



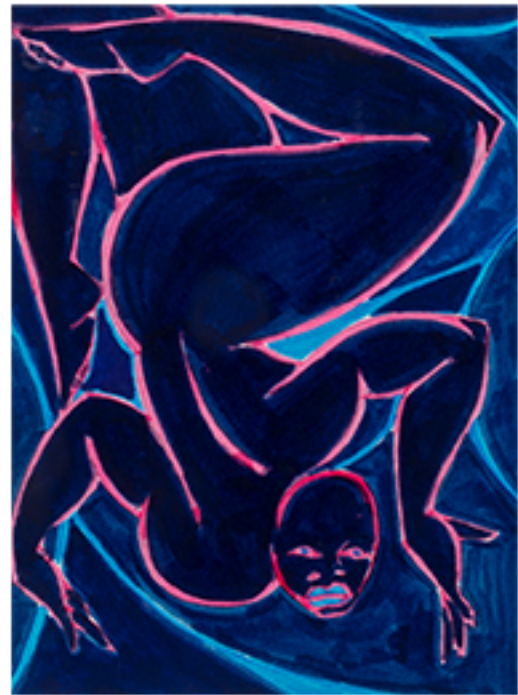
Tunji Adeniyi-Jones,
Untitled (038),
2018. Photo: Craig
Smith



Tunji Adeniyi-Jones,
Untitled (073),
2018. Photo: Craig
Smith



Tunji Adeniyi-Jones,
Untitled (082),
2018. Photo: Craig
Smith



Tunji Adeniyi-Jones,
Untitled (079),
2018. Photo: Craig
Smith

Inspired by West African folklore and the religious practices of Nigerian Yoruba tradition, the distinctive brand of figuration for Tunji Adeniyi-Jones is an analysis of movement: movement of bodies in space, across cultures, land, and through time. Previously framed by the specificity of characterization connected to his own cultural heritage, Adeniyi-Jones has worked to move his figures beyond the distinction of place toward a more ambiguously defined form within Blackness. His large-scale paintings emerge from what the artist describes as cultural addition or cultural hybridity, the idea that as bodies move, they acquire and metamorphose to form new distinct identities. Often compared to Matisse through visual connections to *papiers découpés*, a more apt connection might be to the work of artist Belkis Ayon or contemporaries such as Diedrick Brackens whose explorations of narrative, mythologies, place, and black figures within space and movement relate more readily. Tunji-Adeniyi credits connections with Chris Ofili's blue paintings, and black figurative painters like Kerry James Marshall, Aaron Douglas, and Ben Enwonwu as informing not only his distinctive brand of figurative abstraction but his voice as an artist.

In his series of untitled studies (2018) curvilinear, androgynous black bodies are compacted in a shallow plane, captured in perpetual movement amongst backdrops of vibrant botanicals and undulating lines. The shades used are his night shades, deeper and darker than those in more purposefully luminous settings. Each figure is posed distinctly, appearing poised to a specific action yet to be fully enacted. One figure bounds upright through magenta and plum-colored foliage, the arm on the opposite side from the viewer angled unnaturally, begging the question of another figure hiding submerged beneath dense leafy foliage. Another creeps from above to curiously inspect the world below amid a circular motif of shifting cerulean and indigo. The magenta outline, mimicking that of the first figure, is given luminescent qualities against the darker backdrop. Another figure kneels to stare contemplatively in the direction of their upraised hand, a turquoise outline running unbroken around their body and throughout fuchsia foliage that connects them as one. The last twists and bends, holding their body distended upright with legs curved and toes distinctly pointed. The hands and feet are where the expressive tension lies for Adeniyi-Jones. His figures gesticulate in graceful performance, adding visual depth to an expressive dance unrealized for the viewer.

For Adeniyi-Jones his work is connected emotively, his practice is a visceral outpouring of energy, ritualistically repetitive but distinct in form, feeling, and narrative. Often beginning with studies like these in ink pen or watercolor on paper, the repetitive nature of working in series allows space for continual evolution and experimentation. The use of the body, for Adeniyi-Jones is not only a vehicle for storytelling, but a visual representation of connection, belonging, and solidarity.

-Keshia Turley, Curatorial Assistant
Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art