

Kirsten Dobroth, "A New Exhibition By Celebrated Artist Precious Okoyomon Blooms Atop The Aspen Art Museum,"  
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## A New Exhibition By Celebrated Artist Precious Okoyomon Blooms Atop The Aspen Art Museum

Aspen Public Radio | By [Kirsten Dobroth](#)

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Artist and poet Precious Okoyomon's work now is in bloom atop the Aspen Art Museum. The living installation will be on display until September 2022, the longest running exhibition in the museum's history.

Precious Okoyomon is a celebrated artist and poet (the artist goes by the pronoun "they"). They're known for creating vast living garden installations, which combine flora, poetic prose and sculpture, that have been exhibited — and celebrated — all over the world. *The New York Times Style Magazine* recently hailed Okoyomon as "The Artist Who Transforms Galleries Into Forest And Fields" around the same time Okoyomon received a rave in *The New Yorker* for their spring show at Performance Space in Manhattan's East Village — and won the prestigious Frieze Artist Award at this year's Frieze New York art show.

The latest dreamlike gardenscape to grow from the 28-year-old's mind has sprouted atop the Aspen Art Museum. The exhibition, entitled "Every Earthly Morning the Sky's Light touches Ur Life is Unprecedented in its Beauty," opened June 11 and will be on display until September 2022, the longest running exhibition in the museum's history.

The exhibition will be the site of community-building "activations" while the garden is in bloom, particularly during seasonal solstices. The Aspen Art Museum also recently

opened a reading room that features book selections picked by the Sparkle Nation Book Club, a reading group formed by Okoyomon and friends in 2018.

## Paradise Found

Okoyomon was born in the UK, and raised by a Nigerian mother in the U.S. As a child, they'd write poems and plant them in holes they dug in the earth. Writing the poem is still the first part of Okoyomon's creative process.

"Everything is birthed from the poem," they said. "From there, I can find an actual thing I can hold because you can't really hold language, so it's really nice to create these environments that I know is the poem."

Much of the inspiration for their poetry comes from the pages of the artist's dream journal — a log they've kept for the last 10 years.

"I think a lot of my work is based on trying to build — I call them portals — dreams to new ways we can imagine the world or be in the world with each other obviously

because it's proven that the way we're working together and co-existing doesn't work," Okoyomon said.

Envisioning utopia, however, often means confronting the dark complexities of the world. At the artist's largest show to date (an installation called "Earthseed" at Museum für Moderne Kunst's Zollamt gallery in Frankfurt, Germany), they crafted angel-shaped sculptures from lamb's wool and placed them in a room filled with kudzu — a vine with connotations of racism and slavery in the South. Within months, Okoyomon's angels were ethereally green and glowing, wrapped delicately in kudzu that smothered the walls and floor around them.

"There's hope and magic in that whimsy, I think in those bridges to building new worlds we need that," they said of the fantastical nature of their work.

Invasive plants, like kudzu, are often a predominant element in their work, and at the Frankfurt show, an entire ecosystem including moss and spiders and snails emerged from within the leafy overgrown chaos.

"I love working with things that I can't control," they say. "Plants and soil, to some extent I can help them grow, but I never know how things are going to turn out really. That's my favorite thing, not knowing what's going to happen in the work and then having it shock me."

Letting nature run its course is the plan for the installation at the Aspen Art Museum, too. The artist worked with local farms and nurseries and landscapers, like Erin's Acres and Aspen's BlueGreen, to source a variety of native and invasive plant species—many of which can be eaten.

On a hot summer day shortly after the exhibition opened, bright pink blooms bobbed in the breeze next to honeysuckle, and lily pads skimmed the surface of black algae water. The artist travelled back to their home in Brooklyn after the show opened, but wondered about what treasures will be waiting when they return to Aspen later this summer.

"It's going to be a whole different garden," they say. "We're planting all these special flowers and lots of milkweed for all the butterflies, and by the time August comes it's just going to be bursting with life up there."

Ceramic tiles and glazed angel sculptures were created in the kilns at Anderson Ranch Arts Center, and emerge through the verdant chaos. A cacophony of sound curated by Okoyomon oozed from speakers hidden beneath tangled vegetation along the garden's walking path. Everything from the sound to the flora will change with the seasons, according to Okoyomon, and by winter, they expect black flowers to have bloomed from the earth on the museum's rooftop.

"I love the idea of creating this little biosphere on top of the museum where you're going to be encased in what I want to feel like a perfect space outside of the madness of the world," they said.

And dream along with them while taking it in.