



ESCAPISM

PEJU ALATISE - NDIDI EMEFIELE - ANTHEA EPELLE
GERALD CHUKWUMA - KAINEBI OSAHENYE



ESCAPISM

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@
ARTPANTHEON
12D BOSUN ADEKOYA STREET
ONIRU, LAGOS.

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Art PANTHEON

ESCAPISM: Gallery Statement

Escapism, an exhibition of works by five amazing Nigerian artists, , Peju Alatise, Ndid Emefiele, Gerald Chukwuma, Anthea Epelle, and Kainebe Osahenye, brings us into thoughtful engagement with the concepts of escape and escapism. To live is more or less to witness and endure heart-rending realities. In the face of such unremitting harshness, we would rather forget, would rather we are spared. Facing reality head-on takes its toll, even for the strong. It is a lot easier to simply hide away and to escape.

But is escape possible? To what do we escape? Is there any place from which we can truly be free of reality? The experiences that unsettle us and the pressures that mount against us are manifold. They spring up everywhere like vicious weeds. They take up more space than we can spare in the rooms of our life. Escapism offers, not complete escape but the moment—so much in popular entertainment does that but more importantly a way to think about the things from which we seek escape. The exhibition, in presenting viscerally-engaging works by these contemporary Nigerian artists, fortifies us to meet reality and its harshness with untiring fantasies and imaginations.

The works on display are in conversation with one another and with the viewer, reinforcing and illuminating the theme of escapism in both direct and oblique ways. With her cactus series, Ndid Emefiele takes us into a whole world of fantasy, helping us escape reality for a moment into richly imagined spheres. Peju Alatise's figures (angel-like in their effect) are seen in the world of fantasies, the wings in her pieces signifying the breaking free of struggles. Gerald Chukwuma, in his choice of material and subject matter, celebrates hope & beauty with his vibrant colours, a celebration which also indicts a system that has not done enough for the sustenance and development of such traditions. Kainebe Osahenye, with arresting hues, draws us into the depths of human emotion and solitude. Anthea Epelle, using oil paint, presents us with compelling portraits of bold defiant subjects.

Art Pantheon Gallery is proud to create the space for these kinds of conversations, between artists and the viewers. In presenting Escapism to the public, we at Art Pantheon intervene in the Nigerian situation. We see this intervention as necessary. A worsening economy, insoluble insurgency, and growing insecurity, all of which have become commonplace in the country, cause much despair and could use the response of art. We may not all be able to fully escape the sad realities that engulf us now, but we can meet them with fantasies & imagination to distract and give us relief for the moment and by doing so find our way through. It is with this spirit and conviction that we at Art Pantheon declare open our 4th exhibition, Escapism.

Sincerely,

Nana Sonoiki
Art Pantheon Ltd.

FOREWORD

Imagining Our Way to a Better Reality

It is not necessarily a desirable thing to make or look at art with the notion that the world is a problem to be solved and that the role of art is to solve it. The finest art does not propose to solve the world, nor does it encourage that expectation in anyone. Art, for all its aspirations and grandeur, operates on a rather modest premise: The world is the world, and although it is in several regards less than ideal, it, ultimately, is meant to be lived in, to be experienced, not solved.

Escapism, a group exhibition of the works of five Nigerian artists, is organized around a similar premise. Life, in addition to being beautiful, is savage. And the artists in this exhibition do not presume that they can overturn that. They offer instead what all art strives to offer: an imaginative space of fellow feeling. If people desire to escape from the harshness of reality, then art must do what is humane. It must take cognizance of that desire and show understanding.

The artists in this show—Ndidi Emefiele, Peju Alatise, Gerald Chukwumah, Epelle Anthea, Kainebi Osahenye—present works that are capacious in understanding and humane in their handling of the issues, both individual and societal, which plague us. Recognizing the genuine human need for escape from these distressing issues, the works in this exhibition offer several avenues of escape, several approaches to it. However, the escapism in their work is careful not to lead us into the delusion that as long as we can escape, then all is taken care of. Apathy and a smug dismissal of the issues that deserve our serious consideration (a dismissal which could be considered a moral failure) are a real danger posed by escapism. The exhibition *Escapism* is situated at the nexus of this complexity. It recognizes the very human need to take a break from reality, but it also doesn't lose sight of the very real danger of apathy. Much deliberateness and care are needed to walk this delicate line.

Peju Alatise's work bears the hallmarks of deliberateness and care. They are muscular in their aesthetic and intentionality. Meaning grows naturally out of the pieces. The beauty of

her works, immersive and incantatory in their impact, instills us with their sense and themes. It feels almost like a kind of osmosis: in feeling the force of their beauty, we are impressed with the weight of their meaning.

Peju Alatise is a multi-disciplinary artist. She has written poetry and novels and has worked with different media, all of which set up her practice as serious in its concerns and intentions. Committed to a philosophy of art that is socially conscious, Alatise makes work that examines and addresses itself to the contemporary Nigerian situation. Each of her pieces reflects multi-dimensional thinking and the multiplicity of approaches required to deploy such thinking to tackle the complex problems and failings of society.

Flying Girls, her installation at the Nigerian pavilion of the 57th Venice Biennale in 2017 examined child labour and the inadequacy of laws meant to guarantee the rights of children. But more than that, she described *Flying Girls* as a body of work that offers [girls in Nigeria] a little safe place for them to be children. Her other works have addressed issues of child marriage and the possibility of connection in our time. Her most popular art pieces, populated with angels and wing motifs, reach for the celestial, the transcendental; yet they are grounded in an unyielding earthiness. She creates—out of materials stained with history and the grime of reality—a world of fantasy. This is significant. Escape is woven out of the very materials and circumstances that give rise to the need for it in the first place.

For her contribution to the theme of escapism, Ndidi Emefiele, a surrealist painter, chooses her paintings of cacti, a rather curious choice. Cacti are xerophytes, plants adapted to thrive in desert conditions. Emefiele's cacti, however, are tall, luxuriant, larger than life, and are painted in dreamlike landscapes. In a painting like *Cactus Orgasm (2021)*, we also appreciate their fecundity, how irrepressibly they populate the entire canvas. What could the intention be here? Is it possible that the artist is saying: in order to escape, we need not flee the desert, but rather develop ways to adapt and thrive?

Emefiele's paintings evince a kind of stubbornness, a fierce commitment to a singular vision. She makes her points and highlights her themes as much through omission as through inclusion. She enlarges the presence of what is included by making conspicuous the absence of what isn't, a choice we can imagine her making with decided single-mindedness. In paintings intended to emphasize feminine agency and strength, for example, she leaves men out of the canvas. The omission is so forceful and stark as to be in itself a kind of painting, a painting out. Much analysis of art is about content and composition. Meaning, and hence potency, is often born of what is left on the canvas, what the viewer is presented with. However, in looking at an Emefiele painting, one is made to see that—even in works as maximalist as hers—several things had to be painted out to make for the emergence of more forceful meanings. This is yet another way Emefiele helps us think about escapism. There are things, notions, fears, complexes that we must take out, or suppress, from our perception of reality in order to find greater meaning. Escapism stops being simply a matter of running away from reality. It approaches something greater: the fashioning of newer frames of perception.

