

THE ART
MOMENTUM



Lola and Deen Solebo
Kofi Setordji
Nú Barreto
Jahman O. Anikulapo

UGOCHUKWU EMEBIRIODO | NEW NIGERIA STUDIOS | ART X LAGOS 2020

THE ART MOMENTUM EDITORIAL TEAM

LOLA AND DEEN SOLEBO FOSTERING A LEGACY FOR ART

Lola Ogunnaike is a Nigerian American features and entertainment journalist. As a reporter for The New York Times, she lead its entertainment coverage and wrote for the paper's Arts and Leisure section. Lola and her husband, Deen Solebo, are art collectors, interested primarily in the work of artists from Africa and its diasporas. Their collection ranges in scope, from wax work to abstracts, collage, portraiture, sculpture, and more recently to photography. A few days before the opening of the 5th edition of ART X Lagos, the couple shared openly their perspective on contemporary art and on the meaning of building an art collection.

Your life and professional journey inspired this conversation, especially your love for culture and the arts. Would you share when you were first drawn to the arts, particularly visual art?

The seeds for my love of art were planted early by my family. My late uncle was an abstract artist who dabbled in a range of mediums and his work was a fixture in our home. My deep appreciation for art blossomed during my sophomore year at the University of Virginia. Senora Gazman taught an art history course that quickly became my favourite. She was wildly expressive, loved high heels, and often sat cross-legged atop her desk as she lectured about Dali and Dadaism, Monet and Manet, the cubist movement and pointillism in the works of Seurat and Lichtenstein. I lapped it up. When she wasn't waxing about art, she regaled us with very colorful tales about her friend, Marie Therese Walter, one of Picasso's most famous lovers and muses.

My passion for art has only grown throughout the years and, thankfully, Deen now loves it as well. When we first began dating, his idea of fine art was vintage Tintin posters. Let's just say that his tastes have evolved considerably since then and now he's obsessed with art, primarily the works of African artists.

Of all the people one meets in the art world, the artist and the collector are key. Their connection is unique. As a collector yourself, can you tell us more about how and why you started collecting art and how you perceive your role in the art world?

Collecting has become a mutual passion and we love spending weekends gallery hopping. We collect because it makes us happy. The works bring unparalleled beauty into our homes in Lagos and New York and, through collecting, we've developed deep friendships with artists that we've come to adore.

One of the most exquisite gifts Deen has ever given me is an Alimi oil painting of a young woman with perfectly manicured cornrows, wide almond-shaped eyes, and bright red lipstick. Years later, we met Alimi at ART X 2018 and I gushed about how much I loved this piece. We now own several of Alimi's works and treasure our friendship with him. We also met Modupeola Fadugba and Cyrus Kabiru at ART X 2018 and we've remained friends with them both. Since my days as a New York Times Arts & Leisure reporter, I spent many nights running around Manhattan in search of conversations with a young group of artists. Watching their ascent on the global stage has been absolutely remarkable. One of those artists recently gifted us a breathtaking portrait of our son. Words can't describe its beauty or significance to us.

Are you partial to a particular artist or medium?

Our collection ranges in scope, from photography and wax work to abstracts, collage, portraiture, and sculpture. We seek out works from emerging artists and masters alike. Ben Osawe, Modupeola Fadugba, Aboudia, Ben Osaghae, Cristina De Middel, Abe Odedina, Rom Isichei, Marcellina Akpojotor, Cyrus Kabiru, Lakin Ogunbanwo, Kenny Adewuyi, Soji Adesina, Gerald Chukwuma, Emeka Udemba, Bruce Onobrakpeya, Edozie Anedu, Ayoola, Bob Nosa, Uche Uzorka, Duke Asidere, Deborah Segun, and Uthman Wahab are a few of the artists that have brought us immense joy.

Do you two agree on every purchase?

Deen Solebo: Once in a while, either one of us will sneak in an acquisition without consulting the other. So far so fine, as we have come to trust each other's taste. But generally we try and reach a consensus before committing to a purchase, meaning we've had some passionate debates about acquisitions over the years. Some regrets for sure, but mostly around that piece we didn't buy. My tastes are more avant garde and I'm drawn to abstract work. Lola is seemingly obsessed with figurative works these days, but I'm ready for her to move on. To what exactly? That's the current question in our home.

We have our eyes peeled for photography and we are eager to see what this ART X season and 2021 in general has to offer. Art is a truly common pursuit we genuinely value more than most material things.

