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ELEPHANT

Daughters of the Dust: The Radical Soil-Based Work of Contemporary Women Artists



Sandra Poulson, *Dust as an Accidental Gift*, (2023). Photo by Danko Stjepanovic. Courtesy of Sharjah Architecture Triennial.

A young woman runs through a sun-strewn grove, her indigo dress swaying with each and every step. Expectation glistens in her eyes, the blue from her dress shining amber in the half-morning light. She is holding something in her hands, something precious, something unrefined. She reaches her companion in the depths of the woods, his feet making furrows in the untilled ground. She opens her hands, reveals and frees their contents before him. 'Shad, how can we plant with this dust?' She asks her husband. 'We plant 'em each and every year or we're finished,' he replies, watching the copper soil slip from her palms.

This memory belongs to Nana Peazant, the matriarch of the eponymously named family in Julie Dash's acclaimed feature film, *Daughters of the Dust* (1991). Embraced by two younger generations of her clan, Nana is overcome with a sense of the past, with a recollection as vital to her life story as it is to the stories of those around her. The dust to which her memory returns is that of Ibo Landing, a legendary and now historically recognised site on St Simons Island, off the southern coast of Georgia, America. Nana's flashback may not recover the exact details of the first landing – of the captive West African peoples who, upon first seeing the land, resisted the fate of slavery by choosing death in the water – but her remembrance of the dust, of its infertility and the island's inhospitable conditions as espied in the near-barren earth, reflect what her ancestors saw before her. That a young Nana succeeded in cultivating the poor terrain of St Simons Island is testimony to her determination to live and build beyond her former enslaved state, to create a dynasty who would not only freely live on this same land but own it long after her death. Embracing her granddaughter and great-granddaughter, Nana's wild hope has been fulfilled, her planting of new life grown beyond her initial expectation.



Sandra Poulson, *Dust as an Accidental Gift*, (2023). Photo by Danko Stjepanovic. Courtesy of Sharjah Architecture Triennial.

For all its many references to water, Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* is a film rooted in the earth. The children may play on a golden windswept beach, restless to migrate to the North, but Nana Peazant sits and squats in that same 'dusty' earth towards which her mind continually turns. All day she clears the bracken and brambles from the graves of her deceased kin, and sits in a wicker chair in a similar wilderness reflecting on ancestral knowledge about herbs, plants and roots. Never seen without her tin of 'memories', 'dusty 'tings' as her great-granddaughter Eula terms them, Nana Peazant ruminates on the gifts and curses of the land upon which she was born and to which she will soon die. But her dust-coated and earth-bound memories are not solely about Ibo Landing. Unlike some of her children, Nana knows that the soil of this island contains the buried secrets of former lands and the unwatered seeds of the next. Working the land, protecting and nurturing what is left of it, Nana Peazant protects and nurtures the memory of those from afar – the first Igbo peoples to arrive on the island – as well as the vision of a future generation of Gullah women – a community that still lives on the island to this day.

Daughters of the Dust narrates then an odyssey of the land. It presents a mythical as well as historical account of what the earth was and could be for the most marginalised peoples. A source of brutal oppression for those subjugated to the violence of slavery (like Nana and her ancestors), it becomes in turn a basis upon which to seek and secure liberation, a record of human destruction as well as reconstruction. Dash's film, though specific to the heritage of the women of the Gullah community (from whom she too directly descends), and more broadly speaking, all African Americans, plants in its own poetic and fertile soils metaphors and themes for women artists working with soil-based and natural materials today. In its collapsing of past and future, memory and premonition, home and exile, stasis and movement, oppression and liberation, hurt and healing, body and soul, *Daughters of the Dust* tills the rich plains of collective afro-centric ideas and ideals, and in doing so offers contemporary artists firm ground upon which to sow their own. From the wise and indigo-dyed hands of Nana Peazant, seemingly 'dusty' concerns regarding ecology, geology, economy, climatology, historiography and psycho-geography, indigenous and diasporic epistemologies, decolonial and ecofeminist thought slip into the minds of viewers and artists today. In replanting a sense of selfhood, purpose and futurity in the sterile soil of colonisation and slavery, Nana demonstrates the power of women, specifically Black women, in the cultivation of their own liberation, as well as the importance of land, particularly its 'dust', in the narration of our own human story. Artists like Dineo Seshee Bopape, Otobong Nkanga, Sandra Poulson and Hayy Kahraman recapture something of Nana's complex relationship to the soil in their own works, unearthing her concerns, as well as their own histories, realities and beliefs of how we should and could relate to the land. In placing natural materials in unnatural settings like galleries and museum, these artists recognise the 'sweat of love...in soil', as Nana recalls, and brilliantly subvert what it means to be 'daughters of the dust'.

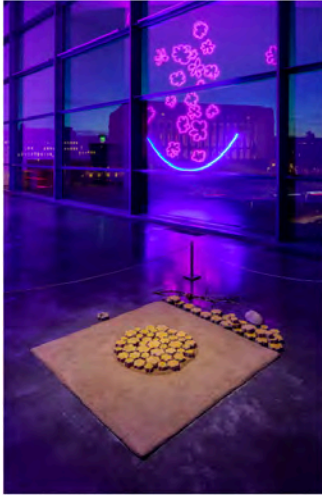


The material of dust is potently and subversively present in the work of Dineo Seshee Raisibe Bopape. Interested in ideas of collective memory and the unconscious, the maternal body and its connection to mother earth, Bopape espouses Nana Peazant's soil-enriched and enabled mode of being, and echoes her empowering ecofeminist faith in ancestral and spiritual ties to the natural world. In fact, Bopape's latest work mines Nana Peazant's – or rather Dash's – Afrofuturist vision of the soil encompassing past, present and future potentialities, ecologies and ontologies, thus rendering dust a means as well as a valued living material in and of itself. Taking her cue from Dash and cinematographer Arthur Jaffa, whose lush poetic visuals frame these themes beautifully in *Daughters*, Bopape creates a dreamscape and an environment in which we too can dream. *(ka) pheko ye – the dream to come*, currently on show at the Kiasma, Finland, features multiple domed enclosures made of soil and peat arranged in a near circular formation amongst other clay structures and miniature figures and forms. Though Bopape references and works with the wintry Finnish light and has floral and herbal scents flowing through the whole installation, it is the unvarnished stuff of the earth, the soil and clay, that here takes pride of place. Upon first glance, the artist's soil-orientated space resembles a geological site, one increasingly being unearthed as well as made of it. Blocks of compacted earth sit cordoned off, whilst a clay painted border surrounds – effectively embraces – the entire gallery circumference. As a kind of archaeology or recreation of an excavation, Bopape touches on Afrofuturist and decolonial notions of undiscovered worlds, alternative geographies and ulterior cartographies slowly coming into being. Yet for all its speculativeness and apparitional atmosphere, the soil-based environment of *(ka) pheko ye – the dream to come* is one to inhabit and touch. Though a site of the imagination, it invites us to dwell and commune, play in and dream with the material language of the earth inside the gallery and then outside of it.



Dineo Seshee Raisibe Bopape. Photo: Finnish National Gallery/ Petri Virtanen

Bopape's domed enclosures also convey a sense of home in the unhomely. Reminiscent of the original soil-enforced dwellings of the Sami people, Finland's indigenous communities, Bopape's structures simultaneously look to the round huts of South Africa and other traditional constructions from the artist's homeland. In a land of unfamiliarity, Bopape reworks the soil into one of familiarity. This diasporic tendency to reconfigure what is foreign and hostile into something homely and safe, takes us back to the young Nana Peazant's fear over the infertile soil of Ibo Landing, and, therefore, her fear of surviving the violence of the terrain itself. It takes us right into the paradox of dust being a force of death and life at once. It takes us back to those forced into close proximity with the earth and whose fates are closely commingled with it. When discussing the migration of African American artists to Western states of the US in the 60s and 70s, Kellie Jones reflects on exactly this conflicting and 'uneasy' state concerning space. For Jones, Black migrants at this time renegotiated the social and natural spaces in which they found themselves. Bringing with them knowledge and skills from the South – and by extension knowledge and skills learnt from their West African ancestors – Black migrants reclaimed and remade the 'terrain' in their own image. This sense of space, for Jones by way of Katherine McKittrick and Jasmine Griffin, is as much physic and ancestral, as it is physical; it is 'the home one carries within'. Likewise, out of the discomfort of being in another land, using other materials, Bopape creates constructions that are as comforting to view as they are comfortable to inhabit. The notion of home is carried within, but replicated without by way of soil available to the artist in that specific country. Bringing together diverse technologies, mediums and epistemologies (Finnish habitudes of dwelling and climate with South African ones), Bopape creates a cross-cultural and inclusive space sustained through and anchored by the diasporic logic of the soil.



Dineo Seshee Raisibe Bopape, (ka) pheko ye – the dream to come, (2023). Installation view. Photo: Finnish National Gallery/ Petri Virtanen



Dineo Seshee Raisibe Bopape, (ka) pheko ye – the dream to come, (2023). Installation view. Photo: Finnish National Gallery/ Petri Virtanen

This exchange between worlds – between their geopolitical, ecological, environmental and cultural knowledge systems and the materials in which they are embedded – takes us backwards as well as forwards in time and place. Despite making soil-based and clay environments that traverse these limitations, Bopape's installation still incorporates and registers them. Finland's historic treatment of migrating bodies and the homelands of Sami peoples, alongside South Africa's own continued narrative surrounding colonial and neo-colonial violence, occupation, land reform and restitution towards Black African peoples, miners and farmers, are all indirectly enmeshed in Bopape's dreamy invitation to sit and dwell together amongst the earth. But can we, in actuality, sit and dwell together, when some bodies and the land they have a historic right to own are denied and torn asunder? It is here, again, that Nana Peazant's Afrofuturistic ethos of acknowledging the past and present trouble in order to move forward in the future comes to mind. Naturally Bopape's work is one of delay and deferral, a dream that can be partially envisioned, but is yet 'to come', as the exhibition title so poignantly states, beyond the confines of the gallery. Sitting amongst the fabric of the earth, what dreams can we make a reality? What lives and bodies come sharply into view when we reflect on this here soil and the stories long buried within it?



Dobong Nkanga, Solid Maneuvers II, (2015), courtesy of the Lisson Gallery.

Otobong Nkanga's multimedia and interdisciplinary work, *Solid Maneuvers II* (2015), also brings to light the bodily realities of indigenous African peoples in relation to their own land. Performing at the centre of a sculpted replica of geological strata, specifically Namibia's Green Hill which has seen its mineral-rich soil plundered and hollowed out, Nkanga highlights the devastating effects of corporate greed on humans and nature alike. Mirroring her own drawings, which also have life-size human figures towering over miniaturised natural plains and green topographies, Nkanga's performance draws the human reality of excavation and mining out of the two-dimensional realm of the imagination in order to underscore the cost of illegal mining and land extraction. Recounting the life and death, aspirations and painful realisations of a former miner, Nkanga demonstrates, through her own words and bodily manoeuvres, the connections between and intersecting repercussions for Namibian bodies, Namibian land and our own. For it is the minerals (chiefly vermiculite) recovered from the bowels of the earth that end up in the make-up of western consumers, and it is these same rare materials that cause grievous illnesses and diseases for the miners and surrounding communities. Throwing out the raw matter of the earth in front of a western audience, Nkanga literalises the waste and wreckage we wreak on the planet and on those bodies who attempt to tend or mine it. *Solid Maneuvers II*, whose title emphasises the actions of human hands and the manual labour of disenfranchised communities, is not, in its layered interaction between global realities and socio-economic structures, so solid after all. Like the minerals that Nkanga ritualistically and ominously disperses before the viewer, the lands and bodies of its people will not hold if we continue to pillage natural resources for vain and capitalistic gain.

Nkanga's performance recalls the still of the young Nana Peasant's dust-covered hands as a metaphor for the inhospitable living conditions she endured. Unlike Nkanga, whose exploration of earthen environments comes as a warning to western corporations and consumers, Dash's close-up of the bronze-tinged dust upon Nana's hands is a reversal of this narrative and testifies as much to the ingenuity of Black women as it does to the acute adversity they suffered, particularly during the eras of pre-war slavery and reconstruction. Nana Peasant's dust covered, indigo-stained hands, that is her intimate interconnection to the land and her enforced labour of it, echoes Katherine McKittrick's observation that Black women are 'both shaped by, and challenge traditional geographical arrangements.' Left little than dust to cultivate, treated worse than the dust crusted upon her hands, traditional geographical and socio-economic arrangements of the land have rendered Nana, like the miners in Nkanga's installation, as less than the dirt upon which she stands. And yet, Nana challenges this dominant geography and economy, generating crops from dust, life from the death often allotted to the enslaved state. Surrounded by her own reconstruction of the scarred and ravaged plains of Namibia, Nkanga, the human form scattering mineral-rich dust like birdseed before us, hints at the possible geographical outcomes and lives to salvage if we reversed the deadly actions our own hands indirectly inflict upon distant lands.



