



BRUCE ONOBRAKPEYA









EXHIBITION OF RECENT  
PRINTS, PAINTINGS AND LOW RELIEF SCULPTURES  
BY  
**BRUCE ONOBRAKPEYA**

NOVEMBER, 2013

LAGOS, NIGERIA



**IBIEBE (ABC) II**  
ADDITIVE PLASTOGRAPH  
92 X 70CM  
1999







## NIGERIA'S GREATEST EXPERIMENTAL ARTIST

I first met Prof. Bruce Onobrakpeya in 1998, when I went to visit him in his studio in Papa Ajao. This was the beginning of a wonderful friendship that has grown over the years, as my admiration for his work, and realization and appreciation of his legendary practice, makes me say with pure boldness, that Prof is indeed *Nigeria's greatest experimental artist*.

Walking into his studio for the first time is something that you have to experience to understand how exciting, and also a bit overwhelming and totally amazing his creative world is. To get to his studio, you need to drive through Lagos and navigate through over populated streets, teeming with a vibrant and forceful humanity, coming and going, in some of the most populated areas of this megacity – before you enter Oloje street, a quieter area of Mushin, and finally arrive at a three story building sitting on a small plot of land, which is partly submerged by a large palm trees.

After being received in a crowded ground floor reception area, filled with sculptures, paintings and other art works, we start to climb three flights of narrow stairs, passing stairwell walls completely covered with large and small framed works from floor to ceiling. As you make your way higher and higher, the works grow in size, until you reach the top landing where his office is situated.



His desk is cluttered with books, memorabilia, writings and papers, surrounded by walls decked with art and awards. When you look out of the louvered windows, you feel a gentle breeze, and see far across the rooftops of Mushin, with the noise of traffic, city and community sounds and smells wafting up from below.

But you're not there yet. You pass through his office and finally get to his studio which is a large room that is divided into a working area with about 4 large tables laden with works in various stages of production on the right side, and on the left side of the room, you see printing presses and rolls and rolls of canvases, frames, papers and works stacked to almost the ceiling. This is the birthplace of most of Prof's master pieces. This is where he conceives, draws, experiments, advises and supervises his team of assistants and creates his brilliant, iconic, and deeply symbolic works.

From the first moment I met this great soul, I was instantly impressed by Prof's effervescent personality; his youthful, joyful, and deeply engaging spirit. His world engulfs and not only inspires you – it has profound energizing and inspirational effect. Once he begins to explain what the various art works mean, you not only marvel at his technique and artistic mastery, you also get a lesson in Nigerian culture and history, tradition and meaning, language and literature, as he references his work to literary and social happenings that inspired him.

Prof has always been a light to his generation. Creating wonderful companionship and deeper artistic practice for his contemporaries and fellow Zaria rebels, such as Demas Nwoko, Uche Okeke, and Yusuf Grillo to name a few. His light has also inspired and mentored so many young artist who flock to him for advice, counsel and inspiration. In his foyer he always has works by younger artists on display alongside his own masterpieces, and when one asks about these art, he happily explains what draws him to these works, and how unique they are.

There have been volumes of essays written about Prof. which are easily accessible to those interested in studying his art. Mine is not an academic introduction. I tried to find a few words to describe one of Nigeria's most prolific and greatest experimental artists who has for the past 80 years impressed the local and international art world, and who, at 81 continues to innovate and create on a daily basis.

The body of work that we present to you today, is made up of recent experiments which are based on years of artistic practice and which touch on almost every facet of life. There are serigraphs from his famous "Sunshine period" of the 1960s-1970s, and there are paintings and etchings that feature images from his "Dance to Enchanting Songs" series. We present small pendants the size of a mobile phone, that reflect his images and symbols drawn from his "Esirogbo" and "migratory media" techniques, and there are his famous metal foil relief and deep etchings and plastocasts which draw deeply on his world view, the culture and language of his beloved Delta state, and his response to years of political happenings in Nigeria.

I am also pleased to present a short film I worked on in 2009-2010, which shows Prof at work in his studio, and gives us another, cinematic insight into an artistic guru's life and inspiration.

We hope you enjoy this body of work and trust that this will whet your appetite to dig deeper and find out more about this living legend.

