

PARTICIPATE

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP THROUGH ART AND DESIGN

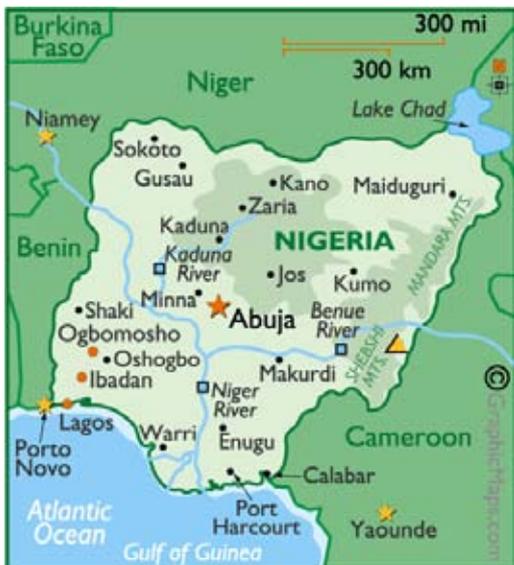
october gallery

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Key stage 2 & 3 Resource pack:
Exploring materials, environmental issues & womens rights
in the artworks of **NNENNA OKORE**
with an introduction to Nigeria

THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA



Geography

Nigeria is a West African country bordering Cameroon to the east, Benin to the west, and Niger to the north and the Gulf of Guinea to the south. The largest city is Lagos, which was Nigeria's capital city until 1991, when the nation's capital was officially moved to Abuja for its more central location.

The total surface area is 356,668 square miles. Arable land consists of 33% of the surface area and the climate is tropical in the south and arid to the north. Natural resources include oil (one of the world's largest producers and exporters, on a similar scale to Kuwait), natural gas, tin, iron ore, coal, limestone, niobium, lead and zinc. Their main agricultural products are cocoa, peanuts, palm oil, corn, rice, sorghum, millet, cassava, yams, rubber, timber and livestock.

BBC news: a timeline with a brief history of Nigeria
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/1067695.stm>

People

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country (148 million -UN, 2007) is composed of more than 250 ethnic groups; the following are the most populous and politically influential: Hausa and Fulani 29%, Yoruba 21%, Igbo (Ibo) 18%, Ijaw 10%, Kanuri 4%, Ibibio 3.5%, Tiv 2.5%.

There are 300 languages with the three main official languages being Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo (Ibo), Fula.

The major religions are: Islam (50%), Christianity (40%) and indigenous beliefs* (10%). There is also a small Jewish, Baha'i and Hindu following.

* indigenous beliefs are extremely diverse, also some of the earliest Christians and Muslims were Africans, therefore the term 'Indigenous religions' can be problematic, especially if referring to faiths predating the Colonial period. In this case we have used the term 'indigenous religions' to describe faiths that are mainly practised locally and less well known than global religions such as Christianity and Islam. These faiths are mainly based on the practices of their ancestors, combined with new innovations and spread to countries like South America and Haiti as a result of the Transatlantic Slave Trade.



Nigeria's Women's football team at the Women's Football World Cup 2008



Ancestral shrine



Ecumenical Church, Abuja



Nigerian National Mosque, Abuja

Environmental issues (CIA world fact book)

•Soil degradation •Rapid deforestation •Urban air and water pollution •Desertification •Oil pollution- water air, and soil has suffered serious damage from oil spills •Loss of arable land •Rapid urbanization

Environmental agreements

party to: Biodiversity, Climate Change, Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol, Desertification, Endangered Species, Hazardous Wastes, Law of the Sea, Marine Dumping, Marine Life Conservation, Ozone Layer Protection, Ship Pollution, Wetlands, Signed **but not ratified: none of the selected agreements**

Shell in Nigeria (Friends of the earth)

www.foe.co.uk/campaigns/economy/case_studies/shell_index.htm

- Nigeria is one of the largest producers of oil in Africa yet half its population lives in poverty.
- Shell is the second largest oil and Gas Company in the world. It operates in more than 145 countries.
- Their operations demonstrate how badly companies can affect the communities they operate in. Shell has been working in the Niger Delta since 1956, causing problems to:

Local communities - gas flares burn day and night, roaring like jet engines and polluting the air with thick sooty particles that stick to almost everything and have serious health impacts.

Livelihoods - oil is a root of conflict and suffering in Nigeria. Over 1000 lawsuits have been filed against Shell, yet it still refuses to pay compensation costs.

The environment - polluting oil spills and fires have occurred for decades due to Shell's rusting pipes seriously affecting local villages, bio-diversity, and contributing towards climate change.

The Nigerian government banned gas flaring in 1969, but Shell continues to flout the law and there have been over 4,000 oil spills in the Niger Delta since 1960

Campaigns and articles:

•Women taking the lead in reversing climate change: www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin/111/Women.html

•Nigerians file oil lawsuit against Shell in the Netherlands: www.foe.org.au/corporates/media/news-items/front-page-news-feed-1/nigerians-file-oil-lawsuit-against-shell-in-the-netherlands

•www.remembersarowiwa.com

"The writer cannot be a mere storyteller; he cannot be a mere teacher; he cannot merely X-ray society's weaknesses, its ills, its perils. He or she must be actively involved shaping its present and its future."

Ken Saro-Wiwa (1941-1995) Writer, Journalist businessman and activist

On November 10th 1995, Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight Ogoni colleagues were executed by the Nigerian state for campaigning against the devastation of the Niger Delta by oil companies, especially Shell and Chevron

In 1990, Saro-Wiwa started to dedicate himself to the amelioration of the problems of the oil producing regions of the Niger Delta. Focusing on his homeland, Ogoni, he launched a non-violent movement for social and ecological justice. In this role he attacked the oil companies and the Nigerian government accusing them of waging an ecological war against the Ogoni and precipitating the genocide of the Ogoni people. He was so effective, that by 1993 the oil companies had to pull out of Ogon.

Deforestation in Nigeria- see page 9

Children's books: Series on Nigeria by Ifeoma Onyefulu

Ifeoma Onyefulu is a Nigerian photographer currently living in the UK. These beautifully printed books are mainly a reflection of rural life in Nigeria. However teachers should be aware that these books do not show the diversity of lifestyles and people of Nigeria and may reinforce stereotypes of life in Africa.

A is for Africa (alphabet)

Emeka's Gift (counting 1-10)

One Big Family (families)

Ebele's Favourite (games)

An African Christmas

My Grandfather is a Magician (jobs)

Welcome Dede (naming ceremony)

Here Comes our Bride (wedding ceremony)

Saying Goodbye (funeral ceremony)

Chidi Only Likes Blue (colours)

A Triangle for Adaora (shapes)



Gas flaring in the Niger Delta

NNENNA OKORE AND HER WORK...

Artists Biography

Nnenna was born in Nigeria and currently lives in the USA where she lectures in Art at North Park University, Chicago. She received her BA degree in Painting from the University of Nigeria (First Class Honors) in 1999, and an MA and MFA. in Sculpture from the University of Iowa in 2004 and 2005. She has received several awards and residencies worldwide, and been shown in numerous prestigious galleries and museums within and outside the United States.