Otobong Nkanga, *Solid Maneuvers II*, (2015), courtesy of the Lisson Gallery.

Again the dualistic symbolism and properties of dust are examined in Sandra Poulson's mixed-media installation, *Dust as an Accidental Gift* (2023). Originally shown at the Sharjah Architecture Triennial, Poulson's daring work privileges dust, specifically that which Angolan peoples situated in the urban area of Luanda experience. Here dust as social marker, political divider and economic deciding factor are all explored and exploded. Featuring a clay-covered interior populated with dust-coated objects, furniture, clothing, implements and apparatus, *Dust as an Accidental Gift* revels in the potentiality as well as the paucity that dust from the inner Angolan landscape brings forth. Clay coloured sculptures of trousers, dresses, shoes and coats figure the absent human inhabitants who have been subject to this arrant colonially enforced yet climatically formed condition. In line with Nana Peasant's dust-clad hands and McKittrick's theories, the prevalent presence and power of dust for the indigenous Angolan inhabitants both shapes and is challenged by them. Although dust distinguishes wealthier white Portuguese settlers from indigenous Black Angolans, the latter of whom were pushed into 'forming informal neighbourhoods 'paved by dust'', it also brings economic advantages through the activities and types of labour organised around its eradication. Dust, therefore, presents a new geography and a new opportunity for native Angolans to thrive, not just survive, the ever palpable hostilities and pervasive atrocities of colonialism.

Poulson's work then, much like Bopape's enclosures and Dash's poetic envisioning of Ibo Landing before them, indirectly shares with what McKittrick defines as a 'black sense of place'. When examining the algorithms predicated upon and employed to predict those vulnerable to violence, McKittrick pauses to acknowledge that various technologies and geographies are posited on the deaths of Black individuals, rather than accounting for and positing their lives. Though in part calling for an excavation of data not land per se, McKittrick sees how this algorithmic violence is located in and also maps out traditional - colonial cartographies. However, in response, McKittrick asserts that a 'black sense of place', though 'born of plantation slavery' and colonial endeavour, cannot be 'contained by the logics of white supremacy'. (That is, no algorithmically contrived map will ever truly capture the lived geographies of Black lives). Likewise, the dusty terrain, though it threatens death and drudgery, can also be the prospect and point of life, the 'accidental gift' in a Black sense of place and time, as well as a promise to Black and brown lives of 'the dream to come'. What is more, a 'black sense of place' is a 'location of difficult encounter and relationality' (think Bopape's cross-cultural earthen enclosures, Nkanga's intersecting worlds through mining soil, Poulson's dust-coated urban inland of Luanda, Dash's infertile Ibo Landing) and 'a collaborative praxis', where renegotiation between former modes of being and newer ones occurs. Diasporic, decolonial and (anti-)plantocratic in nature, a 'black sense of place' in these dust-centric works, courts new exchanges and fosters new communities whilst honouring the histories of older ones.



Hayv Kahraman, Untitled (2021, for Mosaic Rooms). Image courtesy of Pilar Corrias.

Hayv Kahraman's work speaks into this 'black sense of place' in its engagement with soil and the trauma of women of colour. Though soil-based material or dust is not explicitly visible in Kahraman's art, it is implicit in the seams and threads of her drawings which are created on flax. Harvested by bacteria in the soil, the flax becomes another source of creativity – as well as the produce of it – an alive surface cultivated from the live cultures of our microbe-enriched earth. Evidently a source of ingenuity in and of itself, the body of the flax then holds different kinds of bodies and cultures, ones too often othered and equated with dirt. Far from seeing the soil-soaked and reconstituted flax as an abject item, Kahraman sees the effectively "dirtied" material as a surface upon which to map out healing and a creative dimension in which subordinated and oppressed bodies can be. In *Entanglements and Generations* (2022), a long rectangular ink drawing on flax, three women squat amongst a thick tangled intestinal cord. Black like the soil from which the flax has been soaked, the cord at once resembles rope, chains, netting and the aforementioned duodenum-like innards of the body. The women, whose naked torsos and limbs are caught up in this sinister cord, descend downwards as if traversing the digestive or neurological systems of their own bodies. Inspired by 'neurosculpting' and neuropsychology that sees the gut as integral to the health and healing of the mind and the rewiring of neural pathways, Kahraman's drawings, in particular *Entanglements and Generations*, both literalises and narrates this process of renewal through both the human gut and the bowels of the earth. As hinted in the title, the women in Kahraman's drawing revisit and grapple with their traumatic neural entanglements only to regenerate (perhaps even replicate?) and heal. In this light, the cord in *Entanglements and Generations* is re-envisioned into an umbilical thread and linkage gesturing towards a rebirth. In the fabric of the flax and in the composition of the drawing, a rejuvenating form of embodiment that comes from the body of mother earth is presented. In this subversion of abjection – the aggrandisement of the gut, the body, the dirt from which all has sprung and will eventually disintegrate into again – Kahraman moves the language of earth and the soil-soaked flax into the realm of McKittrick's 'black sense of place'. By celebrating and actively nourishing alternative knowledge systems and reclaiming colonised terrain and the bodies that work it, Kahraman's gutsy and gut-orientated drawings become 'locations of difficulty and relationality', ones that reorient us in the embodied difficulty and relationality that they depict. From the beautifully soiled flax these women sit with the trouble and navigate a way forward in the brilliant muddy mess of it all.

From Nana Peasant's hands through to the hand-drawn "dirtied" drawings of Hayv Kahraman, these artists have placed our endangered earth and its most precious resource, soil, at the centre of their works in order to illuminate the most marginalised lives who are tethered to it. Decolonial and ecofeminist in practise, many of the women artists explored above go back to the dust not just out of fear of what it contains – the long lost histories it holds and withholds – but because of what it foretells and could make possible. For the deferred dreams and delayed temporalities, alternative geographies and unwritten cartographies that could, with the care of current generations, be realised now, not least for the future daughters of the dust.

Written by Hannah Hutchings-Georgiou

Artforum
5 October 2023

ARTFORUM

OTOBONG NKANGA WINS 2025 NASHER PRIZE FOR SCULPTURE

By News Desk 🌐
October 5, 2023 2:13 pm



OtoBong Nkanga. Photo: Nasher Sculpture Center.

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Nigerian-Belgian artist [OtoBong Nkanga](#) has won the 2025 iteration of the Nasher Prize. The award, considered to be the world's most prestigious sculpture honor, has since 2015 been presented annually by the Nasher Sculpture Center to a living artist whose work pushes the boundaries of the form. Nkanga will receive \$100,000 from the Dallas institution, and a solo exhibition of her work, accompanied by a monograph, will open at the Nasher in April 2025.

“The work of OtoBong Nkanga makes manifest the myriad connections—historical, sociological, economic, cultural, and spiritual—that we have to the materials that comprise our lives,” said Nasher Sculpture Center director Jeremy Strick in a statement. “Delving deeply into the variegated meanings these materials take on, Nkanga’s work makes clear the essential place of sculpture in contemporary life.”

"I wasn't expecting this, but I am extremely honored," Nkanga told the *New York Times*. The artist, who lives in Antwerp, is known for her experimental work investigating themes of neocolonialism and environmental protection, and frequently centering the global extraction of natural resources. Describing her 2015 work *Solid Maneuvers*, a group of sculptures inspired by Nkanga's trip to an abandoned copper mine in Namibia, Kate Sutton in the pages of *Artforum* noted, "The artist anoints them with piles of pink mineral salts, sand, tar, or mica-based cosmetic powder, as if trying to piece the extracted earth back together again. In other places, she allows these materials to artfully spill into the shimmering sand below, further confusing what is precious with what is waste." Her wide-ranging practice embraces not only sculpture but drawing, installation, photography, and performance. Nkanga has participated in the 2017 editions of Documenta and Manifesta, the 2019 iterations of the Sharjah Biennale and the Venice Biennale, and the 2022 Busan Biennale; in 2019, she was named the inaugural winner of the \$100,000 Lise Wilhelmsen Art Award, presented by the Henie Onstad Kunstsenter in Sandvika, Norway. Her work is on view through January 7, 2024, at Valencia, Spain's IVAM Centre Julio González.

In delivering the news of Nkanga's win, the Nasher announced that it would henceforth present the prize every two years, moving away from the annual schedule to which it has thus far hewn. By lengthening the span between prizes, the institution hopes "to give the museum and the laureate more time to show works at the Nasher, produce a printed monograph, and better communicate their importance in the field of sculpture," according to a press release.


MORE:
OTOBONG NKANGA

The New York Times
5 October 2023

The New York Times

Otobong Nkanga Wins the Nasher Prize for Sculpture

Her expansive sculptures that tackle the plundering of minerals and resources have earned her the \$100,000 cash prize — one of the art world's top honors.

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Otobong Nkanga, the winner of this year's Nasher Prize. Along with the cash award, she will become a laureate at the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas.



By **Zachary Small**

Oct. 5, 2023 Updated 9:10 a.m. ET

The Nigerian-Belgian artist Otobong Nkanga makes unorthodox work addressing the global extraction of natural resources. She has sung to copper mines in Namibia and balanced potted plants on people's heads in Switzerland. But now, her expansive view of sculpture is being recognized by one of the art world's top honors: the Nasher Prize.

The prize is more than a \$100,000 award. A winner becomes a laureate at the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas, where curators help devise public programming, an exhibition and a published monograph.

"I wasn't expecting this, but I am extremely honored," said Nkanga, 49, who now resides in Antwerp, Belgium. The museum exhibition will be an opportunity for the artist to reintroduce herself to American audiences. Her last solo exhibition in the United States was in 2018 at the [Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago](#), where she presented soap sculptures, large paintings and woven tapestries. Included in the [2022 Venice Biennale](#) and [Documenta 14](#), she is a fixture of the European museum circuit, where she has received six major exhibitions over the last two years, including at the contemporary art museum in Turin, Italy, called the [Castello di Rivoli](#).



At a show at the Kröller-Müller Museum in the Netherlands, Otobong Nkanga's "Double Plot," 2018, on the wall, depicts the extraction of minerals and its impact. "Alignment," 2022, on the floor, is created from handmade ropes, Murano glass spheres, a tree trunk, soil and plants. Marjon Gemmeke

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, director of the Castello, was one of the nine jurors who made the selection. Other panelists included the artist [Nairy Baghramian](#), who won the award in 2022, and Lynne Cooke, a senior curator at the National Gallery of Art in Washington.

The selection process starts with more than 160 nominees, according to Jeremy Strick, director of the Nasher Sculpture Center. Jurors convened in June to narrow down a shortlist of 60 finalists to a single winner.

“The work of Otobong Nkanga makes manifest the myriad connections — historical, sociological, economic, cultural and spiritual — that we have to the materials that comprise our lives,” said Strick, who is not a voting member in the jury.

There have been changes to the Nasher Prize’s schedule this year, the first time it will be awarded on a biannual basis instead of every year. Officials said the decision was made to enhance the experience of the winners, giving them more time to plan their exhibitions and publications.

“To be candid, financially it is a loss for us because we celebrate the laureate with a gala, which is a fund-raising event,” Strick said. “There are a lot of prizes in the art world. You set a number for the financial value and that is great. The artists appreciate it, but the programmatic aspect is what distinguished the Nasher Prize.”

“To be candid, financially it is a loss for us because we celebrate the laureate with a gala, which is a fund-raising event,” Strick said. “There are a lot of prizes in the art world. You set a number for the financial value and that is great. The artists appreciate it, but the programmatic aspect is what distinguished the Nasher Prize.”

Nkanga said she would like her sculptures to inspire others to rethink their relationship with the natural world. She hopes that “a young generation will be able to consider the planet we live in and find ways of repair, connection and love.”

Zachary Small is a reporter who covers the dynamics of power and privilege in the art world. They have written for The Times since 2019. [More about Zachary Small](#)

Art Basel Stories
25 August 2023

Art | Basel

Tom Morton

Otobong Nkanga chooses life

With a longtime eco-conscious practice and an organic farm, the Nigeria-born artist imagines other possible worlds

'Humans are only a small, minute part of the ecosystem,' says Otobong Nkanga over a Zoom call from her studio, 'but we as beings have forgotten this.' It's an observation that reverberates throughout the Nigerian-born, Antwerp-based artist's urgent, challenging, and yet ultimately optimistic practice, which ranges from drawings to large-scale installations, from performances to projects in the social realm. To see the world through Nkanga's eyes is to see not merely a stage on which Homo sapiens play out their all too often solipsistic and (self-) destructive dramas, but rather to see a shared habitat, in which what she terms countless 'life forms' (which include fauna and flora as well as soil and rivers, seas and mountains) coexist, connected in a great web of being.