Sandra Mbanefo Obiagio  
Exhibition Curator

IGBUDIA ERHA (THREE FLY WHISKS),  
TRIPTOLININ ON CANVAS,  
2013



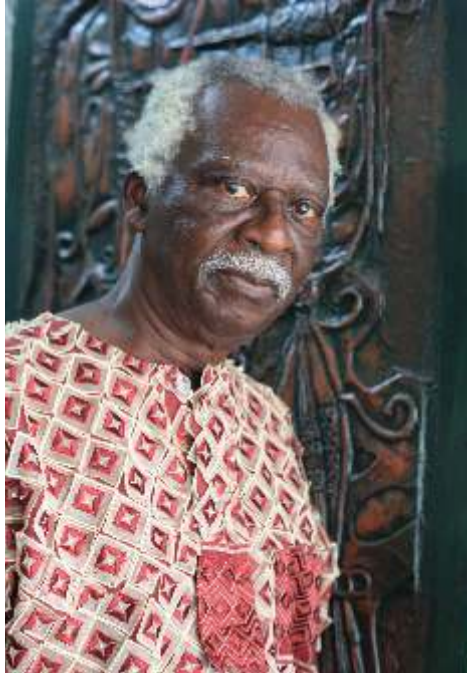








# EXPERIMENTING



I took advantage of the dynamics of printmaking and experimentation to manipulate the same motif or idea to produce different design effects. Tiny line engravings have been developed and transformed into low relief sculptures called plastocasts, in some cases, enlarged into bigger reliefs or paintings. In reverse, pieces which were finished as large pictures or prints have been re-examined in miniature gravures. This process of transformation, or, if you like, migration of a design from one artistic medium, size, or combination, to another, is what I describe as 'Nomadic'.

Being an experimental artist is a response to the urge for a continuous search necessary to put the artist ahead of his or her audience.

Prints are original art works; they are not reproductions. Some day collectors and galleries devoted only to prints will emerge in Nigeria.

Bruce Onobrakpeya

November 2013

LARGE PANEL OF SIX  
COPPER FOIL RELIEF  
230 X 366 X 93CM





“ In 1957, our group met and came together in Zaria: Uche Okeke, Demas Nwoko and Yusuf Grillo and others. We weren't rebelling about anything as such, but we thought that the idea of just using the western art technique without relating it to our culture wasn't right. So, we thought about going back to our culture and developing our good ideas, both in technique and philosophy, and then upgrading this with materials that come from outside – (materials) that are very interesting and valuable. ”

GALA DAY UNDER THE RIVER  
TRIPTOLINEN ON CANVAS  
191.5 X 142 CM  
1998/2011









As an art teacher, the simplicity and directness of the drawings of young people and folk artists had a profound influence on me, particularly in the 1960's, when I taught art at St. Gregory's College, Lagos. I even sometimes copied pieces to give me practice. Such was the drawing of a strange animal which the student called a “cow”. I also called the lino print I made of it a cow. Over the years, I could not reconcile the name to the image, and so in this canvas, which is a revisit to the original picture, I named the animal Ubido, one of the several imaginary animals that roam the Urhobo mythological landscape.





UBIDO (MYTHICAL ANIMAL)  
ACRYLIC ON TRIPTOLINEN CANVAS  
145 X 198CM  
2012













Three Elephant Masquerades was first produced as a painting. A second attempt with this serigraph print gave me the opportunity to introduce to the foreground flat colors which helped stop the legs of the dancers from floating. *Eni* the elephant, is the largest animal in our tropical forest and it features in our folklore as a symbol of greatness. Any hunter who killed an elephant was rewarded by the king for his bravery. This is reflected in an Edo song, "*Tame Ogie Egor wee ovbi Isede gbe eni*," translated, "Tell Ogie Egor that Isede's son has killed an elephant."

3 ELEPHANT MASQUERADES  
SERIGRAPH  
2011









When inspirations come, they reach a point of maturity, which is like when a child is being incubated in the womb of a woman -- when the time to deliver it has come, you cannot hold it back. So the ideas come and they stay with you and mature. And once they are really mature, you just put them down.

For instance, our folklore, our history, our proverbs, whatever happens in our environment, gives me inspiration.

