

expansion of
time







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AN ART EXHIBITION FEATURING WORKS BY

WURA - NATASHA OGUNJI
RAOUL OLAWALE DA SILVA

CURATED BY SANDRA MBANEFO OBIAGO



FEBRUARY 25 - APRIL 28, 2017

TEMPLE MUSE
LAGOS, NIGERIA



Levitare by Wura-Natasha Ogunji, 61 x 61 cm, thread, ink, graphite on trace paper, 2017

“ W E A R E A L W A Y S L A T E
B U T A R R I V E W H E N
E X P E C T E D . ”

W U R A - N A T A S H A O G U N J I



CURATORIAL INTRO

Welcome to *Expansion of Time*, an exhibition of works by two unique and yet deeply synergistic artists, Wura-Natasha Ogunji and Raoul Olawale da Silva.

From the time I first set eyes on their works a few years ago, I was totally fascinated and engrossed by the sheer power of Raoul's large abstract paintings, and the philosophical, exquisitely drawn and stitched narratives of Wura's characters being propelled by colorful and metallic light beams. The thought of presenting their works on the same platform is exciting, in its dynamic contradiction and engagement between intentional precision vis-à-vis exploratory improvisation.

Expansion of Time is a phrase which I believe encapsulates the very essence of both artists' work. They project their creative voices by exploring different aspects of time, memory, and experience in works, which draw on a diverse and rich ethnic lineage. Their work comes from the boundless and often chaotic energy that keeps expanding against the push of modernity vis-à-vis the pull of developing world inequities.

Aside from being creative adventurers, both artists are age-mates and athletes who are inspired by the natural world; Wura through her running and Raoul through his surfing, skate-boarding and martial arts. Both artists have explored painting, performance, and video from multi-cultural perspectives (European, North American and African) while they referenced and textured their creativity through a rich Nigerian heritage. They are artists moving between multiple worlds while living in Lagos, an over-populated city full of vibrant contradictions.

Expansion of Time tells their story, from the outside looking in: two creative souls exploring, seeking, sometimes even battling, to come to terms with cultural anomalies and political incongruity – always attempting to rise above the clutter, constant hum, noise, and over-saturated “Eko-for-Show”. They invite us into a timeless space which expands beyond location and borders (both physical and psychological) in which they are able to transcend and improvise, “levitate”, “walk on water”, and “feel the sun”.

Wura's detailed drawings and intricately stitched lines and color streaks dazzle and dance across thin architectural tracing paper, powerfully placed on planes in which the void spaces and visual pauses are as important as the human figures which appear to be propelled by energetic streams of color. Her fascination with “revelation through light streams” dates back to her student days developing photographs in dark rooms, and being fascinated by the almost magical appearance of images finding their life through light striking photographic paper. She uses cultural iconography, depicted through familiar Ife bronze sculptures, to emanate energy and connect our history with present day reality. These symbols are intricately linked through lotus flowers and long solitary plant stems, curling across multiple paintings, seemingly connecting individual and collective experience and ecosystems.

On the other hand, Raoul's full, bold, large, powerful and fluid strokes driving across abstract worlds, reveal ancient symbols, patterns, repetitions, and speak a strong visual language which has global resonance and also echoes a strong African sensibility. His large canvases and eclectic installation of worn out skateboards which he has painted in monochrome and installed across a wall, point to a conceptual race on a creative and dynamic vehicle which gives him the momentum to fly across space, much like Wura's two dimensional characters.

Feel the Sun (detail) by Wura-Natasha Ogunji,
61 x 61 cm, thread, ink, graphite on trace paper

Both artists' works appear to invite us on a journey through time as we draw connections between past and present, consciousness and dream like levitation. We are beckoned by Wura's colorful projections and teased through Raoul's exploration, his impulsive and improvisational strokes with paint and coffee, and sand, expressing reflexive discernment.

Wura's purposeful, clearly defined, two dimensional characters, always in motion, adorned in familiar African patterns, are perfectly juxtaposed against the seemingly random, intuitive lines in Raoul's work. Here and there Raoul reveals fleeting familiar symbols, forms and expressions which draw us into a complex, often tense migratory color fragments.

Raoul's vibrant orchestra of color and energy is perfectly juxtaposed against Wura's stylized, clean, purposeful planes of intention and perfected narrative. Her fascinating titles provide insight into her positive philosophy which beckons us to "move from the tragic to activate the impossible". Her works titled "catch your breath", "feel the sun", "you must learn to walk on water" and, "levitate", distill and expand conversations from "geographic, architectural and filmic space, " to provide guidance on embracing a state of balanced "being".

Raoul on the other hand, insists that we define our own meaning from his sometimes frenzied, color drenched and intricate renderings. Against Ogunji's generous space and pace, we flow naturally into da Silva's layered, complex reality, inspired by his regular solitary interaction with the elements of earth, water, and air. Wura engages and draws us in, while Raoul steps back and insists we let our imagination find our own clues.

I am sure that *Expansion of Time* will whet your creative appetite to follow these great artists if you are new to their exciting and challenging work. I trust that their powerful art will equally entice emerging and established collectors to deepen their collections, while inspiring up and coming artists not to be afraid to be strikingly different, rather than staying on familiar and tested paths.

I would like to thank our amazing sponsor, UBS, the Swiss international bank, and our long standing partner, Moët Hennessey for their sterling and serious commitment to expanding and sustaining the growth of art in Lagos.

Sincere thanks to the families of our amazing artists, who have supported them over the years and encouraged them to tune in and "listen to the beat of a different drum". And of course, our deep appreciation to Wura and Raoul for sharing their phenomenal work and igniting and inspiring us to expand our vision of time, space and memory!

Sandra Mbanefo Obiako
Curator

Untitled (detail) by Raoul Olawale da Silva, oil on canvas 2014





Catch Your Breath by Wura-Natasha Ogunji, 61 x 61 cm, thread, ink, graphite on trace paper, 2016

EXISTENTIAL JOURNEYS OF WURA AND RAOUL

The works that Wura-Natasha Ogunji and Raoul da Silva present to us in this exhibition couldn't be farther from the shallow exoticism that still pervades large sectors of African contemporary art more than twenty five years since "*The magiciens de la terre*" (1989) and "*Africa explores*" (1991) exhibitions. Definitely, neither Wura nor Raoul's artistic practice is based on these tired clichés, on shifting artistic fashions or, much less, on the dictates and fads of the market. For Raoul, spontaneity, improvisation and the primacy of the gestural brushstrokes are central to his practice. In marked contrast, Wura's approach is more analytical and rational. But, both are giving us something that comes from inside.

Wura and Raoul's works are intensely personal, albeit strongly different. Wura was born in the USA and lived there till just a few years ago. Raoul lived his early years in Lagos but left the country at a very young age and did not settle back in Nigeria till also a few years ago. The fact that both of them have spent most of their lives outside Nigeria and both of them are of mixed parentage has made their artworks to be inextricably linked to their existential journeys. Their artistic itineraries have significant differences and this fact is reflected in their works. In them, it would seem as if Wura is trying to understand herself, while Raoul tries to express himself.

Wura's works are not loud. They don't shout at us, but they are works of unapologetic beauty and simplicity. Part of the reason why her small pieces on tracing paper work so well is the delicate, intimate, careful attention given to detail. She treats the fragile materials with respect and there is quality in each finished piece. The bright colour-rich inks on the translucent paper are subtle and restrained. The ordinary sewing thread becomes in her hands a metaphor of connections, of links, of relations, both physical and immaterial. The threadwork could have remained simply a craft, but it becomes much more.

In this exhibition, Wura presents a few works in which only geometric compositions can be seen. In their conceptualism, at first glance they appear as inexpressive, cold and detached, but it is the colour and, specially, the physical fragility of the medium that brings them to life. They stand out in way that the geometric constructions of Mondrian, for all their compositional perfection, are not able to achieve. The lines that delimit the coloured areas have always a focal point and, therefore, they indicate a direction. As a result, the surface of the pictorial plane on which they appear loses two-dimensionality and suggests three-dimensional space. The fact that the flimsy paper is affected by the ink pigments makes the flat, weak surface become slightly uneven and adds a new suggestive layer of complexity. The hardness and precision of the lines is balanced by the lightness of the paper. She explains: *I use tracing paper, the kind that architects use for preliminary drawings. I love the way the thread looks against it and the way the large sheets of paper move against the wall. It can appear fragile but it also has a weight to it. When I'm working on the drawings, especially when I'm sewing into the paper and because of its translucency, it feels quite filmic, as if I'm creating one cell of a filmstrip. We can talk about the meanings of the paper, but for me, it's about a simple love of the material.* This sentence offers perhaps a key to understand Wura's works: "a simple love of the material".

But there is more than materiality and geometric composition. The frequent presence of the "Ife head" is an iconic figure that recurs in her works. It brings with it associations of the past, of tradition, of roots, of identities. But even if it is just a tenuous thread or a few lines and colour bands emanating from it as rays, the "Ife Head" is a metaphor for a link, a line of communication between different, but interrelated realities. And all this, said with softness, in an understated way. This fragility is one of the main strengths of Wura's works on tracing paper.



Untitled by Raoul Olawale da Silva, 90cm x 127cm, mixed media, 2002, mixed media, paper

For years, there has been a recurrent concern in Wura's works about connections, communications and associations, particularly, the transatlantic bond between Africa and the American diaspora. Her work "*I brought you this*", in two pieces, with the Ife head on one, and a female figure in the other, both of them tied by a fragile bond of colour rays, exemplifies these concerns and successfully embodies these ideas into a physical form. Who brings what, to whom? In which direction is the communication? Does the "Ife head" –and all it represents– say something to the present, or is the direction of communication the other way, with the contemporary figure listening to what the past has to say?. Wura's works are ambiguously open. Can we take Wura's subtle references to history, memory, tradition and identity as an attempt to understand herself and help us understand ourselves in our specific cultural, temporal and geographic circumstances? There is no doubt, that her works question us.

