

C F H K L



STOP  
LXSYEN

January 22  
— February 12,  
2021



## **Stop, listen!**

### **Contemporary Nigerian art at CFHILL**

Diverse, dynamic and as rich in nuances as its nation is in people. The Nigerian art scene is flourishing and it is with great pleasure, CFHILL presents a meticulously curated exhibition with eighteen of the most exciting Nigerian contemporary artists of the new generation, based in Nigeria or living in the USA or Europe as part of the Nigerian diaspora. In *Stop, listen!* their work engages in dialogue with the observer in a vast array of expressions. While some create with strong ties to their ancestral roots, others choose to portray present-day events, reflecting both social, cultural and political aspects of Africa's most populous country.

Matt, saturated surfaces, or a glossy finish, a sublime blend of figurative motifs with abstract elements or hyper-realism with fine detailing, accentuating each pore of the selected subject's skin to perfection. One of the main benefits of art exhibitions where work originating from a specific geographical region is presented, is the opportunity to highlight the varied visual expressions that creatives with the same national backgrounds may possess.

CFHILL is a platform where artistic freedom is encouraged and freedom of speech is considered a basic human right, therefore we allow each individual artist to throw light on the many complexities their work intend to touch upon. If one is to name a common thread in the included artists' practices, it is their ability to create sensational art.

Michael Elmenbeck

Michael Storåkers

Anna-Karin Pusic

*A Conversation About Art in Nigeria*  
with **Adenrele Sonariw.**



## **Adenrele Sonariwo**

Born — Washington D.C, USA  
Lives and works — Lagos, Nigeria  
Instagram — @adenrelesonariwo

**Adenrele Sonariwo is the founding director of Rele Art Gallery and Rele Arts Foundation and the initiator of YOUNG CONTEMPORARIES, an artist training and residency program providing young Nigerian artists with resources to further their artistic practices.**

**You lived abroad for several years and then moved back to Nigeria where you have been expanding the Nigerian art scene by exhibiting young contemporary artists, introducing them to both the Nigerian and the international art market. What inspired you to set up the gallery and the foundation?**

— I started the gallery about six years ago primarily as a response to what I was witnessing within the art and culture space in Nigeria. I felt like the energy, the spirit of the young people wasn't necessarily captured within the culture space. As a gallery, we are committed to presenting the works of some of the most dynamic contemporary artists from Nigeria. Finding ways to nurture young artists is what led to the creation of foundation that we launched about a year after the gallery was founded. The foundation is the institution that organizes the 'Young Contemporaries Program', which we are now in the sixth edition of; it is a critical platform that provides young artists with the tools and resources needed to navigate the art world. In the last two years, we have incorporated a residency portion where the artists can move outside of their normal day to day life to a serene environment where they can feel inspired, develop their practice while receiving guidance from professionals and other established artists/mentors. It is beautiful to see how it has influenced young artists' practices and how it has been a catalyst for them to further their careers.

The foundation also organizes the Art Summit, which brings together top-leaders within the art Eco system to discuss issues within the art world.

**Amazing initiatives, especially since a lot of the younger artists I have been talking to have expressed the difficulties of breaking into the Nigerian art market and find collectors in Nigeria, ready to invest in their art the way collectors are doing abroad. How have you overcome the challenges connected to the introduction of young, unknown artists to the Nigerian art market?**

— The benefit of the institution we have built over the past six years, is that we were not only grooming a younger generation of artists but also a younger generation of collectors. One of the issues I saw in the beginning was that a lot of the collectors were older, and we couldn't rely on the same collectors to grow and develop the market. Now, a younger generation of collectors are emerging and sustaining the art market.

We can confidently say that alongside our international collector base, we also have a good solid group of collectors here in Nigeria, and they are increasing every day.

**So, a young, new generation of Nigerian art collectors, collecting art created by the young, new generation of Nigerian artists?**

— Yes, they are really interested in collecting and their patronage will be instrumental in positively shaping the art market here in Nigeria and Africa as a whole.

**Would you say that there are any distinctive qualities of contemporary Nigerian art? A lot of the works I have viewed include figurative motifs mixed with abstract elements, layers and patterns.**

— I do see that there are a good number of artists who work in that figurative space, but I wouldn't be quick to label it a contemporary Nigerian art aesthetic. With the gallery, we represent a very diverse group of artists that are not necessarily in that figurative space, but who have managed to create signature styles recognizable anywhere. This aesthetic that they have created is often rooted in their individual history, connected to where they are from and how they want to be identified.

**Do you have an overall theme or narrative that spans over your entire practice? A message you would like to convey that you infuse in your work continuously?**

— No not at all, I just feel like there is a lot of talent and stories here and the work that I am interested in doing is to continue to be a support system for those stories to be heard, to find both local and global connections. I am interested in telling balanced stories, raw, somewhat unfiltered and rooted in history, identity and authenticity.

**How do you view an exhibition like Stop, listen! with exclusively Nigerian artists?**

— Exhibitions such as this helps to shed light on the works of artists from a particular region. I encourage it as a starting point. The expectation from here on now is that you after this, find ways to present their work in a more global context. That is the sort of evolution I would like to see. So, start off this way, as an introduction to your audience, but let's not remain here.

**How was the very unique year of 2020 for you and looking ahead, what are your future plans for the gallery and the foundation?**

— We have actually had a really good year despite Covid-19, and now we are excited to be opening up a second space in Los Angeles, California in February, 2021. We are grateful to have kept our exhibition programming intact through 2020, but of course under strict protocols combined with virtual tours. Our artists have been very brave, creating work despite the anxiety and fear that the pandemic and End SARS protests presented. In the future we will keep expanding and of course, adapting to the times.







## **Ikeorah Chisom Chi-FADA**

Born — 2000 in Lagos, Nigeria

Lives and works — Owerri, Nigeria

Instagram — *@chi\_fada*

### **Could you introduce yourself please?**

— I am Ikeorah Chisom Chi-FADA, a contemporary figurative Visual Artist from Anambra State, Nigeria; born in 2000 in Lagos State, Nigeria. I grew up amongst very creative peers so artistic inspiration began at a very young age. I had a best friend at school who could draw exceptionally well too, we used to express ourselves using comics, drawing on walls, schoolbooks, chalkboards, anything we could find. We even sold sketches to our friends and got commissioned to draw assignment diagrams. We were usually sought after in school to help teachers draw illustrations and diagrams on boards. Being an artist as a young child gave me a lot of purpose and happiness and I became very passionate about it. My mum wasn't happy about it. My dad was also a draughtsman as a young man but he had to quit to "learn a real trade that pays". My mom didn't want to see me thread that path so she had my teachers disconnect me from my friend and stop me from drawing. Due to constant pressures, I had to entirely stop drawing as a kid. An incident occurred where I almost lost my only sister to a fire incident when I was six, I experienced trauma and depression as I young child and I found myself drawing secretly as a means of expressing my trauma. This incident is currently a recurring influence in my artistic practice. I began my career as a professional artist in 2018. My personal motivation is to create a legacy through my art that would make my father proud. He believed in my passion as an artist and supported me behind the scenes. The name Chi-FADA is a tribute to his influence on my personal development and my career as an artist.

### **How would you describe your artistic practice?**

— I would describe my artistic practice as "an evolving story" inspired by my personal experiences and association with my social environment. My artistic practice is imbued in the study of Black bodies as envelopes of personal experiences beyond the social construct of the skin. This practice allows me to explore the complexities of humanity. Every person has a story. Every face archives experiences that are psychologically and emotionally embedded. My goal as a figurative artist is to create work that is visually poetic and at the same time, deifies my subjects in their domestic and safe spaces whilst telling their stories and my own stories through a visually poetic play of light, composition, texture, patterns and the use of charcoals and acrylic on canvas. With this, I hope that my work can become a catalyst to trigger self-discovery of value, beauty, and significance among people who in some way may feel marginalized. Additionally, I desire to invite viewers to discover and value the humanity of various backgrounds and beliefs. Life is a continual experience of discovery and it presents an intricate maze of challenges and opportunities for each one of us to navigate. This is a journey, and I am exploring this journey through my paintings."

### **Can you explain some elements of your works? Why do you paint in bright colours? Is the flame seen across your works inspired by your sister's incident? And why do you have borders around your paintings?**

— Most elements in my works are consciously or subconsciously inspired by my background and personal experiences. I grew up across several Nigerian Catholic homes, even though my parents weren't Catholic. All of these homes had celestial paintings with Jesus or Mary painted in very bright colors. As a child passionate about art, I was fascinated and curious, and I got to understand that the artist painted them that way to show how glorious and divine they were. Some of my many influences are from Dutch Baroque painters like Vermeer, Caravaggio and Rembrandt and even more recent contemporary painters like Gregg Kreutz and the Nigerian maestro Tega Akpokona. I am fascinated by the way these artists tell their stories with the play of light. Asides role of light in centering my subject as the focal point of the composition, light in darkness signifies hope which is also an important narrative in my works. Yes, the flames recurring in my works are inspired by my sister's incident. Seeing her maintain a positive attitude going through such experience at a very young age is the most inspiring lesson I have had to learn. It shaped my mindset that her having to pass through that made her stronger and more courageous. Using the flames now in my paintings is a metaphor signifying a transition from being ordinary to immortal. As an undergraduate of Urban and Regional Planning, when we draw city plans, we draw borders around them to center the drawings and help the viewer focus on the plan with other components of the plan placed at the side. Adopting this into my practice as an artist, by employing patterned borders in my paintings, I aim to make the viewer connect intimately within the composition of the painting.

### **What does your work included in this exhibition aim to say?**

— The three works included in this exhibition are excerpts from the Stories of Gold project titled Bosah in Gold, Derrah's Seat at the Table and The Fist respectively. Bosah in Gold is a painting with my friend, Chiderah Bosah as the sitter. The painting was created during a private residency during the heat of the End SARS protests against unjust killings, police brutality and profiling of the youths in Nigeria. At the moment, the fragility of human existence and the responsibility of documenting history and immortalizing our people became heavy on me as an artist. As an artist using his art as a journal of his personal experiences, documenting the life of friends who have left me with a story to tell through my paintings that would be read for generations to come has become a purpose. A purpose to tell the golden stories of my people by creating a space that honors their presence and place in and through culture and time through my paintings Derrah's Seat at the Table is a continued conversation to Bosah in Gold in the Stories of Gold project.

The painting was inspired by my conversation on our responsibilities as young Nigerian contemporary artists championing a cultural revolution and the fate of the next generation. In recent times, it is said that Black artists are now being given a place at the table in the art scene. How are we being offered a place at the table when we own the table? Painted on the table is a book titled *Black Futures*; a book focused on the radical, provocative and gorgeous world that Black creators are bringing forth into history. At a time when it is fragile to live as a young Nigerian creative, it is vital that I paint about the legacies we intend to leave behind and tell a story that would be read for generations to come. Experiencing the End SARS protests left me with a mind-shift and a quest for self-discovery. I saw power play in a way that I had never seen it happen. I realized how powerful we are with our “fists” held high in unity. We were so powerful, that innocent protesters were shot at with guns and ammunitions. This was the inspiration behind the painting titled *The Fist*. Beyond a tool for fighting a place in the world and against injustice, the act of making *The Fist* is a culture; if culture is defined as the way of living, as a young Nigerian, I have had to live through injustice with my fist as the only system of getting justice. With *The Fist*, I hope to document power into history to empower the future generations to come and ignite a self-discovery of how powerful they also can be – as a force in unity with their fists.

#### **As an artist in Nigeria, what are some of the challenges?**

— Every society has its peculiar challenges which in most cases, depending on the artist, can become inspiration or motivation to work harder. Besides the basic challenges of lack of institutions like museums and the mismanagement of available community art centers, the biggest challenge I face as a Nigerian artist, is living with the stereotype that perceives most Nigerians as fraudsters and that, in Nigeria, sees every artist as “starving”. You can almost taste the disrespect in your tongue when you get to interact with most gallerists, curators, collectors or art patrons because of these stereotypes. However, like I said earlier, I really do accept this as a motivation to work harder and leave a legacy that overturns this stereotyping for good.

#### **Can you talk about the artist community in Nigeria? The connection and the support between young artists.**

— I belong to a brotherhood of artists called *The Kolony*. It is a fraternity of young hardworking Nigerian artists dedicated to pushing each other’s goals and dreams by constantly motivating and supporting each other with every resource or platform we have individually. We are members from different ethnicities, tribes and even religions, but we are connected to each other, female or male as brothers.

When personal motivation fails, motivation from the brotherhood never fails. It is a blessing to know that as an artist, you have a support system that is unbiased and non-pretentious. I am also proud that almost all the artists participating in this show are members of *The Kolony*. It is proof that we are moving proud and collectively towards a common goal of pushing a cultural revolution and putting Nigerian contemporary art in a global conversation.

#### **What are your hopes for the future of Nigerian art?**

— My biggest hope for Nigerian artists is to see them awarded with the respects and accolades for all of the hard work and passion they dedicate to their crafts. Nigerian artists are undoubtedly the most hardworking artists in the world and I hope we get included in global conversations on the same pedestal with artists from other parts of the world without stereotyping, prejudice and disrespect. I also hope that we get to have more museums, foundations and institutions that can support Nigerian artists. I am always highly inspired by the goal driven passion and work drive in young Nigerian artists and I hope that one day, I can support the culture and build programs and residencies that can keep the passion of the future young Nigerian artists burning.

#### **Are there any other Nigerian contemporary artists that inspire you and you think are worth looking out for?**

— There are a lot of them! Besides those already in this exhibition; Anthony Ugbo, Kolawole Olawale, Taiwo Adebayo, Julius Agbaje, Wahab Saheed, Anne Adams the Clay Bender, Enoch Chinweuba and the list goes on and on.

**Exhibitions:** (2020) *Black Voices Friend of my Mind*, Black Voices US Edition curated by Destinee Ross-Suttons. Ross Suttons Gallery, New York. (2020) *Young Contemporaries Bootcamp Exhibition*, Rele Gallery, Lagos. (2019) *Acquire Signature and SOGAL*, Signature Galleries, Lagos. (2019) *Revisiting Pan Africanism*, Kan Festival, Urusha, Tanzania, (2019) *Resilience*, Ministry of Arts and Culture, National Gallery of Arts, Enugu, Nigeria (2018) *Art In my City Festival*, I Can Draw Africa in collaboration with British Council and House 33 Gallery, Abuja, Nigeria. (2021) *Stop, listen!*, CFHILL Art Space, Stockholm, Sweden.





Previous page:

**Ikeorah Chisom Chi-FADA**

*A Voice to the Dreams of Many*

2020

Acrylic, charcoal,  
gold paint on canvas

Signed and Thumbprinted

153 x 123 cm

**Ikeorah Chisom Chi-FADA**

*The Fist*

2020

Acrylic, charcoal and metallic  
gold paint on canvas

76 x 76 cm





**Ikeorah Chisom Chi-FADA**

*Derrah's seat at the table*

2020

Acrylic, charcoal and metallic gold  
paint

on canvas

114 x 102 cm



George C.  
2011-2012



**Ikeorah Chisom Chi-FADA**

*Bosah in Gold*

2020

Acrylic, charcoal and metallic gold  
paint

on canvas

102 x 114 cm





## **Ozoemena Nzubechukwu**

Born — 1999 in Benin City, Nigeria

Lives and works — Benin, Nigeria

Instagram — *@blackonwhitegoodness*

### **Could you tell us a bit about your background?**

— I was born in Benin, Nigeria in the year 1999 into a family of six. I had my elementary and secondary education in Benin and I am currently pursuing a degree in architecture from the University of Benin, Nigeria. So, you could say I have lived here all my life. I wouldn't say I grew up around art, but I was greatly influenced by art. I think I started scribbling from age ten, and I moved on to making penciled portrait sketches for friends and family members, and I then decided to go into professional painting in mid 2019.

