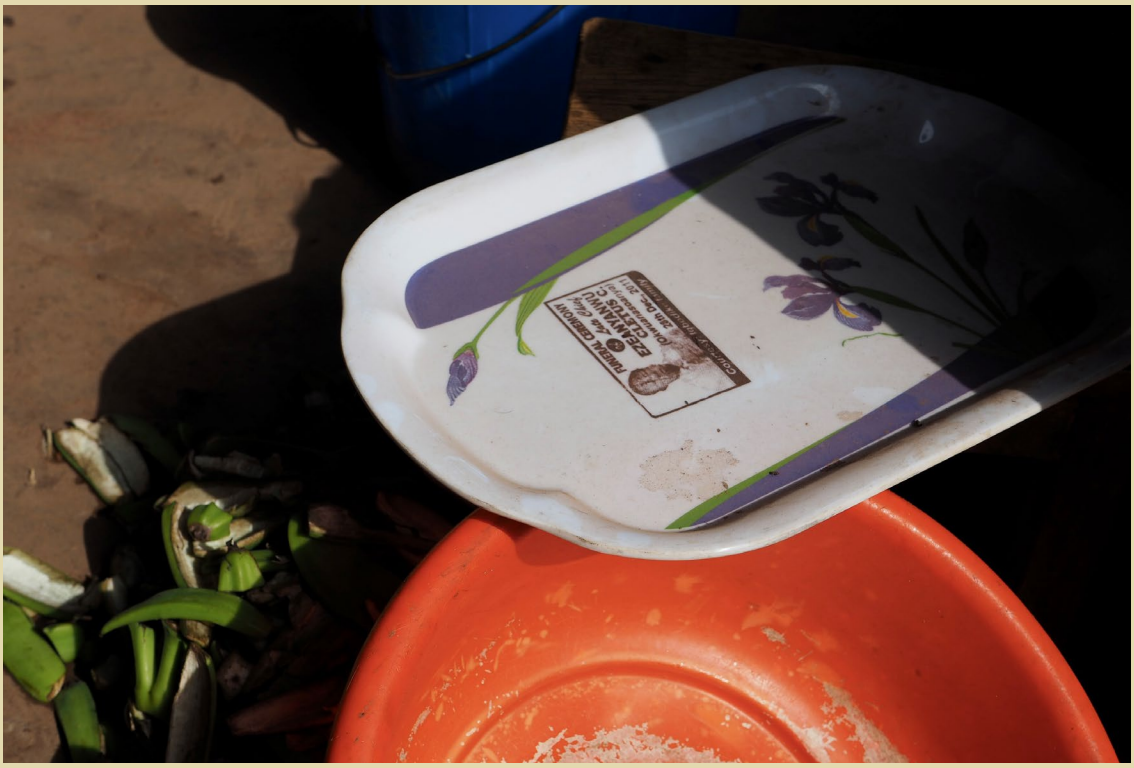
THINGS THAT HOLD US TOGETHER



A conversation between
Cynthia Nkiruka Anyadi and Muna Nzeribe

INTRO
Liz Ikiriko

Cynthia Nkiruka Anyadi
Muna Nzeribe

THINGS THAT HOLD US TOGETHER(III) by Cynthia Nkiruka Anyadi
On view at Gallery TPW until January 7th, 2026.

Beginning in 2025, Gallery TPW launched the TD Window Vitrine project space, a platform dedicated to presenting film, video, and print works in our public-facing window on a 24/7 basis. The inaugural call for interest attracted over 200 submissions from artists around the world. From this pool, the TPW Programming Committee selected eight artists to present projects across 2025 and 2026. Each presentation offers opportunities to expand the work through a range of public programming initiatives.

Gallery TPW is pleased to present *THINGS THAT HOLD US TOGETHER (II),* a video work by Cynthia Nkiruka Anyadi. The work assembles a collage of everyday, banal, and intimate moments filmed in Enugu, Nigeria over the past 30 years. Engaging with themes of archives, memory, technological mediation, and intergenerational movement within the African diaspora, the work reflects a sustained interest in connection across geographic distance—from Anyadi's residence in the UK to arts communities in Toronto.

In response to these themes, Gallery TPW invited Toronto-based digital media artist Muna Nzeribe to participate in a conversation with Anyadi. What follows is a dialogue between two artists, examining the physical and metaphorical dimensions of cultural storytelling and its capacity to traverse distance.

