

Open Space

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Get Well Soon by Anthony Olubunmi Akinbola

<https://openspace.ae/get-well-soon-by-anthony-olubunmi-akinbola/>



Until 25 May 2026, CARBON 12 is hosting *Get Well Soon*, a solo exhibition by Anthony Olubunmi Akinbola, an artist known for transforming culturally charged materials into a complex visual language. The exhibition features a new body of work that continues Akinbola's long-standing engagement with the durag, recontextualising it within the historical lineage of painting while expanding its conceptual reach into questions of memory, identity, and temporality.

Get Well Soon is about a striking dialogue with the tradition of botanical and floral still life. Rather than painting flowers in the conventional sense, Akinbola constructs them. Using durags, stretchable head coverings associated with Black identity, care practices, and cultural expression, he assembles compositions that echo the structure of classical still lifes. Petals, stems, and blossoms emerge not through brushwork but through the layering, folding, and stitching of fabric. In this shift from illusion to construction, Akinbola effectively collapses the boundary between painting and object, allowing materiality itself to become the image.

The durag operates simultaneously as a medium and signifier: a quotidian object imbued with histories of race, identity, and representation. In Akinbola's hands, it oscillates between its life outside the studio as a culturally coded artefact and its transformation into an abstract compositional element. The works thus inhabit a space where art historical genres intersect with contemporary cultural discourse. By inserting the durag into the canon of still life painting, Akinbola both honours and disrupts tradition, proposing a redefinition of what and who belongs within it.

Colour plays a crucial role in this series. Increasingly, Akinbola produces the durags himself, shifting away from reliance on commercially available materials. It allows him greater control over the palette while maintaining the structural integrity of the object. The resulting compositions are vibrant yet restrained, guided by an internal logic of juxtaposition and balance.

Alongside the floral arrangements, the exhibition introduces a secondary motif: the brick. Emerging from earlier explorations of repetition and linear pattern, the brick compositions suggest a subtle transition from abstraction toward representation. Here, the durag once again serves as both building block and conceptual anchor. The brick evokes ideas of structure, permanence, and

habitation; it gestures toward notions of home, legacy, and continuity. In contrast to the ephemeral nature of flowers, the brick signifies endurance and creates a tension that runs throughout the show.

The interplay between permanence and impermanence is further developed through two installations, which are also on display. In one, a bouquet of helium balloons gradually descends over time, tethered by the weight of a perfume bottle. What begins as a gesture of buoyancy and celebration slowly gives way to gravity and decline. In another, a diffuser releases a fragrance into the gallery space, filling it temporarily before dissipating. These works introduce time as an active component: they emphasise the transient nature of experience and the inevitability of loss.

The exhibition's title, *Get Well Soon*, encapsulates this duality. At once a familiar phrase of care and a reminder of vulnerability, it operates as both a gesture of hope and an acknowledgement of uncertainty. The displayed artworks collectively navigate this emotional terrain and oscillate between moments of beauty and fragility, presence and absence.

Ultimately, *Get Well Soon* is an exhibition that unfolds slowly, revealing its layers over time. It invites viewers to consider not only what is seen, but how it is made and what it carries with it. Through the transformation of a single, culturally resonant material, Akinbola constructs a nuanced meditation on the fragile balance between what endures and what inevitably fades.

About the artist

Born in 1991 in Columbia (Missouri, USA) to Nigerian parents, [Anthony Olubunmi Akinbola](#) lives and works in New York. He earned a BA in Communications and Media from SUNY Purchase College (NY, USA), and has since developed a practice that transforms familiar objects associated with Black identity and everyday life into powerful explorations of migration, memory, and belonging. Through this process, Akinbola repositions commonplace materials within the context of contemporary art, questioning established systems of value and visibility while examining the complex relationships between body, culture, and history. His art pieces combine striking formal abstraction with nuanced social commentary, resulting in pieces that are both visually resonant and conceptually layered.

Akinbola's work has been featured in multiple exhibitions, including *Remixed: Entwined Histories and New Forms* (Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, California, USA, 2026); *To Bloom* (The Page Gallery, Seoul, South Korea, 2025); *Western Beef* (solo) (Galerie Krinzinger, Vienna, Austria, 2024); *By Way Of: Material and Motion in the Guggenheim Collection* (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NY, 2024); and *Memorias Del Terraplén, Pt. 1* (Casa Santa Ana, Ciudad de Panamá, 2023), among others.

Akinbola's accolades include receiving the Artsy Vanguard Award (2022) and taking part in many residency programmes, such as FTZ NAYA Residency (Naya Village, Chengmai, Hainan, China, 2025), Dragon Hill Residency (Mouans-Sartoux, France, 2024), and Black Rock Senegal, founded by Kehinde Wiley (Dakar, Senegal, 2023), to name a few. His artworks are also part of esteemed collections, including, for example, the Khouri Art Foundation (Dubai), the Zabłudowicz Collection (London, UK), and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture (Washington DC, USA).