

# Focus on Gerald Chukwuma

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Born in Nigeria in 1973, Gerald CHUKWUMA graduated – with honors – from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, at the age of 30. At the time, El Anatsui was teaching sculpture there and, although he did not follow his teaching directly, Chukwuma says that meeting El Anatsui had a decisive influence on the development of his work. Now considered one of Nigeria’s most dynamic Contemporary artists, Gerald Chukwuma has had several solo exhibitions and participated in group shows across the country, but also in Ghana, Cameroon, France, Denmark, the Netherlands, Turkey and the United States.



Gerald Chukwuma

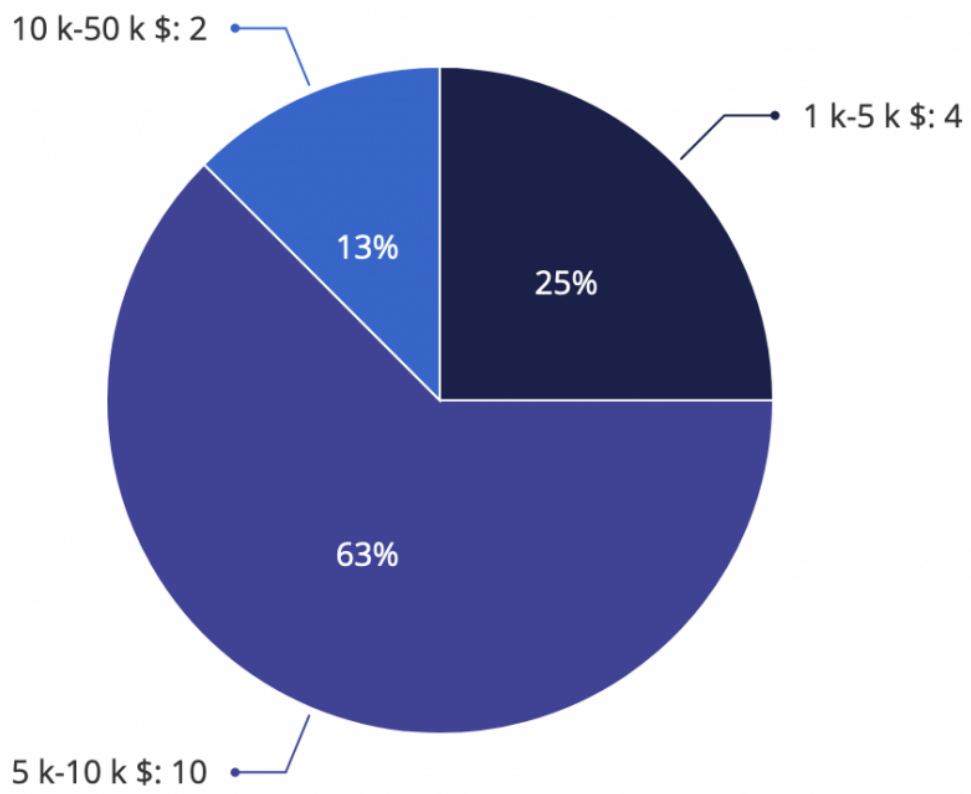
Chukwuma likes to work on a large scale. He creates complex sculptures with common materials such as slate, recycled objects, burnt, chiseled and painted wood. Fond of diversity, he confides: “I never use a single wood for a single job. It’s like a piano. They all (the varieties of wood) have their notes.” This approach to creation also allows him to express his interest in processes of transformation and renewal. For example he reworks the traditional symbols of Uli, traditionally used by the Igbos, especially the women, to decorate the body, but also used in wall decoration. By modernizing this pictorial language, by giving it a new freshness, the artist expresses his attachment to culture and identity. Chukwuma wants to highlight Nigerian traditions, the implications of globalization on the local community, the trend towards homogenization, and new histories that are emerging.

## **Construction of an ‘official’ price range**

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The artist first became known in Lagos, the economic capital of Nigeria where a few art galleries are concentrated and where his work began to be auctioned 10 years ago. Every year since 2010, ArtHouse Contemporary has sold one or two of his works, thus building an ‘official’ and public valuation. His largest pieces in burnt wood sell for around \$15,000. European and American collectors have noticed his work and acquired it. His works are circulating more and more, including through auctions abroad: Bonhams included the artist in a Contemporary African Art sale in London in 2018, and Piasa did the same in Paris the following year. Successful sales in these international marketplaces have bolstered Chukwuma’s values, but none of his works have been offered this year... not a single one. We must therefore turn to the galleries ‘1957’ (in Accra) and Kristin Hjellegjerde (in London and Berlin) with a budget of \$9,000 to \$25,000 for a large work.

His most popular works are from the recent series Wrinkles that was presented in 2019 in London by the Kristin Hjellegjerde gallery. Hjellegjerde supports the artist at international art fairs. For Wrinkles, Chukwuma carried out the work at the historic Igbo Landing site at Dunbar Creek on St. Simons Island where one of the largest mass suicides of slaves took place in 1803. Arriving towards the Georgian coast, the Igbo captives from what is now Nigeria took control of their slave ship and committed suicide en masse to resist slavery.



Gerald Chukwuma: number of lots sold at auction since 2009 (copyright Artprice.com).