

Emeka Ogboh

Portfolio

Imane Farès

41 rue Mazarine, 75006 Paris
+ 33 (0)1 46 33 13 13 – contact@imanefares.com
www.imanefares.com

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 connects to places with his senses of hearing and taste. Through his audio installations and gastronomic works, Ogboh explores how private, public, collective memories and histories are translated, transformed and encoded into sound and food. These works contemplate how sound and food capture existential relationships, frame our understanding of the world and provide a context in which to ask critical questions on immigration, globalization, and post-colonialism.

Recent museum exhibitions include *A bruit secret – Hearing in Art* (Museum Tinguely, Basel, 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).

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.

*Sufferhead Original (Paris Edition),
2019-2022*

Site-specific installation

Unique, variable dimensions

500 bottles of the beer Sufferhead Original (Paris Edition);

black shelves; sound installation (5'12") diffused by three speaker-barrels;

red neon light 'Quand il y en a un, ça va...', 2022, 67 x 113 x 8 cm;

8 framed photographs Sufferhead Original (Paris Edition), 2019, 103 x 153 x 4 cm.



Exhibition view: *Quand il y en a un, ça va...*, Galerie Imane Farès, Paris, 2022. Photo © Tadzio



Details of the installation *Sufferhead Original (Paris Edition)*,
2019-2022, exhibition view at Imane Farès Gallery, 2022

The starting point of this exhibition is a long-term craft beer project called Sufferhead Original inspired by food tastes and the experiences of Africans living in Europe. Through creating a new beer recipe and its associated brand image, the artist questions certain preconceived ideas and a priori assumptions about immigration and integration policies that are generally associated with the destinies of expatriates in Europe.

This project was initiated in Germany as part of documenta 14, where the first version of this beer was created by mixing Nigerian flavors with traditional German brewing methods—a recipe that violated German “purity laws” governing beer production. The beer brand takes its name from Original Suffer Head, the title of a 1981 song by Nigerian composer, musician and political activist Fela Kuti. This Afrobeat anthem denounces the situation of the masses and injustices in Nigeria. While the grooves, regular rhythm, and repetitive structure of the song mimic a long revolutionary procession, Fela Kuti lists the political and infrastructural issues affecting the masses.

Emeka Ogboh pursues this multisensory research, combining the creation of a new “Parisian edition” beer, a site-specific sound installation, and a series of photographs taken from the Sufferhead Original (Paris Edition) advertising campaign.



Details of the installation *Sufferhead Original (Paris Edition)*, 2019-2022, exhibition view at Imane Farès Gallery, 2022

A neon sign welcomes visitors at the entrance of the gallery. The French sentence used for the exhibition's title quotes a comment made by the former French Interior Minister Brice Hortefeux to a North African militant: "Quand il y en a un, ça va. C'est quand il y en a beaucoup qu'il y a des problèmes" which can be translated as: "When there's only one, it's fine. It's when there are many that there are problems.").

In the photographs that accompany the exhibition, Ogbob uses the visual language of commercial and advertising photography to examine the experience of African populations in France. By diverting this visual vocabulary, he addresses the history of African immigration: the ways in which populations of different origins have been and are still categorized and caricatured and the sums of clichés and comments that circulate about them.

He chooses particularly significant places in the colonial history of France and the discrimination against the black minority as locations of the photo shoots. These include monuments (Palais de la Porte Dorée, Monument à la Mission Marchant, Fontaine Cuvier), ruined sites of colonial exhibitions (the Jardin d'Agronomie Tropicale), former commercial signs ("Au Planteur"), and places related to the political claims expressed by undocumented migrants" (sans papiers) (Saint-Bernard Church). The neon signs inside the exhibition and the t-shirts worn by the campaign's models on the pictures are also the results of the artist's long research process on French political speeches on the theme of immigration. They come with quotations and slogans that were used in these speeches, which the artist has slightly transformed or simply diverted to change their meaning.

Sufferhead Original (Paris Edition)

#1 - Monument à la mission

Marchand

2019

100 x 150 cm

Archival pigment print on Hahnemühle

Photo Rag

Edition of 5 + 1 AP



Sufferhead Original (Paris Edition)

#2 - Monument à la mission

Marchand

2019

150 x 100 cm

Archival pigment print on Hahnemühle

Photo Rag

Edition of 5 + 1 AP



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Sufferhead Original (Paris Edition)

#3 - Palais de la Porte Dorée

2019

100 x 150 cm

Archival pigment print on Hahnemühle

Photo Rag

Edition of 5 + 1 AP



With the kind permission of the
Établissement public du Palais de la Porte
Dorée.

