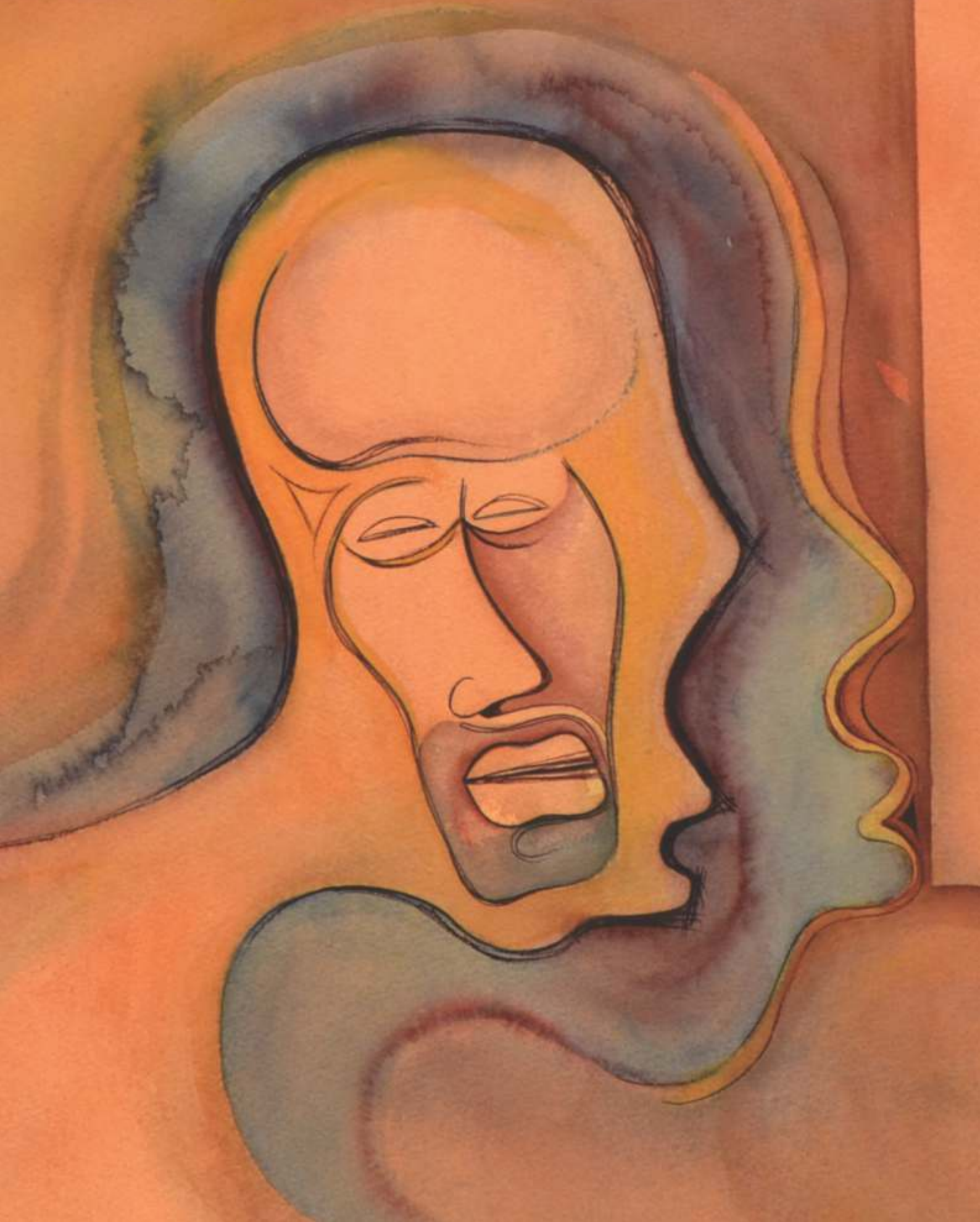


TAYO ADENAIKE





AKALAKA: Lines of Destiny

An Exhibition Celebrating
Watercolors & Sculptures

by

Tayo Adenaike
& Obiora Anidi

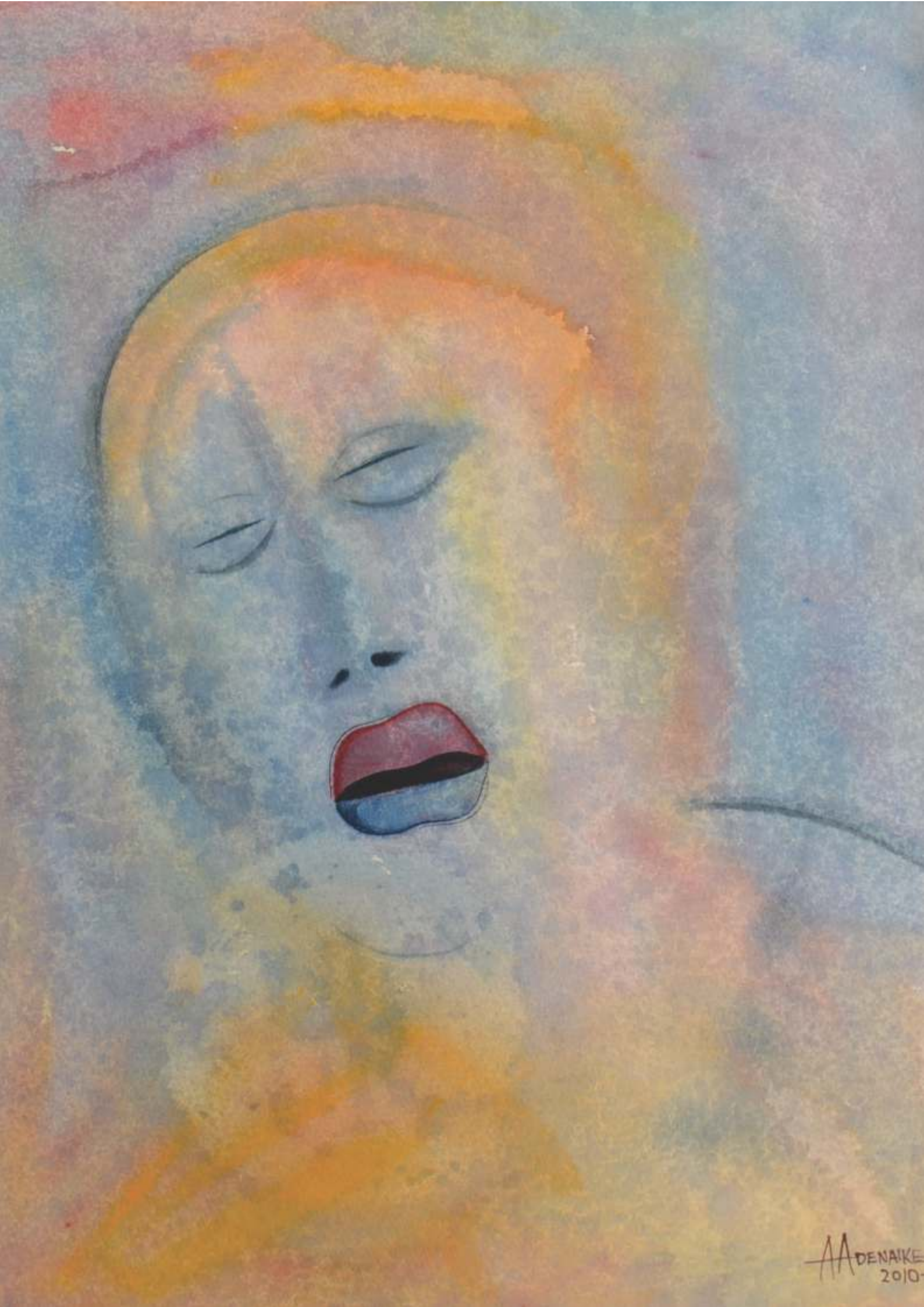
April 19th- July 15th, 2015

The Wheatbaker

Lagos, Nigeria

(Cover) Our hope, life in the begotten Son, Tayo Adenaike, Watercolor on paper, 61cm x 46cm, 2009

(Detail) Eye to Eye ..., Obiora Anidi, Marble, Concrete and Metal, 20cm, 2000



ADENAIKE
2010

Akalaka: Lines of Destiny

Over a year ago, I went in search of two master artists in Eastern Nigeria. I was determined to find these two unusual artists who had important global reputation, but had not had a major showing in the Nigerian art scene for over a decade.

My search brought me to Enugu, the town where I grew up, and after a few phone-calls and investigative conversations, was quickly given the telephone numbers of two men who everyone knew and hailed as not only artists of repute, but as important patrons and mentors to generations of creative minds.

My first encounter with Tayo Adenaike was like meeting a long lost friend. Waving away stiff formal introductions with his signatory humour and quick wit, he reminded me that he knew my parents well, and ushered me into his studio. With an amazing clarity and enthusiasm, he began educating me on the Uli and Nsibidi art traditions, sharing his fascination and deep knowledge of Igbo culture and its aesthetic roots, which he learnt during his over 41 years of living in eastern Nigeria. While talking, he pulled out a whole sheaf of beautifully crafted, intricate paintings and casually flipped through them, while cross-referencing his art by showing me numerous international publications and coffee table books in which his works were featured. The depth, linear form and intensity of his work astounded me.

He promised me he would consider doing a show, but that he needed at least a year, as his thriving advertising business was taking up most of his time. I drove out of his compound stunned and elated by the warm reception, and immediately anxious about being able to do justice to this master artist's proposed exhibition.

The next day I drove to meet Obiora Anidi in his campus home, and was warmly welcomed by him and his wife, also an academic, and their kids, gathered around the dining table doing afternoon tutorials with an astute lesson teacher. Before long, he brought me into his studio, and I immediately felt like a child who had been brought into a candy shop. My art collectors' antennae went up as I beheld some of the most amazing sculptures I had ever seen.

