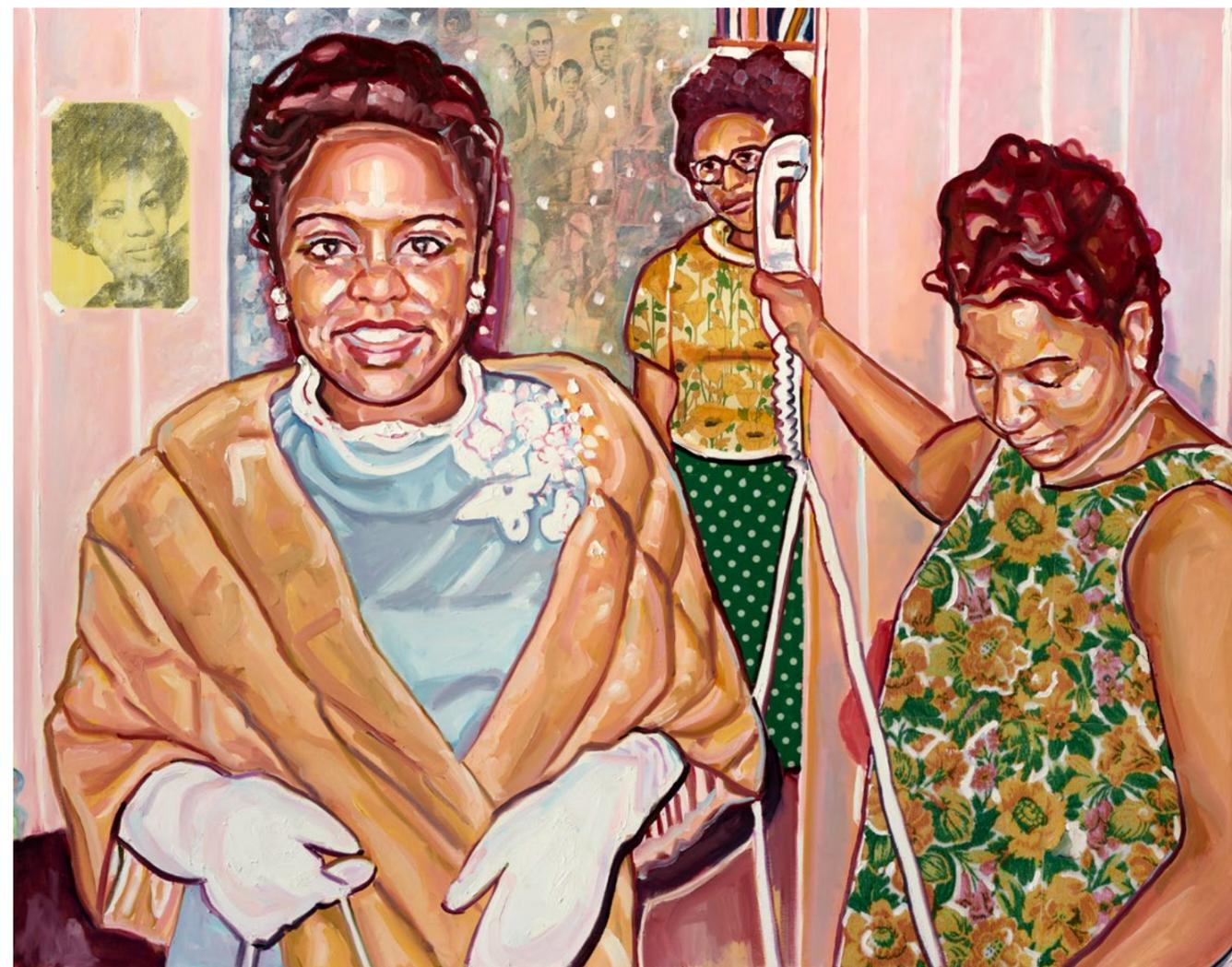
2021

oil, ink and xerox transfer on linen

150 x 150 cm

59 1/8 x 59 1/8 in





You've Really Got A Hold On Me (for Jean Harris)

2021

oil, ink and xerox transfer on linen

135 x 175 cm

53 1/8 x 68 7/8 in





## Nostalgia For The Future

by Shaquille Heath

June 2021

We have almost forgotten there was once a time when taking a picture wasn't as effortless as scratching an itch. I need not emphasize the fact that we carry a camera around in our pockets, but it also feels like a pertinent reminding. For the vast majority of our existence, the ability to readily and so effortlessly document a moment in its exact actuality was inconceivable, if not impractical. Yet, in our existence, it's become a disposition that is practically second-nature.

