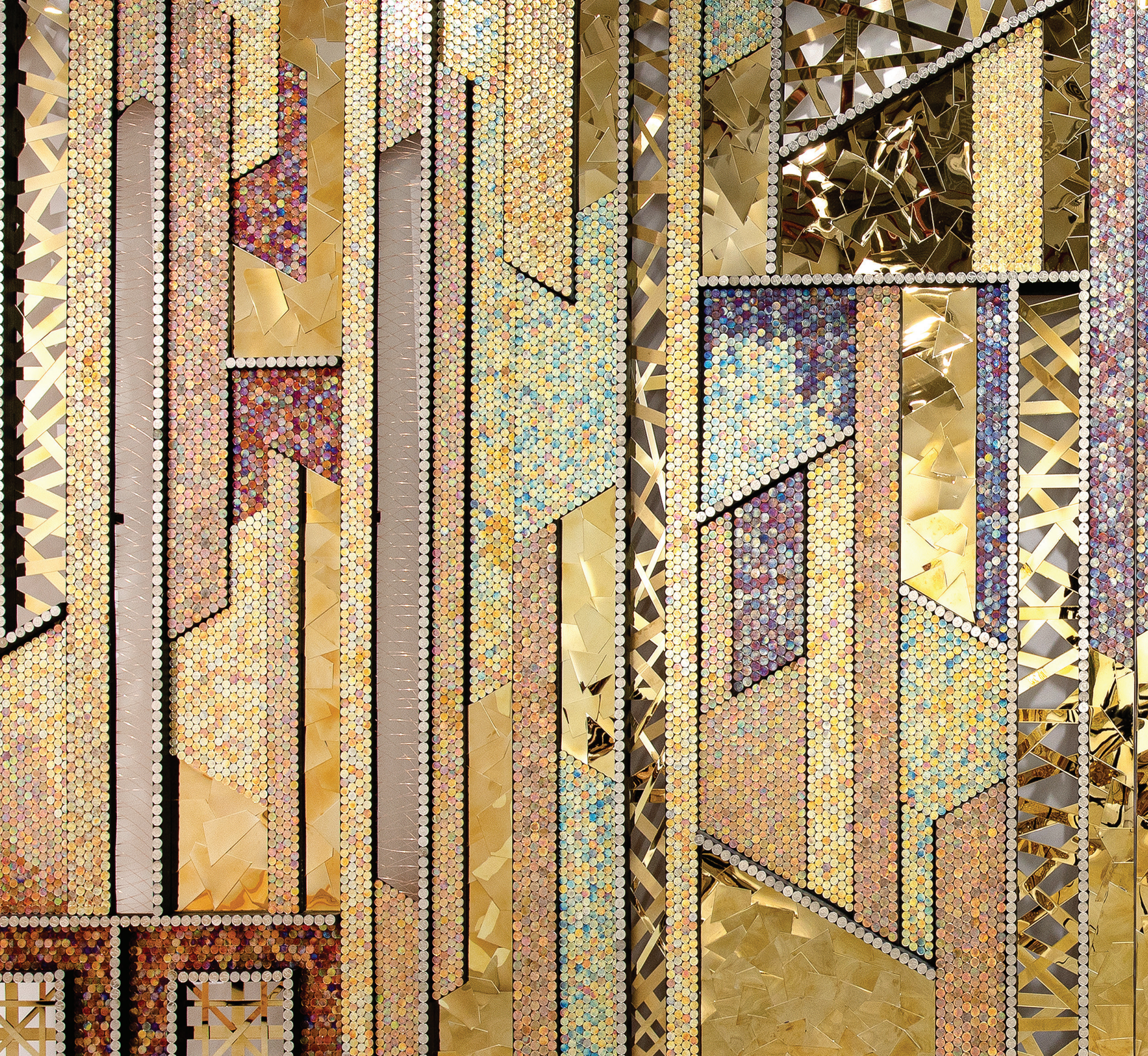
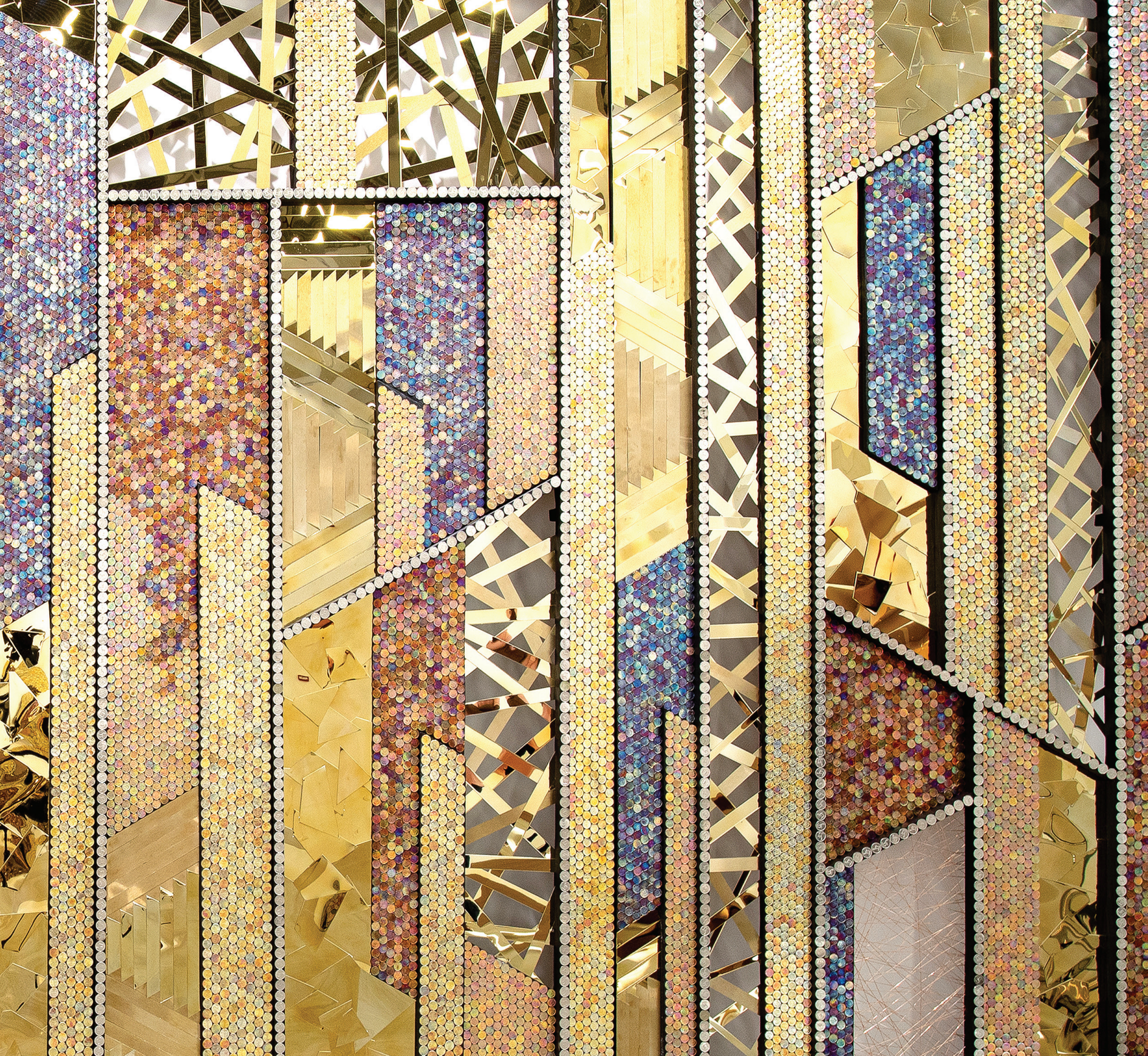




