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Dossier miart

April 14 - 16, 2023

Solo Show by
OLU OGUIBE

Galleria Giampaolo Abbondio | Piazza G. Garibaldi 7, 06059 Todi (PG) | sede legale: via F.lli Bronzetti 8, 20129 Milano
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Olu Oguibe

Olu Oguibe è uno scrittore e artista multimediale il cui lavoro si ritrova spesso a cavallo fra il formalismo minimalista e l'impegno sociale. Sue opere sono state ampiamente esposte in gallerie e musei, così come in biennali e triennali. Ha inoltre realizzato diversi interventi di arte pubblica in molti paesi: fra i più importanti si distingue il *Monumento agli Stranieri e ai Rifugiati*, una scultura pubblica eretta a Kassel in Germania nel 2017, e che ha ricevuto il premio Arnold Bode Preis in occasione di documenta 14.
Nel corso della sua carriera Olu Oguibe ha collaborato con personalità autorevoli della cultura come Salah Hassan, con il quale ha curato nel 2001 la mostra *Authentic/Ex-centric* alla Fondazione Levi nell'ambito della 49° Biennale di Venezia, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, tra i curatori di documenta 14, e Okwui Enwezor, dalla cui sinergia con Oguibe e Hassan nacque nel '94 la rivista *NKA: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, oltre a diversi interventi curatoriali e pubblicazioni significative.
Olu Oguibe è stato Docente di Pittura alla University of Connecticut fino al 2017, quando si è dimesso per dedicarsi a tempo pieno alla pratica artistica.

Olu Oguibe is a writer and multimedia artist whose work often straddles the line between minimalist formalism and social engagement. His works have been widely exhibited in galleries and museums, as well as in biennials and triennials. He has also realised various public art interventions in many countries: among the most prominent is the *Monument to Foreigners and Refugees*, a public sculpture erected in Kassel, Germany in 2017, and which received the Arnold Bode Preis award at documenta 14.
In the course of his career, Olu Oguibe has collaborated with influential cultural figures such as Salah Hassan, with whom he curated the 2001 exhibition *Authentic/Ex-centric* at the Fondazione Levi as part of the 49th Venice Biennale, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, one of the curators of documenta 14, and Okwui Enwezor, whose synergy with Oguibe and Hassan led to the creation in 1994 of the magazine *NKA: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, as well as various curatorial interventions and significant publications.
Olu Oguibe was Professor of Painting at the University of Connecticut until 2017, when he resigned to devote himself full-time to art practice.