It is also worth remembering that this convention was once a more cherished medium. That the documenting of our lives was reserved for the extra ordinary. And I mean that in the most simple of terms – photographs of a birthday party, or a family gathering. A visit with a loved one from out-of-town. The ordinary moments that were exceptionally special – those were what we took the time to capture. And it is with the awareness of this consideration that you can begin to admire a Esiri Erheriene-Essi painting with the dutiful reverence that is necessary.

Over time Esiri has amassed a collection of pictures from this period of photographic reverence, which has informed her work of late. Rooted from the midcentury to the 80s, the photographs underlie the stories of her paintings, supplying an essence for her to breathe new life into. And while we are on the topic of photography's past life, let's also remember that with its proliferation came a new capacity of ownership. Throughout history, moments when the Black existence was not lateral to whiteness has been meager. Yet with the power in our own hands came the ability to showcase ourselves in true – not just in how we wanted to be seen, but in who we actually were.

It is with this electricity that Esiri's new works jolt us back to the present. Long known, it has always been in the hands of Black people to carry on our stories, and because of this, it is common for the pictures of our histories to be torn and faded. It is through this lens that Esiri's paintings pull their greatest power. In bright colors and thick layers of paint, Esiri awakens these sacred moments of living, enabling them a space in line with the spiritual. Her hands are both corrective and restorative. They both flourish and remedy. Through Esiri's honoring of history, a new meaning of ancestry is defined. One in which they don't just walk with us, but prophesize elements that define our immediate existence.

Esiri's new work "The Future Isn't What it Used To Be" pays homage to a David Bowie interview from 1980 in *New Musical Express*. In it Bowie notes, "The idea of having seen the future, of somewhere we've already been, keeps coming back to me." History is a nature that is cyclical, and at its core, what we want for it is no different than what Esiri's subjects wanted too. Space to be infinite and abundant. Unencumbered and free.



## Esiri Erheriene-Essi In Her Own Words

**Shaquille Heath:** I've heard you often refer to yourself as a collector, or even more, (and what I love) as a hoarder. I was thinking, what's really the difference between a collector and a hoarder, other than how you display and make use of the things that you're discovering? I'm wondering how the practice of discovery evolved within your work?

**Esiri Erheriene-Essi:** Well, I mean I've always classified myself as a hoarder. It's a bit less fashionable and a bit more freaky to say hoarder – because there's always these bad negative connotations with it.

I come from a family of Nigerian immigrants that moved to England, so they bought everything they could carry in a little suitcase, and that was their home. So, it was always that everything was really precious. You cherish all of your things because they are memories – and people you carry with you.

So, when I was a kid I was collecting posters all over my wall. It just kept growing and growing, and luckily, I fell into art. I went to art school when I was 17 and then I studied Media Studies and Journalism at University. I was actually on my way to be a journalist, and that's when I turned back to collecting. You're collecting sources and imagery for the newspaper... always collecting things that you could potentially incorporate into the article or the feature.

When I went back into art, I just kind of looked at all of the stuff that was other people's trash like it was my gold. And I realized that yeah, I can use it for something. Before it was stuff that I stripped out of magazines or newspapers that were just piling up in boxes, and I began using them as potential source

material. It wasn't until 2014 that I discovered Xerox transfer. I found this was a good way of incorporating all of these images. It became that all of this hoarding material became actually useful, and it started to kind of become part of my work.

I also grew up being obsessed with Technicolor films. My dad gave me his Polaroid Land camera that he bought when he was a teenager, and I was always taking these photos – they were just so magical. You know, instantaneously, you can have this image. So, it's still that I need these images and I don't know, maybe it's this idealization from childhood that I couldn't really do anything with them then. I didn't understand the power that it had over me. It's always kind of channeling that part, and also you know the magic that it gives me.

