

1

TASTE OF A STONE

KOLANUT TALES – DISMEMBERED

As a meditative oasis, the site-specific installation opens with an indoor garden of rocks and marble pebbles. It is a landscape full of historical and geological traces, and simultaneously a space for interpersonal encounters. Nkanga probes the cultural value and stories of the stones. She asks what they can reveal about land and soil, and what roles they can take on, for instance when delineating territory or taken as a souvenir from their original location, narrating their own diasporic dislocation. The surfaces of the limestone slabs show subtle signs of change that testify to contact with insects, plants or people, thus pointing to the interconnectivity of all systems. The freestanding textile work depicts a botanical image of dismembered plants disjoined and dislocated

2010-2020, site-specific installation, boulders, gneiss, granite, iceland lichen, inkjet prints on limestone, marble pebbles, movements, plants

Courtesy the artist

2010, woven tapestry

Courtesy the artist

Events calendar for the movements can be found on:  
gropiusbau.de/nkanga



2012, aspirator, distilled water, hot plate, table

Courtesy Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, Brussels, New York

2

DIASPORE

Performers in *Diaspore* narrate, sing and focus their stare as they navigate through a topographical map whilst carrying pots of the plant Queen of the Night (*Cestrum Nocturnum*) on their heads. The women, who are in constant dialogue with the plants, carefully direct their movement over the floor of a cartographic map that does not delineate which territory is being traversed. Nkanga further explores the language of diaspora and the journey of leaving home looking for a new future. The native West Indian plant was subsequently naturalized in South Asia. It illustrates Nkanga's interest in the complex network of social and political tensions manifesting when bodies

2014/2020, site-specific installation, Cestrum Nocturnum, performance, plant pots, printed vinyl floor

Courtesy the artist

The space is activated during the following times:  
**Mon, Wed, Thu, Fri:**  
16:00-18:00  
**Sat, Sun:**  
13:00-18:00

The names of the performers can be found on our website

2017, woven textile, colour, ink, metal reservoir

Courtesy the artist

2018, aluminium, air compressor, free-floating element, glass, heating rod, metal, neon light, powder-coated steel

Courtesy the artist

3

DOUBLE PLOT

in seeming defiance of gravity, standing for transcending a situation; one segment rusts, addressing decay and also the changeability of the elements and their states. In this material expression, relating to the very substance of earth, Nkanga considers the state of the world: metaphorical temperatures that heat, cool and resist. It stands

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Courtesy the artist

4

THE LEFTOVERS

SOLID MANEUVERS

This topographical, layered sculpture is like an equation of a negative volume becoming a positive volume: the remaining negative emptiness of one place left behind after the excavation of resources is often not visible in the end product of the erected structure. The sculpture references the abandoned excavation, which leaves the landscape, and our relationship with it, wounded. The structures consolidate elements from underground, such as petroleum, copper, sheet metal, steel, acrylic and aluminium. Brought together and stacked, it makes us think

2014/2020, site-specific installation, Cestrum Nocturnum, performance, plant pots, printed vinyl floor

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2017, woven textile

Courtesy the artist

2015, various metals, acrylic, Forex, make-up, salt, tar, vermiculite

Courtesy the artist

5

CONTAINED MEASURES OF SHIFTING STATES – EVAPORATE

The evaporation process can be observed on the round table. Liquid slowly but steadily drips from the glass container onto a hot plate, which instantly turns into hissing steam. By observing the transformation from fluid to vapour, we witness the change in the state of things. The installation is part of a series that makes the changing states of different elements perceptible – aiming to

2012, aspirator, distilled water, hot plate, table

Courtesy Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, Brussels, New York

2012, aspirator, distilled water, hot plate, table

Courtesy Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, Brussels, New York

2017/2020, acrylic paint, metal, poems inkjet printed on cotton cloth

Courtesy the artist

2017/2020, acrylic paint, metal, poems inkjet printed on cotton cloth

Courtesy the artist

6

IN A PLACE YET UNKNOWN

MANIFEST OF STRAINS

The circular sculpture deals with the interconnectedness of actions, with a view to opening up an overall picture of social and political states. It examines how non-visible emotional spaces and social strains can be translated and rendered tangible. In *Manifest of Strains*, physical and emotional states – such as anger, melancholy or numbness – are manifested in seven material-based parts related to the natural elements of water, air and fire. As

2017, woven textile, colour, ink, metal reservoir

Courtesy the artist

2018, aluminium, air compressor, free-floating element, glass, heating rod, metal, neon light, powder-coated steel

Courtesy the artist

7

WE COULD BE ALLIES

The installation *We Could Be Allies* is composed of visual, textual and sculptural elements, a constellation that delves into the

2017, woven textile, colour, ink, metal reservoir

Courtesy the artist

2018, aluminium, air compressor, free-floating element, glass, heating rod, metal, neon light, powder-coated steel

Courtesy the artist

8

THE LEFTOVERS

SOLID MANEUVERS

about human-made processed materials and about how they are artificially interrelated. The work is inspired by Nkanga's field trip to Namibia, seeing how mountains are reduced during the process of the exploitation of natural resources. In addition to the layers of material, the sculpture references the places that have been stripped, creating holes in the layered structure. The holes stand for the empty absence of the now disfigured land, contradicting the image of the intact hill and telling of human greed.

