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MUSEUM OF ART
PAN-ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY

Artwork Information Sheet **45**

OLUWAYEMISI ONADIPE'S WATER HYACINTH



Oluwayemisi Onadipe. Water Hyacinth, photography. Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art, Pan-Atlantic University.

INTRODUCTION

Oluwayemisi Rosemary Anike Onadipe is a Nigerian photographer whose documentary practice offers a close look into the everyday realities shaped by environmental conditions in coastal communities. Her work *Water Hyacinth* is a photographic study produced in 2025 in Epe, Lagos, capturing the impact of the fast-spreading aquatic plant on local life and livelihood. Through this image, Onadipe reflects on how the invasive hyacinth influences fishing, transportation, and general water use, while also highlighting the adaptive strategies residents employ in response to the challenge. The photograph forms part of a broader inquiry into the relationship between people and their changing environment, and it currently stands as a visual record of resilience and ongoing transformation in the Lagos–Epe lagoon region.

THE ARTIST

Oluwayemisi Rosemary Anike Onadipe is a multidisciplinary artist born and based in Lagos, Nigeria. Her early experiences in the city continue to inform her practice, which is deeply engaged with themes of time, transformation, and memory. Onadipe explores the passage of time through the reimagining of objects and spaces, examining how environmental and social changes shape perception and collective memory. Through her work, she interrogates how lived experiences are archived, altered, and remembered, using visual storytelling as a lens for reflection and dialogue.

She studied Fine and Applied Arts at the Federal College of Education, Lagos, and in 2024 was among three recipients of the Future African Cities Award under the *Unsung Heroes* category. Onadipe has participated in numerous exhibitions and workshops, including *Urban Spaces and Public Life* (Johannesburg, 2024), *In, Relating to, or Characteristic of* (Johannesburg, 2004), *Cosmos of Space of Place*, Blabla Biennale (Bamako), *Once Upon a Time* (Lagos, 2022), and *Iconic Lagos* (2022).

ABOUT THE WATER HYACINTH IN LAGOS-EPE

Water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*) is a free-floating aquatic plant known for its rapid and aggressive growth, often spreading across water surfaces in thick mats that block sunlight and reduce oxygen levels in the water.

Studies on Nigerian coastal waters have long noted this pattern, especially in the Lagos–Epe lagoon system, where environmental conditions strongly support its spread (Nwankwo, 1995). The lagoon receives nutrient-rich runoff from nearby farms and household waste, creating an ideal environment for proliferation (Adegbola & Denloye, 2012). Its naturally slow water flow allows the plant to settle and multiply without resistance, while the warm tropical climate accelerates its reproductive cycle. As the hyacinth expands, it clogs waterways, disrupts fishing routes, and restricts boat movement, a challenge regularly documented in Lagos State Waterways Authority (LASWA) clearing reports. The dense coverage also reduces oxygen levels, making the waters less habitable for fish and contributing to the decline in fish populations (Adegbola & Denloye, 2012). Altogether, this creates a chain reaction that affects both the ecosystem and the everyday livelihoods of communities that depend on the lagoon.



Oluwayemisi Onadipe. Water Hyacinth, photography.

ANALYSIS OF THE WORK

The photograph captures an overwhelming spread of water hyacinth covering the entire picture plane, creating a thick green carpet that visually dominates the lagoon. At the centre of the composition, two figures work from a wooden boat, actively harvesting the plant that surrounds them. One figure is frozen in a moment of movement, stepping out of the boat while holding a large bunch of hyacinth, suggesting both effort and familiarity with the task. The other figure remains seated in the boat, steadying it as they continue the day's work. In the foreground, the camera draws attention to the tangled, fibrous roots of the plant and the heavy, muddy effect they impose on the water's surface. This close-up detail reinforces the suffocating grip the hyacinth has on the waterways of Epe, its ability to slow down movement, block access routes, and interfere with the natural flow of life around the lagoon.

This work was created in Epe as part of a broader study on how environmental changes directly shape the daily survival of people living in the suburban and rural edges of Lagos. While urban areas often face the challenge of plastic waste, the communities around Epe contend primarily with the rapid spread of water hyacinth, which disrupts fishing activities, transportation routes, and general water use. Yet, the photograph also highlights the adaptability and resilience of local residents. Faced with this invasive plant, many have begun harvesting and repurposing it into useful products such as bags, hats, and mats, and in some cases even converting it into biogas for home use. Through this, the image not only records an environmental problem but also points to a growing practice of transforming an ecological burden into a viable economic resource.

CONCLUSION

Water Hyacinth ultimately functions as both documentation and quiet advocacy. Through a single, carefully observed moment, Onadipe draws attention to the complex entanglement of environmental degradation, economic survival, and human resilience in the Lagos–Epe lagoon region. The photograph refuses to isolate the invasive plant as a purely ecological issue; instead, it situates it within lived experience, where environmental change directly shapes labour, movement, and livelihood. By presenting at the foreground of the image, the active presence of local residents within an overwhelmed landscape, the work shows adaptation rather than helplessness. It reveals how communities negotiate survival amid persistent ecological pressure. In this sense, *Water Hyacinth* stands as a visual archive of contemporary coastal life in Lagos, one that invites reflection on environmental responsibility while acknowledging the ingenuity and endurance of those most affected.

REFERENCES

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3. Lagos State Waterways Authority (LASWA) Reports on Hyacinth Clearing (various years).