Architecture: Albert Laprade, @ Adagp,
Paris, 2019.

Grates: Jean Prouvé, @Adagp, Paris, 2019.

Bas-reliefs of the facade: Alfred Janniot, @
Adagp, Paris, 2019.

Sufferhead Original (Paris Edition)

*#4 - Fragments du monument à
la gloire de l'expansion coloniale
française*

2019

100 x 150 cm

Archival pigment print on Hahnemühle

Photo Rag

Edition of 5 + 1 AP



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Sufferhead Original (Paris Edition)
#5 - Jardin d'agronomie tropicale
2019
150 x 100 cm
Archival pigment print on Hahnemühle
Photo Rag
Edition of 5 + 1 AP



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Sufferhead Original (Paris Edition)

#6 - Fontaine Cuvier

2019

150 x 100 cm

Archival pigment print on Hahnemühle

Photo Rag

Edition of 5 + 1 AP

The yellow “danfo” bus with black stripes, visible in the photographs, is the archetypal means of collective transportation in Lagos, Nigeria. Accompanied by different sound compositions, it constitutes an installation in its own right: LOS-CDG (Lagos to Paris), exhibited in 2019 at the Palais de Tokyo.



Sufferhead Original (Paris Edition)

#7 - Au Planteur

2019

100 x 150 cm

Archival pigment print on Hahnemühle

Photo Rag

Edition of 5 + 1 AP



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Sufferhead Original (Paris Edition)

*#8 - Église Saint-Bernard de la
Chapelle*

2019

100 x 150 cm

Archival pigment print on Hahnemühle

Photo Rag

Edition of 5 + 1 AP



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Sans titre (espèces envahissantes)

2022

Unique

variable dimensions

Sound installation (8'12'')

Three neon lights (Yellow, Green, Red)



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

Wilhelm von Humboldt's fascination with language and its ability to resemble a work of art forms the starting point for Emeka Ogboh's work. On the roof terrace of the Humboldt Forum, he has rearranged the Igbo folk song *Nne, Nne, Udu* for twelve singers in his sound installation. The song is an allegory about a young maiden who is entrusted with a treasured clay pot. Her careless behaviour on returning from the stream with the pot of water ends up in the pot falling and breaking into pieces. The broken pot affects the maiden's psychological well-being and that of her community.

The folk song and chants come from a rich Igbo tradition of oral storytelling of teachings and metaphors. *Nne, Nne, Udu* is accompanied by chants inspired by a line from Chinua Achebe's famous novel *Things Fall Apart*. The latter addresses the consequences of colonialism for the Igbo: "He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart". Twelve loudspeakers, covered with Akwete, a traditional Igbo fabric, joins the individual voices into a choir of choral music that performs on the hour.

[Full Press Release >](#)



Stirring the Pot

2021

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

In Marseille, the artist presents an unprecedented work, a composite environment, where moving images, olfactory narratives and a sound installation respond to each other, offering a multi-sensitive experience of a return journey. The exhibition spaces of la Tour welcome a variation of an existing installation, named *Àmà: The Gathering Place*, made in 2019. The artist proposes to invest the space of the museum to turn it into a living space, dedicated to encounters and relaxing. Therefore, he questions the social role of the exhibition space to create favorable conditions to share, discuss and reflect. The installation is inspired by the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria, where traditional fabrics originate, and a sound environment composed from their sacred music. The rooftop of la Friche is taken over by Emeka Ogboh as a platform for possibilities, invested in the continuity of the exhibition by extended artistic forms and cultural moments: invitation for Nigerian chefs from Nigeria, Benin and Cameroon, installation, music program, etc. Those various moments and invitations to the public are specifically thought out for the venue and compose a global proposition where hospitality is championed. A book of recipes from those various encounters is published and constitutes the memory of the project.

[More information >](#)



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.

