

Olumide ONADIPE





CONNECTING THE DOTS

Celebrating

10
YEARS

TEMPLE MUSE



CURATED BY SANDRA MBANEFO OBIAGO



MAY 14 - AUGUST 30, 2018

LAGOS, NIGERIA



CURATORIAL INTRO

In order to appreciate Olumide Onadipe in 360 degrees, you have to drive through some of the densest traffic, to get to the heart of Egbeda, one of the fast growing, densely populated commercial neighborhoods in the sprawling megacity of Lagos.

When you finally arrive at a one story apartment building on a relatively quiet residential street, and step through a large impenetrable iron gate, a feeling of relief sweeps over you, as you are welcomed by hundreds of small and large tropical plants hanging from a trellis along the external wall of Onadipe's ground floor apartment which doubles up as his studio.

Small white seashells create a child-like pattern along the walk way, providing a lush green welcome into the heart of Olumide's creative soul-space, away from the blaring, maddening crush of traffic and city congestion.

Onadipe's art is birthed within the walls of this green reverie, where his young family provides a mental and emotional oasis for his creative spirit. At a time when Lagos is experiencing immense growth pains under acute environmental pressures due to the enormous needs of an exploding population of over 22 million inhabitants, many migrating to the city for better livelihoods, Olumide's experimental art is a clarion call for sanity, sustainability and environmentally sound nation building.

In *Connecting the Dots*, we meet an artist philosopher, whose social commentary is expressed powerfully through over forty-five eclectic free standing and wall mounted sculptures and painted canvases. Onadipe's art presents an arresting narrative which reflects a refreshing intellectual depth, artistic dexterity, diversity, and freedom. His critical analysis of Africa's socio-political struggles and aspirations are woven into his bold artistic palette in very clear visual vocabulary.

Connecting the Dots exposes the different layers of Onadipe's artistic personality in which he researches Africa's rich history and grapples with identity and migration vis-à-vis a universal yearning for community and unfettered opportunities for growth.

Onadipe's interpretation of these universal themes are presented through the tying, knotting, folding and melting of vibrant re-purposed materials used to create striking sculptures which are a unique counterpoint to the delicate brushstrokes of his leaf paintings depicting human forms yearning towards emotional harmony and environmental balance.

"The materials I explore, polythene bags, newspapers, jute and cement bags, electrical cables, ink, paint, wood, and metal reflect "ordinary" Nigerian life and question our consumerism," commented Onadipe whose work is referenced against current global socio-economic trends. "A continent that supports the economy of the rest of the world, now has need for support and a people of earliest inventors and inventions have become consumers."

Onadipe's fourteen years of studio practice since graduating from art school, have helped to mold and channel his restless experimentation towards refreshing creative solutions. Using a broad palette of colorful plastics which

usually clog up the over-flowing gutters lining crowded streets across the city, Onadipe started collecting and up-cycling thousands of discarded nylon shopping bags and other plastics to create imposing sculptures.

Olumide's art has such powerful textural materiality, which draw us towards his subject matter like a magnet, beckoning us to physically touch and emotionally feel their physicality. His wall hangings woven into a tight tapestry using coiled newspapers, twisted and beaded juice packs, and tightly twisted, burnt and woven plastic pieces, reflect a clear influence of Prof El Anatsui's bottle-cap sculptures and Kainebi Osahenye's large scale installations of burnt and squeezed tin cans of carbonated drinks.

On the other hand, Onadipe's thought provoking, free standing sculptures which stand on life-sized legs with stylized, geometrically shaped, headless upper torsos, exude a fresh aesthetic. The strength of Olumide's rendering of abstract concepts in simple visual representations makes his art resonate in the minds and emotions of his audience.

In "Conflict of Thoughts" we see a dense mass of intertwined black plastic rings and rivulets literally swirling and spiraling like negative perceptions through an agitated consciousness, touching on the frightening global upsurge of racism.

Onadipe's sculptures are presented alongside his leaf paintings, which are a continuation of his eclectic palette of rich materiality and textural freedom, with human forms emerging out of an intricate tangle of roots and leaves.

The tying, knotting, folding and melting of vibrant re-purposed materials in his sculptural works is perfectly echoed across his large canvases depicting human forms created out of leaves, concealed within a landscape of intertwined roots and branches.

While his sculptures exude a strong physicality, his paintings reflect a quieter, feminine, meditative spirit and childlike naiveté. Leafy human forms are rendered across highly textured canvases in solitude, engaging in youthful play, or painted in two's reaching out, embracing or supporting each other; they have a magnetic emotional strength.

Olumide uses the delicate brushstrokes of his leaf paintings to speak about the need to preserve fast eroding communal values, found especially in the traditional African family structure, using the fragility and tenacity of the natural environment to show our ultimate dependence on a stable emotional ecosystem for survival.

His painting titled "The Watchers" shows two human forms backing each other, Onadipe's artistic response to the devastating insurgency taking place in northern Nigeria with displaced populations having to watch each other's backs through the night for fear of deadly raids. His social and political commentary reminds us that art is a powerful tool to question the status quo.

It is the artist's desire that "Connecting the Dots" gives us the impetus to be more open to self-discovery and experimentation. It is my desire that the exhibition fans into flame new creative expression within the exciting renaissance we are experiencing in art across Africa.

We congratulate Temple Muse for helping to shape and support the creative economy in Nigeria by providing an important platform for artists to showcase their talent within a beautiful environment for over a decade.

Heartfelt thanks to our artists, partners, sponsors, patrons and collectors who have supported us on this exciting journey. As we recognize the power of art to stimulate growth, may we also harness the questions raised in Onadipe's spectacular showcase, to live and work more intentionally towards the global good of society.

Thank you.

Sandra Mbanefo Obiago
Curator

THE AESTHETIC VOCABULARY OF OLUMIDE

SMO Contemporary Art and Olumide Onadipe give us a new exhibition: "Connecting the dots". He is an artist who continues evolving and maturing. Though he started his professional career producing realistic paintings, in recent years, he has experimented with plastics and other media to produce sculptural pieces of profound quality, meaning and beauty. For those of us who have followed him for more than a decade, his new works do not present themselves as a surprise or a rupture, but as an evolution and deepening of ideas and formal solutions that are gradually developing as Olumide grows as an artist. He is a versatile artist comfortable with different types of media, so in "Connecting the dots", Olumide, presents two distinct bodies of work: paintings and sculptures.

He initiated his artistic practice as a two-dimensional painter. Then, around 2008, he started rendering abstracted faces and figures masked with vegetation. Ten years later, in his paintings, leaves continue being a recurrent compositional element, but his vocabulary has expanded and the works have acquired a greater complexity and a deeper meaning. Nevertheless, the present exhibition shows that while his roots are still in painting, some of the sculptural works retain a distinct pictorial character. His artistic identity is increasingly defined by his experimentation with plastics, paper, newsprint, cement bags, and other materials.

Olumide has always acknowledged the great impact Kainebe Osahenye's exhibition titled "Trash-ing" had on him in 2009. It was a discovery. As he says speaking about that exhibition: "It switched on my inner light and became a guiding compass to what now characterized my artistic pursuit." But, while his first works using melted plastics were tentative and, perhaps a little bit uncertain, the recent ones are much more assertive. Olumide is finding an aesthetic vocabulary and a formal language that allow him work with ideas and meanings in a much more forceful way.

Gradually, Olumide is mastering the primary elements of sculptural artworks: volume and line, weight and mass, shape and texture, solidity and flimsiness, emptiness and fill, roughness and smoothness, order and improvisation, colour and form. But, perhaps, the defining feature of these sculptural works is the fact that they are generally made of countless small units –each one similar, but each one different from the others- put together into a single piece. In this, he is not far from the work of some prominent contemporary artists in Nigeria: El Anatsui, Olu Amoda, Kainebe Osahenye, Eva Obodo.

When Olumide refers to his sculptural works he presents a narrative with allusions to socio-political issues. But these physical commentaries on events, social customs and malaises that affect Nigerian society are rarely explicit. In most cases, they vaguely suggest something through their form. In a few others, it is only the title of the work that opens the door to possible interpretations and readings by the viewer. Olumide is well aware of the difficulty of embedding meaning into a non-representational sculptural form. Nevertheless, since he started painting, he has been very much concerned about meaning and communication. The impenetrability and inherent muteness of matter are a challenge he takes head on with the hope that his works will, eventually, be able to relate, to communicate to both, the body and the mind of the spectator.

Generally, he does not work with untouched materials and there is heavy labour involved in the process of producing each of his sculptural works. Through physical and mechanical processes of breaking, melting, rolling, folding, wrapping, tying, welding and aggregating, the common materials retrieved and used by Olumide acquire a new life in his works.

In his work titled "*Pyramid scheme*" Olumide takes his aim at the fraudulent financial schemes, unfortunately, so common in the country in past years, taking money from the poor to give it to the rich schemers. The works in his "*leg series*" are about the movement of ideas, people and objects into and from the African continent. About those who came –and continue coming- and about those who left the continent and took with them part of it. The "*legs*", in Olumide's recent works are a powerful metaphor for change, for transitions and trade.

The physicality of these pieces is such that the first response to the encounter with them cannot but be intuitive –perhaps, I should say, instinctive. Then, there might be a complex process of perception, assimilation and rationalization of the narrative that permeates these works or, perhaps, the work may remain silent, incapable of conveying what the information we receive is supposed to tell us. In either case, the first response is almost instinctive. With the works of many artists, it is possible to remain indifferent, untouched and removed. In the most successful works in this exhibition, this is not generally the case. They talk to us forcefully.

Consistently, Olumide Onadipe is building a substantial body of work with a well-defined artistic identity easily recognizable in the growing panorama of contemporary sculpture in Nigeria. "*Connecting the dots*" is another step forward. I hope not to miss the next one.

Jess Castellote

Art Critic
Publisher, Nigeria Art Market Report



Olumide Onadipe



Olumide Onadipe (born 1982) is a multidisciplinary visual artist whose idiosyncratic sculptures are built using diverse media including plastics. He studied arts and education at the University of Nigeria Nsukka and the University of Lagos, where he graduated with a master's degree in 2012.

Olumide is fascinated by textures and environmental themes, and expresses this fascination through playful iterations. He has taken part in group exhibitions in Ghana and Nigeria. Olumide's major collaborations include an artist residency and Open Studios exhibition with Arthouse Contemporary (2016), Colours of Hope in partnership with the Cancer Foundation (CLWCF), Children Living with Cancer Foundation (2014), American Nigerian Cultural Collaborative Project, US Consulate and Nike Art Gallery Lagos (2013), Beyond Boundaries, Nubuke Foundation, Accra (2013), October Rain, Nike Art Gallery, Lagos (2011) and Dialogue Between Cultures, National Museum Lagos (2009), commemorating 50 years of cultural relations between Nigeria and France. He has also had two solo exhibitions at the Pan Atlantic University Lagos in 2015 and 2013.

He is represented by SMO Contemporary Art and his works have been showcased at ArtXLagos and 1.54 Contemporary African Art Fair in London (2017), and at START Art Fair in 2018.

ARTIST STATEMENT

It has become trendy to live in isolation. Not isolation from people but from immediate loved ones, and there is a very disturbing under current in modern society which threatens its collapse. I believe a leaf cannot make a healthy tree and a tree cannot make a forest. My paintings involve having a visual dialogue using leaves as a metaphor. Every leaf painted is a symbolic representation of family as the basic organic element that builds and integrates the society.

My practice is characterized by discovering and reinventing new forms of creative expression. In 2009, I saw "Trashing", an exhibition by Osahenye Kainebe. It had a tremendous impression on me, and introduced me to parts of myself yet undiscovered and unexplored. It switched on my inner light and became a guiding compass to what now characterizes my artistic pursuit.

My works are a reflection of my environment. I am particularly drawn to the clash between people and commodities.

The materials I explore are identifiable, relatable, organic and inorganic. They include polythene bags, newspapers, jute and cement bags, electrical cables, ink, paint, wood, metal and fabric which I upcycle and give new meaning through my art. The materials I use greatly depend on the ideas conceived as I strongly believe that developing an idea as it was imagined, best conveys its physical expression.

The ubiquity of these materials reflects the concept of the "ordinary" Nigerian life and affords me the platform to highlight narratives that question consumerism as well as man's relatedness to his environment.

I like to redefine the materials I engage. The process can be very monotonous, painstaking, and labor intensive and involves tying, knotting, folding and melting. At other times, I melt the polythene bags into a mold to cast a shape I desire. This process is a metaphor that evokes and bluntly confronts the realities of social, political and economic dysfunctions; territorial encroachment; movement; forced labour; consumerism and environmental pollution.

