

## 6 Artworks Dealing with the Concept of Walls In Our Uncertain Times



August 16, 2019

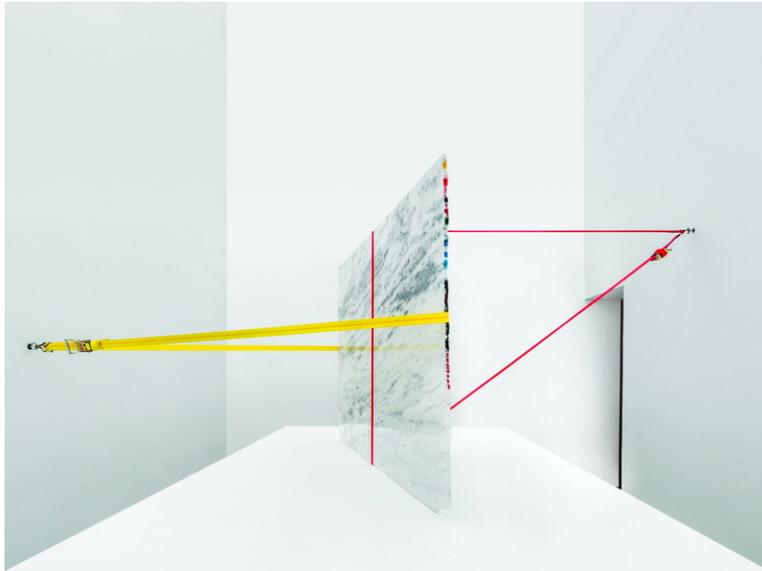
Balasz Takac

Even before 2015 and what is described as **the European migrant crisis**, refugees from different parts of the world suffering from conflicts and ongoing violence used to run to safe environments to remain alive. Whether we speak about the 20th century or modern-day migrations, their definite symbol is **the wall** – a sort of an obstacle hard to cross, sometimes impossible and life-threatening.

The recent times in particular are characterized by **the erection of new walls made to maintain the sovereignty of a certain nation**, primarily to keep (predominately white) Europe from intruders, as migrants are called and perceived by the majority of conservative/right-wing governments throughout the Old continent and beyond. Therefore, **the Wall reflects all the emotional, psychological, and physical effects of living with both real and metaphorical divisions.**

Although various exhibition projects explore the mentioned phenomenon from a multitude of perspectives, the upcoming exhibition set to open in Autumn at **Gropius Bau** in Berlin seems refreshing and promising. Under the title *Walking Through Walls*, it will bring **the works of twenty-eight international artists** dealing

with the notion of the wall in the light of the issues of nationalism, migration, and biopolitics.



Jose Dávila - Untitled (Allure), 2014, Exhibition view State of Rest, OMR, 2014, allure marble, ratchet straps, eye bolts, 177,7 x 301,1 x 550 cm © Jose Dávila & VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2019, Photo: Enrique Macías Martínez

## Behind The Walls – Three Curatorial Points

The curators Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath envisioned the exhibition as a **non-linear experience based on the three points of exploration**. The first deals with **the physical presence of walls** and their function as sites of separation; the second one examines **the impact of the physical and metaphorical walls on those living with them**, while the third underlines **various social and political struggles to overcome existing divisions**.

The show takes into account **the historical context – the specificity of Gropius Bau location** and the surrounding sites

such as a fragment of the Berlin Wall, the Topography of Terror situated on the site of the former headquarters of the Gestapo, the parliament of Berlin, and the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. Bardaouil and Fellrath stated:

*While this exhibition takes the fall of the Berlin Wall 30 years ago as a point of departure, it is primarily concerned with an exploration of the ‘wall in the heads’ as the German colloquialism goes. With the rise of demagoguery*

*across the globe, new walls both real and imagined are being erected through inciting the polarising fears and prejudices of people. The exhibition is, therefore, a reflection on the current moment: an attempt to capture the predicament of division in all its dimensions, and ultimately an assertion of the human will to resist all forms of oppression.*



