

OBITUARY

BY

BOB-NOSA UWAGBOE

24TH NOVEMBER 2018

SIGNATURE BEYOND ART GALLERY



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Cover: The Victor, acrylic on textured canvas, 122cm x 153cm, 2017

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DEDICATION

To the memories of my late parents,
Mr & Mrs A. Uwagboe and To all those
who have lost their lives Due to the
consequences of poor Leadership
in Africa.



CURATOR'S STATEMENT

Before 2017 when footage of commercial bus driver Kester Edun in Benin City emerged, showing a man handcuffed to the back of a police patrol van, dragged on the road and being driven around, there had been other incidents of extreme brutality by officers of the Nigerian Police Force. The killings of five igbo spare parts traders and a young woman was one case too many that left us in horror. Chinedu Meniru, Ifeanyi Ozor, Anthony Nwokike, Ekene Isaac and Augustina Arebu, were murdered on their way back from a nightclub.

After they were shot at a police checkpoint in Apo area of Abuja, to cover up the act the policemen then placed weapons on their dead victims framing them up as armed robbers. In a stop-and-search operation at Akowonjo on the mainland of Lagos, another commercial bus driver Kazeem, was shot on the head by a policeman demanding 50 naira tip from him. When the victim refused and wanted to drive away, the policeman cork his gun and pulled the trigger.

Enjoy your viewing!

Ekiko Ita inyang


Bob
NO WA
WAR

BOB-NOSA UWAGBOE: OBITUARY

The solo exhibition brings together series of remarkable body of works by Nigerian artist Bob-Nosa Uwagboe. Most of the works in this collection are widely noted for their intensity of gloomy background featuring lewd, repulsively distorted forms, and imageries of farcical attributes. In the last decade or so, Uwagboe has remain one of the few artists working in Nigeria who has made camp in the barricade, constantly sticking flames in the face of authority, and derisively responding with provocative works that speaks truth to power.

Many of his figures are loosely conceive to assume postures which reveals obvious attempt to exaggerate features of human forms, easily giving them away as object of whimsical humour. It is this playfulness Uwagboe brings into creating figures in law enforcement uniforms resembling that of Nigerian policemen in profile. Displaying palpable anxiety while depicted with pants falling off so that it's seen below the knees, revealing genitals shrouded in blobs of black paint. The officer is inert, standing awkwardly in-between two female nudes in lurid appearance—so that we are presented with a miserably descriptive lascivious imagery of a drunk flanked by whores.

From the sudden death of his mother to cancer, followed by demise of a bereaved father three months after, a distraught Uwagboe stages an obsequies. The sober tone expressed in most works responding to Uwagboe's traumatic experience in that period meets his indignation over social and widespread humanitarian crisis in recent times. Beside his continuous critique of global political structure, the captivity of African immigrants and refugees traded in open market slavery in Libyan border, the endless atrocities carried out by Boko Haram terrorists as well as the menace of herdsmen witnessed across Nigerian communities, escalate a feeling of resignation and mourning in Uwagboe.

Curator
Ekiko Ita Inyang



THE ART OF BOB-NOSA UWAGBOE: THE INADEQUACY OF THE HUMAN.

INTRODUCTION

I recently received a request from Bob-nosa Uwagboe, who I have not met personally and I have only encountered his artworks through social media. Bob's art caught my eye immediately. My first interest was the anger in his work which I thought, as a South African who lived through the horror of Apartheid in South Africa, that I could empathize with his work. In retrospect I seem to have thought that there may be similarities with the work of Khayalethu Witbooi of Cape Town, who confronts the failure of the new democracy in South Africa and as well as how people are responding to global capitalism. Witbooi calls his art 'pap'(porridge) art and he uses imagery from famous South African political icons that become interspersed with an array of popular entertainment and advertising media images. Both he and Uwagboe use street art forms of collage and spray painting, but it soon became apparent that comparing these two artists was a gross over-simplification. Bob-nosa Uwagboe is more of a protest artist who uses satire and parody as a form of social activism that calls for change and transformation within his country.

According to his website, Uwagboe's art is inspired by the notion of "inhumanity "and says that his art makes social and political commentary as a form of protest art "... *that speaks for the oppressed, the art that kicks against bad leadership, the art that condemns inhumanity in our society*." (1) What "inhumanity' means to Uwagboe includes the realization that, as a philosophical and ethical stance, Humanism is currently also being interrogated somewhat robustly, particularly by thinkers in Africa. As a western concept, it values the application of critical thinking (rationalism) and the demonstration of evidence (empiricism) rather than dogma and superstition. Conversely, where there is no humanism, it is understood that a society lacks human sensibility and, as a consequence, it becomes a violent and beastlike society that tends to inflict pain or suffering on others. To be inhuman is to be cold, pitiless, unkind and without humane and kindly feelings as well as an ability to also inflict or cause physical or psychological pain without hesitation or human feelings. Societies that do not support human rights, dignity and freedom are commonly understood to not respect human values. When looking at the work of Uwagboe, his commentary on humanity forms both a unique and particular interpretation on this topic.

Uwagboe's anger and frustration form part of his personal "protest" creative expression and it is about the local social and political injustices in his country. He is motivated by a desire to want to speak out about how he feels, even though he knows he may not be listened to. The themes in his works, which he refers to as the "consequences" of bad political leadership on the ordinary man in Nigeria, deal with the world of vice, corruption, extortion, murder, illegal migration, inhumane treatment, human trafficking, child labour as well as hate speech and war. If his work is a personal protest, what can he do about it?

Otherwise, if he is trying to protest about the abuse of power on behalf of the ordinary citizen in the country, who does he think will or can make the changes or a difference to this situation for them and, I suspect, himself included?

ABOUT HIS WORK

To try to answer these questions, it may help one to see how his artistic style developed. The scale of his works, the use of materials and brush marks as well as subject matter all form part of his expressive vocabulary. His use of brash primary colours applied in broad expressive strokes often also include collaged images and found materials. Surfaces are scratched with written text and aerosol paint is roughly sprayed over and across painted forms. Some of the collaged are from popular media and found materials may be from the streets of Lagos and these give the subject matter an immediacy as well as a sense of authenticity or credibility. Themes such as war, the cruel fate of refugees trying to cross the Mediterranean amidst the barbarism of extortionists, the poor behaviour of the police and the prevalence of bribery in Nigerian society are represented in large, shallow spaced neo-expressionist paintings that also include abbreviated texts and scribble marks that are commonly seen on public walls on the streets. Compositions and events run from the top and right down to the bottom of large formats and shapes collide and merge to become areas of confusion, strongly painted forms, expressive words, motifs of dangerous objects, child-like drawings or segments of people.

