

mamwlad

Ames Yavuz

Opening Reception: Thursday 15 January 2026, 6 – 8 PM

On view: 16 January – 28 March 2026

Location: Ames Yavuz London, 31 Grosvenor Hill, London W1K 3QU

Ames Yavuz is pleased to present *mamwlad*, the first solo exhibition by Welsh Ghanaian artist Anya Paintsil with the gallery.

mamwlad, meaning motherland in Welsh, marks a return for the artist to the Ceiriog Valley in North Wales after living away for 15 years. Inspired by Ghanaian figurative textiles, the fibre and textile-based works develop her unique artistic vocabulary using labour-intensive craft traditions such as rug knotting, punch needle and tufting, and Afro hair styling.

In the exhibition *mamwlad*, a rich portrait of her hometown and herself emerges alongside hidden textures among leftovers and debris made using materials sourced from family members, local clothing resellers, crafts stores and the over 350-year-old house that serves as her new home-studio.

Paintsil's motherland is not pastoral, nostalgic or romantic, but grounded in the idiosyncrasies of its lived realities. Here, village scandal, rumour and social history become the basis of a contemporary mythology. Its characters include a recently established peacock population in the valley, dividing public opinion; usually uncommon Green Hairstreak butterflies abundant among the Buddleas of the neighbourhood; and mysteriously murdered sheep, often maggot infested. These particular confluences of human and natural worlds, with equal measures of beauty and ugliness, life and death, anchor the artist's stories. In this world, the absurd, brutal and gross are embedded in the everyday, and is experienced with delight.

YOU AND ME BOTH BABES, the artist titles a work with a figure with a dead pheasant, victim to an outbreak of bird flu in the valley. *BORE DA WAKEY WAKEY*, "Good Morning" in Welsh, titles a work with two of the thriving feral peacock population delighting and irking their human companions with early morning cries.

The often-alienated Black figure of Paintsil's earlier works, often literally unmoored in empty space, finds itself among new supports and garb in *mamwlad*. A lilac hue recurs in the found, sometimes dyed, polycotton backings of many of the works, evoking the valley's ubiquitous grey slate, lichen and the fog through which the sky takes on a glowing haziness. Paintsil speaks of rediscovering the "profound beauty" of the region's temperate Celtic rainforests, with rare communities of insects, mushroom and mould. In *BROTHERS*, twin figures representing Paintsil's half-brother find themselves in this setting, at a memorial forest with trees planted in memory of his mother.

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The return also meant re-finding kinship among the "island" isolated Black milieu in rural Wales, distinct from established Black communities in urban England, the latter still alienating for the rural-Wales-raised artist, despite the former's often-overt racism. Communities connect over Whatsapp texts, for example, and Paintsil renders their micro political, cultural economic mundanity in a work narrating a controversial sale of two goat heads made on the group, reported later as rotten.

SMELLS OF POOR CUSTOMER RELATIONS, the disgruntled buyer's comment on the group finds itself in the title of the work, representing a figure cradling the goat heads among a field of flowers. "I couldn't even think of making a work that could not bring me joy," Paintsil attests.

About the artist

Anya Paintsil is a Welsh and Ghanaian textile artist who lives and works in London and Glyn Ceiriog.

Drawing inspiration from her childhood in North Wales, and her ancestral, Fante tradition of figurative textiles, Paintsil combines craft practices she was taught as a young child; rug making, appliqué and hand embroidery with afro hairstyling techniques to create large scale portraits. Paintsils' figures explore the possibilities and politics of non-representative depictions of the Black figure.

Often mistaken as subversion of 'primitivism', Paintsil deliberately and consciously refuses to root her work in the European Fine Art Canon, Paintsil's visual language finds its basis in traditional West African Crafts and Art - carvings, wood sculptures, masks - exchanging the hard materials for soft, in an interrogation of gendered labour, particularly the labour of working class women.

Paintsil made her debut at I-54 Contemporary African Art Fair in London in 2020, and since then Paintsil has received sustained interest from private collectors and public institutions. Museum collections include Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, The National Museum of Wales, The Whitworth Gallery, Manchester and The Women's Art Collection at Cambridge University.

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