



**VICTOR BUTLER**  
NUANCE



*Imagination is more important than knowledge.  
Knowledge is limited.  
Imagination encircles the world.*

Albert Einstein











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CURATED BY SANDRA MBANEFO OBIAGO







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## CURATORIAL INTRO

It has been thirteen years since Victor Butler had a solo exhibition and we are lucky to be the place where he has decided to break his silence.

I have always appreciated Butler as a major international artist floating somewhere above the flurry of the West African art scene. I first heard about his work on a trip to South Africa, and was told that it was very difficult to actually meet the artist and that his work was rare and hard to come by.

Two and a half years ago, I finally had the privilege of visiting Butler in his pristine home studio in the beautiful Trasacco Valley estate on the outskirts of Accra.

I met a soft spoken intellectual who was delighted to show me his work and engage on philosophical plains of nuanced meaning. He deciphered the subtle perspectives painted into his surreal landscapes and showed me how, depending on where one stood, different faces and stories appeared in his expertly textured backgrounds.

That afternoon time stood still in his converted garage studio populated by about 15-20 half completed paintings of various dimensions. The view from his numerous easels was onto a quiet driveway surrounded by a lush garden. He eventually walked us through the cool interiors of his beautiful home gallery,

which also reflected the meticulous detail of Butler's mind. From the manicured garden, to the beautifully appointed architectural interiors, Butler's aesthetic environment and philosophical "Weltanschauung" fit hand in glove.

During the journey of this exhibition our conversations have deepened, and I have become even more fascinated by the painterly perfection and technicolor precision of his collection. Butler's understanding of culture and tradition, alongside his poetic mastery of language, is influenced by his scientific mind which continually explores the meaning of life. Nuance offers amazing insight into this exploration.

### Beginnings

Butler is a self-taught artist who diverted from medical studies to embrace his passion for art. His mother encouraged him at an early age to fan his gift into flame while the influence of his architect grandfather and his father, who was a professor of electronics, can be clearly traced through his art.

The young Butler held his first exhibition in 1987 at the British Council in Accra, and this early breakthrough was quickly followed by regular exhibitions in France, England, Canada and South Africa until 2005 when he withdrew from the public limelight.

After over a decade, Butler finally presents a nuanced and deeply personal body of work that has been well worth the wait.

Nuance is an intimate look at relationships within a complex and multi-layered world. Whether as solitary figures in surreal landscapes, or in groups of two, three or larger clusters, Butler is able to paint a myriad of emotions and human dynamics within private and public spaces.

He presents numerous works showing solitary female forms wrapped in private spheres of meditation. This nucleus of self-love and self-awareness is particularly striking in *Shelter*, where a woman sits curled into herself, holding a book. She is totally at peace under the light of the moon, sitting protected at the entrance to a cave. On closer scrutiny, we see that Butler has painted her body as an extension of the rocks under which she seeks refuge. The interplay of light and texture, emotion and depth of field, shows Butler's impressive painterly dexterity.

Similarly in *The Letter*, a woman sits with her head on her knees, curled into a reverie of thought and memory, holding a crumpled letter in her lap. The scene is painted completely in shades of blue and grey, reflecting her melancholic mood.

In *A Quiet Corner Of The Day*, a woman daydreams as she sits with her head on her knees. Butler has painted

a blue sky with white clouds into her scarf and blouse reflecting a carefree joy in her sunny mind, oblivious of the disapproving shadows painted subtly on the wall behind her.

These intimate portraits are perfectly juxtaposed against works depicting the intricate web of human emotion and politics between couples, family members, within the community, and in the wider realm of society.

In *Witnesses*, Butler paints an abstract sea of faces with interwoven eyes, each fixing their stare on the same scene but with different interpretations, looks, and depth of reasoning; some faces appear complete, while others have either one or two eyes missing or altogether lack the ability to speak in mouth-less faces.

In *Interrupted* we see the subtle dynamics within a group of six women dressed identically, casting questioning looks in the same direction, as if disturbed in mid-sentence. Butler is able to capture the subtle power in their silent stares and nuanced expressions revealing the intricacies and complexity in people's minds as they interpret similar issues from very different vantage points.

We see how Butler's poetic interpretation is deeply rooted in his profound understanding of how community and culture is inextricably linked to science, the natural world, and technology. In his

artist statement, Butler speaks about the peculiarity of “objectivity and subjectivity within the mind and soul of the community” which he explores in each painting.

In *The Lure of the Moon*, we see a two legged form carrying a myriad of faces and beings mesmerized by the moon they are leaning towards. The moon in turn reflects the myriad of beseeching faces, reflecting Butler’s view that “perspective and the scope of our vision is illuminating the horizons of coexistence and the nuance, as always floating somewhere in between.”

