



UNEARTHING AND RECLAIMING. A NEW BE-COME-ING

GBAM!

GBAM!

DANIEL OBASI

KADARA ENYEASI

KOLA OSHALUSI

LEX ASH

NOMA OSULA

OLA EBITI

09.06.18

WHEATBAKER HOTEL, IKOVI LAGOS, NIGERIA



A WHITESPACE
CREATIVE AGENCY





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CURATORIAL I

GBAM! Literally hitting the nail on the head. GBAM! When everyone in the room expresses agreement! GBAM! When in chorus, we affirm something to be perfect! When we are all in synergy. An emotional outburst of agreement over beauty, perfection, congruity, and excellence.

Welcome to GBAM! an exhibition in which six of Nigeria's avant garde fashion photographers express what they believe to be GBAM! Their vision of perfection as it relates to our culture, our history, our sense of justice and equality, gender and identity, and tradition vis-à-vis new concepts of power.

The 25 photographs presented in GBAM may cause us to dig deeper, beneath the obvious, to understand their take on perfection through a roving artistic lens; we can feast our eyes on carefully stylized installations, as well as quotidian scenes captured far away from the urban crush.

Daniel Obasi introduces us to a new "aesthetic for tomorrow" in which traditional beads, hairstyles, fabric and ornaments are used to "deconstruct traditional regalia" against stark backgrounds.

Kedara Enyeasi explores gender and power by questioning traditional stereotypes; his images remind us of hawkers weaving in and out of grid-lock traffic; often faceless and voiceless, disempowered youth who look at their reflection hoping to find a new reality of opportunity. Enyeasi's use of color, light and shadow in highly stylized poses, reflect beauty in the face of inequality.

Kola Oshalusi's documentary depiction of youth in Northern Nigeria present an emotional naiveté, a clustering of untainted stillness and repose within an arid, harsh landscape. His powerful black and white images present a lyrical expose of young adults, always in clusters, facing forward with resilience despite the stark surroundings.

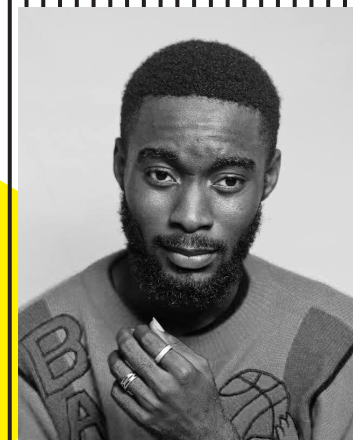
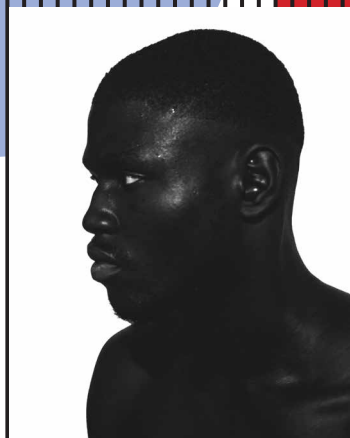
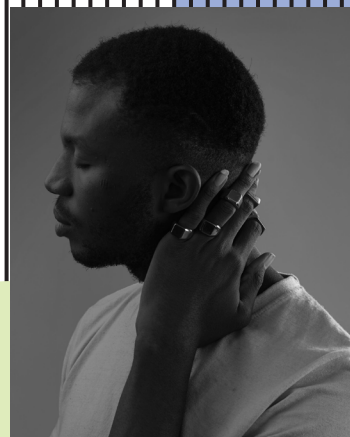
Lex Ash's images of power, authority, and equality vis-à-vis age old tradition and spirituality, cause us to question the status quo. The tradition of prayer over the kola nut, is turned on its head with a young woman bestowing this blessing, reserved for men, in the council of traditional red cap chiefs. By these works we ask deeper questions about both spiritual and temporal hierarchy, and follow Ash's demand to evolve into a contemporary belief system firmly rooted in equality.

Noma Osula's powerful images of Mr. Shola's perfectly chiseled tribal marks across his striking Bantu features are juxtaposed against fine pink fabric, whimsically wound around his stout neck. Osula explores a wonderful interplay of traditional scarification, against a striking scarf-like adornment placed over a heavy set physicality. His deep, rich colors draw us in to explore tradition, beauty and power within the confines of dignity and strength.

And finally, Ola Ebiti draws inspiration from the traditional Yoruba agbada and creates a new fashion vocabulary in which he uses traditional beads and silver and crystal patterns to question our traditional concepts of perfection.

All six photographers are represented by A White Space Creative Agency, which co-curated this exhibition from their wealth of experience in the fashion world. Through this project, Team SMO has broadened its understanding and appreciation of the genre of fashion photography to tackle our understanding of tradition, history and equality through an unapologetic, contemporary aesthetic.

Sandra Mbanefo Obiagio
SMO Contemporary Art
Co-Curator
GBAM!



CURATORIAL II

We're constantly being challenged about what represents us, as Nigerians, as Africans and as black men and women. The legitimacy of our modern, diverse identities queried in nuanced sub-text. Many new visual artists expanding beyond the shores of Nigeria are often asked if their work is 'African'. As though the 'country' was a verb.

I remember recommending a young Nigerian, Lagos based photographer to a renowned New York based international publication, only to be roundly rebuked that the work was 'not African' enough. As Handel Wright has put it, "African identity is a category that is always already overdetermined and spectacularly overgeneralised and homogenised"

As early on as the early 1900's African's such as King Noye have fought against this tendency of homogenous western representation. Similarly, the diverse ideas of 'self-perfection' showcased by the GBAM! photographers continue this tradition. This series of photographs highlight the photographers desire to craft images that make sense to the global audience and to themselves, whilst also allowing the work to be fully immersive in the culture that they represent. The impact of social media also means these images move beyond the given physical context. They will become part of the archive of the contemporary visual narrative showcasing the variety of the 'African self'.

Although most of the photographers seem fully aware of the constructive narrative that photography allows one to shape, they are also fully aware of the complex residues of post-colonial aesthetics and globalization that has conditioned much of our learning and creative reference points.

Thus, style and meaning, for many of the new generation of Nigerian and African photographers follows along the exploration of personal interest. In this series that exploration weaves dynamically and subtlety along the diverse lines of self-identity for all the photographers.

Here identity appears simply as an approach for individualistic expression used to unearth, question and transcend the limitations of categorisations such as gender, traditions, rituals, class, style, beauty, ethnicity and religion in search of a precision moment of clarity, the almost elusive moment of GBAM!

Papa Omotayo
A Whitespace Creative Agency
Co-Curator
GBAM!

GBAM! Unearthing and Reclaiming A New BE-COME-ING

Gbam, is as an explanation, a proclamation; a term that has been popularized exponentially, particularly in Social Media, where it has become an exhortation that concludes whatever precedes it. Gbam makes sense of what is to come, and declares, emphatically that the discussion is closed. However, the six photographers whose works form this exhibition were presented with a far more nuanced brief, one that called on them to express their own notions of perfection, that draws on cultural historical roots and attempts to divine the essence of them whilst simultaneously presenting a balanced sometimes ambiguous whole, one that belongs entirely in the present, and may, possibly point to a new, bolder, more beautiful future. As one would expect of such an audacious and multi-layered brief it has resulted in different approaches, conclusions and points for further discussion or silent meditation as one takes in the images. Moreover, the exhibition which features the works (in alphabetical order) of Lex Ash, Ola Ebiti, Kadara Enyeasi, Daniel Obasi, Kola Oshalusi and Noma Osula marks a watermark as curators SMO Contemporary attempt to capture and document the different elements informing and inspiring contemporary fashion photography in Nigeria and in doing so formally chart it's journey and continuing development.

Origin narratives and etymology both in its literal and cultural sense are central to beginning to unravel the meaning in the images presented. Gbam! Itself as a turn of phrase is subject to debate both in terms of origin and usage with some seeing its etymology in the Igbo language due to the language being one that has a 'gb' diphthong and the word commonly being used as shorthand for 'exactly' and others refuting this, asserting that the context in which Gbam is used, as a concluding exclamation is reflective of its use in slang Yoruba, to describe a collision, be it physical or otherwise.

Such variations are particularly of note when one considers some of the photographs presented by Ola Ebiti who takes both historical starting points and current usage for his pieces and elaborates "there is a Nigerian everywhere in the world", [thus] traditional Yoruba wear is repurposed and becomes

worldly and nomadic. Generations who have incorporated traditional pieces into their everyday life have made traditional fashion seem universal beyond how it was invented by the forefathers. Like our people, our fashion is no longer confined to boundaries of our country." Correspondingly, although utilising collections from contemporary Nigerian fashion houses such as Orange Culture, Kenneth Ize, Grey, Post imperial, and Lisa Folawiyo, Daniel Obasi's A contemporary Dream is "A fashion project that explores the relationship between modern (present day) Nigerian fashion with traditional aesthetics... remaking Nigerian fashion conscious of the future but unearthing the secrets and mysteries of the past." To present different ways of being, both Ebiti and Obasi choose to juxtapose history and tradition with the current norms and aesthetics and fashion, thus creating a new whole: A full stop, exclamation mark or indeed comma to the ties that previously bound.

In Noma Osula's works we are treated to depictions of defiance in the face of modernity in his series of portraits of Mr Shola. Osula notes that the portraits "explore the idea of perfection focusing on Mr Shola objecting to the stereotypical perception of beauty. Mr Shola is portrayed in a state of comfort with not just his scarification which tells a story about his root but his entirety ". In choosing to depict Mr Shola such, Osula's work echoes cultural theorist John Berger's assertion in his seminal work 'Understanding A Photograph' that: "Photographs bear witness to a human choice being exercised in a given situation." Here we are seeing two choices: the first of Osula choosing to use his subject to communicate larger themes around cultural identity and beauty, and secondly, Mr Shola's unapologetic view of pulchritude that is not distorted by imported normative concerns that see scarification as unattractive at best and barbaric and backward at worst.

