



**PRESS RELEASE
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New sound installation by Emeka Ogboh on the roof terrace of the Humboldt Forum

Der Kosmos – Things Fall Apart

In the visual axis to the dome, the artist Emeka Ogboh has created a sound installation with twelve voices on the roof terrace of the Humboldt Forum. The work was selected as part of the competition *Kunst am Bau* (Art in Buildings), ties in with the principles and fields of knowledge of the Humboldt brothers and at the same time critically examines colonial history.

Wilhelm von Humboldt's fascination with language and its ability to resemble a work of art forms the starting point for Emeka Ogboh's work. On the roof terrace of the Humboldt Forum, he has rearranged the Igbo folk song *Nne, Nne, Udu* for twelve singers in his sound installation. The song is an allegory about a young maiden who is entrusted with a treasured clay pot. Her careless behaviour on returning from the stream with the pot of water ends up in the pot falling and breaking into pieces. The broken pot affects the maiden's psychological well-being and that of her community.

The folk song and chants come from a rich Igbo tradition of oral storytelling of teachings and metaphors. *Nne, Nne, Udu* is accompanied by chants inspired by a line from Chinua Achebe's famous novel *Things Fall Apart*. The latter addresses the consequences of colonialism for the Igbo: "He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart".

Twelve loudspeakers, covered with Akwete, a traditional Igbo fabric, joins the individual voices into a choir of choral music that performs on the hour.

Emeka Ogboh: "I approached the folkloric song and chant as a metaphor of what happens when a people's cosmic anchor, their access to the supernatural or otherworldly, is violated, truncated, and replaced with a strange medium or foreign spiritual force. The centre can no longer hold. Using the installation, the public's eyes are trained on the inscription and the cross on the cupola as an emblem of spiritual colonization. The location of the work near the cupola is a jarring juxtaposition that belies a complex history. The cross, a Christian symbol was a tool of colonial domination in what Europe referred to as its civilizing mission of a barbaric non-Western world including Africa."

Hans-Dieter Hegner, Director of Technology at the Humboldt Forum Foundation in the Berlin Palace: "Emeka Ogboh's sound carpet with its wonderful sound texture is both exciting and symbolic. The work stands for cultural forms and societies outside Europe. It counteracts a Eurocentric view of the world and history. This is a unique statement at about 40 m as the crow flies from the dome cross and about 150 m as the crow flies from the office of the German Foreign Minister."

The competition, organised by the Humboldt Forum Foundation in the Berlin Palace, was supervised and carried out by the Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning (BBR) in 2020 as part of the construction project. The jury praised Ogboh's work for representing a view from and of cultural forms and societies outside Europe. It thus counteracts a Eurocentric perspective on the world and history.

Emeka Ogboh

Emeka Ogboh connects to places with his senses of hearing and taste. Through his audio installations and gastronomic works, Ogboh explores how private, public, collective memories and histories are translated, transformed and encoded into sound and food. These works contemplate how auditory and gustatory experiences capture existential relationships, frame our understanding of the world and provide a context in which to ask critical questions on immigration, globalization, and post-colonialism. Ogboh has participated in numerous international exhibitions including documenta 14, (2017), Athens and Kassel, Skulptur Projekte Münster (2017), the 56th edition of La Biennale di Venezia, Italy (2015), and Dakar Biennale (2014).

One building, four partners: This diversity is founded on the collaboration of our partner institutions. The Humboldt Forum is a collaboration between the Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss; the Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz for collections from the Ethnologisches Museum and the Museum für Asiatische Kunst of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin; the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin for the Humboldt Lab; and Kulturprojekte Berlin with the Stadtmuseum Berlin for the BERLIN GLOBAL exhibition.

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