



Search Artsy



Advertisement

Art

Zina Saro-Wiwa's Multimedia Art Connects with Audiences through Food, Drink, and Tears

Ayanna Dozier Mar 16, 2022 5:53pm



[Skip to Main Content](#)

**Zina Saro-Wiwa***Felix Eats Sorgor Salada with Palm Wine, 2022*

Montague Contemporary

Contact for price

Zina Saro-Wiwa works across film and photography to stage intimate encounters that prioritize touch. In her recently closed exhibition “The Illicit Gin Institute” at Montague Contemporary, Saro-Wiwa debuted a new NFT project involving physical bottles of gin, which is part of her ongoing performance series “Illicit Gin Institute” (2021–present). The series draws upon the rain and war deity, Sarogua, of the Ogoni people from the Niger Delta in Nigeria and the ancestral tradition of harvesting palm wine and distilling it into “illicit gin.” The wine was labeled “illicit” by British officers due to their inability to tax it during their occupation of Nigeria in the 1930s and 1940s. Saro-Wiwa makes bottles of palm wine from her craft distillery in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, and uses her photographs to adorn each bottle, turning them into art objects rather than consumer goods. The NFT sale of these gin bottles is open through March 31st.

Although she was born in Nigeria, Saro-Wiwa attended school in London and worked for the BBC as a cultural reporter for 10 years before settling in Brooklyn as an artist in the 2000s. The cross-cultural nature of her practice is evident in her video and photographic series “Table Manners” (2014–16), which was also presented in her recent show at Montague Contemporary. In “Table Manners,” Saro-Wiwa films Nigerians eating directly for the camera. The video piece and the photographic stills emphasize the capacity for political outreach in epicurean communities, cultures that derive pleasure from food and drink.



Search Artsy



Zina Saro-Wiwa

Sarogua Spirit - Kpa Azii (Tree Bark), 2022

Montague Contemporary

Contact for price



[Skip to Main Content](#)



Table Manners refers to the evergreen rules that should

American cultural customs at the dinner table, such as not staring at someone when they eat; enjoying your food silently; and keeping your elbows off the table. All of these customs are broken and confronted in Saro-Wiwa's work as she draws us into the sensuality and pleasure that come from eating. Her photographs capture individuals in this state of vulnerability and remind us of food's existence as sustenance to the human body.

This body of work also comments on food scarcity marked by geopolitics and colonization across the Niger Delta. "When I was younger I found the act of eating sad and solemn. Tragically human," Saro-Wiwa remarked on the series, adding that watching her father eat made her "think of him as vulnerable and in need of protection."





Search Artsy



Mourning Class: Nollywood, 2010

Tiwani Contemporary

Contact for price

Advertisement

Saro-Wiwa's approach to the camera is partially informed by Nollywood (Nigerian Hollywood) cinema. Nollywood has no uniform style, but some common elements include unofficial sequels, low budgets, surrealistic aesthetics, and romantic dramedies. Like Nollywood film, Saro-Wiwa's work is marked by the camera's presence and a "just do it" mentality. This ethos and aesthetic enable Saro-Wiwa to dramatize reality across her video art and photographic practice. In so doing, Saro-Wiwa is able to cope with painful real experiences by choreographing them for the camera, which is especially evident in her 2011 installation *Sarogua Mourning*.

Sarogua Mourning grapples with the artist's inability to mourn the death of her father: poet, author, and human rights activist Ken Saro-Wiwa. He was executed by the Nigerian military regime in 1995. Unable to cry in the years following his death, Saro-Wiwa staged an encounter with the camera where she would permit herself to go to a dark space of grief. The composition of *Sarogua Mourning* is cropped and mirrors the peek-a-boo vantage point of a peep show. There, Saro-Wiwa is featured from bare shoulders

[Skip to Main Content](#) tains crying for 12 minutes. The piece is deeply



Search Artsy



her multidisciplinary practice as a guide to reveal reality, a tool that can provoke a genuine emotion that she, and others, may resist in their daily life, outside of the frame.

Ayanna Dozier is Artsy's Staff Writer.

Further reading in Art



Zina Saro-Wiwa on How Artists
Can Change the Way People Think

Karen Kedmey Sep 28, 2016



The Brooklyn Museum Is
Transforming the Way We Think
about African Art

Karen Kedmey May 3, 2016



The Legacy of Mar
"The Artist is Presen
with New Generat

Ayanna Dozier |

[Skip to Main Content](#)

Get More from Artsy — on the App



Search Artsy



About us

[About](#)

[Jobs](#)

[Press](#)

[Contact](#)

Resources

[Open Source](#)

[Blog](#)

[The Art Genome Project](#)

[Education](#)

Partnerships

[Artsy for Galleries](#)

[Artsy for Museums](#)

[Artsy for Auctions](#)

[Artsy for Fairs](#)

Support

[Talk to a Specialist](#)

[Visit our Help Center](#)

[Buying on Artsy](#)

[© 2022 Artsy](#) [Terms of Use](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Security](#) [Conditions of Sale](#) [ACA Seller's Agreement](#) [Buyer Guarantee](#)
[Do not sell my personal information](#)