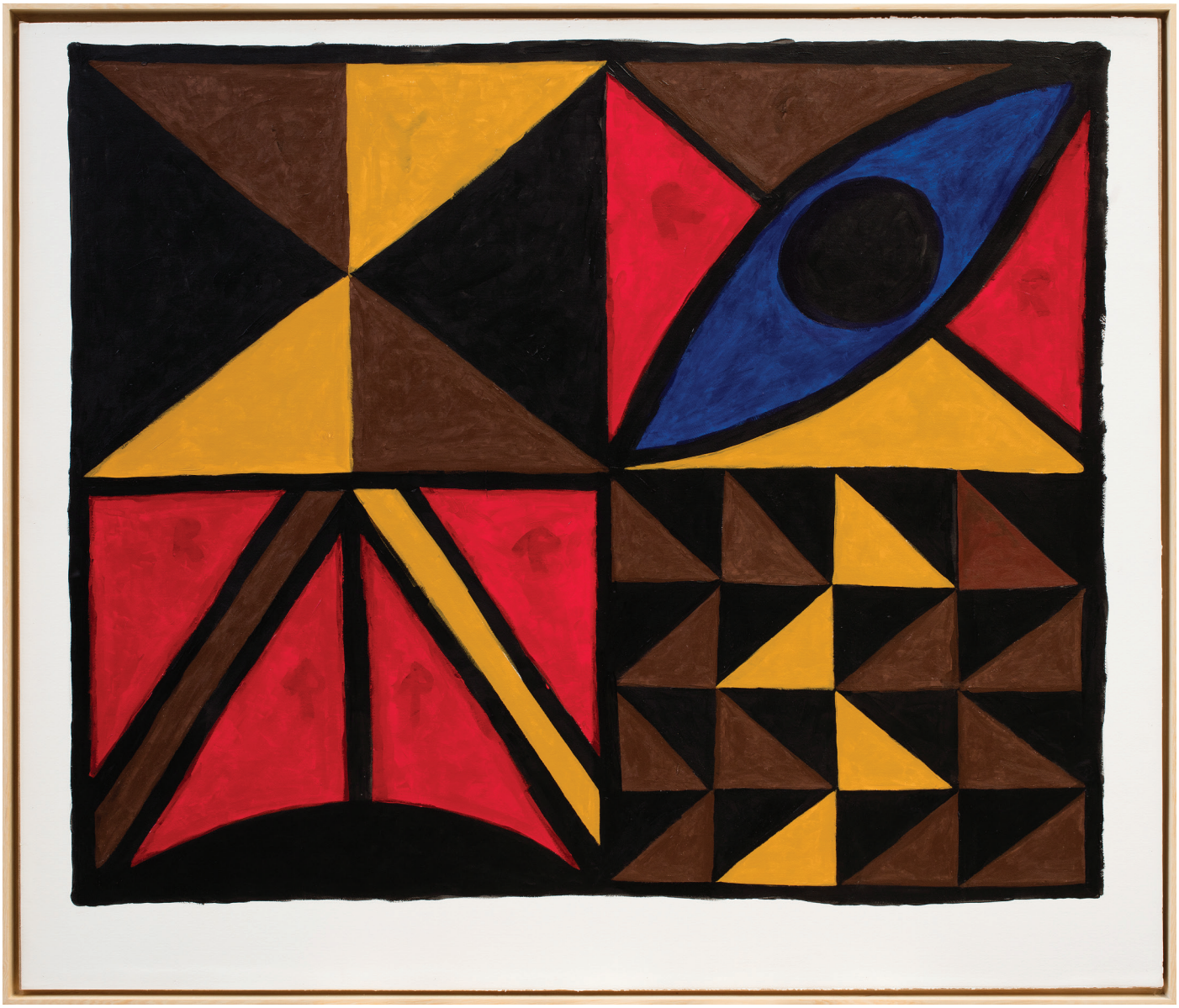
GALLERIA
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Olu Oguibe
BOCHUM II, *2023*
Acrylics on Fabriano Watercolor Paper
142 x 147 cm

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GALLERIA
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Olu Oguibe
M23-I, *2023*
Acrylics on Acid-free Fabriano Watercolor Paper
142 X 153 cm

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GALLERIA
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ABBONDIO



Olu Oguibe
M23-II, *2023*
Acrylics on Fabriano Watercolor Paper
142 x 160 cm

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GALLERIA
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ABBONDIO



Olu Oguibe
M23-III, *2023*
Acrylics on Fabriano Watercolor Paper
142 x 147 cm

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GALLERIA
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Olu Oguibe
M23-IV, *2023*
Acrylics on Fabriano Watercolor Paper
160 x 141 cm

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Olu Oguibe
UNTITLED, *2019*
tavolo in legno e vetro,
180,5 x 60 x H 92 cm

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Olu Oguibe
ALTAR FOR OLABISI SILVA, *2019*
steel
3 elements, Diam44cm, H102 cm

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Olu Oguibe
COMPOSITION WITH BLUE, RED AND YELLOW, *2019*
mixed media
site specific installation
H88cm, W25cm, L52 cm

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GALLERIA
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Olu Oguibe
COMPOSITION WITH RED STOOL - HOMENAJE A DANILO, *2019*
mixed media
site specific installation
H221 cm

