

The Royal Watercolour Society (RWS) Presents:
Modupeola Fadugba: The Chemistry of Water

Exhibition Dates: 5 June – 27 June 2026

The RWS Gallery, 3-5 Whitcomb Street, London WC2H 7HA

Open Tuesday – Saturday, 11am - 5pm



Modupeola Fadugba, Yellow Benin Rider and Pink Lone Rider (2026)
Acrylic, graphite, ink, and beads on burned Canvas, 187.96 x 114.3 cm each, courtesy the artist

The Royal Watercolour Society (RWS), London, is proud to present *The Chemistry of Water* – an exhibition of new and recent works by Nigerian artist Modupeola Fadugba, on view from 5 - 27 June 2026. This special exhibition develops the RWS's expansion of the boundaries of contemporary watercolour practice, and reflects Fadugba's own investment in the materiality of her work. Rather than treating watercolour as a fixed set of materials, the show considers it as a set of behaviours: flow, absorption, resistance, and reflection.

The Chemistry of Water reflects Fadugba's wider practice – from Lagos and beyond – where water has been as much a subject as a condition; something that guides both how her figures move and how her materials behave. Acrylics are thinned and layered to act like watercolours, creating transparency and movement. Burnt surfaces alter the way pigment is absorbed. Beads interrupt and redirect its flow. Resist techniques hold space against it. In the works on show, Fadugba's background in chemical engineering is brought into the foreground. Understanding that water itself is never static – at a molecular level, it is always forming and breaking bonds, always responding to its environment – she applies this to inform how pigment moves across a surface, how heat alters material, and how different elements interact in ways that cannot be fully predicted. The results are works whose canvases are transformed through burning, fluid acrylics, and reflective surfaces that refuse stillness.

On the ground floor, viewers are greeted by the rich pageantry of the Ojude Oba festival held annually in Ijebu-Ode, Nigeria, renowned for its elaborate equestrian processions, resplendent attire, and deeply rooted communal traditions. In these works Fadugba develops her use of bronze, which carries both weight and luminosity whilst also referencing histories of bronze casting in Benin, where the artist has watched metal transformed through fire, melting, and pouring. Applied alongside pinks, indigos, golds, and browns, bronze leaf is laid onto surfaces to catch and shift with light – offering a phosphorescent finish that is at once stable and constantly in motion, like ocean waves. This exhibition prominently features beading techniques, building upon her time working with Maasai beadworkers since her youth, enduring mentorship by artist and textile designer Mama Nike, and current engagement with bead sellers in Lagos markets. Through these shared systems of knowledge, Fadugba draws on the

cultural and spiritual significance of beads across African cultures. Fadugba explores the properties of intumescent paint – a material that expands when exposed to heat, producing raised surfaces that physically interrupt the movement of liquid. This technical exploration expands upon indigo dyeing traditions in Nigeria, where resist is used to create pattern through absence – understood not as emptiness, but as presence in its own right.

On the lower floors of the exhibition, Fadugba forefronts works from her enduring *Synchronised Swimmers* series in the context of how experimentation and ephemerality grounds her practice by recreating her studio space within the gallery. Fadugba approaches water, swimming, and the chemical compound of H₂O not simply as a visual property, but as a method of thinking about movement and memory, relation and change. Reflective pools, layered pigments, luminous beads, and textured surfaces ebb and flow through the exhibition like recurring waves. They trace conversations between chemistry and choreography, whereby material inheritance ultimately leads to education and metamorphosis. We are proud to present the video commission and full poem of *Dear Young Artist*, inspired by Kenyan artist Wangechi Mutu's her essay "They Eat Because You Grow the Food", and Fadugba's similar questions around what it means to sustain an artistic practice over time, particularly within conditions of uncertainty, visibility, labour, and care.

In the final room, the swimming pool becomes alchemical laboratory: a place of creativity and collaboration, inviting visitors to expand their understanding of the methods of making beyond the gallery walls. It asks the question: what might watercolour become if we allow it to behave like water itself – fluid, adaptive, resistant – and always in relation to the wider world around it. *The Chemistry of Water* will be accompanied by live programming throughout the duration of the exhibition, layering multiple interdisciplinary voices to activate the works. These collaborations are the continuation of Fadugba's *The Artist's Algorithm* series – an ongoing, artist-led programme of essays, talks, games, performances, mentorship programmes, murals, and videos which aims to shed light on problems and collection solutions in education, politics, and governance through her art. It also takes place alongside Fadugba's showcase at the Royal Academy's Summer Exhibition 2026, running from 16 June - 23 August 2026.

Anne Lynch, Vice President of the Royal Watercolour Society, comments: *"Fadugba's work brilliantly encapsulates the RWS' commitment to uplifting and expanding the medium, pushing the boundaries of contemporary watercolour practice. Through the vibrance of her materials and the language of this work, Fadugba stretches the medium from within. For years, Fadugba's work has engaged with water—its resistance, its release—and we are delighted to support her further interrogation of the medium further, here in London, coinciding with the exciting London gallery Weekend."*

Modupeola Fadugba comments: *"It feels especially meaningful that this exhibition will take place in London, where I first encountered watercolour as a teenager. At the time, I understood watercolour as something complete in itself, gentle, observational, resolved. I could not have known then that I would return to that same medium years later, not to inherit it, but to stretch it, to test its limits, and to ask what it might become. Watercolour, as it is traditionally understood in England, carries with it a certain image: the artist seated outdoors, brush in hand, capturing a landscape in light washes. It is a medium associated with observation, with control disguised as fluidity. But water itself has never behaved this way. Water insists. It moves beyond instruction. It absorbs, disperses, reflects, and distorts. To be invited into a tradition is also to be asked what you will do with it, whether you will preserve it or push against it - with the works in *The Chemistry of Water*, I aim to do a little bit of both."*

About the Artist

Modupeola Fadugba (b. 1985, Togo. Lives and works in Ibadan, Nigeria) is a multimedia artist known for her work in painting, drawing, and socially engaged installations. With a multidisciplinary background in engineering, economics, and education, Fadugba's art explores intersections of cultural identity, social justice, game theory, and the socio-political dynamics of Nigeria within the global economy. Her acclaimed project, *The People's Algorithm*, a game-based installation fostering dialogue on improving Nigeria's education system, earned her the Outstanding Production Prize from El Anatsui and the Grand Prize at the 2016 Dakar Biennale. *Dreams from the Deep End* (2018) was exhibited at Gallery 1957, Accra, and documented in a film that received an Emmy Award in 2022 for outstanding long-form DEI content. The documentary was also screened at the Brooklyn Museum and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York. Fadugba has participated in prestigious residencies, including the Smithsonian Institute of African Art Research Fellowship (2020), the International Studio and Curatorial Program in Brooklyn (2018), and the International Cité des Arts in Paris (2017). She is also an Archbishop Tutu Leadership Fellow (2024). Her works are part of significant collections, including the Smithsonian Institute of African Art, the Minneapolis Institute of Art, the Sindika Dokolo Foundation, and Facebook, where she completed the commissioned piece *Indigo Reflection* in 2021. In February 2025, she won The Norval Sovereign African Art Prize 2025, a milestone recognising her contributions to contemporary African art.