Kola Oshalusi's pictures sit between landscape and portraiture but also open up discussions in regards to semiotics, a term first coined by John Locke in the 17th century. In 21st century Nigeria we look at the 'sign posts' within the photographs, groups who for the most part are aligned in their dress,

whether it be colorful modest hijabs or football shirts, still seeking the metaphysical truths that they point to. Oshalusi elusively alludes to the pictures being evocative of "...our race, together, against time , for what binds us from our oppressors to redemption, but not by ourselves collectively in twos huddled together in any little shelter we can find as a group...wishing we were successful foreigners yet together." One is left to deduce independently what this success actually looks like or indeed means, and viewers cannot help but consider Roland Barthes' observations in 'The Fashion System' where he notes the correlation in cultural material, such as a fashion magazine with its alluring combination of prose and images, being used by the bourgeois elites to impose its values on others. The taste makers by their very position of privilege are calling the shots literally. Are we, the art loving, educated elites of Lagos and other metropolises of Africa guilty of the same, when we see only the autonomy in Oshalusi's subjects vis a vis what they are wearing as valid, and their living circumstances as undesirable and thus inferior because they do not correlate with our aspirations? The series leaves us to query such at length.

With Gbam! As a word most regularly used in popular culture, some might argue apocryphally in relations to 'Slay Queens', it is with Lex Ash that we see gender parity and authority explicitly explored as Ash dares to imagine female authority in the Patriarchal setting of the Igbo Chief, breaking the Oji, or Kola Nut. Ash explains further: "Even if a woman was the oldest person in the room at the time, it is the responsibility of the oldest man... to bless the Oji....women came after men in every scenario, whether it was with Oji or [being] allowed to be in the council of red cap chiefs...Gbam! indicates a sign of agreement, perfection and concurrence. Considering the push towards gender equality, my take is to redefine what perfection and agreement really means to the tune of what modernization has done to improve the social standing and general appreciation of women in our society." Our female chief is not impersonating a man, as seen in a series of photographs where she goes through the perennially recognizable process, though not necessarily entirely female act, of having her hair plaited.

However, in all the images she owns her power rather than waiting for it to be bequeathed. She is leader by virtue of the cap, and priestess in that she has the authority to bless the kola, and perhaps most evocative of all; her subjects are of mixed gender signifying true equality. Significantly, her beauty and desirability are secondary to the powerful role she plays in society as a whole.

Kadara Enyeasi, for his part takes an alternative approach to gender dynamics and body politics: "I picked up references to religion, culture and also the male gaze. I decided to contrast traditional religion and homosexuality (the male gaze) versus heterosexuality.... My main focus was to re-address what it means to be a man in this century." Yet, in doing so he also illustrates how sexuality, particularly in the male hetro-normative instance is steeped in western social constructs, not too dissimilar to those outlined in Michel Foucault's History of Sexuality, rather than concepts that have Nigeria as their home. This is most vividly depicted in the model styled in what at first glance looks like an evening skirt and Enyeasi notes: "[The model] is dressed in cloth similar to a tutu but the way I styled the tutu it looks a bit more like the attire of a Benin king, who usually wear big regal gowns." Can a man in wrapper, a customary item and visually omnipresent mode of dress found in the south-south and eastern part of Nigeria be considered less so because he is trouser free? Furthermore, who and when and by what means did we decree that such were 'masculine norms' in fashion or standardised dressing for a Nigerian man? Religion in its imported form is represented in the crucifix and female domesticity, another seemingly taboo area Enyeasi dares us to be challenged by when he states he wants viewers to: "start noticing, via symbolism, [the model's] gesture, his face, his gazes and the props as well." Have we reached a conclusion, that proverbial Gbam moment ifwith different sorts of men are acceptable and palatable? Is it a collision of deep seated prejudices that cannot be easily amalgamated into one unifying message, and what does it mean for a man regardless of orientation in Nigeria today?

Overall, Gbam! illustrates emphatically and vividly that fashion photography is so much more than depicting pieces for the purposes of marketing them. Fashion photography especially in the image saturated era we currently preside in is the primary source evidence of who we are now and how we wish to present ourselves, and will be analysed at length both now and in years to come. Contemporary Nigerian Photographers as witnessed in the works that form this exhibition inhabit numerous worlds informed by identity, history, influences, aspirations and multiple geographic locations, both imagined and lived in. Just as no one individual or consortium owns ‘fashion’ or indeed ‘photography’ so no one owns ‘Nigeria’ and the numerous ways fashion is expressed and depicted both at home and in the Diaspora. There are collisions in philosophies and social constructs; there are confluences in execution of ideas and concepts and also in the understanding and presentation of culture. However, what unifies is the confidence that underlies the photographers; individuals who choose to fully own their myriad of truths.

Mazzi Odu

—

DANIEL OBASI

KADARA ENYEASI

KOLA OSHALUSI

LEX ASH

NOMA OSULA

OLA EBITI

—



DANIEL OBASI

“There is an awakening, a resurgence of curiosity and a hunger in the fashion world for a true and more profound understanding of what is traditional and authentically Nigerian; and a desire to recreate a new aesthetic for tomorrow”

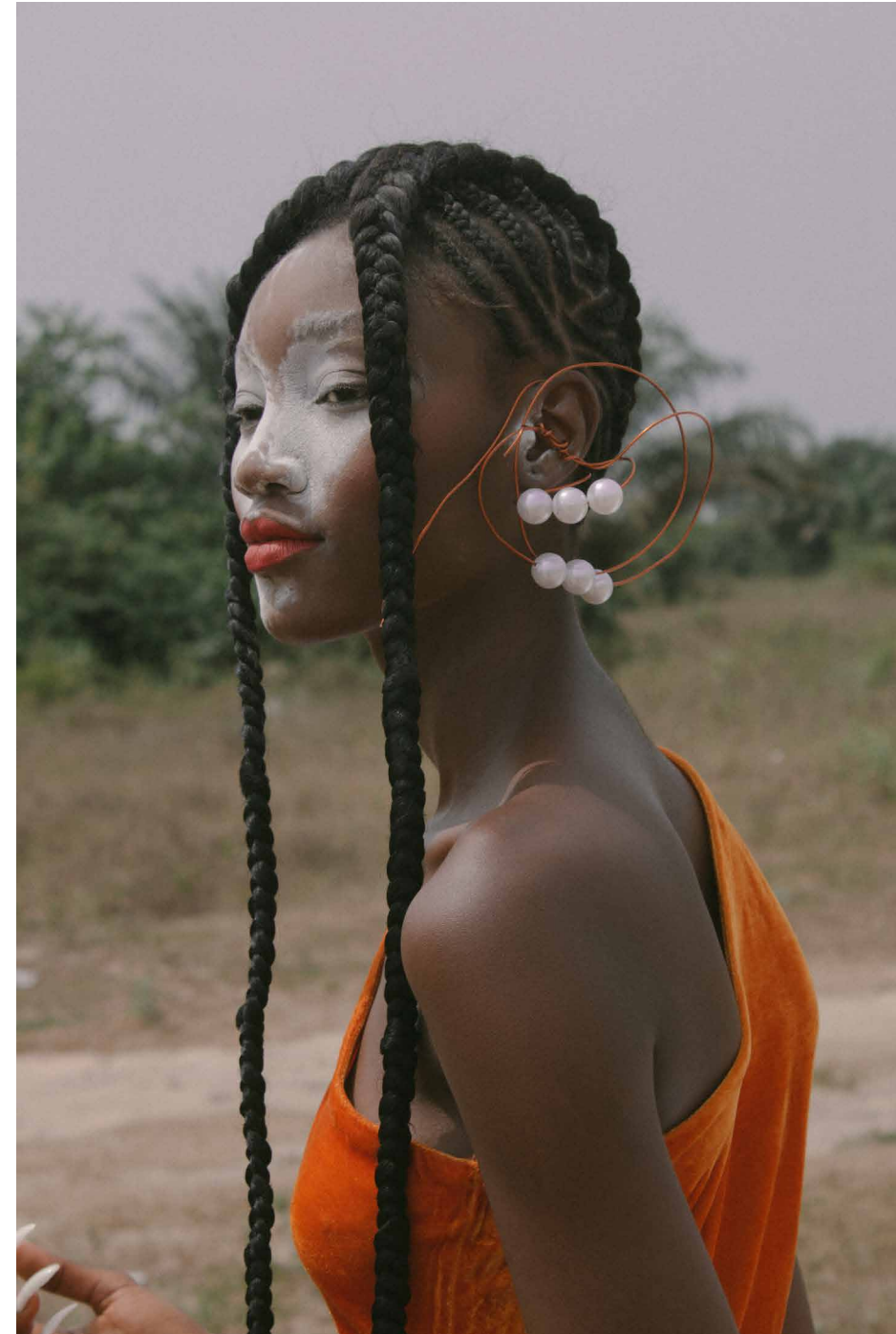


Daniel Obasi

Daniel Obasi's works birth a certain idealism to Afrocentric concepts; whimsical, soft yet powerfully contrasting with sharp silhouettes, colours and stories. Attracted to old cinema and afro futurism, Nigerian born Artist is deeply concerned with advancing the scope of African narratives.

Gradually developing a heartfelt style that lures viewers into an ever evolving imagination; 23 year old Obasi studied language at the university of Lagos and his works have been shown at the Smithsonian National Museum of African History and Culture Washington DC. His film projects have been screened at the Bucharest Fashion Film Festival Romania, at the Palazzo Litta Cultura Milan Italy and recently at the APPEAR Project by fashion Africa now in Hamburg Germany.

Daniel Obasi is a self taught photographer who takes on a rather symbolic and metaphorical approach to his works.



