



VICTOREHIKHAMENOR
STUDIO



WRITTEN RESPONSE

“Origin”, a sculpture for everyone.

The past few months have been rewarding for me in discovering the intriguing history, culture and socio-political foundations of Burlington, Vermont. And these discoveries have further informed my final proposal for the site-specific work titled ‘Origin’. The intentional systematic evolution of local government, implementation of innovative social programs, the championing of the working class, the direct confrontation of foreign policy concerns, all buffered by a unique environment that is inclusive of all races and creeds has motivated me to deepen this collaborative site-specific work.

My initial encounter with Burlington, VT was during a residency a few years ago in Italy where I serendipitously discovered the works of two of Burlington’s native sons, General Truman Seymour and Joseph Mozier, who migrated to Italy. I was researching the history of artists as migrants, just like myself. And this project has also resurfaced for me the social activism of Bernie Sanders, to the timeless comics of Alison Bechdel, and the innovative theories of Jon Dewey. All these are evidence that the city has incubated and given birth to ingenious creatives and voices who relentlessly push the boundaries of cognitive thought.

Cities like Burlington have consistently held space for the constant interrogation of the inequities in the United States’ social, economic and political systems wherever and whenever possible and this project continues that legacy. I have additionally been inspired by the robust social systems and groupings within Burlington which includes the Council of the Arts, Youth offices and the Burlington Women's Council.

Burlington, VT is federally designated as a resettlement site for refugees since the late 1980s which makes it one of the most diverse areas in the United States. According to research at the University of Vermont by Bose; refugee resettlement in Vermont has seemingly mirrored national patterns seen across the US since the 1980s and 1990s.

The Arts and Culture Council of Burlington seem determined to make arts accessible to everyone, including immigrants and working class people as well as the enthusiasm centered on inclusion and belonging of all, motivated the shape of an egg as the imagery of my sculpture. The egg shape symbolically encompasses the notions of possibilities that include but not limited to origins, birth, beginning, togetherness, newness, and great expectation.

The diverse nature of the culture inherent in the people of Burlington from very different backgrounds and contexts bring with them varied experiences from their countries of origin. The divergent yet homogenous life to be found in Burlington is not dissimilar to how I link my various iconographies to become one while conceptualising this proposed work. Whilst researching Dewey Park in the Old North End of Burlington I was inspired by merging my gestural patterning that can be used at multiple scales, with the community-centered vibrancy that is inspired by the setting.

The “Origin” sculpture will explore universal themes of unity, rebirth, history, nostalgia, home, and spirituality. In line with that I propose to create a scaled up version of my work 'A Pregnant World' which was first exhibited in August 2021 at Lehman Maupin gallery in New York. The intertwined cursive iconography which is an ancient script I borrowed from my culture, would be cast in Bronze in the oval shape of an egg. Why egg shape? Eggs have always held particular symbolic significance, partly because it is a visual shorthand for new life and positive great expectation. The egg brings hope and purity. It is a symbol of fertility and circle of life. I connect the fundamental theories of symbolism in the visual arts with that of Dewey’s various breakthroughs in education. Additionally, ancient traditions, from various cultures and religions, used to connect the egg to the creation of the universe, suggesting that the Earth itself may have been born out of an egg.

The finished sculpture will resonate transparency, resilience, hope and a unifying deliverable of creating a contemporary and diverse future with multiple identities and universality. The size of the installation will be imposing yet not intimidating. It will be a major landmark for Burlington just like Anish Kapoor’s “Cloud Gate” aka The Bean in the city of Chicago. “Origin “will be such an iconic piece that it will draw people from all nations and walk of life to itself, and become the background for photography and selfies that will travel the world and put Burlington on the global map of public sculptures for many years to come.

What if we could give birth to a new world? What if we can harness our differences and cultivate shared value? What if we could redefine what democracy and freedom mean to us? What if we can hold space for each other? These possibilities are limitless, starting with the right public art in a community like Burlington.

Burlington community as a muse for “Origin” sculpture.

As a multidisciplinary artist and writer whose work spans large scale sculptures, immersive installations, paintings, and sculpting, the community where I execute my works has always been my inspiration. The majority of my art, photography and writing projects are based on history, socio-political responses, religion and collective memories largely informed by the art of my community while growing up.