Gerald Chukwuma, a sculptor, contributes to the exhibition wood sculptures with an eclectic mix of motifs. Several of them are etched with Igbo symbology, a testimony and a salutation to his cultural roots. Studying in Nsukka and growing up in a world in which Igbo traditions were present, he recognized the riches of Igbo iconography and religious motifs. He also recognized how language and other cultural inheritances were not being passed down properly to the next generation, a development which, coupled with the absence of relevant institutional support and preservation, has resulted in the gradual depletion of cultural stock. His sculptural pieces both celebrate his inheritance and bear his concern, and the mastery with which they are realized keep hope alive. If we must escape, where better than into hope?

The piece *Untitled (wood board) (2021)** is made up of 29 narrow wood panels joined end to end. The ends and sides are burnt and chiseled; the colour on their surface moves from a reddish-orange to pecan to black-brown; and they are engraved with patterns and figures that stand out in bas-relief: beads, lines, waves, lizards, fish bones, mythological symbols. The entire assembly—parallel wood slats joined in a row—evokes a xylophone and the plethora of patterns and symbols, a complex and enchanting piece of music

To think of some of these works as music is quite instructive. This is particularly true in the works of Anthea Epelle. It really is hard to find a more apt or useful metaphor to embody the visual harmony and feeling in her paintings. Her works are figurative, each of them reflecting an inimitable understanding of the human face, and the range of emotions it can express. She paints with vibrant colours, and imbues her subtle portraits with confidence, with daring.

Four paintings are presented in the exhibition—images of the head of a young woman, shown in four different attitudes. Parallel black lines run down the faces which overlap with diagonally placed rectangular patterns. The paintings are red-themed, and the eyes are almost always lightly closed. Everything creates a mood of intimacy, inwardness, sensuality, peace. There is also an inescapable energy, a warm and pleasant aura into which we are thoroughly absorbed.

Unlike the other artists in this exhibition, Kainebi Osahenye, a neo-expressionist painter, approaches escapism in a way that one might consider counterintuitive. He is drawn to solitude, each of his pieces steeped in melancholy. The moods he evokes and in which he immerses his viewers run contrary to conventional ideas of escapism. But Osahenye in this exhibition is not interested in perpetuating conventional ideas. Challenging and expanding them seem to be what he is after. We don't always have to run off when it gets dark and sad. Perhaps in our quest for joy, it is just as meaningful to stay a little while with sorrow.

In *One Love II (2020)**, two silhouetted figures hold each other across the shoulders, their bodies pressed tight together, their heads tilting toward each other. Each one's hand is red and warmly clasped around the other's shoulders. Huge swaths of grey paint cross their foreheads, chests, and legs. The grey drips down their bodies, like figures in the rain walking a lonely road with nothing but each other. It's such a sad and beautiful painting.

Five artists explore escapism—and indeed help us to escape—through art's broad and textured vistas. What they offer, though, is not absolute escape, nor a single conception of it. What they offer is the consolation of art and the reassurance that we can imagine, even in the midst of sorrow, a better reality.

Joseph Omoh Ndukwu

Lagos, Nigeria.



PEJU
ALATISE

Peju Alatise is an interdisciplinary artist, architect and author of two novels. She started her professional career as an architect working in an architectural firm along side running a private art studio. Today, Peju is one of the leading contemporary artists on the African continent. Her works challenge the status quo of the African society and also of global affairs. She has been consistent with her experimentation with materials and techniques as a medium to analyse various socio-political issues. Peju has also been an influential voice on the Child Not Bride campaign in Nigeria, with her work regularly feeding into this discourse.

Peju Alatise is a fellow at the National Museum of African Art, part of the Smithsonian Institution. Her work has been collected by the Smithsonian Institute. She is the 2017 winner of the FNB Art Prize in Johannesburg. Her work was exhibited at Venice Biennale's 57th edition, themed Viva Arte Viva (Long Live Art) in the Nigerian pavilion. Her work was exhibited at the 2018 EVA biennial in Ireland. Peju Alatise's is a regular feature at 1:54 Art fair in New York, Marrakech and London.

Her participation in the Venice Biennale Architecture 2021 was a direct invitation from the Biennale Curator Mr. Hashim Sarkis. Alatise's work at the Biennale, Alasiri was described by the financial

Times as "...eye-catching installation and vivid figures create a solid introduction to the Biennale".