The Dream weaver
Daniel Obasi
2018
42 x 58.5 mm

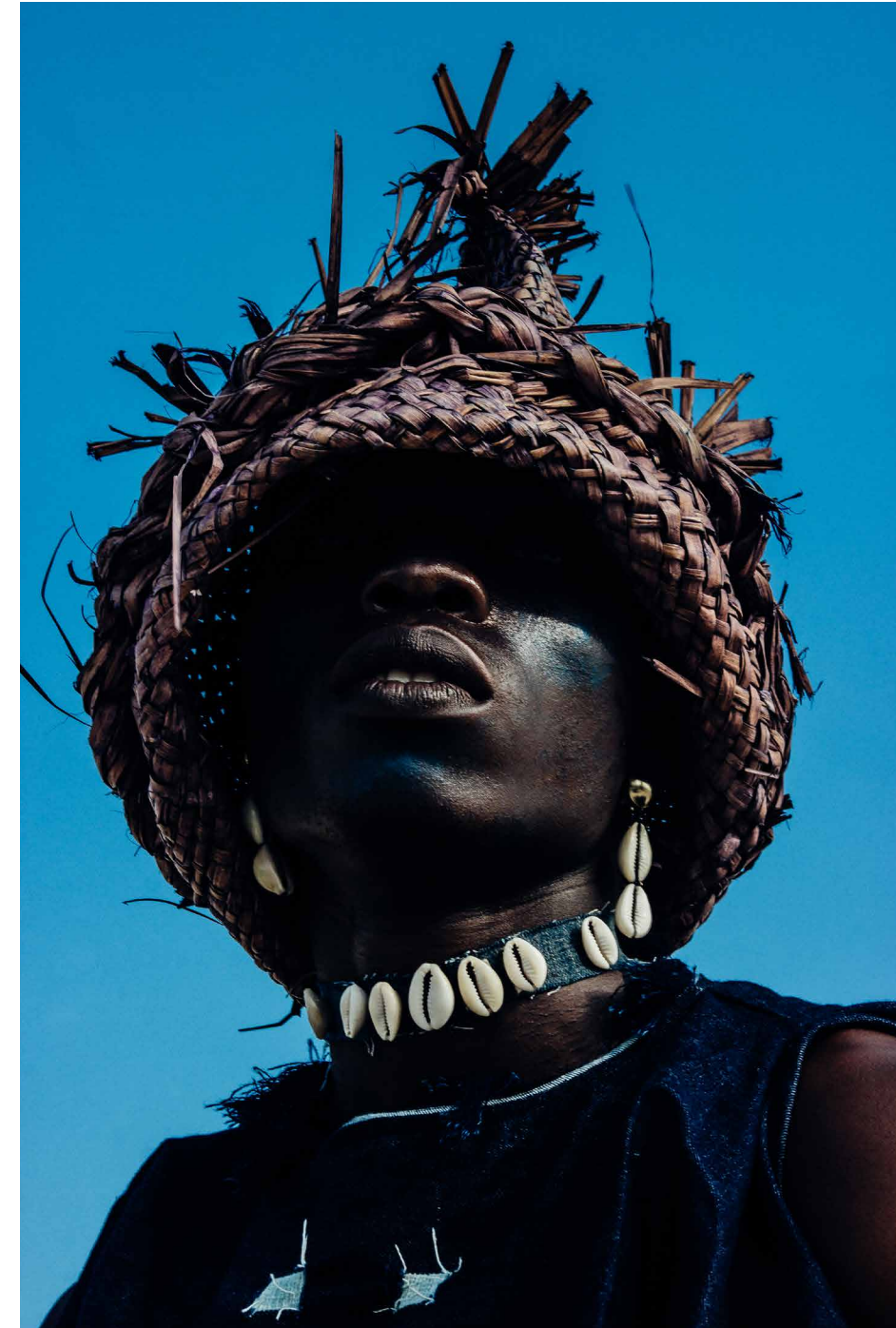
A Contemporary Dream

A fashion project that explores the relationship between modern (present day) Nigerian fashion with traditional aesthetics.

Despite having a cultural background and history that is colorful, exuberant and often flamboyant, Nigeria is constantly influenced by western opinions and ideals on everything from education to fashion. Over the years there has been a steady need to look or sound as foreign as possible, and every form of expression is conformed into white collar boxes that colonization, religion and societal pressure have created. Fashion being one of the strongest forms of personal expressions globally, has become especially susceptible to this influence. Traditional aesthetics, and narratives in fashion have been downplayed and restricted within the boxes of white collar urban wear and traditional regalia - until now.

There is an awakening, a resurgence of curiosity and a hunger in the fashion world for a true and more profound understanding of what is traditional and authentically Nigerian; and a desire to recreate a new aesthetic for tomorrow. It feels as though time has stopped and been reconfigured to perfectly merge the old and the now. Nigeria is finally redefining its own aesthetics through the eyes of design talents who are using locally produced fabrics, prints, incorporating symbols, deconstructing the traditional regalia and embedding Nigerian history into today's fashion.

My project is a fantasy that strives to juxtapose this modern day Nigerian fashion against a traditional atmosphere. An exaggerated attempt at creating characters that perfectly sync traditional styles with modern elements. Eerie, androgynous and mysterious are some of the peculiarities bringing this dream together. Working with Nigerian household fashion brands like "Iamisigo, Ré, Nkwo, and Orangeculture" it would be important to say that this generation is remaking Nigerian fashion; conscious of the future but unearthing the secrets and mysteries of the past. A contemporary dream is a celebration of the beauty and diversity of fashion here in our country and a toast to the future.