In *Guardians of the Night* Butler paints a multi-layered cosmos in which physical layers within a complex world of forms and spaces remind us that things are often not in reality how they appear on the surface.

I trust that Butler’s multi-textured world of wonder and meaning, draws you in as we celebrate his first exhibition in Nigeria and look forward to many more such encounters in the future.

Our sincere appreciation goes to Herbert Wigwe, an astute collector and CEO of Access Bank, who sponsored this exhibition and whose long friendship with Butler paved the way for this rare showcase. Sincere thanks also to our longstanding sponsor, Moët Hennessey, who have supported our exhibitions since our first art showcase at Temple Muse five years ago.

And to Victor, a very sincere thank you for sharing your beautiful creative light and fantastic art with our very appreciative audience.

Sandra Mbanefo Obiago  
Curator





# Victor Butler



Victor Butler (born 1964) is a self-taught artist with over 25 years of studio practice. His works have been exhibited internationally including in Canada, England, France and the United States. He studied medicine and has worked at the cutting edge of auto mechanics, information technology, and furniture design. His impressive painting technique and deeply philosophical approach to life is evident in his surrealist style and subject matter. His works are in important international corporate and private collections; this will be Butler's first exhibition in Nigeria.







## **NUANCE I**

### THE WHISPERINGS OF THE SOUL

...could one say,  
translation is nuanced by interpretation?

...instinct,  
the whispering of the soul,  
the guide to survival...

...without a second thought  
instinct enlightens us,  
it whispers;  
“...you can only integrate when you deploy language... “

Language,  
the common ground for ideas to animate...  
...the reference to what we have been exposed to...

Exposure?  
...exposure determines the aperture of our pupils,  
defines the perspective and scope of our vision,  
illuminating the horizons of coexistence...

...and the nuance,  
as always,  
floating somewhere in between...



easily missed  
by the blinding glare of overexposure,  
or  
blinding by its dimmed alter ego,

underexposure...

instinct enlightens us,  
without a second thought,  
it whispers;  
“...you can only survive when you nurture familiarity...”

...layering of our daily routines subtly reveals the nuance...  
as always,  
floating somewhere in between...

...and the nuance,  
that acquaintance which brings into focus  
or blurs  
as always,  
the peculiarities  
between  
objectivity and subjectivity...

Victor Butler



***Shelter III (A Figure With A Book)***

Oil on canvas  
120 x 150 cm  
2017







***Difference Of Opinion***

Oil on canvas  
122 x 183 cm  
2017



We could say that thoughts occur when  
ramifications of transient clusters of information  
darting about in our minds, that would normally  
collide and bounce off each other, manage  
in the process, to clasp other clusters, forming a  
larger critical mass, resulting in a loss of kinetic  
energy, and then finally settling into little baskets  
placed in our minds called ideas...

There, they remain...  
Ours...

But when ideas acquire a voice  
They activate that interface  
That allows for a voice to touch a soul...

What that interface is designed to do when  
voice activated,  
is to simply convert the format of our ideas into  
One with an extension purposed for sharing...

Then, they no longer remain ours...  
With their new format, Ideas become Opinions..





***Mother, Daughter***

Oil on canvas  
90 x 120cm  
2017









***Climate***

Oil on canvas  
167 x 137 cm  
2017

How much time should we give to prevailing Economic, Political, Social and cultural conditions to establish a climate? Apply the weather standard of 30years?

Or are we determining the period because the most persistent of weather patterns, be it political, economic, or social climate, seems to have a span of only four or five years?



***The Letter V (The Reply)***

Oil on canvas  
50 x 100cm  
2017







***Distance***

Oil on canvas  
60 x 80 cm  
2017

Distance may not necessarily be how far two entities may be from each other, but most significantly, how much room is inadvertently or otherwise created between them to accommodate another ...





***Elopement***

Oil on canvas  
90 x 135 cm  
2017









***Portmanteau***

Oil on canvas  
150 x 120 cm  
2017

It is an interesting thought that a word which in itself is an example of its own definition, in principle, describes how everyone in the course of the day will use a portmanteau.



***Drum Notes***

Print (Edition 1 of 5)  
74 x 102 cm  
2017









***Interrupted***

Oil on canvas  
213 x 122 cm  
2017

Has it always been the case that we have been quick to form groups, sub groups, sub-sub groups and now, social platforms?

Or are we interrupting a social norm, or the other way around; a social norm interrupting what is trending?











## ***Witnesses***

Oil on canvas  
213 x 122 cm  
2017





***Hajia's Bean Cakes (Akara)***

Oil on canvas  
50 x 40cm  
2017

Certain traditional items and practices have withstood the impact of change maybe simply because they have, and reflect, and are imbued with a unique aesthetic...