In conversation with Liz Ikiriko

Liz Ikiriko: What core methodologies or conceptual frameworks guide your research and creative practice? Are there specific questions or provocations that you find yourself returning to throughout your work?

Cynthia Nkiruka Anyadi: Ultimately, I consider myself a geographer. Studying Geography for the last 10 years has shaped both my work within academia and outside of it. The discipline introduced me to ways of thinking which have fundamentally shifted how I move through and understand my place within the world. With that said, being situated within this field comes with its own difficulties and discomforts. The frameworks which geography offers are deeply and fundamentally rooted in white supremacy and the colonial project. I find, particularly working within the geographic space here in the UK, it is impossible, and irresponsible, to disregard or downplay this history. There are elements of my work, and communities who contribute to this work, which I feel the need to protect from the inherent violence and alienation of geography.

Nevertheless, I find a broader guiding sense of purpose, and some reprieve from the weight of this history, when I take the time to extricate geography from capital 'G' Geography, and think about it more as an impulse. For me, this impulse pushes me to think critically about how people, ideas, cultures, and objects, are both produced by and products of meaning within space. A freer understanding of what it means to 'be' or 'think' geographically is also largely the basis of the concepts and methods which I find most inspiring.

Some of the most fundamental concepts which underpin my work emerge from the contributions of theorists such as Katherine McKittrick and Pat Noxolo. Their work calls to first recognise and then valorise the explicit and unspoken, practiced and embodied, polyphony of global Black experiences, cultures, and knowledge. I do not know that there is a singular question or provocation which emerges as a motif within my research, but I am excited by the possibilities which emerge in response to these calls.

Muna Nzeribe: I would say that my work is often autoethnographic and rooted in African feminist inquiry. I do not set out to centre myself or my experiences, but I understand and value the immense knowing of self as central to the way I synthesize the world. I live by the idea that the personal is political, and I have always found personal experience to be the best entry point into theory. There is so much flavour in the deep interactions and parasocial connections I have had with family, friends, lovers, or even strangers that have sparked some kind of thought or reaction.

I would also add that my approach is technical and experimental and often functions as a mode of practice-based research. I see creation as a form of thinking, and every piece I make responds to an inquiry, whether formal, intuitive, or institutional. If I take on a new project involving collage, for instance, I look for an additional layer of experimentation. This might mean learning a printing method, trying out cyanotype, or working with fabric processes in order to arrive at my goal. Learning is integral to my practice. While I pick up techniques quickly, I am not a strong believer in mastery for its own sake.

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My relationship with technology has become a major provocateur in my recent work. Technology has accelerated many artistic processes, yet I still feel that a piece needs some traditional element to anchor it. What interests me most, however, is technology's role in the domestic world and how our existence across different internet eras and cultural zeitgeists has shaped our understanding of art. I am thinking about art as a by-product of technology rather than art produced directly by technology. The questions I return to often sit in these contradictions and in-between spaces. I am considering technology as a factor in how I think about language and as a portal for understanding. Perhaps the clearest way to express this is through Marshall McLuhan's idea that the medium is the message. I think that is the driving force behind my work: how can form speak for itself?

LI: Your work navigates the paradox of preserving personal and cultural histories through both modern and traditional technologies. How do you approach this tension—acknowledging that, even with tools like 3D mapping or interactive storytelling, there are always limits to what can be captured or carried forward?

CNA: In some ways the question of modernity versus tradition holds almost all of its relevancy within a linear sense of time. There was a time, of course, when the traditional was modern, and there will be a time when the modern becomes traditional. I think the pace of technological change over the last century means that this process of, not necessarily obsolescence, but at the very least aging, is speeding up. I do try to adopt a more cyclical sense of time, where the modern and traditional can be found within one another, not in competition, but rather working in tandem towards the same goal.

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Removing their temporal constraints, the main function of these technologies remains the same, even if their forms shift. Across every single culture, and seemingly throughout all of human history, societies have oriented themselves through storytelling. The form of this storytelling, meaning the technologies which we have used to curate a communally sustained shared history, encompass everything from talking around a fire, to filmmaking, to holographics. I often have to challenge my own inclination towards prescribing particular values to these different technological forms. I have many pressing (and valid!) concerns around ecological destruction, inaccessibility, ownership, and capitalist exploitation in relation to contemporary storytelling and memory preservation industries. However, I also try not to lean too much on romance and nostalgia when I think about traditional forms of knowledge sharing, and to rather see how impulses towards preserving history can complement one another, regardless of their era.