YAW OWUSU
In the Cool of Day





CONTENTS

05	—Forward
07	—Yaw Owusu <i>Artist</i>
08	—Kami Cahiga <i>Curator</i>
09	—Yaw Owusu <i>In the Cool of Day</i>
12	—Exhibition Works
30	—Credits

FOREWARD

Since its inception in 2021 and the opening of its permanent space in 2022, Efe Gallery has been establishing itself as a global platform working with some of Africa's most significant artists, including El Anatsui, Yaw Owusu, Abdoulaye Konaté, Isshaq Ismail, Ablade Glover and Slawn.

Dedicated to the representation and advancement of both established and emerging artists from Africa and the diaspora, Efe Gallery has a particular focus on contemporary African art practice and supports the cross-cultural exchange of artist work across the Middle East and beyond. In addition to its roster of wide-ranging artists and exhibitions, the operates a dynamic residency programme that focuses on artist promotion, protection and preservation.

For this ground breaking exhibition led by the gallery's first residency programme, Efe Gallery is profoundly appreciative of the gesture of the spirit of Ubuntu from Dubai Culture & Arts Authority, The Africa Institute Sharjah, Dr. Mohamed Yousif, Mr. Mahmood and Mid East Art without whom the rich thoughtfully curated experiences of the land by Yaw Owusu, clearly evident in the body of work in *In the Cool of Day* would not have been possible.

~Valentina, Kobi, & Kwame Mintah



YAW OWUSU

Artist

Born in 1992, Yaw Owusu creates installations that repurpose found objects, shifting otherwise worthless materials into encounters that challenge political landscapes. Using steel, gold, silver, copper, found objects in foils, sheets, and coins, the processes penetrate the strata of trade, exchange, and labor histories, questioning the foundations of contemporary economies.

An approach rooted in a deep sense of playful alchemy that embraces the complexity of currency, symbolism, and meaning. The work becomes a mediation on the question of how value in itself is made and unmade.

Owusu was part of the selected artists for the 89plus workshop at the Nubuke foundation, 2015. Participant of Part IV international Artist Project residency at Galerie 102 in Berlin, Germany in 2016 and a participant of CopeNYC residency in 2019. His works have been in exhibitions in Ghana and across the world including *'Second Life'*, Museum of African Contemporary Art Al Maaden (Marrakech, Morocco); Special Project at the Art X Lagos 2018, Nigeria; *'Where do we come from, where are we going'*, 2019 at the Sotheby's Art Institute, Re(de)construction at Stueben Gallery at Pratt Institute in 2019, *'Diaspora - From local to*

Foreign' by the Kuenyehia Trust for Contemporary Art, Ghana, *'Hardware, Software & Self: Material Relay'* at SPRING/BREAK Art Show 2020, a solo presentation at Volta Art Fair in 2020. *'Ontology'*, Ross+Kramer Gallery New York, the *'Debut Exhibition'* 2021, by Effe Gallery, Dubai and *'Material Earth'*, Christie's London 2022 by Effe Gallery. Owusu's sculptures are in private and public collections including the Presidency of Ghana, The World Bank, Museum of African Contemporary Art Al Maaden (Marrakech, Morocco), Shylon Museum - Nigeria, FACEBOOK (META) - New York.

He is the recipient of the Kuenyehia Prize for Contemporary Art, 2018, AICAD Fellow nominee 2019-2020, and a recipient of the Pratt Circle Honorary Award. He lives and works between Ghana and New York.

KAMI GAHIGA

Curator

Kami Gahiga is a London-based art advisor and curator who provides bespoke art advisory services to private collectors, companies and institutions.

She offers guidance in the collection management process, from acquisitions to sales, as well as expertise in the global art market with an emphasis on the African art scene. A member of The Baer Faxe Art Advisory, Gahiga is a regular

contributor to art publications, exhibitions, market reports and talks. She is the recipient of a First Distinction Art Business Master's degree from the Sotheby's Institute of Art in London.



YAW OWUSU

In the Cool of Day

In the Cool of Day at Efié Gallery in Dubai presents a selection of Yaw Owusu's sculptural wooden and golden plates, laden with intricate metallic elements laced with the artist's observations, cultures and encounters in the Arabian Peninsula. Partitioned into glowing verticals and horizontals, the sculptural pieces invite the viewer into a multi-dimensional realm to delve deeper into what lies beneath their glittery surface.