Or is it because there's something we have overlooked, is there a hidden code that determines their enduring nature?



***Residents Of The Family House IV  
(A Figure Standing Outside) Diptych***

Oil on canvas  
24 x 18 cm each  
2017







***In A Quiet Corner Of The Day***

Oil on canvas  
70 x 50 cm  
2017

A corner is a point where different planes meet... There are instances when it is essential to be able To access the dimension beyond the intersecting Planes for respite...



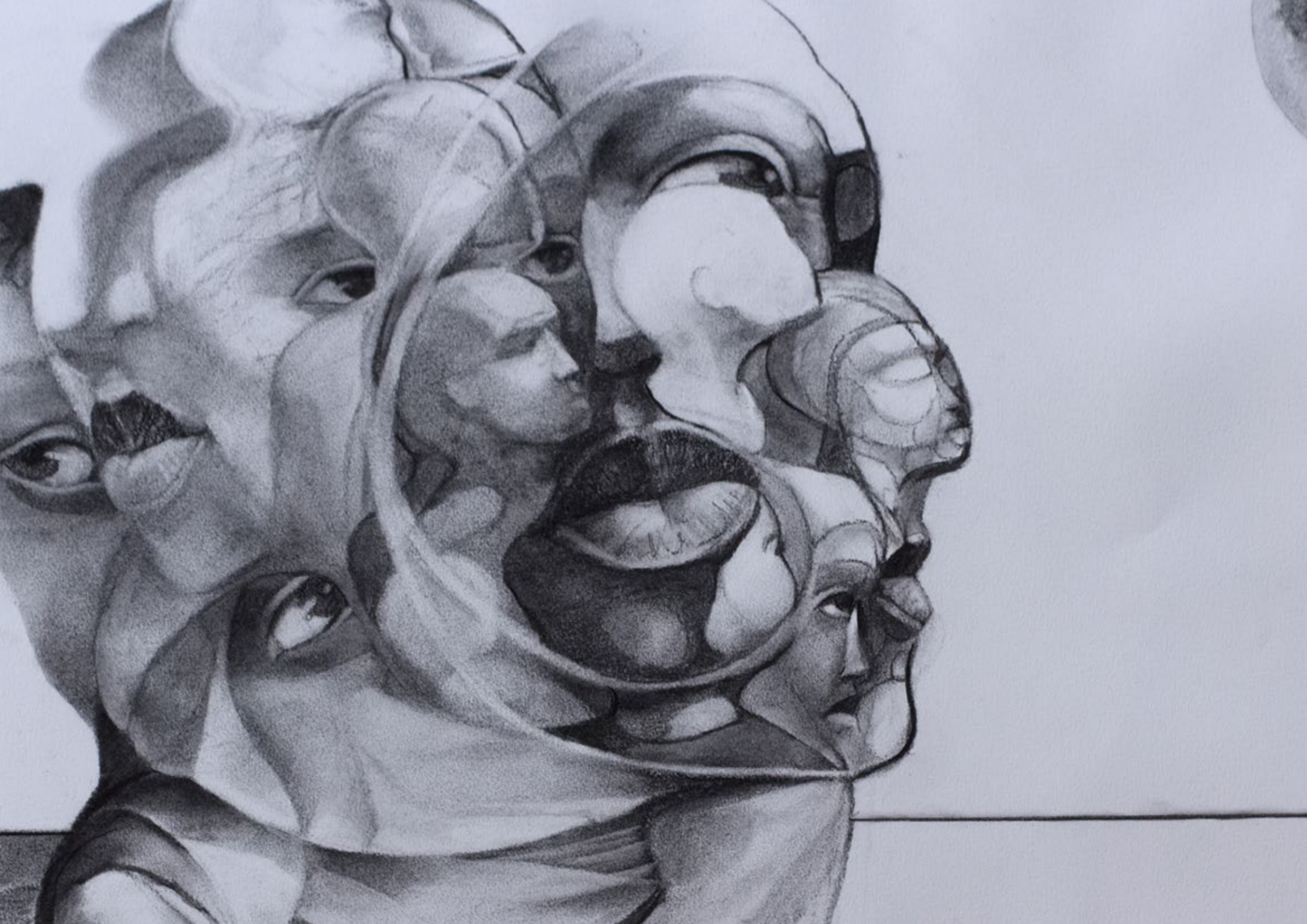


***The Lure Of The Moon (Study For The Composition)***

Print (Edition 1 of 10)

74 x 56 cm

2017









***The Lure Of The Moon I***

Oil on canvas  
150 x 120 cm  
2017

There was once a time when our physical,  
economic and geo-political positioning was  
premised on the only satellite our planet had...

