



Art X Lagos

November 6-9, 2025

Motunrayo Akinola

Uzo Egonu

Diana Ejaita

Erhabor Emokpae

Ben Enwonwu

Modupeola Fadugba

Ayotunde Ojo

Ozioma Onuzulike

Araba Opoku

Ben Osaghae

Booth 7

kó is pleased to participate in the tenth edition of Art X Lagos, marking the gallery's tenth year at the fair. This cross-generational presentation reflects on how cultural memory, personal experience, and material knowledge are carried forward and reinterpreted across time. The presentation features works by Ben Enwonwu, Erhabor Emokpae, Uzo Egonu, and Ben Osaghae in dialogue with contemporary practices by Modupeola Fadugba, Ayotunde Ojo, Ozioma Onuzulike, Motunrayo Akinola, Diana Ejaita, and Araba Opoku.

Across the presentation, several shared threads emerge. Narrative and cultural symbolism link the work of Ben Enwonwu and Modupeola Fadugba, each turning to collective celebration and tradition as a way of articulating belonging and continuity. Enwonwu's depictions of dancers emerged from his engagement with cultural identity during the post-independence period, while Fadugba's recent works consider the Ojude Oba Festival as a living expression of Yoruba collective memory and pride.

Questions of interiority and the emotional conditions of everyday life connect Ben Osaghae and Ayotunde Ojo, who each explore how uncertainty, longing, and fear shape visual experience. Osaghae's psychologically charged scenes of suspended figures resonate with Ojo's quiet domestic spaces, where thought and silence shape the composition as much as action.

Material labor and the transmission of craft knowledge tie Erhabor Emokpae, Ozioma Onuzulike, and Motunrayo Akinola, whose works consider how making is itself a form of cultural affirmation. Emokpae's carved hardwood figures draw on the heritage of the Benin Kingdom while moving toward abstraction. Onuzulike's ceramic palm kernel tapestries explore the aesthetic and symbolic nature of clay-working. Akinola's charcoal-based performance works show how forms hold together, come apart, and re-form in motion.

Finally, graphic language and geometric abstraction form a dialogue between Uzo Egonu, Diana Ejaita, and Araba Opoku, who each distill image-making into patterns, silhouettes, and atmospheric surfaces that hold cultural and emotional meaning. Egonu's fractured spatial systems and rhythmic patterning echo in Ejaita's bold silhouettes and symbolic layering, while Opoku extends these concerns into atmospheric abstraction informed by psychology and sensory experience.

Motunrayo Akinola (b. 1992, London, UK) explores timelines of access, comfort and a sense of belonging, using historical imagery and text to contextualise narratives of today. Akinola's charcoal works on linen feature abstract compositions that balance areas of blackness with negative space. These abstractions, while elusive at first, reveal cohesive patterns of interaction, balance, and disintegration. Inspired by traditions of teeth blackening found in parts of Southeast Asia, Akinola uses this imagery to challenge notions of beauty and address cultural gaps. By invoking the practice of teeth blackening, he underscores shifting generational attitudes and celebrates a more self-affirming embrace of heritage. These works are part of his Movement series, which are informed by performances in white walled galleries or studio spaces.

Uzo Egonu (1931-1996) is widely regarded as one of the most influential modernists of the African diaspora. Born in Onitsha, he moved to the United Kingdom in 1945 at the age of fourteen and studied at Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts. Remaining in London for most of his life, Egonu developed a practice that combined elements of Igbo visual culture, particularly textile patterning, architectural geometry, and carved figurative forms, with the fractured planes and spatial experimentation of European modernism. Throughout his career, Egonu produced paintings, drawings, and a body of linocuts and prints, many of which explore themes of memory, migration, and the reconstruction of cultural identity abroad. Figures, landscapes, and symbolic motifs are embedded within latticed networks of pattern.

Diana Ejaita (b. 1985, Cremona, Italy) explores the layered nature of human experience, spirituality, and cultural memory. Her works embody the idea of assembled histories, where past and present converge through forms, symbols, and negative space. Drawing from West African literature and textile traditions, she develops a visual language that blends abstraction with storytelling. Her compositions present fluid silhouettes that emerge from

dense layers, with recurring motifs resembling bodies, natural elements, and ritual objects such as horns, shells, plants, crowns, and natural fibers. Working through a process of layering and assemblage, she creates what she refers to as “nature morte” or “visual prayers” that imagine new forms of experience and exchange.

