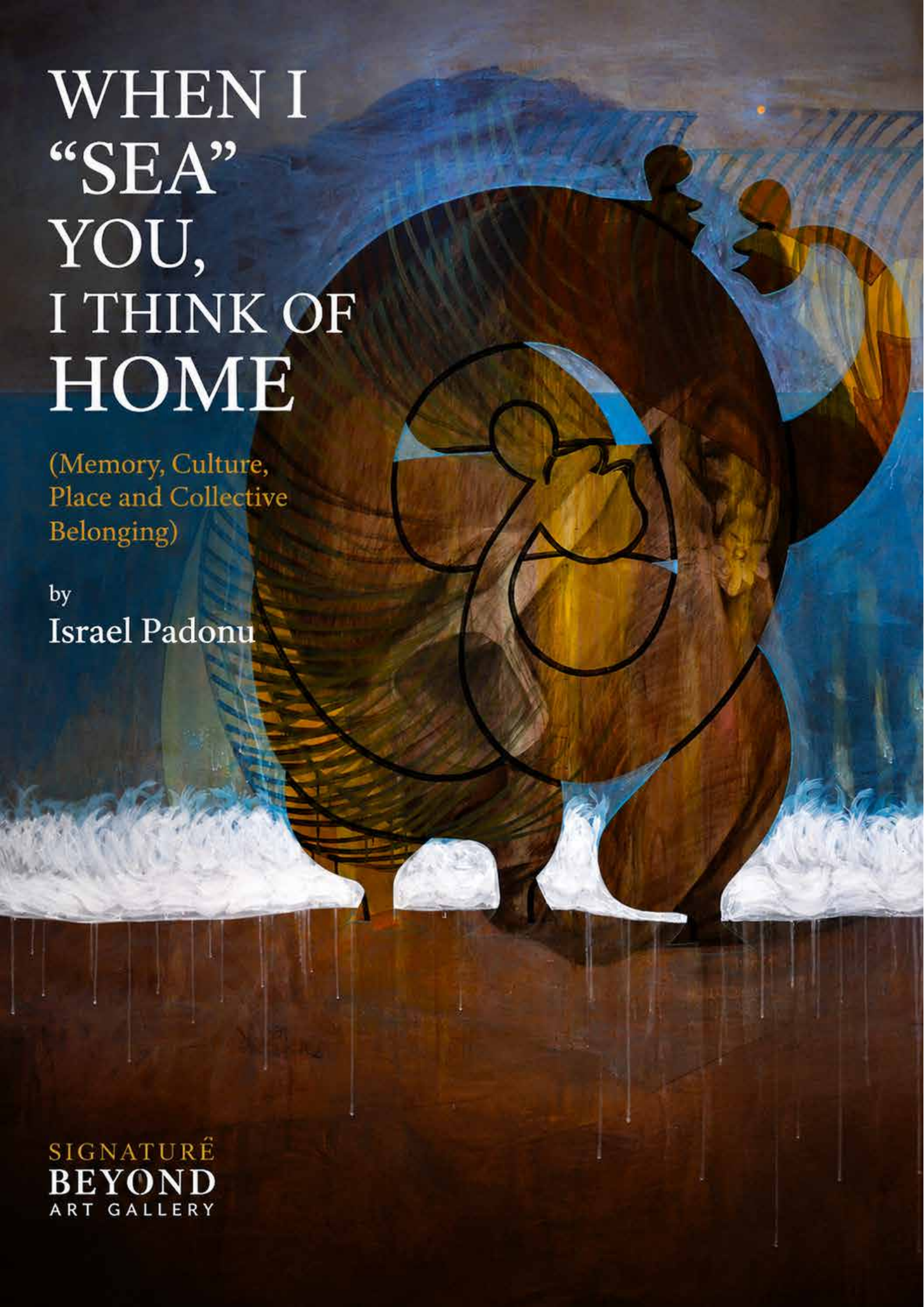


WHEN I “SEA” YOU, I THINK OF HOME

(Memory, Culture,
Place and Collective
Belonging)