Dora García - Two Planets Have Been Colliding for Thousands of Years, 2017. Performance and installation. Exhibition view Somewhere Two Planets Have Been Colliding for Thousands of Years, La Verrière Hermès Brussels, 2017. Performers: Erika Schipa & Leen Van Dommelen © Dora García & Isabelle Arthuis, Photo: Isabelle Arthuis

## The Artists

Practically **all the media** (spanning painting, works on paper, sculpture, photography, film, video installation, sound installation, site-specific interventions and performance) will be featured. The works of Aki Sasamoto, Reem al Nasser, Christian Odzuck, Zahrah al Ghamdi, and Siska and Héctor Zamora are **specially commissioned for the upcoming exhibition**, while few site-specific installations by José Bechara, Jose Dávila, Nadia Kaabi-Linke, Regina Silveira and Samson Young will be **adapted to the architectural specificities of the museum building**.

Mona Hatoum's new sculpture, a series of works on paper from the 1970s by Melvin Edwards, and Fred Sandback's 6-part sculptural

construction from 1980 will be **showcased at the Gropius Bau** the first time as well.



Mona Hatoum - A Pile of Bricks III, 2019. Bricks, wood, metal and plastic, 68.5 x 95 x 62 cm © Mona Hatoum, Photo: White Cube (Theo Christelis)

## Walking Through Walls at Gropius Bau

The exhibition will be accompanied by a **dense program** of artist talks, film screenings and curator-led tours, while a **fully illustrated bilingual catalog** will provide further analyzes of the concept and each work.

*Walking Through Walls* will be on view at [Gropius Bau](#) in Berlin from **12 September 2019** to **19 January 2020**.

To bring you closer to the exhibition, we selected six exceptional works dealing with the concept of walls and separation that are about to be displayed.

Featured image: Mona Hatoum - *Waiting is Forbidden*, 2006–2008. Enamel on steel © Mona Hatoum, courtesy Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin / Paris. All images courtesy Gropius Bau.





## Javier Téllez - Shadow Play, 2014

The first artwork on our list is titled *Shadow Play* and was made by a Venezuelan artist **Javier Téllez**. It takes a 19th century shadow play drama as a starting point for narrating the stories told by the refugees; their gestures reveal silently the horrors of exile: oppression, destruction, misery, censorship, and death. Alberto Giacometti's original bronze sculpture of 1947 *Hand* appears as a **threatening moving form** in several different scenes and observers and navigates the remaining human form silhouettes.

Featured image: Javier Téllez - Shadow Play, 2014. Film installation, 35 mm film projection, 10:56 min, film still. Courtesy the artist & Galerie Peter Kilchmann.



## José Bechara - Ok, Ok Let's Talk, 2006

The work *Ok, Ok Let's Talk* (about impossible dialogues) by **José Bechara** was made in 2006 as a large-scale commission for the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo in Brazil, and the Spanish contemporary art museum Patio Herreriano. The installation is made of **pieces of domestic furniture**, in this case approximately fifty wood dining tables, to create a simple, formal geometric platform. Just a couple of them are slightly pulled up so the unexpected breaks occur in the steady surface. There are also two chairs emerging although they are apparently squeezed by the surrounding tables. The piece, in general, refers to **the impossibility of building dialogue in every aspect of our daily reality private or public, social or political**.

Featured image: José Bechara - Ok, Ok Let's Talk, 2006. Wood tables and

chairs, variable dimensions. Partial view of the installation at Patio Herreriano, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Español, Valladolid, Spain, 2008. Photo: José Bechara.



### Anri Sala - 1395 Days without Red, 2011

In 2011, the artist [Anri Sala](#) collaborated with Šejla Kamerić and Ari Benjamin Meyers on a **cinematographic project** titled *1395 Days without Red*. The final result was two films presented simultaneously as two separate installations, and both reflect the different perspectives of the artists concerning the same subject matter.

Namely, the project is focused on **the siege of Sarajevo**, which lasted from 5 April 1992 until 29 February 1996. According to the UN, during this period the city's population decreased 435,000 to 300,000; around 10,000 people were killed and over 56,000 were severely injured by sniper bullets and grenades. The city was

practically torn down with over thousands of homes and public buildings in one of the longest sieges in European history.

