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Lines of Resistance: Marcia Kure at the Venice Biennale

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One of the main attractions of the ongoing Venice Biennale is the artworks of artists from countries including Africa. Among them, Marcia Kure is particularly noteworthy. Born in Nigeria in 1970, Marcia Kure is known for her mixed-media artworks. Through these, she explores themes such as identity, history, and the lasting effects of colonialism.

[Marcia Kure](#)'s artwork has continually featured references to fashion and textiles, images of veiled women, and frequent attention to gender and political topics. Early research by Kure concentrated on women's agency in patriarchal culture and political violence. Her series *History of Africa by Fela* (2001-2003), consisting of 59 panels on paper executed in pencil, ink, and kolanut pigment, is an illustration of this period. Her latter work explores themes of parenthood, hip-hop aesthetics, haute couture (luxury, custom-made) apparel, and her expatriation experience.

Kure's work has strong ties to contemporary uli, an Igbo women's graphic-intensive art tradition in eastern Nigeria, distinguished by linear patterns and sparse colour use. Additionally, her drawings are described as fusing powerful shapes, symbolic decorative motifs, and sweeping, swirling strokes from many African visual traditions. She frequently uses indigenous African colours, such as coffee and kola nut.

As part of the [interview series](#), a conversation with [Venice Biennale](#) artists, Abirpothi, featuring Nigerian-born artist Marcia Kure. The artist discusses in detail her work and her presence in the Venice Biennale.

Q: Can you tell me about your work at this year's Venice Biennale, which appears to treat drawing not as image-making but as infrastructure: a system of circulation, extraction, and inscription. How does the Biennale presentation extend or transform the concerns you explored in NETWORK and the Networks and Systems works?

Marcia Kure: Drawing and mark-making offered me a way to compress complex, multilayered systems through the line. We live in a time where everything seems to happen simultaneously: information arrives constantly, systems overlap, crises collapse into one another, and I became interested in how the mark could distil that density without simplifying it.

This thinking goes back to my studies at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and my encounter with Uli. What stayed with me was not only the line itself but its relationship to the body, architecture, communication, and inscription. I stayed on the unstable threshold between drawing and writing, and worried about it more. A scar, a trade route, a tally mark, a stitch, a cable line, a glyph: they all began collapsing into one another. The works accumulated through layering, staining, abrasion, erasure, and repetition, so that drawing became less about composing images and more about registering pressure, duration, movement, and relation. Over time, the line stopped functioning as a contour and began functioning as a transmission.

The Biennale presentation extended concerns already present in NETWORK, 2021, and Systems and Network, 2023, but on a larger, more spatial scale. In Venice, the drawings and sculptures operate together as an interdependent field. The sculptures and canvases – the cables, braided hair, ink, pigment and charcoal marks and notations – extend the line physically into and across architectural space; gravity, suspension, and material weight become part of the drawing. The viewer entering the space becomes part of the system being mapped. Venice intensified this by operating through crossings, routes, water channels, and circulation. The work entered into an already existing network rather than occupying a neutral exhibition space.

Q: The Biennale context inevitably frames national histories, borders, and global circulation. Your recent works seem deeply invested in exactly those structures: trade routes, merchant capitalism, migration, surveillance, and extraction. Did Venice become a particularly charged site for these investigations?

Marcia Kure: I had already been thinking through these issues before the Biennale. Venice became a stage upon which those ideas could intensify and expand.

Part of what pushed me toward these investigations was my own experience working part-time as a retail sales associate and later in Amazon fulfilment centres. Inside the warehouse, everything was tracked, timed, monitored, and optimised. You are tethered to machines and screens while simultaneously moving through immense systems of circulation. Labour itself becomes logistical. I became fascinated by the choreography of those spaces: the hazard tape directing workers across the floor, the marks left behind by pallet jacks, the scanners, the endless movement of goods. Even the inscriptions on packages from China became meaningful to me. The warehouse floor itself became a mapped surface: routes organised bodies in motion, scanners translated movement into data, and marks on the ground controlled circulation. I began to see contemporary logistics as a form of inscription operating at architectural and planetary scales.

The Roadkill works emerged directly from this experience. The roadkill was an actual animal I encountered on my way to work, evidence of collision points between ecological systems and human infrastructure, where speed, extraction, and mobility intersect violently with natural life. Having practised in Africa, Europe, and America, I also needed to geolocate myself within these systems and understand my position within global networks of labour, migration, exchange, and visibility. There was something uncomfortable about that, being inside the system I was also trying to map. I am not sure I have fully resolved it. Venice became another node within that network rather than a symbolic backdrop.

Q: The materials in your Biennale work, including indigo, kola nut, charcoal, synthetic hair, gold, and carved wood, carry dense historical itineraries. How do you decide when a material operates symbolically, and when it should instead function as evidence or residue of larger systems?

