

I'll Dedicate The Rest Of My Life To Fine Art –Lemi Ghariokwu

Speaking with Lemi Ghariokwu is a most delightful experience, because you sense traces of his many years of interaction with the late Fela Anikulapo-Kuti (Abami Eda), in every sentence he makes. He talks about art and album illustration with the same passion reflected in his works in an exhibition at Quintessence Gallery, Ikoyi. He spoke with REPORTER, Darlington Abuda, about working with the late Afrobeat king, art, among others.

Excerpt:

you Where did the concept for this exhibition come from?

I met the curator last year at an art conference and we started talking. She told me she had this idea. She was setting up a gallery and a library, and wanted to do three exhibitions, so to speak, in a project entitled *Democracy*, and she had been wondering how to meet me. Eventually my exhibition was used to open the gallery; the gallery is called Centre for Contemporary Arts, Lagos. The curator's name is Bisi Silva. Also, because I have been travelling outside the country doing exhibitions of my work with Fela, I felt it would be a good idea, because it is my legacy and I take it anywhere; it's like a musician who has a hit song and can perform it anywhere in the world. So, that is the purpose of this exhibition. Fortunately for us, Mr. Moses, of Quintessence, came to that exhibition at CCA and indicated interest in bringing it to Quintessence, and we were happy to oblige. This is the first leg of the journey.

I see works of three decades ago here, how long have you been in the arts?

My first album cover design was in 1973, I did something for Blackman Ibra Akeeb Kareem, and the album was called *Singo*. Then I did for a group called World Affairs, and the album was called *Let's Try*. In 1974 I met Fela and he was a very big figure in the music industry. The first cover I did for him was in November 1974 and the album was called *Alagbon Close*, which was a hit. The album cover was also a hit; that was how the dynasty of new album covers started in the industry. What I mean by that is album covers that have a story to tell, conscious and not just decorative. I designed 26



•Lemi and Fela in 1975

album covers for Fela's musical career in a period of 19 years, between 1974 and 1993. All over the world Afrobeat is seen as a movement of music and arts, the combination worked effectively.

How was it like working with Fela?

For me, it was very interesting, quite revealing and educative, because I met Fela in my late teenage years; very young and rearing to go, and I got exposed to Fela's Kalakuta things and the key thing I learned from Fela is for one to be bold and self-confident in whatever one finds to do. And that has helped me through the years. Fela is a character different people have different impressions about, it's like the proverbial three blind men touching the Elephant and when asked to describe it one said it's like an Iroko tree, another said it's like a wall, so that is the way I see Fela. He touched thousands of lives, so everyone has different impressions of him. My own impression about Fela is that he was an egalitarian being – very open-minded, a musical genius, a rebellious spirit and a never-say-die kind of person. I had very good experience with him, because he gave me a leeway, he opened up my vistas in life, and helped me immensely by giving me total freedom to express myself. He did not have much input in everything I did art-wise, the inspiration definitely was from his songs, but I developed my own style; I illustrated the covers not literally translating what he was

saying, I may just take some part of his phrasing and build on that. I put my own idea into it and painted it the way I want, helping to sell his musical point.

In those days, I was so free that I could put my picture and write comments on the back sleeve of his record jacket, which I called designer's comments. It's very strange and nowhere in the world sleeve jacket. And when I remember that in retrospect it brings back such fond memories, which I appreciate a lot.

How would you describe your art?

Mine is a conscious art; it's social commentary and political at the same time, it tells a story and leaves an impact. It's not as if I want to put down any other form of art, because art has various fields; there are some arts that is art for art sake, and some are just decorative. But where I make a safe landing is to say that I believe strongly in destiny; you predestinate life, so we all have roles to play and I feel this is my role.

I developed this instinctively, because I am self-taught, I did not study art in any institution at all, I learnt from checking out exhibitions, checking out artists, asking questions, trying to practice what I see, reading, doing research and all that. That is how I developed my style.

How would you describe the way album covers are made now, should every album tell a story?

Every album cannot with its cover tell a story, because all music does not tell a story. A lot of the songs going on now make me laugh, because a lot of lyrics are very shallow, but that is not to take away from the fact that we have different tastes. Some people like to have their pictures on the cover, and sometimes it's the kind of trend going on that people follow. In recent memory, the computer has come of age and everyone is using pictures even on billboards and they do this Photoshop imaging and use CorelDraw packages. I can do that also. That is why I have survived all these years. I am smart enough to have kept up with the times. Like the latest 2Face album, *Grass to Grace*, it is my work. Tony Tetteila, Eedris Abdulkareem, I am still current, but that is not to say I enjoy illustrating every cover. That was why I did that of Eedris Abdulkareem, *Nigeria Jaganja*. I did it on my own. When I listened to the music I exclaimed, because the music had a strong message, so I called Kenny of Kennis Music and said I would do an



•Ghariokwu with Bisi Silva

illustration. So, I did it trying to introduce that to the new generation artists to see if they would buy the idea, but things are a little bit superficial these days. But I will not stop doing album covers. I do international covers now and I have a cover project in my hand right now for a group called Oulandish in Europe. I have done covers for some Afrobeat groups in America like the Chicago Afrobeat Project, and a Japanese-led Afrobeat group in New York called Akoya.