2014/2020, site-specific installation, Cestrum Nocturnum, performance, plant pots, printed vinyl floor

Courtesy the artist

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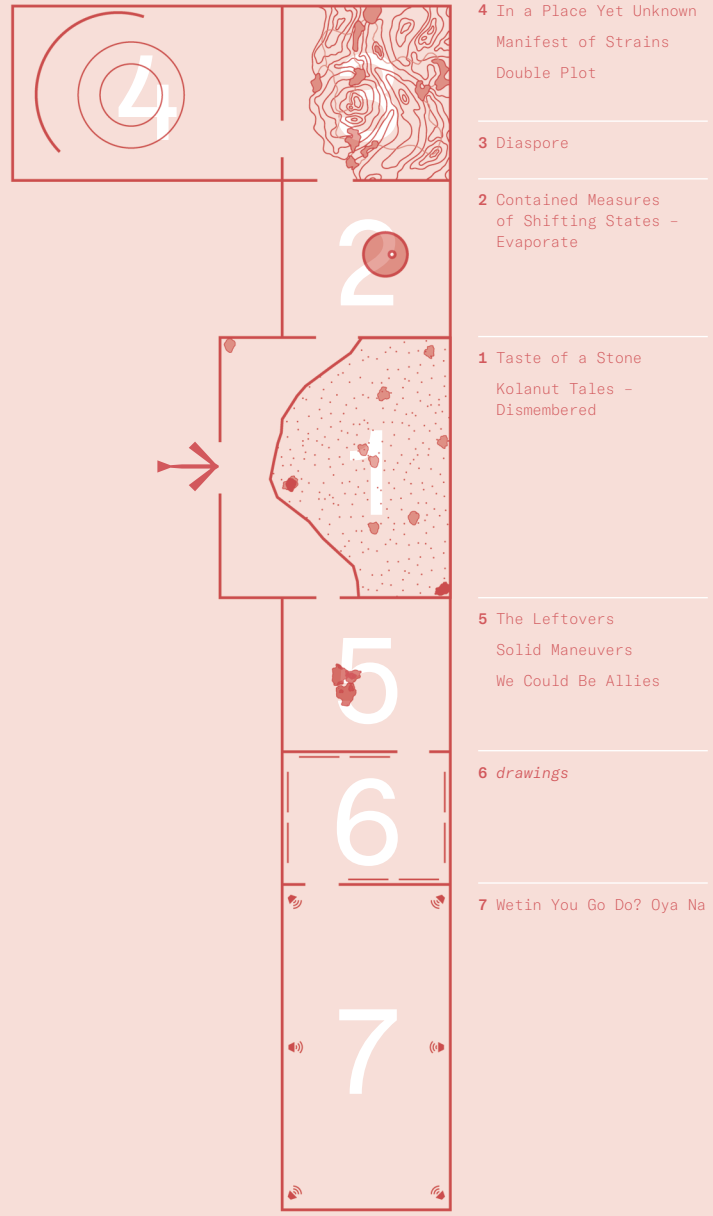
2017, woven textile

Courtesy the artist

2015, various metals, acrylic, Forex, make-up, salt, tar, vermiculite

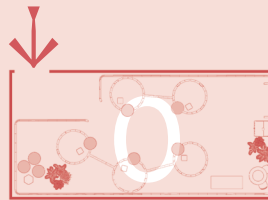
Courtesy the artist

1ST FLOOR



- 4 In a Place Yet Unknown  
Manifest of Strains  
Double Plot
- 3 Diaspore
- 2 Contained Measures  
of Shifting States –  
Evaporate
- 1 Taste of a Stone  
Kolanut Tales –  
Dismembered
- 5 The Leftovers  
Solid Maneuvers  
We Could Be Allies
- 6 drawings
- 7 Wetin You Go Do? Oya Na

GROUND FLOOR



- 0 Carved to Flow  
First gallery on the  
right off the entrance  
hall, just before  
the restaurant

# DRAWINGS

“Drawing can be the first approach to think about a work or an exhibition, starting with quick sketches or drawing directly into space in order to think things through; or it can be an intimate moment in my studio that never results in an actual piece”, says Otobong Nkanga. The artist’s works on paper from 1997–present depict bodies, landscapes and matter that connect as one entity. Such threads reinforce

her approach to drawing, using it as a space that loops into her wider material practice and thinking through making. As with the inhale and exhale of breath, where we exchange invisible lines, the rhythm of drawing is a life force for Nkanga that is fundamental in forming relationships. Further information about the works is delineated on the labels in Room 6.