### **How would you describe your artistic practice?**

— I often think of my art practice like a unfettered spring of running water, with an abundance of ideas and inspiration. Most of my artistic process comes with a lot of thoughts and feelings about how my art would influence people. My works are mainly in acrylics, also most of my muses who are family members, are painted in black paint. I feel using black paint to depict the Black skin is wholesome and sends a sense of the richness of Africa to everyone. I place my muses around architectural elements and its spaces, that is, when I am not making portraits.

### **What does your work included in this exhibition aim to say? You have spoken about the Black narrative, what does that entail?**

— The two portrait pieces I created for this exhibition, would be talking about the just ended End SARS protest, where the youth of Nigeria went into the streets to air their displeasure over the unwarranted killings by the now disbanded SARS. When I was contacted by the exhibition assistant of CFHILL Art Space in Stockholm saying they have been following what has been happening in Nigeria, and they would like to create an exhibition, I was thrilled of the fact that the youth of Nigeria fought for what they thought right and the world got to know about it. I feel that this exhibition comes as a knight in shining armour to cause everyone to actually Stop and listen to what the younger generation has to say. We have seen all over the world that Black people have always been ill-treated just because of the colour of their skin. The Black narrative talks about the emancipation of Black people from all forms of injustice and modern-day slavery, this is why in my paintings, I paint my muses in a bold demeanour, the aura around them speaks authority, there is no need to hide behind the glass.

### **So, you view being in an exhibition with solely Nigerian artists positive?**

— Being in an exhibition like this with just Nigerian artists, I think it is consolidating, consolidating what has already begun – a vanguard of the new age contemporary artists.

I wouldn't think there is any disadvantage to this. It is really great coming together with people of like minds creating together in different perspectives and reaching for one goal, it is simply amazing and I am humbled to be part of it.

### **As an artist in Nigeria today, what are some of the challenges?**

— There are innumerable challenges an artist creating in Nigeria faces on a daily basis. For one, there isn't enough recognition and support for emerging artists in Nigeria, only established artists tend to be on the scene and you are only taken seriously when you have started getting recognition on the international art scene. Also, artists grants aren't tenable for Nigerian artists. Creating art is really expensive and these grants do help to sustain practice. There are materials I would have loved to acquire but I can't due to the expensive nature of these materials, so I think art grants and incentives should be encouraged. Also, there aren't enough exhibition programs where we could showcase our works. Most of the exhibitions being carried out as of now, are organized by private individuals and galleries with little or no assistance from the Nigerian government.

### **How does being Nigerian influence your work?**

— Being Nigerian influences my practice in a lot of ways, but one that really stands out is the doggedness of the average Nigerian to leap through hurdles that may come our way, this does apply in my work I think, to create and hope that a lot of people would experience my art someday, one brush stroke at a time.

What are your hopes for the future of Nigerian art?

I feel there has been an immense recognition of emerging Nigerian artists on the international level, but still there is more to hope for. It would be priceless to see more works of Nigerian artists in international museums and art centers. I would really love for more people to experience Nigerian art through international exhibitions.

### **Finally, what are your greatest sources of inspiration?**

— My greatest inspiration comes from my immediate environment, being Igbo (Igbo is a major ethnic group in Nigeria), life and artists who have come before me, it would be impossible if I am to name them all. I think the ability to create what wasn't in existence before you made it, is a gift, and I wouldn't trade it for anything.



**Ozoemena Nzubechukwu**

*Should we forget 20.10.20?*

2020

Acrylics on canvas

66 x 61 cm

**Ozoemena Nzubechukwu**

*Because we had long ropes for hair*

2020

Acrylics on canvas

63 x 49 cm



Nzambi Ndlovu

## Talut Kareem

Born — 1994 in Lagos, Nigeria  
Lives and works — Lagos, Nigeria  
Instagram — @talut.kareem

### Can you tell us a bit about your background please?

— I am Talut Kareem, I am Lagosian, I was born and raised in Lagos. Art for me started as a passion. As a kid I would always draw, even when my teacher would give me an assignment I would always draw figures in it. Today I am grateful that I decided to pursue art professionally. I have studied Mass Communication in college but felt it was not the right choice for me, so I decided to go to Art School at the University of Lagos. The training there, although self-developed, was both practical and theoretical and we learnt Art History, both African and European. I majored in sculpture and created sculptural works in iron and clay as well as in wood. At that time, I was not painting yet, then I started later and my painting skills are self-taught.

### So how did your painting practice come about?

— After my schooling, I got my studio and I started to get inspired by the people around me. Before I started to paint though, I was drawing in black and white. I was a pencil artist, that was my special skill. I used it as a form of therapy as at that time I was going through a depression and felt the need to put my feelings on a paper. I disconnected from people and blurred out the faces of the subjects in my drawings. That work was very personal to me, I mainly used it to reflect my own reality.

### How are people in Nigeria reacting when you tell them you are an artist?

— Nowadays, it has improved but before people would not take it seriously. My parents for example, it was a lot for them to take in that I had decided on this career path. They thought it was a waste of time.

### How did you go from drawing in black and white to the introduction of colours in your practice and the spherical shapes that we now see in your more recent work?

— That actually came out of the need of being able to be flexible. I experimented and out of that came the colours and spherical shapes. I have always wanted to introduce colours into my practice, as I don't want to get stuck in a box. What techniques I use depend a lot of what type of mood I am in and what my source of inspiration is at the time. I reflect the things that influences me in my art.

### Can you talk about the pieces that are included in this exhibition?

— I was part of the protests (The End SARS). That whole period was joyous to me as it had been a long time coming and it was an eye opener for every youth in Nigeria.

That was the first time, apart from football, an event brought young people together, joint for the same cause. What was important for me as an artist in relation to that, was to portray the unity amongst the people of Nigeria. The togetherness of the youth of Nigeria, how we defend each other and how we are there for each other.

### What are your hopes for the future of Nigerian art?

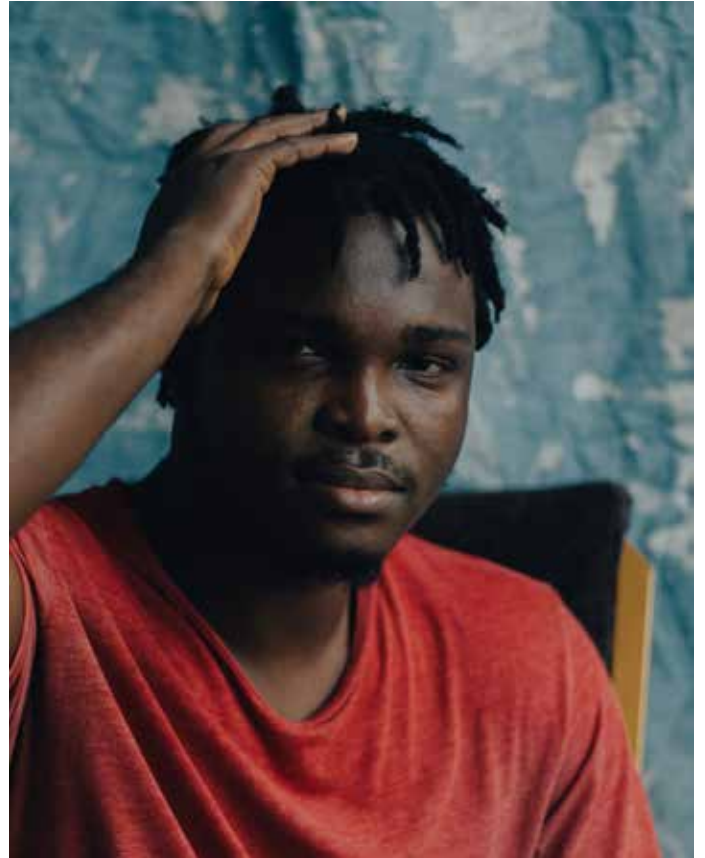
— My hopes for the future are that Nigerian art starts to get the recognition it deserves right here in Nigeria. That the art community here starts to appreciate Nigerian artists.

### Because you as a Nigerian artist gain more appreciation abroad, in Europe and the US than you do in Nigeria?

— Yes, I am speaking for the young artists now though, because the older and established ones get more appreciation. I just hope that in time we young Nigerian artists will get the same feedback here as we already get abroad.

**Exhibitions:** (2020) *Conversations*, Nosa Creatives, Lagos, Nigeria, Latitudes Art Fair, Online Sales Exhibition, *Sublime: Between Solid and Vapor*. Rele Art Gallery (2018) *Next of Kin*, Thought Pyramid Art Centre, Lagos, Nigeria. (2021) *Stop, listen!*, CFHILL Art Space, Stockholm, Sweden.

**Artist Residence:** Young Contemporaries, 3x3x3 Artists in Residence.











Previous page:

**Talut Kareem**

*Mowa pelu e 1 (I'm with you)*

2020

Charcoal and acrylic on canvas

70 x 90 cm



**Talut Kareem**

*Mowa pelu e z (I'm with you)*

2020

Charcoal and acrylic on canvas

91 x 122 cm

## **Temitayo Ogunbiyi**

Born — 1984 in New York, USA  
Lives and works — Lagos, Nigeria  
Instagram — *@temitayostudio*

### **Could you introduce yourself please?**

— My name is Temitayo Ogunbiyi and I am a visual artist based in Lagos, Nigeria. My practice explores the relationship between the environment, line, and representation. I seek to create connections between the present and the past, thinking about revisiting factions of history that I find to be compelling, distorted or worthy of interrogation. This includes looking at our environment and how human gestures and actions can respond to what is witnessed and felt. In this understanding, human beings are part of the environment and not separate from it. How can we really chronicle our contemporaneity in conversation with historicized and present states, telling new stories, bringing together disparate references and thinking about finding similarity in difference, while celebrating contrast?

### **Can you talk about the work of yours included in this exhibition?**

— So, there are three works of mine in this exhibition, two are on paper and one on found fabric. The one on canvas was completed in 2019 and is titled *You will not need a reason to find shelter or ice cream*, and it really marks the beginning of my return to painting. I took too many painting classes and needed to take a break from the medium in order to re-discover it for myself. So, the interpretation of that work is that you will always have protection and time to indulge. I think of my kids and the joy that ice cream brings them. As adults do we indulge in joy enough? One of my works on paper is titled *You will know and confront your great grandmother's taboos*, and this one is somewhat a self-portrait for me because the botanical reference is taro or cocoyam, as some call it here in Nigeria. I was told my grandmother never ate it, that it was taboo in Aboh, her village in Delta, a state in East Nigeria. Cocoyam is one of my favorite root vegetables.

### **Why was it taboo?**

— I think someone long ago ate it and fell ill so it then was decided that it was not to be eaten. It is fascinating how one isolated incident can inform a whole belief system. And I believe this applies to many histories. If you look at western history, we are taught to believe in centralized narratives that are probably only based on a few people's opinions, but those are the opinions that were written down and have been re-produced and propagated throughout history as truth. So, for me this piece is very much about taking the time to internalize the assumptions that we inherit and think about whether we agree. The last work on paper is titled *You will cycle through your circle of life*, and touch people in an instant (Dorine, 8th January 2021). On January 8th I got some really sad news that a colleague of mine had passed away.

I considered him a new friend whom I had just met through this fellowship that I am doing. He was such an incredible artist, working across dance, choreography and performance primarily. I thought of how touched I was by his work. And before getting to know his work, I was really moved by the contributions that he had made to our conversation as part of this fellowship. And these feelings helped me to read and therefore finish this work. I wanted to honor him, and remember him. The spiral configuration is often translated into 'circle of life' in adire motifs, which is a pictorial language that was once very popular in South West Nigeria, which is where I currently live.

### **What about the materials you have chosen?**

— Two of the pieces are on herbarium paper, which is a type of paper that has been used to mount plant specimens for many centuries. In 2018, I took part in a Smithsonian Artist in Research Fellowship, and one part of my research was to look at the National Museum of Natural History and its archives of plant specimens, botanical drawings. Significant takeaways for me were the ways in which these plants were classified, how they were organized in a manner that I interpreted as placing the west at the centre. And so, my choice of herbarium paper, which is archival for the sake of science rather than for the sake of art, is to really confront the biases in the history that we learn about how plants are classified and the justification for their classification; like the shape of the seeds and the leaves. We must remember that there are other ways that one might classify living organisms in our midst. How does it make sense that two plants that are closely related, but one can be eaten and one is labeled as inedible, are named similarly, just because they look similar? It seemed in my research, that a lot of these classifications are very, very arbitrary. I like to continually think about how we understand the system of classification, how we depend on it, and the fact that there are other options. There are other ways to just think about how we understand history and how we understand the relationship that has been historicized and that we need not accept these relationships as true, but in fact, we can develop our own way of critically revisiting these histories in line of what we are experiencing and witnessing today. I am excited to show the works on paper and the painting together for the first time.

### **Speaking about classifications, how do you feel about the theme of having solely Nigerian artists in an exhibition in Sweden?**

— Everyone I have spoken to so far have very different opinions about it. Well, I think it is great to be showing in the company of fellow Nigerians. I think it is wonderful to have an exhibition that is focused on a country.



I mean we have seen so much written about contemporary African art and really, I always thought it is too broad of a category to engage at once. And so, I think that it is positive to focus on Nigeria and how diverse Nigerians can be. There are over 200 ethnic groups in Nigeria, each with its own unique traditions and systems. Acknowledging a multiplicity of histories, this exhibition can share narratives that may be more localized than the overarching contemporary African art genre. Thank you for sharing summarized views of other participants in the exhibition. Again, the diversity of their responses might help the audience better understand the complexity of Nigeria and reimagine the continent. But I also agree with those who say it would be nice if this type of exhibition could be a springboard for the artist to show in other contexts. I think the beautiful thing about being an artist is that as your work is shown in the context of other artists' work in different spaces, it can take on new meanings and can begin to exist in new ways both for the audience but also for you as an artist. And it has been some time since I last showed with this number of Nigerian artists—undoubtedly, we compose a cross section of an important community.

**Selected Solo Exhibitions and Projects:** (2020) *Giocherai nel quotidiano, correndo* (You will play in the everyday, running), Madre Museum, Naples, Italy, *Capillarité* (Capillaritis), 31Project, Paris. (2018) *You will find peace and play among palm trees, Freedom Park Playground*, Lagos, Nigeria. (2017) *Nothing in Nature is Private*, Medium Tings Gallery, Brooklyn, New York, USA. (2014) *A Nightmare's Daydreams*, Kongi's Harvest Gallery, Freedom Park, Lagos, Nigeria.

**Selected Group Exhibitions and Projects:** (2021) *Stop, listen!*, CFHILL Art Space, Stockholm, Sweden. (2020) *1:54 London*, 31 Project Art Paris, 31 Project Cape Town Art Fair, 31 Project (2019) *2nd Lagos Biennial*, Lagos, Nigeria. *Women on Aeroplanes*, TOR Art Space, Frankfurt, Germany (2018) *Strange Attractors* (a curatorial publication created as part of the 10th Berlin Biennale), Berlin Biennale 10, Berlin, Germany. *Talisman in the Age of Difference* (curated by Yinka Shonibare), Stephen Friedman Gallery, London, England. *Gallery of Small Things* (curated by Bisi Silva), Dakar, Senegal. *Women on Aeroplanes, Lagos Edition*, Centre for Contemporary Art Lagos, Nigeria. (2017) *Gallery of Small Things* (curated by Bisi Silva), Federal Palace, Lagos, Nigeria. *The Summer Show*, TAFETA Gallery, London, England. *1:54 New York*, TAFETA Gallery, USA.