In the course of the past five years, ART X Lagos has disrupted the way that art from Africa has been presented in Nigeria and beyond. How would you qualify this disruption?

ART X has been instrumental in establishing Lagos as one of the leading art capitals of the world and, in less than six years, it has quickly become a must-attend event on the international art calendar. Representatives from the Tate Modern, Smithsonian, and Centre Pompidou were on hand at last year's ART X and, once the world opens up again, we fully expect even more luminaries to flock to Lagos for this event.

ART X attendees not only experience the wonders of the fair, but they're exposed to some of the best of Lagos' unique culture. Great meals, killer fashion, late-night concerts with cutting-edge artists, chic, champagne-fueled soirees at local hotspots like Miliki or Nok lounge. What's not to love? We're also thrilled that ART X has made art accessible to the Nigerian masses, which is a true gift to our country and culture. Art has always been one of Nigeria's leading exports, but it is of the utmost importance that our artists are supported and celebrated at home.



ARTWORK BY ALIMU ADEWALE | PHOTO COURTESY: LOLA AND DEEN SOLEBO

Nigerian youth has recently dared to create change for the present and the future of their country. A notable lesson in bravery. Do you think that artists and collectors can also play a role in facilitating this change?

Artists were at the forefront of the #EndSARS movement and played a pivotal role in exposing rampant police brutality and extortion in the country. Historically, African artists have used their work to speak out against injustice, gender-based violence, war, corruption, colonialism, and other maladies that have plagued the continent.

At ART X 2019, we were introduced to the powerful works of Aboudia, who is known for his graffiti-style paintings that are often compared to Basquiat. He lived through the civil war in the Ivory Coast and has used his work to help him digest the atrocities he witnessed. In a recent interview, Aboudia declared, "My weapon has been the painting brush and the battlefield, my canvas." We love that quote because it perfectly and succinctly encapsulates the role of the artist in society.

Artists help us make sense of the world, bring focus to chaos, and render the unimaginable digestible. An artist's job is to provoke, to question the status quo and, as the old adage goes, to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.



LOLA AND DEEN SOLEBO IN THEIR HOME IN LAGOS. | ARTWORK: MARCELLINA AKPOJOTOR, LIKE OTHER DAYS (2019) | FABRIC, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS | PHOTO COURTESY: LOLA AND DEEN SOLEBO



MODUPEOLA FADUGBA, SYNCHRONIZED SWIMMERS (2016 – 2020) | PHOTO COURTESY LOLA AND DEEN SOLEBO



SOJI ADESINA, BLUE HAIR (2018) | ACRYLIC AND OIL ON CANVAS
KENNY ADEWUYI, (STATUE) | PHOTO COURTESY LOLA AND DEEN SOLEBO



MODUPEOLA FADUGBA, SYNCHRONIZED SWIMMERS (2016 – 2020) | PHOTO COURTESY LOLA AND DEEN SOLEBO

FAY JANET JACKSON

KOFI SETORDJI TELLING OUR OWNSTORIES

Kofi Setordji is a multidisciplinary artist, born in 1957 in Accra. Largely self-taught, he is arguably one of Ghana's most successful artists, widely exhibiting his work internationally. Setordji is also an active member of Nukube, a foundation for the promotion and preservation of Ghanaian art and culture, and also runs Arthaus, an artist-in-residence program on the outskirts of Accra, where he assists promising young artists, organises workshops, and publishes an art journal. Setordji is the first African to receive the Rockefeller Foundation Creative Arts Fellowship. As a selection of his work is to be exhibited during the upcoming edition of ART X Lagos, the artist shares his perspective on art, on history, and on the importance for Africans to write their own stories.

You make use of multiple materials, from wood and metal to stone, terracotta, and paint to create your artworks, which comment on historical, social, and political issues. How do your mediums lend themselves to your subject matter?

I am an artist 24 hours a day. I tend to look for materials that resonate with the ideas I would like to explore. So, if I want to talk about the fragility of life, I ought to use something like terracotta. Once the terracotta falls, it breaks. I look for specific materials that will relate to the idea that I want to talk about. That's how come I use a lot of materials

"I tend to look for materials that resonate with the ideas I would like to explore."

You are best known for Travelling Memorial of the Rwanda Genocide or The Star of Memory, a multi-dimensional installation that you created in the memory of the countless anonymous victims of the genocide in Rwanda. Why did you choose to "comprehend the incomprehensible", as Rhoda Woets writes about the work in the African art journal in 2010?

