



# Abuja, Nigeria

ART COLLECTION OF THE  
UNITED STATES EMBASSY

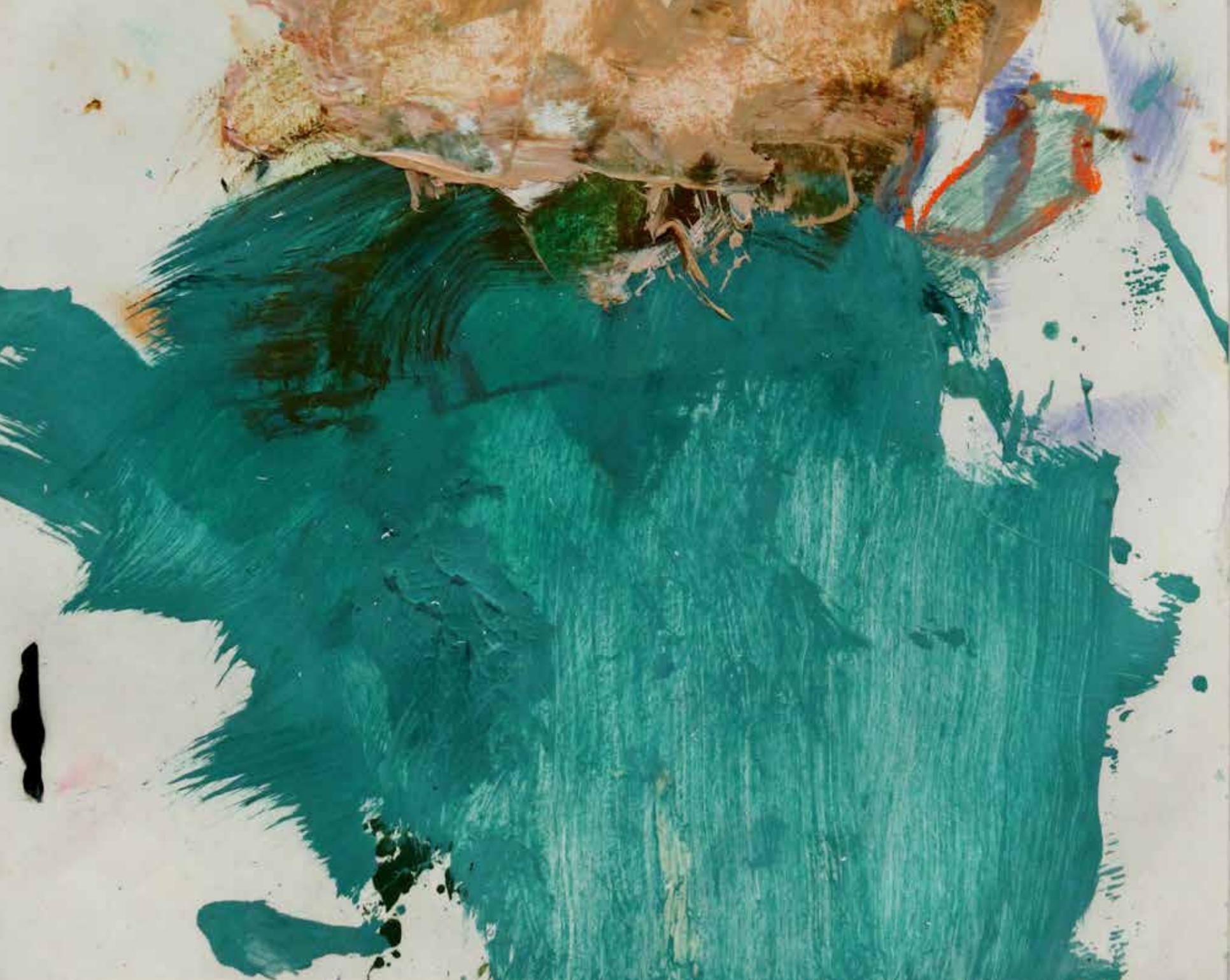




# Abuja, Nigeria

ART COLLECTION OF THE  
UNITED STATES EMBASSY  
CURATED BY ART IN EMBASSIES

**E**stablished in 1963, the U.S. Department of State's office of Art in Embassies (AIE) plays a vital role in our nation's public diplomacy through a culturally expansive mission, creating temporary and permanent exhibitions, artist programming, and publications. The Museum of Modern Art first envisioned this global visual arts program a decade earlier. In the early 1960s, President John F. Kennedy formalized it, naming the program's first director. Now with over 200 venues, AIE curates temporary and permanent exhibitions for the representational spaces of all U.S. chanceries, consulates, and embassy residences worldwide, selecting and commissioning contemporary art from the U.S. and the host countries. These exhibitions provide international audiences with a sense of the quality, scope, and diversity of both countries' art and culture, establishing AIE's presence in more countries than any other U.S. foundation or arts organization. AIE's exhibitions allow foreign citizens, many of whom might never travel to the United States, to personally experience the depth and breadth of our artistic heritage and values, making what has been called a: "*Footprint that can be left where people have no opportunity to see American Art.*"



## Introduction

The exhibition at the United States embassy annex in Abuja, Nigeria, includes work by prominent Nigerian and American artists. Many of the American artists included in the exhibition are of Native American and African American descent, two groups whose histories have been marked by struggles against racial intolerance and inequality. Thus, their work often is informed by issues relating to social justice, issues that are also frequently addressed in the works of Nigerian artists. The selection of American and Nigerian art—and their arrangement in the embassy annex—suggest the ways in which Nigerian and American cultures intersect. Not only is there a common interest in social and political issues, but there is also an artistic link, as many of the works produced by these cultures share sources of inspiration.

A range of media is included in the show, including painting, sculpture, installation works, and photography. Throughout the exhibition, in the works by both American and Nigerian artists, the force of Nigerian culture—and African art more broadly—is present. Whether explicitly depicting Nigerian life and culture, as

in the photographs of J. D. ‘Okhai Ojeikere and Andrew Esiebo and the prints of Otobong Nkanga, or more obliquely referencing African culture and heritage in general, as with Fred Wilson’s *Cadence* and Jas Knight’s *Kaya*, the shared interests of Nigerian and American culture are felt throughout the exhibition. There is a great interest in the Nigerian environment and its people, in its natural resources and its historic traditions; there is also a shared engagement with the history of art and with how best to engage with that history in a modern world. Artists such as Ifeoma Anyaeji and Terrell James are re-examining artistic traditions and adding their unique voices to keep those traditions current and fresh.

By bringing these diverse works of art together under one roof, this exhibition underscores the importance of the relationship between the United State and Nigeria, and promotes an engaged dialogue between the two cultures. Furthermore, this collection serves to celebrate the shared humanity, not just of these two cultures, but of all cultures around the globe.



## Norman Akers

(Fairfax, Oklahoma; 1958)

Native American artist Norman Akers creates works of art that act like maps of culture, of memory, and of place in the vaguest sense of the word. The intersecting lines that serve as the background for his images are clearly cartographic, but it is with the images placed on top of these maps that Akers creates forceful visual statements. As he puts it, “Through color, line, and visual form, I express deeply felt concerns regarding removal, disturbance, and the struggle to reclaim cultural context.”<sup>1</sup>

Further, he says, “Through visual narrative, I explore how my point of view relates to a historical, political, and cultural sense of place in contemporary society.”<sup>2</sup>

Thus, Akers’s images have a cartographic value in suggesting the relationships between places, physical and cultural—of differing perspectives. Indeed, place is an essential concept in Akers’ work: “Sense of place, which is a primary concept explored in my work, can be interpreted in many ways. Place of origin describes the

physical landscape where one lives or originates. Mythological place transcends physical place and describes the timeless spiritual or mythic origin where stories begin and civilizations emerge. History has left its mark on the land, creating a place where political and cultural boundaries define our identities. . . . Through layering of visual images that seem to coexist without any clear hierarchical order, I begin to convey a non-linear sense of time.”<sup>3</sup>

Akers’ lithographic print *All Things Connected* features an elk encircled by an oval halo of bright yellow. The elk is superimposed on a pattern of bisecting lines, suggesting a road map. Other emblems - a spray of acorns, a blazing sun - evoke the artist’s connection to his tribal homeland. The elk and road map are primary symbols that represent a sense of place, according to Akers. “Both symbols assist us in defining that place where we belong,” he said.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted on the artist’s website; normanakers.com/home.html(accessed December 28, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

