

FRIEZE

Olu Ogunnaike's Radical Revival of London Plane Trees

A new commission at Cell Project Space confronts questions about our complicity in the gentrification of our cities



BY JAMILA PROWSE IN REVIEWS, UK REVIEWS | 08 DEC 20



For *London Plain* (all works 2020) – a site-specific installation that reclaims Cell Project Space from its temporary, pandemic-induced programming hiatus – Olu Ogunnaike has covered the gallery's original floor with a herringbone parquet. The artist sourced the lumber from London plane trees, which, due to their capacity to absorb pollution, were planted in abundance along roadsides in the capital during the industrial revolution and have more recently been seen as expendable when making way for municipal enterprises. Walking across the wobbling boards heightens our awareness of the transience of the work, which Ogunnaike compels us to pry up using a crowbar bearing traces of fingerprints and a mallet (*Tools*). Intermittent gaps in the wood reveal traces of additional mark-making by the artist, but, with no mention of what is underneath or certainty that the entire floor will be removed within the duration of the exhibition, a communal hearsay and mystique is evoked. The lack of signage raises a question of permissibility: should we pick up these tools and continue the work of exposing the under-layer; if so, what exactly might we uncover?

HOLLYBUSH GARDENS



Olu Ogunnaike, *London Plain*, 2020, installation view. Courtesy: the artist and Cell Project Space, London; photograph: Rob Harris

Ogunnaike revives these felled plane trees only to ask us to uproot them once more. In contributing to this cyclical process of planting and uprooting we confront questions about our own culpability regarding the gentrification of our cities and the treatment of nature as disposable. 'Radical', as political activist Angela Davis noted in *Women, Culture & Politics* (1989), 'simply means grasping things at the root.' As we clasp the cast-bronze crowbar and wood-crafted mallet, we become aware of our agency in resisting homogenization: we too can overturn a deeply ingrained system and expose what lies underneath. There is power in what we give our attention to, to the roots we investigate and the routes we choose to embark on.

HOLLYBUSH GARDENS



Olu Ogunnaike, *London Plain*, 2020, London plane, parquet adhesive, silkscreen on substrate, underlay, 5.2 x 11.1 m. Courtesy: the artist and Cell Project Space, London; photograph: Rob Harris

Olu Ogunnaike's London Plain is on view at Cell Project Space, London, until 24 January 2021.

Main image: Olu Ogunnaike, Tools, 2020, bronze crowbar, 89 x 10 x 4 cm, London plane mallet, 37 x 18 x 6 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Cell Project Space, London; photograph: Rob Harris