

# Alumna Victoria-Idongesit Udondian '16 Featured in Solo Show

BY CATHERINE FISHER, MARCH 29, 2022

Alumna [Victoria-Idongesit Udondian](#) '16 is featured in her first New York City solo show, [How Can I Be Nobody](#), at Smack-Mellon. This show will remain on view until April 10, 2022.

This site-specific exhibition moves between many mediums including woven textiles, sculptures, and sound. The artist explores questions around bodies and their mobility within labor markets. According to the press release, “the installation connects Smack Mellon’s Dumbo gallery, a former industrial site, to the foundational role of immigrant labor in capitalist production.”

Udondian conceives of her work as an opportunity for individuals from marginalized groups to construct an understanding of their historical past in order to resist systems of domination. This desire manifests through many collaborations including a partnership with Stitch Buffalo, a textile center near the artist’s studio that facilitates economic empowerment for refugee and immigrant women by supporting them in creating handcrafted goods to sell.

In *How Can I Be Nobody*, cast hands surround a suspended ship rib, referencing the eighteenth-century diagrams of the Brookes slave ship and countless other boats that carried migrants and enslaved people across Mediterranean Sea. The “large-scale collaborative weavings are primarily composed of repurposed black fabric in acknowledgement of the black and brown lives lost in search of better conditions.” Additionally, the exhibition includes performance footage from Udondian’s ongoing project, *The Republic of Unknown Territory*, begun in 2017 during her own naturalization process, in which she required gallery visitors to undergo immigration processes in order to gain access to the space. Calling into question the pasts and futures of systematic marginalization, Udondian’s show points out disparities of power.

The exhibition’s title is a quote from one of Udondian’s collaborators who, “while struggling to divulge her personal history, fearing that it would put the community in her home country in danger, asked, ‘How can I be nobody and tell you my story?’” This sentiment clearly articulates the difficult space in which migrants find themselves at this juncture in history.

In 2020, Udondian was named a Guggenheim Fellow. Her works have been exhibited internationally, including The Inaugural Nigerian Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennial-An Excerpt; Fisher Landau Center for the Arts, New York; The Bronx Museum, New York; The Children Museum of Manhattan, New York; The National Museum, Lagos and Lokoja, Nigeria; Whitworth Gallery in Manchester, Centre for Contemporary Arts, Lagos, Nigeria etc. Some of her Artist Residencies include Instituto Sacatar, Bahia, Brazil; Mass Moca, Massachusetts, USA; Fine Arts Work Center (FAWC), Provincetown; USA; Villa Straulli, Winthethur, Switzerland; Fondazione di Venezia, Venice, Italy; and Bag Factory Studios, Johannesburg, South Africa. Udondian received an MFA in Sculpture and New Genres from Columbia University, New York, attended Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, and earned a BA in painting from the University of Uyo, Nigeria.

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