

# Arcadia Missa ï

**Nnena Kalu**

*Nnena Kalu*

25 April - 2 June 2024

Opening: 25 April, 12 - 6pm

An ode to gesture, line, colour and form, this presentation of new work by Nnena Kalu exemplifies the artist's unique fascination with and commitment to materiality and process.

Working predominantly in drawing, sculpture and installation, Nnena Kalu's prolific practice spans over two decades, with the past five years seeing the artist begin to receive the critical acclaim her practice has long deserved.

Repetition is the driving force behind Kalu's work. Ambitious explorations of space, texture and scale, Kalu's voracious sculptures hang heavy with the muscle memory of her methodical process of packing, wrapping and binding. Starting with tightly packed bundles of colourful textile, paper and cellophane, Kalu grows and builds her forms, wrapping and assembling them with layers upon layers of colourful tape, plastic, paper, fabric, string and reams of unspooled VHS tape. Kalu continually and iteratively returns to her sculptures, working and reworking them, often taking old works to reform anew.

Kalu's sculptures explode and invade the spaces they occupy, often latching onto architectural features of their final resting places, as was the case in her major presentations with Studio Voltaire in 2020 (where she has held a studio and has been supported by ActionSpace since 1999) and the Royal Academy's 2021 Summer Exhibition. Here, in a new presentation style, Kalu's chrysalis-like sculptures quite literally hang heavy. Her voluminous, bulbous bodily forms are suspended overhead in the gallery for the first time, imposing from above like overripe fruit.

In previous projects, such as for Glasgow International, 2018, Kalu has turned to live, processual performance, where the viewer is invited to watch her work in situ, engaging directly with her distinctive and generative work in sculpture and drawing. As a practitioner with limited verbal communication, this performative element of her practice has been transformative, serving as a key site for Kalu to demonstrate and communicate the rhythm and methodology of her making process.

Performance also lays bare the inextricable entwinement of Kalu's body to her medium and material. Her sculptural works and drawings are a direct expression of her physical movement – her mark-making and wrapping dictated by the length and reach of Kalu's arms. The dedicated and urgent interrogation of continuous line in Kalu's work evokes the repetitive gesture and internal rhythm that belies her making process. The artist's hand, and body, remain ever present in the work.

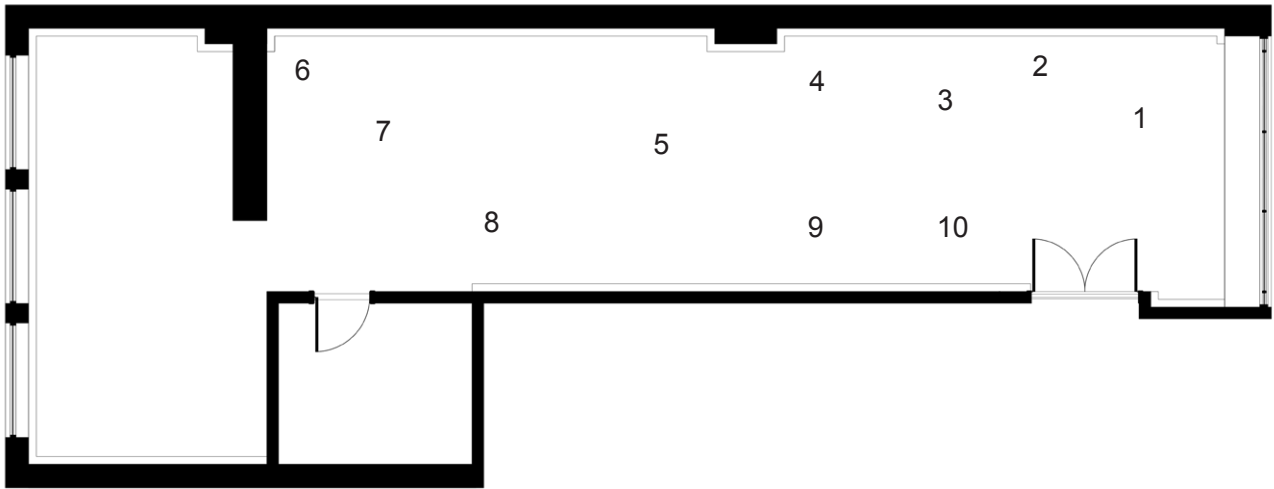
This tethering of the body and production in Kalu's work evokes rich histories of feminist body art and process-based abstraction, calling to mind artists such as Carolee Schneemann, Hannah Wilke, Robert Morris and Bernard Cohen; whilst Kalu's use of found, ordinary household items and waste material further positions her work within the lineage of feminist approaches to sculpture and textile, evoking the corporeality and materiality of artists such as Marisa Merz, Sarah Lucas, Eva Hesse and Helen Chadwick.

Kalu's practice fosters a radical parity between process and product, between production and presentation and between the artist's body and its output.

- Dr Maggie Matić

With thanks to ActionSpace, a visual arts organisation supporting learning disabled artists across London.

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1. *Tube Sculpture 5*, 2023

Drainage piping, rope, mixed fabrics, mixed tapes, plastic strip  
190 x 110 x 61 cm  
74 3/4 x 43 1/4 x 24 inches

2. *Tube Sculpture 10*, 2024

Drainage piping, rope, mixed fabrics, mixed tapes  
125 x 53 x 50 cm  
49 1/4 x 20 7/8 x 19 3/4 inches

3. *Tube Sculpture 18*, 2024

Drainage piping, rope, mixed fabrics, mixed tapes, VHS tapes  
120 x 60 x 65 cm  
47 1/4 x 23 5/8 x 25 5/8 inches

4. *Tube Sculpture 3*, 2023

Drainage piping, rope, mixed fabrics, mixed tapes  
120 x 74 x 45 cm  
47 1/4 x 29 1/8 x 17 3/4 inches

5. *Tube Sculpture 2*, 2023

Drainage piping, rope, mixed fabrics, mixed tapes, plastic strips  
55 x 97 x 65 cm  
21 5/8 x 38 1/4 x 25 5/8 inches

6. *Tube Sculpture 8*, 2023

Drainage piping, rope, mixed fabrics, mixed tapes  
70 x 95 x 45 cm  
27 1/2 x 37 3/8 x 17 3/4 inches

7. *Tube Sculpture 13*, 2024

Drainage piping, rope, mixed fabrics, mixed tapes, plastic film  
170 x 95 x 52 cm  
66 7/8 x 37 3/8 x 20 1/2 inches

8. *Tube Sculpture 1*, 2023

Drainage piping, rope, mixed fabrics, mixed tapes  
2 x 70 x 35 cm  
32 1/4 x 27 1/2 x 13 3/4 inches

9. *Tube Sculpture 17*, 2024

Drainage piping, rope, mixed fabrics, mixed tapes,  
plastic film, VHS tapes  
65 x 90 x 46 cm  
25 5/8 x 35 3/8 x 18 1/8 inches

10. *Tube Sculpture 16*, 2024

Drainage piping, rope, mixed fabrics, mixed tapes  
130 x 80 x 54 cm  
51 1/8 x 31 1/2 x 21 1/4 inches