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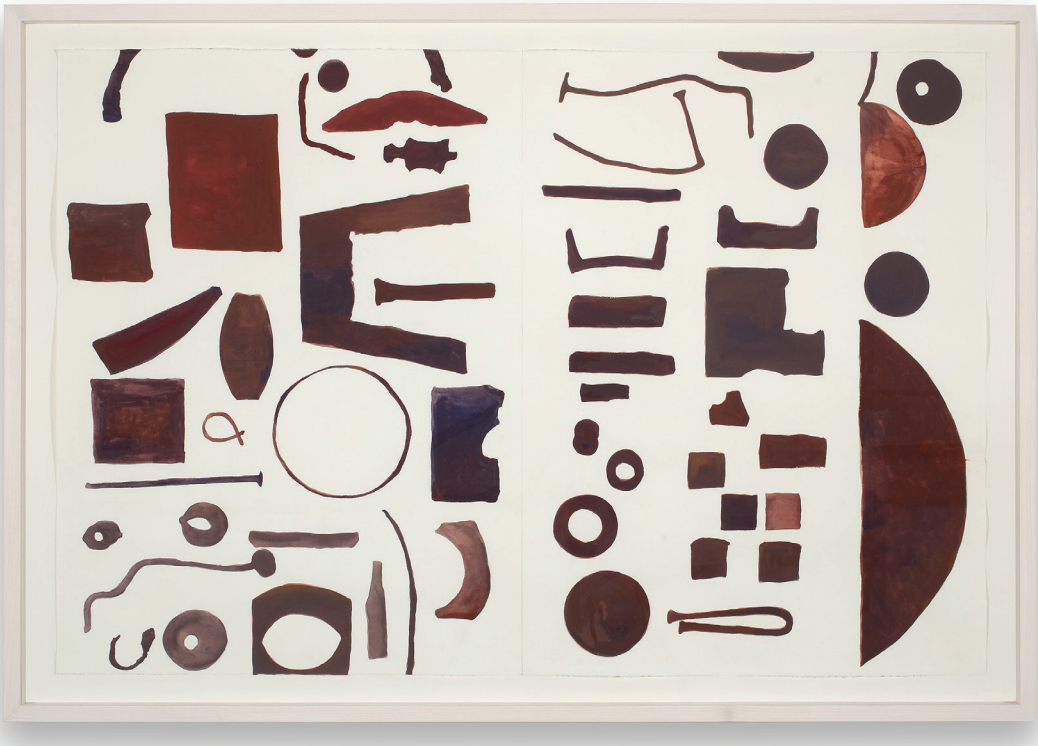
GALLERIA
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Olu Oguibe
FORMS WITH BLUE TOWER, *2019*
steel
site specific installation
H123cm, W105cm, L50 cm

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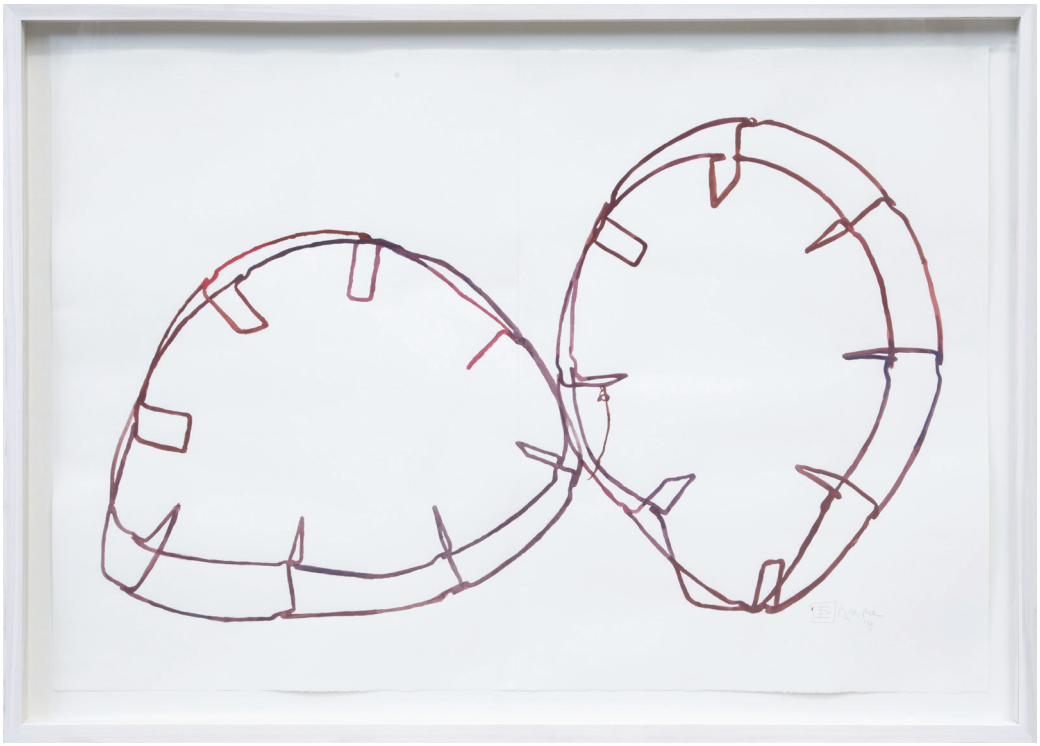
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Olu Oguibe
UNTITLED, *2019*
Watercolor on paper
80 x 112 .cm