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*All Things Connected*, 2007  
Five-color lithograph printed  
on white Somerset paper  
30 x 22 in. (76,2 x 55,9 cm)



## Olu Amoda

(Warri, Nigeria; 1959)

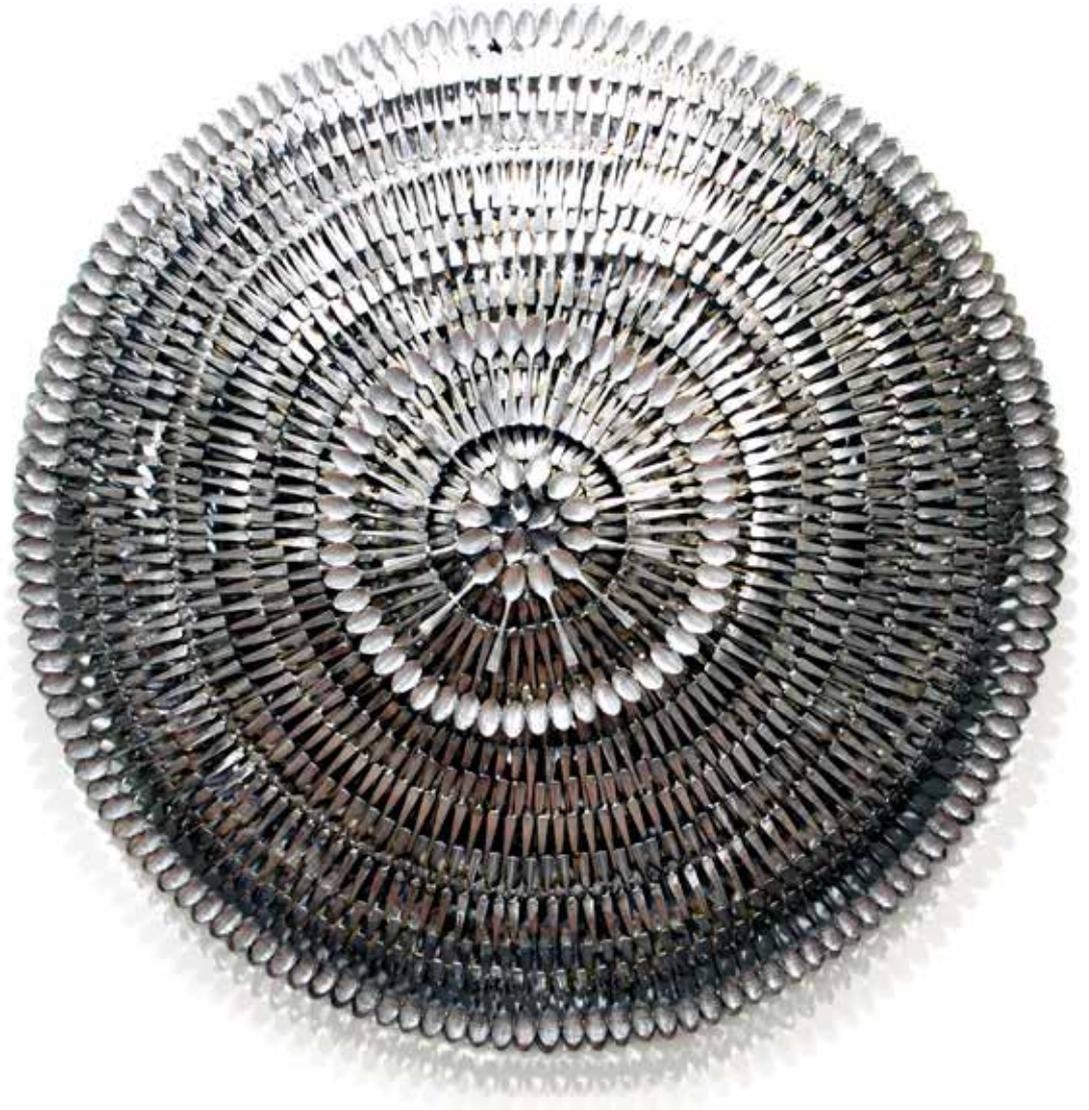
Nigerian artist Olu Amoda uses found objects to create new works that comment on mass production and consumerism while also alluding to history and memory. As Amoda puts it, “I am interested in the former lives of the objects I use and in the new meanings they take on when they are brought together.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted in *Daily Newsmatch*, Special Report, April 22, 2013, p. 52.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

At first glance *Tax Collector (Eye II)* seems to be one large metal sculpture, but upon closer examination, the smaller pieces are revealed to be spoons. Once the viewer notices the spoons in the sculpture, they are almost impossible not to see. For Amoda, it is the small metallic pieces that comprise the whole of his sculptures that are essential. He is interested in the power of clusters of small objects. “What we call little things are merely the causes of great things: they are the beginning, the embryo and the point of departure, which generally speaking, decides the whole future of an existence,” says Amoda.<sup>6</sup>



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*Tax Collector (Eye II)*, 2013  
Repurposed spoons  
Dimensions: 78 3/4 x 78 3/4 in. (200 x 200 cm)

## Ifeoma Anyaeji

(Benin City, Nigeria; 1981)

Nigerian artist Ifeoma Anyaeji was trained as a painter but has made a name for herself as a sculptor. Her colorful, highly textured pieces appear to be natural-fiber textile works, but are actually made from discarded plastic bags. “I am interested in the art of *Up-cycling* to create a ‘new value’ for that assumed to have lost its ‘newness,’” says Anyaeji.<sup>7</sup> In these works, she gives byproducts from Nigeria’s petroleum industry a new meaning in a new context. Anyaeji also references Nigerian culture through her technique, which employs elements from both traditional loom weaving and the threading hairstyle technique. As such, her sculptures are redolent with Nigerian culture. “As an artist, I have always had an interest in producing artworks that communicate with and integrate elements of and from my environment,” Anyaeji says. “Through my works, I reflect on cultural descriptions of value and value systems drawn from elements that reflect social abnormalities. I am intrigued by process and the use of non-conventional materials.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted on the artist’s website; normanakers.com/home.html (accessed December 28, 2016).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

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*Green Mentality*, 2013  
Discarded plastic bag, plasto-yarns,  
bottle caps and twine  
34 1/2 x 25 x 4 in. (87,6 x 63,5 x 10,2 cm)

*Mmili (Water)*, 2011  
Discarded plastic bags, plasto-yarns,  
bottle caps, and twine  
42 1/2 x 39 x 10 in. (108 x 99 x 25,4 cm)

*Ezè na Ozo (Red cap chiefs)*, 2013  
Discarded plastic bag, plasto-yarns,  
bottle caps and twine  
38 x 21 x 5 in. (96,5 x 53,3 x 12,7 cm)



## John H. Brown Jr.

(Washington, D.C.; 1957)

“While exploring the African Savannah in 2013, the grand, sculptural qualities of the foliage . . . captured a significant portion of my attention. These monumental structures project broad canopies that provide desirable shade and shelter for wildlife. In other cases the hardwoods produce vivid flowers, nuts, and succulent fruits to nourish the creatures that roam through the extraordinary ecosystem. The earth’s rich, red soil often covers the timbers’ entire limbs with a coating of thick dust as a result of wind storms that blow across the flat, open fields. In other habitats, the lush and densely-leafed branches shimmer in the bright, yet unforgiving, sunlight. Densely populated forests are rare, except in higher altitudes . . . In most environments, the trees stand apart regally, almost in a solitary manner. Quite often, their imposing stature reflects hundreds of years of growth (in a single plant!). Yet, these structures are vulnerable, too. Thick and heavy branches could be removed or an entire tree might be leveled by herds of elephants in search of berries that are available only on higher branches. In addition, wildfires can sweep away all plant life for several miles—leaving the evidence of devastation. Nevertheless, nature evolves and finds ways to ensure new growth will replace what had existed beforehand. The trees of the Serengeti compelled me to photograph their majestic, fragile, and enduring beauty.”<sup>9</sup>

