

MEDIA RELEASE

[University Galleries of Illinois State University](#) is pleased to present [Kambui Olujimi](#)'s solo exhibition, *The Rock that Cuts the Night in Two* from September 28 through December 10, 2023. This survey exhibition encompasses all four galleries and the lobby.

The Rock that Cuts the Night in Two features Olujimi's expansive and diverse output, including videos, drawings, paintings, photographs, silkscreens, sculptures, installations, and textiles made by the artist from 2005 through 2023. Embedded with a sense of duration and exploration of memory, the exhibition demonstrates Olujimi's long-term interest in both the construction and deconstruction of mythic spaces, via memories, monuments, and other forms of memorials. In the artist's words, he "mines the collective psyche as a source of social and political commentary and brings them out of the world of the implicit. Once given gravity, weight, and shape, it becomes possible to reveal their incongruities and illusory nature."

The exhibition includes work from multiple series, many of which were long-term projects ranging from three to ten years. By presenting these bodies of work simultaneously, it becomes possible to glean the overall weight and significance of Olujimi's practice over the past two decades. For example, this exhibition traces the evolution of Olujimi's research related to the history of Depression-era dance marathons in the United States. Lasting for weeks or months at a time, these marathons were described by curator José Carlos Diaz as "acts of performative desperation." For over a decade, Olujimi has created performances, installations, videos, and long-exposure photographs that explore the underlying implications of these events and examine how dance marathons embody, in his words, "endurance, defiance, and a desire to live beyond the capacities we have internalized."

Watercolor paintings from Olujimi's series *When Monuments Fall* attempt at grappling with the impact of historical monuments worldwide that were created to mythologize and perpetuate global white supremacy. The artist depicts them in various states of revision or removal; for example, a bronze equestrian statue wrapped in ropes and about to be toppled from its pedestal, or a cloth draped over the bust of a Confederate general who was also the first Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan. Small-scale ink drawings from Olujimi's *QUARANTINE* series capture his reactions in real-time during the COVID-19 pandemic as he processed events such as Minneapolis's 3rd Precinct on fire following George Floyd's murder, mailboxes removed during mail-in voting for the 2020 election, and mass burials of unclaimed bodies on New York's Hart Island. Seen three years after the events took place, the works from *QUARANTINE* provide an opportunity to reflect further on the urgency, grief, and unresolved questions of that period and the reverberations still felt today.

Sixty ink drawings from Olujimi's five-year series *Walk With Me* sensitively memorialize the artist's mentor and "guardian angel," Catherine Arline. She was a beloved pillar of the community in the artist's neighborhood when he was growing up. Begun after her death, Olujimi created the series to honor her memory and legacy and to process his own mourning. *We Became Statues*, a 22-minute video that includes Olujimi's interviews with Arline, is featured with other videos created since 2005.

Olujimi's ability to weave together his personal experiences with global, and even cosmic, trajectories can be seen in *Wayward North*, a three-year interdisciplinary project rooted in cartography, astronomy, navigation, and storytelling. Olujimi wrote a novella, which he describes as a "mythology" that is "a mix between personal biography and historical as well as current events." Through twelve monumental textiles, each representing one month of the year, Olujimi explores the constellations of the northern and southern hemisphere. For this exhibition—which is titled for a quote from the novella—three of the twelve textiles are on view at a time, so an entire season is visible at once. They

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 20, 2023

will be switched at even intervals until all four seasons have been exhibited. Each rotation will feature a public reading of Olujimi's accompanying texts.

This exhibition is the center point of multiple programs in University Galleries' 50th anniversary celebration. Olujimi is delivering a public artist lecture. Readings and performances are presented by university and high school students. University Galleries' staff is leading art-making workshops for ISU students, K-12 students, and community members. Sensory-friendly times, scavenger hunts, and AR experiences are available. Virtual and in-person curator-led tours are available by appointment. Field trip reimbursements are available for K-12 schools and community organizations.

Kambui Olujimi: *The Rock that Cuts the Night in Two* is curated by Kendra Paitz, University Galleries' director and chief curator. An exhibition catalogue is forthcoming in 2024. This exhibition and programming are supported by University Galleries' grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, Illinois Arts Council Agency, Alice and Fannie Fell Trust, Harold K. Sage Foundation, and the Illinois State University Foundation Fund. Workshops and field trip reimbursements are supported by the Lori Baum and Aaron Henkelman University Galleries Community Fund.

Artist biography

Kambui Olujimi is an artist, filmmaker, and writer. His work has been screened or exhibited at Sundance Film Festival; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; MASS MoCA, North Adams, Massachusetts; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid; Kunsthal Rotterdam, Netherlands; Para Site, Hong Kong; and on the screens in New York City's Times Square. His work was also featured in the 2023 *Sharjah Biennial* in the United Arab Emirates. Olujimi has been awarded residencies from Black Rock Senegal, Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, and MacDowell. He has received grants, commissions, or fellowships from the Jerome Foundation, NYSCA/NYFA, MTA Arts & Design, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. His work has been reviewed in *The New Yorker*, *Artforum*, *The New York Times*, *Art in America*, *Brooklyn Rail*, *The Guardian*, and CNN. Olujimi was born and raised in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn. He received his M.F.A. from Columbia University. He is based in New York City.

Events and programming

All events are free and open to the public.

- **Opening events**

Thursday, September 28

4:00 p.m.: Artist lecture by Kambui Olujimi

5:00 - 6:00 p.m.: Opening reception

- **Independent drawing hours**

September 29 from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. October 27 from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. November 29 from noon to 1:00 p.m. No registration required. Materials provided.

- **Sensory-friendly hours**

Saturdays from 11:00 a.m. to noon. (September 30, November 4, November 11, November 18, and December 2) and by appointment.

- **Drop-in art-making workshops**

Saturdays from noon to 2:00 p.m. (September 30, October 14, November 4, November 11, and December 9). No registration required. Materials and instruction provided.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 20, 2023

- **Stop-motion animation workshop**

Friday, November 10 from 5:30 to 8:00 p.m.

Ages 18 and up. [Registration required](#). Materials and instruction provided.

- **Readings and performances**

To be announced via University Galleries' website and social media.

- Field trip program, curator-led tours, and workshops available by appointment throughout the exhibition. Reimbursements are available for K-12 schools or community organizations to offset the costs of transportation. Please contact University Galleries at Gallery@IllinoisState.edu or (309) 438-5487 to schedule an appointment.

University Galleries

University Galleries, a unit in the Wonsook Kim College of Fine Arts, is located at 11 Uptown Circle, Suite 103, at the corner of Beaufort and Broadway streets. Parking is available in the Uptown Station parking deck located directly above University Galleries—the first hour is free, as well as any time after 5:01 p.m.

You can find [University Galleries](#) on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#), and sign up to receive email updates through the [newsletter](#). Please contact Gallery@IllinoisState.edu or call (309) 438-5487 if you need to arrange an accommodation to participate in any events related to this exhibition.