Born in Kumasi, Ghana (b.1992) Yaw Owusu received a BFA from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), the influential research-led and innovative art institution which counts internationally acclaimed artists El Anatsui and Ibrahim Mahama as its alumni. There, Owusu studied sculpture and painting before moving to New York to pursue a Master's in fine arts at the renowned Pratt Institute of Art. He is the recipient of the prestigious Kuenyehia Art Prize for Contemporary Ghanaian Art (2018) and the Pratt Circle Award and Outstanding Student Award (2020).

Owusu's cross-disciplinary studies at KNUST and the university's experimental approach to material and art history influenced Owusu's desire to venture outside the traditional media of painting, an aspiration which materialised while he was on a journey to the southern coast of Ghana. While at the beach, Owusu stumbled upon coins which had changed color into variant shades of greens, blues and reds. Composed of copper-plated steel, the Pesewa, equivalent to a penny or shilling, was first introduced by the Ghanaian government in 2007, but their value plummeted due to inflation and thus became obsolete. Intrigued by the effect that salt and water induced on the metallic pieces, Owusu negotiated with the Central Bank of Ghana to acquire thousands of pesewa coins. He began to

research their history and was bewildered to learn that the coins had not been produced in Ghana, but rather by the Royal Canadian Mint, an offshoot of the Royal Mint of the United Kingdom, Ghana's former colonial power.

This realization prompted the artist's use of pesewa coins as a device to interrogate Ghana's economic and political independence and examine the shifting nature of value. He made his coins undergo organic and chemical processes to convey the impact of trade and time, which alter both the appearance and worth of the currency. Further intrigued by the demarcations of power, he converted them into detailed colourful surfaces resembling cartographies as exemplified in Untitled 2, 2016. The sculptural tapestry is inspired by Owusu's compiling of archival maps of Ghana which delineated the way the country's railways were drawn along regions where timber, gold and other natural resources abounded.

Since his graduation in 2020 at the Pratt Institute of Art, Owusu lives and works in New York. The artist has expanded his palette to include US pennies that he juxtaposes with pesewas onto his panels and structures. His work has been celebrated in the US and internationally: in 2021, Facebook commissioned Owusu to realize a fifty feet site specific permanent installation containing 90,000 pennies from around the world.



Left to right:
 Yaw Owusu, Untitled 2, 2016
 Christie's London | Material Earth
 Exhibition, Yaw Owusu, 2022



He has recently exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary African art in Marrakech in 2017, and at Christie's in London with Efe gallery in May 2022. In September 2022, following his artist residency at Efe gallery in Dubai, the artist was invited as a resident artist on the Pacific Coast by the Institute of Contemporary Art in San Diego, California where he has another solo exhibition until 20 November 2022.

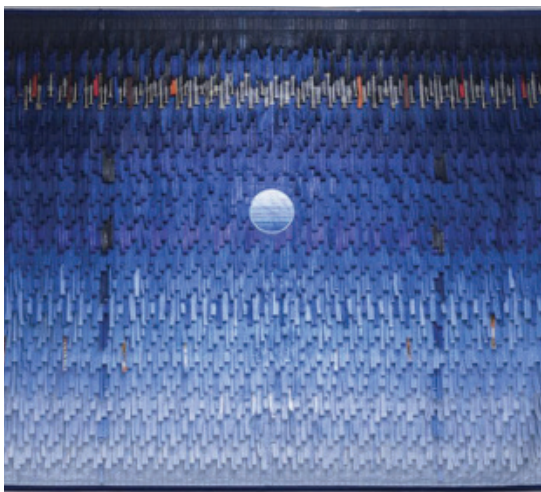
Owusu's extensive body of work has been deeply informed by his environment and its complexities, and coins remain his central source of material. However, it is his artistic residency in Dubai at Efe gallery this past summer which truly marked a turning point in Owusu's artistic career. The physical quality of his work and its underlying concepts took on entirely new meanings in the Emirates, as he explored new directions which the artist had not undertaken before.

The selection of works for In the Cool of Day embrace all key elements present in Yaw Owusu's previous works, yet mark a significant shift in his practice as this is the first time the artist interweaves fils, the Emirati dirham coins with pesewas, and US pennies. Yaw Owusu's residency journey in the UAE unfolded in three parts: First, a preparatory time in New York where he began to work on five works based on his initial impressions of Dubai and his imagination. Then,

his stay in the Emirates with Efe gallery where he created sculptural pieces based on his in-depth experience of the Persian Gulf. Last, his return to New York for the completion of the works and the creation of a monumental piece which symbolised the culmination of his rich experiences during his residency.

Power of Imagination, Golden Hour, To Believe, Something from Nothing and Infinity (2022) are reflective sculptural pieces flush with colour and vibrancy, inspired by the artist's early perception of the city-state of Dubai as a land of abundance, wealth, limitless possibilities and futuristic architecture; a city bustling with creativity which fascinates and attracts the whole world to its shores. The savvy amalgam of texturally treated coins in reds, yellows and blues evoke the elegance of Dubai's opulent edifices that emerged from the Arabian sands at tremendous speed in only a few decades ago. The superposition of translucent metallic plates gives the sculptural pieces a three-dimensionality reminiscent of Dubai's towering and imposing sky-scrappers, as exemplified in Infinity or Something from Nothing (2022).

As Owusu embarked on his residency with Efe gallery in Dubai, the artist had the opportunity to delve deeper into the genesis of the Persian Gulf region, politically, scientifically and culturally. He



Abdoulaye Konaté, Blue Moon, 2019

visited cultural and historical landmarks such as the Al Shindagha Museum, the former residence of the ruling family of Dubai, the Al Maktoum (which has converted to a world class heritage museum) and the historical Etihad Museum. Owusu toured the Sharjah Art Museum, a visit facilitated by MidEast Art, a digital storytelling platform of art and culture of the Middle East region and did a studio visit of the esteemed Emirati artist Dr. Mohamed Yousif, one of the UAE's foremost sculptors. Owusu's unique experiences were made possible by Efe gallery in collaboration with Dubai Culture and Arts Authority. His experience was capped by a trip to Abu Dhabi to visit the Louvre Abu Dhabi and the Sheikh Zayed mosque.

