



Broad Street Groove | 16 inch x 24 inch | 2013

# EKO MOVES

An Exhibition of Photography by  
Yetunde Ayeni Babaeko  
&  
Dance by  
The Society for the Performing Arts of Nigeria SPAN

November 30, 2014 – February 15, 2015

The Wheatbaker  
Lagos, Nigeria



Obalende | 20 x 30 inches | 2014

## WELCOME TO EKO MOVES

Welcome to Eko Moves! An amazing exhibition of photographs which capture the beauty of movement, time and space, within the dazzling, chaotic, always thriving megacity of Lagos.

Yetunde Ayeni Babeko has created 25 beautiful images which reveal classical ballet and hip hop dancers, expressing their flight of vibrancy and attitude, against familiar Lagos city backdrops. We see them dance through places that are both the pride and the underbelly of Lagos: the markets, the under-the-bridge-hangouts, the beaches, the village on stilts, the dumpsites, the classrooms and bus-stops. We see dancers frozen in powerful motion float above the everyday hustle and bustle of city noise. Their lithe, muscled bodies, glistening with an almost reflective sheen, soar above the heads of passersby, glide past pedestrians, pose silently with head-load carriers, and dart over puddles of water in the back streets of Lagos. We see beauty and grace, but also defiance and exuberance; a creative scream and unapologetic sauté in beautifully lit dance-scapes.

As we look at these images, we can almost feel the pulse of a congested bus stop blare while a bare-chested dancer, almost like an apparition, floats by on the wings of a Nigerian flag, or darts past in hip hop sneakers dressed in symbolic green and black. We see a bizarre quotidian stage with dramatically lit dancers like heavenly beings or messengers bestowing their blessing on a world gone awry – a ballerina in full tutu lies across desks in an empty classroom, a scene pregnant with symbolism.

Seeing the heart-beat of Lagos interpreted through this powerful imagery, we come to understand that this dance is more than performance. This dance represents the spirit of the people, who despite all odds, are proud of their city and all it stands for.

Ayeni-Babaeko's work has always been cutting edge. Building on her professional training in Germany as a fashion and advertising photographer, it is heartening to see how she has used her creativity for social development. Her commitment to training young female photographers through professional workshops at the Goethe Institut sets her apart from many other artists wrapped up solely in their own development.

Ayeni-Babaeko demands more from her audience than a perfunctory glance. She forces her constituency to see a new reality through her artistic interpretation, whether it is a ghostly rendering of Yoruba folktales and water-spirits, or chronicling the struggles and triumphs of breast cancer survivors, she leaves her audience gasping for breath, with images that both shock and inspire in their awesome raw beauty.

It is not surprising then, that Ayeni-Babaeko was drawn to the guerilla dance philosophy of the Society for the Performing Arts of Nigeria (SPAN). SPAN is the brain child of Sarah Boulos, a feisty Lebanese-Lagosian artist who has used dance, music and performance to bring hope and fulfillment to a rainbow of talented Nigerians. From privileged kids, to the physically and emotionally challenged, from inner-city marginalized adolescents to university graduates without a cause, her hand picked dancers have a unique blend of fresh talent and pioneer hearts. They dance to express creativity as well as open important channels of communication, professional development, and cross border interpretation. Boulos' goal is to open a dance academy in a dilapidated building in downtown Lagos – the perfect backdrop of some of the interior shots that Yetunde took, looking like a carefully prepared rustique set.

Boulos and the SPAN family have made a positive impact by offering workshops in private schools and clubs, to subsidize free classes in under-served areas in Lagos such as "Dustbin Estate", a community living on top of one of the city's largest garbage dumps. It is by reaching out to Lagosians across the city's economic and geographic spectrum, that Eko Moves resonates and gets its depth.

We hope you enjoy the spirit, the power and the message of Eko Moves! and we hope that these images will not only inspire the world to recognize Nigeria as a cultural and artistic magnet, but that you will support this initiative; part of the proceeds of this creative work will be reinvested in photography and dance for development to continue giving new life, breadth and meaning to our talented youth!

