

EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS AND DRAWINGS BY WALLACE EJOH

Signature Beyond Art Gallery

Present

Impressions De Novo

By

WALLACE EJOH

21ST OF MAY 2022

VENUE: SIGNATURE BEYOND ART GALLERY
107 AWOLOWO ROAD, IKOYI, LAGOS.

OPENING: 03:00PM 21ST OF MAY 2022
EXHIBITION RUNS TILL: 06:00PM 30TH OF MAY 2022

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FOREWORD

Liberation Of The Soul

It's said that everything has Its own time and season. It is year 2022 exactly twenty years after my graduation from art school. Someone may want to know why it took so long to have a solo show. Just as it has been said, there is an appointed time for everything.

After graduation from yaba college of technology, I have been involved in teaching fine art and mentoring students from various art schools in the federation. Which I did for free. This has been my passion apart from painting and drawing.

It gives me joy and a sense of fulfilment when I see my students become successful artists in the industry. This is because I so much believe that, the function of leadership is to produce more leaders, not more followers.

I do not regret anything. Infact, I am elated to be part of the success story of many of my students out there.

Today I want to say that, if I must be remembered, may I be remembered as the master artist who mentored others to become master artists.

This exhibition is titled 'impressions de Novo 'it means 'Impressions Anew '. Here ,one can see that there has been a shift in my colour pallet.

There is a saying that 'when the inner spirit has liberation,inspiration is born ' Moving my studio, the simple plan studio, from Apapa commercial area to Ikorodu Town,afforded me an atmosphere of serenity and peace of mind, this I believe one would notice in these new body of works.

The Signature move in my paintings is not my colours but, rather my dynamic brush work. Presently, I am working with the Zorn pallet. It is the combination of limited colours which I have come to cherish and to promote.

Happy viewing
Wallace Davies Ejoh
5th May, 2022.
Lagos-Nigeria

Impressions De Novo

A New Beginning

As aptly captured, 'Impressions de Novo' is the title of Wallace Ejoh's first ever solo art exhibition held at the Signature Gallery, Ikoyi, Lagos. De Novo is a Latin word meaning anew, from the new, afresh, again or from beginning. What Ejoh is expected to serve his patrons and collectors on this show are impressionistic paintings laced with fresh ideas and refreshing creativity. Some level of newness has been introduced to his approach to painting. And so, the artist's new signature is awash with trends and tastes absolutely different from past works.

Standstill

The paintings on display (15 in number) cover a period between 2021 and 2022 when Ejoh breathed a fresh air as he survived the Covid-19 pandemic that held the world spellbound and kept the globe at a standstill. As the world froze in panic, all sectors also collapsed, but the restless artist in Ejoh did not freeze, neither did it abate. Rather art began to agitate in his temporarily frozen mind. Michelangelo Buonaroti said, "The sculpture is already complete within the marble block, before I start work. It is already there. I just have to chisel away the superfluous material" (Good Reads). Like Michelangelo who freed human figures from blocks or marble, Ejoh saw new ideas and fresh creativity struggling to free themselves from his fertile mind. He felt the inspiration to free them, and had to embark on a journey of experiments that berthed these new works. He says, "The hunger to hit the public with works of unusual flavour, carved in the mould of impressive brush strokes, overwhelmed me"

Like Yesterday

In the past, Ejoh had developed himself into producing a hunk of impressionistic paintings (using a technique and style that accommodated discordant colours), which had influenced quite a number of young artists. In their large number, they copied or appropriated Ejoh's works and brazenly flooded the internet with them! The past period provided Ejoh with a flourishing career that defined him as an artist in constant search of truth, and stumbling on unfolding petals. Overtime, he practised extensively, devised old and new styles that exulted in impressions. Such impressions never allowed for blending of colours on the canvas. Rather he allowed distinctive brush movements that distinguishes each stroke from another, but when the viewer squints his eyes, all the colours blend brilliantly in his eyes. This approach, which is one of the characteristics of the works of painters like Claude Monet, Alfred Sisley, Paul Cezanne, Edgar Degas, Camille Pissaro and Pierre-Auguste Renoir, changed the course of history in art in the 19th century (Editors:2018).

