

TONY NSOFOR





Exhibition of Recent Works

by

Tony NSOFOR &
Ibe ANANABA

November 1-25, 2015

Lagos, Nigeria





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Of Music, Migration & Nuanced Meaning *Ananaba & Nsofor's creative response to global issues*

Welcome to a world of music, migration and nuanced meaning created through the phenomenal art of two of Nigeria's finest contemporary artists: Tony Nsofor and Ibe Ananaba.

This exquisite and rich exhibition of 54 carefully selected paintings and mixed media works expresses the very heart and pulse of African creativity by two socially sensitive artists responding to a myriad of global issues including migration and the effect of social media on inter-personal communication.

I first met Ibe Ananaba almost ten years ago at an art exhibition held at the French School on Victoria Island, organized by a group of promising young artists. I was immediately moved and intrigued by his finely rendered ink on paper drawings and bought a number of his sketches. About two years later, he took part in an exhibition at the Goethe Institute and again, used a simple red biro to sketch intricate and intense portraits of old weathered and bright hopeful faces. His depiction of 90-year-old Madam Ekundayo, a woman whose ground breaking work with orphaned children inspired a hit-song by singer-songwriter-photographer TY Bello, left a lasting impression on me. I knew this was an incredibly talented artist I needed to follow.

From graduating in 1999 with distinction from the Institute of Management & Technology (IMT) in Enugu we fast forward 16 years to meet a mature, confident and deliberate artist who has sharpened his talent as a cartoonist, fashion illustrator, and graphic designer while rising up the corporate ladder to become Art Director for a leading advertising company, Insight Communications Ltd.

His presentation of 28 new works using watercolor, acrylic, oil and charcoal on paper and canvas showcase a visual explosion of Ananaba's impressive artistic range from powerful abstract and stylized portraits, to paintings with fashion themes to dynamic new works from his Yeah-Yeah series which capture and immortalize the spirit of Nigeria's musical legend, Fela Anikolapu Kuti.

The nine watercolor and two oil on canvas paintings depict Nigeria's iconic King of Afrobeat in his legendary performance poses, presented by Ananaba's deft, minimalist strokes of the palette knife on the one hand, as well as through his masterly watercolor technique, which captures both the mood and energy of the pulsating music complete with steam, sweat, and smoke rising through the colors.

The Fela series is presented in a pop-up space at Temple Muse in which the Yeah Yeah works are displayed alongside Fela's famous quotations which Ananaba has written graffiti style across stark white walls creating an iconic space of remembrance for Nigeria's legendary musical prophet with famous refrains such as "Demo-Crazy!" and "... Poor Man De Cry, Rich Man de Mess..."

Ananaba's creative world is expertly counterbalanced by his contemporary, Tony Nsofor, who graduated from the University of Nigeria in Nsukka in 1997, after being mentored by Nigeria's famous art professors, El Anatsui and Obiora Udechukwu. Nsofor's bold, at times prolific, frenzied and complex, at times calm, measured, elongated abstract expressionist style has been honed over years working as a writer, photographer, poet and painter.

I was first introduced to Nsofor's work by Jess Castellotte, respected curator and art critic, who has a great commitment to nurturing emerging artists. When I saw Nsofor's works, I knew I had met a great soul with a huge intellect.

Nsofor's cerebral ethos is punctuated by his loose and measured, vibrant strokes which communicate multi-dimensional human pressures. His dense abstract works comment on a myriad of global issues including the effects of bad leadership and the anguish of the world's displaced people. In *Displaced With Nowhere Like Home* he paints elongated, grey and black mask like faces in which the despair and despondency of the internally displaced masses affected by the insurgency in northern Nigeria is palpable through long,

downward sweeping strokes. In *Red Boats* Nsofor explains “empty red boats floating on a mysterious, bloodied sea echo the recent migration crisis that has placed a burden on the conscience of the world.”

These paintings are juxtaposed with complex, mixed media collages in which Nsofor combines words and fonts cut out of magazines, creating complex compositions using typography as a leitmotif for how the internet and social media has encrypted and stultified our communication, reducing interactions to emoticons and abbreviations like “LOL” and “HBD”, losing the wealth and breadth of language, literature and nuanced communication.

“Both artists creatively explore human relationships and pressing global issues through strikingly diverse and engaging styles that express an exciting range of honest and bold contemporary creativity.

It is refreshing to curate work by artists with a critical eye and social conscience who are using their creativity as vehicles for advocacy through artistic expression.

Sandra Mbanefo Obiango
Exhibition Curator







Tony NSOFOR

Tony NSOFOR



Tony Nsofor was born in 1973 and studied Fine and Applied Arts at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka majoring in painting. During his third year, he worked as studio assistant for Professor Obiora Udechukwu, whose mentorship had a profound impact on the young artist. In 1999 he opened his own studio in Owerri, Imo State, later moving to Lagos in 2001. Besides full time studio work, Nsofor consults as a free lance art writer and photographer.

