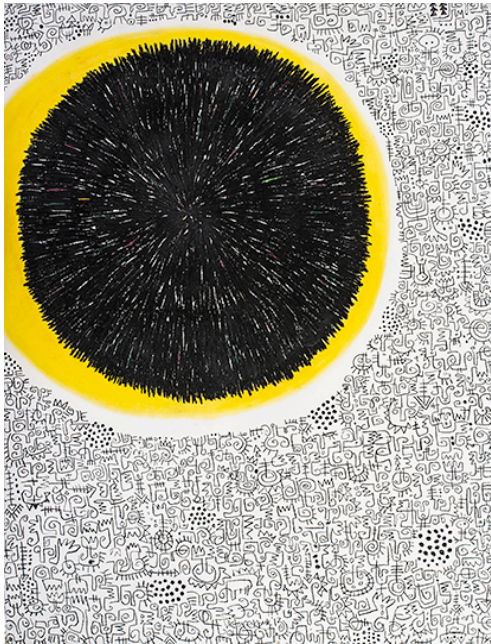


## Hood Museum of Art Welcomes Celebrated Nigerian Artist Victor Ekpuk



Hanover, N.H.—March 3, 2015—Victor Ekpuk composes masterful and intricate arrangements of script-like forms in a staccato fashion, with symbols ricocheting off each other across carefully amassed picture surfaces. His visual language evolved from the ideographic and gestural *nsibidi*, the communication system of the Ekpe secret society, a trans-ethnic men’s association active in the southern border regions of Nigeria and Cameroon. Early in Ekpuk’s career, he was mostly interested in *nsibidi* as an aesthetic resource, but he has since become adroit at inventing his own scripts of dots, scratches, scrawls, contrived signs, and schematized figures. As Ekpuk has often stated, memory—understood as a stream of consciousness that encapsulates human experiences, lived and imagined, inherited or received, personal and collective—is at the core of his practice. *Nsibidi* (as well as the artist’s invented signs) represent this idea in his work, inscribed and reiterated on canvas, acid-free paper, board, and, recently, walls.

*Auto-Graphics* presents recent work by Ekpuk; it was curated by Allyson Purpura at the Krannert Art Museum, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and is on view at the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, from April 18 to August 2. The Hood will celebrate the opening of the exhibition by hosting Ekpuk for a week while he presents a drawing performance, creating a mural directly on the wall of the Hood’s Lathrop Gallery from April 21 to 24; please check the museum’s website for times and details. The week will conclude with an artist lecture by Ekpuk on Friday, April 24, at 4:30 pm, followed by a reception, and a special tour of the exhibition by curator Allyson Purpura on Saturday, April 25, at 11:00 am. Other programming includes gallery talks and introductory tours of the exhibition.

Hood Curator of African Art Ugochukwu-Smooth C. Nzewi, who arranged for the presentation of the exhibition at Dartmouth College, notes, “As a global artist, Ekpuk’s practice is informed by his Nigerian roots and a cosmopolitan consciousness that comes from his numerous international travels to participate in artists’ residency and exhibitions. *Auto-Graphics* presents an important opportunity to introduce the work of a leading contemporary artist to Dartmouth and the Upper Valley, in line with the Hood Museum of Art’s mission to represent the diversity of cultures and artistic practices.”

Born in 1964, Ekpuk trained at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, in southwestern Nigeria,

where he was first exposed to the possibilities of drawing. He developed his minimalist approach of reducing form to constituent lines while working as a cartoonist for *Daily Times*, a leading Nigerian newspaper, in the 1990s. A ceaseless experimentalist with the gestural qualities and sparse formalism of lines, Ekpuk considers drawing a fundamental aspect of his art practice, which also includes painting, printmaking, collage, sculpture, installation, and public art projects.

The intense repetition of the artist's own invented forms juxtaposed with *nsibidi* signs is characteristic of all eighteen works in *Auto-Graphics*. The exhibition includes Ekpuk's whimsical collages, digital prints, and supersized drawings—bold, vibrant, yet restrained compositions in which *nsibidi* emerge as bristling opaque forms that contrast with the more figural works on view. Ekpuk's scripts do not always provide a formal roadmap or a logical point of access for the beholder. Yet there is clarity in the transparency of his compositions. Like *nsibidi*, which take shape both through visible marks and corresponding physical gestures, Ekpuk's immersive drawings seem to be choreographed with the full force of his body. At once expressive and disciplined, Ekpuk's draftsmanship reveals a close kinship between the autographic practices of drawing and writing.

In conjunction with his exhibition at the Hood, Ekpuk will draw a work directly on the gallery wall—an ample surface on which to explore the infinite potential and ephemeral fate of the hand-drawn line—in what the artist refers to as drawing performance, from April 21 to 24. In the conscious act of creating with both serious and playful intents, effortless and controlled, sensual and thoughtful, he invites viewers to follow the pulsating rhythms of his drawing and to share in his experience(s) momentarily, without necessarily understanding the marks on the wall. The mural will be erased at the end of the exhibition in a final act that gestures to life's ceaseless cycle of birth, death, and possibly, renewal.

*This exhibition, on view from April 18 to August 2, was organized by Krannert Art Museum, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and curated by Allyson Purpura. It was partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency. The exhibition's presentation at the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, was generously supported by the Leon C. 1927, Charles L. 1955, and Andrew J. 1984 Greenebaum Fund and the Cissy Patterson Fund.*

### **About the Hood Museum of Art**

The mission of the Hood Museum of Art, as a teaching museum, is to create an ideal learning environment that fosters transformative encounters with works of art. This dynamic educational and cultural facility houses one of the oldest and largest college collections in the country, with more than 70,000 objects acquired since 1772. Among its most important works are six Assyrian stone reliefs that date from around 900 BCE. The collection also presents art from other ancient cultures, the Americas, Europe, Africa, Papua New Guinea, and many more regions of the world. The Hood seeks to inspire and educate through direct engagement with original works of art and

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offers access to the rich diversity of its collections through ongoing highlights displays, special exhibitions, an online collections database, and a wide array of programs and events.

### **About Dartmouth**

Founded in 1769, Dartmouth is a member of the Ivy League and consistently ranks among the world's greatest colleges and universities. Dartmouth has forged a singular identity for combining its deep commitment to outstanding undergraduate liberal arts and graduate and professional education with distinguished research and scholarship in the arts and sciences and its three leading professional schools—the Geisel School of Medicine, Thayer School of Engineering, and the Tuck School of Business.

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Image caption: Victor Ekpuk, *Composition No. 13 (Sante Fe Suite)*, 2013, graphic and pastel on paper. Courtesy of the artist. © Victor Ekpuk

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