Erhabor Emokpae (1934–1984) was a Nigerian modernist whose practice spanned sculpture, painting, murals, and graphic design. Born in Benin City, Edo State, he trained at the Government Trade Center, Lagos (now Yaba College of Technology) between 1951–1953. His bronze replica of the Ivory Mask of Queen Idia was selected as the official emblem of FESTAC '77. In 1974, he was commissioned to create sculptural and decorative works for the National Arts Theatre, Lagos. Emokpae’s wooden sculptures from this period are typically carved from a single block of dense hardwood, often ebony. The figures are elongated in proportion, with simplified heads and minimal anatomical detail, emphasizing verticality and overall form. Surfaces are marked with repeated chisel incisions, creating a rhythmic texture that follows the contours of the figure. This approach reflects Emokpae’s engagement with Benin carving traditions, while adopting a streamlined, modernist reduction of form that places focus on silhouette, structure, and the presence of the figure in space.

Ben Enwonwu (1917–1994) worked across sculpture and painting during the colonial, independence, and post-independence periods, forming a modernist language that engaged Nigerian cultural identity within a global artistic context. *Female Form II* (undated) is carved from ebony with elongated proportions, simplified facial features, and smoothed surfaces that are characteristic of his minimalist sculptural approach. In *Dance of the River (YOWUBA)* (1980), three figures are depicted in rhythmic motion. The work belongs to Enwonwu’s extended series on African dance, exploring the human figure in motion and communal performance.

Modupeola Fadugba (b. 1985) examines the cultural significance of the Ojude Oba Festival, a celebration of Yoruba heritage that reflects deep communal ties and pride. The festival honors the powerful bond between the Monarch and his people in Ijebuland, symbolizing identity, unity, and collective purpose. Her recent works focus on the everyday labor and intimate acts of preparation that underlie the festival, foregrounding the skilled hands and local craft traditions behind its pageantry.

In *Coke and Singer* (2025), a seamstress leans over her Singer machine; beside her, a Coca-Cola bottle glints in the same light. Floral fabrics and striped aso-oke fold Western consumer signifiers into a distinctly local scene, showing how relaxation and industry cross cultures. The scorched surface reads as residue of making: not damage, but evidence of process. The beaded fringe is a quiet applause for the hands that stitch and rest, for people who find joy inside discipline.

In *Benin Rider (Gold)* (2025), Fadugba reinterprets a historic Benin bronze, layering it against a gold field marked ground scarred by fire. Rendered in acrylic and metal leaf, the rider and horse carry the weight of history while also flickering into the present through the artist's hand. Beads frame the canvas in cascading arcs, invoking ceremonial adornment and the endurance of craft. As in her wider practice, Fadugba explores the tension between fragility and resilience: the scorched surface evokes erasure, while the delicate, painstaking beadwork insists on care, memory, and persistence. The fire itself holds a deeper resonance, integral to the traditional casting of Benin bronzes; it transforms raw material into enduring form. Fadugba retains this element not by melting brass, but by burning her canvas, fusing process with metaphor. The rider thus becomes not only a symbol of power, but also of survival, reframed through an aesthetic of both rupture and restoration.

Ayotunde Ojo (b. 1995, Lagos, Nigeria) focuses on everyday moments and the quiet dynamics of human relationships and interior life. Drawing from memory and the atmosphere of familiar domestic spaces, his paintings reflect how thought, distance, and connection take shape in ordinary settings. Ojo works with charcoal, oil, and acrylic, building soft, layered surfaces in a muted palette. He describes the works as self-portraits of experience, informed by encounters, environments, and the traces they leave over time. In *Just Resting My Eyes* (2025), a reclining figure momentarily surrenders to rest amid the quiet fatigue of a workday afternoon. The title evokes that delicate space between alertness and sleep, where the mind begins to wander. In *The Conversation* (2025), two figures share a quiet, charged moment across a domestic space. Between them, and unspoken tension lingers. The looseness of the paint, and the partial rendering of the dog, and the drifting edges of furniture all suggest the fragility of communication, the way words hang in the air before settling.