DANCE TO ENCHANTED SONGS (RED)  
PLASTOGRAPH  
74 X 54CM  
2008









“ I am an experimental artist. They seem to know me more for printmaking. But I also paint, I do some sculptural work and I experiment on other art forms like mixed media and so on. While I was in the elementary school, up to standard two, I started engraving stamps, and that was the beginning of print making but I never realized it. So it started many years ago. Later I went into engraving and low relief work which I call plastocasts. And now I have come back to painting and using the prints as miniatures, which are also being developed into larger art works. ”

DANCE TO ENCHANTED SONGS (GREEN)

PLASTOGRAPH

74 X 54CM

2008









Art has been able to aid development in many ways. Art has now become an investment. People invest in art and get rewards from that. An artist is able to employ himself and employ other people. For me it means employing about 20-30 people

DANCE TO ENCHANTED SONGS (BROWN)  
PLASTOGRAPH  
74 X 54CM  
2008









“ The Harmattan Workshop is about teaching people to keep interested in the arts. I realize that when people leave art school, they often stop working. So it was to create a situation for artists to get back to their art work. And also, when people meet in the Harmattan Workshop, they exchange ideas and skills, and that helps them to develop themselves. And so, over the years, we've had so many people come from Nigeria and abroad, and they learn skills from one another – and then we also discuss artistic ideas which helps the artists to grow. For example, we have print making, stone carving, textiles, jewelry making, metal sculpture, and mixed media work...but above all, we look at an art form that is dying and then we try to resurrect it. Like 2-3 years ago, we resurrected black smithery. We brought an expert from New York who worked with our artisans and artists from Awka – so now and again, we are bringing something new.”

DANCE TO ENCHANTED SONGS (BLUE)

PLASTOGRAPH

74 x 54CM

2008









‘ In the 1960's, I was a frequent visitor to the Lagos Bar Beach. The sandy beach and park at that time, reminded me of the Eruvbi stream in my village where I regularly went to swim. In 1965 I made a painting called Palmwine Women. It was composed of women - one carrying and others standing by kegs of palmwine, among the coconut tress that were plentiful at the beach then. This serigraph is third in the series which I used to revisit the painting. The yellow, orange, and red patches all over the picture radiate sunshine, while the poise of the women suggests suspense and mystery. ’





**PALM WINE WOMEN**

SERIGRAPH

54 X 71CM

1965





A bicycle rider carrying a ram on his shoulders negotiates a bend on a lonely street with decorated mud buildings. This is one of the many pictures inspired by life in Zaria. Black lines, green and yellow motifs tie the subject to the predominantly red buildings which are absorbed by an equally red background and foreground. *Cyclist and ram* is a serigraph version of an oil painting on board I did in the mid-1960's.

CYCLIST WITH THE RAM  
 SERIGRAPH  
 67 x 50CM  
 2012









“Have you heard?” is an imagined expression of shock by three women who had made quick money by the marketing of rare essential commodities during the Nigerian civil war. The print was developed from drawings and paintings which expressed the reactions to the news of the abrupt end of the civil war. “Have you heard?” depicts three women in the rumour mill during that sad episode of our national history. First, it was an oil colour painting on canvas, followed by a plastograph and then, this serigraph. Both the prints and the painting rely on heavy lines both for the tattoos on the bodies, and the blue contrasting motifs on the clothes.”

HAVE YOU HEARD?  
SERIGRAPH  
63 x 50CM  
2010









‘ I accompanied my mother to Idinogbo village at the Okeruvbi valley, near Benin City. A red painting of an animal at the entrance of a shrine in the village scared me and I sought my mothers' protection. The memory of what happened that day was to remain in me for several years. While fiddling with used textile lino blocks for a possible new design in the general art studio in Zaria, the form of that beast suddenly popped up in my mind; very graphic and still scary. I developed the motif in silk-screen and in 1965 it was painted in oil colours on hard board. I called it Leopard in the Cornfield. ’

LEOPARD IN THE CORNFIELD

SERIGRAPH

68.5 X 48.5CM

2012









LARGE PANEL OF SIX,  
COPPER FOIL RELIEF,  
230 x 366 x 93cm













HAIL NEW MOON I,  
METAL FOIL  
9 X 11CM  
2003

















ISOROGUN (MUSICAL INSTRUMENT)