**SH:** Throughout this past year in particular, Black trauma and violence has been a common expectancy. Though, through your work, you've actively showcased the joy, if not the normality of Black life. What has it meant to you to create works that portray Black existence, our true existence, in "The Future Isn't What it Used To Be"?

**EE-E:** I think it's been important, because the whole of social media has been cultivated with Black trauma... Black death... all of these negative stereotypes. And you know, that's a symptom of white supremacy. It's not really what my life is about. But they're only showing this one thing over and over. It's been really important to delve into what is true, and to put out my idea of what's true – and what is also true for my friends and family. It's not about being positive – it's just being truthful. Because there's joy. And there's despair. But I just don't like it that we're always painted as this negative.

I don't want to have conversations about race anymore. Or about how "you need to learn this, for you to understand that I'm a human being." No, I want to make paintings that show us, in all of the ways that we exist and be. Some people, especially white people, come to me like they just discovered racism a year ago. And already they have this fatigue from it. It's like, it's nice that it's only been a year for you, but this has been since I can remember, you know. So, it's really important for me just to show my gaze. And show the way that I see the world as a Black woman from London with ties to Nigeria. But also, who's been heavily influenced by African – American culture. And now the Netherlands... I'm showing all of these different lives of the Black people that have existed.

**SH: We obviously know and understand Blackness isn't monolithic. Yet, there's something about the way in which your paintings create this homogeneity. That when you look at them, you can't pinpoint exactly where they were from. They really spotlight the interconnections between the African diaspora, and how kindred it can be.**

**EE-E:** In the photos I collect, sometimes it says where the image is formed, but most of the time it leaves me to wonder. I really like painting because I can time travel with them. I can bring in new things. For example, I've brought images of Beyonce in from her appearance at the 2016 Super Bowl

from a source image that was originally from the 70s. I kind of like that they become instant Beyonce fans. Bringing in things from the present or from the past really shows that things are similar. It's not that history repeats, but that we are repeating. We come from somewhere. And I just really like to show that.

I once did a guided tour with a group of Dutch-Surinamse kids through an exhibition of mine, where they shared that this was the first time that they ever saw images of people like their grandmother, or their mothers or fathers in a museum. That they felt that they could sit and be with them and feel included. I think that's something that's really important for me, because when I was growing up and going to museums, I didn't feel included. I had to pretend that I was represented. I had to enjoy art from a distance. And when I was learning to paint, I was learning from my family. My sisters and brother, my mother, my friends... They were posing for me. There were no books on how to paint Black skin. I had to learn it myself. Though there were many books on how to paint white skin. It was really looking at my family, my friends, and all of these photographs that I collected to learn how to utilize and paint Blackness. And really celebrate it.

**SH: As Black people in particular, our history is often one that is fragmented, eroded, and neglected. Whiteness has had a tendency of deciding they aren't worthy of being**

**documented. It has always been in the hands of Black people to carry on our stories. What role does your work play in restoring parts of this actuality?**

**EE-E:** History was one of my favorite lessons at school. Besides, you know, art and English literature. I loved history, but I didn't really like it at school because it was always one-sided. I got to learn about British history in the monarchy, the World Wars, but I never got to learn about Black history. It was almost like, Black people came to England in the 50s to help rebuild after the war, and before that we didn't exist. But then I would go home and my parents, their friends, and neighbors, were telling me these oral histories about where we came from. There's all of these things that you get snippets of. And you have to carry the history with you, because it's not in any books.

Nigeria is a formation from colonization – it's like they created these borders and then named it "Nigeria", but in actuality Nigerians are all different people and clans – they're not Nigerians. So it's all of these things that you have to unlearn as you get older.

The reason I'm really stuck with some of the images, especially from the 50s, 60s, and 70s, is because photography became more accessible to the majority of people to use. It wasn't

this weird thing where the colonizers would go and document these "exotic" people. This is ownership where people had the money, the freedom, and the will to document things that they find important. So, it's more of us. It's more showing everyday life instead of showing this weird, scientific-like racism.

I want to open up these images with my paintings because I think the archive is super important. These images in the world, they exist. You have to go into dusty basements or attics, but they're there! I get to open up. I get to put these images in the spotlight and kind of give them the same importance that Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* gets. I find these images equally as important... even moreso, because it's not documented. It's denied. It's erased. It's hidden. And you have to go into the archives to find it.

