



PRESS RELEASE

23 March 2021

kó is pleased to present a solo exhibition of **Ozioma Onuzulike**, titled *The Way We Are*, taking place 29 March-22 April 2021. This exhibition is the final chapter of the three-part series, *The New Nsukka School*, which re-examines the conceptual and material practices that characterise the art department at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Ozioma Onuzulike is a ceramics artist, poet and historian of African art and design whose studio work has largely focused on the historical and sociological roots of the political and socio-economic turmoil in Africa and their debilitating effects on daily living on the continent. He often explores the aesthetic, symbolic and metaphorical nature of clay (his basic material) and the clay-working processes – pounding, crushing, hammering, wedging, grinding, cutting, pinching, punching, perforating, burning, firing – in his making of the multiple units that characterise his mixed-media projects.

His recent work has been inspired by the aesthetic and conceptual force held by such natural resources as 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 burning socio-political and environmental issues (such as reckless politics, bad governance, imperialism, terrorism and climate change) and their effects on the human condition in Africa and beyond.

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 *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.

His most recent project, the *Honeycombs* series, speaks to our current state of emergency due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Onuzulike suggests similarities between bee houses and quarantine houses/isolation centres and intensive care units. The *Honeycombs* series alludes to the fragility of life while also the resilience of the collective community.



Born 1972 in Achi, Enugu State, Nigeria, Onuzulike graduated First Class from the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, where he is currently Head of Department and professor of ceramic art and African art and design history. 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. His works have been included in the forthcoming exhibition at the Museum of Archeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge, UK, arising from the *[Re:]Entanglements* Research Project led by Professor Paul Basu. 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 prestigious Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Maine, USA. This is his eleventh solo exhibition.

ABOUT THE NEW NSUKKA SCHOOL EXHIBITION SERIES

The Nsukka School is term used to distinguish artists who have studied and/or 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. 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. 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 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. 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.