

**NICOLA  
VASSELL**

Opening September 4, 6–8 pm  
September 4 — October 18, 2025

**ADEBUNMI GBADEBO**

**WATCH OUT FOR  
THE GHOSTS**



Gallery Hours

Tuesday–Saturday, 10 am–6 pm

138 10th Ave. New York, NY 10011

For Press Inquiries

For press inquiries, please reach out to the team at [ALMA](#).

# NICOLA VASSELL

Nicola Vassell is pleased to present *Watch Out for the Ghosts*, an exhibition of new work by Adebunmi Gbadebo, the artist's first solo exhibition with the gallery. The title—a quote from Amari Baraka's poem *The Why's and the Wise*—echoes Gbadebo's journey through loss, family history and reconnecting with the land they once inhabited. In bringing together works made in ceramic and paper along with a short film, this exhibition signals the evolution of the artist's conceptual practice and the deepening of her research into material and process.

Upon learning of her ancestors' enslavement on True Blue plantation in Fort Motte, South Carolina, Gbadebo made the site a focal point of her work. For the past three years, she has hand dug soil from the cemetery that she then transforms into clay for her ceramic vessels. The works' unique sizes and anthropomorphic shapes instinctively develop as she hand builds each of them using a Nigerian and Cameroonian coiling technique. Beyond the soil which they are made of, Gbadebo's vessels carry—inside them or on their surfaces—invocations of True Blue's landscape, sometimes being filled with pine needles, Carolina gold rice or woven segments of donated hair, all while acting as bodies occupying space.

The surface of each work is enhanced by Gbadebo's control of fire and smoke during pit and raku firing, achieving distinctive aesthetic outcomes for each vessel. While the oxidized red and black patina results from both methods, during raku firing—where the ceramic vessel is removed from the kiln while still hot before the surface is marked and inscribed upon with hair—Gbadebo creates a myriad of details and effects, from fluid and jagged lines to textured impressions.

The Loblolly pine tree—a new ceramic form developed for the exhibition—illustrates Gbadebo's drive to push her medium ever further. Indentations and shoe polish applied to the trunk's surface reference wood carving and give the illusion of natural bark. These acts of transfiguration create new context for the conifer and its native landscape. The ubiquitous pine that defines vast stretches of the plantation horizon is reimagined through fire and smoke, with earth and hair, into a towering sculpture over five-feet tall. Her tree—a symbol of growth—also announces a new interest in the woodlands as an alternative space for gathering.

Just as her ceramics reveal Gbadebo's multifaceted engagement with the land and history of her ancestors, so too do her paper works. Her largest-scale effort to date, the five sheets Gbadebo will debut in the show, are made using her own technique of mixing cotton pulp and donated hair. Broadening the scope of her material and geographical research, she collected soil from other sites—such as the Stoney Bluff plantation in Trenton, South Carolina and the centuries old kaolin mines in Aiken, South Carolina—which she then transformed into pigment for her sheets. Thus the dye becomes a conceptual and material bridge to her ceramic vessels. Also incorporated in the sheets are a myriad of seeds which survived the middle passage or were grown by Black seed keepers and convey an intensely tactile and almost relief-like quality to the works. Mica, a material new to her paper making process, bestows a shimmering and iridescent quality to the texture of the paper itself.

Gallery Hours

Tuesday–Saturday, 10 am–6 pm

138 10th Ave. New York, NY 10011

For Press Inquiries

For press inquiries, please reach out to the team at [ALMA](#).

# NICOLA VASSELL

Both the scope and detail of Gbadebo's exploration of her family's history is portrayed in a new film eponymously titled *Watch Out for the Ghosts*, directed by Yvonne Michelle Shirley. Weaving together imagery of Gbadebo making work in South Carolina with reunions and reconnection with family members, the film functions as a poetic letter to her ancestors while offering a reminder of an enduring insight of her practice, namely that history, rather than being static or fixed in meaning, can be continuously reinterpreted, remade and reclaimed.

## About Adebunmi Gbadebo

Adebunmi Gbadebo (Ah-dae-bu-me Bha-dae-bo) lives and works in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Gbadebo earned a BFA at the School of Visual Arts, New York and a certification in Creative Place Keeping at the New Jersey Institute of Technology. She was an Artist in Residence at the Clay Studio in Philadelphia (2021-2025) and has also been a Maxwell and Hanrahan Fellow (2023) and a Pew Fellow (2022). Gbadebo was a Keynote speaker for the American Ceramic Circle annual conference (2023) and has given talks at various educational and cultural institutions including the University of Pennsylvania and Clemson University, the Museum of the African Diaspora, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Newark Museum of Art. She served as the Community Engagement Apprentice to Architect Nina Cooke John for the Harriet Tubman Monument in Newark, New Jersey.

Solo exhibitions include *Watch Out for the Ghosts*, Nicola Vassell Gallery, New York, (2025); *Adebunmi Gbadebo: Remains*, Claire Oliver Gallery, New York (2023) and *Uprooted*, New Jersey City University, Jersey City, NJ (2020) and *The Ade Series*, Rutgers University, Newark, NJ (2016). Group exhibitions include *Rise Up: Resistance, Revolution, Abolition*, The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge, UK (2025); *Ten Thousand Suns*, 24th Biennale of Sydney, Artspace, AU (2024); *Blues People*, Express Newark, Rutgers University, Newark, NJ (2024); *Songs for Ritual and Remembrance*, Arthur Ross Gallery, University of Pennsylvania, PA (2023) and *Hear Me Now: The Black Potters of Old Edgefield, South Carolina* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Traveled to the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, University of Michigan Museum of Art, and the High Museum of Art, Atlanta (2022). Gbadebo's work is held in the collections of the Brooklyn Museum, Carnegie Museum of Art, Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minnesota Museum of American Art, Montclair Art Museum, Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Newark Museum of Art, the Rhode Island School of Design, the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, the South Carolina State Museum, Wake Forest University and the Weisman Art Museum.

## About Nicola Vassell

Nicola Vassell is a contemporary art gallery committed to discourse that widens the lens of the history and future of art. Its focus is on developing an intergenerational, cross-disciplinary program of international artists and thinkers.

Gallery Hours

Tuesday–Saturday, 10 am–6 pm

138 10th Ave. New York, NY 10011

For Press Inquiries

For press inquiries, please reach out to the team at [ALMA](#).