**Selected Collections:** Merrill Lynch/Bank of America, New Jersey, USA. Sigma Pharm, Pennsylvania, USA. Museo Madre, Naples, Italy. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris, France. The Gold Truck Trust, Lagos, Nigeria. Omo Oba Yemisi Shyllon Foundation, Lagos, Nigeria.





**Temitayo Ogunbiyi**

*You will not need a reason to  
find shelter or ice cream*

2019

Varnished ink and acrylic on found fabric

137 x 91 cm





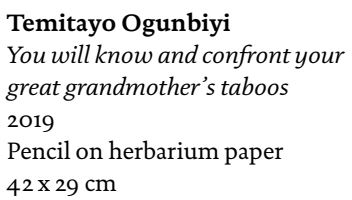
**Temitayo Ogunbiyi**

*You will cycle through your circle  
of life, and touch people in an instant  
(Dorine, 8th January 2021)*

2021

Pencil and acrylic on herbarium paper

42 x 29 cm



*You will know and confront your  
great grandmother's taboos*

Pencil on herbarium paper

42 x 29 cm



## **Adegboyega Adesina**

Born — 1998 in Lagos, Nigeria

Lives and works — Lagos, Nigeria

Instagram — @zacchore

### **Could you tell us a bit about your background?**

— I was born and raised in Lagos, Nigeria which is the state with the highest rate of economic activities in my country, so it houses people of diverse cultures and states around the country, all working to make ends meet with so much competition in the air. It is often regarded as a “No man’s land” in Nigeria.

### **How would you describe your artistic practice?**

— I would describe it as a form of energy transfer from myself to my canvas as I am very particular about documentation of everything and anything. This is quite therapeutic for me as my works are masked emotions triggered by events that affect me directly or indirectly, hence creating a space for my imaginations and reality to coexist.

### **What does your work included in the exhibition aim to say?**

— They are works from my new body of work ALMOST DAY BREAK. In these exhibited works I captured a moment in the End SARS movement where Nigerians and Africans in the diaspora helped propagate this cry for solidarity, even though some have never been to Nigeria. I saw the likes of Kanye West, John Boyega, Rihanna, Beyoncé etc. lend their voices to support the movement. They felt just as affected and concerned as the actual citizens of Nigeria. This was also evident during the Black Lives Matter campaign, Blacks supporting Blacks. The digital age has helped create more connection between Blacks in the diaspora and their ancestral root. Absolutely worth documenting for me. The use of flowers is an element mimicking flowers of a fruit bearing plant which signals it is almost time for fruit harvest. I have held on to the memory of the much-displayed unity, love and activism during the End SARS protest by Nigerian youths as a pointer and hope for a better Nigeria during my current restitutive phase from the tragic 20th of October 2020 genocide.

### **As an artist in Nigeria, what are some of the challenges?**

— The major challenge has been the narrative about art as a career path. The older generation here does not see art as lucrative or as valuable as the sciences and this is because of the limited opportunities Nigerian creatives are exposed to and also how a large part of the community sees artworks as a display of skill or talent not worth paying so much for. I am here to change that narrative and awaken my generation and generations to come.

### **How does being Nigerian influence your work?**

— There is so much about Nigeria, both historically and everyday events, that has been the supposed norm which is worth pondering on and exploring for someone as inquisitive as I am. I consistently ask questions challenging societal, cultural, political and traditional norms, seeking for solutions perhaps itching for the transcendental. I document every piece of the process on my canvas.

### **How do you feel about being in an exhibition with solely Nigerian artists?**

— I feel highly elated exhibiting with family, especially sharing the same voice at the show. No one can tell the story better than the first-hand witnesses.

### **What are your hopes for the future of Nigerian art?**

— Nothing short of positive. I see a booming scene already, as a number of Nigerian creatives are getting the global recognition they deserve. This is really inspiring the younger generation and I am proud to be part of the instrument of change too.

### **Who are your greatest sources of inspiration?**

— I adore Bisa Butler a lot. I also do a lot of study on Kehinde Wiley and Toyin Ojih Odutola. While working, I often have my ears plugged in with Fela, Wizkid, Santan Dave and Avelino... their songs give me the right vibe to channel my energy.

**Recent Exhibition:** (2021) *Stop, listen!*, CFHILL Art Space, Stockholm, Sweden. (2020) *LIMILANITY IN INFINITE SPACE* group exhibition Lagos, Nigeria.

**Adegboyega Adesina**  
*BROTHER'S KEEPER*

2020  
Charcoal, pastel and acrylic  
paint on canvas  
127 x 127 cm





I STAND  
WITH  
YOU!



## **John Madu**

Born — 1983 in Lagos, Nigeria  
Lives and works — Lagos, Nigeria  
Instagram — *@johnmadu\_art*

### **Could you introduce yourself please?**

— My name is John Madu, a multi-disciplinary artist born in Lagos, Nigeria. I am a self-taught artist with a BSc in Policy and Strategic studies. I have always had a knack for art since my childhood, drawing comic strips, creating clay sculptures and reading about art history and the biographies of the great art masters. I never had it mind I would be a professional artist in future, I started painting professionally in 2009 two years after I graduated from the university. I am interested in more forms of creativity and innovation from fashion to functional art, and I intend to make my art relevant in these contemporary times and years to come.

### **How would you describe your artistic practice?**

— My creative practice as an artist, has mostly been directed towards the complexity of identity, capturing moments, history and even banal experiences through my portraits and figurative characters. Inspiration is key in my creative process, I source inspiration from a large variety of places, but can be narrowed down to few things that inspire parts of my artworks, which could be current situations affecting society, be it political or social. I believe the best kind of art is a reaction to certain issues of interest and divulging information to educate and also entertain.

### **How would you define the relationship between your own identity and the art you create?**

— I believe my work is a part of me projected unto my creative output, from my experiences, culture and spirituality, viewing the world and recording its history from the corner of the earth I identify with.

### **What is your definition of pure art?**

— I would say pure art is any form of art created in ingenuity with true intentions and holds some form of aesthetic value.

### **Could you tell us about your work included in this exhibition?**

— I am exhibiting three paintings for this show titled “Stop, listen”. Two of the paintings was directed at the national unrest sparked off by the injustice faced by the youths of Nigeria, concerning a law enforcement agency called SARS and bad governance in general. I will speak on one of the paintings titled Voices on Strings made in acrylic paint with two characters communicating with a tin can and string telephone. This painting describes resilience and the ingenuity of the Nigerian youth during the End SARS campaign. Something happened that has never occurred in the history of Nigeria, where the youths came together in one voice against bad governance and the end of the corrupt police sect called SARS.

The leaders saw the beginning of this movement as a joke and believed will fizzle out with no effect, but to their surprise they witnessed a growing momentum of interest from Nigerians in the diaspora and international bodies, in fact the whole world was watching. The government threatened by the progressive organization of the protesters, tried to cut their means of communication, mostly through social media, threatening with a ban and regulation of social media. This protest saw a rise of a new body called the Feminist Coalition, that contributed greatly to the movement and helped create a network across the country to help fund protesters and release protesters illegally detained. At some point bank accounts of the key protesters were sanctioned and the government tried to cut the means of network against protesters, in this light the protesters still found various means to reach out to one another and still stand in solidarity. My painting elevates the saying “information is power”.

### **How do you feel about being in an exhibition in Sweden with exclusively Nigerian artists?**

— I feel excited exhibiting in Sweden, because this is the first time my work will be shown to the public in Europe. I believe showing with other Nigerian artists in this show will definitely send a powerful message across.

### **Could you describe the essence of Nigeria? Do you feel that there is something abstract, untouchable that is quintessentially Nigerian?**

— I would say the vast multi-cultural identities is an interesting but complex factor that cannot be ignored. The social and communal lifestyle is one thing that cannot be taken away

### **How would you describe the artist community in Nigeria?**

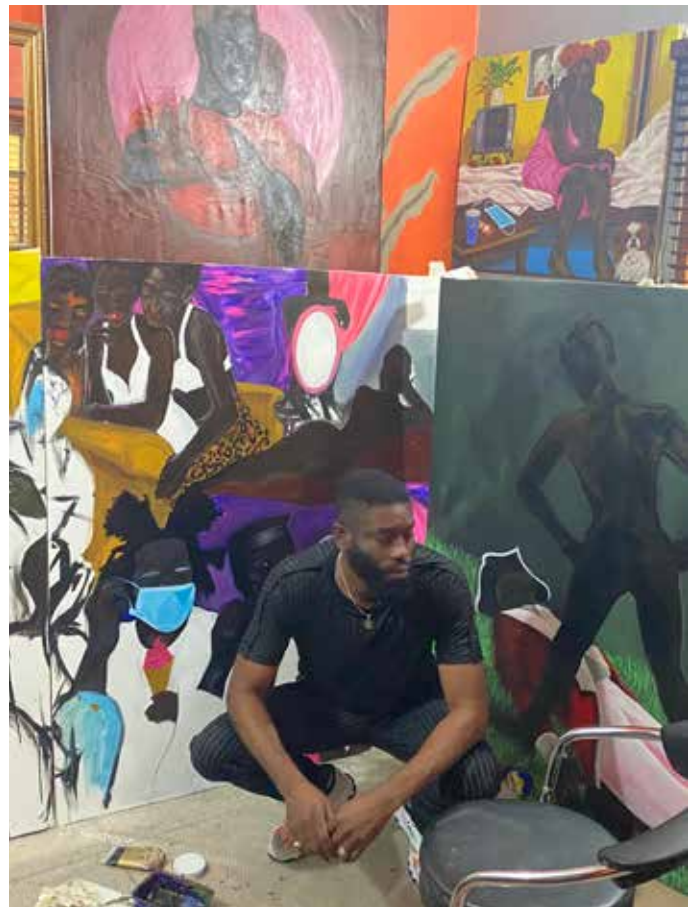
— If I have to describe the artistic community in Nigeria, I would have to use Lagos State as a focal point as that is the power house for contemporary art in Nigeria. There has been an increase in platforms over the years that has helped to engage the artist with the public, such as art fairs, new galleries launching and residency programs. That has helped artists in meeting each other and sharing ideas. I feel the growth in the community is evident.

### **What are your hopes for the future of Nigerian art?**

— I hope there will be more indigenous collectors and the preservation of Nigerian art on the local scene with more infrastructures and institutions that will sustain a world class level.



**Exhibitions:** (2021) *Stop, listen!*, CFHILL Art Space, Stockholm, Sweden. (2020) *Liminality of Infinite space*, African Artists Foundation Lagos. *The Medium is the Message*, Unit London Gallery, London. 2020. Shanghai Art Fair, Shanghai 2020. *When Life Doesn't Give You Lemons*, Tchotchke Gallery, New York 2020. Latitudes Art Fair, Cape Town 2020. *Return to the Surreal*, Litty Contemporary Gallery, Cape town 2019. *Next Wave: The Power of Authenticity and Self Validation*, House of African Art Gallery, London.









**John Madu**

*In Pink*

2020

Acrylic on canvas

153 x 122 cm

**John Madu**

*We came in peace*

2020

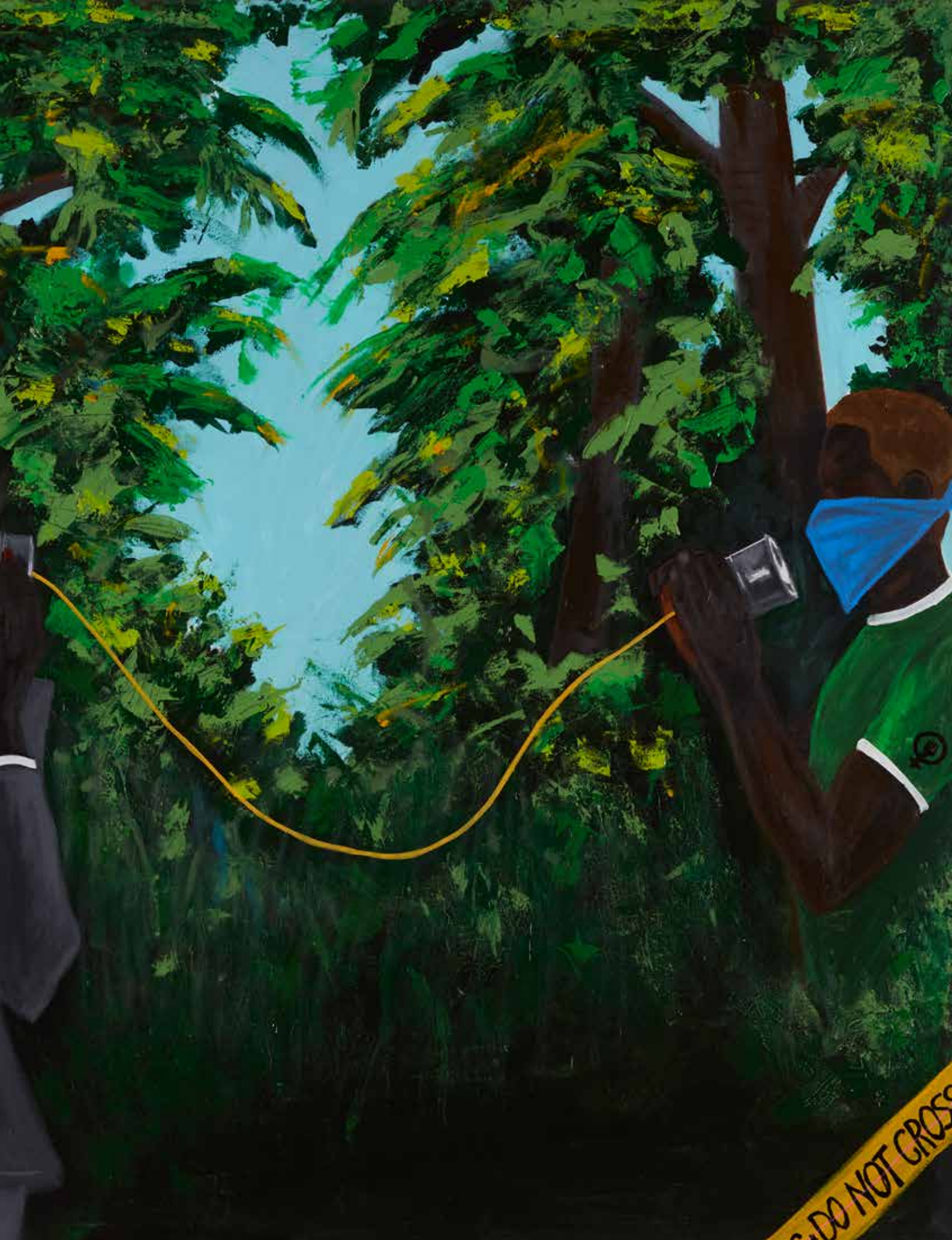
Acrylic on canvas

183 x 152 cm

**John Madu**  
*Voices on strings*  
2020  
Acrylic on canvas  
152 x 152 cm







DO NOT CROSS



## **Johnson Eziefula**

Born — 1998 in Lagos, Nigeria

Lives and works — Lagos, Nigeria

Instagram — @johnsoneziefula

### **Could you introduce yourself please?**

— My name is Johnson Eziefula, I am a self-taught contemporary artist, from and currently based in Lagos, Nigeria.