Olumide Onadipe



THE POWER OF WORDS

Words are powerful. Combinations of letters possess tremendous strength to lead a person to discovery. Words carry the burden of human experience and can break through the walls of the heart, bring remembrance to a forgotten past and trigger spontaneous emotional responses. Words can be perilous and emotions can rise in a fearsome crescendo as headlines appear on mainstream media. And though, just a combination of letters, it is weaponry for political leaders to dictate, manipulate and navigate the realities of society.



Africa will be great again, Mixed Media, 131 x 138cm, 2017

*“combinations of letters possess tremendous
Strength to lead one to discovery”*



Brexit Full-Stop, Mixed Media, 171 x 108cm; 28.5 diameters, 2017



Change, Mixed Media, 145 x 117cm, 2017



The comma is a metaphor about every new journey we take; we have to pause at certain times to reflect on the next point and the mistakes we've made, and gear up for the challenges ahead. It is a point of decision making and reflection.



Comma, Mixed Media, 139 x 114cm, 2018







Brooch, 216 x 138 cm, Mixed media, 2018

OLUMIDE'S ART MAY BE AN ANSWER TO THE MONSTROUS VISUAL CULTURE OF TODAY OR ITS CONFRONTATION.

Introduction

What is Art today? Should we look at art through the perception, understanding and the craft of the artists of the 18th and 19th Centuries, or perhaps the European Renaissance? Can we truly justify the context of today's art in the face of the current rise in multimedia, cinematographic and computer generated 3D printing? There is obviously a thin line between what art is, and what it is not. My understanding is that every generation defines and redefines art to suit their particular understanding and aesthetic, through the powers of the conscious elements within society.

Can we, the art enthusiasts, determine what art is today? Perhaps the philosophy of Piet Mondrian has answers for today's art. He believed that integration of painting, sculpture, and design would lead to an ordered and harmonious society and that art would spread from the interior of the studio, to the home, the street, and the city, and eventually to the entire world.

Olumide's art is quite engaging within this context and it seems that we have arrived at a point of what art really is, bearing in mind our cultural background, where most art objects were first of all created as performance objects.

Olumide's art and growth are easy to follow; from his earlier studies at the Federal College of Education ,Akoka, to his painting and training at the affiliate of the University of Nigeria at the Yaba Tech campus. His new found art is difficult to grasp in one breath. It is a painting in every context and also an installation and perhaps a sculpture, if one likes to see it from such a perspective. In this respect one begins to liken his art to the dream of *Mondrian* in the early nineteenth century, because his art transcends one mode of expression to evoke multiple reactions which confront his imagination. Perhaps his works are reactions to the generational changes in the visual culture of today.

Olumide is quite confrontational in his understanding of the word *aesthetic*; far from being intimidated by the current visual culture, he takes a position and adapts it to his creation and understanding of the contemporary word *art*. His works are neither sculpture nor entirely painting, but a bridge between the two modes of expression. Should we, the audience, begin to think of new perspectives to Nigerian contemporary art, or should we see the prediction of Mondrian in the art of Olumide?

It is my thinking that he has earned his right as an artist within the ideology of contemporary art. He has demonstrated in no small measure that he has come of age with the mind of the post-structural period of expression. It seems that we do not have to wait for the predictions of the Mondrian philosophy. Understanding the future of painting is here now, within the creative essence of the young artist called Olumide Onadipe. The pure hue of the artist's colors is a clear display of the pure essence of his soul, which he brings forth for our contemplation and perception. Olumide Onadipe, the young bearded man, is a contemporary artist to watch and study.

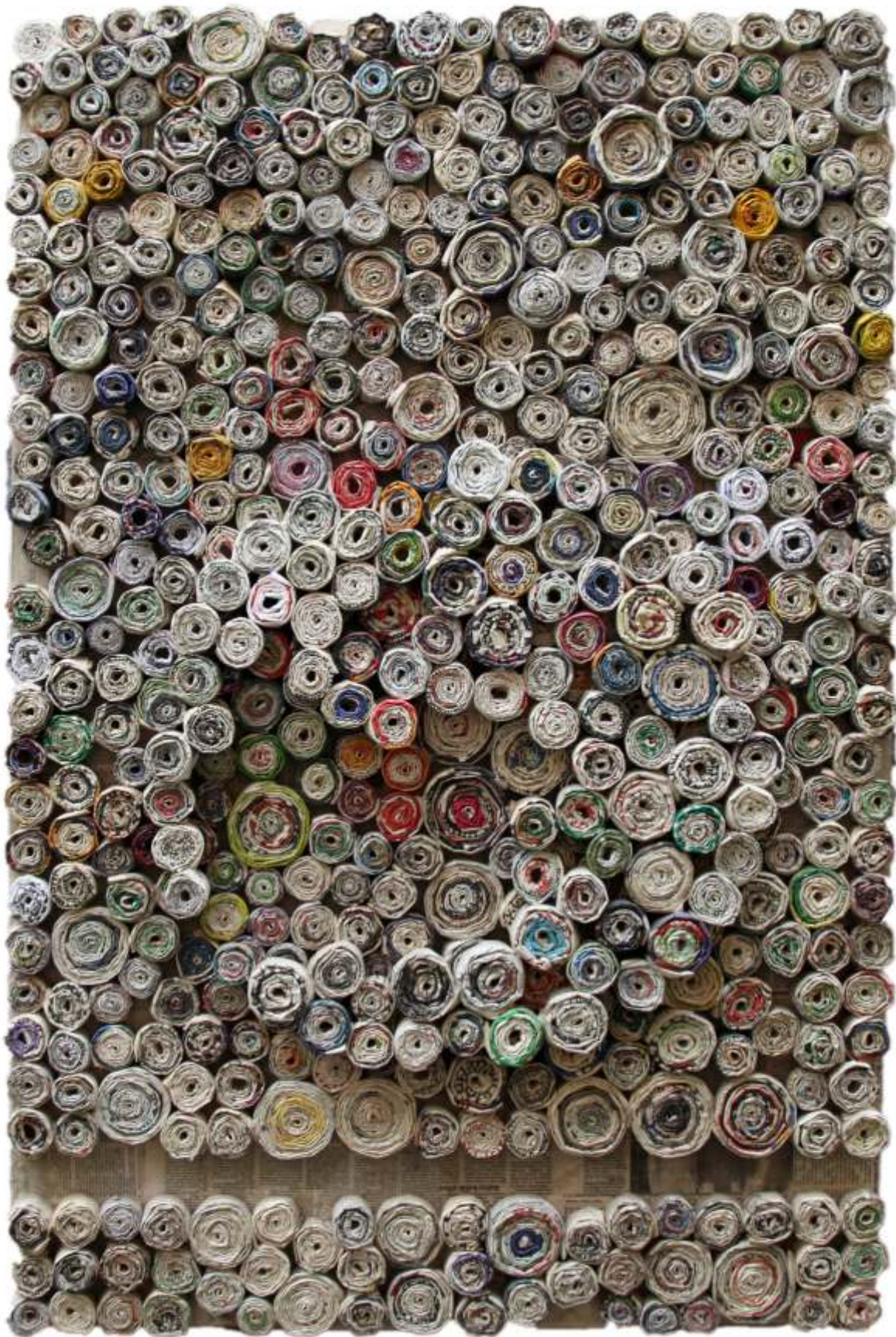
The artist creates pure aesthetic abstraction and explorative figuration as a clear vehicle of expressing pure contemporary semiotic visual theories which are readable within the context of the audience's mind. He tries to redefine the context of the word 'truth' to his audience. The truth of art is what occurs through the medium of art; truth is not an element or component of art. Art moves towards truth, and is not directly identical with truth.

Olumide's creations move towards contextualizing art as an object of knowledge. It would be interesting in our journey of understanding to appreciate what constitutes knowledge within the parameters of visual art; in which knowing would come to bear on the intelligence of humanity. Thus looking at the works of Olumide we will confront images and objects of aesthetic beauty. I can assure you, that you are staring at a future giant in the contemporary expression of the word art.

Thank you and happy viewing.

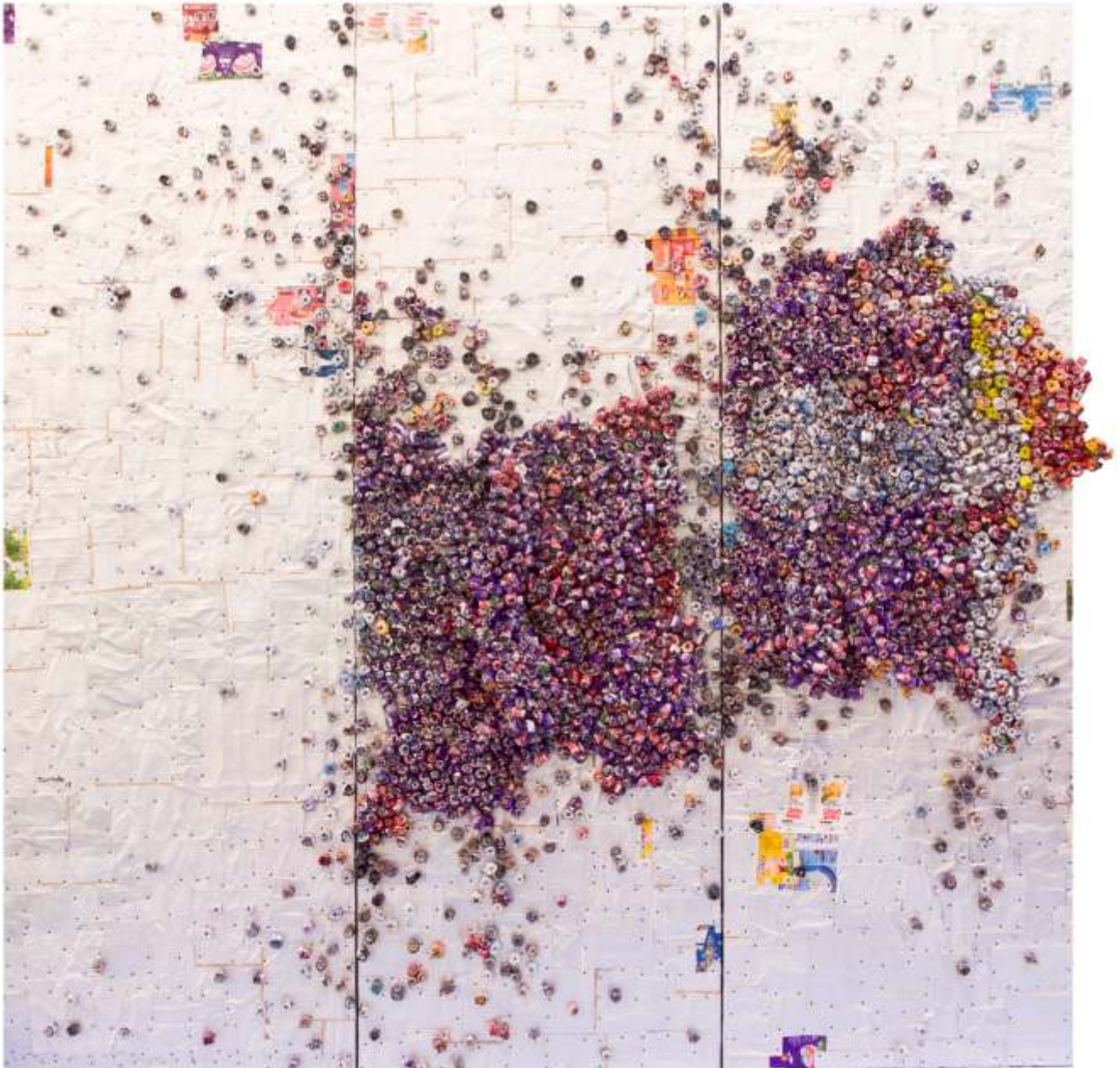
Irokanulo Emmanuel PhD

Department of Fine Arts
Yaba College of Technology



Classified Information 1 (Gap Series), Mixed Media, 122 x 81cm, 2016

MIGRATION



Movement, Mixed Media, 220 x 218cm, 2017





CROSSROADS

At dusk, rituals and sacrifices were carried out. By dawn, what is evident of this mysterious activity is clay pots filled with palm oil, yam, eggs... Some believe it to be food for the gods while to others it represents dark magic, an omen or the transference of a spell. The site of this activity is known as "Orita Merin" in Yoruba language but the English man calls it "Crossroads". During the span of history, people have come to dread this connecting point because of the fetish activities associated with it; forgetting it is symbolic of the realities of life's trajectory. It is a point of reflection; a moment when delicate decisions that can change the trajectory of one's life are made. It is a moment of self-discovery when individuals become the custodians of the limits of their possibilities. It is a junction when people either activate the changes they want to see in the environment or become its victims.