Current work

“Currently, I am invested in forms that explore, or are inspired by intimate spaces, shelters, architectural and natural environments, and ideas related to textures, colors, qualities and social values associated with African fabrics, using multiples and repetitive processes” Nnenna Okore

Nnenna Okore’s Inspiration

Much of Nnenna’s work is inspired by rural life and her child hood years in Nsukka, a small university town in Southern Eastern Nigeria. Her work connects to memories of the natural landscape, discarded objects, dilapidated buildings, nests and shelters.

*“As a child, I was fascinated by the social, natural, and **artificial*** conditions in rural dwellings around the University campus. Embedded within its landscape were evocative imageries captured within its rocky slopes, and architectural structures. I came across several stunning traditional art and architectural forms, such as, roofed shrines characterized by huge mounds of sand under a thatched structure, and yam barns and fences that traced the borders of people’s compounds”* Nnenna Okore

***Artificial:** materials produced or formed or made by humans that do not result from natural processes.

Materials in her work

Nnenna was inspired by all aspects of rural life, in particular the culture and innovation of reusing discarded objects, seeing all materials as precious commodities. Living in America has made her reflect on the way societies regard and value their materials and resources and also the impact of consumerism on our natural environment. When she moved to America she was surprised at the abundance of materials, how much people consume and how much of it is just thrown away. Even though there is a huge recycling industry in America, she felt that it was seen in a different light to how is it used and understood by people in Nigerian society.

“In Nigeria people may use them in other ways such as using paper to wrap foods or a table cloth, old can as lamp shades - children would make toys out of plastics, you are very aware of the recycling culture out there.....”

“.....Reclaiming recycled materials became a huge part of my work- Reclaiming, reforming, reconditioning, reconstructing what was no longer considered useful. I was trying to find meaning to them, to find ways to give them value” Nnenna Okore

She uses a variety of discarded and found materials, in particular paper, such as newspapers, magazines and old phone books. In her work she transform them into shields, baggages made from plastic bags or a rope made from paper.

As well as discarded or found materials she uses clay:

“I came into contact with clay for the first time in my little community in Nsukka, where the landscape has a lot of clay deposits and so I would often play with the sand – it was a material that the locals were very connected to. I appreciate clay because of the connection I had with it growing up in Nsukka”

Nnenna Okore

SHEILD ME, PAPER 2008



ROPE 2006



Nnenna Okore and textiles

If you look at Nnenna's work you may be reminded of a piece of fabric, but instead of being made out of cloth she uses paper or clay. Her use of materials to create pieces with the qualities of fabric and texture, colour and shape connects to how we understand the importance of fabric in society. For example the richer the quality of fabric and its colors often will signify that it's wearer is affluent, their status in society; or particular type of fabric or garment will be worn as part of a celebration or a festival. Nnenna tries to reflect the mood of the occasion and how the wearer feels in the fabric and her work refers to the way fabric is worn within Nigerian society.

Igba Nkuwu (front cover image)

"When a woman is about to marry, the original pre-Christian wedding is performed, and the women see this as a festive period, a chance to really dress up, to be glamorous, to wear the most expensive kind of fabric. It would be a time to celebrate their femininity, to really be graceful and grateful in their movement and in their carriage. I called the piece Igba Nkuwu because for me it really embodies the characteristics of that kind of festivity and mood" - Nnenna Okore



Nnenna was also a student of the Internationally recognised Ghanaian artist, El Anatsui. He produces a diversity of work but is most well known for his large-scale installations in the traditions of the kente cloth from reclaimed materials in particular whisky bottle tops. You can find his work In the Africa gallery of the British museum and most recently adorning the Channel 4 building in London.

<http://www.octobergallery.co.uk/artists/anatsui/index.shtml>

Processes

Nnenna uses many manual processes in her work such as twisting and weaving. She usually starts with making smaller parts or units, which she repeats and then brings together to create a larger work, a sculpture or installation.

"A lot of my processes are very rigorous and labour intensive, and simplistic in nature – I'm twisting papers, I'm rolling them up, crumpling them up, smashing them, dying them. Because they occur in numbers, they tend to be a lot of work to do. I'm waxing them, sewing, tying, roping – what draws me to these processes are the patterns and shapes and textures that result when they're assembled – these are things that attract me the most – colour is something that I really appreciate when I'm putting these processes together and forming the piece I'm making. I'm interested in the way the pieces come together – a lot of them are very accidental – I put them together and I'm amazed at how the variation in each particular unit can create very interesting modulations, textures, colours, undulations, and repetitive patterns in the piece" - Nnenna Okore



These extracts were taken from an interview with Nnenna Okore by Polly savage in 2008. Please refer to the back pages if you would like to read the full interview.

For further information on Nnenna Okore's work please see www.octobergallery.co.uk/artists/okore
www.nnennaokore.com



PAPER PROJECTS

PAPER a brief history

BC 3500 BC		<p>The earliest known use of paper was in Egypt. It was made from beaten strips from the papyrus plant and sold to ancient Rome and Greece.</p>
AD 2ND C		<p>Outside Egypt, parchment or vellum, made of processed sheepskin or calf skin replaced papyrus.</p> <p>Paper produced in China. Ordinarily, documents were written with heavy bone or bamboo (as tablets or bamboo cut into strips) which were extremely heavy to transport, or occasionally on lighter, but more expensive silk.</p> <p>Normally paper was used for wrapping and other purposes.</p>
AD 3RD C. 105		<p>Invention of modern methods of papermaking (inspired by wasps and bees) from rags and other plants). However, it is suggested that paper was in use by the ancient Chinese military more than 100 years earlier, in 8BC.</p> <p>Paper used for writing became widespread.</p>
AD 5TH C.		<p>The Mayans invented a parchment called amate, which is made by boiling and pounding the inner bark of trees. It was widely used until the Spanish conquest, and is still made today for greeting cards and paintings.</p> <p>The technology of papermaking slowly spread beyond China, was transferred to Korea and then imported to Japan.</p>
AD 6TH C		<p>Toilet paper first used in China.</p> <p>Paper was folded and sewn into square bags to preserve the flavour of tea in China.</p>
AD 686		<p>The world's earliest known printed book, the "Diamond Sutra" in China.</p>
AD 8th c.		<p>From China, the use of paper began to spread out through the Islamic world.</p>
AD 10th c.		<p>The world's first known paper money was produced in China.</p>
AD 11th c.		<p>Oldest known paper document in the West, the "Mozarab Missal of Silos", probably written in the Islamic part of Spain.</p>

1120 12th c.

Use of paper began in Europe.



Europe's first paper mill in Islamic Spain

13th c.



More mills appeared in Italy, as an import from Islamic Spain. They used hemp and linen rags as a source of fibre.

1400

Paper is widely manufactured in Italy and Germany.

Woodcut printmaking technique was transferred from fabric to paper.

