

# OZIOMA ONUZULIKE

PORTFOLIO



# OZIOMA ONUZULIKE

OZIOMA ONUZULIKE WAS BORN IN 1972 IN ACHI, ENUGU STATE IN NIGERIA WHERE HE STILL LIVES AND WORKS.

The artist graduated first class from the department of Fine and Applied Arts at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, where he is currently a professor of ceramic art and African art and design history. The artist is also a fellow of the Civitella Ranieri Centre, Umbertide, Perugia, Italy, where he undertook a residency under the UNESCO-ASCHBERG Bursary for artists, and is an alumni of the prestigious Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Maine, USA.

A ceramics artist and poet, his work largely focuses on the historical and sociological roots of the political and socio-economic turmoil in Africa and their debilitating effects on daily living on the continent. He often explores the aesthetic, symbolic and metaphorical nature of clay (his basic material) and the clay-working processes – pounding, crushing, hammering, wedging, grinding, cutting, pinching, punching, perforating, burning, firing – in his making of the multiple units that characterise his mixed-media projects. Ozioma Onuzulike encompasses African natural

resources in his artworks. Onuzulike's current project: The Palm Kernel Shell Beads series explores the aesthetic qualities and historical significance of the palm kernel. Recognising the cultural and economic value the palm kernel held in West Africa during and after the slave trade, Onuzulike translates the palm kernel as a historically charged site within his artwork. He weaves mixed media ceramic structures that resemble Africa's prestige cloths – such as the Nigerian Akwete and Aso Oke or imported ones such as the lace fabrics that are also highly regarded in Africa as markers of social status. His work engages in conversations around the issues of social change that have remained in flux.

# OZIOMA ONUZULIKE

b. 1972, Achi, Nigeria  
Lives and works Nsukka, Nigeria

A ceramist artist, poet and teacher, his artworks largely focus on the historical and sociological roots of the political and socio-economic turmoil in Africa and their debilitating effects on daily life on the continent.



## PRIZES AND AWARDS (SELECTED)

- 2024 - Finalist of the Loewe Craft Prize 2024
- 2011 - African Humanities Postdoctoral Fellowship Award of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS)
- 2010 - Leventis Postdoctoral Research Fellowship, Centre of African Studies, SOAS, University of London
- 2008 - Skowhegan Scholarship, Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Skowhegan, Maine, USA
- 2006 - Highly Commended Prize, Interpreting Ceramics 'Speak for Yourself' Competition
- 2005 - Distinguished Alumnus Award, University of Nigeria, Nsukka
- 2003 - Civitella Ranieri Fellow (Visual Art)
- 2001 - UNESCO-ASCHBERG Bursary (Visual Art)

## COLLECTIONS

- Yemisi Shyllon Museum of art, Lagos, Nigeria
- Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge University, Cambridge, UK
- Princeton University Museum, Princeton, New Jersey, USA
- The Design Museum, Munich, Germany
- Hudson Valley Museum of Contemporary Art, Peekskill, New York, USA
- Anne-Celine & Pierre Donnersberg Collection, France
- Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, California, USA
- Thalie Foundation, Belgium and France
- Ettore Fico Museum, TURIN, Italy
- North Dakota Museum of Art, North Dakota, USA
- The Ruth and Elmer Wellin Museum of Art, Clinton, New York, USA

## SELECTED SOLO SHOWS

- 2023
  - When Hearts Beat with Lofty Dreams*, AFIKARIS gallery, Paris, France
  - Ozioma Onuzulike: Recent Works*, Marc Straus Gallery, New York, USA
- 2022
  - Strings the length of our palm's seal*, CHERTLÜDDE Gallery, Berlin, Germany
- 2021
  - The Way We Are*, kó Art Space, Ikoyi, Lagos, Nigeria

2019

*Seed Yams of Our Land*, Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos, Nigeria

2018

*Beyond Pots and Plates*, Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

2008

*Ceramics and Frescoes*, Fresco Barn/Sculpture Yard, Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Madison, USA

## SELECTED GROUP SHOWS

2024

*Strategic Interplay: African Art and Imagery in Black and White*, Toldeo Museum of Art, Toledo, USA  
*A celebration of craft*, organized for the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France  
1-54 NY, AFIKARIS Gallery, New York, USA  
Art Brussels, AFIKARIS Gallery, Brussels, Belgium  
1-54 Marrakech, AFIKARIS Gallery, Marrakech, Morocco  
India Art Fair, Marc Strauss Gallery, New Delhi India  
artgenève, AFIKARIS Gallery, Geneva, Switzerland

2023

Untitled Art Fair, kó Art Space, Miami, USA  
*Yinka Shonibare CBE RA: Free The Wind, The Spirit, and The Sun*, Stephen Friedman Gallery, London  
Art-X Lagos 2023, kó Art Space, Lagos, Nigeria  
1-54 London, AFIKARIS Gallery, London, United Kingdom  
*Textile Welten (Mondes textiles)*, Museum of Design, Munich, Germany  
*Ce que nous donne la terre*, AFIKARIS Gallery, Paris, France  
ZonaMaco, AFIKARIS Gallery, Mexico City, Mexico  
Artgenève, AFIKARIS Gallery, Geneva, Switzerland

2022

Armory Show, kó Art Space, New-York, United-States of America  
1-54 London, AFIKARIS Gallery, London, United Kingdom  
*Entanglements: Colonial Collections in Decolonial Times*, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge.

