

PRESS RELEASE

Lagos, Nigeria



(L) Ozioma Onuzulike, *Royal Babariga*, 2022, Stoneware clay bodies, recycled glasses, and copper wire (15,875 ceramic palm kernel shell beads), 124 x 120 x 8 in.

(R) Nnenna Okore, *Seeking, Finding, Giving*, 2018, Cheescloth, jute string and wire, 49 x 32 x 12 in.

Nigeria's kó gallery debuts at The Armory Show, New York, presenting artists Nnenna Okore and Ozioma Onuzulike from the prestigious Nsukka school.

kó is pleased to announce its participation in the *Focus* Section of The Armory Show, New York, September 9 – 11, 2022: a curated section dedicated to solo and dual artist presentations that examine the intersectionality of issues surrounding the environment within South-South ecologies, focusing on personal and political climates as they interact with race and gender.

Ozioma Onuzulike and **Nnenna Okore** hail from Nigeria's prestigious Nsukka school, an experimental art department at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, known for its focus on conceptual and material processes. 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, and who share a critical engagement in both their visual and theoretical fields.



An important center for art education in Nigeria, the art department at Nsukka has been spearheaded by luminaries such as Nigerian modernists Uche Okeke and Chike Aniakor in the early 1970s, and has subsequently been led by pioneering artists including Obiora Udechukwu and El Anatsui, stressing the exploration of ideas, materials and forms sourced from the environment. 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. 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 centers on the use of indigenous knowledge to interrogate local and global spheres of art practice.

In 2021, kó organized a three-part exhibition series titled *The New Nsukka School*, which re-examined its conceptual and material practices through a contemporary lens. This presentation at The Armory Show furthers the gallery's exploration into the rich artistic trajectory of the Nsukka School's contemporary practices.

Nnenna Okore, a graduate of Nsukka, creates sculptures and installations that combine natural and discarded materials to create abstract forms. Working with the processes of weaving, sewing, twisting and dying, her work is often inspired by the visual characteristics of Eastern Nigeria. Okore focuses on concepts of recycling, transformation and regeneration of forms based on observations from ecological and manmade environments. These biomorphic formations often examine her dual Nigerian and American identity. For The Armory Show, kó will present a selection of Okore's diverse practices including ceramic and burlap textiles and jute wall sculptures, as well as her newest body of work incorporating vinyl prints and bioplastics of densely-textured natural forms.

Ozioma Onuzulike, who currently serves as Professor of Ceramic Art and African Art and Design History, as well as Director of the Institute of African Studies at Nsukka, explores the aesthetic, symbolic and metaphorical nature of the clay-working processes – pounding, crushing, hammering, wedging, grinding, cutting, pinching, punching, perforating, burning, and firing. His recent work is inspired by 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. For The Armory Show, Onuzulike has created three new ceramic tapestries, made from thousands of ceramic palm kernel shell beads with glazed rims and glass inlays, in addition to natural palm kernel shells, terracotta, and copper rings. Adopting the laborious process of firing the materials through multiple kilns, each firing creates unique colors and textures in transforming the clay, oxides, glazes and recycled glass. The natural palm kernel shells were found abandoned under the palm trees after fruit harvests, which have become dried and hollow over a long period of time. Onuzulike's works examine Africa's history and are metaphors for socio-environmental turmoil. The beads and palm kernel shells reference the slave trade and their association with high social status, and the titles and forms allude to traditional African dress associated with royalty and opulence.



Notes to Editors

kó is an art gallery 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. In addition to its annual exhibition program in Lagos, kó participates regularly in international art fairs. In 2020, kó participated in Frieze Masters London presenting the work of pioneering Nigerian modernist Ben Enwonwu. In 2021, kó presented Nigerian artist Obiora Udechukwu at Frieze Masters London, where four artworks were acquired by the Tate, and Untitled Art Fair in Miami. In 2022, kó participated at 1:54 Paris and will exhibit at Frieze Masters London featuring pioneering Nigerian artist Nike Davies-Okundaye, Frieze Sculpture featuring contemporary artist Peju Alatise, Abu Dhabi Art, and Art X Lagos. kó has also showcased the work of several emerging African and Diasporan artists, many of whom participated in artist residencies with the gallery in Lagos.

ABOUT NNENA OKORE

Nnenna Okore was born in Australia, raised in Nigeria, and works between the United States and Nigeria. Okore spent most of her childhood in Nsukka, where her parents worked as academics at the university. Throughout her career, she has focused on ecological issues steeped in artistic practice, learning, and social engagements. Okore has been involved in numerous participatory art projects and exhibitions designed to produce dialogue, art-making, and an awareness of current environmental issues. In her most recent art project, she uses bioplastic made from food waste and environmentally friendly materials to create new works of art. Okore, who is passionate about generating dialogue on environmental issues, is involved in numerous collaborative environmental projects across Nigeria, Australia, and the United States.

Nnenna Okore is a Professor at Chicago's North Park University. She earned her B.A degree from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (First Class Honors) in 1999, and her MA and MFA at the University of Iowa, in 2004 and 2005 respectively. Okore is a recipient of the Fulbright Scholar Award in 2012. Her works were featured in important exhibitions at the Museum of Art and Design, New York; Tang Museum of Art, Skidmore College, NY; Museum of Contemporary African Diasporic Art, New York; Spelman Museum of Fine Art, Atlanta; Museu Afro Brasil, Sao Paulo, Brazil; Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Memphis and Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art, NY, and Musée des Civilizations Noires, Dakar, Senegal. Okore's iconic work *And the World Keeps Turning* was exhibited at the Brugge Triennial in 2021. She also recently participated in the *Stoa169 Columned Hall* exhibition in Polling, Germany, and the exhibition *Invincible Hands* at the Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art, Lagos.

ABOUT OZIOMA ONUZULIKE

Ozioma Onuzulike is a ceramic 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 characterize 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.

Onuzulike is Professor of Ceramic Art and African Art and Design History, as well as Director, Institute of African Studies, at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. 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 were included in the recently concluded exhibition, *[Re:]Entanglements: Colonial Collections in Decolonial Times* at the Museum of Archeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge. kó presented Onuzulike's second solo exhibition, *The Way We Are*, in 2021. His work is in the permanent collection of the Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art, Lagos.