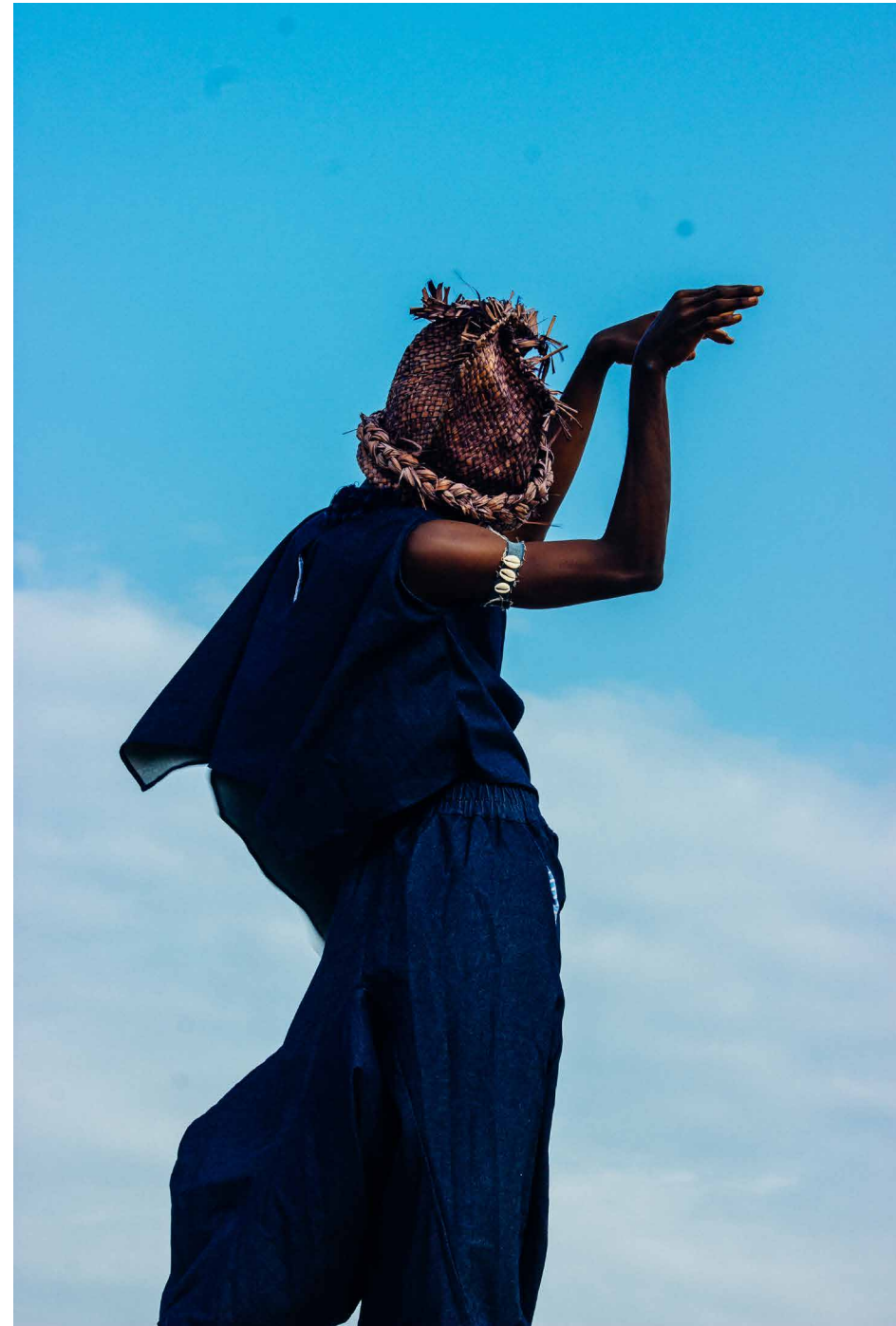


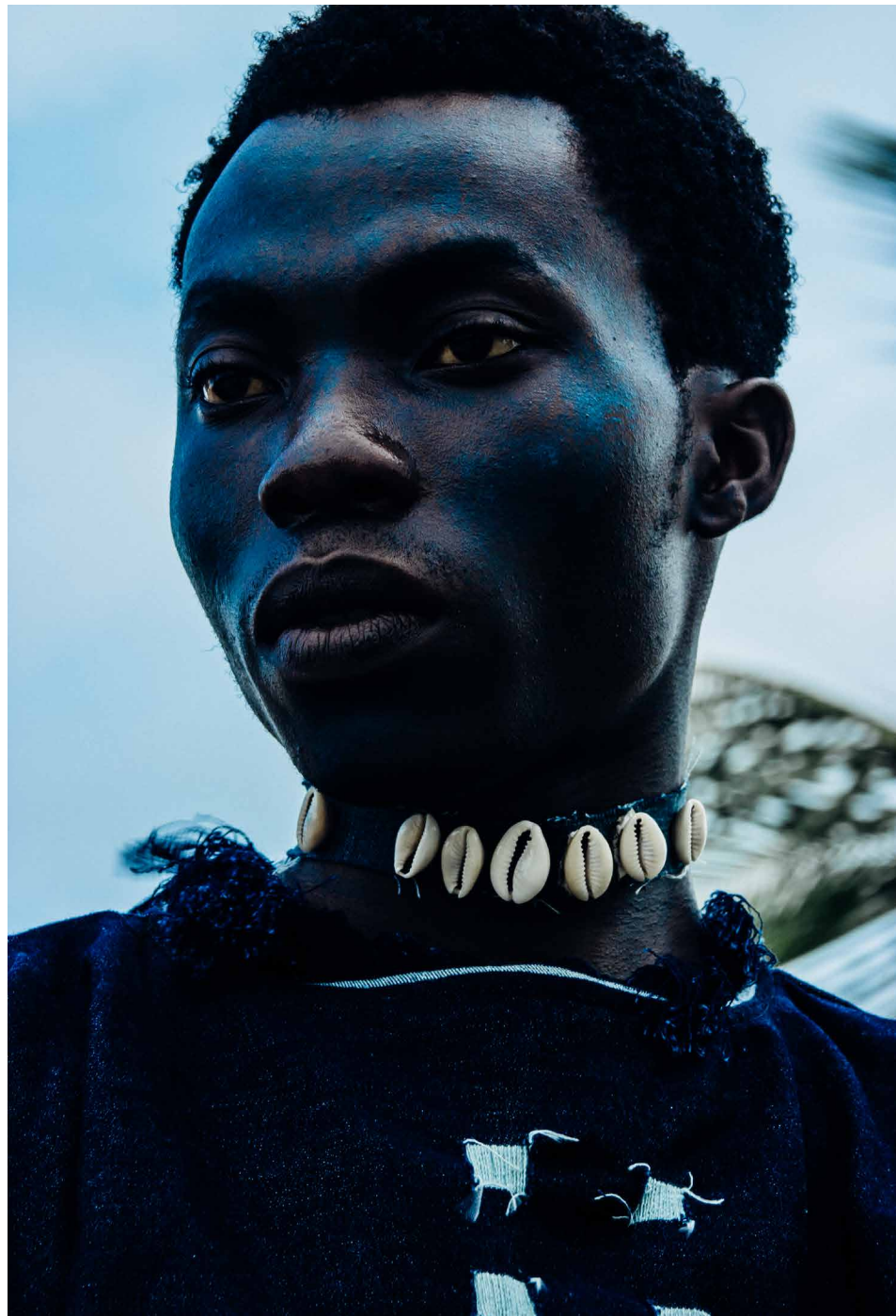
A Spirit
Daniel Obasi
2016
55.5 x 58.5 cm

The Dream weaver
Daniel Obasi
2018
42 x 63 cm



A Spirit
Daniel Obasi
2016
55.5 x 84.1 cm





A Spirit
Daniel Obasi
2016
42 x 63 cm



Illegal
Daniel Obasi
2017
42 x 63 cm



KADARA ENYEASI

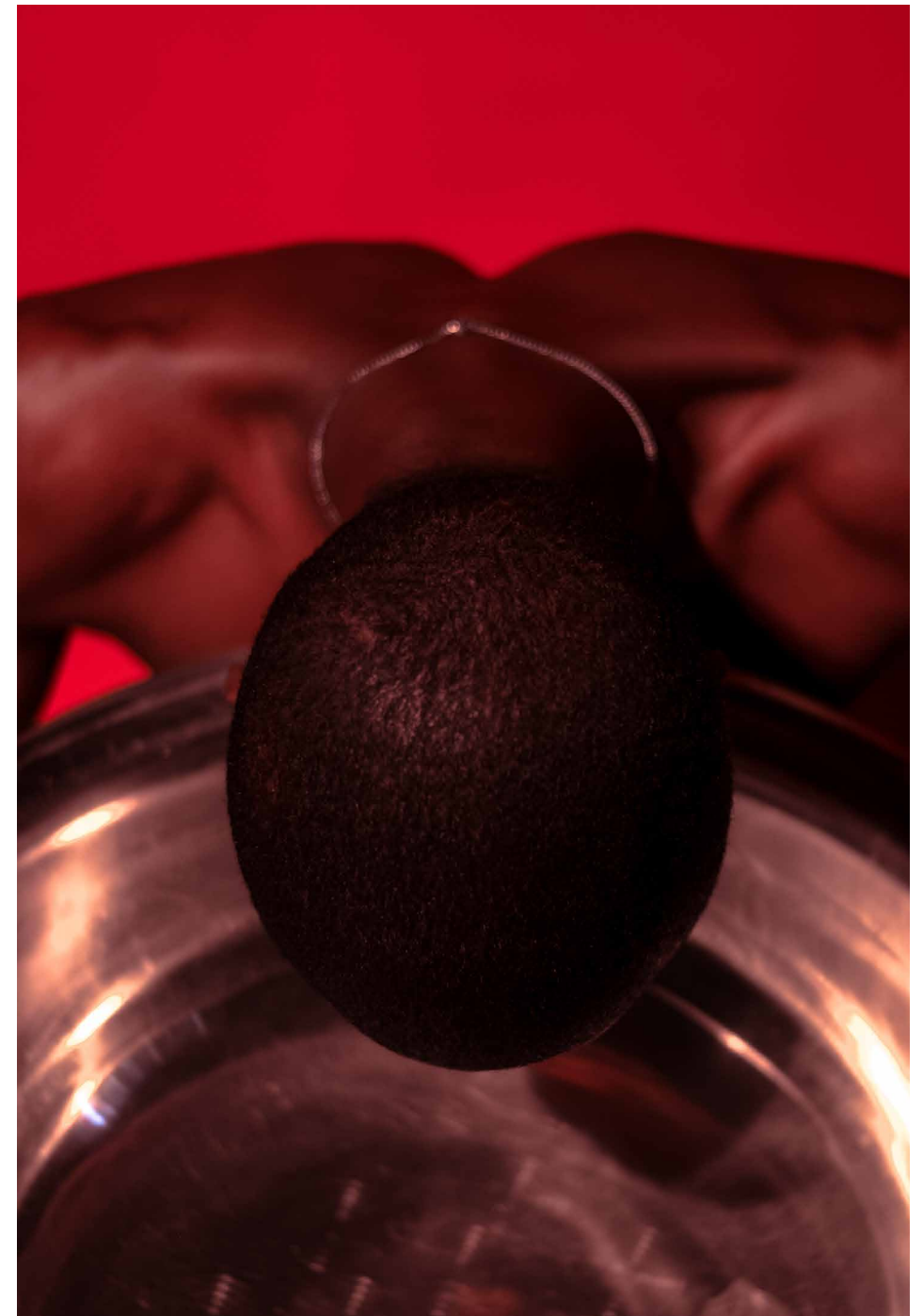
“ I picked up references to religion, culture and also the male gaze. I decided to contrast traditional religion and the homosexuality (male gaze) versus heterosexuality.”



Kadara Enyeasi

Kadara, 23, is a self-trained fine art photographer from Lagos, Nigeria. His work is influenced with an understanding of form, space and perspective; mostly due to his background training as an architect. His early influences stretch from the high concept layered order of the 'five points' postulated by Le Corbusier to the classic avant-garde portraiture of the early West African photographers. Driven by a narrative, his eye, through the camera always see something that wills the audience in; the images seem to riff with the shadows of a serene everyday sexual provocation.

In 2016, he was a finalist in the National Art Competition, and was recently featured on Nataal's 'Ones to watch 2017' list. Kadara was a Junior Curator at the African Artists' Foundation in Lagos where he worked with the team to facilitate exchange and build partnerships between local and international visual artists. His work has been printed in several publications at home and abroad. Kadara is the director of the multidisciplinary fine art studio, STUDIO ENYEASI and is represented by AWCA. He lives and works in Lagos, Nigeria.