Sometimes, a theme comes clearly to me. That allows me to make a guiding sketch for my painting. At other times, I tap into my subconscious by splashing colours or scribbling on canvas. I then study the splashes or scribbles to decipher the story. Since reading Freud and Carl Jung, I accepted the power of the subconscious. I let it lead me. My paintings are strongly affected by the training at Nsukka, which is popular for the iconographical symbolism of Uli. In a loose way (I prefer to call it a Natural Synthesis), I work my canvas with a personal 'iconography'. I may add in symbols from Uli or Nsibidi, but more often do not include them for their traditionally accepted meaning. I scribble and scratch, and draw with random lines. The figures are also drawn with the same freedom. My contemporary experience allows a free flow of information and interactions that happen at lightning speed. We are unbound, unlimited by physical spaces. With my scribbles, I use my fiat to the utmost. It is like free verse in poetry.

*What I do now
is to go beyond
the physical,
familiar presence
of things.
I think there is
more to everything.*

Tony Nsofor



The Deluge swept the windows away, Acrylic and photographic print, 48" x 48", 2014

NSOFOR'S GIFTS

More than 30 years ago Lewis Hyde wrote a book not so well known as it deserves, titled, *The Gift: creativity and the artist in the modern world*. In it, Hyde maintains the simple idea that inspiration comes to the artist as an undeserved gift, and therefore, the artwork produced by an artist endowed with it, should not be treated as a simple commodity. Hyde explains it very well: The main assumption of the book is that certain spheres of life, which we care about, are not well organized by the marketplace. That includes artistic practice, which is what the book is mostly about, but also pure science, spiritual life, healing and teaching....This book is about the alternative economy of artistic practice. For most artists, the actual working life of art does not fit well into a market economy, and this book explains why and builds out on the alternative, which is to imagine the commerce of art to be well described by gift exchange". For a decade I have had the fortune of following closely Tony Nsofor's progress and enjoying the results of that gift. His paintings and collages fit uneasily into the dynamics of the market place. They are also a gift. Whatever their selling price tag, I do not have any doubt that his works, sometimes raw, inscrutable and hard -but always personal and sincere-, are worth more than the price at which they are sold. They are Tony's gifts to us. Few other artists in the Lagos artworld give us something as genuine, rich and suggestive.

Jess Castellote



Mother and Child, Acrylic on canvas, 48" x 48", 2015



Couple (In the beginning), Mixed media painting, 18" x 24", 2015.

PAINTING POETRY: TONY NSOFOR'S RECENT WORKS

Tony Nsofor's recent paintings and photographic collages tell of his continuous search for the deep and surprising. Their disarming playfulness lures their viewers into an endless contemplation of the many images and imageries that the artist composes with tact and wit. In these works, color and line are the dominant pictorial elements that give rise to visual textures rich in their variety and harmony. Like poetry, Nsofor's pictures reveal and conceal, tasking our imagination and rewarding us with the delight of fresh and endless discoveries. Nsofor is among the most imaginative painters of his generation.

Ozioma Onuzulike, MFA, PhD
Ceramics artist, poet, art critic and art historian
University of Nigeria, Nsukka.



August meeting, Acrylic and paper on canvas, 52" x 48", 2015.



Babel's New Language Set , oil on canvas & collage, 2015



Speed of thoughts and words, oil on canvas & collage, 2015



Displaced From Being Human, Acrylic on Canvas, 48 x 36 inches, 2015



Displaced, With No Where Like Home, Oil on Canvas, 48 x 36 inches, 2015

Tony Nsofor's art is a manifestation of superb coordination of thought, vision and execution. As he goes over selected areas several times, exploiting glazing, scumbling, sgraffito and impasto to great effect, the daring, confident way he sweeps his brush across the canvas creates a range of evocative marks – the bold and broad, counterbalanced with the linear and short. His ability to capture the human form, or details of it, with a few linear gestures is remarkable; a good example of this is *Mara and Co*, where with minimal means even the expression on each face comes across, especially in the case of the woman on the right. But not every artwork is executed in this way. In the photographic print *Telling Stories: A Woman with a Sunshade*, Nsofor moves in the opposite direction, packing every available space with a maze of cutouts in various colors; human faces in different sizes, some upside down; garments of variegated patterns, creating the restlessness of a metropolis, the multitude of people and buildings. In related "collages" like *Speed of Thought and Words* and *Babel's Language* text takes over, the picture becomes a discourse anchored on typography. A leitmotif in these two ways of engaging space is text. But, beyond the use of letterform as an element of design, are the words in a given picture, especially when used sparingly, sometimes truncated, utterances per se? Or are they oblique keys to the theme of the work?

Obiora Udechukwu
Charles A. Dana Professor of Art & Art History
St. Lawrence University
USA





Sunset, oil on canvas, 48 x 48 inches, 2015



Soulmates, Acrylic on canvas, 48" x 48", 2015.