The two films deal with **the trauma of the Sarajevo people caused by the conflict** by focusing on a series of daily routes in today's Sarajevo to recreate what was once known as *Sniper Alley*.

Featured image: Anri Sala - 1395 Days without Red, 2011. Single-channel HD video and 5.0 surround sound, 43:46 min. In collaboration with Liria Bégéja, from a project by Šejla Kamerić and Anri Sala in collaboration with Ari Benjamin Meyers. © Anri Sala, Šejla Kamerić, Artangel, SCCA/2011, courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, Hauser & Wirth, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2019.



### Tagreed Darghouth - Vision Machines; Shall You See Me Better Now?, 2019

The new series called *Vision Machines* by Lebanese born British artist **Tagreed Darghouth** feature cropped depictions of cameras, drones, satellites, or any other hi-tech device used for surveillance. These works are underlining the scaring mechanisms of the contemporary society marked by freight, control and nationalist politics, and are the latest extension of her **politically charged exploration of hidden forms of violence and misconception of the other**.

Featured image: Tagreed Darghouth - Vision Machines; Shall You See Me Better Now?, 2019. Acrylic on canvas, 60 x 75 cm. Courtesy: the artist & Saleh Barakat Gallery.



All



Search...


**WIDEWALLS**

Artists Art Venues Events Magazine Auctions Log In



### Gustav Metzger - In Memoriam, 2005

**Gustav Metzger** was a British radical artist and political activist associated with the Fluxus movement in the 1960s. This particular installation was made in 2005 and it deals **the refugee history of the Jewish people**, subject matter Metzger continually explored throughout his work. It consists of a labyrinth of cardboard objects standing at an angle of 90°; the person can walk into it, but in one point the objects density and block one's passage.

Featured image: Gustav Metzger - In Memoriam, 2005. Installation. Photo: Wojciech Olech, courtesy Centre of Con-temporary Art in Toruń.





## Mona Hatoum – Waiting is Forbidden, 2006–2008

The last artwork on our list was made by a critically acclaimed artist [Mona Hatoum](#). It is a blue enamel sign covered with the sentence "Waiting is forbidden" in both English and the Arabic (although the second version is more accurately translated as "No stopping and no loitering"). The object functions as a **street sign**, a **warning** intended for the marginalized groups whether they are homeless people or, in the case of Hatoum's practice, refugees. It relates to the artist's personal experience of displacement when she migrated to London after the Lebanese civil war started.

Featured image: Mona Hatoum – Waiting is Forbidden, 2006–2008. Enamel on

steel © Mona Hatoum, courtesy Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin / Paris.

### Follow These Artists

Anri Sala

[FOLLOW](#)

Mona Hatoum

[FOLLOW](#)

### FEATURED VIDEOS

Powered by [\(primis\)](#)

NOW  
PLAYING



### Read Other Interesting Stories



### The Significance of 'Land' - The Art of Otobong Nkanga

Exhibition  
Announcements  
| Balasz Takac

Gropius Bau is about to open an exhibition of immersive installations by the influential Nigerian-born Belgian environmental artist Otobong Nkanga.

**READ MORE** →



### Comic and Street Artists Tear Down Walls at Urban Spree

Graffiti & Street Art,  
Exhibition  
Announcements  
| Elena Martinique

The upcoming exhibition at Urban Spree will explore the phenomenon of the wall through powerful works of art by 30 contemporary artists.

**READ MORE** →



### The World As Our Garden of Earthly Delights at Gropius Bau

Exhibition  
Announcements,  
Interviews  
| Balasz Takac

In an interview, curator Stephanie Rosenthal and four artists reveal details regarding the upcoming exhibition Garden of Earthly Delights at Gropius Bau.