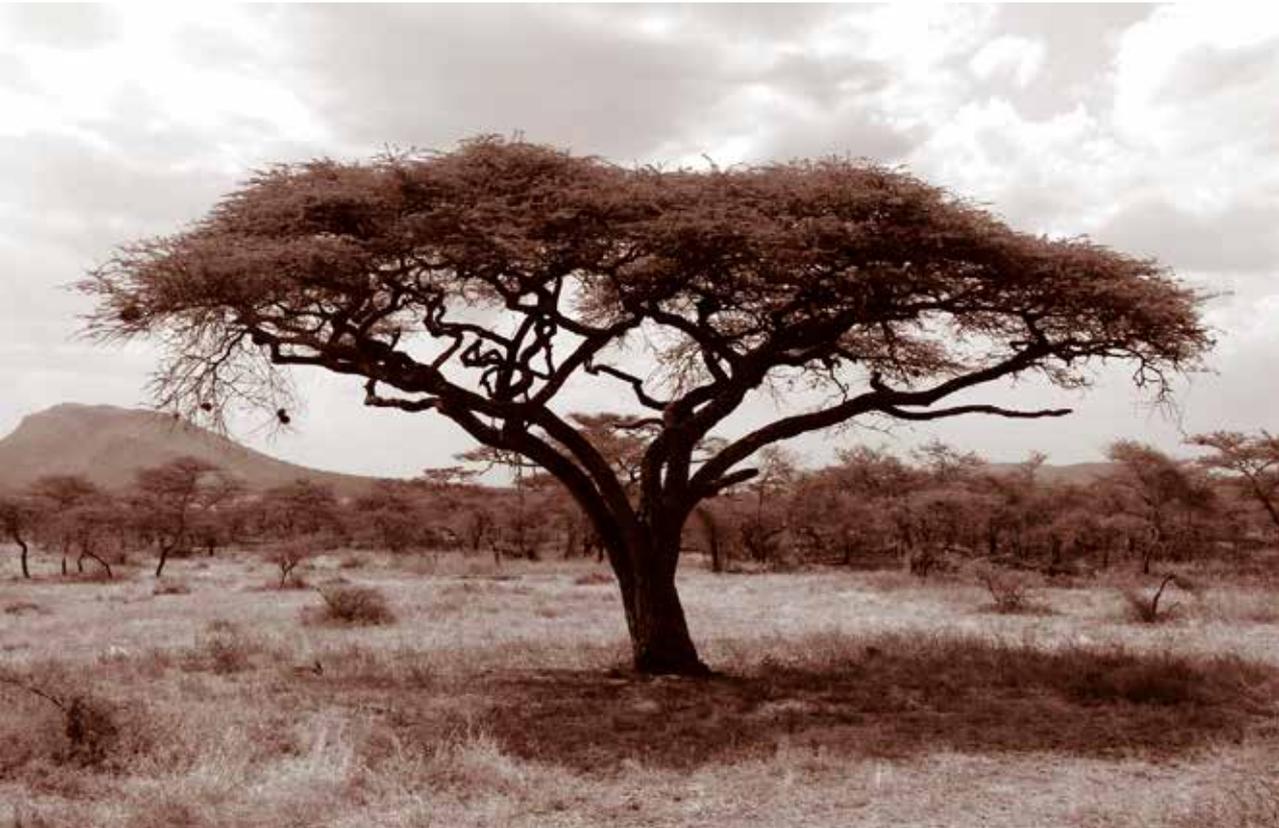
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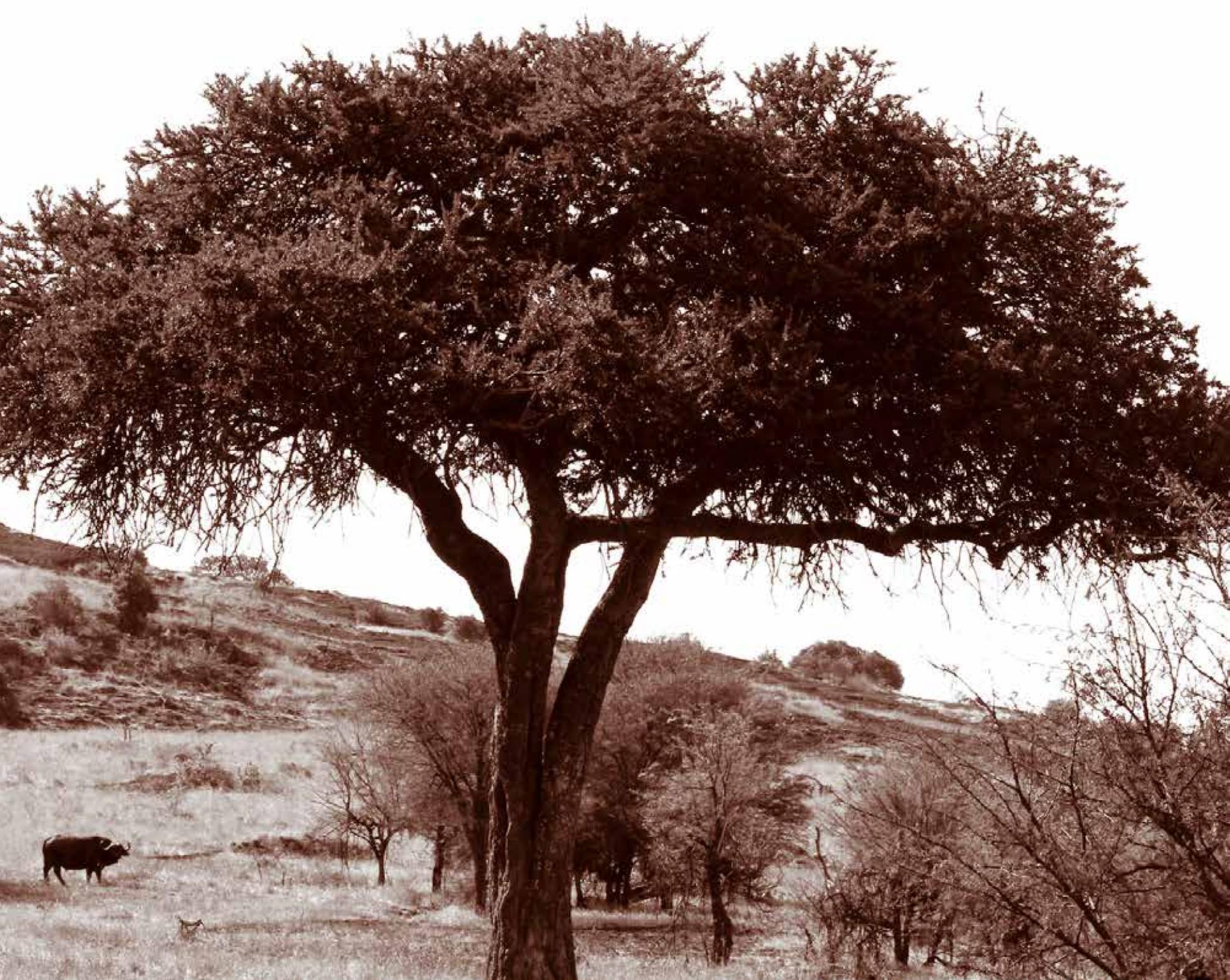
<sup>9</sup> Artist’s statement quoted on his website; [johnbrownphotography.com/about.html](http://johnbrownphotography.com/about.html) (accessed December 28, 2016).