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GALLERIA
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ABBONDIO



Olu Oguibe
UNTITLED, *2019*
Watercolor on paper
80 x 112 cm

Euro + VAT

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The Curious Case of Olu Oguibe's Monument for Strangers and Refugees

From its secret removal to its celebrated resurrection, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung explores the lives and afterlives of the Kassel statue controversy

Exposing the Question the Answer Hides

It was what we call, in German, a 'Nacht und Nebel Aktion'. The concept, which translates literally as a 'night and fog action', signifies a secretly planned act that is quickly carried out at night without prior warning. In Kassel, on 3 October 2018, German reunification day, government contractors arrived like the proverbial thieves in the night to dismantle and remove a monument and art work that had been commissioned by documenta 14 from the artist Olu Oguibe. The sculpture carries the enigmatic title *Das Fremdlinge und Flüchtlinge Monument* (Monument for Strangers and Refugees, 2017) and bears – in Germany's four predominant languages: Turkish, Arabic, English and German – the biblical verse (Matthew 25:35): 'I was a stranger and you took me in.' Hardly has an art piece in recent history solicited so much controversy, leaving no one lukewarm. Oguibe's work will occupy artists and scholars for several generations to come and I hope one day to afford myself more time and space than *frieze* can grant to write about it.

When, in 2014, Adam Szymczyk invited me to join his documenta 14 team as curator-at-large, I knew immediately that one of the artists I would invite was Oguibe – an artist, scholar, curator and poet I had known from afar and whose seminal works in all these domains had greatly guided me towards becoming a curator.

