

Challenging Perspectives: Ken Nwadiogbu on Identity, Displacement, and the Art of Storytelling

Ken Nwadiogbu, a Nigerian multidisciplinary artist based between London and Lagos, creates striking works that explore identity, displacement, and socio-political control. In this interview, he reflects on his creative journey and the power of storytelling through his art.

Gita Joshi (GJ): How did your background in civil engineering shape your approach to creating art, and what inspired your transition to fine art?

Ken Nwadiogbu (KN): I was genuinely excited about studying civil engineering at the University of Lagos, Nigeria. I was drawn to the idea of building and creating, but over time, I realized it lacked the freedom I craved. In civil engineering, everything had to follow strict rules and conditions, and there was little or no room for experimentation. But art was different; it offered me the limitless potential to dream and create. Once I discovered it, I became obsessed with it for the rest of my time at the university and eventually decided to pursue it.

However, my background in civil engineering has influenced my art. Engineering taught me to create with purpose. A structure can be visually stunning, but if it lacks functionality, it ultimately fails. I see art similarly; it can be beautiful, but without meaning or context, it loses its essence. Engineering also instilled in me an obsession to details. In engineering, precision is everything. One miscalculation can collapse an entire project. This mindset drives my creative process, where I take my time and pay close attention to every detail in my paintings.



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Above: Ken Nwadiogbu, *Far from Home*, charcoal, oil and acrylic on canvas, 160 x 130 cm



GJ: Your work often explores themes of identity and displacement. How do these themes reflect your personal experiences as a Nigerian artist living between Lagos and London?

KN: When you're in your home country, it's easier to define yourself because your environment shapes your identity. Growing up in Nigeria, I believed I understood who I was; Nigeria felt like my entire world. But stepping out of that familiar space challenged everything. Moving to the UK forced me to reexamine questions I thought I had answers to: Who am I, really? And what role do I play in a larger global context?

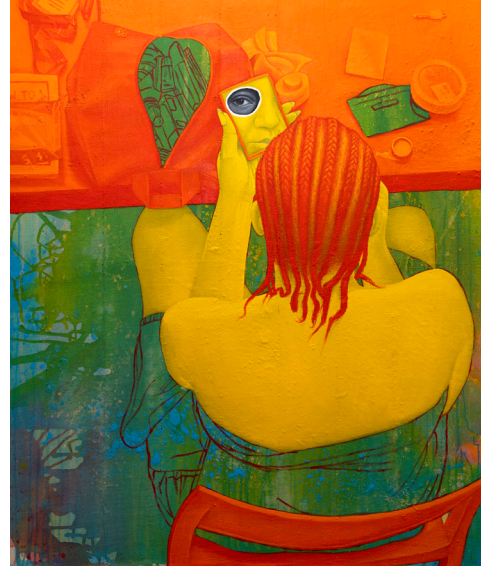
Living in the UK,

I became hyperaware of my African identity - my accent, my culture, and even how I moved through the world. This shift deepened my understanding of

displacement: What is gained, and what is lost? What divides us, and what experiences do we share? Experiencing these two worlds has ultimately shaped my art and allowed me to ask and sometimes answer questions about identity, belonging, and displacement.

GJ: The use of vibrant colors and hyperrealistic eyes is striking in your work. What role do these elements play in conveying the emotions and narratives of your pieces?

KN: I want my art to engage with the viewer, and that's where the eyes come in. The viewer is not just a participant; the painting also participates, looking back at them. This usually serves as an entry point for dialogue. By locking eyes with my subjects, you start an unspoken conversation, peeling back layers of their story. It's a way of humanizing my subjects,



Top: Ken Nwadiogbu, *Her Point of View*, oil and acrylic on Akwete handwoven fabric, 170 x 130 cm

Bottom: Ken Nwadiogbu, *Summer Showers*, oil and acrylic on canvas, 120 x 90 cm

Right: Ken Nwadiogbu, *The Visitor V*, oil and acrylic on canvas, 150 x 120 cm





inviting empathy, and building connections. Colour is equally important. It's my tool for creating a world with meaning. My recent exploration of colour was inspired by thermal imaging, where heat is translated into vivid colours. I love how this palette reveals hidden energies, and I decided to use it in my work. Together, the eyes and colors weave the stories I want to tell and I want them to capture you in a way that feels both visceral and intimate.

GJ: With your art featured in prestigious venues and collaborations with global brands, what do you consider the most impactful in your career so far?

KN: Every new project is a milestone because it challenges me to outdo myself. I strive to grow in quality and depth with each work and push beyond what I've done before.

This mindset keeps me grounded and reminds me to stay focused. It's about staying true to myself while daring to explore new horizons. 🌍

Left: Ken Nwadiogbu,
Morning Mystery,
oil and acrylic on canvas,
160 x 130 cm

Right: Ken Nwadiogbu,
The Traveler,
oil and acrylic on canvas,
170 x 170 cm

Ken Nwadiogbu

Ken Nwadiogbu is a Nigerian multidisciplinary artist based between London and Lagos. Initially trained as a civil engineer, he transitioned to fine art, gaining recognition for hyperrealistic charcoal drawings before exploring more conceptual, multi-technique works. With an MA from the Royal College of Art, London, his art addresses themes of identity, displacement, and socio-political control. Featured in venues like the Royal Academy of Art and Somerset House, Ken's innovative approach inspires young creatives through mentorship, public speaking, and creative collaborations.

kennwadiogbu.com

