



Samuel Nnorom

TRUTH AND CONSPIRACY

SAMUEL NNOROM
truth and conspiracy

Primo Marella Gallery
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~ GEORGE C. ODOH

SAMUEL NNOROM'S TEXTILE INCANTATIONS OF TRUTH, CONSPIRACY AND IDENTITY

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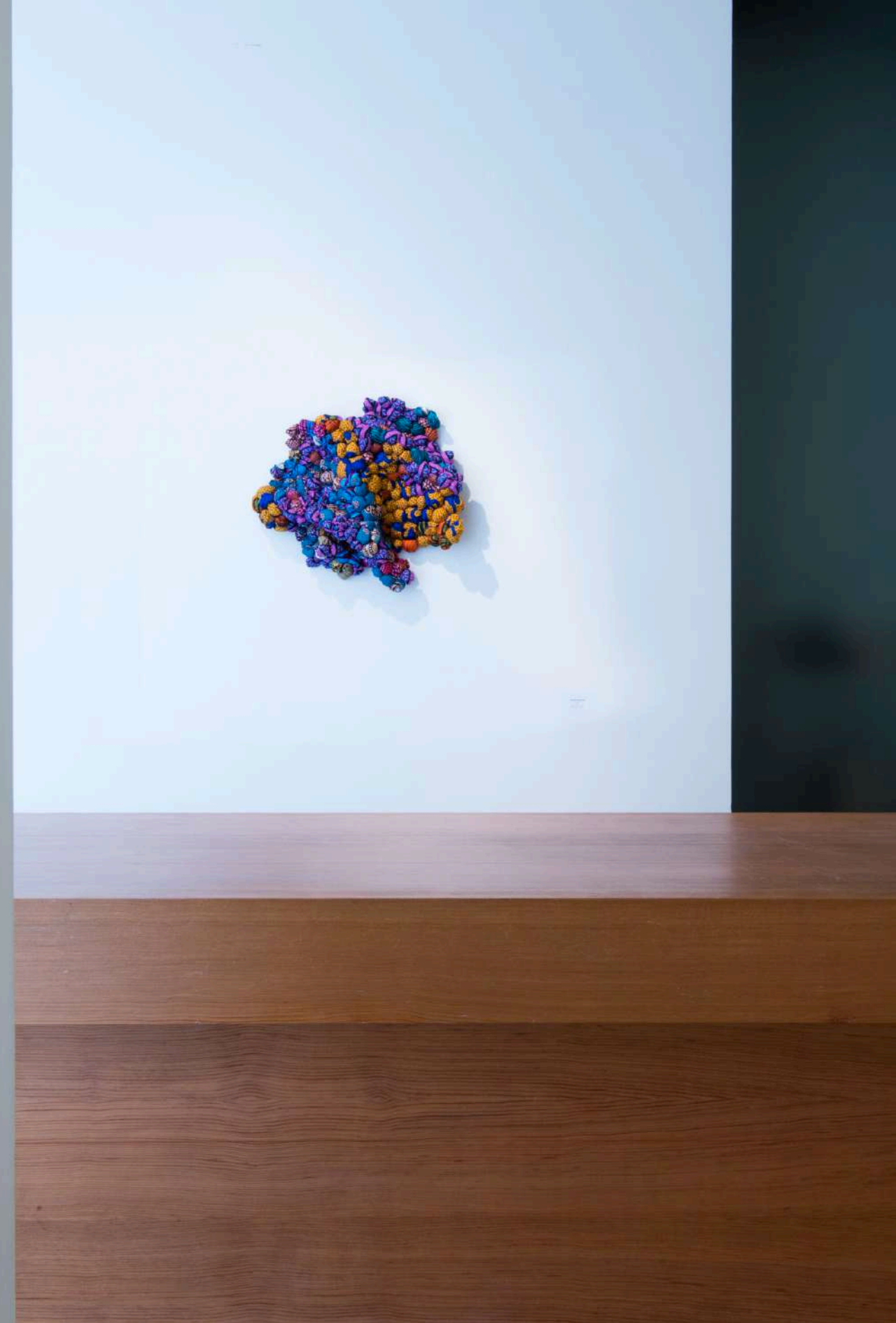
The spellbinding encounter with the works of Samuel Nnorom is an invitation into a mesmerising world where beautifully orchestrated colours and the iterative use of globular forms animate the visual energy of its textile landscape. It is also a world ruled by uncertainties, a place where truth, conspiracy, and identity are not only vigorously contested, negotiated, deconstructed, and re-constructed, but also function as the artist's primary inquisitorial tools for interrogating the varying subjectivities that shape the social, political, and cultural spheres of society. *Truth and Conspiracy*, the theme of this solo exhibition by the artist, offers insight into how the artist uses bubble-like structures created with African wax prints (Ankara fabric) to conceptually explore the multifarious landscape of human experiences.

Nnorom's fast-rising profile and legitimate posturing as one of the most exciting contemporary Nigerian artists derive from the dynamic and fascinating landscape of his textile-based sculpture installations. The stylistic architecture of his art is firmly rooted in the culture of radical practice that foregrounds the art tradition of the Fine and Applied Arts Department of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, where he is presently pursuing a Master of Fine Arts degree (MFA) in sculpture. Although the idea of using textiles as a medium for artistic expression started before his postgraduate studies, it was his exposure to the intellectual and experimental cultures of the Nsukka art department that enabled him to redirect and refocus the conceptual and experimental dispositions of his studio practice, setting his art practice on the path of its current stylistic trajectory. In a personal conversation, the artist acknowledged that it was at the Nsukka art department that the burning desire to critically and robustly explore the bubble concept was fully ignited. Interestingly, before his MFA supervisor recommended and insisted that the bubble concept be the focus of his MFA studio work, Nnorom had earlier wanted to explore hyper-realism in sculpture production because his earlier experience of working on the bubble concept was very laborious, time-consuming and therefore daunting.