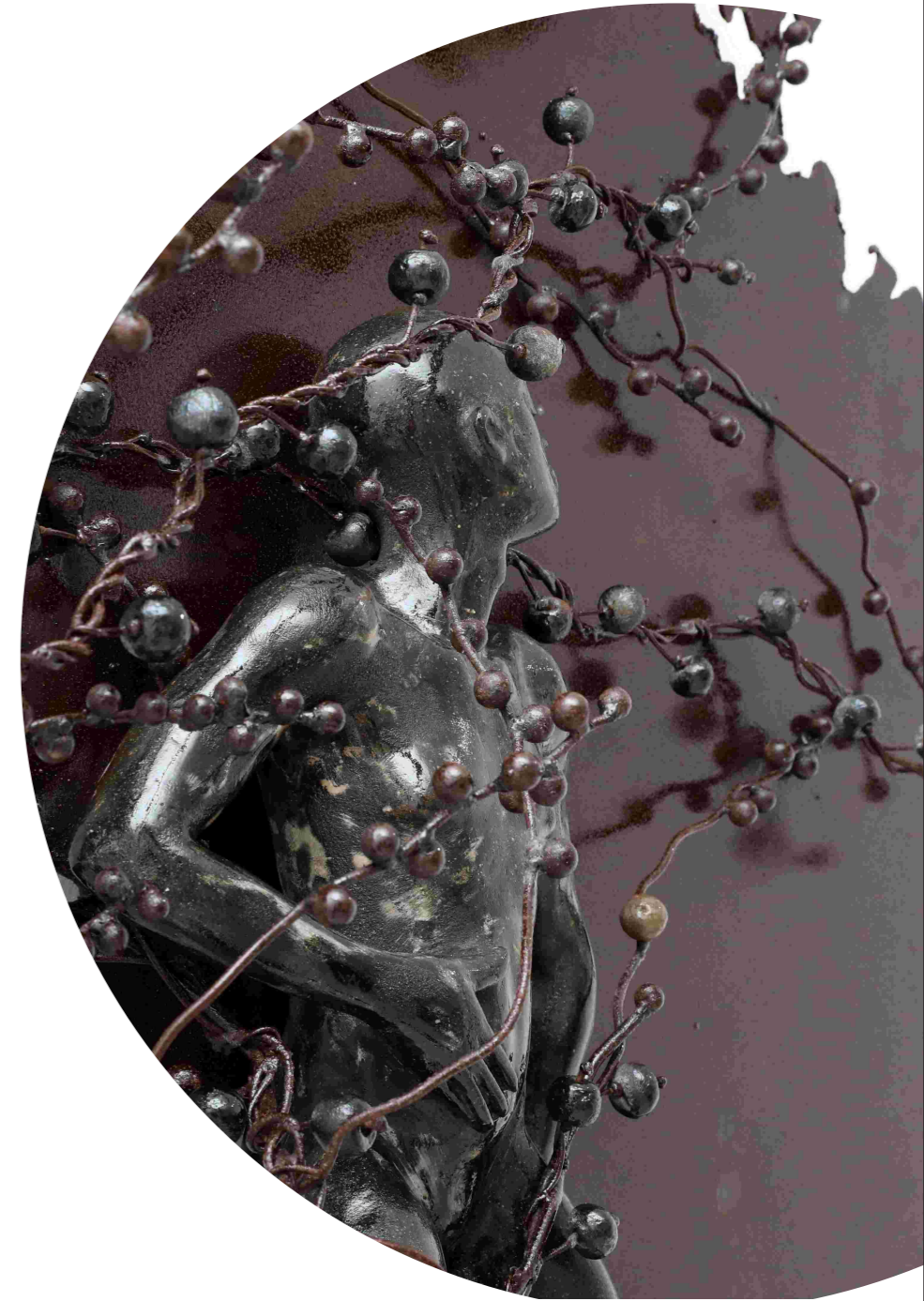
Other selected recent past exhibitions of her works were held at the 2014 Casablanca biennale in Morocco, Cooper gallery for African and African American art Harvard University-2017, Resignification of Black body 2016 in Museo Bardini - Florence. Familiar boundaries - Infinite possibilities exhibition, August Wilson centre, Pittsburgh, USA. Curator- Kilolo Luckett, October 2018 to March 2019. EVA Ireland Biennial 2018. Curator- Inti Guerrero. Manifesta 12, Resignification of Black bodies. Palermo, Italy, Curator- Awam Ampka (New York University) June 2018. Péju Alatise 'Memoirs of the forgotten' 2019 Sulger Buel Gallery, London. Intricacies: Fragment & Meaning Aicon Gallery, New York 2019.

Peju Alatise is the founder of the ANAI Foundation - a non-profit foundation dedicated to the development of visual arts in Nigeria, and the first purpose built artist's residency with a well-equipped ceramic studio, which offers sponsored training programs for ceramic artists.

Her debut novel Orita Meta, chronicling the interwoven path of three women, was nominated for the ANA/Flora Nwapa Prize for Women's Writing in 2006.



WHEN TROUBLE SLEEP...
Mixed Media, 2020, 120 X 120 Cm (47 X 47 Inches)





WHEN TROUBLE SLEEP...
Mixed media, 2020, 117 x 120 cm (46 x 47 inches)





WHEN TROUBLE SLEEP...
Mixed media, 2020, 127 x 117 cm (50 x 46 inches)



WHEN TROUBLE SLEEP...
MIXED MEDIA, 2020, 114 x 114 cm (45 x 45 inches)



WHEN TROUBLE SLEEP...
Mixed Media, 2020, (117 x 114 cm (46 x 45 inches))





KOBO KOBO I
Mixed media, 2020, 107 x 107 cm (42 x 42 inches)



KOBO KOBO II
Mixed media, 2020, 107 x 107 cm (20 x 20 inches)



NDIDI
EMEFIELE

Drawing on cultural, gendered and personal references, Ndidi Emefiele creates layered figurative compositions that, dynamic in brush stroke and in juxtaposition of colour, conjure the complexity of contemporary experience and female identity. Emerging out of the Nigerian panorama, the strength of her narrative becomes even more pronounced as she encompasses collage, textiles and traditional materials conveying a strong sense of cultural heritage and aesthetics inspired by her homeland.

Ndidi Emefiele's incredibly vivid canvases embrace a vision of women as strong, vibrant, self-confident characters who exist in relation to each other in a universe where the male is only noticed by his total absence. Her assertive figures make no attempt to fulfill male expectations. The depiction of enlarged heads which are traditionally said to control and predict one's destiny, and the use of extravagant glasses or CD's, become a recurring element objectifying the need for a shield against the world.

Ndidi Emefiele (b.1987) lives and works in North Hampton, UK.

