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PROFILE OF SUNMI SMART-COLE

Sunmi Smart-Cole, born September 25th, 1941, in Port Harcourt, of Nigerian-Sierra Leonean parentage, is known in for his versatility and the range of his interests. His fame as a gardener and his involvement in environmental groups such as the *Friends of the Earth* and the *Sierra Club* are reflected in his sensitivity for natural subjects. His love of music and fashion, and his varied experience, from newspapers to being father of two young men, enrich and inform his work as a photographer.

Sunmi is mostly self-taught. He was an elementary school teacher at age fifteen. At seventeen, he started training as an architectural draughtsman, and subsequently designed, among others, the country home of Sierra Leone's late Prime Minister, *Sir Albert Margai*. As a jazz percussionist, in the 1960s, he was a founding member of the *Soul Assembly*. Sunmi has performed or "sat-in" with well-known jazz musicians such as the late alto saxophonist *Julian "Canonball" Adderley*, organist *Jimmy Smith*, and trumpeter *Dizzy Gillespie*, the late multi-instrumentalist *Fela Anikulapo-Kuti*, pianist *McCoy Tyner*, singer and key-board player *Segun Bucknor*, the late pianist *Art Alade*, tenor saxophonist *Yusef Lateef* and bass player *Reggie Walkman*. He organized the first Nigerian Jazz festival in 1964 at King's College hall in Lagos. In 1967, his Yaba barber shop "*Sunmi's Place*", was a trend-setting centre for the fashionable Lagos elite. In 1972, he went to the U.S.A, where he worked as an electronic drafter and technical illustrator. His strong visual sense made him embark on a photography course in 1976 at Foothill College in Los Altos, California. Sunmi held his first solo exhibition at Stanford University, Stanford, California, in 1978. In December 1978, he was invited by the National Council for Arts and Culture to mount an exhibition at the National Arts Theatre, Lagos. He continued to work to support his new interest until his return to Nigeria in 1982. Since then, Sunmi has consolidated his position, both as a professional photographer of international standing and leader of the field in his own country. In 1983, he became the first photo editor of the newly established *GUARDIAN* newspaper. Readers looked forward to viewing his black and white works, on Sundays, in *iSunday Portfolio* - a column devoted to his serious photographs with poetic/comical captions.

Subsequently, editorship of the weekly social paper, "*Lagos Life*" gave Sunmi the opportunity to design a newspaper which reached a high standard both visually and in terms of content. Sunmi's contribution to the development of photo-journalism, through his own performance and encouragement of aspiring young photographers, was recognized in 1988 with the Nigerian Institute of Journalism Students' Union Award (he has trained over thirty photographers - **FREE OF CHARGE**). He is a five-time award winner including the 3rd. Commonwealth Photography Exhibition award in Hong Kong (1983), and the first TINAPA Movie Awards "Achievement in Entertainment Award" (GOLDEN CAMERA AWARD - 2007).

Appointed managing editor of the *GUARDIAN* newspaper group in 1988, Sunmi resigned in 1989 to return to full-time photography. The *Sunmi Smart-Cole Gallery of Photography* (probably the first in Africa) was opened in Yaba, Lagos, in 1990. Sunmi was appointed chronicler to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1991, by the Hon. Minister Ike Nwachukwu. In 1999, he was appointed chronicler to Cross River State by Governor Donald Duke. His ambition is to set up a *School of Photography* in Nigeria. Meanwhile, he has maintained his newspaper links by becoming a Contributing Editor and Director of Photography with *THISDAY* newspaper group. He is the Editor-in-Chief of SS-C-Publications Limited (publishers of *PHOTONEWS* magazine).

On August 27th., 1985, Sunmi stood with an eager bunch of journalists, in the Bonny Camp military barracks in Lagos, waiting to see who was to emerge as the new Head of State. Finally, Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida came out and with a wave and a flash of his signature smile, ducked into his car and was driven off. The image that was wired around the world that gave the international community their first glimpse of the new president was Sunmi's. His subsequent trips with the President and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, General Ike Nwachukwu, afforded him considerable access to and a unique perspective on foreign policy of the Babangida years. Smart-Cole's second book, "*A Pictorial View: The Foreign Policy Landmarks of the Babangida Administration*" (in colour/black and white), was commissioned by the President. It was published in July, 1993. His first book, "*The Photography of Sunmi Smart-Cole*", with foreword by Nobel Laureate *Wole Soyinka* (in black and white), was published by Bookcraft Ltd., in collaboration with Daily Times of Nigeria, Lagos, in 1991. Sunmi has held over 30 exhibitions in five continents - including exhibitions in Nigerian missions in Addis Ababa, Brasilia and London (to promote the country's image), as a cultural ambassador. His show in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, was declared open on September 9th, 1989, by President Ibrahim Babangida.

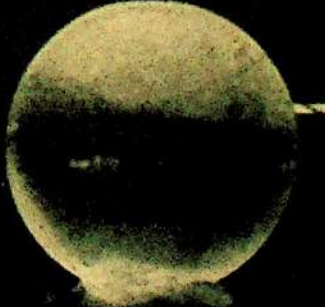
By Professor Jane Bryce and Jide Adeniyi-Jones.

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...SUNMI SMART-COLE

EXHIBITION OF PHOTOGRAPHS BY
SUNMI SMART-COLE



Venue: SILVERBIRD GALLERIA
Ahnadu Bello Way, Victoria Island, Lagos

Sunday, October 28th. - Sunday, November 11th. 2007

Royal father of the day
H.R.M. INAEMEKA A. ACHEBE
The Obi of Onitsha