His repertoire is drawn from a variety of sources, that include his teachers, mentors as well as urban street art forms, the neo-expressionist art by outsiders as well as protest forms of music. His Neo-Expressionistic painting style has been inspired by the work Jean-Michel Basquiat in particular. He was an American artist of Haitian and Puerto Rican descent who reacted to conceptual art in New York by using street art forms combined with elements from abstract expressionism that became popular in the 1980s. (2)

This emergent Neo-Expressionist style tended to portray the human body in a rough and violently emotional way, using bright colours and surface texture that included collage, text and directly applied charcoal and paint. Taboo subjects such as sex, racism and violence were usually interrogated to a point where it became a type of subjective self-expression. (3) Uwagboe's exposure to this work seems to have been through galleries and the media in particular. His two-year internship with the Nigerian artist, George Olisa Nwadiogbu inspired him to also use monumental figures and strong colour to express strong emotions. This happened at the Gon Art Studio in Lagos from 2000. (4)

COMPOSITIONS RELATING TO THEMES

Sometimes his paintings representing a combination of forms and objects become large compositions that describe a personal concern or disdain for social vices or a state of degradation and powerlessness within a situation. "*The Ugly Act* "(2018), includes simplified shapes of guns, parachutes, armoured vehicles. Bullets are combined with childlike representations of military figures, masked crooks, childlike representations of figures amongst found flat collaged shapes as well as a type of stairwell or pavement made of bullets on which a young man walks unknowingly walks on. His addition of the inscribed text "no", indicates that this work is not about a particular event, but a powerful critique about his personal dislike for war in all its forms, be it enacted by a military, extortionists, assassins or ordinary people.



Ugly Act, acrylic, spray paint on canvas, 154cm x 154cm, 2018

COMPOSITIONS THAT RELATE TO ACTUAL HISTORICAL EVENTS

In contrast, his "*Tortured Youth in Libya*" refers to an actual event which appeared in the media towards the end of 2017. Young refugees were badly beaten by extortionists in Libya who beat them up while they were in captivity and waiting for their parents to pay for their safety, Two standing and bound figures appear on a central round stage while five heads act as two – dimensional spectators and their form seems to echo sculpted Benin heads which may have symbolic associations of ori (head), which is a metaphysical Yoruba concept of Orisha that refers to the spark of human consciousness and destiny. The standing figures are combined with found collaged materials that add emphasis to the mutilation of flesh while the pink spots in the backdrop may allude to illness and plagues. The Yoruba believe that if an individual's ori is well taken care of, it will bring material success. And, according to Yoruba philosophical thought, the inner head is regarded as a spiritual essence that contains the whole destiny of man on earth. In this spectacle of torture, both the central figures and the ori-type heads are bound to emphasize the macabre conditions of capture, cruelty as well as the loss of human essence and destiny. The loss of physical life, as well as material and spiritual destiny in this work turns a historical event into a theme which has much deeper implications for society as well. Extortion and torture are now seen to violate the equilibrium of both man and nature.



Youth Tortured, acrylic fabric collage on textured canvas, 4ft x 4ft 2018

Protest and the art of Bob-nosa Uwagboe

Popular mainstream visual arts in Nigeria, like most countries, tends to prefer landscape and portrait paintings in particular. Artists such as Uwagboe belong to a minority group of contemporary artists who criticizes government. He calls his studio the Protest Art Studio where artworks that comment on social and political issues that affect him are made. "*It is the art that speaks for the oppressed, the art that kicks against bad leadership, the art that condemns inhumanity in our society*." (5) As an activist, he does not work within a social movement, but as an individual. He explains his creative activism as a gradual process of protest in which his artworks raise the issue of corruption which also become a medium for change. "*As much as we live in a corrupt country, we cannot look up only to the government to change in the twinkle of an eye, the change has to start individually*." (6)

Protest art is universal and artists tend to challenge power and authority by using a range of disruptive activities, approaches and formats that can interfere, galvanize or mobilize social and political structures. Simultaneously, the form of protest, is also meant to alert viewers to become concerned about issues that can be acted on. Sometimes, the process of protest, can often overpower and dilute the original

concept and very few art works manage to retain their original concept despite having managed to make a strong protest statement. The main work that comes to mind is that of Pablo Picasso's "*Guernica".* However, Uwagboe's form of protest art is very different. His is not one of sabotage or resistance. It is more about trying to set up a counter-culture within a prevailing (corrupt) system. His production site is the Protest Art Studio, his visual repertoire uses parody, distortion, exaggeration, expressive art forms as well as found items and street art conventions. His particular type of protest is a continuous one which includes the tactics of change and waiting.

Uwagboe's views on humanity becomes a very powerful critique on the inadequacy of human nature in contemporary Africa. The statements in his paintings tend to mock and satirize ordinary people, powerful leaders, dangerous criminals and similar, to a point where they no longer resemble rational beings. But he does not expose culprits or point fingers on anyone or anything. Despite the power in his imagery, his statements are more general than specific. Examples can be seen in in his "*Madiba*" paintings, which clearly raise his concern about the ongoing crisis for freedom and liberation in South Africa, despite the media fame and political reverence that has been bestowed on Nelson Mandela. Uwagboe turns this liberation story into more of a mockery of the inadequacy of leaders in Africa to deliver on their promises. His grotesque figures that include struggle iconography seem to become a mockery of the idea of liberation and democracy. A collaged power emblem on the shirt of an idiotic pigeon-toed figure lampoons the whole idea of freedom. In these works, his satire does not insult as much as it asks pertinent questions that becomes a mockery of human endeavour.





How Uwagboe's protest will affect change seems to be determined by the kind of protest artist that he is and three particular factors have already determined this. These are experiences in his youth, his experience of the city of Lagos as well as the types of music that inspire him.

A: Decisions he had to make as a young person

Growing up in the Niger Delta where the exploitation of oil involved big corporate corruption, civil strife and environmental degradation particularly during the 90s occurred, Uwagboe was familiarized him with conflict, corruption and activism on a significant scale from an early age. Additionally, his choice to become an artist became part of his existential search for meaning as he had to struggle to get his father and family members to accept this career choice. These factors may have galvanized him into becoming an activist using visual art.