Meeting local communities brought further depth, scale, and spirit to Owusu's work and allowed the artist to delve deeper into the core fabric of the Arabian peninsula's culture. He recalls one encounter when he visited the farm of a local Emirati who had extended his hospitality to the artist. Owusu witnessed their sober lifestyle, enjoyed communal meals and learned about their traditional customs, which still prevail despite rapid modernization. Though abstract, *Going with the Wind*, *Singing Dunes* and *Tranquility* (2022) reverberate with life and humanity. They bear a quiet quality and seem less extravagant in colour, texture, and shape compared to *Golden Hour* or *To Believe* (2022).

It is also fascinating to notice the presence of unprocessed coins, reflecting his experiences during the second part of his journey, a vivid contrast with the first body of work realized in New York. *Going with the Wind* and *Singing Dunes* allude to his encounters and experience in the desert, the sights and sounds of shifting dunes depending on the time period, and how the desert morphs in unpredictable ways. The desert triggered a creative epiphany for Owusu, who, absorbed by the land's topography, contemplated the characteristics of its climate and how economic activities are planned around weather conditions or the time of day, a fact that distinctively shaped his aesthetic decisions.

Owusu became captivated by the desert, and he is just one of countless modern and contemporary artists who have been drawn to the boundless landscapes of sands, serenity, and the respite it offers.

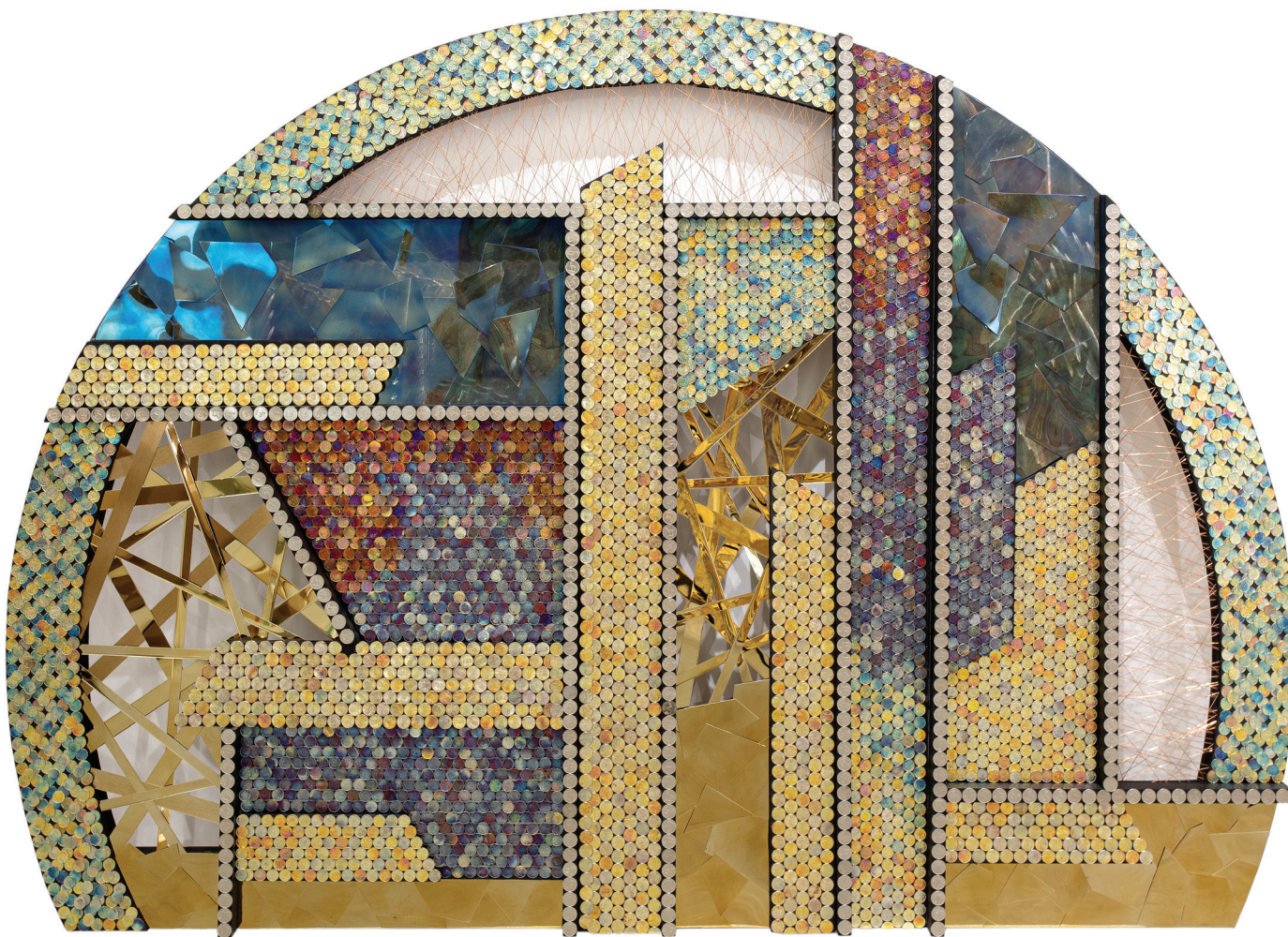
Contemporary Malian textile artist Abdoulaye Konaté recounts how some of his works arise from his childhood memories of the Sahara desert, particularly his interactions with Berber, Fulani, and Malinke communities and the visual effect of moonlight falling on dunes. One can discern various hues of blue in Abdoulaye's work titled 'Blue Moon' (2019). American artists such as Agnes Martin, Bruce Naumann, and Georgia O'Keeffe, among others, have felt a profound connection with deserts, their materiality and geology, a place that has made a lasting impression on them.

The sculptural pieces *Heart of Place*, *In the Cool of Day*, and *Morning Sun* (2022) are resplendent and gilded surfaces. They depict the culmination of his experiences before, during and after his journey with Emirati culture and its lands. Upon his return to New York, Yaw Owusu's monumental piece *Heart of Place*, and completion of *In the Cool of Day* and *Morning Sun* embody his effort to render a balanced view of the demarcations between the Emirates, shedding light on their distinctive natures and qualities. Yaw Owusu's large-scale wall sculptures realized during his residency with Efe gallery mark a significant repositioning and represent the most critical body of work the artist has ever created. His usual investigations around value evolved into new shapes, forms and riveting structures that capture the attention of spectators.