Untitled I
Kadara Enyeasi
2018
42 x 58.5 cm

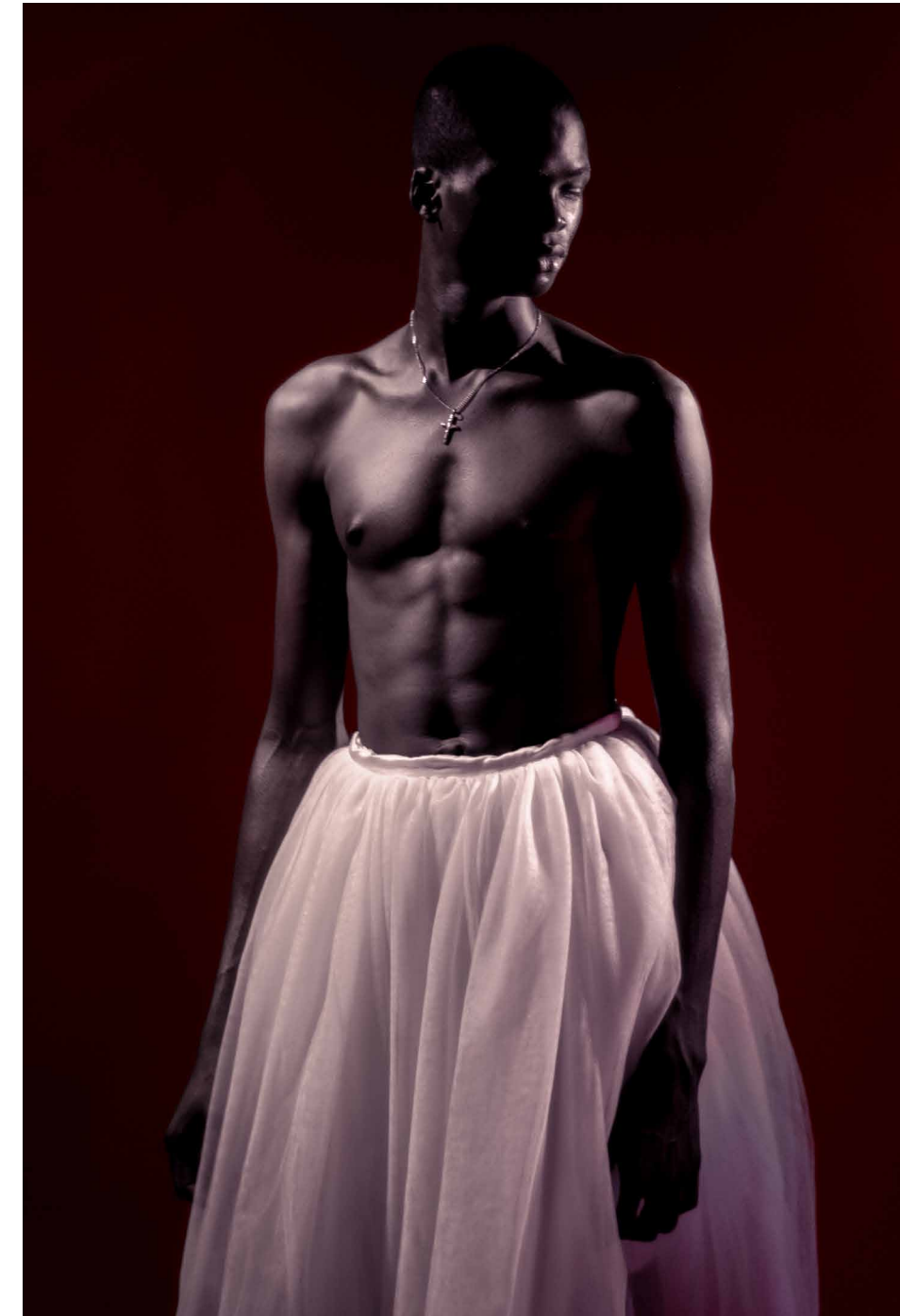
I picked up references to religion, culture and also the male gaze to explore. I decided to contrast traditional religion and homosexuality (the male gaze) versus heterosexuality.

In some images, you have the model dressed in a cloth similar to a tutu but the way it is styled makes it look more like the big regal gowns usually worn by Benin kings. I wanted his look to represent gender equality. Might you ask why? In order to re-address what it means to be a man in this century.

You don't regularly see men carrying trays on their heads with the exception of little boys hawking in the streets. This body of work is less about social constructs and more about how the images are arranged; in terms of contrast, in terms of color, in terms of light and shadow. Those are the little things I played with to make the concept more abstract.

It looks like an image of a guy which is really what it is. But then when you look deeper you start noticing symbolism, like his gestures, his face, his gazes and the props.

When you start picking out all these things, the whole effect will be highlighted by the mood of the picture.



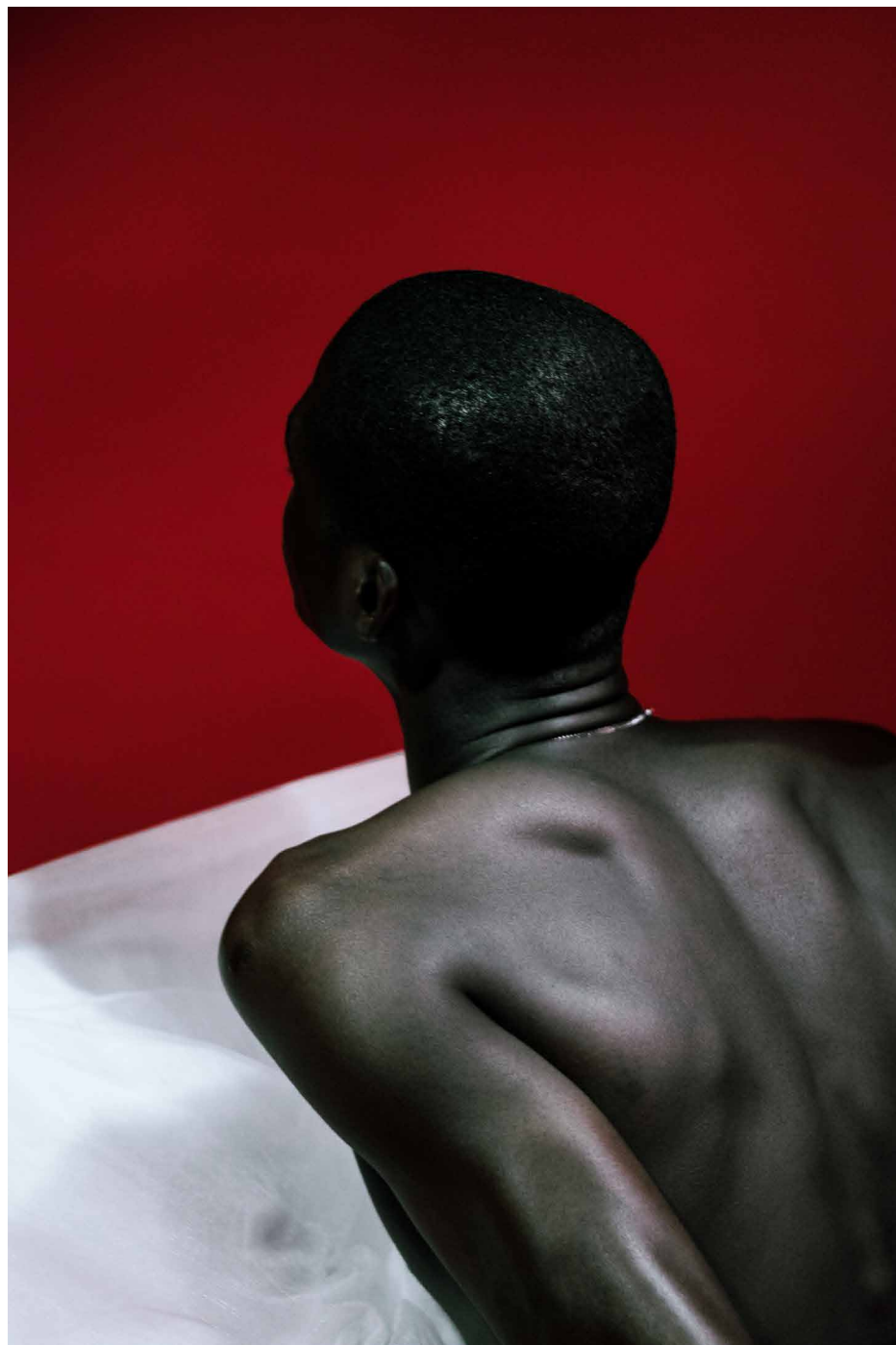
Untitled II
Kadara Enyeasi
2018
42 x 58.5 cm



Untitled III
Kadara Enyeasi
2018
42 x 52.5 cm



Untitled IV
Kadara Enyeasi
2018
42 x 52.5 mm



Untitled V
Kadara Enyeasi
2018
42 x 58.5 cm

“It looks like an image of a guy which is really what it is. But then when you look deeper you start noticing symbolism, like his gestures, his face, his gazes and the props”



KOLA OSHALUSI

"This is a race - our
race, together, against
time , for what binds
us from our oppressors
to redemption, but
not by ourselves"

Kola Olashusi

Kola Oshalusi is a Creative Photographer with Over 12 years of Photography practice. A computer science graduate of the Lagos State University, he is also the lead photographer at Insigna Media a company with the vision of building Africa's largest photography company.

Born 1st June 1980, Kola is a self-taught photographer with training stints from various accomplished photographers around the World. Though not much of an exhibition creative, some of his works were recently shown at the photography exhibition during the Business Of Photography Conference.

His work has been featured in publications around the world including Elle USA, Conde Nast, Mania, IHT, New York Times, Genevieve, WoW, TW, Wings, Bellanaija, Vogue, CNN, Schick and lots more.



This is a race - our race, together, against time , for what binds us from our oppressors to redemption, but not by ourselves

Collectively in twos huddled together in any little shelter we can find as a group,

Right under the tree, the only tree we call shelter

– Wishing we were successful foreigners yet together –

Apart as one separated by perception of age , height, standards and cultural ideologies

Together we walk into a new world our back to our pains our sight only on hope.



The Race I
Kola Oshalusi
2017
63 x 42 cm



The Race II
Kola Oshalusi
2017
63 x 42 cm



The Race III
Kola Oshalusi
2017
63 x 42 cm



The Race IV
Kola Oshalusi
2017
63 x 42 cm



The Race V
Kola Oshalusi
2017
63 x 42 cm



The Race VI
Kola Oshalusi
2017
84.1 x 59.4 cm



LEX ASH

“We’ve come through different stages of being - Antipathy, Apathy, Sympathy, Empathy and we’re at a point of Affinity.”



Lex Ash

A self-taught multi-disciplinary artist, Chidi “Lex Ash” Ashimole is a 26-year-old Estate Management graduate of Covenant University, Nigeria. As a visual artist who is passionate about people, his work is inspired by how he feels and the people he meets.

His images are consistent in evoking feelings and connecting with whoever comes across them. He is particular about visual storytelling, art directing, poetry and natural aesthetics.

His work has availed him the opportunity to influence the international community and he has been privileged to show at a private exhibition by McKinsey & Company. He hopes to be a major driving force in the recognition of art in Nigeria and Africa as a whole.

I grew up in a conservative household. Back in the day, we’d visit the village almost every Christmas, and each time we did, my family would take the chance to visit almost every family in the town. I discovered that it is tradition to serve Oji (Kolanut). It was said that Oji is what welcomes good spirits that come with people when they come to your home. The tradition is that the oldest person in the room at the time of such a visitation, gets to bless the Oji; cuts it, and then delegates someone to serve to the rest of the people in attendance.

