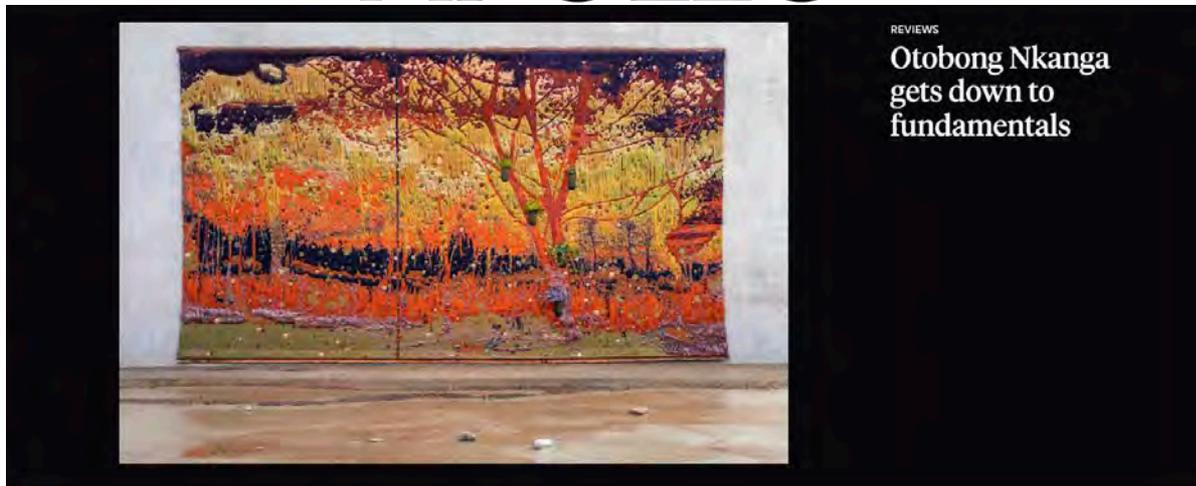


Apollo

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APOLLO



REVIEWS

**Otobong Nkanga
gets down to
fundamentals**

The artist's first retrospective in Paris finds her making connections between humans and the material world in unsettling and inventive ways

Unearthed - Sunlight (2021), Otobong Nkanga.
Kunsthhaus Bregenz. Photo: Markus Tretter/Kunsthhaus
Bregenz; courtesy the artist

An early work in 'I dreamt of you in colours' feels unlike anything else by Otobong Nkanga in the exhibition. It appears to be a blurred photograph of a young woman, the artist, in an inky blue light, occupying a space roughly the size of a full-length mirror. Her head is bowed and she is wearing a white lace dress with a crinoline skirt. The image, *Fattening Room* (1999), depicts Nkanga's attempt to reimagine a ritual of the same name practised by the Ibibio people of southern Nigeria. During this rite of passage (which has significantly waned in recent decades), young women and girls undergo a protracted initiation into marriage and are placed in a room for up to six months in order to be fed – both physically and metaphorically. The goal of the ritual is not only for a young bride to gain weight, but also to acquire knowledge of the family she will marry into and the social and economic environment she will inhabit.

Nkanga's personal 'fattening room', however, was conceived thousands of miles away from her family's Ibibio origins while she was studying at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris. The artist never experienced the traditional ritual herself, but sought to create her own version in her studio. In an interview about the process included in the exhibition catalogue, she describes stealing soil from the university's garden each day to construct the skirt from compacted earth mixed with white clay, building its rings around her body over the course of a month. Nkanga later worked with a fashion designer to create a European-style wedding dress, before hiring a photographer to take a series of images that she then cut up and recomposed to form the final image.

One of the earliest pieces featured in the exhibition, the artist's first solo presentation in a French museum (travelling to Lausanne in April), *Fattening Room* is an unexpected but fitting introduction to her work. Spanning a 30-year career, the exhibition includes drawings, tapestries, installations and a handful of performance pieces that capture Nkanga's enduring concerns with the structures that shape and disrupt our connection with the natural world and the layers of history that link one part of the world to another.



Still from *In Pursuit of Bling* (2015), Otobong Nkanga. Courtesy the artist.

Although the exhibition is not arranged chronologically, a number of early works present the visual motifs to which Nkanga keeps returning. For instance, *Awaiting Pleasures – On Fragile Grounds I* (2003) depicts a feminine figure with its torso removed, mechanically tiptoeing across a raised grid, its dismembered arms raised while holding two rings aloft, as though it is rehearsing for some kind of performance. The drawing appears to be a study of a body moving through space, a mechanistic exploration of limbs as elements of a machine. But its significance is unexplained, leaving us to consider it as part of a wider series under the same title, including an installation called *Awaiting Pleasures – The Workstation* (2003). Featuring a wooden loom, oversized sewing needles, Post-it notes and various types of rope and thread, this is a seemingly prosaic glimpse behind the scenes of Nkanga's tools – the instruments she will use to bring the ideas on paper into three-dimensional life. Around the corner, the severed roots of an orange tree appear to burst through a wall like a foot kicking through plaster, violently pierced with large needles (*Contained Measures of Land – The Operation*, 2008). The combination of wood and stainless steel is reminiscent of the workstation on display, an unsettling reminder of the potential of human tools to be used for art, industry or violence, for both creation and destruction.

The motif of sharp lines piercing, holding and suspending things in place runs through the exhibition, be it in works on canvas, monumental tapestries or floor-based installations. Similarly, traces of her drawings continue to appear in later works that are more ambitious in scale. The glimmering tapestry series *Unearthed* (2021) depicts undersea worlds that are simultaneously enchanting and unsettling. Transformed by the triangular slave trade, mining exploitation and climate change, the aquatic world becomes a punctured and entangled space in Nkanga's imaginary, a deep-sea burial ground where mechanised human limbs sink and fuse with plant matter.



Social Consequences IV: The Takeover (2013), Otobong Nkanga. Courtesy the artist

These limbs sometimes belong to humanoid figures that resemble artists' mannequins; at other times they are entirely dismembered and depersonalised, as in *The Weight of Scars* (2015), Nkanga's first large-scale tapestry. Created after a visit to abandoned mining sites in northern Namibia, the tapestry incorporates documentary images of the scarred landscape that float like orbs against the woven fabric. Although these photographs are held together in a constellation of sorts, they are also pulled apart by phantom limbs in a tug-of-war posture; their gesture points to the history of mineral extraction that decimated the landscape and underlines the use of certain bodies as mere instruments of labour.

The beauty of Nkanga's work lies in its refusal to romanticise violent histories while offering glimpses of the potential for repair and renewal. In her series *Social Consequences* (2009–ongoing), the mechanical limbs reappear in further depictions of exploitative labour, but also in sensual colour images such as *Earthing* (2021) and *Underneath the Shade* (2022). Still, despite hinting at the possibility of metamorphosis, these surreal images hark back to the limbs piled at the bottom of the ocean as the figurines' arms are punctured by the large black dots that accumulate in Nkanga's imagery. The presence of these dots is ambiguous: do they represent holes or pins? Wounds, or joints?

In his writings on the contradictory sense of dislocation and connection that shapes diasporic experiences, the literary theorist Brent Hayes Edwards uses the metaphor of a joint to describe this paradox. For Edwards, 'the joint is a curious place [...] it is both the point of separation – the forearm from the upper arm, for example – and the point of linkage' (*The Practice of Diaspora*, 2003). Although written to analyse Black diasporic literature of the 1920s, his words offer a useful frame for interpreting the black dots that punctuate Nkanga's monumental body of work a century later. Throughout 'I dreamt of you in colours', the artist's ecological questions acknowledge the horrors of environmental destruction while searching for signs of hope. In this light, the black dots pinned to Nkanga's figurines feel like points of separation and linkage, injury and connection, as though she is asking: is this a puncture, or a space for a thread to be woven through?

'Otobong Nkanga: I dreamt of you in colours' is at the [Musée d'Art moderne de Paris](#) until 22 February 2026.

LISSON GALLERY

The New York Times
21 October 2025

The New York Times Trucks, Gowns, Imperial Portraits: Eight Shows to See in Paris

An array of paintings, as well as textiles, films and handblown glass, will be on display across the French capital this month, while Art Basel Paris is on.



The poster for the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts, which was held in Paris 100 years ago. Cyrille Bernard/Les Arts Décoratifs

As a cultural capital, Paris offers a wealth of exhibitions to see at any given moment. This month — when Art Basel Paris takes place, from Friday through Sunday — the city’s art museums and galleries put in extra effort, programming shows that they hope will have broad appeal. Here is a selection.

Otobong Nkanga



“We all carry these emotions, and so much weight, out of everything we’ve lost,” said Otobong Nkanga, who explores themes of ecological disaster, colonialism, displacement and loss in her art. via Otobong Nkanga and Musée d’Art Moderne de Paris

The Nigerian-born artist Otobong Nkanga just won one of the art world’s highest distinctions: the Nasher Prize, awarded by the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas. This fall, she is adding another milestone to her résumé: a [solo exhibition at the Musée d’Art Moderne](#), a leading Paris museum of modern and contemporary art.

In her art, Nkanga (who lives in Antwerp, Belgium) explores themes of ecological disaster, colonialism, displacement and loss. She uses materials including soil, minerals, rope, metals, stones and perfumes. As she [told The New York Times last year](#), “we all carry these emotions, and so much weight, out of everything we’ve lost.”

Her Paris show features ceramic tablets and totems, as well as bowls of seeds and soils, woven textiles, and objects made of handblown glass, wood and clay. There are also multimedia installations and photographic works, in addition to early works being shown for the first time: from her years at Obafemi Awolowo University in Nigeria, and from her studies at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris.

Frieze

24 September 2025

FRIEZE

Rick Lowe and Otobong Nkanga Explore the Power of Friendship in Art

The pair reflect on social practice, early collaborations, and the importance of mutual recognition in their work



Rick Lowe When did we first meet?

Otobong Nkanga Initially in December 2001, and again at Project Row Houses for FotoFest in 2002. I think you were returning from Harvard around that time.

RL I was doing a fellowship there.

ON I was staying at your house while researching for the festival, and one morning you came home surprised to find me there.

RL In those days, I hosted all kinds of artists – Whitfield Lovell, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Fred Wilson – who would leave behind artworks after they stayed. My home often felt like it belonged to someone else.



Project Row Houses, 1993–2018, Houston, Texas. Courtesy: Rick Lowe Studio; artwork credit: Black Women Artists for Black Lives Matter

ON It did when I was there.

RL Because you had taken over. Before FotoFest brought you out to Houston, they told me they had invited this photographer, so I expected a *photographer-photographer*. I had no idea that you would have us cut holes in the floor and rig up heating systems under the house so that you could crawl beneath it. Your project *The New Acquisition of Jennifer McBright* [2002] was incredible. There were photos and texts up around the house. People were surprised when they found that the floor was open and that you were there under Plexiglas.

ON I was wearing a dress, a wig and sculptural body pieces.

RL I remember thinking, this woman likes material. This woman sees the world and its materiality and wants to just dig into it, no matter what it is.

ON When you came back from Harvard, you invited me to an opening, and afterwards we went out for dinner, where you told me about the Project Row Houses. I asked myself, who is this guy? Is he an architect? I came to realize that you were using art in this expanded way, relating it to the community and giving back.

In friendship, there isn't judgement. You don't think of a friend as static.

OTOBONG NKANGA

RL When you're working outside the mainstream, it's very helpful to have artists like you, whom I respect, understand what you're doing. Your art practice can start to operate in your own universe of value and relevance. That night I thought, I'm going to know this woman for the rest of my life.

ON You thought so?

RL Yes, I knew it. It's been amazing, though, to see how our work relates: you left Project Row Houses and started doing work that in a sense is social practice. It's about accessing resources, both human and material, for your community. That's the essence of Project Row Houses, and you picked that up and continued it.

ON I realized it wasn't only about building project houses, but it was the energy that you put into the place. You got to know the people in the neighbourhood.



Otabong Nkanga, 'We Come from Fire and Return to Fire', 2024, exhibition view, Lisson Gallery, London. Courtesy: © Otabong Nkanga and Lisson Gallery, London

RL Tell me about your show in Paris. What's happening?

ON It's at the Musée d'Art Moderne, opening on 9 October. I'll be showing some very early works that I thought I'd left behind. The body sculptures from FotoFest will be included. It's quite strange to be able to show them after so many years.

I'm also including work I've kept from my time at Obafemi Awolowo University in Ife, Nigeria: a colour palette from 1992. It contains a range of colours, from yellows to blues to purples to greens. In Ife, we spent one year just painting these colour palettes. At night, we would all go to the university classroom to work. Everybody was drawing lines and grids and helping each other. If I wasn't good at painting yellows, I'd pass it on to someone else. We'd all be making each other's colour palettes. While working, we would hear the members of the Kegites club singing and drumming all night. The Kegites club often sang songs that celebrate palm wine and African culture.