B: Lagos as home of the Protest Art Studio

Uwagboe's exposure to Lagos society and how social and political elements anger him may be founded on an optimism that the country can change for the better. According to international corruption reports, corruption in Nigeria is both deep and pervasive and a great deal of this can only really be dealt with if structural changes took place such as a new government coming into power that has a clear constitution and mandate, as well as an accountable governance system. It would need both time and a well-organized civic majority to be able to mobilize such structural changes. Such changes will need to include a new or revived morality where the behaviour of leaders become more service-orientated and where justice and truth does not mean having to cow to power. To reach such a point, the role of protest and social activism will remain necessary. Uwagboe and the Protest Art Studio forms such a space where visual artworks become tools that inspire and grow a civic voice for social and political change, no matter how slowly this may take.

By living in Lagos, in a country which has the richest oil and gas reserves in Africa, Uwagboe has been able to witness how an elite can abuse their power to the detriment of the poor. Bad leadership inspired by this city is deliberately mocked and corrupt figures are satirized to become inhuman and almost animal-like. *"For example, it's only an animal that doesn't have direction, it overdoes everything and abuses anything. I am trying to liken the attitude of our leaders to that of animals. They are just animals in power, they are already rich but still loot money. They take more than what they need, leaving the poor masses in abject poverty."* (7) But one cannot help ponder on whether these representations of cruelty and madness may also include a sense of optimism that there is room for a revival towards a more rational and authentic change process for a renewal can become a unique form of post-colonial humanism? The nature of the anger and frustration expressed in his work does not seem to want to destroy or resist what he is encountering as so much as a complain, howl and lash out as a call for change and transformation.

C: Protest and sub-culture music

Two music forms that inform the protest art of Uwagboe is the Afrobeat of the Nigerian Fela Anikulapo Kuti and the counter-culture sounds of Reggae. The stance and sound of Fela Kuti music corresponds to Uwagboe's approach to his art. Kuti's Afrobeat lyrics and sound formed part of his post 1976 dictum of "Music is the Weapon of the Future" and this led to frequent violent confrontations with him and the state. The sound is a blend of scathing anti-establishment lyrics with Yoruba traditional music and Western jazz and its anti-corruption and pro-civil rights messages soon spread throughout Nigeria and West Africa and, today, current Afrobeat music is played all over the world now. (8)

The Reggae songs "*We Shall Overcome*", a popular protest song as well as Bob Marley's "*Get Up, Stand Up*", popular in the 80s, emerged from a Rastafari belief system. This emerged during the independence of Jamaica in 1962, when a need for connection amongst people of African descent in Kingston, inspired by the ideas of Marcus Garvey and his United Negro improvement Association of 1914, emerged. Today, Rastafari, is a belief system that has associations with Ethiopia and a prophet and it currently has over a million followers worldwide and its music form is known as Reggae. Although this type of liberation music is a lot more passive than that of Fela Kuti's Afrobeat, its lyrics and sound express an alternative lifestyle or counter-culture within mainstream society. The idea of The Protest Art Studio seems to resemble the idea of the creation of a non-violent counter-culture as well.

The human figure in the art of Uwagboe
Evolutionary thought maintains that the closest associate to human beings is the chimpanzee because they share the ability to walk upright and also have unusually large brains. Nihilists believe that human life does not have a meaning or a purpose at all, while existentialism maintains that people must choose their own purpose. Thinking about human existence and death for an existentialist creates both fear and anxiety because they believe that human life has no meaning unless people give it meaning or an "essence". In this case, one's freedom can also condemn one to a choice where the very act of choosing involves taking responsibility for what and who we are. Uwagboe's choice to become a protest artist in Lagos was a conscious one possibly also based on the extent of inhumanity he found himself surrounded by and how he represents the human figure in his work explains this clearly.

Bob-nosa Uwagboe's paintings are usually large-format representations of loutish and clumsy figures that seem to be a mockery of the people he is representing. Distortion emphasizes the lack of the efficacy of the figures, while he uses inappropriate conventions of nudity and attire to further his need to satirize society and the political system. He emphasizes the idiocy and ineptness of people by creating small heads, large feet, facial features done in simplified cartoon-like lines with gaping mouths and roughly outlined eyes. Distortions are commonly used and the figures are large, flattened or three-quarter view with big square shoulders and hanging arms as well as enlarged hieratically represented feet that seem to make them clumsily lope in their walk. Sometimes the figures are also inverted. These figures usually occupy a shallow ground with a small delineated floor plane. His use of distortion and scale helps to create caricatures of people who he also inverts, splices and turns into ape like forms who have lost their civility in a world of vice and barbarism (9)

This disillusionment with the inevitable consequences of corruption can be seen in his two "*Walking Away*" paintings. One painting represents a stooped civilian with his hands in his collaged patchwork trousers set on a shallow and base and black backdrop, while the second work represents the back of a barefoot blue overall clad worker walking away into the distance. Both these figures lack human features and their vitality and 'essence' seems to have left them and they have become relegated to the margins of society to become outsiders instead. Urbanisation and industrialisation require a more individualist and survivalist survival approach that is contrary to general African values of social sharing. While the stronger may survive and prosper, the weaker are being pushed into the margins of poverty and homelessness. Without shared values and good governance that enhances social solidarity, the security, safety, and the

wellbeing of people cannot exist. The two figures become a mockery of contemporary humanity – they are without the freedom to think for themselves or the means to be able make rational choices. With this freedom erased, their humanity has become a caricature of social cruelty instead.



Legless Leader, acrylic spray paint on textured canvas, 122cm x 153cm 2017



Walking Away, acrylic fabric collage on textured canvas, 36inch x 60inch 2018 (2)

The idea of fair play or social justice is commented on in the lumpish, inappropriate and mawkish isolation represented in "*The Fighting Man'*, which seems to have become a cartoon of a failed hero or champion.



The Victor, acrylic on textured canvas, 122cm x 153cm, 2017

The figure, which has a small head, large naked body with his arms hanging passively on his sides and wearing oversized green boxing gloves that contrast to the red boxing arena, seems to satirize failed leadership. His inappropriate nakedness, his small head in contrast to the size and strength of his body, emphasizes both how useless and stupid one can become in a setting where nothing seems to be fair, equal or appropriate. The space for a fair or just fight in a world where corruption, vice and cruelty prevail, has reduced the boxer to that of a clown or stupid idiot. The theme of leadership and what it means to put up a fair fight for anything in society has become a mockery. The fighting man has become a parody of the idea of a champion. Where fairness and justice do not exist, a fighting man becomes transformed into a useless, vulnerable and heavy fisted idiot with no idea of what he is doing.



