

# Don't Speak

**KAZ JOHNSON-SALAMI**

A solo-exhibition curated by  
Uwevwi Studios

15<sup>th</sup> - 21<sup>st</sup> March, 2026

MÌLÍKÌ  
7B Etim Inyang Crescent, VI, Lagos



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STUDIOS

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**“BEFORE THERE WERE WORDS FOR IT, THERE WAS THE  
WEIGHT.”**



**Stained by Green**

16 x 11.5 in

Mixed Media

2025



**I've Seen Life**  
35 x 48 in  
Mixed Media  
2025

# Curators Note

There is a silence that runs through every culture, every generation, every home.

It was never taught directly. It was inherited.

Don't Speak is an examination of that inheritance and what it costs the men who carry it.

Welcome.

**Nazerin Gbinije**

*Curator & Cultural Strategist*

**Uwevwi Studios**

[www.uwevwi.org](http://www.uwevwi.org)



**The Common Quiet 2**

16 x 11.5 in

Mixed Media

2025

# Artist Bio



Kaz Johnson-Salami (b.1995) is a Nigerian multidisciplinary artist based in Lagos, working across ballpoint pen, acrylic, photography, and illustrated sculpture. He holds a Foundation Diploma from Central Saint Martins and a BA in Graphic and Media Design from the London College of Communication.



**The Common Quiet 3**

16 x 11.5 in

Mixed Media

2025

His practice is rooted in portraiture and the interior life of his subjects, the emotions that sit beneath composed surfaces, the weight carried without acknowledgement, the stories that go unspoken. Colour in his work functions less as description and more as psychological register: disruption, pressure, the interior breaking through. He draws from the environment he grew up in and the people who shaped how he sees, finding in ordinary faces an emotional terrain that is rarely mapped and rarely spoken.

Don't Speak is his first formally presented body of work.





## Artist Statement

This body of work is centered on what people carry and don't say. Most of my subjects are men, specifically the kind of men I grew up around. Men who were present, dependable, and composed. Men who I now understand were holding something I wasn't allowed to see. My work is an attempt to look at that more honestly.

Whilst this is true, my art is broadly focused on people and emotion. I tell stories people can relate to through portraiture, focusing on tension, emotion, subtlety, and other facets of human behavior in the environment I grew up in, inspired by the people around me.



**The Weight We Carry 1**  
15.3 x 19.6 in  
Triptych Sculpture  
2025



**The Weight We Carry 3**  
15.3 x 19.6 in  
Triptych Sculpture  
2025

# Before There Were Words

Before there were words for it, there was the weight.

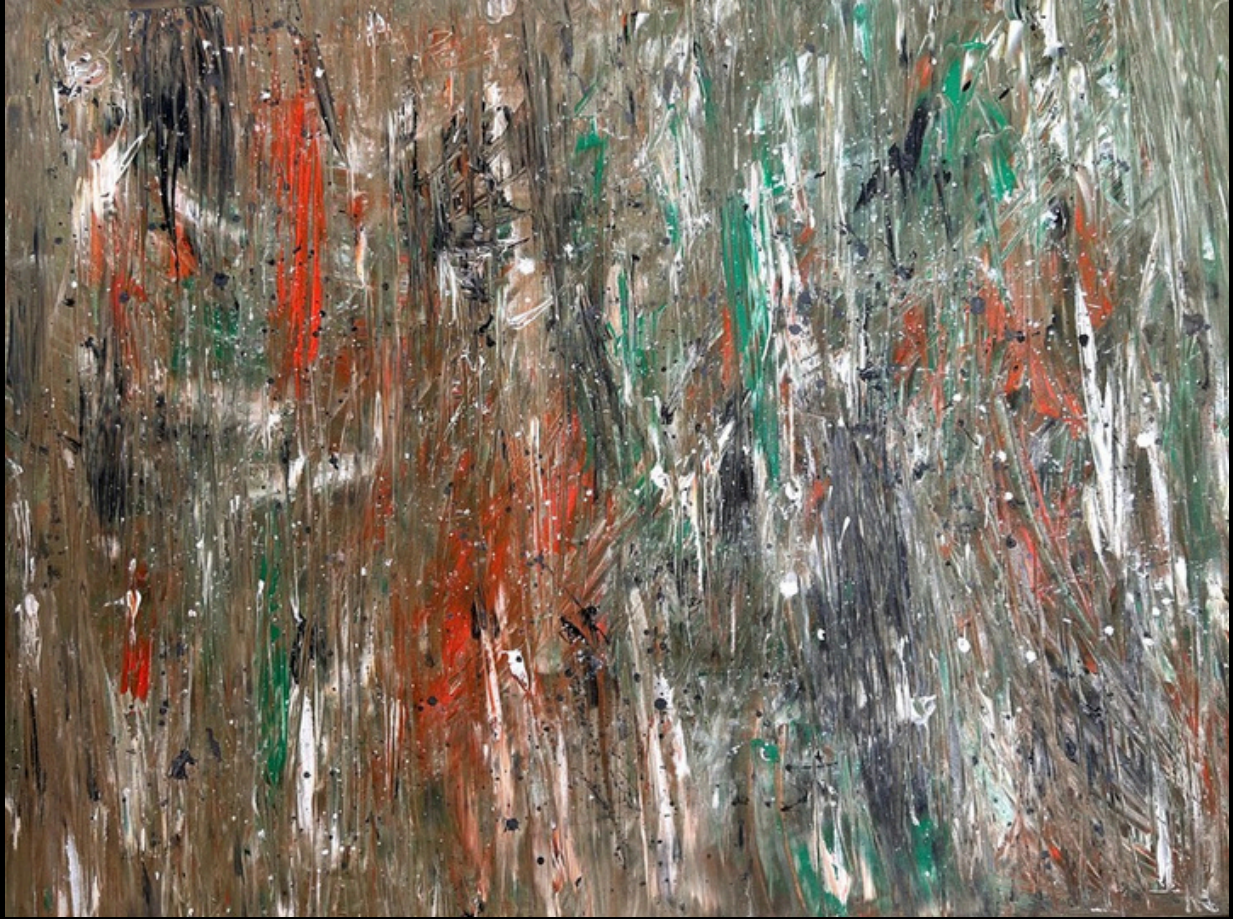
A father who worked without complaint. A grandfather whose grief you never witnessed but somehow inherited. A culture, a faith, a lineage that said: this is what a man is. This is what a man does. This is what a man does not say. The instruction was never written down because it didn't need to be. It arrived earlier than language. It was in the posture of the men around you. In what they laughed at and what made them go quiet. In the space between what they felt and what they showed.