RL That's great. If you need to include any more early work, I have a couple of your drawings.



Rick Lowe, *Black Wall Street Journey #8*, 2021, acrylic and paper collage on canvas, 2.7 × 2.7 m. Courtesy: the artist and Gagosian; photograph: Thomas Dubrock

ON Which ones?

RL Small drawings. You gave them to me at FotoFest; you signed them to me, too.

ON I left them on your wall.

RL Yes, you were among the other friends on that wall. One of the drawings is you on a bicycle.

ON Really?

RL You were just out of university.

ON That was from my first exhibition, at the Biennale de Bamako in Mali. FotoFest was only my second, so I was quite surprised when I was invited.



Otobong Nkanga and Rick Lowe, 2025 Nasher Prize Laureate, 'Each Seed a Body', Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, Texas. Courtesy: © Otobong Nkanga and Nasher Sculpture Center; photograph: Jonathan Zizzo

RL I often think about the energy that you brought, your excitement about life, about being in relationships and communication with others – you haven't changed one bit, and it's contagious. It was great catching up in Dallas earlier this year, when we were there for your Nasher Prize exhibition.

ON The lunch was also fantastic, sitting with you and talking about life and how things have changed. And you're painting now!

RL During the RAW Académie Session 5, Germination, you encouraged me to start. When you and I were in Dakar at the Raw Material Company, founded by Koyo Kouoh, I pulled out my little phone to show you these new works. You responded in a way that told me I could keep digging deeper into the works and see where it goes.

Knowing you understand my practice, I can operate in my own universe of value and relevance.

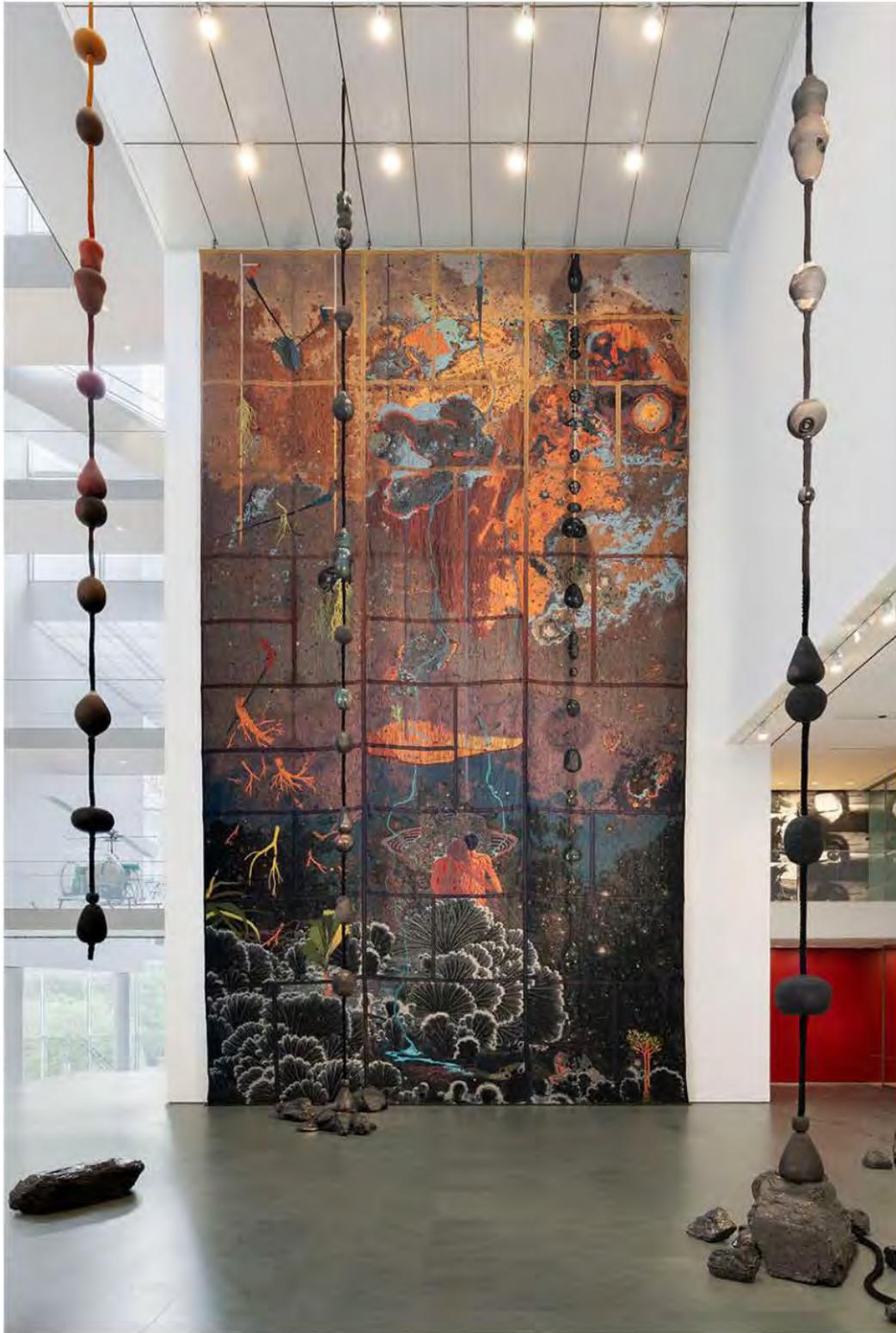
RICK LOWE

ON That's the great thing about friendship: there isn't the judgement. You're not thinking of this person as a static being that has to keep doing what they know or have been doing. Another part of great friendships is that you don't need to talk all the time. But whenever you and I meet and talk about our lives, everything becomes so intense and condensed. You're not there to judge the other person and say, 'Oh, you did that, how dare you do that?' It's more like, 'What are you doing?', and thinking about the future and how you're moving forward.

RL When you come together with friends, it's a celebration. Whatever you're doing, it's exciting for me because I'm interested in what you're interested in and how you're living your life. When I was in New York at MoMA a couple of months ago [where Nkanga had a large installation, *Cadence* (2024), on view], I couldn't wait to start texting you.

ON You did.

RL It's an amazingly beautiful piece. I love scale; I like big things. How do you get your mind around building a composition that makes sense and holds together within the MoMA atrium – and from all angles?



Otobong Nkanga, 'Cadence', 2024–25, installation view, The Museum of Modern Art. Courtesy: © Otobong Nkanga and The Museum of Modern Art, New York; photograph: Emile Askey

ON The installation appears different depending on where you're situated. But if I think back to the scale of projects – artists like you inspire me to think in a completely different way about scale. At MoMA, the work requires a certain scale within the space, but it's entirely different to consider the scale of reaching out to different groups of people, funding, rhizomic networks, even Project Row Houses. It's very intimate, but at the same time historically expansive.

RL When most people think about the scale of Project Row Houses – when grants organizations say we need to 'scale it up' – they focus on having more buildings, more this and more that. Project Row Houses is about relationships and connections among people and communities. Scaling, to me, is about expanding that social space.

This article first appeared in frieze issue 254 with the headline 'Scaling Up'

'Otobong Nkanga' is on view at The Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris, until 22 February

Main image: Rick Lowe, Black Wall Street Journey #5 (detail), 2021, acrylic and paper collage on canvas, 2.7 × 4.9 m. Courtesy: the artist and Gagosian; photograph: Thomas Dubrock

LISSON GALLERY

The New York Times
24 April 2025

The New York Times



When [Otobong Nkanga](#) appeared on the Art Newspaper's "A Brush With..." podcast, the host, Ben Luke, asked which piece of art she would choose to live with, if she could choose only one.

It's a question he asks every guest. Most people pick historical masterpieces, a Turner, say, or a Giotto. Nkanga chose a stone.

Two years ago, Nkanga was announced as the [2025 winner of the Nasher Prize](#), honoring her work in sculpture.

It follows that Luke's immediate reply was: "Because you could sculpt it?"

"No," she said quickly. "Because it would contain all what I need."

The first time I spoke with Nkanga, in a video interview, it was three weeks before the opening of her [Nasher Prize exhibition](#) at the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas (which runs through Aug. 17). The award comes with a \$100,000 prize, one of the art world's biggest. When we spoke, though, she was home in Antwerp, Belgium, packing her bags to head across the Atlantic, and she still didn't know exactly what she would be showing.

Her plan had been to not ship anything ahead of time and instead make all new pieces, on site.

“I want to try out and see if I can make it happen,” she said. “It’s much more riskier in a way. I have such a short time to put everything together.”

The serenity and tangible warmth with which she spoke belied how high-stakes a moment this was.



Nkanga has a Nasher Prize exhibition at the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas. It runs through Aug. 17.
Ntashia Johnson for The New York Times

Over the past 20 years, the Nigerian-born [Nkanga](#), 50, has explored the idea of rock, and by extension the land that sheds it, as both a living entity and a container in a shape-shifting body of work.

Her exhibitions almost always take the shape of a site-specific installation or performance, often both at once. She has planted galleries with fields of pebbles, printed poetry and images on limestone and worn a crown of malachite through the streets of Berlin. In a 2013 performance titled “[Taste of a Stone: Itiat Esa Ufok](#),” she balanced on one leg atop a boulder in a courtyard in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, carrying a potted Queen of the Night plant on her head.

It is precisely the way she has exploded the notion of what sculpture can be that caught the Nasher Prize judges’ attention. As Briony Fer, an art historian and member of the jury, stated in a [news release](#) at the time she won the award, “Otobong Nkanga maps urgent global problems but does so in subtle, enigmatic and probing ways. The intense and productive way in which she presents formal and material questions is what marks out her huge contribution to sculpture right now.”

The second time I spoke with Nkanga, also via video, she was wearing bright red overalls that matched her crimson glasses, sitting on the white oak floor of the Nasher’s Renzo Piano-designed building.

At her side, two assistants were helping her cake a long loop of thick rope with glue and dried aromatic plants, in sections: things like roasted coffee, sassafras bark and corn silk.



Nkanga lines up her supplies. Nitashia Johnson for The New York Times

“We have to do the transitions to make sure that the colors are moving from one tone to another, slowly shifting,” Nkanga said. Once fully dried, the rope was to be hung from the ceiling by two particularly dark sections. The effect would be that of room-size incense sticks. The rest of the loop would flow across the floor, like a contour line on a topographic map.

Elsewhere in the room, Nkanga had been excavating what looked like miniature open-pit mining holes in boulders of red Palo Pinto County sandstone. And she had painted a temporary wall in seven thick bands of earthen claylike colors. A sense of the ground and groundedness was pervasive.

Nkanga sourced her materials from the Americas, many locally; she was thinking about the red earth of Texas and Mexico, of ingredients that spoke to the movement of people and food from beyond the Rio Grande and the trade wars between the United States and other countries.

Nkanga had also brought on board a Texan soap maker, Trang Nguyen, for a new iteration of her [“Carved to Flow” series](#). She first worked on this project for [Documenta 14](#), in 2017, which took place between Athens and Kassel, Germany. She worked with Vis Olivae, a soap maker based in Kalamata, Greece, to produce the soap “O8 Black Stone,” using ingredients from the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and North and West Africa. With proceeds from sales of that soap, she created the Carved to Flow Foundation in Akwa Ibom, Nigeria.

For the Nasher, she and Nguyen are producing two new soaps: a rust-color bar dotted with poppy seeds, called Red Bond, and Salt Rock, a pale chalky bar, made of lye, pumice powder and sea salt. As production continues throughout the show, the soap will progressively fill the space, 2,000 bars, wrapped in custom packaging printed with poems Nkanga has written.



Part of Nkanga's "Each Seed a Body" installation at the Nasher Sculpture Center. Otobong Nkanga. Photo by Kevin Todora, via Nasher Sculpture Center

Exhibiting at the Nasher comes with peculiar constraints, because Piano's building itself is an artwork to protect. You can't make holes in the oak floorboards or drill in the Travertine marble walls.

For Nkanga, though, just doing the show at all came with questions.

"Coming to America this time, it just feels a bit different," she said.

She has been thinking a lot about what it means to work in the United States at this time, given the political shifts.

Nonetheless, she said she felt it was important to make work that could "open up other possibilities and to create also spaces of rest, spaces for reflection and spaces to trigger other ways of existence and to open up other worlds."

"It's good to be able to do this work," she added. "Especially with many exhibitions being canceled, money being taken out, language, different groups of people being targeted."



