

TIWANI CONTEMPORARY

Wura-Natasha Ogunji

space comma space comma space

03 April - 24 May 2025

24 Cork Street, London, UK



Wura-Natasha Ogunji's exhibition *space comma space comma space* embraces not-knowing, the breaking of habits, irreverence and the use of mistakes as integral components of the creative process. Through works on paper, the artist creates a memoir of her time inside the studio - through acts of stitching, cutting, tearing and tracing. The drawings, paintings, and collages are in conversation through shared marks and methods, as well as through titles which suggest a more literal dialogue between the works themselves.

With this new body, Ogunji uses magazine pages, gessoed tissue paper, and glassine, as well as the architectural tracing paper for which she is known. Many of the works have an almost-hyperbolic density to them--especially when considered alongside her past oeuvre where stitched figures are commonly surrounded by large expanses of paper-space. There is an irreverence for the correct way materials should be used: oil paint on tracing paper, a two-sided painting (where only one side is visible, but both are important), or the combination of oil and ink forming a resist pattern of dots along the surface of the trace.

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TIWANI CONTEMPORARY

In other works, like *Lagoon in Tatters*, cut paper becomes fringe, leaving two large openings, the paper falling beyond the edges of its own borders. In a similar drawing, those same lagoon lines become an oasis. Or, perhaps the large hole in the paper is the space of refuge.

This dance between the fullness, or presence of (artistic) matter, and absence is a recurring language throughout the show, lending an almost-trickster like quality to the work, especially when considered in concert with the titles. The four painting-drawings on gessoed tracing paper present a poetic riddle with their titles:

What I want

something something

same same

a thing in a thing in a thing, the mountain was mentioned, are you my mother?

The mother figure appears often in the form of the Gelede mask, part of the Yoruba ritual festival for celebrating women and mothers. For the artist, the paper itself becomes a ritual space. The lines, gestures, marks, motion, cuts and cutaways of thread, graphite, ink, paint, paper and earth are the elemental languages of _____. Here space takes on multiple meanings. It is, of course, form, emptiness, but, and another space entirely. The stillness of the comma; the thing around the thing you're trying to get at; a lull but not a lapse. The paper, too, has polyrhythm.

About the Artist

Wura-Natasha Ogunji is a visual artist and performer. Her works include drawings, paintings, videos and public performances. She is deeply inspired by the daily interactions and frequencies that occur in the city of Lagos, Nigeria, where she currently lives. Ogunji's performances explore the presence of women in public space; these often include investigations of labor, leisure, freedom and frivolity.

Recent exhibitions include *A World in Common: Contemporary African Photography* at Tate Modern, 2023-24; *rivus*, 23rd Biennale of Sydney, 2022; *Diaspora at Home*, Kadist Foundation, Paris, 2021; and *The Power of My Hands: Afrique(s) artistes femmes*, Museum of Modern Art, Paris, 2021. Ogunji was an Artist-Curator for the 33rd São Paulo Bienal where her large-scale performance *Days of Being Free* premiered. She has also exhibited at: Palais de Tokyo; The Lagos Biennial; Kochi-Muziris Biennale; Stellenbosch Triennale; Seattle Art Museum; Brooklyn Art Museum; and Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark. Ogunji is a recipient of the Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship and has received grants from The Pollock-Krasner Foundation; The Dallas Museum of Art; and the Idea Fund.

Ogunji's works are in the collections of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden; The Baltimore Museum of Art; Smithsonian National Museum of African Art; International African American Museum, Charleston; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark; North Dakota Museum of Art; The University of Texas at Austin; Marieluise Hessel Collection, Hessel Museum of Art, Bard College; and Kadist Foundation.

She has a BA from Stanford University (1992, Anthropology) and an MFA from San Jose State University (1998, Photography). She resides in Lagos where she is founder of the experimental art space The Treehouse.