Obituary, acrylic, fabric collage spray paint on textured canvas, 7ft x 7ft, 2018

"Obituary", despite its title, seems to describe a macabre comedy about death where three figures wearing collaged military, khaki and civilian attire, are complemented by two skulls who seem to be feigning shock and grief at a commemorative burial event. The figures are gathered along a buried skeleton that seems to express a violent death with a leg dismembered as well as a hand reconnected to its arm. Written inscriptions on the figures allude to the "six foot under" burial theme. They seem to be representatives from different social strata such as the military as well as formal khaki and florid civil society. A civilian wearing lurid oversized pink underpants has 'die' inscribed on his face while the military figure wears a black band that represents mourning on his red sleeve. Two gasping blue and yellow skeletal heads act as additional shock or comic elements where even the dead can become horrified by the type of mutilation

and killing that has taken place on the transparent buried cadaver. The work is a powerful social commentary about hypocrisy and barbarism. Whether these figures are located in idioms that have changed into satire, begs further questions. The depth and richness of this iconography may be better understood by citizens within Nigeria. One cannot help sensing that "Obituary" is a type of parody of local society and conventions which may also be signposting a call for change.
How much self-realization and satisfaction Uwagboe gains from the amount of inversion he invests in his figurative arts may also demonstrate his respect for humanity and human values. His criticizing, lampooning, satirizing and mocking in his subject matter, also calls to correct this current prevailing disregard for human values and welfare. He does not spell out what this new consciousness should be, but he does judge the impact that greed and corruption is having on humanity.

CONCLUSION

Uwagboe's protest art condemns inhumanity, not people or political parties, and he seem to hold the view is that the loss of human values demonstrates a contempt for democracy. His art as an activist based at The Protest Art Studio calls for a stronger voice needed. As an alternative artist, or an activist voice that emanates from a protest sub-culture, his dissent does seem to provide an alternative. He sees the individual as either a victim or part of a prevailing apathetic bandwagon mentality that justifies a collective "everyone does it" mentality. He is making a call to artists to consciously decide to become change agents within a system of social decay. His distortions and satire seem to call for a new mental picture of leadership to become re-framed into a better version of African humanism.

The art work and the Protest Art Studio of Uwagboe forms an important catalysing locus for a voice of discontent and concern in society. It is in such spaces that visual artists can become activists by using artistic freedom of speech as weapons to bring about the much needed social and political changes. His figurative works are powerful satirical comments about how inhumanity. His "Walking Away" paintings describe the negative impact that corruption has on civilians, while "The fighting man" is a powerful expression about a failed justice system. Likewise, "Obituary" is a powerful critique on the failure of social conventions as well as a respect for life. Uwagboe's artistic output also provides a confirmation that visual artists in Nigeria can to find and their own voice to express their rights and concerns.

The tenets of botho/ubuntu(Zulu term) is also being revisited by thinkers and writers as Africa searches for ethical principles and values that can help design development models that respond to powerful international neo-liberal globalising forces. Ubuntu shifts the concept of humanity into a cultural perspective that relates to the African concept of community as opposed to Western ideas of individual autonomy. It places more focus on the collectivist and communal nature of culture and the "interrelatedness" of human experience where each person is required to use their gifts and talents to better society. To be, to exist, means to be so for the community and for the other person, with the concept of the self being able to emerge from and through the relationships with others. It is in this type of view of humanity that one feels that Uwagboe's art and the Protest Art Studio can play a very important role in contemporary art in Africa now and, as he said in an interview, " I would like to be remembered as an artist and a humanitarian." (10)

Annette Loubser.
Cape Town October 2018



Footnotes:
1. Bob -Nosa, addresses societal ills with Protest Art. Prisca Sam-Duru The Medium. Feb 25, 2016
2. A good example it the work, titled “The irony of the negro policeman” 1981 by Jean-Michel Basquiat.


ARTIST

BOB-NOSA UWAGBOE

b. 1974

Bob-Nosa Uwagboe is a mixed-media Nigerian artist born in Benin City. He studied fine art at the Auchi Polytechnic. He is known for making paintings with amusing characters, usually with the intension to satirise political anomalies and social phenomenons. Most of his works have been widely criticised and derided for their childish simplicity and disregard for decency. Some of these images causing disgust comprises dismembered limbs alluding victims of suicide bombings, skulls and skeletons referencing deaths from religious and ethnic violence in Nigeria. At other times portraying corrupt politicians, policemen, and people in despicable situations. Uwagboe, who has always maintain that his creative process is a moment of calmness, anger, pain, and passion, defies censorship to make daring works ensconced in risqué details. He has earn praises for his candidness and courage as well as being dismissed for his obsession with salacious and gory display.

After a brief practice in Abuja, Uwagboe moved to Lagos to set up the Protest Art Studio. *Obituary* is his second solo show after *Homme Libre* held at African Artist Foundation in 2011.

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

"My main choice of subject matter are the provocative characters in the Nigerian social sphere, as well as the urban landscape. The figures in my paintings include police officers, government officials, businessmen and criminals, which through their actions produce havoc on the everyday citizen. In my paintings, drunk policemen are depicted with liquor in one hand, gun in the other. "Human merchants" carry small children on their backs. Politicians sexually grope defenceless women. A wealthy "big man" hides behind his armed bodyguard. These figures are formed as a kind of caricature, which come across looking animalistic and barbaric. This is reflective of the inhumanity that their actions embody.

The city of Lagos is a continual source of inspiration in my work. As a city of over twenty million people, the average citizen is caught amidst unprecedented change. With rapid development, economic gaps and a lack of basic infrastructure, the average Nigerian carries on through the daily hustle and chaos of the city. At the same time, they find continuous obstacles along the way from political and economic falsehoods.

My artwork is a fundamentally raw political critique on the ruling class. The common man has been forgotten by the government, the elite accumulating wealth while the common man has no food to feed on. It is my goal to use my art as a form of activism and a call to action."