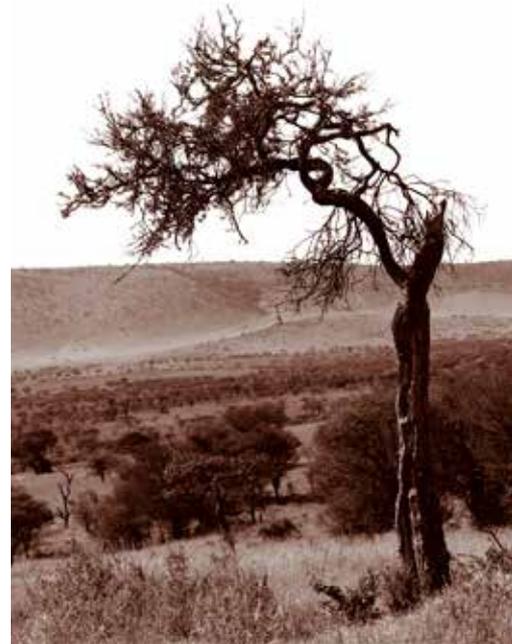


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*Serengeti Tree* series, 2014  
Nine archival pigment prints on  
Arches 140 lbs. cold press watercolor paper  
20 3/4 x 20 3/4 in. (52,71 x 52,71 cm)







## Sonya Clark

(Washington, D.C.; 1967)

“Many of my family members taught me the value of a well-told story and so it is that I value the stories held in objects.”<sup>10</sup> American artist Sonya Clark draws on her Trinidadian-Jamaican heritage to investigate questions of race in contemporary American culture. Working in a range of materials, from textiles to human hair, Clark pays homage to the crafts and traditions of her forebears. As she says in her artist statement, “I investigate simple objects as cultural interfaces. Through them I navigate accord and discord. I am instinctively drawn to things that connect to my personal narrative as a point of a departure: a comb, a piece of cloth, or a strand of hair. I wonder how each comes to have meaning collectively. What is the history of the object? How does it function? Why is it made of a certain material? How did its form evolve? These questions and their answers direct the structure, scale, and material choices in my work.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted on the artist's website; <http://sonyaclark.com/bio/biography/> (accessed December 26, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.



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*Identity Improvised*, 1993  
Dyed and embroidered cloth  
132 x 60 in. (335,3 x 152,4 cm)



## Victor Ehikhamenor

(Udomi-Uwessan, Nigeria; 1970)

Victor Ehikhamenor is an acclaimed Nigerian artist and poet whose work draws on cultural sources from his native country. For Ehikhamenor, the spirit of his local Nigeria is essential to his art, especially when he works away from his home in Europe and the United States. “It’s my way of bringing that seed from the village to become a blossom,” he has said.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, his work is deeply invested in memory and the intersection of African and Western culture.

Ehikhamenor’s sculptural approach to his painted canvases is inherently connected with his Nigerian identity. The end result, he says, resembles geles, the large, colorful head-ties worn by Nigerian women. “It’s a tribute to my mother,” he says.<sup>13</sup> Ehikhamenor’s novel approach to the canvas is also rooted in formal exploration. As he has said, “I decided to free the canvas and see what else I can do with canvas, instead of the traditional way of stretching canvas around bars and framing them.” Freeing his canvas from two dimensions makes his work more immediate and potent.

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted in “Nigerian Artist Victor Ehikhamenor’s Canvas Sculptures,” BBC World News, May 27, 2014; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-27597407> (accessed December 28, 2016).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.



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*Between God and Man*, 2014  
Enamel and acrylic on canvas  
110 x 69 in. (279,4 x 175,3 cm)

## Andrew Esiebo

(Lagos, Nigeria; 1978)

Each of Andrew Esiebo's remarkable photographs provides a penetrating view of Nigerian life, whether the subject is a bustling urban street scene or an untouched forest. But Esiebo's photographs do more than merely document the artist's culture; they are beautiful meditations that purposefully use light, shadow, texture, and color in a way that elevates his photographs. They become about so much more than their subject matter.

Esiebo has been outspoken about the challenges faced by African artists, photographers in particular, in reaching a wide audience, free from "the West's preconceived ideas of our continent." He credits the democratization of digital platforms with his ability to break free from the West's expectations of what African photography 'should' look like. As he says, "I believe that my photographs are a clear reflection of my own vision of the daily realities of the country and the continent where I live in. These are images that until now have not been allowed to pass through the traditional gatekeepers of international media. Thanks to new digital platforms like Instagram and other image sharing apps, some of these trapped daily realities are becoming more visible."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Quoted in an interview with Marisa Schwartz, "#LightBoxFF: Instagram as Revolutionary Media with Andrew Esiebo," *Time*, July 11, 2014; <http://time.com/3810529/lightbox-follow-friday-andrew-esiebo/> (accessed December 26, 2016).



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*Osun groove*, from the series  
*Nigeria on my mind*, 2006  
C-print  
26 3/4 x 40 3/4 in. (67,94 x 103,53 cm)

*Young Efik traditional boys*,  
from the series *Nigeria on my mind*, 2010  
C-print  
27 1/5 x 40 9/10 in. (69 x 104 cm)

Next Spread: left to right

*Erin Ijesha waterfalls*, from the series  
*Nigeria on my mind*, 2006  
C-print  
26 3/4 x 40 3/4 in. (67,94 x 103,53 cm)

*Nneka I*, from the series *Roots*, 2010  
C-print  
31 1/2 x 47 1/5 in. (80 x 120 cm)







## Terrell James

(Houston, Texas; 1955)

Terrell James's landscape-inspired abstractions have the quality of memories. They are not precise renditions of the environment, but they hold profound seeds of reality—they suggest a core that is perhaps more real than the source. They suggest the essence of something.

Her paintings have always been inspired by the natural world, but have also started to explore urban and digital landscapes as well. As she says, “My practice has grown to absorb contexts beyond narrow definitions of ‘landscape’ and ‘nature.’ I now deliberately explore newly available and even unavoidable fields. My work has become engaged with unexpected material. Sometimes it seems that I am simply absorbing and processing everything I encounter. The limitless deluge of the all-enveloping digital world has inspired an expanded palette, to include a vastly larger range of materials, colors and effects.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted on the artist's website; <http://terrelljames.com/tjnews.html> (accessed December 28, 2016).

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*Field Study #706*, 2013  
Oil on vellum  
16 x 12 in. (40,64 x 30,48 cm)

*Field Study #592*, 2011  
Oil on vellum  
16 x 12 in. (40,64 x 30,48 cm)

*Field Study #702*, 2013  
Oil on vellum  
16 x 12 in. (40,64 x 30,48 cm)



## Jas Knight

(Bloomfield, Connecticut; 1977)

American artist Jas Knight's quiet portraits are studies in cultural history as well as in the tradition of portraiture itself. His portraits are suffused with a sense of dignity that recalls the formal portraiture of the seventeenth century, and his use of light and shadow recalls Baroque painting. This is no accident, as Knight admits that his work is inspired by artists from across history. But Knight's work is ultimately devoted to contemporary American culture.

“My work explores the relationship of people to the environments they have created for themselves to live in and the values that they place on objects,” Knight says.<sup>16</sup> What sounds simple and straightforward is in fact immensely poignant. He constructs scenes of complex beauty and depth to communicate forthrightly. As he explains, “It is my goal to speak as plainly as possible to people through these paintings. I hope my work to be like the last traces of the sun's wrath on the clouds of evening, a thing seen and appreciated by the child and the one possessed of a hoary head alike.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Artist's statement quoted on the website of the Richard Beavers Gallery; [http://richardbeaversgallery.com/artist-biography/Jas\\_Knight-65.html](http://richardbeaversgallery.com/artist-biography/Jas_Knight-65.html) (accessed December 28, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

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*Kaya*, 2013  
Graphite pencil on paper  
18 x 14 in. (45,7 x 35,6 cm)



## Mario Martinez

(Phoenix, Arizona; 1953)

In his paintings and prints, Native American artist Mario Martinez, also known as Mars-1, constructs complex abstract images that resemble photographs of distant galaxies; he often calls these images ‘metascapes.’ There is an undeniably fantastical, even dreamlike, quality to his works, which is somewhat tempered by their distinct lines and bold colors. Still, Martinez is wary of ascribing a fixed meaning to his work. He says, “My work is definitely very personal. I feel that some of it, not all of it, has some kind of . . . intelligence or life of its own . . . like something is looking back at you.”<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, Martinez’s work seems to exist independent of its creator or its viewers, swirling and evolving in some matrix entirely its own. That Martinez’s work does not sit still for the viewer to hold onto is part of its power. As Martinez says, his work is about “reaching for the fuzzy logic, the gray in-between areas where it looks like something resembles something, but it’s not.”<sup>19</sup> His lithograph *The Desert, the Yaquis and NYC* features a smoky swirl that snakes across a series of straight lines, interspersed with elements from the natural world. The straight lines, said Martinez, are a reference to the cityscapes of New York and San Francisco, where he has homes. In Martinez’s vision, the Sonoran Desert, which gave birth to Yaqui cultural and spiritual traditions, becomes inextricably linked to the urban environment where he now lives -- a reflection of the contrasting forces that have shaped his life.

