

Line.
by. Line

EVA OBODO

ARTHOUSE
THE SPACE



Line. by Line

EVA OBODO

Cover: Export Quality
2011
Charcoal and metal
148 x 90 x 9 cm.

Left: Line by Line
2015
Jute, cloth, thread, dye, tempera
216 x 120 x 8 cm.

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Line by Line
2015
Jute, cloth, thread, dye, tempera
216 x 120 x 8 cm.

Artist Statement

Erii maara ngwugwu

Ngwugwu mara onye kere ya.

The twine knows the parcel

The parcel knows its wrapper.

(Igbo proverb)

The past and the present are already known. The future remains a mystery. Taking the past and the present apart or in pieces, and then reconstructing them *piece by piece*, *bit by bit* and *line by line*, generates visual imageries that shed light on the future.

In this show, while the charcoal works attempt to look at the historical situations of the present, *piece by piece* and *bit by bit*, the fibre works poke around the future as they deal with the present circumstances, line by line.

In fibre or charcoal, the works maximise the effectual sense of numbers, directional thrust, tenseness and colour to emphasise our ties to the natural world. Thus, the winding strands of nylon fibres in the fibre works bind a web of wrapped jute tubular forms to embody strands of thoughts. Amalgamated into linear narratives, they allude to cloth and what it stands for.

In shredding used jute sacks and animating them with different coloured threads, I seek to make explicit reference to material culture in a global context. The bound bits of charcoal, on the other hand, are constructed into openwork sculptures that reflect the fragility of natural elements and substances. In other words, with materials and processes, I seek to examine human conditions and social issues. Process appears to be the connecting thread in all the works, whether in charcoal or fibre.

I aim to establish an association between fibre and charcoal in creative ways. My studio process appears to have brought these materials close to where they seem to agree in a common artistic vocabulary and mode. In spite of the gap that may still exist in the materiality of the media (charcoal and fibre), I have pushed to find a common theatre where both of them can be engaged in a visual dialogue. So far, wrapping, tying and bundling techniques have been used to highlight the similarities and differences between the actual and the assumed.

Eva Obodo

Nsukka, May 2015



Incisive Summary
2009
Jute, cloth, thread, dye
145 x 105 x 14 cm.



Bad Case III
2009
Jute, cotton and dye
200 x 176 x 10 cm.

Introduction

– Frank Ugiomoh

When site specificity was introduced into contemporary art by minimal artists in the mid-1960s, what was at issue was the idealism of modern sculpture, its engagement of the spectator’s consciousness with sculpture’s own internal set of relationships.

Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum’s Ruins*, 2000: 154

One of the striking aspects of modern sculpture is the way in which it manifests its makers’ growing awareness that sculpture is a medium particularly located at the juncture between stillness and motion, time arrested and time passing.

Rosalind Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, 1981: 5.

Line by line, as the title of this exhibition by Eva Obodo is stated, evinces a neo-avant-garde streak that is at once familiar yet redefines dominant perceptions regarding what can be expected from a sculptor’s studio. Here, forms are given definition not by the idealist philosophy that governed the traditions of sculpture with which we are all familiar. This approach to form is definitely a transgression from the inherited academic tradition that still dominates the sculptural scene in contemporary art. In prevalent traditions of sculpture, which many of us are conversant with, a core concept that coheres with reality or aesthetics of mimesis drives the nature of form. The created image from the above standpoint defines our expectation as it creates a platform for relational expectations and dialogue, like the *call and answer* exchanges.

On the other hand, in Obodo’s work we are confronted with forms that discountenance with familiar formal relationships in what Hans Gorg-Gadamer refers to as non-mimetic or speechless art. In another instance, such a concept as ‘the art of vision’ has been invested on it. These concepts point to new directions in contemporary art. Even as the titles of these artworks stand, considering their poetic timbre, their mere figural essence remains only captivating. Hence, the definitive assertion I make of Obodo’s work that it evinces the qualities of the neo-avant-garde. True, El Anatsui is a precursor when considering this trend. In western art, this tendency has its origin in a combination of minimalist ideals that disrupted traditional

expectations in sculpture and painting. However, in Nigeria, following Anatsui in his relentless search for novel means of inscribing new formal identities in time are other artists like Ndidi Dike, Ifeoma Anyaegi and Nenna Okore.

