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Patience 2019
AKPOJOTOR





P A T R I C K

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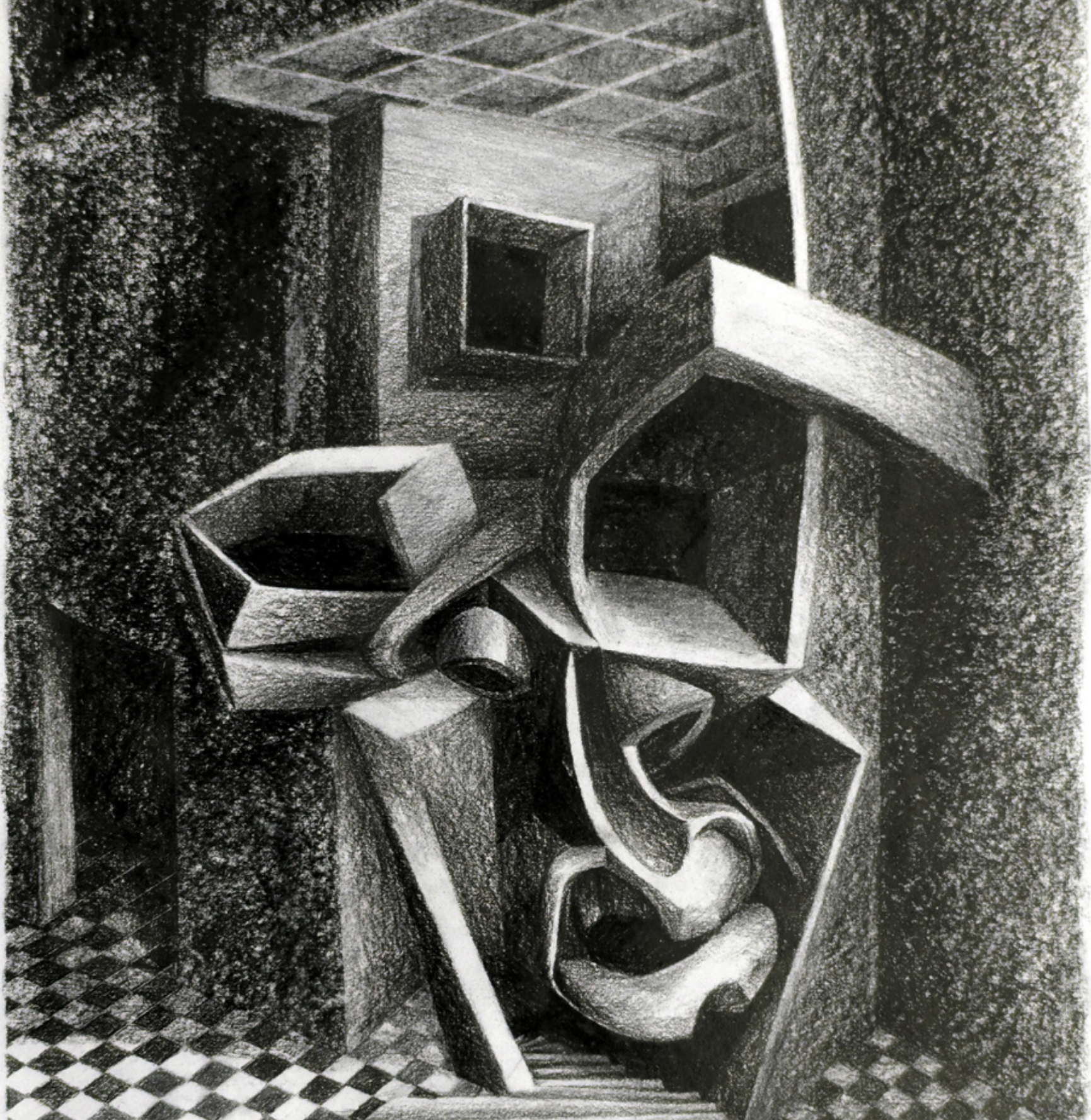
IF WALLS COULD SPEAK

Curated by Sandra Mbanefo Obiako





September 22 - November 8, 2019



THE SECRETS IN THEIR WALLS

The anthropomorphic art of Patrick Akpojotor

Surreal spaces. Slanting doorways. Endless corridors with a sofa positioned like lips at the base of a staircase. Open windows beckoning into the soul of a building. A collar which on closer scrutiny mimics the shape of a Lagos landmark .

Patrick Akpojotor is full of surprises. His art draws us into a fantasy land of hidden meaning, cubist comedy and tragedy. A world where nothing is as it appears. Where walls mimic and cajole. Dance around and wink. Where doorways are touchstones of exciting childhood memories, sliding down large staircases on a board like a daring surfer, eventually stirring the desire to awaken the soul and history of abandoned spaces; to interrogate how the rooms we frequent affect our identity and our emotions.

Akpojotor finds joy in questioning and dissecting different layers of profundity. On the one hand, his architectural renderings have a personality and memory which come alive when we close our eyes and imagine. On the other hand, he creates spaces which have soaked in the personality of their inhabitants, and reflect their identity through their homes.

Akpojotor's art reminds me of when I was a child, visiting the Goetheanum, the center of the Anthroposophical Society in Basel, Switzerland with my architect father. The Goetheanum was designed by Rudol Steiner, who championed spiritual science, and the essence of art and architecture infused with spirit.

Not only was the Goetheanum, named after the famous German writer, Wolfgang Goethe, a center for creativity, it was also an example of how buildings can personify the search and stretch for spiritual transcendence.

Many years later, I visited the sacred groves in Oshogbo, Osun State, in which the buildings and monumental sculptures of Austrian Artist, Susanne Wenger and her sacred art community created their environment with a deeply spiritual personification of sacred spaces.

Wenger's sculptures created in the 1960's and 1970's are echoed in Akpojotor's anthropomorphic architecture. This sacred art and architecture seems to be mirrored in Akpojotor's seminal wooden sculpture of a building with human face. This sculptural architecture with walls

wearing human expressions lead us to ask the questions, what would they say if walls could speak?

Akpojotor's depth of artistic expression was nurtured by his mentor Prof. Bruce Onobrakpeya in whose studio he matured as an artist. His father had written a letter to his kinsman, asking for a studio assistantship for his son in 2004, and the relationship blossomed from there.

Whenever I visited Prof's studio over the years, I noticed a quiet and attentive young man, watching and listening but always respectfully hanging back in the shadows. Akpojotor watched Prof's daily interactions with a host of visitors including clients, collectors, sponsors, academics, and learned by osmosis.

The first time I took note of Akpojotor's work, was when I saw an exquisite woodcut of Adam and Eve under a tree in the Garden of Eden. I recognized it was not Prof's work and in his usual fatherly fashion, Onobrakpeya smiled and pointed at his young mentee, confirming it was his work. The lines were different. Less dense. More youthful and free. I made up my mind, here was an artist to be watched.

In 2014 I curated an exhibition for the Harmattan Workshop, and Akpojotor submitted a number of paintings which were precursors to his current

series. Jobberman was a portrait of a distorted, fragmented face, almost like a comic character, with a hat, and colorful planes across his visage expressing a quiet desperation. The second was a stylized tree with houses growing from its branches, like low hanging fruit.

Both works were incredibly beautifully painted with expert brush strokes and a careful, deliberate commitment to exquisite rendering. Later he embarked on pencil and charcoal portraits of houses which looked like characters out of the film, *Alice in Wonderland*. Each portrait, told a story of a particular building which has caught the attention and fascination of the artist.

In *If Walls Could Speak*, we present the artist's paper, canvas and sculptural works. In the indigene series, the artist sketched pencil and charcoal portraits of people in his community and the houses they inhabit. *Street King* is the portrait of a local don in a densely populated Lagos neighbourhood. The don rules the streets and is feared. The portrait reveals this fearsome strength of character; a no nonsense intensity is portrayed through deep set stylized upper windows as eyes and bulbous lips as the front steps and an overall dare-devil expression.

In *There was a Time*, Akpojotor sketches a building which appears as

a child, stooping over a small wooden table in an effort to draw a naïve painting. His calves look like a twisted sky scraper and the feet and hands like lego blocks. The inspiration behind the work was the artist's response to anachronistic notions of creating an archive of physical books and papers in a digital world.

But Akpojotor not only plays with imaginary spaces, he also uses his art to speak about the pressures of life in a mega-city, where population density, poverty, disease, inequity and lack of social justice has made a deep imprint on the life of communities and their physical environment.

His outrage over the relocation and forceful eviction of slum communities fueled his artistic anger, and gave him a platform to speak about the injustice against the downtrodden masses. We see the anger and indignation as well as the pride and Lagosian hubris rise up in the indigene series of portraits.

Akpojotor's acrylic on canvas paintings are divided into three groups. The older paintings reflect the Lagos city-scape with low cost buildings hanging off trees like fruit, or mushrooming along hundreds of coastal waterways. In the second series, we see Akpojotor exploring his own identity in his self-portraits, in which each tall buildings is made up of clusters of homes the artists has lived in, and the neck and torso is

characterized by his favourite stylized staircases, creating a backbone to his framework.

In Self-Portraits II, the artist explores internal spaces, surreal rooms within his mind and memory, sparse with geometric volume and planes, surrounded by unusual angles and surfaces.

And finally, in the Embodied Images series, Akpojotor paints a series of people, some national heroes through his personified buildings. These paintings not only give us an emotional feel of the rich and colorful history of Lagos' built environment, they also pay homage and immortalize important people, like Dr. Stella Adadevoh, whose timely medical intervention saved Lagos from the spread of the dreaded ebola disease in 2014.

I hope you enjoy *If Walls Could Speak*, and that it wets your appetite to really look at the multi-layered profundity of Akpojotor's work, a bright light in his generation, and in Africa as a whole.

Sandra Mbanefo Obiagio
Curator



Image: Courstey Rele Art Gallery

PATRICK AKPOJOTOR

I am happy that SMO Contemporary Art gave me the opportunity to say a few things about Patrick Akpojotor whose second one – man art exhibition comes up at the Wheatbaker on 22nd September 2019.

Watching Patrick grow gradually as an artist over a span of fifteen years, I have a sense of fulfillment as a mentor. Over the period he moved from being a promising art student to an emerging professional artist. Very talented, intelligent, diligent and passionate, he is able to draw inspirations for his creations from things around him and from faraway places. Patrick has won many prizes including the award which gave him opportunity to have his first one–man show in an exclusive pavilion during the 2017 Art X Lagos art fair.

In 2003, Patrick was admitted to work with me at the Ovuomaroro art studio, Papa Ajao Lagos, like any other intern. Little did I know that it was the beginning of many years of interactions that would prove very beneficial to both of us. He became a very valuable partner.

After working for two years in the studio, he was admitted to study fine art at Auchi Polytechnic. He got the National

Diploma Certificate and returned to my studio to serve the mandated industrial attachment. Afterwards he went to Lagos State Polytechnic to study for the last lap, finally graduating in 2013.

Patrick like other Ovuomaroro interns and art assistants participated in several of the Harmattan workshop sessions even while he was studying at Auchi. The Harmattan workshop series which take place in Agbarha-otor Delta state is my innovation, intended to give opportunities to artists to meet, share ideas and learn skills. Patrick did so well in this informal educational school that he rose to the position of a facilitator (instructor) in the Leather Craft department.