IN CONVERSATION WITH TONY NSOFOR

Sandra Mbanefo Obiagio: Tony – it's been a very interesting series of conversations we've had around your art and unique expression. Thanks for taking the time to let us delve a bit deeper into what makes Tony Nsofor stand out and create. Please take me to the beginning of your artistic journey. When did you know you were an artist and had to pursue art studies? How did you start focusing on your creativity?

Nsofor: I did not know I was an artist. I realized Art was a beautiful way to see life, to address life as a child. I saw this in the works of my uncle who had studied art in the US. I tried to reproduce the photographs of my loved ones, with pleasant results. The feedback from family and teachers was favourable. Just before entering secondary school, I was ill for over a year. (sickness has been part of my growth. I have been ill for long stints and the periods of recovery have availed me wonderful time away from the maddening crowd, enough time for retrospection)

Let me continue. I was sick at age 12 at the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital in Enugu. Then, the student doctors would visit. I became friends with one of them, a Dr. John Ojukwu. He would bring me all these art activity books that allowed you to color sections of a drawing, and to recreate images to scale. I thoroughly enjoyed that. From then on, I saw how art could take one away from the darkness around. So I held on to it.

SMO: What and who were the most important influences on you during art school?

Nsofor: My teachers/lecturers have been great friends, role-models and mentors. I closely observed their personal art practice. They were giants who travelled round the world for art's sake. They came with a vast amount of experience about the international current. Because of this exposure, they encouraged some of us who were quite adventurous to explore beyond populist trends and styles.

As an Nsukka-trained artist, there is no escaping being viewed through the frame of the modern Uli style. So, I studied the masters of the day-Uche Okeke, Chike Aniakor, Obiora Udechukwu, El Anatsui, Benjoe Igwillio etc. Some of them became close friends. They encouraged their students. Under the lecturers of our time (in the early nineties), we soon understood the techniques and practice of art. From their assignments, I soon saw myself delving more into the liberal arts. The themes we were given for exam questions would be drawn from music and poetry. Some of these exam questions allowed us to work for as much as three days. I researched the theme, listened to the music, if for instance, it was a classical piece; or read the poem and some of the biography of the poet. From my university days, I saw how art refined the mind.

Another thing that came with all the reading was an understanding of the root beginnings of the Nsukka Art School, and Uche Okeke. This means I studied the manifesto of the Zaria Rebels. That was the key. Uche Okeke's works that inspired the Uli School were his personal interpretation of the theme of Natural Synthesis. Being encouraged to find my own 'voice', I only studied Uli symbols looking for the reason behind the works, and not really to appropriate the motifs and symbols. I have a different background, a different history. But most important for me, I lived in a different present. The world had grown so much smaller, but knowledge had increased exponentially. I felt more like a citizen of the world because of the urgency and connectivity of the time. So, I borrowed freely, and still felt at home. That is the true spirit of the Nsukka School. People get confused when they don't see Uli motifs in Nsukka.

SMO: When did you go into full time studio work, and how have you managed to focus on your creative journey? There must have been some factors which tugged at you to follow a different direction?



Nsofor: In the early nineties immediately after youth service, I opened an art studio in Owerri. As a young artist, the distractions can be quite daunting. The environment is a mitigating factor as one clearly sees that art is being removed from the glare of the public. In Owerri, patronage for art was quite rare. At some point, the government of the day removed the sculptures in certain roundabouts because they were deemed to be fetish.

I got distracted at some point because the idea then was to migrate in search of greener pastures. Lagos was only a transit point. My first efforts to leave Nigeria failed, and I stayed back in Lagos. I kept up my art practice, but now tried other things too. Carrying wet canvases around Lagos was not something I appreciated, and the art galleries did not help matters. One was often treated like a beggar-there seemed to be a snob rule, and getting put on the list of selling artists was harder than a camel passing through the eye of a needle.

But I had the support of my family. This allowed me to stay focused on art, irrespective of whether the work sold or not. My lecturers had already hammered it into my head that the reason for creating art is not to primarily make money. Things had to be said, the world had to be changed. Art was my weapon. My reading of the histories of the lives of artists and the startling success some of their works achieve after they die allowed me to continue. Something keeps telling me that I am speaking clearly amongst contemporaries. If they don't hear me now, then someday, others will. It's a win-win thing. I recently relocated studios to my village to practice full time again. It is bliss.

SMO: What inspires you? How do you respond to these factors through your art?

Nsofor: I am inspired by 'all things bright and beautiful', by creation, and by the beauty of the human mind. Going through my oeuvre, you find that I have been intrigued by human relationships and the expressions of emotions that emanate. I also love fashion and style. I work inside of my love. It is easier. At the end of the day, if no one buys the work, I remain happy because I enjoyed the process.