MN: I believe this clash between modern and traditional is inherent in technology itself. Using any kind of technology in creative practice produces a tension between the abstract and the material. I often wonder whether preserving personal and cultural histories through these tools removes what Walter Benjamin refers to as the "aura" of a piece or whether it builds on it and adds a new layer.

After going through formal training in documentary during my MFA, I now approach creation through a more existential lens. I have always been fascinated by how humans create meaning. I have discussed the idea of truth in documentary practice with peers at length, and our conversations always seem to lead back to the philosophical question of why. What happens when technology becomes an intermediary in the transmission of meaning or memory? Does it turn the work into a lie, or does it become an added layer to the truth? There is a kind of truth that exists before technology and a truth that emerges after technology.

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I do not have a clear answer to this question. What I

Image Credit: Cynthia Nkiruka Anyadi, *Photogrammetry*, 2025. Courtesy of the artist.

do know is that the tension itself is something I am aware of and constantly grappling with, expressing through my work and my process. I am skeptical of technology while also being deeply fascinated by it, and my yearning for the past and for traditional modes of making, alongside the possibilities that technology introduces, continues to shape the work I put out.

LI: Living and working away from your familial homelands, your work carries the weight and complexity of generational migration. How do you see contemporary experiences of geography and movement—both chosen and forced—reshaping our understanding of belonging and place?

CNA: A big part of my current understanding of belonging and place is tied into an undoing of the idea of home. I am well aware of the fractures and forces which have produced my own circumstances and identity, but I try not to put too much value on the boundaries prescribed to 'homeland', both through formal political cartographies and through our own cultural instincts. Even without these boundaries, distance, of course, is a fact of any transient, transnational existence. Within my own personal experience, I feel quite lucky that this distance has not felt like such a weight. It certainly adds complexities on both a logistical and emotional level, but it also offers a sense of global coalescence and community.

To me, what defines the modern experience and impact of geography and movement is connection. At no point in history has it ever been as logistically feasible to maintain cross-border connections. Whether chosen or forced, the story of place within the contemporary conversation around migration is actually one of relation, where every new place becomes an extension of those places which we have known and loved before.

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It is quite interesting to observe how scale plays out across this kind of question. Our perceptions and interpretations of space and place are mediated through political systems that operate on national or international scales, far removed from the lived reality of migration. Separately, we can also observe individual responses to these systems in the expansion and contraction of space-boundaries even on the imagined and ontological scale. The adaptability of our understanding of belonging and place has the potential to be a really beautiful thing, even if we more often see in it the ugliness and violence of exclusion.

MN: Even when I was living in Lagos, I felt a certain disconnect. Both my parents are from Oguta, in Imo State, and they grew up in the eastern part of Nigeria with strong ties to our ancestry. Growing up in Lagos, to put it in Western terms, I was somewhat like a second generation. Lagos is a multicultural city built on ancestral Yoruba land, but it is also a site of hyper-globalization and was one of the first entry points of British colonization. Lagos is a perfect metaphor for my identity. Growing up and learning both Nigeria's history and my personal history, I became aware of these layers. My education, my interactions, my tastes, my mode of dress, and my exclusive use of English were all products of colonization and globalization. Igbo is my native language, but living in Lagos and conducting most of my life in English created a tension with being fluent in my own language. In that sense, the idea of displacement was never entirely new to me.

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Moving abroad added another layer of complexity and heightened my awareness of movement and presence. I am constantly negotiating my place in different environments. I struggle with feelings of alienation, but I would not describe it as bitterness. I have become fascinated with others' experiences of geography and movement and I see them as a way to connect us. I want my work to be a space where people can sit with displacement and reflect on the human condition, including adaptation, transition, and navigating new environments. We are all, in a sense, immigrants, just to varying degrees. While I love and continue to shout from the rooftops everything that makes me different, I am not interested in being defined as the other.

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Cynthia Nkiruka Anyadi

In conversation with Muna Nzeribe

Muna Nzeribe: Your work engages with the affective power of everyday objects as carriers of memory and healing, especially within migratory contexts. As an Igbo person working within academic spaces, I often feel a tension between the cultural integrity of Igbo artifacts and the institutional frameworks through which they are studied. How do you navigate the emotional weight of Igbo memorial souvenirs in your research while maintaining a practice of care toward the communities and histories they represent?