De Novo

In the new dispensation of Wallace Ejoh's approach to painting, the fresh idea and his colour application subdue the intensity of colour. Brush strokes now truly ventilates his roots with colours not so brilliant. Indeed, it is all about two major features: the colour on one hand and the technique of painting on the other. Ejoh's palette has matured with years of consistent practice. It has gone through different stages of metamorphosis, and the results have been so profound that his mastery of colour is simply masterly! A Yoruba parlance says, "Akoko to n ge'gi n'igbo, o ni'hun to fe gba lodo igi ni" (Oladapo: 1975). When the woodpecker pecks away at the stem of a tree, its mission and purpose are sacrosanct. In the matters of Wallace Ejoh's professional concerns and practice, the woodpecker and the wood it pecks at reinforce a metaphorical aphorism of the artist and his purpose. This is exemplified in Ejoh's art and its effects on the society, which has been sustained over the years. He has a purpose to rejig his art and make new offerings that can make mincemeat of whatever kind of misrepresentation he had suffered in the hands of those young artists who had either copied or misappropriated his technique and style.

Studio Experience

Wallace Ejoh is a master, no debate about it. With a high sense of professionalism, he has maintained a high level of consistency in art practice. Ever since he hit the scene at the turn of the millennium in the year 2000, he has been an artist that hardly leaves the studio. Not only has he kept a date with practice through which he has churned out numberless beautiful works, he has also taken to mentoring. He enjoys raising young artists and taking them to a higher level of professionalism.

Ejoh is a beautiful sight in the studio: he effectively combines painting with teaching and mentoring. Among an array of students that he has trained, he has developed many humorous, but enjoyable slangs with which he communicates to them. They include No kamaye (No problem), Maximum respect (I am 100% loyal) and You're crazy (Every artist has, at least, 5% of craze). Such slangs may

sound vulgar, especially as a way of admonishing any erring student. Ironically, he still uses the same slang for any brilliant students whose head seems wrongfully swelling out of praises. At the Universal Studios, he was loved by students generally. He taught them painting, drawing, portraiture and more. They enjoyed the humorous way he adopted to impact their career. That humorous way is called laugh and learn. So, when they laugh, they never do so in vain.

The Universal Studios was endowed with great masters who taught students in different areas of specialization. Ejoh taught painting and portraiture, Joshua Nmesirionye taught figure painting, Abiodun Olaku, on occasional basis, handled drawing using the indices of demonstration, Mufu Onifade taught Art History, Odogwu Fidelis taught metal sculpture while Bunmi Babatunde (Chairman of the Studios) taught wood carving. Indeed, the Universal Studios of Art is a hub of artistic excellence both in practice and in mentoring. For the period that Ejoh operated at the Studios, no one was more engaged in terms of art teaching than he was. He was a beautiful bride to all students who craved his attention at all times. In truth, the full story of the Universal Studios of Art can never be told without creditably mentioning Wallace Ejoh and the reputation he built and left behind. Not many people know that when the handlers of the Studios talk about mentoring of young Nigerian artists, Wallce Ejoh was one of the professional members of the Studios who made the process possible.

Departure from Universal Studios

Training of students at the Universal Studios was a piece of cake for Wallace Ejoh. The students and the Studios relished it. However, the Studios has always had its own nuances that can be choking at times. Such nuances can also compel some members to forcibly hibernate from activities that benefit the generality of the Studios. This happened to Ejoh. He could no longer breathe the cherished air of freedom, which he had always relished. He felt unwanted anymore, he lost confidence in the system and entity called the Universal Studios, and then decided to move on without drawing flanks with anyone. Hence his move to a new studio at Apapa, a little distance from the National Theatre where the Universal Studios is situated.