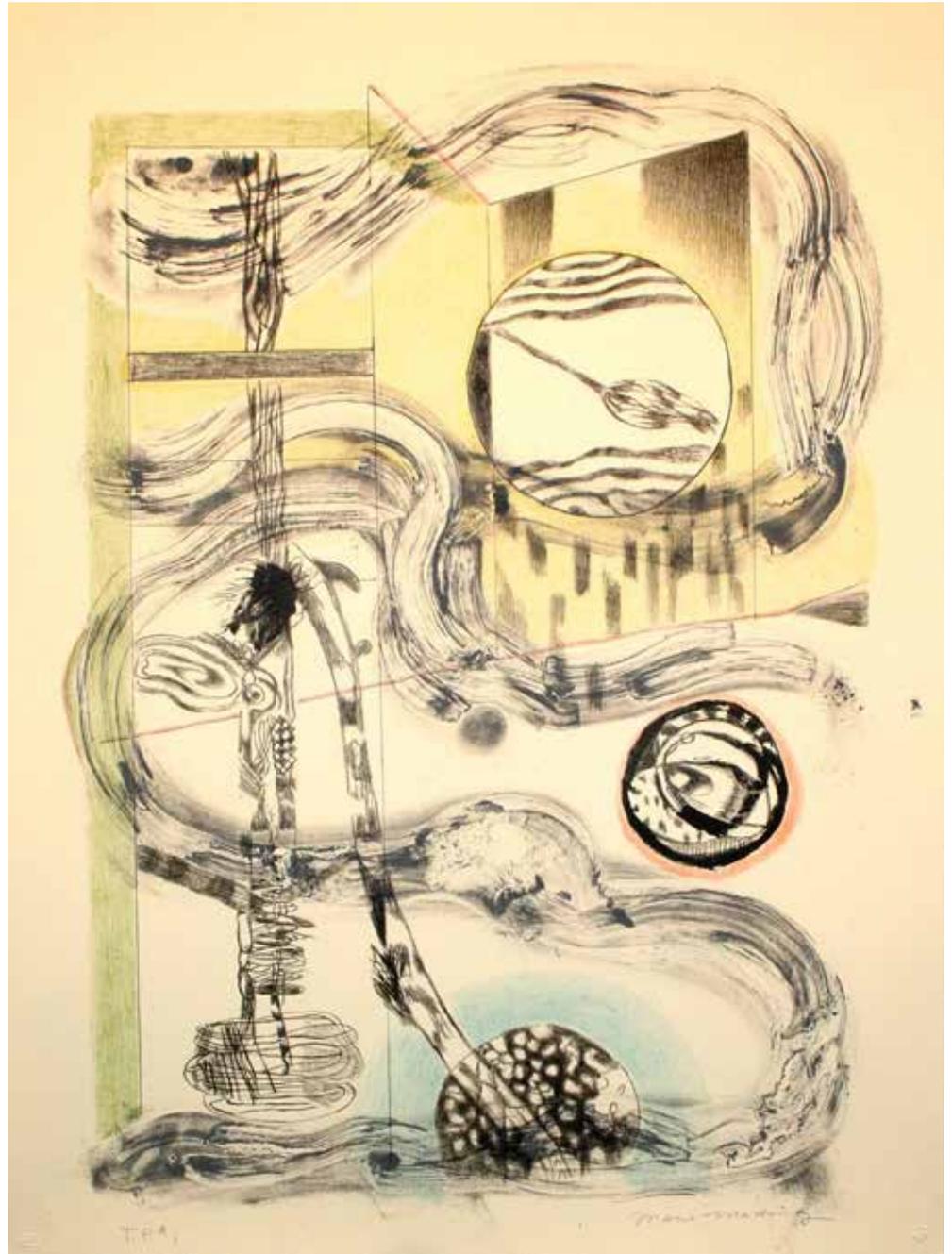
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<sup>18</sup> Quoted at Steel Bananas; <http://www.steelbananas.com/2010/04/familiar-mutations-mars-1-and-infinite-tapestry/> (accessed December 26, 2016)..

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in SFGate; <http://www.sfgate.com/art/article/10-Years-of-Fecal-Face-dot-com-3175408.php> (accessed December 26, 2016).

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*The Desert, the Yaquis and NYC, 2007*  
Seven-color lithograph printed  
on soft white Somerset satin paper  
39 x 31 1/2 in. (99,1 x 80 cm)



## Larry McNeil

(Juneau, Alaska; 1955)

Photographer and printmaker Larry McNeil has been creating socially-engaged images since he began his photographic career as a young man. McNeil's work is largely informed by his Native American identity, and his awareness of the intersections and conflicts within American culture. "You don't have any choice in who you're born to," he says. "It always shows up in your artwork, even if you try and keep it out. That's the fun part. That means that there are layers to your art, that even if you try and keep it literal and very conscious, there are still intuitive parts of who you are that show up even if you don't want it to, or if you're not aware of it."<sup>20</sup> Always aware of his own distinct cultural perspective, McNeil takes on weighty societal issues, from climate change to racial justice. Still he maintains a sense of levity throughout his work.

McNeil's lithograph *First Light, Winter Solstice* injects a dose of subversive humor into a familiar, iconic depiction of American Indians. He challenges the romanticized view of the so-called "vanishing race" popularized by photographer Edward Curtis, who chronicled Native American tribal life during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century. McNeil provides a vivid turquoise backdrop, with a raven spreading its wings, to Curtis's nostalgic sepia-toned photograph of Native Americans on horseback.

The raven is a hint that Curtis's perspective might be skewed, because in Tlingit tribal mythology, the bird is 'a poetic rascal' who frequently amuses himself by subliminally pointing out hidden truths, said McNeil. There is another hint, too: McNeil has added a dilapidated old car to the Curtis photograph, which he identifies as the sort of 'rez car' frequently seen on tribal reservations.

"A rez car is often old and beat up, sometimes barely running," he said. "Rez cars have become part of our identity. I am playing with the perception that Indians are only in the past and [I am] bringing them right into the present. If we can take outdated, stereotypical ideas and laugh about them, we can acknowledge that they are indeed a bit absurd and we can move on in a good way."<sup>21</sup>

Ultimately, McNeil's photographs explore the question of what it means to be human in today's world. While people tend to focus on what makes people different from one another, his work seeks to show the commonality of the human experience. As he puts it, "Photography and other creative media can break down these artificial barriers that we've set up for ourselves."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted in "Art Works Blog," *National Endowment for the Arts*, <https://www.arts.gov/art-works/2014/first-person-photographer-larry-mcneil> (accessed December 26, 2016).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

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*First Light, Winter Solstice*, 2007  
Six-color lithograph printed  
on white Somerset satin paper  
22 1/8 x 29 7/8 in. (56,2 x 75,9 cm)



## Otobong Nkanga

(Kano, Nigeria; 1974)

“*Shaping Memory* is a photographic work that depicts a collaged landscape, made by using collected images from magazines that relate specifically to spaces captured in my memory of my childhood and homeland. Through this work I try to give form to the fragmented memories by using found images that trigger the notion of *déjà vu*. The images are then cut out and collaged together to recreate the new reality of what my memory recalls but which still manages to seize the sensation of the memorized landscape.

I take inspiration from my surroundings and the accounts of certain spaces and natural resources I encounter, which trigger questions that I do not have answers to. My artworks are a result of observations, investigations and sensations of material and spaces. The notions of memory, temporality and displacement of ideas and things have a crucial role in the way I look at objects, architecture and culture.”<sup>23</sup>

The Nigerian-born multimedia artist Otobong Nkanga currently works in Amsterdam and Paris, where she explores questions relating to her native country. Nkanga is particularly interested in memory and how that relates to place. In *Shaping Memory*, she depicts a traditional Nigerian hut with a lush landscape behind it. The fact that the work has been cut out from its surroundings and decontextualized atop an anonymous hand commodifies the scene. The hut ceases to be a simple image of a

place; it instead becomes something fragile, capable of being exploited. The fact that there are two versions of this image—one in color, one in black and white—strengthens that quality.

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*Shaping Memory*, 2012  
Lambda print (2)  
Each: 47 1/5 x 35 2/5 in. (120 x 90 cm)

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<sup>23</sup> Quoted in *Zaynah Magazine*, <http://zaynahmagazine.blogspot.com/2013/01/a-conversation-with-otobong-nkanga.html> (accessed, December 27, 2016).