By the definitive assertion that I accord *Line by Line*, therefore, I deliberately call attention to a growing tribe of adherents to a sculptural trend that Anatusi heralds. In spite of the tribe of followers in the stylistic trend, each artist associated within this trend is known to come from a unique background. Thus, in the body of work here what would be of interest is how Obodo’s visual account cues into his appropriation of meaning in the unfolding reality his socio-cultural space has offered as experience. Artistic style, usually different from personal style, is specified not by convention. Rather, an artist’s style panders to idiosyncratic makers of the artist. This is what sets one artist apart from the other. This attempt falls within a deconstructive initiative. In this regard, my aim is to define Obodo’s uniqueness in spite of his identity with other artists of a similar stylistic affinity. I thus engage some select compositions for evaluation.

Obodo’s body of work in this exhibition can conveniently be sequestered into two broad segments. These are the free-standing and the relief works. In all, they are driven by the lure for repurposing or taking advantage of the opportunity that insightful reconfiguration offers when presented with mere objects; mere objects, as it were, that

have lived out their ‘mundane’ purposes and now cast off as bereft of mainstream cultural values. In the artist’s mind, a new life must be secured for such objects as an act of recuperation. However, the artist in Obodo has only directed us towards the way we must appreciate the potentials such discards could hold. This singular license of the artist remains central to what he or she confers on such discards in human society.

In the dominant compositional format Obodo engages, we encounter molded fabric and fibre in intense construction techniques. Some compositions of note here are *Line by Line*, *Open Ended Inquiry*, *Uli na Nzu* and *Bad Case*. In spite of their titles, the compositions share a soft flatness and the absence of internal associations or core references. In other words, there is an absence of connections to reality in them. Rather, their strength lies in the imagined dialogue they engender. The viewer is forced to invert his or her position with that of the artwork. The space and time that is called into focus here, in an effort to come to terms with the essence of metaphor, returns us to the enigma apparent in *Back Against the Wall* and *Life is War*. These works in their mimetic format create the necessary link that makes the collection of work in this exhibition intelligible.

In this regard, I remain intrigued by the work entitled *Back Against the Wall*. In the work, it is pertinent to appreciate the thought process that reconfigures jute bags with bi-pedestal supports into seeming therianthropic images. Therianthropes are rock-art related images of legendary shamanistic fellows rendered on cave wall sites in Southern Africa. They are associated with the cult of the Eland or Antelope among the San (widely known as Bushmen) who originally created these works. On the other hand, beyond the coincidence where this composition suggests Shamanistic rendezvous that date back to more than 30,000 BC, the work addresses contemporary humanity in its acclaim to modernity. Yet there is that essential bond in the animal nature in the human we would like to get rid of. The jute bags and shoes, as repurposed discards, now redefine our animal nature. This includes our erstwhile dependence on animals as totems to facilitate uncommon realities that befuddle existence, as well as the attempts humanity has made to come to terms with reality.

The irony inherent in the dilemma *Line by Line* proposes is an inability to capture a tangible essence in its presentation. *Against the Wall* as a myth then demands of us to engage ourselves in inward reflection in order to come to terms with reality. Hence, *Back Against the Wall* reinforces the essence of myth in the masquerading image which they evoke. As a metaphor, *Back Against the Wall* evokes the truth of human dependence on unusual means towards desired goals. In another instance, the jute bag as a metaphor becomes inverted in *Life is War*. Rather than conceal an identity, they are upturned as containers and baggages. They are supported on the wall-rack in intertwines and entangled ropes made from fibres, which the bags host. The composition thus gives accent to the misty nature of reality. The bags, having become upturned, continue to be agents of concealment.