Marcia Kure: I had already been working with kola nut and natural pigments since my Nsukka days, partly through learning from Uli mural artists and indigenous systems of mark-making. Initially, I was interested in the materials both conceptually and formally; even simply as colours, they offer enormous richness, subtlety, and depth. There is something powerful to me about the tonal relationships between indigo, charcoal, red oxide, kola nut, and gold.

But over time, I became less interested in materials as symbols and more interested in them as carriers of historical and material memory. Indigo is already embedded within histories of cultivation, trade, and forced labour before it reaches the surface. Charcoal carries combustion and energy. Gold carries extraction and imperial accumulation. Kola nut carries systems of exchange, ceremony, migration, and survival. The materials arrive already marked by the world.

I also became increasingly interested in how materials behave over time: staining, fading, oxidising, dispersing, eroding, absorbing. Nature and time became collaborators within the work. So rather than illustrating history, the materials function as evidence, residue, and active participants within larger systems of circulation and transformation.

Q: You've described pigment as "condensed geography." In Venice, itself historically shaped by mercantile exchange, colonial trade, and maritime circulation, did the city's own history enter the conceptual framework of the work?

Marcia Kure: The thing about Network V is that wherever it is placed becomes part of the network itself. Venice entered the work because it is already deeply implicated in systems of movement, migration, labour, exchange, tourism, and circulation: a city built through routes and water infrastructure, historically shaped by trade, colonial expansion, and spectacle. The instability of the city itself, the water, tides, sinking foundations, corroding facades, reflections, and continual movement of tourists and boats, also became important to me conceptually. It feels suspended between permanence and erosion. The person standing in front of the work becomes part of the network as well. No one stands outside these systems.

Q: Your recent writing insists that "the line" is not contour but conduit: something infrastructural, almost logistical. Was the Venice project conceived as an extension of your long-term engagement with line, or did the scale and architecture of the Biennale push you toward a new understanding of drawing?

Marcia Kure: It was both. The project emerged from a long engagement with line, but Venice pushed me toward a more spatial and infrastructural understanding of drawing.

What Uli gave me was not simply a formal understanding of line but an understanding that marks can operate simultaneously as communication, embodiment, architecture, memory, and spatial organisation. Over time, I became increasingly interested in the point at which line becomes inscription, where scarification, glyphs, routes, codes, and notation systems operate through marks that both communicate and transform surfaces. I also became interested in how lines operate beyond aesthetics in the contemporary world: fibre-optic cables, trade routes, migration paths, shipping lanes, circuitry, surveillance systems, scars. The line became infrastructural.

Venice expanded this because the architecture forced me to think beyond the surface. The suspended sculptures extended the line into space. Gravity, tension, and material weight became part of the drawing. The work became more about constructing systems of relation within space.

Q: The Hair Jackets and braided synthetic-hair assemblages introduce questions of gendered labour, beauty economies, and petrochemical production. How do these sculptural works converse with your large-scale drawings?

Marcia Kure: I see them as part of the same system of thinking. Synthetic hair exists at the intersection of the body, beauty, labour, fantasy, petrochemical production, and global commerce: intimate and industrial simultaneously. The braided forms extend concerns already present in the drawings: hair behaves almost like drawing in space, carrying movement, rhythm, pressure, extension, and duration. Braiding is also a form of accumulated labour and embodied knowledge passed through generations of women, while simultaneously existing within global petrochemical industries and transnational systems of manufacture. That tension between intimacy and industrial production is exactly what interests me.

Q: Your work often refuses stable categories: drawing becomes sculpture, surface becomes structure, mark becomes incision. Is this instability important politically for you, especially in relation to postcolonial identity and systems of classification?

Marcia Kure: I find tension productive. I think I resist categorisation partly because I have spent my career existing at the edges of categories: between African and European contexts, between drawing and sculpture, between the academy and the warehouse floor. That position is uncomfortable, but it is also clarifying. You see the boundaries from the outside.

Colonial systems depended heavily upon categorisation, classification, legibility, and control; contemporary surveillance systems operate similarly. A mark can simultaneously function as writing, scarification, mapping, code, drawing, or wound. I do not want those meanings fixed into singular interpretations. Resisting stable categories can also become a way of resisting total visibility and control.

Q: You emerged from the Nsukka School tradition, with its deep engagement with Uli line systems. Your recent work seems to move from lyrical line toward network logic and infrastructural mapping. How do you understand the continuity?

Marcia Kure: My work still begins with the mark, and I doubt I would have arrived at this understanding of line without encountering Uli. What it gave me was not simply a formal language but an understanding that marks can operate simultaneously as communication, embodiment, architecture, memory, and spatial organisation. A scar, a mark, writing, inscription, mapping, and drawing are all connected. The line simply expanded outward into larger systems of relation. I see continuity rather than rupture.

Q: There's a striking tension in your work between fragmentation and connectivity. The compositions often feel ruptured, unstable, and incomplete, yet they are also held together by dense systems of linkage. Is that tension reflective of how you experience diaspora itself?