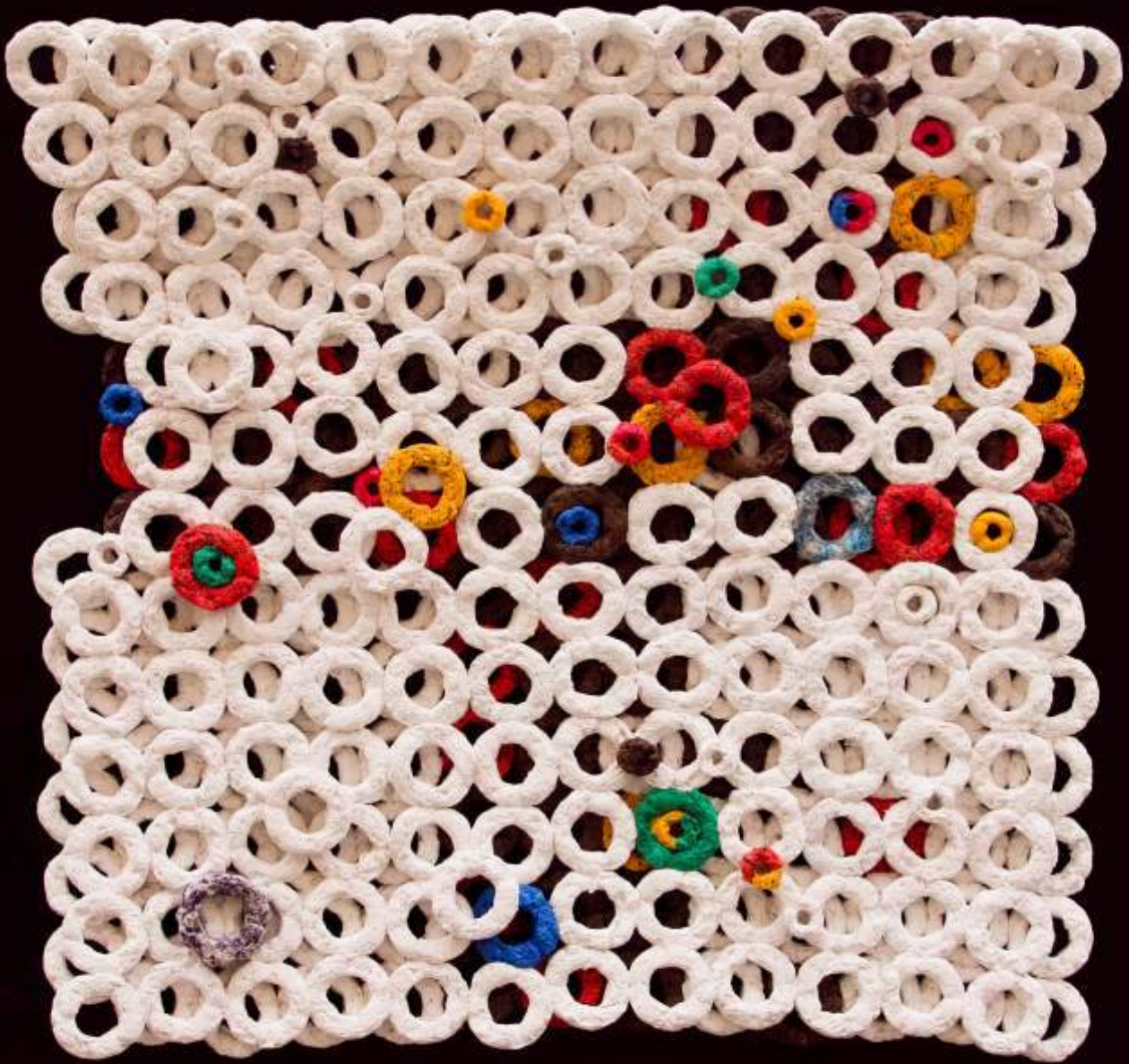


Crossroad II, Mixed Media, 92 x 148 x 70cm, 2017





*The Crossroad is symbolic of the realities
of life's trajectory.
It is a point of reflection.
A moment when delicate decisions
can change the trajectory of our lives.
It is a moment of self-discovery
when we become the custodians
of the limits of our possibilities.
It is a junction where we either
activate the changes we want to see
or become victims.*



Crossroad I, Mixed Media, 142 x 137cm, 2017

"Olumide thinks and works outside the box. He is prolific and creative. His innovative approach to the use of materials makes his work stand out amongst his contemporaries".

Ato Arinze
Ceramist



Map of Identities, Mixed Media, 194 x 92cm, 2016







Interlocked II, Mixed Media, 92 x 148 x 70cm, 2017





THE LEG SERIES

The earliest civilization was recorded in Africa. Since then her rich cultural fabric has been re-embroidered by different generations with fragments of western civilization interwoven but undiluted. By 1884 and 1885, a dynamic shift in her relationship with Europe took place. The scramble for pieces of the continent to be shared amongst colonizers was formalized and the realities of her people took a course far different from their ancestors. A continent that supports the economy of the rest of the world now has need for support. A people of earliest inventors and inventions have become consumers. The numerous gifts, talents, abilities and resources belonging to Africans became shrouded and unexplored by the increasing appetite of her children to identify more with western civilization. But the future of the world again lays in wait for Africa to take the lead.

Movement forms an integral component in social, cultural, political and economic exchange. These elements act as agents of change that constitute and determine Africa's post-colonial experiences, realities and identities.

The 'Leg' series examine these elements and questions of why external forces continue to determine, influence and dictate the mode of living in 21st century African society.



Interlocked Man, Mixed Media, 162 x 84cm, 2018



A continent that supports the economy of the rest of the world now has need for support. a people of earliest inventors and inventions have become consumers.

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in social, cultural, political and economic
exchange. These elements act as agents
of change that constitute and determine
Africa's post-colonial experiences,
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Power Seat, Mixed Media, 176cm, 2018

*“I'm in chains, you're in chains too,
I'm a prisoner, you're a prisoner too...”*

from the song 'Jailer' by Asa



The Box and The Boxed Man, Mixed Media, 208.5, 2018



The Ball Man, Mixed Media, 195cm, 2018

We are pressured by so many conflicting ideas with all these different movements around the world. Black people are still fighting for human rights in America, while in Nigeria, we are fighting ourselves. The problem isn't so much the conflict around us but rather the conflict within us. We are full of conflict.



Conflict of Thought, Mixed Media, 209, 2017





OUR UNIVERSE



Earth, Mixed Media, 113 x 100cm, 2014





Untamed Star, Mixed Media, 103 x 125 x 15cm, 2016



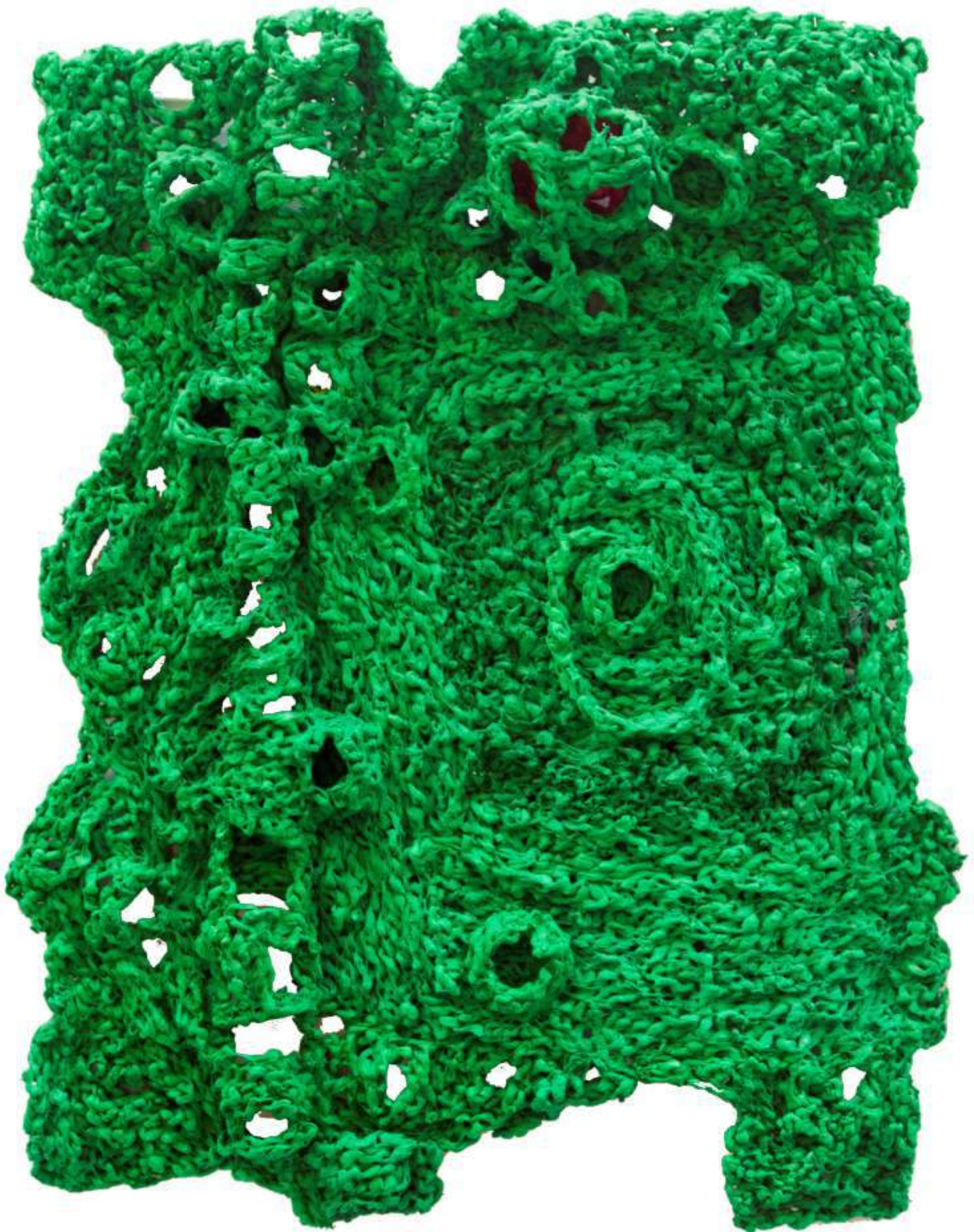




Moon Beneath, Mixed Media, 155 x 120cm, 2015







Endangered Species..., Mixed Media, 181 x 137cm, 2014





Diversity is our strength, a source of endless curiosity and possibility; a mirror that reflects that though inverted, we are not the same but we are same.