However, a greater dilemma Obodo’s work brings out, like the contemporary vogue in sculptures, is instability as an essence of life. These sculptures have become itinerant in nature. They wobble into space. Like the work of Anatsui which they share migrant status with, they are quick to invade space yet they are not site-specific. This is why *Line by Line* as an organizing thematic frame is a call to self-awareness in the mist in which reality engages consciousness.

Frank Ugiomoh; PhD, fpaca, fsna AICA
Professor of Art History and Theory
Chair occupant, Omooba Yemisi Adedoyin Shyllon Art Foundation (OYASAF)
Professorial chair for Fine Art and Design
University of Port Harcourt
Port Harcourt, Nigeria



Sausages
2013
Wood, jute, dye, nylon thread and tea pot
166 x 59 x 62 cm. (variable).



Life is War
2012
Jute and cloth
301 x 172 x 26 cm.



Bad Case II
2009
Jute, cotton and dye
209 x 106 x 10 cm.



Obidiya II
2015
Jute, cloth, thread, dye
124 x 115 x 9 cm.



In Black and White
2013
Charcoal, chicken mesh, copper and aluminium
wires, wood and empty beverage cans
194 x 100 x 15 cm.



Line by Line II
2015
wood, acrylic, tempera
161 x 94 x 16 cm.



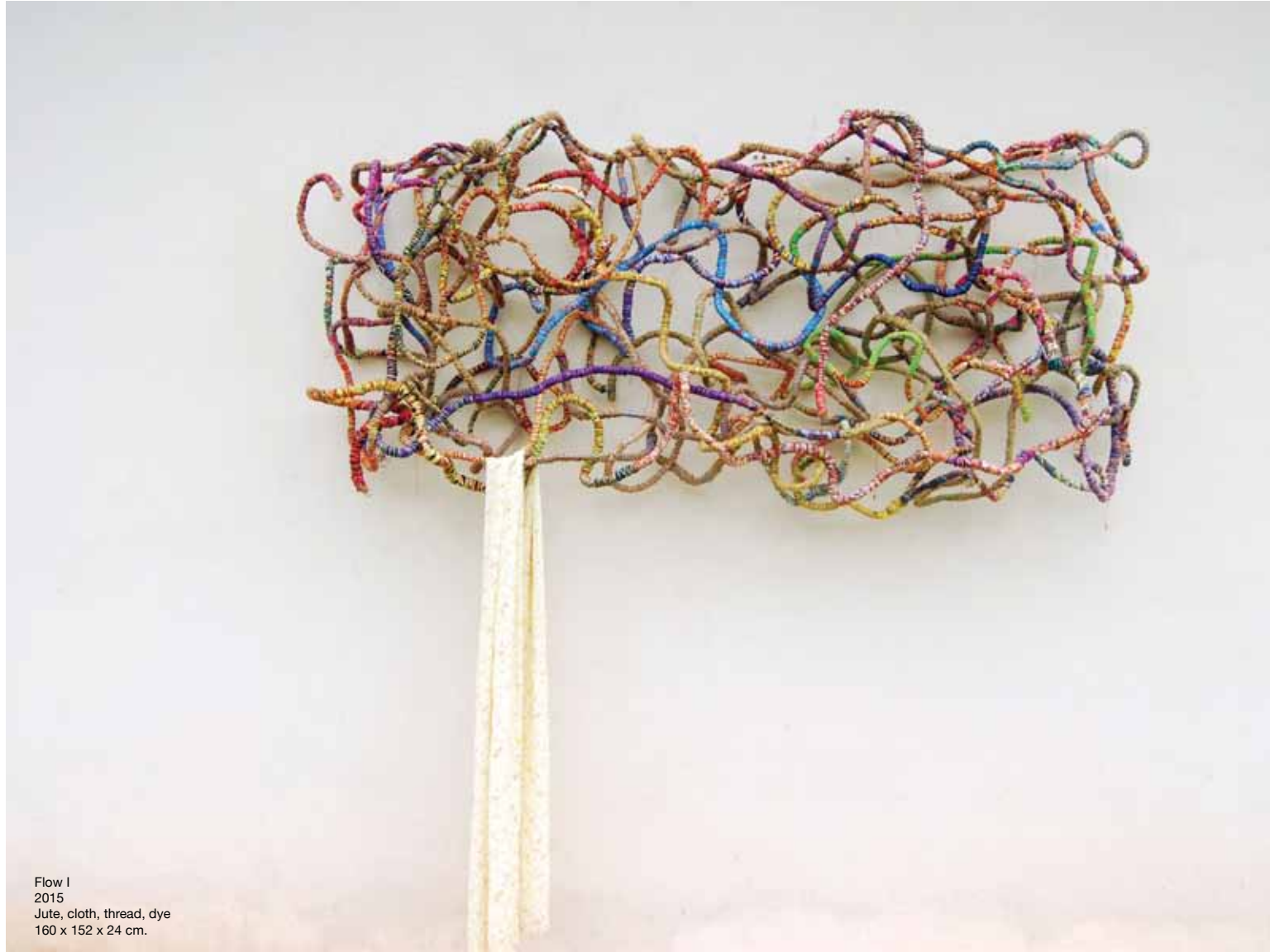
Untitled II
2014
Jute, cloth, thread, dye
104 x 131 x 13 cm.