SMO: How do you create? Take me through your typical creative process from beginning to end of one of your works...

Nsofor: A particular creative process does not remain constant. The work has a life of its own, away from the artist. Inspiration is everywhere around me. Sometimes I find an idea that I would like to explore, or I catch an interesting phrase that sums up a situation. If it is a phrase, I write it down somewhere, and think about ways of communicating the idea. It could end up as an essay. It could lead to a new painting. I jump in on having new knowledge and interactions because they stimulate me to create.

In my university days I enjoyed the essays of the old English poets on the creative process. I was also intrigued by the surrealists, by Freud and Jung. I became sensitive to what happens unconsciously, in relaxed states of mind. I would wake in the middle of the night to draw in utter darkness, relying on the gestures. At other times, I would have prepared for the moment by mixing colours on a palette by my bed. I would use the paints in creating these automatic paintings. Sometimes it comes fast, and I see what is hidden inside of the scribbling. Other times, I either will snap the sketch and carry it about, waiting for the moment when I have clarity, or when I can relate the drawing to an idea or experience.

SMO: Why do you use paper cutouts in your artwork – what do these factors mean in your work and why do you use words and cut out letters?

Nsofor: I love paper cutouts. They have become a way for me to keep aspects of my reading and the signs and symbols of the things I enjoy about life-style, fashion and life. I find that the fonts of printed materials have an aesthetic that helps in translating subtle meanings.

Anyway the creative process starts, I look out for interesting colours and textures in magazines. I glue them to the canvas and then start painting around the textures. The cutouts inspire gestures and movements of the brush. They are also a trigger for explorations of colours.

Text is key to communication-what is said, what is implied. The first gift I got from my dad was a dictionary. I was in primary 3. He bought boxes of novels for us children. Text has always been important to me. In university, I read stuff about language, signs, the symbol and the signifier. I use words, sometimes meaningless words. I once read Lewis Carroll's nonsense poem Jabberwocky. Recalling my experience of Freud and the surrealists, I believe it is possible to send pure thoughts unconscious and unbound by a resolve to communicate meaning. Somehow, I have defined the internet, information age and experience. In my work I want to communicate to the viewer that sense of familiarity that is suggested. We see how language has evolved online. There are so many new words, abbreviations and acronyms one has to be familiar with. It gets confusing. My work tries to make sense of it all.



SMO: Why did you choose abstract expression? Was there ever a time when your work was more into realism?

Nsofor: Of course, my first works were the realistic drawings made from reference materials- photographs and magazines. To be an artist meant one has the capacity to replicate realistic objects. So I drew all the time. I still draw.

What I do now is to go beyond the physical, familiar presence of things. I think there is more to everything. Things can give some interesting readings. I want people to think into things with me. The world has become so much more complex, and you would think that the contrary will be the case, for all the information out there! We need to read in-between the lines about our existence as humans.

SMO: How has the Nsukka Art School movement influenced your expression?

Nsofor: I mentioned this earlier. The good thing about being part of an art school is that it gives one a basis to start from. But that is just the beginning in the journey. The biggest lesson the Nsukka Art School taught me was to investigate my origins, and show an informed presence to live in the present as an artist. Generally, I think the educational curriculum in Nigeria needs an overhaul. But when one talks about movements, I fit in only for sharing time and space. One grows out, naturally.

SMO: You write and also do photography. How do you juggle these different art forms and how do you decide on what to focus on?

Nsofor: The creative process is strange. The painting may inspire a writing, or the other way round. Writing may explain the painting, or just stand on its own. Photography, on the other hand, is my way of seeing reality, of practicing realism. I see my work process as a sort of juggling. The different art forms- writing, photography and painting all balance themselves out to help me express these ideas that come. It's like the ying-yang effect. I am more content, and less under pressure as I pursue the creative possibilities in different ways. In these present times, it is difficult to have the luxury of staying focused on a thing for too long. I try to finish something I started. But I am not averse to rewriting or reworking my photographs. Art cannot be seen totally as one thing, an object. There is so much more. One can only explore all the ways of communicating.

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

Nsofor: There was a time when I needed music while working. These days, I listen to life. Music helps me more when I am not working, because that is when the ideas come. Artists on my playlist would be Bach, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Buju Banton, Burning Spear, Capleton, Lighthouse Family, Tracy Chapman, Bob Marley, Michael Jackson, Youssou Ndour, Salif Keita, Manu Dibango, Fela, Handel, Mozart, and many other classical music composers. I enjoy some of the new artists. But I like being introduced to new music by friends.

SMO: What would you like to be doing in ten years' time?

Nsofor: I will be creating new spaces for people to step into and experience. I hope it will be so much more than just painting. The nomenclature for labelling art is archaic, a bit obsolete. All I know is that, ten years on, I will be creating art.



Internet Love, Acrylic on canvas, 48" x 48", 2015

SMO:What gaps do you think there are between local and international artistic expression?