by
Israel Padonu

SIGNATURE
BEYOND
ART GALLERY





SIGNATURE BEYOND ART GALLERY
PRESENTS

WHEN I "SEA" YOU, I THINK OF HOME

*(Memory, Culture, Place and
Collective Belonging)*

by Israel Padonu

Sat 19 of September - Sat 26th of September 2026

Time : 12:00pm - 6:00pm

107 Awolowo Road Ikoyi, Lagos, Nigeria

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FOREWORD

When I “Sea” You, I Think of Home

by Israel Padonu

At Signature Beyond Art Gallery, we believe that an exhibition becomes meaningful when it creates a space where art, memory and lived experience can meet.

When I “Sea” You, I Think of Home by Israel Padonu offers precisely such a space.

This debut solo exhibition invites us to think about home beyond the boundaries of geography. It asks us to consider home as something carried—in memory, in the body, in culture, in family stories, in landscapes and in the traditions that continue to shape us.

Padonu’s paintings emerge from a deeply personal relationship with Badagry, a place whose historical significance extends far beyond its physical landscape. Yet, rather than presenting Badagry solely through the weight of its history, the artist approaches it as a living environment—one shaped by community, spirituality, nature, resilience and cultural continuity.

At the centre of this exploration is the sea.

The sea becomes both landscape and metaphor: a space of movement, separation, connection and remembrance. It carries stories from one generation to another, while reminding us that places can hold memories long after people have departed from them.

Padonu’s distinctive visual language further deepens this encounter. His figures appear to emerge from and disappear into their surroundings. Faces are partially revealed, bodies become intertwined with organic forms, and layers of colour suggest memories that are constantly being reconstructed. His paintings do not always give us complete answers. Instead, they invite us to look, pause and remember.

There is also an important dialogue between the personal and the collective. The artist’s experience of loss becomes a doorway into larger questions about ancestry, identity and belonging. What begins as an intimate meditation on memory expands into a reflection on what communities inherit, preserve and carry forward.

For Signature Beyond Art Gallery, presenting this exhibition is an opportunity to support an artistic voice that approaches contemporary African experience through an authentic and deeply personal visual vocabulary.

Israel Padonu reminds us that memory is not passive.

It moves.

It changes.

It survives.

And sometimes, it returns through colour, landscape, gesture and form.

We invite you to encounter these works not simply as paintings, but as places of remembrance—spaces where the visible and invisible, the personal and collective, the past and present can exist together.

Perhaps, in looking at these paintings, we may also begin to recognise something of our own idea of home.

Signature Beyond Art Gallery

GALLERY STATEMENT

Home Is More Than a Place

Signature Beyond Art Gallery presents *When I “Sea” You, I Think of Home*, the debut solo exhibition of Israel Padonu, as an intimate and compelling investigation into memory, culture, place and collective belonging.

The exhibition occupies an important position within contemporary African artistic practice because it approaches identity not as something fixed, but as something continuously shaped by place, history, environment, ancestry and experience.

Padonu’s engagement with Badagry provides the foundation for this inquiry. Rather than treating the coastal town simply as a historical site, his practice considers it as a living cultural landscape—one where history, spirituality, family, nature and everyday life continue to intersect.

His paintings transform this environment into a psychological and emotional landscape.

The sea occupies a particularly significant position within this vocabulary. It becomes a metaphor for the movement of people, memories and histories. It connects distant places while also holding the traces of separation. Through the sea, Padonu considers how belonging can survive distance and how memory can travel across generations.

His figures exist within this fluid space.

They are neither entirely portraits nor completely abstract forms. They appear, disappear and re-emerge through layers of colour and gesture. This deliberate tension between visibility and concealment allows the figures to represent more than individual identities. They become vessels for memory—carrying personal histories, cultural inheritance and collective experience.