Though not directly influenced by them, Raoul's works, with their forceful brushstrokes and the spontaneous approach to the painting process, have many features in common with the great German Neo-expressionist and gestural tradition of the second half of the 20th century: Gerhard Richter, Georg Baselitz, Anselm Kiefer, Jörg Immendorf, Markus Lupertz. Like most of these artists, Raoul looks inward for the sources of his works. Memories and instinct are important for him. The content, the subject matter, the communicative value of his works, generally matters less than the works themselves. The source of Raoul's inspiration is intensely personal. He is an artist working within an expressionist tradition and method: spontaneity, expression, improvisation and gestural action are important in his works.

The process of interaction with the pigments and the canvas is central to his way of painting. Each painting, each drawing, is "revelatory" of inner forces, desires and memories. As he says: *in my way of working, the intuitive and impulsive work together as well as against the rational, reflective and explorative side, which helps to bring that balance. In the moments of outbursts, pouring out, and coming from the feeling, it's having that trust and faith that all these memories, which are very abstract and not specific, but even just in the color choice comes from memories which I choose not to pinpoint or overanalyze.* Raoul's works develop from inside out. Their formal strength comes from within. That's why they are so unmistakably personal. To look at Raoul's works the spectator does not need to be distracted by a search for meaning, contextualization or conceptual justifications. These are works to be "enjoyed", rather than to be "comprehended".

His paintings oscillate from decidedly abstract compositions to those filled with expressive biomorphic references, but they seldom try to offer a window into the world as all the traditional western art did for centuries. They are self-referential. There is randomness in his "coffee" works, in which the unpredictability of the shapes is part of the process. For Raoul, the significance of the process is at the core of his works. His colours, lines, stains and forms cover the whole space. In contrast, Wura lets the delicate architectural drafting paper, of subdued yellow tint, take most of the pictorial space. Her figures, made of stitched lines and colour float in space while Raoul's works fill the space with an outpouring of gestures coming from within.

Different as these two artists are, there is a shared sincerity and genuineness in them. Their works offer a rare opportunity for us to experience art that goes beyond the merely retinal and decorative. They engage our senses, but they also engage our minds. In the commercialized atmosphere of the Lagos artworld this is not a small achievement. We are grateful for that.

WURA - NATASHA OGUNJI



Wura-Natasha Ogunji is a visual artist and performer. Her works include drawings, videos and public performances. With these practices she explores: physicality, endurance and gestures of the body as well as our relationship to memory, history and impossible moments in time. Her hand-stitched drawings, made on architectural trace paper, often reference the daily interactions and frequencies that occur in the city of Lagos. Ogunji's performances explore the presence of women in public space; these often include investigations of labor, leisure, freedom and frivolity. Ogunji's work has been exhibited at the Seattle Art Museum; Brooklyn Art Museum; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art and 1:54, London. She is a recipient of the prestigious Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship and has received grants from The Pollock-Krasner Foundation; The Dallas Museum of Art; and the Idea Fund. She has a BA from Stanford University [1992, Anthropology] and an MFA from San Jose State University [1998, Photography]. She lives in Nigeria and America.

My creative work extends between drawings, video and performance art. With these practices I explore: physicality, endurance and gestures of the body; our relationship to geographical, architectural and filmic space; memory, history and impossible moments in time. My drawings are comprised of hand-stitched figures on architectural trace paper; these often include shiny pearlescent inks as well. In my video practice I use my own body [painted with the striations of an Ife head] to create works in which I awkwardly fly across otherworldly expanses of land, or walk on water. Many of my performances highlight the relationship between the body and social power and presence; I am interested in how women, in particular, occupy space through both epic and ordinary actions. I have been deeply influenced by my experience of living between the United States and Nigeria, and more recently of residing in Lagos.



Love More by Wura-Natasha Ogunji, 61 x 61 cm, thread, ink, graphite on trace paper, 2016

For me this is a quintessentially futuristic city as the past feels forever embedded in the present, and the visibility of human physical labor and failed infrastructure exists in concert with all that is innovative and new. I often wonder if what makes this place a megacity isn't its population of over twenty million inhabitants, but rather the fact that the village endures in the city. It is not uncommon to see goats and horses walking unattended, or wild turkeys guarding their hens; and hundreds of white herons make their nests in trees along the property of the Exxon Mobil headquarters. There is the ever-present tension between the built environment and the natural habitat. Trees and other plants grow high above the city--through the cracks of abandoned buildings--causing vacant cement structures to be overtaken by new [old] ecosystems. The city is constantly flooding, even in the most posh neighborhoods, water remembers and returns. It can be impossible to sleep when the rains come and give birth to frogs and their incessant nocturnal audio tracks. It is also a place where the sound of birds can lovingly wake you up in the morning. I am fascinated by these contrasts and contradictions and the way they so eloquently bring the past and the future into direct proximity and conversation. While this is a society that reveres its elders and many aspects of tradition, it is also a nation that has little interest in preserving history, be that personal family documents, national artifacts or historical sites.



Shelter by Wura-Natasha Ogunji, 61 x 61 cm, thread, ink, graphite on trace paper, 2017

I have also begun to draw on both sides of the trace paper, making more direct use of its translucency; the paper itself serves as a kind of veil or curtain, maybe even a fragile wall between what is and what is possible.

On one of my first visits to the National Art Museum to see an exhibition of the Ife heads, I found that two of these regal bronzes lay irreverently, face against the glass in their museum cases. At the same time, a masked performer on the street can bring traffic to a standstill and cause people to clear the path, even run away in order to avoid direct confrontation with the spirit or ancestor in their presence.



Ife and Orchids by Wura-Natasha Ogunji, 61 x 61 cm, thread, ink, graphite on trace paper, 2016

The life head, as well, appears in much of my drawings. I often use this image to reaffirm the idea that history is always present and that we can also be our own monuments, markers, remembrances. With *Catch Your Breath* and *Feel the Sun* I begin to think about what is necessary to survive in the world, to find beauty, power, joy-- not as a kind of spiritual redemption or escape -- but as a lived and felt philosophy of life that perhaps shifts the world beyond the tragic to activate the impossible.

Wura - Natasha Ogunji



Catch Your Breath by Wura-Natasha Ogunji, 61 x 61 cm, thread, ink, graphite on trace paper, 2016

WHEN THINGS
ARE REALLY
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Feel the Sun by Wura-Natasha Ogunji, 61 x 61 cm,
thread, ink, graphite on trace paper, 2016.



YOU MUST LEARN TO WALK ON WATER



You must learn to walk on water by Wura-Natasha Ogunji, 61 x 61 cm, thread, ink, graphite on trace paper



I brought you this by Wura-Natasha Ogunji, 2017,
thread, graphite, ink on trace paper, diptych (30.5 x 30.5 cm each)



IN CONVERSATION WITH WURA-NATASHA OGUNJI

Sandra Mbanefo Obiagio: How did you start your artistic journey?

Wura-Natasha Ogunji: I took acting classes in high school, and then realized this is not for me. I even did some acting as an adult, and for a while I felt resentful. I thought that's not really my path at all; I don't really like actors, and being on stage all the time. Sometimes it's good to have a perspective experience, because it lets you know this is not my place.

SMO: I think when you look back all the dots connect. This probably helped you launch your performance art, and if you hadn't had that early drama training, you might not have had the confidence, skill, talent, or tools necessary to do performances.

WNO: Yeah. I love that feeling when you realize that things connect. I think it takes a while for that to happen. Then it's like oh, this connects to this, and this line is like the other line that I drew. It starts to have a momentum to it that I think only time allows. To see that our lives make sense, you have to trust that, but you don't really see it until hindsight.

SMO: Someone said to me that life is like being in a car. Your headlight only lights up what's right in front of you, and then the rest is darkness. You can actually see ahead, but only a small portion. However looking back, everything is daylight.

WNO: I had this question about amnesia that's actually related to social justice movements and the repetitiveness of revolution, as well as a frustration with this sort of constant struggle; thinking about how do you get out of that cycle. The world doesn't necessarily change - you have to change. Sometimes, I think it's good to say that's the way it was or is, but I'm making this other choice. I think geography can do that for you.