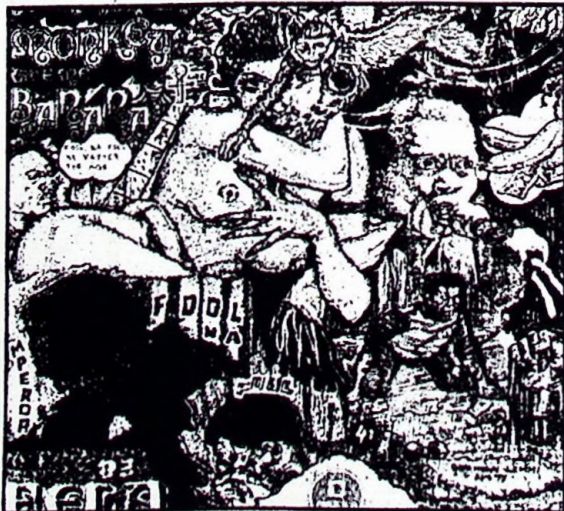
How do people get into the art of creating album covers?

First of all, the person must be talented in art, if you don't have the talent, don't knock it, but if you do, you have to develop it whichever way you deem fit. If you want to go to school for art or you want to be an apprentice

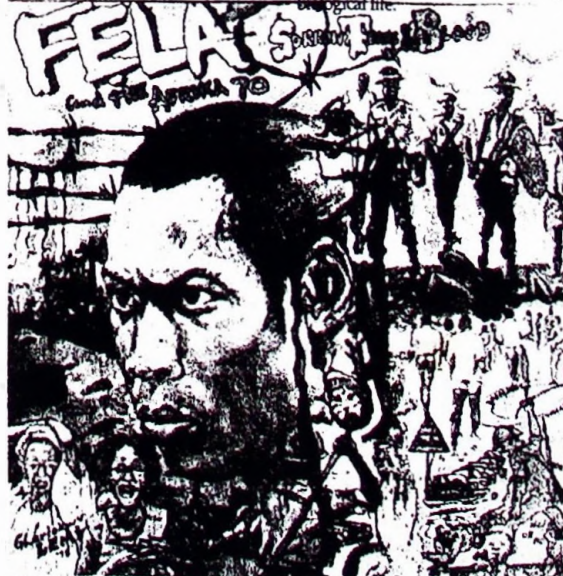
with an established artist, or if you want to learn in the streets like I did, then you have to really be hardworking because you will have to find out a lot of things on your own and give yourself assignments. For example, there was a year I gave myself the assignment of doing one drawing a day. Above all, know who you are and do not listen to anybody, listen to your spirit.

Where are you going from here?

The next step in my art career is the project I have before the end of the year, I want to do paintings of my own idea, I want to recreate myself; I want to start a new style of art. I have decided I want to spend the rest of my life to my fine arts. In recent times, the exposure these covers have given my art have helped me to decide wholeheartedly to work for my legacy for the rest of my biological life.



•Monkey Banana jacket



•Sorrow, Tears and Blood

It was no *volte-face*, after all. Ndid Dike was only exploring possibilities with her painterly skills. This much, you could have gleaned if you have seen her on-going solo exhibition, *Tapestry of Life (New Beginnings)* at the National Museum in Onikan, Lagos. Surely, you would expect her to explore other possibilities like her fellow artists, wouldn't you? Take her previous solo outing at the Yaba-based Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA), for instance. You could have sensed this inherent restlessness to open creative vents. Indeed after decades of doing her totemic poles decorated with motifs from almost every land and clime, you wouldn't expect that she still has a lot to prove in that domain, would you? But, of course, with Ndid as with other artists worth the name you might not rule out surprises.

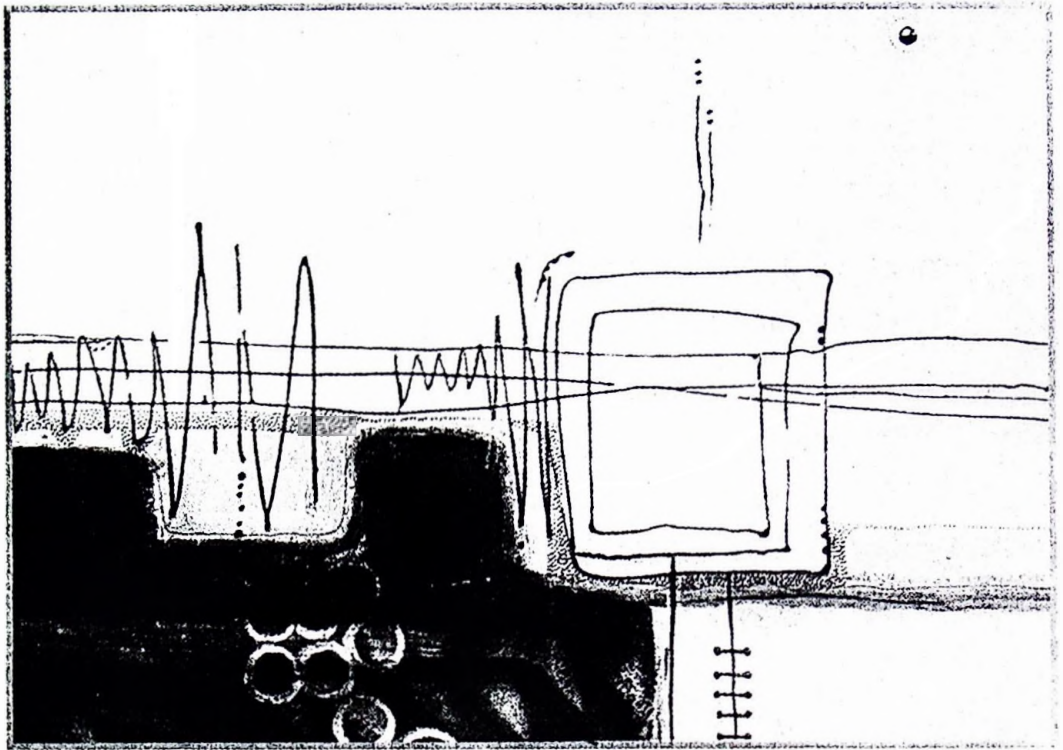
I was at her well-attended opening the penultimate Saturday and endured the *officiness* that preceded the arrival of the foreign affairs minister, the guest of honour. I say "endured" because I am convinced that there could be no better testimonial for the artist than her works. And speak for her they did. In the crowded exhibition halls of the museum, I managed to wend my way through the hordes of attendees to spot those paintings before which I lingered long enough.

