

BAERT GALLERY

JEBILA OKONGWU

UNTITLED, ART San Francisco
2019

1923 S SANTA FE AVENUE LOS ANGELES CA 90021
+1 213 537 073 INFO@BAERTGALLERY.COM

Baert Gallery is pleased to participate to UNTITLED, ART San Francisco 2019 with a solo presentation of new works by Jebila Okongwu.

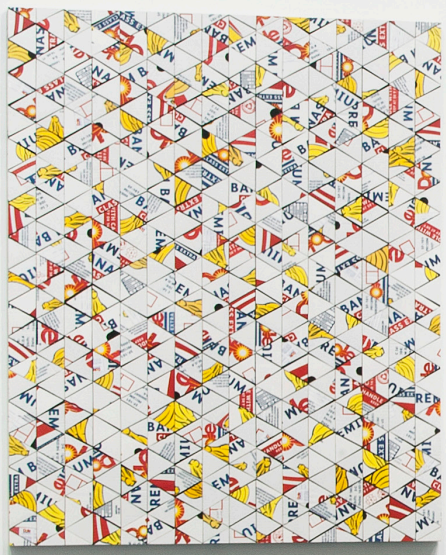
Jebila Okongwu (b. 1975) critiques stereotypes of Africa and African identity and repurposes them as counterstrategies, drawing on African history, symbolism and spirituality. One of his preferred materials is banana boxes; their tropicalized graphics articulate an 'exotic' provenance, much like the exoticization of African bodies from an ethnocentric perspective. When these boxes are shipped to the West from Africa, the Caribbean and South America, old routes of slavery are retraced, accentuating existing patterns of migration, trade and exploitation.

In his series entitled 'Divination Paintings', Okongwu engages with the multi-dimensional realities of traditional African art, a domain that includes legends, myths, ancestors, spirits, death and the cosmos. By creating a process which involves randomly applying triangles of banana box cardboard onto canvas, the artist takes on a role similar to that of the shaman and manipulates random events to transcend his own ego by relaying coded information (and possible revelations) from a sentient cosmos. The graphic elements on the boxes are broken down and reformed to create new visual structures and shimmering optical fields.

Having developed a distinct aesthetic by working solely with collage for several years, Okongwu has recently returned to painting. The visual effect of collage is recreated with oil paint on linen but the artist now has more control of color and tone by mixing the paint. Working with a fluid medium and bristle brushes lends a sensuality to the surface of the work that was not possible with collage and he is now able to subtly alter the logos and texts which are printed onto the boxes, emphasizing both the sociopolitical and personal narratives present in the works.

Okongwu's series of 'Banana Sculptures' consist of formal arrangements of the tropical fruit and playfully subvert the ideals of high Modernist sculpture. He thus reclaims the stolen legacy of African art from the Cubists and repropose his sculptures as totems or sacred objects representing spirit beings. The works are initially sculpted from sections of cardboard which are hand-stitched together and then cast into bronze. By way of this archaic artistic process, Okongwu redefines temporal and spatial dimensions and the ethereal quality of the spirit world is materialized and made permanent.

Born in London and then raised in Nigeria and Australia, Jebila Okongwu currently lives and works in Rome. He received a BA in Visual Art from Monash University and a Graduate Diploma in Fine Art from the University of Melbourne. His work has been exhibited at prominent institutions including the American Academy in Rome (2015), the Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples (2014), and the MACRO Museum of Contemporary Art, Rome (2013). Solo exhibitions include Baert Gallery, Los Angeles (2017), Galleria Lorcan O'Neill, Rome (2013) and Gallery Barry Keldoulis, Sydney (2012).





Jebila Okongwu
Banana Sculpture #23, 2016
Bronze
50 3/4 x 14 3/8 x 8 5/8 in
129 x 36.5 x 22 cm
Edition of 3 plus 2 artist's proofs (#1/3)



Jebila Okongwu
Divination Painting No. 18, 2018
Oil on linen
47 1/4 x 39 3/8 in
120 x 100 cm



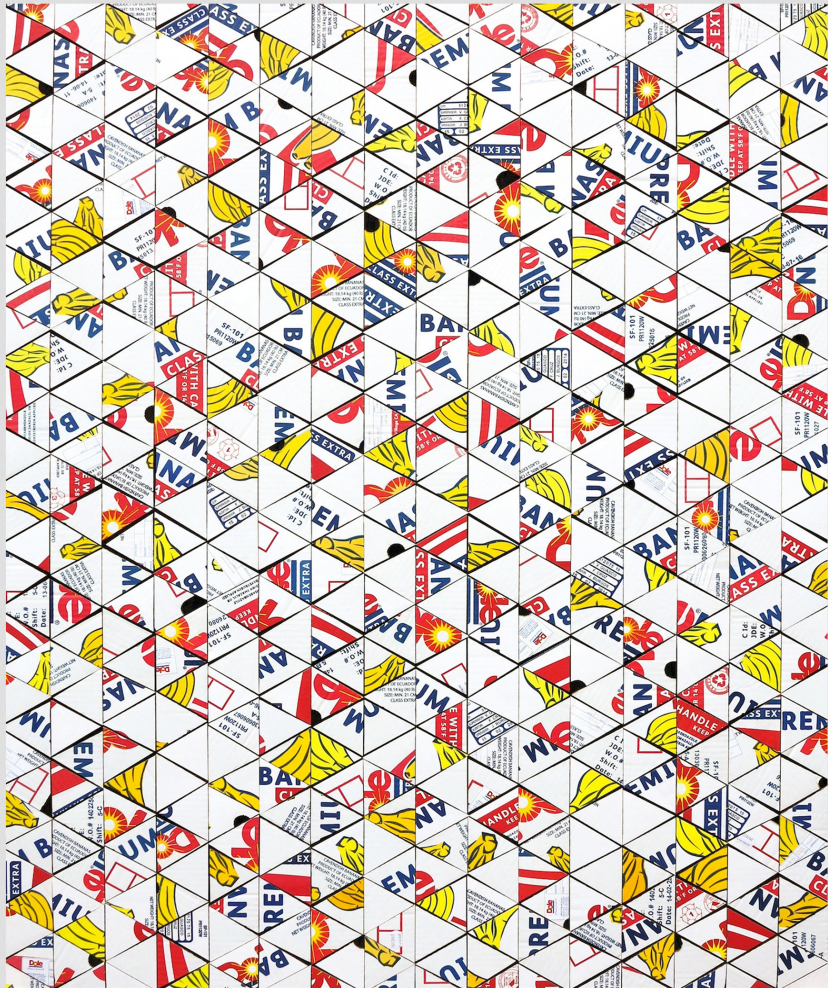
Jebila Okongwu
Divination Painting No. 16, 2018
Oil on linen
47 1/4 x 39 3/8 in
120 x 100 cm



Jebila Okongwu
Divination Painting No. 20, 2018
Oil on linen
47 1/4 x 39 3/8 in
120 x 100 cm



Jebila Okongwu
Divination Painting No. 22, 2018
Oil on linen
47 1/4 x 39 3/8 in
120 x 100 cm



Jebila Okongwu
Divination Painting No. 2, 2015
Mixed media collage on linen
55 1/8 x 44 1/2 in
140 x 113 cm



Jebila Okongwu
Divination Painting No. 3, 2015
Mixed media collage on linen
55 1/8 x 44 1/2 in
140 x 113 cm