I like to use the case of Patrick Akpojotor to emphasize the need for art students to work under masters as apprentices or interns, attend art academies and art informal workshops. An artist can be made out of each of these three categories and, where the training combines the three, the result as we can see is always excellent. The informal workshops become partner to the academics in the upbringing of the would be artist, not a rival.

The final goal for an artist is to use his art to develop his environment and to tell the story of his people to the rest of the world. The path to this achievement is long and rough, but the process can be equally exciting and enjoyable. For Patrick, I pray for sustained energy to continue the ascent. Good Luck.

Bruce Onobrakpeya
September 2019.





Patrick Akpojotor born (1982) in Ile-Ife, hails from Agbarha-Otor, Delta state. He studied fine art at the School of Art, Federal Polytechnic, Auchi and Lagos State Polytechnic, Ikorodu, where he majored in Graphic Design. He also had his training with Dr. Bruce Onobrakpeya as a studio assistant and consultant to the Bruce Onobrakpeya Foundation (BOF) from 2003 to 2017. He has won several awards/prizes including the Olusegun Obasanjo 2013, "OFF THE BIN PROJECT" 2013 and the first Art X prize in 2016. He has participated in several group exhibitions with the most recent being "IN-TER-ACTIONS" at Rele Art Gallery (2018) as well as, Art X Lagos art fair (2017) and Bruce Onobrakpeya and the Harmattan Workshop Exhibition (2016). He has also taken part in several editions of the Harmattan Workshop as a participant in painting sessions and facilitator of the leather craft session. He has been a full time studio artist since 2017.

Patrick is a multidisciplinary artist working across painting, drawing, printmaking, installation art and sculpture. His work is influenced by his fascination with the built space and architecture and their ability to shape ones identity. He is interested in the differences in human attitude, relating to the culture of the built environment that they inhabit. His work merges together visual elements of the built environment, geometry, human forms and imagined spaces to create abstract composition that interrogates our sense of perception which challenges us to see differently.



My work is influenced by my fascination with the built space and architecture, and its ability to shape one's identity. I am interested in the differences in human attitude, relating to the culture of a built environment that they inhabit. I have also observed how structures like buildings, roads and public spaces are named after people, which create an awareness of the person's good deeds and archive their existence.

My works merge together visual references of the built environment, geometry, human forms and imagined structures to create abstract compositions that interrogate our sense of balance and perception, and that challenges us to see differently. Taking references from my memory and personal projections, I create works by deconstructing the spaces I have lived in and spaces I hope to experience by bringing the interior to the fore while bearing in mind the law of perspective in my composition. My surface becomes a playground where forms, colours, perspective, and space come to play and interact. The use of geometry and architectural elements highlight the influence of the built environment in shaping our memories, experiences and identities in the world.



Image: Courstey Rele Art Gallery

“Watching Patrick grow as an artist over a span of fifteen years, I have a sense of fulfillment as a mentor. He is very talented, intelligent, diligent and passionate, and is able to draw inspiration from things around him and from faraway places”

Prof. Bruce Onobrakpeya
Nigerian Contemporary Art Pioneer
and Master Experimental Artist

EMBODIED IMAGES



Face on the street, Acrylic on canvas, 48 X 36 inches, 2019

It is amazing how structures become eponymous. Some of these structures archive and immortalize great feats and historic deeds. The recent heroic actions of Dr. Stella Adadevoh served as a catalyst to actions that successfully curbed the wide spread of the Ebola virus in Nigeria.



Citizen of the world, Acrylic on canvas, 48 X 36 inches, 2019





Legacy of Existence I, Acrylic on canvas, 48 X 36 inches, 2019



Legacy of Existence II, Acrylic on canvas, 48 X 36 inches, 2019



The house That Stella Adadevoh Built, Acrylic on canvas, 48 X 36 inches, 2019

These works celebrate the heroic acts of Dr Stella Adadevoh who lost her life doing her duty by curbing the spread of the Ebola virus in Nigeria thus saving the lives of many.

The title of this work is inspired by Bruce Onobrakpeya's work, *"The house that David Waterhouse built"*



Adadevoh's Courtyard, Acrylic on canvas, 48 X 36 inches, 2019

“In a second series, which Akpojotor says is an homage to Dr. Stella Adadevoh, there is a visible departure from the portraits. Here, the structures are more contorted, complex and bear the marks of Akpojotor's superior technical abilities”

Ayodeji Rotinwa
Writer and Journalist



ENGAGING AKPOJOTOR'S CONSTRUCTED SPACES

This is Patrick Akpojotor's first solo show, and oh! how he seeks to share with us his biographic experience of space and spaces. I am fascinated with his triple engagement with space.

We live, construct, experience and operate in different types of spaces; single spaces, multiple spaces, open spaces, and closed spaces. We take-in given spaces, constructed spaces and negotiated spaces. Then, there are personal spaces we love to keep to ourselves, some we share. We also have to contend with spaces of the other. These spaces could be physical or psychological. The boundaries are often blurred. Across and within we live our lives in joy, pain, trust, betrayal, and mirth. Spaces shape our character, our lives, personality and dreams, perhaps more than we can ever imagine.

In-between spaces are objects, obstacles, boundaries, entrances, and exits. They could also be open fields and worlds that offer us experiential and relational encounters. These are Akpojotor's constructed cubist projects objectified by portraits, architectonic beings, illusionistic three-dimensional forms and in two dimensional realism. Strangely, his spaces are somewhat closed as if keeping secrets. Or could he be alluding to a desire for intimacy? The triple engagement that he boldly

takes on as one in the drawings, paintings and mixed media sculptures would tend to remind us of the era of cubism where artists having encountered the idealistic traditional sculptures of Africa found freedom from formalism. Taken together Akpojotor's works stimulate us to a refreshing experience of the artist's intuition, childhood, the search of identity, adventure and romance with space. With this show, he is introducing himself to us with his own spaces. In a sense, we can see these spaces as classrooms of "Imagineering" endless creative possibilities. We welcome him to this rare tribe of Homo sapiens.

Professor Jerry Buhari
Art critic and Professor of Fine Arts at
Ahmadu Bello University
October 2019
Zaria

SELF PORTRAITS



In Memory Of Living I, Acrylic on canvas, 48 X 36 inches, 2019



In Memory Of Living II, Acrylic on canvas, 48 X 36 inches, 2019



Time, Acrylic on canvas, 48 X 36 inches, 2019

This series draws reference from my memories and personal projections of my interaction with the spaces I have experienced, imagined and spaces I hope to explore.



Imagined Identity, Acrylic on canvas, 48 X 36 inches, 2019





Impression of Place, Acrylic on canvas, 48 X 36 inches, 2019

“What Akpojotor ultimately does in his body of work, is building a sculptural language but on canvas or paper. He establishes that the quality of work on paper or canvas can be so high that it can be transplanted directly into wood, metal, stone, whatever he chooses.”

Ayodeji Rotinwa
Writer, Journalist

SELF PORTRAITS II



Inside out, Acrylic on canvas, 36 X 36 inches, 2019

Growing up, I was familiar with certain parts of architecture and places where I would glide down the stairs with a piece of wooden board, play with doors, climb pillars, scale lintels and windows in construction sites. Those experiences inspired this.



Passage to Possibilities I, Acrylic on canvas, 36 X 36 inches, 2019



Passage to Possibilities II, Acrylic on canvas, 36 X 36 inches, 2019



Mind scape, Acrylic on canvas, 36 X 36 inches, 2019

‘How objects are placed does not matter in my art, what matters are that the objects are represented’.

Patrick Akpojotor



Common Ground, Acrylic on canvas, 48 X 60 inches ,2019

“Akpojotor's works stimulate us to a refreshing experience of the artist's intuition, childhood, the search of identity, adventure and romance with space,”

Prof. Jerry Buhari,
Art critic and Professor of Fine Arts at Ahmadu Bello University.



Contemplating a New City, Mixed media, 122 X 71.5 cm, 2017



Infrastructure Plantation III, Mixed media, 218 x 143 cm, 2015



PATRICK IS PATRICK!

The Homecoming Of Mechanistic Cubism

Patrick Akpojotor is my [younger] artist friend whom I was drawn to initially for his work, but have since discovered that he is inseparable and indistinguishable from his work. His work must be seen in the context of one who may be best described as a lone traveller and perhaps this is why I am drawn to him. I myself am a lone traveller.

So, let's look at Patrick's own self prescribed intentions, his determination to be biographical in concept, to be an 'architectural artist'. I will paraphrase myself twice from earlier this year when I wrote about Patrick:

First; 'There is none so exciting and stimulating as art and architecture that exist as corollary. Since 1983, I have been interested in that connection, starting with Cubist Art and Cubist-Modernist Architecture.' And second; 'Patrick works like an architect. We may not know it yet, but he is one of the cleverest artists in Nigeria today.'

Last Christmas, I found myself discussing art and architecture on a Sunday afternoon in my office with Patrick. He stated unequivocally that his work was spurred by architecture, the city, urbanism and childhood memories, especially of places and buildings;

school buildings, uncompleted buildings and urban wastelands.

Patrick's work reminds me of the assertion of Modernist architect Le Corbusier (1887-1965), the building as a 'machine à habiter'. Upon completion, a building is denied the possibility to be regarded as pure art, and instead is subjected to use, technology and general advancement and wellbeing. It begins to take on the concept of anthropomorphism, of the skeleton and organs covered by the less-complex looking skin.

Having trained under fellow Urhobo artist and great abstractionist Bruce Onobrakpeya before attending formal art school, Akpojotor pursues a very personal path. His work is biographical and this is what lends it such an awesome level of authenticity that ensures he will be around for a long time producing at the very top of his profession. He loves buildings and is willing to make a career out of turning buildings into memory banks. He is a dreamer and dreams of as yet non-existent buildings that do not seem to make any logical sense. He loves staircases, as do I. So does Le Corbusier; stairs, ramps, and other processional features of a building. Again, I

remember Corbusier's 'Promenade Architecturale', which expresses that all buildings should embody, symbolize and signify circulation and journey.

Patrick's work is easily related to Cubism, just like Picasso, Braque, Léger, Ozenfant, Juan Gris, Corbusier et al. It is closest to the proto-Cubist style of Robert Delaunay and Fernand Léger but it is African and it is no surprise that his work is authentically so. To pigeon-hole him in the Cubist bracket would be a disservice, especially at a time when we are trying to regain our confidence in Africa, conveyed by the growth of Afro-centrist thinking.

I'd like to comment on the close relationship of his work with that of Fernand Léger (1881-1955), the later strand of mechanistic or synthetic Cubism and Purism. Reliant on chiaroscuro to create strong object definition, the work distorts perspective. Unlike Cubism, Patrick's works do not deny it. He creates what I may term as '3-Dimensional Cubism', a distorted axonometric set of depictions that lead the eye around in circles as the vanishing point keeps shifting and the work starts to approximate to a sensualism more in tune with surrealism. It's like being on a road to nowhere. Are they buildings, things or humans? Is this a 'spot the man in the picture' sort of exercise? In a way, yes it is, like Kandinsky's masterpiece 'Yellow Red Blue' of 1925.

