



FLOW

an Art Exhibition to celebrate
Recent Works by

Nnenna Okore

February 16th - April 15th, 2013
at **The Wheatbaker**
Lagos, Nigeria

Cover Artwork: *Predicament*, Cloth, resin and acrylic,
30"x24"x5", 2013



Consciousness, Clay and burlap, 48"x48", 2012

‘The loose weave of the open textile suggested to me a sense of lightness and floating and I thought about clouds floating across the sky. Yet at the same time the woven structure and the dark heavy twisted strands suggested the earth's formation, landmass and strata. The work is suspended from the ceiling and comes out from the wall in relief giving it a sculptural quality. It seems to capture a moment in time; perhaps the point of creation or the meeting of mortal and immortal.’

Jaquinta Lindstrom
a-n.co.uk

Introduction

Flowing away from the Norm

It is indeed a pleasure for me to welcome you to FLOW, an exhibition of recent works by Nnenna Okore, which represents new thoughts and movement in her creative journey.

I met Nnenna in 2009 when I interviewed her for a five part documentary film series called *RedHot*, showcasing some of the best artists in Nigeria's creative space. She was in the midst of setting up an exhibition at the Goethe Institut which drew its inspiration from tree bark and leaves, rope, old books and newspapers, soaked and stylized using coffee grinds amongst other things, and ending up like light floating objects hung in space – reminding us of the ephemeral and fleeting qualities of life and matter.

From my first interaction with Nnenna, our conversation was easy and flowed in a down-to-earth sisterly way, very much reflecting the spirit of her work. I found her quiet, open and highly intuitive sense refreshing in an art world where many divas and egos weigh heavily. Nnenna's detailed, intricate and varied art works, from circular curly patterns to long, finger-like clay pieces carefully woven into burlap backed wall hangings display a new direction in African expression which is very much rooted in the rows and patterns that we see in typical African scenes, from how produce is stacked in local markets, to how hair is patterned in our traditional hairstyles.

She explained to me that "I've always been one of those artists who wanted to explore against the norm or do something that was very different from what I saw around me. For instance, clay is known to be a hard substance when it is fired and I want to take it away from that context of pottery and bring it to a place where it starts to assume a different format, to being soft and movable and noisy by clattering. I am very interested in making the clay a fluid form".

Today, we present you with exciting new works which flow in yet a different direction. Nnenna has fashioned soft cloth in to unique hardened sculptural forms, with intricate tactile patterns and with colors that are a departure from her well known earth tones. This unique collection takes us through a diverse journey of different materials interwoven with clay and hardened with resin and acrylic. Nnenna is ever flowing against the norm, and returns to Nigeria her home country, with new insight and tremendous energy to explore and reflect a rising African sensibility.

Sandra Mbanefo Obiogo

Curator

February 2013



Pride, Clay and burlap, 30"x47"x6", 2010

“Nnenna Okore’s carefully crafted sculptures impress through their ergonomic discipline and attention to order. Her ability to transform banal found materials into objects of rough beauty demonstrates a refreshing modesty that is distinct from the purposely squalid and trashy techniques of so-called “scatter art” (typically, assemblages of seemingly randomly chosen, recycled manufactured detritus that have become one of the major modes of contemporary sculpture). Okore hovers between the artistically unfashionable polarities of function and adornment and she marks a return to the hand-wrought and the autographic.”

Kate McCrickard
Art South Africa

FLOW

A universal language

As one who is perceptive of the versatile quality of textiles and its ability to assume form even when void of form, I have attempted to capture enticing and compelling texture, colors and forms that speak to the metaphor and materiality of cloth. Enthrilled by its diverse meaning and attribute, I have created several sculptural forms to reflect the rich tactile, fluid and complex nature of fabric as an object.

'Flow' is a mini exhibition of unique wall pieces that aims to resurrect aesthetic emotions resulting from the magical and graceful movements embedded within the works. I also aspire to uncover in these works, the unbridled undulation of folds and drapes, which the material can very effortlessly assume. Interpreted through fabric, paper, clay and burlap, the concept of flow and fluidity is revealed in the delicate and simple forms that bear the semblance to various fibrous and organic matters in nature. The pieces on display have been carefully formed through a series of layering and repetitive processes including, rolling, twisting, dyeing, starching, gluing and painting.

