

NNEKA KAI

nnekakai.com

B. 1992, Atlanta, GA

Nneka Kai is an interdisciplinary artist whose practice begins with the question of “What is the free black female form?” Through this exploration, Kai employs the textiles techniques of braiding, coiling, and embroidery. The performative nature of these processes combined with their historic legacy collapses time and geographies, connecting Kai to others across the diaspora. Kai’s material-driven practice is emphasized through the color black. Her fibrous abstractions evoke concepts of opacity and minimalism that grapple with what we are taught, what we perceive, and how we arrive.

Through multiple disciplines, Kai confronts the dominant historical narrative of Black feminine identity. Reinterpreting and reimagining pathways for engaging with blackness, intimacy, labor, and positionality. Pulling inspiration from personal anecdotes, Black cultural theorist, and object research, Kai unveils hidden histories with hopes of creating dialogue and cultivating futures of freedom and agency.

EDUCATION:

2019 M.F.A., Fiber & Material Studies, School of the Art Institute of Chicago; Chicago, IL

2017 B.F.A., Textiles, Georgia State University; Atlanta, GA

ACADEMIC POSITIONS:

2019 Graduate Teacher’s Assistant

Micro/Micro Research Seminar
Fiber & Material Studies
School of the Art Institute of Chicago; Chicago, IL

2018 Graduate Teacher's Assistant

Sewing for Beginners
Homan Square
School of the Art Institute of Chicago; Chicago, IL

2017-18 Graduate Research Assistant

Textiles Resource Center
Fiber & Material Studies
School of the Art Institute of Chicago; Chicago, IL

2017 Teacher’s Assistant

Sculptural Fibers
Textiles
Penland School of Craft; Spruce Pine, NC

AWARDS:

2021 Swan Coach Gallery Edge Award Finalist Atlanta, GA

2020 Jean Alexander Artist Grant Recipient Atlanta, GA

Atlanta Contemporary Nexus Award Recipient Atlanta, GA
2019 SAIC Graduate Fellowship Finalist Chicago, IL
2017 Marion Bower Davis Scholarship Recipient Atlanta, GA
2016 Windgate Fellowship Nominee Atlanta, GA
GSURC Nominee Atlanta, GA

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS:

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2019 Nneka Kai: Material Sounding: The Dimensionality of A Thread
Material Gallery Chicago, IL

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2021 Newport Museum “Hair Stories” Exhibition Newport, RI
Guardian Gallery Drop a Pin Show Atlanta, Ga
2020 Guerilla Transmission: Who Owns the Ether Virtual
2019 MFA Graduate Show: Chicago, IL
Re: Working Labor: Chicago, IL
2017 BFA Exit Show: Atlanta, GA
2016 Mammal Gallery Many Hands Show: Atlanta, GA

PERFORMANCE

2021 Tender Ails Atlanta, GA
2020 ODE performances: Atlanta, GA
2019 Groundlevel Platform Gallery: Textured Translations: Chicago, IL
2018 New Blood X11: Chicago, IL
The Happening: Pine Spruce, NC

RESIDENCY:

2019 July MOCA IG: Instagram Artist Takeover

TALKS:

2021 Hair Stories Exhibition Artist Talk with Nneka Kai and Anne Wilson
<https://vimeo.com/616083694/3cea89b1cc>
Spelman University *Black Female Body in Visual Arts Course*
2020 TSA 2019 Symposium: Hidden Stories, Human Lives, Zoom
2019 Oggi Gallery Artist Readings. Chicago, IL
2018 SAIC Graduate Fiber & Material Studies Department. Chicago, IL **SAIC Graduate Fiber & Material Studies Talk/Performance.** Chicago, IL **Re: Workshop Symposium.** Chicago, IL

SELECTED PRESS & PUBLICATIONS:

2021 WGBH “Hair Stories” Exhibition Talk with curator Francine Weiss
<https://video.wgbh.org/video/frida-kahlo-pose-hair-stories-and-more-p2nibm/>
2020 Burnaway Magazine Interview with Susan Mackey

Living Monuments: Nneka Kai on Her Performance Series Odes

<https://burnaway.org/magazine/living-monuments-nneka-kai-on-her-performance-series-odes/>

2019 Kai, Nneka. "Reflections" Catachesis Reader. print

Mackey, Susan; "IN A (BLACK) WAY // THREE CHICAGO ARTISTS PUSH THE LIMITS OF BLACKNESS", The Seen, web.

<http://theseenjournal.org/art-seen-chicago/in-a-black-way/>

2018 Voyage Chicago: Local Story Interview, web.

<http://voyagechicago.com/interview/meet-nneka-kai-nneka-kai-downtown/>