It's been a year of preparation culminating in the show you are about to experience. As the Wheatbaker Art Curator, I am committed to ensuring that our creative platform showcases both emerging talent, as well as honors those master artists who have had a major influence on Nigerian art.

Both Adenaike and Anidi are part of the Uli art movement which originated at the famous Nsukka Art School of the 1970's and 1980's, spearheaded by internationally acclaimed Professor Uche Okeke of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka; the contemporary interpretation of ancient Uli traditions has also been made famous in the work of Professors El Anatsui and Obiora Udechukwu. Adenaike and Anidi are globally celebrated artists whose works have drawn inspiration from this important Uli tradition ("a repertoire of motifs found largely in Igbo land, which is a dying art form; it was solely at the preserve of women, who either used it for body adornment or wall decorations of sacred shrines" Adenaike explains); both have created an unforgettable, powerful visual language that though expressed in different media, has a deep congruity.

Whether you marvel at the profound simplicity of Anidi's three legged sculpture *Ekwu lto* _____ *trinity of the extended family* which clearly shows a strong external family structure harbouring deft internal politics and alignments, or you admire the poetry and symbolic significance of Adenaike's layered visual echoes in *Our Hope Lies in the Begotten Son*, we see an incredible, beautiful interplay of thoughts and expressions across starkly different media.

Adenaike's layered human forms with their intense expressions remind one of the complex tension between emotion and the spirit, which can be seen in perfect alignment with Anidi's concave spaces and solid marble planes representing symbiotic relationships, beautifully intertwined with metal accents; both artists echo the interplay between existential perceptions vis-a-vis physical form and energy, and the traditions as well as the restrictions of culture and society.

Interestingly, both artists held a joint exhibition at the Italian Cultural Center in Lagos 31 years ago. It is indeed Akalaka: lines of Destiny that they are exhibiting together again. And we all stand to gain from this renewed excellent collaboration.

I trust you will take time "far from the maddening crowd" to meander through this exhibition and enjoy the rich symbolism, amazing artistry, and unique representation of our multi-faceted, culturally rich world view in Akalaka: lines of Destiny. Hopefully these magnificent artworks will also inspire us to ponder upon how our deeper selves are quietly mirrored in their hidden meanings.

As always, we thank our sponsors, the Wheatbaker, Global Energy Company Ltd. and Ruinart for their staunch and long term commitment to supporting the best of Nigerian creativity.

We thank our inspired contributors, Obiora Udechukwu, Eva Obodo, Chris Afuba and Krydz Ikwuemesi for taking the time to review this impressive body of work. And most importantly, I humbly thank Tayo Adenaike and Obiora Anidi for their open trust, for agreeing to exhibit after many years of seeming "hibernation", and for once again, sharing their amazing talent, poetic insight and spiritual gift with all of us.

Sandra Mbanefo Obiabo
Exhibition Curator



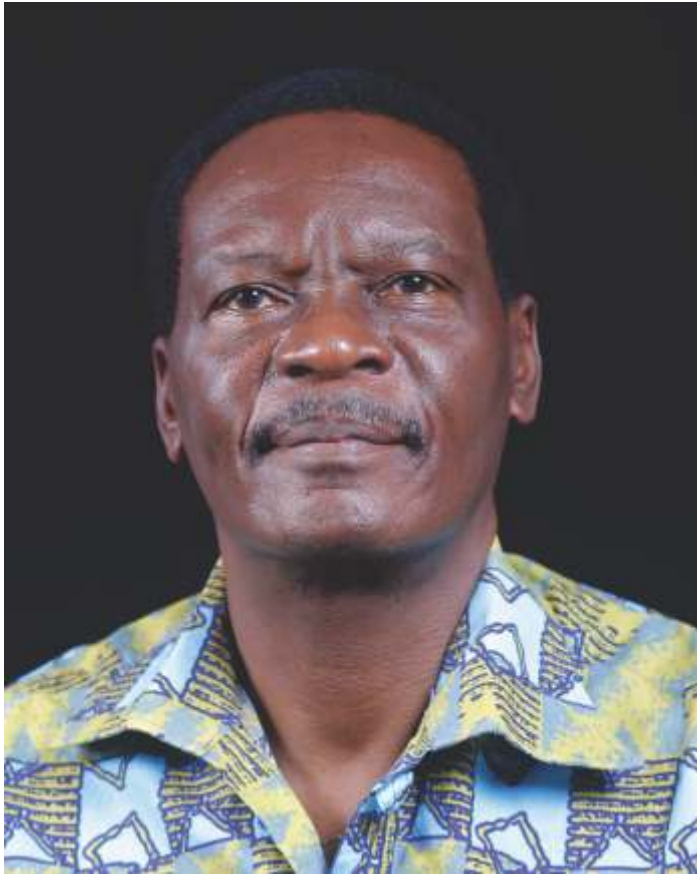




AA DENAIKE
2010

Tayo Adenaike

Tayo Adenaike



Tayo Adenaike (born 1954) studied Fine and Applied Arts at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, where he obtained a Bachelor's degree in Fine Art, in 1979, and a Master of Fine Art degree in Painting, in 1982.

A third generation artist of the Nsukka School following in the Uli painting tradition pioneered by Uche Okeke and Obiora Udechukwu, Tayo Adenaike has developed his own visual idiom and mastery of watercolor technique. In his predominant fluid medium, his keen sense of design and composition give strength and character to his paintings.

Tayo Adenaike has held 20 solo exhibitions and participated in more than 42 group exhibitions in Nigeria, the United States, England and Germany. In 1997- 1998, he was one of the artists showcased in the Smithsonian Institute's National Museum of African Art's "Poetics of Line: Seven Artists of the Nsukka Group" Exhibition. His paintings are in public museum collections in the United States, Germany and Nigeria, and in private art collections in 17 countries; notably, the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution and the Museum der Weltkulturen, Frankfurt am Main, Germany. Tayo Adenaike lives and works in Enugu, Eastern Nigeria. Unique among artists in Eastern Nigeria, his Yoruba heritage and artistic sensibility are enriched and layered by his immersion and fluency in Igbo culture and language. Tayo Adenaike runs a successful advertising business and paints mostly at night and on weekends.

“ I paint for the joy of painting, just like a dancer would dance for the joy of dancing. If in the process of painting I have enough work to display for public viewing and I get applauded or chastised, neither response would make me to stop painting. Painting to me is also like writing, you keep writing because of the joy you derive from writing. External factors or people far removed from your thoughts or the creative process should really not matter much. More often than not, I just drift on the 100% white cotton fibre that is my painting surface to whatever is eventually seen and called a painting. I will be a happier person if my paintings are actually not titled. I do not like the idea of people thinking along with me. I want people to feel free and think for themselves. I want people to see themselves and judge themselves in my work. I am not painting me. I paint what I think and distill from what I see and hear. My art is essentially very human. I think every painting is a reflection of something, and every human being should engage in some form of reverie.”

Tayo Adenaike



A face under transformation, watercolour on paper, 45.72cm x 60.96cm, 2015

“ Tayo Adenaike’s watercolour paintings explore the fluidity and luminosity associated with the medium. They are memorable studies in the judicious balancing of large spaces and select areas of intricate pattern and linear gesture. **Adenaike’s mastery of composition, colour orchestration and the lyrical line compels and draws the viewer into what is at the heart of his best work—the illumination of the range of human emotion.** Perhaps, it is in the oeuvre of Adenaike more than any other Nigerian watercolourist that we see the unforced conjunction of thought provoking content and masterful execution.”

Dr. Obiora Udechukwu

Charles A. Dana Distinguished Professor of Fine Arts
St. Lawrence University, Canton, NY, USA



Sharo – Rite of passage, watercolour on paper, 45.72cm x 60.96cm, 2005

“The 1980s in Nsukka marked the emergence of a third generation of *uli* artists with the presence of Tayo Adenaike, who trained under Uche Okeke and Obiora Udechukwu. He is also one of the first major non-Igbo *uli* artists. Since 1980 when he had his first solo exhibition, *Childhood Fears*, Adenaike has refined his technique and form, weaning himself away from the earlier influences of Udechukwu in the process. He has developed a distinctive style that is informed by his Yoruba background and his experience of Igbo *uli* painting. His early drawings are heavy and less lyrical, but with more decorative *uli* motifs than Udechukwu's or even Okeke's works. The same may be said of his early attempts at using watercolour. With time, Adenaike's watercolours have come to acquire a certain fluidity and originality that is remarkable. Interestingly, he has worked almost entirely in watercolour, exploring the formal possibilities of *uli* design in that medium more than any other artist so far.

Adenaike does not display the typical linear sensitivity that has become the hallmark of the older generation of *uli* artists, yet he still conveys the same formal elegance with his fluid, distinct boundaries between areas of colour. In his more recent work, he combines bold geometric patterns which - though based on *uli* - are reminiscent of Yoruba *adire* textile design, with brilliant colours that have hitherto not been associated with modern *uli*.

