

NOLDOR, GHANA'S FIRST INDEPENDENT ARTIST RESIDENCY, GROWS INTO A THRIVING ARTISTIC HUB AS IT UNVEILS ANNUAL SENIOR AND JUNIOR FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMS

Noldor announces extensive expansion plans, as the residency grows to include additional warehouse spaces to further engage and support contemporary artists from Africa and its diaspora. The new junior and senior fellowship programs welcome leading Ghanaian artist Gideon Appah and emerging local artists Abigail Aba Otoo and Joshua Oheneba-Takyi.



March 9, 2021 (Accra, Ghana) – Inaugurated in November 2020, the **Noldor Artist Residency** is Ghana's first independent arts residency and fellowship program for contemporary African artists, located in Accra, Ghana. Founded by contemporary African art specialist, social entrepreneur and philanthropist Joseph Awuah-Darko, Noldor is excited to announce the expansion of its existing programming and warehouse spaces. The new senior and junior fellowship programs extend Noldor's continuous support to contemporary artists from Africa and its diaspora.

In addition to its annual four-week artist residency, Noldor unveils a year-long program for senior and junior fellows to take place in its newly renovated 700-square-meter warehouse spaces. Forging a flourishing artistic commune, the new initiatives invite artists to collaboratively extend and deepen their practices. The very disposition of the warehouse space encourages this artistic experimentation. A U-shaped structure with connecting footbridges and exposed to extensive light, it is divided into several broad volumes adapted to a variety of formats and mediums.

Set in Accra's blooming *Labadi* district, the residency is rooted in the seafront area's fervent cultural life, nourished by a growing creative community that brings together artist studios, cultural centers and social venues as well as reputed Ghanaian artist Ablade Glover's Artists Alliance Gallery, the largest art gallery in Sub-Saharan Africa.

While the artist residency and fellowships provide the tools for the artists to develop themselves creatively, the program as a whole ensures and fosters a fruitful exchange between them, all-the-while placing Noldor at the heart of a broader local and global artistic ecosystem.

"The notion of the artistic commune is a recurring theme throughout art history," explains Noldor's founder and director Joseph Awuah-Darko. *"These often-repurposed industrial spaces, among which Beijing's reputed 798 art district, have acted as havens for some of the most iconic artistic production in history. By revisiting these decaying warehouses – once a vast pharmaceutical factory complex – we envisioned and seized their full potential at a time when access to artistic infrastructure and resources is extremely limited in Ghana. Beyond the material support to its artists, Noldor mirrors the organic and collaborative dynamics that characterize past and current artist communities – establishing it as a thriving hub for contemporary art, committed to nurturing its artists' creative process."*

Senior Fellowship

Only a few months after the inaugural artist residency of emerging Ghanaian artist Emmanuel Taku, Noldor welcomes its first senior fellow, prominent Ghanaian artist **Gideon Appah** (b. 1989, Accra). Appah has been invited to take over Noldor's extensive fellow studio space for the coming year. In a continuous exchange, Appah will act as a mentor and experienced resource, all-the-while focusing on his studio work and on producing a dedicated portfolio ahead of a private showing at the end of the fellowship.

Through his use of mixed media, from thick, rough applications of acrylic to collaged layers of personal posters, prints and photographs, Appah materializes his strong emotional bond to these elements. He alludes to the organic transformation of memories and recollections over time – invoking important familial figures, luscious landscapes, prevalent architecture, folklore and daily rituals from his upbringing. In the Noldor space, his first studio in Ghana, Appah returns to the very root of his work, his childhood in Ghana, plunging into the rawness and intimacy of his surroundings after several years abroad.



Aimed at mid-career artists from Africa or its diaspora, whose practice reflects Noldor's affirmed African identity and vision, the senior fellowship ensures the representation of an experienced artist within its community – and the benefits of this presence to Noldor's emerging participants.



Junior Fellowship

Working alongside the annual artist resident and senior fellow, Noldor's inaugural junior fellows, emerging Ghanaian artists **Abigail Aba Otoo** (b. 1997, Accra) and **Joshua Oheneba-Takyi** (b. 1997, Kumasi) will set their studios in the adjoining building, accessible through a connecting bridge and recently renovated as a shared warehouse space topped by designated studios for each fellow.

Aimed exclusively at emerging artists living and working in Ghana, the junior fellowship offers year-long access to Noldor's artistic resources and spaces where, in close contact with the other inhabitants of the space, the participants are encouraged to challenge their visual language as they work on creating a full portfolio of work. Upon completion, Noldor's goal is to launch the junior fellows into the primary art market in partnership with a commercial gallery.

The residency's first female participant, emerging mixed media artist **Abigail Aba Otoo** delves deeper into her study of existential themes around the Black female form, addressing both the universal female identity and mental health. Her junior fellow counterpart, self-taught artist **Joshua Oheneba-Takyi** pursues his exploration of

notions of displacement, all-the-while expanding on the use of the chair as metaphor for the latter throughout his drawings and paintings.