Yes, I try to "comprehend the incomprehensible." I was just born less than two decades after World War II started. The Holocaust of the Jews by Nazi Germany started the war. I am extremely interested in the Holocaust because the Jews do not call it genocide – they call it the Holocaust because they want to make the memory of the genocide active in our lives. Every year, there are lectures, seminars, and the likes to commemorate it.

In 1994 when the Rwanda Genocide was happening, I was amazed that it was not even reported in the Ghanaian press. Rwanda is just five countries across from Ghana in the east. In 3 months, 800,000 people died and the whole world watched on. Nobody intervened. The analogy that I am making here is that the lives of Africans matter too. We allowed 800,000 people to die and then, we say, "In 1994, 800,000 people died in Rwanda." We compress 800,000 lives into one sentence, and I said, "No." It is not fair to the people of Rwanda or those victims. I wanted to tell their stories and treat them like human beings.

I am happy that I did so, because the Museum of Abobo in Abidjan has ordered a small part of that installation for a permanent show in their collection. If we do not talk about our problems or reflect on what we are, who do we want to do so for us?

How do you think your work responds to the current political upheaval in Nigeria, following the #ENDSARS social movement against police brutality? Additionally, what do you think the role of ART X Lagos is to comment on this event and others that contribute to the sociopolitical landscape in Nigeria?

Well, my work presented at ART X Lagos is not responding specifically to the Nigerian problem. This said, as an artist who reflects on his environment, politics is one of my main subjects and the work I am showing at ART X, titled Masqueraders, is about that very topic.

In Hands of Fate, you explore the legacy of the humanist and Pan-Africanist ideals of the leaders of the 1950s. You urge Africans to take hold of their destiny, to be actors rather than passive spectators in their own history. As someone immersed in the contemporary art scene in one of the first African countries to become independent, how do you see Ghanaian artists, including yourself upholding this legacy?

I am an individual, but I see myself coming from the human race – as having an affinity to the human race. I am a world citizen. I come from Africa. I come from Ghana. I come from an ethnic group. I come from a family. Because of these connections, I comment on human suffering wherever I see it.

Now, I have been watching how African countries depend on the west in terms of grants for anything we want to do. Why should we go and collect someone else's tax money to fix our lives? I am always against it. We are rich enough to be able to do things for ourselves. Even if we do not do it to the level that we think we can do, we can start it. When I was growing up, my mother always said that, "when you want to carry something on your head, you first have to lift it half way so that somebody can push it to your head." I do not think African states are doing that at all. Africans living on the continent should decide what we want to do with our lives.

You are a founding member and an associate director at the Nubuke Foundation for Contemporary Art and Culture in Accra, Ghana, and you run Arthaus, a global residency for practicing artists. As a mentor for young creative people in Ghana, why is it important to you to showcase the work of young artists from Africa?

I am a multidisciplinary artist. I see things from multiple perspectives, but I do not see young people practicing that way. What I want them to know is my way of thinking. That is why I do what I do. We must give back to society and I think I have reached a place now that I want to give back to young people. Especially because African countries do not see the need to incubate creatives.

Your most recent group exhibition, Prête-Moi Ton Rêve, or lend me your dream, travelled to a total of 6 African countries from 2019–2020, tracing the route where colonialists envisioned a railroad that would ease the movement of British settlers. Why was it important that your work was included in this exhibition?