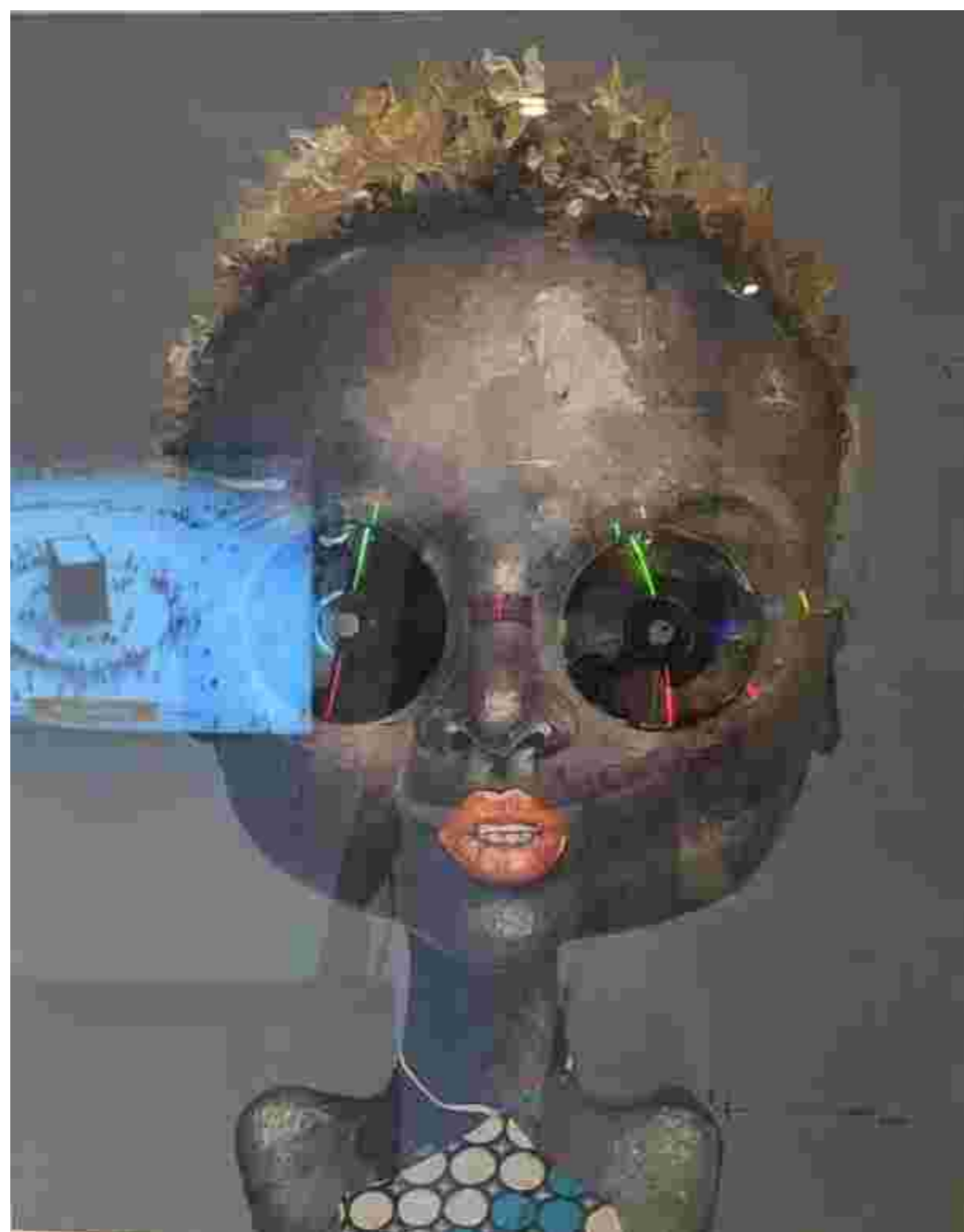
Emefiele has exhibited widely both internationally and in the UK including solo/group presentations in Miami, New York, London, Chicago, Los Angeles, Lagos, Johannesburg and Abuja. Emefiele forms part of private collections such as The Deighton Collection, the Beth DeWoody collection and The Jimenez - Colon Collection. Public collections include: The Mint Museum, The Nigerian Stock Exchange, Lagos, Nigeria and The University Of South Africa, Cape Town. Importantly, she was awarded with the prestigious 'The Olive Prize 2016' (Excellence In Painting, The Slade School Of Fine Art). Emefiele was among the nominees of The Future Awards Africa 2016 for Arts & Culture. Emefiele presented her works at the MoCADA, New York; The Perimeter, London; The Charles H. Wright Museum, Detroit and The Taubman Museum of Art, Virginia as part of the exhibition "Reclamation! Pan-African Works" from the Beth Rudin DeWoody collection.



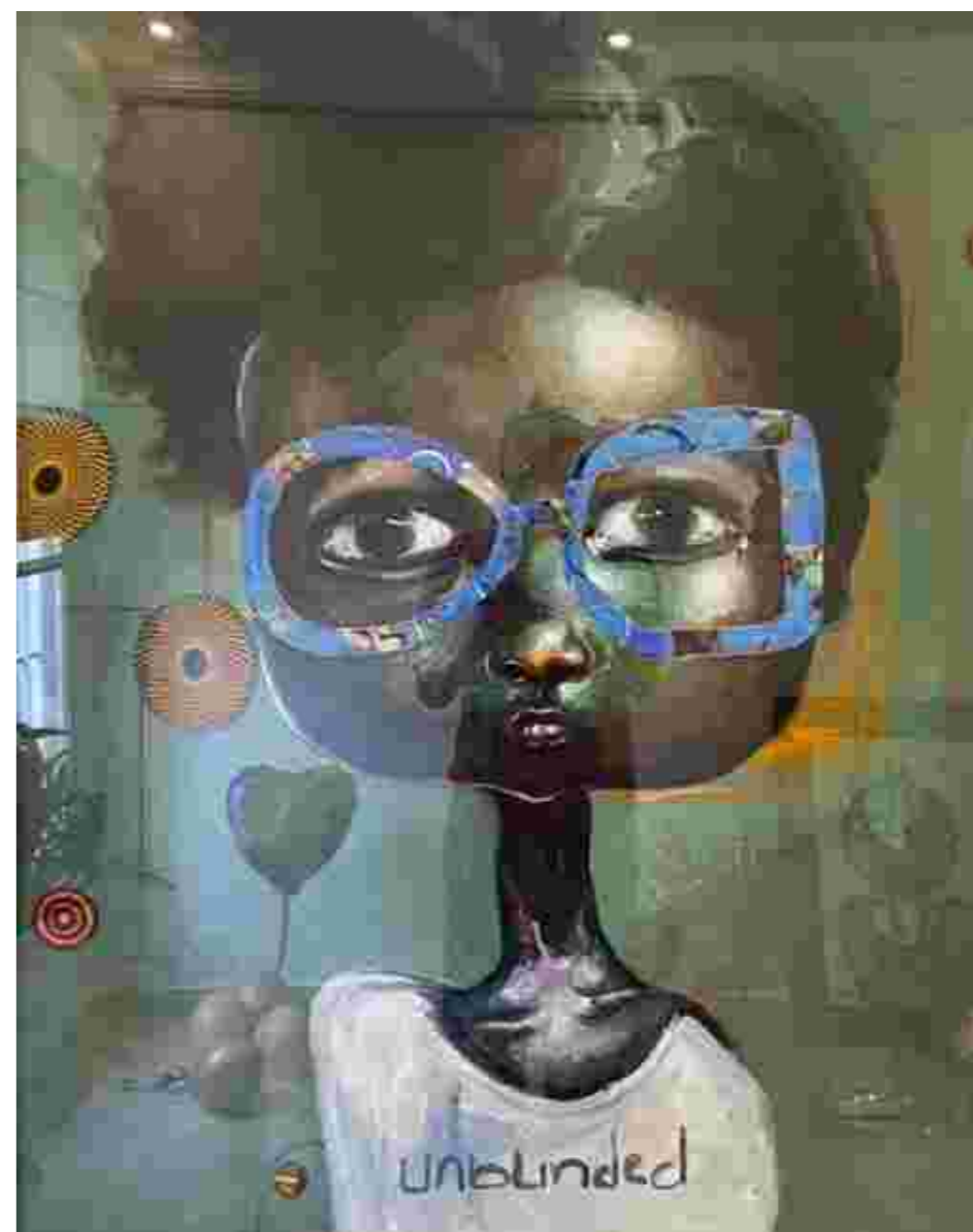
CACTUS ORGASM
Mixed media on paper, 2021, 400 X 230cm (157.5 X 90.5 inches)



OCCASIONAL SWIMMERS
Mixed media on canvas, 2021, 300 x 230 cm (118.1 x 90.5 inches)



RAINBOW II
Mixed Media On Paper, 2015, 70 X 80 Cm (27.5 X 31.5 Inches)
Private collection