The artist's full realisation of the conceptual and artistic potentials of the textile-driven bubble concept occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the bid to relate his art to the emergent realities engendered by the coronavirus outbreak, he began to philosophically connect the material properties of the Ankara fabric, as well as the narratives surrounding its provenance, to the rhetoric that framed conversations on the COVID-19 outbreak. He drew comparisons between

the not-so-clear history about the origin of the Ankara fabric and the accusations and counter-accusations between Western countries and China regarding the origin of the coronavirus. Again, he saw in the visible and hidden attributes of the textile bubble a metaphorical codification of the litany of truths, half-truths, lies, denials, and concealments that characterised governments' and the public's responses to the pandemic. Furthermore, with the emerging practice of the COVID-19 social bubble, which allowed for more in-person social interactions beyond one's household while still potentially limiting the risk of COVID-19 transmission, his understanding of the bubble through the interpretive lenses of biology, chemistry, and physics assumed a much more structural and thematic significance in his work. Thus, the clustering of bubble-like structures in his works became an expressive tool for interrogating the dynamics of contemporary life during the COVID-19 pandemic. The use of Ankara fabric in 'clothing' his artistic and social vision also found both literal and metaphorical validation in its visual enunciation of the often used collocation, 'the fabric of society,' to reference the social order and its many contextual threads.

Samuel Nnorom's post-COVID-19 pandemic art thrives on the artistic and humanistic considerations that shaped his art practice during the COVID-19 pandemic. Stitching and tying are the major techniques that anchor his studio practice. His use of these two techniques dates back to his early childhood and traceable to parental influence (his father was a cobbler and his mother a seamstress). Although cobbling is part of the technical skills he acquired, having learned from his father, his art practice has benefited more from the tailoring skills he learned from his mother. His studio process involves sourcing off-cuts and rejects of assorted Ankara fabric and foams from tailors' shops and upholstery workshops. Sometimes, he scavenges dumpsites to source these materials. The materials are machine-washed and dried before use in the studio. To augment the quantity, designs, and colour range, he also purchases Ankara fabric from the local markets. In the studio, the Ankara fabric is cut into square shapes of varying sizes and stitched on three sides, leaving one end open. Foam is stuffed into this opening, which is then tightly secured to create a globular form. Hundreds of these structures are sorted according to size and colour and painstakingly joined together with needle and thread until the desired result is achieved. Samuel Nnorom's fascination with the Ankara fabric—a material that finds wide acceptance and usage in West Africa and Central Africa—stems from the socio-political force it wields as a historical material and as a powerful form of non-verbal



communication. Certain designs could function as a shared language used by a group of people to express social and political affiliations and identities.

The works featured in *Truth and Conspiracy* explore the historical life and materiality of the Ankara fabric, especially how they relate to concepts of consumerism, identity, and social structures. The conspiratorial essence infused into the works derives from the rhetoric that framed notable events of the post-pandemic era, such as the Black Lives Matter protests, the EndSARS protest against police brutality in Nigeria, the 2020 elections in the United States of Africa, as well as the prevalent global economic crisis, armed conflicts, and the rise of fake news, misinformation, and disinformation. Discourses on these phenomena reveal the intertwined and blurred boundary between truth and conspiracy. Relating this to his art practice, Nnorom explains that the rolled, concealed, and unconcealed nature of the bubbles created with the Ankara fabric is an attempt at interrogating the relativity of truth and the temporality of life. He views the concealment that occurs in his textile bubbles as a conspiracy against the materiality of the medium, while the visible parts speak the truth about its materiality.¹

In the piece titled *After the Pandemic*, Samuel Nnorom uses notions of inclusion, exclusion, and intrusion as narrative handles to interpret social relationships in the immediate post-pandemic era. The artist creates a colourful and energetic field of clustered colonies of textile bubbles, grouped according to related colours and sizes. Sometimes, bubbles of a different hue are introduced in other areas of the composition, enlivening, contrasting, and also bringing a sense of rupture to the related hues that dominate these areas. The idea of belonging, of being excluded, and the quest for (re)integration are metaphorically captured in the work, painting an evocative picture of a society coming to terms with the social burden engendered by the pandemic. In some sense, the work highlights how people tend to be distrustful of others outside their social circle—people perceived as not sharing the same truths, beliefs, or conspiracies. Beyond the outwardly beautiful portraits of different groups of people trying to get back to their normal lives (represented by the visible Ankara fabric), the unseen spaces enclosed by the bubbles symbolise the hidden and unpleasant experiences and memories of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, each bubble not only reveals but also conceals, functioning as the seed of truth and untruth, the warp and weft thread weaving the fabric of our social lives and our collective destiny.

1. In a personal conversation with Samuel Nnorom on May 13, 2023, he shared information regarding the conceptual, thematic and procedural components of his art practice.



Moving Form, 2023
African wax print fabric
60 × 72 × 15 cm



Hanging on you, 2023
African wax print fabric
93 × 77 × 10 cm

Other works by Nnorom, like *Organise Patch*, *Selective Sprout*, *Moving Form*, *Hanging on You*, and *Earth Component*, show the artist's efforts at tweaking the spatial ordering of his compositions in order to create new and interesting forms. Although bound by the restrictive embrace of the wall, these works are organically mobile, possessed of dynamic movement, and very appealing in their organic celebration of warm, cool, vibrant, and muted colours. *The Dancer*, *Conformational Dancer*, and *Unknown Dancer* (presented as suspended installations) allow for a three-dimensional experience of their alluring forms. In the three works, various strands of textile bubbles that mimic stringed beads cling to, interweave with, and penetrate one another to create dynamic abstract forms of a dancing figure. *Conformational Dancer* is the artist's representation of an *Ijele* dancer known for their graceful dance steps. Samuel Nnorom's exploration of the structural and conceptual possibilities of the bubble is also evident in the works *Salvaging the Land*, *Oge*, and *Rhythm and Blues*. The introduction of flat areas (some having a net-like formation) in certain parts of the compositions provides counterweights to the three-dimensional effect of the bubbles. These flat areas are conceived as what is left behind when bubbles burst. The contrast between the flat areas and the globular bodies is conceptually applied to address the inequality in society and highlights the world of the haves and have-nots. Other times, the net-like structures created with strips of Ankara fabric that the artist conceptualises as chemical chain reactions, function as boundaries, bridges, and pathways that separate and also connect people from different cultures and geographies, echoing the rising wave of global migration and displacement.

Appraised within the stylistic influence of El Anatsui, the globally renowned artist who taught at the Nsukka Art Department for several decades, Samuel Nnorom's art is considered a chip off the old block. Similar to Anatsui's work process, his art is the product of many hands—what Julian Lucas (citing El Anatsui) described as the gathering of "spiritual charge."² The metaphors that anchor the cartographic landscape of his textile-driven sculpture installations insightfully contextualise the ambivalences and ambiguities that shape our understanding of life and our experiences of its multidimensional realities. Samuel Nnorom is an artist of the now and the future. The visual incantations engendered by his experimental and evolving studio practice will continue to calcify his bold artistic footprints in the global art scene.