Adenaike synthesises the myths and folklore of the Yoruba and Igbo and draws from proverbs and stories he recalls from his childhood years spent with his grandmother. These sources form the basis for his enquiries into contemporary subject matter. More importantly, this fusion of traditional myths and lore with contemporary existential realities yields interesting currents, which combine with an *uli*-based design to produce what Adenaike considers to be the essence of his distinctive art.”¹

Dr. Chika Okeke-Agulu
Assistant Professor
Princeton University

¹ Quotation from *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa*, Pages 66-68, Whitechapel, Flammarion, Paris- New York, 1995



Burrow of Rest, Watercolour on paper, 45.72cm x 60.96cm, 2004

“Adenaike’s art, despite the predominance of a single medium, watercolor, exhibits development and change, with brief periods of oils and acrylics. His style and type of images have altered somewhat, as has the audience for his work, with his increasing attention in the United States. He seems more distant from his Yoruba background since his 1990 Story-Telling exhibition, but looking at his work as a whole, one can discern important dual cultural influences. Compared to El Anatsui, who has explored cultural designs in numerous African cultures, or Chike Aniakor and Obiora Udechukwu, who draw mainly from Igbo culture, Adenaike is in between, taking from both Yoruba and Igbo but moving toward the second position. He is an atypical Nsukka group artist not being in the academic world (except occasionally as an external examiner) but rather in business, thus not having students of his own and a line of followers, as do Obiora Udechukwu and others. Adenaike keeps in contact with other Nsukka group members through his friendships with Obiora Udechukwu and his wife, Ada, and through members of the AKA Circle of Exhibiting Artists. He is an artist who has created his own independent niche, developing a unique watercolor style for Nigeria and Africa.”²

Dr. Simon Ottenberg
Professor Emeritus
University of Washington

² Quotation from *New Traditions from Nigeria, Seven Artists of the Nsukka Group*, Page 201, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997



AA DENAIKE
2006

“A. Omotayo (Tayo) Adenaike has developed a visual language with the assistance of nsibidi that expresses a highly personalized philosophy about life, art, and meaning. Adenaike's work is heavily informed by the uli aesthetic, most notably in his use of line along with negative and positive space. Working primarily in watercolors, **Adenaike adapts his training at Nsukka into a highly personalized style, where organic forms suggest emotional and imaginative psychological spaces.** His use of nsibidi brings a hint of representation into an abstract realm where color and space rule. Adenaike tends to build rhythm into his compositions by emphasizing one symbol and allowing it to contrast with more highly compressed symbols in a decorative pattern.”³

Dr. Amanda Carlson
Associate Professor
Hartford Art School, USA

³Quotation from *Inscribing Meaning: Writing and Graphic Systems in African Art*, Page 151, Smithsonian Institution Press, 2007



Not happy... Not sad... Just there, watercolour on paper, 45.72cm x 60.96cm, 2010

In Conversation with Tayo Adenaike

Sandra Mbanefo Obiago: Your watercolors are powerful. They mesmerize and intrigue. They emit stirring energy in clearly defined, deft and thoughtful strokes and color. We are engulfed in a world of symbols, geometry, color and floating spaces, orbits that are populated by faces that are ageless, carry a world of experience, emotion, and thought. Please take us back to the beginning of your artistic journey.

Tayo Adenaike: I had my first formal art lesson in 1967, at Federal Government College, Warri, but prior to the formal lessons, I drew on walkways and walls like any kid would do in my mother's home town – Ilese, in Ijebu land of Ogun State. I continued with art studies in higher school at Warri but specialization commenced at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, from 1974 through 1982 when I was awarded an MFA degree in painting.

SMO: Who and what were some of your earliest influences? Which artists have influenced your work and why?

TA: To date, and like I have always said, Obiora Udechukwu, has had the most enduring and endearing influence on me – my work that is, and character wise, I have had quite a lot to cherish too. I worked closely with him and thank God the relationship was not that of 'teacher-to-student'. Perhaps a gulf could have resulted in a relationship of that nature. His style was hands-on and he was always there to encourage you. I must not fail to mention Uche Okeke at the other side of the spectrum. His style was to discourage anyone who was studying painting. You were made to feel that there was something missing in your work. You were always on your toes, nervous and waiting for the next criticisms. Both approaches worked well with me. It was like one was always spanking me while the other was always there to console me.

SMO: In this body of work that ranges from 2004 to 2015, we see a wide diversity of compositions and expression. Please give us some insight into some of the thematic and issues that influenced these works?

TA: I hate to talk about themes, or for that matter my work or body of work. I paint for the joy of painting, just like a dancer would dance for the joy of dancing. If in the process of painting I have enough work to display for public viewing and I get applauded or chastised, neither response would make me to stop painting. Painting to me is also like writing, you keep writing because of the joy you derive from writing. External factors or people far removed from your thoughts or the creative process should really not matter much. More often than not, I just drift on the 100% white cotton fibre that is my painting surface to whatever is eventually seen and called a painting. I will be a happier person if my paintings are actually not titled. I do not like the idea of people thinking along with me. I want people to feel free and think for themselves. I want people to see themselves and judge themselves in my work. I am not painting me. I paint what I think and distill from what I see and hear. My art is essentially very human. I think every painting is a reflection of something, and every human being should engage in some form of reverie.

SMO: You are part of the AKA group and your artistic roots draw from Uli and Nsibidi traditions – please speak to us about these influences and how they are mirrored in your art?

TA: Aka was a group of professional artists united by the sole aim of exhibiting annually. The group made some remarkable impressions locally and nationally, it also had a good following internationally. It was fun while the group lasted, but like with most things in life there comes a time to fade away like the morning dew.

Uli is a repertoire of motifs found largely in Igbo land. As a form for artistic expression, it was solely at the preserve of women, who either used it for body adornment or wall decorations of sacred



(Detail) He runs after your Car often Neglected, Watercolour on paper, 60.96cm x 45.72cm, 2015

shrines. Permit me to state that it is a dying art form. On the other hand, I am always very happy when I attend wine-carrying ceremonies in my naturalized domain, and I see Igbo brides and their bridesmaids adorned in Uli. Think of a good example of what the white man's idea of civilization has done to our culture!

Nsibidi is a set of pictograms. It is symbolic and highly schematic, with roots amongst members of the Ekpe cult in south eastern Nigeria.

Uli and Nsibidi have intrinsic dynamic qualities that if well explored, like I have always tried to do, give room for fresh creative vistas. I use both the Uli motifs and Nsibidi symbols, *always* as decorative elements in most of my work.

SMO: Your work to a large extent focuses on faces? Why is this? How do these works differ from your geometric compositions and what thematic are you grappling with in these different pieces?

TA: Let's put it this way; Tayo is a watercolourist of faces and figures. Why is he fascinated by faces? His fascination is derived from the fact that the face is part of the human head and a headless body does not portray any emotion. You can only figure out any human emotion from the face. Perhaps you may also want to say that Tayo distorts the human face to create series of emotions.

SMO: You have, own and run a full time advertising business – how do you balance your artistic studio work with the demands of entrepreneurship – in a difficult socio-political climate?

TA: I am a graphic designer during daytime, five days in a week. I am a painter at night-time and during most weekends. My daytime job feeds me. My night and weekend painting activity, I hope will someday give me some recognition.

SMO: Over the years, you have focused more on exhibiting internationally than locally – why is this? How do you perceive the local artistic landscape?

TA: It is difficult for me to say why this is so. But how this came about is due largely to the effort of Janet Stanley of the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institutions, Washing DC., and five gallery owners who were interested in carrying my work in the past 24 years. Was the exposure rewarding? I will answer in the affirmative. This is why from the bottom of my heart, I see this exhibition as a homecoming, even though for how long I will remain here, I cannot say because I do not know.

The Nigerian artistic landscape is vibrant. When I was finishing my Masters' Degree programme in 1982, I think there were just about 36 Art schools in Nigeria. I hear there about 60 – 80 now. I am also aware of the fact there are many artists who now own individual studios. These are heartwarming developments and indices for measuring artistic growth.

SMO: What do you think is the role of art in society? Do you consider yourself as a social commentator? Activist?

Art with a capital 'A' be it Painting, Photography, Ceramics, Sculpture, Textile or Graphic design, should be able to change attitudes. I do not paint happy faces, I do not portray happy emotions; am I making social comments? Yes. Am I actively doing this towards any end? Yes. I want people to see the other side of the coin. I want the fortunate to think of the less privileged, I want those who have, to think of those who survive on their own crumbs of bread. Nature abhors a vacuum and yet it is full of opposites; a reminder of the famous Chinese 'yin yang'.

SMO: What influences your use of color in your work? How do you begin a new work and when do you know it is finished?

TA: Don't forget that I have for many years only painted in one medium, which most painters shy away from, because they claim it is very difficult to handle. Some even see the medium as that



A DENAIKE
3-2015

which at your leisure, you while away time with on Sundays in the western world. Make no mistake about it, it is considered by those who know, as the most difficult painting medium that confronts any painter. Its drying time, fluidity and transparency can at times be very difficult to handle and control.

Everything about my work is spontaneous. You can say the white of my paper dictates what comes on it. I paint without sketches. Colours just keep evolving. I do not consider any work as finished, they are merely signed as proof of ownership.

SMO: Do you listen to music when you work? If yes, what music would have to be on your playlist?

TA: I stopped playing music in 1976, at the university, after the death of our bandleader- James Curtliff- an American saxophonist. My instrument was the jazz drum set and vocals. Funny enough, I wanted to become a musician, but for the blunt refusal of my late father. It was very painful for me then. Today, I have no regrets. He probably saw my tomorrow, while I entranced in my mystifying present.

I listen to anything music – late Demis Roussos to Julio Iglesias, and Andrea Bocelli to Rod Stewart to Tom Jones; Salif Keita, and Manu Dibango to Fela Anikulapo Kuti. Fela was different because I grew up knowing him as Egbon – the Yoruba word for elder or senior brother, at Akobi Crescent, Surulere, where I grew up.

I listen to Janis Joplin to Aretha Franklin to Shirley Bassey to soulful Gospels... anything music... Malian, Senegalese, Gambian, Indian, Arabian and American country music. I can boast of a rich and diverse collection of world acclaimed musicians.

University days ... I listened sparingly to Rock and Acid Rock music, Osibisa and virtually any reggae music under the sky. These were laced with Apala and in recent times Fuji music.

From my place of residence, Afam Ogbotobo, Morocco Maduka and Long John, whenever I listen to them, their music act as checks and balances, to the realities I should always have at heart about life and human existence in general. Celestine Ukwu and Goddy Ezike play extremely passionate highlife music that warm my heart, sound substantially endless, and make me develop goose bumps. Their lyrics are highly philosophical.

I am however a bit cold towards many of the Nigerian computer generated music, cooked up in one corner of a room. Many of them are rather repetitive in rhythm and lack the basic creativity that one would expect in musical renditions. May be it has to do with age, some people have once told me so, but you ask what has music got to do with age or vice versa? Just like one may also ask what has poor lyrics and uncoordinated instrumentation got to do with music? Answer to the latter will simply be; very essential, crucial and if lacking, *UNPARDONABLE*, I believe.

