

IOWA

Stanley Museum of Art

UI Stanley Museum of Art installs work by artist Nnenna Okore in lightwell
"Spirit Dance" is part of an ongoing project to highlight contemporary artists with ties to Iowa

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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IOWA CITY – The University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art has completed installation of "Spirit Dance," a site-specific sculptural work by contemporary artist Nnenna Okore. The work, made of vibrantly dyed jute, burlap, and cheesecloth framed by thin wire structures, is installed in the Stanley's lightwell, an open-air space that spans nearly four floors at the center of the building.

"Spirit Dance" was commissioned by the Stanley's curator of African art, Cory Gundlach, who, in recent years, has focused on expanding the presence of modern and contemporary art from Africa and its

diaspora at the Stanley, forming relationships with artists, like Okore, whose work has a direct relationship with traditional African art in the Stanley's collection.

Okore received a BA from the University of Nigeria Nsukka in 1999; completed her MA/MFA in sculpture from the University of Iowa in 2005; and, most recently, received her Ph.D. in Fine Art from Monash University in Melbourne. Her work broadly focuses on ecological concerns related to waste, carbon emission, and energy consumption. She explains "Spirit Dance" as representative of the African-inspired notion that all forms, including humans, nonhumans, and spirits, possess an agentic force that is capable of doing things. "Spirit Dance" calls attention to these forces—like wind, which causes the sculpture to sway in a manner suggestive of dance. Compelling viewers to acknowledge these forces by making their effects visible in "Spirit Dance," Okore hopes, will encourage viewers to be more sensitive to their environment and the forces at work around them.

"Spirit Dance" is the second installation in the museum's ongoing public art series "Thresholds," which features the work of Iowa-associated artists. Works in this series are among the first works of art that visitors to the Stanley will encounter upon entering the building. "The whole point of the 'Thresholds' series is to draw people across our threshold," Stanley Museum of Art director Lauren Lessing says, "to make them curious, to bring them in, to engage them in this space."

Okore visited campus and worked to install the work the week of July 10 – 14. She was assisted by the Stanley's manager of design, preparation, and installation Steve Erickson, members of the Stanley's collections team, and UI MFA students Brant Weiland, Agnes Harry Mills, and Reynold Tawiah-Quashie. Because the work is housed outdoors and will be exposed to the elements, it is expected to change and degrade, offering a new and different experience over time.

Okore urges people to come and experience her work in person. "It is a whole-body experience—you can be under it, inside it, on top of it—and there is so much more to take away when you have that kind of engagement with it. Come in, walk amongst the elements, get a real visceral sense of what is happening here. Dance with the spirits."

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About the University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art

Established in Iowa City in 1969, the University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art reopened its doors in August 2022 after a closure of over a decade. The Stanley Museum of Art is a dynamic and innovative teaching and learning resource for the university and its surrounding communities. Its collections include significant holdings of African art, twentieth-century painting and sculpture by artists such as Joan Mitchell, Jackson Pollock, Sam Gilliam, and Isamu Noguchi, works on paper, textiles, and ceramics.

Spirit Dance

2023

Mixed media

Commissioned loan, courtesy of the artist,

103.2023

Nnenna Okore

Australian / American / Nigerian, 1975—