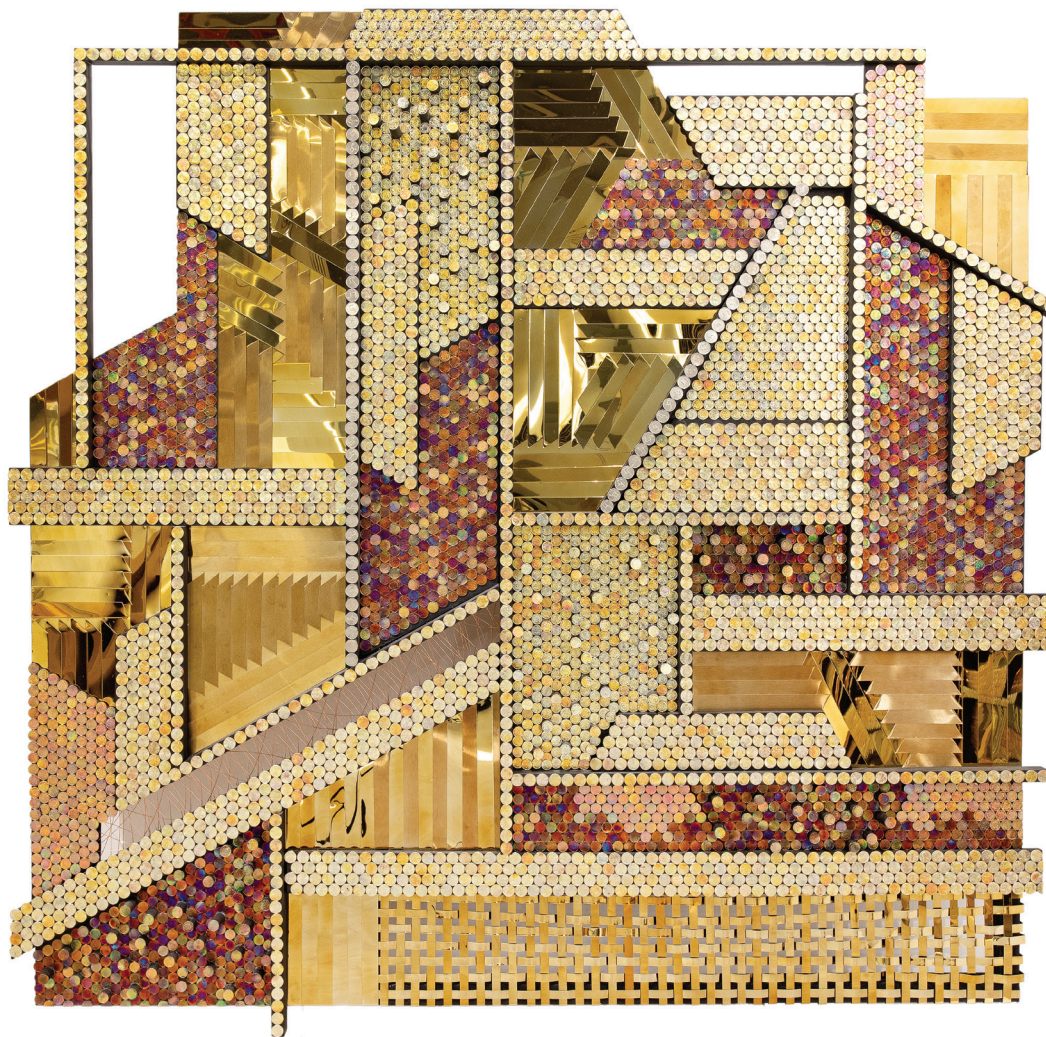
EXHIBITION WORKS



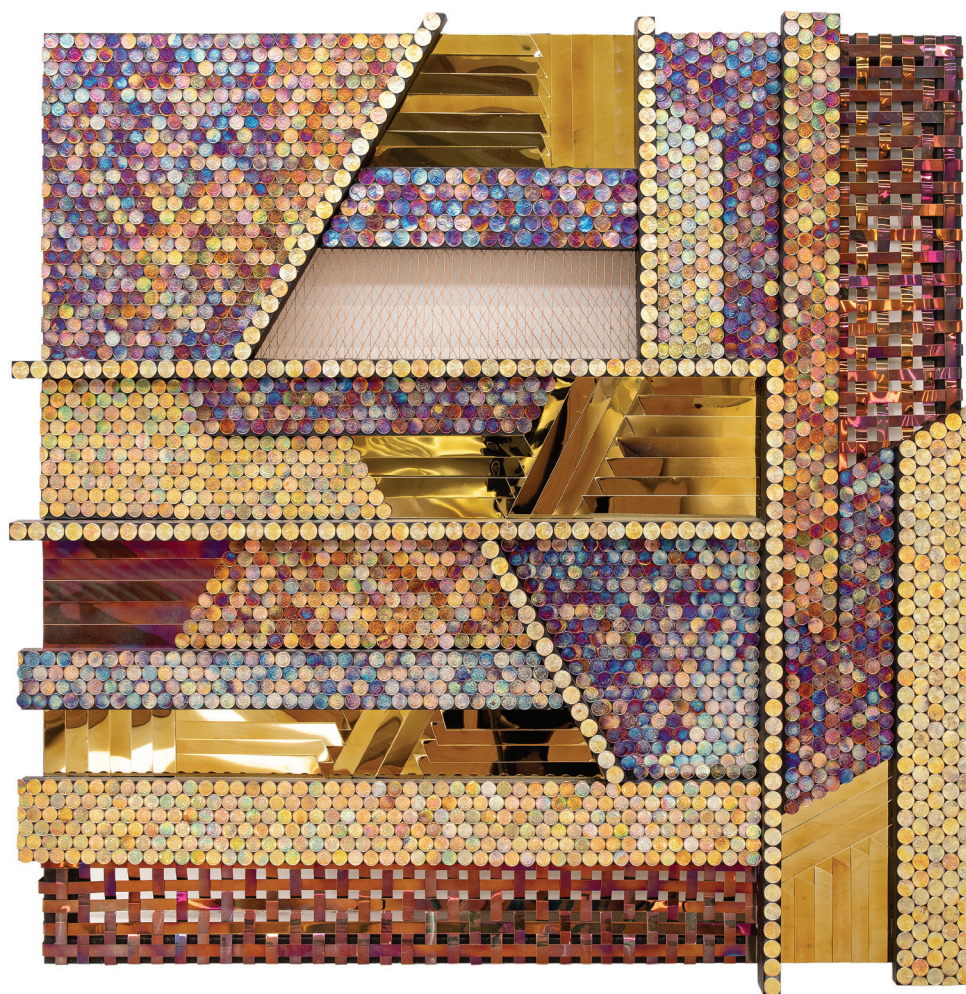




In the Cool of the Day, 2022.
UAE fils, US pennies, Ghana pesewas,
stainless steel, copper wire, wood
177.8 x 127 x 9.5 cm



To Believe, 2022.
UAE fils, US pennies, Ghana pesewas,
stainless steel, copper wire, wood
160 x 155 x 9.5 cm



Power of Imagination, 2022.

