

# PIPPY HOULDSWORTH GALLERY

## VICTOR EHIKHAMENOR

*Reincarnation (I)*

The Box

2 May - 5 July 2025

Private View | Thursday 1 May 2025 | 6-8pm

AND

*For the Love of Stolen Gods & Reincarnation*

INSIGHT 2.1 | Viewing Room

2 - 31 May 2025

Private View | Thursday 1 May 2025 | 6-8pm



Pippy Houldsworth Gallery is delighted to present *Reincarnation (I)*, a sculptural presentation by Nigerian-American artist Victor Ehikhamenor (b. 1970, Udomi-Uwessan, Nigeria) in The Box, the gallery's micro-project space. Ehikhamenor is also included in our INSIGHT 2.1 presentation, an exhibition series displaying new work by artists in the Pippy Houldsworth Gallery Viewing Room. In his multidisciplinary practice, Ehikhamenor focuses on the global African diaspora, the wider legacy of African cultural heritage, and the postcolonial politics of his home nation.

*Reincarnation (I)* belongs to Ehikhamenor's new series, *For the Love of Stolen Gods & Reincarnation*, in which the artist responds to current debates surrounding cultural legacy and the return of stolen artworks. His sculptures reference the iconic Benin bronzes created by the Edo people since the 14<sup>th</sup> century in modern day Edo State, Nigeria. During the Benin Expedition of 1897, thousands of these historic bronzes were stolen by British forces under the British Empire's protectorate control of the region, resulting in their subsequent relocation and diffusion worldwide. Ehikhamenor's project responds to the global repatriation and restitution efforts to return the bronzes to their original home. The international movement has sparked strong debate, offering opportunities to reconsider how we define national collections.

In *Reincarnation (I)*, Ehikhamenor creates a visual and conceptual dialogue with historical Edo artists in both his formal considerations and his emphasized materiality of bronze as a cast medium. Collaborating with local foundries in the precise location that Benin bronzes have been produced for centuries, with the traditional lost wax casting method, Ehikhamenor works within a temporal and material continuum. In a formal dialogue between past and present, the artist casts abstracted versions of the beaded, tiered headdresses and collar-like coral necklaces worn by the Oba and Benin kingdom nobility, as seen in many of the bronzes made during the two golden ages of bronze production in the Oba Esigie (c. 1550) and Oba Eresoyen (1735-1750) reigns.

However, in a departure from tradition, Ehikhamenor renders the face of his figure bare, leaving a highly polished surface that is impenetrable and unflinching. The undefined face signifies the role of absence within the global

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narrative of the Benin bronzes, the erasure and silencing of Edo cultural heritage in the wake of colonial extraction. Likewise polished to a reflective quality are the thin bronze runners that Ehikhamenor has retained from the casting process. These supporting runners make explicit the laborious process of casting in bronze, a method of using wooden carvings, wax, compressed sand and molten bronze that the Edo people have used since the twelfth century.

By directly referencing the loss created by the removal of the Benin bronzes and the global politics of repatriation, Ehikhamenor seeks to reawaken the public's sensibility towards the historical artform, demonstrating that Edo artistic bronze casting has and will continue to thrive even as efforts are made towards restitution.

Victor Ehikhamenor (b. 1970, Udomi-Uwessan, Nigeria) lives and works in Lagos, Nigeria. He holds an MFA in Fiction and an MSc from the University of Maryland (2004; 2008), and a BA from Ambrose Alli University, Nigeria (1991). In 2022 he was commissioned to create a large scale installation, *Still Standing*, in St Paul's Cathedral, London. Recent solo and group exhibitions include *Enigma of Time Remembered*, Maruani Mercier (2024); *REFUGE*, Lagos Biennial, Nigeria (2024); *Rites of Passage*, Gagosian, London (2023); *Free the Wind, The Spirit, and the Sun*, Stephen Friedman Gallery, London (2023); *Lagos, Peckham, Repeat: Pilgrimage to the Lakes*, South London Gallery, London (2023); amongst others. His immersive installations include those at Pinakothek Der Moderne, Munich, Germany (2021); The Nigerian Pavilion, 57th Venice Biennale (2017); and the 12th Dak'art Biennale, Senegal (2016), amongst others. His collections include The Studio Museum in Harlem, NY; The High Museum, Atlanta, GA; the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, UK; Museum der Kulturen Basel, Switzerland; The Staatliche Museen Zu Berlin, Germany; The Onassis Foundation, Athens, Greece; The Museum of World Art, The Netherlands; Yemisi Shyllon Museum, Lagos, Nigeria; and The MARKK Museum, Hamburg, Germany; amongst others.