



## ***New Directions***

March 30-April 27, 2024

**Chinedu Chidebe**  
**Emmanuel Chineye Ifoegbuike**  
**Nduka Ikechukwu**  
**Samuel Nnorom**  
**Ibekwe Joseph Obochi**  
**Odinakachi Okoroafor**  
**Sabastine Ugwuoke**  
Curated by **Ugonna Ibekwe**

kó is pleased to present ***New Directions***, a group exhibition that brings together seven contemporary artists emerging from the renowned Nsukka School at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, including **Chinedu Chidebe, Emmanuel Chineye Ifoegbuike, Nduka Ikechukwu, Samuel Nnorom, Ibekwe Joseph Obochi, Odinakachi Okoroafor, and Sabastine Ugwuoke.**

These artists represent innovative approaches to addressing global phenomena through a diverse range of mediums and artistic forms. They employ experimental processes to reimagine natural and found materials in symbolic ways, drawing inspiration from the Nsukka School's embrace of *Igwebuike* art ideologies and the Igbo belief in the strength of community and multitude. Curated by Ugonna Ibekwe, this exhibition celebrates a new generation carrying forward the influential "Nsukka School" artistic philosophy while forging innovative paths in contemporary and conceptual art.

The term "Nsukka School" emerged as an artistic movement founded on the teachings of Uche Okeke, who advocated for a "natural synthesis" fusing Nigerian indigenous art traditions like *uli* body painting with modern techniques. Earlier Nsukka artists like Obiora Udechukwu experimented with *uli* forms, expanding it from abstract and pictorial storytelling. El Anatsui carved out a new idiom known as the *Igwebuike*, meaning "unity is strength." This concept resonates within the artistic practice of students of the Nsukka School in the transformative potential of their chosen materials. Individually, these materials may not amount to a work of art, but through various artistic techniques, they coalesce into a unified whole, imbued with communal and metaphorical significance.

The artists in this exhibition transform humble, everyday materials into striking visual poetry through meticulous processes of binding, stitching, and assembling. Disparate elements coalesce, transcending their individual forms to convey powerful themes around identity, community, and the human condition. The exhibition reveals the vast creative possibilities when diverse visual languages unite under a shared artistic vision, exemplifying the continued vitality of the Nsukka School as a global force propelling Nigerian contemporary art into new, boundary-pushing directions.

**Samuel Nnorom** (b.1990, Jos North, Nigeria) creates tapestry-like sculptures that incorporate recycled scraps of Ankara wax fabric. Employing a process of sewing, tying, and cutting, he forms constellations of meticulously-stitched foam balls. Nnorom's inspiration stems from childhood

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memories spent playing with scraps found in his father's shoe shop and his mother's tailoring shop. By amassing fabrics into dense, interwoven forms, Nnorom evokes the metaphor of the "fabric of society." He is intrigued by the symbolism of Ankara textiles, whose origins hold complexity within the continent's history. His fabric-covered balls serve as a sociological reflection on the human condition, symbolizing the individual's symbiotic place within the collective community.

**Sabastine Ugwuoke** (b. 1975, Umachi Enugu-Ezike, Nigeria) forms wall sculptures using repurposed aluminum printing plates, aluminum cans, and rubber soles. His artworks manifest abstract forms as the materials flow and take on variable shapes, resembling fabric-like tapestries. Ugwuoke delves into the concept of duality and its pervasive influence on life, as evidenced in his experimentation with discarded materials transformed into expressive forms. Drawing inspiration from the Igbo expression *Ogodo mkpuchi oto*, which translates to "wrapping cloth that covers nakedness," Ugwuoke metaphorically links his artworks to both personal and social identities.

**Chinedu Chidebe** (b. 1998, Onitsha, Nigeria) derives inspiration from architectural principles to explore the complexities of the human mind. Influenced by cubism, his work conceptualizes the mind as a network of shapes, lines, and colors, presenting ephemeral thoughts, emotions, and dreams. This exploration delves into the interplay between internal processes and external experiences, bridging the gap between the physical and metaphysical realms. Employing bold geometric forms, Chidebe intricately maps the terrain of our inner consciousness.

**Nduka Ikechukwu** (b. 1997, Uke, Nigeria) creates sculptures that incorporate industrial strap belts woven and sewn together into abstract forms. Ikechukwu is interested in the symbolism of the strength and functionality of these straps, drawing connections to the Igbo apprenticeship system and chieftaincy titles as markers of progress in Igbo society. The multi-functionality of straps for tying, lifting, and dragging objects speaks to the concept of *akụ lụọ ụnọ*, reflecting the Igbo people's drive for expansion and success. The sewn gyri-like lines and weaving techniques utilized in Ikechukwu's work symbolize the Igbo tradition of business knowledge and craftsmanship.

**Odinakachi Okoroafor** (b. 1987, Isuochi, Nigeria), the sole figurative artist featured in the exhibition, directs attention not only to individual figures but also on the elemental nuances of specific communities. Objects such as ferns and flowers depicted in the background allude to their interconnectedness in nature, highlighting their mutual dependence. References to barcodes serve as a metaphor for the digital organization of information, emphasizing how lines acquire meaning within structured frameworks. Analogous to scars—both physical and symbolic—the automated barcode lines confront the complex histories of the body as a commodity, spanning from historical contexts to present-day realities.

**Joseph Ibekwe Obochi** (b. 1989, Nsukka, Nigeria) shapes ceramic slabs that conceptually suggest human forms without direct representation of natural elements. Through manipulation of the clay while still in its leather-hard state, Obochi configures the visual body language of his thoughts.

**Emmanuel Chinenye Ifoegbuike** (b. 1981, Afikpo, Nigeria) creates fabric sculptures that symbolize the cyclical nature of African politics, employing a repetitive circular motif. His work



explores themes of cycles, order, and disorder, offering metaphors for the twist and turns of leadership on the continent and the perpetual recurrence of certain archetypal characters in positions of power.

The **Opening Reception** will take place Saturday, March 30, 2024, 12-6 PM. A **Curator Talk** with Ugonna Ibekwe will take place on Saturday, March 30, 2024, at 3 PM.

### **ABOUT THE CURATOR**

**Ugonna Ibekwe** is an art historian trained at the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria. As a curator, his interests border on the representation of emerging artists. Ugonna is currently the visionary of the "10 for 10 Art Society" and a volunteer international member and leader of the "World Organization of the Scout Movement." Ugonna served his internship in art history at the Anvil Studio extension where he benefited from the mentorship of Professor Ozioma Onuzulike, acquiring concerted knowledge in African and contemporary art. He is currently the supervisor for Anvil's art history section at UNN.

### **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.