Nsofor: Gaps only exist in people's minds. Artistic expression has a core causal trigger-the human experience. Human experience, in so many ways, are similar and shared. There shouldn't be gaps. Unfortunately, there are gaps created by the problems of individualistic, authoritarian and myopic readings that can deter an artist. The platforms for showing art are exclusive. Locally, the environment does not encourage art practice. This is expected from a country that finds it difficult to manage its human resources properly. The decay spreads to the infrastructure. There is literally no government support and policy for the arts. The local institutions that are meant to support and represent artists have crumbled. The local artist has to struggle without much support.

One sees how different it is elsewhere. There is good management of infrastructure; you hear of welfare states, etc. The environment is in continual improvement. When the question of living well is being answered by the government, then the artist can think beyond selfish, survivalist themes, and explore ideas that will improve life in general. The work of artists generally reflect their living environment. I do not know about good or bad art.

SMO:What would you like to be doing ten years from now?

Nsofor: I will be creating new spaces....

SMO:Thank you.



Bio

Nsofor has taken part in numerous group exhibitions including *A Strangled Song* at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (1996), *6 New Painters from Nsukka*, curated by Obiora Udechukwu and Chika Okeke, at the British Council, Enugu (1997), *Homage to Asele* (2003) at the National Museum, Lagos, *The Rediscovery of Tradition: Uli and the Politics of Culture*, Pendulum Gallery, Lagos; *Beyond Figuration* at Omenka Gallery, Ben Enwonwu Foundation, Lagos (2009); *With a Human Face* at the Pan African University, Lagos (2006); and *A Glimpse into Nigerian Art* at the Cheikh Anta Diop Univ., Senegal (2006), *Anya Fulu Ugo*, at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, an exhibition in honor of El Anatsui and Obiora Udechukwu.

Nsofor's solo exhibitions include *Orthopedic Series*, at the National Orthopedic Hospital, Igbobi, Lagos (2004) *Autobiography and Beatitudes* (2012) at the Pan Atlantic University, Lagos comprising 83 works including paintings, photographs, and experimental sound. Besides newspaper articles for *This Day* and *Comet Newspapers*, Nsofor writes essays and takes photographs for art catalogues and books including *A Fragrant Kaleidoscope*, a catalogue on artworks by Nkechi Abi, Didi Museum, Lagos (2015), *Contemporary Nigerian Art in Lagos Private Collections: New Trees in an Old Forest*, a book by Jess Castellote, *Root: Contemporary Artists from Nigeria*, a book edited by Benetton, Luciano (et al) (2015), *Postcolonial Modernism in Nigeria*, a book by Chika Okeke, and the *SOGAL Auction catalogue* (2015). In 2008, Nsofor began blogging as a means for discussing art, photography, and lifestyle issues.





Survivor, Oil on canvas, 55 x 55 inches, 2014

Ibe ANANABA

Ibe ANANABA



Ibe Ananaba was born in Brussels, Belgium, in 1976 and studied Fine & Applied Arts at the Institute of Management and Technology (IMT) in Enugu, where he majored in painting and graduated with distinction in 1999. Ananaba is a versatile artist with experience working as a graphic designer, cartoonist, fashion illustrator, and painter; currently he works as Art Group Head at Nigeria's leading advertising firm, Insight Communications Limited. Alongside full time professional work in advertising, Ananaba paints in his home studio on weekends, fully committed to his art passion. Ananaba's art has been featured in local and international publications and his works are in private collections in the UK, South Africa, the United States and in his home country, with works in the public collection of the Nigerian National Assembly in Abuja. He has participated in numerous group and solo exhibitions in Nigeria, the United States, South African and Israel, and was listed in the Smithsonian Institution's Libraries Collections.

My vision is to use my art to speak to the depth of a viewer's heart; I want to re-engineer their thinking in a positive way.

My quest is to understand and explore the human figure through different media, as displayed in the array of works in this exhibition. The human figure, especially the female form has been my major subject over my years of practice (I'm still trying to figure out a deeper reason for this besides their rhythmic body flow). I get some sense of fulfillment in exploring the human figure and trying to relay whatever idea it is I'm working on at the moment. I love to capture moods. I love to capture the soul and emotion. Everyday lifestyle activities interest me and I sometimes use them to address some societal or personal issues. Through my fashion and portrait series, I present either solitary figures in a state of deep thought or melancholy, or I try to mirror the colourful expressions we see within our environment, especially featuring trends and fashion.

On the Yeah-Yeah series

This series on the indomitable Afrobeat Maestro titled 'AFRO TUNES: the Yeah-Yeah series, is so dear to me. I started the series in 2014, with the aim of freezing moments of Fela's performance in my art; The watercolour pieces in the series are based on my study of his live performance with Egypt 80 at Zenith, Paris in 1984 while the oils are actually an offshoot. They're my studies off SHOTBOSS' Instagram account.