COPPER FOIL RELIEF

59 x 73CM

1988













HORNS OF FREEDOM (IN HONOUR OF WOLE SOYINKA)  
COPPER FOIL RELIEF  
68 x 48cm  
1988







‘ The pictures are called “Jewels” not only because many of them are wearable, but also because they are attempts to capture life's essence. They are further described as “Nomadic Images” because they have gone through some kind of metamorphosis before attaining their present state, either as individual pictures or used as part of an installation. ’





KWINI (QUEEN) (MINIATURE)

METAL FOIL

2003





NATIVITY (MINIATURE)  
SMALL PENDANT  
METAL FOIL  
2003









ODIRI (PATIENCE) (MINIATURE)

METAL FOIL

2003





SHEPHERD (MINIATURE)  
PENDANT  
METAL FOIL  
2003



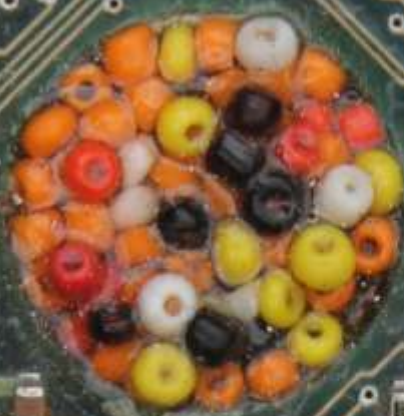


BEAD AND MOTHER BOARD (PANEL I) MINIATURE  
PENDANT  
2003

BEAD AND MOTHER BOARD (PANEL II) MINIATURE  
PENDANT  
2003



CIRRUS LOGIC  
30-003  
2640-120S-C  
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JAFAN-T

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ELEPHANT MASK II (MINIATURE)  
PENDANT  
2003