## Chris Ofili

(Manchester, England; 1968)

Chris Ofili is an English artist born to Nigerian parents. His subject matter often examines black culture in its many forms—both celebrating black culture and re-interpreting racial stereotypes; however, his work is just as much about form, color, and pattern. Abstraction and figuration seem to be in dialogue with one another in his paintings, as identifiable forms emerge from seemingly pure abstraction and pattern. As such, close examination of his art is rewarded with a more complete sense of his subject matter.

“Painting is a kind of pursuit, a hunt,” Ofili says.<sup>24</sup> “I think it’s more interesting when you can corral your subjects, instead of just going right to them. Enjoy and engage with the process—you want to keep going into the unknown, to the point where you don’t think about how long it’s going to take to get there. I’ve become more and more comfortable with the idea that you can construct a narrative and bring someone onstage, and you don’t have to tell them what to do. Once they arrive, they’ve activated their character.”<sup>25</sup> Consequently, there is mutability to Ofili’s work that keeps the viewer engaged.

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<sup>24</sup> Artist’s statement quoted on the website of the Richard Beavers Gallery; [http://richardbeaversgallery.com/artist-biography/Jas\\_Knight-65.html](http://richardbeaversgallery.com/artist-biography/Jas_Knight-65.html) (accessed December 28, 2016).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.



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*Rainbow-Paragon Pink*, 2008  
Spit bite aquatint with drypoint printed in green on pink gampi paper chine collé  
11 x 7 in. (27,94 x 17,78 cm)

*Rainbow-Pink Particles*, 2008  
Drypoint printed in red on gampi paper chine collé  
11 x 7 in. (27,94 x 17,78 cm)

*Rainbow-Grey Seale*, 2008  
Spit bite aquatint with drypoint printed in graphite on blue gampi paper chine collé  
11 x 7 in. (27,94 x 17,78 cm)

*Rainbow-Brown Bathers*, 2008  
Color spit bite aquatint with drypoint printed in brown on blue gampi paper chine collé  
11 x 7 in. (27,94 x 17,78 cm)



## Chris Ofili

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*Rainbow-Blue Friends*, 2008

Spit bite aquatint with drypoint printed in blue  
11 x 7 in. (27,94 x 17,78 cm)

*Rainbow-Violet Narcissus*, 2008

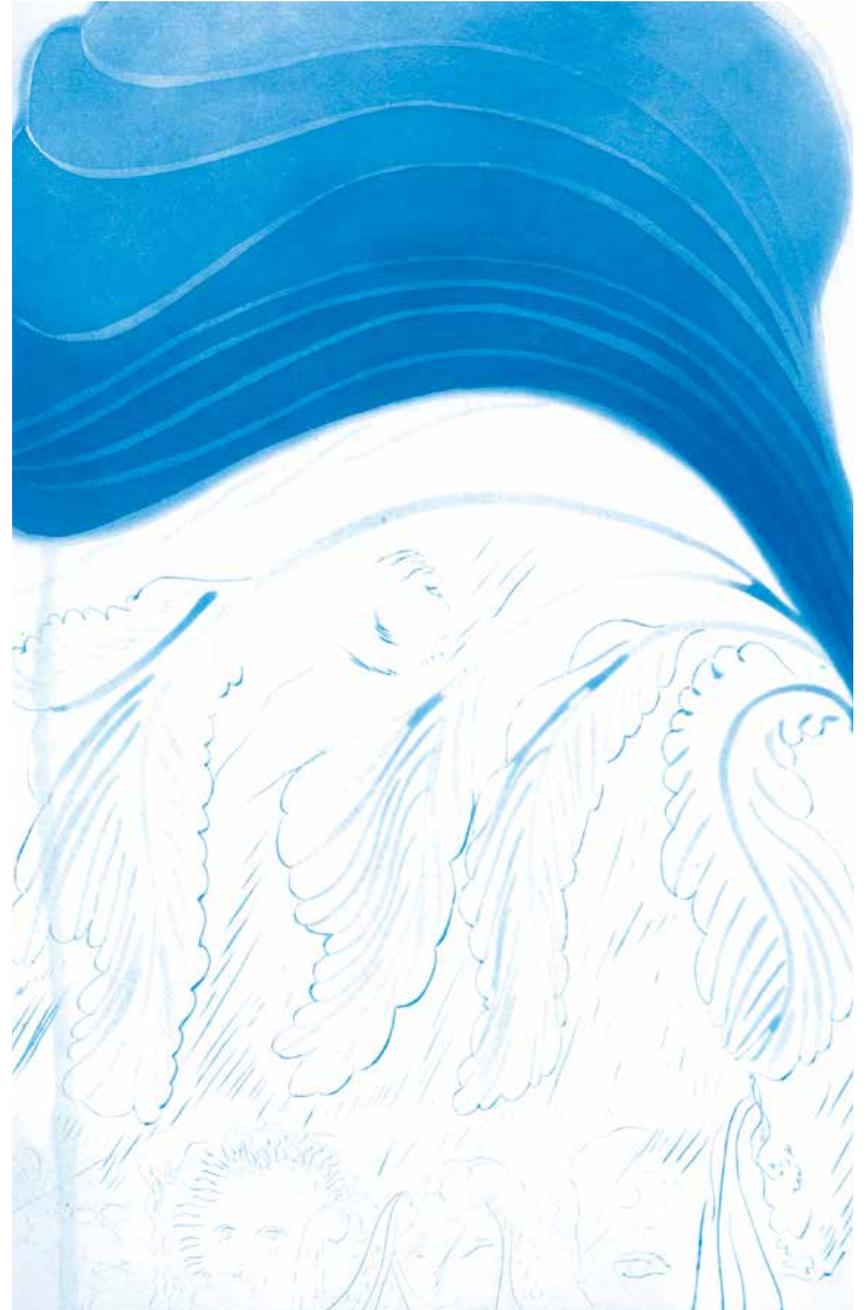
Spit bite aquatint with drypoint printed in purple on  
gampi paper chine collé  
11 x 7 in. (27,94 x 17,78 cm)

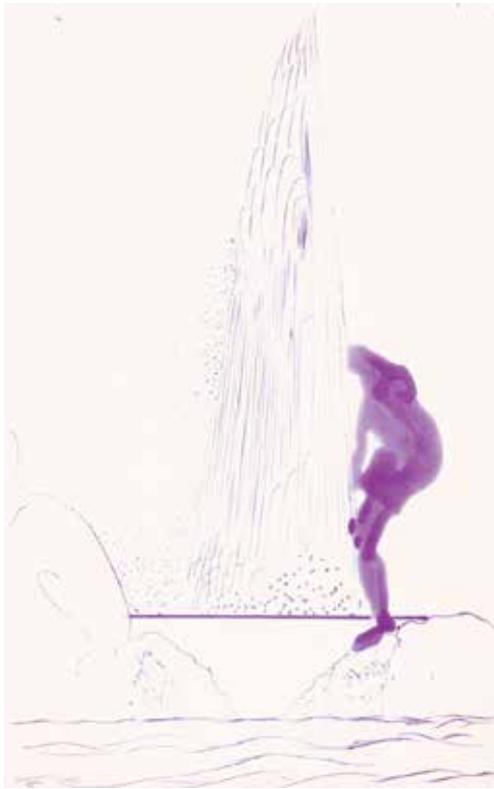
*Rainbow-Green Riann*, 2008

Color spit bite aquatint with drypoint printed on  
gampi paper chine collé  
11 x 7 in. (27,94 x 17,78 cm)

*Rainbow-Red Cave*, 2008

Spit bite aquatint with flat bite etching and drypoint  
printed in red  
11 x 7 in. (27,94 x 17,78 cm)





## Chris Ofili

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*Rainbow-Turquoise Duo*, 2008

Spit bite aquatint with drypoint printed in blue on gampi paper chine collé  
11 x 7 in. (27,94 x 17,78 cm)

*Rainbow-Yellow Day Dreamer*, 2008

Spit bite aquatint with drypoint printed in orange on yellow gampi paper chine collé  
11 x 7 in. (27,94 x 17,78 cm)

*Rainbow-Purple Palms*, 2008

Spit bite aquatint with drypoint printed in blue on yellow gampi paper chine collé  
11 x 7 in. (27,94 x 17,78 cm)

*Rainbow-Orange Ramo*, 2008

Spit bite aquatint with drypoint printed in orange on blue gampi paper chine collé  
11 x 7 in. (27,94 x 17,78 cm)





## J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere

(Ovbiomu-Emai, Nigeria; 1930–2014)

J. D. 'Okhai Ojeikere was a prominent Nigerian photographer, famous for his photographs of women's hairstyles. "Hairstyles are an art form. . . . All these hairstyles are ephemeral. I want my photographs to be noteworthy traces of them," said Ojeikere. His striking black and white photographs not only record the many sculptural hairstyles of his native Nigeria, but they are also remarkable for their own intrinsic beauty as photographs. The textures and patterns of the hairstyles stand out against plain backgrounds; there is a simple beauty in these images. Other photographs, such as *Coiling Penny Penny*, include the faces of the women, resulting in moving portraits.