2021

*Reflections and Reactions: COVID-19 Pandemic in Perspectives*, Obiora Udechukwu Gallery, Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

2015

*Anya FuluUgo: Exhibition in Honour of El Anatsui and Obiora Udechukwu*, Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

2008

*World One Minute*, Beijing Today Art Museum, China.  
*Experimental Frontiers: Society through the Eyes of South African and Nigerian Artists*, Cape African Platform, Cape Town, South Africa

2007

*Clay Without Borders (Nigeria/Norway/Sweden)*, National Museum, Onikan, Lagos

## SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

### ARTICLES & CHAPTERS IN BOOKS/EXHIBITION CATALOGUES

Onuzulike, O. (2017). "Michael Cardew and the Making of a New Ceramic Art and Design Modernism in Nigeria in the 1950s and 60s." In Titi Ogufere (ed.) *This is Africa: Traditional Design, Modern and Contemporary* (Lagos: Interior Designers Association of Nigeria/Essential Media Group), pp.10-13

Onuzulike, O. (2013). "My Hands in Clay and Other Media: The 'Casualties' Project". In JoDahn and Jeffery Jones (eds.) *Interpreting Ceramics: Selected Essays*. (Bath, U.K.: Wunderkammer Press in association with Interpreting Ceramics Research Collaboration), pp.132-137.

Nkala, N.O. & Onuzulike, O. (2012). "The Writings of Demas Nwoko". In Obiora Udechukwu and Chika Okeke-Agulu (eds.), *Ezumeezu: Essays on Nigerian Art and Architecture: A Festschrift in Honour of Demas Nwoko*. (New Jersey: Goldline & Jacobs Publishing), pp.185-199.

Onuzulike, O. (2011). "Pictorial Scripture and Colourful Lines: The Art of Onyema Offoedu-Okeke". In Okey Anueyiagu (ed.), *Contemporary African Art: My Private Collection of Onyema Offoedu-Okeke*. (Atlanta and Lagos: Brown Brommel), pp.26-34.

# THE PALM KERNEL SHELL BEAD PROJECT

In his series *The Palm Kernel Shell Bead Project*, Onuzulike shapes clay to design pieces that look like palm kernels. After the slave trade era, trade in palm oil, palm kernel and other natural resources of the African continent intensified. Nsukka, the region where the artist lives, was particularly noted for palm oil and palm kernel production in servicing the lopsided trade/power relations with the Western world.

Onuzulike considers the palm kernel for its key historical value. If it naturally looks like a bead, the artist emphasizes this trait by turning it into a glass bead. Glass beads used to be a trading currency - also called Slave Beads.

«With I, he weave mixed media ceramic structures that resemble Africa's prestige cloths (such as the Nigerian Akwete and Aso Oke) or imported ones (such as the lace fabric) that are also highly regarded in Africa as markers of social status.»

In contemporary African societies, beads have become items of prestige and social status based on the gesture of accumulation. Usually considered for their commercial value, Onuzulike combines these elements and weaves them together to produce prestigious fabrics.

As a consequence, the titles of his works always refer to pieces of clothing. Thus, Onuzulike creates precious objects, symbols of power and protection. He participates in the ongoing conversation around the issue of social change and our relationship with the environment.



*STARCHED BABARIGA FOR MR PETER OBI, 2022-3*

Stoneware clays, ash glazes, recycled glasses and copper wire (94kg, 9.951 natural and ceramic palm kernel shell beads)

285x200x25 cm / 112x79x10 in



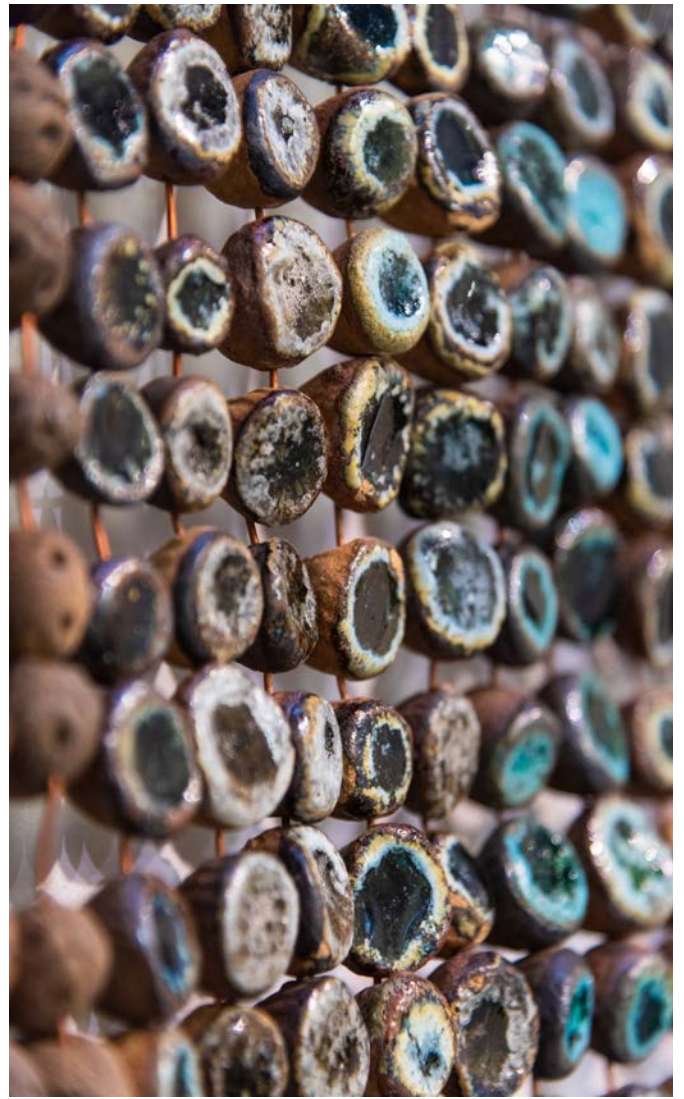
EXHIBITION VIEW

*Ce que nous donne la terre (What the Earth Gives Us)*, AFIKARIS Gallery, Paris, France  
July 2023