Droplets, Mixed Media, 165 x 107cm, 2015

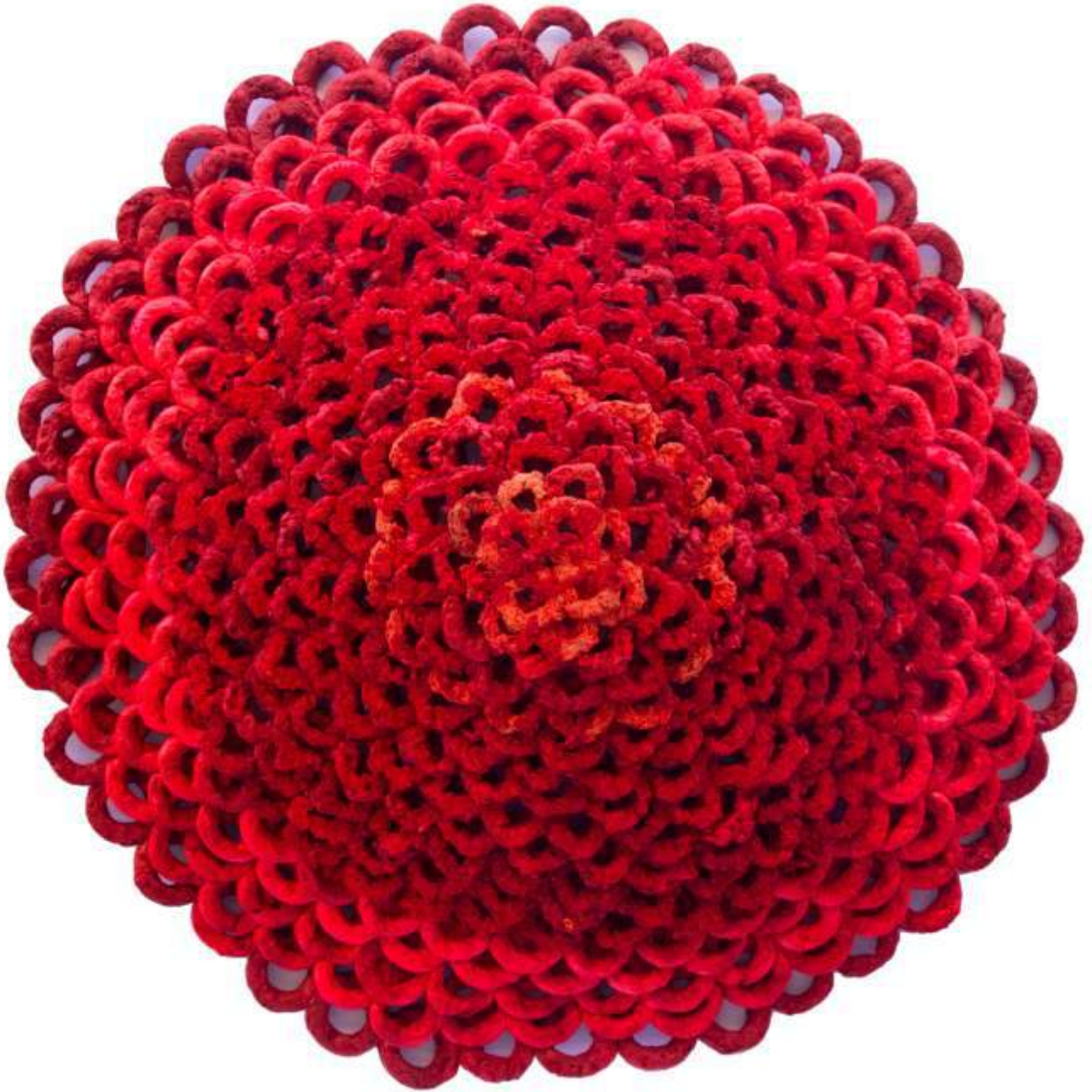




COMMUNICATION

PYRAMID SCHEME

In 2008, the world witnessed a financial meltdown that impoverished many and to them; the whole thing may forever be a mystery. But money is not vapor that should disappear into thin air. It was intelligently swiped and is hidden in the coffers of a few who live extravagant lifestyles. In ancient times, kingdoms were governed by monarchs and it is not unlikely that today society is governed by the same very few. Though people pay heavy taxes, it is never enough to support these elite few. Thus, an intelligent and subtle approach of extracting more was legally devised. Any other similar invention not within their control is labeled a Ponzi scheme and illegal. Meanwhile the majority continue to sweat for the lifestyle of the elite minority. What a paradox!

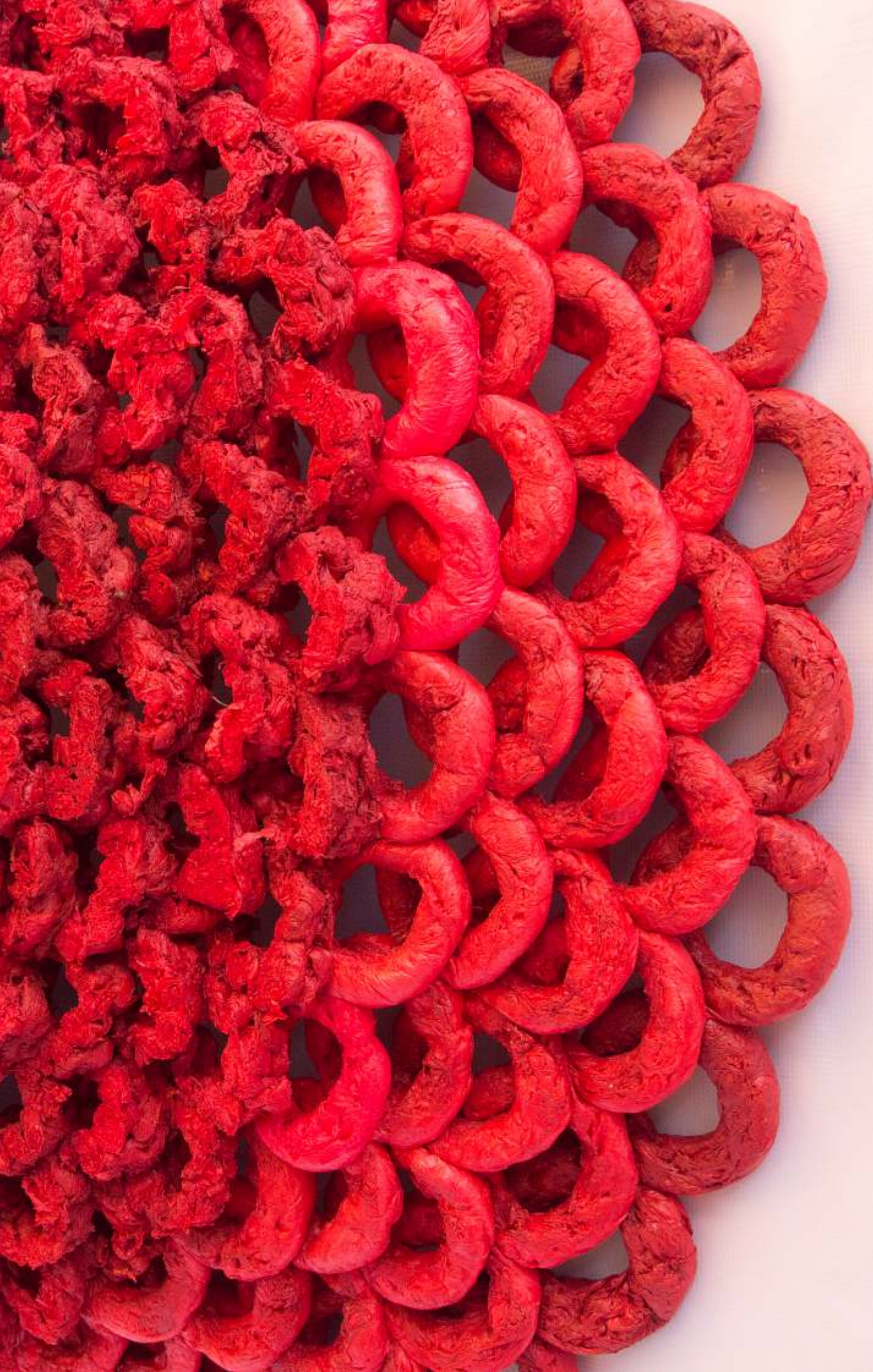


Pyramid Scheme, Mixed Media, 153cm Diameter, 2015-2018



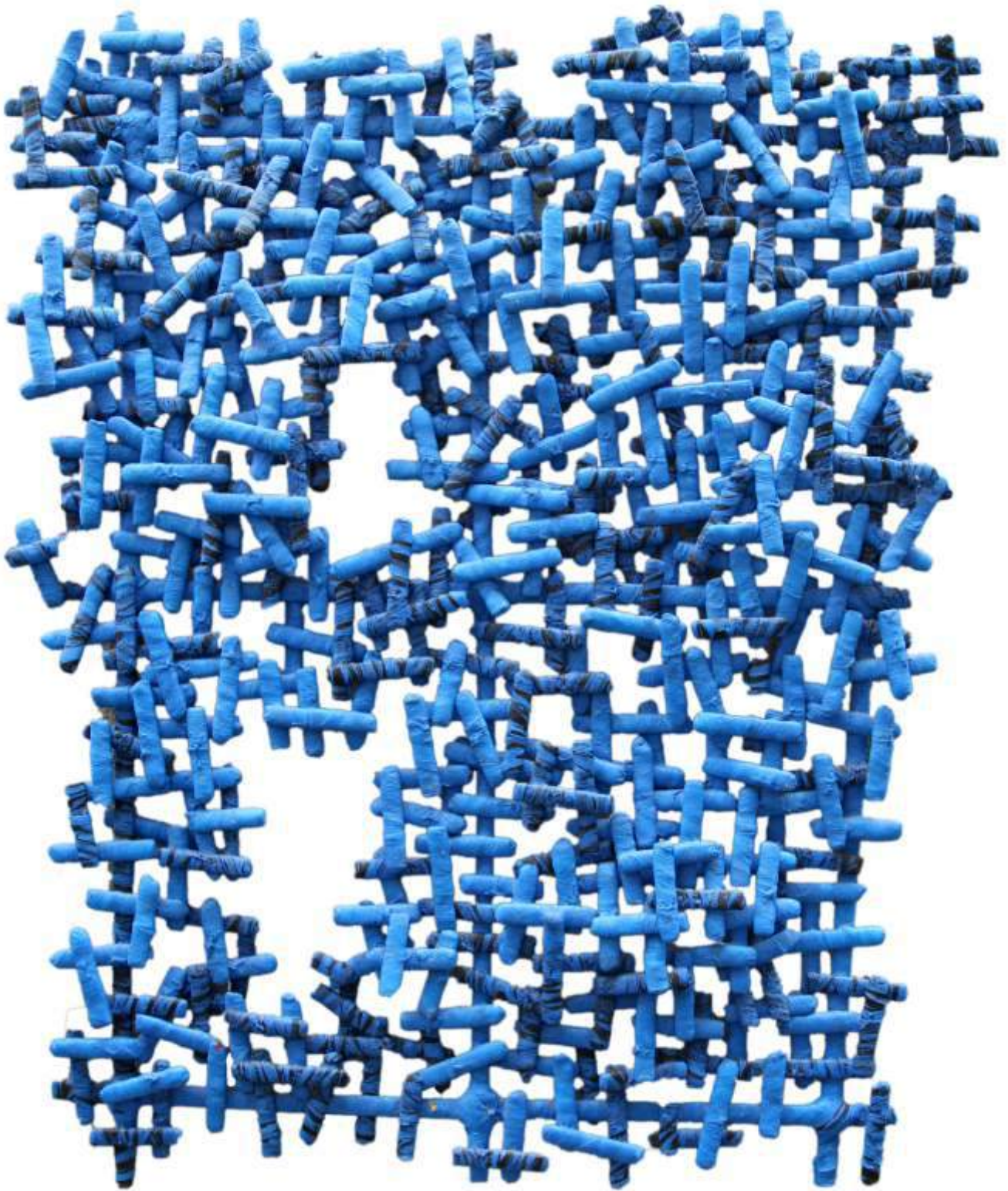
*But money is not vapor that should
disappear into thin air*





RUPTURES

Social media has become an extraordinary tool with indelible impact, giving everyone a voice to contribute to the making of their destiny. Rupture investigates this dynamic surge of consciousness and participatory awakening in regional and global politics by all and sundry.



Rupture I, Mixed Media, 129 x 108cm, 2014





WE ARE NOT THE SAME BUT THE SAME

We dominate the earth. We are of diverse origins looped into pockets around the earth's surface. Some are black, others brown, dark brown, cream, white, red... We wear the same body, a manifestation of spirit. And the blood that pumps in every heart and flows in every vein is red. Our thoughts, ideas, understanding, perceptions, feelings, and responses may vary but no technology can give expression to the form and color of the mind. It is a mystery that is same for everyone. And still, we are dwarf, short, tall, slim, fat...; the same name is given to our race: human. Diversity is our strength, a source of endless curiosity and possibility; a mirror that reflects that though inverted, we are not the same but we are same.