UNBLINDED
Mixed Media On Canvas, 2017, 100 x 80 cm (39.5 x 31.5 inches)
Private collection



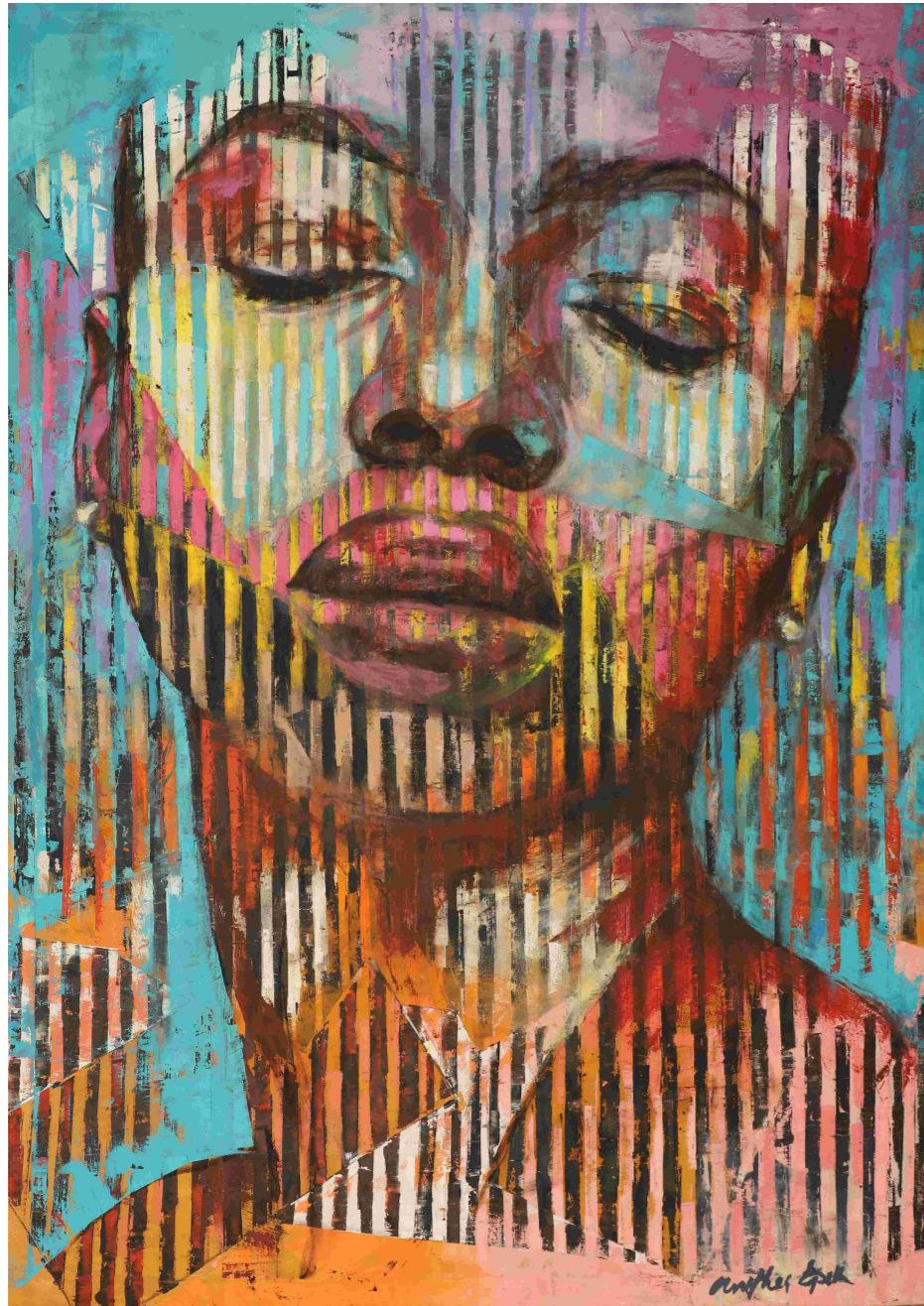
ANTHEA
EPELLE

Anthea Epelle is an artist who lives and works in Lagos Nigeria. She works mainly with oil on canvas but sometimes works with recycled paper and ink and with oil on paper. Anthea's works are mostly figurative abstracts. Anthea is a self taught visual artist and the only creative training she has was gained when she studied Fashion design and technology at the London College of Fashion (Now University of the Arts). Anthea took up painting professionally in 2007. Her work has been featured in exhibitions in Nigeria. Some exhibitions she has participated in are:

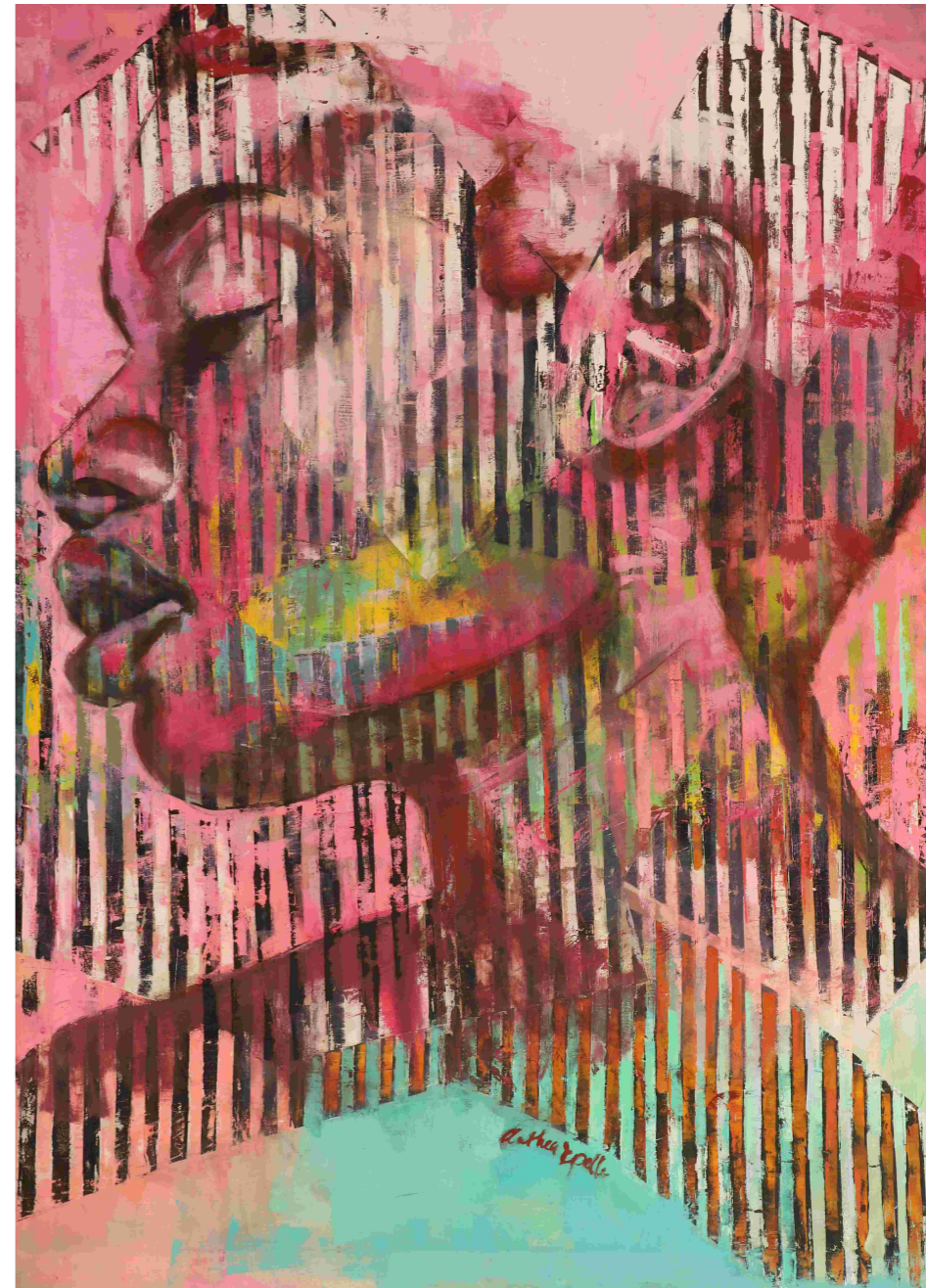
- Nigeria Our Nigeria -Presidential Inauguration Exhibition, Abuja 2011
- The Contemporaries- Wheatbaker, Lagos 2015
- Women's Month Art Exhibition - Rele Gallery Lagos 2016
- Afro Modernism Exhibition - Abuja 2016.