Currently the subject of a solo exhibition, 'Craving for Southern Light' at IVAM València, Spain – a show that is, among other things, a meditation on weather, light, and heat – Nkanga is also a totemic presence in the Hayward Gallery, London's environmentally-focused summer group exhibition 'Dear Earth: Art and Hope in a Time of Crisis'. The Hayward show is billed as inspired by the artist's proposition that 'caring is a form of resistance'. What this means, says Nkanga, is that attentiveness to 'other types of life that do not have a voice as we do' is the basis for countering 'what the economy has to say, what capital has to say, what politicians decide' about the non-human elements of our ecosystem. At a time of planetary emergency, such care is what's needed to ensure 'the possibility of existence' in the critical years to come.



Left: Otobong Nkanga. Photograph by Win van Dungen. Right: Installation view of Otobong Nkanga, *Uneathed - Sunlight*, Kunsthaus Bregenz, Bregenz, Austria, 2021. Courtesy of the artist.



Otobong Nkanga, *Double Plot*, 2018. Courtesy of the artist.

Featured in 'Dear Earth', Nkanga's vast tapestry *Double Plot* (2018) is based on an image of the solar system, taken by NASA in 2011. Light from distant, long-dead stars bears down on our corner of the cosmos, having journeyed here for many thousands of years, while four superimposed photographic discs depict scenes of contemporary civil unrest. Presiding over all this is an enigmatic headless figure, who we might interpret as a kind of puppet master, pulling on the strings of history. Looking at the work, we get to thinking that while the universe may be glimpsed from an infinite number of standpoints, both spatial and temporal, its every atom is nevertheless a part of the same whole. Nkanga relates *Double Plot* to 'thinking within African philosophy [about] time as a flat plane where everything collapses.' Like the starlight in her tapestry, 'your ancestors are part of your life in the present, and they are also the ones who show you the way into the future.' There are calls to action all around us, if only we have eyes to see and ears to hear.



Otobong Nkanga, *Remains of the Green Hill*, 2015. Photograph by Aurelien Mole. Courtesy of the artist.

In 2015, Nkanga visited a copper mine in Namibia. The site is colloquially known as Green Hill, a name that recalls a time when its mineral-rich slopes glowed with verdant oxidized copper, small pieces of which the local San people would carve out for use in trade. In the early 20th century, German colonists transformed it into a bleak crater through blast mining, and in the artist's video work *Remains of the Green Hill* (2015) we see her standing on the site's jagged edge, her back to the viewer, like the figure in Caspar David Friedrich's painting *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (1818). And yet, unlike Friedrich's *Wanderer*, Nkanga isn't expressing mastery over this landscape, but rather addressing it in song, acknowledging the resources that have been plundered from this place, and the cost incurred to human and other life. It's something she describes as an act of 'appeasement,' similar to pouring 'a libation on the ground.' 'We all extract, we all take things out' of the earth, she says, 'but appeasement has no place in the agenda of exploitative companies and structures.' To thank the land for the gifts it yields up (and apologize for those we wrest from it) is for Nkanga a way of balancing our relationship with the planet we call home.

Perhaps her most visually striking project to date, Nkanga's 2021 solo exhibition at Kunsthaus Bregenz in Austria was themed around the four vertical oceanic layers, which range from the deep abyss to the near-surface sunlight zone. Its central feature was a 44-meter-tall mistletoe-choked tree, which appeared to rise from a stagnant pool on the ground floor, and push up through the first and second floor spaces before its leafless tip emerged into the upper gallery. Here, drifts of arid soil suggested a barren, uninhabitable landscape, and a tapestry entitled *Unearthed – Sunlight* (2021) combined woven images of a heat-scorched forest with tendrils of living ivy, a plant long associated with cemeteries. Nkanga says the show developed from contemplating what the bottom of the sea contains, including the drowned 'bodies of millions of people taken from the African continent and moved towards the Americas.' Over the centuries they have 'been transformed into minerals' and are now prone to being extracted from the seabed and put to (likely environmentally destructive) use.



Installation view of Otobong Nkanga, *The Workstation, Carved to Flow*, Athens, Greece, 2017. Photograph by Wim van Dongen. Courtesy of the artist.

In many ways an apocalyptic vision, the Bregenz exhibition was also concerned with how 'life [...] comes out of death.' Once the show closed, many of its components were redeployed: the tree was chopped up for firewood, and the soil used to build a house for the daughter of Nkanga's collaborator on the project, the architect Martin Rauch. 'I don't like the word "sustainable", I never did,' the artist says. 'The whole system has to change.' Nevertheless, this approach points to a still-uncommon way of conceptualizing exhibition making (and unmaking), in which a show is a temporary way station for materials and energies, rather than their expiration point.

The ongoing project *Carved to Flow* (2017-) began life as part of documenta 14, an exhibition sited in both Athens and Kassel, Germany. Nkanga set up a laboratory in the Greek capital, developing prototypes of ten handmade cold process soaps from raw vegetable fats, herbs, and essential oils, set in hexagonal molds. From this emerged a marbled black soap she named *OB Blackstone*, and in Kassel she created a series of tower- or well-like sculptures from some 15,000 bars, which were slowly sold to help fund two distinct, yet related initiatives. One is a nonprofit art space in Athens, Akwa Ibom, which takes its name from Nkanga's father's home village, and which she established with the curator Maya Tounta to stage key exhibitions of previously below-the-radar artists such as Thanasis Totsikas. The second is a foundation in the form of an organic farm outside the original Akwa Ibom in Nigeria, managed day-to-day by Nkanga's brother, Peter Nkanga, an investigative journalist. Using biodiversity-sensitive planting practices, it grows everything from African fluted pumpkins to plantains, pineapples to passion fruit trees.



Left: Otobong Nkanga, *OB Black Stone*, 2017. Courtesy of the artist. Right: *Carved to Flow* Foundation land in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Courtesy of the artist.



Installation view of Otobong Nkanga, *The Carrier* (Ji Yun Lee), *Carved to Flow*, Kassel, Germany, 2017. Photograph by Lena Heubusch. Courtesy of the artist.

Nkanga is firm that the foundation is for the people of Akwa Ibom, 'not something established with the international art world in mind'. Anybody who turns up at the farm can draw free clean water from its pumps, and charge their mobile phone from its solar-powered generators for a nominal fee. Local women sell the farm's produce at market, villagers are employed as laborers, and young people learn how food might be produced without the environmentally devastating, recklessly short-term techniques of industrial agriculture. The artist tells me that she wants the foundation to 'open up another way of looking at food, at the landscape.' While it is a practical project, rooted in a community's immediate, everyday needs, it's also 'a way of imagining what is possible,' and that at this perilous moment in our planetary story 'not all is lost'.



Carved to Flow Foundation land in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Courtesy of the artist.



Installation view of Jason Dodge, *They lifted me into the sun again and packed my empty skull with cinnamon*, Akwa Ibom, Nigeria, Athens, Greece, 2021. Courtesy of the artist.

Otobong Nkanga is represented by ***In Situ – fabienne leclerc***, Paris; ***Lisson Gallery***, London, Los Angeles, New York, Shanghai; and Lumen Travo Gallery, Amsterdam.

Tom Morton is a writer and curator based in Rochester, UK. He is a regular contributor to *frieze* and *ArtReview*, and in 2022 curated the group exhibition 'The Kingfisher's Wing' at GRIMM, New York.

This is the first in a series of articles featuring artists whose practices consider ecology and inspire optimism.

Published on August 25, 2023.

Caption for full-bleed images: 1. Installation view of Otobong Nkanga, *Dear Earth: Art and Hope in a Time of Crisis*, London, England, 2023.

Photograph by Mark Blower. Courtesy of the Hayward Gallery. 2. Installation View of Otobong Nkanga, *Unearthed – Sunlight*, Kunsthaus Bregenz, Bregenz, Austria, 2021. Courtesy of the artist.

Widewalls

8th March 2023

WIDEWALLS

ARTISTS | GALLERIES | GALLERY EXHIBITIONS

• 2 weeks ago

Otobong Nkanga, Nigerian-Born Multidisciplinary Artist, Joins Lisson Gallery

The artist was previously represented by Mendes Wood DM.



Otobong Nkanga is known for her multidisciplinary practice based on colonial extractivism, which includes painting, drawing, film, sculpture, textiles, installation and performances. The Nigerian-born Antwerp-based artist has recently been included in *ArtReviews* Power 100 list for 2022, the same year her artworks were featured in the *When Faith Moves Mountains* group exhibition at Kyiv's Pinchuk Art Centre - the first show at the museum during the war. In September 2021, her solo show *Of Cords Curling around Mountains* opened at Castello di Rivoli in Turin.

The artist will have her first solo exhibition with the [Lisson Gallery](#) in 2024. Between May 3rd till June 24th, 2023, the gallery will organize *Matter As Actor*, a group show that will include Nkanga's tapestries, photography and her performance and sculptural work *Solid Manoeuvres*. Previously, the artist was represented by Mendes Wood DM.

Featured image: Otobong Nkanga, Courtesy of [Lisson Gallery](#)

ARTnews Est. 1902

Lisson Gallery Now Represents Otobong Nkanga, Artist Who Broaches Pressing Ecological Concerns



BY **MAXIMILIANO DURÓN**  March 8, 2023 12:13pm



Otobong Nkanga.

PHOTO WIM VAN DONGEN/@OTOBONG NKANGA/COURTESY LISSON GALLERY

Lisson Gallery, which has locations in New York, London, Shanghai, and Beijing, now represents **Otobong Nkanga**, who has appeared in a range of major biennials over the past several years. She will have her first solo show at Lisson in 2024, and she will create a new tapestry for “Matter as Actor,” an upcoming group show at Lisson’s two London locations.

Nkanga will maintain her representation with her Amsterdam (Lumen Travo Gallery) and Paris (Galerie In Situ – Fabienne Leclerc) galleries, but is no longer represented by São Paulo–based gallery Mendes Wood DM, according to the *Art Newspaper*, which **first reported** the news.

A multidisciplinary artist working across tapestry, installation, photography, and more, Nkanga is known for a research-based practice that contemplates ecological concerns, their intersections with sociopolitical realities, and the unseen connections between them all.

In a **2021 feature** in *Art in America*, Zoé Samudzi wrote, “Nkanga’s work consistently foregrounds African people and their position in the international supply chain, emphasizing the continent’s role as a vital point of extraction for raw materials, whether cacao or coltan (used in the manufacture of cellphones and other electronic devices). Devastating large-scale projects are an integral part of colonialism’s conquest of natural and human resources. The postcolonial economy is not so unlike the formal colonial one.

Samudzi continued, “Nkanga forces us to bear witness to these topographies of land and labor, to remember who creates (and suffers for) the everyday products and luxuries that we take for granted.”

Nkanga’s work has been widely exhibited around the world, including at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark, Paris’s Centre Pompidou, and the Haus de Kunst in Munich. She has had major solo exhibitions at the Kunsthau Bregenz in Austria, the Castello di Rivoli in Turin, Villa Arson in France, Gropius Bau in Berlin, and the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa in Cape Town.

Nkanga has featured in the 2019 Venice Biennale, Documenta 14 in 2017, the 2019 Sharjah Biennial, the 2015 Biennale of Lyon, the 2014 Berlin Biennale, and most recently the 2022 Busan Biennale, among others. In 2019, she was **named the inaugural winner** of the the Lise Wilhelmsen Art Award Programme, which comes with \$100,000 and a solo exhibition at the Henie Onstad Kunstsenter Museum in Norway.

Nkanga is currently the subject of a solo show at the Frist Art Museum in Nashville that is part of the Tennessee Triennial for Contemporary Art, organized by artist María Magdalena Campos-Pons. In July, she will be the subject of a survey at the Institut Valencià d’Art Modern in Spain, and her art will be included in the thematic exhibition, “Dear Earth: Art and Hope in a Time of Crisis,” which opens at the Hayward Gallery in London in June.

Speaking to the *Art Newspaper*, Nkanga said, “Getting to know the gallery, I understood how committed the team are, and I know they will take care of the work and that will also grow with me and listen to me. I think that aspect of listening—not only listening to the artist, but to what the work does and where it’s going—is so important. I think Lisson is the gallery I need for my work.”