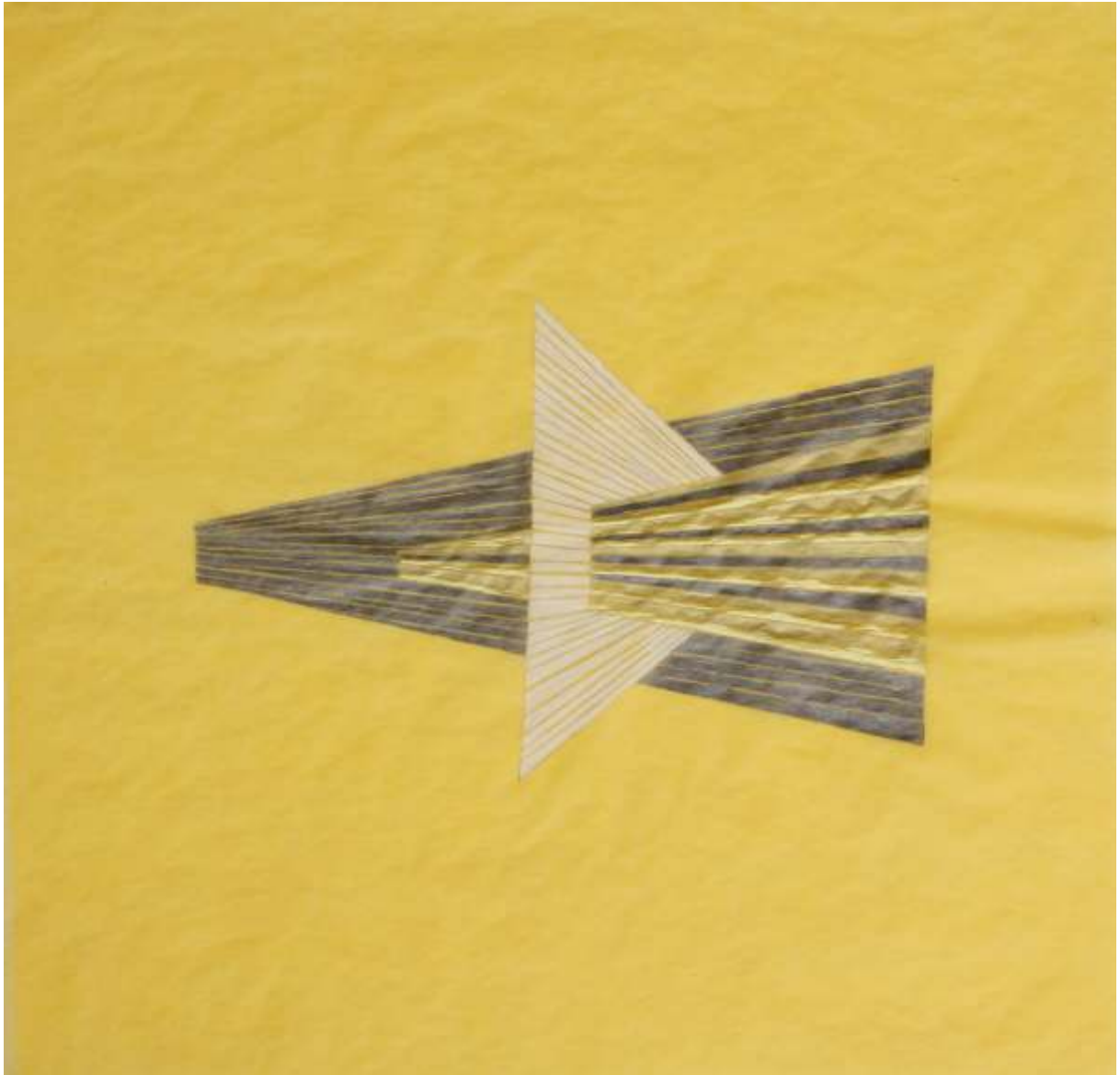
For me, coming to Nigeria was a break from the US, where I could be in a place that wasn't so racialized. When I tell that to my friends in the US, they don't know what I'm talking about. They fight me and say that there's racism all over the world. Well in some ways, but I don't think that's necessarily true. When you are in a place where race isn't your primary organizing mechanism or philosophy, you're operating from a totally different place.

SMO: You talk about history in your work, with the contradictions and yet it all fits together. The disparities, and yet somehow we live through them. Isn't that built up on an appreciation and an acceptance of what has come in the past.

WNO: Totally. I think there's kind of irreverence for the past as well. For me as an artist, in order to create something fresh, I have to completely disconnect from that past. At the same time, I acknowledge it, but I also have to say none of that matters right now. What is it I want to create, and if none of that happened, given the person that I am right now, where do I want my imagination to go? Rather than having it always be referential to specifics in my experience. I mean it always is, but I also try to allow in new information and thoughts.

SMO: And we see that with the Ife head. It's in your current space, but it's somehow connected. So speak to us a little bit about the use of these iconic symbols of African civilization. Where does it fit into the work that you're doing?

WNO: My obsession with the Ife head first came from a very aesthetic experience of just feeling like this is so beautiful. There is this one that I use a lot, I think a woman. Her face is so interesting because it's very beautiful and almost a little cold, as they kind of are, yet imperfect, which you realize when you draw. They are a little



Field Theory White by Wura-Natasha Ogunji, 2016, graphite, colored pencil on trace paper, 30

stylized, but they look like individuals, and have these ears that are often very exact and look realistic. I was very drawn to the beauty of this, and also the idea that they look like individuals. Thinking about time travel and my own cosmology and spirituality and religious systems, and this idea of reincarnation or return or if you believe in the significance of biology and ancestral family, I had these questions about are those souls returning to the world? All these questions about repetition and the reverberation of family, and then seeing these lfe heads and thinking about how do they come back and forth from history and time.

My first significant use of it was in videos where I'm asking, "Do the ancestors in Africa think about their descendants in America?" In the US, we are always looking to Africa and talking about ancestors, but are the people in Africa thinking about what happened to the descendants that left? I decided I wanted to make this lfe head, animate it and have it fly across the sea. From then on, I started using it. In a way I feel like I have a relationship to it, in the sense that it's in Nigeria and so I have a personal relationship to this history. I wouldn't necessarily use a mask from some other country; it wouldn't make sense to me. I continued to use it cause I think it's really beautiful and also there's humor in it, and it can also be a face that's not racialized - yet it's very black to me, and not necessarily gendered - you don't know if it's man or woman. I kind of like that.

SMO: Do you get inspiration from Greek mythology? There is quite a bit of that mythological connection between the gods. How they play with the humans by dipping in and out of our reality affecting things, and then they sitting up to watch what happens.

WNO: I like that a lot, but it's not something I think about. I would more so think about the Yoruba mythology. The orisha and how they take on characteristics of human forces. I like the idea of animating

an object, and the face becoming a person, and being able to do things as humans would in the narrative. Or thinking about can I make my face into an lfe head, and what would that look like?

SMO: When you look at this interplay of ancestry and connections between the old world and the new world -- as an artist who grew up in the "new world", and have now returned the "old world" -- speak to us about that experience, fitting in, and lessons learned in terms of art and life in general.

WNO: I think at first, being mixed/black in the US wasn't necessarily easy growing up. I had a different kind of relationship to Africa and Nigeria because I knew that my father was Nigerian and I had some information about him, even though I didn't grow up with him. Being mixed in that context and these seemingly conflicting things, I understand them as ways of living in a structured world. Because of my experience of being mixed and having these very different ways of interacting, I have this ability to see the truth in multiple things.

Before I came to Nigeria I did work that was really about the space of the Atlantic. Thinking about what that space meant in terms of memory and history. I thought a lot about what are our body's memories, ancestral memories, cellular memories. What knowledge do we carry with us even if we haven't been told? The sea is very prevalent in my work as either literally or as a structuring element in the work itself. I wouldn't have a landscape that's necessarily in the land, but it would be like the sea, or an empty space around the figure that to me feels very fluid or the expanse of the ocean.

I felt it was so great coming to Nigeria for the first time, because I felt very connected. But I didn't feel like it was some kind of redemption. I felt like the space *between* is really exciting because we share things across and the things we share are great because of present



Field Theory, Green by Wura-Natasha Ogunji, 2016, graphite, colored pencil on trace paper, 30



Field Theory, Red by Wura-Natasha Ogunji, 2016, graphite, colored pencil on trace paper, 30.5

exchange, not because of history or need to return to ancestors. Who I am in the world is affected by all these experiences, and I wouldn't be this person without them. My mom was very much about "go out and play, experience the world, create things". We were always making things. I have this very full memory of spending time alone in my backyard, with my friends, climbing trees, digging in the earth and making things. That's my life right now. I can make things and be alone. I'm not worried about fitting into some way of being.

SMO: So how does feminism reverberate through your work?

WNO: That's an interesting question. I tend not to talk about that in Nigeria because I find this society to be so loving and generous, and also incredibly sexist, misogynist and patriarchal. There are so many ways to understand feminism, but for me the basic (tenet) is men and women are equal. We should have equal access to the world. I think it has to do with voice and presence in the world, and being able to be present and take up space; whether you are talking, just being, or expressing an opinion in a manner where other people are acknowledging and listening. That is very much in my performance work, because it's about the presence of women in public space, and it really came out of seeing these inequities within a domestic setting and thinking about free time and the capacity to think and create that this free time gives us. I think in my drawings I tend to be more particular in drawing black people, but that's such a personal and solitary space, I guess you can say I just do whatever I want and I'm trying to get as free as possible in the drawings.

SMO: So you have this little girl in an Ankara dress and she's playing, with some light sparks on her feet, what's the significance of that work?

WNO: Oh you saw her as a child?! You *must learn to walk on water*. I made a few

pieces that are kind of instructions for being amazing in the world. Sometimes I feel you have to be really incredibly amazing and brilliant, or you just suck. We have to really push ourselves to that point. Thinking about the politics of the world, I made a lot of those pieces when there was a lot of shooting of black people in the US, but I really didn't want to stay in the headspace of the tragedy of that, so I was thinking about the power of transcending. This particular one, *You must learn to walk on water*, is really about being super human, which is unfortunate but true if you understand the power of it. You can jump over the limitations of so called reality. It allows us to see our powers as humans in the world, which I think is greater than we can imagine.

SMO: So when you say walk on water, one of the disciples walked on water towards Christ, is there any reference towards that?

WNO: No, I'm not a religious reference person. I know people might have that association, which is fine. It's about being super, extraordinary, and taking on extraordinary powers. Thinking about what it would be for you to walk on water; if you could do the equivalent of that, what would it look like? For me when I made the original *The Epic Crossings of An Ife Head*, these flying videos were about how would these ancestors get to America, well she could either walk on water or fly. Thinking about how to propel that, opened so much of my artistic life. There's another one called *Levitate*, and that's an instruction. Sometimes you just have to levitate.

SMO: What does levitate mean to you?

WNO: It's like when things are really awry, crazy, ridiculous, you just have to float up into the air and relax. That's what you have to do. Especially here. We see things here that are just bizarre, and you can't engage. You just have to take yourself totally out of that mental space, so that you can do what you need to do to make this world a better place.