Cynthia Nkiruka Anyadi: The tension you describe is one that I'm also quite familiar with, particularly with regard to the knowledge represented by these artefacts, and the institutional frameworks which have historically exploited or undervalued this knowledge. The institutions of academia, archiving, or art, which we are a part of are given the power to interpret and inscribe meaning within cultures that they often have little to no connection to. I do worry a little bit less now about cultural integrity, specifically as it relates to particular 'authentic' performances of identity or tradition. That has eased in tandem with beginning to question what legitimacy actually means within a cultural context, and how the politics of authenticity can continue to maintain institutional hierarchies that do not serve Indigenous and Black communities.

Your question of navigating emotional weight is really interesting, because in some respects it has changed a lot throughout my research. In part, it became quickly apparent that I would need to radically alter my understanding of memorial souvenirs. Although their use value and aesthetic values were relatively easily interpreted, their fetish value, their ability to hold memories of the dead, was far less emotionally present within the conversations I was having. The practice of care therefore did shift quite significantly from my early attention towards the objects, to the more singular concern for the needs of the people representing and represented by the objects. This was further complicated by the closeness that existed or otherwise emerged quickly between myself and the Igbo people I have worked with.

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Anecdotally, I think practicing care within a research setting is almost always about being human and recognising the humanity in the people you work with. There is so much to gain from listening to others, from being humble in the presence of people who are far more knowledgeable than we are, and engaging in reciprocity, of resources, time, effort, and recognition. To return to the earlier question about guiding conceptual frameworks, collaborative, community led ethical frameworks such as the Pacific Research Protocols have helped enormously in adopting practices of care which satisfy the needs of people first, before institutions.

MN: As someone who is deeply attuned to materiality and texture, I'm curious about your experience with photogrammetry and the possibilities it offers for digitally preserving the essence of an object. In your view, how might digital tools account for or meaningfully respond to the absence of touch in the preservation of culturally significant materials?

CNA: My earlier understanding of the possibilities for reconstructing tactile material experiences within a digital space were really challenged during my research. As anyone else familiar with 3D modelling and/or photogrammetry will know, 3D models do not like reflective, smooth, or transparent surfaces. The consequences of relying on photogrammetry to represent objects which had some (or often all) of these textures became quickly apparent. Transparent surfaces became distorted, images of the reflective surfaces were scattered across the software's interface, and smooth blank spaces were erased entirely. The objects were not only fractured or malformed but, suspended in pixels on this unfamiliar platform, also seemed to lose the solidity and tactility which had made their physical forms so distinctive. Yet, through finding a new form within this digital space they were transformed in a process entirely reminiscent of their physical counterparts.