The Japanese call it “gaman”:

*“The practice of enduring the unbearable with dignity and without complaint.”*

In Jewish tradition, the patriarch carries not just his family but the covenant itself, the weight of an entire people's survival threaded through his identity. The Irish father who worked three jobs and never once said I love you but showed up every morning without being asked. The Indian son who set aside what he wanted to become what the family needed. The Nigerian man who cannot tell his father he is struggling because his father never told his father, and his father's father never told his.

Across every culture and every century, men have been handed a shape and asked to live inside it, to be provider, protector, patriarch and the asking was so total, so early, and so constant that most never stopped to wonder if the shape was theirs to begin with. And so it was passed down, not as responsibility, because that would have invited resistance, but as identity. As an honour.



**Where Silence Lives**

32.5 x 43.5 in

Acrylic on Canvas

2025



**Time Does Not Erase**

24 x 48 in

Mixed Media

2026

As what it means to be a man. To name it as weight would have been to question the architecture of entire civilisations. So it remained unnamed. Performed daily. Accumulated quietly. And the men who carried it did so with a composure so practiced it became indistinguishable from peace.

Unlike the portraits that define much of the Don't Speak collection, "Where Silence Lives" turns its attention away from the faces and toward the environments that shape them. It is an abstract reflection of place, the beautiful chaos of spaces filled with noise, movement, pressure, and contradiction. It suggests that silence is not only carried by individuals, but cultivated by the environments around them. It is within these spaces, vibrant, chaotic, and alive that the unspoken first takes root

Kaz Johnson-Salami's Don't Speak enters that space. Working in ballpoint pen and acrylic, a medium that demands the same patience and accumulation it depicts, Kaz builds portraits of men in the act of holding. The faces are composed. The eyes carry what the expression refuses to. And the tension between those two things, rendered across canvas, paper, and repurposed wood, is where the work lives.

The most physical articulation of this is a coffee table. Its base is built from old domestic wood, furniture that has already held one life, repainted, rebuilt, made to hold another. The faces on its exterior look out at whoever sits around it.