SMO: *Catch Your Breath*, what's that about?

WNO: It's kind of about feeling the beauty of being alive, and stopping if you need to stop. There's also a reference to the murder in the US where the police suffocated Eric Garner. That was definitely in my consciousness. Also breath is very powerful in terms of how it propels us. I'm a runner so there's always this thing of wanting to go fast, but having to slow down, and the transformative power of that, how that can propel you. The amazing thing about it, is we don't have to think about it all; this happens without our interference.

SMO: You wrote a sentence which actually inspired the exhibition title – *we're always late, but arrive when expected*. That ties in to what you said – *we're always rushing so catch your breath, you will arrive at the right time*. That optimism of, *it will all be okay -- of I choose to be positive*.

WNO: There's something about choice, but also that if you really believe in something, then you have the power to shape things. That is really incredible and once you realize that, you can really shift your life in these incredible ways. I'm always interested in what happens on the page of a drawing, can I make a drawing and change something in the world? There's something about being able to create a world in a drawing that allows me to see the world in these other ways. I'm not a blind optimist, I just believe in the power of being responsible for our lives and for our own joy. The difference between a person who is doing a job they like and a person who is not, is a matter of choice. At some point, you have to decide. We can wait until things get really bad to decide, or we can decide because you realize it's not for you. It's about us.

NAI: Is this the same path from where *Follow the Sun* was birthed?

WNO: In *Follow the Sun*, I was thinking about a lot of things. When I was making the lines, I realized that the lines were similar to lines in some of my drawings I made 8 years ago, which I thought was so cool. You can do things, but you always come back to things that are yours. You might not see it right away, but there's something in there that is totally familiar and you see it in other drawings. I was also interested in the fact that she has this energy emanating and the orchids are following the sun, but they are coming from her and she's listening to them but they are following her. It's like you are your own sun. You don't have to go somewhere else for that, you are divine and beautiful, powerful, unique and connected and if you can follow that joy, it's this really beautiful cycle.

Nneoma Adaobi Ilogu: That's really powerful. So switching tracks a bit, and building on making powerful choices, could you tell us how your artist journey blossomed after school?

WNO: At Stanford I took a lot of photography classes, but was also teaching and making photographs. The way I make drawings is very photographic and filmic. For the bigger drawings, I trace elements, so there's this projection of light. I was thinking about how one of my favorite things to do in photography was when I'd make portraits and taking the negatives back (to the dark room), would develop them by inspection. This means you can actually look at it while the image is coming out on the negative; which is so amazing. It's light sensitive, but you have this little green light, which you put on for a few seconds. You see how much information you allow to come out on the negative, and when it gets to that perfect point, you stop the process. It's like being inside the camera and it's amazing to be in there. The projection on to the surface of the paper when I'm tracing is very similar to being in that light as it emerges on the page. My drawings are heavily influenced by my photography beginnings.



Field Theory, Carbon by Wura-Natasha Ogunji, 2016, graphite on trace paper, 30.5 x 30.5 cm

For a very long time, I taught and made work, a lot of photo based work. In graduate school I studied photography, but did a final performance and installation. That was my first performance art. From there I continued to do that, photography and some film. At some point I really wished I could draw, and decided to take a drawing class. It was so hard and exciting, and I loved it - it opened some things for me.

My sister had a shirt where she had stitched some words on, like a poem. I was so entranced by that stitching and I always loved thread. My mom sewed when we were younger, she tried to teach us, but we weren't really into it. I like sewing and I like threads and that's when I started sewing on paper.

I was going to travel and needed some paper that I could travel with that wasn't bulky or heavy. I was hiking in Austin with a friend and looking down saw this roll of architectural tracing paper, and thought it was so cool. I thought someone had dropped it and would be coming back for it, but my friend said to take it. I love stitching on it. How you have the weight of the stitch and the flatness of the paper that's like a sheet of film. The sound of it and the way it looks, it's not white, but is very neutral.

NAI: Does futuristic mean anything to you?

WNO: I think futuristic is how we imagine tomorrow to be. We speculate on it, it's not something known, but it's also full of possibility and wonder because it's an imaginative space. Because Lagos feels like an imaginative space, everyday I have a sense of actually being in that future place, because of all the contradictions. You can have people fighting on the streets, police banging on cars, you look up and there's a magnificent tree with bright magenta flowers on it. It's incredible.

NAI: How do you juggle performance art, drawing and making films; do you dedicate equal amounts of time to each art?

WNO: It just happens. If I have a particular question, it has to be expressed in a particular way. My performances are answering one kind of question, what does it mean to feel free in space as a woman here and how would that look. If something comes to me and it's filmic, then it will go on video - If the concept, aesthetic, or vision is in moving image. Drawing is really this space of being alone in the studio and making a world. It's something I just love and enjoy - It's totally an isolated space. I typically do whatever I feel drawn to do at the moment.

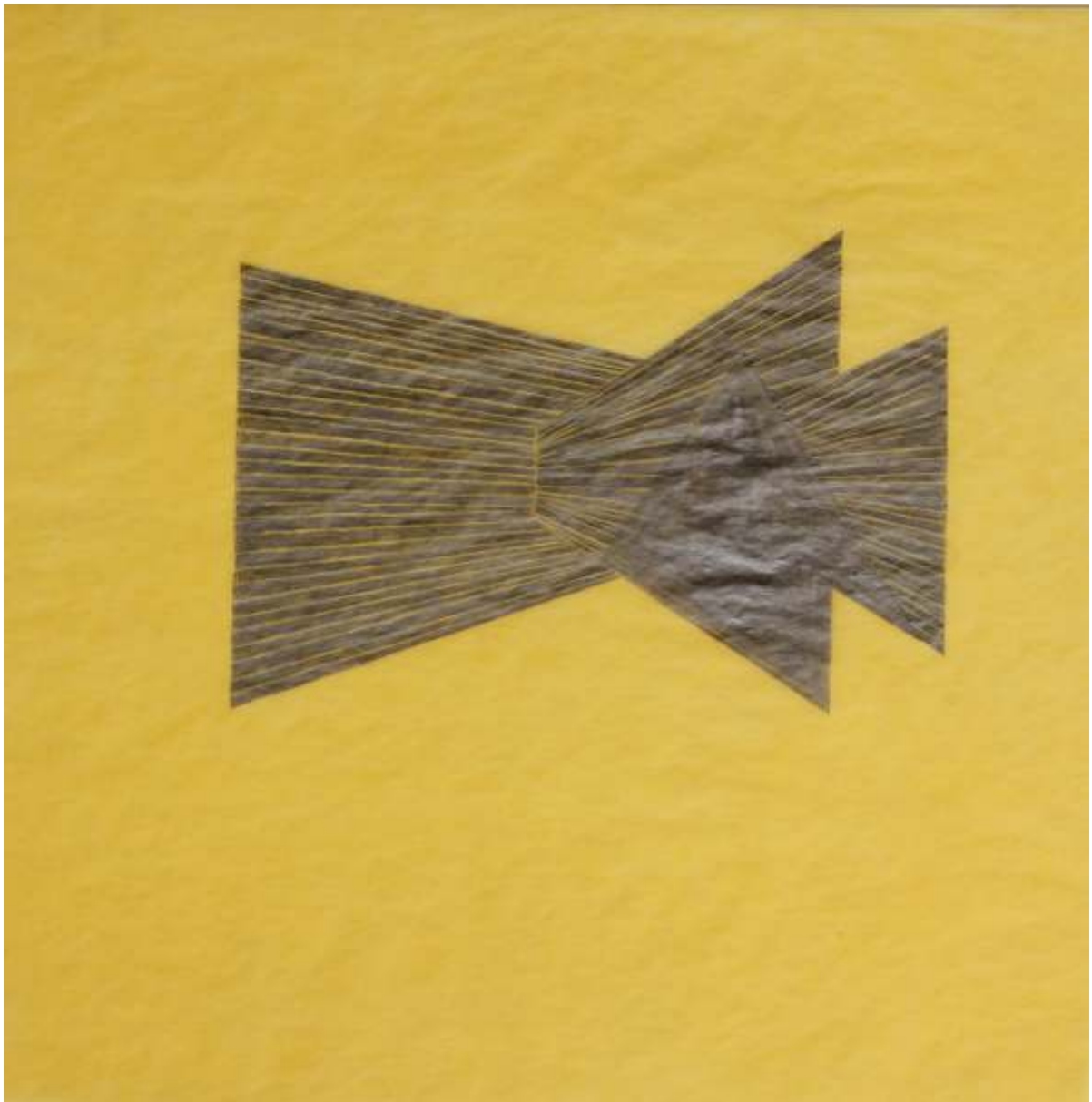
NAI: What narrative birthed this body of work?

WNO: Think they were all about being super human in a way, and what the gestures of that are. Not in a way that is a reaction to tragedy, but in a way that's about becoming the most fulfilled, and what that looks like.

NAI: As an artist who was in the diaspora and moved back, what would you say to artists in the diaspora who might be having the same thoughts?

WNO: I think changes in geography are really important for people because crossing the sea does something to our bodies. It changes us and gives us new perspectives. It's also important to arrive at a place with zero expectations, maybe only the expectation that it will be amazing. Lagos is not for everyone - it depends on the person.

SMO: You're so accomplished and incredibly centered. You've spoken about the guidelines to being a great person, what are the guidelines for being a great artist?