15th c.



Johannes Gutenberg revolutionised Printing Press.

1588



First commercially successful paper mill in England was opened by John Spilman near Dartford in Kent and was initially reliant on German papermaking expertise.

early 19th c.



Invention of the stem-driven paper making machines, which could make paper with fibres from wood pulp. The Fourdrinier paper making machine became the basis for most modern papermaking.



Paper became commonly used for writing and printing and was daily used in other areas.



WHY DO TREES MATTER?

Nnenna uses reclaimed paper in her work, commenting on the environmental damage that is caused by our increasing culture of consumption. In Nigeria has the worlds highest rate of deforestation. Between 2000 - 2005 the country lost 55.7 % of its primary forests (according to revised deforestation figures from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) news.mongabay.com/2005/1117-forests.html which has been cleared for subsistence farming, logging and for fuel. Primary forests are 'old growth forests' that have been untouched by human activity. They are extremely important and have the highest number of plant and animal species.

IF TREES COULD TALK..

We provide homes for a diverse and rich community.

Tropical Rainforests presently give a place to call home for 50% - 90% of all organisms, 90% of primates, and 50 million creatures that can live no place but the rich rainforests. By chopping us down these species and organisms are under a threat of extinction.

Human life wouldnt be the same without us..

Humans also benefit and depend on rain forests. We provide a wealth of renewable resources: nuts, fruit and game, timber and medicinal plants. In fact the forests provide 25% of life saving medicines and then there are all the medicines that are yet to be discovered or that have been destroyed.

There is also the danger of wiping out communities who directly depend on our natural resources for their everyday survival

Mother nature gave us an important role

Us trees regulate the weather and also are a crucial natural defense against climate change, by trapping particles of carbon and other particles that are produced by pollution. We also determine rainfall by replenishing the skies with water. The water also forms clouds, which is another way of protecting the earth from the sun's heat.

Hug A TREE

Useful websites on deforestation

www.umich.edu/~gs265/society/deforestation.htm

The mystery of Easter Island is a prime example of what deforestation can do to a society -

www.mongabay.com/09easter_island.htm

Campaigns

Greenpeace campaign against deforestation: www.greenpeace.org/international/campaigns/forests

Environmental Investigation Agency - Forests for the world campaign www.eia-international.org/campaigns/forests

Recommended reading

Aani and the tree huggers by Jeannine Atkins ISBN: 1_58430_004_3 LEE & LOWE books,inc.

A story based on the real events in Northern India, the women were known as Chipko

andolan ('hug the tree movement') and were victorious in preventing loggers from destroying their precious forests.

ACTIVITY 1: MAKE YOUR OWN PAPER

A SIMPLE RECIPE

Other items



- + Select the pieces of paper to be recycled. You can even mix different types to create your own unique paper.
- + Rip the paper into small bits, and place into the blender (about half full). Fill the blender with warm water. Run the blender slowly at first then increase the speed until the pulp looks smooth and well blended. (30 -40 seconds) Check that no flakes of paper remain. If there are, blend longer.
- + The next step is to make a mould. The mould, in this case, is made simply by stretching a mesh (such as net curtains, or aluminium mesh from a car repair shop) over a wooden frame and stapling it. It should be as tight as possible, or you can buy a deckle and mould from a craft shop.
- + Fill the basin about half way with water. Add 3 blender loads of pulp (the more pulp you add the thicker the finished paper will be). Stir the mixture.
- +Place the mould into the pulp and then level it out while it is submerged. Gently wiggle it side-to-side until the pulp on top of the screen looks even.
- +Slowly lift the mould up until it is above the level of the water. Wait until most of the water has drained from the new paper sheet. If the paper is very thick, remove some pulp from the tub. If it is too thin, add more pulp and stir the mixture again.
- + When the mould stops dripping, gently place one edge on the side of a fabric square (felt or flannel square). Gently ease the mould down flat, with the paper directly on the fabric. Use a sponge to press out as much water as possible. Wring the excess water from the sponge back into the large plastic tub.
- + Now comes the tricky part. Hold the fabric square flat and slowly lift the edge of the mould. The wet sheet of paper should remain on the fabric. If it sticks to the mould, you may have pulled too fast or not pressed out enough water. It takes a little practice. You can gently press out any bubbles and loose edges at this point.
- + Repeat the steps above, and stack the fabric squares on a baking sheet. Save one fabric square to place on the top of the stack to cover the last piece of paper. Use another baking sheet to press the remaining water out of the stack (do this outside or in the bathtub, it can make a mess).
- + After you press the stack, gently separate the sheets. They can be dried by hanging on a clothesline or laying them out on sheets of newspaper. When they have dried peel them off the fabric and voila! You have paper!

ACTIVITY 2:

TWISTING BINDING rolling connecting curling CONSTRUCTING

- In this activity students: create architectural forms in response to their natural and human made environment
- Think about the way in which our built environment reflects people, place and time.
- Students will then design and construct pieces by manipulating and transforming found materials, investigating repetitive techniques

Discuss

Looking at examples of Nnenna's work, ask your students to think about:

- The materials her structures are made from
- Where do the the materials came from?
- How the artist has manipulated and transformed the materials (twisted, rolled, cut, waxed)?
- How has the artist joined the material ?
- What the pieces represent? (what do they look like?)

referring to Pages 3 & 6 discuss:

- Nnena's inspiration
- Materials in her work
- textiles
- processes
- Nnenna's background

Record

Using digital cameras or mobile phones ask students to photograph structural forms in their neighbourhood. These may be natural or artificial.

- The interiors and exteriors of their homes or other buildings that interest them
- Natural forms such as trees, rocks, hills
- Shelters- bus stops and bird boxes

Are there any memories connected to these structures? Why did they choose to photograph it? What materials were used to build it and why?



Architectural forms are the buildings and structures that surround us. The designs or styles of these constructions reflect a particular culture, place or a period of time.

Design

In class print and assemble a montage of all the student's images, stick them to a local map of the area, and attach memories or comments to their pictures.

Ask pupils to think about designing their own structures based on their photographs. Ask them to consider the most important features of these structures- protection, comfort, aesthetics (their shape and form).

Build

Pupils will create their own structures in the classroom. This may be collaborative.

Using paper materials such as old phone directories, shredded paper, cardboard boxes, scraps of paper, hole punch, washing line, wire, plastics, thread, needles. How are they going to join the materials? How will they make the material stronger (roll it, scrunch it)? Encourage students to experiment and play with the paper.



**WARNING!
MESSY ACTIVITY!**

Pupils from Alfred Sutton Primary School made their own Nnenna Okore inspired shelters from reclaimed materials and bamboo. Among the finished products were a home for bats and a mouse hut!





Inspired by Nnenna Okore

A' level pupil Ifrah took part in one of our workshops. In response to Nnenna's work she created a large sculpture made from a very long single length of platted materials including dyed newspaper, various fabrics dyed different colours, silver foil, cling film and netting. Her spectacular sculpture formed an integral part of her A' level portfolio, helping her to achieve a place at the art college of her choice. She plans to explore these techniques further during her time there.