Ojeikere's photographs are a celebration of his craft as well as of his culture. Even more, they are celebrations of beauty. As he said, "I always wanted to record moments of beauty, moments of knowledge. Art is life. Without art, life would be frozen."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Quoted on the website of Magnin-A; <http://www.magnin-a.com/en/artistes/presentation/63/j.d.-okhai-ojeikere> (accessed, December 26, 2016).

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*Onile Gogoro Or Akaba*, 1975  
Gelatin Silver Print  
23 5/8 x 19 5/8 in. (60 x 50 cm)

*Coiling Penny Penny*, 1974  
Gelatin Silver Print  
23 5/8 x 19 5/8 in. (60 x 50 cm)

*Mkpuk Eba*, 1974  
Gelatin Silver Print  
23 5/8 x 19 5/8 in. (60 x 50 cm)

© J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere  
Images courtesy of Galerie  
MAGNIN-A, Paris



## Nnenna Okore

(Nsukka, Nigeria; 1975)

“My work broadly focuses on the concepts of recycling, transformation, and regeneration of forms based on observations from ecological and manmade environments. I am drawn to uniquely diverse and 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.”<sup>27</sup>

Nnenna Okore masterfully captures that essence of change and degradation in her sculptural works. Okore works in Chicago, but brings a unique perspective to her work that is largely influenced by her personal experiences as a woman in Nigeria. Though her work is essentially concerned with time and ephemerality, the lens through which she explores those issues is specific to her personal history. Indeed, her methods pay homage to the craftwork specific to women in her native country. As she says, “All my processes are adapted or inspired by traditional women’s practice, the African environment, world economies, and recycled waste.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Artist’s statement quoted on her website; <http://www.nnennaokore.com/statement.html> (accessed December 28, 2016)

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

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*Osimili*, 2011  
Ceramic and burlap  
62 x 54 x 5 in. (157,5 x 137,2 x 12,7 cm)



## Lawson Oyekan

(London, England; 1961)

Lawson Oyekan is a British-Nigerian ceramicist, famous for his rustic, earthy-looking pieces. Oyekan often leaves his pieces unglazed, evoking natural forms. Many of his pieces are covered in small holes or perforations that enhance their natural appearance. Some of his works resemble vegetal forms such as trees, while others more closely resemble geologic objects, such as coral or fossils. They suggest time, process, and a slow evolution, free from human interference. Still, there is a hint of the human presence in the surfaces of Oyekan's sculptures, which are often incised with vaguely calligraphic lines. Thus, there is ambiguity and mystery in his work.

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<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Central-Cal-Clay; <http://www.centralcalclay.com/lawson-oyekan.html> (accessed December 28, 2016).

He has said, "My intent is to express human endurance and deliver a message of reassurance: that human suffering can be healed."<sup>29</sup>

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*Porcelain Group*, 2013

Porcelain

Dimensions vary for the set of three: Heights:

12 1/2 x 10 1/2 x 11 in. (32 x 26 x 28 cm),

Depth: 9 1/2 in. (24 cm) & Width: 9 1/2 in. (24 cm)



## James Prosek

(Stamford, Connecticut; 1975)

James Prosek is an American artist, writer, and naturalist whose work is concerned with the beauty, wonder, and fragility of the natural world. From a very early age, the natural world held an important role in Prosek's life. He has said, "When I went into the woods, it was the first time that I felt like something was mine. It's almost like this hand came down from above and . . . tapped me on the shoulder and said, 'It's going to be OK.'"<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Quoted in "A Young Artist Finds Solace in Creatures of the Sea and Sky," NPR; <http://www.npr.org/2013/02/25/172898537/a-young-artist-finds-solace-in-creatures-of-the-sea-and-sky> (accessed December 28, 2016).

<sup>31</sup>Quoted in the video *Seeing Nature* on the artist's website; <http://www.jamesprosek.com/wall-of-silhouettes.html> (accessed December 28, 2016).

Although he often approaches his work with the eye of a scientist, for Prosek, the value of nature lies in its mystery. "A lot of what I think about and what I do is about preserving that element of mystery," he says. "The beauty of being human is the friction between the named world and the unnamed world. A world that's named is the world where our minds and language kick in. The unnamed world is that world that we all experience when we lose ourselves in nature."<sup>31</sup>

Prosek's work recreates that quality of losing oneself in nature. The combination of highly naturalistic forms, such as the elephant in *African Elephant*, and silhouetted animals hints at the dichotomy between the 'named' and 'unnamed' worlds, between the world that we understand scientifically and the world that we perceive and feel and lose ourselves in.

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*African Elephant*, 2014  
Oil and acrylic on wood panel  
56 x 90 in. (142,2 x 228,6 cm)



## Robert Pruitt

(Houston, Texas; 1975)

American artist Robert Pruitt's thoughtful portraits fill in the gaps of the black American experience as told by mainstream American culture. The mood of his sitters matches the softness of the charcoal he uses to create his drawings; his subjects seem lost in thought. When looking at Pruitt's work, one gets the sense that there is so much more to these figures' stories than the images can tell us. That, of course, is part of Pruitt's goal. He says, "The subject of my work is the black body and identity. Through my drawing process, the figures in my work become profiles rooted in a fictional ethnography. I project onto these bodies a juxtaposing series of experiences and adornment materials, denoting a diverse and radical past, present and future."<sup>32</sup>

Pruitt's addition of seemingly unrelated subjects into these portraits results in a mixture of humor and discomfort. In *Be of Our Space World*, for example, Pruitt replicates the Vladimir Tatlin's famously unrealized *Monument to the Third International* in his sitter's hairstyle. Thus, an early-twentieth-century piece of Soviet propaganda is materialized in a traditional Nigerian hairstyle. Similarly, the hairstyle of the woman depicted in *Sun God* takes the shape of a sculpture produced by the Dogon, a tribe from Western Africa. The poses and clothing of these women also bear layers of meaning. As Pruitt says, "Using references to Hip hop, Science and Sci-Fi, technology, comic

books, Black political struggles and traditional cultures I am able to create a loose narrative that has become the core ideology of my practice. This narrative attempts to string together the breadth of the black experience and Diaspora to create a sense of commonality and humanity that I find lacking in many forms of black representation."<sup>33</sup>