Our only neighbor for eons in the vastness of the  
universe...

It may seem that the moon has etched its  
influence by being a  
reflection in appearance, of our gray and white  
matter, a subconscious bond of mystery and  
relevance ...

We credited the moon for giving us a sense of  
hope, for it established for us a predictability of  
seasons, tides and time...

Today, when we look up to the heavens at  
night, we have to filter out the stars from our  
now closer myriad of satellites populating our sky  
in the space between ourselves and our long  
standing neighbor.

Our satellites have a role in our current scheme  
of things, to help us to geo-position ourselves  
physically, economically, to help us predict the  
tides, time and seasons...

The moon unperturbed, still reminds us from  
time to time that it has etched its influence...  
its reflection of our gray and white matter, a  
subconscious bond of mystery and relevance,  
with a global event from time to time, when the  
moon takes centre stage in an eclipse ...











***Guardians Of The Night***

Oil on canvas  
137 x 102 cm  
2017

It is said that "nighttime is when a cloak covers the land..."

It is when those who take up the watch, bathe the scene with unselfish devotion, to ward off the selfish...













***Iroko***

Oil on canvas  
100 x 80 cm  
2017

Interestingly, according to scientific classification, the Iroko (*Milicia Excelsa*), is also known in Ghana as the Odum tree. The Iroko and Odum have been the subject of myth and legend. Legend that links its status to ours...

Tall and proud in stature, the Iroko earned its status in an era when lore was the law to abide by...

It is said that if you look closely and long enough at the Iroko, you will see that which inhabits it...

Could it be that we have lost that sense of reverence, the base, the foundation, the root of our inclination to conserve, preserve or reserve our preferred home, that which is above the earth, the environment?

The once tall and proud in stature, is listed as "near endangered" as its conservation status... And by our linked status, ours...

We live in an era where lore is lost to us, where we hardly have the time to look closely and long enough at the Iroko to see that the spirit that inhabits it, is the future...

To serve, to see life as a duty to the environment, is a demonstration of reverence, today, for the future of our preferred home...

Conserve  
Preserve  
Reserve















***“Geo-Politics II” (A Break For The Border)***

Oil on canvas  
100 x 80 cm  
2017

Borders can be described figuratively as lines inscribed in the earth. Lines that indicate how far cultural differences extend...

They have a character that seems to demand that they remain as static as they should be dynamic...

Crossing borders usually requires an appraisal of oneself of the customs of the territory beyond the line...

In the world today and Africa in particular, the awareness of traditions and customs, their uniqueness and fascination seems to have waned..

Or could it be, just maybe, be simply attributed to the fact it isn't a big deal after all? Because, let's face it, an ever increasing list of items such as Akara (Bean Cakes) Jollof, Agbada and the like are easily cleared by customs at our borders.



## **Offside**

Oil on canvas  
213 x 122 cm  
2017

The most controversial of decisions it seems, for a match official is characterized by an ever changing perspective of the line of play... and sight...

Soccer has its place in the national psyche of most countries and for good reason.

As the "beautiful game" evolves, its viewership is increasingly accessed on screens and not in stadiums...

And the adoption of technology at the current rate, may see the discarding of the net, with time. And who has missed the fact that today there is a crystal ball at the center of the scene?





## ***Siesta II***

Oil on canvas  
150 x 120 cm  
2017

Calculating productivity may depend on the angle from which you approach the subject  
From experience we know sustained productivity nurtures the community...

From experience, we have observed that during rest hours, input naturally exceeds output...

Though it has been established that siesta could improve productivity levels, the situation on the ground seems to indicate that having adequate manpower does not always reflect in proportional levels of productivity, and maybe we have taken an inordinately long siesta before addressing this question...



***Seeking Insight***

Oil on canvas  
40 x 50cm  
2017



**Sight:**

Depth of field and focus are algorithms our brain computes to determine where we are, where we stand in the dimensions of space..

**Insight:**

Depth perception of the human spirit is an algorithm developed by the mind, for the heart to compute and determine where we stand in the moral dimension...



***Volunteer***

Oil on canvas  
90 x 135 cm  
2017

Volunteerism is that intuitive response to a call to share your most valued resource, your time...

One of the attributes of the character that heeds to this bidding is usually the character of one who has the ability to confidently manage this resource and share with others.





***Nostalgia IV (Family Portrait In Sepia)***

Oil on canvas  
90 x 120 cm  
2017

Have we collectively stopped to think of the value of nostalgia in our lives?

A domain in the past that generates pleasant associations and affections in the mind; personal or shared, it doesn't matter in the atmosphere of sepia hue...