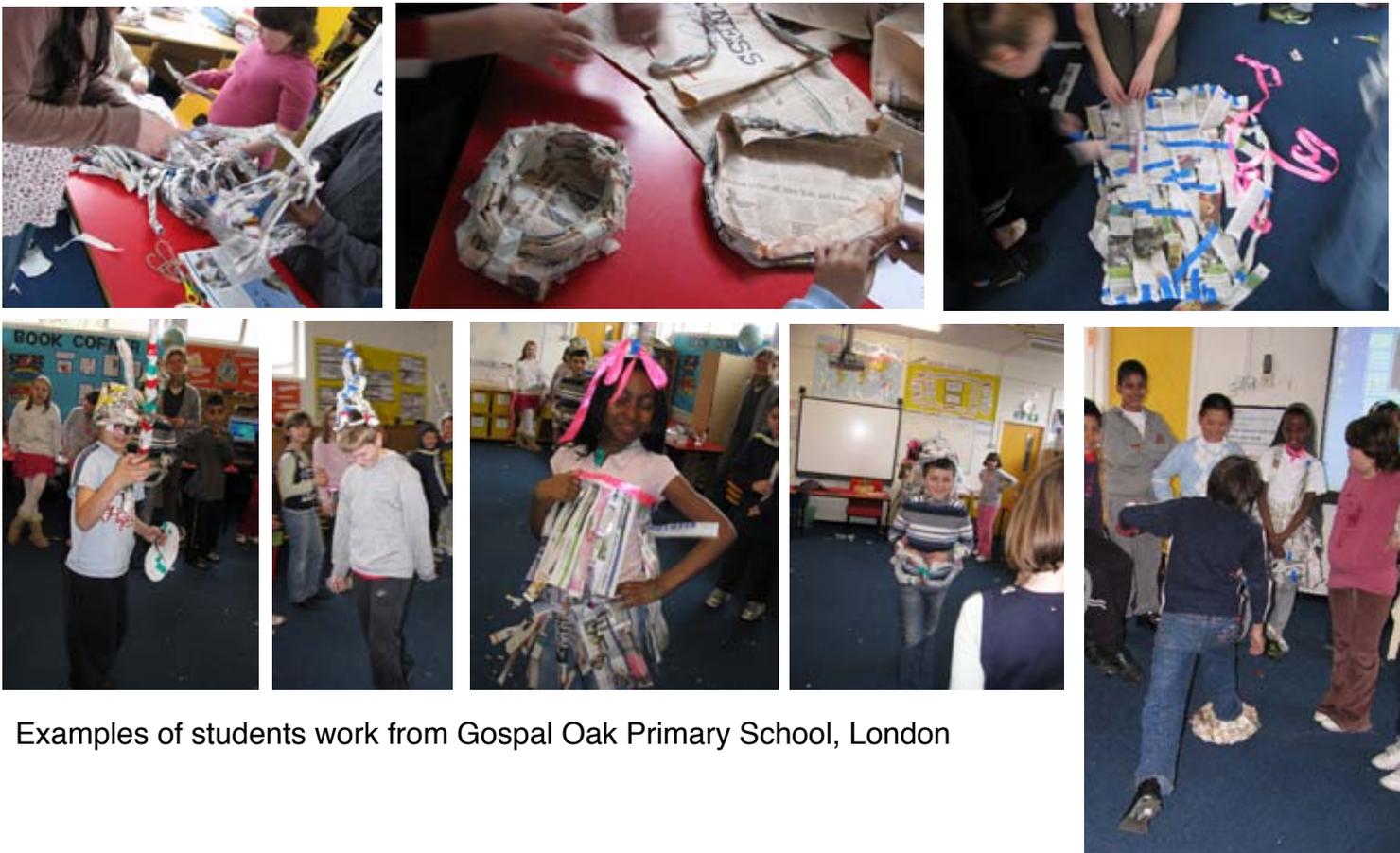
ACTIVITY 3: NNENNA OKORE AND TEXTILES

Paper body sculptures

- ✦ Ask students to think about the types of clothing they wear to special occasions, uniforms for a school or club (sports, scouts), or their favourite fashion item this season. Ask them to describe how they feel when they are wearing them, does it make you stand out in a crowd or blend in with a group? Is there a particular way that they wear it that is unique to them (the way they wrap a scarf or tie a belt)?
- ✦ Looking at Nnenna Okore's work ask pupils to imagine them being worn as clothing, considering the colours, textures and the form: how and where would they be worn (also see activity 1).
- ✦ Pupils can work in groups or individually to design and make paper body sculptures: sculptures that people can wear, that shelter the body, but also say something about the person wearing it.
 - where will it be worn?
 - how will it be worn?
 - how do you think the person feel wearing it?

Encourage pupils to be free with their designs (they do not have to make something that looks like a familiar) They can take inspiration from natural forms, natural and synthetic architecture (collect pictures from magazines, take photographs, see activity 1).

Show pupils how they can create different textures and patterns by manipulating the paper. They can also use paints to dye the paper.



Examples of students work from Gospal Oak Primary School, London

Roll



Wrap



Twist

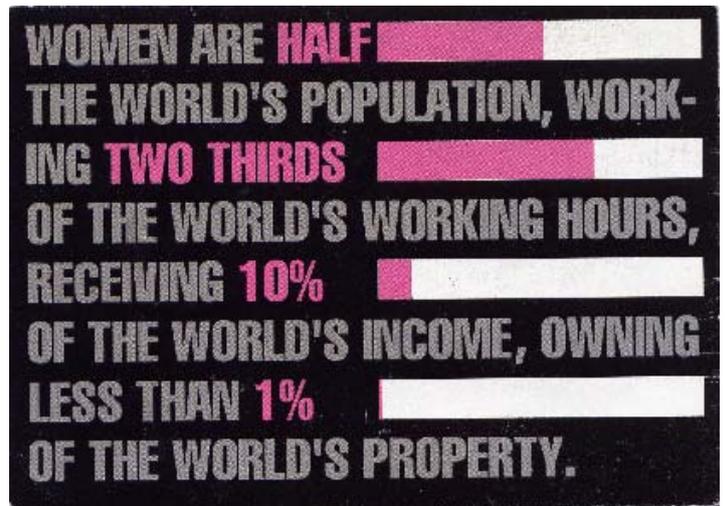


Loop



NNENNA OKORE AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Nnenna Okore has travelled widely, including many countries in Africa and Europe as well as Australia, China. Her travels took her to the fifth Regional Conference on Women in Dakar (1994) Senegal and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China (1995). She organized Youth Service Workshops in Nsukka, and other youth art workshops in Swaziland. Her interests include membership in the Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF). United Nations Development Fund for Women: www.unifem.org



Why does gender matter?

News Flash!

- Women in Parliament World Ranking
- 1st Rwanda 49%
- 2nd Sweden 45.3%
- 3rd South Africa 45% (at their latest election)
- 4th Cuba 43%
- 58th UK 19%
- www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm
- Information correct on 30th April 2009

Did you know?