**Bio for Shaquille Heath:** Shaquille Heath is a writer and essayist living in San Francisco. She is a regular contributor to *Juxtapoz Magazine*. In addition, her work has been published in *The New York Times*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *The Bold Italic*, and others. Shaquille's writing contributed to the exhibition publication of Amoako Bofofo's first monograph, for the Marianne Ibrahim Gallery. First a poet, her writing explores the intricacies of Blackness in art, culture, and our lives. By day she is the manager of communications at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. Every other moment, she's writing.



## The Supremes 2009 to 2015

### “Reflections - Medley of Hits (12” Version)” Diana Ross and The Supremes

“Reflections - Medley of Hits (12” Version)” is a series of paintings that use the motif of the music group Diana Ross and The Supremes. Inspired by their 1966 hit song ‘You Keep Me Hangin’ On’ which has Morse Code-like guitar riffs, I used Diana, Flo and Mary as a vessel in which to convert information from one system of communication (the past) into another (the present) and transmit that message into code (a painting) which could lead to possible new readings. The John Baldessari quote: ‘Historical mispronounced sounds like hysterical’ can best describe the theme and concern of my paintings from this time. With this as a basis, I was constantly attempting to disrupt the confidence and assumptions of a reader who was familiar with history, thus, confusing their sense of logical sequence. I did this by challenging, displacing, appropriating and, in some cases, playing with the order of both collective and intimate strands of history, memory, myths, and culture of the past and present.

In one of the paintings, Diana Ross and the Supremes is painted against a repeated backdrop of Baader Meinhof/RAF member Brigitte Mohnhaupt (who garnered worldwide headlines when she was released from prison in 2007 after 24 years), even though there was no evidence to suggest a connection. In another painting, the group are on the front cover of the fictional newspaper ‘The Black Pantheress’ (a play on the very real newspaper of The Black Panther party). The Supremes never publicly affiliated with any political stance (even though they did attend the funeral of Martin Luther King) so with this painting I wanted to suggest an endorsement of the Black Panther Party (whom the FBI thought of at the time as the most dangerous group in the US).

This is not just a series of the Supremes – for me they are a metaphorical constant presence in a time of much flux. So, with this as a point of departure the paintings combine elements of this period, juxtaposed with the Supremes performances as a façade and explore alternative narratives as well as the premise of (hi)story writing. The title: “Reflections - Medley of Hits (12” Version)” is based on a famous Supremes song, and hints to what this project aims to do – reflect on the lasting legacies of historical narratives, using the Supremes as a ‘safe’ vehicle in which to do so.



Aggressive Politeness (For Emory)

2015

oil, ink and xerox transfer on canvas

200 x 190 cm

78 3/4 x 74 3/4 in



Cabbage Soup Diet (Woo Hoo)