TIWANI CONTEMPORARY

List of works



Wura-Natasha Ogunji
The Library, 2024
Thread, ink, acrylic, oil and gesso on tracing paper
61 x 61 cm
24 x 24 in
(WNO 039)

The piece is dense with matter: thick swatches of oil paint, stitching (figures and text), and blue inked lines. Faces, Gelede masks, and text are sewn in varying colors. They move through the frame from left to right. Thin blue lines of ink suggest waves. The text samples are titles or quotes from the following writers: Madhu H. Kaza's *Lines of Flight*: "The mountain is actually a wave"; Maryam Kazeem's *X, the Navigator*; Amalia Groom's monograph of Beverly Buchanan; Amy Sillman's writing in *Faux Pas: Selected Writings and Drawings* about Paul Cézanne and Mont Sainte-Victoire: "He went out to have a relationship with a mountain."



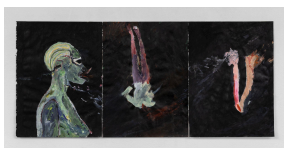
Wura-Natasha Ogunji
same same, 2024
Graphite, ink, acrylic, oil and gesso on acid-free tissue paper
76.2 x 101.6 cm
30 x 40 in
(WNO 049)

With this paper the artist has moved in the direction of something quite delicate. Though acid-free and unbuffered, it is tissue paper, thus requiring several applications of clear gesso before being able to work the surface. The piece combines a densely gestural oil painting on the left with a delicately drawn horizontal figure, with Gelede mask towards the lower right. The mask is painted in acrylic and also stitched with orange, pink, red highlights. An olive-colored speech bubble comes out of the mouth, or is it an eye? The fingernails are painted (stitched) in pink.



Wura-Natasha Ogunji
A fire! A freedom!, 2024
Thread, ink, acrylic, oil, and gesso on tracing paper
61 x 61 cm
24 x 24 in
(WNO 042)

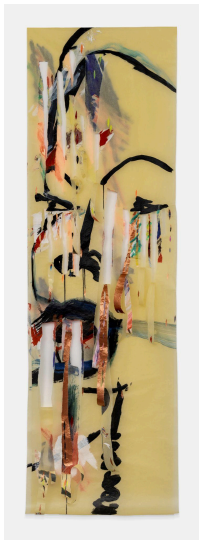
A dark sea with a barely visible, stitched figure floating on the horizon. The figure is mostly obscured by gestural paint strokes that sweep up from the horizon line: whites, reds, deep turquoise, varying greys, blues with white mixed in, a perhaps green ochre. Thin, knife-like shapes have been excised and reinserted over the painted areas, adding an orange and yellow palette. We see one stitched hand and possibly some legs.



Wura-Natasha Ogunji
head breath shadow, 2024
Acrylic on magazine pages
Triptych, 28.6 x 63.2 cm
11 1/4 x 24 7/8 in
(WNO 034)

The feeling is of the darkest ocean expanse, under water. This triptych is made up of a figure visible from the head to just below the breast with gestural paint strokes suggesting a tongue sticking out, or the movement of breath, or spirit, or words. Central image is an upside-down figure floating without a head but instead red paint marks becoming faint, becoming the darkness. On the third page, a figure floats, arms hanging down holding their own hands. Paint marks emerge from eyes as if seeing is texture and looking towards the other pages. The title refers to the Yoruba concepts of head (your destiny, life path); breath (life force); shadow (ancestral guardian spirit).

TIWANI CONTEMPORARY



Wura-Natasha
Ogunji
*Finally! A commotion!
I am still a mystery to
myself, 2024*
Ink, acrylic, oil, gesso,
and collage on
tracing paper
203.2 x 61 cm
80 x 24 in
(WNO 051)

An inked face on a large panel of tracing paper with vertical sections that have been torn out of the paper completely; some remain suspended, hanging down from the drawing. There is the tearing apart and the putting back together, as cutouts have been glued back into the piece. We could imagine this drawing talking to the other works in the show, acknowledging a break: the unconventional use of materials, an important rejection of beauty and precision.



Wura-Natasha
Ogunji
*"—wraps her mouth
around the problems
of the world. I knew
we couldn't sell this
oil on fashion
magazines, double
sided, or whatever
whatever!" (sales
meeting), 2024*
Acrylic, oil and gesso
on magazine pages
86.4 x 111.8 cm
34 x 44 in
(WNO 052)

Note: This painting to be sold to the highest bidder. Final bid accepted on the last day of the exhibition. This work contains magazine pages (five wide by three high). The painting is of a large mouth with teeth eating an abstraction of colors painted in a rough gestural manner. The feeling is of trying to hold too much matter in the mouth at once. While the verso (see below) of the work is not visible here, it is important as it echoes other pieces in the series, such as parade of lunatics.