Akwete
2014
Jute, cloth, thread, dye
90 x 162 x 10 cm.



Uzo di Mma
2014
Jute, cloth, thread, dye
173 x 111 x 12 cm.



Flow I
2015
Jute, cloth, thread, dye
160 x 152 x 24 cm.



Journey of Hundred Kilometres
II 2011
Jute, dye, thread
54 x 190 x 10 cm. (approx.).



Uli na Nzu
2015
Jute, dye, acrylics, cloth, threads
170 x 160 x 8 cm.



Desert Warriors
2015
Jute, dye, acrylics, tempera, cloth, threads
87 x 213 x 10 cm.



Banner
2015
Jute, dye, acrylics, tempera, cloth, threads
65 x 183 x 43 cm.



Okala Ijele
2015
Jute, dye, cloth, thread, acrylic
73 x 239 x 48 (approx.).

Fabric/Fibre and Charcoal: The Multiple Signification of Medium as Metaphor

– Professor Jerry Buhari

Of recent, many artists across geo-cultural creative spaces have found interest in all kinds of waste products. Their interest appears to focus on the origin, material character and visual energies which these waste products possess or generate. Fascinating works have emerged, and will continue to emerge, from contemplating these encounters. This is not a surprise.

We recall that industrialisation in Europe, the First and Second World Wars, and contact between other cultures across the globe played a pivotal role in the way artists responded to the world around them. For example, photo-realism in painting was abandoned to take on fascination with the effect of outdoor light. This gave birth to Impressionism. Encounters with African civilisations revolutionised what was perceived as reality or even art. Idealism was found to be greater or higher realism. Similarly, industrial products gave birth to Pop Art. Duchamp’s famous ‘ready-mades’ and different forms of mixed media works, in the name of assemblage, arose. All of these and more can be said to have completely challenged our perception of what art is.

Questions have arisen about what we may accept or reject as art. Our understanding and reception of what art is, or should be, has opened stimulating artistic production and dialogue. Presently, we know that the discourse has been stretched to boundless limits. What is of importance in this stretched visual exploration appears to be the final convergence of the finest of human cultures. Traditional art of sculpture, painting, drawing, print-making, textile design, ceramics and other forms of creative expression are brought together in visual dialogue with, say, the Bwa Masquerades of Burkina Faso. In the Bwa masquerades, performance, sculpture, painting and raffia, combined with music and dance, presented in a specific narrative of time and space, converge into one complex artistic expression.