If Ndid strikes you as a decorative artist, then you are probably seeing too much of her sculptures and mixed-media paintings. You'd sense the energy coursing through

assemblages. You'd also notice the artist's eclecticism. But you'd be at loss as to what has kept her ticking since she plunged headlong into her studio practice upon her graduation in 1984. Her trademark style earned her a peculiarity, you cannot easily ignore. Let's propose a hypothesis: she has long entered her comfort zone and is now thinking of moving on. That would make installation one way of doing this; and painting, her actual course of study in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, another.

But did she really abandon paintings? Her trademark carvings, mainly 2-D relief pieces, are sometimes suffused not just with motifs and decorative

Painterly Tributes



A Quiet Moment (acrylic and mixed media on canvas)

ARTICLES

By Okechukwu Uwaezuoke

found objects, but also with colours. Abstraction has always been her thing and that is the only thing about her art practice you can wager on. Then, take a look at her more cluttered paintings and you'd conclude they hark back at her wood carvings.

At the exhibition, I was more inclined to her less cluttered paintings. So you'd understand why I could linger between the acrylic-and-mixed-on-canvas painting, "A Quiet Moment". Some kind of

fresh air courses through my consciousness before the painting. On a predominantly white background, the painting has a calming effect. Indeed, white is the colour from which the others – shades of brown, really – emerge. The horizontal zig-zag lines, evoking sound waves, sometimes hint at musical bars. Those two lines projecting vertically from what looks like a platform could be human beings rendered in a minimalist style. The black ringed orb-like dot could be the sun. And the undulating horizontal lines sea waves. I have always loved this painting from the moments I set my eyes on it. It is a different Ndid Dike. A gust of fresh air in the motif-cluttered world of her creations.

I also love her "Swapping Dreams" (acrylic, clay, sand and pen on canvas) with its light-hearted airiness. The colours complement and dove-tail into each other. The brown square patches are thus well highlighted in their greyish background. Two sets of vertical lines drip into the white and cream-coloured space. You can still discern the artist's stock-in-trade *uli* motifs beside the highest-positioned grey patch. And beneath all these, the undulating brown coating interspersed by black-and-white spots, hint at some kind of sea-like turbulence.

In contrast, "Earthscape" (acrylic, sand, clay, beads, earth, glue etc on canvas) gives the viewer rather much to contemplate. Yet, you can't help thinking that it is consistent with the artist's credo. An intervening white band breaks the monotony of the predominant earthy brown, which evokes her wood carvings.

Yet, I am not so drawn to the two acrylic-on-canvas paintings, "Colours of My Universe" and "The Leopard in My Thoughts". Surely, it has something to do with their black background! The artist loves earth colours. I have hardly known her otherwise. So you can imagine the stifling effect of black on her efforts as well as on a sensitive viewer's psyche. And – strangely – there is less of this stifling effect in her "Ullscape" (Triptych). Maybe because there is an attempt to lighten the oppressive darkness.

It is obvious: the artist has never really renounced painting. Acrylic and mixed media on canvas works like "Different Pathways" and "Window on My Mind...A Search for Inner Peace" do not suggest she ever did...

Wooden Treasures

amid Olonade Fakeye could easily have stepped right out of the biblical times. Why, with his beard, clean-shaven head and striped tunic, he looked very much like a prophet. He stood beside his visitors and watched as his apprentices hacked away at a log lying on a grassy patch beside his Ile-Ife residence. A new sculpture – commissioned by the renowned art collector Yemisi Shyllon – was about to join the repository of his many creations. He took a chisel from one of the apprentices and began to hack away at the log. We were watching history about to be made.

We? First, there was Shyllon, in whose jeep we had travelled all the way from Lagos. I should acknowledge the presence of his self-effacing, publicity-shy son, Gbolahan, who would rather I didn't mention him. Kunle Ogunfuyi, one of THISDAY's promising photographers, was also there for photographic coverage. And finally, there was me – here to interview the icon himself, having heard that he was named one of UNESCO's Living Human Treasures.

Fakeye, a scion of an Ila Orangun traditional family of carvers, has an intimidating profile in the contemporary Nigerian art scene and has become virtually synonymous with neo-traditional wood sculptures. Wood carving, though not so lucrative, enjoyed an

extraordinary recognition in this society. His encounter in Oye-Ekiti with Father Carroll, a Catholic priest with more than a passing interest in African art, marked the turning-point in his career. Here he did mainly commissioned works for the government, missions, the University of Ibadan and individuals. With his many travels and exhibitions in Europe and the US, his profile has since then loomed even larger. His recent retirement as an art professor from the Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife, has only opened a new chapter in the career of this septuagenarian. Now, he could devote as much time as he wishes on his studio practice.

His carvings, inspired from mythical Yoruba figures and folklore, are further enriched by traditional patterns and motifs. And don't works like "Chief Warrior Smoking Pipe", "Ose Sango", "Ogun Priest", "Warrior on Horseback with Three Devotees", "Lady Pounding Foodstuff in a Mortar", "Dundun Drummer" and "Asan Eje" summon you to a fantasy trip? You are confronted with figures that are right out of D.O. Fagunwa's *Forest of a Thousand Demons*. These works will with others make this icon's solo exhibition holding at the Ikoyi-based Mydrim Gallery in Ikoyi.