### **How would you describe your artistic practice?**

#### **What is your drive?**

— My practice is strongly influenced by my personal interests, observations, curiosities and experiences and is centered around portraiture and primarily focused on Cultural Hybridity, Blackness, POP-culture and identity amongst others, evaluating and investigating the relationship between environmental influences and the identity/personality of the contemporary West-African individual. In my work, I celebrate being Black, showcasing and inviting you into my world, an alternative reality, which is a product of my imagination/ideologies in conjunction with my reality. The mediums used in creating my works include acrylic, charcoal and pastel on canvas.

### **Could you describe the works that are part of this exhibition?**

— My works included in the exhibition aim to keep the spirit of the Nigerian community up. They aim to recognize, acknowledge, highlight and demonstrate the unity, bravery, resilience, strength, consensus, solidarity, singularity of interests and communal support portrayed by the Nigerian youths in the midst of such shared chaotic space we were caught up within. They also metaphorically portray a commonality of being young and Nigerian, one of which I perceive as being “Black and Blue”.

### **As an artist in Nigeria in this day of age, what are some of the challenges?**

— We face challenges such as lack of basic support programs and an enabling system for young creatives. There is a very small room for a vast crowd of creatives out here in Nigeria, coupled with a rotten system and numerous sociology-political issues that negatively affect one’s mental stability and work ethic. These are some of the factors that even influence the course of our practices as Artists.

### **And on the other hand; how does being Nigerian influence your practice in a positive way?**

— Being born and bred in Lagos, Nigeria, the heart of a country filled with so many tribes, people and personalities has definitely had a strong effect on my practice and course as an artist. It is a wide environment filled with varying ideologies, customs and religions, allowing for a clash of cultures, I find it very interesting, coupled with being alive in this digital age, where my environment goes beyond that which I am physically present in. This multifaceted nature of my environment births my core focus as an Artist, which is the subject matter called Cultural Hybridity.

### **How do you feel about being in an exhibition with solely Nigerian artists?**

— Feels good to make bold statements with my brothers and sisters, through our art, beyond the borders of Nigeria and Africa as a whole. It is something I am glad to witness and also be a part of, especially for a notable cause as this.

### **And finally; what are your hopes for the future of Nigerian art?**

— I hope to see the Nigerian art scene thrive way beyond mediocrity and being one of the most active and reputable art industries in the world, with an appropriate capacity to accommodate the vast populace of Nigerian creatives.

**Exhibitions:** (2021) *Stop, listen!*, CFHILL Art Space, Stockholm, Sweden. (2020) *Black Voices: Friend of My Mind* group exhibition, New York, USA curated by Destinee Ross-Sutton/Ross-Sutton Gallery, (2020) *Liminality in Infinite Space* group exhibition, Lagos, Nigeria, curated by Azu Nwabogu/African Artists Foundation, (2020) *Cultural Hybrids* group exhibition, Tel-Aviv, Israel, curated by Corridor Contemporary gallery, (2020) *Neo Custodians* group exhibition, Lagos, Nigeria, curated by SMO Contemporary Art.



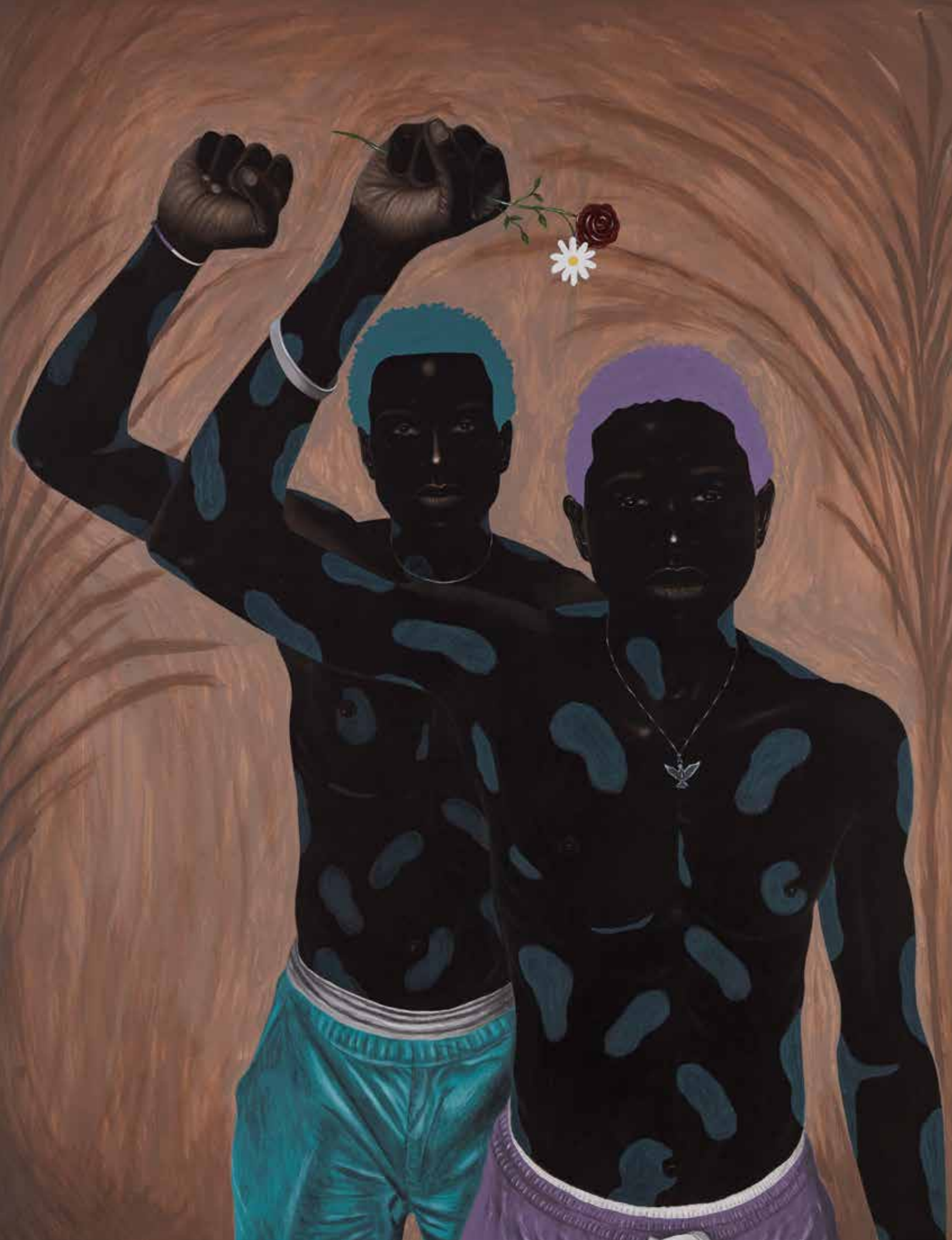
**Johnson Eziefula**

*Brothers from October*

2020

Acrylic and charcoal on canvas

152 x 122 cm







## **Tosin Kalejaye**

Born — 1992 in Ondo, Nigeria

Lives and works — Abuja, Nigeria

Instagram — *@kalejayetosin*

### **Could you introduce yourself please?**

— My name is Tosin Kalejaye. I am from Nigeria, born and bred in Ondo state now working in Abuja.

### **The work you create is very realistic but the skin of the subjects in your images differ from real human skin. What are the thoughts behind the skin texture?**

— I have always loved human skin, the texture of human skin. The whole form and connection on the human body. So, that kind of relation with the human body and the skin have always been my drive towards creating something that is close to reality but a bit more expressive. That is how my work differ from Hyperrealism.

### **Yes, there is a pattern on the skin.**

— The patterns and the forms of the skin, the body of my subjects, are based on the struggles of a Black person. In order for me to portray the struggles of a Black person, I create this zigzag pattern on the skin, making it look like scales. Every human in every phase of life has to at some point go through struggles in life to attain glory. And for me, I don't want to see those difficulties as weaknesses, but rather as a process for growth and glory. When you go through struggles in life, it is going to give you thick skin and with that you can withstand those periods and subsequent hurdles. So, the scale-like pattern on my subjects' skin signifies strength and protection.

### **It also highlights the skin beautifully. Could you talk about the pieces included in this exhibition at CFHILL?**

— I will be exhibiting two pieces and it is about the connection between the two, it is a diptych. The motif is two pretty grown youths, guys from different ethnicities, holding themselves in solidarity, they are confident and they are demanding what is right for them.

### **Is that connected to the End SARS movement?**

— Yes, you know, the End SARS is a struggle from the youth and not only in Nigeria, it is a struggle of the Black race in general and somewhat connected to the happenings in America; people demanding their rights.

### **Yes, but in America it was police brutality from white police officers targeting Black people, and in Nigeria it is Black on Black violence.**

— Yes, that is true; Black oppressing Black. That is reflected in the two pieces I am including in this exhibition at CFHILL, where two Black individuals hold on to each other as a symbol of solidarity.

I have never seen a period in Nigeria like the one during the End SARS protests, where people were putting aside tribalism and religious differences, coming together to fight for a cause. It was collected efforts, regardless of whether you are Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba or from any other tribe, we all came together for unity.

### **Do you feel that the unity has remained even though the protest in the streets have ended?**

— Of course, because we now realize that we can actually do without all these differences, we can actually come together. It is surprising that Nigerians were able to raise \$385,000 through crowdfunding without any government aid, financing this protest amongst themselves. Part of the money raised was spent on legal services for those protesters who were arrested, pay medical bills for those wounded, to provide security at protest centers and daily refreshments. This is something I am very proud of. The kind of tribalism we experience today we got fed from our parents, but we young people don't really care about these tribal and religious differences. What is important is that we come together, as tomorrow we are the ones who are going to be in charge. If a SARS person wants to kill you, they will not ask what tribe you belong to, they will just harass, humiliate, extort or shoot you. I feel it is high time that we come together as one.

### **Your work has socio-political motifs, what risks does that bring about?**

— You know, I have always been commenting on political issues, from way back when I was still at university. I studied History and International Studies and I always criticized the government in this so-called democracy, that in reality does not give any room for questioning. I would really call my work socio-political and I really feel we need to start talking about these issues, about the unity amongst ourselves and the issues that affects us as a nation. I need to protect you and you need to protect me, regardless of your religious or tribal belonging. I used to say; you are human before you are Igbo, you are human before you are Yoruba or Hausa.

### **In regards to freedom of speech, is it really practiced in Nigeria or could there be repercussions for being so outspoken?**

— Actually, the democracy that we are practicing in Nigeria is still growing, it is still developing. We are not there yet and I can't really say that there is freedom of speech because I have seen activists that spoke out against the government and they ended up being arrested and placed in jail without any trial.

**Yet you continue to speak out against unjust treatments through your art?**

— Yes, because it is the only way to improve the situation with bad governance. I comment on this through my art, that is my medium.

**There is an artist community called the Kolony in Nigeria, are you a member?**

— Yes, I am a part of the Kolony and I am proud to be a part of the Kolony. The Kolony is like a disruptor of the traditional way of the art industry in Nigeria. It is evident that the conventional art industry here in Nigeria, if you are young or do not have a formal education in art, they don't vibe with you, they believe that you don't know anything. But I believe that creativity has no limit, it is about what you can offer. I am proud that the Kolony has been providing information and before you knew it, it started to grow. If you look at the greatest young artists in Nigeria and Africa as a whole today, you can't talk about them without mentioning members from the Kolony.

**Looking ahead, what are your hopes for the future of Nigerian art? As the scene is expanding and going through constant changes.**

— The Nigerian art community as a whole is growing and there is no turning back. So, galleries etc. are starting to appreciate younger artists more now, exhibiting them. The thing was, we were growing without them, and they can't afford to lose out on us and the game plan. It is evident that in two to three years' time, the Nigerian art scene will only grow further.

**We know that social media have played a major role in the evolving art scene in Nigeria.**

— Definitely, it also helped out with the End SARS movement. You know, they tried their best to shut us off but they couldn't control the social media. The government is in control of the radio media, TV-media and all of that but social media became our voice because they couldn't shut that off. We were able to get the attention from foreign powers like CNN. People got information about what was going on in Nigeria. The government should be scared because the revolution that has started can't be stopped. We are more aware now than ever before. They never believed that we could stand up like this for our rights. We are ready to lose it all and we are doing it for the next generation. Our children will enjoy it.

**Since the protests, what do you feel have changed?**

— I am proud to say that there have been changes, it is happening gradually.

For example, last week I was in Lagos for my exhibition and all through while we were driving, no police man stopped us, even at night. Normally, if a young guy has a nice car they will stop you and take your phone, expecting that you will bribe them. But there have been changes. The crazy thing about the End SARS protests is that we were not even begging them for jobs, we were not begging them for light or power supplies, we were only begging them not to kill us. It is going to take a long time for everything to improve, but I am proud to say that it has finally started.

**Exhibition:** (2021) *Stop, listen!*, CFHILL Art Space, Stockholm, Sweden. (2020) Group exhibition, *Liminality in Infinite Space*, Africa Artists' Foundation, Lagos, Nigeria. (2020), Group exhibition, *Global Conversation*, UN75 x F.99 x Google Arts and Culture, The United Nations. (2020), Group exhibition, *Locality and the Status Quo*, Pacers Art Gallery, Lagos, Nigeria. (2020), Group exhibition (virtual), *Making Black and Brown Art Important Again*, Brooklyn Ubuciko Festival, New York, United States.

**Publications:** (2020), #drawingwhileblack for The Net Gallery, (2020), "Dare to Zlatan", (2017) in *Postures: Body Language in Art* by Desmond Morris.

**Artist-in-residence program:** (2020) African Artists' Foundation, Lagos, Nigeria.





**Tosin Kalejaye**

*Awakened I and II*

2020

Diptych

Acrylic and charcoal on canvas

127 x 127 cm / 127 x 127 cm







## **Barry Yusufu**

Born — 1996 in Nasarawa State, Nigeria

Lives and works — Abuja, Nigeria

Instagram — @barryyusufu

### **So, for starters, could you introduce yourself please?**

— My name is Barry Yusufu and I am a visual artist from Abuja, Nigeria. I specialize in working with charcoals, acrylics and coffee. So, I am a mixed media artist and I also explore other mediums which are oil, sculpting and collage.

### **Could you talk about your work that is included in this exhibition at CFHILL?**

— I am exhibiting a painting called Against the Book that when you look closely at, you will see two brothers holding their hands and there is a book on the table. That book represent religion. It is a symbol representing religion, because I believe that religion is all about a book that was written and people are set out to follow certain instructions. During the End SARS protests in Nigeria and all the chaos that happened during the period, I saw the most amazing things happen. Now, Nigeria is a very divided country when it comes to religion and traditions, but at that moment I saw the greatest form of unity because the country had a common goal. There was one fight; the youth was fighting against the government, police brutality and oppression. So, in that period I saw the greatest form of unity where Muslims and Christians came together to fight for one cause. What really happened during that protest? The government is a really smart one, so they tried to play the “religious card” when they saw the unity, they tried to break it up by reminding people that they belong to different religions and are meant to be “enemies”. That “religious card” didn’t play, because this generation is more awake, this generation knows what they want and this generation is ready for a good government. Brothers came together to support each other and grow. I mean, I saw people bringing food to the protest’s grounds, I saw people support each other with money and I saw artists painting, so everybody went out 100 percent. The government then changed tactics and sent out “hoodlums” that were disguised as protesters and that was how they were able to disrupt the protests. If not, we were having a peaceful protest with people from different traditions and religions. And at the end of the day we all know how the protests ended; the government came and shot at the peaceful protesters at the Lekki Toll Gate. When you look at the painting you see sunflowers, and sunflowers in my paintings, they represent hope. Each person is hopeful for something good, but this time we are not committed to the ideology that religion makes us enemies, because we are brothers. So that is what this painting represents; two brothers who are supposed be at war, are instead coming together for the same cause.