I noticed very quickly that the oldest person was never the woman. Even if a woman was the oldest person in the room at the time, it is the responsibility of the Oldest man at that time to bless the Oji. It indicated hierarchy, showing that women came after men in every scenario; whether it was with Oji or in the council of red cap chiefs, a unit that symbolizes leadership, authority and power in the Igbo culture, where women aren’t even allowed to be.

Gbam! indicates a sign of agreement, perfection and concurrence. Considering the push towards gender equality, my take is to redefine what perfection and agreement really means to the tune of what modernization has done to improve the social standing and general appreciation of women in our society.

We’ve come through different stages of being - Antipathy, Apathy, Sympathy, Empathy and we’re at a point of Affinity. *

The story is about change and acceptance.

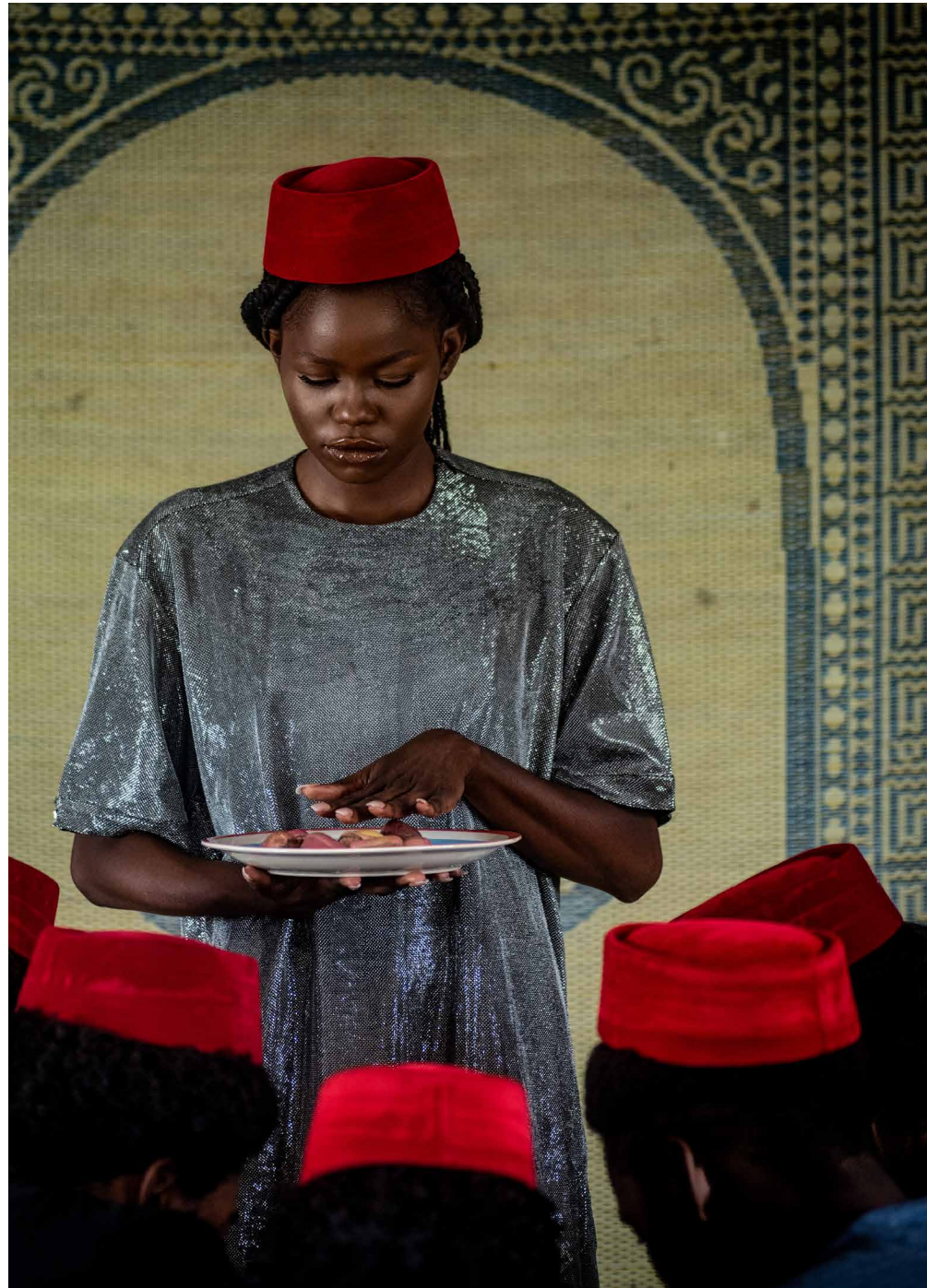
The images exude the following significance -

A woman undermined | A woman dignified | A woman glorified

For me, one of the major defining factors attached to culture is Fashion. As a fashion and editorial photographer, I decided to focus on the fashion element of culture that have significant values and are being questioned by modernization and change.

Iche
Lex Ash
2018
56 x 77 cm





Ekpere
Lex Ash
2018
56 x 77 cm

“For me, one of
the major defining
factors attached to
culture is Fashion”

STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS BACK TO THE FUTURE

With this show, “GBAM! Unearthing And Reclaiming A New BE-COME-ING,” GBAM is continuing in the global tradition of legendary male photographers who documented the lives of the global Diaspora of African people and peeled back the layers of their existence: from their struggles to their triumphs, their pains and their pleasures, their forms of ritual and self-expression and the attire they donned on their journeys.

This exhibition is a reminder that we as a global Africa, having had part of our histories snatched from us or dismissed as irrelevant, are on a constant evolutionary journey of rejuvenating, reclaiming, remembering, re-discovering, re-birthing, rejoicing, remixing, re-imagining and revolutionizing. It is our strength and solace.

Collectively, the diversity of experiences and how those experiences inform the individual points of view of the six photographers presented in this exhibition gave me pause. In looking at their work and their life experiences, I couldn’t help but reflect on some “master” photographers — all men, all of African descent whose reach spanned the globe from Africa to America and many destinations in between – whose work bore witness to the history of us and the times they lived in. I wondered how these legendary photographers may have directly or indirectly influenced these six artists, who, like them, are photographers, architects, artists, stylists and amalgamations of the African Diaspora. In recognizing this group of young photographers, this show for me is also an homage to the giants of African photographers. The case is clear if you take a quick survey of who these legendary photographers were, are, and how the meanings of their work transpires through GBAM!

Universally recognized as the father of African photography and considered one of the greatest photographers of the 20th century, Seydou Keïta (1921 – 2001) lived in Bamako, Mali his entire life. A self-taught photographer, he opened a studio in 1948 and specialized in portraiture. Seydou Keïta’s

photographs eloquently portray Bamako society during its era of transition from a cosmopolitan French colony to an independent capital. His emphasis on the essential components of portrait photography - light, subject, framing - firmly establishes Keïta among the 20th Century masters of the genre.

Whether photographing single individuals, families, or professional associations, Keïta balanced a strict sense of formality with a remarkable level of intimacy with his subjects (comprising mostly of young men, dressed in European-style clothing). By doing this, Keïta simultaneously unlocked the intricate link between personal and universal diasporic understanding via accents of fashion. His numerous clients were drawn not only by the quality of his photos, but also by his great sense of aesthetics – for this reason, he could also be considered as a master stylist.

For Keïta, and many of these photographers, both past and present alike, style stands as one of the most significant elements to the portrayal and true interpretation of messages among their works.

The substance of the aforementioned messages, can sometimes be vague. However, what is continuously evident within each instance of visual documentary are the changing faces of the African diaspora and the multitudes of ways it is represented with portraiture. Three of these diasporic faces lie in oppression, assimilation, and adaptation. It is interesting to note how these concepts are both juxtaposed and connect between past and present.

For instance, James Van Der Zee (1886 –1983), an African-American photographer best known for his portraits of black New Yorkers, was a leading figure in the Harlem Renaissance. Aside from the artistic merits of his work, Van Der Zee produced the most comprehensive documentation of the period. Among his most famous subjects during this time were Marcus Garvey, Bill “Bojangles” Robinson and Countee Cullen.

In 1919, he photographed the victory parade of the returning 369th Infantry Regiment, a predominantly African American unit sometimes called the "Harlem Hellfighters." During the 1920s and 1930s, he produced hundreds of photographs recording Harlem's growing middle class, documenting not only the unique acts of defiance against oppression, but also how the assimilation into a Western society was slowly adopted.

Van Der Zee worked predominantly in the studio and used a variety of props, including architectural elements, backdrops, and costumes, to achieve stylized tableaux vivant in keeping with late Victorian and Edwardian visual traditions. Sitters often copied celebrities of the 1920s and 1930s in their poses and expressions, and he retouched negatives and prints heavily to achieve an aura of glamour to show statement to the fact of this ever growing movement into assimilation.

On the other hand, featured GBAM! photographer, Kola Oshalusi, comments on Van Der Zee's tale through the eyes of rurally placed children in Africa, unbeknownst to influential pushes of modern Western culture in all its subtlety. Oshalusi's body of work also speaks on the essence of unity acting as a powerful movement on its own. Although, a new layer of meaning introduces itself in the hints of imported style, materials and prints.

When compared as neighbours, Van Der Zee and Oshalusi are narrating two parts of the same story - spanning over centuries and borders. Both worlds experiencing a time of a new cultural emergence and the response to that.

Merging black youth and culture into photojournalism encourages new understanding into the future of ongoing movements. It also acts as a bridge between two worlds which are easily forgotten due to a repressed history. Photographer, Malick Sidibé (1936 – 2016), along with the inspired works of GBAM!, delve into this and acknowledged that the youth - the future - of a movement can rarely be silenced or ignored.

Sidibé was a Malian photographer noted for his black-and-white studies of popular culture in the 1960s in Bamako. He specialized in documentary photography, focusing particularly on the youth culture of the Malian capital.