Nkanga's work has often dissected how colonization affects people and places. *Nitashia Johnson for The New York Times*

Nkanga's work has often dissected how colonization affects people and places. When Nigeria, her home country, was colonized by the British, [as she told the art historian Akin Oladimeji](#) in 2024, "We gave access to the core and the being of who we were. And the access to our lands, prodding, digging, taking out extracts, and the access to our bodies to check to see are we normal or not."

Her insistence on acknowledging the connection between the living and the land provides a powerful counterpoint to so much of the art long made about land in America.



"Each Seed a Body" at the Nasher Sculpture Center. *Onobong Nkanga*. Photo by Kevin Todora, via Nasher Sculpture Center

Robert Smithson, known for so-called earthworks like "[Spiral Jetty](#)" (1970), wrote, in his 1968 essay, "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects," of being conscious of geologic time and prehistory in order to "read the rocks" he worked with — and decried how "social structures confine art."

Nkanga, by contrast, said that her work was a “constant grounding back into reality”: a reminder that amid all that earth and rock and wind and water, there are, and always have been, people and other living things.

Thinking about the ways in which governments and companies extract from the land without regard for whomever or whatever lives on it, Nkanga said, “It’s so important to constantly remind us that we do not exist without air, that we do not exist without water, that we do not exist without trees.”

She is the first to admit that, in winning the Nasher Prize, she’s following a roster of extraordinary artists, name-checking the past winners Doris Salcedo, Theaster Gates, Senga Nengudi and Nairy Baghramian.

“When I heard, I was like, ‘Really?’” she said, recalling the moment she learned she had won. “I’m not thinking about the power of the work, I’m thinking about making it. But then at moments like this, you realize that it actually has a vibration that is touching different people.”

The heightened state of awareness under which Nkanga works often leads her, like piano wire under tension, to sing. When she’s stuck in the studio, or waiting for a mechanical Jacquard loom to finish weaving a tapestry, she’ll get up and dance. She loves, loves, loves to sleep.

Sometimes she cries, and, she said, “I’m always grateful when it’s a tear, because it means it’s getting out.”

The parallel between these elements of her daily practice and her broader stance in prepping for this show is instructive: She’s forging ahead with the exhibition, a means to expel doubt and instead give it wonderful shape. Three-quarters of an hour into our first conversation, I was struck by the power of this resolve.

“What keeps you going?” I asked.

She was quiet for 12 long seconds then, with a faint, heavy sigh, she said, “because there’s so much to do.”

“There is a certain trying to understand the world and your place in it and why certain things are the way they are,” she continued. “But it’s not only looking at what’s not going right in the world — it’s also looking at it in its sheer beauty.”

The New York Times
8 October 2024

The New York Times

What Is the Sound of a Teardrop? You Can Hear It at MoMA

Otobong Nkanga's installations can seem simultaneously futuristic and primordial, apocalyptic and utopian. Her latest opens at the museum this week.



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By [Nina Siegal](#)

Nina Siegal reported this story from New York and Antwerp, Belgium.

Oct. 8, 2024

Gazing up at the 60-foot wall in the central atrium of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Nigerian artist Otobong Nkanga felt both excited and terrified.

“You look up, and you’re like, ‘Oh my god, where is it going to end?’” she recalled thinking. “I’m always interested in working in spaces that aren’t that easy. This is by far the most crazy space.”

That was her first reaction when she visited the space with the museum’s chief curator-at-large, Michelle Kuo, after receiving a major commission from MoMA to build an installation in its Marron Atrium. The resulting work, “Cadence,” opens on Thursday and runs through June 8, 2025.

Her second reaction, she said, was to sing.

She improvised, starting high and operatic and ending with low tones, listening for reverb and echoes. “How does the voice bounce off the walls and run around the space before it settles on the ground?” she said she wanted to discover. “It’s just like wanting to know where the light falls.”

Nkanga's voice is often a facet of her site-specific installations, which can seem simultaneously futuristic and primordial, apocalyptic and utopian. They are put together from tapestries, drawings, photographs and ceramics, which she assembles with found natural materials, and sometimes augments with performances and other sensory elements, like scents from herbs and oils.

"My work is connecting all these things and making it clear that it's all intertwined," Nkanga said.



Nkanga during the installation last month of "Cadence" at MoMA. Laylah Amatullah Barrayn for The New York Times

She met with The New York Times in September, on the eve of her 50th birthday, in her studio in Antwerp, Belgium, where she has lived since 2007. The main elements of "Cadence" had already shipped, but fragments remained in storage boxes: charcoal-colored ceramic vessels, coils of thick hand-woven rope, spheres of blown glass and test pieces for a shimmering tapestry, which she unfurled on the floor.

Nkanga's milestone birthday coincides with a moment in the international spotlight. In addition to the high-profile MoMA commission, she was named the 2025 Nasher Prize Laureate, one of the art world's most prestigious awards, with a \$100,000 grant to create a work in the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas in the spring. A major Paris exhibition is scheduled for fall 2025, at the Musée d'Art Moderne.

These honors were “a recognition of the work she’s been doing over many years,” said Alex Logsdail, the chief executive of Lisson Gallery, which represents the artist. “It’s been gradually building. She has had a very significant amount of attention in Europe for some time, and the U.S. is catching up.”

Her artworks — the product of extensive research and contemplation — often focus on the origins of the materials she uses. One recurring theme is mining, and other types of extraction, and how natural resources circulate globally.

All that might sound heavy, but Nkanga has a gentle, nonjudgmental touch, and she translates charged environmental questions into lush, vibrant pieces, often with a handful of glitter.

“She’s one of these artists who manages to connect earth, history and a particular spirituality,” said Joachim Naudts, a curator based in Antwerp. “These are all things that are contemporary, because they deal with climate and our new search for meaning. It’s not art for art’s sake; it’s a socially engaged practice.”



An installation view of “Double Plot” (2018) at the Kröller-Müller Museum, in Otterloo, the Netherlands.
Marjon Gemmeke, via Lisson Gallery

Nkanga’s work reflects a life lived between Africa and Europe, during which she has observed the dynamic political, social and economic forces that divide and bind these continents. She was born in 1974 in Kano, Nigeria, and raised in Lagos. Her father died when she was 7 and her remaining family moved to Paris in 1985, when her mother started a job with UNESCO, the United Nations’ educational and cultural agency.

There, she attended the international British School of Paris, where her art teacher, Diana Schops, recalled a special student, with a “real sparkle.”

“She was open to everything, whatever we were doing, whether it was sculpture, painting, printing, etching,” said Schops, now 80 and retired. “She fulfilled the commitment 100 percent, and then 200 percent,” Schops added.

In 1990, Nkanga’s family returned to Nigeria when her mother’s term at UNESCO ended. Her mother accepted a job at a government-run school in Lagos and supplemented her income by making hand-dyed batik fabrics, which she sold to international designers. Nkanga helped out after school.

“I used to draw on all these five-yard pieces of brocade, using wax, putting in the colors,” she said. “We sometimes worked until 3 in the morning.”



Nkanga's artworks — the product of extensive research and contemplation — often focus on the origins of the materials she uses. Laylah Amatullah Barrayn for The New York Times

At age 15, Nkanga had to choose a career track. “I wanted to be an artist, but it wasn’t the kind of thing you could say,” she said. “When I looked around me at artists, I didn’t see any female African artists.”

But her mother encouraged her. “My mother said, ‘You can have more freedom in art; you can do anything in art,’” Nkanga remembered. “She said, ‘If it’s art, and you have that passion and consistency, you’ll have stamina. You’ll do well.’”

While Nkanga was studying art at the Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife, Nigeria, her mother died in a car accident. When Schops, her former teacher, learned of Nkanga’s travails, she urged her to return to France. “She’d been such a spectacular student,” Schops said, “so when she sent me a letter saying her mother had been killed in a car crash, I talked about it with my husband, and we invited her to come and spend a year with us.”

The extra year allowed Nkanga to put together a portfolio and apply to the venerable École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. She ended up living with the Schops family for a few years while she completed her training there, before moving to Amsterdam, where she took a two-year residency at the Rijksakademie and then completed a master's degree in choreography at DasArts, the city’s theater and dance academy.

As a result of all these varied experiences, she feels there is no limit to the ways she can express her artistic vision. “I always try to remember what my mother said: ‘If you’re an artist, you can do anything.’”

The work that best exemplifies the artist’s global vision is “Carved to Flow,” which started out in the Documenta exhibition in 2017, and has since been presented across a number of exhibitions in several locations. It began with an on-site, interactive laboratory, producing bricks of soap that looked like black marble.

The soaps, developed in Greece, contained charcoal, as well as oil and butter from across the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and North and West Africa. In a second exhibit, the soaps were formed into fortresslike walls, while performers discussed and sold the soap to curious patrons.



A soap-making session, part of Nkanga's work "Carved to Flow: Laboratory," which she first presented in Athens in 2017. Otobong Nkanga, via Lisson Gallery



"Carved to Flow: Storage and Distribution," presented at the Neue Galerie in Kassel, Germany, in 2017. Otobong Nkanga, via Lisson Gallery

Proceeds from those sales helped establish a nonprofit foundation that purchased farmland in the city of Uyo, in southern Nigeria, and create an arts space in Athens. Nkanga said "Carved to Flow" was an international work that addressed global problems, but also led to real-world solutions — "a proposal for alternative systems of care," she called it.

This work especially impressed the Nasher prize jury, said Jed Morse, the chief curator of the Nasher Museum, leading them to select her from among 130 nominees.

"She thinks so deeply about materials and how they connect to our lives, and that's something that goes right to the heart of sculpture," he said. "She takes this deep dive into materials and how they manifest in our lives and what they mean to us."

Nkanga's fascination with how "everything is connected," as she puts it, has evolved. Her early works linked mineral extraction in one country to cosmetics production in another, affecting global beauty standards and health. Now, she's making broader and more abstract connections — like how grief can be its own kind of ecosystem.

Her MoMA installation, "Cadence," argues that the entire world, right now, in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, is connected through death and loss.

The centerpiece of the installation is a luxuriously woven tapestry in luminous threads reminiscent of gilded medieval textiles, covering the 60-foot, 5-inch wall. Two figures stand at the center of the tapestry, seated amid fan-like flora. Their backs are to the viewer, and they face an orange orb that might be a rising (or maybe a setting) sun. The scene unfolding before them, full of explosions, dust and debris, could be a catastrophic stellar event or a moment of genesis, like the Big Bang.



A detail view of "Cadence" at MoMA. Jonathan Muzikar, via MoMA

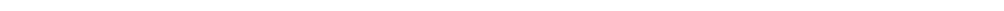
Dangling from the ceiling are ceramic bowls made using a Japanese firing technique called raku, linked to orbs of blown-glass and connected by thick hand-knit rope. Nkanga explained that she tried to give substance to a teardrop.

“It’s one teardrop in slow motion,” she said, explaining that she wanted to give material shape to the minerals within our tears, like sodium hydroxide and iron. She imagined how they become crystallized, she said, and represented them as a rock of anthracite on the ground.

She also wanted to give voice to the teardrop, so she created a 10-channel sound installation that was fitted into the pieces of the dangling sculpture. She sang short phrases of poetry, gasping, wailing, and also laughing, which will reverberate throughout the MoMA atrium.

“After losing my parents, there’s always a feeling of emptiness,” she said. “I think how we all carry these emotions, and so much weight, out of everything we’ve lost. This was a way of trying to render tangible lots of things which are not so tangible. It’s giving form and voice to something we all share, a human condition. Even our teardrops are an ecosystem.”

See more on: [Museum of Modern Art](#)



The Art Newspaper
27 September 2024



THE ART NEWSPAPER

Slowly, Brazil's art market is becoming more racially diverse

Many galleries at ArtRio have recently begun representing Black and Indigenous artists, though non-white dealers remain a rarity

The 14th edition of the ArtRio fair (until 28 September) kicks off in Rio de Janeiro as Brazilian art crests a wave of international recognition, exemplified by Foreigners Everywhere, the main exhibition at the Venice Biennale (until 20 November), organised by the São Paulo curator Adriano Pedrosa.

Brazil's art market is appreciating the attention: it has doubled over the past decade, to 1% of the global share, according to data published in the annual UBS and Art Basel *Art Market* report. Yet longstanding roadblocks continue to prevent a lift off: prohibitively high import taxes and a lack of incentives for private cultural philanthropy limit the trade and keep collections locally focused.

What is most noticeably changing within this market is increasing racial diversity. Galleries are now jostling to include more Black and Indigenous artists, so as to better reflect a country in which 56% of the population identifies as non-white—and to meet increasing demand from collectors, both in Brazil and abroad.

This shift can be observed at ArtRio, where many of the 72 exhibitors, almost all of whom are based in Brazil, have recently begun working with non-white artists. Most contemporary art galleries at the fair surveyed by *The Art Newspaper* are showing at least one Black or Indigenous artist on their stands; in almost every case, those artists were signed to the gallery within the last five years.