The Art Newspaper
7th March 2023



THE ART NEWSPAPER

Otobong Nkanga—who shows at biennials from Venice to Sharjah—joins Lisson Gallery

The Nigerian-born multidisciplinary artist will have a solo show at the London gallery next year

Amah-Rose Abrams

7 March 2023

Share



Otobong Nkanga was previously represented by Mendes Wood DM

© Otobong Nkanga, Photography by Wim van Dongen, Courtesy Lisson Gallery

The Nigerian-born, Antwerp-based artist Otobong Nkanga has joined Lisson Gallery in a move that she says is to focus on her creative growth. She is also no longer represented by Mendes Wood DM. Nkanga has a solo exhibition at Lisson opening next year and will also show work at an upcoming group show at the London gallery in May.

“I don't know if it's a question of change, or if it's a question of growing with another team and with a gallery that I've always had a great admiration for,” Nkanga tells *The Art Newspaper*. “When I first met Nicholas Logsdail [Lisson's founder] and Ossian Ward [the gallery's content director] in Venice, the conversation was just so smooth. It felt like we've known each other for a long time.”

Nkanga is ranked 81st in *ArtReview's* [Power 100 list for 2022](#), which cites her inclusion in the group exhibition *When Faith Moves Mountains*, the first show to have taken place at the Pinchuk Art Centre in Kyiv after the Russian invasion, and her subsequent solo show, *Of Cords Curling around Mountains* at Castello di Rivoli in Turin.

Her multi-disciplinary practice includes performance, sculpture, film, textiles, painting, drawing and installation, and is based on ideas of colonial extractivism and how that manifests in the relationships between people, place, natural materials, society and the body.



Silent Force, Red Caress (2022), part of Otobong Nkanga's show at St John's Hospital in Bruges, Belgium in 2022
Dominique Provost

“As a team we have long admired Otobong and her multifaceted practice, and are excited to announce that we will be starting on this journey together,” says Lisson partner Louise Hayward. “Otobong’s important practice as an artist and thinker spans many media, genres and themes, allowing her to connect audiences to these vital works and ideas. She has broken so much ground already that we are honoured to continue in this vein and committed to helping her grow further.”

Speaking of her reasons for moving on, Nkanga cites the Lisson team's understanding of her work and process. "Getting to know the gallery, I understood how committed the team are, and I know they will take care of the work and that will also grow with me and listen to me," she says. "I think that aspect of listening—not only listening to the artist, but to what the work does and where it's going—is so important. I think Lisson is the gallery I need for my work."



Nkanga's *Solid Manoeuvres* performance at Berlin's Gropius Bau in 2020
Courtesy Lisson Gallery

The group show *Matter As Actor* (3 May-24 June), organised by the Lisson partner and curatorial director Greg Hilty, will include tapestries and photographic works by Nkanga alongside her long-term performance and sculptural work *Solid Manoeuvres* (2015). The show, which addresses artists' relationships with the materials they engage with, will present Nkanga's work alongside those by Richard Long, Yelena Popova, Lucy Raven, Zhan Wang and Feifei Zhou.

This will precede the multi-artist show *Dear Earth: Art and Hope in a Time of Crisis* at London's Hayward Gallery (21 June-3 September) and a retrospective of the artist's work at IVAM, Institut Valencià d'Art Modern in Spain (13 July-5 November).

While she has parted ways with Mendes Wood, which has locations in Brussels, São Paulo and New York, Nkanga is still represented by the Amsterdam gallery Lumen Travo and Galerie In Situ-Fabienne Leclerc in Paris.

ArtReview

Power 100

Most influential people in 2023 in the contemporary artworld

76



Otobong Nkanga

Artist - Artist whose work explores questions of home, place and displacement

76 in 2023

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The curators of *Dear Earth*, at London's Hayward Gallery, said they took inspiration from Nkanga's maxim that 'caring is a form of resistance', with care being afforded to both the human and nonhuman subject. In that exhibition she showed *Double Plot* (2018), a vast tapestry depicting the solar system, while more recent textiles, drawings, photographs, sculptures and performance works featured in solo shows at the Frist Art Museum, Nashville, and the Institut Valencià d'Art Modern. 'Care' is not just a modish curatorial buzzword for Nkanga, but the driving force behind *O8 Black Stone*, a black soap made of petrol sediment (name-checked in Teju Cole's new book), sold in aid of her Athens project space, Akwa Ibom, and an organic farm in Nigeria that promotes biodiverse planting practices and doubles as a hub for the rural community. While shifting galleries, from Mendes Wood DM to Lisson, Nkanga remains as formally innovative as she is socially conscious, winning this year's \$100,000 [Nasher Prize](#) for Sculpture.



Photo: Wimvan Dongen. © Otobong Nkanga. Courtesy Lisson Gallery

LISSON GALLERY

Castello Di Rivoli
2022



A CIELO APERTO 2022. Michelangelo Pistoletto: Il Terzo Paradiso dei Talenti, 2022

A CIELO APERTO 2022

Four contemporary artworks and new commissions to celebrate the 30th anniversary of Fondazione CRC

**Artists: Olafur Eliasson, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Susan Philipsz, Otobong Nkanga
Venues: Grinzane Cavour (Alba), Cuneo, Mondovì, Bra**

A public art project commissioned by Fondazione CRC in collaboration with Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea. It is curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev with Marcella Beccaria and Marianna Vecellio

The project A CIELO APERTO 2022 (Open Air 2022) features the new work *Il Terzo Paradiso dei Talenti, 2022*, by Michelangelo Pistoletto (Biella, 1933) which will be inaugurated at the Rondò dei Talenti in Via Luigi Gallo 1, Cuneo, on October 14th at 5.30 pm.

This new work by Pistoletto, one of the key figures of Arte Povera is the second work of the A CIELO APERTO (Open Air) program. It follows the inauguration of the work *The presence of absence pavilion* by Olafur Eliasson at Castello di Grinzane Cavour in June to mark the occasion of the 8th anniversary of the UNESCO recognition of the vineyard landscapes of the regions of Langhe, Monferrato and Roero in Piemonte, Italy.

Pistoletto's sign-symbol of the *Third Paradise* reconfigures the mathematical sign of infinity by adding a third circle to its center representing synthesis and creation, to promote new connections and interactions between opposite polarities. Since the early 2000s, the *Third Paradise* sign-symbol has formed the centerpiece of this artist's work and has been the inspiration for many of his sculptural interventions over the past twenty years and globally. The work at Cuneo, *Il Terzo Paradiso dei Talenti, 2022*, was specially developed by the artist for the external area of the Rondò dei Talenti building, in relation to the curvature of the building and the structure of the square. It presents the symbol vertically, suspended in the air like a large sign that emphasizes the presence of the Rondò, and is made by silk-screen printing on metal and joining together a selection of over two hundred children's drawings. In this way, the work underlines the particular mission of the Rondò dei Talenti itself, a new center supported by the Fondazione CRC, where young people can participate in various activities in order to experiment and even find their own vocations – their "talents".

The sign of the *Third Paradise* also defines the basis for the collective oper-Action, shared with the community, which will take place at Pistoletto's Cuneo sculpture on October 14 at 4 pm.

Born as a participatory sculpture that promotes the idea of collective work, enhancing the contribution of multiple communities in the Piedmont area, *Il Terzo Paradiso dei Talenti* was created with over two hundred drawings produced by children and students, collected by the Education Department of the Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea in collaboration with the Rebirth Cuneo Embassy – Associazione Con.Te.St oOo, the Cuneo primary and secondary preschools, the Bay Preschool of Turin and the children of the Summer School at Castello di Rivoli. The next day, in the painting action for families led by the Artenaute of the Castello di Rivoli Museum Education Department, in collaboration with the Cultural Association La Scatola Gialla, the sign-symbol will be reworked in the horizontal dimension, inspired by the original work *Il Terzo Paradiso dei Talenti*.

The *A CIELO APERTO (Open Air)* project presents **four public artworks** created by **four international artists** and located in four locations: the Piemontese towns of Alba, Bra, Cuneo and Mondovì – the area of Cuneo where Fondazione CRC operates. The project is part of the program *La generazione delle idee* (The Generation of Ideas) by Fondazione CRC to celebrate its 30th anniversary, and it is designed to be enjoyed by the community and celebrate a spirit of renewed freedom in the open air, in contrast with the limitations that have characterized the last few years of cultural activities.

The initiative aims to establish a new balance between local communities, history, international artistic life and nature, with particular attention to the themes of ecology which today are articulated in an effort to slow down climate change, to seek a quality and sustainability in food production, as well as in the cultural memory that constitutes the identity of these places. The combination of art and land of the *A CIELO APERTO 2022* project enhances the gastronomic and, in particular, the enological culture, in relation to experimental culture of contemporary art.

The project, which involves four internationally renowned artists, creates a dialogue between different cultures and generations. The works of **Olafur Eliasson** (Copenhagen, 1967), **Michelangelo Pistoletto** (Biella, 1933) **Susan Philipsz** (Glasgow, 1965), and **Otobong Nkanga** (Kano, 1974) have been acquired by Fondazione CRC and are presented respectively at Castello di Grinzane Cavour (Alba), Cuneo, Mondovì and Bra.

The President of Fondazione CRC, **Ezio Raviola**, states "The *A CIELO APERTO 2022* project not only renews the long and fruitful collaboration built over the years with Castello di Rivoli, but also offers us the opportunity to bring the works of four extraordinary internationally renowned artists to the province of Cuneo. This is a unique cultural operation, promoted to celebrate the 30th anniversary of our institution, which will leave a mark in four emblematic places in the history of Fondazione CRC."

The Director of Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, **Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev**, states, "After two and a half years of pandemic, it's time to go out into the open air. A project like this, strongly supported by Fondazione CRC, reminds us how art has healing and beneficial effects on the public and also calls us to our responsibility towards the environment, so rich in aesthetic stimuli and so open to welcoming the works of art."

Fondazione CRC thanks Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea for curating and installing the project, as well as its Education Department for the collaboration.

The artworks

Otobong Nkanga



Otobong Nkanga, *Of Cords Curling around Mountains*, 2021-2022, detail of the installation, Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rivoli-Torino
Photo Andrea Guermani

Courtesy the artist and Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rivoli-Torino

In **November**, the new work by **Otobong Nkanga** *Of Sundials, Lines and Weights*, 2022, will be presented in **Bra**. For the public art project, the artist drew a landscape in which curved lines in relation to a sundial connect sculptural elements with organic, almost anthropomorphic shapes, potential containers of food, agricultural materials and products of the earth. Nkanga's artistic research deals with urgent issues related to the climate crisis and the exploitation of resources and sustainability, in line with the philosophy of Slow Food, the international non-profit association born in Bra in 1986. Founded by Bra resident Carlo Petrini, Slow Food's aim is to restore the organic relationships between food, ecology, and cultures and to give food its correct value by respecting those who produce it, in harmony with the environment and ecosystems, preserving the knowledge of local territories and traditions. In this context, the relationship with the African continent and in particular the artist's native country Nigeria, is key, as it enables the expansion of the imaginary of a sustainable future, where Piedmont relates happily with locations in the Global South. Nkanga's empathic relationship with the earth and the environment produces an unprecedented cosmogony for the future in those who experience her works.



Otobong Nkanga

Photo Sebastiano Pellion di Persano 2021

Courtesy Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rivoli-Torino

Otobong Nkanga (Kano, Nigeria, 1974, currently lives and works in Antwerp, Belgium) is considered one of the most interesting artists on the contemporary scene. She studied at the Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife, Nigeria, the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris, the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten in Amsterdam, DasArts Amsterdam and was awarded a residency at the DAAD in Berlin. Her works are present in the collections of numerous international institutions including Center Pompidou, Paris; Tate Modern, London; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rivoli-Turin and has exhibited in exhibitions and biennials all over the world, as well as her solo exhibitions

at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) in Chicago (2018), at the Tate Modern and Tate St. Ives, United Kingdom. In 2015 she was awarded the 8th Yanghyun Art Prize and in 2017 the Belgian Art Prize. Nkanga's project *Carved to Flow* was presented the same year at documenta 14, Kassel – Athens. Her most recent solo shows have taken place at Zeitz Mocaa, Cape Town and Ta-te St. Ives, UK (2019-2020) and Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (MIMA), UK (2020-2021). In 2019 Nkanga was a resident artist at the Gropius Bau in Berlin where she further developed the *Carved to Flow* project, culminating in the solo exhibition *There's No Such Thing as Solid Ground* in 2020. In 2019 the artist received a Special Mention at the 58th International Exhibition of Art of the Venice Biennale; she was awarded the Prize for Best Permanent Installation at the 14th Sharjah Biennial (with Emeka Ogboh); she won the prestigious Peter-Weiss-Preis and was also awarded the Flemish Cultural Award for Visual Arts – Ultima. Also in 2019 the artist was the first recipient of the Lise Wilhelmsen Art Award Program and in the fall of 2020 she presented the solo show *Uncertain Where the Next Wind Blows* at Henie Onstad Kunstsenter in Høvikodden, Norway. In June 2021, the artist presented the retrospective *When Looking Across the Sea, Do You Dream?* organized in collaboration with the Castello di Rivoli, which included the solo presentation *Otobong Nkanga. Of Cords Curling around Mountains*.