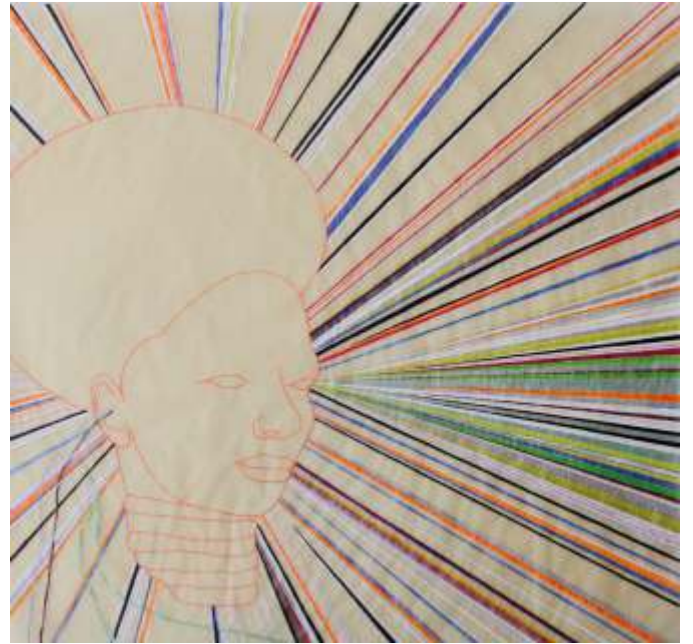


Field Theory, Disappearing, by Wura-Natasha Ogunji, graphite on trace paper, 30.5 x 30.5 cm, 2016,

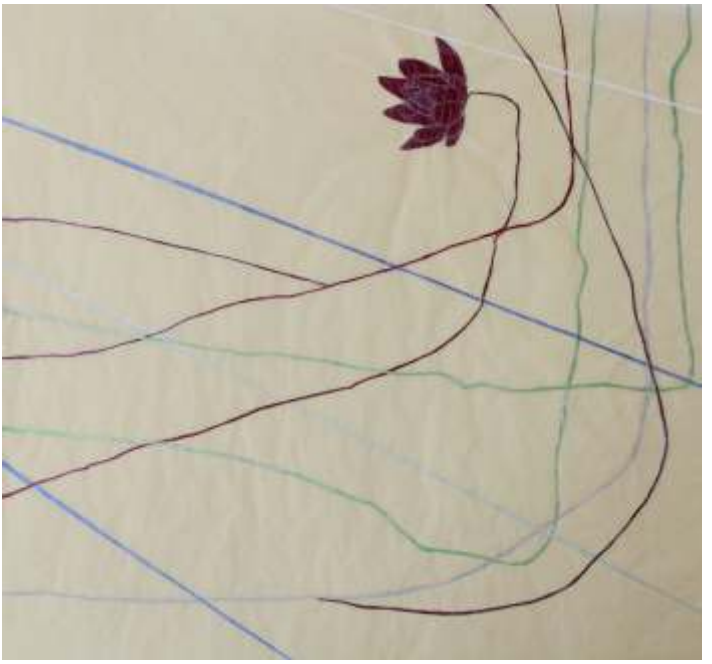
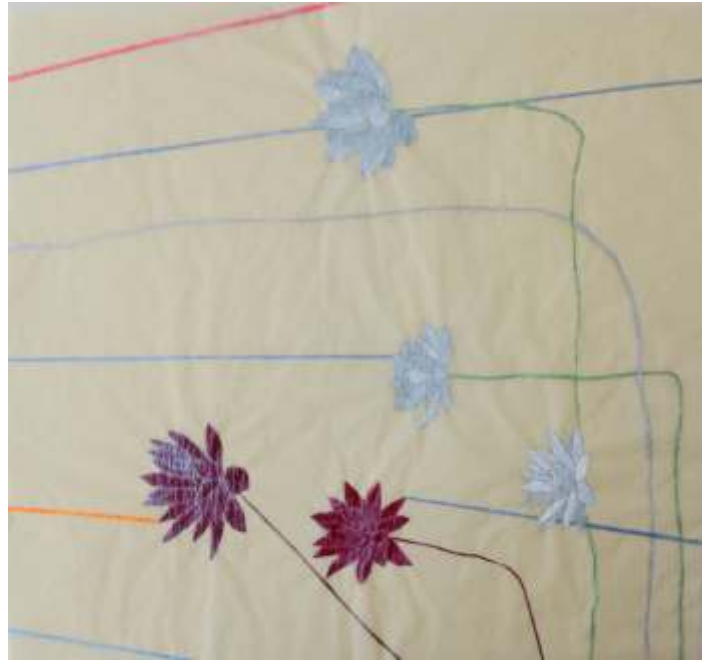
WNO: I had this great conversation with this Syrian artist who was at the Royal Institute of Art in Sweden. He had immigrated about 3 years ago, and it was challenging for him because his family pooled money for him to go to school. He feels like he has to make something good. I told him the amazing thing is once you stop caring about what other people think, that's when you are totally free and can do whatever you want. He was like yeah, but that's about self-love. We laughed but that's the thing, it's so simple and is actually true. If you are not excited to go to the studio and make things, or be

in the world and take in this visual information, it's never going to be enough. You have to do what you love. I would advise people to make the work that makes them happy, trust that the dots will connect at some point, and do what you need to do to make money that's not related to your art. If you need to get a job, do that job, love it and bless it knowing it allows you work for hours in your studio over the weekend. Don't let excuses get in the way of making and being. Don't be dishonest with yourself. To be an artist, you have to make art, so make the work.

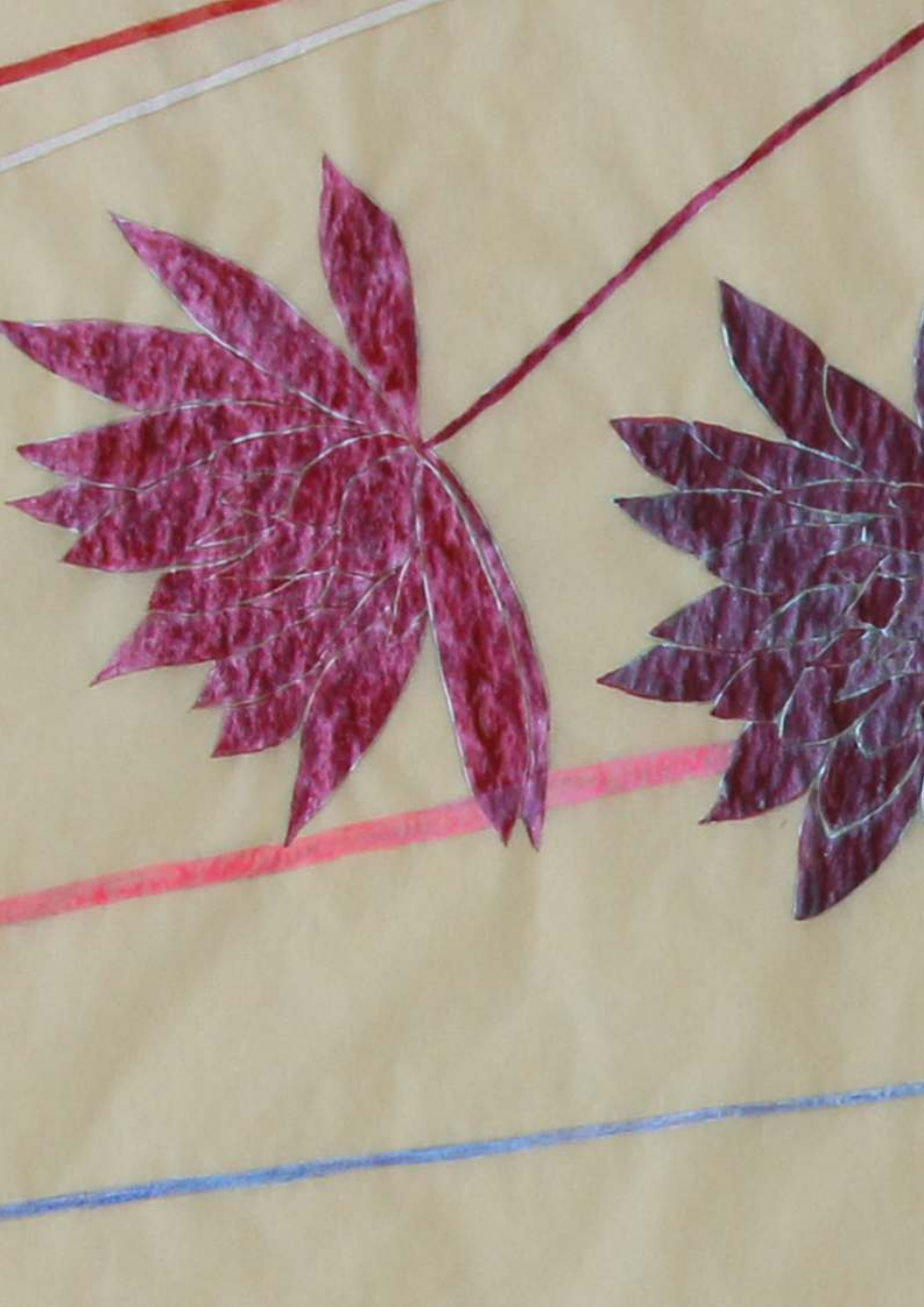




Follow the Sun by Wura-Natasha Ogunji, 61 x 61 cm, thread, ink, graphite on trace paper



I LOVE THAT FEELING
WHEN YOU REALISE THAT
THINGS CONNECT





WURA-NATASHA OGUNJI

EDUCATION

- 1998 San Jose State University, Master of Fine Arts, Photography
- 1992 Stanford University, Bachelor of Arts, Anthropology

AWARDS and HONORS

- 2015 Creation Fund Project Commission, *National Performance Network*, New Orleans.
- 2014 Performance Commission, *DISGUISE: Masks and Global African Art*, Seattle Art Museum.
- Selected Performer, *The Hemispheric Institute*, Encuentro: Manifest: Choreographing Social Movements in the Americas, Montreal.
- 2013 Artist-in-Residence, *Institute for Performing Justice*, The Center for Women's & Gender Studies, Embrey Critical Human Rights Initiative, The University of Texas, Austin.
- 2012 Fellowship Recipient, *John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation*, New York.
- 2010 Grant Recipient, *The Otis and Velma Davis Dozier Travel Grant*, Dallas Museum of Art.
- Grant Recipient, *The Idea Fund*, a project of the Warhol Foundation Initiative, Aurora Picture Show, DiverseWorks and Project Row Houses, Houston.
- 2009 Artist-in-Residence, *National Performance Network*, Visual Artist Network Residency, Diaspora Vibe Gallery, Miami.
- 2007 Artist-in-Residence, *Can Serrat Artist Residency*, El Bruc, Spain.
- 2005 Grant Recipient, *The Pollock-Krasner Foundation*, New York.
- Artist-in-Residence, *Altos de Chavon Artist Residency*, Dominican Republic.