**And in your experience do you feel that the situation in Nigeria has improved since the End SARS protests? Because we are hearing different reactions, some are saying there**

**have been some improvements and some are saying things have remained the same.**

— Things have changed, nobody can say that nothing changed. Because people who didn’t know their rights now do. They now know what to fight for, they know that it isn’t right or proper to be harassed by the police. They now know how to demand for good governance from the government. Because this has happened, the government is on their toes, they have realized that they can’t play with these people the way they did before because they realized that people will fight back. It is like a kid looking at fire, thinking that fire is just for fun, and then when he or she touch the fire and immediately gets burnt, that kid will think twice before doing it again. The government has never seen such a revolution before, especially from the youth.

### **What part do you feel social media played this time?**

— Oh, social media played the biggest part in this protest, because it made the world aware and it made the world smaller as information could travel faster. Protesters could communicate with each other and get the news across. Twitter played the stronger role because we were able to get hashtags trending. We are part of a generation that choose to speak up, instead of just accepting everything and say; “Oh things will get better”. Things won’t get better unless you fight for them. If you don’t stand up and fight things will remain the same. The government knows that they have to be more careful with this new generation. All though, the police changed uniform, they are also aware of the fact that they can’t just act as they please anymore. It is not like before when you could get gunned down for just holding an iPhone.

### **Thank God, because that is insane.**

— The government has subjected us to an extreme level of poverty and oppression and what is expected of the youth is that; no youth is to attain success, so when they see you successful, they assume that you became successful through something shady. But there are so many other ways to become successful through the internet. So many people are able to harness that medium and make it beneficial, like some are into Bitcoin trading and we as artists are able to get our craft out there via social media. Without social media things would have been really bad for us Nigerians.

**Life in Nigeria should be good, the diaspora shouldn’t be so huge. How does destroying the Nigerian people, especially the youth, benefit the Nigerian government? Wouldn’t everyone benefit from the nation thriving in all different ways?**

— You know, it is really just about the elite. They don’t really care about the masses.

Poverty has also proven to be a very strong weapon in politics. Poverty has proven to be used as a means of remaining in power. Now, when it comes to elections and politicians being re-elected, they capitalize on poverty, because they understand that they can buy votes, they can buy people's votes with little amounts of money because a lot of people are subjected to so much poverty that even a plate of rice, a plate of seasoning or a bag of salt can buy people's votes. Since that has been discovered as an instrument of politics, the government capitalize of it. If you have payed attention you will have noticed that the Nigerian sector is having great issues with education because they also understand that, illiteracy is also a weapon of politics. The more illiterates you put out there, the more powerful you will be able to remain in the system. Without knowledge, people become gullible and easy to control, as they will believe anything they are told and will follow the people with the money. With those two elements; poverty and illiteracy, the government is able to control the masses.

**Are you comfortable saying this? Isn't it risky to openly criticize the government like this?**

— Is the government afraid to subject us to this extreme poverty? Is the government afraid to kill its people? No, they are not afraid of doing that, so we, the people, shouldn't be afraid to speak up, because if we don't things will never get better.

**Speaking of unity, could you tell us about the Nigerian artist community? What is the relationship between young artists in Nigeria like? Is there a network of young artists supporting each other?**

— Nigeria is the kind of country where there is hardly any support for young contemporary artists such as myself. So, I created a movement called the Kolony. This movement has proven to be the strongest contemporary art movement in an African city. When you start calling big names on the young African contemporary art scene, almost 60 percent are part of the Kolony. So, when we realized that there wasn't enough support, we came together and started sharing ideas, we started helping each other and empowering ourselves. We are a Brotherhood, and I am very proud to be a leader and a member too, as every member is as powerful as the next member. We have been able to break down doors that have previously been shut, and we have been able to push ourselves beyond our brothers and aim for the stars and reach there. There is no stopping now.

**Is it all male or do you include females too?**

— No, it is not all male, there are females too. What is important is that it is a collective of artists that are looking out for one another. In this exhibition at CFHILL for example, almost every artist is a member of the Kolony.

**At this point, what are your hopes for the future of Nigerian art?**

— We as young Nigerian artists are more appreciated internationally than in our own home. The most strategic thing to do was to create a name for ourselves outside the country so you can be appreciated back home. Because there was no opportunity or platform for people like us here. So, we hope that someday our people will understand that, as young artists we are coming out, not only to make a name for ourselves, but because we are trying to fight for something. We are trying to open more doors and create more opportunities, make the generations coming after us understand that there is a dream that is attainable, if we could achieve this, they can do it too. If we could get to this length, they can do it too and success is contagious. You can actually tap into success if you believe it. We want to give hope and make people understand that when you work hard together as brothers you can reach your goals.

**You would hardly hear any young people say that they want to become artists when asked what they want to be when they grow up. The more common answer would be a lawyer or a doctor.**

— I believe art really brought the world down to where it is, with all its misrepresentations. Anything that people perceive visually is art, from the movies you watch to the paintings you see. So, I feel it is our duty to re-write history. When I grew up, I really didn't see much representations of our people and I felt unworthy at some point. But with time I came to realize that I possess something that is special and that means that I have been brought into this world to be a messenger and I now feel that it is up to me to do my part. As much as I can represent my people in numbers and document our history now, the generations to come will understand that there are people with the same kind of Black skin colour who were able to achieve great things. That will really boost their confidence. We may not get to enjoy the benefits of all this hard work, but I believe that our grandchildren will.

**In what way were you subjected to images of misrepresentation when you grew up?**

— When I was growing up, I only saw representations of white people everywhere, even on the religious scene you would only see white angels and I couldn't relate to that. I used to think; even heaven isn't for me. But I still understood that we were all created in the likeness of God and that means we are all worthy. Salvation is for all. And once you can perceive that, it will boost your courage and you will be able to reach for the stars. Everything boils down to representation. We of this generation are able to represent the right way, without any alterations.

**Exhibition;** (2020) *For Folk's Sake!* Contemporary Artists x the American Folk Art Museum. The Benefit Auction (2020) Group exhibition, *The Medium is the message*, Unit London, curated: Azu Nwabogu (2020) *Artist in Residency*, African Artists Foundation, Lagos, Nigeria (2020)

**Group exhibition:** (2021) *Stop, listen!*, CFHILL Art Space, Stockholm, Sweden. *Locality and the Status Quo*, Pacers Art Gallery, Lagos, Nigeria, curated: Wunika Mukan (2020) Group exhibition, *Say it Loud!* Christie's. Curated: Destinee Ross Suttons, (2020), Group exhibition, *Harlem Art Show*, Harlem Arts Alliance, New York, USA.







**Barry Yusufu**

*Against the book*

2020

Charcoal, acrylic and coffee on canvas

127 x 127 cm



## Wole Lagunju

Born — 1966 in Oshogbo

Lives and works — North Carolina, USA

Instagram — @wole\_lagunju

### Could you introduce yourself please?

— My name is Wole Lagunju, I am a Nigerian and what you would call a mid-career artist. I studied graphic design in Nigeria and over the years I have gravitated towards visual art in painting and drawing. I have lived in the United States since 2007 and it is here that I practice my work.

### Could you describe your work that is part of this exhibition?

— The works included in the exhibition are the second generation, the second series of a body of work I made a few years ago.

My first works I would call montages or hybrids of traditional Yoruba masks and women from different eras. So, the focus on the first series were the masks. With this new series, the second generation, from which I am showing two pieces, the focus is on Black women, women of colour. This time the characters are no longer wearing masks, I am now showing attributes. The kind of attributes I like to emphasize in Black women which are colours, traditions, sexuality, femininity and the new kind of image where women are no longer portrayed as objects of passion only.

### How come you created hybrids between women and masks in your last series?

— It was because of the debate that was taking place when I first arrived in the United States, about the underrepresentation of women of colour in the fashion industry. I was motivated to participate in the discussion, so I created a series of digital drawings whereby I used Caucasian models like Kate Moss and superimposed Gelede masks onto them. It was a way to critique the underrepresentation of women of colour and touch on topics related to identity.

### Do you believe in creating art for the sake of its visual aesthetics only? Or does your work always have a message to convey?

— Art for me must have a message, in this case my passion and what motivates me. I am very interested in my culture, Yoruba culture and I consider myself, in some ways, an ambassador of my culture as I am part of the diaspora. At the same time, you want to assert yourself because of the kind of influences you get in society where people question your culture and where you come from. So, through my art, I share aspects of my culture to assert myself in a society which stereotypes you because of your race and cultural background.

### How would you describe the essence of Nigeria? Do you feel that there is something quintessentially Nigerian?

— Nigeria is divided into so many tribes, so many different ethnic groups, and I can't really speak for other groups but where I grew up, in Oshogbo, there was a famous group of artists called the Oshogbo artists. They were there even before the colonial era and I grew up in the midst of this artist group and the cultural festivals. That is my own background and I cannot divorce myself and my passion from that. I think that it is perfect to be exhibiting with other Nigerian artists now, and it is great to be showing the diversity of Nigeria and its rich culture.

**Selected Exhibitions:** (2021) *Stop, listen!*, CFHILL Art Space, Stockholm, Sweden. *The Cape Town Art Fair*, Ebony Curated Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa, (2020) *Afropop Power Trip*, Foreign Agent Gallery, Lausanne, Switzerland, (2020) *We all live here*, Solo Exhibition, The Gramophone Works, London, (2020) *A Smaller Scale*, Ebony Curated Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa, (2019) *Diaspora*, New Ashgate Gallery, Farnham, Surrey, United Kingdom, (2019) *Wole Lagunju, Contemporary African meets Traditional*, Solo Exhibition, Payne Gallery, Moravian College, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, United States, (2019) *The London Art Fair*, London, United Kingdom, (2018) *Whirling Return of the Ancestors: Egungun Arts of the Yoruba in Africa*, Ruth Davis Design Gallery, University of Wisconsin, Madison, United States, (2018) *The Summer Exhibition*, Ebony Curated Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa, (2018) *Citizenship*, Afropolitan Gallery, Ghateng, South Africa, (2018) 1.54, *Contemporary African Art Fair*, London, UK, (2018) *Yoruba Remixed*, Solo Exhibition, Ebony Curated Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa, (2018) *Navigating Place and Time in Contemporary African and Diasporic Art*. Curated by Yvette Gresle. The Basement, Mayfair, London. United Kingdom, (2017) *Turbine Art Fair*, Johannesburg, South Africa, (2017) *Colour Chart*, Ebonycurated Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa, (2017) *Recits d'Afrique*, Mu Gallery, Paris, France, (2017) *Tempo, expo d'Art contemporain*, Cloître des Billettes, Paris, France (2017) AKA A (Also known as Africa), Art fair, Paris, France, (2016) *Prizm Art Fair*, Art Basel, Miami, Florida, (2016).





**Wole Lagunju**

*Ascension*

2020

Oil painting on canvas

187 x 146 cm





**Wole Lagunju**

*Profile VI*

2020

Ink drawing on paper

61 x 46 cm





**Wole Lagunju**  
*Griot II*  
2019  
Ink drawing on paper  
61 x 46 cm

**Wole Lagunju**  
*Egungun Woman*  
2020  
Oil on canvas  
178 x 120 cm





## Chiderah Bosah

Born — 2000 in Enugu, Nigeria

Lives and works — Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Instagram — @chiderahbosah

### Could you introduce yourself please?

— My name is Chiderah Bosah, I am a visual artist from Anambra State, Nigeria. Practicing in Port Harcourt, a city in Rivers State, Southern Nigeria. I have been creating art all my life but I started professionally in 2017, painting and telling stories through portraiture, watching numerous tutorials on YouTube to perfect my craft.

### What work of yours is included in this exhibition at CFHILL?

— I have been working on a body of work that is very personal to me. It is about the happenings in my country, Nigeria. The issues we have with National Security and a Corrupt Government. These works highlight the reality of three certain personalities; Leah, Sleek and Aisha.

### Since the End SARS protest, SARS have been disbanded, but have things really improved?

— First, I would like to say that it was rebranded. What is the point of having the same men in different uniforms? Just recently, there were gunshots in an area in Port Harcourt where I live, and we realized that it was actually the police who had killed a young man over a dispute because of 100 Naira. We have to understand that this problem goes beyond just disbanding SARS but reforming the police. You can't give arms to a criminally minded person and then expect that they won't act as criminals just because they are carrying a police badge. You can't! So, nothing is getting better just yet. As a young man, if I would wear dreadlocks or a full beard and look clean and comfortable, the police would most definitely harass and extort me too if I ever got in their sight. It is a norm.

### One of the positive developments in recent years must be social media, and especially Instagram and Twitter, would you agree? Also, in relation to the End SARS movement.

— Yes absolutely. If the only way to get the information out there would have been through Nigerian media, nobody outside of Nigeria would have found out. Just like when millions of Biafrans were killed in the past, during the Nigerian Civil War because information didn't move as fast then, as it does now. Aside from social media, there were a good number of brave people at the forefront of the End SARS movement whose actions energized the spirits of the masses, and through social media the word got out. One remarkable person is Aisha Yesufu who has been at the forefront of Nationwide Protests including the End SARS and BRING BACK OUR GIRLS where over 200 school girls were kidnapped in Borno State. Anyone can be a victim just like Sleek (Chibuikwe Daniel), an upcoming music artist who was killed by a SARS official, Saturday 19 September, 2020 while going to visit his friend in Elelenwo, Rivers, Nigeria. He is one of many who have been killed.

### So, they inspired your work. And is Leah referring to the Christian schoolgirl that got kidnapped and refused to abandon her faith and convert and therefore wasn't released by the Boko Haram.

— Yes, Leah Sharibu, her bravery and daring nature moved me and I strongly felt it was something to paint about. Imagine a girl, fourteen years old at the time, kidnapped from her school in Dapchi, Yobe State by the Boko Haram terrorists, and asked to convert to a different religion, but refused and was kept in bondage, even after the other kidnapped girls were released. There is definitely something spectacular about Leah. Now, imagine a girl with such golden spirit growing up in a more decent society that has regards for her life and potential. The saddest part is that the Nigerian Government has done little or nothing to come to her rescue. I believe the world should know about this as I consider Leah a Queen even if she is in bondage. Being a figurative artist, I captured Leah's story through a subtle facial expression and a royal attire. When looking at the piece, you can feel her pain through the eyes of the figure.

### Do you feel hopeful about the future?

— Yes, I do. It is always good to be positive. Change is only going to take time. Because the corruption is so deep in all the systems that keep Nigeria running. The change we seek may not be seen in my generation or even the generation ahead of me. But I want to believe that at some point, there can actually be a good Nigeria.

**Exhibitions:** (2021) *Stop, listen!*, CFHILL Art Space, Stockholm, Sweden. (2020) *COLLECTIVE REFLECTIONS*, Gallery 1957, Accra, Ghana. *LIMINALITY IN AN INFINITE SPACE*, African Artists foundation, Lagos, Nigeria. *LOCALITY AND THE STATUS QUO*, Pacers Art Gallery, Lagos, Nigeria. *THE ARTHOUSE CONTEMPORARY SHOW*, Art House Contemporary Gallery, Lagos, Nigeria.

**Publications:** (2020) *Something Curated – Collective Reflections: Contemporary African & Diasporic Expressions of New Vanguard*, Business Day Press - *Expressions of New Vanguards*, So Much Art on the Artist – Chiderah Bosah.