- On average male artists' work sells for 10 times more than equivalent female artists' work.
- (Sotheby's – *The Independent*)

• How many male artists can you name?

• How many female artists can you name?

• Which scientist discovered radio active metals?

• [Marie Curie](#)

• What did Kenyan Environment Minister Wangari Maathai win the Nobel Peace Prize for?

• [Planting 10 million trees and rejuvenating Kenya's soil and water conditions](#)

• When did women in Britain win the right to vote?

• [1928](#)

• In what year was the first picture of a female sportsperson on the cover of Sports Illustrated Magazine?

• [1987](#)

• Did you know? Women working full time in the UK are paid on average 17% less than men.

• (36% less if working part time)

Activity 1 *William's Doll* – Charlotte Zolotow

- + Read “William’s Doll” over 20 minutes at the end of the day.
- + Look at the front page and the title and predict what the story will be about.
- + Is it William on the front page? If so, then why is he throwing a basketball?
- + Discuss what William’s brother means when he uses the term ‘sissy’ and ‘creep’.
- + Is he being respectful of William and his feelings? How would those words make William feel?
- + Why didn’t William’s dad want him to have a doll? Who understood William the most?
- + Why did Grandma think it was important for William to have a doll?
- + What values did William have?
- + Encourage the discussion around issues of gender and gender roles. Focus on the positive values that William demonstrates

Activity 2 Which is the Odd One Out?

Aim: to initiate discussion around gender roles in jobs and society

You Will Need: Focus for Change pack, or similar images.



- + In the teaching pack ‘Focus For Change’, you will find a series of images that can be used to challenge gender roles and stereotypes.
- + Select images 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, and 23 from the pack (or you can find your own images that raise gender issues and that could be used to challenge gender stereotypes).
- + Ask pupils to choose one picture from the above list that interests them, or about which they have a question they’d like to ask.
- + Form groups of 3 with pupils who have chosen different pictures to one another.
- + In these groups, decide which of the 3 different images is the odd one out and why.

- + Read the information about the picture in the back of the Focus for Change pack;
- + In your groups, discuss the questions it raises about assumptions surrounding gender roles in our society. Note down your discussion.
- + Feed back your thoughts to the rest of the class

All Change Jobs!

- + Use the all change jobs book as a stimulus for thinking about gender job roles.
- + Design your own book using reclaimed materials, with a cut out boy and girl to fit into each pocket.
- + Think of a range of jobs, sports, cultural activities etc. to include in your book.

Activity 3 Make your own toy catalogue

Aim: to challenge gender stereotypes and perceptions of gender roles

You will need: toy shop catalogues, scrap paper, pens and scissors, glue

- + Explain to pupils that they are going to design a toy catalogue for younger children
- + Discuss with pupils how it feels to be excluded from an activity or game because of their gender. Have they ever experienced this? How did it make them feel?
- + In groups, take a look at the catalogues. Are toys targeted at boys and girls? How can you tell?
- + How do you feel about these pictures? Do they think these images represent what all girls and boys like doing? Should children be allowed to play with any toys regardless of gender? Think about other ways advertising might influence your choices.
- + Ask pupils to design their own page of a toy catalogue that doesn't stereotype children by either cutting up pictures from newspapers and magazines, drawing, or using digital cameras to take photos.

Useful Resources

Make Some Noise Facts and Figures at www.fawcettsociety.org.uk

Focus for Change

This photo pack and teaching resource is full of ideas and activities to challenge stereotypes to stimulate discussion. The resource is out of print, but free copies are available from RISC (with a £5 contribution to p&p). Please contact liz@risc.org.uk to order your copy.

Change the World in 8 Steps

This set of posters from Oxfam introduces the 8 United Nations Millennium Development goals to pupils aged 7 to 14. Each A2 poster has a colour photograph on one side and several activities on the back.

Boots for a Bridesmaid – Verna Allette Wilkins

This is a simple and accessible story of a young girl who doesn't want to wear a frilly bridesmaid's dress at a wedding. She is encouraged to find a compromise, and keeps her large boots on underneath. This story is also useful for representing diverse families.

William's Doll – Charlotte Zolotow

A simple and powerful story about a boy who wants a doll to play with. His father thinks it's not an appropriate toy for a boy, so buys him a train set and a basketball. William loves them both, and is very good at basketball, but he still wants a doll. Eventually, his grandmother buys him one, and explains to his father that playing with a doll will help him to be a better father when he grows up. A great tool for raising gender issues and empowering young boys to be themselves.

Amazing Grace – Mary Hoffman

This is a lovely, positive and beautifully illustrated story about Grace, who loves to act. When her school decides to perform Peter Pan , Grace decides she'd be perfect for the leading role as Peter. Her classmates say that Peter was a boy, and besides, he wasn't black... But Grace's mum and grandma tell her she can be anything she wants if she puts her mind to it.

80:20 Development in an Unequal World

This book, useful for background research, introduces several topical development and human rights issues in an accessible format, culminating in suggestions for taking action.

NNENNA OKORE

Interviewed by Polly Savage 18/09/08 Iowa/ London

PS: Are you working with a particular tradition of textiles in Nigeria?

NO: I'm working with the social understanding of fabric in Nigerian society, and how Nigerians attach a lot of sentiment to the kind of fabric they have, or the kind of clothes they wear, because it defines their self esteem, their carriage. The richer the quality of the fabric, the higher the self-esteem of the wearer. They have many clichés or names that they attach to a specific kind of fabric. Some of those I try to capture in the work, for example in my work Igba Nkwu, which denotes the pre-wedding ceremony of a young woman. When a woman is about to marry, the original pre-Christian wedding is performed, and the women see this as a festive period, a chance to really dress up, to be glamorous, to wear the most expensive kind of fabric. It would be a time to celebrate their femininity, to really be graceful and grateful in their movement and in their carriage. I called the piece Igba Nkwu because for me it really embodies the characteristics of that kind of festivity and mood. Many of my fabrics are not about a particular kind of prototype or cultural identity, it's more about defining their mood and the people and their carriage and the way it gives them a sense of pride and affluence, because a lot of times fabric defines your status in society. This piece called Oriaku makes reference to a woman who is in an affluent home, who receives a lot of gifts from her partner, and who is well taken care of, and she is called an oriaku – literally it means someone who is enjoying the affluence of her home, celebrating their affluence. When I was growing up in Nigeria in the 80s, it was a time when there was a little bit of stability in our economy, things were really good in the early 80s and a lot of women at the time were really taken with this kind of fashion that featured lacy, spirally designs, transparent materials, and they would wear these, and float around and feel really fabulous and glamorous, so I think for me, the name Oriaku embodies that period and the people. Other pieces also, like 'sample material' and 'dance piece' – I'm alluding to how people generally feel about their fabrics. In the market place there are lots of wealthy lovely displays of a range of fabrics. Sometimes they have sample materials – one of a kind fabric that they would display, they would come in strips of cloth, very limited in edition, in quantity. These are generally very sought after – they are one of a kind, very delicate, very sought after. I like the idea of embodying the need people have for this kind of fabric – this sought after fabric. Whenever you go to a fabric store, they will ask you whether you want to see the samples, they have them displayed in strips all over the store. Also the dance piece – that for me is trying to embody the lifestyle of people – cloth and festivity for me often work hand in hand, especially among the wealthy Nigerians. Those in the lower sectors of society may not agree with this, but among the more wealthy sectors there is this sense of showing off, or exhibition of wealth when you are wearing cloth. There is also a sense of festivity – people want to dance, want to be seen in their various kinds of attires. I think that 'Dance' speaks to me about how people carry themselves, and feel free-spirited, like butterflies – it is a lifting of their spirits.

