

# The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum

For Immediate Release

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## LAYO BRIGHT: DAWN AND DUSK April 7 to October 27, 2024

### Layo Bright's first solo museum exhibition features new and recent works in glass and pottery

The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum is pleased to announce Layo Bright's first solo museum exhibition featuring new and recent works in glass and pottery made between 2020 and 2024. This show brings together several ongoing series tracking Bright's synchronized jumps from figuration to abstraction. *Layo Bright: Dawn and Dusk* will be on view April 7 to October 27, 2024, and will be accompanied by the artist's first museum publication.

Working in the round, on the wall, and in relief, Bright's practice centers narratives of ancestry, feminism, migration, and the African diaspora. She cites her matrilineal heritage, the Nigerian Ife Heads, and West African textiles, as well as contemporary artists Simone Leigh, Wangechi Mutu, Beth Lipman, Fred Wilson, Alison Saar, and Shin-ichi and Kimiake Higuchi, as some of her inspirations.

Bright chooses materials that express geopolitical and biographical resonance to spotlight themes of female solidarity and matriarchy, as well as memories of Nigeria and her diasporic experience in the United States. Her portraits in blown and kiln-formed glass and pottery are tributes to the women in her life. She adorns her ceramics with gele, West African head ties, symbols of beauty and culture. The handed down fabrics personify the memories of friends and family, advancing their stories forward.

The origin of the exhibition's title can be found in two mold-blown glass busts of a singular woman, named *Dawn* or *Dusk* respectively. This series, begun shortly after the murder of Breonna Taylor, honors female Black power in the wake of historic injustice. Bright's attraction to glass as a material originates both from its singular ability to shift from transparency to opacity and light to darkness but also for its metaphorical potential as an expression of ambiguity and change. Each object is positioned on a natural wood pedestal rubbed in a Nigerian camwood powder, imparting it with a reddish finish and earthy scent.

Her glass paintings are composed in panels and merge kiln-fused glass with grounds covered in "Ghana must go" bags, named after the 1983 decree that forced two million undocumented Ghanaians and African migrants from Nigeria. The inexpensive woven and checkered nylon totes characterize forced exodus and consider global displacement. Installed in proximity, is *The Thorn and Roses* (2022), the artist's first working fountain, blown in a luminous black glass. In Yoruba culture water is the dominion of the spirits, a liminal space where life and death



Layo Bright, *Bloom in Spring Green & Purple*, 2023. Kiln formed glass. 21 x 17.5 x 5 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

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coalesce. The sound of the water's flow fills the gallery, symbolizing life and death as well as passage and regeneration.

The exhibition also marks the unveiling of three new glass portraits, her largest to date, that allude to masks and caryatids. Oval and diamond shaped, each features a face of a woman close to her, rendered in its own individualized palette. As homages to women in the artist's community and family, each portrait is encircled by a lavish arrangement of blown, fused, and cast glass flowers native to Nigeria—such as the Nigerian trumpet flower, the country's national flower, Nigerian hibiscus, and the Nigerian star flower—as well as a blend of flowers from around the world, speaking to migration and the cross-pollination of cultures. The sumptuous blossoms spread out of the frame and climb the lattice, demonstrating the bounty and fortitude of Black brilliance and sisterhood.

The exhibition will be accompanied by the artist's first institutional publication which will include images of the works on view, installation views, and an introduction and interview with the curator, Amy Smith-Stewart.

Layo Bright was born in 1991 in Lagos, Nigeria and lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. She received a law degree from Babcock University in 2014 and an MFA from the Parsons School of Design in 2018. Her work has appeared at venues including the Museum of Glass, Tacoma; Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago; Sean Kelly Gallery, New York; Welancora Gallery, New York; Mike Adenuga Centre, Lagos, Nigeria; Parts & Labor, New York; Meyerhoff Gallery at MICA, Baltimore; Mana Contemporary, Chicago; Smack Mellon, New York, among others. She is the recipient of awards including the Ron Desmett Award for Imagination in Glass, UrbanGlass Visiting Artist and Designer Fellowship, the International Sculpture Center's 2018 Outstanding Student Achievement in Contemporary Sculpture Award, and the Beyoncé Formation Finalist Scholarship (2017). She has attended residencies at the Museum of Glass, Tacoma; UrbanGlass, New York; Tyler School of Glass, Philadelphia; Art Cake, New York; NXTHVN, New Haven; Triangle, New York; Flux Factory, New York; The Studios at Mass MoCA, North Adams, MA, among others.

*Layo Bright: Dawn and Dusk* is organized by Amy Smith-Stewart, Chief Curator.

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