UAE fils, US pennies, Ghana pesewas,
stainless steel, copper wire, wood
105.4 x 106.7 x 9.5 cm



Morning Sun, 2022.
UAE fils, US pennies, Ghana pesewas,
stainless steel, copper wire, wood
177.8 x 127 x 9.5 cm





Heart of a Place, 2022.

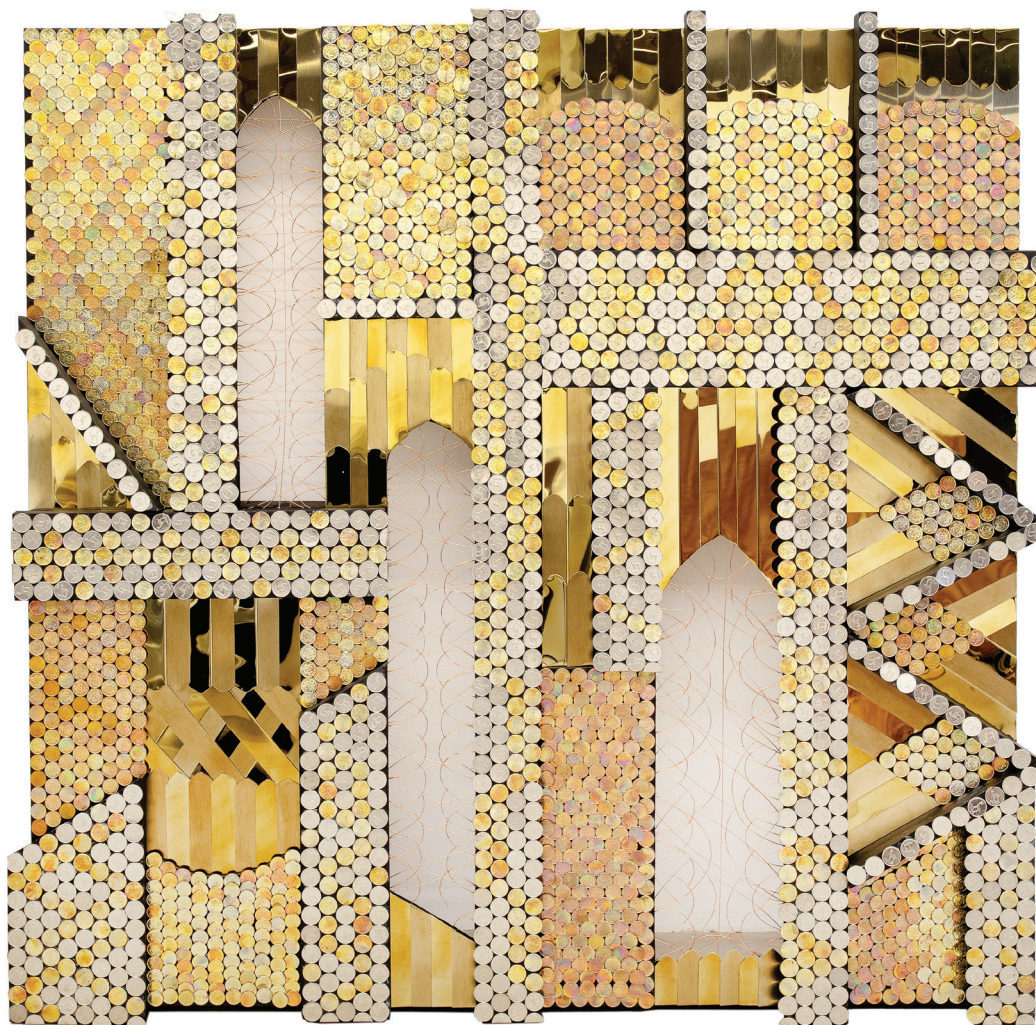
UAE fils, US pennies, Ghana pesewas,
stainless steel, copper wire, wood
243.84 x 487.68 x 9.5cm