PS: Do you feel critical of these kinds of practices? Do you see your work as social critique? Or are you celebrating these aspects of Nigerian culture?

NO: I am definitely more critical than celebratory. Whilst I know it is a norm for people to want to celebrate their Nigerian dress culture through dress and fabric, I think it is only a small minority who get to enjoy these kinds of practices and fabrics. I think this creates a sense of misplaced priorities, because when these status quos are created there are so many who can't afford these things, and this kind of culture forces people who can't afford it to go borrowing, in order to maintain that kind of status quo. So I'm not celebrating it, I'm only commenting on what I see, and

what I live with. I come from a humble home – I'm not known to try to display a lot of affluence or wealth, so I see it from that perspective.

Some other pieces from this series are exploring texture, process, the innovation of using found materials. That is the one big thing that I have seen happening that really inspired me in many ways, amongst the less privileged Nigerians, who couldn't afford to lead these more affluent and comfortable lives – they would be very quick to find ways to accommodate their situation – so I have some pieces in there that speak more about transformation and reformation – for instance, *Baggage*, which is made out of plastic bags – another piece – *Rope* – and *Shield Me*, also *Fence* – these pieces have more commentary on recycling, reusing, on trying to find ways that these materials could be translated. Nigerians may not use them in this manner, but they would use them in other ways – for instance paper is used as a food wrapper - food peddlars wrap food in newspaper, or use it as a table cloth – recycled cans are used as lamps – children would make toys out of plastics – you are very aware of the recycling culture out there. So taking these materials out here, and trying to make something functional out of them is very meaningful to me. I'm trying to find a function – I see so many times materials finding a new function, a new meaning, a new perspective, which can be seen from a very productive point of view.

PS: Is the content of your materials important to your work? The text in your newspapers for example?

NO: No I don't particularly pay attention to the text in the newspaper – I try to deconstruct that – I don't want it to be what I'm talking about. But I do use a lot of yellow pages, because I feel they embody our information system, they embody our society – they talk about everyone, about who we are. So I have more connection to the content of the yellow pages than the content of my newspapers. With that, I am more interested in considering what they can become – how they could become other things.

PS: Your use of clay – do you see this as a connection across classes in society, a link between the materiality of consumption and a more natural connection to the earth?

NO: I came into contact with clay for the first time in my little community in Nsukka, where the landscape has a lot of clay deposits and so I would often play with the sand – it was a material that the locals were very connected to. I appreciate clay because of the connection I had with it growing up in Nsukka, but I don't necessarily connect clay with the poor.

PS: You use many manual processes in your work – twisting, weaving – could you talk about the role of process in your work?

NO: I have a strong affinity and obsession with multiples and accumulative processes, so I repetitively found I tend to make work which is very labour oriented – so I make smaller units, smaller pieces which I will probably bring together into a larger form or installation. A lot of my processes are very rigorous and labour intensive, and simplistic in nature – I'm twisting papers, I'm rolling them up, crumpling them up, smashing them, dying them. Because they occur in numbers, they tend to be a lot of work to do. I'm waxing them, sewing, tying, roping – what draws me to these processes are the patterns and shapes and textures that result when they're assembled – these are things that attract me the most – colour is something that I really appreciate when I'm putting these processes together and forming the piece I'm making. I'm interested in the way the pieces come together – a lot of them are very accidental – I put them together and I'm amazed at how the variation in each particular unit can create very interesting modulations, textures, colours, undulations, and repetitive patterns in the piece.

PS: You've moved around a lot in your life – in what ways have your changing environments affected your work? How do you feel your work connects with place?

NO: I feel the natural environment here connects more for me than the social or cultural environment. But I've found a lot of similarities and references to my own sensibilities from a Nigerian perspective – with the landscapes here, which are very familiar to me. I connect with things like random piles of objects – this brought back memories of Nigeria – things like dilapidated buildings, nests, the way trees fall – things like this have had an impact on me, resonating with what I already know. But in terms of picking things up in my work – no, not very much.

PS: What about your work with discarded materials – has living in the United States affected your perspectives on consumption?

NO: Absolutely. When I moved out here and found in abundance these wasteful cultures and wasteful outlets of materials – that got me thinking and even pulled me in the direction of how these materials are so valuable where I come from – of how they mean so much, and are not wasted as you find them here. Although here there is a huge recycling culture, a recycling industry, it isn't with the same intensity – it's not seen in the same light – there is not so much value for the materials – they wouldn't be recycled so instantly as they would in poorer communities in Nigeria. So yeah, I think I sought to question why there was so much wastefulness in societies out here, and to investigate the patterns of consumerism where people buy food without even being able to eat it all – there's so much out there for people to have, and they're not even in dire need of these things. Drawing on what I've seen out here, it may have an impact on the way my work has transformed, especially my attitude to recycled materials. Reclamation and recycling became a huge part of my work – reclaiming, reforming, reconditioning, reconstructing what was no longer considered useful. I was trying to find meaning for them, to find ways of giving them value, especially coming from my background.

PS: Can you talk about your development as an artist? How did you begin working with these materials? What were the key events that shaped your practice?

NO: I've always been interested in creating. I started getting a sense of direction, of space and sculpture especially, when I came into contact with El Anatsui. I was really inspired by his works and his approaches to art, and I was very privileged to mentor and work with him for a year between 2000 and 2001. He was my teacher in my undergraduate programme. My exposure to him really helped me to begin to appreciate work from a spatial perspective. Before then I studied painting, so I was more into a two-dimensional, compositional approach to art. When I met El and spoke to him a few times, we would talk about art, and he always had very insightful feedback on my work, which helped me broaden my scope beyond the canvas, beyond the paper, and ask how can I bring my environment and my other experiences into the work. That was like my turning point, where I started to think about making sculptures and installations, and then I looked around me, and saw there was so much around that could be transformed into art. I started picking up leaves, sticks – I would put it together and he would do a critique for me of the works I was doing independently. I started to feel so comfortable with this that I decided to go to graduate school and get a degree in this, because it was something that I had so much affinity and drive for, and I went to graduate school and I really loved it – I found so much passion for sculpture in a way that I never had bothered to explore in the past. Also coming upon the abundance of waste – that was a helping point for me so I took it and ran with it and I've been running with it since then.