Wura-Natasha
Ogunji
verso
*"—wraps her mouth
around the problems
of the world. I knew
we couldn't sell this
oil on fashion
magazines, double
sided, or whatever
whatever!" (sales
meeting), 2024*
Acrylic, oil and gesso
on magazine pages
86.4 x 111.8 cm
34 x 44 in
(WNO 052)

TIWANI CONTEMPORARY



Wura-Natasha
Ogunji
a thing in a thing in a thing, the mountain was mentioned, are you my mother?, 2024
Thread, ink, graphite and acrylic on acid-free tissue paper
101.6 x 76.2 cm
40 x 30 in
(WNO 050)

Vertically oriented. Bright red, orange, cornflower blue sky, colored pencils. Below an inked sea in blacks with overlapping blue inks. The left upper, skywards a Gelede mask with colored lines flowing from eyes down onto a record on a record player. The Gelede and turntable sit atop a figure which navigates the sea, boat-like. Cut-outs suggest oars (similarly shaped as those in 'A fire! A freedom!'). On the tips of the toes, another mask in pale yellow with pink mouth looks beyond the right edge of the frame. A set of graphite eyes with (perhaps angry or questioning) eyebrows looks back at the boat-like figure.



Wura-Natasha
Ogunji
What I want, 2024
Acrylic on acid-free tissue paper
76.2 x 101.6 cm
30 x 40 in
(WNO 047)

Acrylic on tissue paper, an abstraction with a certain horizon one third of the way up. The lower third is black gesso covered in gestural reds, slight suggestion of the darkest blue. Upper two thirds a something suggesting a heart form, actual, not the symbol, surrounded by whites, almost peach, and orange, brown mixes of color.



Wura-Natasha
Ogunji
The black of space comma space comma space as told by herself, 2024
Thread, ink, gesso, acrylic and oil on tracing paper
61 x 61 cm
24 x 24 in
(WNO 040)

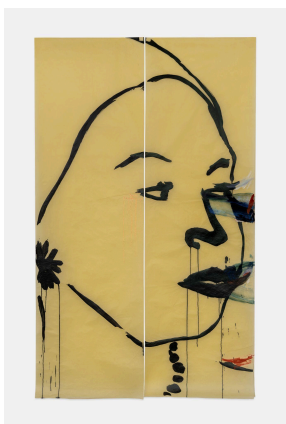
Darkness, cutouts (eye shaped but vertical), glued lengths of thread, oil paint, dramatic. The title borrows from Ousmane Sembène's film *La Noire de* which was translated into English as *Black Girl*, though the two titles have very different weights and meanings. The literal translation of *La Noire de* being *The black of*, which Ogunji borrows here. Rather than suggest ownership it inverts, twists, misuses the original meaning to think about blackness and art, blackness as space itself, and space as a literal opening. This might occur in the writing of a sentence. For example, I'm feeling _____, _____, _____ about the film. While the authorship of this painting is not in question, the phrase 'as told by herself' references the literary genre of slave narratives in the USA. To include 'as told by herself' served as an affirmation of truth and authenticity of the autobiography. The title also references a very early series created by Ogunji titled a short history/of the black female nude/as told by herself which included self-portraits made on the copy machine which were then printed onto sheets of aluminum.

TIWANI CONTEMPORARY



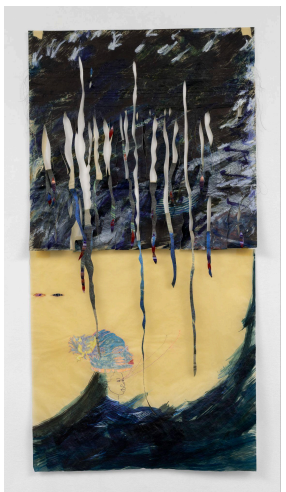
Wura-Natasha
Ogunji
*(How every black
woman at the party
felt)*, 2024
Ink, acrylic and
collage on magazine
page
28.9 x 21.6 cm
11 3/8 x 8 1/2 in
(WNO 037)

Magenta sharpie drawn over a woman in what could be a ball gown. She leans against the turquoise wall printed on the page of the magazine. From her face emanates a large mask with collaged eyes and a yellow triangle-ish shape that could be a tongue or a mouth.



