

***Lagos Soundscapes***. Emeka Ogboh, 2019. Berlin, Germany: Kerber. 164 colour and 85 b/w illustrations, bibliography, index, list of works, 216 pp.

Emeka Ogboh's work is well-known. His multimodal art spans countries and subject material, his albums and videos have traveled the world over, and his venture into beer making as social commentary has gained him awards and accolades. His most recent artistic output comes in the familiar package of a soft-cover book entitled *Lagos Soundscapes*. The book offers an aesthetic experience of sound, sight, knowledge and artistry. The volume takes readers through the early work of Ogboh, offering political commentary on the sonic changes happening in Lagos and featuring page after page of photographic evidence of both Ogboh's exhibits and the changing atmosphere in the city. MoMA curator, Ugochukwu-Smooth C. Nzewi, joins Ogboh in outlining the cultural significance of the sound installations at hand, showcasing a dialogue between artist and curator in a collaborative conversation discussing Lagos, sound, and Ogboh's work, and why linking them are paramount in understanding human interaction, neo-liberalism and our individual places in an ever-changing society.

The book itself is structured in a recognisable exhibition publication format, offering readers text interspersed with images of Lagos over time and thick sections of images of Ogboh's various sound works throughout. The foreword, provided by the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of African Art curator, Karen E. Milbourne, contextualises the work of Ogboh, explaining the history of sound art and the perception of the art form as exclusively grounded in Western artistic practice. Milbourne urges readers to rethink their preconceived ideas about soundscape artistry, holding up Lagos as an extremely complex and engaging site for sonic exploration. Ogboh has commented on the false assumption that the soundscape is a strictly Western concept many times throughout his career, and various interviews showcase his deep understanding of, and ties to, the medium. In a recent talk with Art X Media, Ogboh proclaims his deep need to work with sound, stating "we are embedded in sound from birth" before going on to describe the city of Lagos as a true composer of soundscapes unlike any other (Ogboh, Emeka. Lagos, 2 November 2019). His deep connection to the city and its sounds are manifest in every interview he gives, and this book only ventures deeper into the meaning behind his work and the beauty of Lagos soundscapes.

The namesake of this book is restated in its first true section. Simply titled, "Lagos Soundscapes", it is a relatively brisk yet deep dive into the sights and sounds of the city of Lagos. Nzewi articulately describes the booming economic centre that is Lagos, pulling from the work of Ogboh and historical photographs and accounts alike. In this section, we are also presented with a brief overview of Ogboh's own inspiration and predecessors, an inclusion of the artist in the historical overview of the city that further proves his expert position as soundscape artist and city inhabitant. It is here that readers are introduced to a number of earlier works by Ogboh, including his first attempt at soundscaping the city titled, *This is Lagos*, and his subsequent *Lagos Soundscapes*. The title of this book signals the importance of the *Lagos Soundscapes*

project in the canon of Ogboh's work, and as the artist and contributors ponder on the importance of this particular piece, we are navigated through historical facts and artistic accomplishments, a concrete set-up for our first look at the artist's work presented in full page, photographic evidence.

The first suite of work included in the book focuses on many of the sound and multi-media installations outlined in the previous sections. Readers are now able to see snippets of various soundscape projects, signaling the importance of visual aesthetics and symbolism throughout Ogboh's work. In this way, the book works as a companion to the aural experiences of these various soundscapes, and the authors are consistently purposeful in their written commentary, adding anecdotes and information pertinent to the formation and subsequent understanding of each artwork.

The photographs themselves are stunning. Pages bathed in full colour glimpses of the city give the reader the feeling of experiencing the exhibits for themselves, despite many of them having closed years ago. One is invited to view the installation and experience of many of these projects in locations across the globe, from a park in Manchester to a busy street in Cape Town. The written depictions offered in preceding sections of the book of towering speakers of various sizes behind velvet ropes for Ogboh's *LOSlantic* are brought to life in page after page of images, and readers are now able to see for themselves Ogboh's utter fascination with Danfo buses played out in countless images of the yellow and black patterning of the bus reimaged on gallery walls and signage. The book feels as though it is organised as an activity in imaginative understanding, offering readers only written descriptions to spark curiosity before revealing through stylish photographic artistry the reality of those descriptions. These moments of the imagination realised on the page bring a playfulness and interaction to the book in an unexpectedly, magical way.