His wooden sculptures are related to his paintings and charcoal drawings and I suspect that he is as yet unaware of the heights of his ability to create in the 3 Dimensional. There's only one serious difference between the paintings and sculptures and that is light. The paintings do not rely on a single source of light but the sculptures do because they are real, tangible and here with us. His sculptures have more plasticity than his paintings and are more nuanced with colour.

In conclusion, the works are about stories; Patrick's stories, human stories, stories of places, and stories about heroes, like late Dr Stella Adadevoh. It is about an artist, whose graphically strict geometric works still manage to be sensuous and touching, while retaining a certain palpable melancholy in the hidden faces within the works, much like Munch's 'The Scream' (1893). Surely, only a gifted one would achieve these seeming contradictions.

There is a quote from the late Rufus Ogundele (1946-1996) which I will apply to Patrick. It goes; "Europeans also buy my paintings, but sometimes I get annoyed with their kinds of compliments. Some of them call me 'The Picasso of Nigeria'. I never saw Picasso's work when we started with Georgina [Beier] and I was told it was he who was influenced by African Art. Then what sense is there in saying that I, an African, produce work which

resembles the man who has copied
African art? That's nonsense, Rufus is
Rufus".

Chuka Ihonor
Architect
September 2019

SCULPTURES



Entangled, Wood, 15 x 9 x 10 inches, 2019





Head, Wood, 16 x 10 x 12 inches, 2019



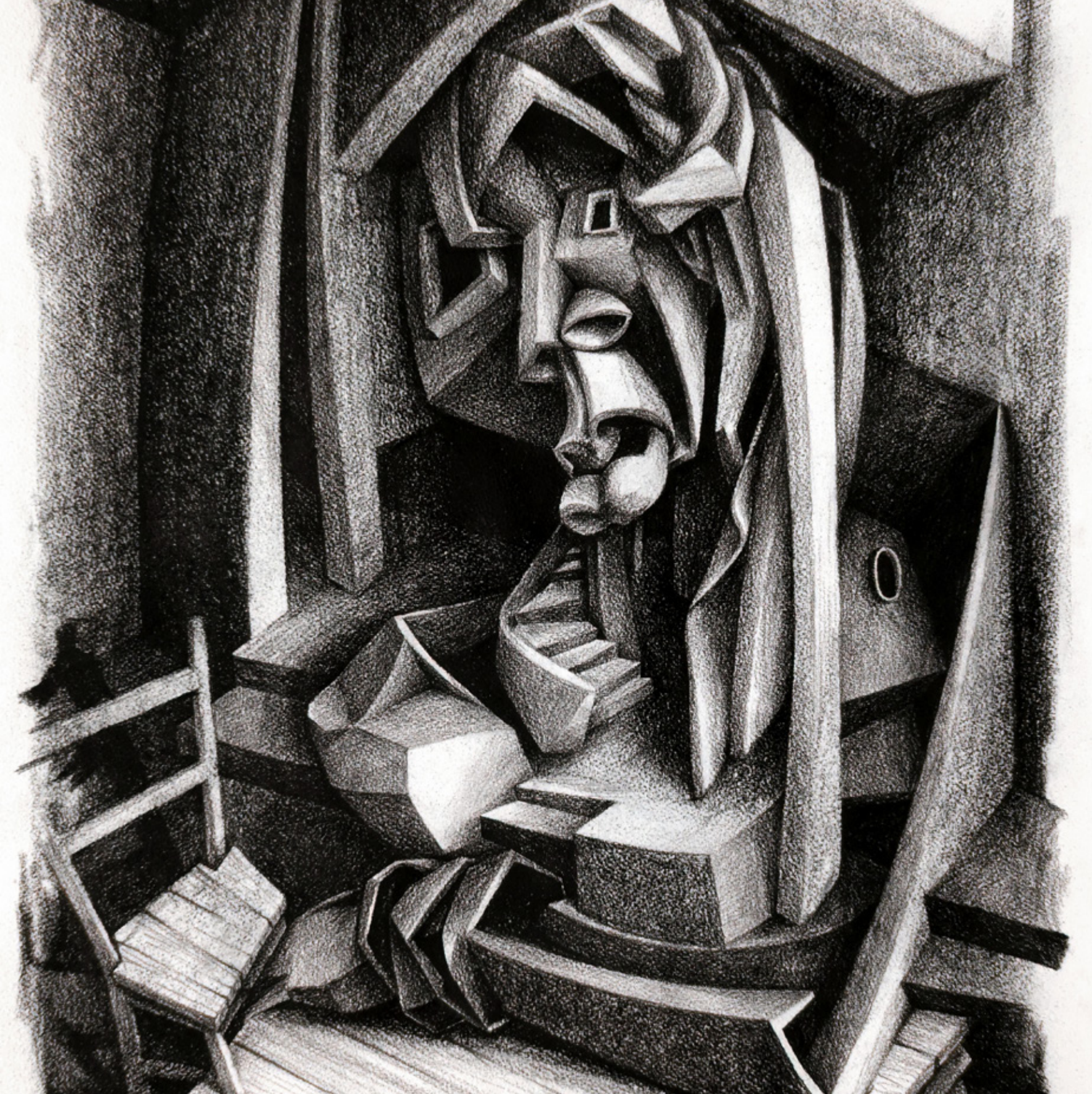


Power Lines I - III, Copper tubes, 2018 - 2019









PATRICK AKPOJOTOR GETS IN FORMATION

At first glance, what Patrick Akpojotor is proposing to the viewer in his work, seems simple enough. Obvious, perhaps.

Across paper, canvas, wood and metal, he animates, lends a spirit and even personalities to still structures. It is a familiar achievement. We have seen it in popular media: in film productions of science fiction set in the future or in ones where the buildings are given life by magic or something altogether unexplainable. A building that creates a portal or shape shifts so Harry Potter, the Avengers, children of Chronicles of Narnia, A Wrinkle in Time can gain access to another world and save the one they left. But yet, believable. Entertaining. Those structures are usually in service to a larger cause or story.

Akpojotor has no such extracurricular concerns. The viewers' concern is exclusively with the structures he has wrought.

His work is immediately evocative.

I first came across Akpojotor's work in 2016 when he won the Art X Prize and I've been following his work since. What struck me initially was the inexplicable

way he brought fluidity to an otherwise static form. I wondered what made him so preoccupied with architecture as an artist. I realise those two concerns are not at all that far apart and many artists draw from both to create but Akpojotor's execution was especially arresting. I learnt recently that he grew up around uncompleted buildings with no doors and windows. He played in them, sliding on wooden boards down spiral staircases.

In the series of paintings, "Self Portraits", we see 3D biomorphic forms. The figure is given flesh by roofs, lines, windows, doors, columns, staircases, shapes. It is perceptibly male-characterized. If male characteristics can be drawn from the stereotype of boxy, sharply realised forms that could pass for shoulders, a hint of an Adam's apple or the space where it should be. Akpojotor composes these paintings the way a photograph - a portrait - might be realised. The background on which the structures lay are dark, entirely in black acrylic or a mix of colours to make a rich, broody olive. The structures themselves seem to draw inspiration from a range of architectural styles. We see the wall paintings, shapes and spire-like forms

of Islamic and specifically, Northern Nigerian architecture. Others are more modern, brutalist even or resembling towers. A family of green colours is a running theme in this series, mixed with a mélange of brighter ones. Taken together the paintings project an accomplished person, a kind of sophistication; a figure within, dressed up and going places. Putting the title into consideration, the series could easily be Akpojotor's visual autobiography, a metaphor for his life. This is his first solo, the journey to which spans a decade and a half. In that time he has been under the tutelage of visual art legend Dr. Bruce Onobrakpeya and as a student of drawing, painting, sculpting and experimenting at Auchi Polytechnic. He has gone from one dimensional drawings to ambivalent paintings to experimenting with different mediums, to winning Art X Lagos' inaugural prize, and now this. Finally.

In a second series, which Akpojotor says is an homage to Dr. Stella Adadevoh, there is a visible departure from the self-portraits. Here, the structures are more contorted, complex and bear the marks of Akpojotor's superior technical abilities. I see eyes and lips that aren't eyes or lips. A tongue, a grin, a grimace, a smile? He manages to animate them, painting in (shades drawn from) purple, which he says represents royalty, achievement, legacy, leadership. All of the things that

can be ascribed to Dr. Adadevoh, who sacrificed her own life, so the Ebola epidemic would not fatally spread in Lagos, our country's commercial capital of 21 million people. In these paintings, Akpojotor uses black to more dramatic effect, as not just a background but in pockets across the painting so the other coloured forms seem to sleep, slither over and shine on it.

It is in this particular series that the influence of studying the work of the late British sculptor Henry Moore is most apparent. Moore is known for his fluid forms and sculptures that take on new meaning or understanding, depending on what angle you are looking from or could appear to be more than one thing all at once. Akpojotor achieves a similar effect.

But this body of work is particularly resonant for more reasons. In Nigeria, there is a dutifully upheld state-sponsored legacy of forgetting. Hero(ine)s are only that for a moment. The most powerful aspect of our history is that we don't teach it. With this series, Akpojotor contributes to filling the void. He draws from the urban planning culture of naming streets and buildings after people to hold them in memory. Yes, Nigeria does this but not in a way that enriches understanding as to why these names are recognised as such.

In this series, Akpojotor names and

celebrates, the legend of Stella Adadevoh. He paints her for posterity. It is important to admit however this visual history will only be seen by a few, in residences of collectors. Still. This body of work enters into a growing, rare library of personal creative endeavours that immortalize the doctor's service. In 2016, there was the heartbreaking Steve Gukas-directed film, 93 Days that showed how Ebola came to be eradicated and the doctor's role in making that happen. In 2017, Modupeola Fadugba painted in gold leaf and ink, a stunning 60 x 60 piece on burned paper in Adadevoh's honour, in her exhibition, "Heads Up, Keep Swimming," curated by SMO Contemporary Art. The piece was intentional and by its very nature, belonged in a public collection for infinite consumption. However, there is currently no existing institution that would have made this remembering possible.

The crown jewel of Akpojotor's body of work that also includes wood and copper tube sculptures, are charcoal drawings on paper. If his paintings are the keyhole of his stellar draughtsmanship, the drawings are the door broken down. Akpojotor leaning into Moore's philosophy draws people as landscapes, landscapes as people, merging two subjects that otherwise would just coexist side by side. On seeing them, the first thing that occurred to me is that he advances

the still life drawing style. He realises forms with shading, delicate penciling - as seen in a video - a play on light. The result includes forms that are both beautiful and grotesque, that invite close, sustained inspection, and a lot of staring. In doing so, over the last two years, it has never been immediately apparent to me where the drawings start or stop. In them there's a quality of imperfection, that is continuous, inconclusive and yet satisfying. How he is able to achieve the same effect across medium is particularly noteworthy. The effect is especially striking in his wood sculptures in this exhibition, perhaps too sharply. They could come across as unfinished, and do not immediately wear the elegance of his other forms. But Akpojotor's intent is clear.