The series is also a catalogue of his iconic poses which in themselves, I see to be quite rhythmic. I take these poses as a literal translation of the term "body language". I see the series as the imprimatur that every man is entitled to travel his own road, since each of us is born with their own unique map. This is my contribution to communicating the essence of Fela's "brand" in order to document the man's enduring relevance as the contributor of a unique and powerful message to human civilization. ! I just wonder what his view of today would've been.

FELA's inimitable character always speaks to me each time I see him on screen. His fashion sense and mannerisms are so epic. The man had style! And this is why it is said that style will never go out of fashion. Because style is fashion and something more- it's our personality and individualism expressed in our own narrative.

Why have I done this documentary in mainly watercolour? I just wanted to visually capture the feeling and mood in a medium that practically depicts the flow and fluency of water which I use to portray freedom. After all, one of his masterpieces is the song "Water no get enemy". Hence I translated this visually by adapting a "loose technique" using watercolor with few details.

With the above said, Let his music flow on!

*I hope you have an intimate interaction with each piece on display.
Have a great visual treat!*

*Ibe Ananaba
Lagos*



Signature



IBE ANANABA ON FELA: AN ECLECTICIST COMES OF AGE

Seeing this series by Ibe Ananaba, one is captivated by the substance of the artist as a storyteller who has adopted to take responsibility to document the gift of the artiste for society to benefit from. In this case, it's the gift of Fela to the world.

By this series, I see yet another facet in the expression of the eclecticism and talent for which Ibe has become established in the firmament of art.

That he chose to make a contribution to the subject of Fela, an incontestable icon in the battle for the emancipation of the citizen in any socio-political context, holds Ibe out as a good example of socio-political and cultural relevance.

This is sine qua non for any artist that should be worth his easel. Even if I have to repeat it.

So Ibe is acquitted. He has grown to maturity; in his commitment to evolve into the rank of an elder in the African society, who understands the demands and responsibility that a gift confers on him.

Ibe the artist is therefore a storyteller, like our African griots who are compelled to present heroes for society to learn from.

Fela, his protagonist here, gave us music but more, Fela gave us a message.

Thank you Ibe, for making us SEE the music in the man. And the message in the music. And the music in your free-flowing water colour medium as you have done here.

The responsibility left for us, is to do the dance that the music calls us to. I see it in the various poses that Ibe has frozen on canvas here.

Let's learn the steps and let everybody say "yeah yeah" as Fela was characteristically saying in those paintings. I can hear him.

Thank you Ibe.

Solomon Ikhioda
Curator
Inimitable Lifestyle Limited



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Afro Tunes (Yeah - Yeah series 4-7), Watercolor, 24 x 30 inches, 2014.



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BOLD. COLOURFUL. VIBRANT. ICONIC.

These are adjectives that not only describe the subject of the Yeah-Yeah painting series, they also aptly describe Ibe Ananaba's painting style.

In putting together this series of 11 paintings, Ibe has done a fantastic job of celebrating one of Africa's most impactful artistes in a most vibrant way.

Each brush stroke, be it in water colour or oil, capture not only the form, but also the essence of the music maestro, the man we love and call the ABA MI EDA!

In each painting, Ibe has beautifully brought to life on canvas some of Fela's iconic postures and mannerisms that made each one of his stage performances both electrifying and unforgettable.

For one who never saw Fela live, Ibe really outdoes himself by bringing out those little details that make Fela, Fela. How he used to hold his 'wrap' and how he moved his waist and legs while performing were quietly but firmly captured.

Truly, the devil is in the details.

Fela was more than a singer and instrumentalist. He was a prophet and the stage was his pulpit from where he relayed his messages in music, song and dance.

Ibe's works have shown again that people of Fela's caliber never really die.

They continue to live in the hearts, minds and (in this case) on Ibe's canvas.

Well done Ibe. Well done!

Deji Somolu
Prima Garnet
Lagos



Afro Tunes (Yeah - Yeah series 2 & 3), Watercolor, 24 x 30 inches, 2014.

IBE AND HIS ART

Ibe Ananaba is one of the most talented artists I know. Gifted with a strong sense for composition, colors, and perfect draftsmanship his paintings are a visual delight . His bold approach coupled with equally bold technique of painting with palette knife without sacrificing the beauty of female form shows his command over the medium. The little touch of abstraction in his realistic work makes it even more beautiful. I really like his work and wish him every success . "

Dr. Vijay Kakde, M.A.; Ph.D.; G.D. (Art)



NEXT OUTLOOK, 2015. Mixed media, (Charcoal, acrylics and newspaper, 36 x 36 inches



Dreamer, Mixed media (Charcoal, acrylic and newspaper), 36 x 36 inches, 2015.



Urban Chic In Blue Shoes, Acrylic on Canvas, 36 x 36 inches, 2015.



