

The artist takes five minutes out of her day to answer our eight questions. Words by Holly Black

 elephant.art/nengi-omuku-its-the-only-irreplaceable-thing-in-my-studio-27062022/

June 27, 2022



Nengi Omuku, Reclining Figures, 2022

Plants hold particular significance for Nengi Omuku. The Lagos-based artist trained as a florist and horticulturist under her mother before embarking on her art education at the Slade in London. The imprint of the natural world can be seen embedded in her ambiguous multimedia paintings, where indistinct figures, often seen together in tangled pairs or groups, appear surrounded by luscious trees, potted plants and other markers of flora and fauna. Her latest works, made during the intermittent lockdowns of the last two years, are filled with a particular sense of longing for a landscape beyond the confines of the home.

Instead of using traditional canvas, Omuku stitches together strips of sanyan, a Nigerian dress fabric made from wild silk, and paints on top of it. The result is something akin to a contemporary wall hanging, where works are mounted on rods, and the end of the picture plane is extended by the irregular blocks of textile that surrounds it. Occasionally, the sanyan patterns inform the palette and composition of the picture within, in a satisfying fusion of ordered tradition and mysterious, fluid figuration.



Nengi Omuku, Red Velvet, 2022

If you could save only one item from your studio, what would it be?

I'll definitely take my Nigerian sanyan fabric collection. I've bought all the sanyan I have come across over the past few years and it's the only irreplaceable thing in my studio.

"If I could get my hands on a painting by Yusuf Grillo my life would actually be complete"

What was the last art material you bought to use in your work?

I bought oil sticks while on a residency last year and I've just started working with them. I'm officially addicted! It feels like I'm colouring when I use them as opposed to painting.

What is your go-to song when you're working in the studio?

It totally depends on the whether I'm stressed out or not. But my go-to song this year has been *Feeling* by Ladipoe. It's the right tempo and just upbeat enough without being over the top.

Which single work of art would you choose to live alongside in your home?

I live with a lot of art by people I admire. But if I could get my hands on a painting by Nigerian artist Yusuf Grillo, who died just last year, my life would actually be complete.



Nengi Omuku, *Repose*, 2022

What are your top art or photography books?

Nigerian Weaving by Lamb and Holmes. It was a really difficult one to source but has been pivotal in my research around sanyan and pre-colonial weaving practices in Nigeria.

“Seeing the paintings in that space was a deeply spiritual experience”

If money was no object, what would you most like to experiment with in your work?

I would take a year out to travel to all the West African counties to learn about their weaving traditions, and experiment with how to work with these fabrics.



Nengi Omuku, *Comfort and Joy*, 2022

Tell us a pet peeve of yours when it comes to the art world.

Wet paint at auction.

What is your favourite gallery or museum space around the world?

Musee de l'Orangerie in Paris. I saw Monet's *Waterlilies* there for the first time last year. Seeing the paintings in that space was a deeply spiritual experience.

Holly Black is Elephant's managing editor

Nengi Omuku: Parables of Joy is at Pippy Houldsworth Gallery in London until 30 July 2022

Listen to all the go-to songs picked by our 5 Minutes With artists [here](#)

5 Minutes With

Meet the other artists who've faced Elephant's 8 questions

EXPLORE NOW