Inverted Series- We are not the same but the same II, Mixed Media, 170 x 171cm, 2018

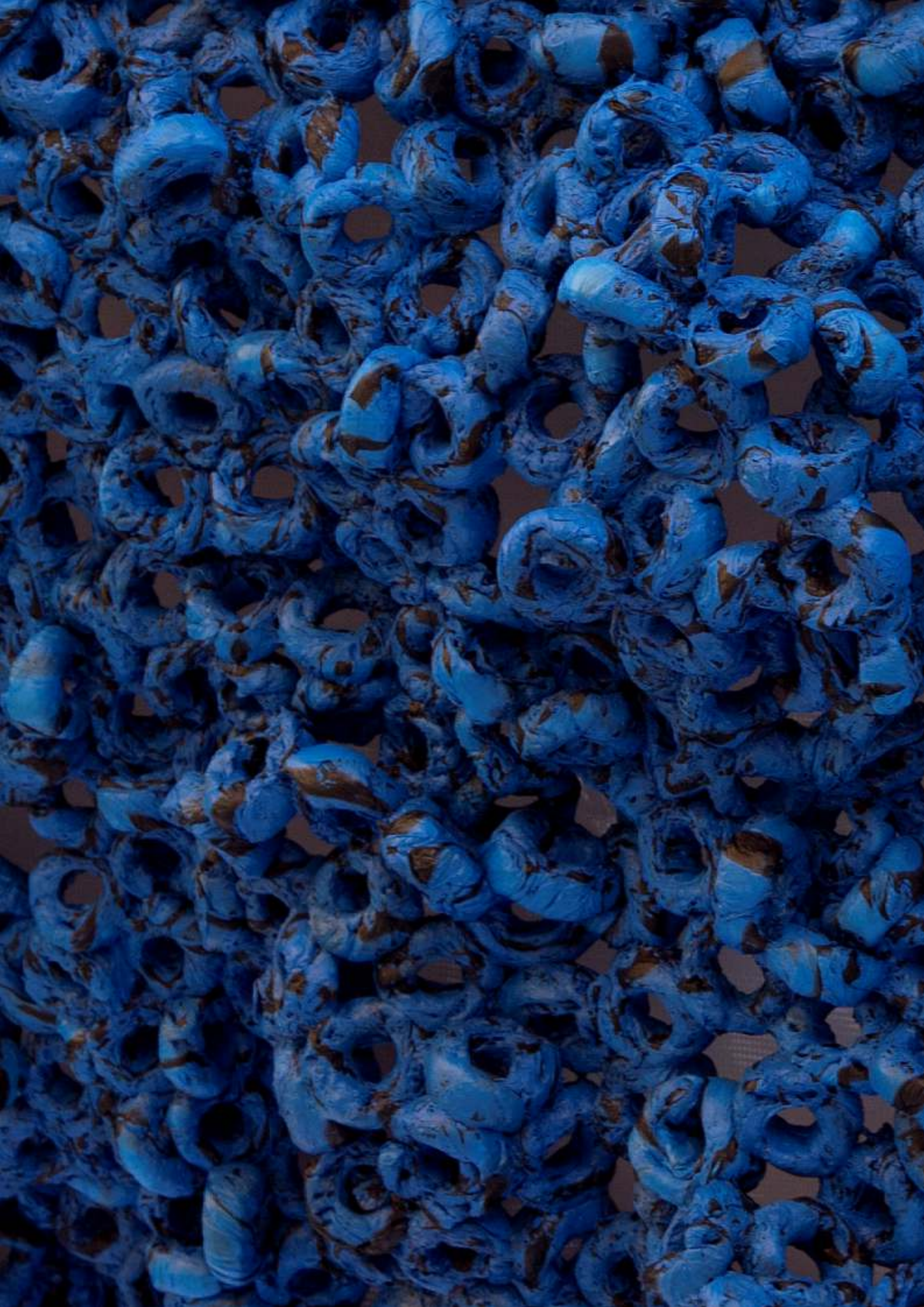


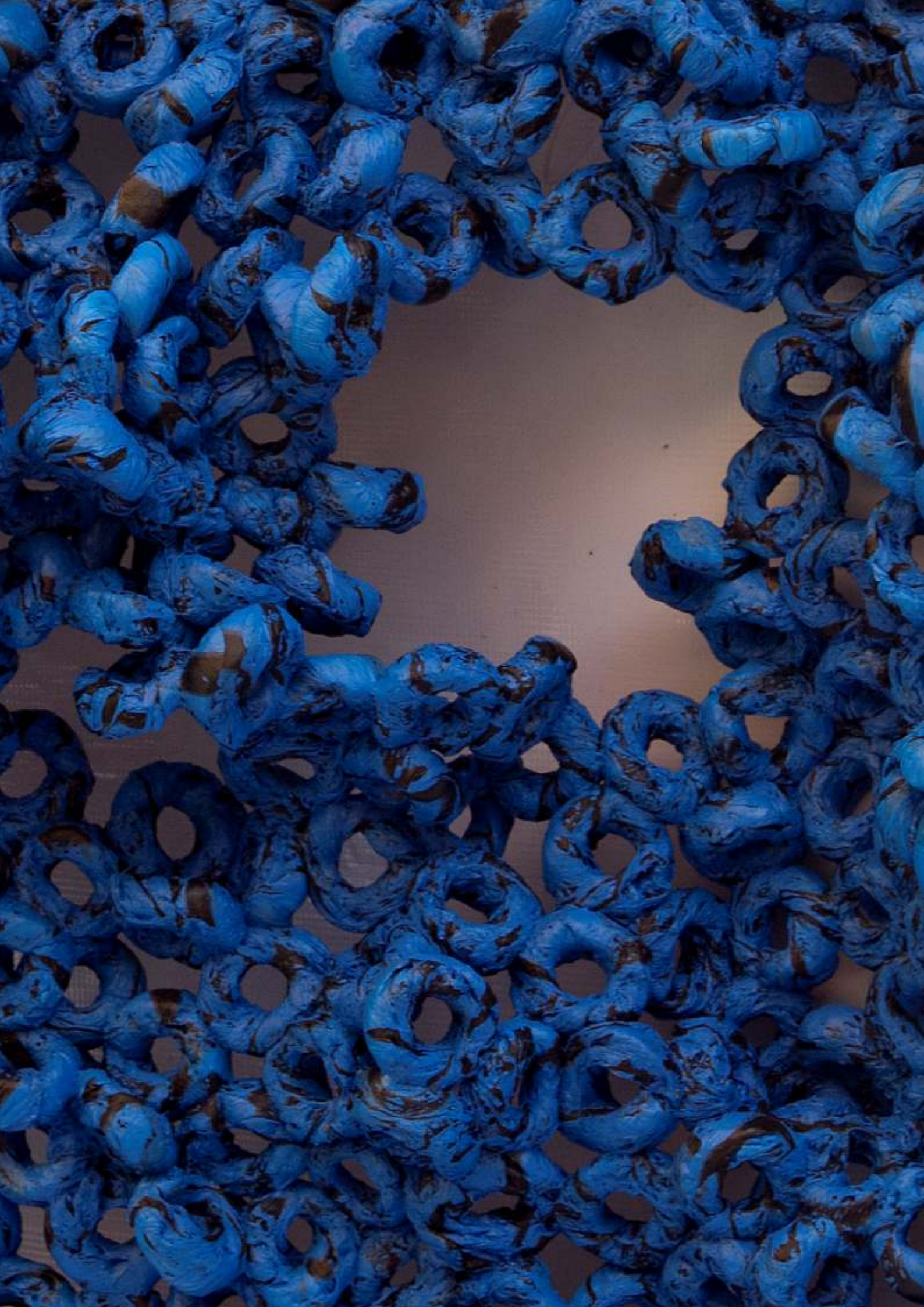


We wear the same body,
a manifestation of spirit



Inverted Series - We are not the same but the same I, Mixed Media, 194 x 32 x 45cm, 2018







The Monocular, Mixed Media, 172 x 142cm, 2017





Side by Side, Mixed Media, 108 x 140 x 30cm, 2015





Paintings

Nneoma A. Ilogu: Please tell us how you got started in art.

Olumide Onadipe: I got started fourteen years ago. After secondary school I wanted to study accounting. Unfortunately due to my results not meeting the entry requirements my Mom advised me to enroll at the Federal College of Education, Akoka, so as not to sit at home doing nothing. I got offered a place in the Art Department which I initially refused. I remember Dr. Kunle Filani, who was then the Deputy Provost, meeting with my Mom and advising her that art was a good career and asked her to bring me over for a chat which I refused. Eventually I listened and enrolled in the Art Department and to my surprise, I found it interesting. I got to see that art is life. It is enjoyable and gives me an indescribable feeling, like euphoria.

In school I would go to the library to study history of art and the paintings of Michelangelo. I found it fascinating and when I finally got the chance to change my major to accounting, I didn't. I adopted the maxim that I can get anything done if I put my mind to it. I was one of the least experienced students in my art class because most of my peers had a background in art since they were children. Although I had drawn a little as a child, it was not towards a career in art. I started polishing my skills and learning about the history of art. I started participating in exhibitions from my second year of university and I realized that to distinguish myself in the art scene, I had to stay distinct and experimental.

My studio was like a laboratory. Although I studied sculpture in school, I didn't like it because the primary medium was clay. In 2006 I was looking at a magazine and I saw foliage captured by a photographer. It was captured from beneath the leaf against the backdrop of the sky so the leaves were backlit. This inspired the leaf

paintings. Previously, I had experimented with using natural leaves to create forms and expressions without having to paint them. I asked a friend who was an industrial chemist to find me chemicals to preserve leaves and help me experiment with using them directly on a surface as a sort of mixed media which all failed. I then realized that instead of trying to use natural leaves to create impressions, I could simply paint the impressions on canvas. That was what gave birth to expressing myself with leaves on canvas.

I remember 'Art Zero' by Ato Arinze in 2006; it was such a beautiful platform for young artists to showcase their work. I showcased the first series of my leaf paintings at an exhibition by the National Council of Arts and Culture and they were bought. I remember I received a lot of accolades and Ato Arinze told me that if they were to give an 'Artist of the Year' prize, he would give it to me. Ato Arinze is a mentor and someone I still look up to; his 'Art Zero' platform gave me the push I needed to keep creating.

NAI: How did your use of leaves spark a deeper conversation? What subjects are you addressing?

OO: Firstly, I see myself as a social commentator. My leaf works talk about deforestation, the environment and family life. I see the leaves as many parts coming together to form a community and it mirrors what is currently happening in our society. Everybody wants to be alone and live in isolation and the concept of traditional family life is dying. The modern, cosmopolitan lifestyle has caused families to fragment and live in isolated pockets. As I paint, I depict concealed images with leaves; the narrative behind it is about bringing people together, forming bonds, and giving each other emotional support while addressing issues relating to family life. I believe that the family is a fundamental unit of society, it is where



Head with Morning Rose, Acrylics on Canvas, 132 x 107cm, 2016

society begins and if we are to build a strong society we need to start with the family.

NAI: When I come to your home studio to see your works, there is a strong family presence everywhere; your wife has an amazing green thumb and your kids are always around. How does this contribute to the works you create?

OO: My family is a source of my ideas and gives me the leverage to identify and interpret life. My family life is integrated into my studio life. My family is so crucial to my creativity that taking me away from them is like taking a fish out of water. It is almost impossible for me to create without my family. When I got married in 2010, I tried working from an external studio thinking it was crucial to my expression but I realized it wasn't working for me. I am fortunate to have a wife who understands my work and loves cultivating plants, which are a reflection of my environment and inspire my creations. So when I see unusual and unfamiliar leaves in her plants, I try to use them to create new forms on my canvas. Before I got married I was an artist creating amazing things but there was a turnaround in the journey after marriage. She appreciates my work and is like a curator or manager who guides me on what direction to take in my creative process. Her advice has been fundamental to my development as an artist.

NAI: You referred to yourself as a social commentator and in looking at your paintings I see a lot of them with interesting titles and forms. One of your paintings is called 'Watchers'. I really want to know what this work is talking about.