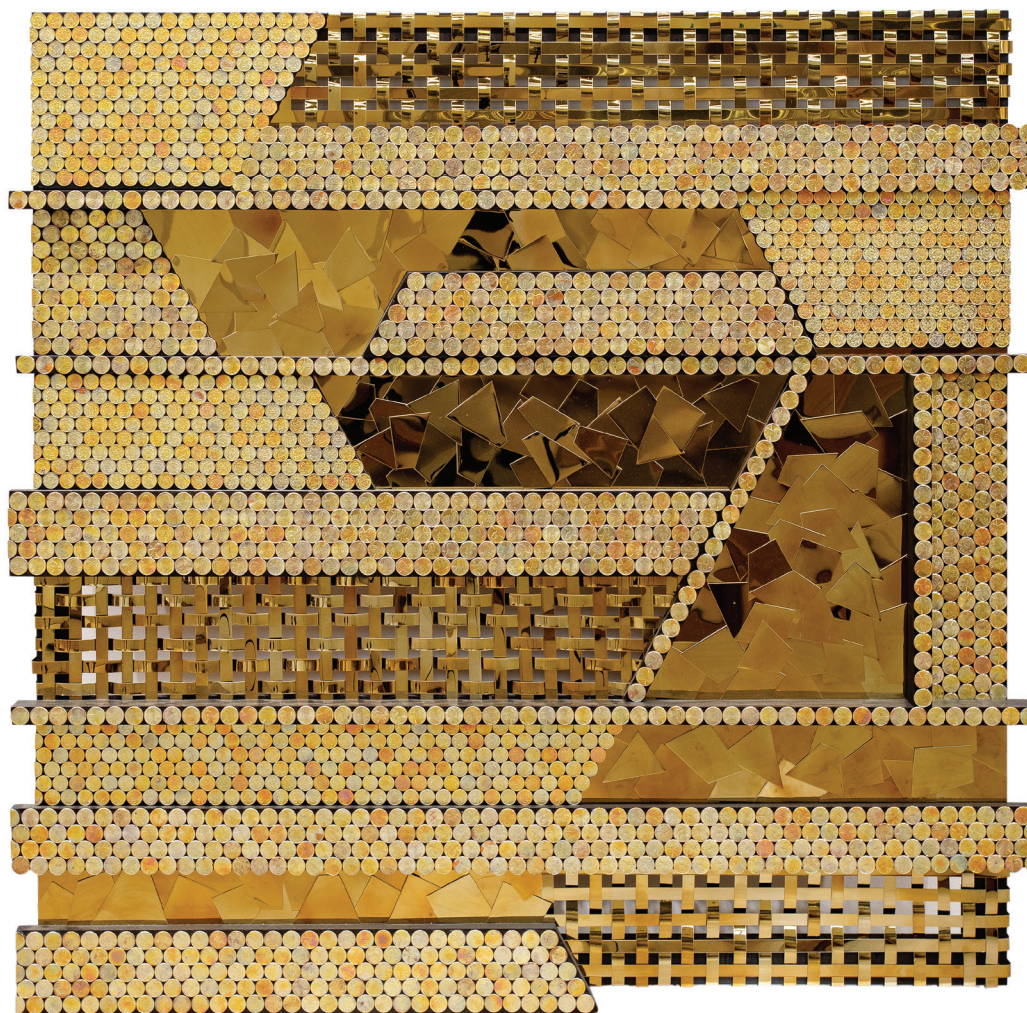




Going with the Wind, 2022.
UAE fils, US pennies, Ghana pesewas,
stainless steel, copper wire, wood
105.5 x 104.14 x 9.5 cm

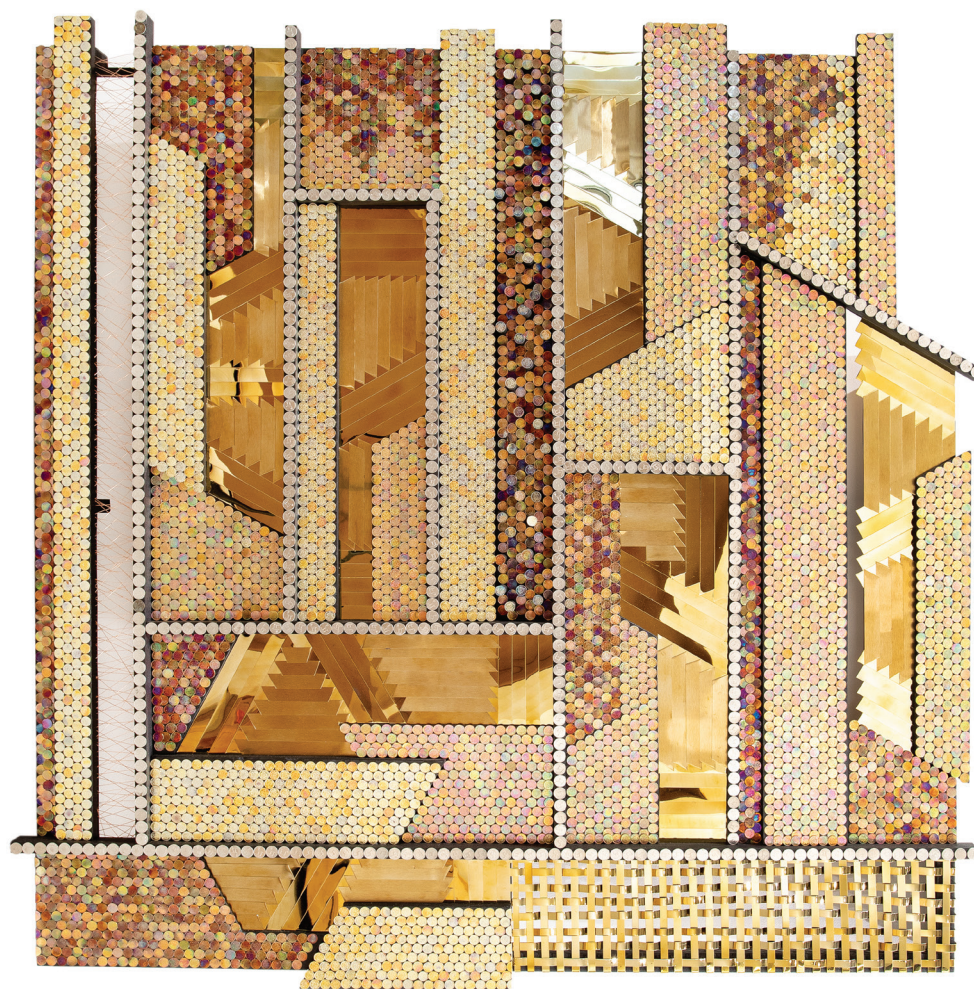


Singing Dunes, 2022.
UAE fils, US pennies, Ghana pesewas,
stainless steel, copper wire, wood
164 x 157.5 x 9.5 cm