**The Common Quiet 1**

16 x 11.5 in

Mixed Media

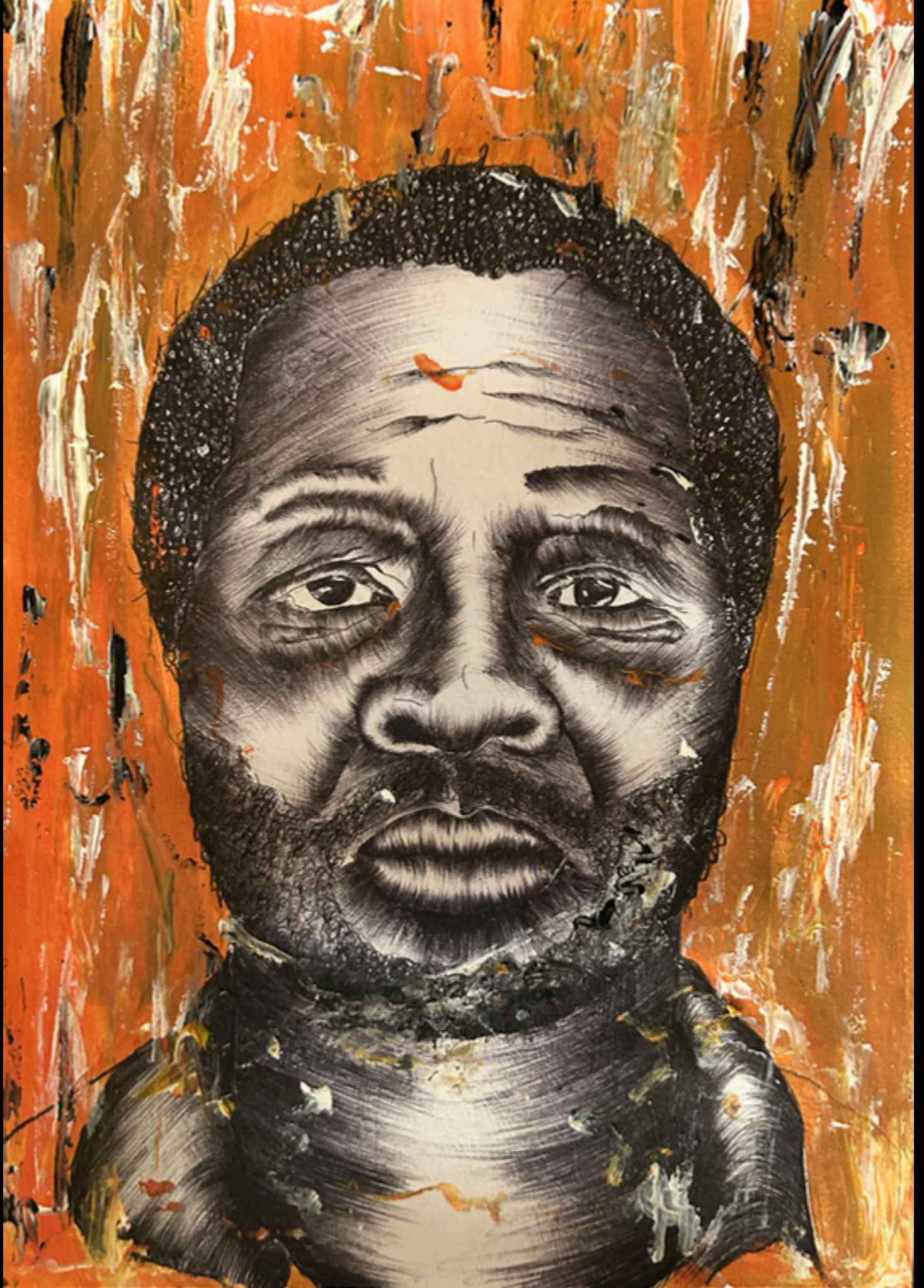
2025

The Common Quiet series places five men in the same frame without naming them individually. Different ages, different backgrounds, a single shared condition. The repetition is the argument: this silence is not personal. It is systemic. It is the inheritance. And in *Stained By Green*, that inheritance is caught at its earliest moment, a boy, not yet a man, his face already being absorbed by the green of his environment, of his nation, of the world he was placed into before he had a say. The question the work asks is quiet but it does not go away:

*“How much of what we become was ever really ours to choose?”*

What makes *Don't Speak* significant is not that it exposes suffering. It is that it refuses to flatten the complexity of what it examines. For many men, across many cultures, endurance has been the truest form of love available to them, the language they inherited when no other was offered. A father who could not say I love you but never once failed to show up. A man who could not speak his fear but carried it so his children wouldn't have to.

This body of work does not ask these men to have been different. It asks us to finally see what they were doing. And perhaps, having seen it, to ask whether the sons who come after them might be allowed a wider language.



**The Common Quiet 4**

16 x 11.5 in  
Mixed Media  
2025



**The Weight We Carry 2**

36.3 x 19.6 in

Triptych Sculpture

2025

## Words from Kaz

As this body of work comes into the world, I am deeply grateful. First, to God - for the courage to begin again, and for the grace to persevere through doubt.

To my wife, thank you for your patience, belief, and steady support. Your presence has been a quiet strength behind this work.

To the Uwevwi team, who trusted the vision and helped shape this experience, and to everyone who has shown up - your time, your presence, and your openness mean more than you know.

Thank you!

**Kaz Johnson-Salami**

Lagos, Nigeria



**The Common Quiet 5**

16 x 11.5 in  
Mixed Media  
2025



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