

Artist Statement and Vision for Purple Hibiscus

Installed on the Lakeside, a public space, *Purple Hibiscus* is a site-specific, colourful and spectacular commission that brings together textiles and materiality with a focus on communities – craftspeople, weavers and makers in Ghana, but also referencing the many workers that contributed to the making of the Barbican’s iconic building. Comprising approximately 2500 metres of bespoke cloth in pink and purple, woven by weavers and sewn together by hundreds of women from collectives in Ghana, the fabric will be fitted around the Lakeside façade of the Barbican Centre. The work is an homage to the Barbican – the materiality of the pitted concrete so painstakingly hammered by hand and representing the labour of multiple workers is allied with respect for the building as a masterpiece of urban planning that built homes and a world-class centre for the arts from the wreckage of a WWII bomb site. The pink material will have up to 100 antique smocks, robes worn by kings, embroidered on to it. These are precious textiles that are often saved by families over generations as talismans of lineage and power. The memories embedded in the textiles carry impressions of the body, of the intimacy acquired and worn into the threads by the kings that wore them, imbuing their powerful presence and history in Mahama’s work. The pink and purple colour of the woven cloth is intended to project a joyful vista, but also reflect connection and allyship with marginalised communities, including LGBTQIA+ groups in Ghana and the UK.

About the artist:

Ibrahim Mahama (b.1987) is a Ghanaian artist whose work explores themes of commodity, globalisation and economic exchange as reflected in Ghana’s history and culture. Mahama is known for his large-scale installations, using collections of objects and materials that carry stories of individuals, groups and wider socio-political issues that shape how these objects have been traded, used and understood locally within Ghana and globally. Rigorous research informs his practice, bringing historical references, stories and customs to the fore in his choice of materials – be that jute sacks, shoe boxes, train carriages, window frames or sewing machines. Trained as a painter, Mahama is interested in materiality and texture; worn, degraded or bearing scars from years of use, the memories embedded within speaks of lives bound up in distributions of power that reflect enduring cultural and economic disparities. Fearless when it comes to scope and scale, Mahama’s impactful installations take space, demand questions and enquiry, but also reflect solidarity with the many communities he works with and employs in Ghana to realise his artistic vision. As an educator and curator, he is active in Ghana in bringing his art back to the people and tireless in his work to allow for transparency and communication between the histories and connections reflected in his works, and the lives of Ghanaians, outside of the commodified and exclusive environs of the art market.