**READ MORE** →

## The Significance of 'Land' - The Art of Otobong Nkanga



July 3, 2020

Balasz Takac

The liaison between **the environment and politics** has never been more obvious as it is in recent times. Almost every scholarly or journalistic text

Every secretary or journalistic text concerning the climate crisis points out the pervasive nature of capitalism and hunger for profit that causes more pollution across the globe. All the resources are equally endangered, however, **it seems that soil unlike air and water still attracts most of the attention of the political elites** not only for agricultural and architectural expansion but for symbolical maintenance of the (national) identity.

At the center of the artistic practice of the renowned Nigerian-born Belgian artist **Otobong Nkanga** lays this complex question that requires multidisciplinary dissection which this artist devotedly tends to achieve. She is best known for **the citation and translation of the famous performance piece *Baggage* (1972) by Allan Kaprow**, for which she shipped bags of sand from Antwerp to Lagos and vice versa, **to expose the geopolitical and colonial aspects of the relationship between her two homes**, Belgium and Nigeria. Nkanga perceives soil/land as a site of economic, social and ecological, contestation and conflict, and her multimedia works are a result of intensive research **rooted in performativity, especially poetry and storytelling**.

Furthermore, the artist proposes a new paradigm of the term land as a discursive and geological formation that goes beyond the physicality of soil, mapped territories, and earth.

The upcoming exhibition titled *There's No Such Thing as Solid Ground* at **Gropius Bau** will **articulate global systems of extraction and exploitation of flora, fauna, humans and natural resources** (in this particular case minerals) with a series of durational installations, performance works, a new wall drawing and multi-channel sound piece.





Otobong Nkanga - Solid Maneuvers, 2015. Installation view Crumbling Through Powdery Air, Portikus, 2015.  
Photo: Helena Schlichting, courtesy: Portikus

## Otobong Nkanga Responds To The Gropius Bau Program

Otobong Nkanga's authentic approach responded perfectly to **the themes concerning land, the Anthropocene, interspecies communication, global resources, conflict** that are explored through the Gropius Bau exhibition program. In 2019 the artist was part of the museum's artist residency when the idea about the exhibition was generated and further navigated by the curators Clara Meister and Stephanie Rosenthal, Director of the Gropius Bau, who stated the following:

*Many of the artists we will work with over the coming years are deeply concerned with themes of care and repair, reflecting our time of ecological crisis and social turbulence. The Gropius Bau has its own troubled history. During the building's renovation after the war, the marks of damage were not covered over but deliberately left visible, a reminder of the need to acknowledge trauma and find ways to look to the future.*



Left: Otobong Nkanga - Diaspore, 2014. Site-specific installation and performance 14 Rooms, Basel. Inkjet-printed topographical map laminated to the floor, *Cestrum nocturnum*, plant pots © Otobong Nkanga, photo: Wim van Dongen / Right: Otobong Nkanga, 2017. Belgian Art Prize Portrait with artwork *In a Place Yet Unknown*, 2017 © Otobong Nkanga, photo: Yannik Sas

## The Works

The exhibition will start with the evolving installation called *Taste of a Stone* (2010-2020), an **indoor garden** crafted specifically for this

historical gallery. Consisting of gravel and boulders appears serene, this artificial landscape tends **to evoke the legacies of forced labor, geological finds, and crumbled earthly material** where a series of lectures, workshops, and social encounters will take place.

The visitors will also be able to experience a performance-installation *Diaspore* (2014/2020) consisting of **women of African heritage carrying potted *Cestrum nocturnum*** (night-blooming jasmine); this piece will be focused on generating narratives concerning oral memory, ancestry, rootedness, abandonment, and black female presence.

On display will be the recomposed version of a multi-channel sound work *Wetin You Go Do? Oya Na* (2020) that critically **examines power structures and fragility during difficult times**; consisting of echoes, chants, polyphonic tones, and utterances in English and Nigerian, it functions as an homage to the acts of resilience, submission, and rebellion.

Nkanga's installation *Manifest of Strains* (2018) that deals with environmental justice, collective rage, and technology will be featured as well. The same considers **the western everyday luxuries in regards to the minerals they're made from** to reflect upon materialism, industrial exploitation, and the environmental impact mass industry has on African communities.