2. See Lucas, J. (2012, January 11). How El Anatsui broke the seal on contemporary art. The New Yorker. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/01/18/how-el-anatsui-broke-the-seal-on-contemporary-art>



After the pandemic, 2021
African wax print fabric
518 × 174 × 30 cm



~ SAMUEL NNOROM

TRUTH AND CONSPIRACY

Truth and Conspiracy as the theme of this exhibition suggest is a studio exploration that interrogate that metaphorical quality of material and technique into the materiality of creative existence to convey artistic response. The theme derives from the rolling, concealing and unconcealing the nature of bubbles with African print wax fabric popularly known as Ankara fabric that is stitched to constitute the visual and formal element that embodies the body of work under discourse. In other words, concealing material could mean conspiracy against materiality while unconcealing material could also be refer to as being truth to materiality. However, these two word "truth" and "conspiracy" becomes the pilot to the discourse of material and process of this exhibition.

The major material constituent in the production of *Truth and Conspiracy* is African print wax fabric. African print wax fabric in *Truth and Conspiracy* series drew its foundation from the vacillating origin of Ankara fabric in Africa. It was said that Ankara fabric originated from Indonesia but was brought to Africa by the colonial masters who found Africa as a dumping ground for the rejected fabrics in Europe. It was also said the fabric was used by European trader to exchange gold, cocoa and other resources with the African trader. Also, it was believed to have come from a city called Ankara in turkey. But most African historian agreed that its design, motif and colours are African, these uncertainties, gave rise to the manipulation of the story either to please the African's or to glorify the white (colonial masters\ Europeans). African print wax fabric commonly known as "Ankara prints", "African prints", "African wax prints", "Holland wax", "Dutch wax", or kitanga in East-Africa is a 100% cotton fabric with vibrant patterns and complimentary colours. It is usually a colorful fabric which is primarily associated with Africa because of its tribal-like patterns and motifs. Ankara fabric can be adap-



Organize patch, 2023
African wax print fabric
85 × 77 × 15 cm



All Around, 2023
African Wax Print Fabric
72 × 78 × 11 cm

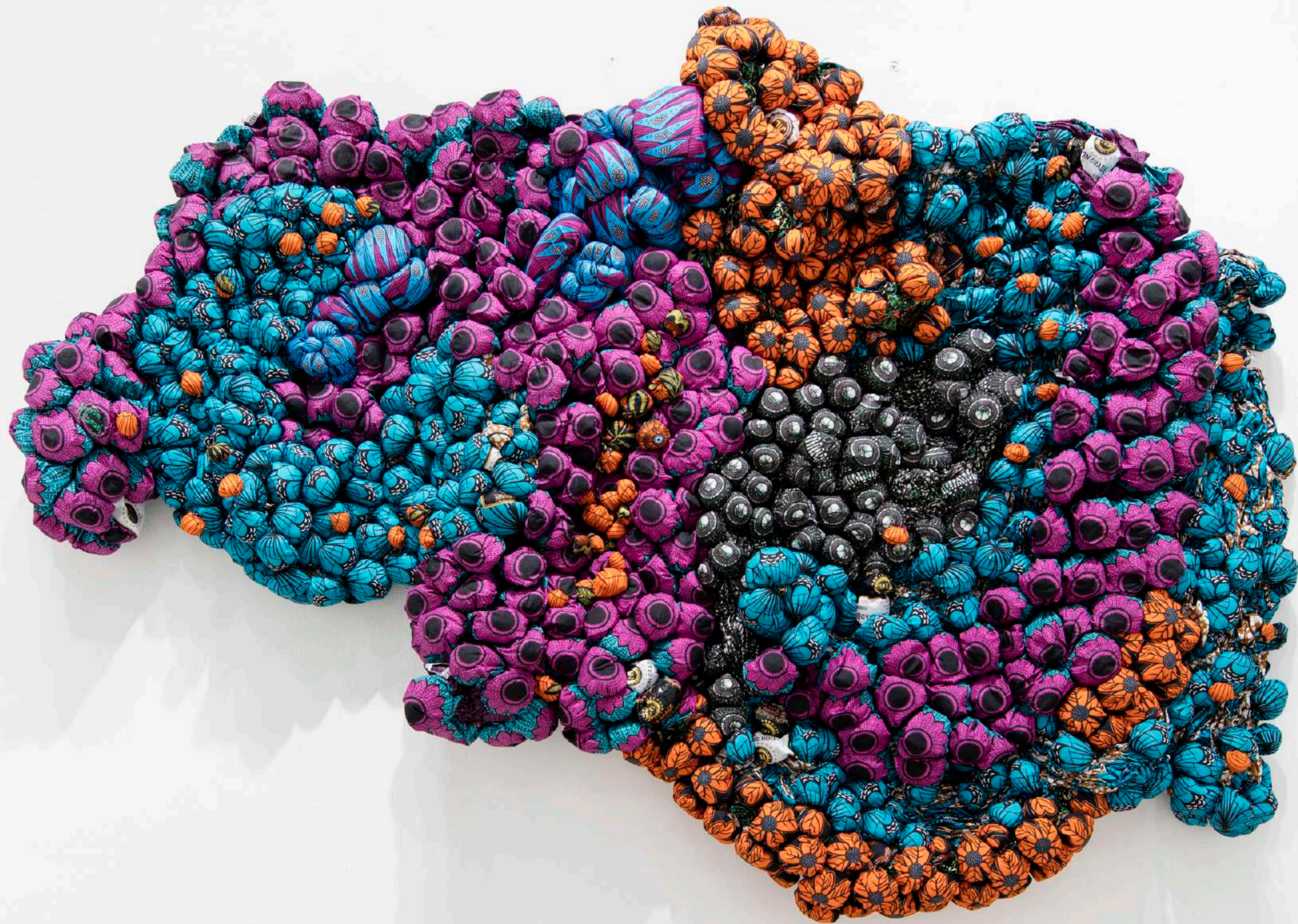
table on many items such as hats, earrings, blazers, and shoes etc. which many fashion brands and fabric suppliers have manufactured ankara prints on fabrics like chiffon, silk, spandex, leathers for clothing such as kaftans, iro and bubas, bathing suits, sports bars, leggings, socks and shoes. These backgrounds hold important clues to the conceptual content of works in this project.