The exhibition also aims at evoking thoughts about the connections between cloth and environmental elements such as, water, bodily or plantlike forms. Through these works, I hope to enrich the experiences and sensitivities of the viewers and stimulate interesting and thought provoking conversations about the significance of fabric in our cultural and natural world.

Nnenna Okore

Lagos, February 2013





Bio

Raised in Nsukka, Nigeria, Nnenna Okore has emerged as one of the foremost artists of her generation. Her largely abstract works are inspired by textures, colors and landscapes of her milieu. Finding reusable value in discarded materials, Okore enriches her work with layers of meaning through familiar processes. Both in her home country Nigeria and United States, she relies on the use of flotsam or discarded objects, which are transformed into intricate sculpture and installations through repetitive and labor-intensive techniques. Some of her processes include weaving, sewing, rolling, twisting and dyeing, which she learned by watching local Nigerians perform daily tasks. Most of Okore's works explore detailed surfaces and organic formations.

Nnenna Okore is an Associate Professor and former chair of the Art Department at North Park University, Chicago. Her works have been exhibited internationally in museums and galleries in Chicago, New York City, London, Paris, Cancun, Sao Paulo and Copenhagen. She is a recipient of the 2012 Fulbright Scholar Award; and has also been recognized by the Chicago Tribune, BBC and New York Times, among dozens of media outlets, for her exceptional use of materials, textures and colors in her works.



Agbogho, Clay and burlap, 49"x28"x4", 2009

"I am drawn to uniquely tactile characteristics of the collective physical world. I am astounded by natural phenomena that cause things to become weathered, dilapidated and lifeless - those events slowly triggered by aging, death and decay - and subtly captured in the fluid and delicate nature of life."

My materials are biodegradable and comprise largely of old newspapers, found paper, ropes, thread, yarn, fibers, burlap, dye, coffee, starch, clay, etc. Through manually repetitive techniques as mirrored in both natural and mechanical reproductions, my processes of fraying, tearing, teasing, weaving, dyeing, waxing, accumulating and sewing allow me to interweave the distinct properties of materials together. I systematically deconstruct and reconstruct my media to yield subtle transformations of visual complexities. And much like impermanent earthy attributes, my organic and twisted forms mimic the dazzling intricacies of trees, barks, cloth, topography and architecture.

I desire to heighten through my works, the perception of textures, undulating contours and movements that exist within our ephemeral world; and to evoke some reflection about how we can better preserve and care for our earthbound surroundings."

Nnenna Okore



Igba Nkwu, Clay and rope, 49"x42"x5", 2008

Think Nigerian art and your mind probably turns to... the rare terracotta artefacts of the Nok tribe that date back as much as 2,000 years. But now some new names appear to be coming to the fore... Nnenna Okore is a rising star of the Nigerian contemporary art world...

Simon de Burton
Financial Times

Sourcing her compositional materials from clay, recycled paper and other discarded materials, Okore has imbued in her art a new energy that bristles with the aesthetics of fashion, climatic upheavals among other socio-cultural issues.

McPhilips Nwachuckwu
Vanguard



Lined Cloth, Clay and burlap, 28"x56"x7", 2010





Detailed view: Twist, Cloth, thread, resin and acrylic, 24"x32"x6", 2013

‘ Okore was among a handful of students at the University of Nigeria whose works, on account of the freshness of vision, imaginative use of media and variety of expressive formats inspired me to curate the exhibition “New Energies” in 2001 (at two venues:- Mydrim and Nimbus Galleries in Lagos). I remember one of her a piece in this show, entitled: ‘The Wedding is Over’ in which, employing rolled up newspapers woven into a large loose cloak, she did a performance in which this was worn and quickly discarded. I could decipher the very poignant commentary on a human institution which is increasingly short-lived, using a medium which is not only ephemeral itself but has news, (literature with the most fleeting life-span), printed on it. she has already built a formidable track record in some critical venues around the world . ’

Remarks by El Anatsui
Exhibition Opening: Of Earth- Barks and Topography



Detailed view: *Heritage, Clay and rope*, 55"x28", 2008