Photo credit: Studio Vanssay

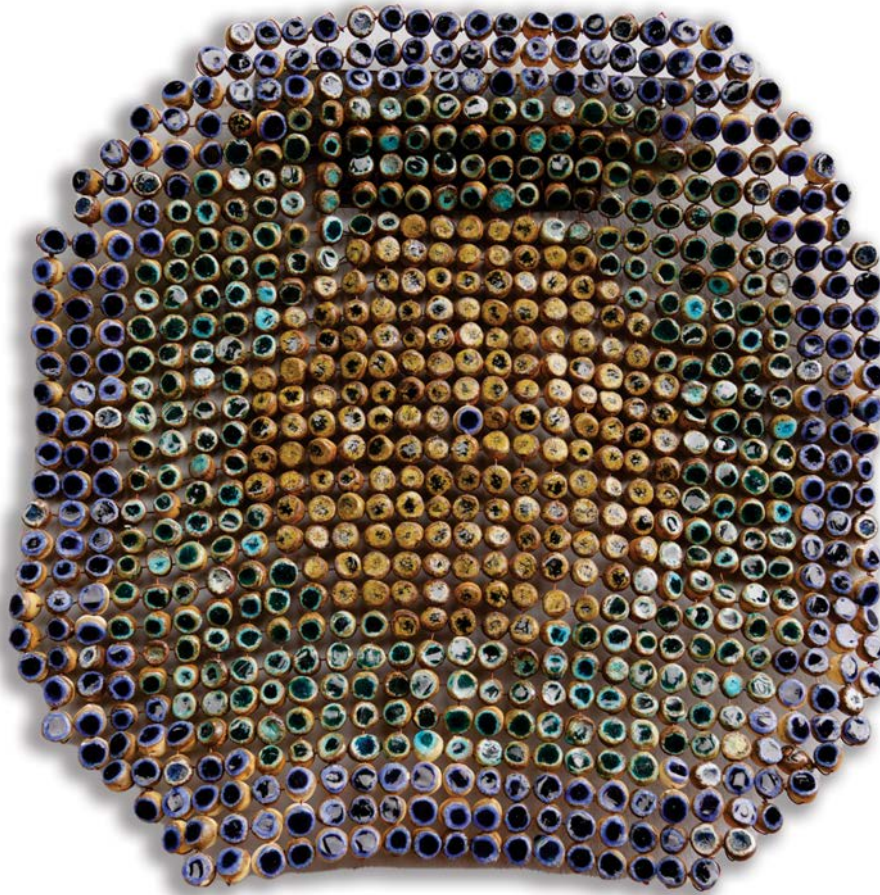


« My works confront the viewer with a role reversal in which symbols of lower socioeconomic status acquire a place and dignity denied in reality. »



*STARCHED BABARIGA FOR MR PETER OBI, 2022-3  
(detail)*

Usually considered for their commercial value, Onuzulike combines palm kernels and glass beads by weaving them together to produce prestigious fabrics. As a consequence, the titles of his works always refer to pieces of clothing. Thus, Onuzulike creates precious objects, symbols of power and protection. He participates in the ongoing conversation around the issue of social change and our relationship with the environment.



*IMPERIAL MATT WITH VENETIAN GLASS BEADS I, 2023*

Earthenware and stoneware clays, ash glazes, recycled glasses and copper wire (763 ceramic palm kernel shell beads)

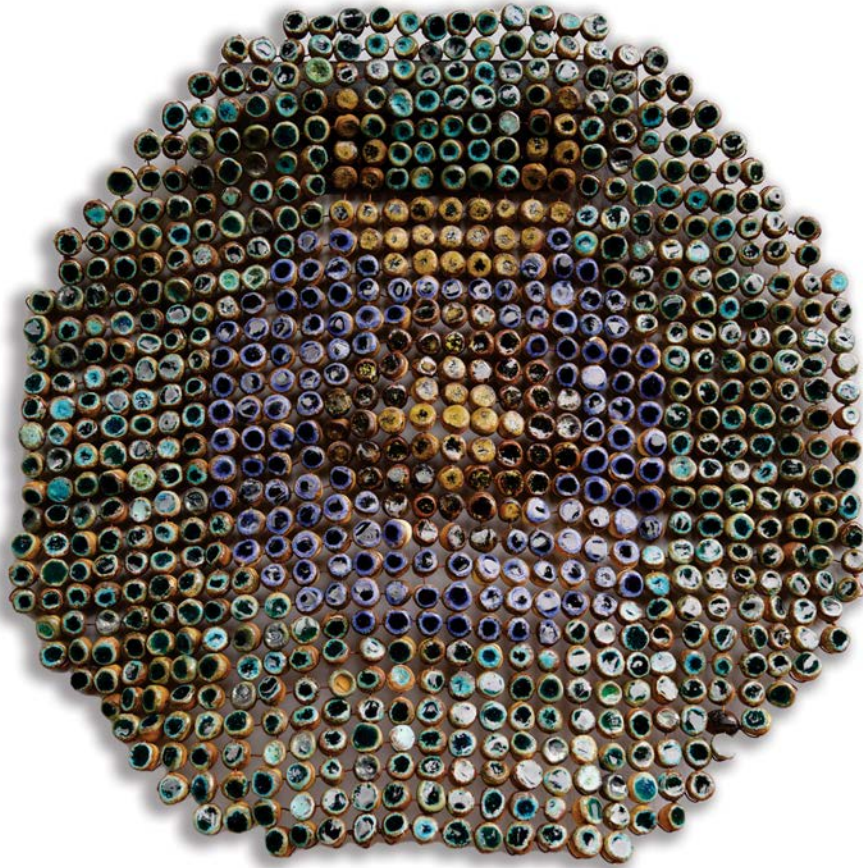
66x68x5 cm / 26x38x2 in



EXHIBITION VIEW

*When Hearts Beat with Lofty Dreams*, AFIKARIS Gallery, Paris, France  
November 2023