Bubbles are elements or structure that holds or store something for a period of time, respectively. Conjoining the vacillating history of Ankara fabric and the encased structure of bubble and what it represents; it makes it easier for the audience to contemplate the individual statement every piece entertains. Imperatively, these pieces of sculpture are not limited to the history of Ankara fabric rather, it laid the terrain upon which the artist narrates his creative discourse through personal experiences, recent happenings, futuristic prediction, and global content. The exploration on the synergic materiality in relation to the structural formation of bubbles into sculptural piece gives the idea or thought of what Plato consider as “the real world of the forms, which are perfect and unchanging and the sensible world that we all perceive around us which is an imperfect copy of forms and insofar as the copy is imperfect so is its illusion”. However, the socio-political, socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-religious interaction among individuals and their interactions creates a social structure these pieces investigate.

However, a coin has two sides and any of these sides can only be used as legal tender, if and only if it is not separated from each other, which implies that only one side of a coin can never operate on its own independently of the other side no matter the value the currency bears; but if it does, it loses its efficacy, authenticity and value of being a legal tender. In line with the above analogy, this series *Truth and Conspiracy*, draw its inspiration from the events of 2020, a post-pandemic era that has led the world to experience some levels of paradigm shift following the COVID19 pandemic, Black Lives matter, End SARS protest in Nigeria, American Election saga, and the current political, insecurities and economic global crisis which has led to so many conspiracies and truth been inter-twined together.

Finally, I hope this exhibition provides a background for my audience to engaged with each work individually from their experiences and possibly lead to an unending possibilities.





