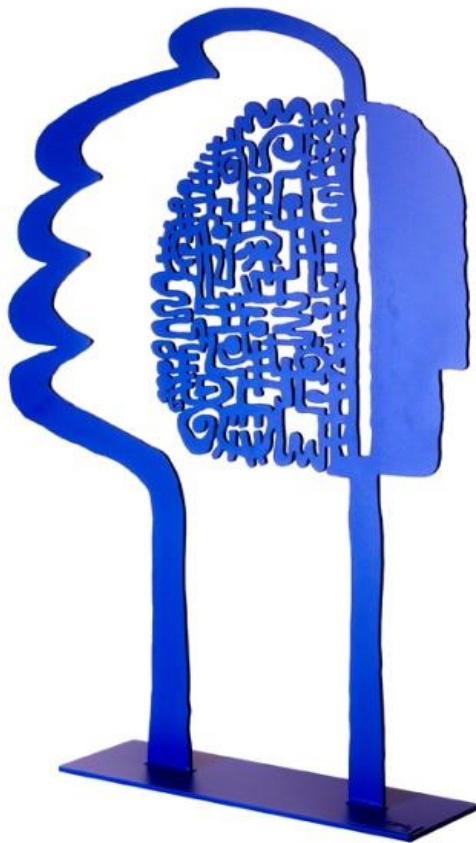


Victor Ekpuk
Marks and Objects

Aicon Gallery Exhibition: May 30th – June 22nd, 2019
Press Preview & V.I.P Reception: Thursday, May 30th 2019
35 Great Jones St, New York NY 10012



Victor Ekpuk, *The Philosopher*, 2018
Powder coated steel, 28 x 36 x 6 in.

We are delighted to present *Marks and Objects*, Aicon Art's debut solo exhibition of Nigerian-American artist **Victor Ekpuk**. Guided by the aesthetic philosophy *nsibidi*, Victor Ekpuk's work embraces a wide spectrum of meaning that is rooted in African and global contemporary art discourses. The exhibition comprises three bodies of work - a series of recent canvases that incorporate impasto, a suite of drawings that offer early examples of the artist's mark-making and totemic sculptures that are informed by the artist's marks and take on a life and scale of their own. The exhibition concludes with a site-specific room installation for which the artist has come to be known for and incorporate drawings directly on the surface. His varying range of works indicate his interest in assimilating a simulacrum around these universal marks and objects. In Ekpuk's own words "The subject matter of my work deals with the human condition explained through themes that are both universal and specific: family, gender, politics, culture and identity."

Ekpuk's art builds upon the tension between art and writing, exemplified by his use of gestures that create the illusion of text. This practice bears resonance with *nsibidi*, an integral feature of ritual and art in the Cross-River region in southeastern Nigeria and southwestern Cameroon. *Nsibidi* is an open-ended linguistic system, with deletions, creations and variations across time and geographic space. It continues to be used today.



Victor Ekpuk, *Mickey on Broadway*, 2014
 Found objects on wood panel, 5 panels 84 x 36 in. each

Ekpuk's iconography elucidates mark-making to be the motto of his artistic bent. The titles given to the works such as *The Philosopher*, reflect his folkloric ways of understanding the secular, to which the narratives of sacred and the profane intermix creating a creative universal expression. With his steel sculptures, Ekpuk engages the viewer in dialogue that opens up room for interpretation. *The Philosopher* gives the audience a beautiful multidimensional view of iconic forms in his brilliant blue color powder and imbedded with *Nsibidi* glyphs. Ekpuk's *Mickey on Broadway* incorporates found objects from Disneyland to elevate the icon of Mickey into the composition of *nsibidi* characters. This placement of Mickey's mask on mythical bodies of *nsibidi* marks brings both the subjects: marks and objects, together in one composition – an unusual gesture for the artist. It is indicative of a self-referential tendency in his work – one that fuses folk and pop culture.

Born in 1964, Ekpuk trained at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, in southwestern Nigeria, where he was first exposed to drawing. He developed his minimalist approach of reducing form while working as a cartoonist for Daily Times, a leading Nigerian newspaper, in the 1990s. He considers drawing a fundamental aspect of his art practice, which also includes painting, printmaking, collage, sculpture, installation, and public art projects. Ekpuk's works have been shown at **Institut du Monde Arabe** in Paris, **12th Havana Biennial**, **Dakar Biennial**, **The Tang museum**, **Hood Museum**, **Fowler Museum**, **Museum of Art and Design**, **Newark Museum**, **The World Bank**, **Smithsonian Institution National Museum of African Art**, **New Museum of Contemporary Art**, and the **1st Johannesburg Biennial**. His artworks are in permanent collections of **The Smithsonian Institution National Museum of African Art**, **The World Bank**, **Newark Museum**, **Hood Museum**, **Krannert Art Museum**, **United States Art in Embassies Art Collection**, and **Fidelity Investment Art Collection**. Ekpuk has been awarded commissions by major museums in the United States. In 2016, he designed trophies awarded to recipients of the museum's first African Art Awards by The Smithsonian Institution National Museum of African Art. In 2017, he completed a large-scale 30 x 18ft. centerpiece mural commission at the North Carolina Museum of Art in the African art gallery. He is currently commissioned by Penguin Random House Publishers to illustrate new covers of popular books by Africa's most renowned author, Chinua Achebe.

Please contact Aicon Art (dheeya@aicongallery.com) for more information.

35 Great Jones St, New York NY 10012 +1.212.726.6092 newyork@aicongallery.com