

KUNLE ADEYEMI AND HIS SYMBIOSIS OF SYMBOLS AND MULTIPLICITY OF FORMS

Kehinde Adepegba Artist/Writer
Longman Nigeria Plc, Ikeja, Lagos.

A visit to Kunle Adeyemi's Studio is a journey into a wide world of profuse and profound visual creations. A world that is overwhelmed by images, shapes, textures, and patterns, emanating from Yoruba artistic, aesthetic and philosophical richness and culminating in multiplicity of forms that translate into understandable symbols, motifs and signs.

The studio that houses hundreds of assorted works executed in varied and mixed media, and in a spectrum of contrasting and harmonious colours, is a place to be. Different works, old and new, neatly arranged and sometimes scattered, are all over the studio. Some smaller works are seen hiding away behind larger frames, boards and canvases of bigger works. While some artworks occupy the tops of the tables, some are tucked away in folders. As you try to manoeuvre yourself around the multi-room studio, you find artworks wherever you turn. Drawing tables, easels, and palettes with used paints and other working tools and materials as they occupy their different positions, give the impressions of restlessness, arduousness, on the part of the user of the studio.

The panoramic view of these tasteful works feed the eyes endlessly that the mind is made complex with thoughts that keep coming in chains. As a result, one is tempted to caress the surfaces of some of the artworks to feel the textures and patterns emblazoned on them that the eyes cannot feel. Visitors to this studio will not only be amazed by Kunle Adeyemi's proficiency and profuseness but also entangled in the web of the diversity of his creations, such that a proposed visit of twenty minutes may last well over two hours. Therefore, the works showcased for this exhibition is just a tip of the iceberg; nevertheless they represent the multifariousness of his creativity- a window into his world of artistry.

The height of Adeyemi's creations today, which is not a mean achievement, began twenty-one years ago when he graduated from Yaba College of Technology in 1984 with HND in Painting and later with MFA in Printmaking from the University of Benin. This of course is not the very beginning; he began his art career as an apprentice to a street signwriter of Jimpoly Art Studio, from 1973-1975, while he was still in Secondary School in Ondo. Though Ondo is not popular in Yoruba art history, yet like other Yoruba city-states, the art

traditions that Yoruba are known for like, blacksmithing, woodcarving, leatherworking, embroidery, tye and dye among others, are also found in Ondo. This background, his apprenticeship and knowledge of the verbal and philosophical elements of the Yoruba, helped him to easily transform from the path of naturalism on which he tread right from his Yaba days, until when he got a fresh dose of Africaness, when he trained as a Printmaker at Benin Art School.

According to Rasheed Amodu, who has been following Kunle Adeyemi's antecedents, the two schools produced those syntheses that gave Kunle a new universe of creative essentiality. Kunle's art has the influences of masters like: Bruce Onabrakpeya, Irien Wangboje, Yusuf Grillo, Dele Jegede, Kolade Oshinowo, Dan Ikhu Omobude and Kunle Filani. His experimental and explorative inclinations made him to wade through the challenges of these necessary transition and transformation.

Kunle's exhibits that are portraying Sign, Motifs and Symbols are entrenched in Yoruba culture. Though he is not a direct descendant of the Ona group of artists, who seek to portray visual images from the Yoruba understanding of art (ona), yet his love for his culture as a bonafide Yoruba, triggered off this affinity. Some of these motifs are derived from Adire (tye and dye) patterns and those of the Yoruba woodcarving. This style is what Cornelius Adepegba classifies as "revisitation and adaptation of traditional forms". This is one of the characteristics of Contemporary Nigerian Art as noted by Adepegba. Mufu corroborates this by saying that "Adeyemi is committed to exploration and exposition of our traditional legacies at a time when there is an exodus to modern technology and globalisation. Artists like Adeyemi are needed now to salvage our cultural norm, that are fast disappearing in the name of modernity, through their arts.

Kunle Adeyemi is an artist with seven lives as typified by his media of visual creation namely oil painting, serigraphy, additive plastography, deep etching, plastocasting, illustrating and mixed media. He makes good use of each of the media, living each life almost perfectly. In his usage of the media, Adeyemi projects symbols that reflect commonplace objects and nature, religious and secular issues, and socio-political metaphors. Because some of these works are people-oriented some functional and aesthetic symbolisms are on the display. Tales of the past, folklore, oral literature, myths and legends of the Yoruba are the thematic considerations, he employs for the purpose of transforming the society through his works.

Kalilu observes at last's year exhibition held by Kunle Adeyemi that with his

works, he tries to clarify issues and redefine process for the advancement of the society. By this the socio-crusader in Kunle is brought to bear. Likewise, this exhibition, which is a commentary on the politics of the land, does not only present Kunle as an artist cum social crusader but also as a political reformer. He believes that the present democratic dispensation can be allowed to evolve into a better governance that will be beneficial to all and sundry. This is timely as Nigeria's 45th Anniversary Celebration is still fresh in our memories. Little wonder Chigozie understand opines that when Adeyemi is armed with brush, which is his own weapon of struggle, brings Nigeria's problem to the centre stage.

Adeyemi's colour usage goes also with his thematic symbolism. The way he conveys meaning with his motifs, signs and forms is the way he also communicate with his substantive colours to every beholder of his works. Such a beholder is captivated by the appealing power of Kunle's colours and their hues. Atmospheric meaning and identity, according to Kunle, are perceived by his audience, through the seductive appeal of those vibrant and alluring colour tonality.

The works of Adeyemi, on the whole, are perfect symbiosis and synthesis of his forms that are not only multifaceted but also multifarious in nature, and that communicate well their intended symbolism. In this solo exhibition, which is the ninth (including the one in USA and Germany), introduces us to an artist, whose visual creations cannot go unnoticed in the Contemporary Nigeria Art scene. The least I wish Kunle Adeyemi are: more oil to his palette... more colour to his canvas and more...

Kehinde Adepegba
Artist/Writer
Longmaan Nigeria Plc,
Ikejaa, Lagos.
Adepe200us@yahoo.com

References

Rasheed Amodu (2003) 'The Symbolic Synthesis of Kunle Adeyemi', New Wine Exhibition Brochure, Lagos: A.V.I Services Limited. P.8

C.O. Adepegba (1995) Nigerian Art, Ibadan: Jodad Publishers. P.100

Rom Kalilu (2004) 'Transformative Aesthetic process: the search as a challenge',

20 Years in the Art Jungle, Still Searching Exhibition Brochure. Lagos: Wangboje Art Gallery P.16

Chigozie Akanhiu (2004) 'Kunle Adeyemi: The Artist and his works', Agufon Journal, Vol 2, No 4. P.26

Kunle Adeyemi (2004) 'From the Artist', 20 Years in the Art Jungle, Still Searching Exhibition Brochure. Lagos: Wangboje Art Gallery. P.19.