Bob-Nosa Uwagboe



Divine, acrylic on textured canvas, 24inch x 30inch, 2018



Sinner, acrylic on canvas, 10inch x 10inch, 2018



Sinner, acrylic on canvas, 10inch x 10inch, 2018



Sinner, acrylic on canvas, 10inch x 10inch, 2018



Sinner, acrylic on canvas, 10inch x 10inch, 2018



Sinner, acrylic on canvas, 10inch x 10inch, 2018



People Purging, acrylic, spray paint fabric on textured canvas, 123 x 152.5cm, 2018



Man Purging, acrylic, spray paint fabric on textured canvas, 123cm x 152.5cm, 2018

FROM FORCED MIGRATION TO OBITUARY: BOB-NOSA UWAGBOE'S MAPPING OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH EXPERIENCES

Art wasn't supposed to look nice; it was supposed to make you feel something. (Rainbow Rowell)

Artistic creations influence and reflect their time, place and culture. For this reason, art functions as a mode of documenting the movements in culture; its travails and directions. Art presents its truth not only as prepositional statements, but also through imagistic metaphors doused with feelings, emotions, beauties, ugliness, and opinions of the world from the artist's perspective. Through its multiple dimensions, deeper facets of human experiences are revealed beyond the lineal and empirical methods of science. It is maybe for this reason that arts sustain its attraction to the public despite advancements in sciences and technology. Artists from the Renaissance and Modern era such as Leonardo da Vinci, Francesco Goya, Eugene Delacroix, Honore Daumier just to mention a few are typical examples of European artists that have used their artistic medium as a tool for political and social commentaries. At the turn of postmodernism, minority views represented from the paradigm of race, gender, sexual orientations, social and wider cultural categories expanded knowledge by contributing subaltern perspectives into the plurality of the postmodern era. This pluralism of perspectives had created spaces for artists such as Jean-Michel Basquiat, Barbara Kruger, Mariana Abramovic, Banksy, Chris Ofili, Yinka Shonibare, El Anatsui and a lot of artist who enriched the global narratives. In Nigeria for instance, the afrobeat legend Fela Anikulapo Kuti has a timeless influence on new generation of creative people who use their artistic medium to confront perceived injustices and abuses of power by the government. This influence had spread beyond the performing art into the visual arts. Like Bob Marley, Peter Tosh and Fela, visual artists operating from similar cultural backgrounds had transmuted the essence of social consciousness through cognate visual forms. The late Ben Osaghai, Heymann Ogbemi and Bob Nosa Uwagboe are notable example in this group. Coincidentally, this trio had used theriomorphic references to allude to the senselessness of power and the ineptitude of people in power as expressions of the baseness and the lacunae of adequate leadership in Africa. Providence had linked the three artists through; sharing alma-mater, living in the same area of Lagos and being contemporaneous to the madness that typifies the Nigerian state.

It will be at this point that I will focus more on Bob Nosa's exhibition titled Obituary. This is with a view to interrogating the issues pertaining to the forceful migration to death by illegal migrants as a reflection of power game in the contemporary era. The trend of migration and its horrific tales of inhuman treatment continue to plunge many Global South countries into a hopeless situation. This leaves an unbroken chain of the drift to the abyss starting from slavery and colonialism to the contemporary manifestation of voluntary slavery. The satellite news media is inundated with video clips of stranded or drowned migrants from sub-Saharan Africa en-route to the EU and entrapped to what amounts to *refoulement* in Libya. But Bob-Nosa had chosen to focus on Libya for reasons that I believe are linked to the affinity of; Africa, the Global South, and targeted economic group.

Around the mid-November of 2017, a CNN crew investigated and secretly recorded the auction of humans from sub-Saharan African countries including Nigeria at Gharyan, Zawiya and other centers across Libya. At a particular auction, two humans

sold for 1,200 Libyan dinars which is less than 600 USD. This situation had been exacerbated by the horrendous experiences of the human commodities in the hand of smugglers trading on humans and human parts. The trans-Atlantic/trans-Mediterranean contemporary slave business and its accompanying gory tales of; butchery, forced unpaid labor, rape and unimaginable violence are the reasons for organized cartels profiting from the illegal movement of humans. As a transitional center for the journey to Europe, Libya also doubles as a metaphor for *Golgotha.* If not, what promises of better live compensates for the danger of watching harvesters of human organs mutilate bodies and rip vital organs from a life victim if not the need to escape unfavorable conditions at home?

Until lions have their historians tell the story of the game between the lion and the hunter, tales of the hunt shall always glorify the hunter. In this concatenation of events, the hidden issues behind the current migration from Africa to Europe and America need a holistic perspective in order to understand the dynamics of this contemporary slavery. In Nigeria, the endless period of inept and irresponsible leadership had frittered down to the entire population and translated to a culture of corruption. A general asphyxiation of developmental projects due to misappropriation of public funds had forced the country to remain a behemoth of dysfunctional system with no infrastructure to sustain basic living. For this reason, some young people sees hell as an appropriate comparison for the situation at homes, hence, the preference for slavery at a foreign place. Looking back to the Ajaokuta Still Complex and several other projects that were never completed is a latent evidence of unmitigated looting that has become systemic within the Nigerian project. The locals had also blamed some international organizations and governments for their collaboration.

Considering the above antecedents, the recent intervention of China through Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) leaves a bleak future for the youth to believe in nationhood. *Obituary* captures an abiding semiotics of a people under siege of gerontocracy and kleptocracy from their own pseudo-leaders. *Obituary* explores the deepening of the Nigerian situation under the vice-grip of China using the FOCAC project as a subterfuge for re-colonizing the South-South countries in the contemporary era. China is now primed to make up for its absence during the partitioning of Africa when Western European powers under the German Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck in 1884-85 profited immensely. These and other multiple issues form the rhetorical basis behind the oeuvre of work presented in *Obituary. Obituary* is interpreted not only from the tormentors in Libya but also from those pseudo-leaders who lay the foundation for forced migration in their respective countries and the youths who are caught in the web of greed.

In a society rendered turgid by Pentecostalist psychology, *Obituary* as a title reflects artistic boldness by not pandering to the voyeurism of religious magic and unfounded sentiments. Having known the depth of Bob Nosa's work even before our stint with Collocation 5 Artist Collectives in Abuja, I was not stunned by the title or choice of works selected for the exhibition. This is not implying that they lack the shock elements but simply that Bob-Nosa is within his elements by pulling surprises. This also attests to Libya's fall from grace to grass especially after the lies purported by the West that led to death of

Muammar Gaddafi. I can only attempt a reading of the iconographic references in *Obituary* as painted visual/verbal metaphors of the descent of Nigerian and other African youths to a Golgotha called Libya.