Bloggers Gist (comment Section), Acrylic on canvas, 36 x 42 inches, 2015.



He Said..., Mixed media (Acrylic and Newspaper), 24 x 28 inches, 2015.



She Said..., Mixed media (Acrylic and Newspaper), 24 x 28 inches, 2015.



If Only..., Acrylic on canvas, 21 x 28 inches, 2015.



What Does The Future Hold?, Acrylic on package board, 24 x 28 inches, 2015



Retweet, Oil and on canva, 36 x 42 inches, 2015.

IN CONVERSATION WITH IBE ANANABA

SMO: I have been watching your art evolve over the past ten years Ibe. What an amazing evolution. Let's start at the beginning – please tell me about your artistic journey. How did you get interested in art, and what influence did your family have on your journey?

IA: My artistic journey dates back to my childhood. I never chose art, rather art chose me and we fell in love immediately. By watching my elder brother Ugo and the stunts he used to pull in those days I began to grasp the possibilities of what a pen or pencil could do on sheet of paper, and it became obvious that art was my calling.

Luckily, I grew up in a family that truly believed in the Arts. Ugo happened to be the first artist I came in contact with and his influence was my springboard. My biggest supporter then was my mum. She never discouraged me when I was as a kid always scribbling every and anywhere. The feeling was always priceless each time she bought me art materials whenever she could. Since then till now, it's been a jolly ride despite all the odds.

SMO: You were born in Belgium but grew up in Nigeria – tell us a little about your continental journey.

IA: I was born in Belgium but relocated back to Nigeria at a tender age after my father's death. I'm really grateful for the experiences I've had growing up here in 'Naija' which has contributed to making me become the artist I am today.

SMO: What was the primary factor that made you decide to study art?

IA: Besides by brother's positive influence, I loved flipping through books and magazines with strong illustrations. This also made me aspire to be an artist. I felt there was more fun and adventure to experience by being creative so I plunged into art and this has been my drive throughout my life.

SMO: You attended the Institute of Management & Technology (IMT) in Enugu and graduated with distinction in painting. When you compare IMT with other Nigerian art schools like Yaba Tech – what would you say distinguishes IMT graduates? Is there a different philosophy or influence that has had an impact on your artistic expression?

IA: IMT graduates derive joy in being practical, and in experimenting with imaginative compositions. We were drilled and taught which has had a major impact on the way I work. Through discipline, you gain a deep feeling of independence..

SMO: Your skill in painting has been honed by spending time creating cartoons, illustrations, graphic design and most recently advertising... how have these different but related disciplines affected your art practice?

IA: These different disciplines have positively affected my art. I believe that "creativity is the currency" that runs through all these elements. I strive to always maintain some sort of balance. Some of these disciplines lean more towards the

Like This & Like That, Oil on canvas, 36 x 42 inches, 2015.



commercial side which provides me with a steady income. On the other hand, my less commercial creativity provides me opportunities to take risks, explore, and experiment which contributes to new ideas being birthed. All these disciplines helps me understand more about business, human psychology, behavioral patterns, cultural values and more.

My advertising practice has helped expand my understanding of human behavioral patterns, understanding what drives or influences people. It's all about psychology. It helps me define my target audience and understand how to communicate better through my art.. For instance, an idea for a campaign hits me and next I pick my pen or pencil to sketch it out. This is the same process I pass through when I conceive an idea I want to paint.

SMO: Who are your mentors in art? Whose work has affected and inspired you and why?

IA: My mentors keep increasing by the day especially as technology gets more advanced. There are many local and international artists whose works have affected and inspired me. When you talk about cartoons, names like Cliff Ogiugo, Tunde Soyinka, Mike Asukwo come to mind. Tunde Soyinka and his team pulled great stunts back in the day, addressing real societal issues in heavy satirical ways with THE CARTOONIST.

During my years at IMT my art appreciation really took flight which divine. I met great guys like Okey Iwundu, Chima Etu, Henry Morkah, Chamberlin Ukenedo, late Damian Onyekuru who were all in some way reflected in my work. Outside IMT I met great creative minds like Uche Iroha, Kelechi Amadi-Obi, Duke Asidere, Segun Adejumo, Sam Ovrati, Pita Ohiwerei and many others whose work warms my heart and inspires me in deep ways. I am also inspired by international artists like Dan McCaw, Milind Mulick, Jennifer McChristian, Sebastian Kruger etc who create amazing art.

SMO : What inspires you in your work? What themes do you grapple with and what issues or thematics are recurring in your work?

IA: Everything has the potential to inspire me. As a creative person, I try to engage with things around me. I also try to remain open minded. I am like a sponge trying to soak in as much as can. I also make mental notes which with time, I sieve through, pick out valuable ideas, experiences, and impressions to work on. One just has to be observant to spot the gem in everything. It could come from a song, a phone call, a fight on the street, news, jokes, nature... anything. An idea is like air, it could come anywhere, anytime.