Otobong Nkanga and Hans Ulrich Obrist on ecology, lockdowns, and ‘14 Rooms’

Hans Ulrich Obrist

The artist and curator reflect on one of Art Basel’s most significant projects and how it continues to resonate, six years later

When asked about her favorite memory of Art Basel, the gallerist Sadie Coles replied, “‘Il Tempo del Postino’ in 2009 and ‘14 Rooms’ in 2014: These were the years when the Art Basel projects were of such an ambitious scale that they emphasized why Art Basel is, for me, the world’s most extraordinary, challenging, and agenda-setting art fair.’

‘Il Tempo del Postino’ and ‘14 Rooms’ mark important steps in Art Basel’s 50-year history. These hybrid events, which were articulated around performance-based artworks, were realized in collaboration with the Manchester International Festival, as well as Fondation Beyeler and Theater Basel. Each edition of curators Hans Ulrich Obrist and Klaus Biesenbach’s ‘Rooms’ project (it was also staged in 2012 as ‘12 Rooms’ for the Ruhrtriennale in Germany and in 2013 as ‘13 Rooms’ for Kaldor Public Art Projects in Australia) was adapted to reflect its site-specific context. Blurring the line between audience and artwork, ‘14 Rooms’ offered visitors the opportunity to walk in on or trigger performances, rather than experience them according to a set time frame.

In Basel, this meant four new commissions along with an artist list that spanned three generations and four continents. It featured **Marina Abramović, Tino Sehgal, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Xu Zhen, Joan Jonas, Ed Atkins, Bruce Nauman,** and **Otobong Nkanga**. On the occasion of Art Basel's 50th anniversary, Obrist and Nkanga connected over Zoom to reflect on '14 Rooms' and how lockdowns around the world have had an impact on the way performance-based work is thought about and staged.



Diaspore, performance by Otobong Nkanga during '14 Rooms', Basel, 2014.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: '14 Rooms' was about the relationship between space, time, and physicality, but also about living sculptures. With performance, there is a fixed time – the performance lasts from 6 to 7pm or from 8 to 8:30pm – and Klaus and I were interested in the idea of ongoing performances and interactive pieces. Visitors could come any time during the day and would encounter a new situation in each of the 14 rooms. I want to revisit your extraordinary piece, *Diaspore*, and talk about how you came to it.

Otobong Nkanga: When you invited me to be part of '14 Rooms' I thought it would make sense to expand the piece I was working on at the time, which was related to a work called *Taste of a Stone*. *Taste of a Stone* started in 2010 as an installation at Kunsthall Charlottenborg [in Copenhagen], but later on I expanded the work because, as an installation only, it felt like something was lacking. It needed to be expanded so the body would start connecting with the elements – the stones, the soil, and the plants – in the space. In 2013, when I performed *Taste of a Stone: Itiat Esa Ufok* in Sharjah [in the United Arab Emirates], I added the Queen of the Night plant on top of my head. That plant is connected to my childhood in Nigeria, but I found it in the Emirates, so I thought it made sense to perform with it.

For '14 Rooms', I wanted to extend the work to other women, particularly women who confirmed they have African heritage, and in that way connect to how I see myself, an African woman, as well as think I through the diaspora. The idea of movement made sense in relation to the diaspora and the plant itself, which is actually from the West Indies but has moved through and arrived in many other places, such as Southeast Asia, Australia, and behind my

house in Nigeria. I wanted to create a piece about the idea of *di* – a word-forming element of Greek origin meaning two, split, or double – and *dia*, also of Greek origin, meaning through, across, or from point to point, and then the spore, which is like a seed.

HUO: ‘14 Rooms’ was also an extremely physical exhibition, it had a lot to do with being present. It was about the body, about many different ways of being together in a space. It was the opposite of our current reality, where we’re mostly communicating by Zoom.

ON: With the lockdown, I’ve been thinking a lot about how one continues performing, how one brings the body into a space where everyone is worried about this invisible element that goes through nostrils. During ‘14 Rooms’, we never thought about one person standing next to another – one could easily enter Marina Abramović’s performance, *Luminosity* [1997/2014], which had a naked performer breathing and sweating in a room [while sitting on an elevated bicycle seat fixed to a wall]. But now, for example, I’m showing *Diaspore* at Gropius Bau in Berlin and I had to rethink how to show it – how to create distance between the performers and to be more aware of the visitors coming in and out.

With *Diaspore* and the Queen of the Night plant, there is an important relationship to the autobiographical space. Every night, when I was a kid in Nigeria, we would smell the Queen of the Night blossoming. That relation to smell, to the notion of the queen, to something that makes you remember its existence every night, is very strong. I wouldn’t notice the plant, but I would notice the smell. The plant being on the head of a performer is also important because the plant becomes similar to a crown. The notion of the queen then starts entering the posture of the body – the body has to hold the pot and that forces the performer to take the posture of a queen.

HUO: Herzog & de Meuron created an exhibition architecture with mirrors so the rooms could be mirrored to infinity. In your room, you added another layer – a topographic map on the floor, which was almost like looking at the land from above. You were mapping the bodies that performed in the space, but also the bodies that entered the space.

ON: In order to emphasize the displacement or movement of bodies from one place to another, it can help to think of the world as a topographic map of pylons and places that are low, where the water flows, where the rivers and streams are passing by. Adding this map to the floor was a very graphic way of expanding the idea of the diaspora or the movement of people.



Otobong Nkanga, *Carved to Flow*, 2017 Public program sessions, The Workstation, 2017 (collaboration with Evi Lachana and Maya Tounta), *documenta 14*, Athens. © Otobong Nkanga. Photo: Wim van Dongen.

UO: How did you feel about Herzog & de Meuron's architecture?

ON: I went through different emotions. The first time I arrived, I was shocked to see how the room felt expanded and how the use of the mirrors allowed one to look 'beyond.' But I was also nervous about looking at myself in a mirror because I don't like looking at my own reflection. This always brings us to the narcissist, or back to the self. What I did enjoy was the way they divided the space and how the area in the middle allowed for a lot of people to move around before entering each room.

They designed it so that once you opened a door, you entered a world – and you couldn't leave that world. You either got into that world or ran out, there wasn't an 'in between,' it didn't leave you indifferent. In my room, the space created a place where people calmed down and contemplated, relaxed, and sometimes became quite emotional. I think the design – the wall, the door, looking at oneself – allowed the visitor to reset before entering each room.

HUO: What rooms are strongest in your memory?

ON: One room that I still connect with is Roman Ondak's *Swap*, which was about exchange. You'd have something with you and go in, and then you'd have to sit down and barter – you'd exchange something and then it would continue and continue. Another work that has stayed with me is Ed Atkins's *No-one is More 'Work' Than Me* with the performing robot, and also Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's piece, *R.145*. I won't say too much about her work because you are meant to experience it, but it forced you to be on your own until something happened, and recently we've been in a situation where we've had to be on our own. With the lockdown, we were contained within spaces, and I think that piece works very well when thinking about how we manage and work within a space that is on lockdown.

HUO: My last question is one that I ask in all my conversations and have asked you many times before – can you tell me about an unrealized project that is dear to you?

ON: I would like to have a farm in Nigeria. I've already gotten the land, but it will be a lifetime project. I'd like to have goats and a place where there can be healing, where we can connect with younger generations, and where we can find ways to work with local materials. This is the dream I'm working towards – a place where you can still make things, but a place that's connected to the landscape, to people, to plants, to animals...A farm.



Otobong Nkanga, *Solid Maneuvers*, 2015. Installation view of 'Crumbling Through Powdery Air', Portikus, Frankfurt am Main, 2015. Photo: Helena Schlichting. Courtesy of Portikus.

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Monopol
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Otobong Nkanga. There's No Such Thing as Solid Ground

10 Jul 2020 – 13 Dec 2020



Photo: Helena Schlichting, courtesy: Portikus

Otobong Nkanga's interest lies in the complex relationship between humans and land. In her works, she explores this relationship within the tension between exploitative extraction processes and structures of care and repair. Following her one-year stay as In House: Artist in Residence 2019 at the Gropius Bau, a solo exhibition will offer insights into the central issues of her work.

Otobong Nkanga evokes the idea that the human body and the landscape on which it moves are interdependent. Based on extensive research and the interweaving of various media such as drawing, installation and performance, she traces the movement of minerals, goods and people in order to explore in depth economic and ecological processes. In her work, she also investigates the differing meanings ascribed to natural resources in various cultures and the violent relationship on which their extraction and further processing is based – thus challenging traditional ways of thinking.

ArtReview
18 January 2019

ArtReview

Q&A: Otobong Nkanga

ArtReview Collaborations 18 January 2019



Otobong Nkanga is nominated for Artes Mundi 8 alongside Anna Boghiguan, Bouchra Khalili, Trevor Paglen and Apichatpong Weerasethakul. The biannual prize is awarded to international ‘artists who directly engage with everyday life through their practice and who explore contemporary social issues across the globe’, with the shortlist selected from over 450 nominations spanning 86 countries. An exhibition of the shortlist is now open at National Museum Cardiff and the winner will be announced 24 January. *ArtReview* is a media partner of Artes Mundi 8.

Artes Mundi is specifically interested in everyday life, what role do you see art playing in vernacular culture?

The ‘vernacular’ is a very tricky thing. The vernacular is always in flux; I’m quite critical of the term. It implies that there is a break between it and all other possibilities of culture. This division is one that has grown up historically to suggest that one group does not, or should not, interact with the other.

What strategies should an artist take to escape the insularity of the gallery?

There is the possibility of being in and out of multiple spheres, being in and out of institutions. And I think that has happened forever: if we look at artists from the Renaissance, their art existed among kings and queens, within the church, and on the street. Political art can be in a museum, because it allows a certain group of people to reflect on it, but the same artist can enter spaces outside the white cube, working with different groups, working with scientists, entering multiple representations. Showing in a place like the National Museum Cardiff is interesting because as an institution it proposes multiple viewpoints: it has a natural history department, a geology section and so on. All of which attract different publics.

In these intemperate times, should art seek to foster unity or to provoke opposition?

With art making you should never start off knowing, or thinking you know, what the end artwork will do. Art should not be conditioned with a given aim, but come from a place of experimentation and research. Art is also unpredictable: what might be unifying one time in one place, will provoke a huge reaction in another.

We never see the result of an artwork, the results an artwork produces within society or within an individual viewer, but we know that it has the possibility of shifting the brain, changing one's thinking. That result might take time though.

What does being nominated for a prize mean to you?

Most of those nominated are friends! The sense of competition then does not even come into this!

Online exclusive published on 17 January 2019

ARTnews

Otobong Nkanga, Emeka Ogboh Named Winners of 2019 Sharjah Biennial Prize



BY **CLAIRE SELVIN** March 11, 2019 10:53am



ADVERTISEMENT

The **Sharjah Art Foundation** in the United Arab Emirates has awarded its **Sharjah Biennial 14** Prize to artists Otobong Nkanga and Emeka Ogboh for their project *Aging Ruins Dreaming Only to Recall the Hard Chisel from the Past* (2019), which is now on view at this year's edition of the exhibition. Mohamed Bourouissa, Shezad Dawood, Phan Thảo Nguyên, and Qiu Zhijie also received special mentions.

For *Aging Ruins Dreaming Only to Recall the Hard Chisel from the Past*, Nkanga and Ogboh filled crevices at the ruin Bait Al Aboudi—one of the biennial's venues—with sea water and salt. The piece also comprises light boxes and a recording of an Emirati “rain song.”

The jury for this year's Sharjah Biennial Prize included critic and curator Octavio Zaya; scholar and theorist Homi K. Baba; and curator Solange Farkas. The award was established in 1993.



Otobong Nkanga and **Emeka Ogboh**, *Aging Ruins Dreaming Only to Recall the Hard Chisel from the Past* (work in progress), 2019.