She is featured in a book titled "Art of Nigerian Women" by Chukwuemeka Ben Bosah, due to be launched in 2016

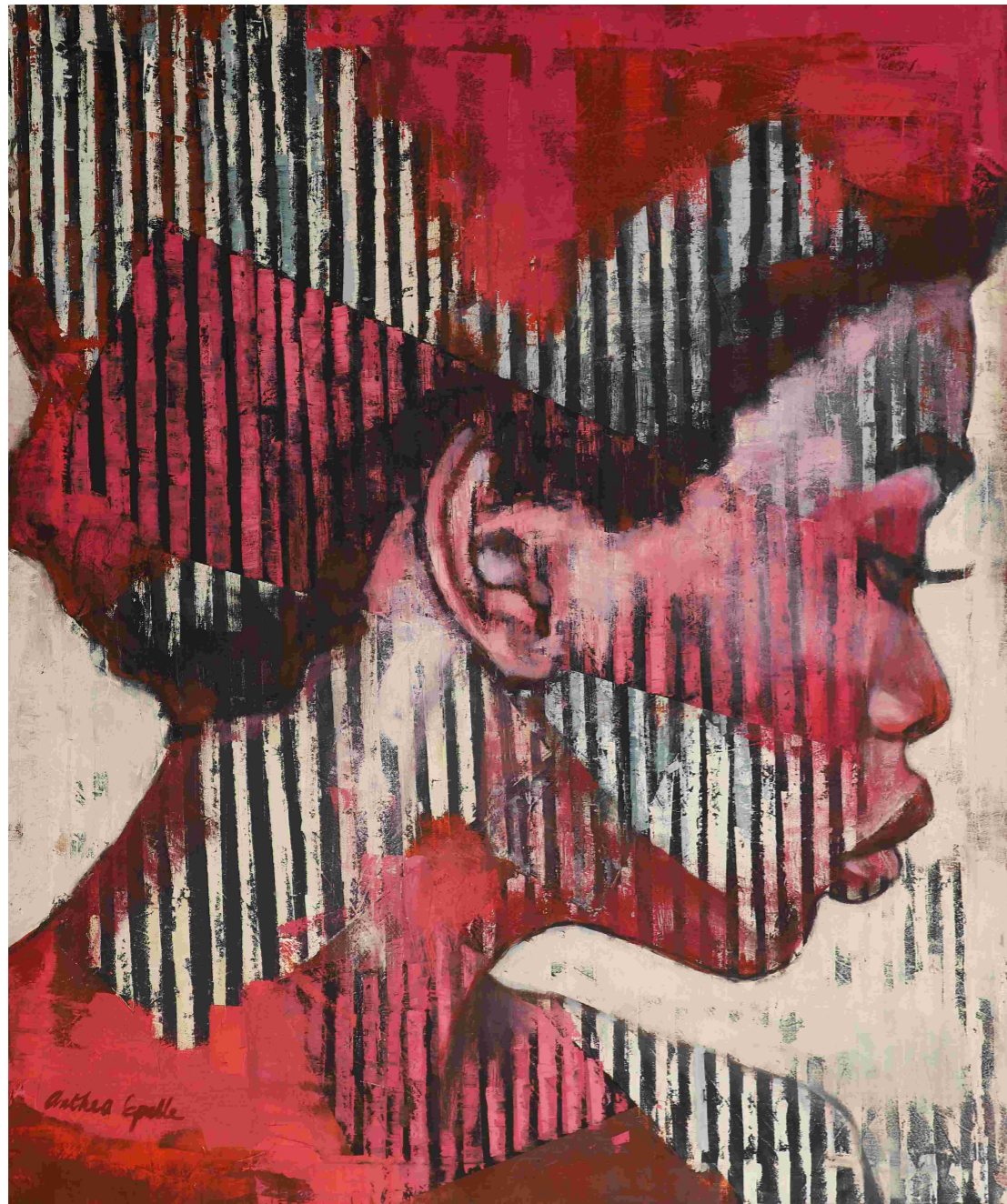
Several of her works have been sold at auction by Arthouse Contemporary Lagos since 2010.



