

The Beauty in Freedom

Kunle Adeyemi, October 2010,

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The struggle for freedom began with the emergence of life on earth and will continue till the end of this world.

According to Choudhury D.[1998], the foetus seeking its freedom from the dark confines of the womb pushes its head forward and labours through the birth canal to be born free. After birth, the child prepares itself for the bigger battles of existence that have to be fought and the struggle continues through youth and old age till death liberates the immortal soul from the bindings of the mortal body.

To be free is to live lives at ones own terms without hurting oneself or others. Freedom is emancipation for the enslaved, empowerment for the weak, the downtrodden and the women. It is the liberation of a nation from the ramshakles of colonialism of any kind, be it political, economic, cultural etc. It is peace without the impending threat of war. The beauty in freedom for the caged bird is a glide across the expansive skies, for the blind his vision, for the hungry a loaf of bread, for the naked a piece of cloth to conceal his shame, for the homeless a shelter over his head and above all freedom is enlightenment of the soul.

As an artist, i enjoy the beauty in my freedom of expression having leant the language of visual arts, i can at least objectify and subjectify my imagination and thoughts. Each time i think of Gods endowment or investment in me for being counted worthy to speak a universal language of visual arts for which everybody on the surface of the earth understand, i feel elated and on top of the world.

Images in my mind congeal together and form a tangible object through line, form, tone, texture, colour and composition.

I was rather too young as a child of 14 months old when my country Nigeria became an independent nation in October 1st, 1960. To be an independent nation means to be free from colonisation of any form, particularly human impostors. The credit for this goes to the collective efforts of our heroes, heroines, political juggernauts, professionals, students [home and abroad] other peace loving independent nations etc. Nigerians of my contemporary read in history books how long and fierce the battle for political freedom was won. This effort, sacrifice and struggle of our forerunners gave way to self rule and liberation from the British, unfortunately the fruits of this struggle is still having its bitter taste 50 years after. The only consolation now is that the last 11 years of our nationhood witnessed a fairly stabilised occasionally turbulent democratic system of government. Military incursion of any kind into governance for almost 29 years of our 50 year old nationhood was an aberration. Needless to say, it left its relics and scars of gross underdevelopment, egocentrism, ethnic chauvinism, greed for power and money, economic retardation, religious bigotry etc.

In the visual arts which is my constituency, I count myself as fortunate and blessed having been properly schooled and still being trained by the best of visual art professionals Nigeria had ever had. The likes of Dele Jegede, Kolade Oshinowo, Moses Fowowe, Dan Ikhu Omobude, S. I. Wangboje, Bruce Onobrakpeya, Yussuf Grillo and now Dr. Emeni, Professor Osa Egonwa, and others too numerous to mention. My development as a self-conscious, liberated and totally free artist had been slow even outside the tutelage of these great art teachers but very progressive. I have tried to overcome discontentment with my determination to work, think, draw, print and paint. I have pursued my vocation undeterred and never claim to be a clever person or an intellectual. I have most times been guided by my emotions, love and passion.

My creative art and thoughts in recent years witnessed freedom as my exhibitions begins to move from nation to nation. I realise i need to explore the visual language to portray the ills of my society, give succor to the hungry, the deprived, the tortured, the downtrodden and at the same time be contemporaneous in order to document my time. I choose to communicate through some thematic works i called series. I found out that i cannot express myself in a single sentence or in few words that will give full meaning or do justice to my theme. I therefore look at such subjects from multiple angles because it is difficult and too limitless for me to translate the varied moods and connotations on a lone canvas, paper, or board. These series can be found in my recent female forms, democracy, traditional forms and motifs, wheel of fortune, success, dialogue, house posts, royalty, fragments of tradition, procession, ere ibeji, ancestral masks, to mention just a few.

As the long celebrated golden jubilee of our dear nation is presently on, we need to think afresh and ask ourselves questions on the subject of freedom. Are we truly free even as we govern ourselves in the last 50 years? Are we truly liberated when issues such as hunger, manipulation of justice, corruption, homelessness, religious and ethnic domination, lack of good roads, unemployment, deprivation of basic needs, and much more still slap us on the face and stand on our way like stumps? Are we still not at the mercy of home grown impostors, wolves in sheep's clothing, whose dubious intentions and their cohorts are difficult to gauge; wanting to take over power at all cost and send us back to another 50 years of slavery? There may not be beauty and meaningful freedom if at this age and time my people are still grappling with freedom of expression, freedom from want, freedom from pain and fear of the future, freedom from getting justice, freedom from getting the dividend of democracy which we all laboured for, etc.

In concluding this essay, i will postulate that there will be beauty in our collective

freedom if as creative minds would regularly meet to interact intellectually and discuss matters of social relevance and way out. Not keeping the proceeds of our discussion on our shelves and studios but expose them more to the public for the fine tuning of the beauty in freedom we desire.

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