**Chiderah Bosah**

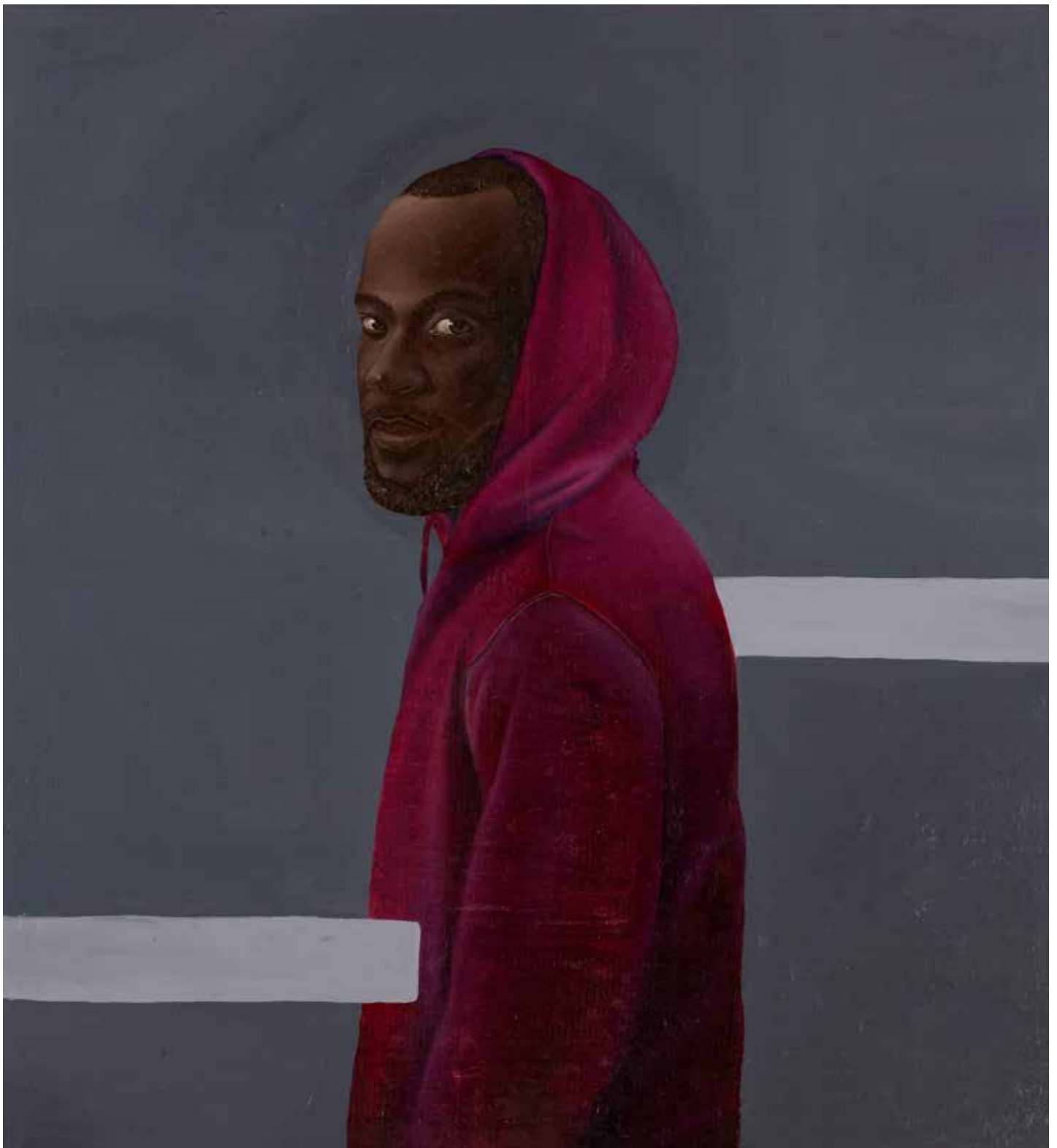
*Leah*

2021

Oil on canvas

114 x 114 cm





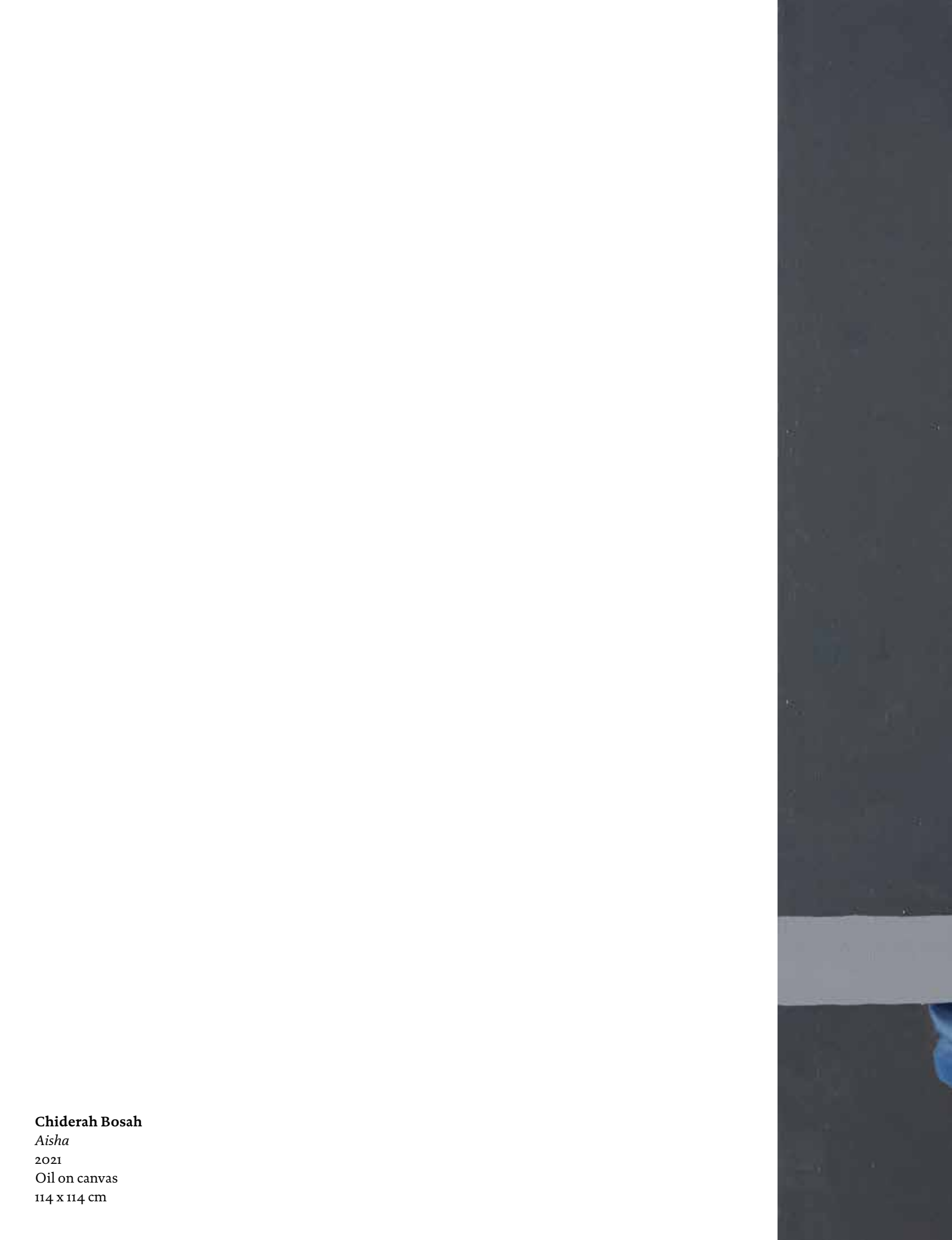
**Chiderah Bosah**

*Sleek*

2021

Oil on canvas

114 x 114 cm



**Chiderah Bosah**

*Aisha*

2021

Oil on canvas

114 x 114 cm





## Kelechi Nwaneri

Born — 1994 in Lagos State, Nigeria

Lives and works — Lagos, Nigeria

Instagram — @kaecyart

### Could you introduce yourself please?

— My name is Kelechi Nwaneri Charles. I am a self-taught multimedia Artist that loves to tell stories with figurative images. I work in a genre of art that falls somewhere in between Realism, Surrealism and contemporary art. The main characteristic of my work is the presence of Black figure, usually crested with motifs of ancient indigenous African marking patterns. I work with a range of materials, from charcoal sticks and pencils to paints and pastels.

### How would you define the relationship between your own identity and the art you create?

— I am from IMO state, south-eastern Nigeria and that makes me Igbo, one of the ethnic groups in Nigeria. In the Igbo culture there is a concept of Scarification, where an individual's body is marked with chalks, to signify spiritual identity and spiritual importance. These marks are called Ichi in Igbo and the marked person is called an Ichie. This is a direct reflection of the idea of my Black figures.

### What is your definition of pure art?

— I think pure art is any form of expression capable of capturing an audience by its aesthetics and more importantly, capable of speaking to them.

### Could you tell us about your work included in this exhibition at CFHILL?

— OSONDU is an Igbo word that means Race for Salvation. The painting is inspired by the October 2020, End SARS protest that was held in Nigeria and all over the world and the components of the painting were inspired by the Nigerian coat of arms. The surreal appearance of the painting represents the dream the youth have, the dream of a better Nigeria.

### How do you feel about being in an exhibition in Sweden with exclusively Nigerian artists?

— It feels good to know these kinds of shows can be curated.

### Finally, what are your hopes for the future of Nigerian art?

— I hope we can create a strong force on the continental and global art scene, based on originality, marketability and also create the right institutions within the country to foster the growth and preservation of the Arts and Cultures.

**Solo Exhibitions:** (2021) *Myths* at Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery Berlin, (2020) *Modern Marks* at Ebony Curated, Cape Town, South Africa.

**Group Exhibitions:** (2021) *Stop, listen!*, CFHILL Art Space, Stockholm, Sweden. (2020) *All the Days and Nights*, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London (2019) *STASIS*, SMO Contemporary Art Gallery, Temple Muse, Victoria Island Lagos, Nigeria. (2019) *SECRET GARDEN*, ODA gallery, Fransccheok, Western Cape, South Africa. (2018) *Ode to mankind*, Artyrama Gallery, CFAO building, Victoria Island, Lagos, Nigeria. (2018) *Spanish Festivals and traditional celebrations*, Thought Pyramids Gallery, Maitama, Abuja, Nigeria. (2016) *Exploring the Goldmine Inherent in Nigerian Creative Industries*, National Festival for Art and Culture (NAFEST), Ibom Hall, Uyo, Nigeria.

**Online Shows:** (2020) Latitude Art fair online, Ebony Curated 1:54 New York. Residencies: (2020) AKKA Project, Oct - Dec, Venice.

**Collection:** held in the Beth Rudin DeWoody Collection (US).







**Kelechi Charles Nwaneri**

*Osondu (Rece for Salvation)*

2020

Mixed media, oil paints on primed canvas

150 x 100 cm

## **Bara Sketchbook**

Born — 1993 in Lagos, Nigeria  
Lives and works — Kaduna, Nigeria  
Instagram — *@barasketchbook*

### **Could you please introduce yourself?**

— My name in Bara Sketchbook and I have been practicing art professionally for three years now. During that period, I have come to realize that it is more than just having a talent or having an ability to be able to understand figures, colours, textures or any other element of art. It is about documenting your existence. What do I mean by that? I mean; Who are you? Who are your people? What are they going through? What are they saying? What is your voice? If painting is your voice, if dancing is your voice, if defending people before a judge is your voice, if taking people through surgery is your voice. Then use that voice and document your people's truth. I came to that point three years ago, and that was when my career began.

### **Your work is full of colours, how do you view the relationship between colours and identities?**

— I see colours as individuals. In my earlier series, the series I was working on before where I am now, I tried as much as possible to create these human beings whose skin had vibrant, radiant colours, but you could not give them any identities. You could not say that this individual is Caucasian, or that this individual is Nubian, or Hispanic or Asian. You could just identify with them as a human being. The very minute you start to select one colour you put people in boxes. That is one of the major problems of race. And that was what I was trying to say in my earlier series.

### **And where are you right now in your artistic practice?**

— Right now, I am focused on family and the loss of family. So, I am using two hues to be able to capture these themes; purple and blue. Through those two colours I am able to tell my story, tell my truth.

### **Could you talk about the works that are part of this exhibition? What do you aim to say through these pieces?**

— I am showing two pieces, in one the them; Martha's Husband I was trying to capture a memory. Right now, the both of us just met, three to five years from now on, we might still meet again. And then we can say; do you remember when we had that interview? So, right now we are creating a memory for the future. So, in that very painting I was trying to capture one singular memory as regards to the future. And what was the memory I was trying to capture? The fact that there are people in our lives who may not be there ten to twenty years from now. But they are there now and later on when they are not, we will cherish the memories that we have.

### **Does any of your work touch on the End SARS movement?**

— A lot of people died during the End SARS protests, a lot of young kids died. It made a lot of sense to me that we are trying to capture and honor the memory of the kids who died. It is not going to end as a hashtag. I have no choice but to speak up. In one of the paintings; Silas and Chioma, there is a boy and girl who are standing up boldly, right in front of you and they are not ashamed of who they are, they are not ashamed of what they stand for. You can clearly see that they are young, but their poses are intricated, because as delicate as their poses are, they are also very strong, they are very profound. You cannot just push them aside. The girl has one hand balancing on the boy's shoulder and he is looking through you. Basically, they are trying to let you know that; We are young, we may not have that much experience, but we know that what is happening right now is not ok, and we are not going to stand for it.

### **As an artist in Nigeria, what do you feel some of the challenges are and how are things progressing?**

— Social media has been amazing. Through primarily Instagram, I have been able to connect with an international community. It was challenging a few years ago because people did not appreciate art. But right now, there is a renaissance going on in West Africa as regards to Black contemporary art. There is a huge wave because we are trying to reinterpret what African art is, and what it is going to say ten to fifteen years from now. So, as challenging as it may be, it is important to be part of the conversation. Basically, I do not see this as work, it is what I was born to do. I have no choice but to do it. And it is beautiful because I enjoy the process.

### **What are your greatest sources of inspiration?**

— For now, this body of work I am working on, I need to access the beauty of my people from their skin to their hair. I aspired to capture my mother's heritage not only for their beauty, but for the stories that connect them. The fabric of my subjects captures their intricate history. As their skin, hair and eyes display a rich, confluence of generationally diverse, African beauty. The tender but bold poses in each story, a desperately loving attempt to conjure the spirit of my recently departed mother. So, this body of work is very inspired by my family; my mother is from Sierra Leone and my father is from Nigeria. I think about the stories my grandfather told my mother and my mother told me. I have a lot of brothers and sisters, and I get inspired when I think about the dynamics and the relationships, and you know how it was when everybody was growing up. And now some of them are lawyers and some are doctors or writers.

