Ranti Bam lives and works in Paris. She has exhibited internationally including: *Anima*, at James Cohan, New York (2024); *Hard/Soft: Textiles and Ceramics in Contemporary Art*, Museum of Applied Arts, Austria (2023) and Liverpool Biennial, Liverpool (2023). In June 2026, Bam will unveil her permanent public artwork for Oulu26 Finland, European Capital of Culture. Ranti Bam was invited to the 61st International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia by Koyo Kouoh.

Ranti Bam, *Ifas*, 2023. Installation view at St Nicholas Church Gardens, Liverpool Biennial 2023. Photography by Stuart Whipps. Courtesy Liverpool Biennial.

Overleaf: Tommerup Ceramic Workshop, Tommerup, Denmark, 2025. Courtesy of Ranti Bam. Photo by Alix Marie.

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The works on display can be photographed. Share your pictures with us on social media.

Large print guides are available

Poster: Ranti Bam, *In Heartlands*, 2022. Video Still from Performance in Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove, Osogbo, Nigeria. Courtesy Ranti Bam and James Cohan, New York.

Cover: Ranti Bam, Portrait. Image courtesy of the artist and James Cohan, New York. Photo by Laura Stevens

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RANTI BAM SACRED GROVES

South London Gallery
1 May – 23 Aug 2026

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INTRODUCTION

Ranti Bam (b. 1982, Lagos, Nigeria) has worked with ceramics for the past fifteen years, incorporating performance, photography, and film into her practice. She was raised in the UK, travelling between London and Lagos as a child, before pursuing her formal studies in London. Her work explores elements of Yoruba culture, a language and an ethnicity originating in Benin, Nigeria and Togo.

Bam's practice is rooted in Yoruba mythology and her belief in the magical properties of clay. She is drawn to the material through the idea that humankind is inseparable from the environment, and that by experiencing the world through our physical bodies, as well as our minds, we can form a deeper connection with the earth.

Her sculptures are made from terracotta and stoneware, often incorporating pattern and colour on both the interior and exterior of the vessel. She constructs these forms by overlapping slabs of clay or using moulds to scale up her sculptures.

If you would like to handle some of the material, please ask a gallery assistant for a sensory pack.

"I enjoy the corporeal immediacy of working with clay. With this material I have a symbiosis. There is so much I love about it – the way it remembers every action. It feels to me as if I am working with spirit manifested as matter. I also enjoy that it is a material that can do and be anything you want. I like that it has great narrative potential, telling stories about civilisations long gone."

– Ranti Bam

ENTRANCE WAY

Untitled, 2026
Sound, 10 min.
Set to loop

Courtesy the artist and James Cohan, New York

GALLERY 1

"I use clay as language and a grounding tool. They aren't objects so much as presences that occupy space the way a living thing does."

Ranti Bam's practice is rooted in a deep engagement with clay, a material she views as a living entity. For Bam, clay is the most primal of all materials: earth and water shaped by hand and transformed by the fire of the kiln. She connects this process to the idea of the primal feminine, an instinctive source of creation and wildness that exists within all of us. Working at a considerable scale, with ceramic sculptures nearly two metres high, these forms feel bodily and tree-like, at once raw, and charged with a living presence.

Left: Ranti Bam, *Igbo*, 2026.
© Ranti Bam, 2026. Image courtesy the artist, James Cohan, New York.
Photo by Alexandra de Cossette

GALLERY 2

Bam was raised between two worlds: Nigeria and the UK, an experience that sparked her interest in etymology. The artist generates titles for her artworks by incorporating different dialects, languages, and phrases from various sources including Yoruba and Greek. This ongoing series of work titled *Ifas*, is created by physically embracing the wet clay and moulding it against her body.

'Ifa' in Yoruba means both ifá, a spiritual system of divination, and I –fàá, to pull close. Yoruba is a genderless language, the gender neutral pronoun 'o' is used in the place of he/she, and unlike languages with a Latin root, the nouns are not gendered female/male. Bam draws on eco-feminist writings and West African beliefs around gender duality, situating femininity as a cultural and spiritual concept rather than a fixed social role.

Left: Ranti Bam, *Afikun*, 2026.
© Ranti Bam, 2026. Image courtesy the artist, James Cohan, New York.
Photo by Alexandra de Cossette

GALLERY 3

"It's about saying to the clay, 'show me what you can do! Where can we go together?' It's important to me to be able to work freely, quickly and just let things flow. I work very intuitively, I go into the studio intending to use a particular colour or feeling inspired by a poem I've read and I just let the clay do what it wants."

The works in this room were created in Bam's studio. Each sculpture is built by wrapping and layering slabs of clay, slowly forming intricate, hand-worked structures. Bam rolls clay over fabric or patterned boards to press textures into the surface, embedding traces of other materials into the skin of the vessel. In places, she punctures and perforates the surface by hand, revealing glimpses of the glaze within.

The *Abstract Vessels* take inspiration from clothing and language while also referencing the energy and gestural approach of the early twentieth-century 'action painters', who were interested in the process of making art more than the end result. The colours used by Bam are drawn from the natural world, the bark of trees, shifting light on a forest floor, and the cool green tones of symbiotic plants emerging from dark fallen branches. Colour and pattern arise from these quiet relationships between living things.

GALLERY 4

At the start of the year Ranti Bam spent time at the Osun-Oshogbo Sacred Groves, a place she has visited many times. The forested area is situated on the Osun river in south-western Nigeria. The grove has been inhabited over hundreds of years as a place to worship the deity Osun, a Yoruba god of fertility. The site is one of the last surviving sacred groves in the region due to stigma around the belief system, environmental changes, and pressure on land use.

Bam is drawn to the grove as a middle-space where the human and divine meet. Here, what is felt in the body, the energy, ancestral echoes, and quiet movements of the land, shape the experience of the believer more deeply than what is seen.

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