And this promises to be a rare treat for connoisseurs of neo-traditional African art.

arts & review/music



• R-L: Mode Nine and other musicians at the WAPI festival

Everyday Is Earth Day

It is funny how another WAPI festival catches up with you. Wasn't it just yesterday that everyone was going green over the environment? No, it was actually a month ago. For a fiesta aiming to cultivate young talent, the trajectory hasn't changed. Ditto for its progenitor the British Council, which has remained unflinching in its push to remain an avenue for building creativity. Although the theme for today had changed, there were still some usual suspects.

The festival was also brimming with new artists. This took a lot of shine from preceding events as the audience displayed a lack of interest in them. But you had to applaud the efforts of these budding stars that'd gone to so much effort in generating dance, poetry and creativity targeted at celebrating Earth Day. Yes, that was today's theme. Although it was celebrated on April 22, the organisers were attempting to make it a daily event. This might not be unconnected with the recent alarm of an impending global food crisis and the need to protect the environment from further harm and depletion.

The desire to register their point saw them inviting rap heavyweights like Mode 9, Rooftop M.C's, O.D. Terry the Rapman, 6 Foot Plus and a host of other popular acts. They were meant to inspire and they were already achieving that without picking up the microphone.

With the lyrical pedigree on parade, music was definitely going to gain the upper hand today and tongues were already wagging on what to expect.

Rooftop M.C's been the first to render a few of their popular tracks. This would set the tone for the other acts. The uniqueness of their rhymes resounded their rising popularity among youths and the importance of music as a tool for uniting youths of diverse origins and experiences.

Mode 9 introduced a queer dimension to the proceedings. Rather than a rendition of his popular tracks, he threw the floor open to a teeming crowd to flex their

LITERARY CAFE

By Adeyola Ajao

lyrical skills and a few precocious talents were identified in this rap throw down.

This put paid to earlier fears about the relevance of rap to the day's proceedings as it had etched its importance into many anxious hearts. The letters African Hip-Hop Alliance were boldly printed on his top symbolising the heavy presence of an emerging school of musical acumen. This came to its apogee when O.D and Terry the Rapman joined him on the stage. Their lyrics were a bit explicit but what would rap be without a little obscenity? Their ingenuity on the microphone demonstrated a keen ability to rouse the audience and would also give Rugged Man a few things to talk about. The Nigerian hip-hop swagger wasn't just popular, to the local audience. It had spread its tentacles to other African continents.

Rapper Buddha Blaze from Kenya shared this view. Having participated in WAPI events around the African continent, his love for the Nigerian version lay in its ability to always generate new possibilities for, not just the African youths, but also for music.

"All we're doing here is a cross pollination of ideas. I'm extremely happy about the whole thing," he said.

Buddha was also full of praise for an event that displayed the ability to gather so much talent on a monthly basis. "These gatherings will ultimately start something," he recounted. "At the onset, we had the problem of trying to knot WAPI's ideals with rap but I'm happy we were able to achieve that. Our gatherings identify strength and if people keep coming together like this, we're in for a movement. Just look at the rappers on parade. They aren't just entertainers, they're a movement."

Few would doubt him. The love for this brand of music definitely reflects that of the larger society and from the array of musical prodigies on ground a result is certainly overdue.

This view was shared by Adeyola Kunle of Rooftop M.C's. "The idea of the whole festival is good but I believe strongly in results. The promotion of creativity should come with it. I'd like to see how the festival ministers on the lives of its participants."

The British Council is aware of this development and from the words of Ojoma Ochai, its head of media and culture, WAPI is gradually moving into that stage where its pool of creative prodigies will be properly trained.

"As you know, the festival focuses on creative economy and giving young people training in that regard. It's all about building their capacity and our aim is to create a sustainable economy for such talent," she said.

Their knack for youth empowerment has seen the festival gain ground since its Nigerian debut in June 2007. The council has also developed entrepreneurial talent. Popular musician MI is one of WAPI's products and he is currently on a tour of the United Kingdom.

"It's all about people that are ready to change the creative economy, that's why our topics are relevant to society and young people," he added.

As the crowd dispersed to the sounds of Naija Boys and Kaka's explicit lyrics, the stage seems set for next month's event. Tagged "Savour the Flavour of Democracy", it's aiming for an anatomy of democracy.

Having whetted the appetites of its audience yet again with another monthly surprise, the bar for the next one is taking off where this one ended. For Emen Emma, one of the organisers, there was no cause for worry, as WAPI is always raising the roof.

"You know we'll definitely up the ante and next month's event. Our aim is to continue from where we left off," she boasted.

ART LOG

The wish is the father of the thought. Thought engenders desire and with a little effort, it all comes to life. This is one way of describing the desire to perpetuate new thinking art and culture, which is the main thrust behind the latest gallery in Lagos. Located within Sandiland Arcade on Muri Okunola Street in Victoria Island, the gallery opened its pristine interiors to an enthusiastic crowd last weekend. The aim of this latest sanctuary for art is to showcase and champion contemporary Nigerian creative thinking and culture across a wide range of art forms, while examining the questions and issues shaping artistic thought.

Patrick Koshoni and Ade Shokunbi are the brains behind this stimulus for new national orientation and thought. For them, the present effort was a desire to establish a forum brimming with refreshing and alternative art forms and styles. Ade explains

"A simple review of art galleries in Lagos will reveal locations filled mostly with representational art. In gallery after gallery, one finds paintings depicting more or less the same subject matter like local market scenes, ubiquitous Danfo buses and other well catered for themes. Artistic License is about changing that," he said.