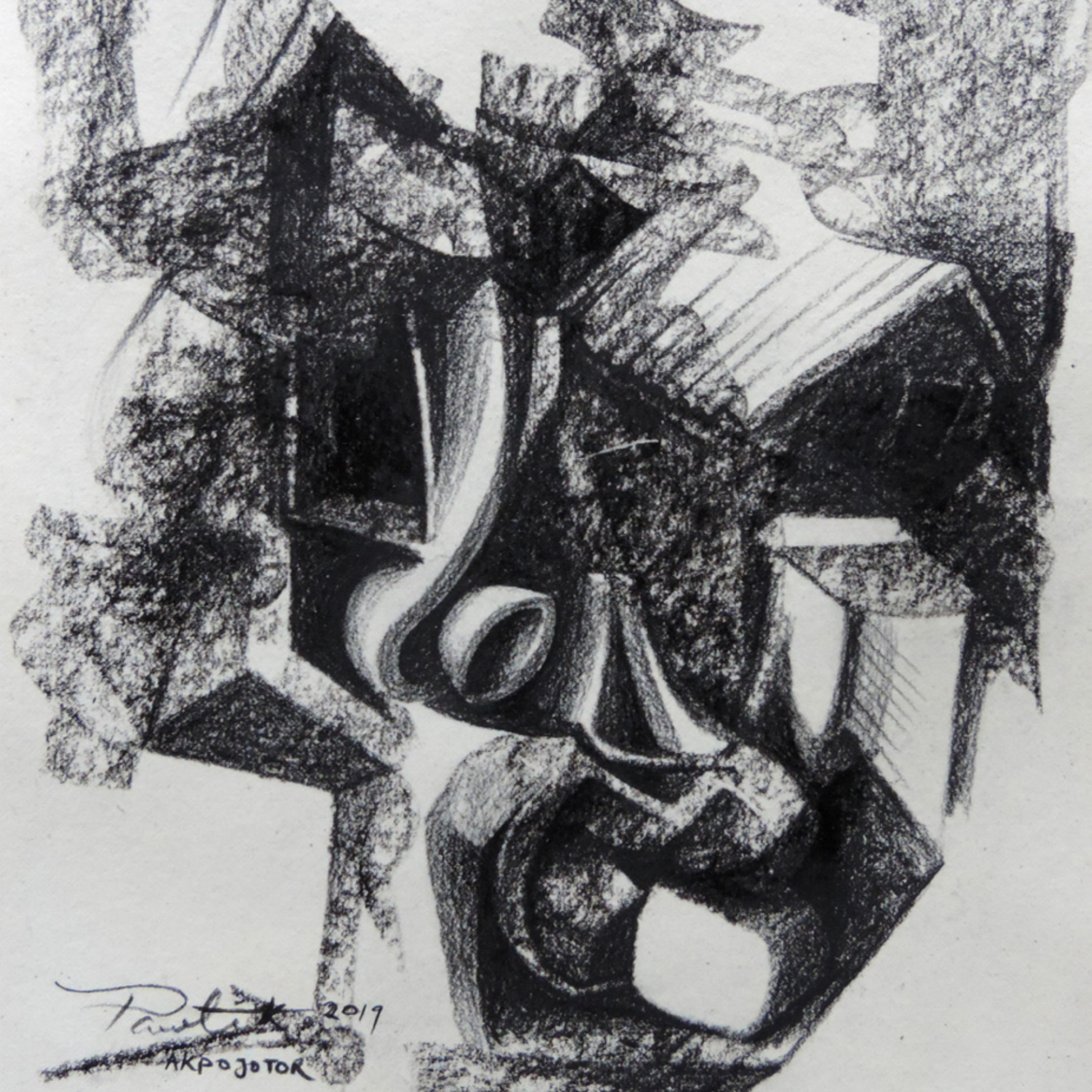
He told me he particularly wanted to create and present work in all mediums that have been part of his training and studio tutelage. What I heard in what he didn't say is perhaps to prove to himself that he can transplant his technical gifts best lent to paper and canvas, literally to sculpture: in wood and copper tubes.

With his recent oeuvre, Akpojotor is building a sculptural language on canvas or paper. He establishes that the quality of work on paper or canvas can be so high that it can be transplanted directly into wood, metal, stone, whatever he chooses. This

hasn't always been apparent to me. I have come to admire Akpojotor's work because he seems to grapple with the form first before the idea or as is popular these days: the content. I'm usually partial to work that seeks to directly reflect or say something, that is unapologetically political. That sometimes puts this before the artistry. Nina Simone said after all, "art must reflect the times." Akpojotor challenges this bias. His work or approach is first guided by the possibilities of his chosen medium, forms and shapes, where his own hands leads. The idea is then folded into what has been set before it. Stella Adadevoh could have been a more realistic drawing or sculpture. But in Akpojotor's work, I am confronted with not only her memory but the forms, shapes, lines, technical accomplishment and excellence that has placed her in front of me. Usually the import of the former might outweigh the latter, in the works of more experienced artists and amongst Akpojotor's contemporaries. Akpojotor draws, paints and sculpts himself out of such limitations.

He will form his own way.

Ayodeji Rotinwa
Writer and Journalist



Pauline 2019

AKPOJOTOK

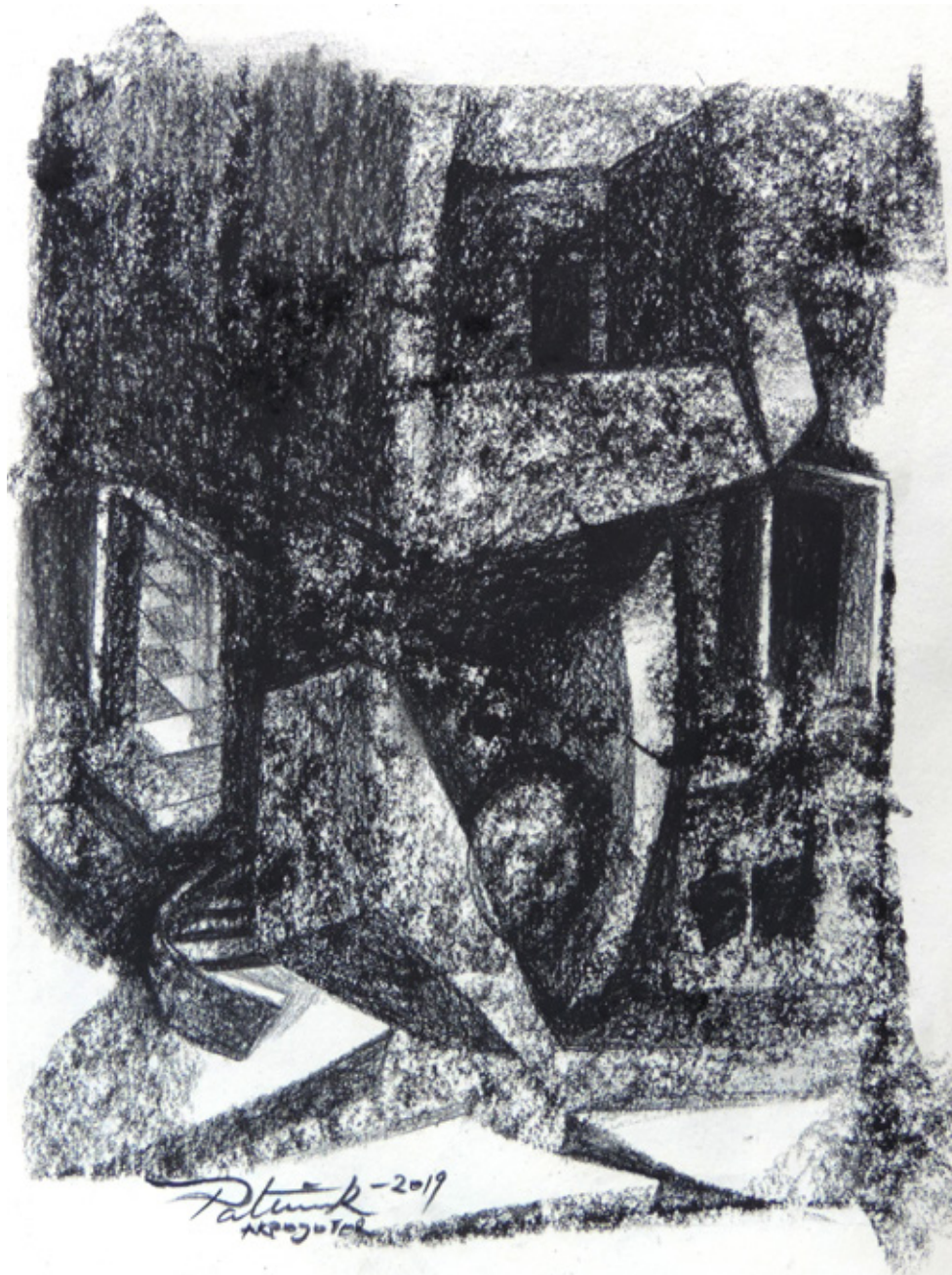
INDIGENE



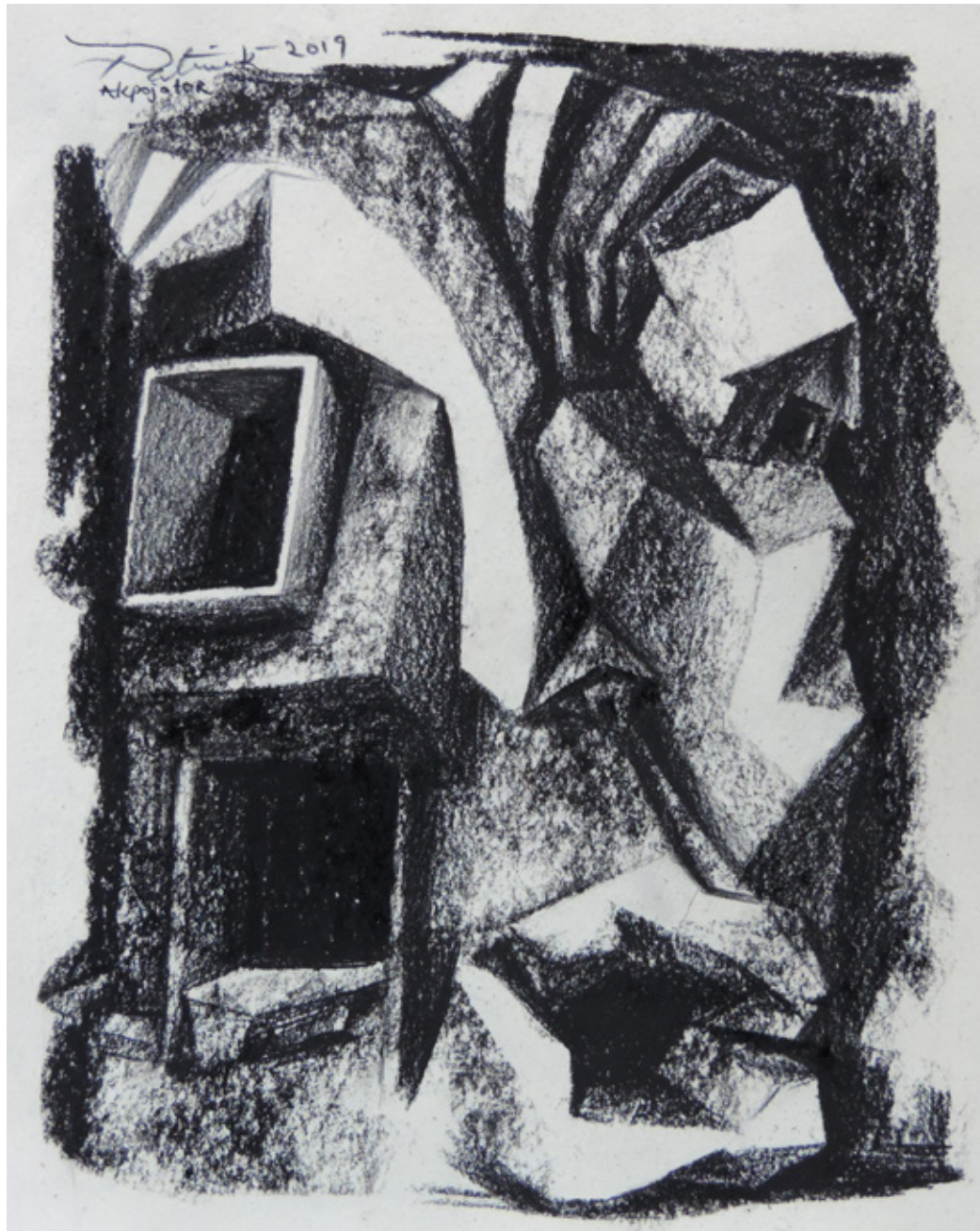
Indigene I, Charcoal on paper, 9 X 7 inches, 2019