Courtesy Collection  
Wim van Dongen

# WETIN YOU GO DO? OYA NA

Recorded in 2015 and transformed into a spatial composition for the Gropius Bau, the piece is a reaction to the feeling of powerlessness in the current world – facing a wave of political tension and uprising against political systems, which have often collapsed and stayed unanswered. The broken English *Wetin You Go Do?* asks the question “What are you going to do?”, which is as urgent today as it was five years ago. Nkanga’s own voice takes different styles when lending a voice to characters and materials,

especially the material of concrete, which is taken for granted, stepped on, used and extracted. Her voice splits into different characters and states when whispering, screaming, flirting, chirping and complaining. These characters all have different approaches to life, the angry one resisting a situation, the drunken voice not even being aware of the situation, or the excited one just voicing enthusiasm without action. The voices are accompanied by snapping and singing and guttural tones, carrying the poetry of the work further.

2020,  
multi-channel sound  
installation, loop,  
20 min, 28 sec

Written and  
performed by  
**Otobong Nkanga**

Courtesy the artist

# CARVED TO FLOW: GERMINATION

The project *Carved to Flow* is a support structure that is embedded within art and the social sphere. Consisting of three phases, the first was the *Laboratory* in 2017, a workshop installation in Athens during documenta 14. Ten soap prototypes were created including *O8 Blackstone Soap* – a cold-production process soap comprising water, coal, lye and seven butters and oils from the Mediterranean, the Middle East, North and West Africa. The production process and the combination of these raw materials in one object reflects on the circulation of goods, bodies, geographies, traditions and stories. It contrasts the fecundity of these regions with the charred aftermath of crisis, destruction, extraction or mismanagement: states that leave peoples and environments physically gasping for air. The second phase, *Warehouse and Distribution*, took place later that year during documenta 14 in Kassel as a 100-day performance involving the selling of the *O8 Blackstone Soap* through conversations with the

public. The sale of the soaps finances the Carved to Flow Foundation, creating circularity with the previous phases. Currently the third phase, *Germination*, focuses on local ecologies through research and knowledge sharing, structured around exhibitions, workshops and events. The transmission of knowledge through conversation, horizontal learning, poiesis and bodies in flow is a key aspect of this platform for research, communal production and connection. *Carved to Flow* is conceived as fluid and developing, replacing economies of extraction and displacement with a system of transference, where what is removed is replaced or repaid in some form. The ground-floor work space, inspired by African architecture and managed by Nuno Vasconcelos during the course of the exhibition, is a continuation of Otobong Nkanga’s residency at the Gropius Bau in 2019. It will be activated by workshop formats and conversations and the constant evolving presence of materials.

This work can  
be found on the  
ground floor of  
the Gropius Bau

Architect and  
researcher:  
**Nuno Vasconcelos**

Present Wed, Thu, Fri  
14:00-18:00

All events for  
*Carved to Flow* can be  
found on:

[gropiusbau.de/nkanga](http://gropiusbau.de/nkanga)



Curators: <b>Stephanie Rosenthal</b> with <b>Clara Meister</b>	Graphic: <b>Very</b> with <b>Felix Ewers</b>	Production <i>Manifest of Strains</i> : <b>Saygel &amp; Schreiber</b>	Gropius Bau is supported by <b>The Federal Government Comissioner for Culture and the Media</b>
	Conservators: <b>Ekkehard Kneer,</b> <b>Silke Schröder</b>	<i>Wetin You Go Do? Oya Na</i> : Production, sound design, arrangement by <b>Contemporary Sound</b> Recorded at <b>Studio P4 / Berlin</b> Sound engineering by <b>Jean-Boris Szymczak</b>	The exhibition is funded by the <b>Hauptstadtkulturfonds</b>
	Exhibition Installation: <b>EMArt Ruben Erber</b>		Kindly support by <b>The Flemish Community</b>
	Lighting: <b>Marc Aldinger</b>		
	Consultant Architecture: <b>Günter Krüger</b>		<b>#otobongnkanga</b> <b>#gropiusbau</b>

Berliner Festspiele  
#gropiusbau  
English

# GROPIUS BAU

## OTOBONG NKANGA

### THERE’S NO SUCH THING AS SOLID GROUND

#### INTRODUCTION

Otobong Nkanga (\*1974, Kano, Nigeria) was the Gropius Bau’s *In House: Artist in Residence* for one year in 2019. Interested in the relationship between repair and care, she deals with complex relationships between people and land as evinced through global mining and other systems of exploitation, the movement of natural resources and people, and history’s violent legacy. Land can be understood as earth, soil and landscape, as well as the terrain on which ecological, economic, political and social issues are navigated. Interweaving media such as installation, textile, performance, painting, drawing, texts and stories to create multi-sensory encounters,

Nkanga’s work is often based on a period of intensive research, teasing out the many-layered intersections between objects and actions. Oxygen, voice and the act of breathing are elements that connect the artworks in this exhibition, from Nkanga’s reshaped sound work *Wetin You Go Do? Oya Na* (2020), a new aural arrangement that reconfigures her existing voice recordings, to her drawings and the three-phase project *Carved to Flow* (2017–2020), begun at documenta 14. These works resonate with the past and present to reveal hidden secrets, altered histories and forgotten stories.

All events and  
performances can  
be found on:  
[gropiusbau.de/nkanga](http://gropiusbau.de/nkanga)

A booklet with  
additional texts  
is available in  
the Walther König  
bookshop