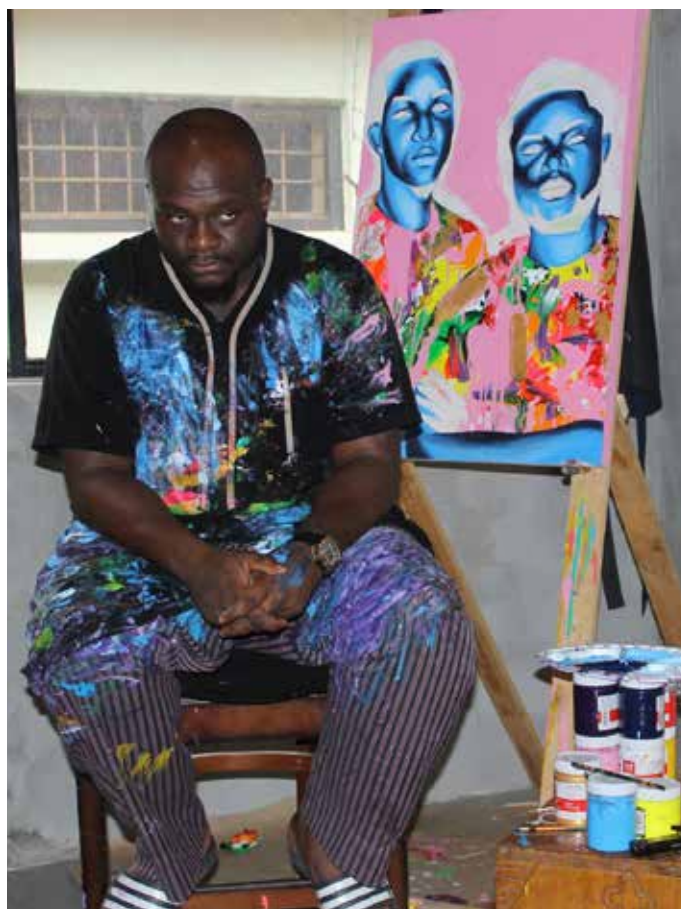
I am the only painter in the whole flock. I think of the relationships between all of us and how it makes me feel. I remember the first time when I told my parents that I wanted to be a painter, how they felt then. How they reacted. All those things, all those moments are inspiring me. They are my sources of inspiration. Telling the story of how beautiful my tribe is. Two parts of Africa came together and formed a tiny little tribe; Our family. There are a lot of things going on within us, the beautiful things, the sad things, the annoying things. Everything about it, I am documenting.

**That is the ultimate tribe? Family?**

— Yes, exactly. If everything is done wrong there, at your primary source of education, your family, it is going to be very difficult to get that individual effected straight.

**Selected Exhibition:** (2021) *Stop, listen!*, CFHILL Art Space, Stockholm, Sweden. (2020) *The Locality and the status Quo*, Group Show at Pacers Art, Lagos, Nigeria, *21th Century Striding Man*, nation-wide Campaign, Johnnie Walker Nigeria. **Residencies:** (2020) African Artist Foundation, Lagos, Nigeria

**Selected Press:** (2020) *New York Times*, “Artists respond to the protests”, *The Spark Nigeria*, “How artists are using social media to show support for protesters”.





**Bara Sketchbook**  
*Martha's Husband*  
2020  
Acrylic on canvas  
91 x 91 cm





**Bara Sketchbook**

*Silas and Chioma*

2020

Acrylic on canvas

122 x 122 cm



## Olamide Ogunade

Born — 1996 in Lagos, Nigeria  
Lives and works — Lagos, Nigeria  
Instagram — @olamideogunade

### Could you introduce yourself please?

— I am Olamide Ogunade, born and raised in Lagos. I am currently studying art, but I started drawing at the age of six. I used to be involved in several different art forms, such as; acting, dancing, drawing and it got to a point where I had to sit down to understand what I really need and how I should specify myself. I picked drawing. It is easy for me to express my feelings on a surface, especially on paper and on a canvas.

### Your work is hyper-realistic, what do you feel are the benefits of creating work so close to reality?

— I intend to make my audience have conversations with the work. I want it to look as if they are having a conversation with another human, knowing it was done with pencil, but the storyline is really making it look as if the drawing is talking directly to them. The work included in this show is from the Bubble Series.

### Can you talk a bit more about the Bubble Series? What do you aim to say with this body of work?

— I realized, we African people are faced with pressure. So, the pressure determines if, either you survive with it or you don't. You will notice that when bubbles are coming out of the subject's (in the picture) face, it has pressure coming out, then somehow it disappears. It is temporal. The bubbles made me realize that problems are temporal. No matter what you do, you either overcome it or you don't. My art actually let people understand that they are powerful and they should not let things weigh them down. They are strong.

### Where do you get your strength from?

— I think personal experiences and the happenings of my society. My dad was sick for eight years, with my mom taking care of him without leaving him. So, I watched my dad suffer for eight years and I saw my mom crying for eight years but now I can say that with the glory of God, a source of happiness can still appear. That is how I tend to see bubbles.

### As something that comes and then evaporates?

— Yes, it is like a problem that disappears, it comes by itself and then it goes by itself and that is the moment that I tried to capture in my art.

### I have seen your work where it looks as if the skin of the subject pictured, is wet. Extremely fine detailing.

— I have actually evolved with my art recently. If you see my most recent work; having no colours makes it look incomplete but it is complete. I try to tell my story through the skin.

### What would you say are the positive aspects of being a Nigerian artist right now?

— The Kolony is one. It is a group of artists coming together to change the art scene. We are encouraging each other to continue doing what we are doing. Reminding each other that there is a reward for it.

### Nigerians have taken a stand against SARS (the Special Anti-Robbery Squad) in recent protests and in the aftermath, the unit has been disbanded. But have things really improved?

— Nothing has really changed because the leaders, they are not challenged. They don't care, all they are really interested in is money and power. They are trying to get rid of the people supporting the End SARS Protests.

### And you are not afraid of talking about this problem?

— In Nigeria there is freedom of speech but freedom of speech is not guaranteed. So, the only thing we can do is to try and get the word out there for the world to see. If we don't talk we will die.

**Exhibitions:** (2021) *Stop, listen!*, CFHILL Art Space, Stockholm, Sweden. (2020) *Breath of hope Africa* by Adebimpe Adebambo, Virtual Exhibition (2018) *Afrika First Exhibition*, Valerius Art gallery, Luxemburg (2018) *This is Kuta Exhibition*, Nest by Kuta, Abeokuta, Ogun, Nigeria (2017) *Art Varsity Awakening*, Funaab Art beat, Ogun state (2017) *PGM live art exhibition*, Lagos, Nigeria (2016) *Bella A beau art exhibition*, Lagos, Nigeria.

**Magazines:** (2020) *Ake Review* (2020) *I choose life*.



**Olamide Ogunade Olisco**

*Man with no bracer*

2021

Charcoal and acrylic

122 x 91 cm





**Olamide Ogunade**

*Surprise Visit*

2020

Charcoal and acrylic on canvas

91 x 91 cm





**Olamide Ogunade O**

*The Awakening*

2020

Charcoal and acrylic on paper

51 x 64 cm

## **Abe Odedina**

Born — 1960 in Ibadan, Nigeria

Lives and works — London, England and Salvador Bahia, Brazil

Instagram — *@abeodedina*

### **Could you introduce yourself please?**

— My name is Abe Odedina, artist, I live in London. I started practicing as an artist after several years, actually most of my working life, I was an architect. The transition from architect to painter was very natural. Even if as an architect, I was very fortunate with the people I worked with and the opportunities presented to me.

### **How would you define the relationship between your own identity and the art you create?**

— The idea of a dialog with context is important to me, and it carries on being important in my process because art is how I process life. It has to be natural for me, like breathing. The aesthetic is important, so are the phenomena that affects us as human beings. It is the triumphs and the tragedies of daily life that interests me. Great things happen but, in the end, I am interested in how that impacts each individual human being, so I tend to not be looking at my own inner subconscious because I think that looks after itself. It leaches out, it comes naturally. Just how you don't actively have to think about breathing. Every so often when I have a studio visit and we bring all the paintings out, it is often then I realize that I discover things about myself. For example, in relation to a number of paintings I made this last year, there were lots of questions asked about how the year of 2020 with the Covid-19 virus has affected my work, but you know I never saw a gap. My art is always about life.

### **You call yourself a folk artist. What is your definition of a folk artist?**

— It is a matter of positioning. It allows you to take a long view and you establish yourself, not in the special world of 'artists of beautiful aesthetics', but in the market place, I mean that metaphorically. So that you are looking out of the window, rather than looking inside.

### **You are reflecting the times and telling the stories of the people?**

— Yes, and it is important that I know that the people have not asked me to do this. It is something I am volunteering at my own cost. I expect nothing, I make no demands, all I do is I make my paintings relentlessly. And I publish them. I love Instagram and not because I can make pictures of my food or my feet or anything, but because I can make a piece of work and share it with anybody who happens to look at it and it is visible immediately.

### **It is a dialogue?**

— Exactly, it is a dialogue and this issue of the dialogue will in fact affect a lot of the things we want to talk about.

Because my work happens in the intersection of what I might have intended and your interpretation. It is the language of our conversation that reveals the art. And that work has to keep doing that, even if I am not in the room. I don't have to be a part of it. That conversation might be between two separate people who have nothing to do with it. So, the idea is that the work is an instrument, not in a functional sense, but an instrument of enchantment. Something that is available to stimulate a question. I have no answers. I believe it is a very difficult thing if you feel that you have all the answers.

### **Yes, because then the artist is trying to imitate God.**

— Yes, and that sense of "this is it" could be wildly inaccurate, as you could be just stating the obvious, over and over again. We need dialogue.

### **Could you talk about the work that is included in this exhibition at CFHILL?**

— Yes, I would love to and it is interesting because when I got a communication about this exhibition in Stockholm, I was ready - immediately. Because the works were ready, I hadn't quite worked out why they would be appropriate, but I just knew what I wanted to show. So, there are three paintings and they were made last year (2020), and I would have to confess to you, before any of the seismic events that were going on. I am not going to make a painting because there have been the End SARS protests or any of the other dreadful things that were going on. Because this mode of imbalance in the world, in many places, it has been around for some time. It has been bubbling. It has been the subtext of our lives for so long; people being casually murdered, like let's look at the United States and the George Floyd case that sparked things up. This has to be addressed (continuously) because it can't be ok for any of us, for this to be part of our world. And I was glad that one or two of those paintings captured that mode. If I take Up the Ante which is a painting of a young woman, standing on a bench, playing an accordion. Now, that was really about speaking up and about what a lonely place it is to stand up and speak up. If we go back to the End SARS protests, it was actually a coalition of amazing young women who made this happen. With incredible courage, organization skills and abilities. Online and then translating it off-line without a shadow of doubt that it will be moved to the civic structures where politics will be moved. I will take you back to 1929 to the Aba Women's riots in the south east of Nigeria, they were calling it the Women's War, where market women wreaked havoc because of unfair taxes for local traders. They caused mayhem and the colonial administrators had to back down. And then in the 1940s, the late great Fela Kuti, his mother Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, was an incredible woman.

She also organized thousands of women to resist against unfair taxes on market women and a lot of this goes back to fuel the independent struggle in Nigeria. So, there is a history of amazing women holding the authorities to account.

**Without a doubt. How come musicians are re-current motifs in your works?**

— I do paint musicians a lot, and this is because I am jealous, haha. I can't play any instrument. And because of the way music can infiltrate all of your senses. If you closed your eyes you wouldn't be able to see my paintings, but if there is music, whether you like it or not, even if you are deaf, you will be able to feel the vibrations. That for me is important, because my work is outward facing, it is a communication and I tend to use music as a metaphor, as a symbol of that. The accordion, I love that instrument, it is the instrument of immigrants. It has no place in any concert hall. People pack their accordion as they have been driven out of one place and forced to escape to the next. It is like a suitcase, a very humble instrument but capable of the most incredible virtuosity, the way it is so human. Even the way you play it, is like the lungs opening and closing, and it seems to only be telling heartfelt folk stories about where people have come from. The accordion is all over Brazil, all over the deep south and they are used to for Cajun music. People don't associate the accordion with Black people, but it is included in so many traditions.

**Do you listen to music while you create?**

— No never ever, it would sabotage me. I listen to the news, I listen to the radio. I just want ordinary life, I don't want elevated.

**So, you don't step into a ritual when you begin to paint?**

— I tell you my ritual is coffee. And what I need, and which is why I have never moved out of the house, is a need to be surrounded by figures. These very important figures were collected by my wife and I for decades. They are very high-quality objects that we are custodians of, that I see as my classical tradition. I am trying to have them as more than just historian artifacts. They are beautiful, powerful objects and I am learning from them on a daily basis.

**And you feel that they possess magic qualities?**

— The magic is impossible to resist, but we have to understand where that magic is. Sometimes we get confused because of the rituals associated with these objects. The magic qualities are activated through the rituals, but I am not a priest. I see these objects as bridges from the past. I extract values through them, to get a sensibility, to understand that not only do they have a ritual function, they also merge from a very elegant aesthetic context and it is a very beautiful and direct way of thinking.



So, for me it is to learn immediately from and distil in my life in the 21st century. It is important for me to look for these values in everything I have around me. It is a way of life.

**But where does the magic come from? You say it is activated by ritual.**

— It is all dialogue, that is where the magic happens. We are part of the magic, we make the magic happen, we are part of the system. It is important that we are not only observing culture, but rather that we engage with these objects. It makes us discover the similarities between all of us. That is much more interesting, than to focus on the differences.

**What is your definition of pure art?**

— It is a very interesting question, but I think it can be answered very quickly; it seems to be an art that in its manufacture, prioritizes the aesthetic. It is a pure expression and it comes forth from the artist and is therefore very pure in some way. It is unfettered by any kind of notion of being functional, it is almost as if the artist is a conduit inspired by greater powers that makes this pure thing that we all learn from. That is not my process.

**Do you start out with a question and then search for an answer throughout the creative process?**

— I find my positioning much more exploratory and it is probably typically of someone who is not trained as an artist. But, I have always been interested in art, even as an architect. Most of my clients were art institutions funnily enough. In all that time, I was making studio spaces for artists.

**Very interesting. A final question; what are your prospects for the future of Nigeria?**

— You know, Nigeria is a very large country with over 200 million citizens, Africa's most populous country. And the percentage of those people that are young is amazing. So, not only Nigeria but Africa as a whole, is a place of the future. Whatever anybody thinks. I have no anxieties about Africa nor Nigeria, it is without a doubt going to be fine. If you look at the young people today, they are exploring available technology, they have agency and they are going to make the changes as they have the intelligence and the empathy to come together.

**Solo exhibitions:** *Just Looking*, ARTX Lagos, (2019), *Birds of Paradise*, Copeland Gallery, London, (2019), *True Love*, The Department Store, London (2018); *Say it Loud*, 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair, Somerset House, London, (2017); *Eye to Eye*, Copeland Gallery, London (2016); *Hi-Life*, Brixton East (2014); *Under the Influence*, The Lookout, Aldeburgh (2013).

**Group exhibitions:** *Discerning Eye*, London, (2020), *Summer Exhibition*, Royal Academy, London (2020), *Talisman in the Age of Difference*, Stephen Friedman Gallery (2018), *Summer Exhibition*, Royal Academy (2017), *Brixton Design Trail*, Street Gallery (2015); *Global Artists Consortium*, Knight Webb Gallery (2013); and *BP Portrait Award*, National Portrait Gallery, London (2013). (2021) *Stop, listen!*, CFHILL Art Space, Stockholm, Sweden.

**International collections:** The British Government Art Collection, the Africa First Collection, Agnes B Foundation, and numerous private collections worldwide including Danny Boyle, Robert Devereux, CCH Pounder, Vanessa Branson, Gbenga Oyeboade and Olufemi A. Akinsanya.





**Abe Odedina**

*Newcross*

2020

Acrylic on plywood

122 x 122 cm





**Abe Odedina**  
*Requiem*  
 2020  
 Acrylic on plywood  
 122 x 122 cm

**Abe Odedina**  
*Up the Ante*  
 2020  
 Acrylic on plywood  
 122 x 207 cm





## **Victor Ubah**

Born — 2000 in Lagos, Nigeria

Lives and works — Lagos, Nigeria

Instagram — @victor.ubahh

### **Could you introduce yourself please?**

— My name is Victor Ubah, I am a Nigerian visual artist from and based in Lagos.

