

Emeka Ogboh

Portfolio

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Works: Courtesy of the artist and Imane Farès, Paris



Emeka Ogboh, 2018. Photo by Michael Danner

Emeka Ogboh (b. 1977 in Enugu, Nigeria) Lives and works between Lagos and Berlin.

Emeka Ogboh engages with places by using all five human senses: sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch. His art installations and culinary creations incorporate sensory elements to explore how private, public, collective memories and histories are translated, transformed, and encoded into different sensorial experiences. Ogboh's works delve into how sensory perceptions capture our connections to the world, shape our comprehension of reality, and offer a backdrop for examining critical issues such as migration, globalization, and post-colonialism. Recently, he has ventured into the world of music, debuting with the album "Beyond the Yellow Haze" on the Ostgut Ton sub-label A-TON in 2021. He continued this musical journey with his second album, "6°30'33.372"N 3°22'0.66"E," released under his self-founded label, Danfotronics in 2022.

Recent museum exhibitions include: Hamburger Bahnhof – Nationalgalerie der Gegenwart Nationalgalerie: *Narrative Wisdom and African Arts* (Saint Louis Art Museum, 2024), *The True Size of Africa* (Völklinger Hütte, 2024), *ABJ* (Something Art Space, Abidjan, 2024), *A Collection for the 21st Century* (2023), *A bruit secret – Hearing in Art* (Museum Tinguely, Basel, 2023), *Collection 1980s–Present* (MoMA, New York, 2022-2023), *Der Kosmos – Things Fall Apart* (Humboldt Forum, Berlin, 2021), *Stirring the Pot* (Friche La Belle de Mai, Marseille, 2020), *Àmà, the Gathering Place* (Cleveland Museum of Art, 2019), *The Song of the Germans* (The Power Plant, 2018), *If Found Please Return to Lagos* (Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, 2017), *Market Symphony* (Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, Washington DC, 2016). Emeka Ogboh has participated in numerous international exhibitions including the 56th Venice Biennale (2015), documenta 14 in Athens and Kassel (2014), and Skulptur Projekte Münster (2017), 15th Gwangju Biennale (2024). Upcoming: São Paulo Biennale (2025), Folkestone Triennial (2025).

Emeka Ogboh is also the co-founder of the Video Art Network Lagos. In 2016 Ogboh was awarded the Prize of the Bottcherstraße in Bremen. He was in 2018 a finalist of the prestigious Hugo Boss prize and he received in 2019 (with Otobong Nkanga) the Prize of the Sharjah Biennial 14.

The Way Earthly Things Are Going II
(Mother Earth's Lament)

2025

Multichannel sound installation (16 channels) with charred tree stumps arranged on a charcoal-covered floor, olfactory components (burnt forest scent), atmospheric smoke and ambient lighting.

Variable dimensions

9 min 18 sec

Lyrics by Emeka Ogboh, Music composition by Rachael Gerrard.

The Way Earthly Things Are Going II (Mother Earth's Lament) is a multisensory installation exploring the entanglement between human progress and ecological collapse. Centered on deforestation, it combines folk rhapsody, data-driven composition, and sensory elements to reflect on our interdependence with the environment.

Inspired by *Fragment I* of the Biental statement, the work activates hearing, sight, and smell in the face of ecological devastation. The choral piece *Mother Earth's Lament* draws from environmental research, oral histories, and traditional songs of grief. Reimagined as a contemporary folk lament, it conveys the Earth's pain through simple, emotionally resonant lyrics.

Voices, presented in an a cappella multichannel format, emerge from charred tree stump speakers. These folk songs, reinterpreted for a contemporary female choir, become vessels of memory and mourning — each stump a resonant body testifying to loss. Folk songs endure for their honesty. Here, they give voice to planetary grief — and a final call before silence.



