



PRESS RELEASE

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kó is pleased to present a three-part exhibition series, *The New Nsukka School*, featuring solo exhibitions by artists **Ngozi-Omeje Ezema**, **Eva Obodo**, and **Ozioma Onuzulike**, taking place January-April 2021. The first exhibition, *Ngozi-Omeje Ezema: Boundless Vases*, will take place January 28-February 11, 2021.

The Nsukka School is a term used to distinguish artists who have studied and taught at the Fine and Applied Arts Department at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in Southeastern Nigeria, and who share a critical engagement in both their visual and theoretical fields. The formal and aesthetic codes of the Nsukka school draw primarily from the art school's creative ideology which places emphasis on experimentation as a critical aspect of the creative process. An important center for art education in Nigeria, the experimental trajectory of the post-Civil War art department at Nsukka was spearheaded by Uche Okeke and Chike Aniakor in the early 1970s, and has subsequently been led by prominent artists including Obiora Udechukwu and El Anatsui. Historically, stylistic trends in the Nsukka school have largely been driven by the enriching influence of art teachers whose pedagogical footprints and artistic sensibilities have had a crystallizing effect on the Nsukka art school's stylistic identity. The Nsukka School is best known for the revival of Uli, an Igbo art tradition that was historically used for body art and wall murals, placing this visual language into contemporary art discourses.

As a descriptive label, the Nsukka School references a stylistic heritage whose formal and aesthetic codes draw from a creative ideology that is conceptually idealized, experimentally driven and intellectually grounded. Nsukka artists leverage this ideology in creating contemporary art through the exploration of ideas, materials and forms sourced from the environment. Many of these artists are known for a stylistic regime that critically engages with the materiality and metaphoric value of both natural and man-made objects. The core thesis of Nsukka school art centres on the use of indigenous knowledge to interrogate local and global spheres of art practice.

The New Nsukka School exhibition series re-examines the conceptual and aesthetic concerns of the Nsukka School through three contemporary artists, who all currently serve

as lecturers or professors in its art department. Although sharing commonalities in technical approaches and the use of commonplace materials, the differing formal language employed by these artists highlights how they each engage the potentialities and materiality of their chosen medium. In this context, actions like piercing, tying, stringing, suspending, perforating, cutting, firing, dyeing and roasting, among others, are used as metaphors that explicate the temporariness, permanence and liminality of the human condition.

The first exhibition features **Ngozi-Omeje Ezema**, lecturer of ceramics at University of Nigeria, Nsukka, January 28-February 11, 2021. Titled ***Boundless Vases***, this exhibition includes recent ceramic art installations that present the artist's ongoing exploration of the leaf motif as an expressive visual element rich in affective metaphors. Taking her personal experiences as a point of departure, her work addresses issues relating to identity, family and the female body. She often references the object of the vessel in various ways, taking inspiration from the forms and materials of the natural environment.

Ezema's suspended vases are infused with a social vision that interrogates the gendered landscape of her cultural milieu. In her works, the material properties of leaves are used as formal and narrative handles to address issues relating to womanhood. The burdens that women bear in relationships, their physical attributes as well as experiences that define their position in society are symbolically wrapped around the physical and functional attributes of a vase, as well as in the materiality of her clay medium. Using multiple strands of suspended fishing line, hundreds of perforated leaf motifs are strung together at predetermined levels and positions to simulate vases of different shapes and sizes. For the artist, the leaf motif represents a state of being; a transient element whose materiality symbolically dramatizes rites of passage and its associated conditions of liminality.

As the artist explains, **“The leaf represents aspects of tenderness in women that is often taken for granted. The leaf is equally suggestive of the long suffering that women undergo in relationships. When you look at the colour of the leaves in my work, they give the impression that the leaves have dried, yet they still retain their beauty”**.



In its congregated and suspended state, the leaf motifs act as both the messenger and the message. They not only simulate forms, they also disrupt, define and activate spaces. Ezema's installations can quickly shift from a state of stasis to that of dynamic movement. In contemplating her suspended vases, our experience and understanding of what a vase is and the function it performs are radically subverted. Ideas relating to motherhood, subjugation, oppression, indifference, conflict, resilience, resistance, togetherness and freedom are framed using a formal language that is as sensuous as it is evocative.

Ngozi-Omeje Ezema trained as a ceramic artist at the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. In 2009, the same year she completed her Master of Fine Arts (MFA) programme in ceramics, she was offered a teaching appointment at the Nsukka art department. For the past decade, she has combined art teaching with a vibrant studio practice. Ezema's training at the Nsukka art department strongly impacted her artistic development. Her exposure to the culture of experimentation and exploration which drive the creative philosophy of the Nsukka art department opened up her mind to the possibilities of creating art using unconventional methods and commonplace materials. Ngozi-Omeje Ezema represents the new generation of contemporary Nigerian ceramists who infuse modernist sensibilities into an age-old traditional art form, radically challenging long-established notions that locate ceramics within the limiting frame of its utilitarian function.

The second show in the exhibition series will feature **Eva Obodo**, Senior Lecturer in sculpture at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, taking place February 25-March 11, 2021. The third exhibition presents **Ozioma Onuzulike**, Professor of Ceramics and Art History, taking place March 25-April 8, 2021. The exhibition series includes a three-volume catalogue, with texts and critical analysis by **Dr. George Odoh**, Senior Lecturer in painting and drawing at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

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. For more information, please email us at info@ko-artspace.com, or visit our website at www.ko-artspace.com.



ABOUT NGOZI-OMEJE EZEMA

Ngozi-Omeje Ezema received her BA in Fine and Applied Arts from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and an MFA in ceramics from the same institution. She currently serves as a lecturer at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, where she teaches ceramics.

Her first solo exhibition, *Connecting Deep*, was held at Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA) Lagos in 2018. She also participated in the First International Biennale in Centra China and *Le Pinceau De L'Integration* in Senegal, during the Dakar Biennale in 2016. She was commissioned for a special project installation at Art X Lagos in 2016. In 2019, she won the High Excellence Award at the Cheongju International Craft Biennale in South Korea.

Ngozi-Omeje Ezema has participated in artist residencies with the Centre for Contemporary Art/ Trianglar Art Trust (Lagos), Goethe-Institut Nigeria (Nsukka), Sevshoon Art Centre (Seattle), Goethe Institute Ghana (Kumasi), and the Trianglar Art Trust (Jos). Her project, *Against All Odds*, won the Outstanding Concept Award of Nigeria's National Art Competition in 2015. In 2014, she was the winner of the Life in My City Art Foundation Prize. Ezema lives and works in Nsukka, Nigeria.