COURTESY THE ARTISTS

E-flux Announcements
12 October 2019

Otobong Nkanaga receives inaugural Lise Wilhelmsen Art Award

Henie Onstad Kunstsenter



Otobong Nkanaga, *Double Plot*, 2018. Woven textile with photography. 265 x 770 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Mendes Wood DM São Paulo, Brussels, New York.

**Otobong Nkanaga receives inaugural
Lise Wilhelmsen Art Award**

Henie Onstad Kunstsenter

Sonja Henies vei 31
1311 Oslo
Norway

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The inaugural winner of the Lise Wilhelmsen Art Award Programme is Otobong Nkanga.

Revealed during a reception at The Conduit in London on September 30, the winner was announced by Tone Hansen, Director of the Henie Onstad Kunstsenter: "Otobong Nkanga is an artist of unshakeable integrity and vitality. The impact we have upon our environment and one another constitutes the essence of her work. She is a wonderful choice as inaugural artist for the Lise Wilhelmsen Art Award Programme, which celebrates the work of distinguished international artists."

The Lise Wilhelmsen Art Award Programme is a new collaboration between the Lise and Arne Wilhelmsen Family and the Henie Onstad Kunstsenter. Every two years, the programme presents 100,000 USD in prize money to a distinguished, mid-career artist whose work will inspire and motivate future generations to active participation and social responsibility. In addition to the prize, there is an acquisition budget for the inclusion of the artist's work in the Henie Onstad Kunstsenter collection, and the winner will feature in a dedicated exhibition at the museum the following year. The award represent a financial commitment that places the programme among the most significant art awards internationally.

On winning the award, Otobong Nkanga said: "I am truly honoured to be the inaugural recipient of the Lise Wilhelmsen Art Award Programme and to exhibit next year in the Henie Onstad Kunstsenter. The award will enable me to work further on developing ideas, pursue dreams and have the time to reflect on topics that are inspiring me."

Nkanga's multi-disciplinary practice, which spans tapestry, drawing, photography, installation, video and performance, connects threads that reveal the entanglements of bodies, land and natural resources. Her work reflects on the processes and consequences of the extraction of natural resources from ethical, human and material perspectives. She explores the transformation of natural substances, such as minerals, into desirable commodities as a commentary on the value placed on material culture, often at the expense of the environment.

Otobong Nkanga's exhibition at the Henie Onstad Kunstsenter in Norway will take place in autumn 2020, as part of a two-year programme with the museum.

The winner of the Lise Wilhelmsen Art Award Programme is decided by an international jury, composed of **María Inés Rodríguez**, Editor of *Tropical Papers* and Curator at Large at MASP, São Paulo; **Michelle Kuo**, The Marlene Hess Curator of Painting and Sculpture at MoMA, New York; **Elvira Dyangani Ose**, Director of Showroom, London; **Paulina Rider Wilhelmsen**, Founder of Wilstar Social Impact, Oslo; **Caroline Ugelstad**, Head of the Art Department and Chief Curator at the Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Oslo; and **Tone Hansen**, Director of the Henie Onstad Kunstsenter.

The Lise Wilhelmsen Art Award Programme was established in order to continue and honour Lise Wilhelmsen's (1936–2019) commitment to the visual arts. The Wilhelmsen family seeks to promote extraordinary artists as well as inspire and motivate future generations to active participation and social responsibility. The family's commitment with the Henie Onstad Kunstsenter is confirmed for the next 16 editions, spanning 32 years, with the intention of a further extension.

On the creation of the award, Paulina Rider Wilhelmsen noted: "It is important for us to create a programme that is in keeping with Lise Wilhelmsen's appreciation and support of mid-career artists with an international standing. There are many art prizes for young, up-and-coming artists today, but we want to recognise artists who have been working for some time. The award is based on Lise Wilhelmsen's wish for future generations to benefit from her many years of commitment to painting and sculpture."

ARTnews

Otobong Nkanga Wins \$100,000 Lise Wilhelmsen Art Award Programme, One of the World's Largest Art Prizes



BY MAXIMILIANO
DURÓN

September 30, 2019
2:47pm



Otobong Nkanga.

WIM VAN DONGEN

The Henie Onstad Kunstsenter Museum in Høvikodden, Norway, has named Otobong Nkanga the inaugural winner of the **Lise Wilhelmsen** Art Award Programme, a biannual prize for mid-career artists that comes with \$100,000 in cash, an exhibition at the museum next fall, and a budget to acquire work by the artist for the museum's permanent collection.

The prize, which is among the world's largest single prizes for an artist, was **first announced** in March, and is fully funded for its first 16 cycles by Norwegian cruise ship magnate Arne Wilhelmsen and his family in memory of his late wife Lise Wilhelmsen. During her lifetime, Lise acquired art for her husband's company, Royal Caribbean Cruises.

Nkanga, who was born in Nigeria in 1974 and currently lives in Antwerp, is currently the subject of solo exhibition at Tate St. Ives, up until next January, and another survey of her work will open at the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary African Art in Cape Town, South Africa, in November. She received a special mention at the 58th Venice Biennale earlier this year and won the 2019 Sharjah Biennial Prize in March.

Though the award was originally billed as being for a painter or sculptor, Nkanga is a multi-disciplinary artist, working across tapestry, installation, photography, video, and other mediums. Her practice looks at the ways humans shape—and ultimately destroy—the earth.

“Otobong Nkanga is an artist of unshakeable integrity and vitality,” **Tone Hansen**, the Henie Onstad Kunstsenter Museum’s director, said in a statement. “The impact we have upon our environment and one another constitutes the essence of her work.”

The jury included Hansen, María Inés Rodríguez, Michelle Kuo, Elvira Dyangani Ose, and Caroline Ugelstad. In a statement, the jury wrote, “Otobong Nkanga was selected because her work and practice so poignantly and effectively address the contradictions inherent in humanity’s most celebrated characteristics: imagination, creativity and the ability to respond to and engage with the world around us. In the 21st century, humankind has gradually come to realize the immeasurable force and impact of its existence, not only on cultural, social and economic systems, but also on our planet. Nkanga brings a new perspective to these subjects while creating poetic paintings and sculptures of an extraordinary quality.”

Frieze
26 March 2018

FRIEZE

Otobong Nkanga: To Dig a Hole That Collapses Again

Ahead of a survey opening at MCA Chicago, the Nigerian artist mines and represents narratives of place, from Antwerp to Lagos

A

BY ANNA MARTINE WHITEHEAD IN PROFILES | 26 MAR 18



Despite hundreds of years of the transatlantic slave trade, in 1870 just 10% of Africa was under European control; by 1914, only Ethiopia, Liberia and parts of modern-day Somalia remained independent. The near total colonization of the continent by Europe involved, to a great extent, the aggressive mapping and penetration of the land south of the Sahara – a history that continues to complicate contemporary questions around belonging, migration and citizenship. Nigerian-born, Antwerp-based artist Otobong Nkanga, whose exhibition ‘To Dig a Hole That Collapses Again’ opens this Saturday at the MCA Chicago, asks audiences to further consider how one’s connection to land informs a broader, though still personal cosmology. In her tapestries, paintings, installation and sculpture, Nkanga uses her body and other organic material – plants, grasses and fruit – as catalysts to reveal the shifting nature of objects, imagery, narratives. Her work frames ‘landscape’ as a flexible, discursive field; also, as an operative force in the construction of identity as well as a negotiable entity, affected by time and trauma.



Otobong Nkanga, *Baggage 1972; 2007-2008: Meeting Point, Eleko Beach, Lagos, 2007-08*, from 'Baggage 1972; 2007-2008, a happening by Allan Kaprow re-invented by Otobong Nkanga', 2007-08, photograph on postcard, 13 x 16 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Allan Kaprow Studio

In 2007, Nkanga reworked Alan Krapow's *Baggage* (1972), a performance piece in which Krapow transported bags of sand from Rice University in Houston, Texas, to a beach in Galveston, where he replaced the bags with sand from the Gulf Coast before returning them to the university. In Nkanga's reimagining of Krapow's piece, *Baggage* (2007–08), she extends the geopolitical and racialized implications of the work to address the relationship between her two homes, Belgium and Nigeria. For her own version, Nkanga shipped bags of sand from Antwerp down to Lagos, where bags of Nigerian sand were then sent back to Belgium. While the work emphasizes the fraught historical ties between Northern Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa, it also probes recent – and ongoing – experiences of displacement, indigeneity and human trafficking that persist on both continents.



Otobong Nkanga, *Diaoptasia*, 2015, film still. Courtesy: the artist

Like Kaprow or land artist Robert Smithson, Nkanga is interested in humanity's fluctuating relationship to land and place, which is, at turns, violent and restorative. In the painting *Social Consequences II* (2010), a disembodied arm stabs a tree shedding green leaves into the open palm of another unattached arm. In another painting from the 'Social Consequences' series, a figure adorned with polygons is poked with wooden sticks or metal spears, as if bodies were at once formed by and put at risk by inhuman elements. These shapes resemble cut stones and precious minerals, and their presence transforms the body into something elemental. In the performance *Diaoptasia* (2015), first presented at the Tate Modern in London, Nkanga, wearing an assemblage of paper polygons, skewers her own costume at random while singing, 'As I tanda so, my eye dey torchlight una for North.' (In Nigerian pidgin, 'From I stand, my eye will send a light to you in the North.' In other words, I am a geographical place – which is South – and which is looking at you.) In *Diaoptasia*, language is skewered by pidgin English, from the artist's lyrics to the work's title, which becomes a hacked and jerry-rigged instrument that reforms and reinforces its meaning. Nkanga steps into such violence, the violence of words, dresses herself in it, operates it as a kind of prosthetic, and lets it take shape inside her mouth in the form of song.

Like Smithson, Kaprow, Carl Andre and other artists similarly engaged with nature, Nkanga addresses the ways the artist can change earth into something else. While, for Andre, sculpting wood and stone into minimalist lines is a continuation of a long-held positivist tradition of the human power to change material, critic Philippe Pirotte notes that Nkanga evades the drive to 'make a new product out of [resources].' Instead, she is much more interested in the way natural resources transform us.



Otobong Nkanga, *A Taste of Stone I - II* (detail), 2010, installation view, Nottingham Contemporary. Courtesy: the artist

For example, in *A Taste of Stone I – II* (2010), the artist filled one of Nottingham Contemporary's galleries with images of stones printed onto limestone and set atop table legs, accompanied by two placards, which together form a fragmented narrative. One uses images – a body, a map, a landscape – while the other uses text to tell a piece of a story addressing recurring themes in Nkanga's work (land demarcation, fear, memento, etc.). The installation refers to didactic spaces such as the MINES ParisTech's Museum of Minerology in France, with a key difference: there, actual stones and minerals are placed inside vitrines as a way to make clear 'the beauty and diversity of these mineral treasures' that compose the school's field of study. Nkanga's limestone prints of rocks, on the other hand, flatten stone's visual imprint while refusing scientific understanding through the use of placards: Instead of objective description of resources, the installation makes use of the stones as part of a phenomenological narrative. In an adjacent gallery, heaps of gravel spread across the gallery, with large stones placed throughout, form an immersive, overwhelming landscape. In it, one feels the sound, feel, and story of rock.



Otobong Nkanga, *The Contained Measures of the Kola Nut* (detail), 2010–ongoing, performance documentation, UC Botanical Garden, Berkeley, 2016. Courtesy: the artist

Nkanga's practice can be viewed in dialogue with Ana Mendieta, whose work likewise acknowledged the earth's impact on her body even as she transformed the earth around her, particularly in her 'Silueta Series' (1973–80). In *The Contained Measures of the Kola Nut* (2010–ongoing), Nkanga sits next to a table lined with images of folk and corporate uses of the nut, its cultivation and historical significance. During the performance, visitors are encouraged to individually approach a small table of kola nuts, where they may choose an image card and a nut, which Nkanga slices in the traditional way in order for it to be shared. As both visitor and Nkanga nibble at the nut, she tells a story related to the chosen image. In this way, the work weaves together modalities of experience, including oral, ritual, intellectual understandings of space and place, as well as shared experiences between Nkanga and the participant. For Nkanga, it is a work of endurance. The work is impossible without her participation in it, but it is equally impossible without the kola nut, which becomes, as Piroette notes, a vehicle for delivering an intimate and integrated experience between artist and viewer.



