



Press Release

Lagos, Nigeria

Nigeria's kó gallery debuts at Expo Chicago, April 13-16, 2023, featuring a solo presentation of ceramics artist Ozioma Onuzulike.

kó, an art gallery based in Lagos, Nigeria, is pleased to participate at Expo Chicago, the international exposition of contemporary and modern art, in Chicago, Illinois, April 13-16, 2023, Booth 374. This presentation will showcase seven new ceramic artworks by Nigerian artist Ozioma Onuzulike, featured in the *Exposure* section.

Ozioma Onuzulike (b. 1972, Achi, Enugu State, Nigeria) creates large-scale ceramic installations that hang like tapestries, formed from thousands of ceramic palm kernel beads, terracotta and copper rings, and natural palm kernel shells. He explores the aesthetic, symbolic and metaphorical nature of the clay-working processes – pounding, crushing, hammering, wedging, grinding, cutting, pinching, punching, perforating, burning, and firing. His recent work is inspired by yam tubers, palm kernel shells and honeycombs which he mass-produces in terracotta and weaves together in often laborious processes. He configures a multiplicity of the individual units in ways that call attention to pressing socio-political and environmental issues, such as reckless politics, bad governance, imperialism, terrorism and climate change. Adopting the laborious process of firing the materials through multiple kilns, each firing creates unique colors and textures in transforming the clay, oxides, glazes and recycled glass.

In his *Bead* series, Onuzulike likens the palm kernel shells to the history of colonialism and the slave trade. Beads have a history as a symbol of slavery, once used as a currency in transactions. For the artist, they also represent the continuing imbalance in political relations between Africa and the West. In his *Yam* series, Onuzulike uses the metaphor of the “king” of sacred Igbo crops, pointing to their inevitable deterioration in misuse. As the artist explains, “When they are grown in a hostile environment, they come out with blisters, they come out empty, they come out rotten and eaten or devastated by rodents”. He also uses the intricately packed quality of his yam works to reference the claustrophobic conditions of African migrants on boats in search of job opportunities. In his *Honeycombs* series, Onuzulike suggests similarities between bee houses and the congested urban environment, alluding to the fragility of life while also the resilience of the collective community.

Hailing from Nigeria's prestigious Nsukka School in Southeastern Nigeria, his work has become synonymous with Nsukka's experimental art department which he has led,



known for its conceptual and material processes. An important center for art education in Nigeria, the art department at Nsukka has been spearheaded by luminaries such as Nigerian modernists Uche Okeke and Chike Aniakor in the early 1970s, and has subsequently been led by pioneering artists including Obiora Udechukwu and El Anatsui, stressing the exploration of ideas, materials and forms sourced from the environment.

Ozioma Onuzulike graduated First Class from the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, where he now serves as Director of the Institute of African Studies. His solo exhibition, *Seed Yams of Our Land*, was held at the Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA), Lagos, Nigeria, in 2019, along with a presentation of his poetry collection of the same title also published by the CCA. kó presented Onuzulike's exhibition, *The Way We Are*, in 2021. His works were included in *[Re:]Entanglements: Colonial Collections in Decolonial Times* at the Museum of Archeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge, UK. His exhibition, *Strings the Length of Our Palm's Seal*, was held at Chertlúdde, Berlin, in 2022. His work has been included in recent presentations at The Armory Show, 1-54 London, Artgenève and Zonamaco. Onuzulike is a fellow of the Civitella Ranieri Centre, Umbertide, Perugia, Italy, where he undertook a residency under the UNESCO-ASCHBERG Bursary for Artists, and an alumnus of the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Maine, USA. His work is in the permanent collection of the Museum of Anthropology and Archeology, University of Cambridge, Princeton University Art Museum, Hudson Valley Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, and the Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art, Lagos.

About kó

kó is an art gallery based in Lagos, Nigeria, that is dedicated to promoting modern and contemporary art. kó has a dual focus in championing Nigeria's leading artists from the modern period and celebrating emerging and established contemporary artists across Africa and the Diaspora.