

RETROSPECTIVE RETROSPECTION: BIODUN LADIPO'S EXPERIENCIAL ART-PAST

By

Kunle Adeyemi

The theme of this exhibition for Biodun Ladipo and for the visual art community (patrons, critics, artists, students, observers, etc.) is apt. A retrospective show indeed, bearing in mind the antecedent of Biodun's old vibrancy in the art of painting in the time of yore. Biodun was in the midst of Nigeria's emerging artists of the 1990s when suddenly he had a deflection. Not because he accepted Christ and later trained as a pastor nor Nigeria's economic downturn affected him! Could Biodun's prodigality have been caused by personal conviction or lack of professional stamina? Could it have been a sudden or gradual disinterest in his primary vocational love that was taking him somewhere? Could it have been the fact that he just got fed up with dining and wining with kings and queens in contrast to what the book of proverbs says that a man that is diligent in his work will dine with kings and queens and not stand before mere men? Anyway, that story is for another day!

I, Kunle Adeyemi on behalf of all other art stakeholders worldwide wish to welcome one of our illustrious 'son' in the arts in the person of Pastor Biodun Ladipo who went and deflected into personal art-exile back to the ever vibrant, expressive, delightful and soul searching visual art community.

Retrospect as a theme for this time outing is thinking about a past event or situation, often with a different opinion of it from the one that was held at a time. Again, Biodun's future success story in the visual arts will tell this story. I just hope this time; Biodun has loaded his artillery and he is ready to fire art-missiles to the camp of all his professional art-enemies. Even in saying this, i quickly remember the book of Romans that says, 'the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, but it is God that shows mercy'. I know our God is a merciful God whom his ordained servant; Biodun has been pouring rain of prayers to; day and night for this studio art practice revival.

In time past before the interlude, i beg your pardon, 'before the strike', Biodun was very consistent in experimenting new medium, styles and techniques since his university days. Even in his daringness, he dares to break new frontiers; he

remained resolute and unrepentant in projecting the tradition of good draughtsmanship, thoughtful paintings and bold brush strokes style of the Zaria school of art as legated by the legendary late Gani Odutokun. This he has also brought to the fore in 'Retrospect' which is understandably announcing his come back to the progressive meaningful art fold. Biodun is very different from others trained from his alma-mater; at least he has a different style when compared with the works of his contemporaries who are now well footed and established both in academics and practice. The likes of Akeem Balogun, Wale Ajayi, Lasisi Lamidi, Mallam Sani Muazu and even our erstwhile Tony Okpe who understandably the later two are now associate professor and professor respectively.

In the works on display at this Ibadan Museum show, one can see that though it has been docile for a while, this however did not reflect in his style, draughtsmanship and perception. His colours are still as vibrant, fluid and lucid as ever. His landscapes enjoy the best of space as if 2ft X 11/2ft work is expressed on 8ft X 4ft ground. He achieves this by his characteristic manipulation of his brush and colour. Movement in his paintings though suggestive like those of the impressionist era, at the same time illusionarily real. In the painting titled 'Melody', Biodun is able to depict a legion of drummers within a simple centralised space on the canvas. Armed with the perspective principles which he holds dearly in most of his works, he is able to show the drummers in their procession in an orderly form as if they are to do what they know how to do best in a seniority manner. The influence of being a minister of God reflects so much in the way Biodun puts order into his compositions, arrangements, designs, style and forms. Little wonder the boisterous joy, happiness and loudness that pervade the drummers ensemble can be heard loud and clear by the viewers in their subconscious. The mastery of the colour usage in Biodun's works shows his determination to succeed even with this 'new-re-debutant'.

In 'Curple' and 'Behold', the unnatural torsion of the images and the primitivist fullness of the heads to the burst region of the images reveal Biodun's intension to create a plastic expression on the human upper region through affected, even exaggerated figuration, that is markedly anti-manneristic, and which 'blocks' or breaks down all movement, denying its fluency. At the same

time all trace of psychology is put into the images. This act has a claim to Rodin statement which says, 'the art of sculpture lies entirely in the modelling, not in the rendition of movement or character' and Biodun seems to have observed this remark scrupulously.

As of now, one can see that Biodun in his paintings and drawings is not interested in semi-serious, erotic themes or the aggressiveness of the cultural ethos that typifies his imaginary art level. The good he's doing now is to start the crusade on a gradual note and with therapy, practice and consistency can raise the tempo to where he ought to be. 'it thus quick satisfy the Yoruba adage that says, 'Ibi pelebe latin mu oole je', meaning; you start eating the 'moin-moin' loaves from the flat part. As the Ibadan museum opened her doors for contemporary artists of Biodun's stature through our amiable, progressive art minded Ireti Kola George, it is, I hope, a forward ever show for both Ibadan museum and Biodun Ladipo

We say to Biodun like the father of the prodigal son, 'you are welcome back, your position is still available for you to occupy'. I am optimistic the ever traditional, reserved Ibadan audience will support the likes of Biodun Ladipo in soaring higher by encouraging him through patronage and other forms of appreciation.

I wish you all happy viewing.

Kunle Adeyemi, (2011)

Painter and Printmaker,
Art Lecturer, Yaba College of Technology,
Yaba, Lagos.