Sandra Mbanefo Obiogo  
Exhibition Curator  
October 2014

**I WANT TO SEE DANCE AS AN ART FOR  
CHANGE AND NOT JUST ENTERTAINMENT**

Ukalina Celine Opuwari | Head of SPAN Dance Academy



Woman's Everything | 20 x 30 inches | 2014



Dustbin Estate 2 | 20 x 30 inches | 2014





Dustbin Estate | 20 x 30 inches | 2014



Dustbin Estate 3 | 16 x 24 inches | 2014





Dustbin Estate 4 | 16 x 24 inches | 2014





**NOTHING GOOD COMES TO YOU IF YOU DON'T WORK HARD FOR IT.  
I CANNOT IMAGINE TRAINING WITHOUT PASSION.**

Peter James | SPAN Fitness Instructor

Education 3 | 16 x 24 inches | 2014



Education | 24 x 36 inches | 2014





Education 2 | 24 x 36 inches | 2014



Femi's Shrine | 20 x 30 inches | 2014





Yetunde Ayeni Babeko | Artist

## YETUNDE AYENI BABAEKO

Dance had never been more to me than a fun thing to do on a Friday night. But the day I went – or rather was dragged by my sons who desperately wanted to learn HipHop – to see a group of dancers, I was inspired.

I needed to photograph them. And the good thing is, that they are artists too. Talented, passionate about their craft, brave and able to think outside the box. There is something special about artists of different art forms coming together and having a common goal. And I am definitely a team player.

Watching dancers on stage is an ordinary thing that one should expect. But for me art is about something you least expect. Something unsettling people's minds and worldviews. So it was my goal to take the extraordinary dance moves and dynamics and place them into an ordinary environment like an every day market or a buzzing

street; hoping the beauty of dance would somehow rub off on Lagos.

After the first shoot with the dancers in the Sandfill Area there was something I saw in this project that motivated me to carry on. It was the 'Upliftment' in a visual and emotional sense that was pouring out of the images. It makes me hopeful for my city and country. Also the curiosity and appreciation of passersby for the arts, who I intentionally included into the picture, gives the work the authenticity and at the same time, the bizarreness needed. It creates the contrast I so much embrace in my works.

So if I should summarize what this particular body of work has done for me and not for you, I would say it has pulled me out of my comfort zone and has let me explore every bit of my artistic freedom in the limited space of our everyday environment.



**DANCE IS NOT MY JOB, ITS MY OXYGEN  
I BREATHE IT IN...CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT IT**

Peter James | SPAN Fitness Instructor

Broad Street Groove | 16 x 24 inches | 2013



Broad Street Blues | 20 x 30 inches | 2014





Lagos Stadium | 24 x 36 inches | 2013



Lagos Stadium 2 | 20 x 30 inches | 2014



## IN CONVERSATION WITH YETUNDE AYENI-BABAEKO

**Sandra Mbanefo Obiago:** Yetunde, after a number of years focusing on the symbolic interpretation of Yoruba folklore, speak to us about this new body of work. Why did you decide to focus on dance? Why dance and why now?

**Yetunde Ayeni Babaeko:** I did not decide to focus on dance. It just happened, like so many things in life and photography. My children woke up one day and begged me to take them to this Hip Hop class. When we got there I was immediately captivated by the dance moves of the young dance instructor and I asked myself how I could capture it. I found out more about him and his dance company and we decided to have an experimental shoot.

**SMO:** How did you pick your locations and what about those places moved you to create your visual story?

**YAB:** I decided to have our first test shoot at the sand filled area around Dolphin Estate in Ikoyi. The reason for that was simply because I thought we would have enough space there to do different jumps and the soft sand would absorb the pressure for the dancers when landing. To my surprise some of the images made that day are some of the strongest in this body of work. Looking at the images later, I began to see the potential for a great exhibition theme. The significant Lagos’ skyline in the background and the well known orange sun set of Africa made me want to take more pictures of the dancers in different places of Nigeria.

As a beginning we decided to start with Lagos. So with this in mind the second shoot was held in Makoko, which is an attraction in Lagos. And our next location was the National Stadium and so on and so on....



**SMO:** What themes are you trying to address with your images? Are they visual poetry and/or political statements?

**YAB:** They are a little bit of both. My images are about the beauty and art of dance in a Nigerian environment. And there is almost no way you can take pictures in Nigeria without having a political angle in them. Everything we go through in this country on an every day basis shouts politics; not to say bad politics. So it would have been very difficult to avoid that thematic even if I wanted to.

The images from Dustbin Estate though have an intentionally strong political message. We photographed there almost a full day and I did not find a way to make the images look beautiful or poetic. Dustbin Estate is a dump area in Ajegunle where many

unfortunate people have to live and sleep literally on litter. None of us felt comfortable there. And instead of trying to disguise our discomfort I let it show. These images are about creating awareness about this dilapidated place that seems to be totally abandoned by Lagos government. Some of the proceeds of this exhibition are going back to initiatives in Dustbin Estate.