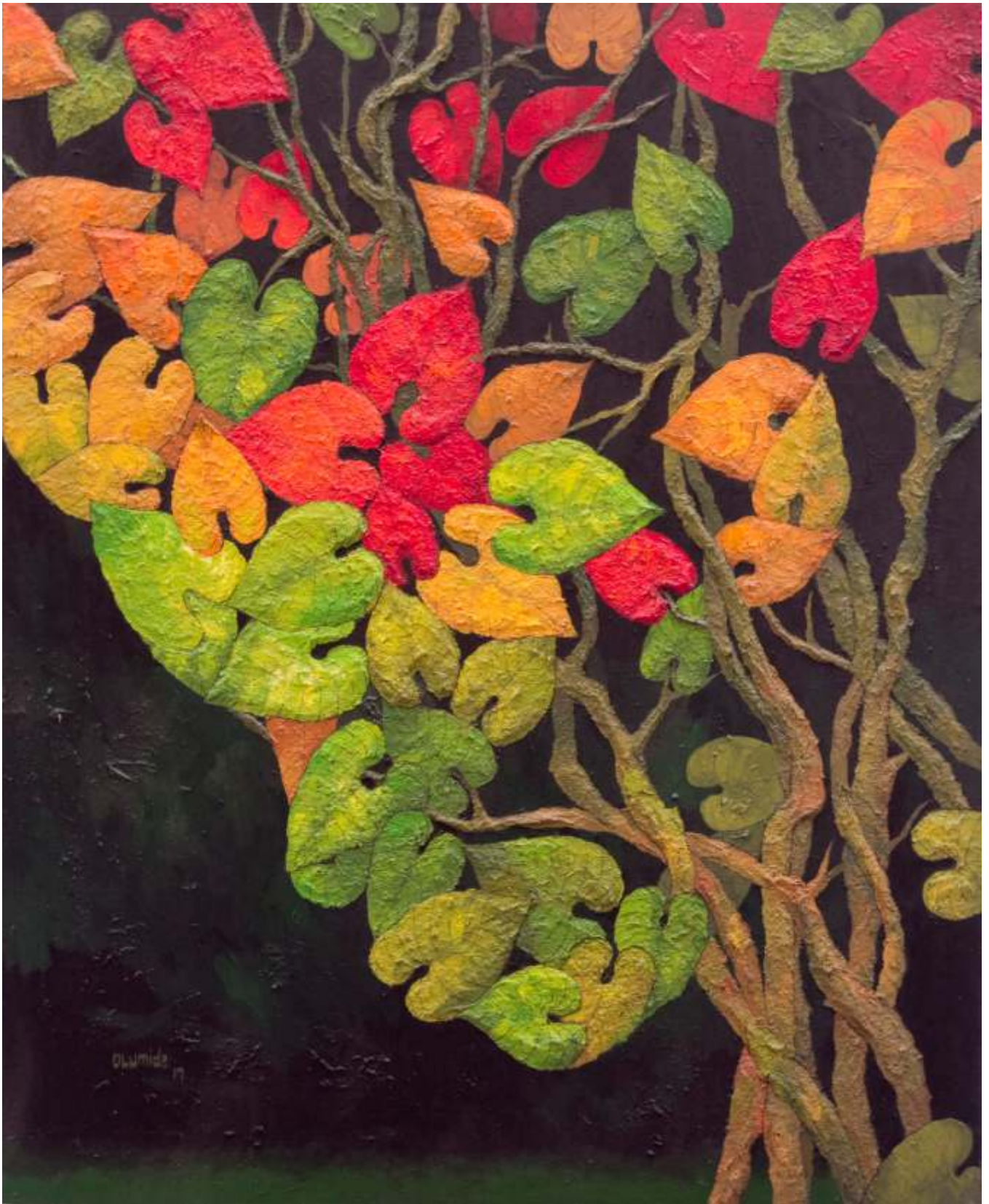
OO: As a social commentator and an artist, my works reflect my environment. I started The 'Watchers' series around 2013-14, during President Goodluck Jonathan's regime when there was a lot

of tension in northern Nigeria. People could not sleep with their eyes closed and everyone had to watch each other's backs to stay alive. I tried to express those realities in 'Watchers' by showing two people backing each other, to keep watch and protect each other from being massacred by the so-called Boko Haram which has displaced so many people from northern Nigeria.

NIA: what about 'Queen's Retinue' with a woman sitting on a throne with two figures standing guard behind her. When I look at this painting I think of your family structure because your wife is like your queen who is being guarded by you and your sons?

OO: Yes, the 'Queen's Retinue' talks about the position of women in our society. I believe women are playing a critical role in the development of our society and are expanding their role which is good. I have also come to appreciate what my wife does when she is around the kids and I have time to paint. I have two figures standing behind the queen symbolizing my two sons guarding my wife. When I go out, I tell my sons to take care of their mom.

Another interesting series I just started is called the 'Muscle Economy' which is a reflection of Nigeria's current economy. If you think about it, we are in the information age where people value intellectual property and Nigeria is investing in agriculture which is fantastic, because we need to be able to take care of ourselves. However if you look at the more economically progressive nations, you see that they tap into their human resources and intellect; good examples are Facebook, Google and Instagram. I believe Nigerians have far more capacity than the people in the developed world, yet we are busy pumping money into agriculture. If some of that money could only be invested in information technology,



Meditation of a Focused Boy, Acrylic on Canvas, 130 x 106cm, 2017

education and infrastructure, I think it would go a long way towards our development. We need to expand our thinking beyond agriculture for the future.

NAI: Speaking of 'Muscle Economy', it is a work that is quite different from your other paintings because it is done on wooden slats. What brought about this new medium?

OO: The approach of painting on wood actually occurred to me when I was watching a BBC News segment and I saw street art that was done on wood panels and packing cases; the lines separating those panels created an impression. 'Muscle Economy' was my first attempt at painting on panels and it opened up a lot of new possibilities.

NAI: When I first heard about your art, it was as a painter. Later I found out that you also do sculptures. You aptly describe yourself as an experimental artist and I'd like to understand what the link is between these two forms of art?

OO: When I started working on sculptures with up-cycled plastic, people didn't believe it was the same artist; they couldn't understand the connection between the two. To me they are like two sides of the same coin; I put the same emotions in my leaf works as I put into my plastic works, however, I can't work on both at the same time. I always leave one to work on the other. But they are both an extension of the experimentation which characterizes my work. Prior to now, I experimented with beads and was known as a bead artist. I remember Omenka Gallery published an article about me a few years ago and wrote "Olumide the bead artist". I was surprised to still be referred to as a bead artist since I had moved on from working with beads. I have experimented with a myriad of media and that is what still inspires my work. I am beginning to develop and experiment with new forms and materials.

NAI: But how do you share your creative time between painting and sculpture? Do you derive the same energy from both processes?

OO: Whenever people approach my work in public spaces I derive joy. Sometimes buyers tell me that my works are even more interesting in person than in photos. This kind of response gives me more boldness to explore and convinces me that I am on the right path. There is a competitive tension between my sculptural life and my painting; I find it difficult to do one thing for a long time so I share my time between several activities throughout the day. I believe that the more an artwork spends time in my studio, the more energy it absorbs. While sculpture takes more of my physical strength, I have a technical approach to painting. It's like a game that I enjoy, hence all my creative activities take place in different "pockets of time".

NAI: So how did you start working with plastics?

OO: My artistic journey is characterized by experimentation. In 2009 I visited an exhibition titled 'Trash-ing' by Kainebi Osahenye at CCA Lagos and it left a deep impression on me. It opened my eyes to new possibilities and I went home with a lot of questions. I remember that night my Mom came home from the market and as usual she returned with all sorts of fancy plastic bags. I thought to myself that I could actually create with them and so I started collecting them in huge numbers. When I started experimenting with plastic in 2009 I was not successful. I knew there was something missing but I didn't give up. After I got married I continued exploring with my wife's encouragement. One day I decided to try melting the plastic although at that time I had no knowledge of the heat gun. I remembered that when women go to the hair salon they use a hair dryer, so I purchased one, but discovered it



Portrait of a Boy IV, Mixed Media, 153 x 107cm, 2017

wasn't working because the intensity of the heat wasn't high enough. I eventually got the right equipment and it was like a breakthrough that changed the direction of my practice. The first piece I created with plastic and the heat gun was given to my friend Jess Castellote and his response to the piece was a huge boost of encouragement for me to continue in that creative line. There have been many challenges like near suffocation from the fumes from melting the plastic, which led me to work outdoors as well as try different techniques such as tying or using a mold.

NAI: When you speak about how your life inspires the works you create, I can't help but draw similarities between your body frame and your free standing sculptures, especially those from the 'Leg Series'. Tell us some more about the inspiration behind them.

OO: The Leg Series examines the relationship between Africa and the rest of the world right from the pre-colonial era. Africa is said to be the earliest civilization. Historians have said that the Queen of Sheba came from Ethiopia and recently some people said she came from Ibadan. The series is about the movement to Africa and the long standing relationship we have had with the outside world. It speaks about how Africa has evolved, how it has impacted the world, and vice versa, especially during the colonial era when Europe decided to take Africa's resources to rebuild their economy after the World War I, even though they had been in a relationship with Africa way before then.

The negative impact of colonization is addressed in the 'The Box and the Boxed Man', one of the pieces in the series. Over time we've absorbed a lot of western ideas which have enslaved us. How are we trying to free ourselves from the shackles of these ideas? Interestingly, those who boxed us are

themselves not free from the ideas they have chained us with. That actually captures the lyrics of the song 'Jailer' by Asa which says "I'm in chains, you're in chains too, I'm a prisoner, you're a prisoner too". Basically it is impossible to make a prisoner without enslaving yourself too. It is fear that enslaves the one who seeks to imprison the other. Another piece, 'Conflict of Thoughts', speaks about enslavement in the post-colonial era. It addresses the indecision we face when grappling with conflicting ideas from different world movements. While black people are still fighting for human rights in America, we are fighting ourselves in Nigeria. The problem isn't about the conflict around us but rather the conflict within us. We are full of conflict.

The 'Ball Man' addresses the lasting influence football has on Africans. Football is a European invention and came to Africa in the 19th Century. It is captivating how we are so passionate about football and how it is able to bring people together. Football has been able to influence the economy and decision making and foster peace among people of different values, opinions and races.

NAI: Very interesting. So what is the process you go through in creating your sculptures?

OO: There are different processes I use in creating my work. One of them is melting the plastic into different shapes such as small nuggets used to create whatever forms I desire. If I want to create specific shapes like triangles or circular rings, I melt the plastic using a mold which becomes a skeletal frame for the work I am building. These processes can be tedious and boring but the finished product compensates for the process. I conceive the work in my mind and don't sketch my ideas. I allow the work to manifest how it was conceived in my mind. It is like a woman conceiving a child and trying to dictate



Listening Ear, Acrylic on Canvas, 130.5 x 130.5cm, 2017

the gender of the child or its features. Sometimes the idea demands that I use nuggets and other times that I use cubes; for each idea, the processes are different.

NAI: How did you get started with using newspapers and what is the inspiration behind your 'Letter Series' which is made from newspapers?

OO: I started experimenting with newspapers two years ago. I started coiling newspapers and integrating them with discarded electric cables. What led to the 'Letter Series' was a lot of news coverage about Brexit and the change that would bring. I began exploring letters and words to emphasize the emotions which lead people to embrace change and make decisions. I created 'Brexit Full-Stop' with an inverted 'B' with the outline of a man in a state of solitude or meditation symbolizing Britain telling the rest of the European Union that they wanted to be left alone.

I also have the letter 'C' titled 'Change' which was inspired from the campaign slogans from the last election; the fact is that the change has not been what we expected. But it is not just about political change; it is also about social change, inter-personal change, family change and personal change.

I also have the 'Comma' which captures how we make decisions. The comma is a metaphor for life's journey. We have to pause at certain times to reflect on the next point and the mistakes we've made, while we anticipate the challenges ahead.

The letter 'a' in the letter series is one I find very fascinating because it is about President Trump, whose slogan, 'Make America Great Again', resonated deeply in my mind. I thought that if Donald Trump, while trying to make America great again, is trying to push people out of his country, meanwhile Africans are trying to migrate to the west. Why can't we make Africa great

again and stay in our countries to do so? Instead of criticizing Trump, I choose to look at it from the angle that if we work on ourselves, there will come a time when Americans will also be struggling to come to Africa. So we need to start telling ourselves to "Make Africa Great Again". We are a great people with great resources and a diverse culture, thoughts and values and if we come together we can make Africa great again.

NAI: Which leads me to talk about your large artwork titled 'Movement'. It appears that a lot of your work speaks about migration?

OO: Movement is the largest work in the exhibition; it is about 7 by 7 feet and took about seven months to create. A lot of things can cause movement. People sometimes move to the city for better opportunities or from the city to the fringes of the city to escape pollution. The work captures movement across Africa and through the deserts of Libya, to the Mediterranean Sea. One of the major reasons people migrate is due to population explosion. Sometimes this leads to congestion such as in Lagos state where I live. I remember growing up in Lagos when most of the landscape was made up of forests and highlights how much the population has affected the environment. It has led to deforestation as a result of exponential growth. Though our resources could comfortably cater for our population they are not properly managed which has led us to relying on foreign aid.

NAI: Are there people or experiences which have influenced your work?

OO: Over the years, Jess Castellote has been a great critic and advisor. Prof El Anatsui and an exhibition by Kainebi Osahenye have had a big influence on me and became a compass guiding me to what I've become today. Sometimes a conversation here or there has led me to better express myself. Dr.



Portrait of a Boy III, Acrylic on Canvas, 131 x 131 cm, 2017

Emmanuel was such a fascinating lecturer who helped me through my years at the University of Nsukka's chapter at the Yaba College of Technology. Working with SMO has given me more cultural capital within the art space and you understand a part of me that a lot of people don't. I also hold dear the conversations I have had with Mrs Obiago who makes me see more value in my work especially in the areas I don't fully believe in myself. I recommend that artists always have a relationship with someone who totally believes in their work.

NAI: If there's one thought you want to leave with the viewers of 'Connecting the Dots', what would that be?