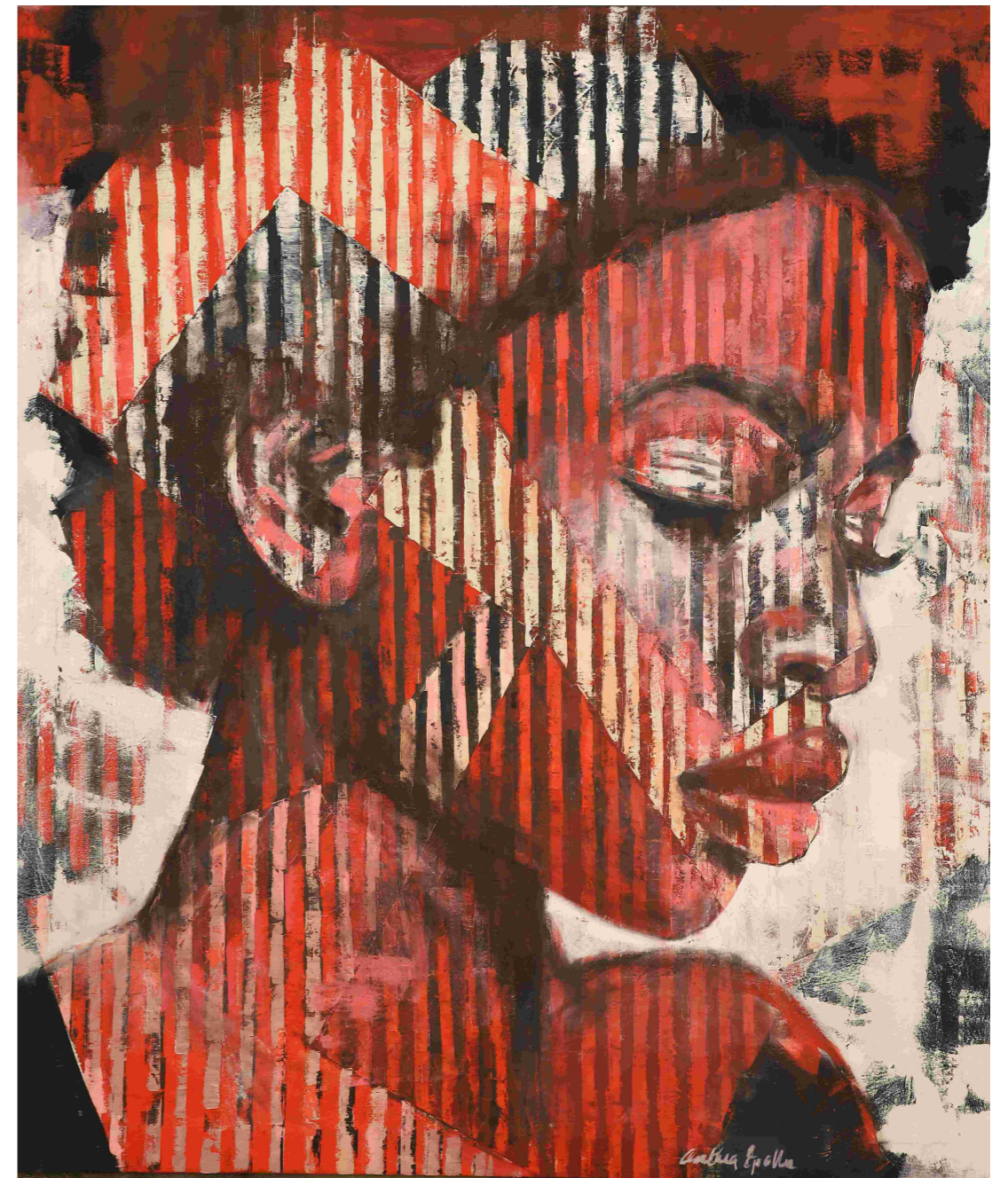
HOPE
Oil on canvas, 2021, 127 X 177.8 cm (50 X 70 inches)



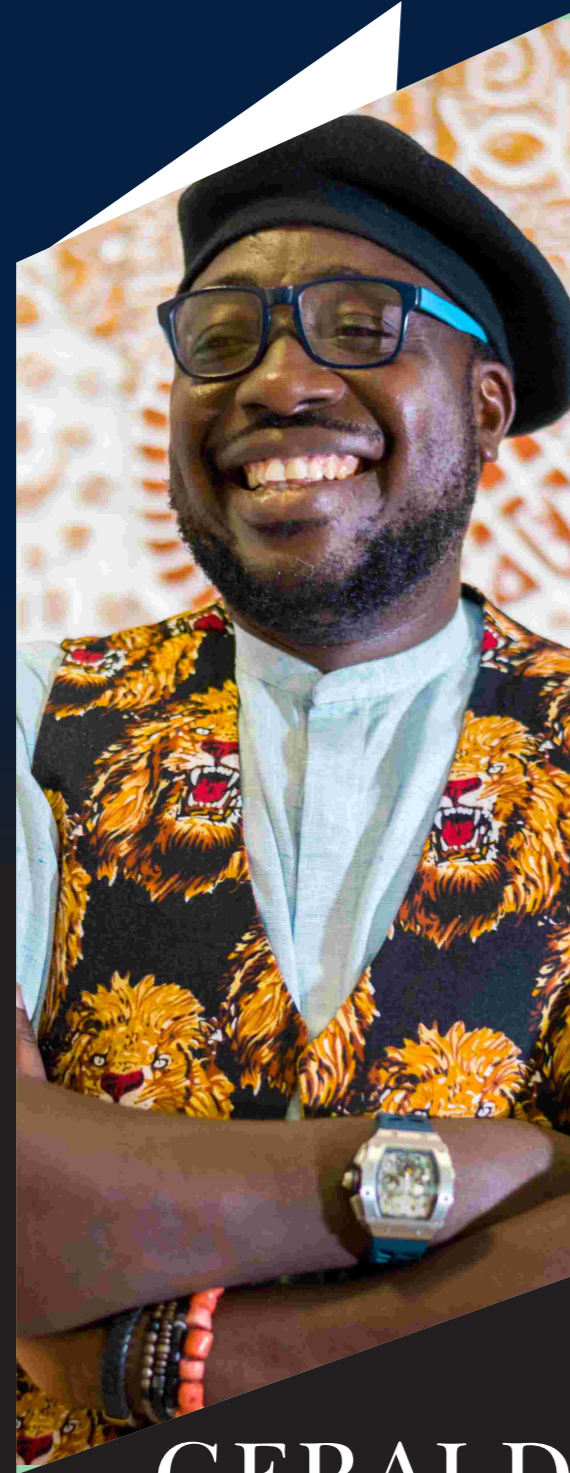
UNDEFEATED
Oil on canvas, 2021, 127 x 177.8 cm (50 x 70 inches)



MELODY III
Oil on canvas, 2021, 127 x 152.4 cm (50 x 60 inches)



MELODY IV
OIL ON CANVAS, 2021, 127 X 152.4 cm (50 X 60 inches)



