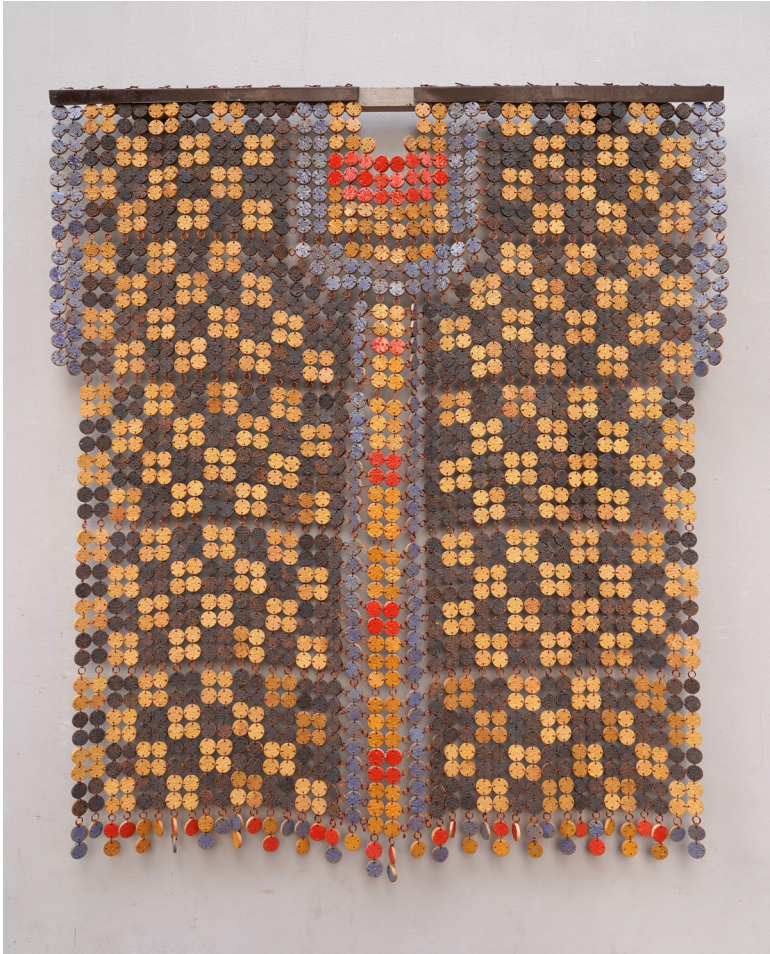


Ozioma Onuzulike

Who Knows Tomorrow

March 14 - April 26, 2025



Ozioma Onuzulike

Flamboyant Armour for Femi Falana I (Lace Series), 2025

Earthenware and stoneware clays, glazes, and copper wire

64½ x 58½ x 5½ in. (164.00 x 149.00 x 15.00 cm)

A reception will be held for the artist on
Friday, March 28th from 5 - 8 pm.

The artist will be present.

In Ozioma Onuzulike's workshop in Nsukka, Nigeria, the fiery core of the kiln is a crucible of radical transformation. Within this space, the artist experiments, explores, and forges a universal language- one without a name, yet shared across borders. Here, art transcends national divisions, creating dialogues that connect rather than divide. Using pigments from the UK, clay from Nigeria, and exhibiting in New York, Onuzulike's work speaks in a boundless, cross-cultural discourse.

A major source of inspiration for Onuzulike's work is his mentor and teacher, Ghanaian sculptor El Anatsui, particularly his "Broken Pots" series from the 1970s. Onuzulike extends these ideas to his art making; his process - cutting, smashing, and subjecting clay to violent force - mirrors historical ruptures, evoking war and colonial exploitation. Fire, both destructive and creative, is central to this narrative, transforming materials in an irreversible act of transmutation.

A recurring motif in Onuzulike's work is the palm kernel, symbolizing Africa's extracted and discarded resources. Whether human or material, Africa has long been exploited without regard for ethics or sustainability. His work features palm kernel shells, both natural and clay-fabricated, together with glass, evoking Venetian trade beads historically used in transactions, including the transatlantic slave trade. Once a symbol of subjugation, these beads have re-emerged as markers of wealth and status - Onuzulike reclaims them, integrating the legacy of trade into contemporary cultural expression.

Deeply rooted in local traditions that have endured for centuries, Onuzulike draws inspiration from his surroundings, incorporating material and non-material heritage, from the intricate patterns of Akwaete, Aso Oke and Kente textiles to the impermanent lines of Uli design; from naming his works after figures of political and social significance to naming his heavy creations after types of clothing and armor - a purpose they can never serve. All of this informs his practice, adding layers of historical references and semiotic relationships that are evident not only in the forms and textures of his sculptures but also in their very names.

These themes can be seen in *Royal Alkyabba*, Onuzulike's most ambitious work to date, a majestic large-scale cape comprised of over 35,000 individually cast ceramic pieces and palm kernels woven into a glorious tapestry. In another more playful work, *Flamboyant Armour for Femi Falana I*, Onuzulike brings new color, reverence, and humor to his oeuvre, naming the piece after Femi Falana, an important human rights activist in Nigeria, participating in an African custom of naming children, fashion, and other acquisitions based on the circumstances of their birth or significant events of the time.

Onye ma echi—who knows tomorrow? This Igbo saying echoes throughout Onuzulike's work, embodying the unpredictability of history, identity, and transformation. Through ceramics, he navigates a complex web of associations, drawing on traditional practices of making, dressing, naming, and thinking to interrogate the shifting relationships between symbols and meaning. In a world of rapid political and environmental change, his work becomes a discourse on history and resilience, asking what is lost, what is reclaimed, and what the future might hold.

Ozioma Onuzulike
Royal Alkyabba, 2024

35,000 ceramic and natural palm kernel shell beads and copper wire
189 x 179½ x 5⅞ in. (480.00 x 457.00 x 15.00 cm)



The gallery is proud to present Ozioma Onuzulike's second solo exhibition in the United States. Onuzulike (b. 1972) is Professor of Ceramics and African Art History, and Director of the Institute of African Studies at the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. His solo exhibitions include *Seed Yams of Our Land* at the Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA), Lagos, Nigeria (2019), along with a presentation of his poetry collection of the same title also published by the CCA. His works were included in the exhibition at the Museum of Archeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge, UK, arising from the [Re:]Entanglements research project led by Professor Paul Basu. Onuzulike is a fellow of the Civitella Ranieri Centre, Umbertide, Perugia, Italy, where he completed a residency under the UNESCO-ASCHBERG Bursary for Artists. He is a 2011 recipient of the African Humanities Postdoctoral Fellowship Award from the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) and a 2010 Leventis Postdoctoral Research Fellow, University of London Centre of African Studies, SOAS; and an alumnus of the prestigious Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Maine, USA. His work represented in numerous important collections including the Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art, Lagos, Nigeria; Museum of Archeology and Anthropology, Cambridge University, Cambridge, UK; Princeton University Museum, Princeton, NJ; The Design Museum, Munich, Germany; Hudson Valley Museum of Contemporary Art, Peekskill, NY; Donnersberg Collection, France.

CONTACT:

Artist Inquiries: Alex Browngardt | alex@marcstrauss.com | 631.377.9835

Press Inquiries: Erin Baeskens | erin@marcstrauss.com | 909.908.6592

Designed by: Martina Scala | martina@marcstrauss.com | 929.595.4937