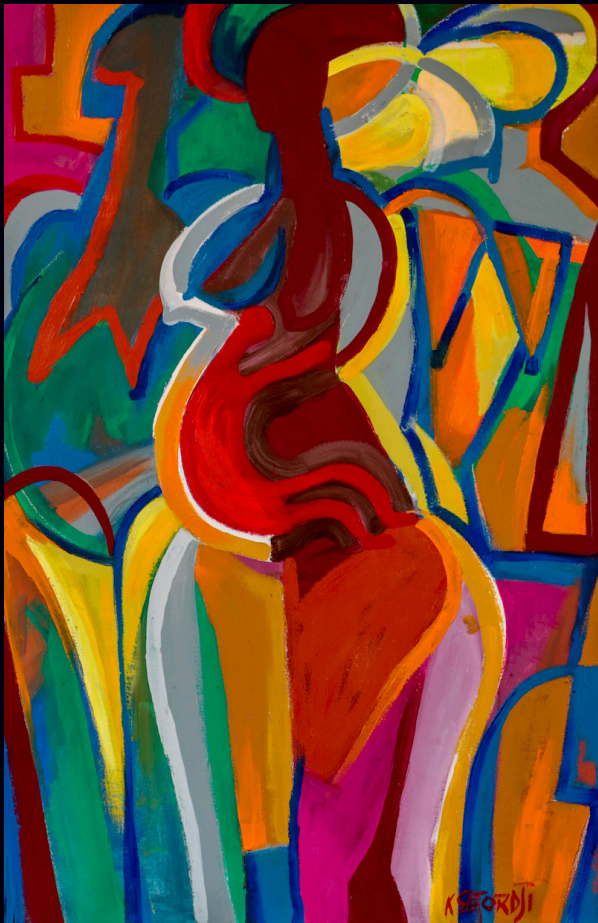
I am incredibly happy to have my work in this exhibition because it is being shown on the African continent. I think it is high time that we celebrated our own and that is one of the reasons why I accepted to be part of it.



KOFI SETORDJI, HEAD NO. 5 | ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 150 X 110 CM | PHOTO COURTESY NUBUKE FOUNDATION. PHOTO CREDIT: ERNEST KWEKU



KOFI SETORDJI, MASQUERADERS | ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 150 X 110 CM | PHOTO COURTESY NUBUKE FOUNDATION | PHOTO CREDIT: ERNEST KWEKU



KOFI SETORDJI, CONCEPTION. ACRYLIC ON CANVAS | 120 X 80 CM | PHOTO COURTESY NUBUKE FOUNDATION | PHOTO CREDIT: KOFI SETORDJI



KOFI SETORDJI, I BELIEVE I CAN FLY | ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 150 X 150 CM | PHOTOS COURTESY NUBUKE FOUNDATION. PHOTO CREDIT: KOFI SETORDJI

MATHILDE ALLARD

NÚ BARRETO THE FASCINATION OF RED

Multidisciplinary artist, Nú Barreto draws attention to political and social issues on the African continent. His work resonates strongly with the #EndSARS movement currently shaking Nigeria. Few weeks before the opening of the 5th edition of ART X LAGOS during which a selection of his works is presented, Nú Barreto spoke about his practice, his inspiration, and his projects.

Graduated from the AEP Photography School (Paris, France) and from the National School of Crafts Image Gobelins (Paris, France), you have been extending your artistic practice to other media, including drawing, painting, collage, and even video. Would you say that this recent experience as a photographer has influenced your use of light and colours in your work?

I am aware that my training as a photographer is a source of inspiration. In my work, photography benefits or is inspired by other practices, and the reciprocity is also true (from photography to drawing or painting). I introduce or think about the composition of a work when I shoot a photograph. It is also my concern to introduce my photographic assets when I paint or draw. To me, it is creativity as a whole that leads you to multidisciplinary. My passion for art has only grown throughout the years and, thankfully, Deen now loves it as well. When we first began dating, his idea of fine art was vintage Tintin posters. Let's just say that his tastes have evolved considerably since then and now he's obsessed with art, primarily the works of African artists.

Could the colour red be seen as a guiding thread in your work? What does this colour mean to you?

The colour of anger and the most attractive. No other colour in history, be it as intense and captivating, has been so praised or fought against. In my case, it goes beyond the modest symbolism of a thread. Red has, in my opinion, a betrayed soul and a suffering body. It is a colour that fascinates and moves me at the same time, to the point that I can't do without it.

With Bones, you introduce a more sculptural dimension to your work. How important is mixing media for you? Is there another technique you would like to explore in the coming years?

In the quest for creative expression, we are compelled to find a way out of the project that we conceive. That said, we must never lose sight of certain aspects where unfeasibility is in question. In my creation, I go everywhere, in terms of mixing, assembling, or associating materials. For the work Bones (Ossements), I had to deal with several techniques, ranging from the marouflage of canvas on plywood (the structure of the work) and the manufacturing of "clumps" of bones suspended on each star. I have an immense love for sculpture. I also have another sculptural project on hold and I hope to realise it one day.

Bones is a large canvas mounted on wood, representing a revisited American flag with Pan-African colours and bones instead of stars. This painting is part of a series questioning the unity of the African continent, entitled États Désunis d'Afrique (Disunited States of Africa). Could you tell me more about the story of this painting?