Selective Sprouting, 2023
African Wax Print Fabric
143 × 191 × 26 cm





Oge, 2022
African wax print fabric
317,5 × 201 × 23 cm

Earth Component, 2023
African Wax Print Fabric
163 × 140 × 14 cm







Crossing red, 2022
African wax print fabric
256,5 × 264 × 20 cm

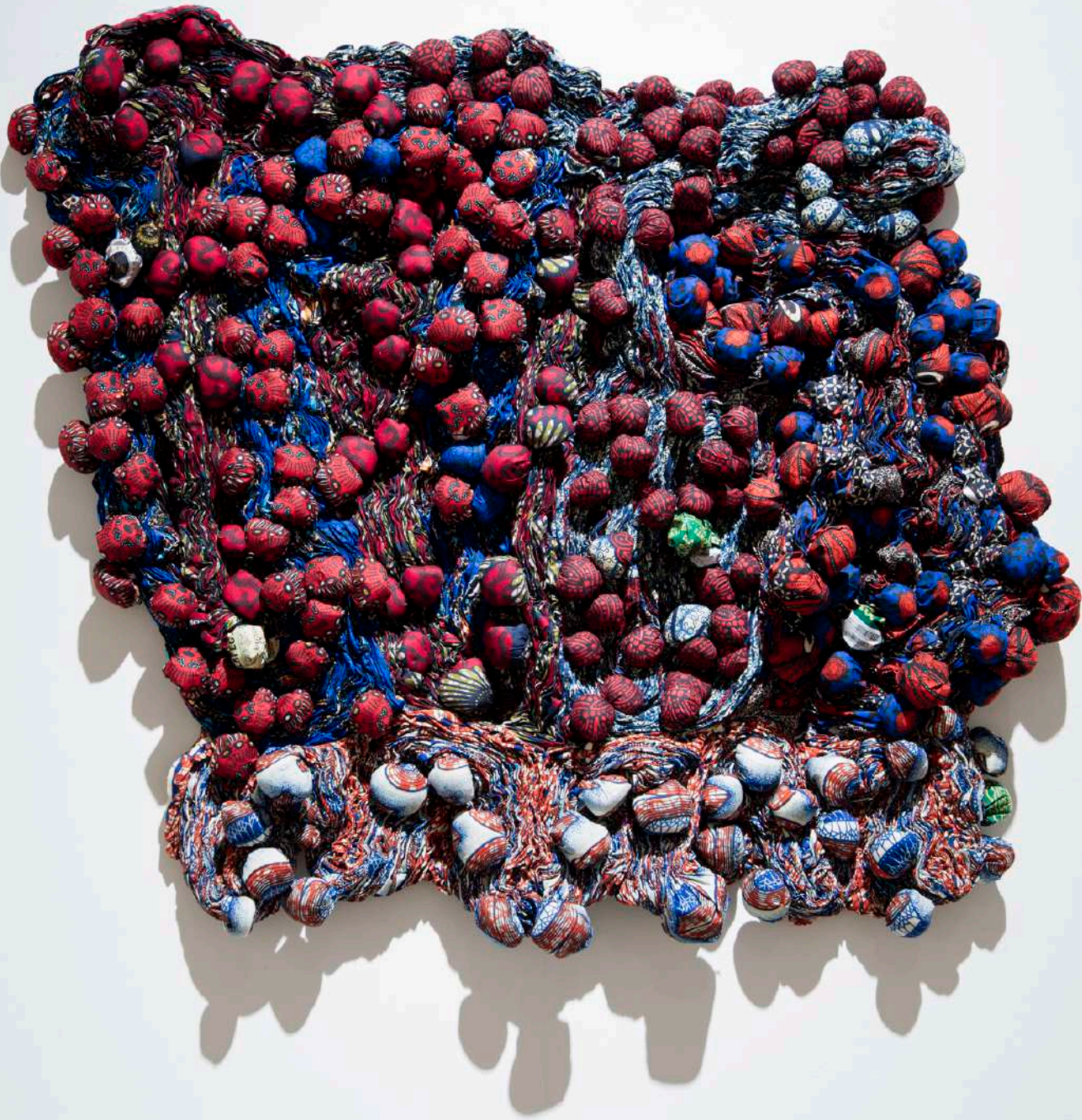




Venus of Colour, 2022
African wax print fabric
221 × 226 × 23 cm

Contemplation, 2021
Ankara fabric
130 × 212 × 12,5 cm



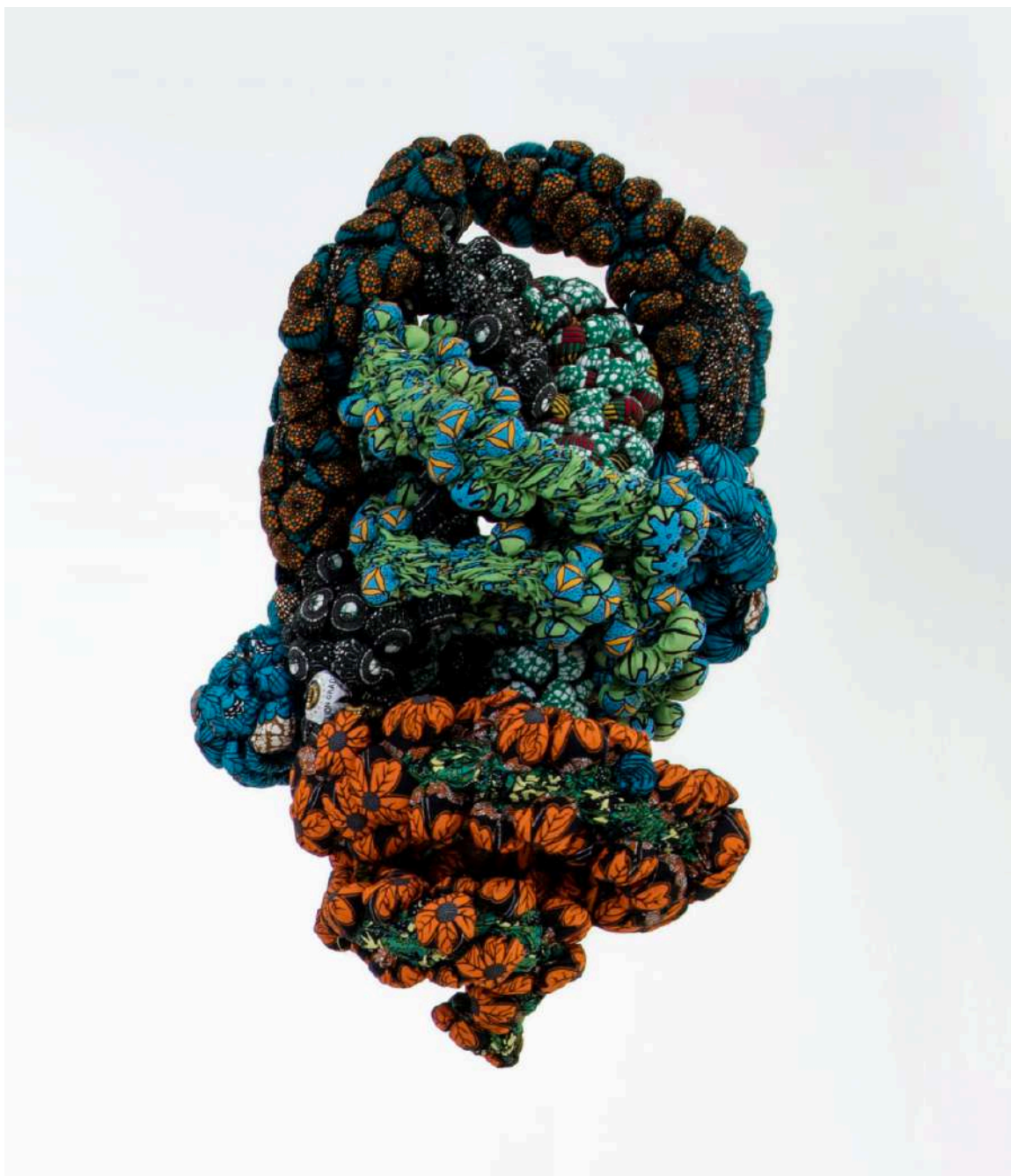


Rhythms and Blues, 2022
African wax print fabric
104 × 115 × 15 cm



The Dancer, 2023
African Wax Print Fabric
230 × 83 × 83 cm





Unknown_Dancer I, 2023
African Wax Print Fabric
135 × 94 × 84 cm



Bloom, 2022