One such institution now frequently cited as a buyer of work by Black and Indigenous artists is the Inhotim Institute, the art museum and botanical garden in Minas Gerais. Under new direction, it is making a clear push to diversify its programme and collection. The two temporary exhibitions that are currently showing there are both by Black artists—Nazareth, who is Brazilian, and Grada Kilomba, whose ancestors migrated from West Africa to Portugal. Both are presenting politically charged work explicitly on themes of race, colonialism and slavery.

But even as a more diverse group of artists finally breaks through to Brazil's established art spaces, their continued marginalisation demonstrates how much work there is left to do. In 2022, Alexandre publicly lambasted Inhotim for a group exhibition of 32 Black artists in which he was included. He wrote on Instagram that he was "embarrassed" by the exhibition's treatment of Black subject matter and forced the museum to remove his work, stating that white artists are given much more space to exhibit in the museum.

In response, Inhotim stated that in 2025 a pavilion will be inaugurated for the Nigerian artist Otobong Nkanga, though this will be the first permanent pavilion for a Black artist in the Brazilian institution's almost 20 year history.

The Guardian
19 September 2024

The Guardian

Art

'Art changes people and people change the world': the artists targeting UN's general assembly

Posters by global artists have been placed around New York City to coincide with the annual meeting, hoping to drive home the importance of certain issues



📍 'Art can help bridge that understanding of how we are connected to the planetary system' ... an installation image of Future Ours. Photograph: Art 2030

This year, global artists have decided to shake up the scripted, polished performances of high politics at the UN general assembly. As delegates make their way toward UN headquarters in midtown Manhattan to debate goals for a sustainable future, they will be greeted by posters encouraging them to do things like commit crimes against reality, stop to ponder that we are all solar powered, consider African food emancipation and think about urban planning from the perspective of a child.

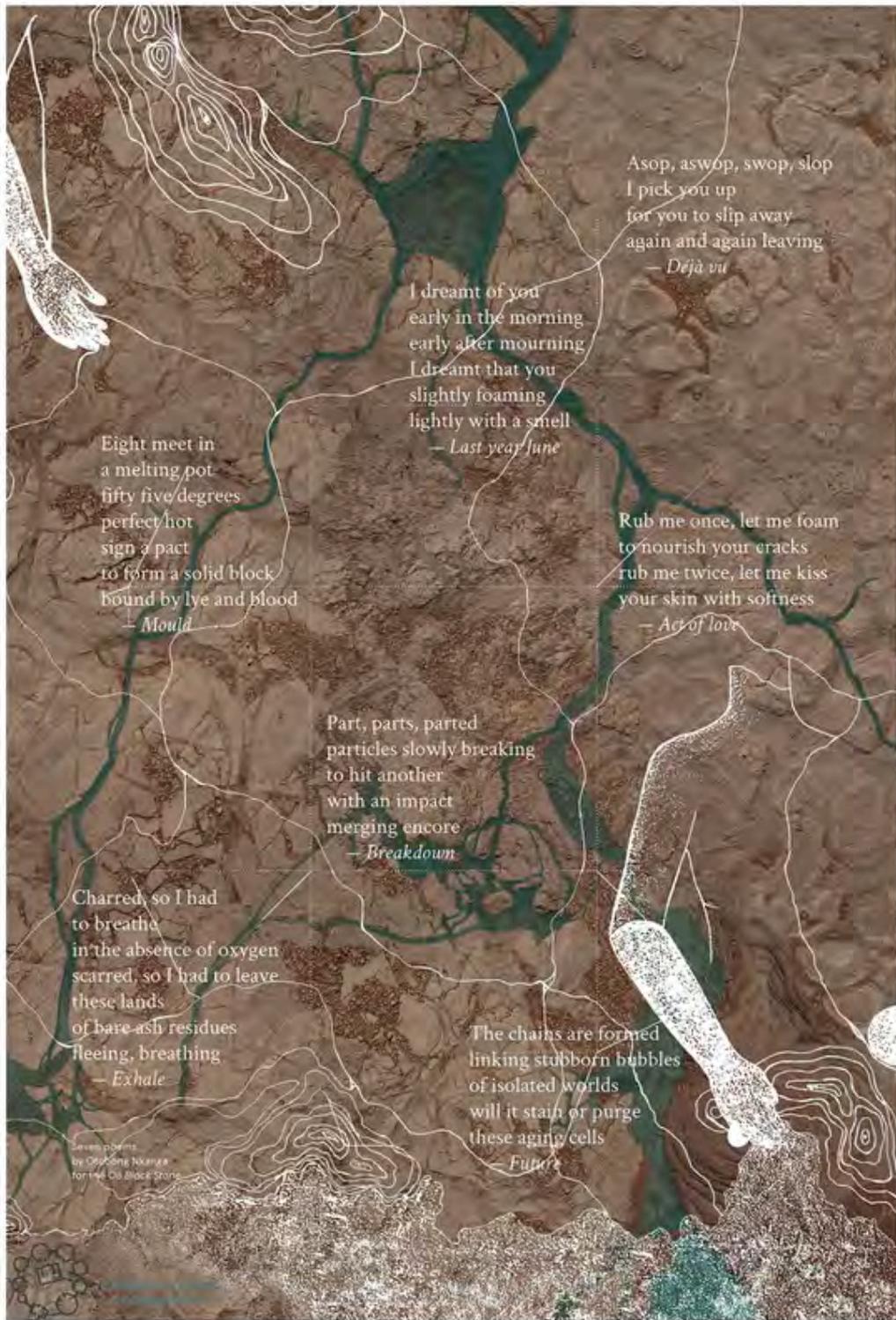
These posters are part of a carefully planned artistic intervention into what is widely considered one of the most pivotal meetings of the UN general assembly in years. The 79th general assembly, which opened on 10 September, will attempt to accelerate progress toward 17 major sustainability goals, covering such issues as climate change, women's equality, ending global hunger and developing sustainable consumption models. Artists hope to have their own say into these goals and how they are achieved.

Titled Future Ours, this intriguing public art exhibition will proliferate artists' posters throughout hundreds of bus shelters covering all five boroughs of New York City, as well as inside the UN itself. Attempting to offer a truly global, intergenerational perspective, Future Ours will include work from nearly two dozen artists and arts collectives from nations such as Thailand, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Syria, Nigeria, Serbia and Brazil.

Future Ours is a project of the non-profit organization Art2030, whose mission is to unite art with the United Nations 2030 agenda for [sustainable development](#).

Nigerian-born, Antwerp-based artist Otobong Nkanga is representative of the global energy that Future Ours hopes to bring to the sustainability debate. Known for work that examines the intersection of neocolonialism and environmental degradation, she explores how practices like extractive mining or the creation and dyeing of tapestries leave their marks and memories in human bodies. "Otobong's work is about being in communion with the environment, as opposed to a dominating colonialist separation from the environment," said Hans Ulrich Obrist, a curator with Future Ours.

Nkanga's contribution to the exhibition, entitled Flow, combines a topographic map superimposed over an image of parched, cracked earth, with short, enigmatic pieces of verse. One imagines the transportive, mysterious piece as juxtaposing quite strongly with the daily commute of those navigating the hyper-urbanized New York cityscape.



Asop, aswop, swop, slop
I pick you up
for you to slip away
again and again leaving
— *Deja vu*

I dreamt of you
early in the morning
early after mourning
I dreamt that you
slightly foaming
lightly with a smell
— *Last year June*

Eight meet in
a melting pot
fifty five degrees
perfect hot
sign a pact
to form a solid block
bound by lye and blood
— *Mould*

Rub me once, let me foam
to nourish your cracks
rub me twice, let me kiss
your skin with softness
— *Act of love*

Part, parts, parted
particles slowly breaking
to hit another
with an impact
merging encore
— *Breakdown*

Charred, so I had
to breathe
in the absence of oxygen
scarred, so I had to leave
these lands
of bare ash residues
fleeing, breathing
— *Exhale*

The chains are formed
linking stubborn bubbles
of isolated worlds
will it stain or purge
these aging cells
— *Future*

Several poems
by Otobong Nkanga
from the *Old Black Stone*



📷 Otobong Nkanga - Flow, 2024 Photograph: Art 2030

LISSON GALLERY

world-architects
13 September 2024

world- architects .com Profiles of Selected Architects

'Energies' and Beyond

Exploring the East Village via the Swiss Institute



New Affiliates built a wall from discarded architectural elements sourced from exhibitions across the city to display archival materials in the Swiss Institute's first-floor gallery as part of *Energies*, September 11, 2024 – January 5, 2025. (All photographs by John Hill/World-Architects)

***Energies*, the new exhibition that opened at the Swiss Institute in Manhattan's East Village on September 11, invites visitors to explore other parts of the neighborhood related to the exhibition's themes of “ecological affordances and effects, social formations, and political arrangements attached to energy past and present.” World-Architects visited a day after the exhibition opened.**

Curated by Swiss Institute (SI) director Stefanie Hessler with a small team of SI curators, *Energies* was inspired by something that happened nearby more than fifty years ago. In 1973, in the midst of the oil crisis, inhabitants of the once torched and abandoned building at 519 East 11th Street, just a few blocks east of SI, installed a two-kilowatt wind turbine and solar panels on the building's roof. Notably, the turbine was the first to be installed in New York City and the building became one of the first sweat equity co-ops in the city. More important to history and the current exhibition is the fact Con Edison, the near-monopoly provider of power in the city, sued the co-op — and lost, forcing Con Edison to buy back electricity generated at the building and forever changing US energy regulations.



519 East 11th Street and its side yard today

The turbine and solar panels are gone, but the building on East 11th Street is marked with a plaque to educate passersby about the important role its occupants played in local and national history and the way the installation fit within the larger countercultural ethos of East Village and Lower East Side residents. Furthermore, a wall at the back of the building's side yard is the setting for a mural by Otobong Nkanga, installed as one of the partner events accompanying *Energies*. A visit to the group exhibition, which occupies all three floors of SI as well as its rooftop, is rewarding, but it is incomplete; one does not fully grasp the show's message without exploring other parts of the community. In the words of the curatorial team, "The exhibition sprawls from SI into the East Village, sending metaphoric electric impulses through the neighborhood."



Otobong Nkanga's mural, *Social Consequences I: Segregation – Encroaching Barricade – Entangled – Endangered Species – Rationed Measures – Intertwined*, is visible from the street but can be seen up close on selected Saturdays in September.

Shirazeh Houshiary: The Sound of One Hand, September 13th–October 26th, 2024

Lisson, Los Angeles

Since rising to prominence as a sculptor in the 1980s, Shirazeh Houshiary's practice has swelled to encompass painting, installation, architectural projects and film. "I set out to capture my breath," she said in 2000, to "find the essence of my own existence, transcending name, nationality, cultures." Veils, membranes and mists are leitmotifs in work that tries to visualise modes of perception, spanning the scientific and the cosmic while drawing on sources as wide-ranging as Sufism, Renaissance painting, contemporary physics and poetry. Houshiary finds succour in the transformation of material: Arabic words, one an affirmation the other a denial, are pencil-stroked onto canvas so lightly and clouded over by finely wrought skeins of pigment, that they morph in front of the naked eye and defy reproduction. So too, aluminium armatures and elliptical brick towers, charged with dynamic tension, appear different from every angle, as if negating their own presence; her commission for the East window of St Martin in the Fields, London, presents a cross, warped and spanning from a circular motif, as if reflected in water. "The universe is in a process of disintegration," she says, "everything is in a state of erosion, and yet we try to stabilise it. This tension fascinates me and it's at the core of my work" (2013).

Shirazeh Houshiary was born in Shiraz, Iran in 1955, where she attended university before moving to London, UK in 1974. She has a BA from Chelsea School of Art (1979) and lives and works in London, UK.

She has had solo exhibitions at Lisson Gallery, London (2021), Shanghai (2020), New York (2017); Singapore Tyler Print Institute, Singapore (2016); The Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin, Ireland (2007); Tate Liverpool, UK (2003); Islamic Gallery, British Museum, London, UK (1997); Magasin-Centre national d'art contemporain, Grenoble, France (1995); University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA, USA (1994); Camden Arts Centre, London, UK (1993); Musée Rath, Geneva, Switzerland (1988); and in 2013, her exhibition 'Breath' was a celebrated Collateral Event of the 55th Venice Biennale in Italy. Recent group exhibitions include: 'Artists and the Rothko Chapel: 50 Years of Inspiration', Moody Center for the Arts, Rice University, Houston, Texas, USA (2021); 'Abstraction and Calligraphy ? Towards a Universal Language', Louvre Abu Dhabi in collaboration with Centre Pompidou, Abu Dhabi, UAE (2021); 'Spirit and Endeavour', Salisbury Cathedral, Salisbury, UK (2020); Jesus College, Cambridge, UK (2017); Fondazione Palazzo Albizzini, Collezione Burri, Citta di Castello, Perugia, Italy (2016); University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor, MI, USA (2014).