SMO: Finally, you are originally from Western Nigeria yet have lived and worked for the last 40 plus years in Eastern Nigeria and speak Igbo fluently. How has this rich cultural diversity influenced your work?

TA: I am not a superstitious person. I don't believe in astrology either. But in Igbo tradition, I have come to learn and understand that every living being has a 'Chi'. In Greek philosophy, you come across the word 'Muse' as it relates to art and creativity. Overtime, I have to believe that I have a Chi and that my Muse is not of Greek descent but most likely of Igbo origin.

My stay in Igbo land and the influence on my work, my person and my world view, has been tremendously rewarding, in various ways, too numerous to list here.

SMO: Thank you.

TA: You have succeeded in making me shift from my rather placid position. My pleasure though.



Politician-one who murders truth, watercolour on paper, 45.72cm x 60.96cm, 2008



A Street Person clad in green, watercolour on paper, 60.96cm x 45.72cm, 2009





AA DENAIKE
2006

A Double Heritage

The Work of Tayo Adenaike

Tayo Adenaike's artistry dates back to his childhood in Idanre, Ogun State of Nigeria, where he was born in 1954. His talent first manifested when he began to draw with broomsticks on sand. Of course, this is a popular pastime of most children, but when a child carries that hobby beyond infancy, it often results in an art career. Even though Adenaike was frightened by the fabulous theory that if he continued to draw on the ground, he "stood the chance of having (his) 'mother's breasts crawling on the floor for eternity...should any house fly perch on the lines," he sustained his creative propensities until his enrolment at Federal Government College, Warri, in the present Delta State. It was here that Adenaike received his first formal instruction in art in 1967.

Against his father's inclination, he turned increasingly to art in 1972 when he finished from the secondary school, buoyed, perhaps, by his success the same year in the All Nigeria Secondary School National Art Workshop held at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, where he won the second prize. At this time he was also making some money from his paintings. This rudimentary achievement later found its denouement in Adenaike's admission to the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in 1974, four years after the Nigeria-Biafra war. The few years after the civil war were very interesting period at the University of Nigeria. The euphoria of a new beginning sustained by a renewed optimism encircled the environment. In the art department of the university, a subtle paradigmatic revolution had begun in 1970, engendered by the presence, vision, and activities of three artists: Uche Okeke, Chike Aniakor and Obiora Udechukwu. Uche Okeke was the wary dean of the Zaria rebellion¹ in 1958. After a sojourn in Enugu and Germany, Okeke was lured back to Nigeria by Prof. Achufusi, then Dean of the Faculty of Arts, to return to Nigeria after the war and head the art department at Nsukka. Aniakor also studied at Zaria and was employed to teach art at University of Nigeria in 1970 after a stint as a secondary school teacher in Nnobi, in Anambra State of Nigeria. Udechukwu equally had a Zaria background. He had begun his art training there but scampered to the east of Nigeria following the pogroms in northern Nigeria in 1966, and transferred to the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. At the end of the civil war in 1970, he was one of the displaced students who opted to continue their studies at Nsukka, rather than return to their previous universities. Udechukwu had just completed his first year as a Junior Fellow in 1974 when Adenaike arrived, having himself completed a B.A. programme in Fine and Applied Arts in 1972.

All the three teachers were painters, although Chike Aniakor later studied art history in the United States. Their visions were different as should be expected, but they had one thing in common: a keen interest in *uli*, the Igbo feminine, cosmetic, but also ritualistic, painting tradition that was very popular in pre-contact Igbo country on the human body and walls of public spaces. For the three artists and some others at Nsukka at that time, *uli* presented a possible access road to their history and heritage as a handle for coming to terms with the exigencies and challenges of the whirlwind of the West-led, hegemonic modernisation. Adenaike was taught by all three, but his deeper attachment to Udechukwu was a centralising factor in his art and their relationship has been sustained in exemplary friendship.

Adenaike was very fortunate to have arrived Nsukka at the time he did. Indeed, he had been a fortunate pupil. At Warri, he had a brilliant art teacher and various art materials were provided for class exercises. This enabled him to try his hands on diverse media including gouache, watercolour, and acrylics. At Nsukka, he found favour in Udechukwu who occasionally gave him watercolour paper, watercolour and other materials to experiment with. At times, he had the privilege of watching Udechukwu paint. The impact of these experiences on Adenaike's vision in those early years cannot be overemphasised. His initial attempts at creating serious works betray some

influences. The results are a conjunction of Okeke, Aniakor, and Udechukwu, although Udechukwu's style seems to have fascinated the young artist most. Influence is a natural factor in the process of art training. Promising pupils would emulate their teachers without necessarily aping them, just in the same way the proverbial kid learns to chew the cud by watching the movement of mother-goat's mouth. And Adenaike was a promising pupil; when he learnt to chew the cud, he also recognised the need to chew it his own way – the need for originality.

Between his graduation in 1979 and his graduate degree in 1982 and his nine-city exhibit in Germany in 1986, Adenaike's works were marked by a persistent search for an enduring voice and character. But originality is only an empty phenomenon which allows the artist to put on airs of uniqueness within the bounds of a tradition with a long line of exponents. What happens in the artist's works is that he finds a refreshing way of doing what his predecessors have done and what his peers are doing. This is basically what the *uli* neo-classicists – Uche Okeke, Chike Aniakor, and Obiora Udechukwu – did in the adaptation of the *uli* idiom to modern artistic enterprise. The idiom found continuity in the exploitation of its pattern by successive generations of artists. Adenaike belongs to the second generation of artists, although some writers, such as Ottenberg, groups him in the third.* Like Okeke and Udechukwu, his works are an extension of the *uli* paradigm. Their character lies in his unique style which he has been developing in over 20 years. To this extent, he is very original. For as the traditional *uli* women painters would put it, "*Uli di n'aka, n'aka*" (each *uli* artists has her own "hand" [style]).²

Beyond Nsukka

Since graduation from Nsukka in 1982, Adenaike has worked in advertising and public relations, apart from his commitment to painting. In fact, as a student he often worked part time as a graphic designer for a private company in Enugu. On graduating in 1979 from the University of Nigeria, he taught for a while at Institute of Management and Technology, Enugu, and started MFA studies at Nsukka, which he completed in 1982. It was that year that he also became a director of Maan Ltd., an advertising agency in Enugu, although his stay there was rather brief.

In 1984, he co-founded Dawn Functions Nigeria Ltd., where he worked as Partner & Creative Director until 2005; since then he has successfully run his own advertising agency, Artsaels Ltd. Advertising is a very demanding work and it leaves Adenaike little time to attend to painting. But he has devised a schedule which enables him to work at night and on weekends. He does not work at random, but works towards exhibitions, of which he has held many since his student days.

At the end of his graduate studies in 1982, Adenaike had participated in more than 60 exhibitions, including twenty solos, one of them (*Homage to Uli*) in 1981 at the Africa Centre, London, "whose small and poorly designed gallery," Simon Ottenberg says, "has served for many years as a European starting point for African artists". His 1982 solo (*Distorted Souls*) was at the Goethe Institut, Lagos, where he had exhibited in 1980 under the theme of *Childhood Fears*.

By 1986, Adenaike's profile had grown considerably and his works met with much acceptance in the art circuit in Lagos. As Ottenberg (1997) reports, "In 1986, Adenaike went to Germany on a Goethe Institut Scholarship, travelling to and exhibiting his work in nine cities. This was an important year for him, for he also held two solo exhibitions in Nigeria, and became a founding member of the Aka Circle of Exhibiting Arts"³.

I believe the Aka connection is very important in the development of Adenaike's vision, as it was for most of the other members of the group. Aka was a catalyst in the years it existed – especially in the 1980s and early 1990s – to its individual members as well as in the general art landscape in Nigeria. There is no doubt that members' visions and styles affected one another's perspective and helped to sharpen their imagination. Adenaike must have benefited from this salutary interaction, as it must have provided new experiences, possibilities, and vistas. Participating in all of the group exhibitions in Enugu and Lagos, Adenaike was one of the AKA members who helped shape the image of the group and make its annual exhibitions really “a major art event, one that the public would look forward to every year,” as AKA's mission statement had it⁴. But unlike some Aka members, he did not depend solely on Aka for the exposure vital to the growth of the artist. He was already widely exhibited at the time of Aka's birth and he was very active outside Aka throughout its existence. After the demise of Aka in 2000, Adenaike has remained active, painting and holding exhibitions abroad.

Adenaike is no stranger to the exhibition halls in Lagos: Goethe Institut, Didi Museum, Italian Cultural Centre, Iola gallery, all have hosted exhibits of Adenaike's works at various points in his development. But since the 1990s, he has also made useful contacts with some galleries in the United States of America where he has exhibited annually in the last decade.

Towards a Hermeneutics of Adenaike

Adenaike's forty-one sojourn in the Igbo country, east of Nigeria has played a dominant role in his art. But his vision is not trapped in the *uli* linear configuration. His works, over the years, have matured into a commune of *uli* symbology, *nsibidi* motifs and Yoruba oral tradition. Like his teachers, Udechukwu, Aniakor, and Okeke, Adenaike believes in the potency of the creative return of history.

In Nigeria, where ethnicity is almost a personal virtue, where artists – like politicians – are usually unable to transcend visions of parochialism, Adenaike should be seen as an exemplary personality, having imbibed the Igbo *uli* tradition and living and practicing among the Igbo for more than four decades. He should, thus, be counted effectively among the *uli* art tradition, although he has often borrowed from *nsibidi* signs and Yoruba tradition to enrich his art.

At the thematic level, Adenaike has gradually become more intuitive, using his art to relate with the subconscious and as an access road to happiness. Earlier on in his career, he engaged in resistant art, like most Nsukka artists, “thinking he would change politicians”⁵. Unfortunately, Nigeria and Africa seem to defy the phenomenon of change and critical art seems to be on the decline in these parts. Artists (including Adenaike) still paint social themes, but Adenaike no longer conceives his works predominantly from a social-instrumentalist standpoint. According to him, his art is a graphic re-enactment of what he hears and sees.