**SMO:** As a photographer who spends a fair bit of time covering the fashion scene, and whose previous work has delved into the issues of gender and equality – what did this project bring to your creative experience?

**YAB:** Yes, I am more of a fashion and advertising photographer. Always working in controlled environments. This project has challenged me immensely because I had to throw myself and my camera out of my “comfort



zone” and make use of what Lagos was willing to give me.

It was amazing how the dancers’ performances on the streets were able to build bridges. Surprisingly, we were not facing any harassment from area boys at all. Instead it was more of curiosity and absolute admiration.

I also learned a lot technically. Photographing dancers at high speed while in the air and at the right moment is not an easy task. When I look at behind-the-scene videos of some of our shoots and see how fast the dancers moved in front of my camera, I am baffled how I was able to capture that particular pose in that particular frame. It is as if looking through the viewfinder and concentrating on the dancer and shutting all the distractions out, the whole movement turned into slow motion right before my eyes.

**SMO:** Talk to me about the inspiration behind the photo “woman’s everything?”



**YAB:** “A Woman’s Everything” was taken in Dustbin Estate. The lady in the image lives in a hut made of plywood and carton with her second set of twins. It was a rainy day and her carpet was soaked and water was dripping from everywhere into the room.

I used a wide angle lens to show the room from one side to the other. What you see in the image is everything she owns. The dancers are dancing like guardian angels around her. A message that is also supported by the Madonna poster to the left of the dancers. While dancing, Peter’s leg accidentally hit her very old decoder and she was so upset and close to tears. (The TV was all right but I gave her money for it and her babies.) That’s why I called this image “A woman’s everything”.

**SMO:** One of the locations is a school – why did you pick these backdrops?

**YAB:** This set of images is coming clearly from a very political angle. And

they are called “Education”. Though Lagos government has done a bit to upgrade public schools in Lagos, which should not be unmentioned, we still have a long way to go. The images were taken in a very poorly maintained public school on Lagos Island. The rooms were empty as kids had not returned from the Ebola break and the school had not been declared fit for resumption. I would have loved to have school kids in this shot, but I also liked the empty class room and its untidiness. For me it stands for abundance and helplessness.

**SMO:** What do you hope to achieve with this body of work? What messages do you want to convey? What actions do you want to evoke?

**YAB:** I want to portray Lagos in a way we have never seen it before. It is all about the element of surprise. And at the same time this body of work also has a far deeper meaning. To me the dancers sometimes look like guardian angels descending from heaven and

bringing peace and balance upon our chaotic Lagos.

The dancers jumps are also supposed to elevate the spectator from the hard realities in life. Making the viewer feel weightless and floating above all. In short my work should bring hope to a sometimes seemingly hopeless situation.

Broad Street Break | 20 x 30 inches | 2014





Obalende | 20 x 30 inches | 2014





Obalende 2 | 24 x 36 inches | 2014





## YETUNDE AYENI BABAEKO BIOGRAPHY

Yetunde Ayeni-Babaeko was born in Enugu, Eastern Nigeria in 1978 to a Nigerian father and a German mother. She moved to Germany as a child and completed her high school diploma (Abitur) before embarking on a photography apprenticeship majoring in advertising photography at Studio Be in Greven, Germany. On completing her apprenticeship in 2003, she returned to Nigeria and joined Ess-Ay Studio for a 12 month photography program, facilitated by Invent, Germany. This experience spurred her to deepen her photographic skills by enrolling at Macromedia, a school for art and design in Osnabrueck, Germany.

Ayeni-Babaeko returned to Nigeria in 2005 and worked as a free-lance photographer, before opening her own studio in 2007 ([www.camara-studios.com](http://www.camara-studios.com)). She has been active as a photographer with a social conscience, chronicling the life of modern Nigeria. Besides her fashion and documentary

photography, Ayeni-Babaeko has facilitated numerous photography workshops in partnership with the Goethe Institut, mentoring young female photographers.

Her latest work looks at modern and contemporary dance presented against the stark urban landscape of Lagos, one of the world's most vibrant and dynamic megacities. Over the past two years, she has worked with the director of the Society for the Performing Arts of Nigeria – SPAN – a modern dance company that uses creativity to bring hope and new opportunities to marginalized youth. Yetunde has photographed these talented SPAN dancers in traffic, under bridges, against sky-scrapers, near garbage dumps and along water high-ways – the typical scenes within which over 20 million inhabitants of Eko, as Lagos is called, “live, and move, and have their being”.