Indigene II, Charcoal on paper, 9 X 7 inches, 2019



Indigene III, Charcoal on paper, 9 X 7 inches, 2019



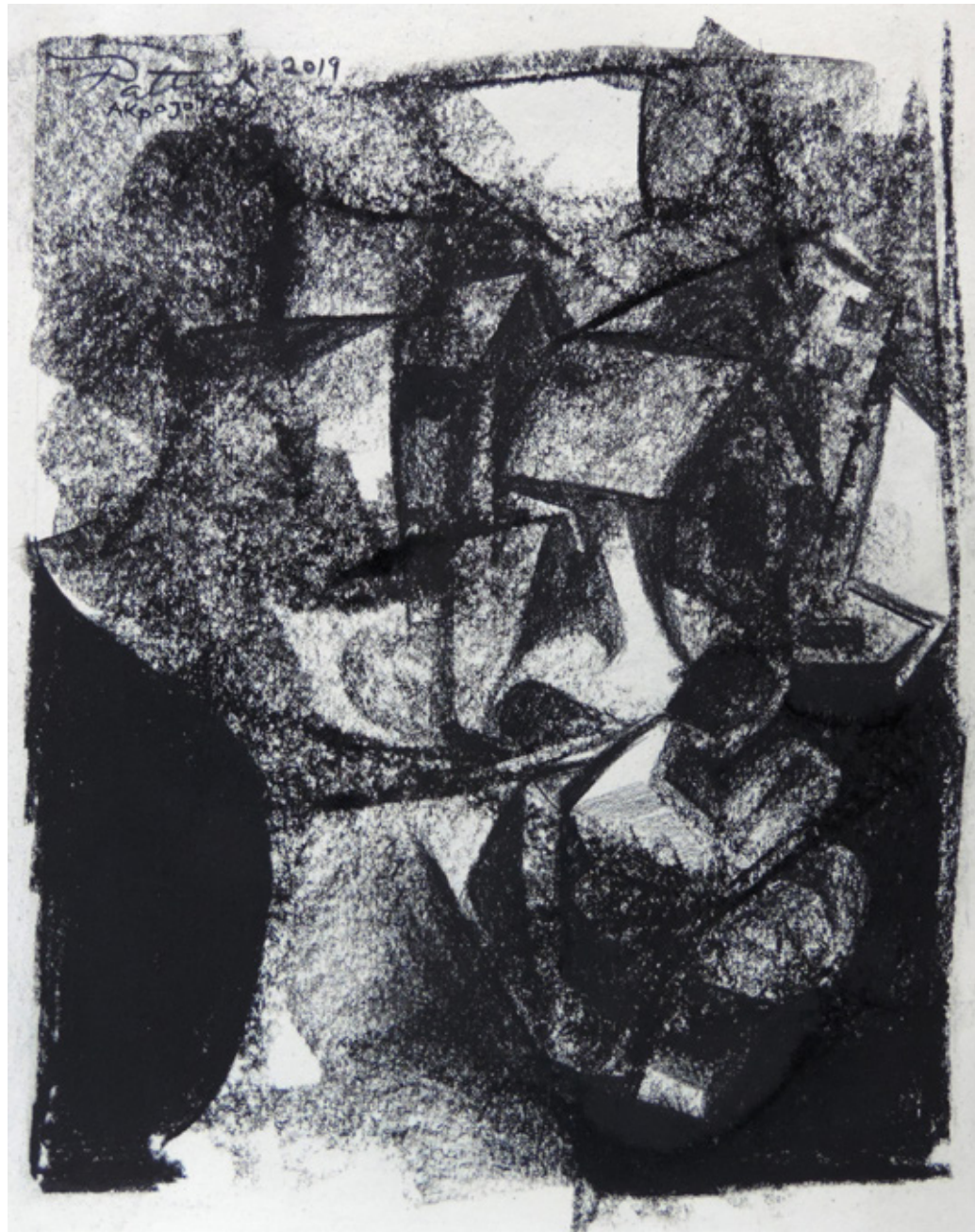
Indigene IV, Charcoal on paper, 9 X 7 inches, 2019



Indigene V, Charcoal on paper, 9 X 7 inches, 2019



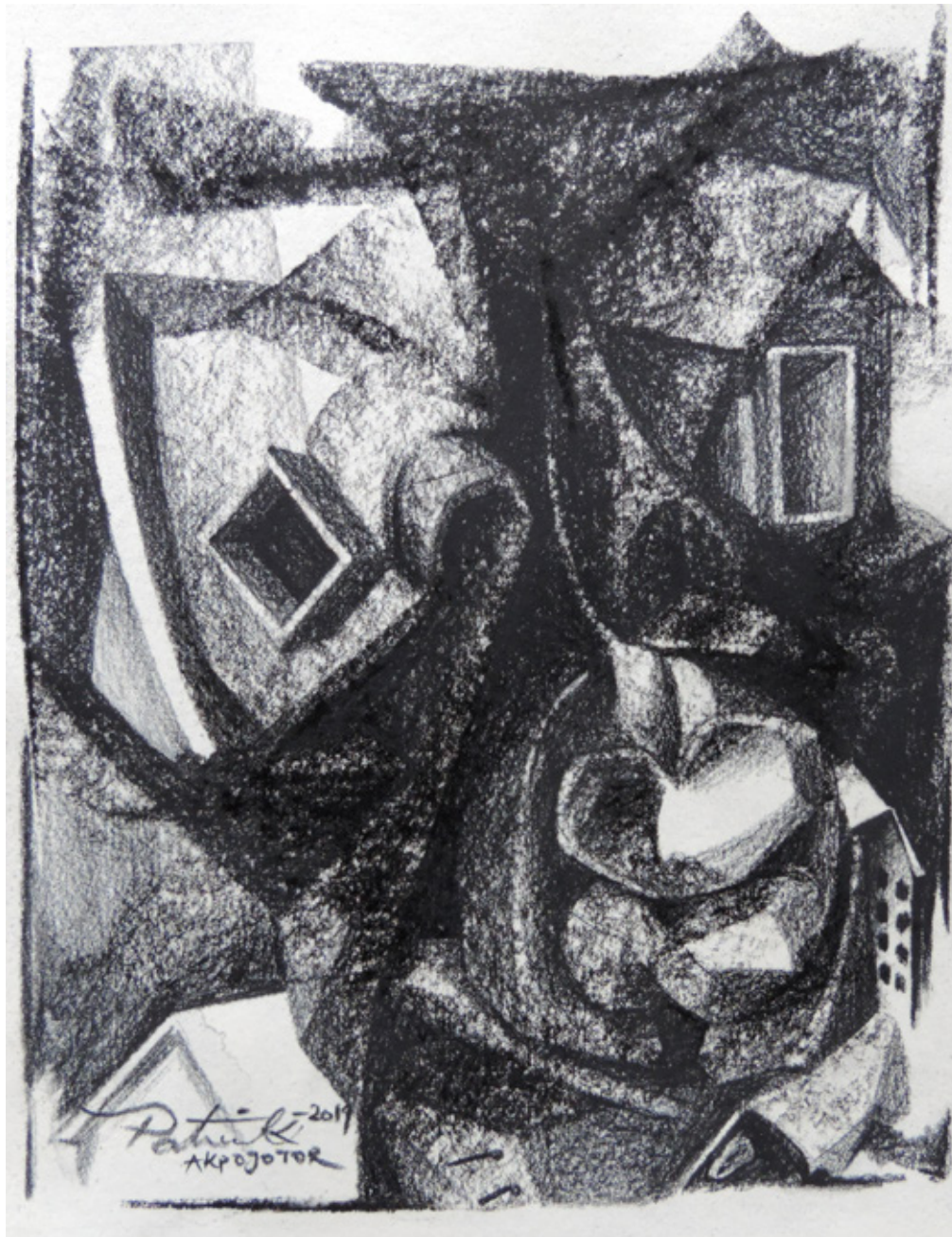
Indigene VI, Charcoal on paper, 9 X 7 inches, 2019