Otobong Nkanga, *Taste of a Stone I-II*, 2010, installation view, Nottingham Contemporary. Courtesy: the artist

In her book *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013), environmentalist and writer Robin Wall Kimmerer describes her experience as both a biologist and a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation in terms of a pilgrimage: 'Beneath the richness of [scientific] vocabulary and its descriptive power, something is missing, the same something that swells around you and in you when you listen to the world.' Like Kimmerer, Nkanga grabs that swelling something, and attempts to describe it – in the pidgin song next to the colonizer's map, in objects, in performance – and thereby allows it to unfold around her – and us.

Otobong Nkanga, *To Dig a Hole That Collapses Again* runs at the MCA Chicago from 31 March – 2 September.

The Guardian
12 April 2018

The Guardian



Otobong Nkanga explores Africa's relationship with the west - in pictures

The Nigerian-born, Belgium-based artist's first North American exhibition looks at the relationship between Africa and the western world, focusing on the mining of natural resources. To Dig a Hole That Collapses Again draws from a range of media, from photography to illustration to tapestry, to show how raw materials have been turned into consumer objects. The exhibition is at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago from 31 March to 2 September 2018

Main image: Otobong Nkanga *In Pursuit of Bling*, 2014. Photograph: Courtesy of Lumen Travo Gallery, Amsterdam and Galerie In Situ - Fabienne Leclerc, Paris.

Thu 12 Apr 2018 07:00 BST



Study for 'Crisis' (More land), 2008

Photograph: Courtesy of Lumen Travo Gallery, Amsterdam and Galerie In Situ - Fabienne Leclerc, Paris.



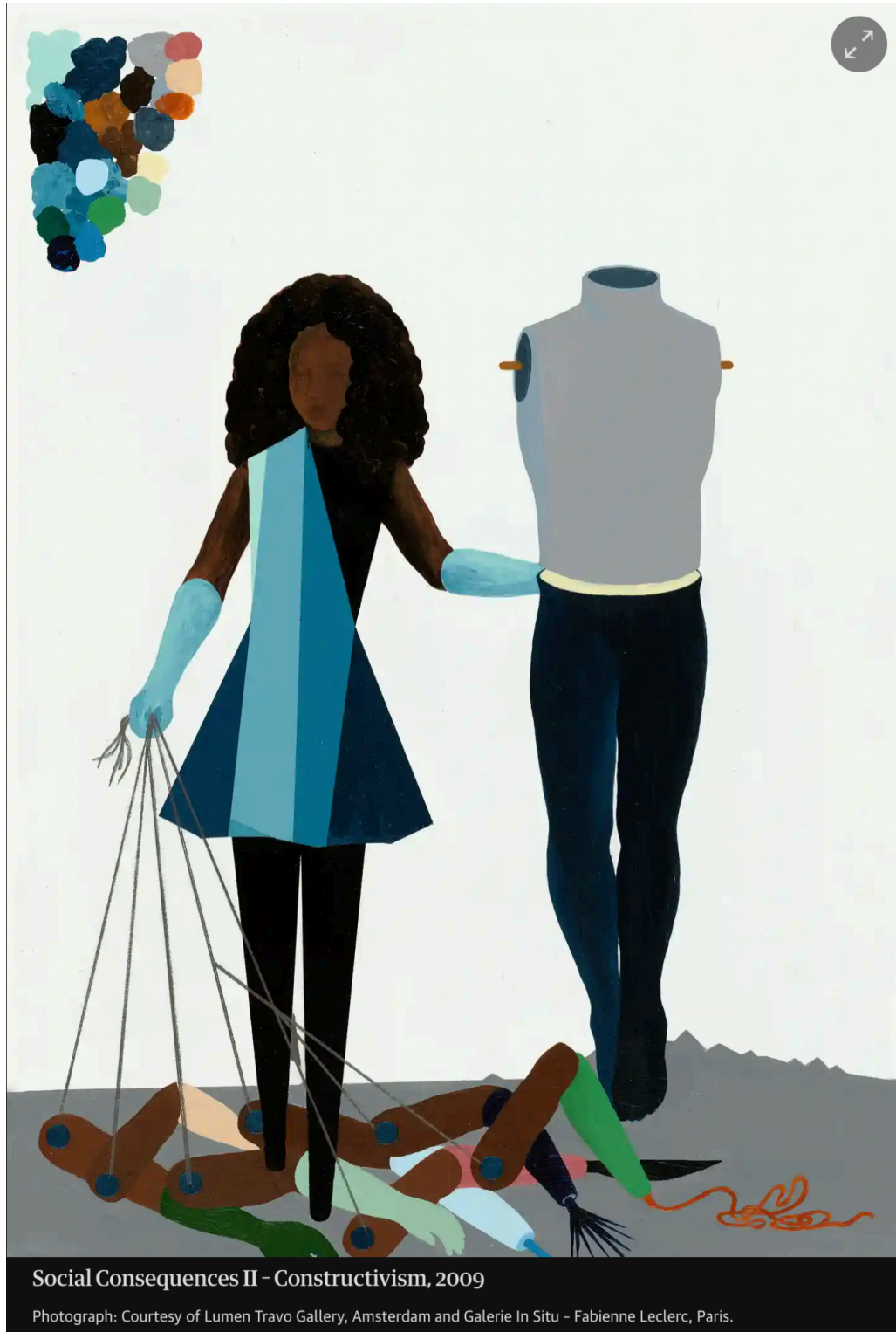
Social Consequences I - Heritage, 2009

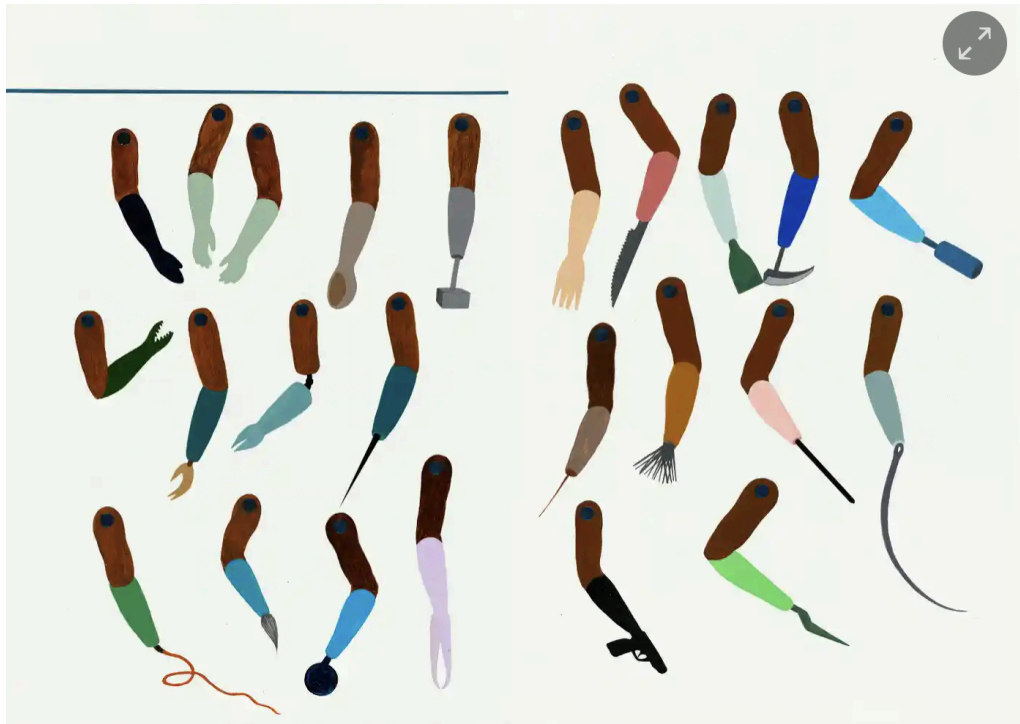
Photograph: Courtesy of Lumen Travo Gallery, Amsterdam and Galerie In Situ - Fabienne Leclerc, Paris.



Filtered Memories Home, 1977, Yaba, Lagos, 2009

Photograph: Courtesy of Lumen Travo Gallery, Amsterdam and Galerie In Situ - Fabienne Leclerc, Paris.





Social Consequences II - Choices we make, 2009

Photograph: Courtesy of Lumen Travo Gallery, Amsterdam and Galerie In Situ - Fabienne Leclerc, Paris.



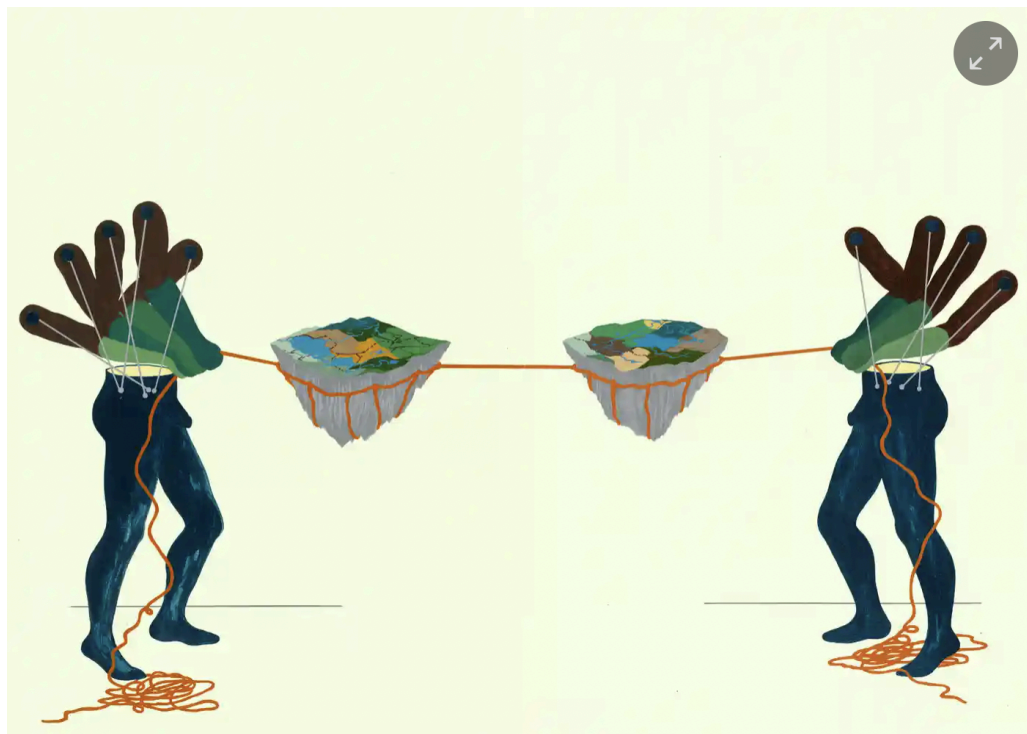
Filtered Memories - Working Men, 1990

Photograph: Courtesy of Lumen Travo Gallery, Amsterdam and Galerie In Situ - Fabienne Leclerc, Paris.



Filtered Memories - Reduced to Ashes, 1978

Photograph: Courtesy of Lumen Travo Gallery, Amsterdam and Galerie In Situ - Fabienne Leclerc, Paris.