Trading place

2024

Variable dimensions

Sound and objects

Trading Places is a sound installation that connects the vibrant world of street hawking with the fast-paced energy of stock exchanges, exploring the universal essence of trade and commerce. Using soundscapes from bustling African streets and high-stakes trading floors, the installation highlights the shared human impulse to exchange, negotiate, and assign value, regardless of setting.

At its core is a metal tray, symbolizing grassroots trade, embedded with a speaker and encased in a wooden box evoking the structure of financial institutions. This juxtaposition reflects the evolution of trade, blending traditional practices with modern systems.

Through an electroacoustic composition intertwining these distinct soundscapes, the project offers an immersive experience, inviting audiences to reflect on the timeless and universal nature of economic exchange.



ABJ

2024

Variable dimensions

Audiovisual installation

Abidjan, the economic heart of Ivory Coast, thrives as a multicultural hub shaped by migrants, particularly from North and West Africa, with this diversity profoundly influencing its culture, seen in its vibrant cuisine, music, and fashion.

The ABJ project, named after Abidjan's airport code, explores the city's dynamic identity through migration, focusing on bustling markets where cultures and traditions intermingle, capturing the essence of Abidjan through soundscapes, interviews, and film, as vendors' calls, customer negotiations, and a mix of languages bring these spaces to life, revealing the human stories behind the city's diversity.

Key highlights include fashion with designers merging traditional African textiles with contemporary trends, cuisine as a fusion of African, Middle Eastern, and French influences spotlighting Garba, a national dish symbolizing cultural synthesis, and music blending traditional West African rhythms with modern styles.

Through immersive multichannel installations, ABJ brings Abidjan's vibrancy to audiences, highlighting the city's evolution as a multicultural melting pot shaped by migration, creativity, and resilience.



Der Kosmos – Things Fall Apart

2021-2022

12-channel Sound installation

A new sound installation on the roof terrace of the Humboldt Forum in Berlin

“Der Kosmos – Things Fall Apart” is a sound installation on the rooftop of the Humboldt Forum that utilizes public space to prompt reflection on the legacy of colonialism. It features twelve loudspeakers, each wrapped in traditional Igbo textile *akwètè*, arranged in a circle. Every hour, the silence following European Christian church bells is filled with a performance by an Igbo chorale singing “Nne, Nne, Udu,” a folk song about the unintended consequences of human actions, deeply rooted in Igbo culture.

The installation begins with a chant from Chinua Achebe’s “Things Fall Apart.” It reflects Okonkwo’s lament, “He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart,” which articulates the disruptive impact of colonialism and Christianity on Igbo culture. Located near the Forum’s cupola, which bears Christian inscriptions, the installation challenges historical narratives and acts as a space for mourning, remembrance, and dialogue. It invites visitors to contemplate the profound effects of colonial history on contemporary societies.



Stirring the Pot

2021

Personal exhibition at La Friche Belle de Mai, Marseille, France

The multisensory installation *Migratory Notes* presented for the exhibition *Stirring the Pot* immerses visitors in Marseille's rich cultural identity, reflecting its history as a cosmopolitan hub and entry point for goods. Inspired by the journey of food from African plantations to Marseille's bustling markets, the work also explores the experiences of the city's African diaspora.

Through a blend of visuals, sounds, and scents, the installation captures the dynamic exchange of cultures and goods that define Marseille. From the vibrant farms of Cameroon to the aromatic spices of Marseille's kitchens, **Migratory Notes** invites visitors to experience migration through the everyday sensations that shape migrant lives. It challenges sensory norms, drawing attention to the resilience and adaptability of communities navigating displacement.

The work integrates personal narratives and communal histories, highlighting themes of continuity, change, and belonging. Furthermore, the utilization of intangible elements such as scent in the installation serves to heighten the impact of the work on viewers and enrich the storytelling experience. The mineral and briny smells of the Mediterranean Sea, the earthy Sub-Saharan petrichor, and the aromatic cooking spices are seamlessly integrated into the narrative, enhancing the immersive nature of the installation. These scents not only transport viewers to specific locations and moments in the migration journey but also evoke visceral emotional responses, fostering a deeper connection to the stories being told. By engaging multiple senses, *Migratory Notes* offers a profound exploration of migration's complexities, blending human stories with the movement of goods and cultures.