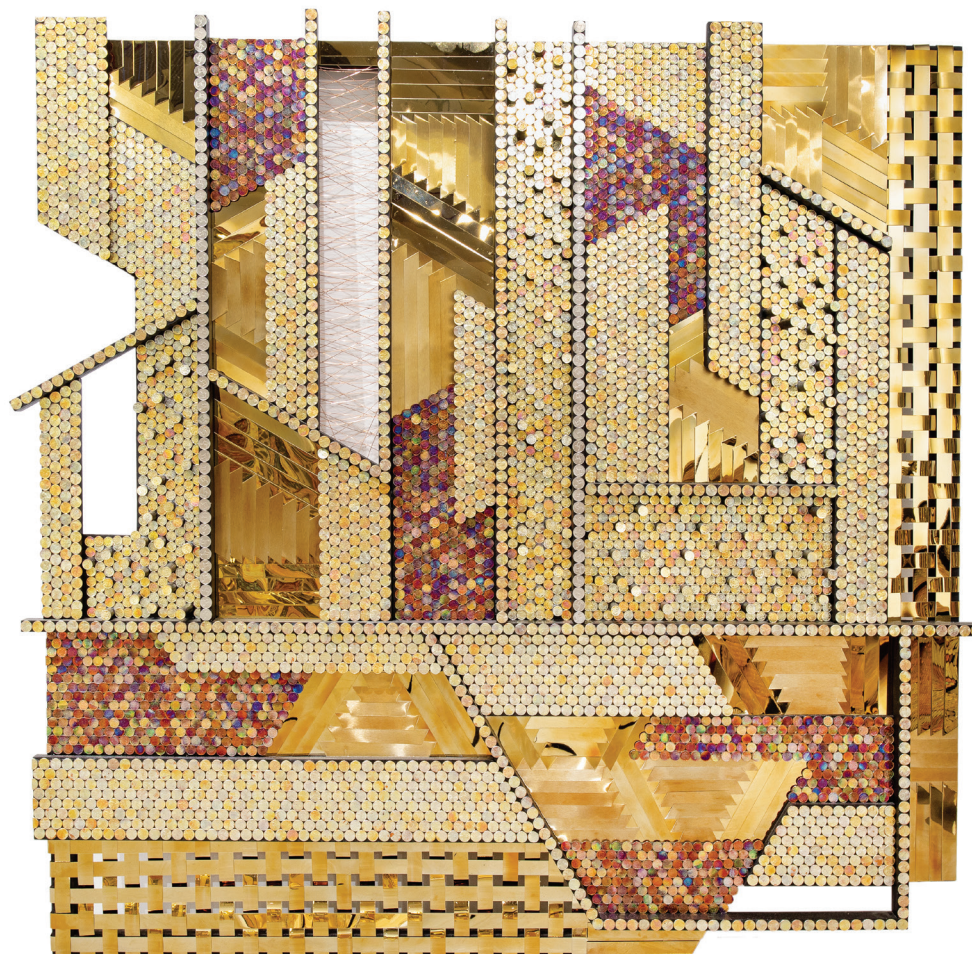


Golden Hour, 2022.

UAE fils, US pennies, Ghana pesewas,
stainless steel, copper wire, wood
106.7 x 104.1 x 9.5 cm

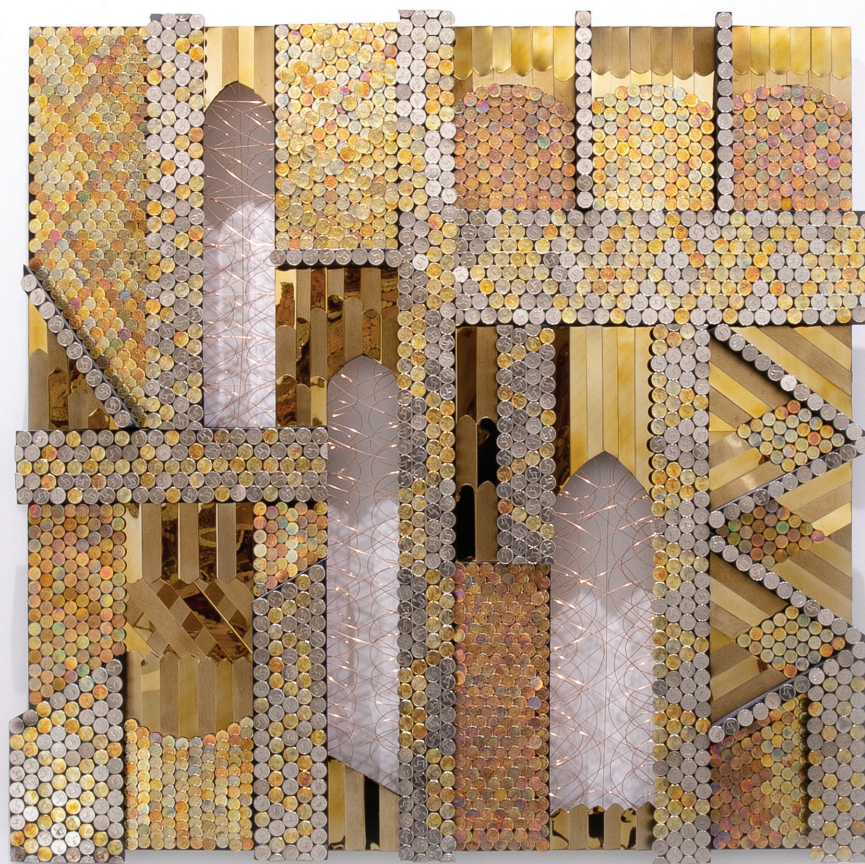


Something from Nothing, 2022.
UAE fils, US pennies, Ghana pesewas,
stainless steel, copper wire, wood
160 x 157.5 x 9.5 cm



Infinity, 2022.

UAE fils, US pennies, Ghana pesewas,
stainless steel, copper wire, wood
157.5 x 160 x 9.5 cm



CREDITS

Curator: Kami Gahiga

Catalog Design: Mindfull Creative Agency

Photography: MOZ Photography



Unit 2 Al Khayat Art Avenue,
19th Street Al Quoz 1,
off 1st Al Khalil Street,
Dubai UAE

Dubai +971 (0)4 252 4182

info@efiegallery.com
www.efiegallery.com

This catalogue was published on the occasion of the *Yaw Owusu* solo exhibition
"In the Cool of Day"
19 October 2022 - 20 December 2022