## SOLO & GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2014** *Battle Scars*, an exhibition of photographs celebrating breast cancer survivors, Goethe Institut Lagos
- 2012** *Itan* - Telling Stories, an exhibition interpreting Yoruba mythology, Porsche Centre Lagos
- 2011** *The Collectors Series*, a group exhibition at The Wheatbaker, Lagos
- 2011** *The X-Perspective*, Goethe Institut Lagos
- 2010** *Reconstruction in Reverse*, Omenka Gallery, Lagos
- 2009** *A Perspective of Contemporary Nigerian Photography*, Omenka Gallery Lagos
- 2008** *Body Landscapes*, Goethe Institut Lagos

Balogun Market | 24 x 36 inches | 2014





Matthew 11:28 | 24 x 36 inches | 2014





## THE SOCIETY FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS OF NIGERIA SPAN

The Society for the Performing Arts in Nigeria (SPAN) is a registered non-governmental organization that aims to set a world-class standard for performing arts education in Nigeria, offering unprecedented opportunities in dance, music and theatre to Nigeria's talented citizens. SPAN was founded by Sarah Boulos in 2005, who established the dance company as a faith-based social development initiative to bring hope and opportunities to urban youth and poor communities.

SPAN mentors and teaches gifted artists by strengthening their talent with skills and professional techniques through formal and informal classes in theatre, music, dance and art management. SPAN has trained over 100 Nigerian dancers and has provided opportunities for them to work with international choreographers through short master classes taught by local and international talent such Contemporary African Dance by Dayo Liadi, Ballet & Jazz taught by American choreographer, Suzanne Lang, Latin & Ballroom dance by Greek choreographer Dennis Tsamados, Argentine Tango by Pierre Dib who heads the Nameless Dance Academy in Lebanon.

SPAN also sponsors its outstanding instructors to attend international dance workshops such as the DARC International Dance Workshop and Festival in Chateauroux in France. SPAN's certification courses for dance instructors includes African Dance, Ballet, Creative Dance, Latin & Ballroom, Hip Hop, Salsa, Jazz and Tap.

SPAN has trained hundreds of children in Nigerian schools and uses the income from courses taught in private schools to give free dance classes to children in public schools including Ovie Brume Youth Centre, Child Development Center, Juvenile Center Ikeja, Leeland Secondary School, Southfield School, Western College Yaba, Freedom Foundation etc.

The long-term goal of SPAN is to establish performing art centers where the richness and diversity of Nigeria's culture and tradition can be nurtured, preserved and showcased for all to see and experience.

For more information visit [www.spanigeria.org](http://www.spanigeria.org),  
<https://www.facebook.com/spanigeria>

Devoted | 20 x 30 inches | 2014





Mobilé | 24 x 36 inches | 2014



Admiration | 24 x 36 inches | 2014



**I WAS AMAZED AT HOW BEAUTIFUL THE PHOTOGRAPHS  
TURNED OUT AND HOW THEY BROUGHT DANCE TO LIFE.**

Mya Ejiro Dudu | SPAN Trainee





## IN CONVERSATION WITH SARAH BOULOS

**Sandra Mbanefo Obiagio:** Sarah I have seen you work with dancers and performers for many years. Your work has positively influenced the lives of marginalized youth and given them new hope and expression. SPAN, your dance company and creative toddler, turns 10 next year. When you look at the images that Yetunde has created – what first comes to mind? How do these images move you as an artist and dancer?

**Sarah Boulos:** As an artist and dancer, I am inspired by the living spirit coming out of the pictures. The dancers' movement and pauses are filled with hope and the desire to reach beyond and soar on higher heights. There is not only beauty but a sense of knowing there is more to life through our gifts and talent... It inspires me to keep believing that everything is possible!

**SMO:** Speak to me about your personal inspiration in dance. How has the journey been these past ten years? Do these images touch on your journey? Or are they purely the photographer's interpretation of dance and Lagos?

**SB:** Yetunde's images using accomplished and novice dancers from SPAN has reminded me that these skills should be available to everyone. These images are also an important step in opening our Agidigba Community Center in the heart of Lagos Island,

within which some of the images were shot. It is now a reality. Not only are we envisioning building a state of the art performing arts center and academy, but also adding a community skills center to reach out to the talented youth who might not realize they can dance. These pictures have in a way realized our search for a refuge where everyone's gift can be crafted into a piece of art like Yetunde's photographs, placing our dancers in the middle of Lagos' mainstream daily lives!