The influence of the Igunuko masquerade adds another important dimension to the work. Padonu draws from its verticality, movement and spiritual associations without simply reproducing its physical appearance. Instead, he translates these qualities into a contemporary visual vocabulary, creating figures that seem to occupy the space between the human and the spiritual, the remembered and the present.

Nature is equally important.

Coconut fronds, water, sea foam, vegetation and earth tones establish a strong relationship between the human figure and the coastal environment. The landscape is not merely a backdrop. It becomes a participant in the narrative—an observer of generations and a repository of memory.

This relationship between body and environment is central to the exhibition.

The body remembers.

The landscape remembers.

The sea remembers.

And through painting, these memories are given another form of life.

Signature Beyond Art Gallery is particularly interested in exhibitions that demonstrate how contemporary artists can engage cultural histories without becoming confined by them. Padonu's practice does this by allowing history to coexist with imagination, personal experience and contemporary expression.

When I "Sea" You, I Think of Home therefore becomes more than an exhibition about Badagry. It becomes an invitation to consider the meaning of home itself.

Where does home begin?

Is it the place where we were born?

The people we remember?

The stories handed down to us?

The landscape that shaped us?

Or the memories we continue to carry long after we have left?

Padonu does not provide a single answer.

Instead, he gives us images through which we can ask the questions.

For Signature Beyond Art Gallery, this exhibition represents our commitment to presenting contemporary African art that is conceptually ambitious, culturally conscious and visually distinctive—art that engages its immediate environment while speaking to experiences that extend far beyond it.

We welcome viewers into Padonu's world: a world where water becomes memory, the body becomes an archive, the landscape becomes a witness, and home becomes something we carry within us.

Signature Beyond Art Gallery
107 Awolowo Road, Ikoyi, Lagos, Nigeria

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Deconstructing Padonu: Inspiration and Visual Vocabulary

A Painter Between Memory, Place and Belonging.

Every place carries stories. Some are preserved in archives, monuments, and historical records, while others survive through rituals, landscapes, family memories, and everyday life. For Padonu, Badagry is such a place: not simply a geographical location, but a living archive where personal memory, cultural identity, environmental relationships, and collective histories converge.

His debut solo exhibition, *When I “Sea” You, I Think of Home*, emerges from a sustained investigation into the relationship between people and place. The exhibition considers how home is experienced beyond physical boundaries, how it is remembered and inherited, and how places and histories become embedded within the body.

Through figurative abstraction, he creates paintings that exist between recognition and mystery. Human figures emerge within layered environments, sometimes appearing clearly and at other times dissolving into water, colour, and organic forms. Faces become fragments rather than fixed portraits, allowing the paintings to move between personal experience and collective consciousness.

The title *When I “Sea” You, I Think of Home* captures this emotional and conceptual foundation. By replacing “see” with “sea,” Padonu transforms the ocean into a metaphor for memory, movement, connection, and continuity. The sea is not merely a physical feature of his coastal environment; it becomes a way of thinking about how people, histories, and memories move across generations.

Grief, Memory and the Personal Archive

At the foundation of Padonu’s artistic journey is a deeply personal encounter with loss. The death of his mother became an important emotional experience through which he began to consider memory, absence, and continuing connection. Grief revealed that although someone may no longer be physically present, their presence can continue through memories, stories, gestures, emotions, and places.

This understanding informs the structure of his paintings. Memories are rarely complete or static. They emerge in fragments, shift with time, and are reconstructed through emotion and experience. Similarly, the artist’s figures are often partially concealed, overlapped, or absorbed into their surroundings. Faces emerge beneath layers, while bodies dissolve into water and colour.

The layered figure therefore becomes a reflection of layered identity. A person is shaped not only by individual experience, but also by family histories, cultural traditions, inherited memories, relationships, communities, and landscapes.

His personal experience of grief consequently expands into a broader question: if individuals carry memories of those who came before them, can communities also carry ancestral memories? His paintings transform private experience into a wider meditation on remembrance, continuity, and the human desire to remain connected despite absence.