If Ejoh had convinced himself that he was no longer interested in mentoring of students and young artists, he was mistaken. No sooner he started operating at his Apapa studio than he was fished out by students seeking a good place where they could undergo their industrial training as required by Nigerian universities and polytechnics. Unknown to him, some of the students he had earlier trained at the Universal Studios had returned to their various institutions of learning to propagate his good works. The junior ones who got the news now made it a point of duty to seek him out. He had no choice than to take some of them in again. He practised painting and mentoring again until circumstances pushed him out of Apapa. He now operates a newer, bigger and more comfortable studio at Ikorodu. It's a larger place than everywhere he had practised in the past, but ironically, the studio looked smaller due to massive sizes of woks he prepared for this exhibition.

Ejoh is still besieged by new students learning under him. Some of those Ejoh's old students of yester-years who are now emerging masters in their own right, who are also making waves at exhibition grounds include, but not limited to Kehinde Ogunsola, Tonia Nneji, Chigozie Obi, Bertha Onyekachi, Ogundeji Samson, Eugene Konboye, Osinachi Okafor, Foluso Eludire, Joval Umoru, Mary Nwele, Chukwu Nkemakolam, Almat Adams, Mary Onidare, Chidinma Nnoli, Aragbada Olayinka Stephen, and Odeyemi Oluwaseun Ezekiel.

Commissions

Oftentimes, Wallace Ejoh is always working. By his nature, he has little or no social life. He is a typical artist who relishes reclusivism and individualism. His studio is his home away from home because he's always on ground except one or two days in a week, which he shares with his family. It's a lifestyle the family is used to. So, no qualms. When I ran into him at an exhibition by Oluwafemi Otoki at the Signature Gallery in Ikoyi, I was surprised that such an outing betrayed his reclusive lifestyle. When I asked what prompted him to grace the show, he confessed that he did it for affinity sake. Ejoh and Otoki were members of the Index Art Group between 2003 and 2006. They operated from the same studio and took part in the same shows of the group. When the group vaporized, they all lost touch. For Ejoh, Otoki's exhibition was an opportunity to catch up with an old buddy.

Ejoh has constantly received commissions from various galleries, patrons and collectors. He was particularly commissioned by a gallery that has deeply fallen in love with his style of painting. The gallery keeps coming back because it also keeps selling. For this reason, Ejoh cannot afford to stop painting. His marriage of convenience with production of commissioned works is greatly responsible for his inability to hold a solo exhibition for a long time until now. Before he finishes a work, a client is waiting to collect

it. Although he has taken part in many group exhibitions within and outside Nigeria, no exhibition celebrates an artist better than his solo efforts. When he finally saw the need to run a solo show, he had to reschedule his studio activities. He also had to limit his commissions and focus more on works specifically produced for this all-important solo exhibition.

Appearances at Group Exhibitions.

Wallace Ejoh's works are always a delight at group exhibitions. In the midst of many artists, his works often stand out. Visible brush strokes and harmonious colours are two major outstanding features of Ejoh's painting style. Even when he deliberately uses discordant colours, he combines them in a way that they blend in the eye and form a delicious harmony. This makes him both a colourist and a colour master. It, therefore, becomes imperative to have a sneak preview into some of the group shows he has taken part in.

i. Colours, Moods and Feelings

This is a group exhibition of paintings by four incredible artists namely Wallace Ejoh, Titus Agbara, Sam Ajobiewe, and Moses Oghagbon. Held at the Tru View Gallery, Lagos and curated by Olujuwon Olusanya in August 2005, the show was a true class! The four artists were emerging masters at the time, and their works showed flicks of a robust future for the four artists. In fact, Abiodun Olaku who wrote a foreword to the catalogue of the show titled it 'Time Will Tell.' This suggests that he still begged for time to issue a strong word of confidence and testimonial on the four artists. Luckily, the four artists are still in active practice till date. All the same, Olaku still managed to give them a clean bill of health: Significantly, these days when not a few Nigerian artists are confused about the direction of their philosophies, as it is fundamentally engendered by the pressures of the ever-dynamic scholarly/academic discourse on the essence of Afrocentricity in artistic endeavour, these determined missionaries have decided to pitch tent with age-long principles of art. Their succinct imageries rendered with discipline, consciousness, and level-headedness bear testimony to this assertion (Olaku, 2005:3).