African wax print fabric
79 × 56 × 66 cm



Unknown_Dancer II, 2023
African Wax Print Fabric
120 × 84 × 74 cm





Salvaging the Land, 2022
African wax print fabric
256,5 × 221,5 × 16 cm

Conformational Dance, 2023
African Wax Print Fabric
201 × 102 × 100 cm





Creation, 2022
African wax print fabric
76 × 130 × 20 cm

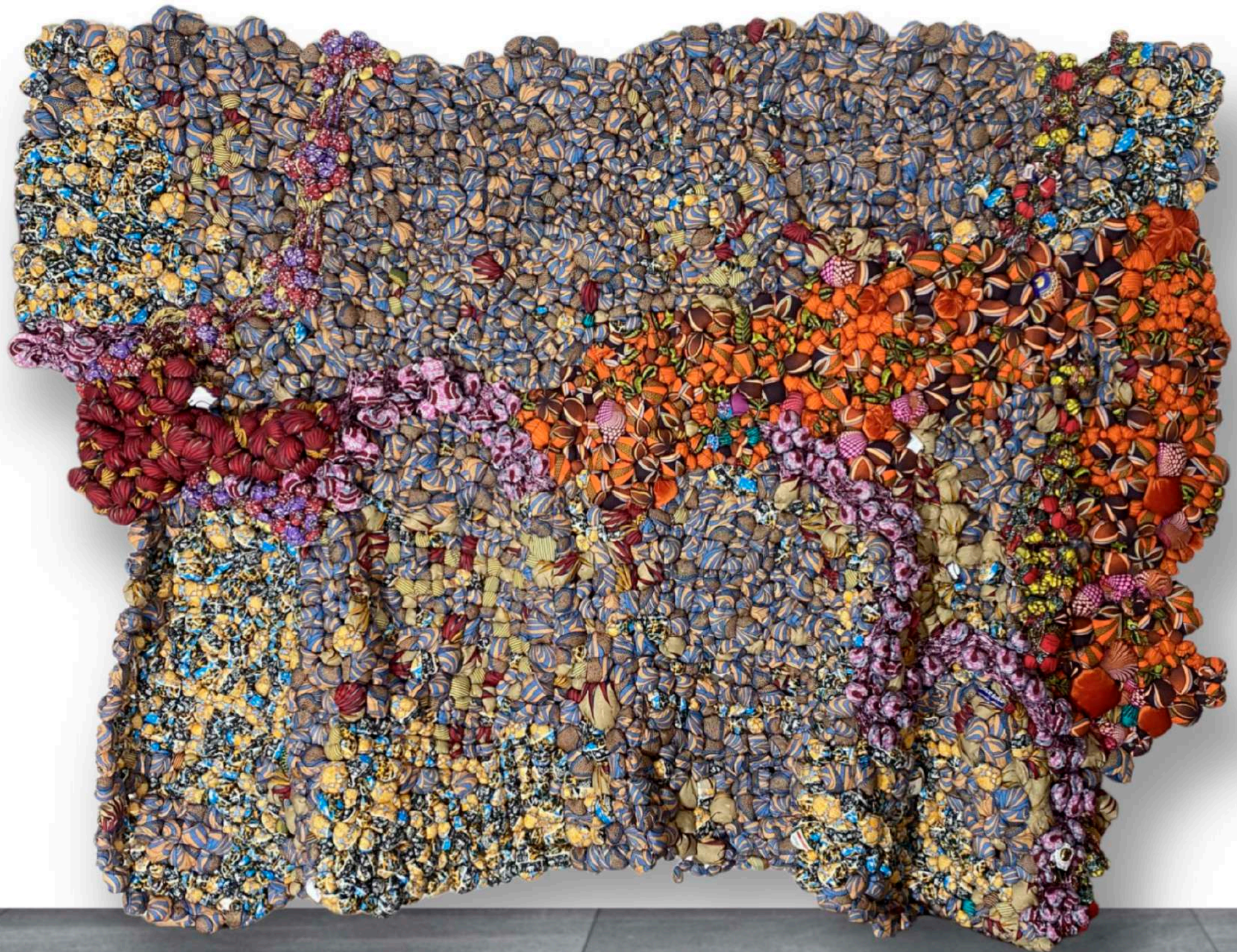
NEXT STEPS

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NEW ARTWORKS



Recuperating Scape, 2023
African Print Wax Fabric
230 × 420 × 20 cm



Optimism Amidst Quakes, 2023
African Print Wax Fabric
203 × 330 × 23 cm



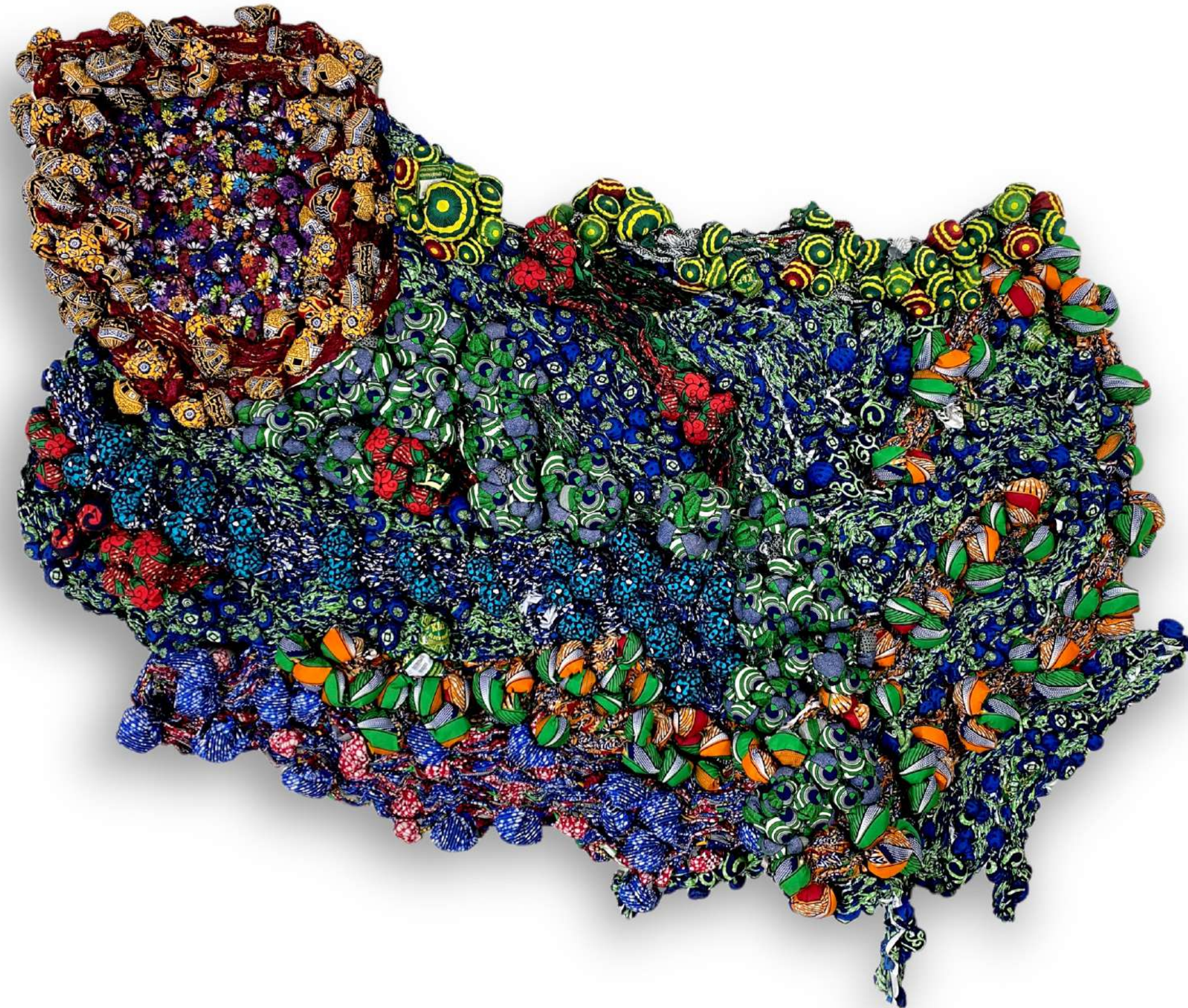
Pathways on Roses, 2023
African Wax Print Fabric
180 × 320 × 20 cm