Her work has been included in major group exhibitions since the 1980s including: Dayton Art Institute, Dayton, OH, USA (2011); Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, USA (2007); Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice, Italy (2002); Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo, Netherlands (1990); Centre Pompidou, Paris, France (1989); Louisiana Museum, Humlebaek, Denmark (1986).

She has also participated in numerous biennials including Cartagena de Indias, Colombia (2014); Kiev Biennale, Ukraine (2012); the 17th Biennale of Sydney, Australia (2010); and the 40th Venice Biennale, Italy (1982). She was nominated for the Turner Prize in 1994.

LISSON GALLERY

The Art Newspaper
12 June 2024



THE ART NEWSPAPER

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Podcast | A brush with... Otobong Nkanga

The Nigerian-born artist talks to Ben Luke about her influences—from writers to musicians, film-makers and, of course, other artists—and the cultural experiences that have shaped her life and work





A brush with...

In this podcast, based on *The Art Newspaper's* regular interview series, our host Ben Luke talks to artists in-depth. He asks the questions you've always wanted to: who are the artists, historical and contemporary, they most admire? Which are the museums they return to? What are the books, music and other media that most inspire them? And what is art for, anyway?

Otobong Nkanga, born in 1974 in Kano, Nigeria, explores the land and the environment in relation to our bodies, and the cultures and histories that mould and define them. Working across sculpture, installation, performance, sound, photography and video, the artist brings together what she calls constellations of images, movements and objects, to poetically interweave ideas relating to cultural history and anthropology, geography and geology.



Otobong Nkanga, *Between Embers and Ashes* (2024)
Image: © Otobong Nkanga, Courtesy Lisson Gallery

She fuses in-depth research with her own lived experience. The result is a practice with a distinctive coherence between materials and concepts, where references to present-day geopolitical and ecological realities sit alongside forms, metaphors and symbols that speak to broader timescales and narratives and disparate belief systems.



Otobong Nkanga, *Tender Offering II* (2024)
Image: © Otobong Nkanga, Courtesy Lisson Gallery

She reflects on her early choice to pursue art over architecture, discusses her use of minerals and particular colours, recalls encountering the Bakor monoliths in Nigeria as a child, and then Western masters from Caravaggio to De Hooch in Europe.

She talks about her enjoyment of writers like Uwem Akpan and Helon Habila and the huge range of music she plays in her studio, from Alt-J via Fatoumata Diawara to Rihanna.

Plus, she gives insights into life in her studio and answers our usual questions, including the ultimate: “what is art for?”

• *Otobong Nkanga: We Come from Fire and Return to Fire*, **Lisson Gallery, London, until 3 August**

• **Nkanga's first permanent UK commission, for Art on the Underground at Nine Elms Underground station, will launch in 2025**

LISSON GALLERY

Frieze Magazine

17 June 2024

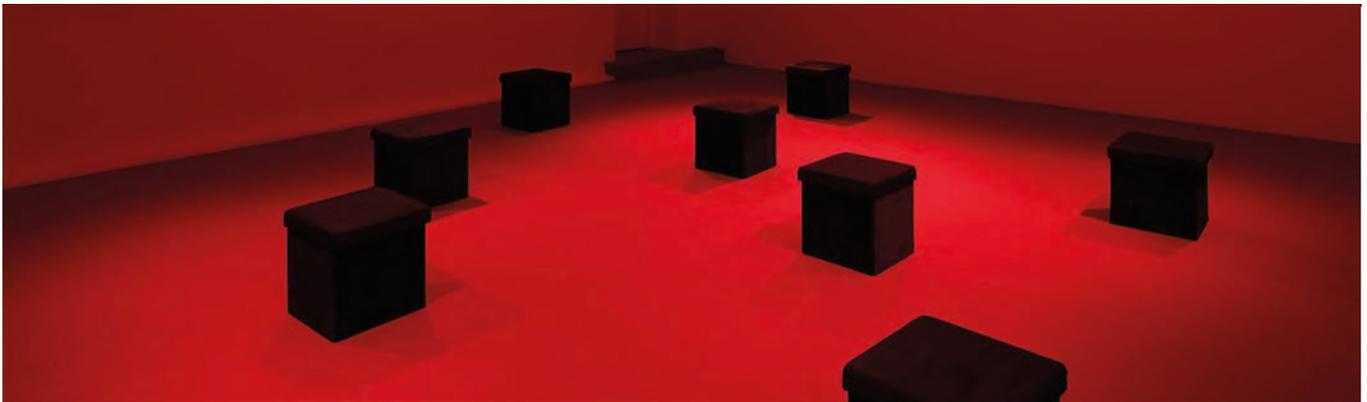
FRIEZE

The Elemental Pull of Otobong Nkanga

The artist's debut solo exhibition at Lisson Gallery in London features a compelling mix of objects, tapestries and installations, creating ritualistic compositions from an array of material



BY VAISHNA SURJID IN EXHIBITION REVIEWS | 17 JUN 24



What does it mean to smoulder, crack open and emerge from the ashes? Such elemental and existential questions preoccupy Nigerian artist Otobong Nkanga, whose inaugural solo show at Lisson Gallery contains objects, tapestries and sound installations that unite disparate materials into ritualistic compositions.

In the show's titular work, *We Come from Fire and Return to Fire* (2024), a heavy hand-braided rope clamped with iridescent, smoked-raku ceramic beads snakes around precious stones on a hand-tufted carpet, reaching up to the skylight. The careful arrangement is at once imposing and enticing: I have to resist the urge to lie on the rug and absorb the energy of the obsidian, tourmaline and labradorite. The carpet's design was inspired by the constituent minerals of pyrargyrite: *pyr* and *argyros* being Ancient Greek for, respectively, fire and silver. The amorphous rug contains psychedelic colours and patterns; black lines slice through layered shades of purple peppered with spores of red and cobalt.



Otobong Nkanga, *We Come from Fire and Return to Fire*, 2024, hand tufted carpet, glazed and smoked raku ceramic, obsidian, shungite, tourmaline, labradorite, handmade rope, metal connectors, Murano glass with black palm kernel oil and palm oil, 7.2 × 2.7 × 3.4 m.
Courtesy: the artist and Lisson Gallery

Towers of ceramic punctuate the gallery space, emerging from the floor like the burnt trunks of palm trees. One, *Beacon – Resilience* (2024), stands 1.6 metres tall – an ambitious height for cast-ceramic. Circular pots containing medicinal herbs like nettle, thyme and ‘herb-of-grace’ appear around the bases of these scorched trees as reminders of the former healing qualities of this ceramic forest, and of its vitality and regenerative potential.



Otobong Nkanga, *Between Embers and Ashes*, 2024, woven textile with hand stitching, 1.6 × 3.4 m. Courtesy: the artist and Lisson Gallery

Hanging on an adjacent wall is *Sunburst* (2024), one of two larger woven textile works. Historically, tapestries often documented significant religious or political events; in contrast, Nkanga eschews narrative and scatters abstract clues across the works. Take the fiery copper *Between Embers and Ashes* (2024), which extends more than 3.5 metres in length. Tree branches reach out across the surface; fungal shapes bloom at the bottom while small orbs of colour are dotted across like little celestial bodies. These motifs are rich and chaotic. Both wall hangings consist of four layers – or floats – which the artist weaves between to illuminate some elements and carefully conceal others. These works feel sacred, pulsating with mystical energy.

Scattered between these larger sculptural and woven pieces is a selection of delicate small-scale acrylic, drypoint and aquatint works on paper, such as *Afflicted* (2024), and sculptural threads comprised of more hand-braided ropes, bespoke glass vessels and precious stones, including *Silent Anchor III* (2024). Seeing such a varied and accomplished practice spanning so many scales, surfaces and mediums is remarkable. Yet, while these peripheral sculptures pick up the motifs found in compositions like *We Come from Fire and Return to Fire*, they don't quite match their impact in the space.



Otabong Nkanga, *Confluence - Afterglow* (detail), 2024, metal pole with base, ceramic pieces, ceramic bases, pipe insulation and metal ballast, 1.5 × 2 × 2 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Lisson Gallery

The most striking moment, however, is found deep in the belly of the show: the audio installation *Wetin You Go Do? Oya Na* (2020), in which a voice asks, in Nigerian pidgin English: 'What are you going to do?' In this room, the walls are the red of a blaring siren, bright and alarming. The sound slaps you from every direction, blasting from six speakers. The first iteration of this piece was created in 2015, when climate protests and media noise around the UK's impending Brexit vote prompted the artist to ask herself the titular question. Here, multiple characters – including a politician, a drunkard and Mother Earth, all voiced by Nkanga – chant and sing in a spectacle where there is nothing to see but red. As the voices overlap and harmonise, building to a crescendo, the effect is one of ritual. Nkanga's voice is overwhelming and empowering: a fitting conclusion to a fiery show.

Otabong Nkanga's *We Come from Fire and Return to Fire* is at [Lisson Gallery](#), London, until 3 August

Main image: Otabong Nkanga, *Wetin You Go Do? Oya Na*, 2020, installation view. Courtesy: the artist and Lisson Gallery



VAISHNA SURJID

Vaishna Surjid is a writer and curator based in London.

artnet

8 Must-See Shows at This Year's London Gallery Weekend

London's expansive gallery scene is serving up another bumper crop of exhibitions, talks, and performances.

The London art scene has been busy installing its final batch of exhibitions before collectors flee en masse to some far-flung villa or yacht this summer. To mark the occasion, the fourth edition of London Gallery Weekend (May 31–June 2) has partnered with 130 galleries to offer its usual program of free events, talks, public performances, and parties.

Among the highlights this year will be curated walking routes by the likes of artist Lubaina Himid, curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, and editor Edward Enninful. The filmmaker John Akomfrah, who is currently representing Great Britain at the Venice Biennale, is also unveiling new work as part of the Cork Street Banner Commission.

Despite ongoing concerns about London's health as a global art capital post-Brexit, this weekend offers a chance for the U.K.'s sprawling capital to flaunt its lively and diverse gallery scene. From NW to SE, here are the shows that have caught our eye.

Otobong Nkanga's *"We Come from Fire and Return to Fire"* at Lisson Gallery



Installation view of Otobong Nkanga at Lisson Gallery during London Gallery Week 2024. Photo courtesy of Lisson Gallery.

Material investigations run through Otobong Nkanga's new series of woven wall hangings and floor-based objects, many of which have been strung together with rope. For her debut at Lisson Gallery, the Nigerian artist is staying true to form with highly conceptual pieces that explore our relationship to, not to say reliance on, land and the natural world through an impressive range of media. Expect to bathe in richly textural surfaces from thickly layered and knotted fiber to colorful craquelure.

Financial Times
29 May 2024

FINANCIAL TIMES



John Akomfrah's Cork Street banners project, 'The Secret Life of Memorable Things' (2024) © Luke Hayes

Mayfair's Cork Street is bedecked with banners covered in clocks, butterflies and question marks, all the work of Britain's Venice Biennale artist John Akomfrah. His floating project heralds the fourth edition of London Gallery Weekend (May 31-June 2) for which 134 commercial and contemporary art galleries across the city extend their opening hours and lay on special events.

Conceived during the Covid lockdowns, which put art fairs and their concentrated crowds on hold, London Gallery Weekend is on its way to becoming a fixture in the art calendar. While London already boasts a slew of fairs and exhibitions, by making an event of gallerists' day-to-day business, the weekend sparks the imaginations of the city's most creative traders — and brings in the crowds.

“London Gallery Weekend is distinctly different from our peer events [such as the Frieze fairs] in that it's about driving people into the gallery's own spaces,” says co-director Sarah Rustin, also a senior director at Thaddaeus Ropac gallery.



Jodie Carey's 'Guard' at Edel Assanti features 150 jesmonite sculptures © Tom Carter

This year's participating galleries stretch from Harlesden High Street in north-west London to Xxijra Hii and Studio/Chapple in south-east Deptford. Emerging spaces such as Palmer Gallery and Hot Wheels, among the participants that opened in the past year, mix with the likes of London long-timers Sadie Coles and Maureen Paley as well as global outfits Gagosian and David Zwirner. The map can look daunting — London Gallery Weekend is by far the biggest such event worldwide — so organisers have also pulled together route suggestions from art world experts, including the artists Lubaina Himid and Flora Yukhnovich.