What is of significance in Obodo’s works in this show is that two materials, fabric/fibre and charcoal, have also been brought together into an artistic dialogue of seeming opposites. The works in fabric, which he prefers to regard as fibre, originate from colourful Ankara fabrics and coloured jute materials. These are stitched together in

diverse ways. Two of these works are worth close study. In *Line by line* (2015), for example, different pieces of jute and cloth, dyed in brilliant colours, have been intricately tied in singles and then horizontally joined together to form something that looks like a hanging procession. Or could they be the electorate on queue to vote? They number about seventy six figures - fragile, vulnerable, and disfigured. Here, many visual narratives are evoked, including the dying processes of a textile designer, hangings for a ritual preparation, and bridal jewelry. The reading is endless. Viewed against the artist’s statement, this intricate visual puzzle begins to communicate with us. The fabric/fibre has been used by the artist as signification of construction and interpretation of time, past and present. Viewed against the backdrop of the country’s current political landscape, the work becomes a portrait of a nation in bundled struggle.

When *Line by Line* is placed next to *Life is war* (2012), one immediately begins to understand the world that Obodo is constructing for our contemplation. For in *Life is war*, we are brought face to face with the struggles of life in a form of memory-replay. Several bags (some half-filled/half-empty, others empty) have been hung together to suggest different states of human desire and (dis)satisfaction. The entangled robes suggest a narrative that defies simplistic understanding. Obodo craftily appropriates traditional images of African life and presents them to us in a modern city like Lagos to remind us of our recent past. The works in charcoal medium, on the other hand, present themselves as black and white mosaics. In a sense, the cube-like formation also draws a visual relationship with the fibre works. Construction, joining, hanging, fragility and complexity form common visual characteristics of Obodo’s works.

In Black and White (2013) suggests a strong reference to environmental issues. Here, again, the power of black and white with all its multi-suggestive readings is evoked. A delicate linear tree branch, stripped of its bark, breaks the harmony of composition in this work. This induces us to recall Uli’s poetic aesthetics while at the same time compelling us to connect our visual experience to the environmental challenges facing our country today. Each black piece of charcoal

seems to represent a fallen tree, and the fragile tree branch, delicately exploring the mosaic charcoal composition, speaks of an endangered forest.

In this exhibition, Eva Obodo has given us two visual experiences to contemplate. On the one hand, we are presented with works that refreshingly celebrate the aesthetic exploration of, and experimentation with, fabric and charcoal as material. The artistic possibilities of mixed media, especially of waste and common objects, so well articulated and inspired by El Anatsui, are also on eloquent display. On the other hand, Obodo’s works bring us face-to-face again and again in different ways with images of waste and environmental destruction. Although colourful, they also take the form of tortured and bundled figures that

are silenced and exploited. This evokes the seriousness with which we must view Obodo’s works. They are not just beautiful art works. They are a critical assessment of a nation that often hides its weaknesses and downplays the forces that threaten its corporate existence. But in the artist’s works, we also see solutions proffered. We see how through his compositions we can gain insight into how solutions can be derived from multiple applications of media for nation-building.

Professor Jerry Buhari
Ahmadu Bello University
Department of Fine Arts
Zaria, Nigeria



Believe Me!
2015, jute, dye, acrylics, tempera,
cloth, threads
81 x 224 x 50 cm. (approx.)



Open Ended Inquiry
2009
Jute, wood, foam, fabric and dye
130 x 106 x 15 (approx.).



Main Inside
2009
Jute, cloth, thread, dye
126 x 93 x 8 cm.



Untitled I
2014
Jute, cloth, thread, dye
120 x 127 x 19 cm.



Man of the People
2009
Jute, wood, fabric and dye
41.5 x 109 x 17 cm.



Ripples
2015
Jute, dye, cloth, thread
215 x 90 x 9 cm.

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Untitled III
2015,
Charcoal and metal
93 x 62 x 5 cm. (variable)



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