My creative direction is largely driven by both exploration and exploitation of the human figure to capture moods, character, soul and pure essence which communicate a message that can challenge or inspire and warm the heart.

SMO: I am fascinated with your use of the printed words in your works – please tell me a little about this technique and why you have decided to use newspaper cuttings in your works?



IA: Art is about experimenting and questioning – searching for new experiences. I started using newspaper cuttings to create a textured surface. Part of what makes art interesting is when you see or feel unusual forms.

I shred and paste newspapers on canvas with glue, and then paint over it while leaving some parts raw to complement the painted areas. That was how I started using headlines or mastheads of newspapers. My graphic artist side of me has a love for fonts, so I use cut out words in my.

SMO: When do you work and how do you work? Do you listen to music? If yes, what would be your playlist when you create your artworks?

IA: I mostly paint at night. The passion is what keeps me going. Sometimes after navigating through the thick, unfriendly, and suffocating Lagos traffic, I enter my studio to work out my frustrations. It's always great to work and ideas flow from deep within in an organic way. Letting it flow is how I love to work

Yes! I listen to music sometimes and my playlist ranges from Hiphop, highlife, gospel, reggae, soft rock, afro-pop and so on depending on my mood. One of the favorites is 2face Idibia. He's truly blessed and is a major source of inspiration always making me reflect.

SMO: When I first saw your work probably 10 years ago, you were drawing intricate realistic portraits using mostly red pens– today you have a very textured, palette knife type of technique with your oil on canvas work, coupled with delicate watercolor works– why the change in media and how do you decide on which medium to use for which expression?

IA: Experimenting with various media is the whole essence of art. Years ago I could not afford expensive art materials so I worked with ink pens and paper. At this stage in my practice, process of making art it is very vital. Switching from one material to other helps me develop my skill and gives opportunity for something new. I remember seeing my brother's felt pen sketch soaked in water years ago and the effect when it dried was epic! That experience led to creation of a new body of works using this technique. What determines the medium I use depends on the idea, availability of materials, and time.

SMO: Thank you.



JOINT EXHIBITIONS

DOTS IN MOTION (with Chamberlain Ukenedo):
Quintessence, Falomo Shopping Complex, Ikoyi, Lagos, Nigeria. -2003

LINES AND REASON (with Ugochukwu Ananaba):
Quintessence, Falomo Shopping Complex, Ikoyi, Lagos, Nigeria. -2005

JOINT EXHIBITION (with Segun Aiyesan)
Constant Capital, 25 Femi Okunnu Road, Ikoyi, Lagos, Nigeria. - 2014

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

COLOURS NIGERIANA:
Consulate of Nigeria, Johannesburg, South Africa. - 2003

STROKES OF VALUE:
Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, Victoria island, Lagos, Nigeria. -2004

EXPLORING THE WONDERS OF NIGERIA:
Givatayim Theatre, Tel-Aviv, Israel. -2006

ARESUVA: International Conference Centre, FCT, Abuja, Nigeria. – 2008

ART EXPO: National Gallery of Arts, Onikan, Lagos, Nigeria.- 2009

STRIP: Re.le Gallery, 5 Military Street, onikan, Lagos, Nigeria.- 2015

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

ED'STRAVAGANZA:
Ice House, Fayetteville, Arkansas, U.S.A – 2007

AGAINST ALL ODDS:
Goethe Institut, Lagos, Ozumba Mbadiwe Street, Victoria Island, Lagos, Nigeria. – 2009

IDENTITY CHECK:
Alexis Gallery, 282 Akin Olugbade Street, Victoria island, Lagos, Nigeria. – 2012

WORKSHOPS

LAGOS OPEN: An Emeka Udemba initiative co-ordinated by Goethe-Institut, Lagos,
Nigeria - 2005

CATCH THE BIG IDEA (Ideas Management Workshop) -2006
Ideas Management University, Germany.

CREATIVE PLANNING AND PERFORMANCE -2007
Ideas Management University, Germany.

HEAD FOR CREATIVITY
Association of Advertising Agencies of Nigeria (AAAN) -2011

ABSOLUT OPEN CANVAS LAGOS- [#transformtoday](#)

Herbert Macaulay Way, Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria - 2013

PUBLICATIONS

UNIFYING AFRICA (edited by Uche Iroha, published by Photo.Garage, 2010)

101 NIGERIAN ARTISTS (published by Ben Bosah Books, 2010)

CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN ART IN LAGOS PRIVATE COLLECTIONS (published by Bookcraft, 2012)

Artists of Nigeria (published by Five Continents / Onyema Offoedu-Okeke, 2012)

DASH Magazine, UK (2nd Edition, 2012)



Rehearsal, Acrylic on canvas, 55 x 55 inches, 2014.

Sponsor



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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.



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"well fed cattle: the forest fled."

IBE ANANABA



Ibe Ananaba