My early foray into art originated from watching my grandmother weave cloth with locally dyed thread in her mini-loom to observing my mother’s meticulous painting/decorating of her walls with homemade clay paint and charcoal pigments, to watching other villagers’ mark-making on ancient shrine walls and altars. Elaborate sculptures and ancient scripts that were delicately drawn on walls in commemoration of my ancestral environs were my early influence. Beyond the symbolism of the egg, concrete through-lines of bronze casting, calligraphy and weaving passed down from generation to generation exists in several cultures.

My process has always been cemented in qualitative and quantitative research. This research is grounded in a participatory, action-oriented, and community-based approach—working, for example, with mutual aid societies and migrant organizations who believe in shared value to identify and refine key research questions. For the past three months my team and I have been immersed in trying to understand the social aspects of Burlington through the various research papers available from University of Vermont specifically.

Though I have not physically visited Burlington (Which I will definitely do if my sculpture is chosen), my knowledge and experience living and working in very similar contexts in countries like Nigeria, Indonesia, Germany, Poland, Senegal, South Africa etc. has influenced my practice as an artist. In general, I am motivated to explore the historical and cultural symbolism of new communities. In choosing the egg as my departure point for this project, it relates to the sundry human spectrum that exists in the United States and reflected in a city like Burlington.

History routinely reveals to us how inherently existential our cultural connections are whether we are Africans, Asians, Europeans and Latinas etc. As an American of Nigerian descent who traces his ancestry to the famous Benin Kingdom; known for its historical bronze casting tradition, every day continuously unveiled itself in one art form or the other to me in a way I can relate to Burlington.

Dewey Park sculpture, a safe space for gathering

I was born and raised in the ancient kingdom of Benin in Nigeria, where there are a plethora of community meeting places both open and closed. Stories, teachings, oral narrations, performances and everyday recreation happen under designated man-made spaces. In one of my seminar installations at the Dak'Art Biennale in Senegal called “The Prayer Room” (2016), I created a peaceful enabling space for community gathering which attracted a record-breaking number of people who would not ordinarily go to a museum or a gallery to see works. I believe art should be for everyone. I create work for the people not for a selected few, My proposed sculpture for Dewey Park will not be different, I will be creating it for the community and the entire world both physically and virtually.

How does one make a public sculpture appeal to all? By turning a mundane and generally recognizable object or idea into an unusually celestial form. So I picked an egg, familiar in form and concept through the history of mankind and art for that matter. From Salvador Dali to Jean-Baptiste Gueuze and Hieronymus Bosch the symbol of the egg through art history has been visceral. The egg has always held particular symbolic significance, partly because it is a visual shorthand for new life and un-hatched potential. Decorated eggs have roots in Persian cultures but shifted globally to many other cultures. Ancient peoples linked the magic of this parcel of new life to creation itself, believing that the world was formed from a cosmic egg. Such an egg features in the ancient beliefs of India, Egypt, Greece and Phoenicia.

In one account, Brahma, the Hindu creator, appeared from a golden egg that floated in universal waters while Chronos, the Greek personification of Time, produced an egg from which the world’s creator emerged. In Australian Aboriginal Dreamtime the egg was a symbol of light. The Greeks and Romans of the ancient world placed eggs in tombs or left nests of eggs beside them — a sign of life after death — while Maori people buried their dead with an egg of a now-extinct moa in one hand. Even today, Jewish mourners traditionally eat eggs after a funeral to signify loss and the circle of life.

More than 2,500 years ago, eggshells were decorated as part of spring rituals in Africa and elsewhere to symbolize new growth and life. Undoubtedly influenced by such traditions, Christianity adopted the egg to denote the Easter Resurrection of Christ. The decorative painted eggs of Eastern European countries, such as the pysanka of Ukraine, were used in Christian rituals from the 10th century AD. By the late 13th century ostrich eggs, which had first hung in mosques to symbolize light and life, began to appear in churches, too, and featured in Easter ceremonies.