This artist offers nuanced narratives that pull from the greed of the illegal migrants, inept government officials at home countries and the heartless tormentors in Libya. The 'Fighting Man' depicts a theriomorphic form of man-gorilla nude boxer painted against a red and grey background. This painting calls to mind the recurring theme of the Negro boxer by Jean-Michel Basquiat who also adds epigrammatic texts to reinforce the doggedness of his boxers. In the 'Fighting Man', Bob-Nosa is drawn to the resilience of the glove-armed boxer who though exposed to the vagaries of his world (being naked and vulnerable) is undaunted in his resolve to facing his adversaries. Another painting titled Obituary has the color dominance of greens and reds with streaks of whites and blues. The piece just like many of his works shows a kindred spirit with Jean-Michel Basquiat's depiction of part-skeleton, part-full fleshed humans. Whatever informs the iconographic similarity between Bob-Nosa's paintings and Jean-Michel Basquiat's works is not the crux of my interrogation, the truth remains that both artists though separated in time and space operates from similar cultural backgrounds of subjugation, victimization, malfeasance and raising the subaltern voice to the mainstream. These works seem to capture the plights of Lucky Akhanene or Mr Aghayere and others not lucky enough to tell the tales behind Libya. Lucky had offered his insider's advice by saying, "I just want to plead with everyone out there, and Libya is not a place to go". Like Lucky, many migrants had been trapped in places such as Gharyan from where they were confronted by their visionlessness and consequent obituary. This choice becomes a *self-sabotage* of *stranded youths* trapped within the nexus where some are never lucky because they have become *'human merchandize'* on whom power seekers perpetrate the *'ugly acts'* of harvesting organs while alive. The whole narrative is a sordid tale of torture on our youths.

Understanding these background issues presented through *Obituary,* a viewer need not to wander far to comprehend the deployment of theriocephalic forms as metaphors for a post-human stage where the African's (leader/follower) proclivity is not to contemporary technological advancements as could be seen in futuristic movies from the West, but to medieval sentiments of bestiality. Great artists according to Henry Ward Beecher "are like loaded guns. They are dangerous in anybody's hands...Every artist dips his brush in his own soul, and paints his own nature into his pictures". This artistic Homme Libre had dipped his brushes into the chromatic freedom of pristine colors to paint freemen with dangling genitals as a metaphor to rethink humanity and the need for freedom. On this note I draw the curtain with the hope that art historians and critics will unlock the cryptic mysteries hidden in the flurries of colors and designs that writes the epitaph on the tombstone of our soulless humanity.

Ike Francis (Ph.D).
University of Port Harcourt. 2018.



Walking Away, acrylic fabric collage on textured canvas, 36inch x 60inch, 2018



Walking Away, acrylic fabric collage on textured canvas, 36inch x 60inch, 2018



Legless Leader, acrylic, spray paint on textured canvas, 122cm x 153cm, 2017



Stranded Immigrants II, acrylic spray paint fabric and paper collage on textured canvas, 154cm x 154cm, 2018



Stranded Immigrants, acrylic, spray paint fabric and paper collage on textured canvas, 154cm x 154cm, 2018



Obituary, acrylic, fabric collage spray paint on textured canvas, 7ft x 7ft, 2018



The Mourners, acrylic, fabric spray paint on textured canvas, 4ft x 4ft, 2018



The Victor, acrylic on textured canvas, 122cm x 153cm, 2017

TRACKING ART OF BOB-NOSA UWAGBOE FROM *HOMME LIBRE* TO *OBITUARY*

When Bob-Nosa Uwagboe made his debut solo art exhibition titled *Homme Libre*, at African Artists' Foundation (AAF) Gallery, Ikoyi, Lagos, specifically, in July 2011, he set out on a mission with destiny. His art came during the period that the Lagos' visual environment was being challenged with evolving controversy about contents of contemporary Nigerian art.

The avant-garde, contemporaneity and modernism suddenly became contentious in Lagos such that quite a number of young artists were confused. In fact, some of these artists -- based on loud noise about contemporaneity -- were herded into directions in which they had no idea of their prospect or future.

But with Uwagboe's *Homme Libre*, an aura of libralism in fresh strokes radiated on the Lagos art landscape. In my review of the exhibition published in the July edition of The Guardian Nigeria newspaper with headline 'Fresh strokes of liberty', I noted that *'the environment in which Uwagboe works is still far from liberalisation'.*

About eight months before *Homme Libre,* the artist's work had been a centre of attraction in Douala, Cameroon, during a group exhibition titled *The Last Pictures Show VII*, which also featured works of other Nigerians such as
Duke Asidere, Alex Nwokolo, Ogbemi Heymann, Joshua Nmesirionye, Patrick Agose, Fidelis Odogwu, Babalola Lawson, Kehinde Babalola, and Ayoola. Organised by Catherine Pittet-led Gondwana, the Nigerian artists joined others from Cameroon, D.R. Congo and Republic of Benin in the four-day show held at BOJ, an event venue in Douala.

In my review of the Douala gathering, published in The Guardian Nigeria, December 07, 2010 edition, I wrote: *'It was an opportunity for young Uwagboe to confirm what some French art connoisseurs in Nigeria observed about his work. He said that over the years, collectors, particularly of French nationals here told him that his kind of work will be better appreciated in French speaking countries. Indeed, during the special preview attended by diplomats, corporate and group individuals a day before the public opening, Uwagboe was, perhaps, the busiest artist who constantly attended to curious visitors swarming around his canvases. The higher intellectual content of his abstract-realism in such work as 'Feelings of Guilt' attracted attention.*

About eight years after, the artist remains stronger in his choice of art form, of which neither the hardline Nigerian propagandists of avant-garde nor the conservatives can shoot down. He seems not interested in being prolific or be the 'blue-eyed boy' of aficionados. In fact, he says with pride that "Signature is the only gallery where you can find my work".

Working with Uwagboe to organising the press preview of *Obituary* for select art journalists, my visit to the artist's studio in Egbeda further convinced me that indeed, his consistency in radicalising the canvas has evolved strongly over the years. An inscription 'Protest Art Studio', boldlly printed in white on black refreshed one's memory of a part in the career of the artist. Perhaps, the 'Protest art' philosophy of Uwagboe was energised from one of Asidere-led 'Orelope Workshops', in 2011, held just few minutes drive distance within the same Egbeda, Lagos suburb axis.
The artist responded that "Some of us had always believed in protest art before the workshop, but few of us are still bold enough to hold onto it till date".



