



## PRESS RELEASE

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kó is pleased to present a solo exhibition by **Yadichinma Ukoha-Kalu**, titled *Saffron in the Desert*, 19 November-3 December 2020.

This new body of work was initiated during the artist's residency in Dubai earlier this year, as kó's representative for Art Dubai's 2020 artist residency programme. While her residency in Dubai was cut short due to the global lockdown, Yadichinma has further developed the project for this solo exhibition.

Yadichinma Ukoha-Kalu's artistic practice centers on explorations of line, form and boundary, which she expresses through a variety of media including painting, drawing, sculpture, and film. She often creates landscapes on paper made with combinations of abstract elements and textures. Influenced broadly by a mix of artistic movements, Yadichinma uses research and documentation of everyday life to instruct her work, resulting in exploratory experiences taking place in real and imagined spaces. Her work exposes the skeletal process of creating, where the audience is invited to witness and explore the themes of discovery and change.

*Saffron In The Desert* uses saffron spice as a metaphor for psychological healing and hope. During her residency in Dubai, Yadichinma explored the Diera market and was drawn to the ubiquity of saffron spices, which she used as inspiration and as a material. Saffron ranks as the most expensive spice in the world and is fondly called "the gold of spices". Exploring the indomitable quality of its golden-yellow essence, Yadichinma uses this raw material to apply to her paintings of landscapes and environments. Yadichinma uses the analogy of this pigment to examine the relationship between gold and the "golden moment of opportunity", the opportunity we have to turn the seemingly barren spaces of our minds into regenerative spaces. Through this process, she begins to allow herself to fill these spaces with her own imagined beings and objects, reflecting on the private space of human emotions.

Yadichinma experiments with a variety of materials, including saffron, spray paint, watercolour, transparency paper, and canvas, alongside sculptures made of Plaster of Paris and a plexiglass installation that was laser-cut at the Tashkeel Studios during her

residency in Dubai. These plastic shapes served as stencils that are used in many of her paintings. Yadichinma uses color as a guiding framework to represent her emotional states. As a form of therapy, the dominant colors of red, yellow and black could suggest burning, fire and rage. Her use of tracing paper further alludes to the fragility of the present.

Alongside the materiality of saffron, Yadichinma creates an indecipherable alphabet that is used as a reoccurring motif within the series. Yadichinma highlights the commonalities with drawing and language, creating a system of pictorial signs that are put together as scrolls of text. She refers to these elusive texts as “epitaphs”, a symbol of loss, memorialization, and transiency.

In *Mercury in the Ninth House*, Yadichinma draws a self-portrait, its title referencing her astrology signs. The Venus-like figure is depicted in a conventional sculptural pose, floating and illuminated with a saffron-orange hue, possessing an aura of power. In the series of sculptures titled *Emotional Landscapes*, Yadichinma depicts amorphous shapes that suggest an abandoned archaeological relic, a reminder of the cyclical processes of time and renewal. Yadichinma explains: “A desert can so easily offer qualities of barrenness and hopelessness, but also respite, if one looks hard enough.”

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Yadichinma Ukoha-Kalu (b. 1995) is an experimental artist and graphic designer based in Lagos, Nigeria. A self-taught artist, her solo exhibition, *BIG 60, Crossing borders*, took place at A Whitespace Creative Agency in Lagos in 2013. In 2017, Stevenson Cape Town presented *A painting today*, her maiden group show in South Africa. Group exhibitions include *Artyrama Pop Up Show* in Lagos (2017); Prizm Art Fair, Miami (2017); Intense Art Magazine Launch at Alara Lagos (2017); Art X Lagos, Stevenson Gallery booth (2017); *Mckinsey meets Art*, Mckinsey Lagos (2017); *Opening Shadows* at WAFFLESNCREAM Lagos (2017); EHN, Art X Lagos (2016); *Philosopher’s Muse*, Lagos (2016); *The Young Contemporaries* at Rele Gallery in Lagos (2016), and *Woman In Bloom*, Freedom Park Lagos in 2015. Yadi was nominated for the Orisha Prize, Gallerie Appartment, Paris (2017) and the Swiss Vontobel (A New Gaze) Photography Prize (2018). In 2020, she participated in the Art Dubai Residency Programme. Yadichinma was commissioned by the African Artists Development Fund in 2018 to create “GrowBox”, which was later shown at the Zeitz MOCAA in South Africa. In 2019, Yadichinma became a finalist for the ART X Prize at the Art X Lagos Art Fair.



## **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.

For more information, please email us at [info@ko-artspace.com](mailto:info@ko-artspace.com), or visit our website at [www.ko-artspace.com](http://www.ko-artspace.com).