Today is an opportunity to generate pleasant associations and affections with persons, entities, and locations, to generate nostalgia for the future ...





## IN CONVERSATION

**Sandra Mbanefo Obiako:** Mr. Butler, we're very delighted to be showcasing your work in Nigeria for the first time. How do you feel?

**Victor Butler:** I feel very good about it. It's been a while since I first visited Nigeria and it feels very good to be coming back.

**SMO:** So I just wanted you to start at the beginning and tell us what was your first childhood memory, when you realized, "gosh, I am an artist!"

**VB:** Oh it goes back to when I was three years old. I can't remember all the details but my work was put in a classroom exhibition at Trinity School. They asked my parents to encourage me to continue with my gifts.

**SMO:** This was when you were three years old in pre-school?

**VB:** Yes, when I was three - four. I was supposed to be very advanced when it came to drawing. My mother thought it was my grandfather's genes because my grandfather Samuel Wood, was an artist and architect known for many of the iconic buildings in Accra and along the coast. He designed and supervised the building of Secindi Harbour, the Achimota School administration block, the Clock Tower at the University of Ghana, and parts of

Korle-Bu Hospital and Makola Market Number 2. But I had an interest in science. Art was more on the side line. It continued until it was time to go to university. Somewhere along the line it hit me that I'd like to be someone who could express what I felt about my life, and I sort of concentrated more on my paintings and gave up the other courses.

**SMO:** So what did you study?

**VB:** When I was seventeen, I was thinking of going into medicine and design. My idea was to study medicine but not practice -- instead I wanted to design equipment for medicine. My father, who was a professor of electronics, gave me a lot of ideas in electronics, design, art, and medicine. But after my A levels, I knew it was my destiny to become an artist. I couldn't do anything else. My father was making all the arrangements and when it was brought to his notice that I didn't want to continue with medicine but wanted to paint, it caused a rift between us, a rift that ended the morning of my first exhibition and my father became an avid advocate of children charting the course of their dreams, but with parental guidance and support.

My mother was more understanding because of her recognition of the gift I had, and she talked to my Dad. So I started on my first collection of work and by

the time I was 23, I had my first exhibition at the British Council in Accra which was quickly followed by a number of exhibitions in Paris. That's how everything started. I am a self-taught artist that stuck to my dream and I continued from there.

But I always say a gift and talent is not enough to establish anyone in a profession. I have done a lot of reading on art history and acquainted myself with the careers of prominent artists. Kobina Bucknor was my kind of contemporary artist. He lived just down the road from us and I spent time in his studio sometimes helping him to mix his colours. I was very proud showing him my sketches and he was a great influence. I was interested in expressionism and also liked the work of Picasso. But more than anything my interest and my inspiration comes from science and mathematics and its applications. Albert Einstein and Isaac Newton have very strongly influenced my career as an artist.

**SMO: Definitely I can see a strong influence of science and mathematics in your work. Probably also the earth sciences because of the unique perspectives and different materials and textures which appear in your work. Please take us through your artistic process. How do you start a painting and how do you know when it's finished?**

**VB:** I usually start with a theme or concept in my mind. So for instance with *Nuance*, the subtitle is *The Whisperings of the Soul* which inspired me to look at the fact that in the world today, a lot of things which are perceived are barely defined. When you look closely, many things have found their way into a picture which might not necessarily be worth making any attribution to the final product. I can give you an example if you pick one of the paintings to illustrate my point.

**SMO: What about *The Lure of the Moon*?**

**VB:** In physics the moon influences and determines the tides and the fluid content of the planet. Now traditionally in Ghana among the Akan and the coastal tribes the moon seemed to have a very significant role in determining festivals and the calendar. The word for moon is the same word for month and deity/spirit. When you explore how the moon influences us in our everyday lives you might not think that the moon is having a direct effect on us.

The Akan calendar is a very interesting calendar. Every month is not always exactly 30 days, some are 42 days, 12 days longer, but it still has to fit into a seven day week. The calculation is based on the fact that in the cycle of the moon in a year, there is usually a little discrepancy. The Gregorian calendar has been able to work it out by making February a 29 day month, making the 12 months. But traditionally the Akan calendar is very interesting because the calculation is

not based literally on which month follows which, but which month is going to allow for the 42 day month. And that month invariably falls between October and September. This marks a very interesting period in the calendars around the world. It marks the Passover (in the Jewish calendar) and the Akan have the Ogu Afeshe and Akwasidae festivals. And most global festivals seem to fall around September to October, take Halloween. Everything seems to be around the month that has a latitude for 42 or 32 days. I believe the moon's influence is something we cannot ignore. In Ghana today people don't make much of a big deal about the moon and it's phases, but it must have been a very important part of the everyday lives of our ancestors. I was thinking that we have to be able to find a link with how our ancestors lived and how we should live today because the moon has an effect on our everyday lives.