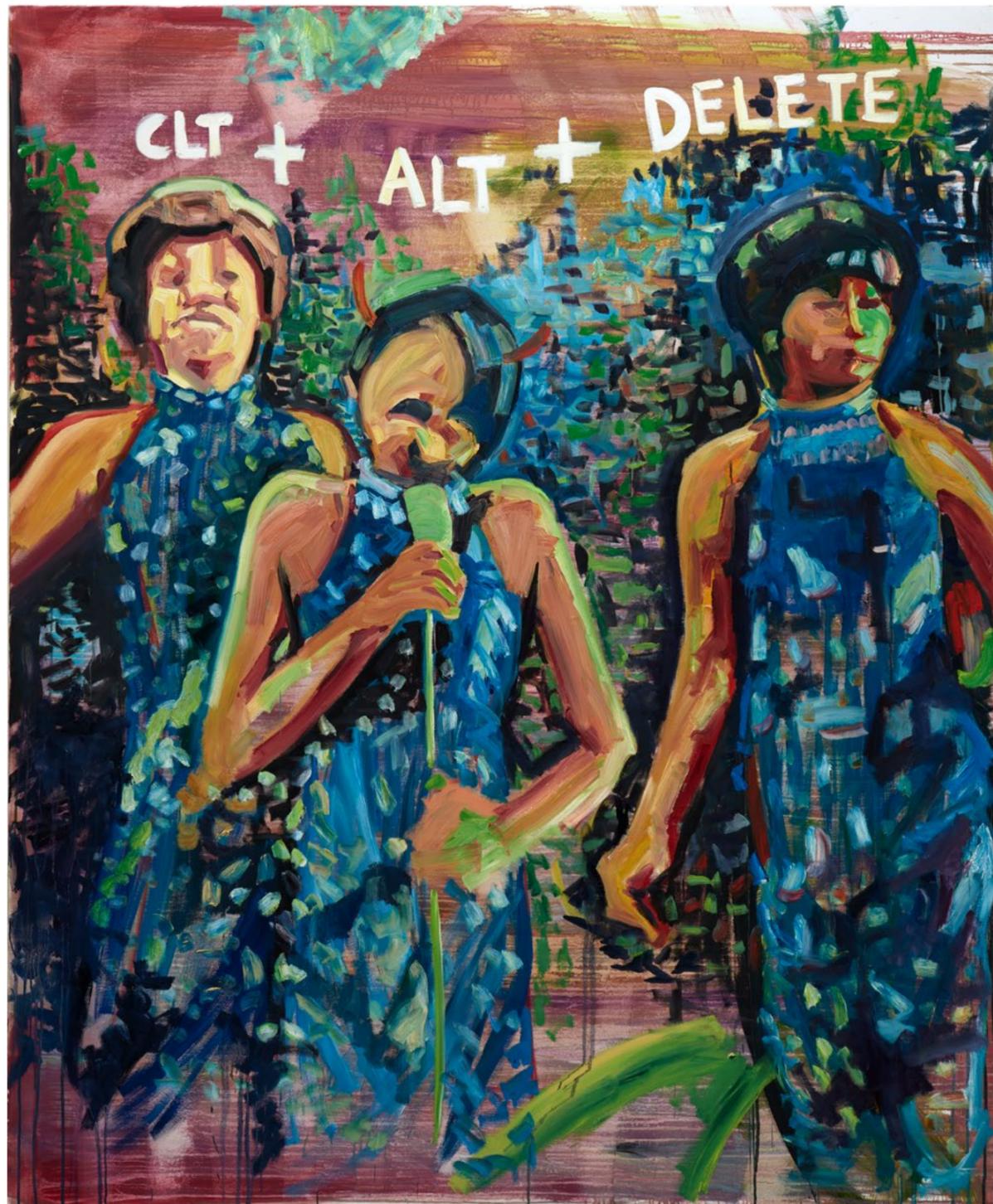
2011

oil on linen

155 x 200 cm

61 1/8 x 78 3/4 in





Ctrl+alt+delete

2009

oil on canvas

240 x 200 cm

94 1/2 x 78 3/4 in



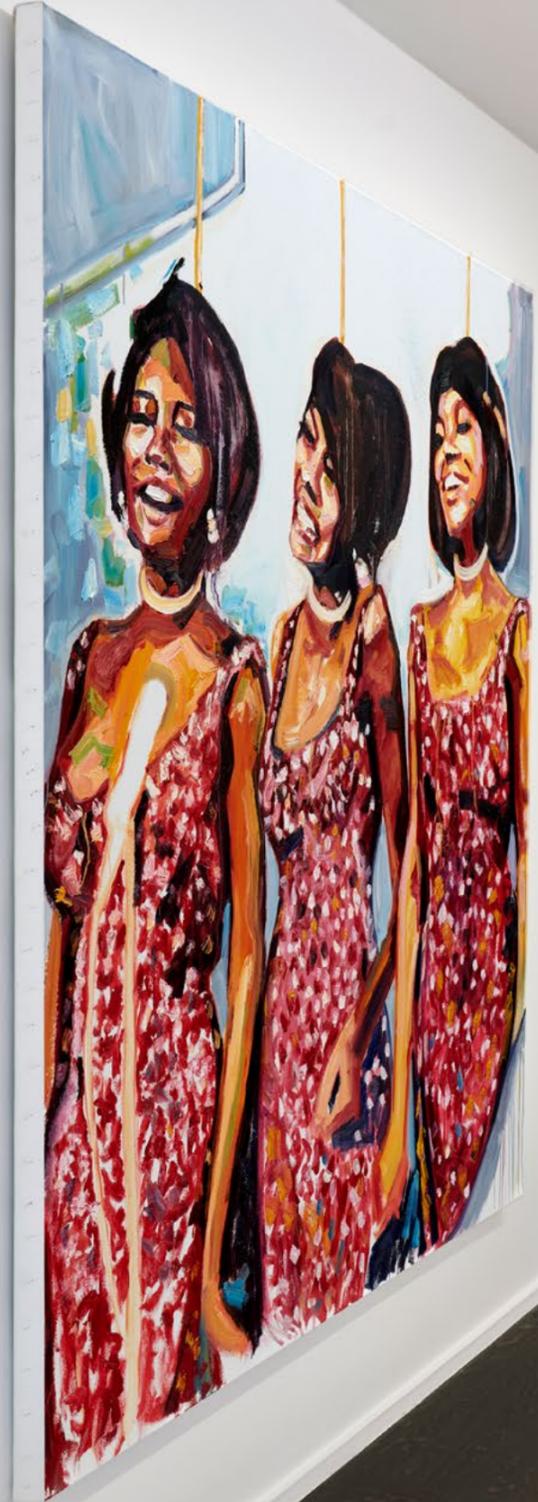
Eloquence Doesn't Always Come with a Pretty Face

