

Otobong
Nkanga

I dreamt
of you
in colours

3.4.2026–
23.8.2026

Exhibition
Guide

ENNASUAL
SIRA-XUAEB SED
LANONTAV EÉSUS

A major figure on the contemporary art scene, Otobong Nkanga, born in Kano, Nigeria, in 1974, and based today in Antwerp, Belgium, has been developing a body of work that draws inspiration from her history and research, focusing on the connections between ecology, memory and the circulation of resources.

Following her studies in Nigeria, France, and the Netherlands, the artist explored issues relating to mining and the use of the earth's resources, examining our complex social, political and material connections to space and the earth through a multidisciplinary practice including drawings, paintings, installations, tapestries, photographs, videos, sculptures, ceramics, performances, sound and poetry.

Drawing on her personal history and research, which reflects transhistorical and diverse influences, she creates networks and constellations between humans and landscapes while addressing the restorative capacity of natural and relational systems.

The notion of strata is central to the artist's practice, both in the materiality of her works and in her way of thinking about the relationships between bodies and lands, made of mutual exchange and transformation. Nkanga simultaneously explores the circulation of materials and goods, of people and their intertwined histories, as well as their exploitation, marked by the residues of violent colonial histories. While questioning memory, she offers the vision of a possible future.

At once a survey and a cross-section of the artist's protean oeuvre, the exhibition traces the genealogy of recurrent subjects whose visual expression is constantly evolving. It brings together emblematic installations, monumental tapestries, and a significant number of drawings, some of which go back to the earliest years of her career and are being shown for the first time. On this occasion, the artist reactivates certain works through performances in a poetics of entanglement, creating connections between forms, materials, and ideas.

1st Floor

Gallery 1

The exhibition opens with works on paper created while Nkanga was still a student at the Fine Arts Department at Obafemi-Awolowo University in Ilé-Ife, Nigeria. In her first year at the University, Nkanga studied mainly painting and in particular the colour palette whose chromatic range runs throughout her work, and which would later unfold in the shimmering hues of her monumental tapestries.

It was in Paris, where she was studying at the École des Beaux-Arts, that Nkanga created what she considers to be her first-complex and multi-layered work of art, *Fattening Room* (1999). In this piece she brought together for the first time her ideas on architecture, sculpture, and costume design in a performance that gave rise to a photomontage. This work thus encapsulates the central themes that the artist would continue to explore, namely the body in its connection to the earth, architecture and textiles, at the crossroads of multiple influences.

The artist's relationship to home and childhood memories can be seen in the drawing series *Filtered Memories* (1999), in which she revisits significant events from her early years. As she puts it, emphasising the importance of drawing in her practice, 'From childhood, apart from playing with the soil, I was also drawing and sketching things... Drawing is that space of release where thoughts, imaginaries, conflict, anger, all kinds of emotions and feelings are put together and bundled

and thrown out onto the paper. But it's also a way for throwing out sketches and plans, because only by drawing can I get close to what I wish to convey.'

The installations *Awaiting Pleasures But It Cut* (2002–2003) and *Awaiting Pleasures – The Workstation* (2003) reflect her connection with architecture and her taste for experimentation. The needle, an element found at the heart of both installations, bears a dual meaning, between care and threat, tackling the question of the body and its vulnerability. These wooden structures, like the ceramic pieces in *Pleasure Fragments* (2002), were created mainly for performances.

With the *Alterscape* (2006) series of photographs, the artist pictures herself behind a model where natural landscapes and human constructions blend. She seems to physically merge with the environment, inviting us to think about our human impact on the Earth, but also about our potential for connection with the landscapes and biodiversity that surround us.

Gallery 2

The installation *In Pursuit of Bling* (2014) renders Nkanga's extensive research on a now-closed copper mine in Tsumeb, Namibia, and reflects on the metamorphosis of natural resources as they are transformed from raw materials into finished products. Tsumeb was part of an extractivist system in which a resource-rich site is taken over and expropriated, to be integrated in a global network of capital and infrastructure. Between the time operations began in 1875 and the closing of the mine in 1996, millions of tons of copper, zinc, lead, cadmium, silver, and germanium were extracted and sent to Germany, Belgium, and North America, leaving behind a land depleted and emptied of its resources.

Initially created for the 8th Berlin Biennial after a long period of research, *In Pursuit of Bling* uses minerals (mica, malachite, copper), photographic images printed on limestone, make-up powder, and videos, all displayed on 28 tables arranged around two tapestries that reproduce the structure of a mineral atom. The whole creates a cartography of mining sites that extract shiny minerals (bling), their circulation in the global economy, and their transformation, underscoring the links between the colonial enterprise, power, and natural resources.

In the video *Remains of the Green Hill* (2015), filmed in Tsumeb, Nkanga addresses the wounded land in song, acknowledging all the resources that have been plundered from this place and the cost in human and

nonhuman lives. She describes her performance as an act of healing, similar to an offering made to the land.

Facing the installation *In Pursuit of Bling*, the tapestry *The Weight of Scars* (2015) also reflects on scarred landscapes, the question of reconstruction, and the weight of colonial and extractive legacies. The circular photographs document the remains of various abandoned mine sites in Namibia, picturing cracked ground, abandoned concrete, pipelines, and fenced-off emptiness. Relying on the impact of images on our perception, the artist constructs a historical map of industrial activities, highlighting their geological and human consequences.