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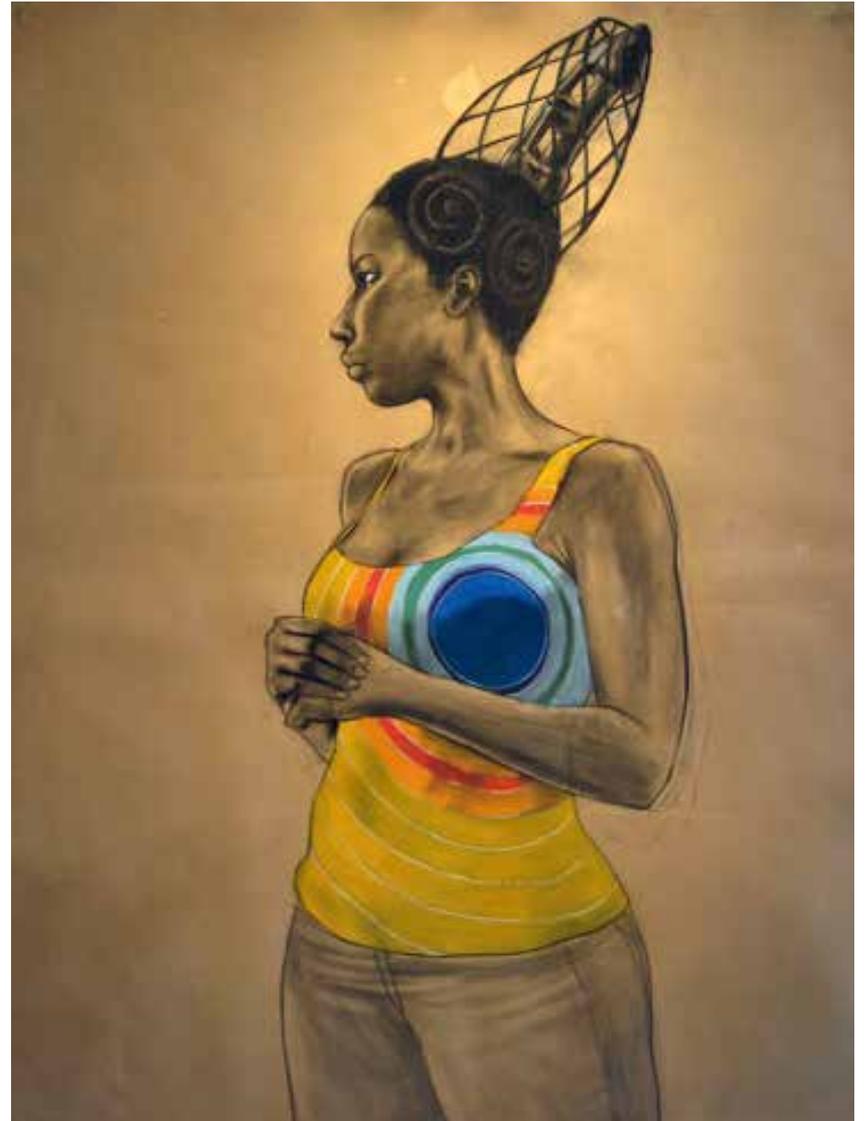
*Be of Our Space World*, 2009  
Charcoal, conté crayon and mixed media  
48 x 36 in. (121,9 x 91,4 cm)

*Sun God*, 2011  
Conté crayon, charcoal and pastel on hand-dyed paper  
50 x 38 in. (127 x 96, 5 cm)

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<sup>32</sup>Artist's statement quoted on his website; <http://www.robert-pruitt.com/about-2/> (accessed December 28, 2016).

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.



## Jaune Quick-to-See Smith

(St. Ignatius, Montana; 1940)

“I see myself as a bridge builder. My art, my life experience, and my tribal ties are totally enmeshed. I go from one community with messages to the other, and I try to enlighten people.”<sup>34</sup>

Since her emergence as an artist in the 1970s, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith has had a unique voice in American art. A woman artist from the Flathead Indian Nation in Montana, she is one of America’s best-regarded contemporary artists with the invaluable perspective of an “outsider.” Smith has worked in a variety of media and has addressed a range of subjects, but is largely interested in the issues related to her Native American identity. As she says, “In my work I use humor and satire to present narratives on ethical treatment of animals, humans and our planet. My work is philosophically centered by my strong traditional Salish beliefs.”<sup>35</sup>

Her lithograph *We Are All Knots in the Great Net of Life* incorporates sketches of an American Indian man with an eagle feather in his hair, as well as wild animals, insects, and a stalk of maize — and a spider’s web and a human skull, two reminders of life’s fragility. “This lithographic drawing is a symbolic microcosm of my life, but has analogies to the larger system on our planet,” she added.

Smith has taught and lectured across the country and her work can be found in the collections of several major museums, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

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<sup>34</sup>Quoted on the website of the Smithsonian American Art Museum; <http://www.americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artist/?id=4505> (accessed December 28, 2016).

<sup>35</sup>Artist’s statement quoted on her website; <http://jaunequick-to-seesmith.com/bio-4/> (accessed December 28, 2016).

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*We Are All Knots in the Great Net of Life*, 2007  
Five-color lithograph printed  
on white Somerset satin paper  
39 x 31 1/2 in. (99,1 x 80 cm)



## Marie Watt

(Seattle, Washington; 1967)

Marie Watt's work is at once abstract and concrete, ephemeral and tangible. In her lithograph on display at the embassy annex in Abuja, for example, what at first appears to be a detail of a woven blanket reveals itself to be lines of text that mimic the warp and weft of a woven textile. In this work, the ephemerality of words is preserved in a concrete, tactile form. The lithograph's language "tapestry" reveals the "personal, social, and cultural histories" embedded in ordinary household items, she said.

Watts's work celebrates her indigenous American heritage by reexamining the objects and traditions associated with Native American cultures. As she says, "My work explores human stories and rituals implicit in everyday objects. I consciously draw from indigenous design principles, oral traditions, and personal experience to shape the inner logic of the work I make."<sup>36</sup> By alluding to the blanket-weaving tradition, Watts recalls her own Seneca heritage and suffuses it with new life. As such, the intangibility of oral tradition is given solidity and permanence in another traditional form. Watt weaves together distinct media to celebrate her culture and its relationship to American culture at large.

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<sup>36</sup>Quoted on the website of the Portland Museum of Contemporary Art; <http://pdxcontemporaryart.com/watt> (accessed December 28, 2016).

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*Blanket Series: Continuum (Book I / Book III)*, 2007  
Six-color lithograph printed on natural Sekishu on white Arches paper  
31 1/2 x 39 in. (80 x 99,1 cm)



## Stanley Whitney

(Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; 1946)

American abstract artist Stanley Whitney is a self-described process painter. He creates bold images comprised of unmediated squares of pure color. His interest in color relates to several abstract traditions from the twentieth century, particularly color field painting and minimalism, but Whitney also draws on many other sources, both from within the visual arts and elsewhere. Music, especially jazz, has been a significant source of inspiration to Whitney. There is an undeniably musical quality to Whitney's paintings: the spacing and size of his squares create a distinct rhythm, the colors each suggest a different note, and the relationship of the squares of color to one another is reminiscent of musical harmonies.

Whitney is one of America's leading black painters, but his work never overtly addresses questions of identity or race. "African American art is typically understood as depictions of the body and not the intellect. Even today, it is a fight to be an abstract artist. A fight to be outside of blackness not in a post-racial way . . . but almost in a class way, moving beyond demographics. Skin color remains, culture remains, but what does that look like—being outside of blackness as an artist, not being white and just being human?"<sup>37</sup> Whitney's abstractions are suffused with elements from black culture, but they never overtly address identity. They are evocative of many things, much like the melody of a song.

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<sup>37</sup>Stanley Whitney as told to Adrianna Campbell in "500 Words," *Artforum* (July 14, 2015); <https://www.artforum.com/words/id=53610> (accessed December 28, 2016).

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*Wonderland*, 2009  
Oil on linen  
72 x 72 in. (182,9 x 182,9 cm)



## Fred Wilson

(Bronx, New York; 1954)

Fred Wilson, winner of a MacArthur Grant in 1999, is one of America's most respected contemporary artists. His work covers a range of materials and subjects, but it is for his so-called 'trompe l'oeil curating,' in which he assembles objects and suggests new meanings by changing their context, that he is most celebrated. In so doing, Wilson enables viewers to make connections and see what is invisible in typical museum displays.

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<sup>38</sup>Quoted in "Structures," *Art in the Twenty-First Century*, Season 3 (2005); <http://www.art21.org/videos/segment-fred-wilson-in-structures> (accessed December 26, 2016).

Wilson has also made his mark as a sculptor. His blown glass *Cadence* is an example of his breadth as an artist, as well as his power to imbue simple forms with great potency. "When I watch glass-blowing it's like the creation of a planet or something. You get seduced by the material, by the process. And then you almost don't care what it looks like afterwards," Wilson says. "Glass is always a liquid. It never completely solidifies; even though it looks like it's solid, it actually is still moving. And so, making it into these strip forms makes inherent sense for the material. And I wanted to use black glass because it represents ink, it represents oil, it represents tar. Some of them have . . . cartoon eyes, because of 1930s cartoons, which were recycled in my childhood in the sixties were representing African Americans in a very derogatory way. I sort of view them as black tears, so that to me is ultimately a sad commentary."<sup>38</sup>

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*Cadence*, 2014  
Blown glass  
71 3/4 x 14 1/4 x 3 in.  
(182,2 x 36,2 x 7,6 cm)



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