Today, if Olaku can read again the review he submitted in 2005 on the four artists, his lips will give way to smiles of satisfaction. Reason: between 2005 and now, none of these artists has disappointed in pursuit of art practice as a number one calling.

ii. Stepping Into Universality

This was a major group exhibition by the Universal Studios of Art. It was not the first exhibition by the Studios, but indeed, it had the largest collection of artists on one show. Held at The View, Ikoyi, Lagos and curated by Sandra Obiago, it opened on December 5, 2009. The show featured the following artists: Patrick Agose, Monday Akhidue, Ebenezer Akinola, Olapeju Alatise, Bunmi Babatunde, Ndidi Dike, Wallace Ejoh, Bisi Fakeye, Osatuma Iyomona and Joshua Nmesirionye. Others were Alex Nwokolo, Fidelis Odogwu, Edosa Ogiugo, Abiodun Olaku, Kolawole Olojo-Kosoko, Mufu Onifade, Tayo Quaye, Frank Uduh, Josephine Obo-McLeod, Haliru Abdullah, Efosa Ero and Boma Joe Jim. In all, 22 artists were featured on this highly successful exhibition.

Most interesting is the fact that the show was not limited to the professional members of the Studios alone; its welcoming arms were stretched to other Nigerian outstanding artists who had had some working relationship with the Studios in the past. They were described as Guest Artists

On the unique invitation card, the exhibition was projected thus: Stepping Into Universality reminds us of what is truly remarkable about the latest explosion of Nigerian Art (Obiago, 2009). Indeed, the successful outing was felt among the participating artists, especially members of the Universal Studios who went to procure new cars shortly after the closing of the exhibition.

iii. The Last Pictures Show VI

If Stepping Into Universality was a huge exhibition with a large number of participating artists, it's a far cry from this particular exhibition. Held at Maison Du Parti on October 12, 2009 in Douala, Cameroon and the Civic Centre, Lagos on November 23, 2009, it featured 47 artists drawn from across the African continent including Cameroon, Republic of Benin, Nigeria, and Democratic Republic of Congo. The exhibition, which featured Ejoh's outstanding works, also featured some masters of contemporary African art who were sparsely known in Nigeria. The show was massive and told the story of Africa through her modern/contemporary art. Latute (2009:120) who put the show together, only set out to assemble and promote the art and culture from the South, recalling a time when lands, if not the people as they did not yet exist, were united.

iv. Togetherness.

A 2012 group exhibition, this group show featured works by artists of the South South extraction. The exhibition was curated to

form part of the activities marking the South South Economic Summit of 2021. The show was held at the Delta Convention Centre, Asaba, Delta State from April 23 to 28, 2012. It featured 21 artists including Bruce Onobrakpeya, Abrahaham Uyovbisere, Sam Ovraiti, Wallace Ejoh and others. Oputu (2012:14) used the avenue of the exhibition to insist we should fix our eyes everyday on the greatness of Nigeria. That was one of the cardinal lessons from the exhibition.

v. Imbued Essence.

This was another exhibition of contemporary paintings, sculptures and Craft held in commemoration of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. It was held from July 15 to August 12 at the G-Live, Surrey & Theatre Royal, Stratford. Described as a substratum of a comprehensive investment profiling of the Nigerian nation (Adeniyi, 2012:14), it was sponsored by the Bank of Industry. It featured 27 artists whose works were mesmerizing. Ejoh's participation is described in the catalogue thus: "Wallace Ejoh engages with the theme of love, all portrayed in a solitary portraiture of a woman." This description derives from his work titled Ife mi (My Love).

vi. Essence.