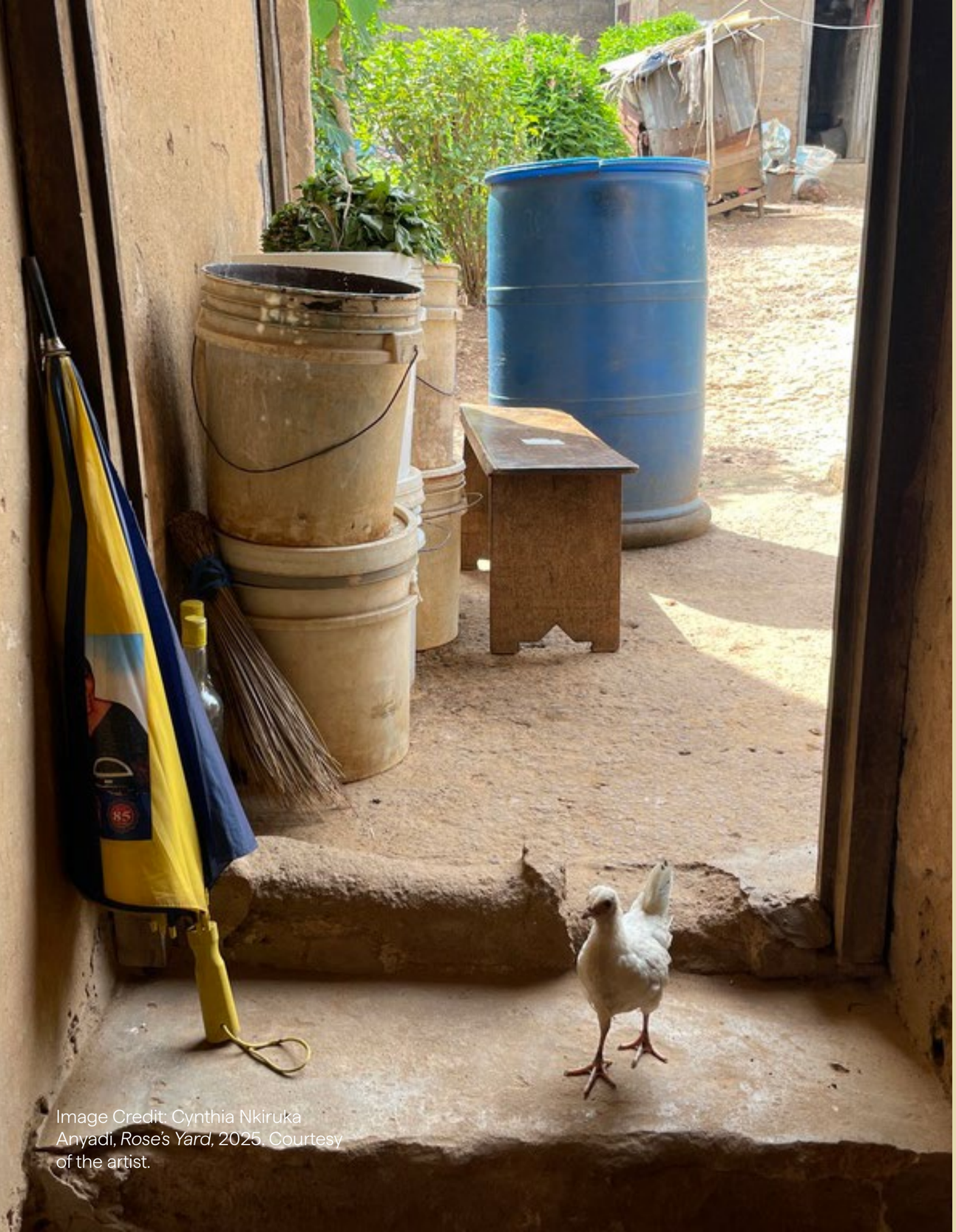

Image Credit: Cynthia Nkiruka Anyadi, *Rose's Yard*, 2025. Courtesy of the artist.

Memorial souvenirs are far from perfect themselves. Each one shows the signs of their use. The departure of these memorial souvenirs in comparison to, for example, safely guarded jewellery or precious heirlooms, is, to me, an essential part of their value. Simultaneously during these processes, I was struck by the almost discordant clarity of the souvenirs' printed images on the digital models. In the midst of warped shapes there still remained the face, name, details of the deceased in stark relief. If their producers could have anticipated that one day the mug which they had designed would be digitized, I have often wondered if they would have chosen to adapt it simply to make modelling 'easier'. Or, instead, if they would have been glad that the details of their loved one demanded focus.

As a wider conversation around digital repatriation has emerged, particularly over the past 5 years, I have thought about how these digital representations are positioned against their physical counterparts. In my own opinion it is not possible for digital tools to account for touch. They can perhaps simulate the sounds and sights which cue our brain to remember the sensation of touching, but the contact itself is elusive. But these tools offer their own unique contributions. I look at the spaces created in Muna's *Mama, in Your Absence*, for example, which finds ways to mirror real world settings, but which also hosts engagements and interactions which are only possible in a digital world. I find inspiring models of meaningful response in, for example, Abira Hussein's Nomad Project, or in the work of organisations such as African Digital Heritage and the Museum of West African Art (MOWAA). In fact, I am constantly reminded through the work of others that there are unlimited possibilities to use the tools around us to preserve and reinvigorate our cultural heritages.

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Image Credit: Cynthia Nkiruka Anyadi, *Florence Nwakaego Anih memorial souvenir*, 2025. Courtesy of the artist.

Muna Nzeribe

In conversation with Cynthia Nkiruka Anyadi

Cynthia Nkiruka Anyadi: I often struggle with reconciling the often inaccessible and esoteric nature of cultural knowledge which is produced within an academic setting. I wonder, what value do you see in extracting your work from the academy, and how do you approach situating it back within your own community?