Well before the advent of Christianity, eggs were also used ritually to encourage human and agricultural fecundity. Women of the indigenous Japanese Ainu people had to take eggs from the nests of certain birds and present them to their husbands or fathers. The women would then mix the eggs with seeds to be planted that year, while the men prayed for good crops and made inao (talismans) to place in the nests. Today in China, red and other brightly coloured eggs continue to feature in traditional naming ceremonies. In Southern African cultures, ostrich eggs are decorative ornaments symbolizing good luck for families. Above all, the importance and fragility of an egg to its owner demands that it must be respected and protected by all means – just the way we humans and citizens of countries should protect our world.

Making the “Origin” sculpture interactive

Public art is meant to be touched, seen and heard by thousands if not millions of people. The core consideration as we create this sculpture will champion public safety and will also address the points below:

1. Relevance to the community/city and its values, culture and people.
2. Suitability of the work for outdoor display (including its maintenance and conservation requirements), paying detailed attention to the yearly weather conditions in Burlington. I chose bronze against other materials because of its durability and low maintenance in outdoor situations.
3. Appropriateness of the size and scale of the artwork to enable proper interaction. It might be possible to create an opening in the “egg” for people to get inside for purpose of photography. (This will be discussed with safety experts before creating the sculpture).
4. There will be a strong relationship of the work to the site and the host community, especially how it serves to activate and enhance the space.
5. People can rest their backs on it.
6. It will be a landmark for community reference and interaction, “Meet me by the egg sculpture”, or “Once you go past the big egg sculpture, make a right turn”.

3D RENDERING OF PROPOSED ARTWORK



3D Rendering of proposed artwork



Proposed artwork located on a 2-dimensional site plan



Proposed artwork rendered into perspective drawings



Proposed artwork rendered into perspective drawings



Proposed artwork rendered into perspective drawings

PROJECT TIMELINE

- February 1st - 15th, 2022: Artist to work with Vinnetti's foundry on sculpture preparation
- February 15th - August 31st, 2022: Vinnetti's will procure materials needed and begin work on fabrication Origin Egg sculpture and plaque. The work will continue daily until completion) approximately 6.5 months. During this time, we will work with the city and electrician to pull appropriate permits.
- September 5th - 9th, 2022: Electrician to prepare installation area for electrical (lights around sculpture).
- September 12th - 13th, 2022: Concrete contractor to pour the pad and the anchor bolt sets.
- September 13th - 20th, 2022: Concrete cures
- September 19th - 23rd, 2022: Landscape surrounding park area.
- September 26h - 28th, 2022: Transport sculpture to site (Nashville TN, to Burlington, VT).
- September 29th - 30th, 2022: Install sculpture, plaque (Vinnetti's) and lighting (Electrician) Project is complete.

<https://tinyurl.com/ykrr2tne>

PROJECT BUDGET

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PROJECT BUDGET			
Description	Vendor/Person	Amount	Comments
Origin Sculpture Fabrication and Installation	Vinnetti's Casting and Design	\$88,287.00	Quote
Plaque for sculpture	Vinnetti's Casting and Design	\$800.00	
Foundational engineering	Parks department contract	\$3,700.00	Utilize the Park's current contract for foundation
Zoning Permit	City	\$250.00	
Building Permits	City	\$793.05	Building permits are \$8.50/\$1000 of construction (\$3.3k for sculpture and foundation)
Artist Fee	Victor Ehikmenor	\$30,000.00	
Project Management Fee	Aurora Davis Projects	\$10,000.00	
Artist Travel to Foundry and Site (3x)	Various	\$5,000.00	Budget Includes flight, hotel rental vehicle and food
Project Managers to travel to site (2x - 2 people)	Various	\$3,000.00	Budget Includes flight, hotel rental vehicle and food
			Lighting surrounding sculpture: Hire licensed electrician to pull a permit and terminate connections for electrical installation from the distribution panel to termination points to light sculpture. Will partner with Burlington Electric Department
Electrical	Licensed Electrician in the Burlington from list	\$3,500.00	.
Landscaping budget	Source from The Parks Departm	\$2,500.00	Partner with the Parks department to incorporate additional plantings to beautify the park
Misc.	TBD	\$2,000.00	
Grand Total		\$149,830.05	

Thank You.