Badagry: Beyond Historical Trauma

Badagry occupies a central position within Padonu's artistic consciousness. As a coastal town with a complex history connected to the transatlantic slave trade, it carries important narratives of displacement, memory, and identity.

Yet the artist's work does not reduce Badagry to historical trauma. His interest lies in presenting the town as a living community shaped by cultural heritage, fishing traditions, spirituality, rituals, family structures, indigenous knowledge, and everyday resilience.

The coastal town is therefore understood not only as a place of departure, but also as a place of survival and continuity. He asks what remains after historical disruption: What traditions survive? What stories are passed down? What identities continue?

His paintings become an act of cultural recovery. They acknowledge difficult histories without allowing those histories to become the only definition of the people and place. Badagry is not frozen in the past; it remains alive, evolving, and capable of generating new narratives.

The Sea as Memory

Water is one of the most significant elements in this artist's visual language. Growing up within a coastal environment has shaped his understanding of the sea as both physical landscape and symbolic space.

The sea carries contradictions. It connects and separates, preserves and erases, sustains life while also holding memories of historical journeys. In *When I "Sea" You, I Think of Home*, it becomes an emotional archive representing movement across generations, ancestral connection, and memories carried between places.

Water does not simply function as background scenery. It enters and surrounds the figures, interrupts forms, and creates transitions between different states of being.

Through this relationship between body and water, Padonu suggests that people are not separate from their environments; they are formed by them.

The coastline consequently becomes more than a specific geographical setting. It becomes a metaphor for belonging itself.

The Igunuko Influence

Another significant influence within Padonu's visual vocabulary is the Igunuko masquerade, particularly its verticality, movement, mystery, and spiritual associations.

The artist does not seek to reproduce the masquerade literally. Instead, he extracts qualities from its form and cultural significance and transforms them into a contemporary painterly language. The Igunuko can be understood as occupying a space between the visible and invisible, the human and spiritual, and the past and present. These ideas resonate with Padonu's exploration of ancestral presence and cultural continuity.

His elongated figures therefore function as symbolic bodies rather than portraits of specific individuals.

Their vertical forms may suggest spiritual elevation, ancestral presence, ritual performance, movement, and a connection between earthly and invisible histories. The figure becomes a bridge between heritage and contemporary experience, individual and collective identity, and physical and remembered presence. Rather than preserving tradition through literal representation, he explores how the past can continue to speak through contemporary visual language.

The Body and Face as Vessels of Memory

The human figure remains central to Padonu's practice, existing somewhere between portraiture and abstraction. A face may be recognisable but interrupted; a body may appear clearly before dissolving into its environment.

This tension between visibility and disappearance reflects his understanding of identity as fluid and relational. The body becomes an archive that carries family memory, cultural inheritance, ancestral influence, geographical belonging, and personal experience. His treatment of the face extends this idea. A visible face creates an intimate point of connection, while an obscured face allows the figure to move beyond individual identity and represent ancestors, communities, generations, and shared experiences. The incomplete face invites viewers to enter the work through their own memories and experiences of belonging. The figure can therefore be both specific and universal.

Deconstructing the Visual Vocabulary

Padonu's visual language is built through recurring forms, materials, colours, and painterly decisions.

The **coconut fronds**, represented through flowing green linear forms, emerge from the coastal environment of Badagry. They function as visual markers of place while suggesting growth, resilience, ecological connection, and continuity. They connect the human figure to the natural environment and position nature as a witness to generations of human experience.

The **white and pale wave-like forms** reference water and sea foam while suggesting movement, transition, purification, memory, and spiritual presence. Their interaction with the figures reinforces the idea that environment and identity are inseparable.

His use of **layered acrylic surfaces** reflects the accumulation and reconstruction of memory. Colours overlap, forms appear and disappear, and earlier gestures remain partially visible beneath subsequent layers. The surface becomes a metaphor for memory itself: something continually rewritten while retaining traces of what came before.