Oil well, 2023
African Print Wax Fabric
132 × 153 × 30 cm



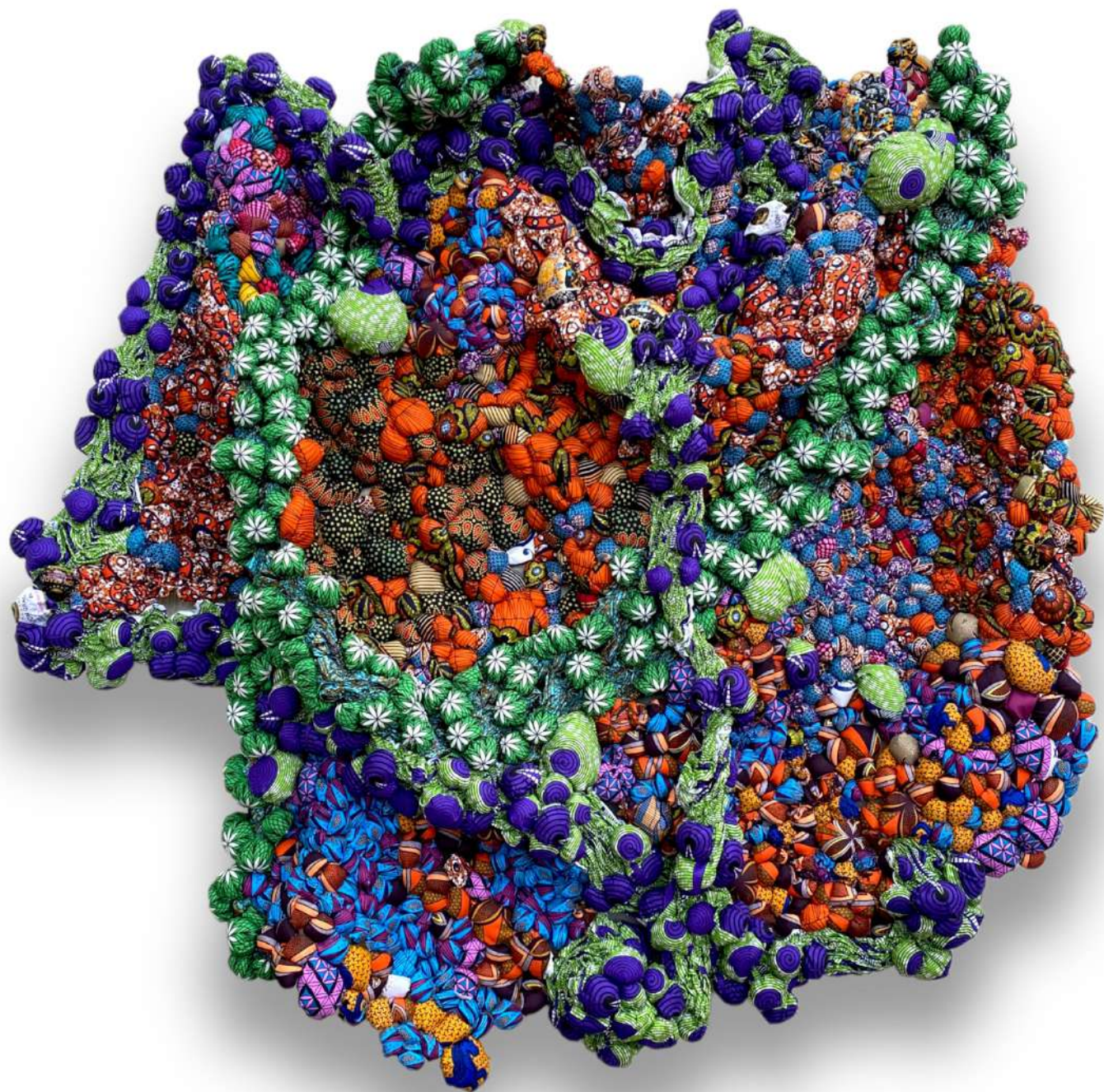
Once in a Blue Moon, 2023
African Wax Print Fabric
300 x 234 x 30cm



Sunrise on this Side, 2023
African Wax Print Fabric
230 x 193 x 20cm



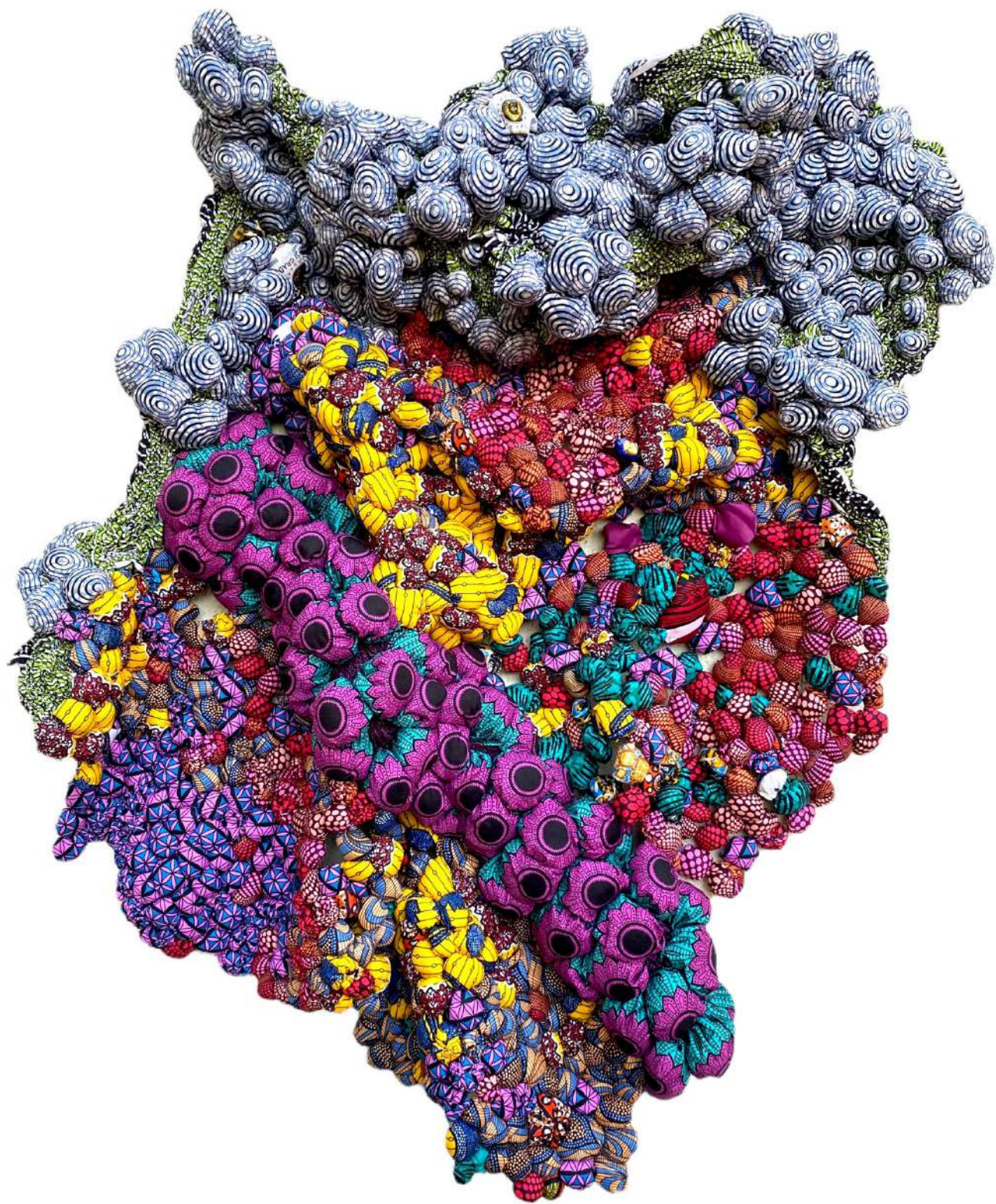
Urban Seekers, 2023
African Print Wax Fabric
185 x 150 x 15cm