Photo © Jean-Christophe Lett

Song of the Union

2021

7-channel Sound installation

Burns Monument, Edinburgh

Co-commissioned by Talbot Rice Gallery and
Edinburgh Art Festival

On the 29th January 2020, as the United Kingdom departed the European Union and as a final gesture of farewell, Members of the European Parliament took to their feet in Brussels, held hands and sang Robert Burns' 'Auld Lang Syne' – a song which has come to represent solidarity, friendship and open doors. The following week, Nigerian artist Emeka Ogboh stood in the Robert Burns Monument in Edinburgh and conceived of *Song of the Union*, a sound installation featuring singers from all 27 EU member states living in Scotland today, as well as one from the recently departed UK. The resulting polyphonic choir gives voice to those who were unable to vote in the 2016 Brexit referendum, and has been created at a time when the post-Brexit reality is still far from resolved.

The Burns Monument provided a resonant site for the work, as further to Robert Burns being Scotland's national poet and author of 'Auld Lang Syne', the monument is nestled between two significant historical sites: it is adjacent to the Old Royal High School / New Parliament House, the original site prepared to house the Scottish Assembly following the nation's first (unsuccessful) referendum for a devolved parliament in 1979; and it overlooks Holyrood where the Scottish Parliament sits today.



LOS-CDG (Lagos to Paris)

2019

Volkswagen 'danfo' bus, 4 speakers,
6 headphones, various audiovisual
equipment

Variable dimensions, variable duration
(looped sound)

Unique

LOS-CDG (Lagos to Paris) is a Lagos soundscapes installation that incorporates the Danfo bus, sounds associated with the Danfo and its bus stations and electroacoustic music composed by the artist. The installation incorporates a 4-channels sound of the Danfo bus conductors calling out Lagos bus routes on the outside of the installation, and a 6-channels immersive headphones installation of different sounds from Danfo bus stations and electronic music inspired by Lagos soundscapes.

Lagos, Nigeria is impossible to imagine without one of its main avatars, the 'Danfo': old sixteen to eighteen seater Volkswagen transporter, kombi or vanagon mini-buses, compact in size, repurposed and painted cadmium yellow with two black stripes. Danfos connect the dots across the map of a megacity that seems to move en-masse. First appearing on the scene in Lagos in the 70's, they are the archetypal means of mass transportation to convey the microcosmic mass of the city from one point to the other.



Exhibition view: Prince.sse.s des villes, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2019, Photo © Marc Damage

The Danfos' continued popularity in Lagos results from its affordability and agility to penetrate every nook and cranny of the city, virtually plying all existing bus routes in Lagos. The Danfo bus drives the spirit and soul of the megacity Lagos; its hustle and bustle, the city's resilience and indomitable spirit, its multi-lingua, culture and ethnicity - the city's never-say-never attitude. The Danfo bus embodies and expresses 'Everything Lagos' as it ferries the city's populace through its network of roads. It is inevitable that once inside the Danfo you will experience multiple perspectives of Lagos through everything associated with this mode of transport.

A Danfo bus extracted from its context is another yellow bus with two black stripes until you experience its peculiar composition of sounds: vehicle horns, conductors calling out bus routes, mobile music courtesy of the driver, salesmen and women advertising the latest cure-all, passengers trading up-to-the-minute city gossip, hawkers and mini-mercantilism on the move, tribal jibes, dialogues, mobile phone monologues, as well as religious tantrums, all temporarily trapped in this teeming space. This mobile theatre of drama and entertainment is awash with the overall vibes of a city for nearly the entire 24 hours of the day.