This relationship between concealment and revelation is central to the paintings. Something is visible, yet something remains hidden. A figure emerges, yet parts of it disappear. A landscape is suggested but transformed. The viewer is therefore invited to participate in the process of uncovering meaning.

Colour, Rhythm and Emotional Geography

Colour contributes to the emotional atmosphere of Padonu's paintings. Earth tones evoke land, ancestry, history, and belonging. Blues connect to water while suggesting distance, reflection, longing, and remembrance. Greens evoke vegetation, renewal, ecological relationships, and continuity, often functioning as pathways through the composition. White introduces light and movement, recalling sea foam while suggesting transition and presence.

Together, these colours create an emotional geography in which landscape becomes inseparable from

memory. Movement is equally important. Flowing lines, elongated figures, curved forms, and directional gestures create rhythm. This rhythm recalls the movement of waves, fishing boats, people, and traditional performances. The paintings consequently feel alive, suggesting that identity, memory, and culture are continually changing.

From Personal Memory to Collective Belonging

Perhaps the most important development in Padonu's practice is the movement from personal memory toward collective reflection. His work begins with grief and individual experience but gradually expands into questions about how communities remember, how cultures survive, and how generations remain connected.

Memory exists not only in the mind but also in landscapes, bodies, traditions, rituals, stories, and artistic expressions. The painting becomes a meeting place between what was, what is, and what continues.

Ultimately, *When I "Sea" You, I Think of Home* is an exploration of belonging as an emotional and cultural condition. Padonu's paintings suggest that home is not simply a geographical location. It is carried within us through memory, ancestry, environment, relationships, and inherited stories.

The sea becomes memory. The body becomes an archive. The landscape becomes a witness. The figure becomes a vessel of collective experience.

To deconstruct Padonu is therefore to encounter a visual vocabulary shaped by grief, cultural inheritance, environmental consciousness, and the desire to preserve invisible connections. His paintings remind us that home is not only where we come from. **Home is what remains within us: the memories we carry, the stories we inherit, and the places that continue to live through us.**

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Israel Padonu (b. 1987) is a Nigerian contemporary artist from the ancient coastal town of Badagry, Lagos State. He holds a B.A. (Ed) with Honours in Creative Arts from Tai Solarin University of Education (2017).

Rooted in the shoreline realities of his hometown, Padonu's practice explores memory, belonging, and the emotional weight of place through multilayered figurative abstraction. His work is deeply shaped by personal grief following the death of his mother, as well as Badagry's historical identity as a former transatlantic slave route.

These influences form the foundation of a studio practice that engages the sea as both a physical landscape and a symbolic archive; holding stories of loss, survival, ritual, and return.

Through elongated abstracted figures, inspired by the "Igunnuko masquerade" and layered surfaces that evoke coconut leaves, shoreline texture, and coastal waters, Padonu reconstructs inherited narratives while searching for healing and home.

His art functions as both personal therapy and collective reflection, bridging psychological recovery with broader environmental and cultural consciousness. Padonu has exhibited previous works locally and internationally.



ARTIST STATEMENT

My artistic practice emerges from grief, memory, and the ongoing process of healing after the loss of my mother. Painting has become a space of refuge and release, allowing me to transform personal emotion into reflections on history, identity, and belonging. Rooted in Badagry, an ancient coastal town in Lagos State, my work engages the sea as both landscape and metaphor.

To me, the water is witness, passage, provider, and archive, carrying stories of labour, spirituality, migration, loss, and survival. My practice looks beyond Badagry's dominant association with the transatlantic slave trade, drawing attention to the living cultural memory of the Ogu people and their enduring relationship with the coastline. Through multilayered figurative abstraction, I create fluid compositions informed by coastal landscapes, coconut fronds, shoreline patterns, and water currents.