White Flowers in Paradise, 2023
African Print Wax Fabric
170 x 168 x 22cm



Brittle Moves, 2023
African Wax Print Fabric
110 x 107 x 20cm



Clouded thought, 2023
African Wax Print Fabric
152 x 122 x 23cm



The Good, Bad and Ugly, 2023
African Print Fabric
150 x 180 x 10cm



Liquid Metal, 2023
African Print Wax Fabric
326 x 235 x 20cm



Japa Syndrome, 2023
African Wax Print Fabric
335 x 488 x 30cm



Recuperating Scape I, 2023
African Wax Print Fabric
800 x 340 x 20 cm



SAMUEL NNOROM BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1990, Isiukwuato, Abia state, Nigeria. Living and working in Nigeria. Samuel holds a B. Aed (sculpture major) from the University of Jos and currently concluding an MA in sculpture from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Samuel won the National Art Competition organized by the National Gallery of Art in 2010 and 2012. He also won prizes in the 2016, 2017 and 2019 editions of the Life in My City Art Festival. He was the first prize recipient (leatherwork category) of the Icreate Africa 2019. Nnorom has received invitations to important workshops and group exhibitions, including the international art workshop by IICD at the United States Embassy, Abuja (2019), Young Contemporary 2021, published in an international magazine the UK (zine, issue 11, artist responding to issues) 2021, Cassirer Welz Award, Bag factory and Strauss & co South Africa 2021 and recipient of 2022 Royal Over-Sea League and Art House Residency London, Guest Artist Space award, Residency and fellowship by Shonibare Art Foundation 2022 and several others. He belongs to the New Nsukka School of Art and he is currently exploring Okirika clothes and Ankara fabric using bubble techniques as sculptural media while interrogating human experiences that relate to sociopolitical and economic issues.

Samuel Nnorom discovered his talent at the age of 9 years while assisting his father in his shoe workshop - where he started making life drawings of customers that visited the shop. He was also influenced by his mother's tailoring workshop -as a kid who played with colourful fabrics with sewing needles and thread. He went further to develop this talent through apprenticeship, training, workshops, Exhibitions, art school and practice.

His works are inspired by the daily struggles and hustles that every individual goes through to survive. Nnorom fondly use Ankara fabrics as a medium to create his body of work as it lends its historical origin as something uncertain to Africa with its daily consumption among the African people for events, ceremonies, festivals, and domestic and religious activities. Nnorom also patronized the use of bubble forms in my work as a method to represent the uncertain nature of human conditions and the hope hoped for existence.

Using fabrics and fabric debris collected from tailor shops, and foams from furniture workshops become an anchor to supply hope to the audience in asking further questions to interrogate the nature of being and the abstraction of mind as it plays a huge role in the understanding of the aesthetics in his works.

Recent solo and group exhibitions include:

2024
Dakar Biennial, Senegal

2023
BISO International Biennial of Sculpture of Ouagadougou, Burkina-Faso.
Truth and Conspiracy, Primo Marella Gallery, Milano, Italy.
Points of Departure, Galerie Art Mûr 5826, rue St-Hubert Montréal, (Québec) Canada.
Politics of Clothes, The Mitochondria Gallery, Houston Texas, United State of America.
Politics of Fabrics, an Expository solo exhibition, The Guest Artist Space, Yinka Shonibare Foundation, Lagos.
Immigration and Integration, The Art House, Wakefield United Kingdom.
Maps of Meaning, 5 artist show, Rele Gallery, Lagos Nigeria.
International contemporary art exhibition "Paragone: What's with mediums today?", The Water Museum - EPAL, at the Depósito da Patriarcal and at the Cape Verde Cultural Centre, Portugal.
Undiscovered, 5 artist show, Thought Pyramids, Lagos Nigeria.
International Royal Oversea League Art exhibition, London, UK.
Tiwani Contemporary, viewing room show, London.
Kate-Ferri Project, Dark Matters, New York USA.

2022
Recycle Matter, Alexis Gallery Lagos Nigeria
Matters of Essential, a Salon Show at Ko Artspace, Lagos Nigeria.
Voices of Textile at Gallery Marion Chauvy, Paris France.

2021
Wielding Power, joint exhibition, Gallery At The Landmark, Lagos.
Rele Art Foundation, Exhibition of Young Contemporary Artists, Ekiti State.

2019
Best work, Enugu zone, Life in My City Art Festival, Enugu, Nigeria.
United States International Institute for Creative Development Exhibition, 4 Oguda Close Maitama Abuja, Nigeria.
One Environment Hybrid Art Exhibition, Ceddi plaza Abuja, Nigeria.

2018
Life in My City Art Festival, 2018. Top 100, Enugu, Nigeria.

2017
Life in My City Art Festival, Enugu, Nigeria
Union Bank Art Challenge Exhibition, Lagos, Nigeria

2016
African Art Resource Centre, art exhibition, National Museum Onikan Lagos, Nigeria.
Spanish Art Competition, Thought Pyramid Art Center Abuja, Nigeria,
Life in My City Art Festival, Enugu Nigeria

2015
6th National Visual Art Competition (Theme: National Security and Stable Power Supply) Abuja, Nigeria.

2014
Life in My City Art Festival, Enugu, Nigeria.
African Art Resource Center (AARC), Art for Life, Lagos, Nigeria.

2013
Splendid Art Exhibition, Faculty of law, lecture hall university of Jos, Plateau, Nigeria.
Contemporary Renaissance, FAA Departmental Gallery (October 9-11), Plateau, Nigeria

2013
Puscat Art Competition, 2nd Prize Winner. Plateau Nigeria

2013
Life in My City Art Festival, Enugu, Nigeria.

2012
4th National Visual Art Competition, Nigeria Gallery of Art (Theme: National Security), Abuja Nigeria.

2010
3rd National Visual Art Competition, Nigeria Gallery of Art, Tertiary Category; (Theme: Electoral Reform as Ethics for Good Governance), Abuja Nigeria.

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