Throughout the 1960s and '70s, in graphic, vigorous, black-and-white pictures, Sidibé captured the dynamism and joy of a rapidly changing West Africa. In particular, he honed in on the vernaculars of style: the brash suits, the purposefully clashing prints, the girls pairing their headdresses with cat-eye shades, the children in full tribal costume and face paint, the dancers kicking off their shoes.

Sidibé became the first African and the first photographer to be awarded the Golden Lion Award for Lifetime Achievement at the Venice Biennale in 2007. Robert Storr, the show's artistic director, said:

"No African artist has done more to enhance photography's stature in the region, contribute to its history, enrich its image archive or increase our awareness of the textures and transformations of African culture in the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st than Malick Sidibé."

The story of this rich culture - in its many forms - continues through the works of Samuel Fosso. Called by some as "the great master", Fosso is an acclaimed photographer known for pushing self-portraiture into new realms of gender-bending theatricality. Throughout his career, Fosso, like Cindy Sherman, Iké Udé, and Yasumasa Morimura, has focused on one subject: himself. By playing with the cultural codes of style and pose, Fosso evokes the power of personal transformation - one of his muses being Fela Kuti.

While using the art of his photography to educate, Fosso injects his personal history of childhood illness into his work to validate the power of traditional medicine - something he has said Westerners have long rejected. He used his 1997 commission by the Paris department store, Tati to create a discourse about segregation and slavery and a demand for independence and freedom. In his "African Spirits" series (2008), he paid homage to the history of blacks in Africa and America and their fight for civil rights and liberties.

Fosso continuously drew on personal experiences as a Cameroonian born Nigerian photographer to dictate an engaging narrative about the powers behind his culture. Ultimately, he became the author for change by focusing on a beauty born from an oppressive state. Daniel Obasi of GBAM! exhumes a similar beauty in his work by creating a fantasy state or world in an "exaggerated attempt at creating characters that perfectly sync traditional styles with modern elements". Both Fosso and Obasi effectively achieve this without losing the elements of hardship being experienced in their current realities.

Amid this venture of creative cultural representation, themes of self reflection, rediscovery and realisation seemingly begin to emerge. The portraits of men and women in their domestic or work environments by South African-born photographer Zwelethu Mthethwa (1960 -) are known for containing a strong psychologically charged narrative. Mthethwa's photographs are created in a scale and composition that establish a confrontation between the subject and the spectator. Drawing from the history of portraiture, documentary photography and cinema, Mthethwa's works often comment (and beg the spectator to question) the traditional roles of Black men and masculinity, and raise consciousness around issues related to post-apartheid South African society.

Alike Mthethwa, Kadara Enyeasi (GBAM!) uses personal observation to question the understanding of a male's role in society through the male gaze, among others. Enyeasi similarly looks inward, and throughout the norms of his own culture to identify how the interaction of systematic oppression, tradition, and self expression evokes change from within.

Throughout the works of GBAM!, lie evident nuances of an African diaspora in a tug-of-war between tradition and modernity with the combined struggles of a repressed culture at its feet. Each image is a glimpse into a tormented past of a rich culture which has never completely settled in the gut of those involved. It has morphed itself into new challenges that come with being a part of an African identity navigating through a modern world, dictated by the many faces of diaspora.

Though the use of style is only a snippet into the expansive world of one's character, it is also one of the most pinnacle ways we choose to tell our own story in an effort of self expression. It evidently creates a doorway into the world of the African diaspora and the subcultures in relation to that - independent of time or place. It criticizes the magnitude of issues faced and explores the way a complex culture adapts to those issues. Oppression, assimilation, adaptation - few of the many faces of a diaspora immersing itself into both foreign and familiar worlds - scar the faces of the subjects in these photographs and many others alike. GBAM! Recovers a repressed history and reminds us of global Africa's former scars by recovering and recreating them into a remixed tale.

To stand on the shoulders of giants is a courageous task in itself. However, this extraordinary group of young photographers (both mentioned and not) have committed to doing exactly that. In them and in their work, the sense of art's future is evident and substantial. By effectively using the narratives from past photographers works and remixing it with their personal interpretations, the creative movement has become a force in which the end is fortunately unforeseeable. It could be due to the aforementioned sources of inspiration, or similarly, for reasons unknown. All that these artists may ask, is for you to reach out in an attempt to interpret it for your own.

Denise Bradley-Tyson

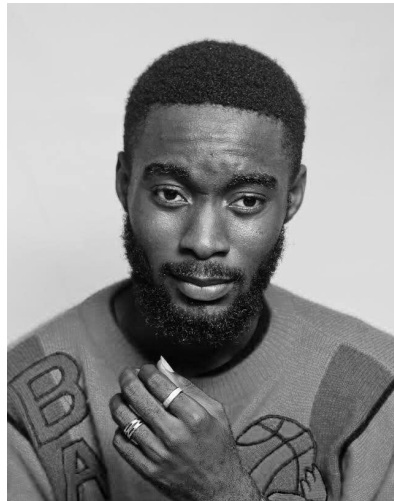
Founder & Chief Curator of Inspiredlux.com
(A Marketplace Platform devoted to showcasing the Artists,
Artisans and Artistry Emanating from the African Diaspora)



NOMA OSULA

“Laugh ke? Why?
Nobody dey laugh”

“Mr Shola had said when
asked if he was mocked
for having tribal marks”

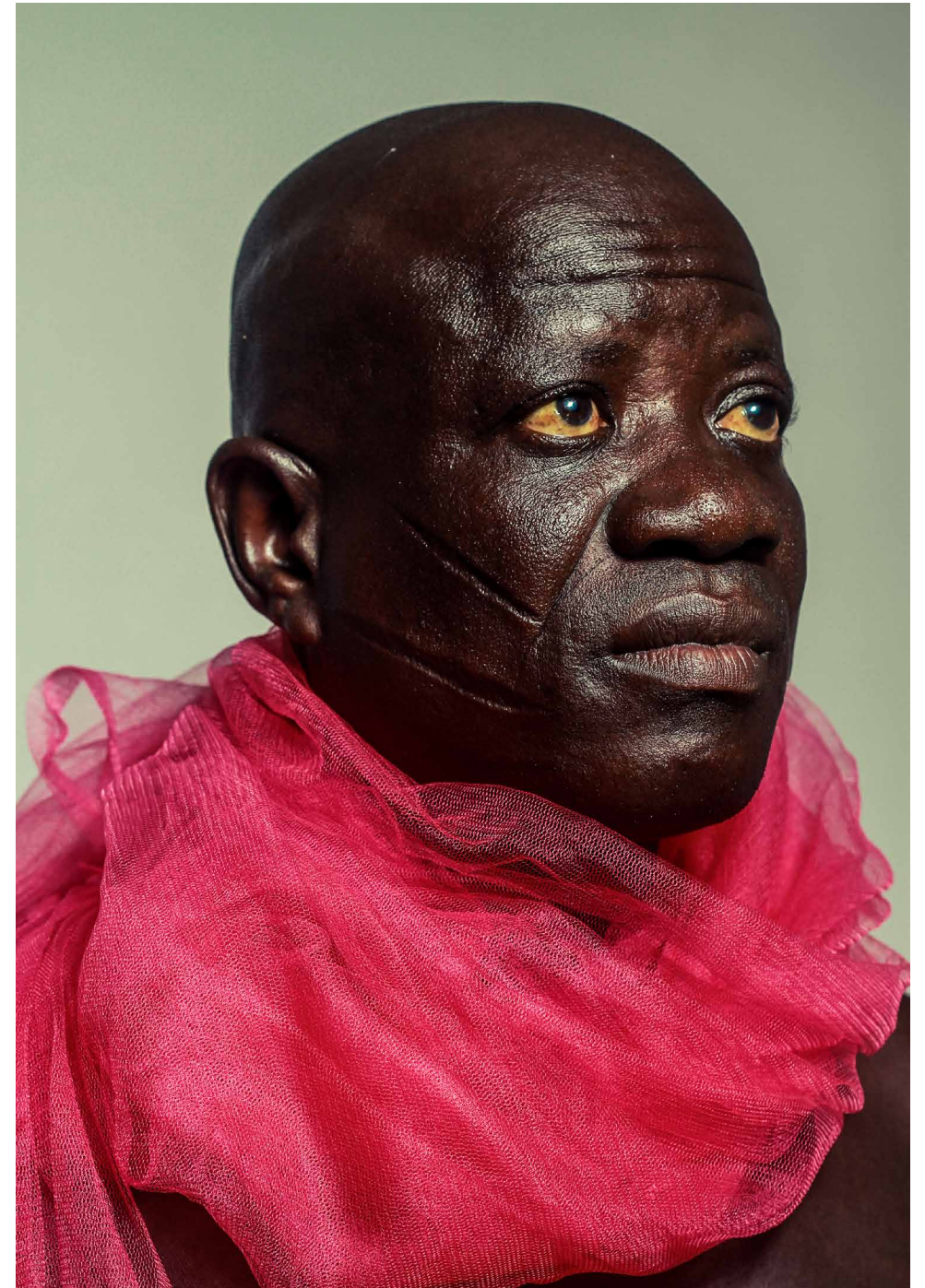


Noma Osula

Noma Osula is a 25 year old photographer born and based in Nigeria. He is a graduate of Redeemer's University. He is self-taught and was an assistant to a photographer for a short period before diving into photography as a career.

Noma's works have been exhibited twice in group exhibitions; In Yagazie Emezi's 'Dialere' and Kadara Enyeasi's curated exhibition titled 'New Wave'.

His work often involves the use of textures, vibrant colours and gestures which draw inspiration from the regularity of everyday life in his environment. A slight integration of fashion and minimalism helps build the aesthetics of his portraits.



Sho 1
Noma Osula
2018
42 x 63 cm



Sho 2
Noma Osula
2018
42 x 63 cm

"Laugh ke? Why? Nobody dey laugh" Mr Shola had said when asked if he was mocked for having tribal marks. This explores the idea of perfection focusing on Mr Shola objecting to the stereotypical perception of beauty. Mr Shola is portrayed in a state of comfort with not just his scarification which tells a story about his root but his entirety



Sho 3
Noma Osula
2018
115 x 78 cm

“This explores the idea
of perfection focusing
on Mr Shola objecting
to the stereotypical
perception of beauty.”