GERALD
CHUKWUMA

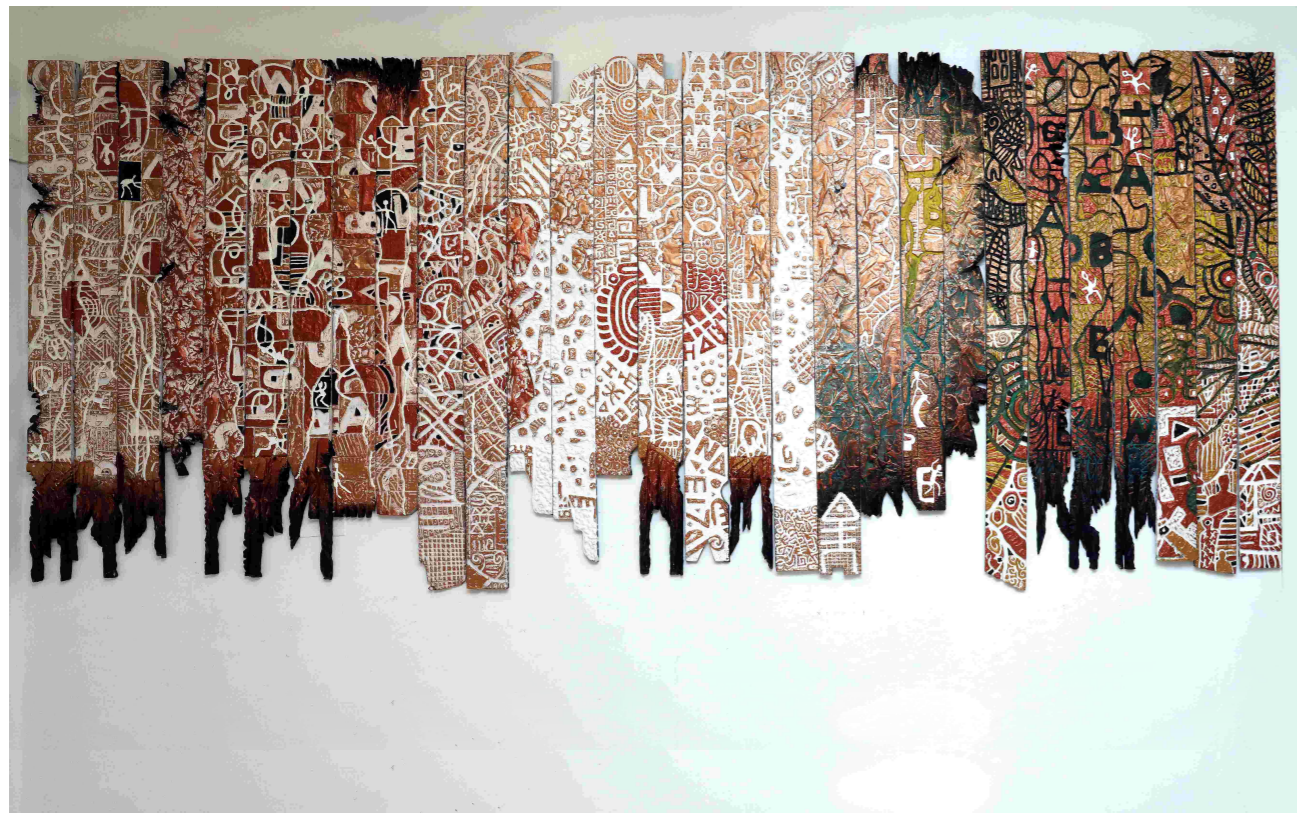
Gerald Chukwuma's art explore migration as a constant process of transformation. Working with his signature upcycled aluminium battered wood carvings and installations, he creates works that reflect the joys , struggles and erosion of culture and language as it grinds in the mortar of globalisation through richly illustrated depictions of stories , myths and legends . He tells his story using the uli and nsibidi patterns in a refreshing way. Laden with personal and symbolic meanings they speak to our human desire to communicate with each other and share stories about who we are, where we have come from, where we may be going , and most importantly what we are saliently becoming.

Gerald's audacious and inherently dramatic pieces explore creative opportunities locked in certain waste materials and the possibilities of creating narratives and emotional contents that allude to notions such as globalisation, decay, movements, slavery, culture and history. The entire demeanour of his art which he has exhibited widely in many parts of the world including

nigeria, the united states of america, united kingdom, denmark, turkey, netherlands, South Africa and Berlin is majestically severe, forceful, unrelenting, colourful, abrasive, playful and even imposing.

In 2008 and 2011, Gerald emerged as one of the top three winners in the reputable national art competition. His art was featured in the cable news network, CNN's Inside Africa in 2011 and the New York Times art review in 2019. His works are in the collections like the University of Nigeria Nsukka, Beth Rudin De Woody USA, The Hague Netherlands, Eston Capital/John Friedman collection, Pan African University Lagos, Seth Dei Collection Accra, the World Bank Collection Washington D.C., Yemisi Shyllon Museum, Lagos.

Born in nigeria in 1973, he cultivated his aesthetic at the university of nigeria, Nsukka where he earned his art degree summa cum laude.



BLACK, WHITE & NUDE
Mixed media, 2021, 168 x 366 cm (66 x 144 inches)



WHEN THE MOON WALKS INTO THE ARENA
Mixed Media, 2021, 244 x 152.5 cm (96 x 60 inches)



ULIMMA (THE GRANDMOTHER'S STORY)
Mixed Media On Paper, 2019, 137.2 X 122 cm (54 x 48 inches)



ULIMMA (THE GRANDMOTHER'S STORY)
Mixed Media On Paper, 2019, 137.2 X 122 Cm (54 X 48 Inches)



KAINEBI
OSAHENYE

Kainebi Osahenye b. 1964 in Agbor, Delta state, Nigeria. He studied at the Auchi polytechnic, Auchi and Yaba college of technology, Lagos, majoring in painting in 1989. In 2012, he received a masters of fine arts (MFA) from Goldsmiths, University of London, London, UK.

Osahenye works across a variety of mediums which includes painting, sculpture, installation, drawing and collage. He has used assortment of basic materials to address issues about life, spirituality, consumerism, identity and the environment.

Osahenye has had residencies at the school of visual arts in New York and Vermont studio center, Vermont, USA.

He has participated in several exhibitions including 1.54 Art Fair, London, 2018; ArtXLagos 2016, 2017, 2019; Biennale Jogja, Indonesia, 2015; Art 14, London; Shifting Currents, National Museum, Lagos, 2014; Afropolis; Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum, Cologne, Germany, 2010; Dak'Art (Off), Dakar, Senegal, 2010; Trash-ing, CCA Lagos, 2009.

Osahenye was included in Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu's Contemporary African Art since 1980 and Phaidon's Art Cities of the Future: 21st Century Avant-Gardes.

He lives and works in Lagos.



ERASING PAIN
Mixed media on canvas, 2017–2021, 233.5 x 233.5 cm (80 x 80 inches)



UNTITLED
Mixed media on canvas, 2017–2021, 233.5 x 233.5 cm (80 x 80 inches)



INTERRUPTION
Mixed media on canvas, 2018, 233.5 x 183 cm (80 x 72 inches)



INTERRUPTION I
Mixed media on canvas, 2018, 233.5 x 183 cm (80 x 72 inches)



THE HEART OF THE MATTER
Mixed media on canvas, 2021, 148 x 158 cm (58 x 62 inches)