**SMO:** What are you trying to achieve through your work in Dance?

**SB:** My work in Dance is first and foremost spiritual. It reminds me of my service to inspire, love, and care. Dance makes sure that my God given talents are used to bring life and hope to all whom I meet on my dance journey. Building a performing arts center that will not only educate our gifted performing artists but also present masterpieces has become part of the dance; La Danse de la Vie, where every step we take brings not only a sense of freedom but a purpose to strive for more, reach out for more and exist for more. A journey of wonders mixed with slow, fast, light, heavy, passionate, strong, sad, joyful and aspiring tempo and rhythm, inspiring steady movement and emotions which lead the artist to a victorious life where he lives with purpose.

**SMO:** What are your greatest challenges?

**SB:** The greatest challenges have been trying to convince the private sector to support creativity. We all know that without theater, music, or dance performance, our lives would be so dull. But how do we convince a typical enterprise to support the arts and invest in lives that may not have a direct financial return? My biggest challenge is the transformation of mindsets toward philanthropy and investment in our art and culture development!

**SMO:** What do you hope to achieve through this exhibition? What response are you hoping for from your audience?

**SB:** I not only hope to support and develop our dancers and raise awareness for the need of a community center, but I hope the audience will be thrilled by the imagination and creative work of Yetunde; that the beauty of Nigeria, and the hope of Lagos as a city lives through the dancers movements, and inspires our audience to continue to invest in this spectacular city filled with true humanity. We are a community that celebrates and rejoices and hopes and never gives up... This exhibition breathes that message...

**SMO:** Is this a new expression for your dancers? Do you see a new

creative expression through Yetunde's photography?

**SB:** Dancers love posing but Yetunde has taken them to another level by challenging them to think beyond the dance studio, to share their movements within often difficult community spaces and aesthetics in a vicarious manner. She has taught us to appreciate our city and community more and to see the extraordinary opportunities for dialogue that dance has opened.

**SMO:** Why Dance? Why Lagos? And Why Now?

**SB:** Dance because God told me so... It was in my heart and scripted in my destiny; the freedom to be and live what I was made for. Through Dance I make God smile. LAGOS because I was planted here 18 years ago when my father brought the SCOA group to Lagos. Where you live is where you serve and where you serve is where you meet great artists like Yetunde who will help change mindsets and bring us to love LAGOS, help it, and serve it.

Makoko | 24 x 36 inches | 2013



Blue | 24 x 36 inches | 2013





Light House | 20 x 30 inches | 2013



Light House 2 | 24 x 36 inches | 2013



Sandfill Area | 24 x 36 inches | 2013





Sandfill Area 2 | 20 x 30 inches | 2013



Sandfill Area 3 | 20 x 30 inches | 2013



**I CAN SAY I WAS TRANSFORMED.  
IT MADE ME REALIZE HOW MUCH VALUE DANCE CAN  
BRING TO THE WORLD.**

Ukalina Celine Opuwari | Head of SPAN Dance Academy



Femi's Shrine 2 | 24 x 36 inches | 2014



## SPECIAL THANKS TO OURS SPONSORS

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With its art program Deutsche Bank is making a sustainable contribution to the development of society. Creativity is a source of innovation and progress. That's why Deutsche Bank has been enabling access to contemporary art worldwide for more than 30 years: with its substantial collection, in exhibitions, and through cooperation around the world. The "Art Works" concept is an integral part of Deutsche Bank's Corporate Citizenship program. In line with this motto Deutsche offers employees, clients and the general public access to contemporary art-through its collection at the workplace, in international exhibitions, at the Deutsche Bank Kunst Halle in Berlin, as well as through education programmes. Deutsche Bank supports joint projects with museums, art fairs and other institutions to award and encourage emerging talents, which is best shown in the "Artist of the Year" award which provides a platform to contemporary artists. The magazine ArtMag provides insight into the international art scene. These extensive global activities – designed and accompanied by a team of experts – enable increasing numbers of people to engage with contemporary art. We are creating opportunities, enabling talent and fostering creativity.

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



Ruinart is the oldest established Champagne House exclusively producing champagne since 1729. Founded by Nicolas Ruinart in the Champagne Region in the city of Reims, the house is today owned by the parent company LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton SA. As a patron of contemporary art and design, Maison Ruinart can be found all over the world, wherever the artists of today have the freedom to express themselves and exhibit their work. Ruinart is a proud sponsor of many international art events including Masterpiece London, Art Basel Hong Kong & Miami, MiArt, PAD Paris & London.



## SPECIAL THANKS

We would like to gratefully  
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## CREDITS

Editorial & Artistic Direction Sandra Mbanefo Obiagio  
Photography: Yetunde Ayeni Babaeko  
Design: Visual Players, Minoo Treichler  
Logo Design: X3M IDEAS

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