

YAW OWUSU

Ghanaian, b. 1992

“My work primarily investigates the concept of value. How is it made and unmade? I use materials and objects that are connected to that idea in forms of currency “

-Yaw Owusu

BIOGRAPHY

Yaw Owusu creates sculptural installations that repurpose found objects, shifting the value of otherwise-worthless materials into encounters of beauty. Built from countless pieces of loose change, his work activates urgent questions around global economy and politics. Typical of Owusu’s approach to working with local agencies to develop his work, the artist acquired the coins by negotiating with banks – a bureaucratic process that is as important to the artist’s practice as the final works. Created as structural works that embrace the same organic qualities of their materials, his sculptures incorporated tens of thousand coins, transforming under various conditions and processes. The copper plated coins and industrial steel residue undergo various natural and chemical treatments, using oxidation and reduction process with salt, vinegar, and other elements to reveal their age and quality. They can appear fixed onto wooden panels, draped over walls or loosely hanging onto surfaces to form a camouflage, however they are anything but decorative displays of natural beauty. Instead, these installations are an expression of the artist’s reflections on the complex processes exchange, circulation, and accumulation.

Like the economy itself, the sculptures seem robust due to their dense façade, yet they are in flux and constant movement with their surroundings. The surfaces act both as protective layers of indestructible metal and a shiny foil made up of empty matter. Through his socially engaged yet visually rich practice, Owusu continues to question the non-functionality of the economic and political systems. In his new body of work, devalued coins are transformed into detailed surfaces resembling maps. A mediation that questions how value in itself is made and unmade. In one instance, they could be images of maps representing economic power structures drawn by history, or they could be alternative typographies that map out new possible relations for a more resourceful future. While the material itself is inseparable from the failure of socio-economic structures, the artist’s playful approach is rooted in a deep sense of playful alchemy that embraces the complex notions of value, exchange and locality in an increasingly global environment.

Yaw Owusu received his BFA in painting from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana and an MFA from Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York. He currently lives and works in New York and Accra.

EDUCATION

- 2020 MFA, Pratt Institute, New York.
2015 BFA Painting, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi.

AWARDS & PRIZES

- 2018 Winner - Kuenyehia Art Prize for Contemporary Ghanaian Art
2020 Pratt Institute - Pratt Circle Award
2020 Pratt Institute - Outstanding student Award
2022 Norval Sovereign African Art Prize shortlist. Norval Foundation, South Africa

SOLO AND PUBLIC EXHIBITIONS

- 2022 In The Cool of Day. Efie Gallery, Dubai UAE
A Penny, for what it's worth. Institute of Contemporary Art, San Diego
What can you do with a Penny? Tijuana, Mexico
2021 Reflections From the (In) Visible Past, Gallery 1957, London
NEW YORK, New York', Meta New York
Beyond the waters and winter sunshine, Jones Beach, New York
2020 Through the earth and Back, Ohio
'The Worlds We Make'. Volta New York Art Fair, New York
2019 Exchange Project - 'What would you do for a penny?', New York
2017 'All that glitters', Gallery 1957 - Accra

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2023** The Alchemists, Johnson Lowe Gallery, Atlanta, GA
Norval Sovereign African Art Prize shortlist exhibition. Norval Foundation, SA
- 2022** Unlimited. Gallery 1957 Ghana
154 Art Fair Paris, Gallery 1957
Chromotherapy in The Age of Doubt. Pratt Institute New York
Material Earth, Christie's London + Efié Gallery
154 Art Fair, Paris
- 2021** The Medium is The Message-African Diaspora Story. University Of Delaware
Efié Gallery Debut show, Dubai - UAE
Ontology, Ross+Kramer Gallery, New York
Eye of The Collector, London
- 2020** 154 Art Fair London, Gallery 1957.
"Inheritance", Super Dutchess Gallery, New York
Hardware, Software & Self: Material Relay, SPRING/BREAK Art Show, NYC
- 2019** Diaspora – From local to Foreign,, Kuenyehia Trust, Accra - Ghana
De(Re)construction, Stueben Gallery, New York
Where do we come from, where are we going?' Sotheby's Institute, NYC
Right at the Equator, Depart Foundation, Malibu – California
- 2018** Primaries Primaries Primaries Primaries', Steuben Gallery, New York
Johannesburg Art Fair, Johannesburg – South Africa
- 2017** ArtX Lagos, Nigeria
'Second Life', MACAAL. Marrakesh - Morocco
Special Curated projects, ArtX Lagos Art fair. Nigeria
- 2016** '16/16', Collection of Gallery 1957, Accra
Part IV International Artist project, Galerie 102. Berlin - Germany
Spirit Robot, Chale Wote Art Festival, JamesTown - Accra
Cornfields In Accra, Museum of Science and Technology, Accra
If You Love Me... - Locomotive shed, Kumasi Railways Station, Kumasi
- 2015** Silence between the Lines - Prime Motors Showroom, Kumasi
The Gown Must Go To Town - Museum of Science and Technology, Accra

WORKSHOPS, RESIDENCIES, TALKS, AND LECTURES

- 2023** Artist in Residence, Alma-Lewis, Pittsburgh, PA
- 2022** Artist in Residence, ICA San Diego
Artist in Residence, Efié Gallery Dubai UAE
- 2021** Conversation with Prof. David Malik, SOAS London
Visiting Artist, Integrated Practices MFA, Pratt Institute, New York
Visiting Artist, University of Delaware
Artist Talk, The Delaware Contemporary, Delaware
Visiting Artist Lecture, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, (KNUST)
Conversation with Marwan Zakhem, Gallery 1957, Accra
- 2020** Juror - APEX Art
Juror - Kuenyehia Prize
- 2019-2020** Visiting Artist Lecture Coordinator, Pratt Institute. New York
- 2018** CopeNYC Artist Residency, Brooklyn, New York
Pechakucha 20 x 20, Goethe Institute, Accra
- 2017** Conversation with Osei Bonsu, Gallery 1957, Accra
- 2016** International Artists Project, Galerie 102, Berlin - Germany
- 2015** 89+ workshop, Nubuke Foundation, Accra