

Press Release: *'If Walls Could Speak' Exhibition Opening:* *An exploration into how identity is shaped by the built environment.*

(Lagos, Nigeria, September 12, 2019) The Wheatbaker is pleased to present the works of one of Nigeria's most promising emerging artists, Patrick Akpojotor, for his debut solo exhibition *If Walls Could Speak*. The exhibition, curated by SMO Contemporary Art, includes 38 oil paintings, pencil sketches, seminal works in wood, and an installation of copper sculptures, which represent the artists' exploration of our subconscious connections between identity and the built environment.

In light of the sustainable development goals SDGs' recognition of the important role cities and human settlements play in addressing global challenges of 'inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable' spaces for human development¹ Akpojotor explores how architecture and our environment influence our individual and collective identities. Growing up in the megacity of Lagos, Akpojotor was fascinated by the names of streets and buildings, and started playing with the personification of abandoned buildings which harbor silent memories of forgotten people and historic events.

After graduating from the Auchu Polytechnic in Fine Art in 2008, followed by a degree in graphic design from Lagos Polytechnic in 2013, Akpojotor worked for Prof. Bruce Onobrakpeya as a studio assistant. In 2016, Akpojotor was deeply disturbed by the violent ejection of residents of the waterfront slum community of Otodo Gbame in Lekki, where thousands of people were displaced. He channeled his anger and frustration into his paintings and wood sculptures, creating buildings with human features and emotions.

These signature anthropomorphic structures with their cubist geometry, perspective, balance, and form, were his creative response to the realities of mega-city population pressure. His imagined structures and abstract compositions interrogate our sense of rootedness and belonging. Later that year, Akpojotor won the first ArtXLagos Prize for emerging artists with this important body of work.

"Akpojotor's works stimulate us to a refreshing experience of the artist's intuition, childhood, the search of identity, adventure and romance with space," commented Prof. Jerry Buhari, art critic and Professor of Fine Arts at Ahmadu Bello University. "Watching Patrick grow as an artist over a span of fifteen years I have a sense of fulfillment as a mentor," added Master Artist Prof. Bruce Onobrakpeya, a pioneer of Nigeria's contemporary art scene. "He is very talented, intelligent, diligent and passionate, and is able to draw inspiration from things around him and from faraway places."

"These amazing works not only give us an emotional feel of the rich and colorful history of Lagos' built environment; they also pay homage and immortalize important people, like Dr. Stella Adadevoh, whose timely medical intervention saved Lagos from the spread of the dreaded ebola disease in 2014," said Sandra Mbanefo Obiagio, the curator of the exhibition.

"Akpojotor's work captures the heart of traditional, colonial, and contemporary architecture scattered across the Lagos cityscape" concluded Architect Mosun Ogunbanjo, Director of the Wheatbaker. "We are proud to host *If Walls Could Speak* and use our hotel to promote the best of Nigeria's creative talent to a growing local and international community of art enthusiasts."

If Walls Could Speak is supported by Louis Guntrum wines and will be open to the public from September 16 to November 8, 2019.

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¹ From the *Oslo Manifesto: Design & Architecture for the SDGS*; Goal 11 recognizes the important role of cities in addressing global challenges with the need to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. The SDGs as a whole reiterate the importance of cities both in terms of their vulnerability as well as their growing opportunity.

Patrick Akpojotor (Biography)

Patrick Akpojotor born (1982) in Ile-Ife, hails from Agbarha-Otor, Delta state. He studied fine art at the School of Art, Federal Polytechnic, Auchi (2008) and Lagos State Polytechnic, Ikorodu (2013), where he majored in Graphic Design. He also had his training with Dr. Bruce Onobrakpeya as a studio assistant and consultant to the Bruce Onobrakpeya Foundation (BOF) from 2003 to 2017. He has won several awards/prizes including the Olusegun Obasanjo 2013, "OFF THE BIN PROJECT" 2013 and the first Art X prize in 2016. He has participated in several group exhibitions with the most recent being "IN-TER-ACTIONS" at Rele Art Gallery (2018) as well as, Art X Lagos art fair (2017) and Bruce Onobrakpeya and the Harmattan Workshop Exhibition (2016). He has also taken part in several editions of the Harmattan Workshop as a participant in painting sessions and facilitator of the leather craft session. He has been a full time studio artist since 2017.

Patrick is a multidisciplinary artist working across painting, drawing, printmaking, installation art and sculpture. His work is influenced by his fascination with the built space and architecture and their ability to shape ones identity. He is interested in the differences in human attitude, relating to the culture of the built environment that they inhabit. His work merges together visual elements of the built environment, geometry, human forms and imagined spaces to create abstract composition that interrogates our sense of perception which challenges us to see differently.