PS: Do you see yourself as part of any particular movement? Do you draw influence from the Nsukka group for example, or any other international movements? Aside from EI, who would you describe as your influences?

NO: I haven't been able to place myself in any kind of category. There are artists in the diaspora who are struggling with ideas of identity, and I don't really see myself in that way because I don't think I'm struggling with my identity – I feel very comfortable with who I am and I know where I'm coming from. I don't necessarily see myself as coming from the Nsukka school, because I think it's not very defined right now what the Nsukka school is. It used to be the school of the Uli people, of the Uli set, like Uche Okeke and Chika Okeke, and those kinds of people. They kind of moved on, and I don't know if we have since found an identity for the school. I know that EI has established a new movement now in Nsukka, where young artists are being more exploratory and experimental, and less regimented by the old techniques and styles. There's been a huge transformation and change of direction by the artists who are there now, but I'm not sure if I would classify myself with that group because I'm not presently there, and I'm not sure how my work fits in there. I'm part of the generation that EI has brought out – but I'm not sure where I can classify myself.

PS: It's interesting what you say about the Nsukka school, which emerged perhaps from the challenges of independence – maybe those ideas aren't so urgent for artists now. What challenges and issues would you say were important to you and your contemporaries at the time you were working in Nsukka?

NO: One thing I found that was a challenge for me when I was there, and I found very different when I came here, was the level of exposure that young emerging artists in the Nsukka school have. I think it's very useful to see what's going on the international scene – to visit lots of museums and exhibitions, to see and talk to lots of artists, and get access to literature and visual images which relate to these ongoing discourses – I don't know if we have enough of that – I mean there is some kind of enlightenment and effort about the need to increase the availability of resources for artists, but I don't know if they have enough of them – how much internet access they have for example, to find out what's going on with the arts out here, and how other Africans are exploring new ways, and new techniques – so coming out here really gave me an edge, because it gave me a broader perspective of art in general – of contemporary art. It was also inspiring to see work by so many people I had never heard about, both Europeans and Africans and Americans – and that enriches your vocabulary and your language and understanding of what you are doing, so I think that in a sense I find myself to be more advantaged than those young, upcoming artists in Nsukka, because I have more exposure to the art world here. I don't know how much things have improved since I left – how much internet access has improved, for example.

PS: What about patronage – is there a lot of support for artists locally in Nsukka?

NO: Yes – that's the other thing – I know that a few centres and art galleries have opened in Lagos for artists who are exploring art in unconventional ways. I know some effort has been put in place to market these artists – I know there is some effort on EI's part to bring Nigerian artists information about opportunities out here and to engage in discussions out here. Things are improving, but it's not enough – we don't even have enough teachers, we don't have the support system, we don't have the funding. There's no endowment or group that supports artists in the way that you get support here. It's quite a challenging struggle for many of them. But then again, just because of the peculiar social and economic network – people need to be comfortable and stable to appreciate art that is experimental – you know you have to be in a state of mind to indulge in it. In the economic situation now in Nigeria – with people not having enough to eat, and

not finding shelter, there are very few people who are interested in experimental art.

PS: What plans do you have for the future? In what directions do you see your work developing?

NO: I'm very interested in getting grants to create architecture – I'm very interested in architectural forms, but financially I can't afford the ideas and concepts that I've come up with. But I'm working hard to come up with larger pieces which are referencing architectural spaces from my rural community – that's something I'm very interested in – working with architectural forms and spaces – I think there's so much to explore to that end. Even in poverty stricken areas there are so many beautiful forms, with lots of textures and colours. I'm drawn to them and would like to do some extended work on that, maybe at some point visit the people and talk to them, and find out what they're thinking, to see how I can bring some of those emotions to the work as well. So I think in the near future, I'm going to go a little larger, and maybe even more experimental.

PS: Do you see your work as political? Do you see possibilities or strategies for making it accessible to these poorer sectors of society, for example?

NO: I do! I'm not sure I can define how I do, but I do see an underlying political tone to the work that I do – in thinking about class and poverty. I think I can connect with them on a certain level. I don't make my work political in a specific way – I am more concerned with form. If my works have a political undertone then that's great, but I'm not a politician. I don't work hard to promote that in my work, but invisibly it's always there.

PS: Going back to your title – the butterfly – you talk about your work as being without finite form – something uncontained – could you talk about this? Does it connect to your ideas about textiles?

NO: Beyond thinking about something that continues to flow, I tend to see my works as animate, moving forms – very fluid – because of the way I form them. I tend to look at my works as a having a continuous dance or movement to them – that was the thing that attracted me to a butterfly, it was very free and fluid – you can follow it and it continues to glide. I try to capture that in my works, using undulating surfaces, using a lot of suggestive movement – I think that is how the butterfly comes into my work – it's very fluid, free-flowing. You could also even see it as informing the works themselves – each time the work is reinstalled it will reshape into new forms and pieces. Really that it is it – I see them as free-flowing forms.



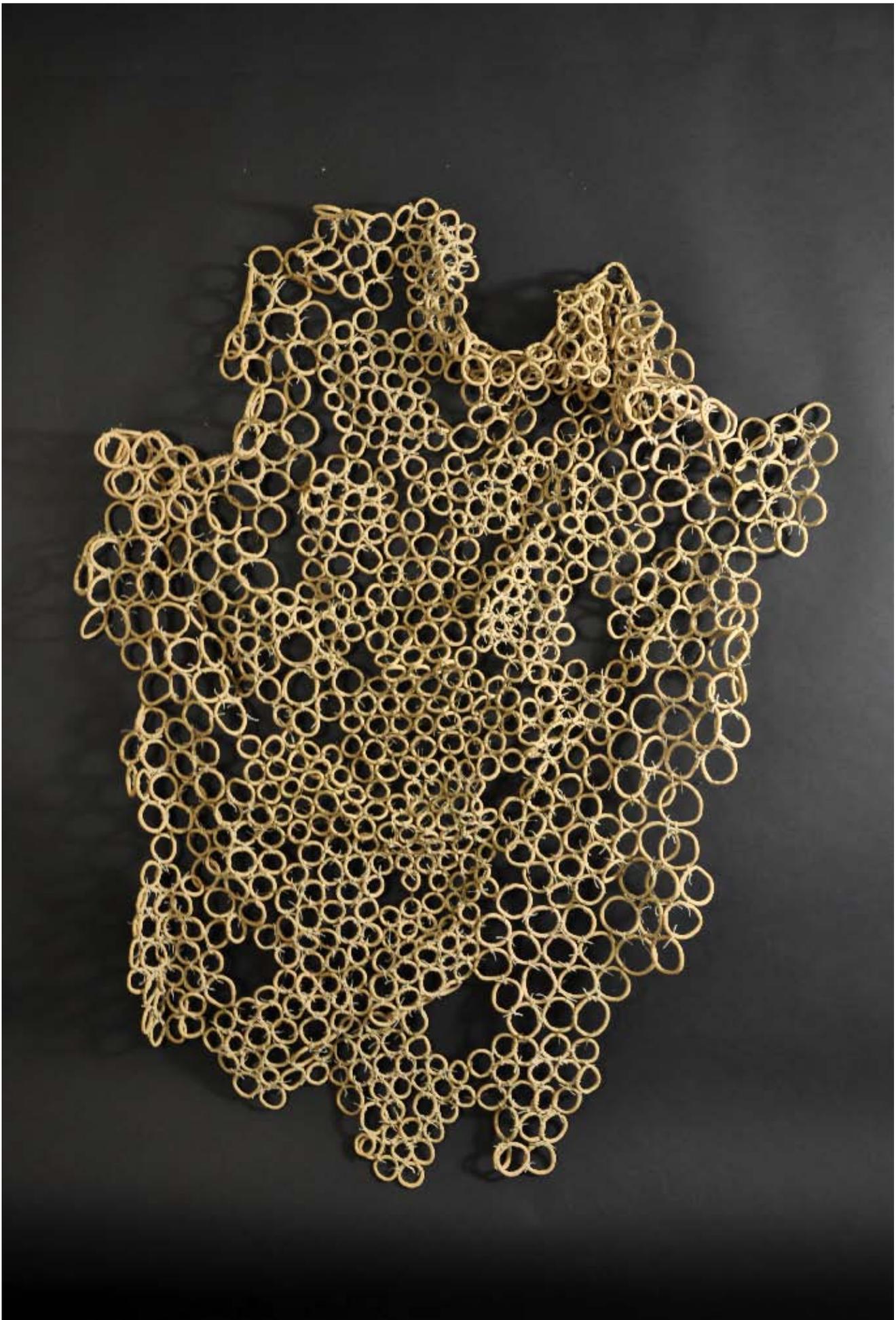
Baggage, 2008
plastic bags, 102 x 178 x 26cm