Whatever their thematic-philosophic contents, Adenaike's works rely mainly on the intensive orchestration of colour for their evocative power. Much of the history and development of watercolour revolves around portraiture and landscape painting. Adenaike is evidently one of those few artists in the history of art who have extended the mediumistic frontiers of watercolour and its ability to sustain and concretise serious thematic visions and emotional messages. But Adenaike is not only a watercolourist. He also holds the biscuit in other painting mediums such as acrylic, oil and ink.

Ottenberg (1997) addresses Adenaike as a “watercolorist of faces and figures”⁶, but I refuse to agree with him, unless “faces” and “figures” are to be taken metaphorically. Be they of animals, men or women, the “faces” and “figures” in Adenaike's paintings are transcendental. They are windows, not of the souls of known or unknown persons or animals, but of the society or the cosmos itself. They are not esoteric windows where we are alienated, stranded, and excluded. They are windows of inclusion. Through them, we are offered some insightful glimpses of the world and man's peregrination in it.

Adenaike's watercolours are an essay in the pursuit of essence, meaning, and happiness through the instrumentality of chromatic eloquence.

Chuu Krydz Ikwuemesi, Ph.D,
Painter, art critic and ethno-aesthetician
Associate Professor of Fine Art,
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Notes

1. Contrary to the opinion of some Nigerian critics, “rebellion” can be positively characterised. See C. Krydz Ikwuemesi, 2004 “Introduction,” *Spaces and Silences* Lagos: Pendulum Art Gallery, p.8.
2. See Sarah Adams in Simon Ottenberg, 2002, *The Nsukka Artists and Nigerian Contemporary Art*. Washington: National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, pp. 52-62.
3. Simon Ottenberg. 1997. *New Traditions from Nigeria: Seven artists of the Nsukka group*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, pp. 181-201
4. The mission statement - “A Note on Aka” – is to be found in most of the Aka exhibition catalogues.
5. See Simon Ottenberg, *ibid.*
6. See Simon Ottenberg, *ibid.*



A face under transformation, watercolour on paper, 45.72cm x 60.96cm, 2015

Bio

AUGUSTINE OMOTAYO ADENAIKE

Born:

1954, at Idanre, Ijebu-Imushin, Ogun State

Education:

1960 - 1965 Abadina Primary School, University College Ibadan

1966 - 1972 Federal Government College, Warri

1974 -1979 University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Department of Fine and Applied Arts, BA

1980 -1982 University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Department of Fine and Applied Arts, MFA

1986 Awarded the Goethe Institute Scholarship to study the German language and had a traveling exhibition, which was shown in nine German cities, for a period of eighteen months

2000 Recipient of Marshall Frankel Fellowship Award and was resident at the Vermont Studio centre, Johnston Vermont for 30 days

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Studio & Solo Exhibitions

1980 Childhood Fears, Goethe Institute, Lagos.

1981 Homage to UU, Africa Centre, London.

1982 Distorted Souls, Goethe Institute, Lagos.

1983 Faces of the Time, National Council for Arts and Culture, Lagos.

1984 The Subconscious, Italian Cultural Institute, Lagos.

1986 We Live in the Deep, Goethe Institute, Lagos and Nine cities in the Federal Republic of Germany.

1990 Dialogue, Italian Cultural Institute, Lagos. Story-telling, Italian Cultural Institute, Lagos.

1990 Fragments, Mbari Art, Washington, DC.

1991 Towards Essence, North Carolina A&T University, Greensboro, North Carolina.

1992 Solemn Notes, Open house at Stella Jones', New Orleans, Louisiana.

1993 Impulses, African American Gallery, Charleston, South Carolina.

1994 Recent Watercolors, Gallery 1619, Denver, Colorado.

1995 New Currents in Acrylics, Private viewing, Fuschia Gallery, Seattle, Washington.

1996 Tayo Adenaike: Watercolours, Mossadi's Collection Gallery, Denver, Colorado.

1997 Echoes of the Past, Kubatana, Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia.

1999 Old Songs New Notes, Parish Gallery, Washington, DC.

2003 Talking with the Past, Parish Gallery, Washington, DC.

2004 As Time Passes, Skoto Gallery, New York

2008 Glimpses of What is and What is Not, Parish Gallery, Washington, DC.

2010 Faces and Emotions, Parish Gallery, Washington, DC.

SELECT JOINT AND GROUP EXHIBITIONS.

- 1980 Afrikanische Kunst Heute, Galerie Exler, Frankfurt am Main, Germany.
- 1982 Nigerianische Kunst Ausstellung, Bonn, Germany.
- 1986 AKA Circle of Exhibiting Artists, Enugu and Lagos, (Annually for over six years)
- 1989 VSO Auction for the World, London, England.
- 1992 Recent Acquisitions: New Dimensions, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.
- 1994 Sources: Contemporary Nigerian Art, Hammonds House Galleries and Resource Center, Atlanta, Georgia.
- 1995 Statements, Istituto Italiano di Cultura, Lagos.
- 1997 Poetics of Line: Seven Artists of the Nsukka Group, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC
- 1997 From Two Minds, Iola Gallery of Arts, Lagos.
- 1998 Wosene & Tayo, Stella Jones Gallery, New Orleans, Louisiana.
- 1999 To be Counted, Parish Gallery Show, Miami, Florida.

BEYOND ART

- 1979 -1980: NYSC – Lecturer Life and Natural Form drawing and Painting, Institute of Management and Technology, Enugu.
- 1981-1984: Art Director, MAAN Limited, advertising agency
- 1985- 2005: Head, Creative Director and Partner, Dawn Functions Nigeria Limited, advertising agency
- 1990-1995: Gave lectures on Art in Six American Universities and presented two papers at the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC
- 2005 To Date: Owner and Principal Consultant Artsaels Limited, Graphic Design and Production Company
- 2009: Director, Paul & Grace Foundation - NGO
- 2011 Owner Tachi Studio, full service photographic and video recording studio
- 2013 Director, Lift Saxum – NGO



Obiora Anidi

Obiora Anidi



Obiora Anidi (born 1957) is a Chief Lecturer at the Fine and Applied Art Department, Enugu State College of Education. He is also the Chairman of Board, Enugu State Council for Arts and Culture, and a Member, Local Organizing Committee of the annual Life in My City Art Festival, Enugu, which has provided an important platform for many young Nigerian emerging artists since 2007. He graduated with a Higher National Diploma in Fine and Applied Art & Sculpture from the Institute of Management & Technology (IMT) in 1982. He also holds a Master's and Doctorate degrees in Educational Technology, from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka and Enugu State University of Technology, respectively. One of the founding members of the famous AKA Circle of Exhibiting Artists, Anidi is a celebrated sculptor from the Uli tradition who has taken part in many local and international art exhibitions in Nigeria, USA, Jamaica, Germany, and Italy. His works are in numerous private and corporate art collections in Nigeria and abroad.

Anidi's powerful sculptures are recognized and prized in the Nigerian contemporary art tradition; "their lucid, figurative and abstract formal language tends to blend with their ambiguous titles to make the viewer understand the physical experiences that he has translated into sculptural expressions," according to Dr. Eva Obodo of the University of Nigeria Nsukka's Fine & Applied Arts Department. Anidi's artistic legacy is documented in local and international publications including the *Okike: An African Journal of New Writing, African Arts* and in the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African Art publication *Nigerian Artists: A Who's Who and Bibliography* (1993).



Anya Ike..Innocence of the Youth Marble, Concrete and Metal, 70cm 2000





Ancestral Forest....Grandpa II , Marble, concrete and metal 50cm 2015

Ancestral Forest...Grandpa III, Marble, concrete and metal, 31 cm, 2015



“ Beyond sales, business, beauty and decoration, art is primarily for education and knowledge expansion, especially non-formal education for the rich, the poor, and the general masses. In the hands of an informed curator, an educational technologist, a teacher, parent, guardian, role model or mentor, **art is indeed a veritable tool and media for instruction and renewal of society.** For a society such as Nigeria, where some basic human values and the people are constantly embattled and in despair, art can indeed play a great role to integrate, celebrate, reflect, redirect and restore hope to a society that was once humble, self reliant, sufficient, proud and confident. Hence, the subjects in this exhibition: Down, Not Out..., Aftermath....Never Say Die..., Ancestral Forest...Grandpa..., Ikolobia..., Anya Ike...and Robosity...of a rich culture ...

We cannot give up as a people. We must all continue to interrogate the past, to be able to reconstruct and re-invent today so as to build a sustainable future, for posterity.”

Obianidi (Ph.D)
March, 2015



Down, Not Out, Marble, concrete and metal 65mm, 1999







Stress in, Stress out, Stress all over, Concrete and metal, 33cm, 1991







Robosity...of a culture, Marble, concrete and metal, 30cm, 1991



In Conversation with Obiora Anidi

Sandra Mbanefo Obiagu: From the first time I saw your work, I knew I was beholding the works of a master. Your sculptures are unforgettable. They are robust and solid, yet light and airy. The interplay of form and void is impressive and memorable. Your work is intriguing. It draws one in, and makes the viewer think, question, ponder, dream and, soon, one sees a deep reflection of oneself in your masterpieces. Please take us back to the very beginning. How and when did your artistic journey start?