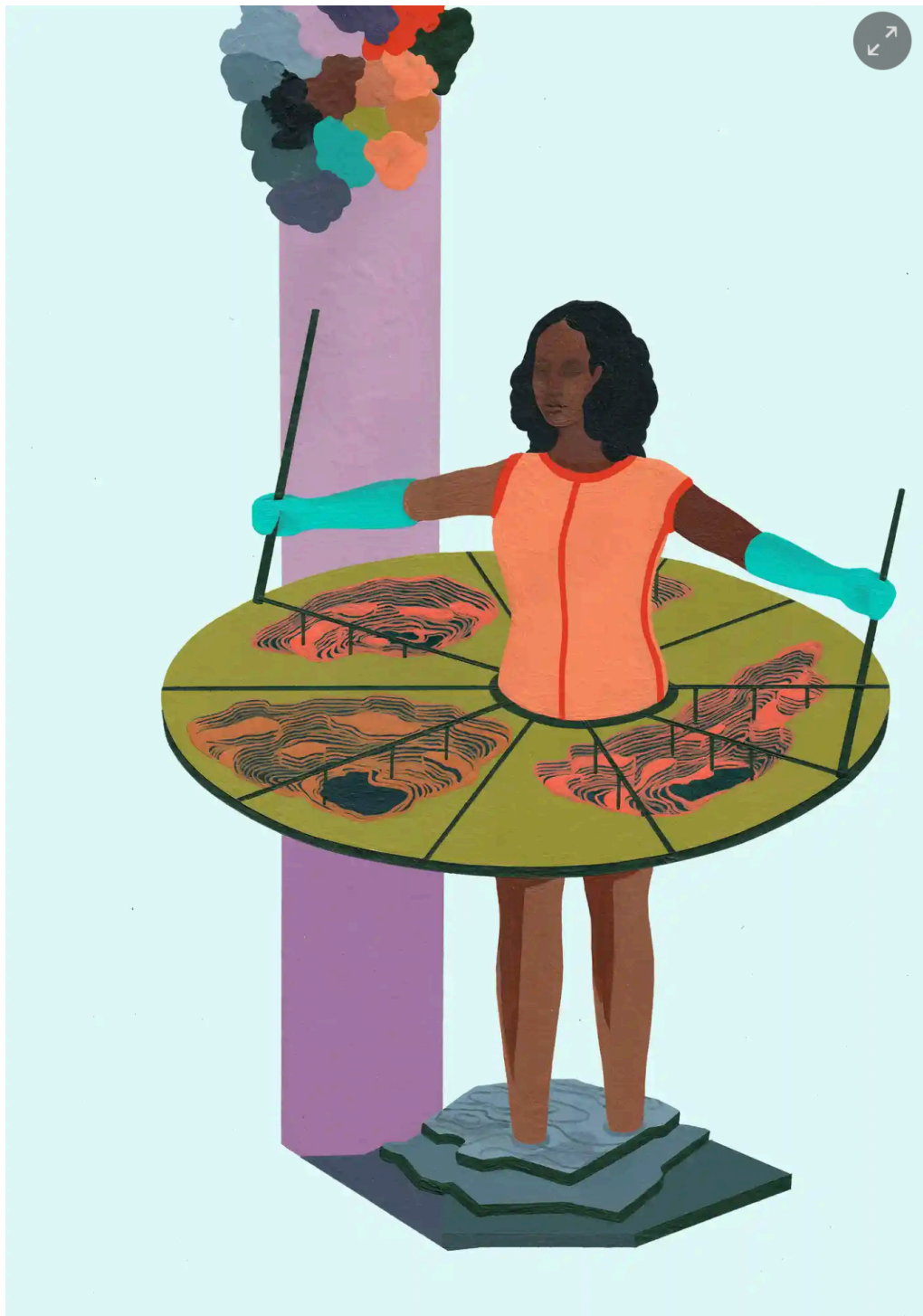
Social Consequences I - Crisis, 2009

Photograph: Courtesy of Lumen Travo Gallery, Amsterdam and Galerie In Situ - Fabienne Leclerc, Paris.



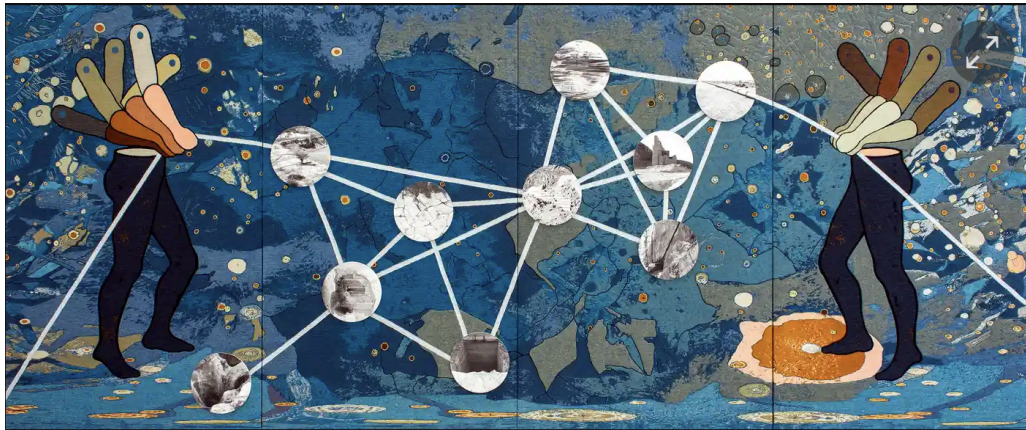
The Flow Will Not Stop!, 2011

Photograph: Courtesy of Lumen Travo Gallery, Amsterdam and Galerie In Situ - Fabienne Leclerc, Paris.



Social Consequences IV: Avaritia, 2014

Photograph: Courtesy of Lumen Travo Gallery, Amsterdam and Galerie In Situ - Fabienne Leclerc, Paris.



The Weight of Scars, 2015

Photograph: Museum of Modern Art, Antwerp. Courtesy of Lumen Travo Gallery, Amsterdam and Galerie In Situ - Fabienne Leclerc, Paris.



In Pursuit of Bling, Installation 2014

Photograph: Courtesy of Lumen Travo Gallery, Amsterdam and Galerie In Situ - Fabienne Leclerc, Paris.



Solid Maneuvers, 2015

Photograph: Courtesy of Lumen Travo Gallery, Amsterdam and Galerie In Situ - Fabienne Leclerc, Paris.



Infinite Yield, 2015

Photograph: Courtesy of Lumen Travo Gallery, Amsterdam and Galerie In Situ - Fabienne Leclerc, Paris.



In Pursuit of Bling: The Transformation, 2014

Photograph: Courtesy of Lumen Travo Gallery, Amsterdam and Galerie In Situ - Fabienne Leclerc, Paris.



In Pursuit of Bling: Indulgence, 2014

Photograph: Courtesy of Lumen Travo Gallery, Amsterdam and Galerie In Situ - Fabienne Leclerc, Paris.

ARTnews
1 October 2018

Art in America

Otobong Nkanga

By *Lauren DeLand* October 1, 2018 10:53am



The title of Nigerian-born artist **Otobong Nkanga**'s first major survey in North America, "To Dig a Hole That Collapses Again," referred to the Namibian town Tsumeb, which was founded in 1905 by German colonists seeking to pillage the area's ore deposits. The sapping of local resources to produce globally distributed consumer goods was the overarching theme of the exhibition, which brought together an assortment of Nkanga's **sculptures**, **installations**, **tapestries**, **paintings**, **drawings**, and **prints** from the past fifteen years.

Certain sculptures incorporate materials—tea leaves, spices, mica, malachite—common to **colonial export** operations. The tapestries, meanwhile, have a pixelated quality that recalls the screens on digital devices, which are frequently produced from Congo-derived minerals whose extraction has funded bloody conflicts. In addition, some of these textile works, such as *Infinite Yield* (2015), which portrays a figure standing in a hole and obscured by rocky forms, feature natural and shiny synthetic fibers woven in wavy configurations that evoke moiré patterns on video screens. Nkanga currently resides in Antwerp, and her work takes up the history of her adoptive country: the Flemish tradition of cloth manufacture stretches back to the Middle Ages, and colonialism has played a significant role in Belgium's economic health (in the sixteenth century Antwerp prospered in part by importing products of slave labor in the West Indies such as sugar and tobacco; and in modern times Belgium had two major colonies in Africa, controlling the rubber- and copper-rich Congo starting in the late nineteenth century, and then, after World War I, adding the Ruanda-Urundi territory to its holdings).

A common vocabulary of images is found across Nkanga's textiles and paintings. For instance, bodily fragments—including pairs of legs unencumbered by upper bodies, and marionette-like arms sporting holes at the shoulders—are frequently rendered as components of spindly contraptions, often spearing, digging, or hacking away at flatly rendered landscapes. The influence of Duchamp's *Large Glass* (1915–23) is obvious in such works, especially the mixed-medium painting *Social Consequences II—The Overload—Projectiles—Piercing Pressure—Hostage—Waterscape—The Overflow* (2009), in which a cluster of five overlapping women cranks a mobile-like apparatus with a number of arms attached to it, and a group of leaking containers recalls the barrel forms of Duchamp's chocolate-grinding machine. While Duchamp's epic construction only alludes to human figures through object-like motifs, Nkanga's works often portray actual human forms, suggesting the very real casualties of the Global West's ravenous appetite for material resources.

The exhibition was organized by [Omar Kholeif](#) and suffered from the same lack of rigorous editing that his other recent shows have. The works were aesthetically and conceptually consistent; there were simply too many of them. *Amnesia* (2018) is a towering, freestanding white wall split horizontally by a fissure in which a fragrant confetti of tobacco, tea, coffee, and cloves is embedded. Looming at the back of the room, it would have been striking if not for the smaller sculptural groups that interrupted the view from nearly every angle. One of these groups comprised hollow towers constructed from bricks of black soap that Nkanga had designed, and was accompanied by a performance element: at specific times the soap was available for sale, to benefit a foundation in Nigeria. When I visited the show at one of those times, however, the “performance” appeared to be just two smock-clad museum employees engrossed in conversation with each other and ignoring all passersby. This seemed representative of the exhibition as a whole, which would have benefited from a pared-down selection of works and a more attentive approach.

ArtReview
20 April 2017

ArtReview

Otobong Nkanga wins Belgian Art Prize 2017

ArtReview News 20 April 2017 artreview.com



Otobong Nkanga, In a Place Yet Unknown

Otobong Nkanga has been announced the winner of the biennial [Belgian Art Prize](#) at a ceremony in BOZAR Centre for Fine Arts on 19 April. She received a €25,000 (£21,000) cash prize to encourage and support the development of her artistic career.

Nkanga was selected by an international jury consisting of Beatrix Ruf (director of the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam), Hans Ulrich Obrist (artistic director of the Serpentine Galleries, London) and Dieter Roelstraete (cocurator of Documenta 14), art collector Mimi Dusselier and Estelle Francès Lasserre (director of the Fondation d'Entreprise Francès). Maarten Vanden Eynde was selected as the public's favourite artist, receiving €10,000 (£8,400). Nkanga and Vanden Eynde's work are on view alongside that of other shortlisted artists Edith Dekyndt and Simona Denicolai & Ivo Provoost at BOZAR Centre for Fine Arts, Brussels, through 28 May.

20 April 2017

The Korea Herald
12 November 2015

The Korea Herald

Nigerian artist Otobong Nkanga wins Yanghyun art prize

By 이우영

Published : Nov. 12, 2015 - 19:30



Nigerian artist Otobong Nkanga received the eighth Yanghyun Prize at the National Museum of Korea in Seoul on Thursday.

“I am happy to be here, honored and extremely overwhelmed to receive this prize. And I am very proud to represent my continent and my country Nigeria,” said Nkanga at the award ceremony. “It’s an amazing thing to imagine that my work is recognized in Korea, on the other side in the Eastern part of the world.”



Nkanga, the first African-born artist to receive the prestigious art award, is expected to receive 100 million won (\$86,300) and an opportunity to hold a solo exhibition at any chosen museum around the world.

According to the prize's two judges -- Chris Dercon, director of Tate Modern, and Adam Weinberg, director of the Whitney Museum of American Art -- the artist has interpreted serious social issues such as inadequate distribution of resources and imbalances in the global economy through her unique lyrical perspective.

"Her work addresses the effect, movement, use and meaning of global resources and how they impact society," said Weinberg, at the ceremony.

Nkanga, 42, born in Nigeria, lives and works in Antwerp, Belgium. She has held exhibitions at renowned art institutions, including Stedelijk museum in Amsterdam, Sharjah Biennial and Tate Modern.

Nkanga has been a prolific artist, creating more than 28 series of artwork from 2003 to the present. She has traversed different mediums from painting, photography, sculpture, installation to performance, drawing her inspiration from her personal memories, environment and postcolonial histories related to her home country.

Her "Filtered Memories" series (2009-2010), which consisted of drawings and paintings, reflected herself, based on selected memories of her childhood and teenage years in her home country. The series developed further to examine abstract concepts of labor, domesticity, home, belonging and possession and their effects on society in "Social Consequences I-II-III" (2009-2010).

"Otobong Nkanga is taking journey in cultural space of art, taking many disciplines from ecology, from science, from sociology, from politics and theater," said Dercon.

She also has symbolically dealt with environmental issues through installations and performances that use natural objects such as stones, leaves and tropical colors reminiscent of Africa. She presented a performance for her 2010 "Tropicology" series in which she held up banners in tropical colors that remind of her childhood memories and to explore architectural structures in tropical areas.

The prize, created in 2008, is given by the Yanghyun Foundation, which recognizes established artists with in diverse fields from art to film, regardless of nationality.

"This is a prize open to all international artists without any kind of prejudices such as nationality, age, gender and ethnicity," said Choi Eun-young, chief director of the Yanghyun Foundation, in her greetings at the ceremony.

Past recipients include Mexican artist Abraham Cruzvillegas, Thai filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul and Brazilian artist Rivane Neuenschwander.

"With the prize and support, we hope the recipient flourishes and achieves wider accomplishment in art," Choi said.

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"Home 1977 Yaba Lagos" by Otabong Nkanga (Artist's official website)



A performance scene as part of the "Tropicology" series by Otoibong Nkanga (Artist's official website)