The first flag of the Disunited States of Africa was realized in 2009/2010. The founding idea is an umpteenth denunciation of the disunity of the countries of the continent, masked by the utopia of the 'African Union', an idea dear to some African leaders. Using the American flag as the symbol of union, I have simply replaced the colours with the ones most used by the African States (red, yellow, green, and black), and I have painted 54 black stars, corresponding with the 54 States of the continent, but these stars are disseminated in a disorderly manner to show the lack of a common vision. In 2018, when an important and determining project of a solo exhibition (Africa-Renversante, Renversée at the Galerie Nathalie Obadia) was proposed to me, I was able to present several pieces (États Désunis d'Afrique) evoking different issues of the continent.

Bones is a work dedicated to the numerous genocides and crimes against humanity in the history of the continent. The bones hung on the stars are a tribute to the ones who lost their lives in these unforgettable tragedies.

Bones resonates strongly with the current situation in Nigeria. The country is facing a huge wave of protests against the government and its police system. While thousands of people were protesting against police brutality as part of the #EndSars movement, the army opened fire — causing multiple deaths.

In spite of so few improvements, the whole world notes with dismay the regression of the continent in terms of freedom of expression and good governance. Dictatorships are institutionalised and this only disturbs those who care about the African continent. There is a deep fault line between the rulers and the people. The conditions for acceptable development are lacking on a continent that is the lung of the world. The result could not be anything other than revolts, riots, frustrations. The Arab Spring set the tone and the Maghreb was shaken, deposing the most worn-out political powers, but in the other part of the continent, this spring seems to only meet weapons threatening the population.

How do you feel about this situation? How does this echo with what you are denouncing in États Désunis d'Afrique?

I would be delighted that this work is perceived or read as such, in the awareness of our reality. In any case, the work bears witness to its time, and will remain in the history of the African that I am and that of the continent, a testimony, disturbing but genuine. I wish my works will enter into this category of art, which marks its time and is usefulness for society. Let us be happy, considering the other, and accept the differences for a better life.

NÚ BARRETO, BONES (OSSEMENTS) | THREADS, ACRYLIC, AMULETS ON CANVAS MOUNTED ON WOOD, 200 X 318 X 5 CM |
COPYRIGHT NÚ BARRETO 2018, COURTESY LOUISIMONE GUIRANDOU GALLERY



NÔ BARRETO, A ESPERAR | MIXED MEDIA ON MAROULAGED CANVAS, 110 X 110 CM | COPYRIGHT NÔ BARRETO 2019. COURTESY LOUISIMONE GUIRANDOU GALLERY



NÔ BARRETO, BURMENDJU TURMENTADU | MIXED MEDIA ON MAROULAGED CANVAS, 110 X 110 CM
COPYRIGHT NÔ BARRETO 2019. COURTESY LOUISIMONE GUIRANDOU GALLERY

THE ART MOMENTUM EDITORIAL TEAM

A CREATIVE VISION COMMITTED TO CHANGE JAHMAN O. ANIKULAPO

Aside from practising as an artist since 1980, Jahman O. Anikulapo has been an arts and culture journalist since 1984, writing mostly on the performing arts, visual arts, literature, film, and cultural affairs for a number of local and international publications. Jahman is also an arts and culture activist, helping to shape national and international policies through seminars, conferences, art festivals, and projects. The Art Momentum caught up with him in the lead up to ART X Lagos 2020 to discuss the shifting perceptions of art on the continent, the importance of archive, and the political responsibilities of the artist. He also shared his views on the relevance and impact of private initiatives like ART X, and the evolution of artistic practice and arts writing in Nigeria.

For the past 40 years, you have been committed to the arts and culture landscape in Nigeria and across the continent. What are your most revealing observations about the evolution of culture and artistic practices in Africa?

The production and expression of culture have changed drastically in character and volume. Significantly, the demographic changed in the sense that a lot of young people who were not part of the ecosystem joined up, especially on production and, of course, in consumption. Historically, parents in the 90s and mid-2000s were known to discourage their children or wards from studying the arts, or exploring and developing their talents in disciplines in the arts. Mostly they wanted their children to study so-called elite disciplines – law, medicine, or engineering. The situation began to change in the late-2000s as new social and economic realities in the national schemes opened up inherent resources in the arts. The emergence of a new middle class spurred and, perhaps determined by consumption patterns and tastes, helped trigger this rediscovery of the potentials of the disciplines in the creative arts. With more young people involved in the production of creative products – music, movies, plastic arts, fashion in particular, and literature to an extent, this ostensibly also affected the demography of expression and consumption of artistic products. Another factor is the shift in global economy, which, in a way, led to the return of a huge population of diasporic Nigerians to their homeland. This class of Nigerians came with mental and material resources that were hitherto locked out, and these injections helped to change the dynamics of consumptions, ostensibly also affecting productions, including packaging and allied services to the creative sector. This situation, I believe, also resonates with the rest of the continent.