Obiora Anidi: I was born into an artistic family, one that appreciates the values of aesthetics and creativity. I am the third in a family of five children. Following my disposition, I was encouraged very early to take to art as a course of study, by the kind guidance and support of my parents, Chief Raphael Ejiofor and Nono Lydia Nwaliweaku Anidi, and my elder brother, Arc. R. C. Anidi. I was also privileged to have had good art teachers, early in life. In the late 60's, at St. Patrick's Primary School, Enugu, our art teacher, popularly nicknamed "Utulo", provided an enabling and motivating start; in the 70's, Mr. Ibeto (the father of the Nigerian lady musician) taught me Fine Art, at the Colliery Secondary School, Enugu-Ngwo (then, in the former East Central State of Nigeria). I trained and graduated as a Sculptor, in 1982, from the Fine and Applied Art Department of the Institute of Management and Technology (IMT), Enugu, Nigeria. Then, at the IMT, students passed through good lecturers, such as, Paul Igbunugo, Anene Obianyo, Chike Ochi, Charles Nduanya, and others. Lecturers at the IMT Art School, then, allowed a measure of freedom in their methods of instruction, concept formation and experimentation, with various materials, in the execution of student assignments. It was indeed a good start.

SMO: Whenever your name is mentioned within Nigerian and African art, you are always linked to Uli & Nsibidi traditions. Could you please explain your linkage to these artistic roots? What does it mean to you and why do you draw on these specific artistic traditions?

OA: Man is a product of his or her environment – immediate and global. God in his infinite grace and wisdom created man and everything, and imbued into each appropriate values and power, to create and re-create, adapt, to conquer his or her environment. The first duty of the artist is to help in the creation and recreation of knowledge, starting from one's immediate environment. Uli and Nsibidi traditions are Igbo material and artistic traditions for writing (mainly as body and wall decorations) bequeathed to man by our ancestors. They are revived and adapted in modern art by Uche Okeke and others in the Nsukka Art School. These traditions are continually being reconstructed and adapted in my works. The design elements of Uli and Nsibidi have the enormous powers of symbolism, simplicity and economy of the use of space and forms. These are my attractions to them. Again, it is Igbo: Ours to the world.

SMO: You co-founded the AKA group. What was and is the vision of AKA, and how has this group evolved and gained expression?

OA: The AKA group is envisioned and rooted on the philosophy of co-operation and unity in diversity, comparable to the structure, capacity and potentials of the human fingers and the hand and palm. As noted, in all our exhibition catalogues as published, the word, aka, is from Igbo language, meaning 'hand'. The hand makes things. The hand creates. It may be directed by the brain or the mind. But then, different cultures and ages have also advanced talent, intuition as a third force in realization of works of art. This factor is often associated with destiny, akalaka, another Igbo word literally meaning "the lines of the hand and palm". It predetermines what a man would be, encodes the choice he made at the point of reincarnation, of returning to the world of the living. The hand is also made of individual members, the fingers, whose collective enterprise gives control and direction to the whole. The saying "aka weta, aka weta, onueju" is also a driving philosophy of the AKA circle of artists, for each artist retains his individuality while working with the group. In one

of the AKA brochures, it has been made clear that AKA is not an art movement or a school but a circle of exhibiting artists – a forum for the interaction of kindred spirits and professional artists, Nigerians and expatriates working in the then Anambra State.

Experts have asserted that AKA at their peak stirred and indeed dictated the trends in contemporary Nigerian and African art. In 1995, at AKA's tenth anniversary exhibition, it was the general opinion that the event had become the most highly anticipated and enthusiastically discussed in modern Nigerian art, perhaps throughout the African continent. AKA indeed made and had a significant impact on the development and growth of contemporary art in Nigeria.

SMO: What were some of the early influences on your art? Which artists do you draw inspiration from and why?

OA: First is my environment – immediate and remote, childhood experiences, and my elder brother, Arc. R.C Anidi -my first mentor. I believe that my first contact with his drawings triggered off appropriate creative buttons in my art psyche.

The influence of older artists, such as Obiora Udechukwu, a friend of my elder brother, has been significant. Other artists that I admired their works and indeed could perceive their influence on my works include: Idubor of Benin, whom I worked with when I was a student, during my Industrial Training (IT), Erabor, Henry More, Barbara Hypworth, among others.

It's important also to note that even before gaining admission into the I.M.T Art School, in 1978, I already had a "carry-over" of some traditional influence, such as the strong influence of my loving aunty, late "Ucham' Nwaeziobodo", a poet and musician in her own right. I recall, then, how I used to abandon the comfort of the city (Enugu) to spend my holidays with this aunty, in her humble mud hut, at Abor, my village. I was simply attracted to her artistry and native sophistication. Her dirge/poems, rendered in our native dialect, could make your hair stand, at a 'right angle'! Her dexterity at playing the *une*, mouth musical instrument, baffled me. Her entire red walls were permanently embellished and enhanced by *ufie* and *uli* designs. She indeed shocked and excited my aesthetic sensibilities, early in life. Again, at the I.M.T, one was lavishly exposed to the history and practice of traditional African/European art. I believe that the motto of my alma mater, the Institute of Management and Technology – 'skill and service' – usually fostered and encouraged the spirit of experimentation among the average student and product of the institute.

I am attracted to the IMT works, may be because they address the "subject" rather than the "object". They are one and at home with content, media and technique, that agrees with me totally. I pursue just that objective in my work.

SMO: Speak to us about your creative process – how do you begin a piece of work – do you work every day? Or do you take artistic retreats and withdraw into your inner artistic space for long periods of time?

OA: I do not work every day. I work when I'm so inspired. At times, I start with a thumb-nail sketch or maquette (3D or 2D). In some cases, I start a work directly without a sketch or a model. In terms of content, media choice or techniques (style), I allow my subject or issue to drive me – the entire execution. I share the same view with the traditional artist, that an art work should be able to set free the soul, liberate the mind of both the artist and the viewer, provoke or agitate appropriate emotion(s) from an audience. I freely adapt the use of "Uli" and "Nsibidi" (Igbo design elements/sign writing) and other symbols of visual expression from other cultures, as carriers of conceptual thinking in my works. I freely mix media (metal, concrete, marble, textile, paint) and other primary elements of expression (line, form/space, colour, void, shape). I freely mix, combine or adapt any medium or element, as long as I can arrive at a required construct or presence, sophistication and expressive power, comparable to the traditional artist. I reach for monumentality of form (2D or 3D), no matter the size a piece might be. These effort or experiments have enabled me to expand or

increase the visual vocabulary or possibilities of my work. I emphasize the need to enhance the spiritual or emotional essence or value of a work, more than the objective accuracy or beauty of my work. I address or close-up on my “subject”, rather than the “object”. For me, art is and should be practiced as a religion, because it is always reaching for the hidden and high values of life and living – always trying to leave man and the environment better than it found it. My works attempt to portray, celebrate, interrogate, criticize, mourn, reflect a phenomena or an experience of life and living. My works remain a dialogue of the continuous struggle of life and living against the choking vicissitudes of life, with every solution creating yet new challenges.

SMO: Your choice of material is unique and there is a clear stylistic integrity and identity in your use of metal intertwined and running through your solid marble and cement forms – speak to us about your choice of materials and how this affects your creative expression?

OA: As I said earlier, I like to experiment with various media and styles, themes and environment. I respect and promote the very essence of all materials and attempt always to promote same in my works. I like the multi media/elements inclusiveness, symbolism and simplicity, including its sophistication, typical of African traditional sculptures. They do inspire me to produce 2D or 3D works that may usually incorporate all kinds of elements and media of expression. I pursue monumentality, even in a small piece of work.

SMO: Two of your works are called “Youth in flight” and “Anya Ike...Innocence of the Youth”; what global and local issues are you addressing with these pieces?

OA: Anya Ike: Youthful exuberance, either as a child or of a young nation, for example Nigeria, could portend disaster or bring about development or under development, peace or war. “Youth in flight” signifies “youth” which is usually in haste, curious, adventurous and generally impatient. It is therefore advisable for people of that “age” to slow down; once in a while, they should reflect and review the past, to enable them stabilize the present, and to launch successfully into a sustainable future.

SMO: In works like “Nightmare of the Deprived” and “Aftermath...Never Say Die”, are you addressing political and historic issues? Would you consider yourself a social activist?

OA: Yes, these sculptures are socio-political interrogation of the concepts. In some cases, yes, I do. “Aftermath” addresses the resilience of the human spirit, in times of challenge and also pays tribute to that subject. I am also honoring and saluting the patience of the downtrodden in our society, victims of the system through “Nightmare of the Deprived”. Do they have options?

SMO: You are presenting an amazing body of works spanning almost 25 years – from 1991 to 2015 – has your artistic practice changed over the years? When you look back, what are your thoughts about the local art landscape and the environment within you work today vis-à-vis twenty years ago?

OA: Yes, my practice has indeed evolved. I started with drawing, painting with traditional media, such as pencil, charcoal, poster color, including water color, even though, to date, these collections have never been shown, to any audience. They are still in my private collection. My practice and search further evolved to drawing with metal wire and scraps (“live wire series”) and the integration and adaptation of other media such as concrete, marble, color and metal, etc. I also, at a time, early in this millennium (2000s), experimented with soft sculpture –adaptations of the appliqué techniques. Today, I am revisiting the adaptation of 'live wire' with 3D and void expression.



Aquatic Landscape, Metal and Fabric, 210cm, 1990

Artists today in Nigeria have continued to respond to change. Our traditional art style/techniques are subtly being blended with modern styles/techniques. Some favour strict adherences to a chosen art form; others favour the contrary. The search is continuous. The art scene is getting more interesting and engaging. Today, more Nigerians are ready to collaborate with the artist and invest in the development of an appropriate management strategy or enabling framework or structure or environment with the capacity of engendering a more robust art practice and business in Nigeria and Africa. These were completely absent 25 years ago. So, things are gradually improving. But more work needs to be done, especially in the areas of making or enabling laws, providing appropriate management expertise and skill, resources and infrastructure, platforms, competitions, festivals and residency programs, including auction opportunities, especially for the up and coming artists.

SMO: Do you feel fulfilled? How and why?

OA: Yes and also No.

