



Ajarb Bernard Ategwa, Studio Ekwe's," 2020, Courtesy of Peres Projects

## Ajarb Bernard Ategwa – at Peres Projects

The exhibition entitled Studio Ekwe's by Cameroonian artist Ajarb Bernard Ategwa is at Peres Projects, in Berlin, until November 20, 2020. Ategwa's second solo exhibition in this gallery features several large-scale portrait paintings that reflect post-colonial African identity, contrasting with Western ethnographic views.

Ategwa's paintings portray characters in photographic poses. The initial inspiration comes from the photographic studios that became popular after independence in African countries – Studio Ekwe's is the name of the studio next to the house where the artist grew up in Cameroon. Ategwa also adds a different temporality to the use of the camera, the contemporary "selfie" culture on social media. The titles of the works are a direct reference to this, for example: Chilling with friends, My Instagram album, Fashion followers. The introductory text states that, in both cases, the camera imagined by the artist is an instrument of affirmation of status, ancestry and abundance. Ategwa's paintings reveal the emancipatory power of posing in front of a camera: the control of one's image and transforming the author into the narrative itself.

The technique used in these seven paintings is similar to digital paintings. The field of view has no depth and the subject portrayed is the priority. The thick lines create the outlines of the body, hair and clothes. All the portraits are within asymmetrical coloured frames – another reference to the photographs. An unexpected and distinct technique is used on the skin of the subjects portrayed. Similar to watercolour, several colours are combined and resemble cosmic images. The astronomer Carl Sagan defined the term "cosmos" as "everything that once was, everything that is and everything that will be." Obscuring the information expected by the viewer provokes that same creative power of the cosmos affirmed by Sagan. The colour of the cosmic skin in the Cameroonian images built by Ategwa reaffirms the will to achieve African identity independence from the Western eye.