My elongated, shifting figures evoke ancestral presence, communal experience, and the emotional weight of home. When I "Sea" You, I Think of Home is an ongoing meditation on how the ocean holds memory, grief, and connection between the living and the departed. Ultimately, my practice is an act of remembrance and care—reimagining Badagry as a living archive where home becomes not simply a place, but a feeling that returns like waves.

VIEW PLATES



PENTHO: THREE FOREVER AFTER TWO

Charcoal and Acrylic on Canvas

2026

153 x 153cm



CLUSTERED REMEMBRANCE
Charcoal and Acrylic on Canvas
2026
153 x 153cm



OLD TOWN GLORY
Charcoal and Acrylic on Canvas
2026
153 x 153cm



TIME AFTER TIME
Charcoal and Acrylic on Canvas
2026
153 x 153cm



MADE OF US
Charcoal and Acrylic on Canvas
2026
153 x 153cm



NO 1
Charcoal and Acrylic on Canvas
2026
73 x 31cm



NO 2
Charcoal and Acrylic on Canvas
2026
73 x 31cm



MAUYON: TOMORROW IS FOREVER NOW
2026

Charcoal and Acrylic on Canvas
213 x 153cm
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MAULOME: FEW ARE AS YOU
2026

Charcoal and Acrylic on Canvas
213 x 153cm



EARTH AND WATERS
2026

Charcoal and Acrylic on Canvas
213 x 153cm



TALL TALE
2026

Charcoal and Acrylic on Canvas
213 x 153cm



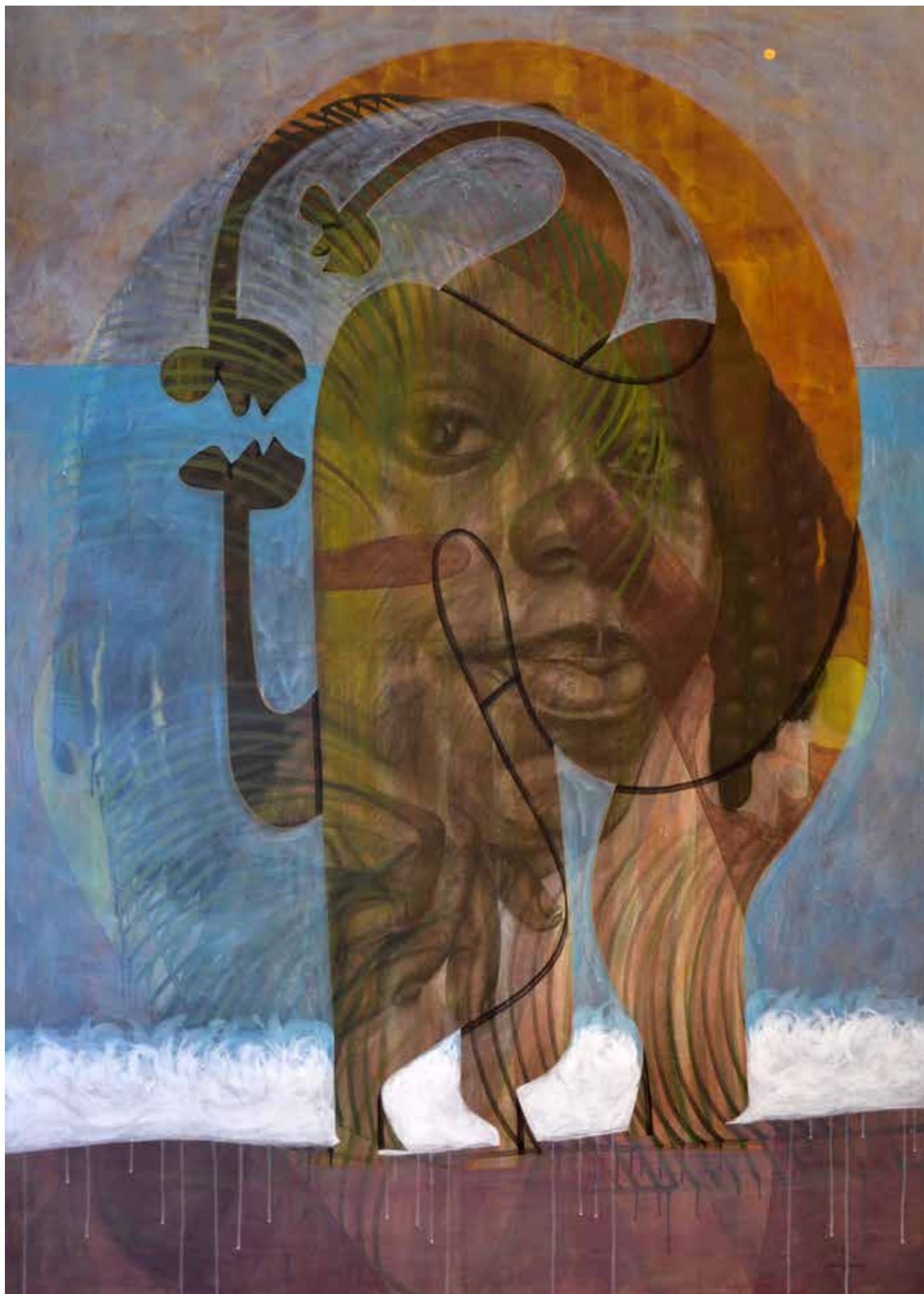
ANCESTRAL GATHERING
2026

Charcoal and Acrylic on Canvas