Armed with these lofty aims, they went to work and came up with their current project, which is already rearing for a piece of the aesthetic action.

In terms of design, lighting and location, they definitely got it right. The name was another highlight, which Patrick Koshoni was eager to explain. "Anything goes. The name of the gallery itself goes in sync with that objective. It's actually a licence to be indigenous and dynamic. Not doing the ordinary but creating something uniquely different. Our exhibitions aim to stimulate peoples' minds."

With the array of works on display, this was the least of their worries. Conscious of actualising this objective, their first exhibitor was Alex Nwokolo. An experienced artist with a fetish for colour and artistic development, he quickly went to work. But rather than his usual form of pictorial representation, his showcased the products of his experiments with cubism. These engendered exciting and eye-catching pieces. Obtrusive but rife with a strong design element and harmony of colours.

This novel effort is clearly a deviation and from his explanation, it's not the finale for his art as existence is all about dynamism. He added

"Change is the only permanent thing in life. I'm getting older and my art mustn't be stagnant. He said, "It's an experiment but not a final thing. Our resolve was for a new direction and we'd settled on that before the exhibition. The art and the gallery are just new ways of seeing things from a different perspective."

These deceptively simple pieces boast of truculent hue while exposing a fascination with shapes and the

Art in the Present Sense

Artistic License Gallery makes its colourful debut on the artistic scene with the exhibition *The Road Less Travelled*. Adewole Ajao examines this new haven for art and creativity



* L-R: Patrick Koshoni, Angela Amadasun, Ade Shokunbi and Alex Nwokolo at the Gallery opening

restlessness common to products of the popular Auch School of Art.

The aim of these visually stimulating pieces is a depiction of real forms in a natural and reduced way

by sustaining only the allusion of the natural subject. Hence, they are said to capture something of depicted objects in the natural world. They also crackle with a visual ambiguity, which I wasn't alone in voicing. For Alex, they were simply achieving their aim of tasking the brain. "You can read the shapes. The directions task your brain but the new values it's aiming to project are more important," he said.

Fresh abstract art and a fresh gallery with a synergy of themes that achieved a felicitous harmony of expression between the artist's concerns and those of the gallery. In achieving its lofty aims, this form of fresh thinking didn't just captivate but also managed to ruffle a few feathers along the way.

Another plus to the gathering was the price of the works on this display. These went in tandem with the positive comments of an enthusiastic audience that included SNA President Kolade Oshinowo.

"An addition to the list of galleries is a welcome idea," he said. "This one is properly set up, the lighting is okay and the environment is also very conducive. The works on display are also very good. At first glance, you wouldn't know Alex made them. They're an innovation he must stick with so it'll sink in. This entails some consistency and continuity."

Sculptor Niyi Ibiyemi was also full of adulations for the gallery and its exhibitor. For him, art was all about replication. "Repetition is accepted in art. As a deviation, it's okay. The level of creativity here is excellent and it's something you can't take away."

The atmosphere also got thumbs up from designer Lape Caxton-Onakoya. For her, the aesthetic aura of the whole establishment got her full marks. "Being here is a privilege," she said. "So much effort has gone into gallery and it's also been able to achieve the uncanny nexus with the works on display. It's highly commendable."

One of the objectives of this giant leap is the opening of another vista in the art industry that will provide audiences with the opportunity of appreciating experimental creativity of different forms and origins. On the back of this successful first impression, it might happen sooner than expected.

Life in My City

Perhaps, you still remember *Life in My City*. It was in October last year when Rocana Nigeria Limited, an outdoor advertising and printing company, collaborated with Alliance Française, Enugu, Pan African Circle of Artists (PACA), Centre Culturel Française, Celt Nigeria and a host of other art-based and corporate organisations, held a national Arts exhibition and competition for artists between the ages of 18 and 35 years. *Life in My City* was the theme of the exhibition cum competition. This theme tasked all participating artists to render an artistic illustration of the physical identities and psychological realities of their individual cities.

The exhibition cum competition held with the following key objectives in mind: to make Nigeria an important destination for the arts; to provide an arena for Nigerians to rediscover African modern arts; to stimulate economic empowerment for young artists while reinforcing arts as an economically profitable vocation; to whip up public enthusiasm and appreciation for Nigerian arts and finally, to encourage, by this example, corporate social responsibility among corporate bodies doing business in Nigeria.

The response to the exhibition was encouraging. This was as artists from different parts of Nigeria, motivated by both the prize on offer and other intangible benefits of participating in an exhibition indicated their willingness to participate. Artworks of various forms and interpretations poured in from all over the country. The submissions included paintings, sculpture, ceramics, photography, graphics and textile.

The event ran in two phases; first the semifinal from which artworks adjudged to be the best were selected for the ultimate round of the exhibition/competition. The final of the event held on December 1, 2007 with three winners emerging. The first prize was clinched by Oresgun

Olumide with his work incidentally christened, "Life in My City... Late Nite Callers" by Okpa-Iroha Uche won the second prize, while "Survival" by Kelani Abass was adjudged the third best.

The *Life in My City* art exhibition was widely applauded by artists, art curators, critics and reviewers for the rich and, sometimes, radical artistic expressions it paraded and also for proving a much needed avenue for the capture and preservation of the images of the time for posterity, a valuable property that would have been otherwise lost.