Muna Nzeribe: I see it more as bringing the academy to my community rather than a full extraction. I say this because people see work that arises from an academic setting or work from someone who has been formally trained in the academy as automatically more rigorous. Most times that may be the case but you have to look at it from an access point of view. However, my issue with it is that the academy started out as this abstract thing. Especially when you look at how information was and is passed down in an Igbo setting. Ingenious programs like the apprentice programs set up to give young Igbo people the tools to be economically autonomous. I am not sure what I am trying to get at here, but I remember reading a conversation between Dawoud Bey and LaToya Ruby Frazier for LaToya's book *The Notion of Family*. Bey highlighted in his question to her the importance of her work "[g]iven that much of documentary work has been predicated on an often disenfranchised or marginalized subject being visualized for a more privileged viewer." In response LaToya said:

"One of my goals is to disrupt the privileged point of view that only educated and elite practitioners can create work about the poor or disenfranchised. Theoretical discourse is empty rhetoric unless it is applied to daily life in a language that anyone can understand. For example, the portraits Huxtables, Mom, and Me [page 64] and Momme (Shadow) [pages 76–77] were shot by my mother, not me. She is fully aware of capturing our relationship as mother/daughter and photographer/sitter. We've always discussed our portraits together. Once she told me that the 11-by-14-inch self-portrait print she held in her hand was not her, it was only an idea or glimpse of who she was in the past. My mother did not have to read Roland Barthes to understand death in a photograph. In a lot of ways *The Notion of Family* was made for me and my mother, initially we were the audience."

This part of the conversation struck a chord and articulated the feelings I had on the exclusivity of the academy quite perfectly. It is not that I don't believe in the value of what is taught, it is that these thoughts don't exist in a vacuum. My worry is about people who are having similar thoughts outside of the academy and don't fall into the academic language conventions to 'properly' articulate themselves. So to answer your question, my continuous approach to situating my work back within my own community is taking the knowledge from the academy and applying it to my personal experience. Through creating these accessible snapshots of my cultural identity which is an embodiment of larger theories circulated in the academy, I hope to strike a chord in my community that has them thinking in a similar vein albeit abstract. My favourite feedback is when people tell me I had them thinking about instances they had everyday encounters with in a different way. This is how art democratizes education. Similar to how Paulo Freire argues in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, I see my community as co-creators of knowledge. I want to dissolve the hierarchy between academic knowledge and community knowledge. My work translates, reframes, and returns theoretical ideas to the people who have always embodied them.

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CNA: Modern technologies and digital worlds are often positioned as abstractions which detract from, or perhaps even undermine, our ability to maintain intimate connections. Yet your work in documentary practice and immersive online world-building speaks directly to your emotional connection to home. Do you have any hopes – or fears – for technology as a future framework for complex, sometimes messy, human emotion?

MN: I have high hopes for technology, but I certainly have fears as well. The messiness of human emotion feels like an apt analogy for technological