“You can see how the gallery geography has changed since we started,” says the event's founder Jeremy Epstein, also co-founder of Edel Assanti, which shows a striking installation by Jodie Carey of 150 jesmonite sculptures, moulded around flowers and soil. Epstein notes a marked consolidation into central London, extending beyond the thriving Cork Street — which has 10 participating spaces — to Bloomsbury and Fitzrovia (where Epstein's gallery is located). In the post-pandemic, work-from-home environment, “there have definitely been deals on commercial property and business rate relief,” he says. This has resulted in some invitingly non-traditional gallery buildings: Union Pacific's latest space is in a former production agency office in Bloomsbury where it will show paintings by the Seoul-based Jin Han Lee.



Jin Han Lee's 'Coming to You' (2024), shown by Union Pacific

London Gallery Weekend's website lists 128 events at time of writing, some starting earlier in the week. These range from the usual 6pm-8pm openings to full-blown parties. Borough gallery Copperfield marks its 10th anniversary with a "10pm till late" party on June 1 while Harlesden High Street offers a day-long "Caribbean food & music event" on June 2. Possibly less fun, but still engaging, is Hauser & Wirth's 90-minute "informal gathering" on June 1, for which visitors are encouraged to "express your own opinions" on its concurrent shows of Harmony Korine and Isa Genzken.

This year fields more performances, two organised by London Gallery Weekend and UP Projects, by the Italian artist Adelaide Cioni (two performances on May 31) and Turkey's Nil Yalter (June 2). Each also has a coinciding show at their respective galleries, The Approach and Ab-Anbar. Other performances come through the participants themselves, including one by Berlin artist Anna-Lena Krause, whose work questions "the bonds connecting people in the modern world" (Guts Gallery, June 2).

Other galleries are using the opportunity to get collaborative. In south London, Matt's Gallery and The Sunday Painter have joined forces for the first time for a two-venue showing of new work by London artist Harminder Judge, based on a Native American ceremony. The 10-minute walk between the galleries "is part of the experience of seeing the show," says Tim Dixon, deputy director at Matt's. A purpose-built tunnel that leads into his gallery's exhibition is echoed through a railway tunnel on the walk between the spaces, he notes.

Sadie Coles takes collaboration to a new level on Kingly Street with an ambitious Matthew Barney show, *Secondary*, a project that runs across three other galleries in Paris, New York and Los Angeles. Coles also hosts Margate's 243Luz in her residency space.



'Secondary: Light Lens Parallax' by Matthew Barney (2024) at Sadie Coles HQ

Historic highlights include a standout show of the collection of the critic and curator Guy Brett, who died in 2021, mostly cutting-edge, 20th-century Latin American works, at Alison Jacques. At Thaddaeus Ropac is Robert Rauschenberg's ROCI project, an exploration of international artistic exchange that gets its first gallery showing since a major 1991 exhibition at the National Gallery of Art, Washington.

It certainly isn't all oil paintings, a reflection of taste moving beyond this most traditional of media. There's a prevalence of photography, including Gagolian Gallery's showing of Nan Goldin's early black-and-white works in its Burlington Arcade space, an extension of its takeover of the former Welsh Chapel on Charing Cross Road. Elsewhere, Maureen Paley shows Hannah Starkey, TJ Boulting has Adam Rouhana and Soft Opening shows Dean Sameshima. Ceramics feature at Kate MacGarry (Renee So) and tapestries at Lisson Gallery (Otobong Nkanga).



Hannah Starkey, 'Untitled, April 2024' (2022) at Maureen Paley

Galleries are pushing the boat out, Sadie Coles says, because the event now brings in collectors and curators. “It started out as a nice collegial idea through a WhatsApp group during Covid and has become very professional and very ambitious. People come out and see the shows that weekend,” she says. Visitors include those from outside London, she notes, with travel and accommodation support for curators from museums across the UK, in partnership with the Art Fund, as well as bursaries for approximately five curators from Europe.

Organisers emphasise that the event is not just for art world cognoscenti. “There’s potentially a much larger public for art,” Epstein says. And while the shows are commercial endeavours, visiting is free, unlike at art fairs and most institutional exhibitions. There’s even a charitable aspect this year: as well as his own exhibition of work by Michaël Borremans, David Zwirner hosts a show of editions sold to raise funds for London’s Gasworks, which provides studio spaces for London-based artists.

The event’s range is a reminder of the city’s creative clout, despite Brexit’s negative impact on the arts and a downbeat economic environment. “We talk so much about the market but look at the offering that London has in terms of being a hub for the next generation of artists,” Rustin says. Coles summarises: “There is a feeling of collaboration, which builds on itself and shows that when we work together we will thrive. London Gallery Weekend has proved its worth.”

londongalleryweekend.art

LISSON GALLERY

Artlyst
29 May 2024



London Gallery Weekend 2024 Recommendations – Artlyst Guide

Prepare for a whirlwind art extravaganza as London Gallery Weekend rolls into town! This year's edition boasts 130 participating galleries, each flinging open doors with free admission. It's all about building community among galleries and artists while making contemporary art accessible to everyone.

The brainchild of a post-COVID-19 revival effort, London Gallery Weekend was launched to breathe life back into the art market and boost cultural tourism. And it worked like a charm! Now in its fourth year, this event has expanded its scope and ambition, drawing in more galleries and a growing international crowd. Expect a jam-packed schedule featuring exhibitions, insightful talks, guided tours, and special events with top-notch artists, curators, and critics.

This weekend-long bonanza kicks off from Friday, 31 May to Sunday, 2 June 2024, showcasing the very best of London's vibrant and varied gallery scene. Each day is dedicated to a different area: Central London on Friday, South London on Saturday, and the East End on Sunday. So, whether you're an art lover or just curious, there's plenty to see and do.

Mark your calendars – galleries will be open from 11 am to 6 pm on Friday and Saturday and from 12 pm to 5 pm on Sunday. With over 70 free events, including public art and performances, this is your chance to dive deep into London's dynamic art world. Admission is free, so grab your friends and make a weekend of it!

Take advantage of this highlight of the capital's cultural calendar. London Gallery Weekend is your ticket to exploring the city's most exciting contemporary art and connecting with a community as passionate about art as you are.

London Gallery Weekend Recommendations

Otobong Nkanga: We Come from Fire and Return to Fire Environmental artist Otobong Nkanga's U.K. solo debut introduces her holistic vision across tapestry, sculpture, and sound. The exhibition features towers of raku-fired ceramics suggesting burned trees, herbal remedies in hand-blown vials, and ritual offerings, highlighting ecological devastation and potential renewal. Lisson Gallery, NW1, until 3 August

Wallpaper*

Everything to see at London Gallery Weekend 2024

London Gallery Weekend 2024 highlights, from Nan Goldin to John Akomfrah, as 130-plus galleries and 70 live events take over the capital (31 May – 2 June)

Given the buzz around London Gallery Weekend 2024, you'd be forgiven for forgetting that the event is only in its fourth year. This edition, opening this weekend (31 May – 2 June), promises a stellar line-up of exhibitions, performances, and live events across the city. London's art world is showing us its best, including an installation on Cork Street by the UK's representative at the [Venice Biennale 2024](#), Sir [John Akomfrah](#); another by legendary American artist [Nan Goldin](#); and exhibitions from other art stars alongside some of the most exciting up-and-coming talents working today.

'London Gallery Weekend (LGW) has changed significantly in reach and ambition,' say co-directors Sarah Rustin and Jeremy Epstein. 'It's now firmly established in the London art world calendar, which has brought about a shift in the majority of participating galleries opening new exhibitions specially for the event, as well as a huge increase in the special events programmed for the weekend. Just a couple of our initiatives that reflect our aims to engage with both the public and institutional audiences in new ways are the addition of the public performance programme and the bursary scheme with Art Fund to enable curators from UK institutions to visit London for the weekend. Our partnerships very much reflect LGW's development too.'

A dizzying 130-plus participating galleries and 70 live events are taking place, but if that sounds overwhelming, a selection of cultural figures and art experts – including Wallpaper* contributing editor Ekow Eshun, curator and artist Lubaina Himid, and photographers [Mary McCartney](#) and Nick Knight – have curated routes of their personal highlights to follow, available on the [LGW website](#). Some will take you across the city, and others focus on areas such as the East End, Fitzrovia and Mayfair. You can also sign up to join various live local tours.

Here, meanwhile, are Wallpaper's highlights to help you plan your art-filled weekend.

A must-see is Otobong Nkanga's first solo exhibition with Lisson Gallery, 'We Come from Fire and Return to Fire'. Other interesting shows include Harlesden High Street's solo exhibition by Marcus Jefferson, Copperfield's group show of work by neurodiverse artists, Harminder Judge's 'A Ghost Dance' shown at both Matt's Gallery and The Sunday Painter, Seventeen's presentation 'Nina Davies: Becoming the Edit', mixed-media sculpture at Nam Gbewonyo, 'Nude Me/ Under The Skin: Dark Stars' at TAFETA, and Amel Bashier's solo exhibition ورد الجوري 'Ward el Juri', translating as 'damask rose', at Addis Fine Art.

Art Basel
28 May 2024

Art | Basel

Art insiders share their favorite routes ahead of London Gallery Weekend

Artists and cultural grandees including Lubaina Himid, Nick Knight, and Edward Enninful reveal their top picks for navigating the 134 galleries participating in the fourth edition of the world's largest event of its kind

London Gallery Weekend kicks off on Friday and it's bigger than ever before. Now in its fourth edition, it is already the largest initiative of its kind in the world and gathers 134 participating galleries across focused geographical zones: East, South, and Central London. To help steer visitors through a three-day program of openings and events that can at times feel overwhelming, London Gallery Weekend offers a rich selection of curated routes, laid out by some of the city's leading creative minds, from artists **Lubaina Himid** and Flora Yukhnovich, to fashion photographer Nick Knight and *Vogue's* Global Creative and Cultural Adviser, Edward Enninful. These are set out online and will also be delivered as in-person tours by event assistants.

Curator and writer Ekow Eshun leads visitors from East to West, beginning at **Victoria Miro**, where paintings by brothers Geoffrey and Boscoe Holder, celebrated artists in pre-war Trinidad, are brought together for the first time. Eshun's route takes in a show of work by **Robert Rauschenberg**, made during his 1980s cultural exchange with artists from countries including China, Mexico, and Cuba at Thaddaeus Ropac, as well as exhibitions by late British-Indian artist Gurminder Sikand at Maximillian William and Otobong Nkanga at **Lisson**, before finishing up at Hackelbury Fine Art for Sharon Walters, an artist that Eshun has long admired.

'London is a tidal city, with the Thames ebbing and flowing each day through its center. The same is true of the city's art industry,' says writer and curator Charlie Porter. 'At the turn of the millennium, it seemed like East London was becoming the epicenter of the city's gallery activity – a frenetic energy which quickly died away. In its place, serious galleries have established which concentrate on the long-term, rather than short-term hype. To me, this is more rewarding for artist, visitor, and gallerist.'



Charlie Porter © Richard Porter



Otobong Nkanga, *Tender Offering II*, 2024. Courtesy of the artist and Lisson Gallery.

The Guardian
28 May 2024

The Guardian

Art

Nan Goldin to Nil Yalter: 10 must-see shows at London gallery weekend

Commercial galleries across the capital open their doors to showcase work by their most important artists, from American football and fountains to porn theatres and Palestine

This weekend (and beyond), commercial galleries all over the city will be showcasing work by their most important artists - and admission is free. Here are 10 great shows to drop in on if you're in the capital, from a film by Nan Goldin to images of Palestinian youth.

Otobong Nkanga: We Come from Fire and Return to Fire

Nkanga is leading figure in a new wave of can-do environmental artists. Not content simply to outline the eco-crisis, her work suggests solutions that she makes good on in real life, such as the organic farm she's established in Nigeria. Following a big museum show in Europe, this exhibition introduces her holistic vision across tapestry, rope and ceramic sculpture, sound and more. While towers of raku-fired ceramics suggest burned trees, the devastation is offset with potential renewal in the shape of herbal remedies in hand-blown vials, a carpet-work dusted in minerals, ritual offerings of oil and seeds. **Lisson Gallery, NW1, until 3 August**



📍 Otobong Nkanga: We Come from Fire and Return to Fire at Lisson Gallery, London. Photograph: © Otobong Nkanga/courtesy Lisson Gallery

LISSON GALLERY

The London Culture Edit
27 May 2024



Hi, it's Nancy from The London Culture Edit. Thanks for inviting me into your email, to bend your ear about what's good (and occasionally what's mortifyingly dreadful) in London culture right now.

I'm finding my feet at the moment so it's all free, but at some point some of it will go behind a paywall. There's 15% off forever though, if you become a paid subscriber before June 6.