Marcia Kure: Yes. Diaspora produces a complicated condition of simultaneity: you exist across multiple geographies, temporalities, systems, and histories at once. There is a connection, but also a rupture. Histories accumulate unevenly across bodies and geographies; some memories remain visible while others erode or become partially inaccessible. The fragments in the work never fully resolve into coherence, but they also never become entirely disconnected. They remain suspended in relation to one another. In many ways, that tension is a portrait of my own existence.

Q: Your collages and photomontages frequently appropriate imagery from ethnographic archives, fashion systems, children's literature, and colonial image cultures. What interests you about these visual regimes of classification and display?

Marcia Kure: I am interested in how bodies become constructed, categorised, circulated, and consumed through images. Ethnographic archives, colonial photography, fashion systems, and popular image cultures

all participate in systems of looking and classification. In my recent work, the body increasingly merges with pigment, inscription, and material; indigo, kola nut, scars, marks, and adornment all become ways the body is written upon and transformed into surface. The archive reveals how visual systems organise knowledge and power, but I am also interested in disrupting those systems through fragmentation, layering, opacity, and recombination.

Q: In works such as *Ethnographica* and *The Three Graces*, clothing and adornment appear as extensions of the body, almost like portable architectures of identity. Has your understanding of the body shifted in your more recent work on capital, extraction, and circulation?

Marcia Kure: Yes. Increasingly, I think of the body as infrastructural: something through which systems of labour, migration, trade, surveillance, extraction, and desire move and organise themselves. Clothing, adornment, synthetic hair, scarification, and ornament all become extensions of those systems. The body becomes both surface and site, a place where histories and infrastructures register themselves materially.

I think about my own body in this way too: what it carries visibly and invisibly, what it is read as before I speak. That is not an abstract condition. It shapes what spaces feel available, what kinds of authority are assumed or withheld, and how presence is interpreted. The work is partly an attempt to make those readings visible and to complicate them.

Q: You've written about how merchant capitalism transformed bodies and land into exchangeable commodities, and how contemporary surveillance capitalism extends those logics into data and attention. How does drawing allow you to think through these immense systems differently than writing or theory would?

Marcia Kure: When I am working through a problem in the studio, asking how a route becomes a scar or how logistics becomes a form of inscription, I cannot always find the entry point through language. Writing requires me to stabilise an argument before I fully understand it. Drawing lets me stay inside the uncertainty longer. Contradiction, simultaneity, and fragmentation can coexist on the surface without needing to be resolved. A mark can hold migration, circuitry, scarification, trade routes, and extraction at once; I can keep working without deciding which one it is.

That indecision is not a weakness. It is how I find out what I actually think. The body moves through the work before the mind catches up. Drawing allows me to think spatially, materially, emotionally, and relationally at the same time, not as an illustration of theory, but as a way of thinking through systems that exceed language.

Q: Your work often oscillates between beauty and violence. The surfaces are sensuous, materially rich, and seductive, yet they also carry histories of coercion, labour, and displacement. Is aesthetic pleasure something you deliberately complicate in the viewer?

Marcia Kure: Yes. Many of the materials I work with are seductive: indigo, gold, charcoal, hair, rich pigments, intricate surfaces. But embedded within them are histories of labour, extraction, coercion, and violence. I am interested in how surfaces can draw viewers into proximity before those histories begin to emerge more slowly. I do not want the viewer to arrive at a stable relationship to beauty. I want the pleasure to remain complicated and entangled.

Q: You've spoken about perception itself being partial: that viewers can only ever grasp fragments of larger systems. Does your work intentionally resist total comprehension as a way of critiquing the modern desire to map, classify, and control everything?

Marcia Kure: Total comprehension is often tied to systems of domination and control; colonial, bureaucratic, and surveillance systems all depend upon visibility, legibility, and the continuous extraction of information. I am interested in opacity, fragmentation, incompleteness, and partial perception. The systems the work engages are themselves too vast and entangled to fully map. Opacity can become a form of resistance.

Q: Across drawing, collage, pigment, and assemblage, your practice continually asks how materials remember histories. At this stage in your career, what do you think drawing can still do politically and emotionally that other mediums cannot?

Marcia Kure: Drawing remains profoundly important to me because it is at once immediate, unstable, intimate, and expansive. It can move between body and infrastructure, between gesture and system, between intimacy and planetary scale with extraordinary fluidity. It can absorb writing, mapping, notation, scarification, architecture, code, and memory while remaining open. Politically, drawing still resists fixed categories. Emotionally, it can register hesitation, exhaustion, repetition, fragility, pressure, care, erosion, and duration in ways that feel deeply human. Even when engaging immense systems of extraction, surveillance, or circulation, drawing still carries the body's trace. I still believe it allows us to remain inside complexity without needing to fully master or resolve it.