Photo credit: Studio Vanssay



*IMPERIAL MATT WITH VENETIAN GLASS BEADS Iii, 2023*

Earthenware and stoneware clays, ash glazes, recycled glasses and copper wire (748 ceramic palm kernel shell beads)

68x70x5 cm / 26x27x2 in



EXHIBITION VIEW

*When Hearts Beat with Lofty Dreams*, AFIKARIS Gallery, Paris, France  
November 2023

Photo credit: Studio Vanssay



*ROYAL SHIRT WITH TWO FRONT POCKETS FOR MR MACRON, 2023*

Earthenware and stoneware clays, ash glazes, recycled glasses and copper wire  
(2,960 ceramic palm kernel shell beads)

152x116x9 cm / 60x46x3.5 in



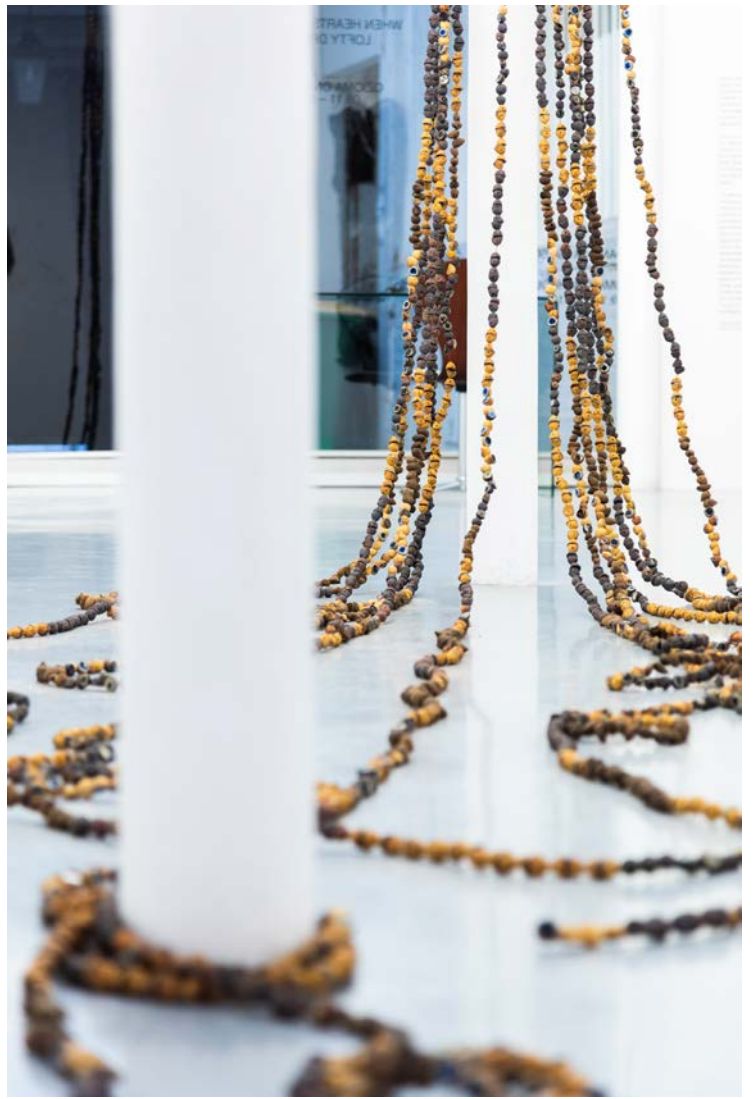
*TENDRILS I, 2023*

Installation made of 14 lines hanging from the ceiling.

Earthenware and stoneware clays, ash glazes, iron oxide engobe, natural palm kernel shells, recycled glasses and copper wire

The lines measure in between 400 and 600cm (between 158 and 236 in)





*TENDRILS I*, 2023  
(Details)



*CHEQUERED JUMPER WITH V-SHAPED EMBROIDERY, 2022*

Stoneware clays, ash glazes, iron oxide engobe, recycled glass and copper wire  
255x240x20 cm / 100.4x94.5x7.9 in



*IMPERIAL SHIRT WITH CHEQUERED PATTERN, 2023*

Earthenware and stoneware clays, ash glazes, recycled glasses and copper wire (1,806 ceramic palm kernel shell beads)

120x108x9 cm / 47x43x3.5 in



*MAMA OBI'S BEADED BLOUSE, 2023*

Stoneware clays, ash glazes, recycled glasses and copper wire  
126x120x8 cm / 50x47x3 in



*EXTRA EMBROIDERED BABARIGA FOR EL-RUFAI, 2023*

Earthenware and stoneware clays, ash glazes, recycled glasses and copper wire (3,012 ceramic palm kernel shell beads)

150x118x10 cm / 59x46x4 in



*BEADED BLOUSE FOR AUGUST MEETING, 2023*

Earthenware and stoneware clays, ash glazes, recycled glasses and copper wire  
(1,521 ceramic palm kernel shell beads)