Conductors / Oshodi Oke

2018

Installation composed of two sound boxes
with speakers, 80 x 80 cm (each)

Edition of 5 + 1 AP

ed. 1/5: Private collection, USA

ed. 2/5: Collection Musée national d'art
moderne/Centre Georges Pompidou,
Paris, France

In 2008, when Ogboh began to work on Lagos, he was drawn to the ambient noise that he encountered daily in the sprawling megalopolis. Lagos has been variously described as chaotic or under siege, yet hews to its internal logic. This logic is palpable in the way in which the seemingly dysfunctional city evinces recognizable patterns that once mastered, allow one to fully grasp how the avalanche of noises systematically composes the city and at the same time carries individual stories: the airy ambience of speeding cars as they blare their horns at different decibels; punctuated by conversations and hurrying footsteps. Bus conductors call out bus routes and terminals including "Oshodi Oke" and Race Course/CMS drop offs. An ambulant hawker shouts out "buy pure water" in mellifluous bursts. "Pidgin" English meets Yoruba in the haggling banter over the price of a snack. American Hip hop meets the raging Nigerian pop music. There is a certain sensation created by the erupting bedlam. For the familiar listener, the space is part of lived experience.

— Ugochukwu-Smooth C. Nzewi



Exhibition view: No Condition is Permanent, Galerie Imane Farès, Paris, 2018. Photo © Tadzio

Spirit and Matter

2017-2018

Light and sound installation composed of three photographs printed on stained-glass and mounted on lightboxes, and sound

252,2 x 152 cm

Duration: 10 min 34 sec

Unique

Spirit and Matter is a stained-glass light box taking the shape of a triptych in yellow tones.

The piece spreads the dual soundtracks of frantic Lagos with that of a church-like echoing sermon. The piece takes as a starting point a photograph of the under bridge area of Ojuelegba. An extremely busy bus terminal, Ojuelegba is a point of convergence and passage for the West African coast. It also used to be the site of a shrine for the Yoruba deity Eshu.

The photograph is manipulated to look like a prism, emphasizing the lens through which the artist or the viewer perceives the city, his position in Lagos, Berlin, or elsewhere. Ogbob mixes the spiritual and religious Yoruba undertones with that of Christian Europe, resulting in a piece resembling stained-glass windows. The artist distinguishes between the physical and spiritual, but also between his own physical wandering in the world opposed to his mental peregrinations bringing him back home to the Nigerian megalopolis.



Exhibition view: Multiple Transmissions: Art in the Afropolitan Age, WIELS, Bruxelles, 2019

À là

2014

Two-channel video installation, colour and sound

4 minutes

Edition of 5 + 1 AP

ed. 1/5: Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art (YSMA), Pan-Atlantic University, Ibeju, Nigeria

ed. 2/5: Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, USA

<https://vimeo.com/217242177>



LOS-RAK

2019

Multichannel sound installation

LOS-RAK is an installation by the artist Emeka Ogboh. Composed of sound sculptures from the Lagos Soundscapes project, combined with compositions created from recordings made in the Medina of Marrakech, the installation is in keeping with the artist's research into the history and oral tradition of cities. In this new creation, he explores the historical commercial relations between Marrakech, a caravan city, and the neighbouring cities of West Africa.

For DaDa, he creates a sound landscape that bears witness to the energy found in markets, the dynamics and changing flows of activity during the course of a single day. It includes the call to prayer that punctuates the weather, street music, the voices of vendors, preachers, peddlers, the sounds and animation of snake charmers, car horns and the roar of engines. The installation Los - Rak is an invitation to live the experience of listening, to feel the bubbling and fervour of the cities of Africa born of post-colonialism, cities that have created their own acoustic symphonies.