### **How would you describe the work you create?**

— My work is a reflection of beauty, love and our social environment.

### **And the pieces in this exhibition?**

— My work in this exhibition is titled Am I the Next and it is a self-portrait of two identical images in different clothing, set against two differing backgrounds. It is a cathartic visual response to the constant terror inflicted on Nigerian youth by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS).

### **What would you say are the main challenges for an artist in Nigeria?**

— Being an artist in Nigeria presents many daily challenges but by far the major obstacle is bad governance and constant police harassment.

### **How would you describe the artist community in Nigeria?**

— I feel that the artist community in Nigeria is united, we come together to support each other, knowing we are all largely experiencing similar situations. I am a reflection of the times we are living in. Being a Nigerian artist has helped build a personal resilience and my paintings are reflections of my environment, hopes and dreams.

### **What are your hopes for the future of Nigerian art?**

— I hope the art scene in Nigeria continues to innovate and create space for emerging artists to grow locally.

**Exhibitions:** (2021) *Stop, listen!*, CFHILL Art Space, Stockholm, Sweden. (2020) Group exhibition, *Locality and the Status Quo*, Pacers Art Gallery, Lagos, Nigeria. (2020) Two- Person exhibition with David Olatoye, *Historical Fictions*, Pacers Art Gallery, Lagos, Nigeria. (2020) *Art Now- Edition 1*, Angels and Muse, Lagos, Nigeria.





**Victor Ubah**  
*am I the next*  
2021  
Acrylic on canvas  
112 x 95 cm

**Victor Ubah**  
*am I the next*  
2021  
Acrylic on canvas  
112 x 95 cm





## Tonia Nneji

Born — 1992 in Imo State, Nigeria

Lives and works — Lagos, Nigeria

Instagram — @tonia\_nneji

### Can you tell us a bit about your background?

— My name is Tonia Nneji. I was born in Imo State, Nigeria and I come from a long line of traditional carvers and masquerade carriers. Following the family tradition of artistry, I graduated with a B.A (Hons) in Visual Arts from the University of Lagos, Nigeria in 2016.

### How would you describe your artistic practice?

— My recent paintings show women's bodies in various stages of movement draped with colourful, intricately detailed swathes of print fabric. This preoccupation with body forms and textile material navigates cultural and social meanings of fabric in contemporary African societies while exploring the protective qualities of clothing. I use drapery as a tool of hiding, to represent protection, a safe place. Drawing from my experience in dealing with personal health issues, my work is focused on confronting a culture of suppression and silence on issues around women's physical and mental health, body autonomy and sexual harassment in a bid to create safe spaces where conversations could be held freely.

### Can you talk about your work included in this exhibition?

— The works presented in the exhibition explore significant moments throughout my journey. It is an invitation into a world of trauma and healing, isolation and companionship, creating a space for dialogue and solidarity.

### What do you feel are some of the challenges, being a young artist in Nigeria today?

— Unavailability of painting materials and minimal art institutions.

### How does being Nigerian influence the work you create?

— Nigeria influences my work because it is the environment in which my experience with PCOS (Polycystic ovary syndrome) is centered around. The dysfunctional health care system is part of the troubles women with reproductive health issues face. It is also where I am from and where I was born. I have lived here all my life.

### What are your hopes for the future of Nigerian art?

— My hopes for Nigerian art include better art institutions for art students, easier availability and accessibility to art materials as well as increased recognition of Nigerian artists on a global scale.

### Finally; what is your main source of inspiration?

— My greatest source of inspiration is myself and my health and my journey to find healing.

**Exhibitions:** (2021) *Stop, listen!*, CFHILL Art Space, Stockholm, Sweden. (2020) *You May Enter*, Rele Gallery, Lagos, Nigeria. Group Exhibition: (2020) *Young Contemporaries Alumni Exhibition*, National museum of Art, Onikan, Lagos, Nigeria. (2019) *It's a wrap*, Rele Art Gallery, Lagos, Nigeria, Afrika Savoies, Bassens, France, *Young Contemporaries*, Rele Art Gallery, Lagos, Nigeria. (2018) *Emotions, a salon*, New Jersey, USA, *Sisters: The Art of Nigerian Women*, Carnegie Gallery, Columbus Metropolitan Library, Ohio, USA, *Soul Attraction Revealed*, Gallery88, Miami beach, Florida, USA, *Wake Up Essence of Africa*, Gallery88, Miami beach, Florida, USA, *Next of kin*, Thought Pyramid Gallery, Ikoyi, Lagos. (2017) *October Rain*, National Museum of Art, Onikan, Lagos. (2016) *Afro Modernism*, Retro Africa gallery, Abuja, Nigeria.

**Residencies:** (2019) Art Dubai Residency, Dubai, UAE. Selected **Publication and Media:** *Vogue* (13 November 2020) "In the art of Tonia Nneji and Zohra Opoku, poignant narratives of healing." *Artgence* (16 October 2020) "Tonia Nneji: Bold Colours from Lagos." *The Vanguard Newspaper*, "ALERTS! Female visual artists on the rise." December 21, 2017. *Harper's bazaar* US (February 2020): "The New Guard. In Celebration of Black History Month". Article written by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. *Harper's bazaar* Arabia (April 6, 2020) "Five UAE based artists that should be on your radar". *The Guardian newspaper*, "Nneji, The Fluidman and his peers." October 8, 2017.



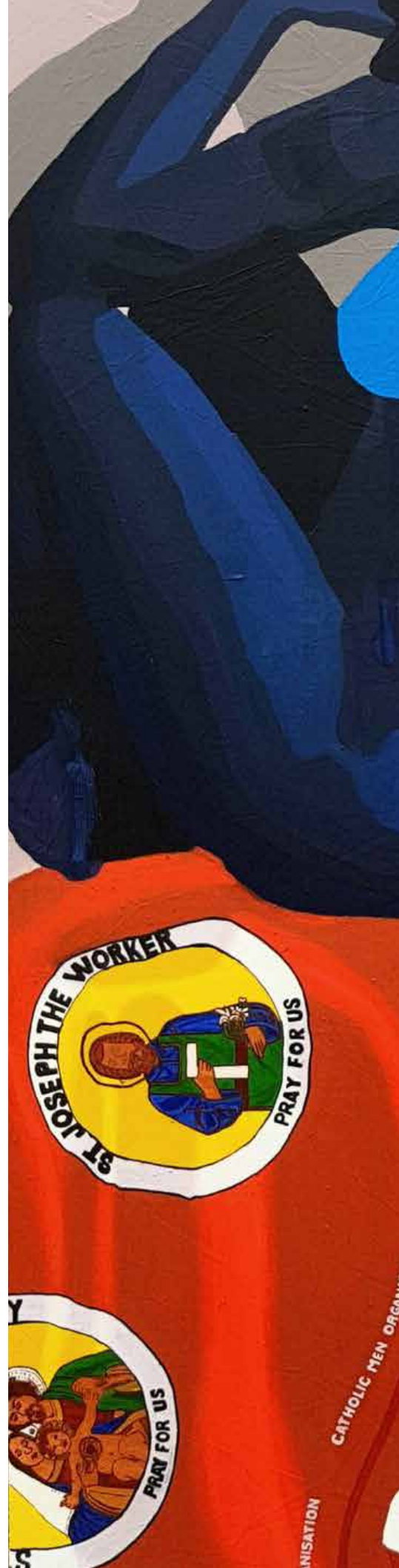
**Tonia Nneji**

*Prayers in orange*

2020

Acrylic and oil on canvas

122 x 122 cm



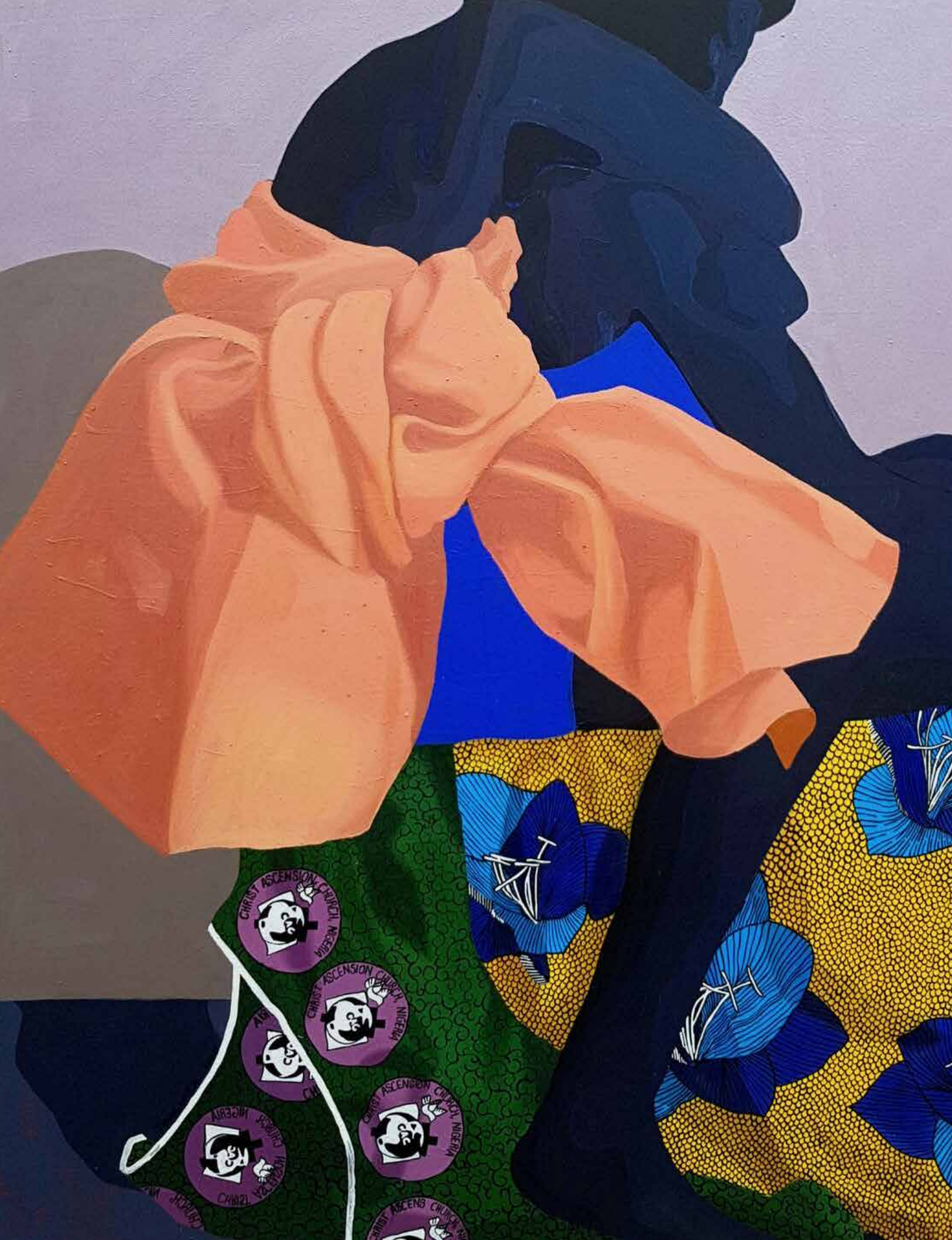




CATHOLIC MEN ORGANISATION

MARY ST JOSEPH THE WORKER  
10 CMO  
ST JOSEPH HUSBAND OF MARY ST JOSEPH  
CMO







**Tonia Nneji**

*Sooner or later*

2020

Acrylic and oil on canvas

122 x 122 cm





## Oliver Okolo

Born — 1992 in Suleja, Nigeria

Lives and works — Abuja, Nigeria

Instagram — @okolo\_oliver

### Could you introduce yourself please?

— My name is Oliver Okolo, I was born in Suleja, Nigeria. I am 28 years old. I hail from Anambra state, Nigeria. I have a BSc in Human Resource Management from Caritas University in Enugu State Nigeria. I am also a self-taught artist.

### How would you describe your artistic practice?

— I have always been a true believer of growth, practice and experimentation. In my art I have tried to show these things and also let the work speak about the things that I think are relevant for people to hear, that are not spoken of. I pay a lot of attention to my subjects as I try to capture what it is that make them who they are. Paying close attention to the eyes, I am able to navigate through my subject's soul to speak and share my opinion. My process in creating my works has changed over the year, as I keep exploring new ways to approach my painting's surface, be it a paper or a canvas. My works are mostly painted in oil and charcoal on paper or canvas.

### What does your work included in this exhibition aim to say?

— The painting I have submitted for this show is titled Boy in Purple. This painting was created not only for its aesthetics but also to speak to the African community and the diaspora about how great we all are. Purple in the painting was used to symbolize royalty, power, mystery, truth or even grandeur. I believe that a lot of us have lost hope and also have forgotten who we are as individuals. During the pandemic I was able to search deep in my soul and I was able to find myself as an artist. This has made my work come from a really deep place that I have never explored before. The painting is an allegory of pride, a reminder of who we are, who I am, who you are as a free being.

### As an artist in Nigeria, what are some of the challenges?

— As a Nigerian artist, I have faced some great challenges and I believe I still face them till now. Some of which involves not having a steady electricity supply to create art at night. I always have to try to work as much as I can during the day in order to meet my creative goals. Sometimes it is hard also trying to deal with galleries in the country because the art market in the nation isn't strong, so this makes it a little harder and slower building up good art career.

### What about the artist community in Nigeria? The connection and the support between young artists?

— This is question I can talk about for hours. I must say it is amazing how young artists in Nigeria has grown together and has helped each other by supporting and sharing each other's works on different social media platforms. We support each other by recommending one another for exhibitions etc. Young artists in the country really look out for one another and it is a thing of beauty to witness.

### How does being Nigerian influence your work?

— Nigeria is a beautiful place where waking up is already a very big influence on one's life. There is a lot to talk about, things that are unknown to other people, great cultures to uphold and show to the world through art. Through art I can speak openly and strongly about my experiences of living as a Black man in Nigeria.

### What are your hopes for the future of Nigerian art?

— I really believe that there is great potential in the future of the Nigerian art scene. The elite and rich people are beginning to find out about the importance of collecting art and also pushing art into the international market. Even Nigerian art galleries are seen in major art fairs and events around the world. Nigerian artists are globally recognized and it is a big inspiration and hope for emerging artists like myself and also for Nigerian art.

**Exhibitions:** (2021) *Stop, listen!*, CFHILL Art Space, Stockholm, Sweden. (2020-2021) Group Show curated by Danny Dunson, *Collective Reflections: Contemporary African and Diaspora Expressions of a New Vanguard*, Gallery 1957, Accra (2020) *An Overwhelming Experience: The Human - Earth Relationship*, virtual group exhibition by design art and concept Miami Florida, (2018) Dream Home gallery open call group exhibition, (2018) *Art in my city*, group exhibition by British council, (2018) *Shades*, a solo exhibition of drawings by Okolo Oliver, (2018) *Abuja literary society/ I Can Draw Africa*, (2018) Art for development group exhibition by Action Aid Nigeria, (2016) Life in my city art festival (LIMCAF) zonal group exhibition.

**Bibliography:** Art Plugged UK, Okolo Oliver: Artist inside the industry.

**Residency:** Legacy Bros Lab: A residency by Legacy Brothers LLC curated by Danny Dunson.





**Oliver Okolo**

*Boy in purple*

2020

Charcoal and oil on paper

102 x 76 cm



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