Beyond your vision of journalism, would you say that documenting, testimony, and archiving are essential to building the history of a city, of a nation? Does a private initiative like ART X Lagos also contribute in some way?

Very affirmative. Documentation and archiving, in particular, had been largely absent in the production and expression of culture for a long while. Such significant services had been left to the mainstream media and academia, which had limited or underdeveloped capacities and lean resources. These two vital services were not seen as viable ventures that could help resource the creative production base. However, the advent of what could best be described as the 'accidental visual culture', signposted by the film industry (Nollywood, in particular) helped to set in motion a sort of reordering of the system.

For one, there was now a plethora of recording equipment, facilities, and investments, which were ready and willing to be deployed to service documentation and archiving. Essentially, Lagos, and by extension the whole of Nigeria, became constant features in visual representations. The former imaginary character of Lagos as a chaotic, dysfunctional, uninhabitable site changed dramatically as the movies, in particular, began to paint a different picture of a sassy, sexy centre of human creative outputs.

The coming of ART X Lagos has helped to burnish this new profile, in that it brought in a new set of creative producers, who probably would never have paid any significant attention to what had been going on here. For instance, Nigeria's contemporary visual arts production, which had been on for nearly a century, gained traction globally in the 60s with the emergence of the first set of modernists represented by the products of the famous Zaria Art School. ART X Lagos, remains, however, the single biggest interventionist project to bring the global visual arts family to feast on Nigeria's artistic resources.

The record of accomplishments has been incredibly impressive in such a short time. Its success, I believe, has helped to spur such other initiatives, such as the Lagos Biennale and the annual Art Summit, even as it has enervated the existing gallery and studio structures and practices.

How would you describe the evolution of arts writing in Nigeria? What important changes have you noticed in the past years?

I recall I was a speaker at one of the past discursive sessions at ART X on arts writing and documentation in the arts, and the conclusion we drew from that experience was that even the practice of cultural journalism (where I have been active in the past three decades) was changing exponentially.

Various art schools were beginning to take courses such as Art History more seriously, attracting a lot more students and producing more doctoral students and professionals in the discipline. For a long while, writing on the arts at home was concentrated in the print medium, with a few journals and occasional publications by the few art historians practising. But the increased activities in production and means of expression have encouraged a lot more people to venture into the vocation, with broadcasting media especially taking keener interests. Nearly all the major TV houses now have programmes dedicated to the visual arts, for instance.

Remarkably, there are more journals – both print and digital – emerging and helping to create an environment of enlightenment, education, and empowerment around the creative industry.

Over the past five years, the artists participating in ART X Lagos have been engaged with numerous subjects, such as post-colonialism, African diasporas, identity, police brutality, and injustice in all its forms. Would you say that it is the duty of the artist and more broadly of the art industry to raise a voice to allow for political and social change?

Fundamentally, an artist should have certain ideals to which his creative vision is committed. There ought to be a deliberate intent to his/her production. I do not think any artist creates out of vacuum or a void of intention. But then this is my personal conviction. In particular, for an artist of African orientation, or one compelled by circumstances of birth, location, or practice, I doubt such can be impactful without being affected by the social and political factors in their environment.

As one had stated elsewhere, an artist in our kind of circumstances (existential and developmental challenges) on the continent do not have the luxury of art for art's sake. Even if the artist is oiled by resources or grants from charitable, external sources, this can only last so long. To remain relevant to their audiences and impactful in their immediate environment, the artist would have to be deliberately socially conscious in



INSTALLATION OF BEN ENWONWU MBE'S MASTERPIECE 'TUTU' DURING ART X LAGOS 2018 | COURTESY OF ART X LAGOS

his vision and creations. So, affirmatively, I would say it is the cross the artist must bear to respond to the extenuating factors that exist in his production base or location of practice. I guess this also applies universally; I doubt if there is any creative production base in the world that is shorn of its own peculiar social, political, or even cultural elements that feed into the artist's vision and practice.