Ala Igbe, 2008
Clay and burlap, 231 x 91 x 10cm



Ashioke Series, Variation VIII, 2008
Clay and burlap, 71 x 89 x 10cm



Ulukububa (infinite flow), 2008
Clay and burlap, 216 x 165 x 20cm



Sample Material, 2008
Material and thread, 200 x 64 x 21cm



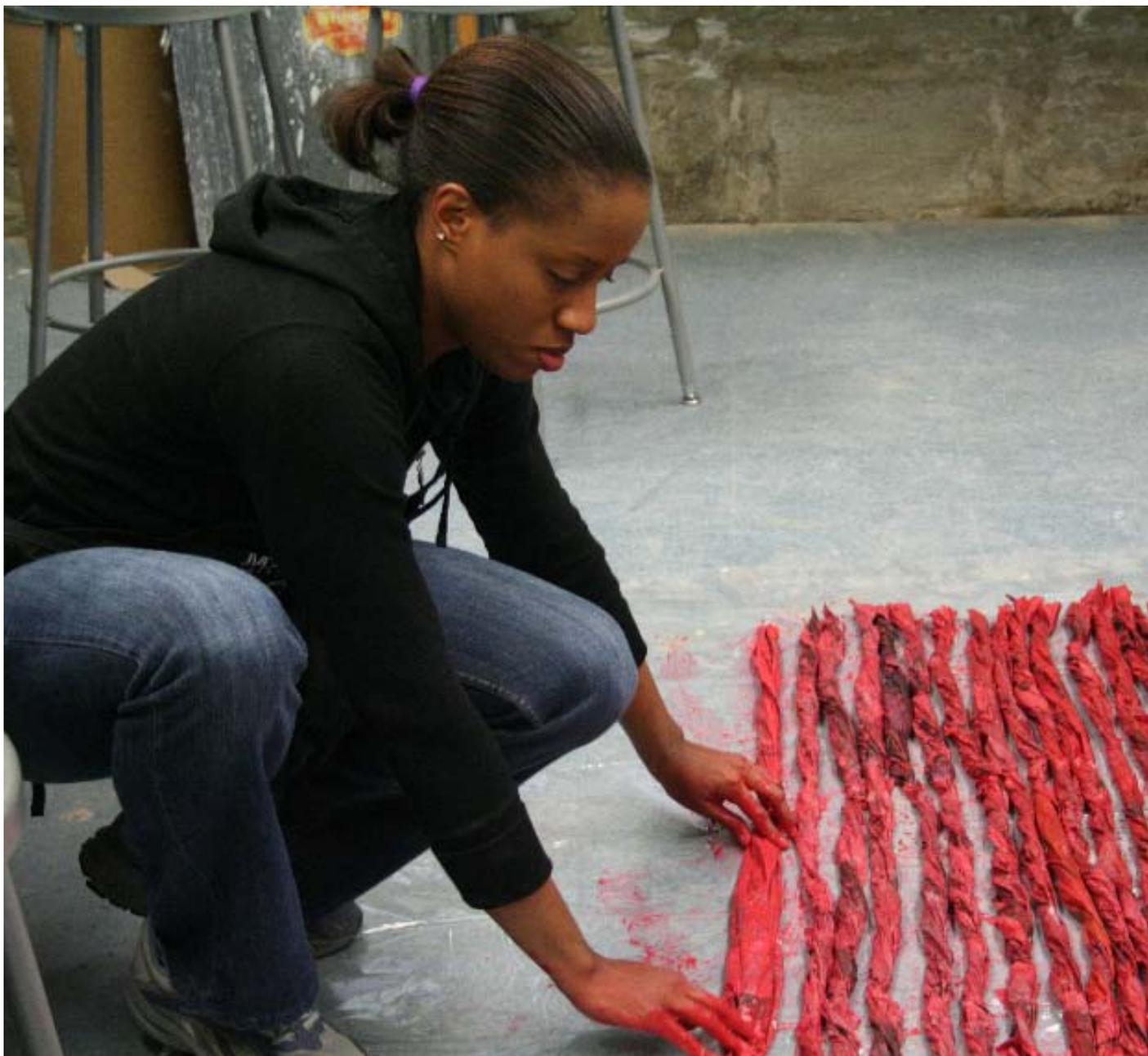
Sample Material (detail), 2008
Material and thread, 200 x 64 x 21cm



Shield Me, 2008
Newspaper, acrylic colour, starch, yarn and rope



Untitled, 2008
Yellow and White Pages, 168 x 135 x 16cm



Nnenna at work in her studio

YOUR COMMENTS

Please send your comments and any images of pupil's work and responses to shehnoor@risc.org.uk

Teacher's feedback:

Were you able to successfully deliver both Art & Global Citizenship through this project?
Please tell us about what happened

Which GC concepts? Human Rights; Interdependence; Sustainability; Peace & conflict;
Diversity; Social justice

What were the strengths of this project?

What were its weaknesses?

Pupils responses:

When we did this art project I thought about.....

The best thing about this project was.....

Something I learned that I didn't know before.....

Before we did this project I thought..... but now.....



www.octobergallery.co.uk/participate

We would like to say thank you to all those that contributed to this resource:

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