

Celebrating a Score Professional Anniversary

Kunle Adeyemi 2009

Celebrating a score professional anniversary is not a new thing. Very many people in different professions including the arts have done that in the past. Some people were even given the grace by God to celebrate silver, two scores, golden, three scores even up to four score active professional practice. The most important issue in events like this is how consistent the professional is in the practice; how have one withstood the storm of the dynamics of professional practice; how consistent has one being in the practice; how dogged and resilient is the professional in the pursuit of excellence; how has a professional practice and the practitioner influence society; how has one brought a positive change an impact through one's profession. These questions are endless.

I started noticing a change in my art practice about ten years ago. This was brought about by the drive to speak new language through my art, to create new things, which I can really, beat my chest and say, it is my unpolluted and undiluted creations;. to chart a way of doing my thing, my own way; to be able to walk tall professionally without being held by the hand; to be able to pave way for other budding and emerging artists, impact knowledge, wisdom, create new avenues and pave way for a sound professional art practice.

The solid foundation I got from the Yaba College of Technology, Art school under the tutelage of Professor Yusuf Grillo, Kolade Oshinowo, Dele Jegede, Agbabiaka, YAG Lawal, Late G.O. Imo, Late Abiola, 'Mama' V.O. Osemwegie, P.A.Salu, to mention just a few, provided the much needed technical tonic to start my art practice as a budding artist.

This solid foundation was greatly enriched, buttered and moulded by the experience I got from the residency I took part in, in the United State of America in 1990 under the aegis of Afram resources incorporated, East Orange, New Jersey.

My professional feat was better solidified with my training in the Master of Fine Arts degree (MFA) programme at the University of Benin under the tutelage of Late Professor Solomon Wangboje, and Mr. Dan Ikhu-Omobude of blessed memory. Others are Dr. Moses Fowowe, Mr. Ellis Erimona, Dr. Izerbigie, Mr. Ebigbho, Mr. Efe Ononome, to mention just a few.

These and many more in the areas of workshop, seminars, conferences gave me the much needed impetus, strength, will power, knowledge, wisdom, understanding and consistent commitment to creativity. I can assure my admirers and audience that the search is still on and this has crystallized into making my art become stronger, more mature and relevant.

Looking back, twenty years after my graduation as an artist, I make bold to say that my quiet research over the years has consistently beamed a searchlight on artistic dynamism, message driven works, inspirational artworks that give value to contents, aesthetics, style, good finishing and mastery of both improvised and ready made materials.

My sea of inspiration flows from my subconscious through the sociocultural as well as the political ambience in consonant with the art scene in Nigeria and around the world. This exhibition sums up my response to the artistic challenges of creativity in contemporary Nigerian art.

The works in this exhibition are developed and interpreted freely by composing imaginatively my experiences of the past, present, projecting into the future. I also explored the environment, forms, motifs and symbols. Artworks in this exhibition portrays Nigerian culture, especially the Yoruba culture where I hail from.

In my research, I took a deep look into the symbols motifs and designs in the traditional Yoruba Adire (tie & dye) Fabric. Adire is an intergral part of Yoruba textile culture. Adire, is the Yoruba word for indigo resist-dyed cloths. An art form of the Yoruba mostly employed by women. It is very profound in meaning and expresses the Yoruba culture vividly. Adire motifs and symbols used naively as in the old helps in giving meaning to my works and equally a means of

expressing my cultural identity, and the iconography of the designs helps my works to provide a voice on matters of public interest especially where the use of typography is involved in my composition. Like the Yoruba Adire cloths, some of my works bear writings (words) in the form of letters as motifs. Many of these lettering motifs are directly related to speech and sometimes some reigning phrases in the community. They could be prayerful notes, positive or negative reactions to events in the society as well as personal or social comments such as the following; success is mine (Ire ni temi), children are the pride of the world (Omo lere aye), Have mercy on me oh Lord (Sanu mi Oluwa) etc. Most of the words like in my artworks were sublimely combined with traditional visual forms to produce my works....

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The freehand application of the adire motifs allows me greater freedom of expression. I equally enjoy the use of the motifs, symbols and patterns because of the sequencing and content that were handed down through the ages. Original ideas for the symbols, forms and motifs are borrowed or taken largely from historical, folklores and daily events. For example, in a bid to document a historical landmark of their period, the native Yoruba women artists composed and designed the pillars of Mapo Hall which was incorporated into Adire cloths. Mapo Hall is a neo classical style building on a hill in the middle of Ibadan, which serves as a town hall. It was built around 1945 by the famous contractor, Taffy Jones. Birds of all varieties are mostly drawn in profile, other objects and creatures such as snakes, lizards, frogs, scorpions, eggs, roundabouts, ducks, umbrellas, mirrors, koran slates, guinea fowl and so on are inculcated into adire designed works. A good use of these objects in my works reflects my everyday perspective of nature and my environment.

My art shows mainly reflections of my Yoruba ancestry. They represent my Ondo-Yoruba heritage, especially the contextually traditional "Obitun", "Elders

processions”, “house posts” and “fragment of tradition”series. The busy and compact outlook of the subject and objects in my artworks is due mainly to my love for designs, motifs, forms and symmetry. Simply put, my work is a fusion and a continuum of contemporary traditional African art. It creates a unique bond between traditional and contemporary art. Romancing and indulging in the usages of traditional African art forms, symbols and motifs should not be misconstrued as delving into the occult/fetish terrain. This romance is just the cultural wind of reawakening, replenishing and rekindling the yearning of my soul. Media employed shows that the works have addressed the issue of modernity in traditional garbs expressed in our fast fading culture of African art, craft, history, oral literature, folklore, myths and legend.

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Colours

I use colour as the heart and soul of my artworks. With paint, I reproduce any colour that comes to my mind. I use colour as a catchment to create atmospheric meaning and identity. Most times my colour generates or creates some philosophical questions such as what am I? who am I? why am I treating that subject? where am I? and when or what mood am I when creating the picture?. I run my colours from neutral earth hues to warm reds and indigo blues. I use colour to create illusions of new worlds or evoked some vivid antique memories.

Colour is very crucial in the production of my artworks. Like any other artists, I have my favourite colours which often dominate my palette. My favourite colours find their way into any of my work irrespective of the theme of the work. The colours has a way of presenting themselves naturally in my works. When

working, my instinct will just flow naturally into using my warm reds, cadmium pale yellows, indigo blues and some hues of purple. My exposure to the world of printmaking further enlarged my vision of the colour spectrum. I now see colour as a tangible, solid thing that runs the heart and soul of my art. I feel the warmth of the reds, the natural neutral soft earth colours, the uplifting azure blues, the cheerful, glow of airy yellows and the unifying drab and withdrawn natured browns which I use sometimes to play on sophistication, mysteries and earthy richness.

I allow my colours to glow, mixed and mingled properly on my palette so as not only to create the beauty the artwork provides but the beauty each viewer of the work perceives. My colours are my visual powerhouse that I use intentionally to move my viewer spiritually and emotionally. My colours soothe heart, lift up spirits, energizes the mind and can sometimes make my viewer feel jubilant or sad, agitated or calm. Simply put, My colours are therapeutic.

Culled from The New Wine (published notes on Kunle Adeyemi's works) Authored by the artist.