**SMO: Very interesting. So in the painting we see a human form carrying multiple layers of faces and eyes with different visions. They are all being carried by one pair of legs which is stepping into another plain or space.**

**VB:** I just wanted to say that we can identify ourselves as one entity with the moon on the other side.

**SMO: You have this incredible way of having a multiplicity of forms and perspectives all in the same context, but each of them appears to play a very**

**different role. Your work is so multilayered. How do you come up with these concepts? The more I look at your work the more I see. It's like a science fiction movie you walk into it and all of a sudden you are part of a virtual reality experience in fantastical landscapes.**

**VB:** Well I think that when you want to address a topic, you can decide at which level you make a statement. If you look at the painting called *Offside* for instance, the background looks like a wall with a lot of faces. But if you look closely you're seeing faces but there are no eyes in that painting. Everything which you are seeing out of, is another mouth. I believe that in football these days everybody's a pundit and has something to say. The vision is left to the official because we have more to say than what we see. So if you look closely at that painting there's an illusion that you're seeing faces but there are no eyes in that painting only mouths in the background.

We also have a crystal ball at the center of the painting because one of the trajectories in football is technology enhanced predicting and betting. Betting has become a big part of football. Predicting a match seems sometimes to be more important to many of the people viewing, than the skills that are supposed to be at play on the field. When you have a collection titled *Nuance* without making sure that every little detail is there, the 'Nuance' will evade you.



**SMO: I was just thinking about *Guardians of the Night* which has all these intricate layers of different landscapes.**

**VB:** Yes. When it comes to the feeling of security in our lives or family or in the community, it is not just a flat plain. It is a multilayered approach to having that feeling of security, and it usually involves others and not ourselves. That was the initial thought that determined the structure of that painting. In the middle there is a thin line. If you had a magnifying glass you would be able to see that there are two men holding staffs. Sometimes, when I'm painting, I'm able to let my brush produce what I can't really view with my eyes unless you have a magnifying glass. These two men actually have faces and they have staffs in their hands. That is what keeps me excited about the work; the fact that the artist is just the medium. You are able to get the thoughts and inspiration so that nothing is missed. *Nuance* means a lot to me because I get to capture everything that I have been thinking about for a while.

**SMO: There's also a very strong African essence in your work which as you said, draws on your traditional roots including language and customs. You talked about customs being the boundaries of community. Your work is so strongly tethered to the African soul and yet it's also so futuristic. In *Portmanteau* for example, the women have avatars. It kind of reminds me of the new movie, *Black Panther*, which is a fusion of African traditions and futuristic technology and advanced science.**

**VB:** I haven't watched it yet because I have literally been living in my own little world, but I have *Black Panther* on my wish list for when I have a little more time.

**SMO: Your work, like *Black Panther*, is futuristic with a strong pull to take us into a world beyond.**

**VB:** The future for me is the reason why we are here now. The future for me is a time when you will find that language, art, and everything comes together as one. If you look carefully at *Portmanteau*, I think you've described it very well when you say the women seem to have avatars. We are all part of another that makes us complete like a portmanteau. I am very intrigued by language. You say traditions are customs, but the word *custom* also refers to crossing a border and declaring what you are carrying across. When you're crossing from one country to another you go through *customs*. It's a very big word that we also use to define our traditions. It's interesting that even the human brain sometimes makes sure that we have something common in the way that we express ourselves.

**SMO: You have an incredible ability to express yourself in language. You said you love language. How does your brain focus on one and not the other meaning? Is it not sometimes very confusing or do you just go with the flow?**

**VB:** One thing that I noticed very early about myself is that I'm able to look at a situation and see many layers and arguments. When it comes to an individual work, I'm really focused on the content, but if the work is part of a collection, then there must be a link to the others.

**SMO: Do you listen to music when you work?**

**VB:** Yes I listen to music a lot. Music is a very important additional dimension of artistic expression. But it's interesting that with this collection, I worked in a lot of silence. I usually have my playlists ready but I think with this particular collection there was a lot coming together. I get very sensitive to what is influencing me. If I'm listening to a classical piece, I'm analyzing it while I'm painting. With this collection I did a lot of the work in silence. When somebody decides to create an artistic piece, it could be music, writing, art, or software, it's because the person is inspired and gives the inspiration a tangible form. So when I'm listening to music and I'm thinking about what might have influenced the musician to produce that song which might become a distraction when I'm painting or it could be an inspiration to push or help me along.