Following the first suite of images, the reader next encounters interviews with the artist himself. The interviews are the heart of the project, explaining why this book was necessary given the already celebrated status of the artist. Here we learn from Ogboh about his inspirations and catalysts for creating art. We are taught about the gentrification and changing soundscapes and political atmosphere of Lagos. We are told stories of Danfo drivers and given explanations of city planning and noise ordinances. Every preceding word in this book leads to these interviews, all acting as a foreword to the main event, the primary reason for wanting to engage in this book. Each section holds valuable information about Lagos, Ogboh, sound, and life that are necessary to interact with before engaging with Ogboh himself.

The interviews are broken up by additional suites of work featuring stills from videos and photographs of microphone set ups across the world from various past exhibitions. Each batch of photos serves the written words that came before, keeping with the ebb and flow of discussion and the invitation to imagine the artworks followed by visual representation. Photography can be found in the main bodies of text as well as in the major suites of work. Each section of text includes various archival photographs, depictions of daily life in Lagos and snapshots of the artist himself. These images allow

the reader to experience Lagos outside of their own imaginations or memories. The suites of work fluctuate between exhibit photographs and video stills. Images of microphones set up on busy streets are juxtaposed with those of speakers in the museum. Ogboh presents us with views of both his gathering of sound and its installation in temporary homes in museums and parks. He invites us to watch his installation process through photographs of workers installing speakers near a park and gives us an exhibit map to study. These images run from conception to execution in his soundscape visions, allowing an in-depth look at Lagos, sound, and the artist documenting it all.

The book is a compilation of written analysis, interviews, photography and aesthetic sensibilities. It is one of the more handsome art publications I have engaged with, from the quality of the images to the textual spacing and even the placement and sizing of page numbers, every visual aspect of this small rectangular object has been well thought out and considered by Ogboh. His past experience in graphic design is evident in every aspect of the book, and each page is a new presentation of aesthetic quality. This book is a full experience, not just a vessel for knowledge. It is equal parts political commentary, photographic collection, artist biography and soundscape manual. It has a place in home libraries, offices and classrooms alike, easily enjoyed by academics, art critics and casual readers. The language and tone are strong and precise, and the three authors bring their own experiences and voices to the pages. No sentence is bogged down with superfluous jargon, and each point is clear and concise.

Language has obviously been a central focus for the editors and compilers of this publication. The book is presented in both French and English, offering the right side of the pages to English readers and the left to those who better understand French. Though the decision to publish in both French and English was due to Ogboh's working with a Paris based gallery to produce the book, it is still imperative to note the importance of language throughout his work. Ideas of language and inclusion have been themes in a variety of projects by Ogboh. Most notably, his two pieces, *Song of the Union* and its predecessor, *Song of Germans*, focus on multiple languages layered over each other in commentary on unity and diversity. From issues of refugee mistreatment to Brexit and European ruptures, Ogboh has used language as a political tool throughout much of his career with great care. There is a clear line of intentionality in his use of language in previous works, an intentionality that the artist carries through to his textual work in his inclusion of layered language in *Lagos Soundscapes*.

Ogboh is an artist working in many different modes, and in the foreword to this book he is hailed as an artist working with all four senses in his art making. Sight and sound are the obvious modes at play here, but Ogboh has also ventured into working with taste (as seen in his research into the Black experience in Europe through his *Sufferhead Beer Project*) and smell (his most recent focus being on smell as a mnemonic). This begs the question why his book seems to focus on the visual aspects of soundscapes above all else. No audio recordings are included, and taste and smell certainly do not play into this publication. While the lack of sound is noticeable in this project, we can also see this as a deliberate excursion into the sense of sight; a rare

departure from listening to truly immerse ourselves in text and images allowing the reader to focus directly and intentionally on sight alone. *Lagos Soundscapes* inspires the reader throughout to consider what these images trigger in the memory and what sounds are composed internally as the words are processed and images page by. This reads and views as a masterful act of intentionality in Ogbob's work, forcing us to focus on one sense above all else, adding to his body of work an art piece dedicated to the sight and visual experience of Lagos soundscapes.

**Kathleen W. King**, Music Department, University of Virginia