

Charlotte Call Gallery Presents

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Victor Nwankwo: *eⁱKENGA*

11 April – 16 May 2026

Opening reception: Friday, 11 April 2026, 6-8pm



Los Angeles, CA. Charlotte Call Gallery is pleased to announce *eⁱKENGA*, a solo exhibition of new sculptural work by Nigerian-American artist **Victor Nwankwo**, on view from 11 April through 16 May 2026. Comprising bronze, concrete, and ceramic sculptures, the exhibition marks Nwankwo's debut solo presentation in Los Angeles and introduces a body of work that recasts the sculptural tradition, Ikenga, of the Igbo people.

In *eⁱKENGA*, Nwankwo translates this ancestral cosmology into a system of contemporary forms. Rather than reproducing traditional carvings, the artist reframes Ikenga as a conceptual language responsive to contemporary conditions. Drawing from the aesthetics of collectable consumer culture, he redirects familiar modes of desire, accumulation, and attention toward introspection, self-governance, and ethical clarity. In a world increasingly shaped by distraction and extraction, the work proposes Ikenga as a living framework for intentional action.

Charlotte Call

The project addresses a striking absence: while the global collectibles market has produced iconic figures rooted in Japanese, American, and East Asian visual cultures, from KAWS to Pop Mart's Labubu, no equivalent object exists from Africa or the African diaspora. For Nwankwo, this gap is symptomatic and a question of representation. *eⁱKENGA* proposes that the Igbo sculptural tradition, with its millennia-long entanglement of art, commerce, and personal aspiration, is not only equipped to fill that void but may be its most natural occupant.

An Ikenga is a consecrated shrine figure central to Igbo cosmology, documented in the region from the ninth century CE. Carved and kept in domestic settings, each figure stands as a personal engine of ambition, an embodiment of the “power of the right hand,” and self-determination. Traditionally, a man commissioned increasingly elaborate Ikenga figures as he ascended through the title system, accumulating symbolic attributes of achievement: ram's horns denoting stubborn resolve, ritual implements signifying spiritual authority, and an upright, confrontational posture announcing readiness for action.

The exhibition's prefix, *eⁱ* signals the compounding, imaginary and digital origin point of each figure and a broader conceptual wager: that the age-old function of the Ikenga as a technology for focusing individual will has never been more urgent. Where the traditional Igbo shrine channeled a person's drive toward ethical achievement, Nwankwo's sculptures intervene at a moment when attention itself has become the most extracted resource on earth. Each figure embodies a guiding attribute: Strength (*Ikè*), Resilience (*Ìdidi*), Voice (*Olu*), Harmony (*Ìdo*), Wisdom (*Àmàmihe*), Joy (*Ọnù*), Grace (*Àmàrà*); and invites its beholder to identify the quality most needed in their own life. The work recuperates the meditative, talismanic function of sculpture in an era that has largely abandoned it.

“Ikenga statues were not intended as museum objects. Each figure functioned as a technology for focusing your will and manifesting your trajectory. I designed the eⁱKENGA figures to sit with you, to remind you of the person you are meant to become.” Nwankwo says. *“If Pop Mart out of Asia can create a global language of collectible figures, then why doesn't Africa have one? With a medium as popular and ubiquitous as it is among its demographic, this becomes an issue of representation.”*

Nwankwo adapts elements of Igbo tradition and updates the gendered conventions. Ikenga figures made from the 19th century onwards are overwhelmingly male; female examples are rare. Nwankwo's suite breaks down this gender wall as a deliberate recomposition grounded in the artist's research into pre-colonial Igbo social structures, where distributed tribal governance produced a far wider spectrum of gender expression than the colonial and missionary interventions from the 1860s onwards that later constricted it. The expansion is not revisionism but rather a restoration of fluidity and nuance.

Nwankwo's project draws on a robust lineage of postcolonial thought. Firstly, it extends the theory of *Natural Synthesis* first articulated by the Zaria Rebels of late-1950s Nigeria, the proposition that authentic postcolonial art must merge indigenous aesthetic systems with global techniques, into the terrain of digital fabrication and the collectibles market. Secondly, it engages with the curatorial arguments advanced by Azu Nwagbogu and contemporary restitution discourse: that genuine restitution is not merely the return of looted objects but the liberation of African art from the static vitrine, returning it to the active, value-driven circulation for which it was originally made. Moreover, it embodies the Afropolitan aesthetic theorized by Achille Mbembe and Chielozona Eze, in which the modern African diaspora operates simultaneously across high finance, technology, and popular culture, refusing the Western expectation that “authentic” African art must appear rural, distressed, or ethnographic.

About the Artist

Charlotte Call

Dr. Victor Nwankwo (USA, b. 1984) is an artist, medical doctor, and data scientist focused on voice and dialogue through the revisiting of anachronistic media and technology. Nwankwo works across moving image, sculpture, and code to create immersive experiences that employ sampling, remixing, and reappropriating to better speak to the deep mind. Exhibitions and projects include Shoreditch Arts Club, London; “Spirit House,” New York; 207 Front Street, New York; and Harold Arts, Chicago. Nwankwo has collaborated on code and artwork with the Twilite Tone & Gorillaz, Nicholas Jaar, Hikari Yokoyama, and sat for Rashid Johnson. He is the founder of Chicago’s union studio(s) and is working on upcoming projects with Marvin Tate and King Willonius.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Artist: Victor Nwankwo

Exhibition title: e⁺KENGA

Dates: 11 April – 16 May 2026

Opening: Friday, 11 April 2026, 6-8pm

Location: Charlotte Call Gallery, 560 N. Western Ave., 90004 Los Angeles

Medium: Bronze, concrete, ceramic, and mixed media sculpture

Website: <https://e-kenga.com>

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High-resolution images, artist biography, and interview requests available on inquiry.