**SMO: You have a piece that shows three female forms walking into a thicket of Iroko trees. The trees have faces and feet. I just watched a rather interesting documentary by Dame Judi Dench who loves trees.**

**She explores how trees communicate and are linked through their root system. I find your painting very intriguing. How does nature influence your art?**

**VB:** Well I'll say in a very big way. Nearly everyday, I spend a little time in my garden. I do maybe an hour of gardening for exercise. I like to cut my lawn myself. Although during the last few weeks with my busy schedule my lawn has grown an afro. I even have a few birds that are my friends in my garden, that when they see me passing they don't fly away. Nature is the only template for learning. Nature is our home.

There are certain species that we've come to rely on and that rely on us. I found that many communities in Ghana settle near the Iroko and the silk cotton tree. It's difficult to find any settlement along the coast that does not have a prominent silk cotton tree somewhere in the center of the village or the town. The interesting thing about the Iroko tree is that it seems to stand on the ground. The root system looks like somebody stuck it there as opposed to it coming out of the ground. There are many myths and legends that are associated with that tree. It is so majestic that when you are under it, it blocks out the sky. It stands up and stands against anything. But the sad thing is that it makes excellent wood for flooring and cabinets so it's now endangered. Nature actually inspires me a lot because what we do to nature is a reflection of how we see ourselves.

**SMO: Many of your landscapes are quite arid similar to the Grand Canyon with petrified soil.**

**VB:** I was inspired by archaeological finds in the north of Ghana to the east of Tamale, where they found these figurines on the ground after it rained. The locals said they fell from the sky. It was discovered that it was widespread erosion which was bringing them up. This was about a year after my first exhibition. I'd never been to the north of Ghana before and the land there was so flat, that one could see about 50 miles all around; it really made a big impression on me. At the back of my mind I'll say we all have a destiny but in the end they say you are dust and you shall return to dust. Amongst the Akan the word for being is tree; a human being is symbolized as a human tree.

**SMO: You've been a full time studio artist now for many years...?**

**VB:** 31 years this year.

**SMO: Over the years you've also taught art at the Ghana International School.**

**VB:** Yes, I taught for seven years.

**SMO: Does teaching and mentoring play a big role in your life and professional practice?**

**VB:** Yes it does. When you are teaching art its very interesting because the curriculum has decided for us who is going to get an A and who is not. But what determines an A in art does not necessarily depend on the person's level of inspiration. It's just the person's ability to convince an examiner. Teaching art puts you in that particular position where somebody calls you and says something like 'Mr. Butler I'm trying to draw a pineapple but I can't seem to, I can get the outline but I can't paint the texture". There you are as a teacher being asked to let that person see the surface as you are seeing it and as you would render it, which I think is not fair. The teacher needs to analyze what the person has done already and guide and convince the person to let it look like the pineapple they have in their mind, as opposed to the pineapple that everybody thinks you should draw. I think that this approach to teaching, not only in art but in every discipline is the best way to educate a population.

**SMO: Yes I agree with you. Finding your true voice and your unique perspective on life is the path everyone is trying pursue. That's the difficult job of the artist. It's also a very lonely path because sometimes people don't get it. From the way you paint, your depth of perception, your incredible artistry in terms of detail and draftsmanship, and the way you manipulate perspective time, space, texture... there are very few who have reached your level of expertise. Do you sometimes feel lonely; that you don't have enough of a community?**



**VB:** Let me say that when I enter my zone, that space beyond the canvas, it is not a lonely place at all. It is a very exciting place to be, but when I do come back from that space, people should be able to see that I spent my time well. Once you've captured the reflection of what the inspiration was in your work. ... when you're painting to capture the essence, the feeling, the character, the personality of a subject or an object in the painting... I believe when people look at it there must be a certain common acceptance that this could not be any other way. When you walk in the corridors of your life, there are doors on either side and if you don't have a key to those doors, you just have to wait for the people to come out.

**SMO: Interesting. Would you consider yourself a spiritual person?**

**VB:** Maybe apart from your soul, I think the largest percentage of being is spirit, the smallest being is the body.

**SMO: I like that a lot. The smallest percentage is our physical and the largest percentage is our spirit.**

**VB:** We all have to be aware of our larger selves, that we are more spiritual than anything else. The soul for me is the part of us that can congregate, the part of us that can grow wings, the part of us that

can morph, but the spirit is the part of us that is clearly defined as who you are and it defines when you can communicate, when you can interact with another.

