



CLAIRE OLIVER GALLERY ANNOUNCES FIRST SOLO EXHIBITION BY ARTIST BISA BUTLER

*The Storm, the Whirlwind, and the Earthquake* Will Feature Seven New Works by Butler,  
on View February 29 – April 25, 2020



**NEW YORK, NY | February, 2020** – Claire Oliver Gallery is pleased to announce the debut solo exhibition by artist Bisa Butler, *The Storm, the Whirlwind and the Earthquake* on view February 29 – April 25, 2020. Butler’s textile portraits of people of color are created from layers of brightly colored fabrics with a multiplicity of meanings. Butler’s composite characters are inspired by historical photography; the resulting images are rendered life-sized with viewers often engaging the subjects eye to eye.

“I create portraits of people that include clues of their inner thoughts, their heritage, their actual emotions, and even their future,” states Butler. “I represent all of my figures with dignity and regal opulence because that is my actual perspective of humanity. I use West African wax printed fabric, kente cloth, and Dutch wax prints to communicate that all of my figures are of African descent and have a long and rich history behind them. I choose bright technicolor cloth to represent our skin because these colors are how African Americans refer to our complexions.”

Butler’s recent works were inspired by vintage photographs of African Americans taken during World War II by the U.S. Government Farm Securities Administration. This recently digitized archive offers a

rich pictorial record of American life between 1935-1944, but were left undeveloped for decades and many of the subjects remain anonymous. Butler has transformed these unknown figures into composite characters with vibrant inner lives and identities and restoring their collective histories.

*The Storm, the Whirlwind and the Earthquake* references a famous quotation from a July 4, 1852 speech by Frederick Douglass rebuking the nation for celebrating freedom during a time of slavery: “It is not light that we need, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake.”

Butler’s life-sized quilted works should also be contextualized within the reappropriation of traditional crafts by feminist artists Judy Chicago and Miriam Shaprio. These works likewise challenge the historical division between textiles and fine art. Butler employs traditional modalities of creating works as an intentional and celebratory act informed by the tradition of quilting and African American women using the scraps of fabric that were available to them to create objects of warmth and comfort. She further recontextualizes the practice of quilting from its utilitarian roots to the creation of rich visual storytelling that combines painterly colors and forms.

“I hope people view my work and see the expressions of joy, the vibrancy of colors, and the quiet dignity of my portraits. All of my pieces are done in life scale to invite the viewer to engage in a dialogue—most figures look the viewers directly in their eyes,” states Butler. “I am inviting a reimagining and a contemporary dialogue about age old issues, still problematic in our culture, through the comforting, embracing medium of the quilt. I am expressing what I believe is the equal value of all humans.”

Butler will be the subject of two solo exhibitions this year “Bisa Butler: Portraits” March 15 – June 14 2020 at the Katonah Museum of Art, New York and at the Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois September 5, 2020 – January 24 2021. Her work will also be featured in an exhibition at the Museum of Fine Art, Boston, October 11, 2020 – January 18, 2021. Her work is included in the permanent collections of many museums and institutions including The Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Fine Art Boston, the Minneapolis Institute of Art, Kemper Museum of Art, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Mount Holyoke Museum of Art and other important public and private collections.

#### **IMAGE CAPTIONS (L to R):**

Bisa Butler, *Asantewa*, 2020, Cotton, silk, wool and velvet quilted and appliqué, 52 x 88 x 2 in | 132.1 x 223.5 x 5.1 cm

Bisa Butler, *Africa The Land Of Hope and Promise For Negro People's of the World*, 2020, Cotton, silk, wool and velvet quilted and appliqué, 52 x 88 x 2 in | 132.1 x 223.5 x 5.1 cm

#### **MEDIA CONTACT**

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#### **ABOUT CLAIRE OLIVER GALLERY**

After 17 years in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan, Claire Oliver Gallery has reestablished in Central Harlem in a four-story brownstone. The gallery’s exclusive commitment to the primary market promoting significant emerging artists has allowed for an intensive focus that has nurtured and grown the careers of their artists. Many of the gallery’s artists have been included in The Venice Biennale, The Whitney Biennial, and biennales in Sydney, Pittsburgh, and Lyon and have exhibited works in

major international museums including the Smithsonian American Art Museum, The Art Institute of Chicago, Center Georges Pompidou, The Philadelphia Museum of Art, and The Los Angeles County Museum of Art amongst others. Claire Oliver Gallery artists are included in the permanent collections of many important museums worldwide including The Smithsonian American Art Museum, The Art Institute of Chicago, The Tate Britain, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The State Hermitage Museum and MoMA. Claire Oliver Gallery held the first American exhibition for the Russian collaborative AES+F, whose work went on to twice represent Russia in the Russian pavilion of the Venice Biennale. Gallery artists have received prestigious fellowships including Fulbright, Guggenheim, USArtist and National Endowment for the Arts.

**2288 Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard**

**New York, NY 10030**

**Tuesday – Saturday, 11am -6pm**