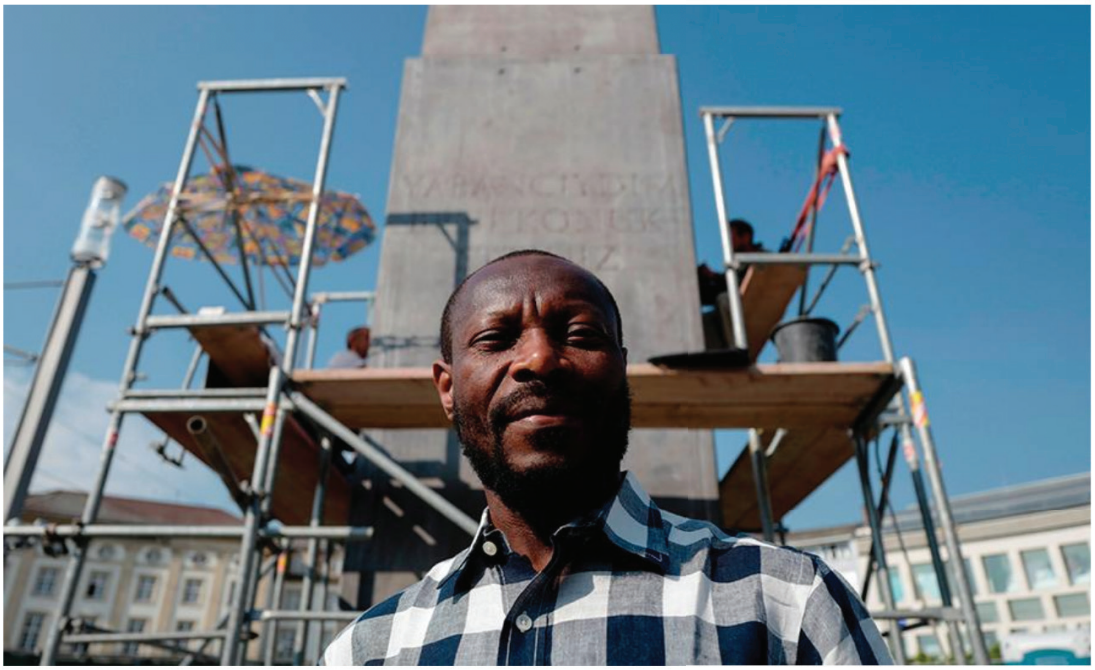


Olu Oguibe, *Monument for Strangers and Refugees*, 2017, installation view, documenta 14, Kassel. Courtesy: documenta, Kassel; photograph: Michael Nast

The invitation to Oguibe lead to two pieces that can only be described as monumental and timely: the *Biafra Time Capsule* (2017), presented at the EMST National Museum of Contemporary Art in Athens to commemorate the Biafran War (1967–70), and the *Monument for Strangers and Refugees*, which manifested itself majestically as an obelisk on Kassel's Königsplatz. The works were conceived during what was derogatorily referred to by many as 'the refugee crisis' in of 2014/15 – a critical period in German history in particular and European history in general, when hundreds of thousands of humans fled wars, poverty and other atrocities daring to cross the Mediterranean Sea and walk through Southeastern Europe to countries like Germany. While some refugees were warmly welcomed initially, the tide soon changed and migrants faced hostilities as national borders were shut and Europe became a fortress again. When German chancellor Angela Merkel famously said 'wir schaffen das' (we can manage this) in 2015, as way of motivating her citizens to stay strong during this humanitarian crisis, violence

against migrants in the country skyrocketed – not only at the fringes of extreme right-wing parties, but also institutionally. It was in such friable times that Oguibe produced his obelisk.

The gold-plated inscription – 'I was a stranger and you took me in' – can be understood from multiple perspectives. Foremostly, as an expression of gratitude for hospitality and care, in instances where that was the case. But the use of a biblical phrase in this context could also be seen as an affront by those who never wanted to be hospitable in the first place and expressed hostility instead. It could also be perceived as rubbing salt into the wounds of a society that claims to be founded on Christian and democratic values. As if each letter, each word, served to remind the reader of the hypocrisy of nationhood, religion, democracy and other values of Germany's so-called 'Leitkultur' (guiding culture).



Olu Oguibe in front of *Monument to Strangers and Refugees*, 2017, Kassel. Courtesy: AFP/Getty Images; photograph: John MacDougall

For the 100 days of documenta 14 and afterwards until its infamous tearing down, the obelisk became a pilgrimage site for pro-migration and pro-democracy activists, as much as it became a meeting point and selfie-backdrop for the large

Turkish, Eritrean, Syrian and other migrant communities in Kassel. However, the monument was also used by right-wing extremist groups as a metaphorical screen on which to project their hate. This was most famously done by Germany's right-wing party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), whose principal political agenda is anti-immigrant and whose foundation is racist, antisemitic and revisionist towards Germany's Holocaust history. In a meeting of Kassel's cultural committee, an AfD city councillor said the obelisk was 'ideologically polarizing distorted art' (entstellte Kunst) – reminiscent of the Nazis' use of the term 'degenerate' to describe modern art (entartete Kunst). Indeed, this makes the 'Nacht und Nebel Aktion' by no means farfetched, since the expression goes back to Adolf Hitler's December 1941 decree to the Wehrmacht High Command that led to the sudden transfer of resistance fighters in occupied territories of France, Belgium and the Netherlands to the German Reich, who were then sent to concentration camps or executed. During the Nuremberg trials of 1945–46, this command was dubbed the 'Nacht und Nebel Decree'.