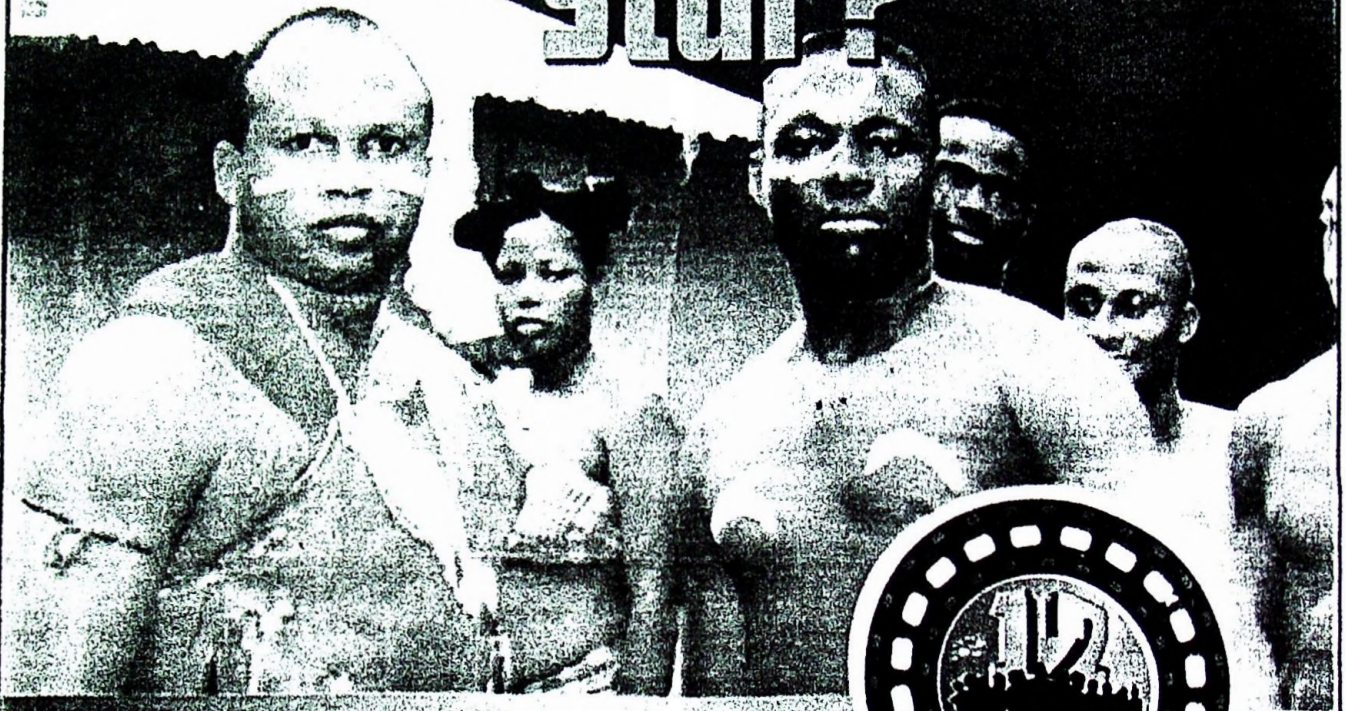
Encouraged by the resounding success of the maiden edition, Rocana and her allies are back again with its 2008 version.

This year's event will, like last year's, be held in two phases. The first phase will hold at selected Alliance Française centres across the country namely; Ibadan, Enugu, Owerri, Jos and Kaduna between May 5 and 24. The second phase, also doubling as the event's grand finale, takes place in Enugu from June 15 to 21. Details of the event are available on its website, www.lifeinmycity.org.

Submissions have already been received from artists across the country. Deadline for submission was on April 25. Application forms were downloaded from the website. Each applicant was allowed a maximum of two entries in any of the following categories: painting, sculpture, ceramics, photography, graphics, media arts and textile. About 300 works have been received this year.

The event shall also feature international musicians and artists who are coming through the French Cultural Centre. Participants and members of the jury will equally include artists of high repute. An invitation is extended to all lovers of arts and all those involved in youth empowerment to identify with this brilliant project.

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Keeping It Simple

anticipation gives way to a battle for prominence between his stage names Dekunle Fuji and Jomo in my consciousness. But these aren't the only obtrusive distractions that welcome me to the natural habitat of this popular artist. A huge banner with his picture, the Arsenal portrait, flat-screen television, colossal furniture that seems more fitted for a giant and a range of other masculine identifiers bring to mind the residence of a couch potato.

Dekunle doesn't seem to mind my observation; he's more concerned with typing his programme for an upcoming musical concert. Such is the importance of his profession for him, and it's less surprising when I discover he's been in the business for 14 years. Striking with his dark hue, imposing bulk and shock of hair, he's one of those artists that always come out with something unique when everything can't be special. He's also one of the few artists credited with engendering their own unique style. Enter Gospel Fuji. His lyrical plot has seen him churn out several popular tracks. Commendable for a musician who found success in a profession that was never a first choice. "Music is something I didn't plan for," he explains. "There were three of us initially. Then, we didn't have a name for it, so we just called it gospel Fuji. They later left and I continued."

Inspiration would find form in Pastor Taiwo Odokoya, who'd been behind him for years and despite the solitariness, he rose up to the challenges of etching his lyrics in musical hearts. His doggedness paid off and with two albums in the kitty, he has evolved into one of the few musicians that have effectively used a Fuji music style associated with obscenities and bawdy lyrics to project spiritual messages to a teeming public. "I heard Fuji and realised it'd be good if one could do it in a gospel way and since then, I've done it."

There's gospel music and there are gospel musicians. Rather than applauding the ingenuity of gospel hybrids, many regard them as diluted or tainted forms of the real thing. Dekunle seems to have developed a thick skin to such comments. He says it is something he's already used to. "At first, people didn't take it very well but in this game, you have to know how to do your business," he said. My target wasn't just the Christians, but all believers.