107x97x6 cm / 42x38x2 in

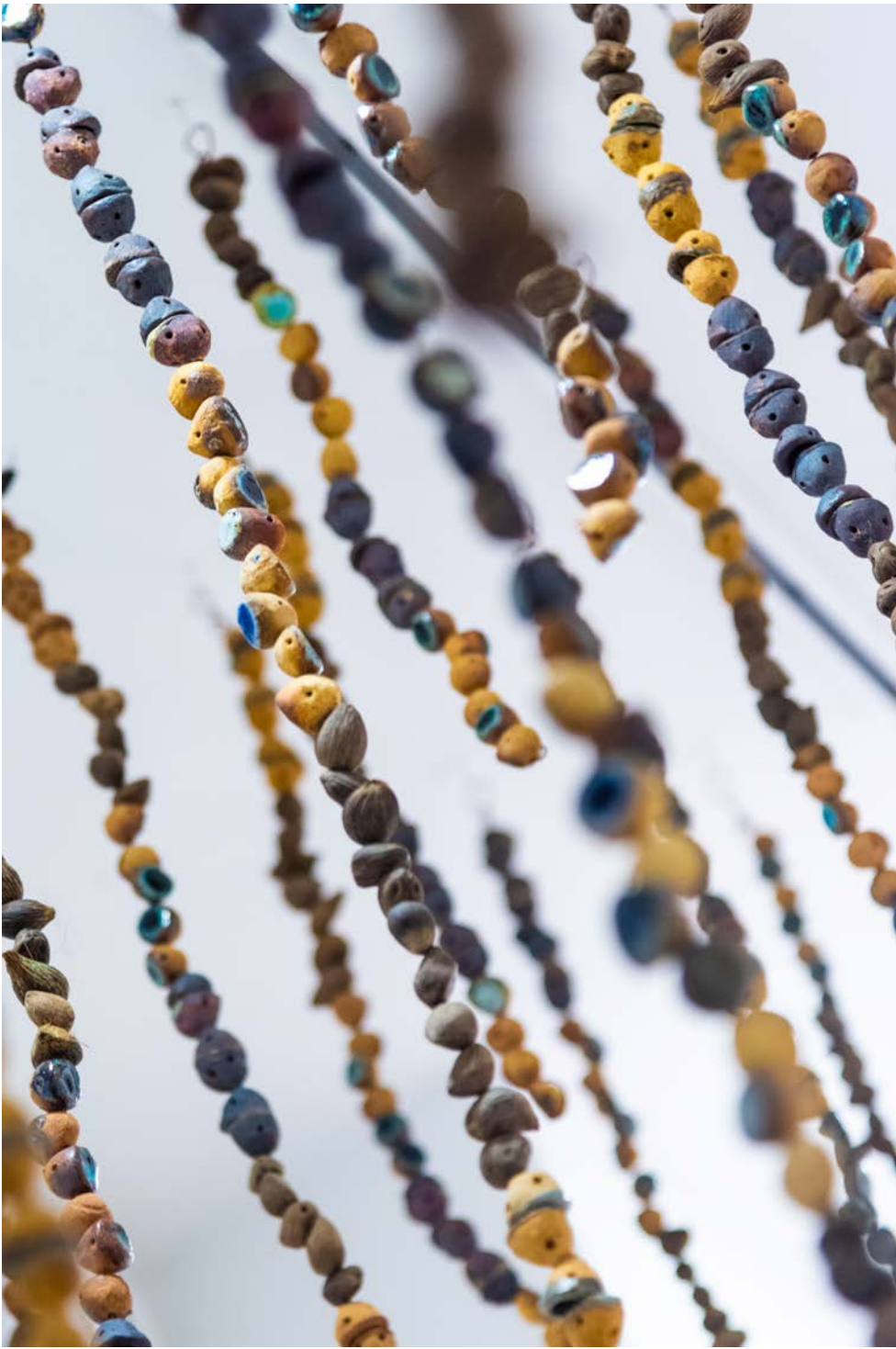


*TENDRILS II, 2023*

Installation made of 50 lines hanging from the ceiling.

Earthenware and stoneware clays, ash glazes, iron oxide engobe, recycled glasses and copper wire (ceramic palm kernel shell beads)

The lines measure in between 20 and 160 cm (8 and 63 in)



*TENDRILS II, 2023*  
(Details)



# THE YAM PROJECT

The yam is a sacred and prestigious crop among the Igbo of Nigeria, Onozulike describes it as «place of origin and nurture ».

In the past, the yam crop was the main socio-economic stay for men and their families. The yam seedlings, therefore, were held sacrosanct as the future hope of every family for economic and socio-political sustenance.

When planted in a harsh, barren or impoverished environment, the yams become stunted, ravaged, devastated or totally destroyed. When they lie individually, the forms of the yam tubers can look like motionless human bodies encased in body bags. When sorted and tied together (like in a typical African yam barn), they are also a reminder of the African slaves whom were in the past crammed in slave ships like mere commodities, but also how they are today tightly packed in trucks and boats hazarding the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea with the hope of going to “grow” better in a more conducive environment. Even when many have been lost in transit.

The debilitating conditions that have made the African continent a very hostile environment to grow her “seed yams” remain with us today, and are rather worsening by the day.

They push the plastician to explore the seed yam metaphor in my quest to draw critical attention to the devastating effects of these conditions on the continent’s youth population -the metaphorical yam seedlings.