A whole weekend of art

London Gallery Weekend is a gateway to a constantly changing world



Li Hei Di's *The Willow Tree* performance in Hoxton Square at London Gallery Weekend 2023. Photo: Linda Nylind. Courtesy of London Gallery Weekend

Though I'm generally of the opinion that every day is an art day, and it would be to the benefit of absolutely everyone if we were able to fit it into our lives one way or another, like brushing our teeth, I am also hugely in favour of the focused initiative that is [London Gallery Weekend](#), kicking off for 2024 this Friday.

Set up in 2020 by a group of the city's commercial galleries - that's the ones that sell art, of which there are hundreds in London, as opposed to the public ones like the National or Dulwich Picture Gallery or whatever - it aims to encourage people to find out about the galleries near them or in a given area (Central, East and South - they do have West but it tends to get rolled into Central) and explore them over the course of the three days.

Now I'm painfully aware that, unless you are a known billionaire, it's not always a particularly edifying experience, walking into a commercial gallery. They do quite often fall into the stereotype of being comically unwelcoming, especially the ones in the fancier areas. Yes, there is usually a surly assistant on the front desk; yes, very often they look as if they would rather rend their own garments than greet you, a member of the (ugh) public.

I suspect this is more because they are wildly underpaid, if at all (the commercial art world, like fashion and many other creative industries, is built on a thin but solid layer of free and low-paid labour, which is a whole other conversation), or bored out of their minds, than because they actually hate people, but it can be hard to tell, which is disconcerting.

And unlike a public gallery, the information on the art or the artist can be tricky to fathom. Though there is usually a press release available on the front desk or via QR code, this is very often incomprehensible. Artbollox is a unique global dialect that looks and sounds like English but isn't, so you can end up feeling less informed than you would have done if you'd just looked at the art and left.



Hannah Starkey, *Untitled*, November 2023, © Hannah Starkey, courtesy Maureen Paley, London

But! Don't let that put you off, really. When you get used to their ways and start visiting, it opens up a vast new world of art that is constantly changing - commercial exhibitions tend to last little more than a month - and is always entirely free to see.

In galleries that focus on contemporary art, it's also nearly always new (I might write about secondary market and Old Master galleries at some point in the future, they also are great fun and often a lot more friendly), so you're seeing what's swirling in the art ether, what artists are thinking and making work about, well before it gets anywhere near a museum show. Plus the artists would be delighted to know that actual people, rather than just 'collectors', have seen their work.

And this weekend, certainly, everyone will be on their best and most welcoming behaviour, and as it's grown the programme has got really quite good.

130 galleries across London, from the long-established names like Sadie Coles, Thomas Dane, Maureen Paley and Victoria Miro, to newer galleries like Sid Motion, Cooke Latham, Guts or Soft Opening, are taking part. As well as the exhibitions, there's a live programme of more than 70 events, including talks, workshops, book launches, artist performances, parties and activities for kids.

Though all the galleries will be open for the duration, the main focus of activity shifts each day, starting with Central on Friday, followed by South on Saturday and culminating on Sunday in the East End.



Ithell Colquhoun, Volcanic Landscape, 1969. Courtesy Ben Hunter, London,
Photo: Jack Elliot Edwards

The LGW actually has a really good, well-organised website, and you can plan your own route around a given area using their map, but there are also live in-person tours over the course of the weekend, which are brilliant, or you can follow curated routes chosen by art world and art world-adjacent people, like former Vogue editor Edward Enninful, artistic director of Serpentine Galleries Hans Ulrich Obrist, artists Lubaina Himid and Flora Yukhnovich, photographer Mary McCartney and Selfridges creative director Laura Weir, among others.

My very personal picks would be: Sin Centre, Hannah Barry Gallery (South); Searching Minds, Sid Motion Gallery (South); Jodie Carey: Guard, Edel Assanti (Central); Otobong Nkanga: We Come From Fire and Return to Fire, Lisson Gallery Bell Street (Central); Nan Goldin: Sisters, Saints, Sybils, Gagolian at the former Welsh Chapel (Central); Ithell Colquhoun, Ben Hunter (Central); Renee So, Kate MacGarry (East). This last one isn't listed on the website among the exhibitions, weirdly, but the gallery is and the show opens on Friday, so there we are, go anyway.

As much as anything else, all the concentrated activity makes this weekend a lovely time to feel the buzz of the contemporary art world, something that can be difficult to access unless you're in it. So why not dip your toe in?

A rectangular orange button with the word "Share" in white text.

London Gallery Weekend runs from May 31 to June 2, all information on tours, routes, exhibitions, galleries and events can be found [here](#).



IL GIORNALE DELL'ARTE

Nkanga nature heals

For her debut at the Lisson Gallery in London, the Nigerian artist envelops the audience in a multisensory environment inspired by the ability of man and the earth to regenerate

From the Greek philosopher **Heraclitus**, proponent of the maxim " *πάντα ῥεῖ*" (everything flows), to the German playwright **Gotthold Ephraim Lessing** and his "connected" and "intertwined" vision of nature, up to the biologist and economist's law of conservation of mass Frenchman **Antoine-Laurent de Lavoisier** (" *nothing is created, nothing is destroyed, everything is transformed* "), for centuries the ability of the surrounding world to reinvent itself and present itself in other forms has fascinated scholars and thinkers of all latitudes. This can be perceived in the first solo exhibition of the Nigerian multidisciplinary artist **Otobong Nkanga** (Kano, 1974) with the **Lisson Gallery** in London, « **We Come from Fire and Return to Fire** », which will open at 27 Bell Street **from 23 May (until 3 August)**.

Recognized as one of the major **pioneers of contemporary sculpture** by the **Nasher Prize**, a biennial award organized by the Dallas center of the same name, Nkanga has made her art an opportunity to explore the reciprocity and conflict that mark the relationship between human beings, nature and its primordial elements. Relying on the ability of materials such as clay, rope, glass, wood, fabrics, oils, and even aromatic herbs, to **bring to mind suggestions and sensations typical of the universe**, the artist has given shape to a **self-contained**, multisensory ecosystem and continually renewed.

Rather than exploit the shock effect of sensationalist environmental messages, Nkanga looks at the **climate crisis** as a **metaphor for the fragility and wounds** suffered by the international community that caused it. Here, stones and minerals with different shapes and origins become a carpet that invites visitors to delve into the exhibition itinerary, while raku ceramic towers stand as a symbol of the fires that have devastated the green lungs of our continents in recent decades. However, there is no shortage of elements capable of reinvigorating the **environmental commitment** of spectators: bodies of water, essential aromas and powders capable of "purifying" us, in the manner of baptismal fonts.

Ranging between **sculpture, video, performance and textile art** , the route embraces **spirituality** , embodied by hand-woven talismans suspended in mid-air, or "Silent Anchors", cascades of wooden pendants and blown glass vases with biomorphic shapes, to answer the question: «What are you going to do?» (What will you do?). This is the question posed by the audiovisual work «Wetin You Go Do» (2020), which immerses the audience in a whirlwind of voices, all interpreted by Nkanga herself, in a surreal stream of consciousness. By impersonating a hypothetical Mother Nature and extreme psychological states and staging a caricature of a political protester, the artist has created a complex and discordant environment where elements burned by flames are juxtaposed with others capable of sheltering and repairing us, thus highlighting «the 'interconnection of all things'».

L I S S O N G A L L E R Y

Elephant

02 February 2024

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 speculativism 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 Ralibele 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 Peasant'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?



Dabong Mkanga, 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.



Share full article



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.

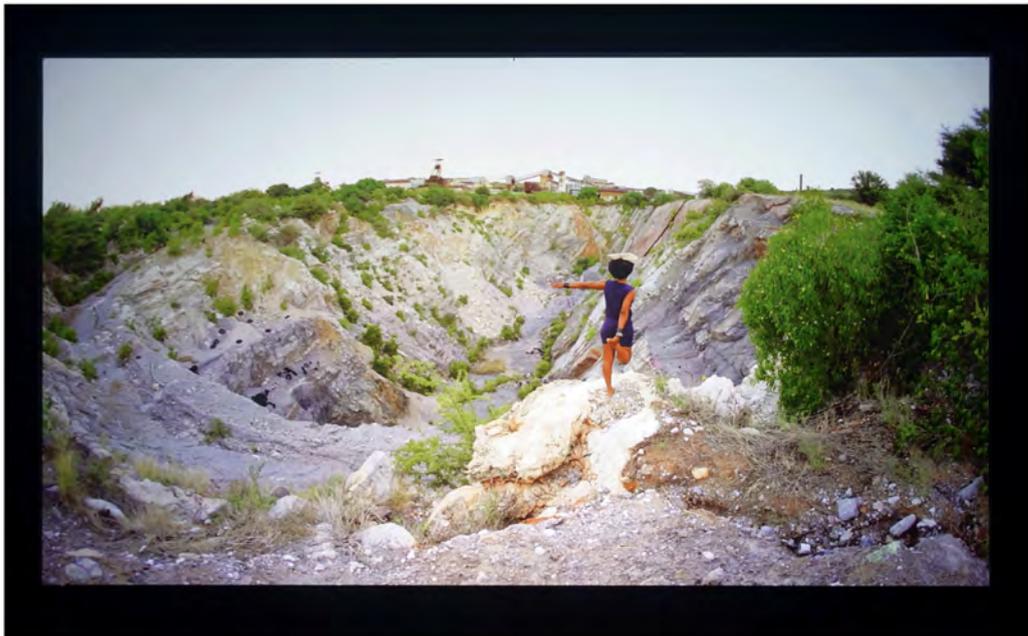


Left: Otobong Nkanga. Photograph by Win van Dungen. Right: Installation view of Otobong Nkanga, *Uneathed - Sunlight*, Kunsthaus Bregenz, Bregenz, Austria, 2021. Courtesy of the artist.



Otobong Nkanga, *Touchin' Fire*, 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 Otoong 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: Otoong 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 Otokong Nkanga, *The Carrier (I 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 Isson Godeis, *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

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• 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

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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

← Prev ≡ Full list → Next



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

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 Artente 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*.

Art | Basel



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.



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

COURTESY THE ARTISTS

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.

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

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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

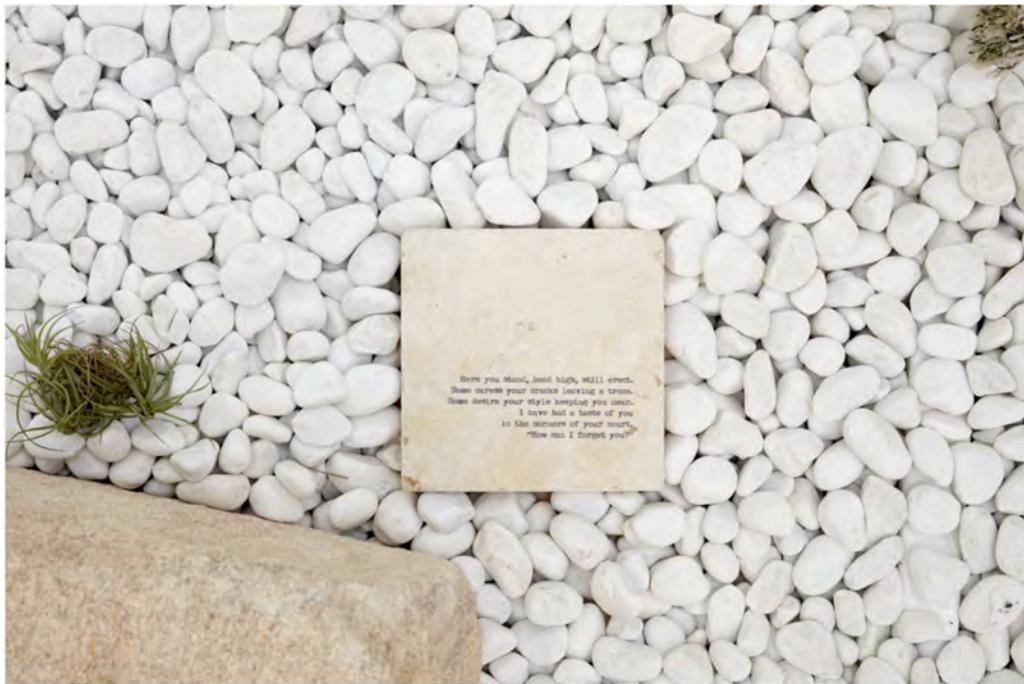
In 2007, Nkanga reworked Alan Krapow's *Baggage* (1972), a performance piece in which Krapow transported bags of sand from Rice University in Houston, Texas, to a beach in Galveston, where he replaced the bags with sand from the Gulf Coast before returning them to the university. In Nkanga's reimagining 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.