It is unclear if this and his musical acumen are behind the success of his current album but it has definitely found a home in the hearts of many. An instant hit since its release last year, the most popular track is the song resonating with his love for Jesus. This has crystallised into endless airplay. The song is stark simplicity of the song makes one wonder how it got so famous. Dekunle's also oblivious when I ask him the secret behind the album being a hit. "Can't really say. I write all my songs and after writing that particular one, I gave it to Cobhams. He added some other stuff and that's about it. Perhaps the time of the song had come? One can't really say but its accolades were so strong that it gingered him to do his own research. He explains, "I did a survey with another pal and discovered that most were familiar with just the first track."

Perhaps it's the simplicity of the first track album or just destiny but its acclaim doesn't seem to be faltering as it's proven to be the enigma of the whole album. "People are only familiar with the first track, I don't think they've bothered to listen to the other songs but I'm excited, happy and give God the glory. Everyone wants his songs to receive immense airplay. He said."

Still brimming with gusto over his recent album's success, Dekunle gave me his queer perspective on how gospel music got its groove back. "There was a time when gospel lyrics were only played on Sunday's but the efforts of Kenny and DI who broke the jinx, now we're playing it everyday and everywhere."

Let's not forget his use of the Fuji style to gain attention. This has engendered support from that section of the industry, which he's not shying away from. Heavyweights like Kwam One, Adewale Ayuba and Pasuma have been following his glittering career. "Kwam One has been very supportive. I don't just see him as a King but he's also a father. I'm also close to Ayuba and Pasuma."

One would have expected a holistic existence for Dekunle, but his social life has also seen him fraternising with other popular names. For him, it's all boils down to knowing when to draw the line. "I have lots of pals that aren't gospel. I hang out with Nomoreloss, Daddy Showkey and others. People sometimes comment that a gospel artist shouldn't be seen in such company but I know when to draw the line," he tells me.

Another dimension to this versatile young man is his

Dekunle Fuji is one artist you can always count on expecting something from, writes Adewole Ajao

STAGE LIGHTS

acting career. The graduate of theatre arts has appeared in popular serials in different roles. One of the few actors to be discovered by Tunde Kelani, he's balancing acting with his music. His love however lies with music as its pecuniary benefits surpass those that acting attracts but that don't stop their nexus. "For me, both work together. You can't separate music from acting. For now, the money can't compare with music. I actually wanted to be a pilot and I'm still believing God for that"

Unlike his contemporaries, he's in no rush to start a record label or clothing line. The record companies particularly got their fair share criticism from him. "There's no record label in this country. Those that claim to have it are joking. He said "you must be able to effectively cater completely for an artist before calling yourself one. Also, I'm not interested in the clothing line thing, people will think I'm satisfied with my albums which I'm not"

The Nigerian industry is also looking up. He is especially full of praises for the rap game, which has its leading lights. "So far, so good. I like Rugged Man, Ikechukwu and Mode 9. Their lyrics are powerful and you can hear what they're saying."

For Dekunle, the future is perspicuous. "We're still in the laboratory experimenting. Anything can happen," he enthuses.



Dekunle

Simply Eni-matic...



Berlin-based Nigerian visual artist, Emmanuel Eni, basks in the euphoria of his just-released album...recently

Communiqué de presse

Kader ATTIA

"Mythes et poésie du vide"

Du 17 mai au 28 juin 2008



« Mythes et Poésie du Vide » est la première exposition de Kader Attia à la galerie Anne de Villepoix.

Selon l'artiste, le vide est la matrice et le symbole paradoxal de notre époque. C'est l'élément caractéristique au sein duquel se déploie la forme de l'œuvre comme celles de la pensée et de l'expérience.

Dans la première salle sont accrochés deux tirages de photographies prises à Jérusalem : des formes architecturales distinctes issues d'époques éloignées intimement liées entre elles par le jeu complémentaire des notions de vide et de plein.

Il y a aussi une « colonne sans fin » s'étirant du sol au plafond. Faite de mégaphones empilés les uns sur les autres, c'est une pièce à la fois « visuellement sonore » et « silencieusement politique », aux dires de l'artiste.

Dans la seconde salle—oscillant au moindre souffle ou bien se transformant subrepticement—, des sacs en plastique vides conservent l'empreinte de leur contenus absents. Au mur, un texte de l'artiste accompagne ces sculptures fragiles et radicales.

Dans la troisième salle, des parpaings découpés sont alignés, recouvrant tout le sol d'un mur à l'autre. C'est à la fois « aride et généreux ». Foule en prière dans une mosquée, mémorial vacillant, « plage des rochers carrés » d'Alger, vagues continues : une pluralité d'images se superposent et le sens de cette imposante installation demeure en suspens.

Au fond de la galerie, dans la quatrième salle, sont présentés les dessins de l'artiste. Il y a un seul et même sujet, à la fois identique à lui-même et toujours changeant : un sac plastique. C'est un espace de « souvenir », de mémoire et d'annotations graphiques. C'est aussi, selon Kader Attia, une réflexion en image sur l'irreprésentabilité de la représentation.

Dans l'annexe — nouvel espace inauguré pour l'occasion — est présentée « la carte du monde arabe ». Déposée dans une vitrine, s'offre au regard une vieille carte scolaire chargée de réminiscences et de souvenirs personnels comme du poids de l'Histoire.

Conscient de la nécessité d'un art qui soit à la fois éthique et politique comme des impasses dans lesquelles il est si facile de se fourvoyer, Kader Attia — bien loin de nous imposer des certitudes —, désigne simplement deux voies s'offrant à nous : celle du mythe, menant au travestissement de la réalité, et celle de la poésie, conduisant à une forme fulgurante de vérité.