Yes, because one has added to the body of knowledge in art practice and education, within our environment, and beyond; No, for the fact that a lot is yet undone, especially at home in Africa and Nigeria. There is an urgent need to develop an enabling environment for the artist, both the young and old to grow and practice. Stake holders and the Government need to collaborate –establish residency programs, enact appropriate enabling laws, develop and organize annual and sustainable art festivals, fellowship programs, competitions, etc., such that can engender sustainable growth in art practice and business in Nigeria.

SMO: Would your work change if budget were no issue? In what ways?

Yes of course. Especially, in terms of size, techniques and possibly media options

SMO: You are the Chief Lecturer of your University's art department. What is your advice to young artists? Your prayer for artists in Nigeria?

OA: For our young artists, I will advise them to read and work continually. My prayer for art and artists in Nigeria is that the time has come for all stake holders and Government to collaborate. A good example of this collaboration is the Nollywood project. We need to develop enabling management frameworks or platforms, up-grade the physical infrastructure and legal framework for art practice and education, so that Nigeria art and artists can compete globally.

SMO: In conclusion, what are some of the main themes and messages you would like us to remember from this exhibition?

OA: Rich cultural values are pillars and a banner of any system. They are indeed the fortress that can renew society in the face of challenge and failure.

SMO: Thank you!





“ The Ancestral Forest... Grandpa II” and “...III” are in the arena with heightened vigour. It is a solid dance of marble, concrete and resilient metal. You can feel the tension of subdued energy and tamed emotion. It is a plunge into the mystery of the unknown. Only our elders, our ancestors, can reveal to us what lies hidden in the deep hollows of the woods. With the mastery of the sculptural elements of planes, concave and convex surfaces, Obiora Anidi is able to engage contour lines with smooth and abrupt transition as he swims from the deep to the surfaces of his pieces. ”

Chris Afuba

Now and Then

It is true that man is a product of his environment. But in our digital age, caught in a cross fire of prolific print and electronic media, it is very difficult to place man, in the context of natural, cultural and man-made environment. Is it surprising to find Nigerian – American or British – Nigerian in your mother's kitchen? No!

Only a handful of people belong to where they come from. Obiora Anidi is one of them. As I stepped into his home gallery, I was hungry for some humps of dried meat, masked with thick bitter leaf soup and bowls of pounded foo foo (Akpu). But as the dishes were gently opened, it was delicious egusi, hot pepper soup and pounded yam that stared at me!

The sound of Iggede, Abia and Ikoro came tumbling down. Who could resist a few delicate steps? "The Ancestral Forest... Grandpa II" and "...III" are in the arena with heightened vigour. It is a solid dance of marble, concrete and resilient metal. You could feel the tension of subdued energy and tamed emotion. It is a plunge into the mystery of the unknown. Only our elders, our ancestors, could reveal to us what lies hidden in the deep hollows of the woods. Obiora has made three successful attempts to sculpt beauty in ugliness. With the mastery of the sculptural elements of planes, concave and convex surfaces, he was able to engage contour lines with smooth and abrupt transition as he swam from the deep to the surfaces of his pieces.

His understanding of the principles of sculptural form is made manifest by his careful handling of intricate planes and contour lines of his works. With soft and smooth transition approach he is able to give facial features almost painterly, water colour effect. His "Ancestral Forest..."(s) have features with eyes that are lost beyond the realm.

A look at the "Ekwu Ito..." would let you into the organized but complex structure of the extended family. It is still one family unit, like the piece of sculpture, but a careful study would lead you into depths, branches and ramifications not so simple to understand.

Now that Obiora has been fully tested and seasoned by studies, beautiful relationship and professional experience, his works are tempered with the philosophy of relativism. Even his "Anyika Ike...", which looks singular in interpretation, is pluralistic in concept formation. He addresses the youth in their complex world. A shock presentation of almost two dimensional reality in a three-dimensional structure. Young people are driven by the energy that propel them, like the axe that tears and splits a block of wood.

That strength, force and vigour could let you feel what was happening then to "Okpanikogwu" when the sculptor was packed with "Burden in my Heart", "T UP", "Tribute to Valour", etc. Then you could feel the brute force and raw strength of granite loaded with potent lave about to erupt. Explosive! Now, even though granolithic, you feel more welcome and accommodated. A blend of romance and beauty, with synthesis of mind and body swings you to a symphonic orchestra of visual expression which is what you have waded into.

Enjoy yourself!

Chris Afuba

Sculptor

Former Lecturer, Enugu State College of Education (ESUT)

March 2015



Reclining Figure III (Nightmare of the Deprived), Marble, concrete and metal, 45cm, 1991





Spectacles of Sprouting Metals: Obiora Anidi's Sculptures

The old woman does not get old in the dance she has mastered. After a major show held about ten years ago, Obiora Anidi stages a comeback with this exhibition of 20 works (produced between 1991 and 2015 - a period of 25 years) that represent the result of his meditations and experiences while on creative retreat.

As a founding member of the famous Aka Circle of Exhibiting Artists, which annual exhibitions in the 1980s and 1990s were enthusiastically awaited by the Nigerian art audience, Anidi is not a new name in the Nigerian art exhibition circuit. Having severally exhibited locally and internationally, it is not in doubt that he has long come under the spotlight. Although he has participated in recent group exhibitions (such as the 2014 show at the Skoto Gallery in New York), this present exhibition pulls his significant body of work together in a manner that demonstrates the creative kinship he shares with other celebrated artists of his generation.

Generally, Anidi's works speak to the viewer in riddles. Their lucid, figurative and abstract formal language tends to blend with their ambiguous titles to make the viewer understand the physical experiences that he has translated into sculptural expressions. Chike Aniakor has noted that Anidi's works exhibit formal consistency in the interplay of sculptural mass and space in their dynamic associations.¹

Combining different sculpture media (especially concrete, marble and metal), Anidi negotiates spatial congruity and produces works which are among the most formalistically proficient sculptures created in contemporary African art.² His aim has been, according to him, to produce sculptures that interrogate the past, reconstruct the present and bestow hope to the hopeless³. In fact, Anidi's works titled *Monument to Odo*, *... of Education, Knowledge, Freedom and Development*, and *Aftermath... Never Say Die*, amongst others, fulfil this ambition. In *Monument to Odo* Anidi employs Odo motifs and form to reflect the resilience of Odo masking tradition in communities where it has been in fierce confrontation with the Christian faith. Using scientific and artistic symbols, the artist portrays the road map to a sustainable social development in modern times in the work titled *... of Education, Knowledge, Freedom and Development*. *Aftermath... Never Say Die* is a reminder that it is not over until it is over.

Anidi's oeuvre in this exhibition speaks of the resoluteness of expression that lyrical narratives can possess as visual metaphors. Beyond the portrayals of people and their social conditions, it also includes folklore. *Ancestral Forest... Grandpa I and II* are good examples. In the works, the elements are brought into a formal dialogue where combinations of opposites (black and near-white, curved and straight lines, as well as mass and space) interact to animate the works. Here, the viewer is immersed in an open-ended process of speculation. Black metal rods sprout sporadically from the odd, off-white concrete heads and grow into space, creating visual impressions of the all-powerful ancestral spirits often painted in Igbo folktales, which appropriately describe the hydra-headed despots and cabals who hold the society hostage. This growth has however become a signature motif which creates its own kind of beauty, especially in combination with some of the other elements that distinguished different pieces.⁴ All told, Anidi has provided veritable spectacles of sprouting metals that depict the society and its people.

Eva Obodo, MFA, PhD

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University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Notes:

1. Chike Aniakor, 'Aka: A Second Season of Harvest,' Aka '87, April 23 - May 25; July 2 - 16, Enugu: Hotel Presidential; Lagos: National Gallery of Crafts and Design. (1987), p. 7.
2. Onyema Offoedu-Okeke, *Artists of Nigeria* (Milan: 5 Continents Editions, 2012), p. 374.
3. See the Artist's Statement
4. Cynthia Nadelman, 'Interrelated Parts: Claire Liberman', in *Sculpture*, 22.10, (2003), p. 22.

Bio

DR. OBIORA ANIDI

Born:

1957, Enugu

EDUCATION:

| | |
|-------------|--|
| 2008 – 2015 | Enugu State University of Science and Technology |
| 1999-2006 | University of Nigeria Nsukka |
| 1993-97 | Enugu State University of Science and Technology |
| 1977-82 | Institute of Management and Technology, Enugu |
| 1972-77 | Colliery Comprehensive Secondary School, Ngwo/Christ High School, Abor |
| 1963-71 | St. Patrick's Primary School, Ogbete Enugu |

QUALIFICATIONS:

- PHD 2015.(Educational Technology, ESUT)
- M.Ed 2006 (Educational, Technology, UNN)
- PGDE 1999 (Educational Foundation, ESUT)
- HND 1982 (Fine and Applied Art- Sculpture, IMT, Enugu.)

