

YUSSEF AGBO-OLA

7 RIVERS IN BONE ASH

KÖNIG TELEGRAPHENAMT

11 SEPTEMBER – 16 NOVEMBER 2024

KÖNIG TELEGRAPHENAMT is pleased to present the solo exhibition 7 RIVERS IN BONE ASH by Yussef Agbo-Ola. The artist will create an immersive environment featuring sculpture, installation, artifacts, and sound. Yussef Agbo-Ola, an artist and architect, splits his time between London, Ibadan in Nigeria, and the Amazon Forest. Born in rural Virginia to a family with Nigerian, African-American, and Cherokee heritage, his work explores hybrid identities and relationships with diverse landscapes, ecologies, and cultural rituals.

7 RIVERS IN BONE ASH showcases objects that reference ancestral artifacts traditionally used to honor connections to the non-human world. In Yoruba culture, every form of matter possesses a living spirit, and this exhibition serves as a sacred space, holding vessels for unseen environmental entities and inviting viewers to reflect on the invisible aspects of the natural world. With this in mind each work acts as a poetic expression in making the small, fragile and forgotten, large, crystalised, and remembered.

The focal point of the exhibition is a womblike wooden structure, draped with knitted red fabric. SAKO: 12 SEED ALTAR serves as a space for introspection, allowing reflection on the unseen nutrient exchanges between seeds and soil. The design draws inspiration from the internal forms of various medicinal seeds from the Amazon Forest, while symbolically representing the fertilization process that occurs underground. The altar features an open middle layer where knitted fabrics interconnect in a web resembling the ribosome networks found beneath the forest floor. From a side view, the altar illustrates the three layers of earth, forming a womb-like structure where a seed undergoes transformation before resurfacing. The work honors the farming rituals of the Yoruba culture and reflects on harvest ceremonies.

Agbo-Ola aims to reopen our eyes to the natural surroundings, sharpening our senses to what is invisible yet constantly evolving, transforming, dying, or growing. Many of his works are inspired by organisms on the brink of extinction, with the exhibition holding space for the living, the dead, the seen, and the unseen ancestors that connect us to the natural world.

The series MEDICINAL SKIN SPECIES merges the symbolic textile traditions of the Yoruba and Cherokee with inspiration drawn from biology, phytology, and ritual practices of environmental consecration. Each piece is hand-knitted, evoking the form of animal skins. The patterns and motifs are inspired by diverse cultural cosmologies, microscopic organisms, animals, and insect skins—some of which are endangered or already extinct. Through reflection on the unseen within various ecosystems, these skins commemorate different species by symbolically extending their lives and presence. A group of works on paper is similarly inspired, representing reimagined, fossilized plant organs encased in Arctic ice. These pieces are painted with watercolors and Indian ink mixed with raw pigments.

Belief systems and religions across the world often assign significant roles to environmental elements. Agbo-Ola questions the origins of these beliefs, practices, and values, and the degree to which they influence our relationships and interactions with our surroundings. In one culture, a river might be viewed as an economic resource, while in another it is seen as a living entity. What is at stake when environmental elements are valued only for their physical properties, and not for their interconnected, unseen roles in larger systems, such as a tree converting CO₂ into oxygen for most species to breathe? For Agbo-Ola, the BONE TOTEMS SERIES seeks to reveal the unseen relationships between environmental elements and cultural cosmologies. Each piece is carved from Amazonian Angelique wood that has been washed in river water. The smaller wooden works represent cosmological spirits of the land, inhabiting various environmental elements such as stones, trees, and flowers.

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OPENING HOURS

Tuesday – Saturday
11 am – 6 pm
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