Kader Attia est né à Dugny (Seine Saint-Denis) en 1970.

Il vit et travaille à Paris.

En 2008, plusieurs expositions personnelles lui sont consacrées en France, en Israël, en Espagne ainsi qu'aux Etats-Unis.

En 2009, il participera, entre autres, à La Force de l'Art (Grand Palais, Paris) et à la Biennale de La Havane.

KADER ATTIA

“MYTHES ET POÉSIE DU VIDE”

PARIS ART DU 30/05/08 PAR RAPHAEL BRUNEL

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corps de femmes en prière vidés de l'intérieur. Juste des enveloppes dans et autour desquelles circule plein de vide.

Avec *La Fragilité du vide*, il propose un ready-made composé de plusieurs sacs plastiques d'épicerie, qui correspondent à ceux utilisés par les sans-logis pour récupérer la nourriture distribuée par des associations. Une fois vidés des aliments récupérés, ils en conservent la forme.

De ce constat, Kader Attia dresse les limites de l'intention politique d'une œuvre d'art face à la réalité sociale. Brecht ne suggérerait-il pas qu'une photographie ne dirait jamais rien sur les réalités de production dans une usine Krupp ?

À l'emploi d'artifices conseillé par Brecht, Kader Attia préfère laisser le vide reprendre sa place, combler le champ entre éthique et esthétique, les liant par l'expérience du spectateur.

Si la vague de parpaings reste l'œuvre la plus forte de l'exposition par sa présence physique, son efficacité formelle et sa force évocatrice, *La Fragilité du vide* apparaît comme un tournant dans la réflexion et la pratique de l'artiste.

Par le vide, c'est à une poésie de la vie qu'aspire Kader Attia.

Œuvre(s)

Kader Attia

— *Untitled*, 2008. 9 dessins au stylo bille noir et bleu. 32 x 40 cm encadré chacun

— *Untitled*, 2008. Parpaings. Dimensions variables.

— *La colonne sans fin*, 2008. Mégaphones en colonne. Dimensions variables.

— *La fragilité du vide*, 2008. Six sacs plastiques. 35 x 45 x 45 cm le sac.

— *Le vide, le plein*, 2008. Diptyque : 2 impressions sur diasec collé sur aluminium. 66,5 x 100 cm chacune.

— *Sans titre*, 2008. Carte de géographie sur carton et vitrine en verre et aluminium. Carte : 100 x 130 cm.

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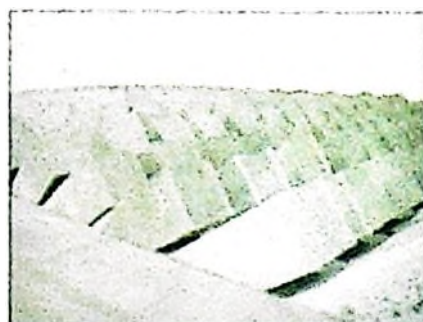


KADER ATTIA

"MYTHES ET POÉSIE DU VIDE"

PARIS ART DU 30/05/08 PARRAPHAEL BRUNEL

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Kader Attia
Mythes et poésie du vide
17 mai - 28 juin 2008
Paris. Galerie Anne de Villepoix

Pour sa première exposition à la Galerie Anne de Villepoix, Kader Attia propose un dialogue saisissant entre plein et vide, matérialité et forme éphémère et mouvante. Il entame une réflexion sur le vide, sur les limites de l'art politique et

aspire à une poésie de la vie.

Depuis plus d'une dizaine d'années, Kader Attia cherche à marier politique et poétique. Il met à jour des compromis formels, souvent très efficaces, qui permettent cette cohabitation. Il serait tentant de parler d'une certaine schizophrénie dans son travail tant ces deux notions semblent aujourd'hui, à l'heure du résultat et de la rentabilité, incompatibles. Evitant les écueils d'un art dogmatique ou prosélyte, il réussit à extraire de situations culturelles et politiques délicates des formes au fort pouvoir d'attraction et de fascination.

Il s'amuse d'ailleurs du potentiel suggestif des ses œuvres et de leurs ambiguïtés, jouant sur les décalages entre perception du spectateur et matériau utilisé, esthétique attrayante, faisant parfois écho à l'histoire de l'art, et symbole d'une violence politique et sociale.

Ainsi, pour sa première exposition à la Galerie Anne de Villepoix, Kader Attia présente, d'un œil au sculpteur Constantin Brancusi, une *Colonne sans fin* composée de mégaphones empliés. Associés aux manifestations et à leurs leaders, ces porte-voix semblent plongés dans un mutisme politique, défaits de leur rôle, orphelins de slogans, pendants ironiques des célébrations actuelles autour de Mai 68. Si leurs formes ainsi accumulées évoquent une certaine contenance, elles donnent surtout l'impression d'avoir été vidées de leur plein.

A l'image du diptyque photographique inaugural, l'exposition de Kader Attia s'organise en effet comme le poème de Gherasim Luca, *Les Secrets du vide et du plein*. D'un côté, une réflexion sur une esthétique du vide, qui trouve son origine dans le constat d'une perte des repères socio-culturels et d'une crainte en l'avenir. De l'autre, celle de la matérialité presque outrancière de parpaings qui saturent l'espace, vague de béton suggérant autant la prière que la jetée d'un port. Le regard circule de l'un à l'autre, provoque une respiration prête à briser toute stabilité.

Cette réflexion sur le vide avait déjà été amorcée avec *Ghost*, œuvre composée de formes moulées en aluminium,