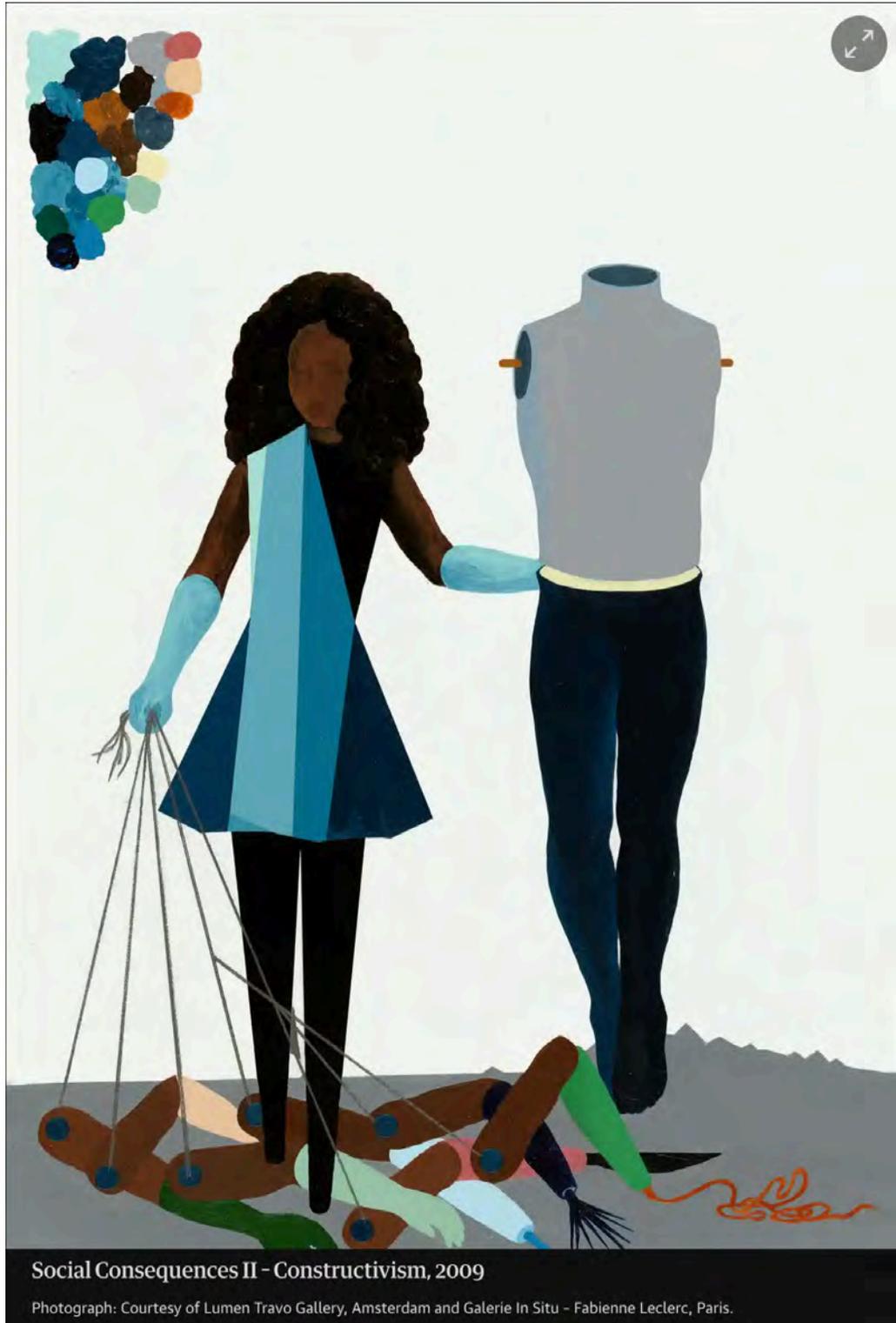
Social Consequences I - Heritage, 2009

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



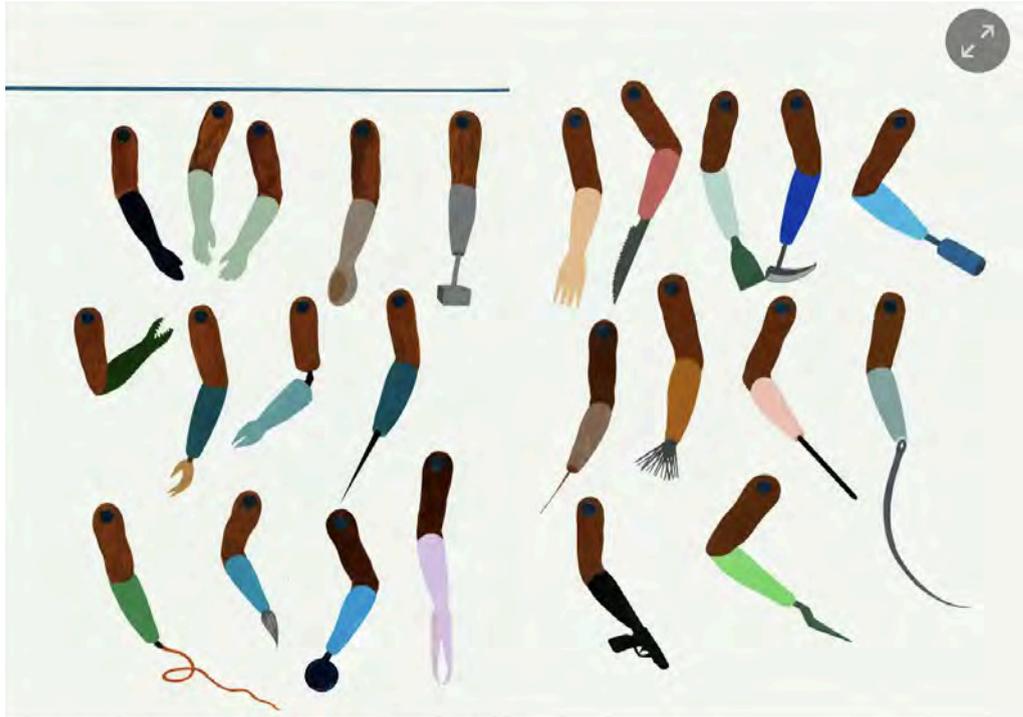
Filtered Memories Home, 1977, Yaba, Lagos, 2009

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



Social Consequences II - Constructivism, 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.



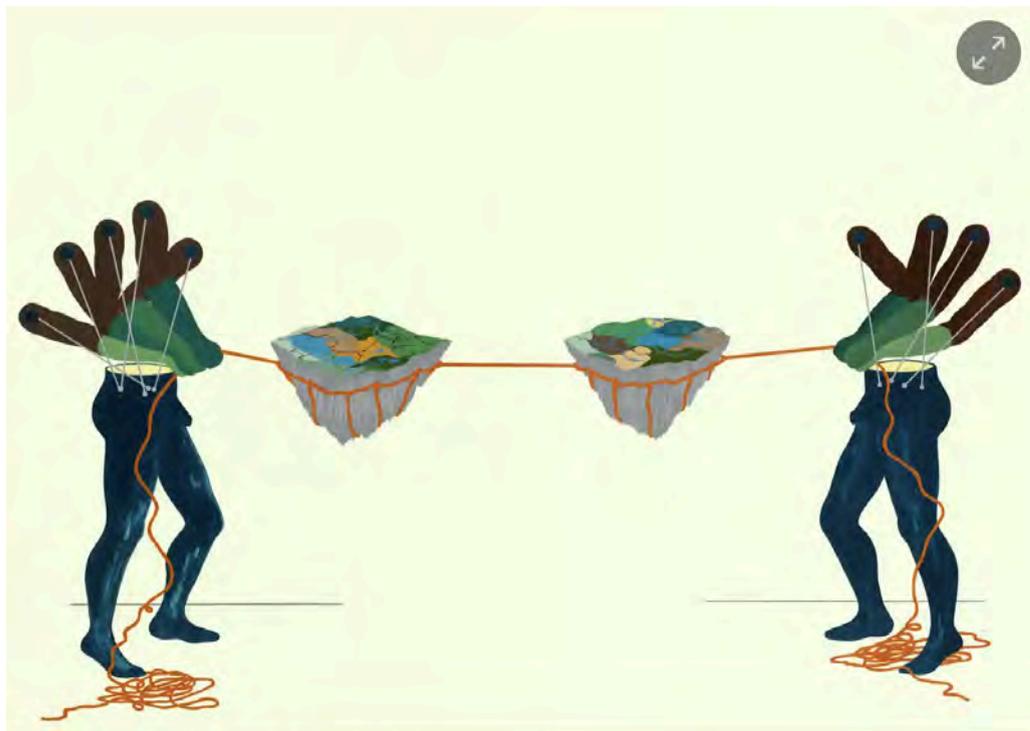
Filtered Memories - Working Men, 1990

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.



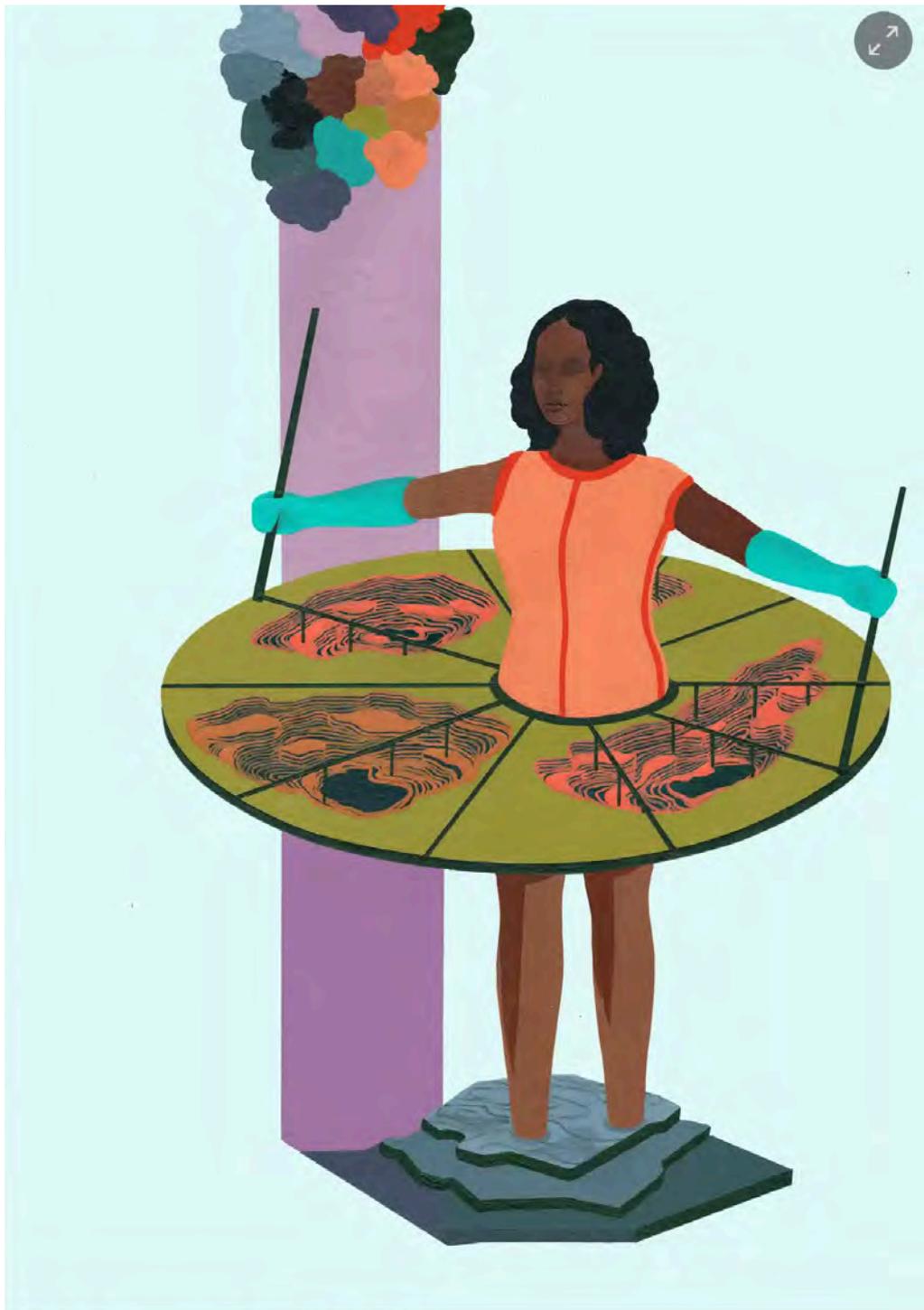
Social Consequences I - Crisis, 2009

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. *Amnesis* (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.

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.

By Lee Woo-young (wylee@heraldcorp.com)



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



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