JUBILATION IV (MINIATURE)  
PENDANT  
2003





UYENJO VO EPHRAN (MASK WITH BIRD),  
IVOREX,  
11 X 9CM, 1990



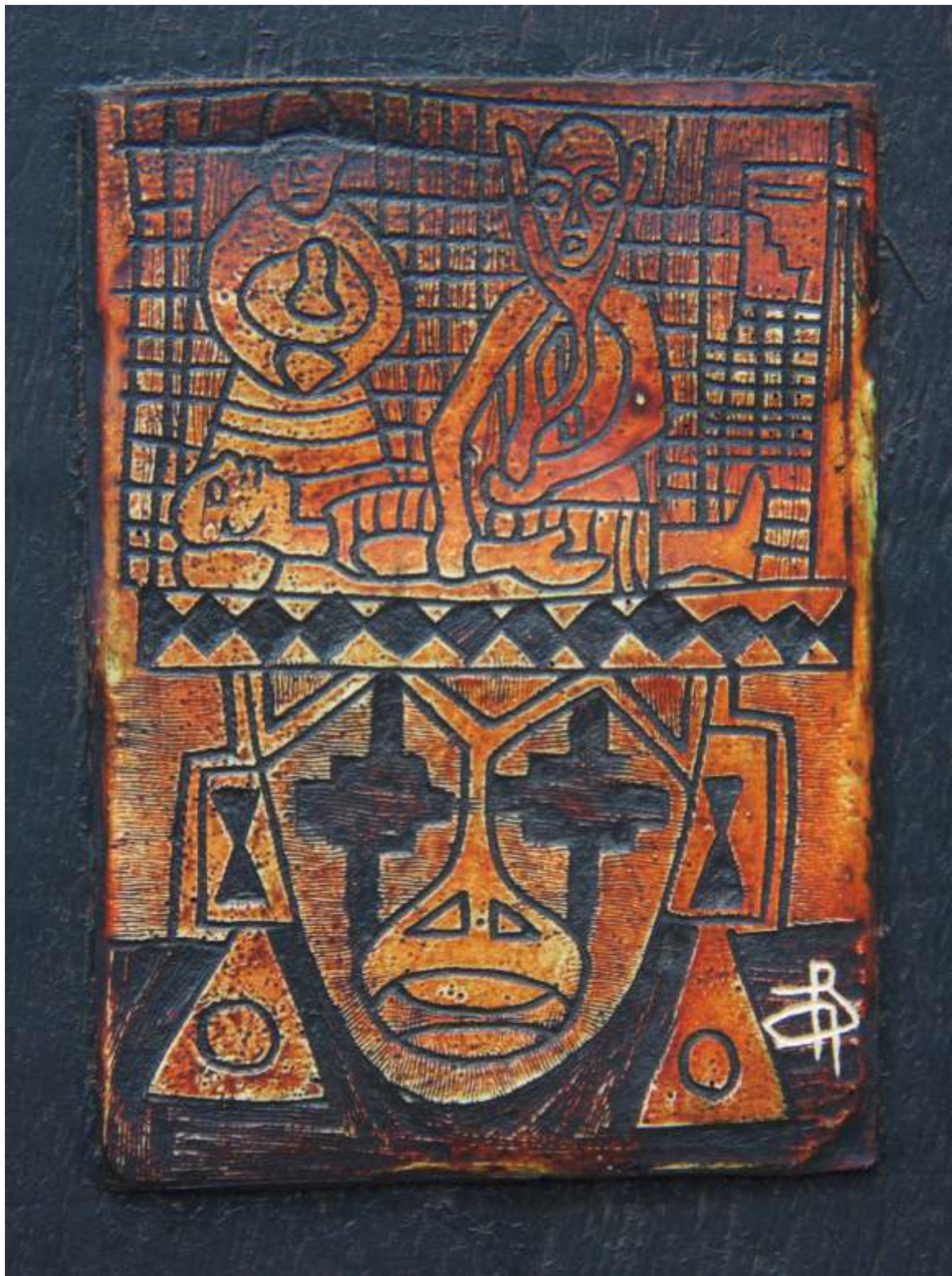


BOVINE STATUE WITH UMBRELLA  
SMALL IVOREX  
11 X 9CM  
1991



OMA ERHUE  
BOVINE STATUE  
SMALL IVOREX  
11 X 9CM  
1991





Dockto Vi'nusi (Doctor & Nurse)

SMALL IVOREX

11 X 9CM

1991





EKPEVWEN (THANKS OFFERING)

SMALL IVOREX

11 X 9CM

1991





YOUNG LEOPARDS ON A WALK, PLASTOCAST, 102 x 79CM, 1987









BIRDS AND OTHER ANIMALS, PLASTOCAST, 79 x 99CM









Working within a multi-ethnic society which is Nigeria, there is need to give some insight into the themes, many of which are in different Nigerian languages. I have deliberately retained local titles for the works, because much is lost through translation into English. Nigeria is in the throes of change. It requires a type of art (call it modern) that will reflect its on-going effort to achieve meaningful development and cultural identity. Appreciation and use of the new art form by the people cannot be automatic; it can only come through exposure to symbols of our ancestral groves or knowledge of the past of our people

