

FRIEZE

Olu Ogunnaike Saws Through Bordeaux's Colonial Past

At CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, the artist's wooden works commemorate the links between the region's wine industry and its colonial history



BY ORIANE DURAND IN EU REVIEWS, EXHIBITION REVIEWS | 22 DEC 21



London-based artist Olu Ogunnaike has placed wood at the centre of his artistic practice. Depending on the type of lumber he selects and how it is processed, his works make exhibition spaces speak, as well as the history of the city in which his pieces are shown. 'London Plain', his radical exhibition at Cell Projects Space in 2020, for instance, saw the gallery's floor covered with a parquet made of plane trees. Using a crowbar and a mallet, visitors were invited to lift the planks and remove them – a destructive action revealing our conflicted relationship with nature as something we aim to control, capitalize and

HOLLYBUSH GARDENS

then dispose of. For 'Miettes' (Crumbs) at the CAPC in Bordeaux, Ogunnaike's first solo exhibition in France, the artist decided to work with French pine, corresponding to the material he found in the Lainé warehouse which houses the museum.

At the entrance of the gallery, *Tools* (all works, 2021), a corkscrew inserted into the wall of the threshold – as if the space was ready to be uncorked – is a first reference to Bordeaux's wine industry. Elsewhere, *You are here*, a monolithic sculpture measuring 2 × 4 m, is on one side made up of a flat surface of metal plate, in which the visitor is reflected. The other side shows a grid composed of numerous strips, taking the form of a wine cabinet. While its body is made of French pine, its interior is composed of various exotic hardwoods that grow in former European colonies. Purposely mixing different kinds of woods, Ogunnaike commemorates the links between Bordeaux's wine industry and colonial history.



Olu Ogunnaike, 'Crumbs', 2021, exhibition view, CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux. Courtesy: the artist and CAPC, Bordeaux; photograph: Arthur Péquin

HOLLYBUSH GARDENS

then dispose of. For 'Miettes' (Crumbs) at the CAPC in Bordeaux, Ogunnaike's first solo exhibition in France, the artist decided to work with French pine, corresponding to the material he found in the Lainé warehouse which houses the museum.

At the entrance of the gallery, *Tools* (all works, 2021), a corkscrew inserted into the wall of the threshold – as if the space was ready to be uncorked – is a first reference to Bordeaux's wine industry. Elsewhere, *You are here*, a monolithic sculpture measuring 2 × 4 m, is on one side made up of a flat surface of metal plate, in which the visitor is reflected. The other side shows a grid composed of numerous strips, taking the form of a wine cabinet. While its body is made of French pine, its interior is composed of various exotic hardwoods that grow in former European colonies. Purposely mixing different kinds of woods, Ogunnaike commemorates the links between Bordeaux's wine industry and colonial history.



Olu Ogunnaike, 'Crumbs', 2021, exhibition view, CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux. Courtesy: the artist and CAPC, Bordeaux; photograph: Arthur Péquin

HOLLYBUSH GARDENS

The notion of celebration and gathering is particularly present in *Who's next*, a large, 8-metre-long pinewood table supported by legs that repeat the design of the wine rack. Shortly before the opening of the exhibition, the piece was used for a large banquet to which all museum employees were invited. Following this festive meal, the artist burned the surface of the table using the Japanese technique of *shou sugi ban* to reinforce the durability of the wood and – on a more symbolic level – to conserve the memory of the evening. A thick layer of black–brown dust now covers the piece.

These ashes prefigure a series of stainless-steel plates, *Out for Lunch*, in which the printing ink has been replaced by sawdust the artist collected from the pine beams of the museum building when sanding it. The plates show photographs taken during the meal but the motifs are barely recognisable, and, to emphasize this ghostly impression, dust has been spread around the works, leaving large brown spots on the walls and the floor.



Olu Ogunnaike, *Out for Lunch*, 2021, installation view, CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux. Courtesy: the artist and CAPC, Bordeaux; photograph: Arthur Péquin

HOLLYBUSH GARDENS

The origin of the pine tree is present in *A mistake in Les Landes*, large panels on which photos taken in the Landes forest – the largest artificial woodland in Western Europe – have been printed, giving a glimpse of the history of the Lainé warehouse, which was built in 1824 to store colonial goods. Joseph Lainé, then Minister of the Interior, fought against the Haitians during the revolution for independence at the end of the 19th century (the first successful slave revolt in the modern world) but was also the driving force behind the reforestation of the Landes woodland. It was during this same period that wine production in Bordeaux replaced the slave trade economy when slavery was abolished in France in 1794. By using local wood to draw on the region's conflicted past, Ogunnaïke reminds us of the passage from a painful period in French history to a festive and local economy, a commemoration that may pave the way for a healing process.

Olu Ogunnaïke 'Crumbs' is on view at CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux until 26 March 2022.

Main image: Olu Ogunnaïke, Somewhere else, but here, installation view, CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux. Courtesy: the artist and CAPC, Bordeaux; photograph: Arthur Péquin