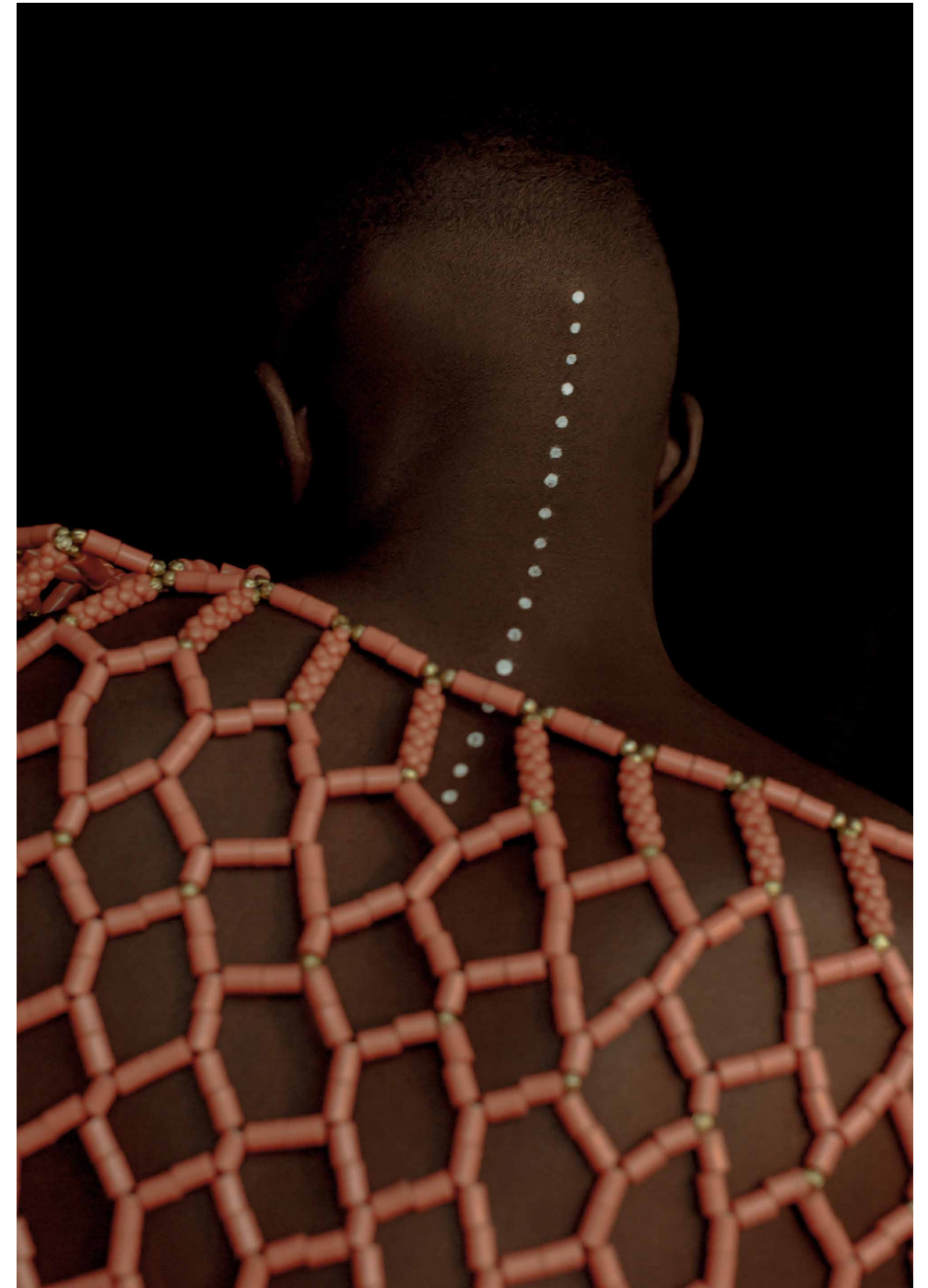


OLA EBITI

"Like our people, our
fashion is no longer
confined to boundaries
of our country."

Ola Ebiti

Ola Ebiti is a menswear stylist based in London. His work touches on Nigerian history, particularly highlife between the 40s-60s and merges that with contemporary menswear fashion. These images aim to transcend region hopefully creating a rich visual landmark for Nigerians but also relevant visual language within the international menswear scene.



Abu as the king
Ola Ebiti
2018
42 x 63 cm

As a stylist my approach to Gbam is focused on the traditional Nigerian look and how it can be translated to the current times .

Taken from the saying "there is a Nigerian everywhere in the world", traditional Yoruba wear is re-purposed and has become worldly and nomadic. Generations who have incorporated traditional pieces into their everyday life, have made these traditional fashions seem universal beyond how it was invented by the forefathers. Like our people, our fashion is no longer confined to the boundaries of our country.

Having been obsessed with tailoring here in the UK, I tried to find a Nigerian counter-part and the Agbada came to mind; Agbada is a flowing wide sleeved robe worn by men in much of West African countries. The name "Agbada" originates from Yoruba language.

Drawing inspiration from the Eyo masquerade and a need for decoration, the Eyo's white robes remind me of the Agbada. The mystery behind the Eyo and the fear and curiosity it awakens in people inspired me to use transparent fabric as a symbol of the ghost figure that some believe Eyo could be. I consciously chose a boy with dark skin to contrast the material. The diamonds on his face and head touches on our need to decorate and our love for excess. The rich in Nigeria live so lavishly with ostentatious lifestyles and what better way to show it than having a face literally decorated with diamonds.

Referencing the Oba and drawing inspiration from how he is dressed, I wanted to do something that felt regal but still keep the revealing aspect of an Agbada. The hat signifies the royal cap, I reworked the gold tassel using a gold tiger brooch instead.



Abu as the Masquerade
Ola Ebiti
2018
42 x 63 cm



Abu as the Spirit
Ola Ebiti
2018
42 x 63 cm

"Like our people,
our fashion is no
longer confined
to boundaries of
our country."



The Wheatbaker as part of the Legacy Hotel Group, has keenly supported Nigerian arts and culture since opening its doors in 2011.

The hotel's commitment to celebrating the best of Nigerian creativity saw it dedicate its walls to showcasing exceptional traditional, modern and contemporary art. The Wheatbaker has hosted world class art exhibitions including the Collectors' Series showcasing Duke Asidere, Kelechi Amadi-Obi and Yetunde Ayeni Babaeko (2011), Making History showcasing ancient Nigerian art (2012), Sequel 1a showcasing works by Olu Amoda, Recent sculptures by Billy Omabegho (2012), the WW Independence Series featuring Tayo Ogunbiyi, Karo Akpokiere, Folarin Shasanya, Hakeem Salaa, Toyosi Faridah Kekere-Ekun (2012-13), Flow showcasing mixed media installations by Nenna Okore, Here & There showcasing paintings by Polly Alakija (2013), photography by Lakin Ogunbanwo, Duality showcasing paintings by Isaac Emokpae, Unfurling, showcasing photography & poetry by Sandra & Amara Obiagio (2014), Eko Moves showcasing photography by Yetunde Ayeni Babaeko (2014) and AKALAKA showcasing paintings by Tayo Adenaike and sculptures by Obiora Anidi, The Contemporaries, showcasing Nnenna Okore,

Duke Asidere, Uchay Joel Chima, Gerald Chukwuma, Raoul Olawale da Silva, Anthea Epelle, Taiye Idahor, Chika Idu, Tony Nsofor, Onyeama Offeodu-Okeke, Tony Nsofor and Adeyinka Akingbade, and Save Our Art! Save our Heritage!, a charity exhibition supporting the restoration of the Osun Groves UNESCO World Heritage Site that featured 18 artists including Sangodare Ajala, Adebisi Akanji, Rabiun Abesu, Buraimoh Gbadmosi, Kikelomo, Ajibike Ogunyemi, Bisi Fabunmi, Jimoh Buraimoh, Muraina Oyelami, Prof. Bruce Onabrakpeya Chief Nike Okundaye & Chief Tola Wewe, Polly Alakija, Wura-Natasha Ogunji & photographer Adolphus Opara in 2015-2016 ; Equal Rights showcasing Mike Omoighe, Evolving Currents featuring Raqib Bashorun and Chika Idu , and Mental Space

showcasing paintings by Duke Asidere, Freedom featuring Gbenga Offo in 2016 ; Permutations featuring Tayo Olayode; In 2017, the Wheatbaker hosted Standing Out II which featured Amami Isiuwe, Bunmi Oyesanya, Data Oruwari, Marcellina Akpojotor, Ngozi Ezema, Olawunmi Banjo, Omo Udentia, Ozoz Sokoh, Sade Adebawale and Taiye Idahor, Wanderlust featuring Chidi Kwubiri, Emeka Udemba, Jimmy Uche Nwanne, Junkman of Africa, Numero Unoma and Yetunde Ayeni Babaeko. From 2017-18, the Wheatbaker showcased the hotel's permanent collection featuring over 40 exceptional works by artists who have exhibited at the hotel since 2011. In honour of International Women's Day 2018, the Wheatbaker hosted Unmasked, an all-female exhibition featuring the works of Djakou Kassi Nathalie, Koromone Yobaere Koroye, Nengi Omuku, Nyancho Nwanri, Queen Nwaneri, Reha Shishodia and Somi Nwandu.



Louis Guntrum was established in 1648, and eleven generations later, Louis Konstantin Guntrum has elevated the wines to fresh new heights. With their commitment to artistry, tradition and excellence, the Guntrum family is proud to introduce these new wines that represent the tradition and vision of a rich wine-making legacy in Germany's Rhine valley.

Louis Guntrum award winning wines are enjoyed in over 80 countries worldwide. A newcomer in the Nigerian market, Guntrum wine is pleased to support African creativity.

GBAM!