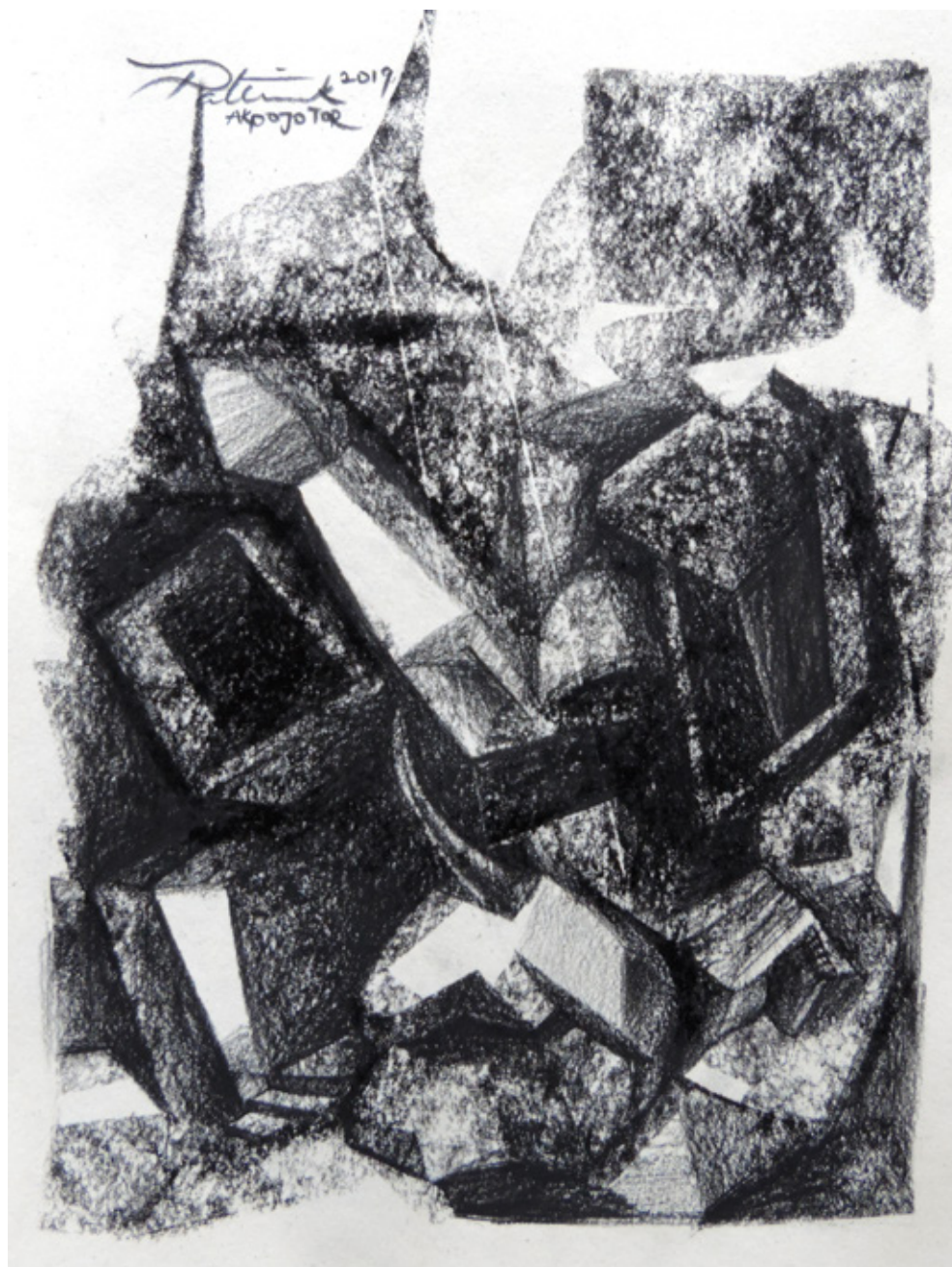
Indigene VII, Charcoal on paper, 9 X 7 inches, 2019