The final project to be presented will be the one called *Carved to Flow*, launched at documenta 14 (2017), that **deals with the production of knowledge**, communal production, and participation. Inspired by the African architecture, it will be located on the ground floor in the form of a **workshop that results in the making and distribution of O8 Black Stone soap**. This particular product consisting of nourishing oils and butter from Africa, the Middle East and the Mediterranean basin (all sites of current migrations) and charcoal (the remnant of organic matter that is carbonized in the absence of oxygen) will function as an amalgam of crisis, destruction, extraction, and mismanagement.



Otobong Nkanga - *The Breath From Fertile Grounds*, 2017. Wall drawing, acrylic, vinyl, wood, glass, peat, plants, acid water © Otobong Nkanga, photo: Kasia Kaminska

## Otobong Nkanga at the Gropius Bau

The upcoming exhibition will also take into consideration **the historical context of the location of Gropius Bau** to pose questions concerning our relationship to the land in the time of global crisis, the notion of belonging, and borders. The visitors will have a unique chance to plunge into Nkanga's projects and learn more about **the urgency of caring and sharing practices** that should move from merely anthropomorphic view to a more universal and all-encompassing agency of environmental and other species preservation.

*Otobong Nkanga: There's No Such Thing as Solid Ground* will be on display at [Gropius Bau](#) in Berlin **from 10 July until 13 December 2020**.

### Studio Visit with Otobong Nkanga, Gropius Bau Artist in Residence

#### Studio Visit with Otobong Nkanga



Featured image: Otobong Nkanga - *The Breath From Fertile Grounds*, 2017. Wall drawing, acrylic, vinyl, wood, glass, peat, plants, acid water © Otobong Nkanga, photo: Kasia Kaminska; *Carved to Flow*, 2017. Public program sessions, *The Workstation*, 2017 (collaboration with Evi Lachana and Maya Tounta), *documenta 14*, Athens © Otobong Nkanga, photo: Wim van Dongen. All images courtesy Gropius Bau.

#### Read Other Interesting Stories





### Toyin Ojih Odutola's Immersive Barbican Commission Soon On View

Exhibition  
Announcements  
| Balasz Takac

The Barbican is about to open a show featuring new drawing-based installation by Toyin Ojih Odutola that explores the power relations in a fictitious ancient community.

[READ MORE →](#)



### Overlooked No More - Evelyne Axell at Muzeum Susch

Exhibition  
Announcements  
| Balasz Takac

The works of the overlooked Belgian pop artist Evelyne Axell, who was tutored by the Surrealist master René Magritte, will be soon on display at Muzeum Susch.

[READ MORE →](#)



### Australia Celebrates the Pioneering Artist Joy Hester

Exhibition  
Announcements, Art  
History  
| Balasz Takac

Heide Museum of Modern Art in Melbourne celebrates the acclaimed Australian Modernist artist Joy Hester with the grand retrospective.

[READ MORE →](#)

## Toyin Ojih Odutola's Immersive Barbican Commission Soon On View



July 20, 2020

[Błasz Takac](#)

Identity has become a central focal point found in many artistic practices worldwide. However, what makes the good ones stand out is a particular stylistic and conceptual

framework that transcends the chosen medium.

An example to prove this claim is **the excellent drawing-based practice** of the Nigerian-born American artist **Toyin Ojih Odutola**.

By using [drawing](#) to capture her imagination and the fictitious myths related to the legacies of African storytelling, the artist tends to articulate her own identity in a more *behind the scenes* performative manner. Therefore, her multidisciplinary works **examine familiar histories and propose constructed realities**.

A new **site-specific installation** titled *A Countervailing Theory* by Ojih Odutola will be presented at **The Barbican**, as the artist's first-ever UK commission. Ojih Odutola's new work is **an installation of epic dimensions** that sprawls throughout the 90-meter long gallery along with **an immersive soundscape** specially crafted by renowned conceptual sound artist **Peter Adjaye** for this occasion.