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 2016 *DISGUISE: Masks and Global African Art*, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle. Commissioned performance and video installation. Curated by Pam McClusky and Erika Dalya Massaquoi. June 18-August 7, 2015. The Fowler Museum, October 18, 2015-March 13, 2016; Brooklyn Art Museum, April-September 2016.
- 2015 *Magic*, Omenka Gallery, Lagos. October 3-24.

- Statues Also Love*, 50 Golborne, London. June 11-July 18.
- No Such Place: Contemporary African Artists in America*, Edward Tyler Nahem Fine Art, New York. Curated by Dexter Wimberly and Larry Ossei-Mensah. February 26-April 3.
- 2014 *That's not the Atlantic (There's a disco ball between us.)*, Arthello Beck Gallery, Dallas. September 13-October 25, 2014.
- Six of one, half dozen of the other*, DiverseWorks, Houston. May 17-August 23.
- Your heart is clean*, MASS Gallery, Austin. April 25-May 31. Austin Critic's Table Award for Best Solo Exhibition.
- Future Reflexions*, The Arches, Glasgow, Behavior 2014: The Arches Festival of Live Performance. Curated by Martin Baasch. March 6-May 2.
- Noise*, Portuguese Cultural Centre, Luanda. Curated by Suzana Sousa. May 6-20.
- 2013 *Six Draughtsmen*, MoCADA, New York. Curated by ruby onyinyechi amanze. October 24, 2013-April 11, 2014.
- transFiguration*, Big Medium at Canopy Gallery, Austin. A project by Rino Pizzi. November 22, 2013 - January 6, 2014
- Time to Pretend: Constructions of Heritage, Memory & Belonging*, First Floor Gallery, Harare, AFIRIperFOMA Biennial. November 9-22.
- Moving Pictures*, brand 10 + x art space, Fort Worth. September 6-October 26.
- No one belongs here more than you*, Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos. June 15-Sept 14.
- 2012 *The Progress of Love*, Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos. Curated by Bisi Silva and Kristina Van Dyke. October 13, 2012-January 27,
2013. The Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts, St. Louis, November 16, 2012-April 20, 2013. The Menil Collection, Houston, December 2-March 17, 2013.
- 2012 *Lettering*, Medialia... Rack and Hamper Gallery, New York. Curated by Nicole Vlado and Tara Donahue. September 8-29.
- New Works*, Cliff Gallery, Mountain View College, Dallas. August 27-Sept 14.
- 2011 *Queer State(s)*, Visual Arts Center, UT Austin. Curated by Noah Simblist and David Wilburn. September 9-November 4.
- Selfless. Selfish. Selfiness*, brand 10 art space, Fort Worth. September 9-Oct 15.
- Video Program 006*, Champion Gallery, Austin. June 2-July 16.

Somewhere/Nowhere: You can live in paradise forever, Queen's Park Gallery, Bridgetown, Barbados. May 4-9.

Nowhere Near Here, Fotofest and Houston Center for Photography, Houston. Curated by Toby Kamps and Michelle White. March 10-April 23.

2011 *The epic crossings of an Ife Head*, Women and Their Work, Austin. January 13 - February 17.

2010 *Currents 2010*, El Museo Cultural, Santa Fe, New Mexico. Curated by Parallel Studios. June 17- 27.

2010 *As Far As the Eye Can See*, Galería Universidad del Sagrado Corazón, Santurce, Puerto Rico. March 11-15.

ves:sel, The Brennan Gallery, New Jersey. Curated by Kenya Robinson. February 2-26.

2009 *Screwed Anthologies*, labotanica, Houston. Curated by Ayanna Jolivet Mccloud. November 27-December 31.

Soundings, Diaspora Vibe Gallery, Miami, FL. July 31-August 5.

Négritude, Exit Art, NY. Curated by Papo Colo, Tania Cypriano, Rose Réjouis, Franklin Sirmans and Greg Tate. May 20-July 25.

2008 *Delicacies*, Charles Dana Danforth Gallery, University of Maine, Augusta.

Women's Work, Diaspora Vibe Gallery, Miami.

2007 *New American Talent: The 22nd Exhibition*, Arthouse at the Jones Center, Austin.

¿Y QUÉ? *Queer Art Made in Texas*, Landmark Gallery, Texas Tech U, Lubbock, TX.

PERFORMANCES

2016 *There are many ways to fall into the sea*, CAT Cologne. Activism Conference. April 9.

The Kissing Mask, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark. May 6, 7.

2015 *The Kissing Mask*, The Fowler Museum, UCLA, October 17. Presented as part of *DISGUISE: Masks and Global African Art*.

The Kissing Mask, Seattle Art Museum, June 19. Presented as part of *DISGUISE: Masks and Global African Art*.

And Fight, London. June 12. Performance with Mary Ononokpono in conjunction with *Statues Also Love*.

- 2014 *Queen Sweep and Elizabeth Olowu's Journeying, Whose Centenary?*, Igoun Street, Benin City, Nigeria. Curated by Inês Valle. December 6, 7.
- A tortoise walks majestically on window ledges*, Künstlerhaus Mousonturm, Frankfurt. Directed by Storm Janes van Rensburg. Presented as part of Afropean Mimicry & Mockery, Curated by Martin Baasch. November 14, 15.
- Can't I just decide to fly?*, Live Art Festival, Gordon Institute of Performing and Creative Arts, Cape Town. August 27-September 6.
- Sweep and Paint Like a Man!*, Call & Response, Antioch College, Dayton, Ohio. July, August.
- Sweep*, The Hemispheric Institute, Montreal. June 24.
- 2013 *twin*, performance drawing with ruby onyinyechi amanze, MoCADA, Brooklyn, NY. Oct 26.
- beauty*, The University of Texas, Austin. November 13.
- Sweep*, Yari Yari Ntoaso Symposium, Accra. May 18.
- Queens*, Bar Beach, Victoria Island, Lagos. May 11.
- Will I still carry water when I am a dead woman?*, Sabo, Lagos. April 18.
- beauty*, Obalende Motor Park, Lagos. April 11.
- A tortoise walks majestically on window ledges*, The Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts, March 2.
- Radio Kaduna*, The Menil Collection, Houston. February 16.
- 2012 *A tortoise walks majestically on window ledges*, Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos. November 17.
- 2011 *Oyibo!*, Projects on Ashburn, College Station, Texas. October 22.

ARTIST TALKS

- 2015 *Spaces of Displacement: Negotiations of Migration and Refugeeism in Mass Media and Visual Arts*, Artist Talk as part of Goethe Institute Symposium, Lagos.
- DISGUISE: Masks and Global African Art*. The Fowler Museum, UCLA.
- 2014 *Performance Art: The Presence of Women in Public Space*, University of Lagos.
- 2013 *Six Draughtsmen*, Artist Talk with ruby onyinyechi amanze, Temitayo Ogunbiyi and Odun Orimolade, MoCADA, Brooklyn, NY.

Black Radical Imagination, Panel Discussion with Cauleen Smith, Robert Pruitt, Amir George, Art League of Houston.

Performance Art in Lagos, Nigeria, Artist Talk, Center for Arts of Africa & its Diasporas, University of Texas, Austin.

- 2012 *Performance Art in Africa*, Panel Discussion with Jelili Atiku, Bernard Akoi-Jackson, Valérie Oka, Bisi Silva. Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos.

Performance Art: An Introduction, Lecture, Yaba Technical College, Lagos.

Glenn Ligon: America, Gallery Talk, The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth.

- 2011 *Epic Crossings*, Artist Talk for Professor Moyo Okediji's *Africana Women's Art* course, University of Texas, Austin.

- 2010 *Run, Jump, Fly: If they tell us there are no pictures, will we see the stories when they come?*, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Blurring the Lines: Public Art Re-Examined, Participatory presentation of performance and video portfolio, City of Austin's Art in Public Places Symposium, Austin.

- 2009 *Dash: Metaphor and Connection*, Artist Talk with Tisa Bryant, Carl Pope, Ronaldo V. Wilson, M. Asli Dukan and Nalo Hopkinson, curated by Torkwase Dyson, Fire & Ink III, The Blanton Museum, Austin.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 2016 Allyn Gaestel, *Nigerian-American artist Wura-Natasha Ogunji stops traffic with Strut - her latest street performance in Lagos*. www.nataal.com/wura

- 2015 *If I Don't Show It, Nobody Will*, Contemporary And, Print Edition no. 3, 2015.

- 2014 Lotte Levholm, *Performance is Perhaps a Ghost Performing all the Time: Decolonial Aesthetics Through Nigerian Performance Art in Dialogue with Video*, Afrikaada, L'Image en Mouvement: Re-inventing Narratives, No. 8: November-January.
www.issuu.com/afrikadaamagazine/docs/afrikadaa-image_en_mouvement/1

Caitlin Greenwood, *Wura-Natasha Ogunji: Your heart is clean*, The Austin Chronicle, May 9.