ART X Lagos has grown to become a catalyst for talent from the African continent and to make contemporary art accessible to the widest and most diverse audience possible. As a fervent defender of culture for all, what is your opinion of the relevance of the mission of ART X Lagos in Nigeria today?

I think essentially, the ART X has manifested as a game changer in the way visual arts is produced and presented to the public. Appropriately defined, the ART X is an intervention agency for the repositioning of art and, by extension, the creative industry in the national economy.

Associated with this is the fact that it remains the prior agent for the globalisation of home products and practice. It creates the necessary nexus between the home market and the global scene. It is also a pillar for networking, cooperation, and collaboration between and among artists across the various divides of age, race, gender, and orientation. For Nigeria in particular, ART X has helped to showcase the new possibilities of its otherwise monochromatic economy. How the managers of the national economy key into this emerging vision is another matter entirely. ART X seems ahead of the politico-economy system in which it has found itself.

Public art can express the concerns of a community and contribute to change on a larger scale. We have seen this in recent events where public statues or works of art are either seen as symbols of change or as representative of systemic oppression. What about the vibrant city of Lagos?

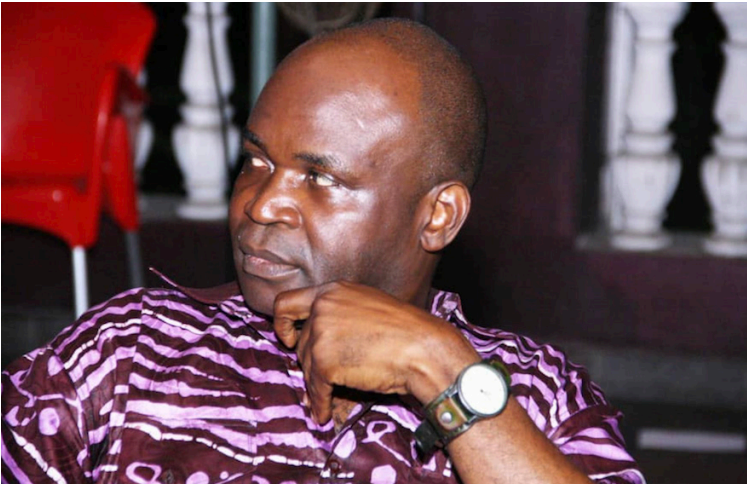
Art in public spaces, though a long, tested practice in Nigeria, has not gained the necessary traction or earned the profile it deserves. This is perhaps because art patronage until the turn of the century had been largely governmental. While private collection had been around for a long time, it had not been so pronounced until the arrival of private galleries and private collectors in the era of liberalised economy of the mid 90s to early 2000s.

However, the combination of free political space, liberalised economy, and its attendant change in the economic dynamics, which led to reemergence of the otherwise suppressed middle class, has led to a drastic change in the perception of art, changing the consumption pattern that then favoured creative products. As a result, public art has gained a good measure of prominence, which, in Lagos specifically, was consolidated by the massive investment by the former Akinwunmi Ambode-political administration.

From your perspective and experience, what is your view of the impact that an art fair or commercial initiative like ART X Lagos can have on the local art scenes in both the short and the long term?

Art fairs and 'commercial practice' help to direct sharper focus to the potentialities of the creative economy. About a decade before ART X was born, there had been the Art Expo, promoted by the Arts Galleries Association of Nigeria, AGAN – to which I was an active participant. It was purely commercial in intent, but it helped a lot to bring greater awareness to the value of the arts in the economy. The only other initiative within easy recall was the Society of Nigerian Artists (SNA)-promoted October Rain, which, although artistic in orientation by the nature of its organisers, also had underlying commercial interests that were not all that hidden, as invitations were directly extended to select members of the business club.

ART X has been so clear and direct in its objective of dragging Corporate Nigeria into its arts patronage. The strategies are there, even in its operational profile and programming content. The longer-term effect is the fact that the art will become a staple means of investment by Corporate Nigeria. A recent study revealed that, next to real estate, visual arts has become the second most favoured investment for the rich and the middle class. This can only be consolidated with the increasing engagement of the resources (marketing, promotional, capacity building, etc.) which ART X and other art fairs would ultimately bring in.