Toyin Ojih Odutola - Imitation Lesson; Her Shadowed Influence from A Countervailing Theory (2019) © Toyin Ojih Odutola. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

## The Artistic Journey of Toyin Ojih Odutola

[Toyin Ojih Odutola](#) continually explores the notion of identity and the role it has in the historical context, for example in series such as *The Treatment* (2015-17), *Scenes of Exchange* (2018), and the recent one *Tell Me A Story, I Don't Care If It's True* (2020). By focusing on the Black bodies, Ojih Odutola **reclaims the historical representational canons** while at the same time accentuating the texture of the skin to achieve intriguing luminous effects.

The focus on corporeality, the landscape, and domestic interiors in recent series speak even more about **the layers of personal and collective histories of the depicted subjects**. The [portrait paintings](#) for Ojih Odutola becomes an artistic vehicle to elevate the medium of drawing, to express highly emotional states and tackle social and political implications regarding Black presence.





**Left:** Toyin Ojih Odutola - What Her Daughter Sees (2018) © Toyin Ojih Odutola. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York / **Right:** Toyin Ojih Odutola - Representatives of State (2016-2017) © Toyin Ojih Odutola. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

## The Installment

The Barbican exhibition consists of **forty drawings executed in pastel, charcoal, and chalk**. The narrative takes place in the surreal landscape inspired by the rock formations of Plateau State in central Nigeria and features a fictional prehistoric civilization, dominated by female rulers and male laborers. Each work stands **as a separate sequence in the storyboard** and tends to enable the visitor a possibility to edit their own narrative as they like.



Based on a wide range of sources, from ancient history to popular culture, Ojih Odutola examines **the power dynamics within this community** while commenting on the contemporary circumstances in her home country, but in America and beyond.



Toyin Ojih Odutola - To See and To Know; Future Lovers from A Countervailing Theory (2019) © Toyin Ojih Odutola. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

## Toyin Ojih Odutola at Barbican

This exhibition will be accessible **according to the new safety measures** meaning timed entry slots, safe flow of visitors through space, and booked tickets in advance.

A catalog featuring a **new text by acclaimed writer Zadie Smith and an interview with the artist** will accompany the exhibition.

*Toyin Ojih Odutola: A Countervailing Theory* will be on display at

Curve, [The Barbican](#) in London from 11 August 2020 until 24 January 2021.

Featured images: Toyin Ojih Odutola - A Forbidden Impulse from A Countervailing Theory (2019) © Toyin Ojih Odutola. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York; Mating Ritual from A Countervailing Theory (2019) © Toyin Ojih Odutola. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. All images courtesy The Barbican.

## Read Other Interesting Stories



### 10 Must-Read Black Art History Books

Top Lists, Art History, Book(s) in Focus  
| Elena Martinique

We have compiled a list of ten black art history books to educate yourself on the subject - courtesy of the art historian Alayo Akinkugbe.

[READ MORE →](#)



### The Black Experience Behind Kevin Beasley's NBA Jerseys

Exhibition Announcements  
| Balasz Takac

The current online exhibition at Casey Kaplan by the artist Kevin Beasley takes into considerations the jerseys worn by NBA players.

[READ MORE →](#)



### Navigating The Complexities of Human Experiences - Amoako Bofo at Mariane Ibrahim

Exhibition Announcements  
| Balasz Takac

This Autumn, Mariane Ibrahim Gallery from Chicago will present a solo exhibition of new works by the Ghanaian born Austrian artist Amoako Bofo.

[READ MORE →](#)

## WIDEWALLS

We provide art lovers and art collectors with one of the best places on the planet to discover modern and contemporary art. We aim at providing better value

**ABOUT WIDEWALLS**  
About Us  
Terms Of Use  
Privacy Policy  
Cookies Policy  
Contact Us  
Jobs

**PARTNERSHIPS**  
Widewalls For Galleries  
Widewalls For Auction Houses  
Widewalls For Investors  
Media Partners  
Contributors  
Advertising



for money  
than most.

© 2013-2020 Widewalls | Modern & Contemporary Art Resource