Installation view: DaDa, Marrakech, 2019. Photo: Mickaël Huard

Àmà: The Gathering Place

2019

Multi-channel sound installation

Commissioned by the Cleveland Museum of Art

The first commissioned artwork for the Ames Family Atrium, *Àmà: The Gathering Place* by Emeka Ogboh (Nigerian, b. 1977) is an installation integrating sound, sculpture, and textiles. As you listen to the music that migrates throughout the atrium, we invite you to relax and consider your experience of this setting. The work's point of departure is the social role of the Cleveland Museum of Art's atrium, used by visitors as a place for meeting and exchange, eating and drinking, working and relaxing. Ogboh describes the atrium as the "heart and soul of the museum," and compares it to the *ámà*—or village square—the central force of Igbo life in southeast Nigeria where he was born. "Both sites," Ogboh explains, "are contact zones, spaces of gathering and ritual activities in their respective settings."



Installation view © Gropius Bau

The Way Earthly Things Are Going

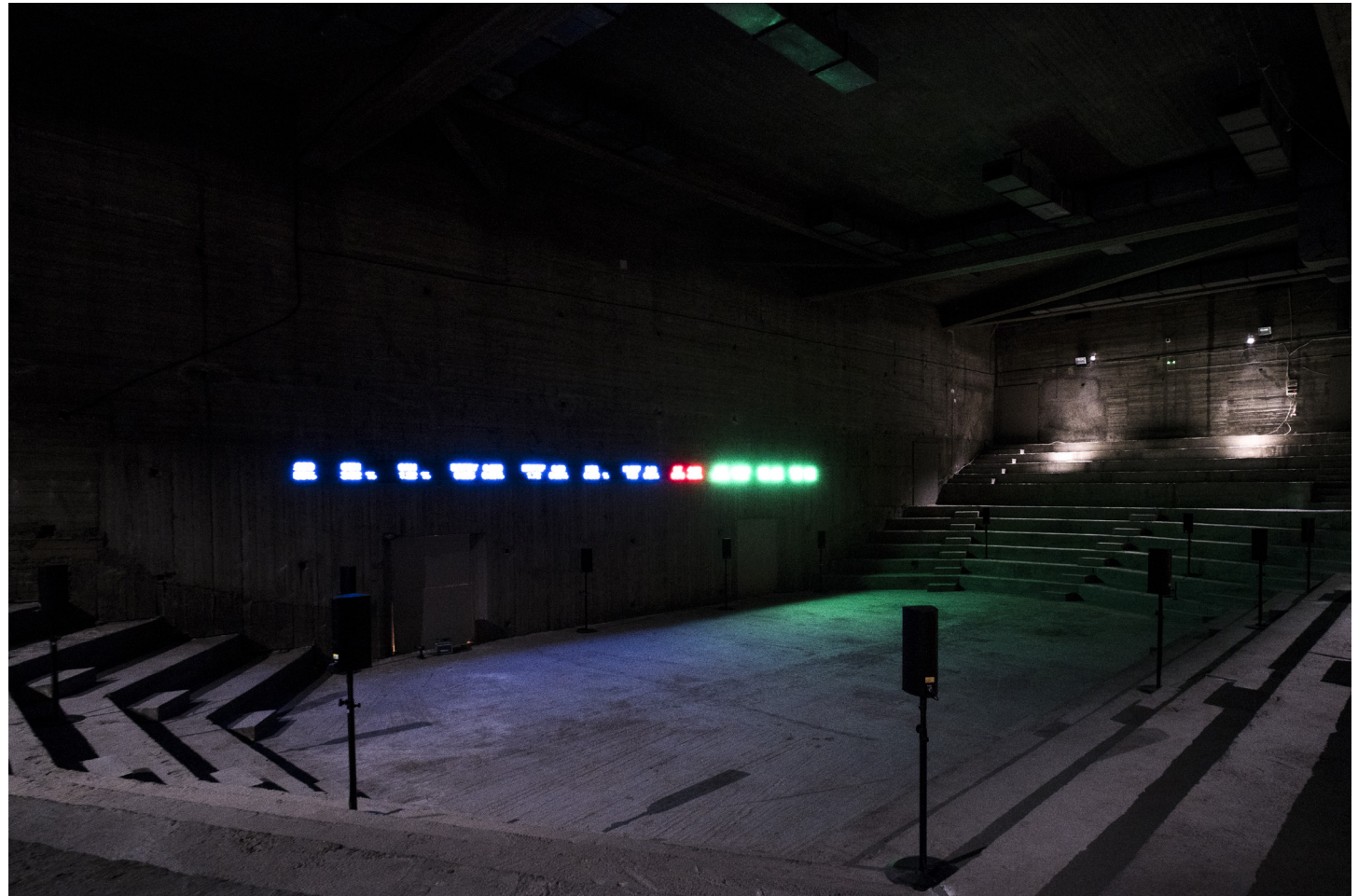
2017

Multichannel sound installation, the traditional polyphonic song *When I forget, I'm glad* from Epirus, Greece, and real-time LED display of world stock indexes

Pleiades Female Vocal Group (vocal performance), Fotis Moschos and Emeka Ogboh (sound design), Areti Andreopoulou (acoustics consultant), Yiannis Loukos (production supervisor), Thomas Bucker (voice arrangement), and Fredrik Olofsson (stock program)

Ogboh explores how private, public, and collective memories and historiographies are translated, transformed, transcribed, and engraved in sound and sonority. Such is the case when he rummages through the archives for documents about financial crises from 1929 to the present day. In *The Way Earthly Things Are Going* (2017), Ogboh, in dialogue with a traditional polyphonic choir, deliberates sonically on the multiple effects and manifestations of states of crisis. The enchanting sound installation addresses the (im-)possibility of existing in a cul-de-sac; it tells of wanderlust and yearning, of pain and a survival urge, and it features comments on and impressions of an economic crisis that has plagued and is still ravaging.

— Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung



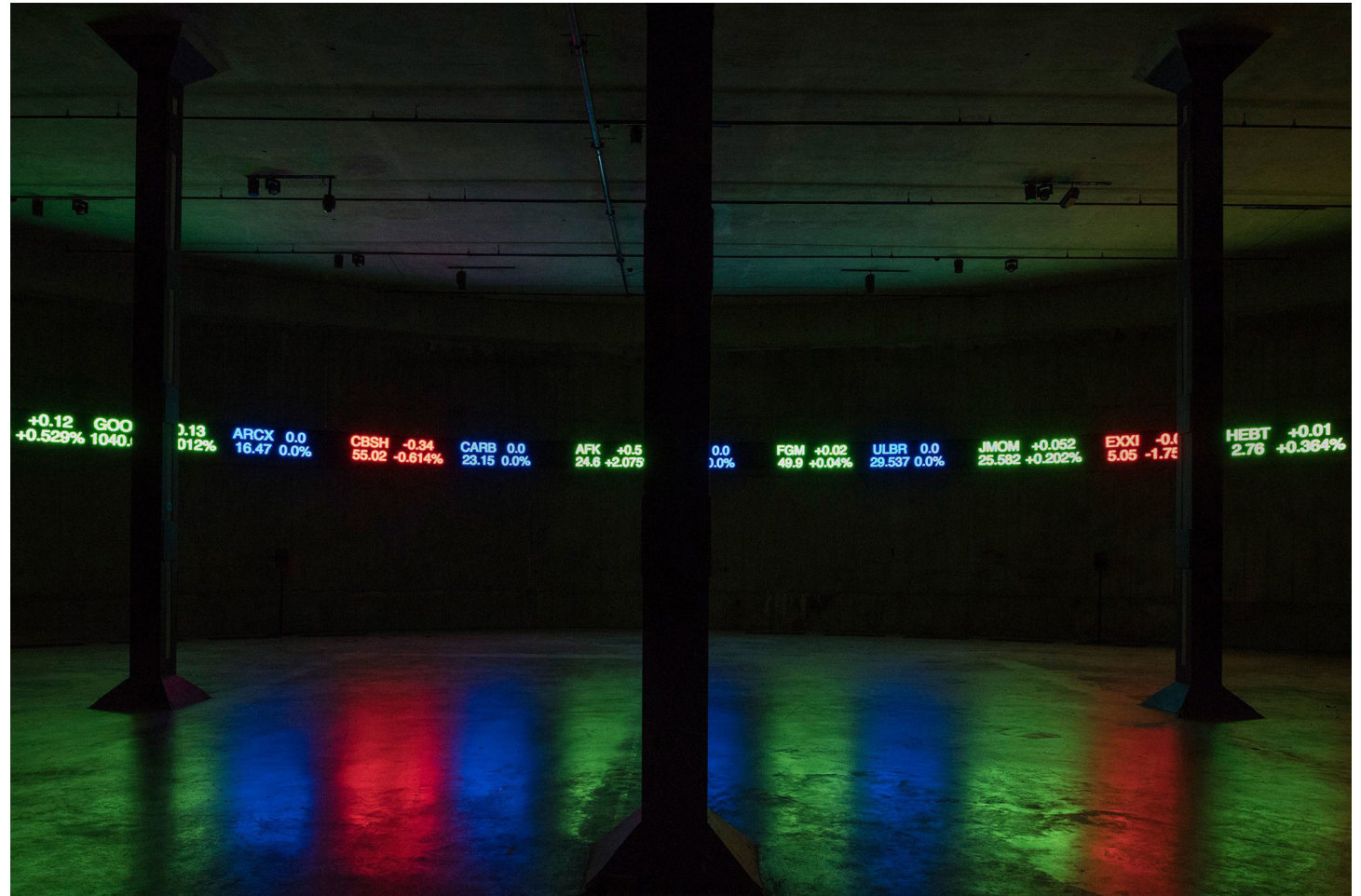
Installation view: Athens Conservatoire (Odeion), documenta 14. Photo: Stathis Mamalakis

The Way Earthly Things Are Going

2017

Multichannel sound installation, the traditional polyphonic song *When I forget, I'm glad* from Epirus, Greece, and real-time LED display of world stock indexes

Commissioned by documenta 14



Installation view: East Tank, Blavatnik Building, Tate Modern, London

Passage through MoonDog

2017

Sound installation (soundscapes, Couplets by Moondog, Trimba music, 16 speakers)

Commissioned by Skulptur Projekte Archiv.

As his contribution to Sculpture Projects, Ogboh has developed a sound concept for the Hamburger Tunnel, an underground passageway next to Münster's main station. Based on the compositions and poems of the legendary American musician Moondog, he uses, among other things, material recorded on the trimba by Moondog's close friend Stefan Lakatos. The instrument was invented by Moondog—a blind street musician, who was born Louis Thomas Hardin (1916–1999)—and it is characteristic of the pieces he began composing in the late 1940s. According to the obituary written by his old New York flatmate Philip Glass, he was one of the most influential nonconformists of his time, an associate of Leonard Bernstein, and a source of inspiration for the composer Artur Rodziński. Thanks to his intense involvement with rhythm, melody, and language, Moondog wrote several hundred two-line poems in addition to his music pieces. After leaving New York, where he had gained fame as the Viking of 5th Avenue, Moondog ended up in the Westphalian town of Oer-Erkenschwick, moving just before he died to Münster, where he is buried at the main municipal cemetery. The concept of soundscapes shared by both Moondog and Ogboh reveals a common interest in the public space as a source and stage for their compositions: the street, which John Cage called 'the true concert hall'.



