

Press Release: Bruce Onobrakpeya: *Eni! You Can Always Tell Where the Elephant Has Passed by!*

(April 26, 2019, Lagos, Nigeria) To mark sixty years of Prof. Bruce Onobrakpeya's stellar career as one of Nigeria's most celebrated pioneer contemporary artists, 36 rare prints will be showcased in a special commemorative exhibition, *Eni! You Can Always Tell Where the Elephant Has Passed by!*, curated by Sandra Mbanefo Obiagio of SMO Contemporary Art and hosted by the Wheatbaker in Lagos.

Eni! You Can Always Tell Where the Elephant Has Passed by! marks sixty years since Onobrakpeya's first exhibition in 1959 in Ughelli, during his student days at the Nigerian College of Arts Science & Technology in Zaria. The rare prints presented in the exhibition provide highlights of not just the artist's life and works, but are an important chronicle of Nigeria's post-independence era.

Onobrakpeya (born 1932) grew up in Delta State, and is one of Nigeria's most important artistic pioneers. He obtained a Diploma in Fine Arts and a Teacher's Certificate from the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology (now called Ahmadu Bello University) in Zaria in 1962. Onobrakpeya was a member of the famous Zaria Art Society, a student group which sought to develop a new aesthetic language deeply rooted in African tradition and philosophy. The group included Uche Okeke, Yusuf Grillo, Demas Nwoko, Oseloka Osadebe and other students who drew strength from the post-colonial independence movement.

These aspiring young artists were later called the "Zaria Rebels" and quickly made their mark internationally with their strong visual philosophy. "We were not rebelling against anything as such but thought that the idea of just using the western art technique without relating it to our culture wasn't right," commented Onobrakpeya, who began to experiment with diverse media including painting, sculpture, prints, low relief foils, large scale installations and mixed media works created out of found objects.

Onobrakpeya has received many awards and his works have been exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 1990, the Tate Modern in London, the National Museum of African Art of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., the Malmö Konsthall in Malmö, Sweden and the National Gallery of Modern Art, Lagos to name a few. He received the UNESCO *Living Human Treasures* Award in 2006.

"We are excited to be exhibiting *Okpogho (The Hornbill)*, a print which dates back to Prof. Onobrakpeya's first exhibition in Ughelli in 1959, alongside *Chibok Girls*, a recent print he created in 2017, as an homage to the kidnapped Nigerian school girls, as well as prints from his Niger Delta environmental protest series," said the exhibition curator, Sandra Mbanefo Obiagio. "Prof Onobrakpeya is not just one of our finest artist's, his works are also important historical documents which showcase Nigeria's rich history and culture, alongside socio-political events of the past sixty years.

"We are extremely proud to host this internationally significant exhibition of Prof. Bruce Onobrakpeya's prints," said Mosun Ogunbanjo, Director of the Wheatbaker. "It is important to us that both our international and local guests enjoy some of the best art Nigeria has to offer, as we confirm our commitment to using our platform to celebrate the best creativity of our master artists as well as emerging talent."

The ENI exhibition is supported by Louis Guntrum Wines, and will run from April 27th until the end of July, with a special reception and artist talk held during the month of June. Another important exhibition of Onobrakpeya's installations and sculptures is currently being exhibited at Freedom Park in Lagos, with a third exhibition planned in Agbhara-Ottor in August, all to commemorate his prolific career.

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