*YAM VESSELS*, 2019  
Glazed earthenware

Biggest piece measures:  
19x10x11.5 cm / 7x4x4,5 in

Smallest piece measures:  
12x12x9 cm / 5x5x4 in



EXHIBITION VIEW

*When Hearts Beat with Lofty Dreams*, AFIKARIS Gallery, Paris, France  
November 2023

*COUPLE AT CROSSROADS*, 2023

Glazed earthenware  
34x21x11 cm / 13x8x4 in



*COUPLE AT CROSSROADS, 2023*  
(details)



EXHIBITION VIEW

*When Hearts Beat with Lofty Dreams*, AFIKARIS Gallery, Paris, France  
November 2023

Photo credit: Studio Vanssay

*RESILIENT BODY*, 2019

Terracotta (iron-saturated earthenware clay)

32.5x17x10 cm / 13x7x4 in



*COUPLE AT CROSSROADS II*, 2019

Glazed earthenware

24.5x7.5x6.5 cm / 10x3x3 in and 22x6.5x7 cm / 9x3x3 in



In this strange yam barn,  
Where Ajuwaya' flutes fill our ears  
With immortal echoes  
Of our first day at boarding school,  
When boxes skinned our heads,  
Metal buckets shrieked in spare hands,  
As legs wavered with muds of fear  
And hearts beat with lofty dreams

Now,  
Our cold eyes meander  
Through proud gaits of early birds  
Searching, like water  
To find our level

EXHIBITION VIEW

*When Hearts Beat with Lofty Dreams*, AFIKARIS Gallery, Paris, France  
November 2023

Photo credit: Studio Vanssay



*DRY SEASON III, 2023*

Earthenware and stoneware clays, ash glazes, recycled glasses, iron oxide engobe, burnt wood and copper wire

115x164x7.5 cm / 45x65x3 in





EXHIBITION VIEW

*When Hearts Beat with Lofty Dreams*, AFIKARIS Gallery, Paris, France  
November 2023

Photo credit: Studio Vanssay



*YAM FIELD, 2019*

Iron-saturated stoneware body, X-ray films, wood and light

Large boxes measure:

48x41x15cm / 19x16x6 in

48x25.5x15cm / 19x10x6 in

45.2x25.2x13.7cm / 18x10x6 in

Light Boxes:

48x41x15cm (chacunes) / 19x16x6 in



*YAM BODY*, 2019  
Iron-saturated stoneware clay  
35x12x9 cm / 14x5x4 in



*YAM VESSELS V*, 2019,  
Glazed stoneware (Six-piece ensemble)

Biggest piece measures:  
36x12x10 cm / 14x5x4 in

Smallest piece measures:  
24x10x4 cm / 9x4x2 in

# THE CHAINMAIL PROJECT

This serie is made of thousands of terracotta and copper rings crafted like chainmail.

While the copper rings come in a single colour, the terracotta rings are made in different earth colours, which are a combination of natural clay colour at different firing temperatures along with those patinated with iron oxides and also fired at different kiln temperatures. Both the making and firing processes are as complex as the process of crocheting fabrics. The results are chainmail-like structures that look like crocheted shawls. The copper wires used for the most recent pieces are upcycled from burnt electric transformers.

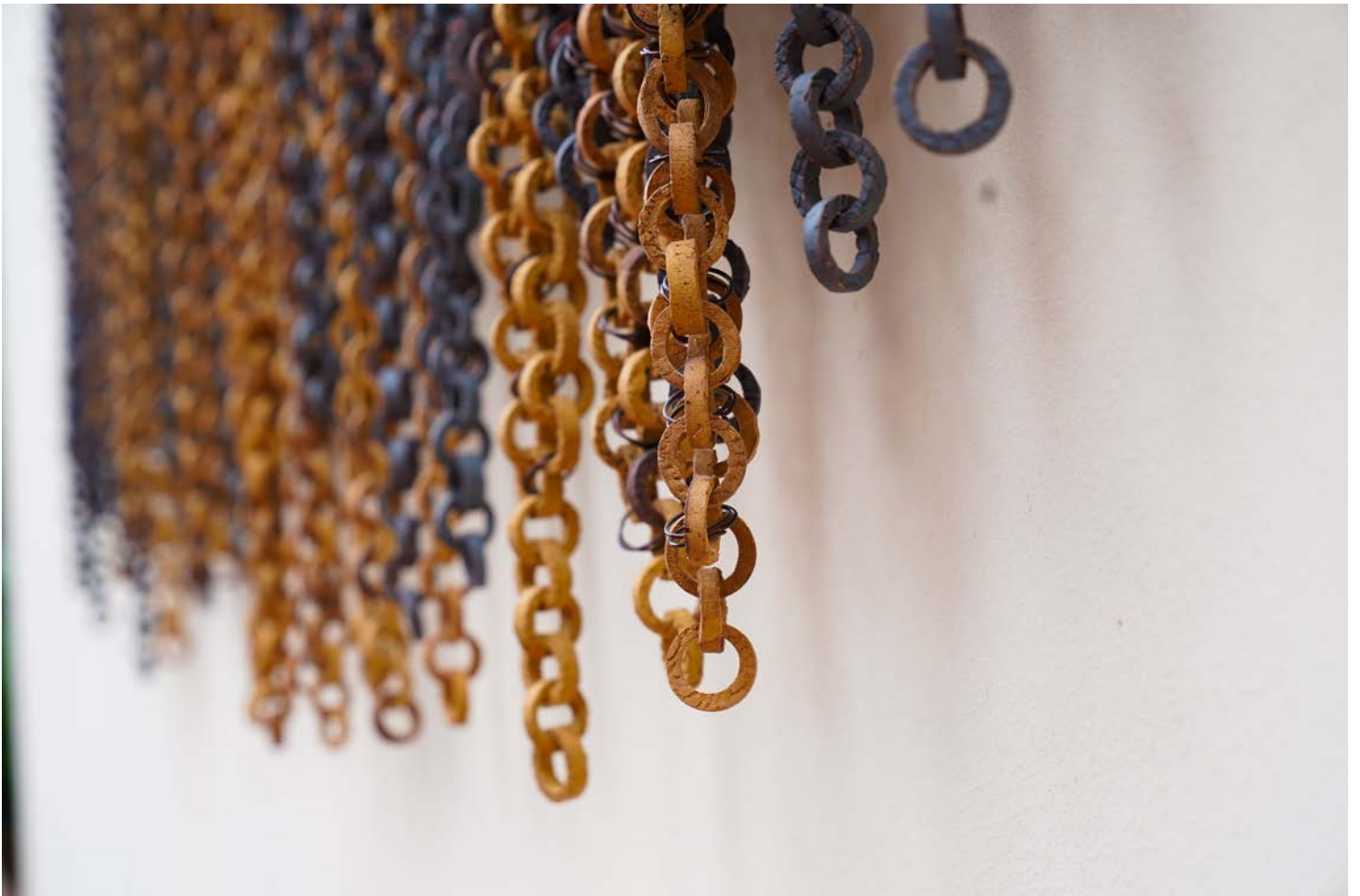
The clays are sourced from the immediate Nsukka environment. Transforming the clays through several firing circles is a metaphor for socio-environmental turmoil.