Jeanne Claire van Ryzin, *Wura-Natasha Ogunji mines family connections to Nigeria*, austin360.com, Saturday, May 17.

- 2013 Layla Al-Zubaidi, Paula Assubuji and Jochen Luckscheiter, editors, *Women and Land Rights: Questions of Access, Ownership and Control, Perspectives*, #2.13 (cover art)

Wendy McDowell, editor, *Religion in Africa and the Diaspora*, *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, Summer/Autumn 2013. (art for cover and lead article)

Maryam Kazeem, *Performances That Seek to Interrupt: Nigerian Artist Wura-Natasha Ogunji & The Craft of Spectacle*, *Okayafrica*, May 28.
www.okayafrica.com/2013/05/28/nigeria-art-wura-natasha-ogunji-visual-performance

Grace Benton, *Visibility of Contemporary Women Artists in Africa*, *Africa is a Country*,
April 3. www.africasacountry.com/the-visibility-of-contemporary-women-artists-in-africa

Wana Udobang, *Una performance contada por dentro*, *afribuku: cultura africana contemporánea*. <http://www.afribuku.com/wana-udobang-una-performance-por-dentro-wura-ogunji-centre-for-contemporary-art-lagos-nigeria-arte-performativo/>

Antonio C. La Pastina, *A Food Connection: Interview with Wura-Natasha Ogunji*.
<http://asterixjournal.com/a-food-connection-interview-with-wura-natasha-ogunji-by-antonio-c-la-pastina/>

2012 Alec de León, *Catching up with Wura-Natasha Ogunji*, interview, *National Performance Network*.
www.npnweb.org/2012/08/06/e-newsletter-july-2012/#wura





RAOUL OLAWALE DA SILVA



Raoul Olawale da Silva, is an artist, musician, snow- and skate-boarder and surfer. His large and powerful, intricate and symbolic works have a truly universal appeal, making him one of Nigeria's most exciting contemporary abstract artists. Through his paintings, sculpture, and music, Raoul's artistry reflects broad ethnic diversity and a deep commitment to biodiversity, especially in the marine environment. Growing up on Lagos Island, his talent was fanned into flame at National Museum summer art classes, which he attended with local youths like the celebrated painter, Alex Nwokolo. Raoul's art studies continued with a four year intensive apprenticeship in furniture design and cabinet making in Switzerland, which was followed by four years studying art at the distinguished University of Applied Arts in Lucerne, Switzerland. Raoul has worked as a studio artist since graduating from art school and has taken part in numerous international exhibitions, including two solo shows at the National Museum in Lagos in 2006, and at the Wheatbaker Hotel in 2013.

My works are the result of interchanging factors such as intuitive and impulsive approaches, set against reflection and exploration. This form of encountering through the creative act engages improvisational awareness and reflexive sensibility.

Experience, knowledge, ability, and memory, found together in various constellations, are a system that functions as a constant evolutionary process. Common threads are the recurring themes, which are condensed and “boiled down” to an essence which relates to matter through a chosen medium.

Multiple understandings: the components in their colour, material structure ,and given space, provide room for occurrences, which have a potential for discovery and which reveal new aspects, ideas, subjects, themes and direction for action as a consequence of experimentation. Formulating and describing conditions in conjunction within the logic of the works, results in works that are open to associations and interpretation.



Untitled by Raoul Olawale da Silva, 90 cm x 127cm, mixed media on paper 2002



Untitled by Raoul Olawale da Silva, 90 cm x 127cm, mixed media on paper 2002

The artist Gerhard Richter has greatly influenced the way I admire works. He realized that painting is a language just like talking and somehow not enough justice can be done with either of these two. Therefore it's better not to speak about a work, but to allow the viewer understand it based on the vocabulary that the viewer has,

Raoul Olawale da Silva



Untitled by Raoul Olawale da Silva, 90 cm x 127cm, mixed media on paper 2002





Untitled by Raoul Olawale da Silva, oil, on canvas, 2014





Untitled by Raoul Olawale da Silva, oil, on canvas, 2014





Untitled by Raoul Olawale da Silva, oil on canvas, 2014





Untitled by Raoul Olawale da Silva, oil on canvas, 2014





Untitled by Raoul Olawale da Silva, oil on canvas, 2014





Untitled by Raoul Olawale da Silva, 191,5cm x 190,5cm, mixed media on canvas 2014

IN CONVERSATION WITH RAOUL OLAWALE DA SILVA

Nneoma Adaobi Ilogu: Tell us about how your artistic journey began.

Raoul Olawale da Silva: I started very early to be interested in art, as early as primary school. At this time, it wasn't necessarily in regard to a career, more so a passion, but after secondary school I guess that's when I decided. I went on to a basic art training for two years, after which I did a four-year apprenticeship in carpentry, and finally went on to get an art degree in University. From then I decided I would do this as a full time profession.

NAI: Has the carpentry experience played any role in shaping your art?

RDS: After the basic art course, I decided to learn a profession as a source of income, as well as something to fall back on. I knew then as a budding artist, I would have to create works hoping people would appreciate it, and I'd be able to exhibit and have a potential income from that. Hence I decided to learn a craft, carpentry, which I could get employment with and have a steady income.

The carpentry experience has not directly impacted my art. However, it has given me the technical skill to find practical solutions on how to go about hanging, or creating an installation. Also, it has helped in knowing how to combine various materials such as waste products, which I use for installations.

NAI: You also had some training in sound and light engineering, how has this impacted your appreciation and creation of art?

RDS: Specifically I can't pinpoint how it has directly affected my paintings or installations. What got me into sound and lighting is I create music solo as well as in a band. Also, light is a very important aspect, as you have to be very aware of the lighting of your canvas when in the creative process.

This experience exposed me to theater directly, not just being in an audience, but also working in theater production; being directly involved in stage set up, and the logistics and effects of lighting based on angles and colors. I think that all these sources of experience and knowledge blend into my works in one way or the other.

Sandra Mbanefo Obiogo: I conversed with Wura earlier; she spoke about guidelines to reaching our greatest potential, one of which is "catch your breath". As someone who does karate and surfing, I'm sure you understand the importance of breathing. Let's project that into the artistic realm, what does "catching your breath" mean to you as an artist?

RDS: I recently watched an interview on the two brothers of the renowned hip-hop production team, Bomb Squad. They were mostly known for their work with the group, Public Enemy. During the interview, one of the brothers spoke about how during production he shuts out everything and doesn't listen to anything other than what he's working on. He said it helps avoid the interference and influence from outside being so direct. This has always helped me too. While things around us influence us, there has to be a way to control or minimize it, so we can feel certain things which come from within us.

Especially while working intuitively. I see a very close parallel to also "catching one's breath". In that moment when you breathe and there's a short pause between inhaling and exhaling. It might seem fluent to us, but there's always the short moment of a pause.

Also the short moments of pause where in my way of working, the intuitive and impulsive work together as well as against the rational, reflective and explorative side, which helps to bring that balance. In the moments of outbursts, pouring out, and coming from the feeling, it's having



Untitled by Raoul Olawale da Silva, 49,5cm x 74,5cm, oil on paper, 2006

that trust and faith that all these memories, which are very abstract and not specific, but even just in the color choice comes from memories which I choose not to pinpoint or overanalyze. Simply trusting that the colors work, and might as well have connections to my background, but in the way I use it hopefully opens it up to a more general understanding.

SMO: Do you think this pause is an important thing in terms of your artistic expression, and how does this relate to your artistic cycle?

RDS: I think it's very important, because in the process of creating you get so close to your work that you are basically part of it. That pause, in different ways gives you the opportunity to step back, recharge, and reflect.

NAL: Speaking about reflection, your works look like they are made up of lots of converging memories. What are these encapsulated moments that impact your works?

RDS: Yes it's a combination of different moments, like the memory of movement, vision, and sound. Memories are strange things, as they evolve and change with time. It becomes blended with various things and transforms due to certain factors. The perception and memory of a shared experience may differ for all parties involved. I feel like my creative process has a dream like feel, where memories can't be pinpointed, but come together as a collective as you work. This is why it's so hard for me to put a concept behind my method of working, or trying to explain the meaning.

I've also realized in looking at an artwork, we have the tendency to form associations that may differ from what the artist intended, but are still valid associations. The artwork is beyond the artist, though they create it, it has different meanings for different people; meanings which stem from their repository memory.

SMO: When you look at your works, do you see the influence of your African, Brazilian or Swiss roots?

RDS: It's more of a feeling than a conscious thought. I believe these influences are just there, and I don't feel the need to work on a conscious level in dissecting them as I work. It flows in whatever proportions depending on where you are in time and space, and what reflections of history or background have been done. Before the work is created, that you have had the time to live, reflect and be.

SMO: In your journey, who are the artists who have fascinated and impacted you as an individual?

RDS: It's so difficult to narrow that down. There are definitely influences, because no man is an island, you are influenced and being influenced. What's challenging is that as an artist, you have to trust that what you bring out is one hundred percent you.

NAL: Is there a particular kind of music you listen to while you work?

RDS: It varies. I listen to a whole spectrum of music, I'm very open to all kinds of music. I'm always grateful when I get music recommendations from people, and I am constantly looking for new music. My music collection and listening choices spreads across a wide range of genres, and depends on my mood, or the dynamics of what I'm working on.

SMO: You have a particular passion for the sea and marine eco-system. You surf and spend a lot of time near water, is that water reflected in your works?

RDS: Water is a universal thing. I mentioned the color choice earlier; the blue can be pinpointed to my African heritage, or the materials my Mom collected when I was younger. All these memories converge, and color choice could be as a result of a million other things. I don't feel it necessary to analyze the influences; on the contrary I feel it might take something away from



Untitled by Raoul Olawale da Silva, 49,5cm x 74,5cm, oil on paper, 2006

the mystique of the work. Almost like talking a painting to death, especially being that my works are very intuitive.