OO: That would be self-discovery; to discover new things about themselves within my work. I want people to engage with my work and connect the missing dots in their lives through my work.

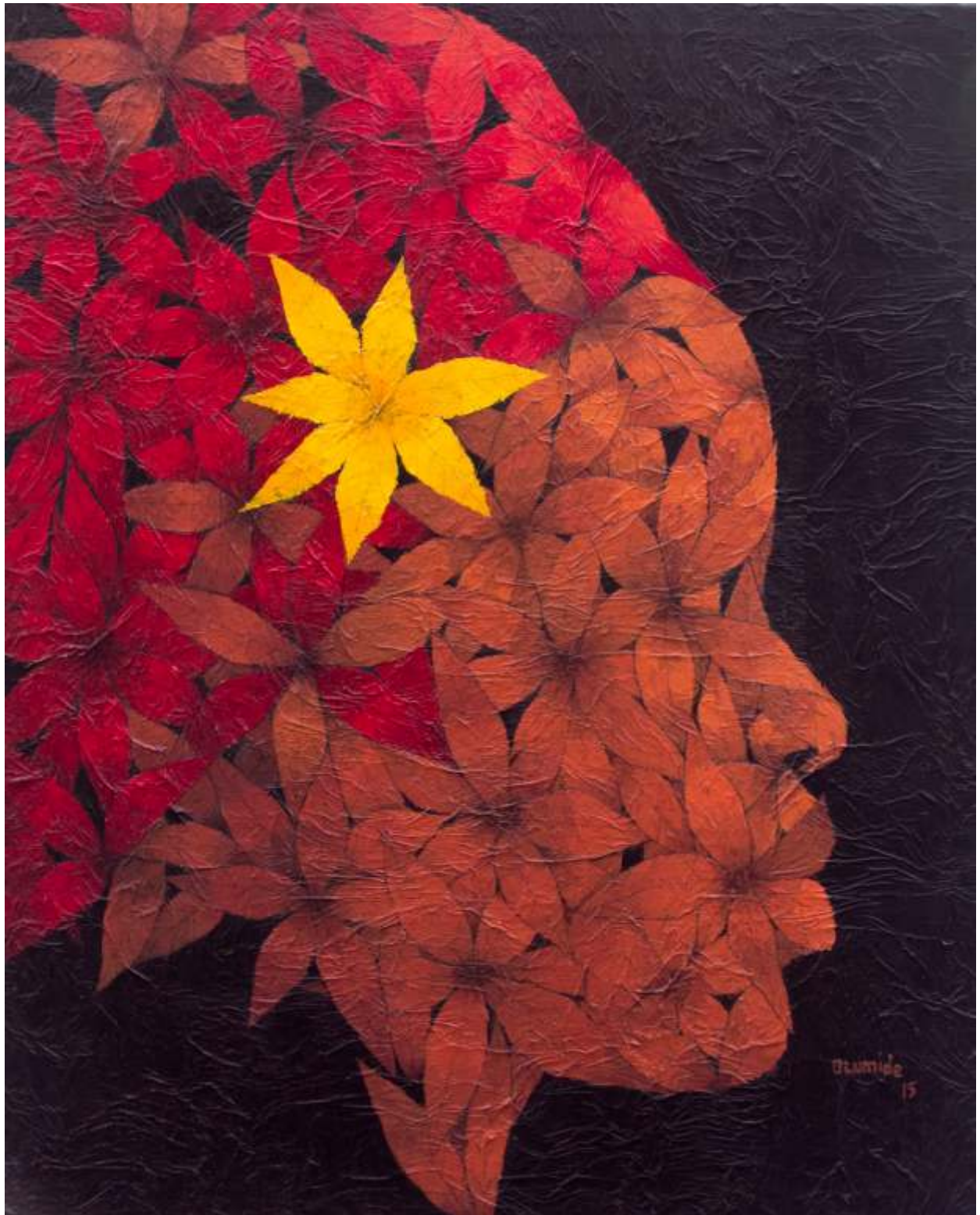
NAI: Thank you!

Footnote: *Nneoma Ilogu is Manager at SMO Contemporary Art. She holds a Masters of Science degree in Public Health, and has been active in the Nigerian art space for the past two years.



Untamed Mind II, Acrylic on Canvas, 130 x 106cm, 2017





Model, Acrylic on Canvas, 132 x 106cm, 2015

WATCHERS

The moments of the night were always longed for, its impressions leaving long lasting beautiful memories. These were moments when tall trees with undulating foliage snap against the light of the cooling moon, and cast soft shadows on surrounding compounds. The environment vibrates with cheers, claps and laughter of those that left since morning. Songs, riddles and tales of the day, along with shrill cries of insects break the silence of the unfolding night. All these beautiful memories suddenly became history when the shrill cries of insects were overlapped by the rattling sound of dry sticks cracking under strange footsteps. The strange steps cast deadly shadows on reclining figures. And there arose thunderous wailing and crying as many lay in pools of blood. Houses were set ablaze and entire families annihilated. The night was never the same again. It became a terror and everyone cowered as it approached. The silence of terror and bloodshed hung on the atmosphere. And the only way to make it through was to keep watch. But it was a long night.



Watchers III, Acrylic on Canvas, 131 x 107cm, 2017

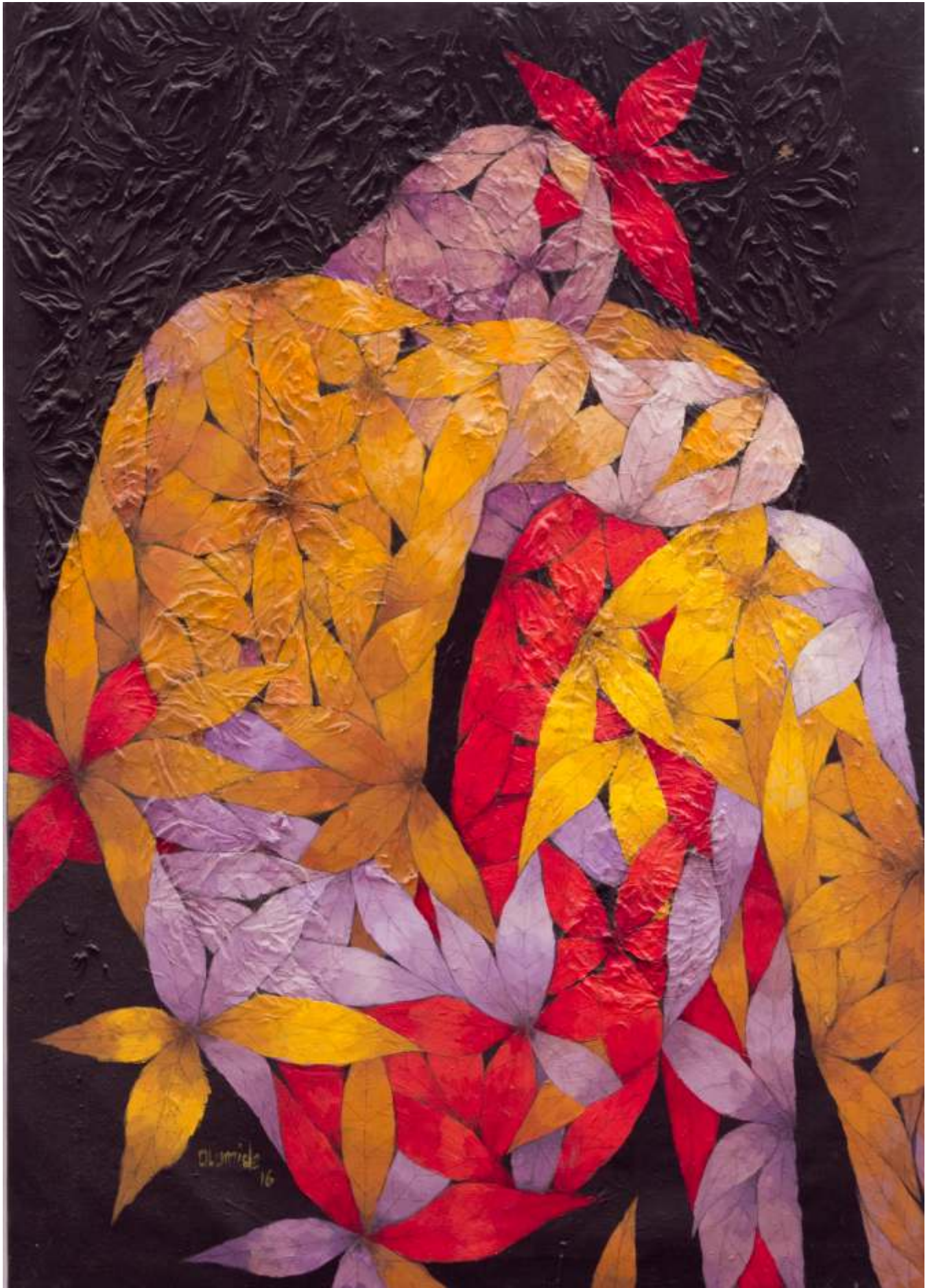
*AND THE ONLY WAY TO MAKE IT THROUGH
WAS TO KEEP WATCH. BUT IT WAS A LONG NIGHT*



Watchers II, Acrylic on Canvas, 131 x 107cm, 2017



Muscle Economy, Acrylic on wood planks, 150 x 110.5cm, 2018



The Thinker, Acrylic on Canvas, 128 x 95cm, 2017



Prayer of an Emigre, Acrylic on Canvas, 130.5 x 130.5cm, 2017



Reclining Boy, Acrylic on Canvas, 120 x 106cm, 2014



In Thought II, Acrylic on Canvas, 120.5 x 105.5cm, 2014



Embrace, Acrylic on Canvas, 131 x 107cm, 2016



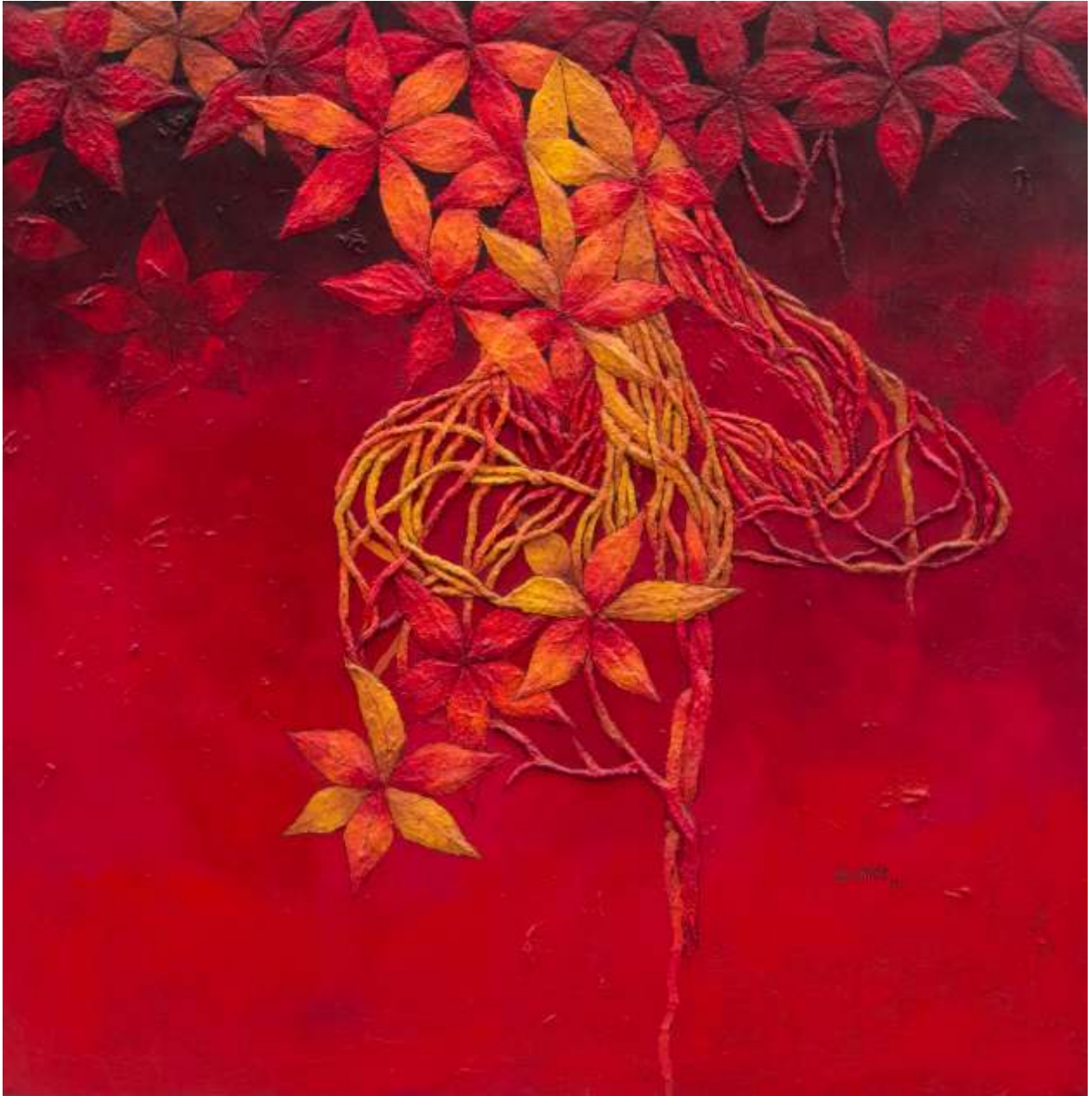




In Thought I, Acrylic on Canvas, 106 x 119.5cm, 2014



Guitar Man, Acrylic on Canvas, 121 x 136cm, 2013



Unanticipated Encounter, Acrylic on Canvas, 128 x 128cm, 2017





*I believe a leaf cannot make a healthy tree
and a tree cannot make a forest.*



Queen's Retinue, Acrylic on Canvas, 183 x 142.5cm, 2017



CV

DATE OF BIRTH 1982

EDUCATION

- 2012** University of Lagos
Masters in Visual Arts (Arts Education)
- 2008** University of Nigeria, Nsukka
B.Ed/BA in Fine and Applied Art
- 2004** Federal College of Education (Tech.), Akoka
NCE, Fine and Applied Art