Yeye Man, acrylic, spray paint on canvas, 4ft x 4ft, 2018

For his current exhibition, it seems to be built on overrated human value on earth and the strength of death in deflation of that ego. With strokes of lines and shades generated from medium such as acrylic, fabric, spray-paint, paper collage, Uwagboe texturises canvas full of soul enriching reflective contents. However, couldn't the artist get a less 'harsh' title for the exhibition? "I couldn't find a better title than *Obituary* to adequately express my thought", he replied me.

Sectionlised into three series of 'Obituary', 'Yeyeman' and 'Human Merchandise', the contents of the body of work and its central theme ooze in what could be described as provocative to human senses. Yes, not friendly, so it seems, but enriching and nourishing to the soul with hidden spiritual recipe.
The artist, for example, in 'The Mourners' replicates the irony of life that exists between the living and the dead. The work, which though serves as a tribute to the victims of Benue killings and other troubled spots in Nigeria, also comes as a metaphor that makes no distinction between the dead and the living.

Everyone discerning enough, to always reflect over life, has a story to tell. For Uwagboe, losing his parents and an artist friend, Ben Osaghae to deaths were perhaps the starting point for him towards a more reflective life. "The deaths of an artist friend Osaghae and my parents were examples that changed my attitude towards life," he explained during our chat.

As much as *Obituary* is basically about preparing the souls ahead of the inevitable, some deaths can be provocatively cheap and avoidable. The exhibition's 'Human Merchandise' series look at the senseless and self-inflicted deaths of African migrants in Libya.
Some of the series have figures turned upside down to explain the depth of tragedy involved in such cross-continent misadventures. Among such works are the series the artist described as "disturbing images seen online" during the outrage against the inhuman treatments of the migrants in Libya".

Quite a volume written and spoken about the tragic stories of African migrants crisis always blame leadership of the countries of origin. Uwagboe's *Obituary* visual narratives also have a space for the knocks on poor and irresponsible leadership. Quite a contentious issue: it has been argued that searching for 'greener pastures' as a result of 'bad leadership' in home countries should not be enough reason to head towards the suicidal desert and Mediterranean routes.
But Uwagboe's Obituary's highlights of the consequence of blind desperation of the migrants is well captured. Titled 'Walking Away', one of the related pieces, acrylic on textured canvas depicts a gloomy background of a figure walking towards, perhaps, unknown future.
And in a direct satirical context, he deplores more visual venom in 'Legless Leader' and 'Dying in Power'.

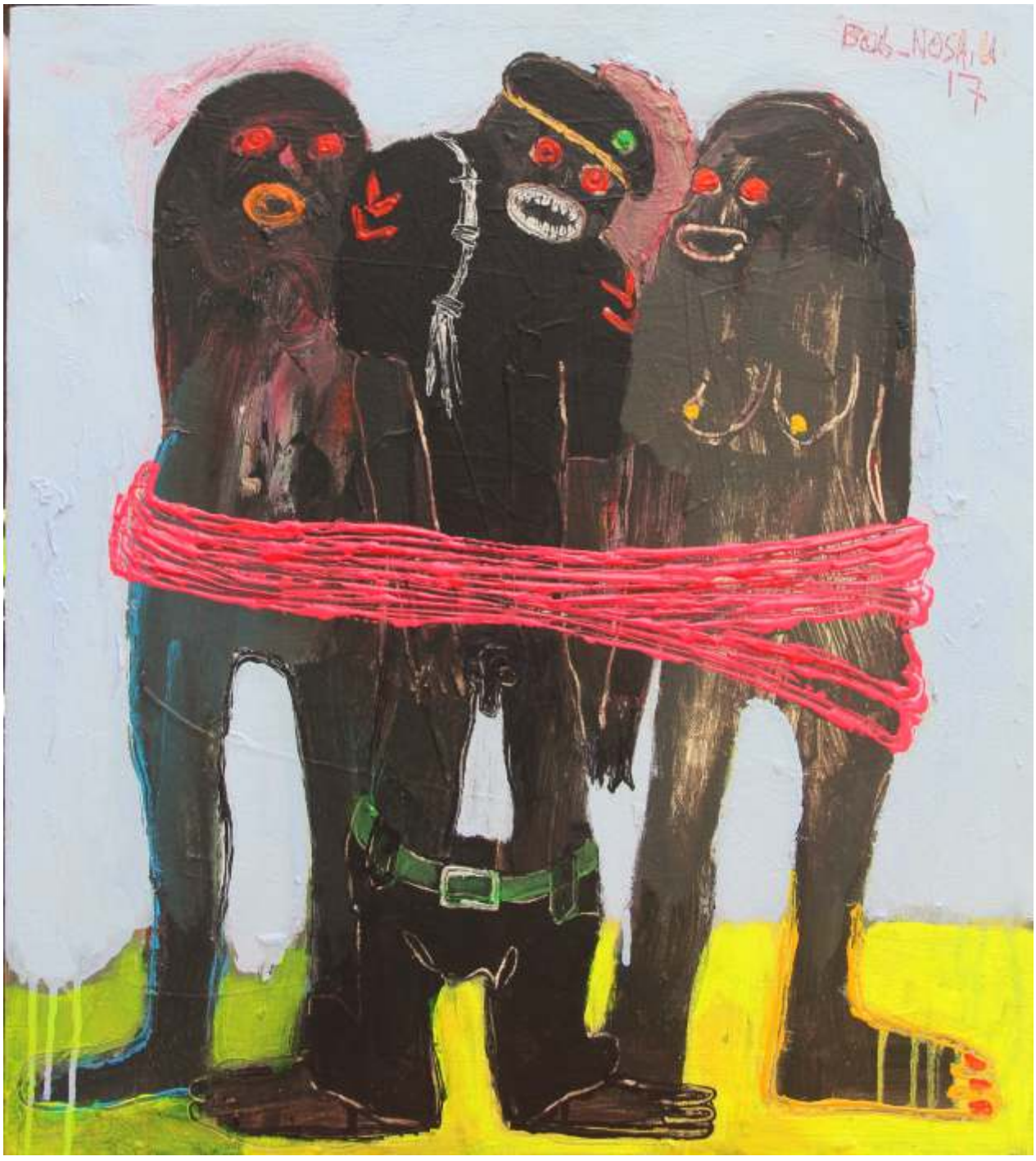
For what he argued as "results of poor leadership" of the victims' countries, the artist declared that the exhibition explains how "I am trying to mourn these poor people, using my art". In fact, the body of work, he emphasised, is his contribution "in mourning the deaths of humanity".