Installation view: Hamburger Tunnel (underpass), Münster central station

Lagos State of Mind III

2017 - 2022

Eighteen-channel sound installation (35:25 min.), painted wall, galvanized steel and aluminum street sign, U-Bahn metro sign, concrete slab, vinyl wall graphic.

Variable measures

Collection Museum of Modern Art, NYC, United States.

Emeka Ogboh's installation, *Lagos State of Mind III*, invites viewers into a hybrid world, blending perspectives from Lagos and Berlin—cities the artist has called home. The work features a soundscape composed of field recordings collected over a decade, encapsulating everyday sounds from both cities: car horns, engine noises, street music, Berlin train announcements, and conversations among African expatriates in beginner German. This auditory collage delves into how collective memory and global histories are communicated and preserved through sound. Additionally, a fictional transit map displayed on the walls reimagines Berlin's public transport network extending into Lagos, creating a visual and sonic interplay that reflects the interconnected experiences of an immigrant navigating two cultures.



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*Sufferhead Original (Kassel
Edition)*

2017

50,000 bottles of beer, billboards,
television commercial, radio jingle
Various locations in Kassel

Commissioned by documenta 14

In interviews with Africans in Germany,
Ogboh tickled the taste buds to map a
landscape of sonority. By collating their
gustatory experiences, he created a recipe
from which the dark Sufferhead original
(2016) is brewed. The name is taken from
Fela Kuti's political hymn, which Ogboh uses
to catalyze discourse on the politics of race,
concepts of nation, and migration.

— Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung

The work Sufferhead Original has been
adapted and presented in the following
cities: Paris, Baden-Baden, Frankfurt,
Berlin.



featuring Ursula Rucker

Logan Squared: Ode to Philly

2017

Multi-channel sound installation

Commissioned by Monument Lab

Logan Square, Philadelphia

[Link to sound extract](#)

For Logan Squared: Ode to Philly, the artist collaborated with renowned Philadelphia poet Ursula Rucker and members of the Chestnut Street Singers, drawing on the ideas of hundreds of Philadelphians who submitted proposals during Monument Lab's 2015 discovery phase. Ogborn noted, "The point of departure for this work begins with what the city of Philadelphia remembers and what it chooses not to remember in terms of its history. The question is put across its citizenry in the form of research feedback."

Responding to the open dataset of proposals, Rucker composed an epic poem that served as the backbone of the project. Each Sunday, visitors were invited to experience a special weekly listening of a multichannel sound installation on the Skyline Terrace atop the Free Library of Philadelphia's Parkway Central branch. The composition included the sounds of Rucker's poem and a special choral arrangement of Louis Gesensway's "Logan Square at Dusk" from Four Squares of Philadelphia. Visitors were also able to hear the sound monument at solar-powered listening stations around the square, where they could plug in their headphones.



The Song of the Germans

2015

10-channel sound installation of an African choir performing the German anthem (Deutschlandlied) in ten African languages: Igbo, Yoruba, Bamoun, More, Twi, Ewondo, Sango, Douala, Kikongo and Lingala.

In *The Song of the Germans* (2015), Emeka Ogboh uses sound to bring to the table issues of entitlement, nationalism, xenophobia, and racism. In a Germany where one in five people is of migrant origin, in the era of refuge and of radical shifts to the right with the emergence of organizations like the National Socialist Underground and Pegida, Ogboh questions whether the “Unity, Justice and Liberty” in August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben’s 1841 lyrics for “Das Lied der Deutschen” applies to all or just a few. By appropriating the German national anthem, translating it into ten different African languages and then letting it be sung by members of a Berlin-based African-gospel choir in their mother tongues, Ogboh complicates concepts of fatherland, citizenship, and nationality.

— Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung



The Song of the Germans

2015

10-channel sound installation of an African choir performing the German anthem (Deutschlandlied) in ten African languages: Igbo, Yoruba, Bamoun, More, Twi, Ewondo, Sango, Douala, Kikongo and Lingala.