EXHIBITIONS

Solo

- 2018** "Connecting the Dots" by SMO Contemporary Art, Lagos
- 2015** "Twist and Twirls", Enterprise Development Centre, Pan Atlantic University, Lagos.
- 2013** "A Tale Within" Pan Atlantic University, Lagos.

SELECTED GROUP

- 2018** "START Art Fair", London
- 2017** "Art X Lagos"
- 2017** "1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair", London
- 2017** "Art Work" Arthouse Foundation, Lagos.
- 2015** "Platform" Art Twenty One, Lagos.
- 2015** "Phases and Faces" Terraculture Art Gallery, Lagos.
- 2014** "Colours of Hope" An Exhibition organized by Children Living with Cancer Foundation (CLWCF). Civic Centre, Lagos.
- 2014** "Orezie 2(The King's Crowd)" Ime Obi(Obi's Palace), Onitsha.
- 2013** "Heritage Rising" by Heritage Bank, Abuja.
- 2013** "American Nigeria Cultural Collaborative Project" at the US Consulate and Nike Art Gallery Lagos.
- 2013** "October Rain" Nike Art Gallery, Lagos.
- 2013** "Illumination" Nimbus Art Gallery, Lagos.
- 2013** "Beyond Boundaries" Nubuke Foundation, Accra, Ghana
- 2012** "October Rain" National Museum, Lagos
- 2011** "Express It" Omenka Art Gallery, Lagos.
- 2011** "October Rain" Nike Art Gallery, Lagos.
- 2010** "October Rain" Nikei Art Gallery, Lagos.
- 2009** "Dialogue between Cultures" by Alliance Francaise (Commemorating 50 Years of Cultural Relations between Nigeria and France, National Museum, Lagos).
- 2009** "October Rain" National Museum, Lagos.
- 2009** "Nigeria the Beautiful" Life in my City at Nike Lake Resort, Enugu.
- 2009** "Art on the Mainland" National Council for Arts and Culture, Lagos.
- 2008** "October Rain" National Museum, Lagos.
- 2006** "Art on the Mainland" National Gallery of Arts, Lagos.
- 2006** "Aesthetic Bond" National Museum, Lagos.
- 2005** "Within Our Grasp" National Museum, Lagos.
- 2005** "Experience Nigeria" Muson Centre, Lagos.
- 2004** "Experience Nigeria" National Museum, Lagos.

REVIEWS

Tajudeen Sowole. "Expanding future with four Artists at Arthouse." *The Guardian*. The Guardian, 17 Apr. 2016, p. 32

Ayodeji Rotinwa. "CANVAS IS THE NEW BANK." *THISDAY Newspapers*. THIS DAY, 05 June 2016. Web. 13 Apr. 2017.

"Platform – Group Exhibition." *Contemporary And*. N.p., n.d. Web. 12 Dec. 2015.

Tajudeen Sowole. "VISUAL ARTS: Moulds of Twist and Twirl from Onadipe's watch." *The Guardian*. The Guardian, 28 June 2015. Web. 13 Apr. 2017.

ART RESIDENCES

Arthouse Foundation Artist Residence, Spring. 2016

WORKSHOP

Expanding Horizons (a professional development workshop for visual artists), School of Media and Communication, Pan Atlantic University, Lagos.

2016

Alimosho Art Workshop, Lagos. 2015

ART AUCTIONS

2013 (May) Arthouse Contemporary, Lagos.

2015 TKMG Auction House, Lagos Art Auction, Lagos.

2016 TKMG Auction House, Lagos Art Auction, Lagos.

2016 Affordables Art Auction, Arthouse Contemporary, Lagos

2016 (November) Arthouse Contemporary, Lagos.

2017 Affordables Art Auction, Arthouse Contemporary, Lagos

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION

Member, Society of Nigerian Artist (SNA)

Member, Artzero Group

Visual Art Society of Nigeria (VASON)

Decreative Minds





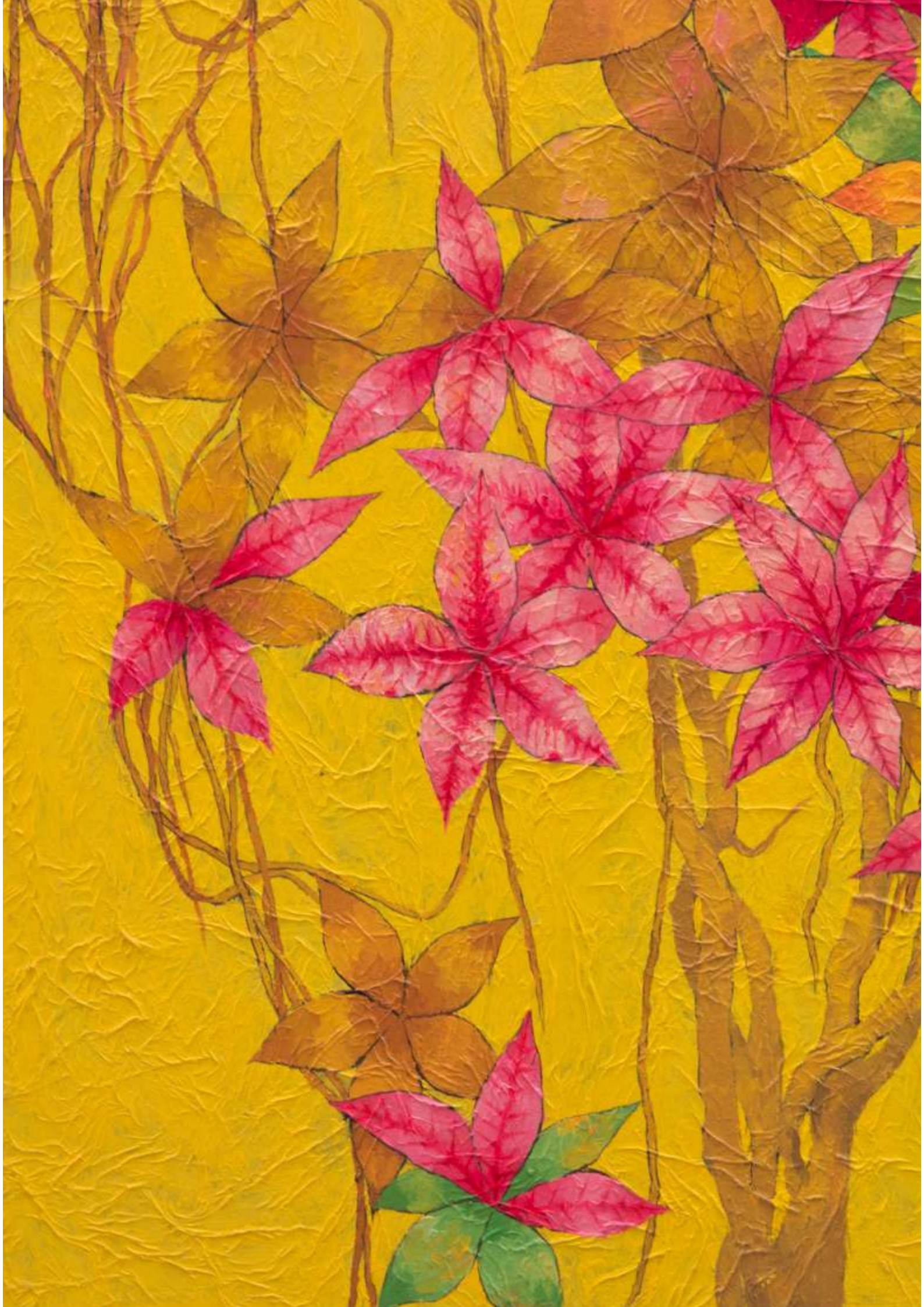
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Thanks to God who continues to endow me with penetrative insights, sound health, and surrounds me with extraordinary people. My deepest gratitude to my mother, Taiwo Onadipe, for her unending support and from whom I imbibed the culture of discipline, diligence, and hard work. I revere my wife, Oluwayemisi Onadipe, for her moral, physical, spiritual and emotional support. Thanks to my children, Olumide and Olamide, and to my brother, Kehinde Onadipe, who has never stop believing in me.

I am particularly grateful to the mentors that surround me: Jess Castellote, for his unavoidable priceless criticisms, encouragement and support; Dr. Irokanulo Emmanuel, Ato Arinze, and Ogbemi Hayman for moral, technical and professional advice.

Special thanks to Mrs Sandra Obiago and her team for choosing to join me at this time of my artistic journey, and for absorbing me into your family and becoming an indelible part of mine.

Thanks to Lateef Olajumoke, Abinoro Collins, Christopher Chinedu, Hassan Musa, Osagie Aimufia, Richardson Ovbiebo and wife, Kelani Abass and others who, unequivocally, have contributed immensely to my growth and development.





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GALLERY



Having opened its doors in May 2008 Temple Muse is West Africa's leading luxury concept store focusing on designer home & giftware, fashion & accessories as well as art & design. Our strength not only lies in offering the very best of world-renowned brands, but also in nurturing homegrown talent from across the continent.

The iconic flagship store equipped with its very own champagne bar is located in the heart of Lagos and possesses a "gallery-like" open feel, where clients can relax & indulge in all things wonderful.

Over the years Temple Muse has developed a reputation as being one of the leading art spaces in Nigeria having hosted a number of critically acclaimed exhibitions, and through continuously offering its clients cutting edge contemporary art.

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CURATOR

Adolphos Opara



Sandra Mbanefo Obiago is a multi-faceted writer, photographer, poet, art collector & curator, and award winning filmmaker. She has curated art shows and worked with the local creative industry to promote the best of Nigerian art.

She ran the communications program in Sub-Saharan Africa for environmental group, WWF International for eight years before founding and running *Communicating for Change*, a media for development social enterprise in Nigeria for fourteen years. She is a social activist and her campaigns, films, radio programs and publications have touched on themes such as human rights, women's empowerment, health including HIV & AIDS, environment, democracy and good governance. She organized conferences, workshops, and symposia for Nigeria's growing film industry and helped develop a course on *Media Enterprise* at the Pan African University.

Obiago produced and directed many films over the years, including a five-part documentary film series, *Red Hot: Nigeria's Creative Industries*, featuring artists from the film, music, performance and visual arts sectors. She was Associate Producer of the feature film, *Half of A Yellow Sun*, adapted from the award winning novel by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

She has been involved in many community initiatives and served as a trustee of the Convention on Business Integrity (CBI), was a member of the Advisory Council of the Nigerian National Film Institute and has served as a member of the jury of the *Nigeria Media Merit Awards*. Obiago is a Fellow of the Aspen Institute's *African Leadership Initiative for West Africa (ALIWA)* and has served as Sunday School teacher since her teens. She received an M.A. in Telecommunications from Michigan State University, and a Bachelor of Education degree in English and German from the University of Manitoba, in Canada. She is happily married with three children.

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CONTEMPORARY ART



The green walkway to Olumide's studio

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