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Anthony Olubunmi Akinbola

Camouflage

Sean Kelly, New York

September 5 – October 18, 2025

Opening reception: Friday, September 5, 6-8pm

Sean Kelly is delighted to present *Camouflage*, an exhibition of new paintings by Anthony Olubunmi Akinbola. Marking a pivotal moment in the artist's practice nearly a decade after he first began working with durags as his primary material, this exhibition is the apotheosis of Akinbola's evolving relationship with durags and their cultural associations. Presenting a range of styles, this new body of work reflects a shift from overt sociopolitical commentary toward a more nuanced, materially focused inquiry, centering on the durag's formal potential, chromatic variation, and emotional resonance. There will be an opening reception on Friday, September 5 from 6-8pm. The artist will be present.

Titled in homage to Akinbola's earliest durag works, *Camouflage* explores the idea of metamorphosis, how a material, like identity, can adapt, evolve, and carry multiple readings at the same time. Akinbola's durag paintings, which once spoke primarily to themes of assimilation, stereotype, and Black identity, now reveal themselves equally as rigorous studies in color theory and abstraction. Drawing on the durag's variability, such as discrepancies born from supply chain idiosyncrasies, Akinbola mines beauty supply stores for unique tones and textures, orchestrating compositions that oscillate between loose improvisation and grid-like formalism.

This focus on material experimentation has also allowed Akinbola to imbue his work with greater emotional intimacy. Though the durag remains a politically charged object, the works in *Camouflage* are less concerned with teaching or critique and more attuned to how

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color, texture, and gesture can express personal states such as anxiety, grief, or joy. “Color itself is political,” Akinbola states, “and strong enough to carry meaning on its own.” In this way, the durag becomes both medium and metaphor—camouflaging not only the head but also the intentions behind the work, simultaneously concealing and revealing.

Camouflage also introduces a new series of “brick” paintings that signal a conceptual expansion within Akinbola’s durag-based practice. Inspired by his time at the Black Rock Residency in Dakar, these works reference the ubiquitous, often incomplete construction projects seen throughout the region—physical symbols of aspiration, labor, and halted progress. Akinbola approaches the brick as both a literal and metaphorical building block: a gesture toward permanence, infrastructure, and legacy. The brick motif also opens a compelling dialogue between textile and architecture. In these works, the stitch becomes mortar, binding fragments into a unified structure that is as much about memory and endurance as it is about form.

In *Camouflage*, Akinbola doesn’t abandon the history of the durag, but expands its visual language. His paintings speak to transformation, not just of material, but of purpose, intention, and of self. In doing so, he opens new space for the durag to function not only as a symbol of identity, but as a radical vehicle for color and abstraction.

Anthony Olubunmi Akinbola was born in Columbia, Missouri in 1991 and received a BA in communications and media from SUNY Purchase College. In February 2027, his work will be the subject of a two-person exhibition at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh PA. His work was recently the subject of a major solo exhibition at the SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah, Georgia. He has also exhibited one person and group exhibitions at renowned institutions such as the Guggenheim, New York; the Institute of Contemporary Art San Francisco, San Francisco, CA; Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, Germany; The Queens Museum, New York; the Randall Recreation Center, Washington D.C.; the August Wilson African American Cultural Center, Pittsburgh, PA; the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, WI; the Saint Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, MO; Kunsthaus Graz, Graz, Austria; the Bruce Museum, Greenwich, CT; and the Museum of Art and Design, New York, NY, amongst others. His work is included numerous collections, such as the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY; the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, NC; The Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, NY; the Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, MI; the Speed Art Museum, Louisville, KY; the Ogunquit Museum of American Art, Ogunquit, ME; the Pizzuti Collection, Columbus, OH; the Beth Rudin DeWoody Collection, West Palm Beach, FL; and the Zabłudowicz Collection, London, UK.

For additional information on Anthony Olubunmi Akinbola, please visit skny.com

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Image: Anthony Olubunmi Akinbola, *Ghillie Suit*, 2025, durags on wood panel, 72 x 96 in © Anthony Akinbola Courtesy: the artist and Sean Kelly, New York/Los Angeles