JAHMAN O. ANIKULAPO



INSTALLATION OF BEN ENWONWU MBE'S MASTERPIECE 'TUTU' DURING ART X LAGOS 2018 | COURTESY OF ART X LAGOS



YINKA SHONIBARE, ART X TALKS, 2018 | COURTESY OF ART X LAGOS

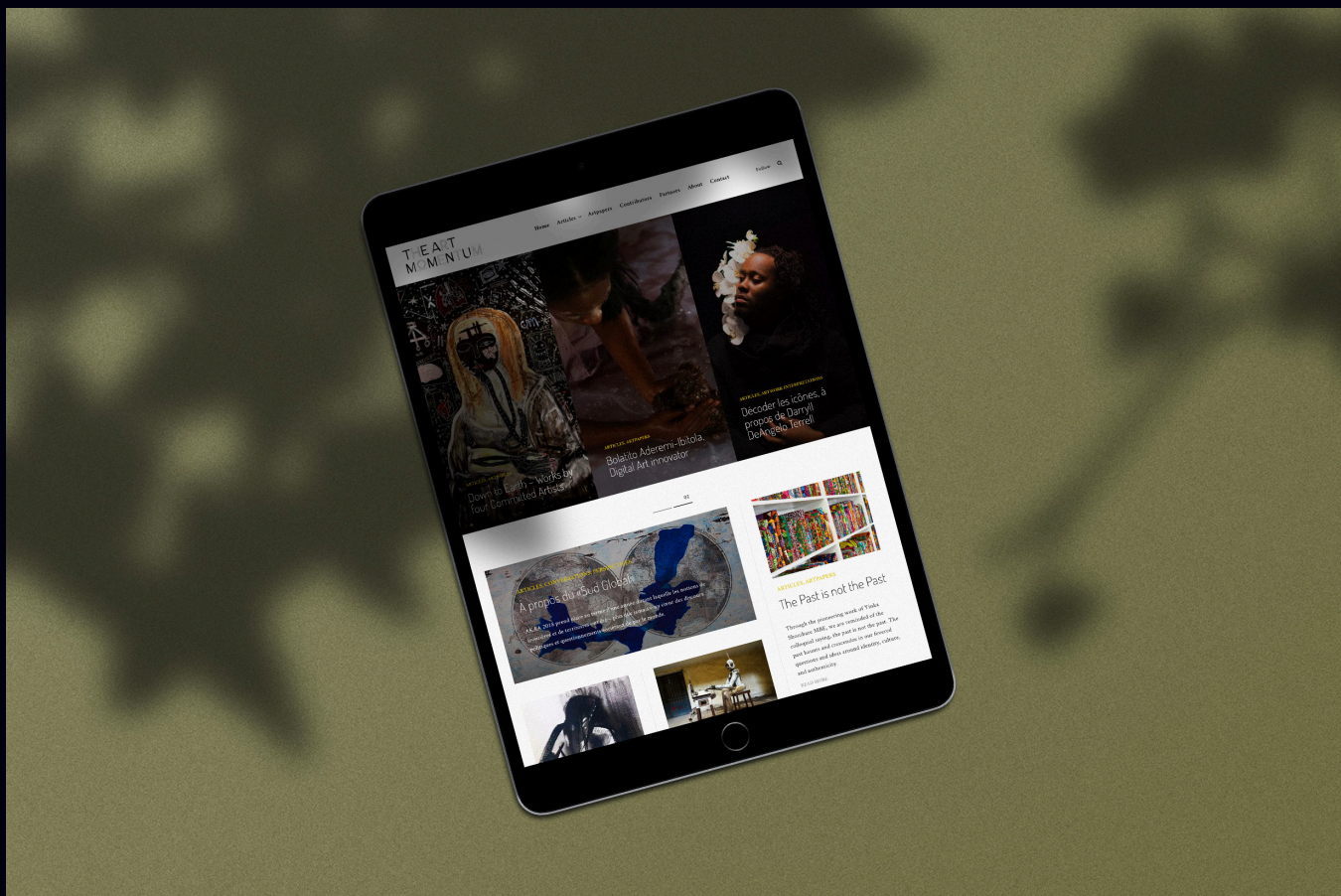


ACCESS BANK ART X PRIZE FINALISTS, 2019
FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: YADICHINMA UKOHA-KALU, CHRISTOPHER NELSON
OBUH, ETINOSA YVONN, AYOMITUNDE ADELEKE, PETER EBAHI OKOTOR
COURTESY OF ARTX LAGOS



LADI POË | ART X LIVE | ART X LAGOS

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