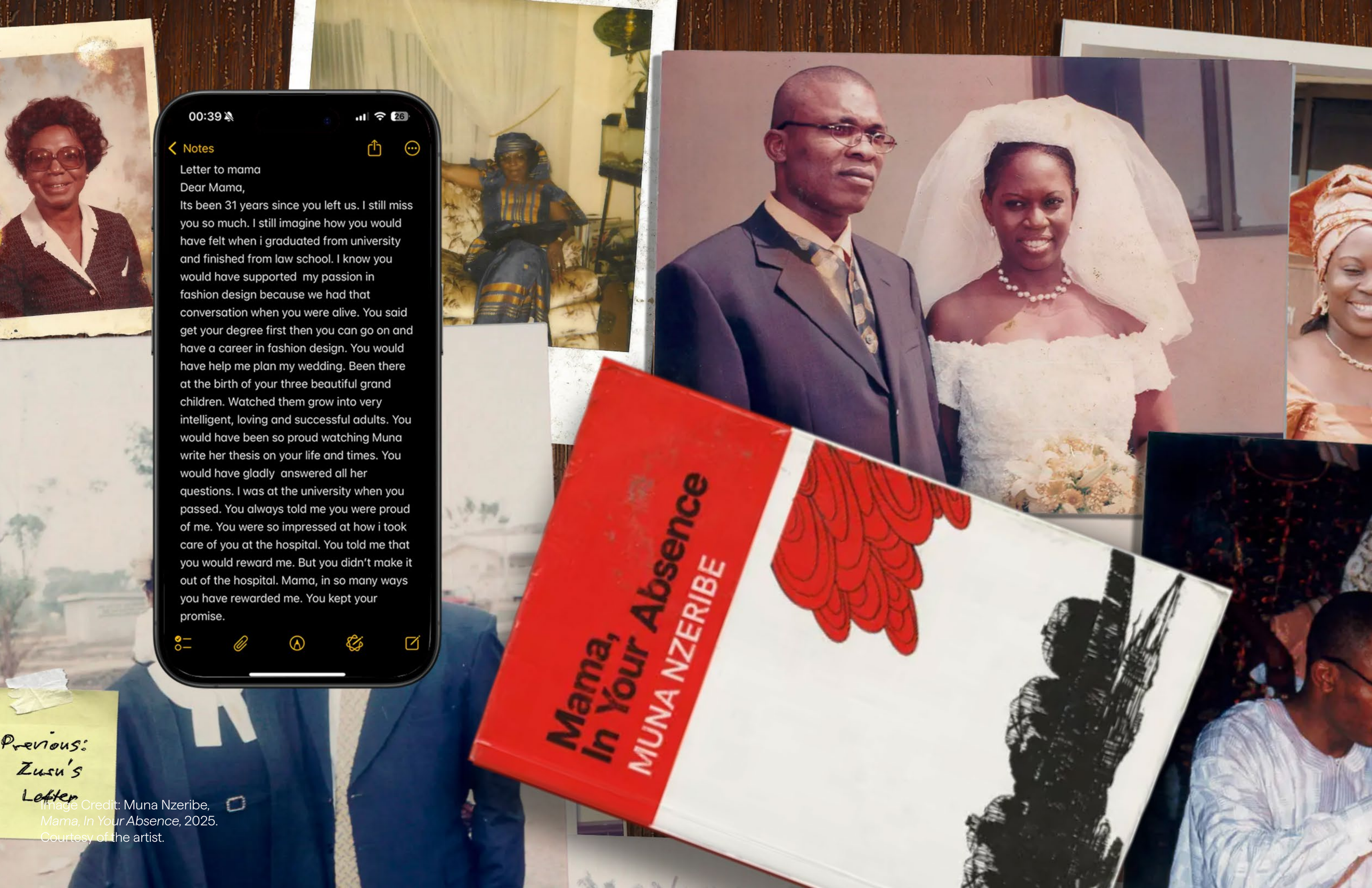

Image Credit: Muna Nzeribe, *Mama, In Your Absence*, 2025. Courtesy of the artist.

innovation and evolution. We have a tendency to wield technology, assemble our own Frankenstein, and then call it a monster. Even when a person's practice is more traditional and uses minimal technology, there is often this sense of looking over one's shoulder in fear of a larger, all-consuming, almost anthropomorphized version of technology coming for them and their resources.

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"We have a tendency to wield technology, assemble our own Frankenstein, and then call it a monster."

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In moments like that, I remind myself that behind every machine there is a human being. This is my guiding principle and my ethical anchor when I use technology. Achieving connection online is difficult because people can hide behind machinery. My hope with my work is to call attention to these gaps while always holding onto reality and shared humanity as my anchor.
To clarify what having technology as a framework means in my practice, I try not to let it become the centre of the work. I always want a tangible accompaniment or a physical anchor to ground the digital and make space for genuine connection.

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"... behind every machine there is a human being."

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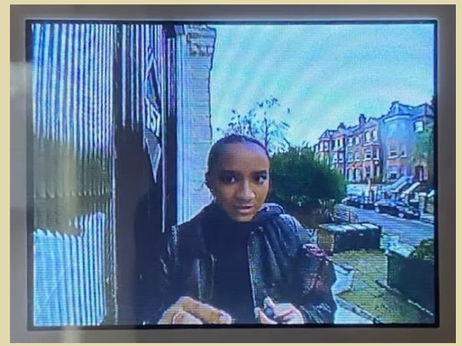
Artist Bios

Cynthia Nkiruka Anyadi



Cynthia Nkiruka Anyadi (she/her) is a cultural geographer based across Enugu, Berlin, and London, where she works at the junction between spatial science and the visual arts. Her practice draws on multi-sensory methods to explore the affective potential of everyday objects, with a focus on understanding how these objects may repair connections fractured by migration.

Cynthia is currently completing a doctoral thesis which traces identity, migration and loss through Igbo Nigerian memorial souvenirs. Her work draws primarily on collaborative explorations into photography, photogrammetry, and film, as a route towards community storytelling.