Making items of personal adornment and protection from the process symbolizes the idea of personal and environmental securities as lying primarily with our individual actions and environmental securities as lying primarily with our individual actions and choices.



*SKIRT-ARMOUR WITH WAIST GATHER, 2023*

Earthenware and stoneware clays, iron oxide engobe and copper wire  
205x240x12 cm / 81x94x5 in



*SKIRT-ARMOUR WITH WAIST GATHER, 2023*  
(details)



*ZIPPED ARMOUR FOR OBI, 2023*

Earthenware and stoneware clays, iron oxide engobe and copper wire

240x200x12 cm / 94x79x5 in



# THE HONEYCOMB PROJECT

*The honeycomb project* was first conceived during the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 as a tribute to all frontline workers - the heroes and heroines of the struggle who needed to wear protective gears and hazard very harmful territories like bee farmers.

The project took another turn according to the plastician at the end of the quarantine.

The honeycomb is a reminder that Africa's natural resources have been at the base of its woes (what has been described as "Resource Curse").

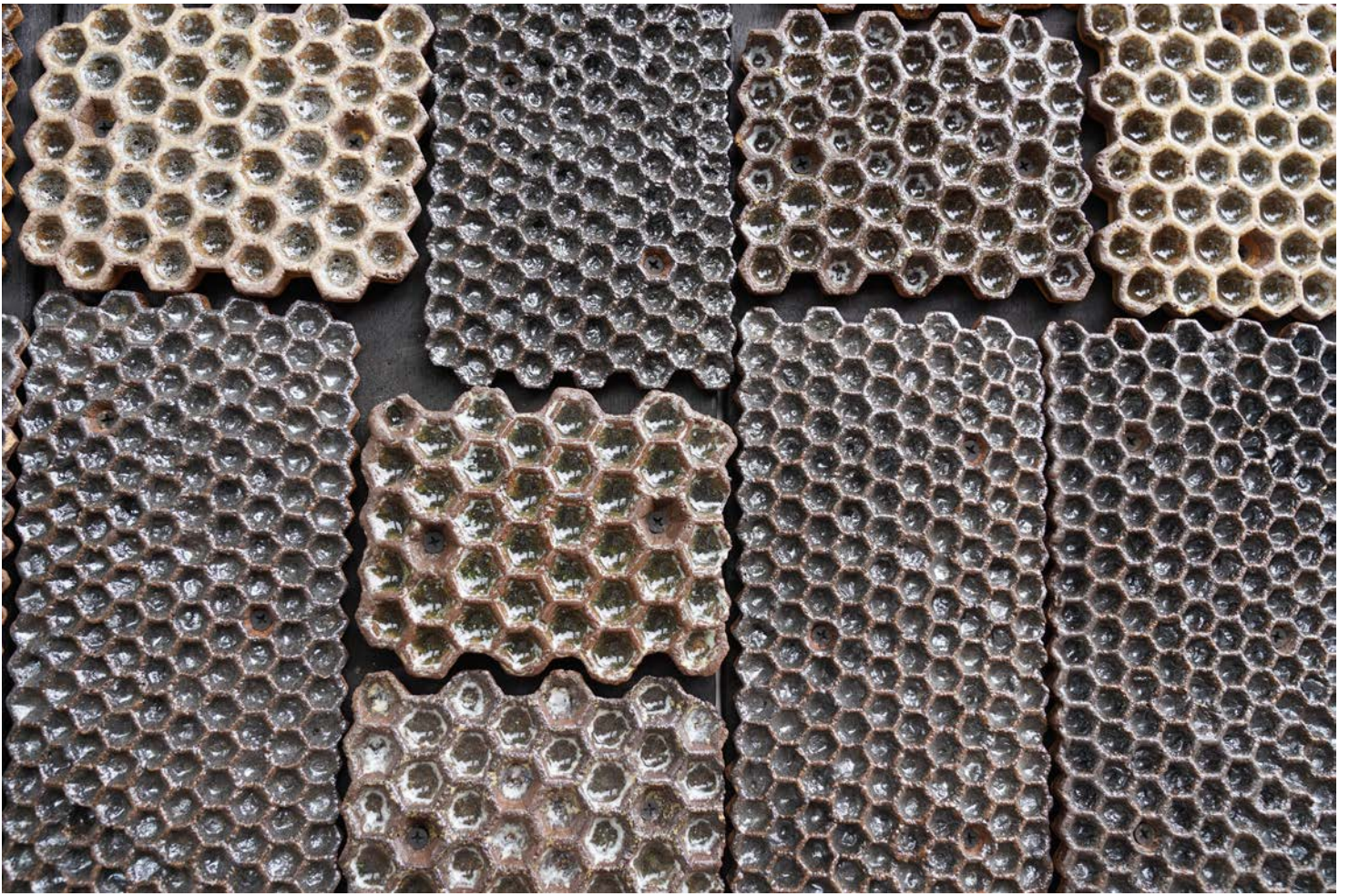
Historically, perhaps beginning from the highly skewed trade relations with the Western world (including the obnoxious slave trade), the continent's natural resources have been the honey pot pulling the ravenous appetite and interests of the imperial nations of the world.