Wura-Natasha
Ogunji
*Lately, I do nothing
much*, 2024
Thread, ink and oil
paint on tracing paper
Diptych, 203.2 x
121.9 cm (overall)
80 x 48 in
(WNO 053)

A large drawing of the face of a woman, painted in black ink stretching over two large sheets of light-yellow tracing paper. Stitched text, with hanging threads sits below one eye. It reads: Lately, I do nothing much. (For a while, the artist has been thinking about the importance of leisure time (space) to artmaking (and life!). See her performance, Strut, for example, <https://nataal.com/wura> Paint drips from the woman's earring, nose and mouth. Iridescent blue ink emerges in a large swath from one eye and the mouth.



Wura-Natasha
Ogunji
Monument, 2024
Thread, ink, oil, gesso
and collage on
tracing paper
121.9 x 61 cm
48 x 24 in
(WNO 046)

Two square panels of tracing paper, a vertical diptych. Top is dark black with cutouts that hang into the lower part of the piece. Below is a figure with a shimmering blue Gelede mask on the top of her head; she is surrounded by blue black ink, the sea, a wave building in front of her and off the edge of the page.

TIWANI CONTEMPORARY



Wura-Natasha Ogunji
Navigation by glitch, 2024
 Thread, ink, acrylic and collage on tracing paper
 30.5 x 29.2 cm
 12 x 11 1/2 in
 (WNO 035)

The Gelede mask. In this Yoruba ritual festival, women and mothers are honored. The mask here is florescent blue ink with orange highlights and a woman moves from within the mask (as if a spacesuit), her hand grasps the mouth from the outside. Her eyes look through one eye of the mask. She moves through waters rendered in inked lines. Cutouts in the shape of an eye, but vertical, make an irregular pattern in the water. Some of these have been collaged back into the piece.



Wura-Natasha Ogunji
You Fly!, 2024
 Ink, acrylic and oil on tissue paper
 44.5 x 50.8 cm
 17 1/2 x 20 in
 (WNO 038)

Experiment working on a sheet of blue tissue paper coated with clear gesso. A blue black, inky figure stretches horizontally across the page. The figure holds several masks including two Gelede: one in pinks and turquoise-leaning-green; the other red with black features. Thin blue ink lines above the figure suggests waves or ropes. Below is a body of water, perhaps a pool, with oil paint splashing up towards the figure from the surface (blue whites, red pinks, moments of iridescent blue ink).



Wura-Natasha Ogunji
Ssssstudio, 2025
 Ink on glassine
 3 panels
 360 x 150 cm each
 141 3/4 x 59 in
 Note: re media:
 Micron ink (archival)
 and Lascaux glassine
 (acid-free, ph neutral)
 (WNO 055)

Three large sheets of glassine stretch up to meet the gallery ceiling. The drawings are made with ink pen lines--copper, red, blue, white, silver, black. The marks come from outlines of splotches, drips and erroneous marks on the artist's studio walls in Lagos. The shape of a cut mark (an eye shape, but vertical) may be seen within some of the other drawings in the show.



Wura-Natasha Ogunji
Lagoon in Tatters, 2024
 Ink on tracing paper
 71.1 x 61 cm
 28 x 24 in
 (WNO 043)

Lightest blue shimmery ink. Fringe coming out of and falling over the edge of the tracing paper. The fringe has been cut from a deep blue lagoon. Two rather large shapes, holes remain in the paper above.

TIWANI CONTEMPORARY



Wura-Natasha
Ogunji
*A mouth that sees
everything, 2024*
Acrylic and ink on
magazine page
28.9 x 21.6 cm
11 3/8 x 8 1/2 in
(WNO 031)

White gesso covers a standing figure (holding a bag, wearing a checked suit). Black writing-like lines emerge from the eyes and ears. Another set of eyes hovers in front of the face along with two additional mouths (teeth with a tongue) drawn in various stages of opening. The title suggests a way of knowing the world beyond mere eyesight.