

Press Release

Kindred Spirits: Celebrating 25 Years of Artistic Collaboration

(Lagos, Nigeria, April 24, 2023) The Wheatbaker is proud to host *Kindred Spirits*, an exhibition of 32 paintings and mixed media works by experimental artists, Tayo Olayode and Ade Odunfa. The exhibition, is curated by SMO Contemporary Art and showcases recent works by two artists whose creative roots are inter-twined, having graduated from Ahmadu Bello University with a Bachelor's degrees in Fine Art in 1998, and collaborated for over 25 years.

With an eye for experimentation, Olayode and Odunfa have explored unconventional mediums and techniques to create a dynamic interplay between texture and form, highlighting the energy and vibrancy of their African heritage. Both artists have exhibited locally and internationally over the years, and also worked on large-scale sculptural commissions in public areas in Lagos and Port Harcourt.

In *Kindred Spirits*, their paintings and wall hangings are a response to the political realities facing a nation's socio-cultural challenges, reminding us of the power of art to create bridges rather than divisions. Their work is an examination of up-cycled waste and household materials such as rubber slippers, charcoal, beer and soft-drink cans, cutlery, newspaper, and textiles from traditional Nigerian outfits, to depict typical scenes within their communities, documenting the economic pressures, societal and cultural strictures, and the influence of technology on artistic practice and identity.

Tayo Olayode (born 1970), long known for his dexterity with line and color, presents his latest paintings and mixed media works, including his *Flip Flop* series, in which he creates intricate mosaics out of tiny, fragments of sliced up rubber slippers, the cheapest and most common footwear of millions of people across the continent. These detailed assemblages depict typical scenes within densely populated urban neighborhoods such as "Help me push, abeg", where a passenger is forced to push a motorbike taxi, popularly called Okada, which is the most cost-effective form of transport. Through this ironic role reversal, Olayode comments on the dashed hopes of millions of youth who aspire to better their lives in under-served poor communities, but end up pushing the system meant to enable them.

In contrast, Ade Odunfa (born 1973) presents his *Sunday Morning* and *Siblings* portrait series, in which he paints female figures on carefully sourced, vintage lace textile. His subjects' confident unwavering gaze and flamboyant head-wraps showcase the elegance and vibrancy of African women, unapologetically embracing their meta-physical existence, accentuated by swirling organic leaf patterns, which he cuts out of the fabric pasted across his canvases.

Over the years, both artists have contributed to the sustainability of the Nigerian art landscape and have supported key institutions and initiatives to strengthen young talent. Through Odunfa's "Faces & Phases" capacity building platform, he has mentored young artists by teaching regular workshops. Olayode similarly co-founded the Iponri Art Studios with fellow artists from the Guild of Fine Artists, organising regular exhibitions. Olayode has served as President of the national *Watercolour League* and

both have been active members of the Society of Nigeria Artists (SNA) and the Guild of Professional Fine Artists, showcasing their work locally and internationally.

“Art has embraced a lot of things like artificial intelligence (AI) technology and in five to ten years, it may be a struggle identifying which is AI generated art and which is traditional art; artists may have to compete with computers and the competition is going to get a lot tougher even though I believe it will help increase the value of traditional art,” commented Olayode, whose recent works dissect and question the influence of technology on our identity and acceptance of self, by painting headless figures floating through a maze of colorful lines and circuitry, under the centrifugal force of technology and social media.

“I would say express yourself as much as you can through art but don't make it your sole source of income,” Odunfa added during a recent interview. “My journey has been dynamic. I worked as creative director on the Lagos Carnival Project for seven years, and this influenced my large sculptural works through interactive power of carnival art and performance.”

“SMO is committed to showcasing the work of mid-career artists, as an important avenue for telling a more complete narrative of the African art landscape,” explained Sandra Mbanefo Obiogo, the exhibition’s curator and creative director of SMO Contemporary Art. “The rich textures and diverse media showcased in *Kindred Spirits* is a reminder that we need to appreciate the solid talent and artistic contributions of a whole generation of important artists, who have paved the way for the young and dynamic “Tik-Tok” generation taking over social media.

Kindred Spirits also a reminder of how friendship across artistic mediums strengthens and enriches society.” The exhibition is open to the public from May 1st to June 30th, 2023, at the Wheatbaker Hotel, Lagos.

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