2009

acrylic and oil on canvas

240 x 200 cm

94 1/2 x 78 3/4 in





Metabolism Booster Diet

2010

oil on canvas

210 x 180 cm

82 5/8 x 70 7/8 in



## Mexican Standoff

2010

oil on canvas

145 x 175 cm

57 1/8 x 68 7/8 in



Molly, You in Danger, Girl

2013

oil and indian ink on canvas

200 x 180 cm

78 3/4 x 70 7/8 in



## Biography & CV



Esiri Erheriene-Essi, is an Amsterdam based artist, born in London from Nigerian parents. Inspired by artists such as Kerry James Marshall, Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Lucian Freud, Alice Neel and Jean-Michel Basquiat, she creates colourful mid to large-scale figurative paintings portraying family and friends in everyday situations, incorporating familial and historical backgrounds as well as personal experiences.

An important part of her work process consists of collecting photographs, fabrics and other archival documentation relating to the African diaspora to incorporate into her artworks. Starting from a found, vintage photograph, she then edits it in photoshop and makes a sketch with acrylic ink juxtaposing colourful fabric patterns against magazine cut-outs and other paper collage elements.

The figures on the canvases represent individuals from the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, chronicling Black experiences by exploring untold, often forgotten and even neglected narratives of people of the African diaspora. We can see her paintings as speculative history writing, collaging the past and the present with potentialities, acknowledging just how fragmented and circumstantial history is.

Through her distinctive brushstrokes, Erheriene-Essi attempts to change our reading of history by re-imagining more humane and liberating narratives. The scenes that the artist enhances are pulled out of everyday life, such as afternoon outings, dinners, and birthday gatherings. Through her vivid work, the artist reflects on the inherent bias and racism within the film technology of the 1950s and '60s that made it almost impossible to capture the nuances of Black skin tones due to it being created with only the best representation of white skin in mind. She explores the wealth that she finds in the quiet histories within the source material and uses a vast range of colour in her paintings as a way to make up for what was denied.

Erheriene-Essi's paintings make socio-political comments in a subtle way, with some explicit references to these themes. In the background of some of her works, posters of Angela Davis and Malcolm X are hanging on the wall and some of the figures wear badges in support of the Poor People's Campaign. Erheriene-Essi is committed to making visible the richness of Black lives and her canvases are an inventory of everyday stories and ordinary moments. Through the selecting, deconstructing and reformulating of the source photographs through painting, she hopes to create a familiar present where some recognition of sorts can take place, leaving ample space for elaboration and new readings. Erheriene-Essi would like people to look at her paintings as a place to interact with history and imagine futures at the same time.

In 2007 she attended the international residency programme De Ateliers in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. In 2009 she was the winner of the esteemed Dutch Royal Award of Painting (Royal Palace, Amsterdam). In 2014 she had her first museum solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, Arnhem, the Netherlands.