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| 2006 -Till date | Chief Lecturer , Fine and Applied Art Education Department, Enugu State College of Education (Technical) Enugu. |
| 1988-2006 | Taught Sculpture and Exhibition Techniques/Drawing at the Fine and Applied Art Education Department of IMT, Enugu, Nigeria. |
| 1983-88 | Instructor , Umuoka Technical School, Enugu State, Nigeria. |
| 1982-83 | Taught Fine Art at the Oyo State College of Education Ilesa, Oyo State, Nigeria. |

CONSULTANCIES

| | |
|---------|--|
| 2007 | Adjudicator , FIDA Enugu Day of the African Child 2007 Art Competition. |
| 2004 | Adjudicator , Enugu State Festival of Arts (ESFAC) 2004. |
| 2004 | Curator , Salt of the Earth: Women and Children in Society, Art Exhibition, Alliance Franciase Centre, Enugu. |
| 2003 | Curator , Current Experiments: In keeping with Tradition Exhibition of works by students of Fine & Applied Art Department, I.M.T, Enugu- Alliance Francaise Centre Enugu. |
| 2002 | Chairman , Local Organizing Committee (LOC) Global Cultural Centre (GCC) 7 th International Group Show (IGS), Restoration Enugu, Nigeria. |
| 1997 | Chairman , Enugu Home Coming Project Committee. Okanga Group of Artist, Enugu. |
| 1996 | Adjudicator , Children Cultural Carnival, Enugu-Nnamdi Azikiwe Sports Stadium Enugu, Nigeria. |
| 1995-96 | Executive Member/Financial Secretary , Society of Nigeria Artists (SNA), Enugu State Chapter. |
| 1995 | Adjudicator , 12 th National Festival of Arts and Culture, Abiokuta –Nigeria. |



- 1995 - Till Date **Chairman**, Okanga Group of Artists, Enugu, Enugu State, Nigeria.
- 1992 **Producer**, National Festival of Arts and Culture (Entries) NAFEST '92.
- 1990 - Till Date **Financial Secretary**, Sculptors Guild of Nigeria.
- 2007 **Jury**, Life in my City Art Competition (2007-2013)
- 2008 **Member, Governing Council**, Enugu State College of Education (Technical) Enugu.
- 2009 **Chairman**, Enugu State Council for Arts and Culture.
- **Alternate Chairman**, Sub-Committee on Culture and Tourism, Enugu Centenary Committee.
 - **Member**, Implementation Committee for the First Agbaja Heritage Celebrations
 - **Member**, Local Organizing Committee Life in My City Art Festival 6th Edition 2012.
 - **Chairman**, Enugu State College of Education (Technical), **Art Gallery Committee** 2006.
 - **Chairman**, Production of Sculptural Works to Beautiful Enugu and other Urban Areas of Enugu, ESCET, Enugu. 2007

WORKSHOPS:

- Four Polytechnic Project/Learning Material for TTC, IMT, August, 1989.
- 3rd and 4th Original Print making workshop, UNN, 1987/90.
- Print making workshop, UNN, 1985
- Metal Sculpture Construction Workshop, IMT, 1987.
- Concrete Casting Process of Sculptural/Photography Sculpture, Workshop, IMT, 1995.
- Writing workshop for the Adaptation of the new Basic Education Curricula for the visually impaired learners by the Nigerian Educational. Research and Development at Enugu, Danic Hotel, 21-25 January 2008.
- Nigerian Creative Workshop at the Alliance Franchise, Enugu, 2006.
- 1st International Visual Art Teacher's Workshop on the Theme: Rebranding the Teaching of Fine Art, 2013, held at FCC, Okene, Kogi State. Organized by the National Gallery.

MEMBERSHIPS:

AKA Circle of Exhibiting Artists, (Founding Member)
 Sculptors Guild of Nigeria (SGN), (Founding Member)
 Okanga Group of Artists, Enugu, Nigeria, (Founding Member)
 Society of Nigeria Artists (S.N.A.)
 Professional Sculptors Guild of Long Island, New York, USA.

AWARDS:

Merit Award (Creative Art), Nigeria Union of Journalists, Anambra State Council, 1992.
 Prize Winner, USIS, First Annual Young Artist (Sculpture) Competition, Lagos. Nigeria, 1987.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS:

- 1984 Live Wire, National Gallery of Craft and Design, (National Theater), Lagos, Nigeria.
- 1983 *Water and Oil (Live Wire II)*, Exhibition of sculpture, Italian Cultural Institute, Lagos, Nigeria.
- 1989 *NOSTALGIA" (Live Wire III)*, Exhibition of Sculpture, Italian Cultural Institute, Lagos, Nigeria.

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

- 1984 (a) "JAMFEST" World Youth Festival of Art, Kingston, Jamaica.
(b) Silver Jubilee National Art Exhibition, National Theater, Lagos, Nigeria
- 1985 (a) "Aka 86", French Cultural Center/Ministry of Education Enugu and French-German Exhibition Hall, Lagos, Nigeria.
(a) "*Grafisches Design*" Bayreuth, Germany.
(b) "*Nigerian German Prints*", UNN, Lagos, Nigeria.
- 1986 (a) *Original Prints*, Lagos and Baureuth, Germany.
(b) "Aka 87" Hotel Presidential Enugu, Nigeria.
(c) National Gallery of Craft and Design Lagos, Nigeria.
- 1988 (a) "Aka 88" NUJ Press center Enugu, Nigeria.
(b) Contemporary Art Gallery, Institute of African Studies UNN, Nigeria.
- 1989 (a) "Aka 89" Hotel Presidential, Enugu, Nigeria.
(b) National Gallery of Craft and Design Lagos, Nigeria.
© A.D.B. 25TH Anniversary Art Exhibition, NICON Nuga Hilton Hotel, Abuja, Nigeria.
- 1990 (a) "Aka 90", Hotel Presidential, Enugu, Nigeria.
(b) Goethe Institute, Lagos, Nigeria.
- 1991 (a) ENUGU, AKA *Exhibition*-British Council, Enugu, Ni (b) National Museum, Ikoyi Lagos, Nigeria.
© *Artist's of Enugu Exhibition*-British Council Enugu, Nigeria.
- 1992 (a) "Aka 92", Bona Gallery Enugu, Nigeria.
(b) DID Museum, Victoria Island Lagos, Nigeria.
(c) *African Artists*, National West Minister Bank, New York, U.S.A.
(d) *Art in African Project Exhibition of Works on Paper*, Sokoto Art Gallery, Soho, New York, USA.
- 1993 (a) *The way we Live, Exhibition of Painting and Sculptures*, Lagos, Nigeria.
(b) "Aka 93", Bona Gallery, Enugu, Nigeria.
(c) DID Museum, Victoria Island, Lagos, Nigeria.
(d) *Art in African*, Skoto Art Gallery, Soho, New York, USA.
- 1995 (a) "Aka 95", Bona Gallery, Enugu, Nigeria.
(b) DIDI Museum, Victoria Island, Lagos, Nigeria.
(c) *Art in Africa. Uli Art/Master works*, Skoto Art Gallery, Soho, New York, USA.
- 1996 (a) "Aka 96", Bona Gallery, Enugu Nigeria.
(b) Signature Art Gallery, Lagos, Nigeria.
(c) *Arrangements and Compositions*, Skoto Art Gallery, Soho, New York, USA.
(d) *Spatial Complexities: Contemporary & Traditional Exhibition*, L. Kahan Gallery Inc., African Art, New York, USA.
- 1997 (a) *Contemporary African Art Exhibition, Ohio 97*, Ohio State University, Columbus, USA.
(b) *Enugu Home Coming Art Exhibition*, Hotel Presidential Enugu, Nigeria.
- 2000 (a) *Aka 14th Annual Exhibition*, National Museum, Enugu Nigeria.
(b) National Museum, Lagos Nigeria.

- (c) *Dynamic Experimentation IMT Experience Art Exhibition*, British Council, Enugu, Nigeria.
- (d) *African Heritage Art Exhibition* (Courtesy PACA circle of Artists) National Museum Enugu, Nigeria.
- (e) Didi Museum Lagos, Nigeria.
- 2002 (a) *7th International Group Show*, GCC, IGS, Restoration, Enugu, Nigeria-National Museum Enugu.
- 2003 (a) *Blossoming Flowers*, Artists of Enugu Exhibition- Alliance Franciase centre, Enugu.
- 2005 (a) *"African in Portraits" Painting, Drawing, Photo Sculpture*, Skoto Art Gallery, Soho New York, USA.
- 2005-2006(a) *"Aka of Age 2005 Exhibition"* - Alliance Francaise Centre, Enugu, Abuja and Lagos.
- 2008 First African Regional Summit and Exhibition on visual Art (ARESUYA) at International Conference Center Abuja, Nigeria .
- 2009 Visual and Film Exhibition in commemoration of the golden jubilee of Chinua Achebe *Things Fall Apart*. at Ofu Obi Africa Centre Enugu 12-15 Feb 2009
- 2009 SNA Art Exhibition, Coal City 2009, at Olive Gate Hotel ,Enugu.
- 2009 Africa Art Exhibition, *Voices from within: African Art Expression* at Olive Gate Hotel, Enugu. 2009,
- 2009 *Life and Times of His Excellency Chief C.C Onoh* Exhibition of Photo's, Books and Art Works, Enugu. 2009.
- 2014 Group Exhibition, Skoto Gallery, NY, USA, 2014.
- 2014 *Nigeria/Roots Contemporary Artists from Nigeria. Imago Mundi*, Luciano Bentton Collection, 2014.

COMMISSIONS:

- Bust of His Royal Majesty, OBA Adekunle Aromolaran II, the Admula, OWA Obokun of Ijesa Land. Oyo State, Nigeria.
- Co-Sculpting of FIFA Mascot, Nnamdi Azikiwe Sports Stadium Enugu, Nigeria. 1995.
- Bust of Lt. Gen. J.T. Useni-Hand ball Court, I.M.T, Campus III Enugu, Nigeria, 1997.
- Statue of Chief Nwadinobi, 2000 (more than life size), Umuahia, Abia State, Nigeria.
- Bust of Chief Clement Muoghalu Ezekwesili Nwosu, 1918-1995.
- Bust of Dr. Ikechukwu Madubuike (2000) M.O.N. Former Minister of Health and Social Services, Nigeria.
- Bust of Chief Bola Ige (1983). Former Governor of Oyo State, Nigeria.
- Bust of Late Engr. L. Mmamel, Aguobu Owa, Eziagu L.G.A, Enugu State, Nigeria, 1999.
- Mother and Child Statue for Chief David Nwaigwe, Obolo Mbano L.G.A, Imo State, Nigeria, 2007.
- Mother and Child Bronze Statue for Enugu State Government 2006.
- Statue of late Chief Nwosu of Umunkwo Community, Imo State, Nigeria.
- Mother and Child Statue for Mea-Mother Elizabeth Secondary School, Enugu.
- Design/Land Scaping & Mounting of Akwata Roadabout Monument, Enugu.



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Back cover: We Are In Company (Dual), Marble, Concrete and Metal, 32cm, 2015

Aftermath...Never say die, Marble, concrete and metal, 32cm, 1991

OBIORA ANIDI