What provoked so much tension, so many emotions – varying from excitement to rage – around Oguibe's monument, besides its conceptual and aesthetic brilliance, was the fact that it was audacious. The obelisk had the audacity to stand on the city's 18th-century Königsplatz, which was named after Friedrich I, King of Sweden and Landgrave of Hesse-Kassel. The obelisk had the audacity to point at Germany's Achilles heel: the question of migration. The obelisk had the audacity to reveal the bigotry hidden behind religious claims and democratic flags. The obelisk had the audacity to betray an essential and fundamental unspoken truth in this construct called Germany: that it is a conglomerate of tribes and peoples who fought against each other for hundreds of years. United to combat the Romans in the Teutoburg Forest in 9CE, to form the German Empire in 1871, to repair the devastation of World War II in 1945, and to reunify East and West Germany in 1990, the country's common denominator – its underlying truth, too often denied – is its strangeness and pluriversality. One might say, the obelisk revealed that we are all strangers – physically, philosophically, spiritually. But, above all, Oguibe's obelisk had the audacity to utter, to preach and to disseminate that most unfathomable of all things: love and compassion.

The sadness that seized me upon hearing the news of the removal of *Monument for Strangers and Refugees* was soon dislodged by the certitude of the illimitable potential of art – its propensity, by or even beyond the will of its author, to divulge certain truths, mysteries, things unseen and unheard. As James Baldwin wrote in his seminal essay 'The Creative Process' (1962): 'A society must assume that it is stable, but the artist must know, and he must let us know, that there is nothing stable under heaven. One cannot possibly build a school, teach a child or drive a car without taking some things for granted. The artist cannot and must not take anything for granted, but must drive to the heart of every answer and expose the question the answer hides.' With *Monument for Strangers and Refugees*, Oguibe exposed several questions hidden by the plethora of answers we find in our societies.



Olu Oguibe, *New Monuments Series*, 2020, acrylics on acid-free watercolour paper, 2 sheets, each 76 × 107 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Kandlhofer, Vienna; photograph: Manuel Carreon-Lopez / kunst-dokumentation.com

The obelisk was later afforded an afterlife, when it was resurrected and remounted alongside other historical documenta works on Kassel's Treppenstraße in April 2019. But this is just one of its many afterlives: the idea has metamorphosed into varying forms exploring issues of displacement and hospitality. Oguibe's *New Monuments Series* (2020) acknowledges personalities like Domenico Lucano, the former mayor of Riace and the German ship captain Carola Rackete, who has been arrested docking vessels carrying migrants – people who have pushed themselves beyond their privileged bubbles to help humans – refugees – who are in dire need. Faced by today's precariousness as we fight to survive a global pandemic, works like *New York, April 2020* (2020) are markers and witnesses of the pains and crumbling of social infrastructures in these times.

This essay is part of a series on public art that will appear in the May issue of frieze.

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Education:

PhD, Art History, University of London, 1992

Selected Honors, awards and Fellowships:

2017 Arnold Bode Prize for documenta 14
2013 Fulbright Award to Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India (Declined)
2013 Governor's Award for Excellence and Lifetime Achievement, State of Connecticut
2006 Senior Fellowship, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC
2001, 2002 Senior Fellowship, Vera List Center for Art and Politics, The New School
1998 Resident Fellowship, Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center, Bellagio, Italy

Solo Show:

2020 Olu Oguibe ,Galerie Kandlhofer ,Vienna, Austria
2019 Cuba Project, Galleria Giampaolo Abbondio, Milano
2014 Olu Oguibe - iPad Prints, Real Art Ways - Hartford, CT, US
2010 Olu Oguibe, Real Art Ways - Hartford, CT, US
2002 Olu Oguibe, Newman Popiashvili, New York City, NY, US
1994 Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

Group Show:

2023 O Quilombismo, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin
2022 Rewinding Internationalism, Scenes from the'90, Today, Van Abbe Museum, Netherlands
A Different Now is Close Enough to Exhale on You, Goodman Gallery, Cape Town ,Cape Town, Johannesburg, South Africa
2021 12th Edition Sonsbeek, Sonsbeek International Sculpture Exhibition, Arnhem, Netherlands
2019 13th Bienal de la Habana: La costrucciòn de lo posible, La Bienal de La Habana, Cuba
2018 Feedback: Art, Africa and the 1980s ,Iwalewahaus ,Bayreuth, German
RuhrTriennale, North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany
2017 Documenta 14, Benaki Museum of Greek Culture, Athens, Greece
Documenta 14, Kassel, Germany
2016 11th Shanghai Biennial, Shanghai, China
2015 Arte contemporanea na Colecao Sindika Dokolo - You love Me, You Love M…, Municipal Gallery Almeida Garrett, Porto, Portugal
2013 The Art of Translation: The Simon Ottenberg Gift of Modern and Contemporary Nigerian Art. Newark Museum of Art, Newark, NJ, US