213 x 153cm



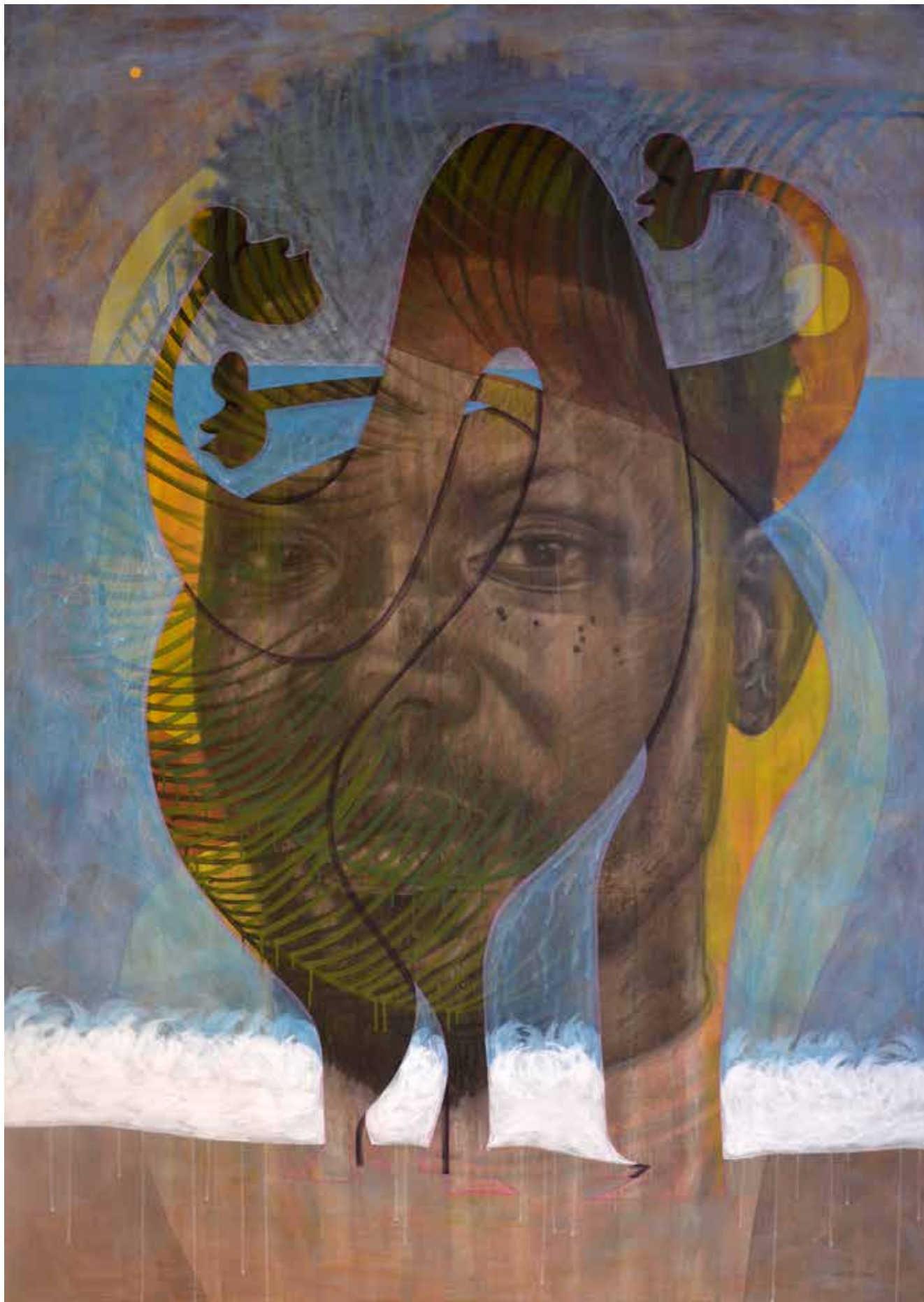
TASTE OF SALT AIR
2026

Charcoal and Acrylic on Canvas
213 x 153cm



OGECHI: PEACE IN SKIN TONE
2026

Charcoal and Acrylic on Canvas
213 x 153cm



DEHUMO: I BRING YOU ME
2026

Charcoal and Acrylic on Canvas
213 x 153cm

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

When I “Sea” You, I Think of Home

by Israel Padonu

Signature Beyond Art Gallery extends its sincere appreciation to everyone whose support, contribution, and encouragement have made *When I “Sea” You, I Think of Home* possible.

We are deeply grateful to Israel Padonu for entrusting the gallery with this deeply personal and culturally resonant body of work. Through his paintings, Padonu invites us into a world where the sea becomes memory, the landscape becomes an archive, and the idea of home extends beyond geography into identity, belonging, heritage, and lived experience.

We acknowledge the inspiration drawn from Badagry’s rich cultural and historical landscape, as well as the traditions, people, stories, and ancestral memories that continue to shape its identity. We honour the communities whose histories and cultural expressions provide an important context for this exhibition.

Our appreciation also goes to the collectors, art enthusiasts, curators, writers, cultural practitioners, friends, partners, and members of the public who continue to support contemporary Nigerian art and provide platforms for artists to share meaningful stories.

We are grateful to everyone involved in the planning, documentation, installation, production, promotion, and presentation of this exhibition. Your dedication has helped transform an artistic vision into a shared cultural experience.

Most importantly, we thank every visitor who takes the time to encounter these works. Your presence, reflection, and engagement complete the journey of the exhibition.

When I “Sea” You, I Think of Home is ultimately a celebration of memory, place, culture, and belonging. We are honoured to present it and to contribute to the continuing conversation around contemporary Nigerian art.

With gratitude,

Signature Beyond Art Gallery
107 Awolowo Road, Ikoyi, Lagos, Nigeria

S I G N A T U R E



✉ signaturebeyond@gmail.com, signaturebeyon01d@gmail.com

☎ +2348033177676

📷 Signaturegalleryandsogal

🐦 @signaturebeyond1

📘 signature-beyond

🌐 WWW.signaturebeyond.com

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Photography, layout, design and editing
by Lasisi Oluwatosin
Art Documentation & Collection Management

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WHEN I "SEA" YOU, I THINK OF HOME

All Enquiries: | signaturebeyond@gmail.com

Lateef Aremu

+234 (0) 80 3317 7676

