

The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago presents the first North American museum survey of Nigerian-born, Belgium-based artist Otobong Nkanga, whose work explores the relationship between Africa and the Western world, with a focus on the intense mining of natural resources since the rise of global capitalism. Drawing from a range of media including drawing, photography, tapestry, and installation that she activates with performances, Nkanga examines how raw minerals from Nigeria and other African countries are transported through various covert economies and transformed into desirable consumer objects. This exhibition introduces Nkanga to American audiences with the most comprehensive presentation of her works to date, in addition to the debut of a performance for the exhibition's opening. On view from March 31 to September 9, 2018, the exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue focusing on Nkanga's drawings with essays by acclaimed author Teju Cole, as well as new poems by Nkanga.

At the heart of Nkanga's work is her fascination with what she calls 'shine.' For her, shine has a dual meaning, referring both to the glimmering surface qualities of natural resources like rare minerals, as well as the desire to be seduced by exotic consumer objects. One of the major works on view, *In Pursuit of Bling* is a multimedia installation of the many states of mica, exploring its transformation from a raw mineral form to the shimmering powder used in makeup, a product of seduction. The display—which includes geological samples, tapestries, video, and photographs—captures the contradictory nature of bling as both a vehicle for impressing others and simultaneously for exploiting the world's natural resources.

In tapestries and works on paper, Nkanga references West African resources and cultural artifacts from her memories growing up in Nigeria. For example, *Filtered Memories - Home, 1977, Yaba, Lago* depicts an image of Nkanga and her sister standing under a palm tree in front of a house on stilts; in *Filtered Memories - Reduced to Ashes, 1978, Yaba, Lagos*, she portrays the same idyllic house a year later, but now it is on fire. With this series and *Social Consequences*, which builds on *Filtered Memories*, Nkanga's drawings look like the pages of a children's book; only upon looking closer does one notice the violence within each frame, alluding to her interest in the seduction of appearances.

Nkanga's personal experience is also central to *Solid Maneuvers*, a sculpture that is activated with a performance at the exhibition's opening. The work is inspired by a site she visited in Namibia known as the "Green Hill" for its rich sources of copper ores, such as malachite and azurite. Western explorers quickly came for its copper leading to the exploitation of the area, and it became a nexus of railways and mines. The town's name, Tsumeb, literally translates as "to dig a hole that collapses again," a phrase that suggests a body or landscape consistently attempting to reconstruct

or protect a site of mystical beauty only for it to be destroyed. The performances involve pouring pink mineral salts, sand, tar, and mica-based cosmetic powder over the sculpture, as if trying to piece the extracted elements back together.

Through her work, Nkanga acts as a cultural anthropologist—tracing the violent means by which contested minerals and objects are exhumed from their natural environments, and prompting audiences to reconsider their relationship to the world around them. In *Delta Stories*, she shows aerial views of the oil-rich Nigerian delta in a series of eighteen drawings. Images of burning oil-drainage pipes are paired with images of blood-stained, disembodied hands and a face shedding tears.

The MCA presents a site-specific work for the exhibition, *Anamnesis* (2016-ongoing), in which the artist constructs the shape of a meandering stream of water in the wall. Inside this crevice, she places the most commonly imported spices to Chicago, such as cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, coriander, cumin, pepper, and vanilla and lets the smell permeate the gallery.

Otobong Nkanga is the latest artist to be featured in the MCA's acclaimed Ascendant Artist Series, which features exhibitions that present the most relevant upcoming artists working today.

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