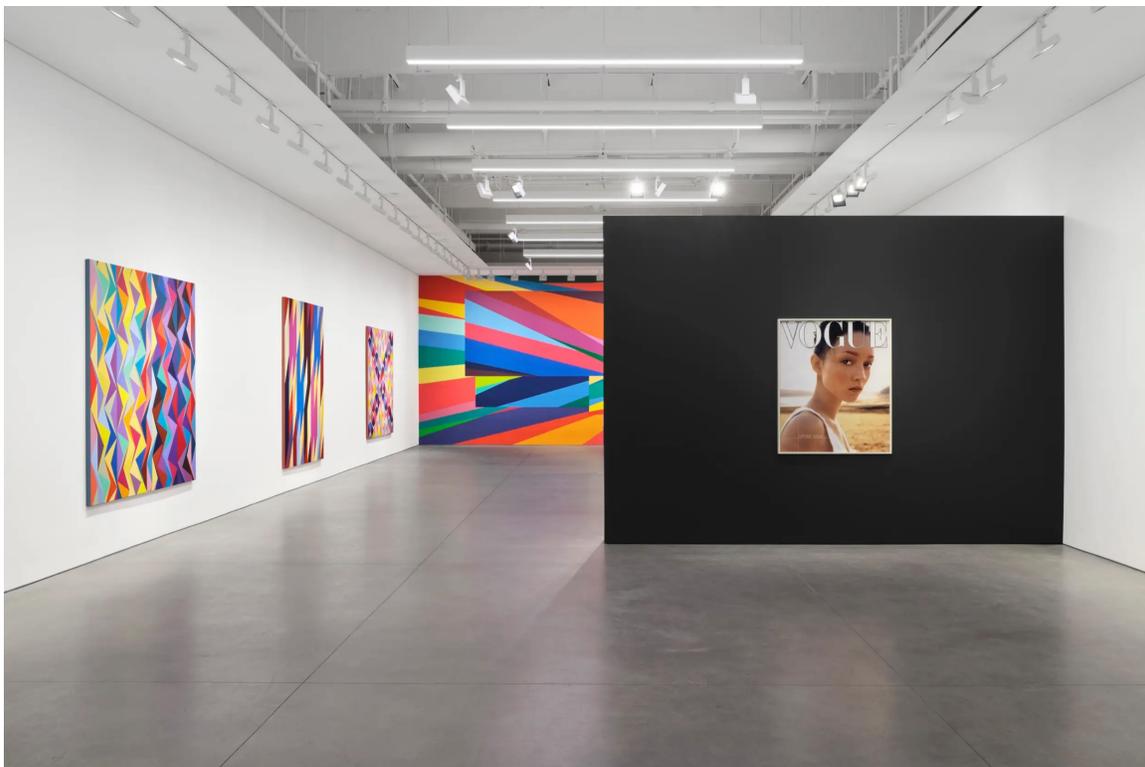


ARTSEEN | February 2026

Odili Donald Odita: *Shadowland*

By Ann C. Collins



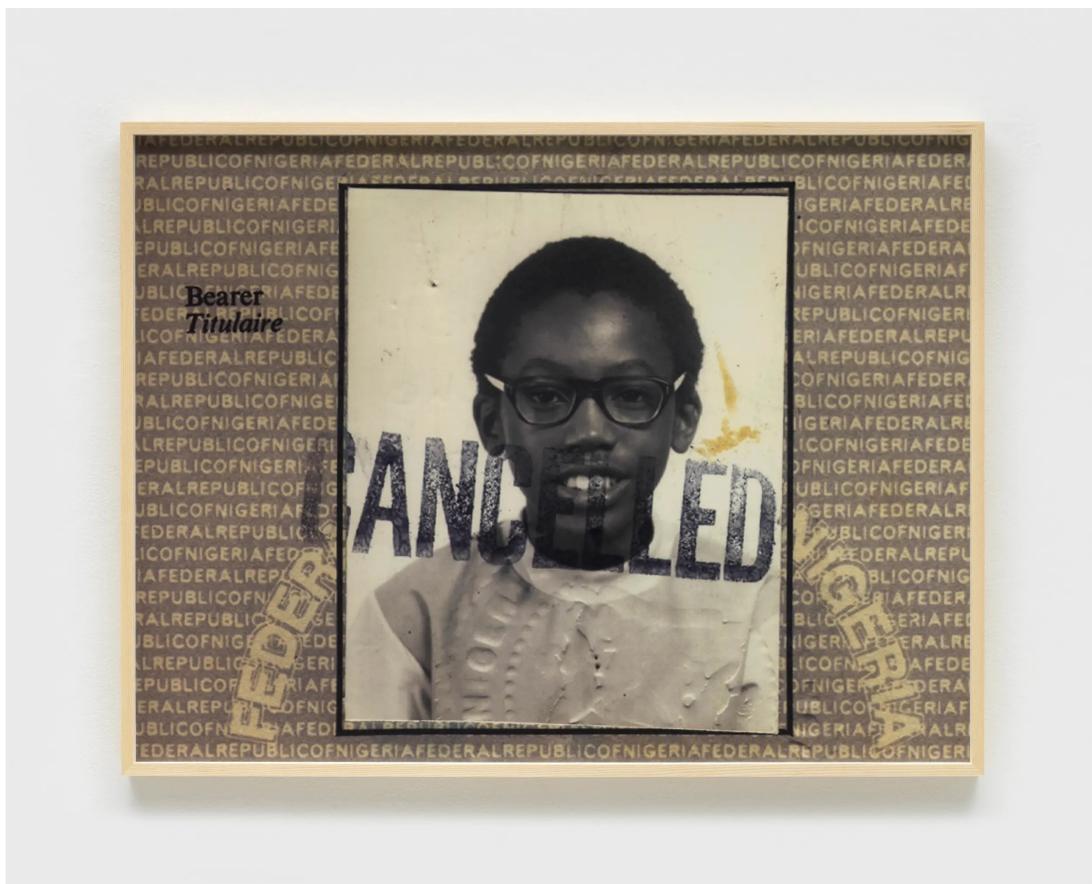
Installation view, Odili Donald Odita: *Shadowland*, at David Kordansky Gallery, 2026, New York. Courtesy David Kordansky Gallery. Photo: On White Wall Studio.