**SMO: Yes indeed. What's your feeling about the future of Africa?**

**VB:** Well the best description of Africa for me is what a "Black Hole" is in Physics. That is something that has so much energy that matter itself does not exist in three-dimensions. It has immeasurable gravity and even light disappears in that space. We are supposed to be a black continent but what we are not realizing is the amount of critical mass that we have. A black hole has so much gravitation that it cannot be weighed by itself. Gravitation for me is the one aspect that maybe our leaders haven't really considered when it comes to what our potential is. Gravitation is the relative pull between one body and another based on its mass. A lot of mass has inertia, and when something has a lot of inertia, once you can get it rolling it is very difficult to stop. So Africa has a lot of potential. But we just need inspirational leaders to give this continent of ours a little push because when it starts rolling it is going to be very difficult to stop it. But we have to get out today and push.

**SMO: Thank you.**



## CV

D.O.B: 1 April 1964 Accra, Ghana.

### EXHIBITIONS

#### SOLO

- 1987** "Sample Expression" British Council Hall. Accra
- 1988** "Synopsis I" British Council Hall. Accra.
- 1989** "Concept I" British Council Hall. Accra.
- 1989** "Synopsis II" British Council Hall. Accra.
- 1989** "Deux Amies et une Baguette" France Residence. Accra.
- 1990** "Profile" Maple House (Canadian High Commission) Accra.
- 1991** "A Twentieth Of A Century" British Council Hall. Accra.
- 1995** "Inner Space" Italian Cultural Institute.
- 1996** "Beyond TheSurface" Catto Gallery London .
- 1998** "The Enigma" American Embassy. Accra.
- 1999** "Recent Paintings" Berj Art Gallery. Accra.
- 1999** "A Glance OfMind" Glaziers Hall. London.
- 2000** "An Old Highlife Tune" Ottawa, Canada.
- 2003** "Postures Of The Soul I" Johannesburg South Africa .
- 2004** "Postures Of The Soul II" Johannesburg South Africa.
- 2005** "Recent Works" Accra.
- 2005** "Textures Of The Mind" Accra.



## **GROUP**

- 1988** "Jeune Peinture" Grand Palais Paris.  
**1989** "Jeune Peinture" Grand Palais Paris.  
**1989** "Jeune Expression" Galerie Du Nesle Paris.  
**1990** "Jeune Peinture" Grand Palais Paris. .  
**1991** "A Group Of African Artists" World Bank.  
Washington DC

## **OTHER**

Associate Senior Art Teacher At The Ghana  
International School 1988-90 & 1993-1999  
ECRAG Award  
For Artist Of The Year 1991. WEST AFRICA  
Magazine -Artist Of The Year 1996.

## **NATIONAL COLLECTIONS**

Ghana (Official Residence of the President,  
Parliament House, Accra City Hall).  
The Government And The People Of France.











# CURATOR



Sandra Mbanefo Obiagio is a multi-faceted writer, photographer, poet, art collector & curator, and award winning filmmaker. She has curated art shows and worked with the local creative industry to promote the best of Nigerian art.

She ran the communications program in Sub-Saharan Africa for environmental group, WWF International for eight years before founding and running Communicating for Change, a media for development social enterprise in Nigeria for fourteen years. She is a social activist and her campaigns, films, radio programs and publications have touched on themes such as human rights, women's empowerment, health including HIV & AIDS, environment, democracy and good governance. She organized conferences, workshops, and symposia for Nigeria's growing film industry and helped develop a course on Media Enterprise at the Pan African University.

Obiagio produced and directed many films over the years, including a five-part documentary film series, Red Hot: Nigeria's Creative Industries, featuring artists from the film, music, performance and visual arts sectors. She was Associate Producer of the feature film, Half of A Yellow Sun, adapted from the award winning novel by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

She has been involved in many community initiatives and served as a trustee of the Convention on Business Integrity (CBI), was a member of the Advisory Council of the Nigerian National Film Institute and has served as a member of the jury of the Nigeria Media Merit Awards. Obiagio is a Fellow of the Aspen Institute's African Leadership Initiative for West Africa (ALIWA) and has served as Sunday School teacher since her teens. She received an M.A in Telecommunications from Michigan State University, and a Bachelor of Education degree in English and German from the University of Manitoba, in Canada. She is happily married with three children.





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.

Over the years Temple Muse has developed a reputation as being one of the leading art spaces in Nigeria having hosted a number of critically acclaimed exhibitions, and through continuously offering its clients cutting edge contemporary art.

[www.temple-muse.com](http://www.temple-muse.com)







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 has expertise in organizing symposia, conferences, training and events, which provide a platform for the creative industry to inspire and strengthen humanity's aspiration for the good society.

#### Priority Areas:

Art Curating  
Research & Documentation  
Valuation  
Events  
Film & Photography  
Training & Artist Talks

For more information contact  
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[www.smocontemporary.com](http://www.smocontemporary.com)







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