The new fellowships further solidify Noldor's goal to support African artists – both local and global, emerging and established – through their creative process, while acting as a pillar for their introduction and development within the Ghanaian and global contemporary art scenes. Marking Noldor's inauguration in November 2020, the first artist residency welcomed an emerging African artist with previous technical training, but limited access to infrastructure and material resources. Produced throughout the program, Taku's new painting series, *Temple of Blackness – It Takes Two*, was exhibited at Noldor from December 4, 2020 – January 17, 2021. Once again attesting to Noldor's durable engagement for its artists, Taku's solo debut exhibition, *The Chosen Few*, which builds on his residency series, will be presented at **Maruani Mercier Gallery** in Knokke, Belgium, from April 3 – May 15, 2021.

Establishing itself as a stepping-stone for African artists both locally and internationally, Noldor advocates for a both organic and dynamic approach to creation. Through its unconventional and ever-growing format, the non-profit fosters a creatively cohesive yet independent community. With the continuous support of Noldor's Founder, **Joseph Awuah-Darko**, Cultural Curator **Rita Benissan**, as well as the residency's Advisory Patrons, including renowned architect **Sir David Adjaye OBE**, the artists are immersed in a thriving artistic ecosystem: one that allows them to learn and grow from one another.



Both locally attuned and globally minded, Noldor extends its engagement to its artists and to artistic creation beyond its walls. As they emerge from the program, it ensures the longevity of its residents and fellows' careers within a competitive local and international art market. Moreover, nurtured by the local context, Noldor is committed to giving back to the local community by continuously engaging in philanthropic work in Ghana and abroad. Acting as a cultural repository, it encourages educational initiatives and offers learning opportunities to participants, local and global audiences alike. In doing so, it actively seeks to alter perceptions of and access to contemporary African art. All-the-while breaking down ubiquitous barriers of education and wealth within Ghana and across Africa, Noldor affirms itself as a bridge between local and global creative scenes, committed to strengthening the country and continent's ties with the international cultural scenes.

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

About Gideon Appah:

Born in Accra, Ghana, Gideon Appah (b. 1989) is the Noldor Artist Residency's first senior fellow. A mixed media artist, using thick, rough applications of acrylic to build up his compositions, Appah draws from personal experiences of life in Accra, responding directly to his own familial stories and Ghana's history.

A graduate in Fine Arts from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Appah presented his debut solo show in 2013, at the Goethe Institute, Accra. In 2016, Appah was shortlisted for Ghana's renowned Kuenyehia Art Prize for Contemporary Ghanaian Arts and received the 1st Merit Prize Award of the Barclays Atelier Art Competition, Johannesburg. The exposure led to a three-month residency at the Bag Factory Studios.

Appah is represented by notable international galleries, including Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York; Gallery 1957, London and Accra; and Afikaris, Paris. His works have been exhibited internationally, including: Casa Barragán, Mexico City, 2019; Ghana Science Museum, Accra, 2017; Nubuke Foundation, Accra, 2017. His work is included in the collections of the Absa Museum, Johannesburg; Museum of African Contemporary Art Al Maaden, Marrakesh; and Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto as well as several private collections.

About Joshua Oheneba-Takyi:

Born in Kumasi, Ghana, Joshua Oheneba-Takyi demonstrated an affinity for the arts at an early age, using it as a child as a coping mechanism to make up for his dyslexia. Moving away from these difficulties, Oheneba-Takyi pursued a degree in Construction Technology and Management at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (2020), all-the-while finetuning his artistic practice through conscientious self-teaching.

Oheneba-Takyi's versatile practice, based on drawing and painting, has increasingly drawn attention. In his work, he intimately documents and examines the themes of placement and displacement, often employing the chair as a metaphor for notions of stability and belonging.

He held his debut solo exhibition, *Inside Energy*, at the Jubilee Mall, Kumasi, in 2018, and has taken part in several group exhibitions, including *Full Moon*, at Antique Lemonade Gallery, Accra, 2017, and Secret Garden, Accra, 2019.

About Abigail Aba Otoo:

Born in Accra, Ghana, Abigail Aba Otoo (b. 1997) is currently completing a Pharmaceutical Doctorate Student at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. Actively pursuing her artistic practice in tandem with her studies, Aba Otoo explores existential themes around the Black female form, addressing issues from mental health to female identity. Using her signature mixed media approach, which incorporates party hoes, plastic, gold leaf, and chalk, Aba seeks to create evocative, subtly figurative sculptural compositions on canvas.

Actively engaged in initiatives around psychological wellness, she donated works to the Serenity Mental Health Advocacy and Community Fundraising Event (2019), a cause in which she continues to be involved. A newly emerging artist, she has taken part in select group exhibitions, including *Full Moon*, Secret Garden, Accra, 2019.

About Noldor:

Founded in 2020 by contemporary African art specialist, social entrepreneur and philanthropist Joseph Awuah-Darko, the Noldor Artist Residency is an arts residency and fellowship program for contemporary African artists. Located in Accra, Ghana, and as the country's first independent residency, Noldor is committed to nurturing the creative process of artists from Africa and its diaspora, while acting as a pillar for their development within the Ghanaian and global contemporary art scenes.

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Image credits:

Image 1. View of Noldor Artist Residency, Labadi, Accra, Ghana. Courtesy of Noldor Artist Residency.

Image 2. Joshua Oheneba-Takyi in the Junior Fellow studio space. Courtesy of the artist and of Noldor Artist Residency.

Image 3. Abigail Aba Otoo, She Rides and Reigns, 2021. Mixed media on canvas, 72 x 72 x 72 cm. Courtesy of the artist and of Noldor Artist Residency.