The spectacled face of a young boy smiles out from a duotone photograph over which the word “cancelled” has been stamped. In *Passport* (2000), a large manipulated photograph, Nigerian American artist Odili Donald Odita repurposes an expired document issued to him long ago by the Federal Republic of Nigeria to consider origins, identity, the way we carry the past, and the way the past carries us. Hanging in the vestibule of David Kordansky Gallery, *Passport* neatly sets up *Odili Donald Odita: Shadowland*, an exhibition that brings together the artist’s recent and older works with those of his father, the

*Odili Donald Odita:
Shadowland*
David Kordansky
Gallery
January 15–
February 28, 2026
New York

late Nigerian artist and academic Dr. Okechukwu Emmanuel Odita. The result is a powerful immersion in color and form enriched with considerations of time, legacy, and art making's endless potential to foster both personal connection and political disruption.

In his current practice, Odita creates large, abstract paintings in which repeating geometric shapes emerge and expand from a central seam or point. He paints in bold and deeply saturated acrylics, and his patterns recall both M. C. Escher's intricacy and the energy of Keith Haring while evoking traditions of Mbuti textile design. In *Peonies and Pansies* (2025), square tessellations pinwheel out from a central point. Odili's strategic use of navy, teal, and red allows his painted forms to coalesce into an X that seems to float above a ground of pink, yellow, and mauve squares. *Sanctuary* (2025), meanwhile, features two vertical panels striped with triangular fractals. On the left, Odita employs sunny yellows, pale blues, lavender, and aqua to form shapes that merge and collide, creating the illusion of three-dimensionality. Shifting his palette to darker shades of purple and red on the left, the artist plays with the perception of darkness and light as positive and negative spaces appear in his careful juxtapositions of color. For Odita, the idea of a shadowland, a place cast in darkness, offers privacy and protection. It is in the endless combinations his geometric renderings create that nascent modes of resistance and creative expression can be nurtured.



Odili Donald Odita, *Passport*, 2000. Manipulated photograph, 30 x 39 7/8 inches. Courtesy David Kordansky Gallery. Photo: Dario Lasagni.

The presence of the artist's father—whose work was at the avant-garde of Nigerian modernism—and his impact on Odita's work is made clear by the inclusion of two of his works: *Njikoka: Nigerian Unity, Yoruba and Igbo, Panel 2* (1976) and *Njikoka: Nigerian Unity, Yoruba and Hausa, Panel 3* (1977–1978). These two figurative paintings, made in the years following Nigeria's civil war, celebrate the delicate unity of Nigerian ethnic groups who worked together in the struggle for freedom from British colonial rule. In *Panel 2*, a faceless woman dressed in flowing textiles rendered as color blocks stands against a background of geometric shapes that prefigure Odita's paintings. In *Panel 3*, a similar figure in multicolored robes stands anchored against a field of earthy colors. Hanging adjacent to the younger Odita's work, these paintings show us a generational line of artmaking that provides context for the more recent work on view here. I can imagine the child in the passport photo playing in the shadows of the senior Odita's studio, observing and absorbing everything in anticipation of his own future practice.

Two works from earlier in Odita's career, *Vogue* (1997) and *The White Issue* (1997–1999) feature digitally manipulated photographs plucked from the American fashion world of the 1990s. These images examine pervasive, if subliminal, messages of white supremacy that abound in mainstream media. In *The White Issue*, a freckle-faced gamin in a white crocheted top stares blankly at the camera. Odita has removed most of the coverlines, leaving only the words, "white issue." *Vogue* features a diptych of two covers produced for the same summer issue



Odili Donald Odita, *Revolution Action*, 2026. Acrylic latex on wall, 155 x 336 inches. Courtesy David Kordansky Gallery. Photo: On White Wall Studio.

of the eponymous magazine. On the left, Nikki Taylor, a white model clad in a yellow polka-dot bikini, rises from the sea in a modern retelling of the Aphrodite myth. "Getting the body you want ..." a caption teases, only to be answered by the phrase "... and dressing it!" on the next page, the inside cover, where the Black supermodel Naomi Campbell assumes a near-identical pose on the planks of a weathered dock. Her bikini is leopard print and her overall look is weighed down by a pair of chunky sandals. "Animal prints unleashed," the text that surrounds her reads.

The centerpiece of the exhibition is a site-specific mural titled *Revolution Action* (2026) after the 1999 song by Atari Teenage Riot. Spanning the entire back wall of the gallery, the work features eight overlapping quadrants exploding with bands of glorious color. Referencing screens, televisions, and phones, the quadrants collide and eclipse each other as if vying for visual primacy. On a cold morning in the heart of this endless winter, the mural's vibrancy urged me to shake off any bleakness I'd carried into the room. A revolution is the overthrowing of a government or social system, but it also refers to the turning of one object around another, an action that follows a set path but sometimes provokes change as well.

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