



Image: Senga Nengudi, Sandmining (2018) installation view courtesy of Henry Moore Institute. © Image by John McKenzie

ENAM GBEWONYO PERFORMS

agbegbogbo

AN ACTIVATION OF SENGA NENGUDI'S, SANDMINING

HENRY MOORE INSTITUTE

SUNDAY 17 FEBRUARY 2019

3.00 PM

**HENRY MOORE
INSTITUTE**



THIS EVENT IS ORGANISED
IN COLLABORATION WITH
THE INTERNATIONAL
CURATORS FORUM

About agbegbɔgbɔ

Enam Gbewonyo's *agbegbɔgbɔ* takes direct inspiration from Senga Nengudi's body of work, channelling *Sandmining's* themes of Native American healing along with Nengudi's love of African ceremony most apparent in *Ceremony for Freeway Fets*. This activation harnesses the symbolology and cultural practices inherent in her Ghanaian Ewe heritage to become both a response and conversation.

agbegbɔgbɔ commences with ceremony, storytelling and drumming. The performers start in procession from Nengudi's *Bulimia* installation walking through the exhibition galleries till they reach *Sandmining*. The symbols (see key opposite) the performers adorn each other with are a nod to the tradition of adorning dancers for the Ewe *Hogbetsɔtsɔ* festival – an annual festival celebrated in Ewe tribes. However two of the symbols used in *agbegbɔgbɔ*, Gbewonyo chose specifically for their relevance to the performance. *agbegbɔgbɔ* continues with the performers moving backwards through *Sandmining* in the shape of the figure 8, which they also draw in the sand at the four corners of the 8. The backwards movement recreates the story of the Ewe tribe's pilgrimage from Togo to what became Eweland in Ghana. The legend tells that to escape the rule of cruel Togolese King Agorkoli they sought help from a powerful hunter Torgbui Tsali. During a festive holiday, he enchanted the village drums to put all the royals and the King to sleep and led their escape instructing the citizens to walk backwards to confuse their pursuers as their footsteps would look like they were walking towards the village rather than away.

The symbolism of the footsteps and figure 8 speaks in the first instance to the journey of the black race historically - its dispersal across the globe, the idea of return and retracing back to their ancestry - giving a sense of the infinity of all things. More widely it also speaks to the journey of mankind as a whole.

The colours used throughout the performance, from the cloth the performers wear to the paint adorning their bodies links back to those used in the healing mounds of *Sandmining*. In Native American healing practices the belief was that these mounds of colour pigment would draw out the toxins causing a person's sickness.

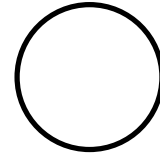
Sandmining's power as a healing space is further revived through *agbadza*. The traditional dance of the Ewe tribe, *agbadza* is said to have healing properties, specifically through its movement as it activates the spinal chord (7 chakras) and opens up the chest allowing air throughout the body. *agbegbɔgbɔ* culminates with a climatic performance of *agbadza* in two sets before the performers exit *Sandmining*. An excerpt of Nengudi's audio piece *Double Think Bulimia* replaces the sound of the drums leaving the audience with thoughts of oneness and returning to the whole.

The reverberation of the drums is the heart of *agbegbɔgbɔ* as it is in traditional *agbadza* dance. The purpose is for the drum's vibrations to penetrate the sand, channel into the performers bodies radiating through their movements out into the gallery space, into the audience and back into *Sandmining*. Once again the sense of cyclicity/ infinity is powerfully engaged.

This performance is dedicated to the memory of curator and artistic director of CCA Lagos, Bisi Silva who passed away last week.

Painted Symbols

The performers adorn themselves with the following symbols;



The circular outline is often painted on Ewe dancers during the annual Hogbetsɔtsɔ* festival. Here it connects to performance's infinity references in the figure 8.



'Venɔɔ nyo' meaning, 'It is good to be in pairs'. A symbol of mutuality representing the two dancers and their performance's symmetry.



'Enu etɔ yae wɔ agbe' meaning, 'Three things make life'. A symbol of worship. In *agbegbɔgbɔ* the performers, drummer and Senga's *Sandmining* make life.

*Hogbetsɔtsɔ - pronounced Hog-bey-cho-cho

About the Performers



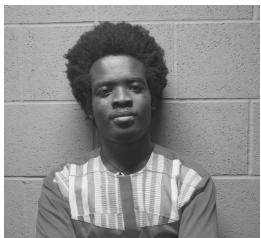
Performer: Enam Gbewonyo

Artist/ curator Enam Gbewonyo's practice investigates identity, womanhood, and humanity through textiles and performance. It also promotes handcraft using processes like embroidery, knit, weave, print and wirework. In exhibiting and curating, she has worked with the likes of Bonhams (2018), TEDxEuston (2015) and Toronto's, The Artist Project Fair (2016). She was also a 2017/18 International Curator's Forum 'Beyond the Frame' participant. Passionate about elevating black women artists, Enam is also founder of the Black British Female Artist (BBFA) Collective - the platform works to support emerging black British women artists.



Performer: Carmen Okome

Carmen Okome is currently reading Fine Art at the University of Leeds on an undergraduate course of study. She previously studied a foundation course at Kensington and Chelsea College. Her practice focuses on expressions of identity and navigating the representation of the black female in current British culture. She uses a range of mediums including digital media, photography and performance, as well as the more traditional methods such as sculpture and painting.



Drummer: Nii Kwartey Owoo

Nii Kwartey Owoo is the founder of Radio GaMashie (Accra), director of Miishejelo Dance Theatre (Accra/London) and Miishe African Music and Dance (Leeds), a Creative Associate at The Geraldine Connor Foundation (Leeds), a Navigate Artist/Choreographer with Ace dance and music (Birmingham) and an African Dance Tutor- Diverse Dances Styles (BA) Hons degree, Irie! dance theatre and University of Roehampton.

Originally from Accra, Ghana, Nii draws on his Ga heritage, including spiritual beliefs, storytelling and symbolism, creating original choreography that blends tradition with current global dance styles. Nii grew up in a traditional royal household and was given the title Custodian of Culture by his elders at age 12; he incorporates this knowledge of West African culture and music in his work.