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The poetic line, Makerere Art gallery, Kampata, Uganda
2010 Outsight Inn, Rupert Ravens Contemporary, Newark, NY, US
2009 International Incheon Women Artist's Biennale, Icheon, South Korea
2008 Speak to Me: The ConnecticutBiennal 2008, The Mattatuck Museum Arts&History Center, Waterbury, Connecticut, US
2007 52nd Venice Biennale, Africa Pavilion
Shadow Show, Real Art Ways, hartford, CT, US
Equatorial Rhytms, Stenersenmuseet, Oslo, Norway
In the Color Line, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, NY, US
2006 Report (Not Announcement), Basis voor Actuele Kunst, BAK, Utrecht, Netherlands
Trienal de Luanda, Luanda, Angola
2005 Anyang Public Art Project, Anyang, Korea
2004 Black President - The Art and Legacy of Fela Anikulapo - Kuti. Cincinnati Contemporary Art Center (CAC). Cincinnati, OH, US
Camoufleurs, Kunstverein Springhornhof, Neuenkirchen, Germany
Global Priority, San Francisco Arts Commision Gallery, San Francisco, CA, US
Busan Biennale 2004, Busan, South Korea
2003 Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
2nd Biennial of Ceramics in Contemporary Art, Liguria Italy
Black President - The Art and Legacy of Fela Anikulapo - Kuti, New Museum, New York, NY, US
The African Exile Museum, Migros Museum fur Gegenwartskunst, Zurich, Switzerland
Next Flag - Reexistencia Cultural Generalizada, BPS22, Musee d'art de la Province de Hainaut, Charleroi, Belgium
2002 Family, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT, US
Binary Code, Akus Gallery, Eastern Connecticut State Univesity, Willimantic, CT, US
2001 Mirror's Edge, Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen, Denmark
Benefit 2001 Raffle, Momenta Art, New York, NY, US
Mirror's Edge, Tramway, Glasgow, Scotland, UK
2000 Greater New York PS1 New York
7th Bienal de La HAbana 2000, Havana, Cuba
Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennal 2000, Nigata-ken, Japan
Mirror's Edge, Castello di Rivoli, Turin, Italy
Continental Shift, Ludwig Forum fur Internationale Kunst, Aachen, Germany
Insertion: Self and Other, Apexart, New York, NY, US
1999-2000 Mirror Edge of Awareness World Health Organization Headquartiers, New York, SESC Pompeia, San Paulo, Brazil, Palazzo della Triennale Milano
1998 The Poetics of Line - Seven Artist of the Nsukka Group, Nigeria, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institute, Washington DC, US
1997 Trasforming the Crown: African, Asian and Caribbean Artist in Britain 196…, Bronx Museum of Arts, The studio Museum in Harlem an Caribbean Cultural Center, New york, NY, US
CROSS/ING: Time, Space, Movement, USF Contemporary Art Museum, Tampa, FL, US

1997 2nd Johannesburg Biennale, Johannesburg, South Africa

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1996 Interzones Kunstforeningen GL Strand, Copenhagen, Denmark
Kunstforeningen, Copenhagen
Uppsala Konstmuseum, Uppsala, Sweden
Malmo Kunsthalle, Sweden
Setagaya Art Museum. Tokyo, Japan
nstitute of Contemporary Arts, Johannesburg, South Africa
University Galleries, Gainesville, Florida
1995-96 Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa, Whitechapel Gallery, London Malmo Kunsthal
le, Sweden
1995 An inside Story: African Art of Our Time, Setagaya Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan
Contemporary Art Museum, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida
1995 Whitechapel Art Gallery, London
1986 - 1994 Solo and Group Exhibitions and Projects in Africa and Europe