And in 2019, Erheriene-Essi was nominated for the Prix De Rome, one of the Netherlands' most prestigious art awards, giving her the opportunity to create a series of works that was exhibited in the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.

## ESIRI ERHERIENE-ESSI

1982 Born in London, England  
Lives and works in Amsterdam, The Netherlands

## EDUCATION

2007-2009 Post-graduate Institute, De Ateliers, Amsterdam, NL  
2004-2006 MA (with merit) Fine Art, University of East London, London, UK  
2001-2004 BA (Hons) Media Studies, University of East London, London, UK  
2000-2001 (foundation) Camberwell College of Art, London, UK

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2021 The Future Isn't What It Used to Be, MARUANI MERCIER, Knokke, Belgium  
I am here because you were there, Galerie Ron Mandos, Amsterdam, NL  
2018 The dogs bark, but the caravan goes on, Galerie Ron Mandos, Amsterdam, NL  
2015 The Usual Suspects, Galerie Ron Mandos, Amsterdam, NL  
2014 Don't Support the Greedy, Museum Arnhem, Arnhem, NL  
2011 Performance, Galerie Ron Mandos, Amsterdam, NL  
2009 I Don't Like Nostalgia Unless It's Mine, Galerie Ron Mandos, Rotterdam, NL  
2008 Test, De Ateliers, Amsterdam, NL

## GROUP EXHIBITIONS (SELECTION)

2021 Tomorrow is a Different Day - Collection 1980 - Now, The Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Amsterdam, NL  
Trailblazers: 150th Anniversary of the Royal Award for Modern Painting, Royal Palace Amsterdam, NL  
Roaring 20's, Museum Kranenburgh, Bergen, The Netherlands  
2020 The Pearl, Ramp Gallery, London, UK  
The Armory Show, Galerie Ron Mandos booth, New York, NY, USA  
Realism Nu, Stedelijk Museum Schiedam, Schiedam, NL  
ME: An Exhibition of Contemporary Self-Portraiture, High Line Nine, Chelsea, New York City, USA  
Empathy | No human is an island, Museum Ijsselstein, Ijsselstein, NL  
2019 Prix de Rome 2019, The Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Amsterdam, NL  
Your Voice Matters, Museum Arnhem (De Kerck), Arnhem, NL  
2018 De Kersentuin (4), KunstRAI, Amsterdam, NL  
Common Ground, AkzoNobel Art Foundation, Amsterdam, NL  
2017 ZOALS JIJ EN IK (LIKE YOU AND ME), Art Chapel, Amsterdam, NL  
What's New, Acquisitions, Museum Arnhem, Arnhem, NL  
2016 What We Have Overlooked, Framer Framed, Amsterdam, NL  
ROEMERS DRIELING (III), De Nieuwe Bibliotheek Almere, Almere, NL  
ROEMERS DRIELING (II), Bibliotheek Den Haag, The Hague, NL  
Roemers Drieling in Nieuwspoor, International Press Centre Nieuwspoor, The Hague, NL  
2015 Museumnacht 2015 - "Parallel Stories - The Whistleblower and the Dreamcatcher", Arti et Amicitiae, Amsterdam, NL  
ROEMERS DRIELING, Centrum voor Beeldende Kunst, Amsterdam, NL  
Art Amsterdam 2015, Ron Mandos booth, Amsterdam, NL  
ZIJ WAS EENS... TETEM Kunstruimte, Enschede, NL  
2014 'Levenslang', het criminele brein ontleed, museum Het Dolhuys, Haarlem, NL  
2013 Open Studio, Nordisk Kunstsenter Dalsåsen, Dale i Sunnfjord, Norway  
Amsterdam Drawing 2013, Stichting Nieuwe Dakota, Amsterdam, NL