And, traditionally, to freely and deeply harvest the honey (the resources), the "bees" needed to be subdued, tamed, conquered, forcefully driven away or even killed by all means, including naked flames !

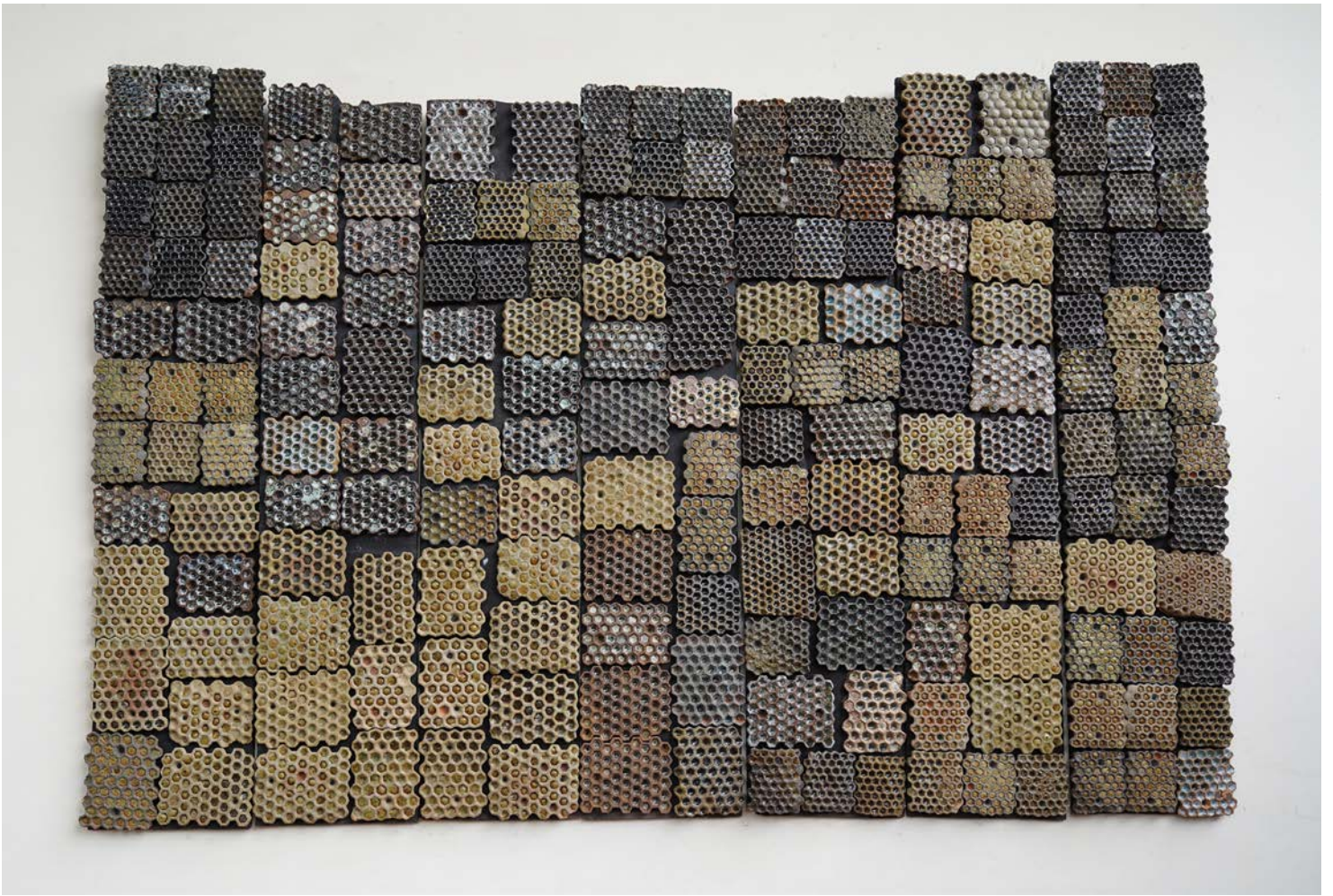


*HONEYCOMBS II, 2022*

Earthenware and stoneware clays, iron oxide, ash glazes, recycled glasses and burnt wood 141x189x-4cm / 56x74x1,5 in



*HONEYCOMBS II, 2022*  
(detail)



*AGEING BEE HIVES, 2022*

Earthenware and stoneware clays, iron oxide, ash glazes, recycled glasses and burnt wood  
130x194x4 cm / 51x76x1,5 in