Muna Nzeribe

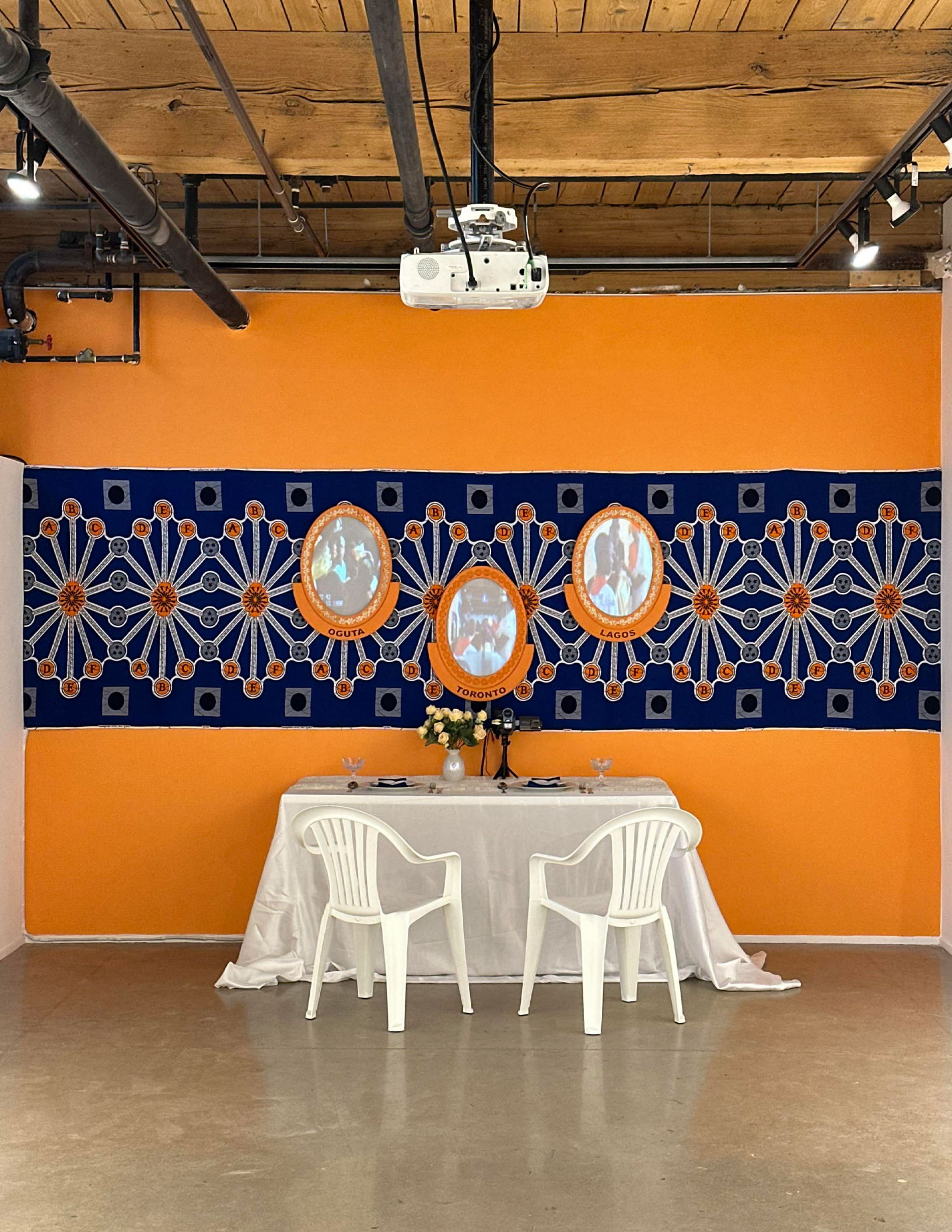
Muna Nzeribe (b. 2001, Lagos, Nigeria) is a multidisciplinary artist and received their MFA in Documentary Media at Toronto Metropolitan University. Their work explores family history, cultural identity, and societal relations through film, photography, and graphic design. Rooted in storytelling, Nzeribe's practice examines the intersections of memory, archives, and personal narratives, often employing collage-like techniques in their video art. Drawing from their upbringing in Lagos and experiences in Toronto, they use art to challenge dominant narratives and reframe historical perspectives. Their current research investigates archival representation, particularly in relation to Igbo women's intergenerational histories. Muna's interactive web documentary is accessible online at www.mamainyourabsence.com.

Gallery TPW is grateful for the generous TD Bank Ready Commitment funding support of the TD Window Vitrine project space.

TD READY COMMITMENT

Front Cover Image Credit: Cynthia Nkiruka Anyadi, *Ezeanyanwu Cletus memorial souvenir*, 2025. Courtesy of the artist.

Back Cover Image Credit: Muna Nzeribe, *Mama, In Your Absence*, 2025. Courtesy of the artist.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