Ozioma Onuzulike (b. 1972, Nigeria) creates large-scale ceramic works, resembling tapestries, that are meticulously crafted from thousands of ceramic palm kernel beads and natural palm kernel shells. He explores the aesthetic and symbolic nature of clay-working, adopting a laborious process to achieve unique colors and textures in the clay, oxides, and glazes. Each ceramic undergoes bisque-firing and is dipped into ash glazes before being adorned with recycled glass. The pieces are woven with copper wire and allude to the West African textile traditions of Akwete, Aso Oke, and Kente. These beads mimic the visual lightness of precious stones or ivories and also carry a tangible weight, much like Africa's woven prestige textiles, dense with meaning, history, and identity.

Mixed Armour for Emir Sanusi (2025) extends Onuzulike's exploration of dress as a metaphor for power, protection, and identity. Named after the Emir of Kano, a figure whose intellectual authority and moral courage continue to provoke dialogue about tradition,

leadership, and reform in contemporary Nigeria, the work reimagines royal regalia as a sculptural emblem of power shaped through the language of clay. The piece combines ceramic chain mail with hundreds of lace-impressed ceramic buttons, woven together into a garment that evokes the intricate architecture of an Emir's turban and robe. Dyed in iron oxide engobe and fired at high temperature, the chain links acquire a metallic, timeworn sheen, an aesthetic that merges the sensibility of armour with the dignity of royal attire.

Kirikiri Star (2025) continues Onuzulike's exploration of how lace and textile aesthetics can be reimagined in clay to reflect on memory, identity, and transformation within African material culture. The work is composed of thousands of small, circular ceramic modules—each created by pressing lace fabric into plastic clay, cutting the impressed surface into button-like forms, and firing them to high temperature with a combination of locally compounded ash glazes and imported bright glazes from the United Kingdom. These luminous elements are laboriously woven together with bits of copper wire to form a large, flowing ceramic lace wrapper. Named after the popular waxprint fabric known among the Igbo as kirikiri star, a design pattern evoking a constellation of tiny stars, the work pays homage to women's wrappers as potent emblems of beauty, prestige, and cultural continuity in West Africa.

Araba Opoku (b. 1998, Ghana) creates abstract paintings through a fluid process that interlaces winding brushstrokes with geometric motifs, depicting escapist landscapes. Her practice explores the multiplicity of ecologies, those rooted in the body and psyche, as well as the natural, spiritual, and mystical realms. Through her layered compositions, Opoku evokes the entanglement of these tangible and intangible worlds, evoking the interconnectedness of existence. Vivid psychedelic hues ripple across the surface in undulating patterns and textures, suggesting organic and symbolic resonance. The canvas is encased in a warped, sculptural frame that mirrors the painting's internal fluidity, echoing her expansive approach to form. Drawing from material culture, Opoku considers how patterns, symbols, and sensory experiences can act as portals into concealed layers of meaning.

Ben Osaghae (1962–2017) was a central figure of the Nigerian post-modern figurative movement, celebrated for paintings that merge psychological depth with an abstract and gestural sensibility. Osaghae developed a distinctive visual language in which figures appear suspended and spatially disengaged, using rapid brushstrokes to suggest ambiguous outlines and narratives. In *Green Light* (2001), a lone figure shifts across a luminous ground, surrounded by floating forms. The composition suggests a moment of transition or threshold as a psychological state of passage. The painting distills Osaghae's enduring interest in how internal experience can be rendered through color, atmosphere, and the tension between abstraction and the human form.



ARTIST TALK

The Rebels and the Movement: In Conversation with Bruce Onobrakpeya, Jimoh Buraimoh, Muraina Oyelami, and Nike Davies-Okundaye

Saturday, November 8, 2025 | 4:45 PM | Art X Lagos

In conjunction with kó's exhibition, Osogbo, Art X Lagos presents "The Rebels and the Movement". This conversation revisits two landmark movements that redefined modern art in Nigeria-the Zaria Rebels and the Osogbo School. Emerging from the pre- and post-independence era, the Zaria artists sought a new aesthetic grounded in indigenous forms yet open to modern experimentation. The Osogbo School, which arose in the 1960s, cultivated a vibrant fusion of traditional Yoruba art and contemporary media. Together, their intersecting legacies continue to shape contemporary artistic practice, identity, and dialogue across generations.

About kó

kó is an art space 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.

www.ko-artspace.com