Indigene VIII, Charcoal on paper, 9 X 7 inches, 2019



Indigene IX, Charcoal on paper, 9 X 7 inches, 2019

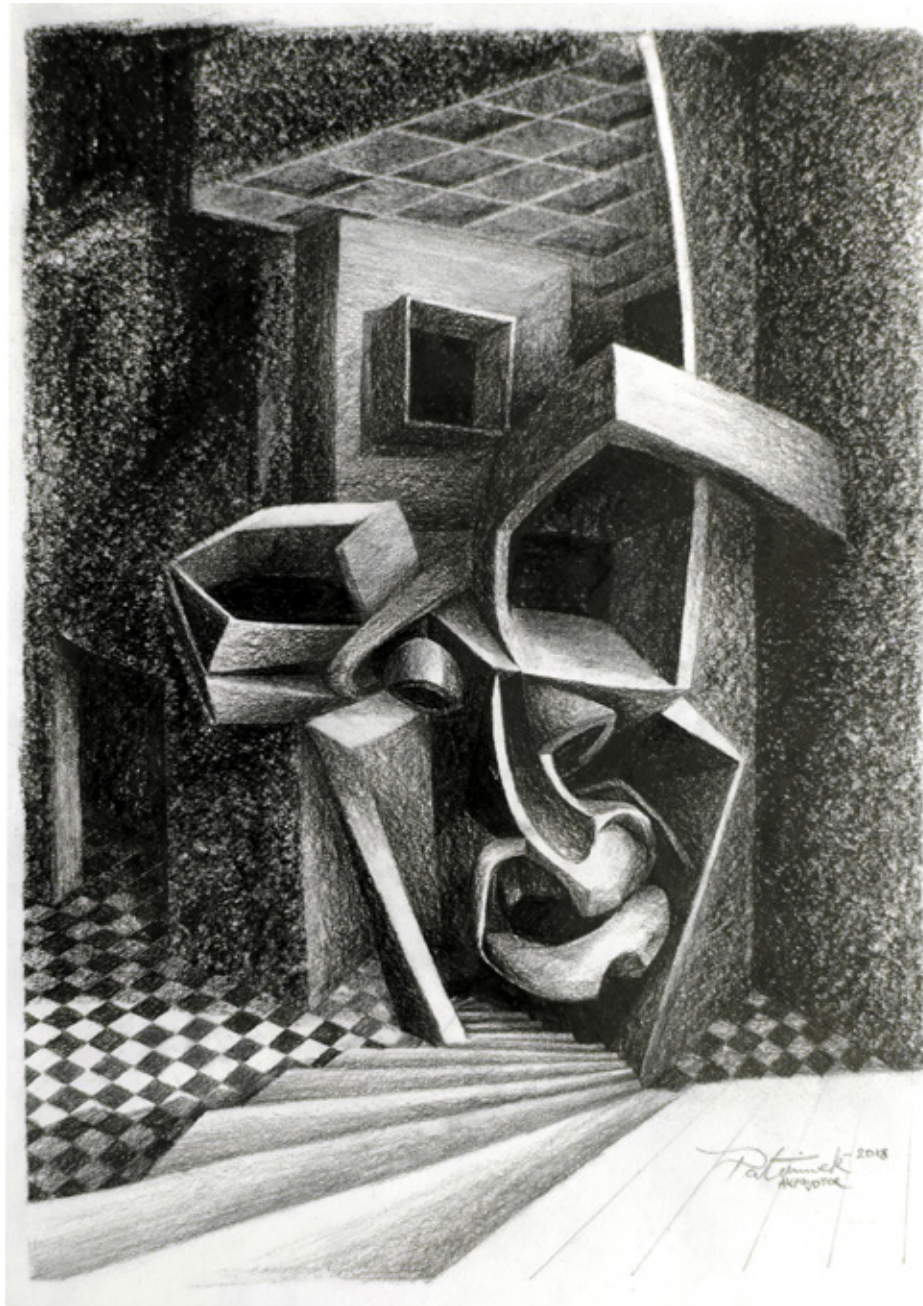


Indigene X, Charcoal on paper, 9 X 7 inches, 2019

UNTOLD SPACE



Untold Space I, Charcoal on paper, 15 X 11 inches, 2018

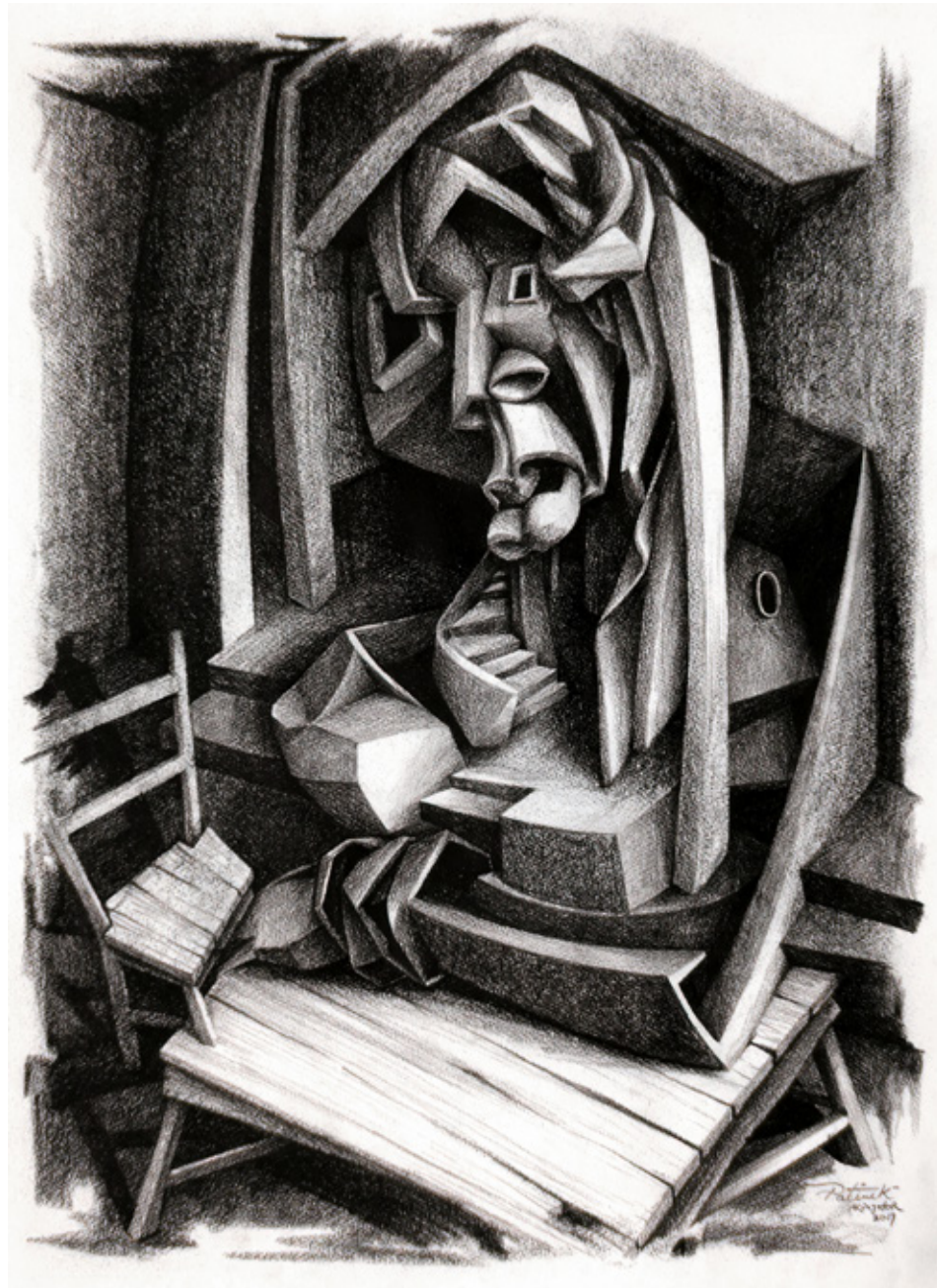


Untold Space II, Charcoal on paper, 15 X 11 inches, 2018



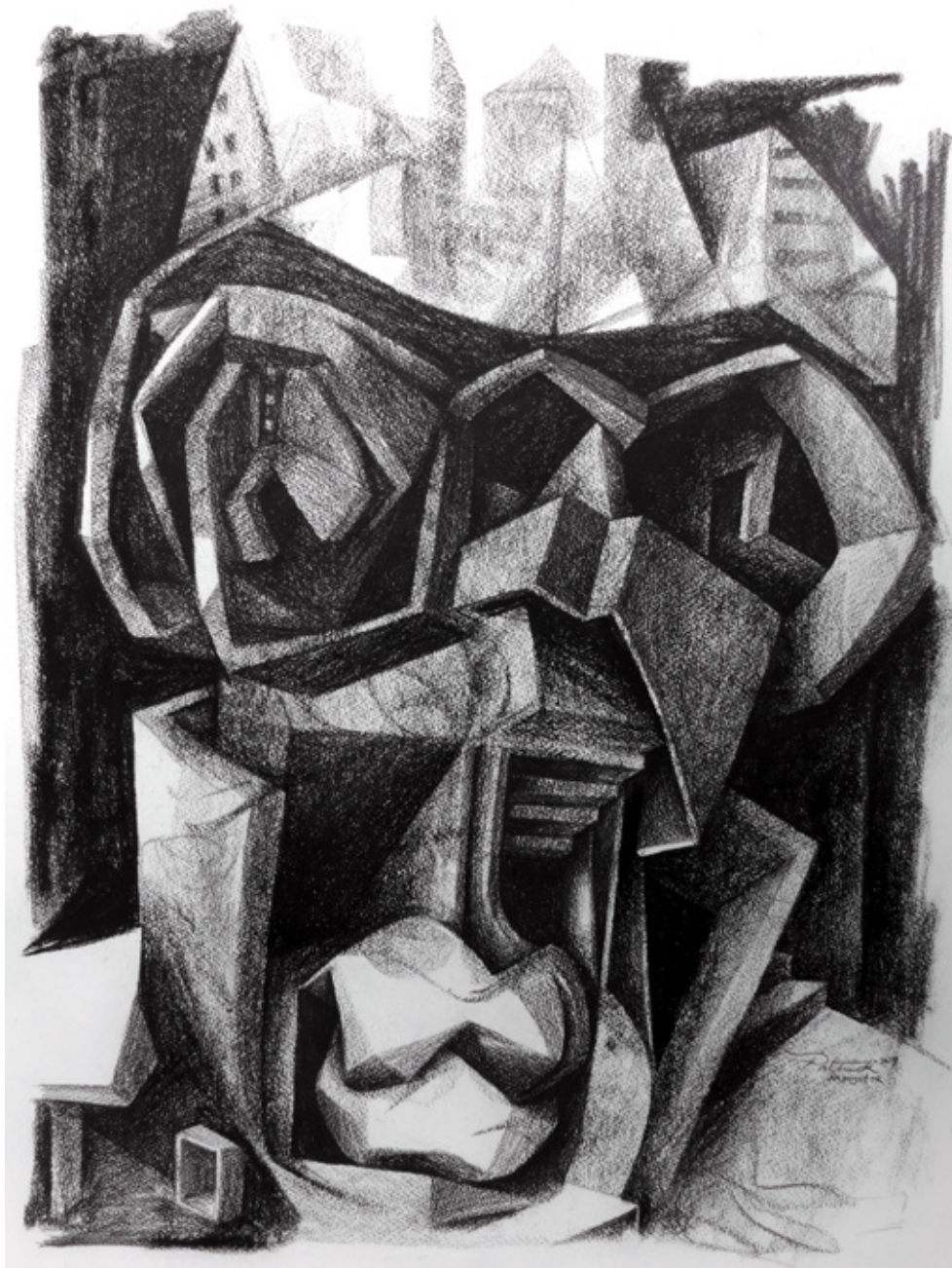
There Was A Time, Charcoal on paper, 28 X 20 inches, 2019





Archive of Better Days, Charcoal on paper, 28 X 20 inches, 2019





Street King, Charcoal on paper, 28 X 20 inches, 2019





In Conversation: Patrick Akpojotor And Moni Oloke

Moni Oloke: Hi Patrick please introduce yourself.

Patrick Akpojotor: My name is Patrick Akpojotor and I'm a multidisciplinary artist. I paint and sculpt with fiberglass, wood, metal and copper tubes. I also work as a printmaker and graphic designer.

MO: Tell us about your childhood and your creative journey.

PA: My father was a police officer and I grew up in MOPOL 20 Barracks in GRA Lagos. I'm the middle child of seven children and was quite stubborn. I followed my instincts to create things that appealed to me. I would go to the trash dumping site to pick materials like plastic, cartons, and discarded Dunlop slippers to make something out of them. I was unknowingly grooming myself because I never knew any artist who I could look up to. At that time I didn't see art as something anyone could call a profession. Some of the things I would build from discarded materials were toy cars, sandals and slippers, and robots.

I grew up around a lot of run down buildings. I would think about their designs and think about reproducing

them in some way. I played a lot in these buildings, especially by gliding down their stairs. I was so playful that I repeated primary five which allowed my sister to catch up with me. My dad said he wouldn't pay for textbooks he'd already paid for the year before. So all through secondary school, I created things like toy cars made from carton and sold them to my school mates to buy textbooks. If I saw anyone making things, I'd say to myself that I could do it too. Even if I didn't have the particular material, I'd still find a way.

MO: So what was the turning point where you realized that you could make art a career?

PA: The turning point was when my secondary school art teacher advised my parents that I should attend a government technical college. He even personally went there to make enquiries about admissions and I eventually spent three years there. The technical college sent their students for Industrial Training (IT) so my father told me about Prof. Bruce Onobrakpeya and wrote him a letter. I went to his studio on a Sunday morning and

that was my first time meeting Prof. Bruce not knowing that he was from my village and was basically a relative. He asked me to resume the next day as a studio assistant and that's how I started training with him. As I spent time with him, I studied him and saw that art was really something tangible. He showed me how he built his three-story home from the income from his prints and I was really inspired.

MO: That was such a fortuitous connection! To have access to Prof. Bruce at such an early age must have been fascinating. How did he influence your growth as an artist?

PA: Spending time with Prof helped me first gain understanding of what it meant to be an artist. Aside from learning printmaking, I also learned how he works and how manages his production and assistants. I learned about how he does research and makes studies, before creating artworks. I watched him take artworks from conception all the way to the end product. I've also seen how he interrogates his work and asks other people working with him in the studio to do the same and how he reacts to how they

see his work. I've also watched the way he experiments from start to finish. I've been involved in some of his experimentation because he is the kind of mentor who gives his studio assistants the opportunity to contribute to his works.

MO: Is there anyone else who has influenced your creative process?

PA: Yes. I've also been influenced by the works of British sculptor Henry Moore. The way he created his forms have influenced the way I create my works.

MO: How did your understanding for art mature?

PA: Dr. Bruce Onobrakpeya inspired me to study printmaking. I later gained admission to Auchi Polytechnic where we were made to work with different mediums. I discovered sculpture was my favorite and my final project focused on metal sculpture. When I graduated from Auchi I focused primarily on printmaking before going on to further my education at Lagos State Polytechnic where I majored in Graphic Art. But sculpture still remains my favorite medium to work



Entangled, Wood,
15 x 9 x 10 in, 2019

with. I started thinking of sculptures with colors because I love colors. This is what led me to work with the copper tubes I now use. In some of the workshops I attended, I also learned how to carve wood and I even experiment with textiles.

MO: What made you love sculpture?

PA: When I got to Auchipolytechnic in 2005, I discovered there were a lot of things to learn. I found some students working on fiberglass sculptures and others working on metal sculptures in the Higher National Diploma (HND) department. I always went there to assist them and that's how I learned about fabrication, modeling and other skills.

MO: Could you tell us about the journey of creating wood sculptures for this exhibition?

PA: In this exhibition I made a promise to myself to show my diverse strengths to the world. By combining all the things I've learned from workshops and studios of the masters, I decided to do something I'd never done before which was to create wooden sculptures.

MO: We also have some copper tube sculptures in this exhibition; can you tell us about the inspiration behind these works?

PA: The choice of copper tubes for my sculptures came from when I looked at the veins and muscles, and the human anatomy. I thought about how to represent the stripped down anatomy of the human form. During this time, I met a man called Mr. Anifowose, who had a lot of copper tubing because he installed air-conditioning units. He knew I was an artist, and asked me what I could make out of piles of copper tubing. He gave them to me and we agreed that whatever I came up with, he would get one art piece from my experimentation and I could keep the rest. I had the tubes for a year before I discovered that I could create veins out of the tubing. The first two I produced were sold which was encouraging. It turns out that there aren't any sculptors working with copper tubes so I decided to develop the technique and produce more works. I had to start sourcing for the tubes myself and got familiar bending rods, the curving pliers, and the different grammage names and sizes of the



Time, Acrylic on canvas, 48 X 36 in, 2019



Imagined Identity, Acrylic on canvas, 48 X 36 in, 2019

tubes.

MO: Tell us about your installation of three female forms created out of copper tubes?

PA: The copper tube sculptures are basically a celebration of womanhood. I created an installation of three ladies sitting together bonding while having a drink.

MO: Let's talk about your love for architecture which started during your childhood.

PA: I loved architecture because of the buildings where I grew up, especially the uncompleted buildings where the door frame and windows are open. In terms of architecture, the staircase does it for me. This was where I spent many memorable childhood moments gliding down with a wooden board with friends. I like architecture but not to the point of wanting to study it. My works are influenced by childhood memories but they are also cubist in the same way that architecture is cubist. Over time I was able to see how one's space can have an influence on behavior

and human interaction.

MO: That's very interesting -- you talk about how people interact with their spaces through your work...

PA: The way people interact with their spaces is what I'm exploring in my new body of work. How they affect their space by virtue of their character, tribe, background, past experiences and all the other things that make up our identity. An identity which will then influence the kind of design they give to their immediate environment, and in turn that environment also influences them.

MO: There are quite a few staircases in your paintings and drawings. What do they represent in your work?

PA: The staircases you see in my work are from a series titled 'Self Portraits' and it is basically looking at my story. I have always been fascinated with staircases in school, in church and any buildings I frequented as a child, I always looked out for the stairs. In the "Self Portrait Series" you don't only see stairs, you also see bare windows and doorways and some kind of architectural structure.



There was a time,
Charcoal on paper,
28 X 20 in, 2019

I have created the structure within which I grew up in, you'll also see the architecture of where I currently live with my family as an adult, as well and the kind of futuristic architecture I hope to live in one day. These works represent my past, present and future.

MO: In some of your drawings and paintings the structures are anthropomorphized and take on the physical characteristics of human beings. Can you explain that aspect of your work?

PA: Yes I'm trying to combine elements of the human form and the environment because I believe we affect the environment as much as the environment affects us. I divided the concept into two where in some of the works the human form is merged into the architecture while in the other works the architecture itself is in the human form.

MO: There are also strong lines, forms, and geometric shapes in your work.

PA: People have said that I draw like Picasso and I said to myself that it was good to be compared to a

legend but I still wanted to be Patrick Akpojotor. The lines and forms are my quest to find myself and explore my identity. I visited my hometown Agbara-otor and saw a bamboo plantation. The way the bamboo leaves and branches moved inspired the strokes in my work. In 2010, I first created a series with unique forms, which were inspired by seeing Henry Moore's drawings and studies of his sculptures and the roundness of his forms. I wanted to make my strokes look three dimensional on paper so I decided to work on my flat strokes and give them form, volume and depth so they would look 3-D. Putting all of these elements together made me realize that architecture in itself is like a cubist sculpture.

MO: In your artist statement you mentioned something about the 'eponymous' nature of spaces which refers to spaces taking on the identity of people they are named after which is kind of the opposite of what we spoke about earlier; people being shaped by spaces. We name structures like roads and buildings after people and use them as archival tools. Can you explain how you arrived at that concept in your work?



The House Stella Adadevoh Built, acrylic on canvas, 48 X 36 in, 2019



Indigene VII, Charcoal on paper, 9 X 7 in, 2019

PA: Growing up in Ikeja GRA, there were lots of streets, houses, and complexes named after people I'd never seen or heard about. Naming spaces after people archives their history and keeps their memory alive for future generations. As a child it motivated me to find out who some of these people were. I decided to document this concept in my work.