[More information ↘](#)



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 gossips, 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 Ogbah 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>



Syntax Error

2018 28 photographs on paper, framed

40 x 66 cm (each)

5,25 x 1,60 m (total)

Edition of 3 + 1 AP

Exhibition view: No Condition is

Permanent, Galerie Imane Farès, Paris,

2018. Photo © Tadzio



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

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

Ámà: The Gathering Place

2019

Multi-channel sound installation

Commissioned by the Cleveland Museum of Art

The first commissioned artwork for the Ames Family Atrium, *Ámà: 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 © Scott Shaw

The Way Earthly Things Are Going

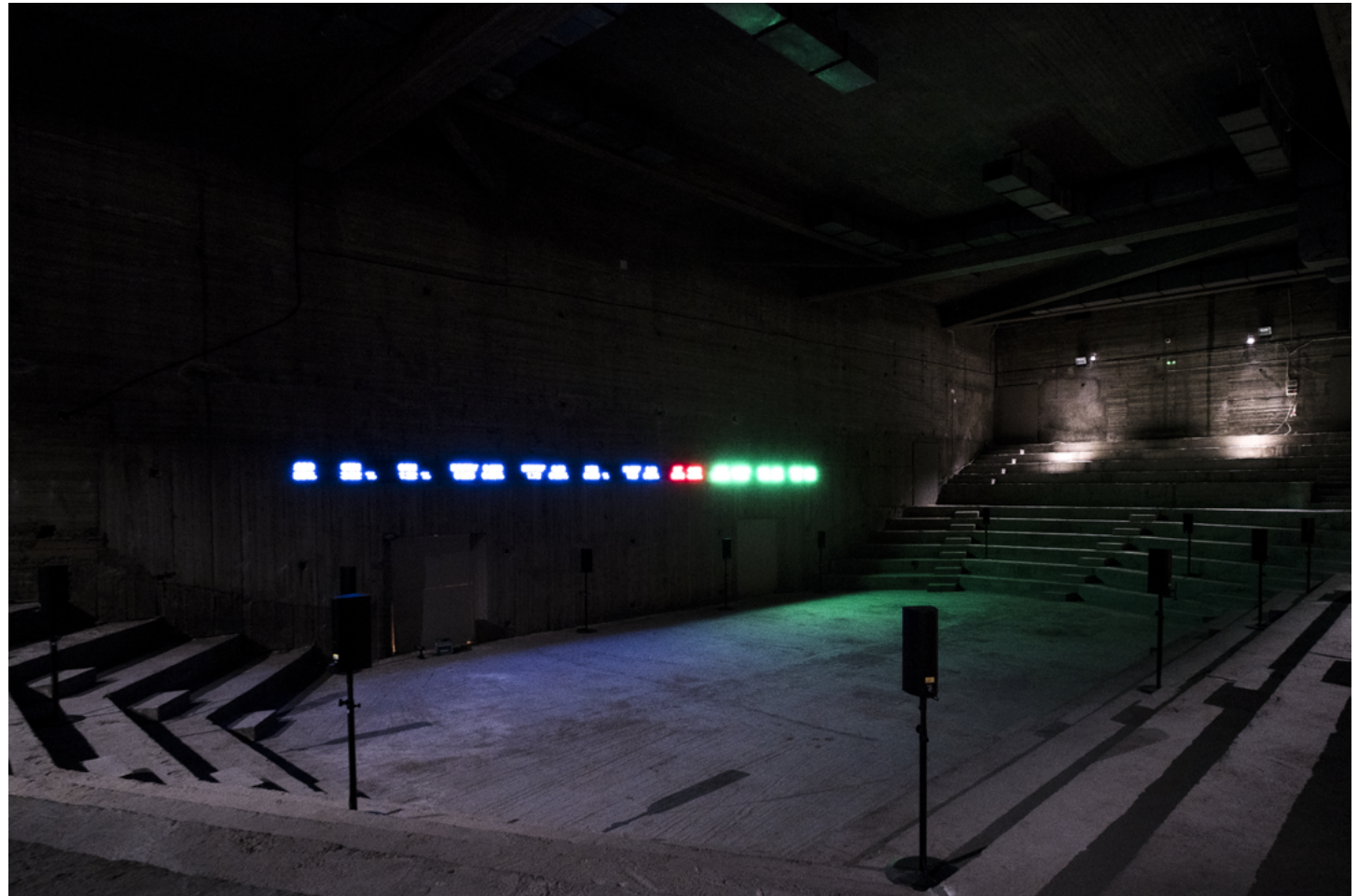
2017

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 Bücken (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

The Way Earthly Things Are Going

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

*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



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



Installation view: *Walking Through Walls*, Gropius Bau, Berlin, 2019.

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.