	Jättekatastrof, Mitt Möllan, Malmö, Sweden
2012	Open Studio, Nordisk Kunstnarsenter Dalsåsen, Dale, Norway Big Show 7, Silas Marder Gallery, Bridgehampton, NY, USA
2011	De Volkskrant Beeldende Kunst Prijs 2011, Stedelijk Museum Schiedam, NL What's New 2, Acquisitions, Museum Arnhem, Arnhem, NL
2010	VOLTA6, Ron Mandos booth, Basel, Switzerland What's New, Acquisitions, Museum Arnhem, Arnhem, NL Art Rotterdam, Ron Mandos booth, Rotterdam, NL
2009	Offspring, De Ateliers, Amsterdam, NL Koninklijke Prijs voor de Vrije Schilderkunst (Royal Awards for Painting) (1st Prize), Koninklijk Paleis, Amsterdam, NL
2007	Art In Mind, The Brick Lane Gallery, London, England Disposable Fetish, Bow Arts Trust, London, England
2006	Memory & the Stream of Time, APT Gallery, London, England Final Exhibition, UEL MA Fine Art, London, England Student Show, UEL AVA, London, England
2005	Works On Paper, RK Burk Gallery, London, England End of year show, UEL AVA, London, England

## RESIDENCIES & AWARDS

2019	(Nominee & winner of Children's Jury Prize) Prix de Rome 2019, The Netherlands Mondriaan Fonds, (Investment project Artist) The Netherlands
2017	Development Budget, Amsterdams Fonds voor de Kunst, The Netherlands
2016	Werkbijdrage Bewezen Talent, Mondriaan Fonds, The Netherlands
2013	Mondriaan Fonds, (Investment project Artist) The Netherlands
2013	Nordic Kunstnarsenter Dalsåsen, Dale, Norway (residency)
2012	Nordic Kunstnarsenter Dalsåsen, Dale, Norway (residency)
2012	Fonds BKVB, (Work Budget), The Netherlands
2011	Fonds BKVB, (Work Budget), The Netherlands (Nominee) De Volkskrant Beeldende Kunst Prijs 2011, The Netherlands
2010	Starter Stipendium, Fonds BKVB, NL
2009	Koninklijke Prijs voor Vrije Schilderkunst, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

## COLLECTIONS

Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Amsterdam, NL  
 Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations of The Netherlands, Den Haag, NL  
 Stedelijk Museum Schiedam, Schiedam, NL  
 21C Museum Hotels, USA  
 The Collection of Beth Rudin DeWoody, USA  
 Mana Contemporary, Chicago, USA  
 AkzoNobel Art Foundation, Amsterdam, NL  
 Fries Museum, Leeuwarden, NL  
 Museum Arnhem, Arnhem, NL,  
 Robert & Renee Drake Collection, Wassenaar, NL  
 The Scott-Newman Collection, USA  
 The Dean Collection, USA  
 Private collections in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Germany, Iceland,  
 the United States, Belgium, South Africa, Switzerland, Hong Kong and Austria

## TEACHING

2020	Create it - with Esiri Erheriene-Essi', artist workshop, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, NL
2019 - present	Artist tutor, Painting and Printmaking department, Royal Academy of Art, The Hague, NL
2019	Guest tutor, De Ateliers, Amsterdam, NL
2018	Individual mentoring/tutoring 2nd year Fine Art Students from Minerva and Gerrit Rietveld Academies, NL
2015	Guest teaching, Leeds Beckett University, Leeds, UK

## OTHER

2021	Azu Nwagbogu and Esiri Erheriene-Essi in conversation, 'I am here because you were there', Galerie Ron Mandos, NL
2020	Artist lecture, Royal Academy of Art, The Hague, NL
2019	Esiri Erheriene-Essi, Prix de Rome 2019, Stedelijk Museum. Amsterdam - interview : <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h72IDlx3Uxg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h72IDlx3Uxg</a> Artist talk, De Ateliers, Amsterdam, NL
2018	Artist talk, The dogs bark, but the caravan goes on, Galerie Ron Mandos, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
2017	Artist lecture, Read My World Festival 2017 "Black USA, Literature of the Resistance", Tolhuistuin Amsterdam/ Framer Framed, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
2016	Artist talk, 'Event: Farewell to the hermetic monoculture', Framer Framed, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. <a href="https://framerframed.nl/en/projecten/lecture-farewell-to-the-hermetic-monoculture/">https://framerframed.nl/en/projecten/lecture-farewell-to-the-hermetic-monoculture/</a>
2015	Artist lecture, Leeds Beckett University, Leeds, UK
2014	Artist lecture, 'Marlene Dumas: The Power of Photography & The Power of Painting', 23 Nov 2014, Teijin Auditorium, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