Yes, his works drip in 'Protest' and activism contents, but also radiates hope, so explain spots of bright colours faintly seen in some of the canvases.

As *Obituary* opens to the public at Signature Gallery, one hopes that Uwagboe's art becomes a reference point in the vocabulary of collecting and appreciating art.

Tajudeen Sowole of Translucent S.I. Communication is a Lagos-based independent writer on Visual Arts.

By Tajudeen Sowole.



Chained in Immorality, acrylic on textured canvas, 26inch x 29inch, 2017



Chained in Corruption, acrylic on textured canvas, 24inch x 30inch, 2017



Yeye Man, acrylic, spray paint on canvas, 4ft x 4ft, 2018

TRIBUTE

Well done. Congrats. It was a good run. Outstanding contribution to your own ends. Hats off. Even the colonialists must be in awe. Not sure if your neo-ness has quite surpassed their ripping raping shipping and slaving but no as I said its been a good run. A very good run.

But who am I to write this 'tribute' to the death of our humanity? Yes with regret, I regret to inform you that humanity is dead. Hope remains hopeless and only direct action might do. I do hope we will find a way to revive ourselves after this loss. Can you get *them* to reinvent our consciousness into an app or something and sell us back to ourselves? The battery on the mobile phone as it goes down and the phone dies so too dies the little child in the Congo mines. The blood draining from his body dying a hard death so that others may have.... may have.. may have the latest MyPhone.

Coltan matters. Resources are not scarce when you are in Africa. Hypocrites circle and set up charities to weigh in and save us. But are we beyond 'beyond aid'? I tore up my fifty quid note and flushed it down the toilet after defecating on it; went outside hugged a tree, picked and ate berries, watched the sun go down, worshipped the stars and was content. Illusions impress the easily led and if a lie is practiced enough times it wont just be believed it will be lived.

Most of our deaths on this side started way before our physical birth, at the site of a baobab tree where our names of old were stolen and lost in the ether of human tragedy and greed. Today the so called leaders preside over a bloody exodus of despair where the hopeless young take the dirt track to nowhere, a route that knows no heaven and cannot penetrate the elite false field. Those who were once coerced and forced onto ships of enslavement now volunteer themselves over. Unconscious authorities who are uncaring at best, cut blind eyes to red waters. That 'gate of no return' has become some twisted mantra for a route out to leave the continent, and turn against source for scarcity because nothing is being shared. Futures are sabotaged with the beret clad attaché stripped gate keepers of a callous unchecked convention that is both directly and indirectly killing all of us. The grimness of grey guts strung out on a whim on the winds of change blowing in the wrong direction. Neon sick vomits from the overhang of dull imperialism and unpaid labour still exists on this pilgrimage to justice. Tout and hawk. Dusk till dawn, like Kemet and Timbuktu never happened. The air all around is full of the unhappy and un-transitioned. Millions of invisible skulls.

Trousers sag past the cracks of reason and pride
Donning deadness
Prison- penitentiary- plantation
Glamourised in filth
A ship
A boat
A dingy
...Cant swim drowns in desperation
Presidential humanity is lost like a large inactive dangling penis that urinates on us. The gloves must go on for a final defying bout to purge the soul and stop this

mock on our timeline. The carbon has corrupted and Orion's belt lashes us ahead of the wrath to end the world as it is and rebirth it with that which hasn't happened yet but *must*. We are in a constant state of mourning for this unnecessary State of *their* affairs that could so easily be fixed.

It was a good run
For you
The few
Not for us the many
On this once beautiful planet
Spinning
Spinning
Turning for now...

Cleo Lake
Arts and Events manager
Dance Artist, Activist, Educator





Waka, acrylic fabric collage on canvas, 122cm x 106cm, 2018



Shame on You, acrylic, spray paint fabric on textured canvas, 123cm x 152cm, 2018



Ugly Act, acrylic, spray paint on canvas, 154cm x 154cm, 2018



Two Mattresses, acrylic, spray paint on textured canvas, 154cm x 154cm, 2018



Dying in Power, Acrylic, fabric collage on textured canvas, 122cm x 153cm, 2017



Dying in Power, acrylic, fabric collage on textured canvas, 122cm x 153cm, 2017









Human Merchandise in Libia, acrylic on watercolor paper, 11.69inch x 16.53inch, 2018



Youth Tortured, acrylic, fabric collage on textured canvas, 4ft x 4ft, 2018



Chibuike Uzoma, 2015

C.V

Selected Exhibitions:

CU--ULTURE and TRADITION, Same experience different local. (Group Exhibition), London; 2018.

Beirut art fair, Beirut Lebanon; 2017.

The Art Fair 2016, Cape Town, South Africa.

Sogal Art Auction, 2016, Lagos.

Breaking News (group exhibition) Art21 Gallery, Lagos Nigeria; 2016.

The 17th Lagos book & art festival 2015 (They Have Asked Us To Smile) group exhibition, Freedom Park Lagos, Nigeria.

World Bank Art Exhibition (group) Abuja; 2013.

Nigerian Independence Day celebrations Kenya (Building Bridges); 2013

ARTHOUSE Contemporary Auction 2013, Lagos, Nigeria.

The Children of the World - German Cultural Centre Lagos; 2012.

Nigeria Now Present New Works by Ayoola Gbolahan and Bob-Nosa Uwagboe, Abuja; 2012.

Art Basel Miami Art Fair, Miami (U.S.A); 2012.

The Last Picture Show- Le Meridien Cameroon; 2011.

Thought Pyramid Art Gallery Abuja - Generational Statement; 2011.
The Last Picture Show- La Galeric Vendome Paris.

Cora Art Festival 2011 "Do not resuscitate" Freedom Park, Lagos.

Beyond Figuration by Omenka Gallery, Lagos; 2009.

French Women Association Lagos Art Exhibition at African Artist Foundation (AAF); 2009.

The Last Picture Show V.I. / Maison Du parti Douala; 2009.

Collocation 5 Art Exhibition, Though Pyramid Art Centre, Abuja; 2009.

Thought Pyramid Art Gallery Abuja. Collocation 5; 2009.

Edo State Council for Art and Culture, Edo State Sports Festival Art Exhibition; 2002
(Oba Ekenzua Cultural Centre, Benin City).

Treasure of Our time, Pendulum Art Gallery, Lagos; 2001.

Lagos State Council for Art and Culture Art Exhibition for Nigeria Artist; 2001.

SOLO EXHIBITION: Homme Libre- African Artist Foundation Lagos; 2011.

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