Speaking of influences, the artist Gerhard Richter has greatly influenced the way I admire works. He started out with photorealistic work, and his works now have far surpassed that. At some point he realized that painting is a language just like talking is, and somehow not enough justice can be done with either of these two. Therefore it's better not to speak on a work, but allow the viewer understand it based on the vocabulary that they have.

SMO: You have created paintings on the front of used skateboards. What do you love about skating?

RDS: To me it's the same as a lot of music I listen to - the aesthetics and the ability to lose oneself in the moment. You can't and don't think of anything else. There are moments of distraction, but the immediate feedback you get from being distracted snaps you right back. Also, the raw energy from it is alluring, and it keeps evolving.

I first got attracted to skateboarding when my friend came to school with a skateboard showing off tricks like the Ollie, which seemed like he was defying or manipulating gravity. Seeing that for the first time, especially in the early 80s, was mind-blowing. Also, realizing that skateboarding relates to everything, whether it's music, food or culture, it's reflective of many aspects of life. A renowned skateboarder and artist, Mark Gonzales, compared skateboarding to blues, referring to the loneliness of the sport and in its ability to serve as a release of emotion. Skateboarding, like life, seems so simple, but is very technical with a multitude of movements working together.

NAI: Could you walk us through your creative process.

RDS: It has a lot do with being present, making coffee in the morning, playing

around with my collected materials, forming them into an installation of some sort, experimenting, and music. There's something very beautiful where I stay in Tarkwa Bay, at the old chalet. Before it was occupied, kids would hang out there, and the walls, especially one wall has kids' drawings. I am inspired by their expressions on the walls with charcoal and pencil; the rawness of it all, these are things that inspire me. Thinking about the mixture of writing and painting, almost like raw graffiti, which brings me to Basquiat, who pinpoints his way of drawing to a childhood accident he had. This ritual of having my coffee and looking out at these interactions is a huge inspiration.

NAI: How did you come about painting with coffee?

RDS: Part of my morning ritual is coffee and maybe sketching. I draw a lot from mishaps and the nature of things. The moment of realizing coffee stains on paper, observing the color, and experimenting. One day I decided to make liters of coffee, start spilling and making a mess, rearranging it and see what happens; just letting go.

SMO: Both yourself and Wura are artists who were based in the Diaspora and moved back to Nigeria. How have you found this experience?

RDS: I find it very tough, at the same time very enlightening. It's a necessary toughness, which I believe contributes to my evolution. It was a very necessary step, which is still ongoing. A big part of my creative process is collecting, being open, whether it's material or experiential, and letting it build up to the point that there's no other way than to let it out. This is opposed to the romantic idea of sitting in wait for inspiration, but rather working towards it through opening yourself to experiences that can inspire.



Untitled by Raoul Olawale da Silva, 49,5cm x 74,5cm, oil on paper, 2006



Untitled by Raoul Olawale da Silva, 64,5cm x 96 cm oil on paper, 2007



The Skateboards

I have repurposed these Skateboards as objects, and used their form, shape and surface for painting, drawing, collage assemblage, installation and performance.

Skateboards are a vehicle for movement, transportation, and expression, which is not always visible to the eye. They have imprints of forms, flips, lines, shreds, carves and curves, and marks left behind that previously had been drawn on the asphalt, concrete, wood or metal surfaces; marks of being an actively ridden board with used trucks, axles and wheels. There is a precision that manifests when the skateboard becomes an extension of the skater's extremities. Images are captured as one seemingly effortlessly flies by.

Since its evolution from surfing, the nature of skateboarding is in close relation to art and culture, science and philosophy. Skateboards thereby transform discourse into their own context through curiosity, youthful essence, dynamic approaches and expressive and impressive energy. Skateboards push seemingly endless boundaries, which lend themselves to exposure and exchange in space.

With an uncompromising, raw and unfiltered attitude, skateboarding influences important aspects of media, creativity, critical and philosophical thinking, sports, art and culture, in the way space structures, and can be perceived.

The Soul of Skateboarding transcends to a surface for projection of identity into spaces of observation, interaction and reflection. Broken, used up and old skateboards are a means for discourse on intuitive processes, influences and their effect, defining and redefining spaces, structures, architecture, cultures, and processes in societies, evolving from a subculture to a more universal form of expression and communication.

I see the world as a moving canvas, and the skateboard as a body of resonance. Launching in to the air, reaching for hang time and the impact upon landing results in impressions on the surfaces as well as on reasoning and understanding.



Untitled by Raoul Olawale da Silva, 79cm x 19cm, Mixed Media, skateboard 2003



RAOUL DA SILVA

BORN 1969

EDUCATION

- 1986 – 1988 BASIC ARTS AND CREATIVE CRAFTS SCHOOL,
"FARBMÜHLE" LUCERNE, SWITZERLAND
- 1988 - 1992 APPRENTICESHIP AS CARPENTER IN LUCERNE, SWITZERLAND
- 1994 – 1998 LUCERNE UNIVERSITY OF ART AND DESIGN
- 2000 – 2002 KUNSTHALLE ZÜRICH, SWITZERLAND

EXHIBITIONS AND SHOWS

- 1987 EXHIBITION THE VITRINE KLEINTHEATER, LUCERNE
- 1992 – 2013 A LARGE NUMBER OF CONCERTS AND PERFORMANCE ART
IN SWITZERLAND AND LAGOS
- 1998 GROUP EXHIBITION AT ART MUSEUM LUCERNE "ZWISCHENRAUM"
SWITZERLAND
- 2002 EXHIBITION AT THE "ENTLEBUCHER BANK" IN SCHÜPFHEIM, SWITZERLAND
- 2002 EXHIBITION AND MUSIC PERFORMANCE AT "A SCENT BOWL" LUCERNE,
SWITZERLAND
- 2003 EXHIBITION AT "GROMAG STUDIOS" LUCERNE, SWITZERLAND
- 2005 EXHIBITION AT THE "ENTLEBUCHER BANK" IN SCHÜPFHEIM, LUCERNE
- 2006 EXHIBITION AT THE "NATIONAL ART MUSEUM", ONIKAN LAGOS NIGERIA
- 2006 GROUP EXHIBITION AT THE "MINIATURE ARTFAIRE" LAGOS, NIGERIA
- 2013 EXHIBITION AND PERFORMANCE ART, INNER WORLDS OUTER SPACE,
"THE WHEATBAKER" LAGOS NIGERIA
- 2015 THE CONTEMPORARIES AT "THE WHEATBAKER" LAGOS NIGERIA
- 2016 "TERRA KULTURE" LAGOS NIGERIA

Untitled (detail) by Raoul Olawale da Silva, 64,5cm x 96 cm oil on paper, 2007



GALLERY



Having opened its doors in May 2008 Temple Muse is West Africa's leading luxury concept store focusing on designer home & giftware, fashion & accessories as well as art & design. Our strength not only lies in offering the very best of world-renowned brands, but also in nurturing homegrown talent from across the continent.

The iconic flagship store equipped with its very own champagne bar is located in the heart of Lagos and possesses a "gallery-like" open feel, where clients can relax & indulge in all things wonderful.

Over the years Temple Muse has developed a reputation as being one of the leading art spaces in Nigeria having hosted a number of critically acclaimed exhibitions, and through continuously offering its clients cutting edge contemporary art.

www.temple-muse.com

Untitled (detail) by Raoul Olawale da Silva, oil on canvas, 2014



S P O N S O R S



Shelter (detail) by Wura-Natasha Ogunji,
61 x 61 cm, Thread, ink, graphite on trace paper





C U R A T O R

Adolphos Opara



Sandra Mbanefo Obiagio is a multi-faceted writer, photographer, poet, art collector & curator, and award winning filmmaker. She has curated art shows and worked with the local creative industry to promote the best of Nigerian art.

She ran the communications program in Sub-Saharan Africa for environmental group, WWF International for eight years before founding and running Communicating for Change, a media for development social enterprise in Nigeria for fourteen years. She is a social activist and her campaigns, films, radio programs and publications have touched on themes such as human rights, women's empowerment, health including HIV & AIDS, environment, democracy and good governance. She organized conferences, workshops, and symposia for Nigeria's growing film industry and helped develop a course on *Media Enterprise* at the Pan African University.

Obiagio produced and directed many films over the years, including a five-part documentary film series, *Red Hot: Nigeria's Creative Industries*, featuring artists from the film, music, performance and visual arts sectors. She was Associate Producer of the feature film, *Half of A Yellow Sun*, adapted from the award winning novel by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

She has been involved in many community initiatives and served as a trustee of the Convention on Business Integrity (CBI), was a member of the Advisory Council of the Nigerian National Film Institute and has served as a member of the jury of the *Nigeria Media Merit Awards*. Obiagio is a Fellow of the Aspen Institute's *African Leadership Initiative for West Africa (ALIWA)* and has served as Sunday School teacher since her teens. She received an M.A. in Telecommunications from Michigan State University, and a Bachelor of Education degree in English and German from the University of Manitoba, in Canada. She is happily married with three children.

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CONTEMPORARY ART

Untitled (detail) by Raoul Olawale da Silva, oil on canvas, 2014

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Cover Artwork: Feel the Sun by Wura-Natasha Ogunji,
61 x 61 cm, Thread, ink, graphite on trace paper, 2016.

Inside Front Cover: Untitled (detail), by Raoul Olawale da Silva
oil on canvas, 2014

Back Cover: Untitled by Raoul Olawale Da Silva,
90cm x 127cm, Mixed Media paper, 2001

Inside back Cover: Levitate (detail) by Wura-Natasha Ogunji,
61 x 61 cm, Thread, ink, graphite on trace paper, 2016