IMAGES 1  
WALL HANGING  
PLASTOCAST  
104 X 83CM  
1990











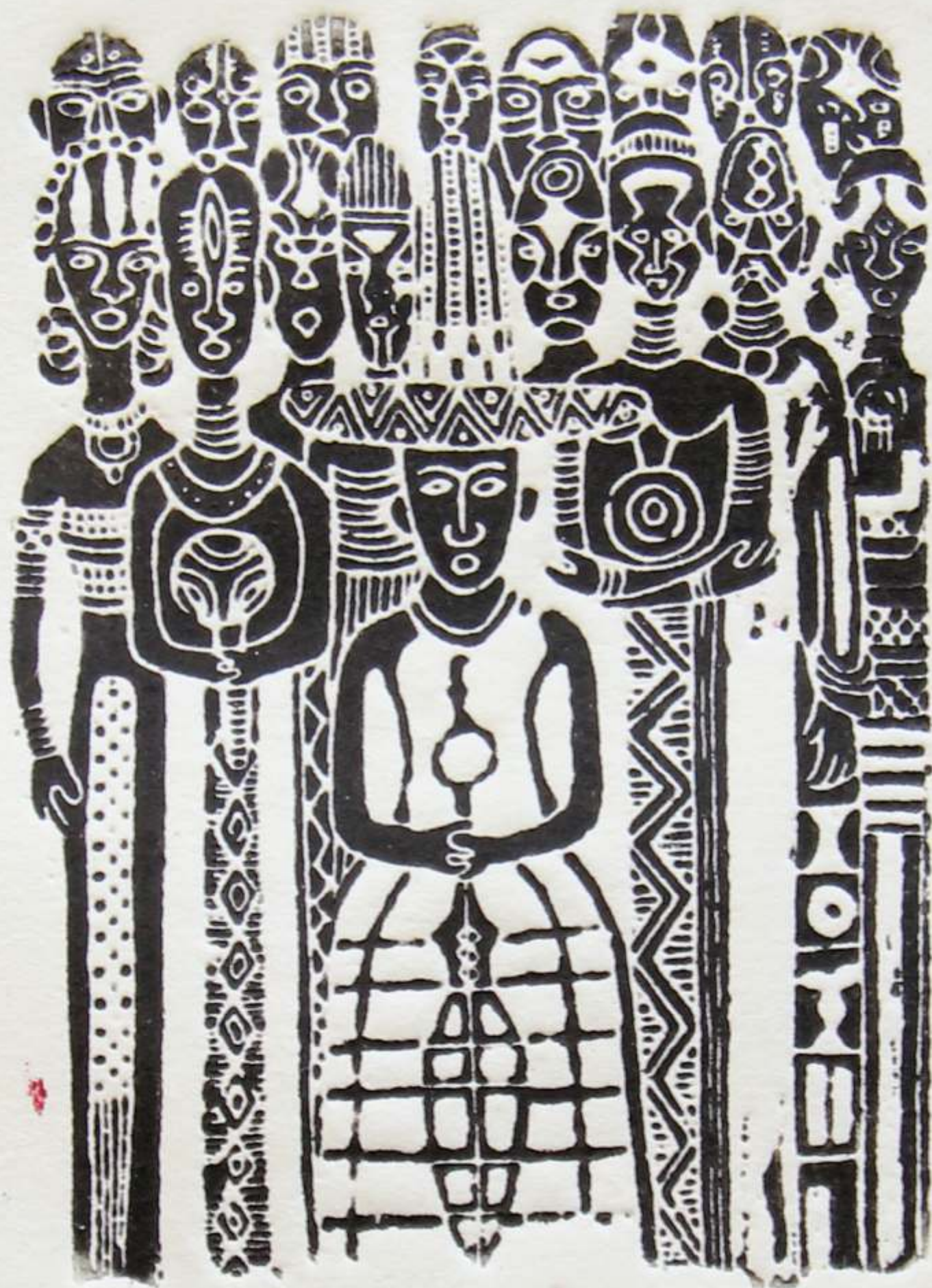






TOBORE (ACHIEVED AT LAST)  
BLACK AND WHITE MINIATURE  
18 x 15CM  
2005













ISOROGUN (MUSICAL INSTRUMENT)

BLACK AND WHITE MINIATURE

1988





PILLARS OF TIME  
MIXED MEDIA INSTALLATION  
2013





“ I pray for time to develop the ideas that God has given to me. I feel very fulfilled. Particularly when I see that there are a lot of people who are going to enter my shoes. People who are working and getting inspiration from what I do. I feel very much fulfilled! ”



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Having opened its doors in May 2008 Temple Muse is West Africa's leading luxury concept store focusing on designer home & giftware, fashion & accessories as well as art & design. Our strength not only lies in offering the very best of world-renowned brands, but also in nurturing homegrown talent from across the continent.

The iconic flagship store equipped with its very own champagne bar is located in the heart of Lagos and possesses a “gallery-like” open feel, where clients can relax & indulge in all things wonderful. Most recently, Temple Muse has hosted a number of specially curated art exhibitions offering its clients cutting edge contemporary art and will soon introduce a new multipurpose design space, 'The Salon', located in the Temple Muse gardens





Editorial & Artistic Direction: Sandra Mbanefo Obiogo  
Photography, Layout & Design: Adeyinka Akingbade  
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Special acknowledgement and thanks to Bruce Onobrakpeya  
and the Ovuomaroro Production for permission to reprint  
excerpts from the following books:  
*Symbols of Ancestral Groves*, 1985  
*Jewels of Nomadic Images*, 2009  
*Serigraphs: A Revisit to the Sunshine Period 1960-1970*, 2012

Special acknowledgement and thanks to Communicating for Change  
for the permission to reprint excerpts of an interview with  
Prof. Bruce Onobrakpeya in *RedHot: Nigeria's Creative Industry* film, 2011