MO: You have a series in this exhibition created after Dr. Stella Adadevoh and her remarkable story. Is that your way of documenting what she did for the sake of history?

PA: This body of work was my response to the concept of buildings being named after people to keep their memory alive. I never met Awolowo, but seeing roads and structures named after him, led me to asking questions about him. I feel that Dr. Adadevoh's contributions are important and recent enough for me to create artworks which keep her memory alive. I thought that even though I can't build physical structures with her name on them, I can preserve her memory and document her life through my art. As an artist I often see myself documenting the events around

me. For example I documented the Otodogbami crisis where an entire community was violently ejected by the government, and the demolition around Third Mainland Bridge, as well as how the structures in Lagos state have developed over time.

MO: You also have a series of drawings called 'Indigene', what are they about?

PA: They are charcoal drawings that capture the essence of people from a particular environment. I remember as a student in Auchi Polytechnic, I would go into nearby towns for our general drawing assignments and meet the indigenes. They would come up to me and want to be featured in my drawings. So I'm expanding on the concept that it is possible to talk about an environment and also capture the people living in that environment.

MO: Tell us about your creative process? Do you create simultaneously across different media!

PA: Yes, sometimes a piece of work, like an installation, encompasses all

the different media. I might build a work that has painting, prints, found objects, and different sculptural pieces.

MO: What sparks your creativity?

PA: I would say it is mostly just day-to-day life. I am often drawn to how people feel as well as their stories. It leads me to question things, which leads me to create. The journalist can write an article about it, the poet might write a poem, but as a visual artist, I create a picture.

MO: This is your first solo exhibition. How excited are you?

PA: Wow. I am really excited because I've looked forward to this. I could have had my solo exhibition long before now, but growing up with the masters, I've learned how to consider the power of a curator. I understand that we are in an ecosystem where we need each other so that's why I've held off on having my solo exhibition. I could have paid to rent a space, but I've always wanted to put my works in the hands of a good curator.

MO: What do you hope is the impact of this exhibition on your audience?

PA: I hope people who see, read or hear about the exhibition get to appreciate things the way I see them. I hope to create an awareness that our life experiences can be projected outward in artistic ways that aren't exclusive to just writing.

MO: While this might be your first solo exhibition, you've been in this industry for a while, and have been blessed to have worked with, and been mentored by, some really important people. What advice would you give to young artists trying to navigate the art world?

PA: I would advise both younger artists and even my contemporaries to work with masters or established artists. There's a lot to learn from these older artists and it is expected that we won't make the same mistakes our mentors made. Mentors should also make an effort to nurture and guide younger artists.

MO: Finally, what would you say to your younger self and also your future older self?

PA: I would say to my future self, after achieving all the things I have on my list, that my artistic journey has been worth it. To my younger self I would tell him to be inquisitive, patient, and prayerful and to take life one step at a time.

“Akpojotor pursues a very personal path. His work is biographical and this is what lends it such an awesome level of authenticity that ensures he will be around for a long time producing at the very top of his profession.”

Chuka Ihonor,
Architect



PATRICK AKPOJOTOR

Date of Birth: 20th January, 1982
Nationality: Nigeria
State of Origin: Delta state
Place of Birth: Ile – Ife, Osun state.

EDUCATION

2013 HND, Art and Industrial Design (Majored in Graphics Design),
Lagos State Polytechnic, Ikorodu, Lagos.
2008 ND, General Art, Federal Polytechnic, Auchi.

EXHIBITIONS

2018 IN-TER-ACTION, Rele Art Gallery, Lagos, Nigeria.
2017 ART X Lagos art fair, Civic Centre, Victoria Island Lagos, Nigeria.
2016 Ribbon in April II, Moor house, Lagos, Nigeria.
2016 Bruce Onobrakpeya and the Harmattan Workshop, Lagos
Court of Arbitration, Lagos, Nigeria.
2015 Ribbon in April, Alliance Francais, Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria.
2015 Rise above Terror, Abuja, Nigeria.
2013 Off the Bin Project Exhibition, Terra Kulture, Lagos.
2013 Life in my City festival (Lagos chapter), National Museum,
Lagos
2012 DAK' ART, Dakar, Senegal.
2010 Involving Current, Abuja, Nigeria.
2010 Nigeria and Ghana Contemporary Artists, New Jersey, USA.
2009 Miniature, Terra Kulture, Lagos
2005 Esthetique Bond, Didi Museum, Lagos.
2005 Harvest of the Harmattan Workshop, Pan African University,
Lagos.

AWARDS AND PRIZES

- 2016 Art X Prize
- 2013 3rd Prize, OFF THE BIN PROJECT.
- 2013 Life In My City Art Festival
- 2012 3rd Prize, Olusegun Obasanjo National Art Competition, Category B.

WORKSHOP

- 2003-2019 (4th-20th) Harmattan Workshop, Painting Section, Delta, Nigeria
- 2005 International Stone League Workshop, National Theatre, Lagos, Nigeria.



CURATOR

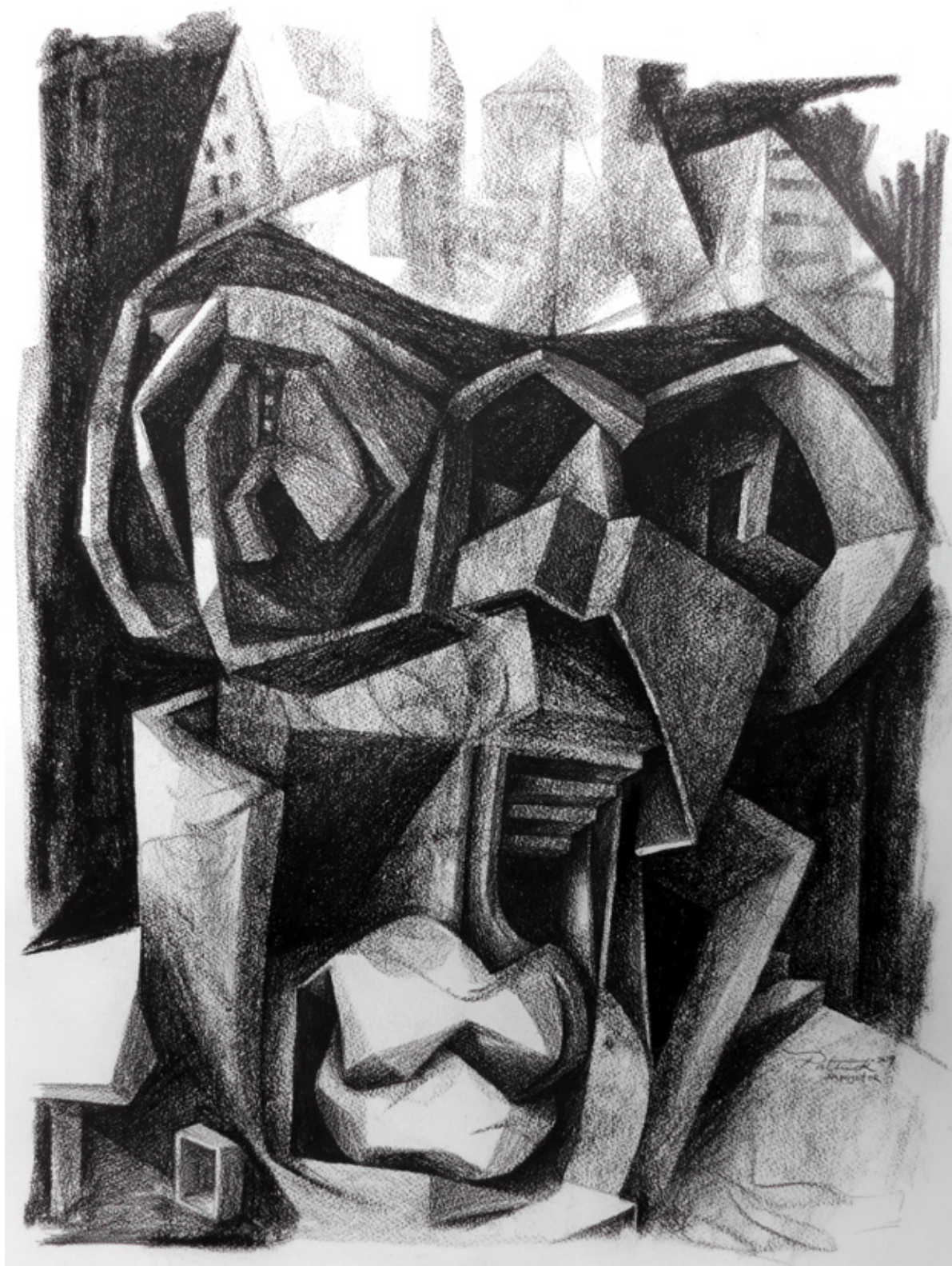


Sandra Mbanefo Obiagio is an art curator, photographer and award winning filmmaker who is passionate about strengthening the creative industry to develop the African continent. She is Founder and Artistic Director of SMO Contemporary Art, curating art exhibitions in non-traditional gallery spaces to promote the best of African art. She started her career in 1988 as a technical director and video editor at the European Business Channel in Zurich, Switzerland. Two years later she joined environmental group, WWF International, and covered environment and development projects in Sub-Saharan Africa as a photo-journalist for eight years. In 1998 she founded Communicating for Change (CFC), a media for development social enterprise based in Lagos, which became an important content provider for local and international television stations. Her award winning films and radio programs focused on human rights, women's empowerment, HIV & AIDS, environment, democracy and good governance, and art for development. Obiagio is a Fellow of the Aspen Institute's African Leadership Initiative for West Africa (ALIWA). She has a Bachelor of Education degree from the University of Manitoba in Canada, and a Masters of Arts in Telecommunications from Michigan State University, USA. Obiagio focuses on using creativity as an avenue for wealth creation and inspiring a positive narrative about Africa for local and international audiences





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* (2011), *Making History* (2012), *Recent sculptures* (2012), *the WW Independence Series* (2012-13), *Flow, Here & There* (2013), *photography by Lakin Ogunbanwo*, *Duality, Unfurling*, (2014), *Eko Moves* (2014), *AKALAKA, The Contemporaries, Save Our Art! Save our Heritage!*, (2015-2016), *Equal Rights, Evolving Currents, Mental Space, Freedom* (2016), *Permutations, Standing Out II, Wanderlust* (2017), *The Wheatbaker Permanent Collection* (2017-18), *GBAM!*, *The Contemporaries II* (2018), *Recent Works, Eni! You Can Always Tell Where The Elephant Has Passed By*, (2019)





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SMO Contemporary Art specializes in showcasing contemporary art in non-traditional exhibition spaces, focusing on established and emerging artists based in Africa and the Diaspora.

SMO priority areas include art curating, research and documentation, valuation, events, film and photography, training and artist talks. SMO has expertise in organizing exhibitions & events which provide a platform for the creative industry to inspire and strengthen humanity's aspiration for the good society.

www.smocontemporary.com



Patrick 2019
Australia

Editorial & Art Direction: Sandra Mbanefo Obiako
Project Management: Nneoma Ilogu
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