A 2015 exhibition held at the Alexis Gallery on Victoria Island, Lagos, it featured paintings and sculptures by 9 Nigerian artists namely Akinola Ebenezer, Bimbo Adenugba, George Edozie, Gerald Chukwuma, Joshua Nmesirionye, Kunle Adegborioye, Osagie Aimufia, Segun Aiyesan and Wallace Ejoh. In between them were 40 striking pieces on the show. In the words of Chidiac (2015:2) who curated the exhibition, "Having sat with some of them to discuss art locally and internationally, I was (sic) marveled at their ideology and their strive to take the ever vibrant Nigerian Art scene to the international stage."

vii. The Genesis

This was a charity exhibition held in Lagos on 19th March, 2016. Organised by the Ovie Brume Foundation, it featured 10 establishing Nigerian artists with outstanding and fascinating works. Drawing from the foreword by Castelotte (2016: 5) on the catalogue of the show, "Charity exhibitions address primarily not the need of the artist to serve his or her audience and to advance a professional career, they are organized to serve some societal need." Such is the emotional attachment that compels someone like Wallace Ejoh to take part in some group exhibitions such as this. Everything is not just about commerce, but to give back to the same society that produced him as a professional artist.

viii. Mutual Art Inspiration

Unlike other group exhibitions, this showcases works by international artists who congregated in the Netherlands for an Art Exchange project. It was a workshop through which artists exchanged ideas and produced works based on their individual experiences. The two artists who represented Nigeria at the exchange were Wallace Ejoh and Joshua Nmesirionye. They were joined by their Holland counterparts: Marjon Cordes, Lilian Wessels, Fiona van Alphen-Alwayn, Friederike Kimmerle, Xandra Lappere, Wonny Stuger, Birgit Boogaard, and Hetty Arens. It was a great experience and exposure to a different culture and personalities.

ix. Ascension

Ascension is one of the Mydrim Gallery's many classics. This gallery is known for not showing works that do not satisfy basic principles of art. This exhibition is no exception. It was a unique show of oil and pastel paintings produced by two prodigies namely Wallace Ejoh and Jefferson Jonahan. The exhibition opened on September 22 and ran till October 6, 2017. Ogunsanya (2017: 3) who curated the show had this to say on the two artists: Mydrim Gallery is proud to present and celebrate these two extremely talented artists. We trust you would enjoy the exhibition and add these unique pieces to your collection."

x. Other exhibitions

Listed above are just a few of those remarkable, catalogued exhibitions that Wallace Ejoh has participated in, but that is not all. There are still many others not catalogued or listed here. In 2003, Ejoh was a member of the studio artists who practised within the Workshop Studios of the National Gallery of Art, Lagos. All the artists were very talented and rich in their skills and intellect. Soon, they constituted themselves into a nameless group that constantly held meetings at their leisure time. Such meetings led to a decision to found an Art Group called Index. Mufu Onifade was the Chairman while Dixon Okonye was Secretary, Ogaga Tuodeinye (late) was PRO. The group hosted its commemorative show three consecutive years; Ejoh took part in two of them. His contribution, based on qualitative output lent credence and integrity to the image of the group.

The Index Group would have been the best art group in Nigeria if the dream had been rigorously pursued. One of the manifestos of the group hinged on the principle that every member must be a graduate of Fine Arts with a minimum of HND. He must also

have been in practice for a minimum of five years. Their three exhibitions at Nimbus Gallery, Ikoyi, Pendulum Art Gallery, Lekki and Terra Kulture, Victoria Island were superlative. Their consistency at galleries redefined the quality and integrity the group was known for. Unfortunately, a straight tree never lasts in the forest. Greed and excessiveness of some of the members led to the death of the group.

In the same vein, Stepping Into Universality was not the only exhibition held by the Universal Studios of Art. There were others like Resurgence held at the Terra Culture Arts Centre and In due Season at the Mydrim Gallery. Both shows were welcomed with Open Seminars that attracted artists, galleries, scholars, etc. Wallace Ejoh participated actively in all of them.

Ejoh is also not a stranger at auctions. He has participated in the two editions of the Lagos Art Auction 2014 and 2015. They were organized by TKMG Auction House, a joint partnership between the Terra Kulture and Mydrim Gallery.

Conclusion

Wallace Ejoh's revisit to Impressionistic painting style with a new vision and a dynamic approach is the artist's right thinking in the right direction. It is a testimonial to the new palette that he has just discovered via relentless studio experiments. This rebirth of his old ways that paved way for a fresh one is also due for scholarly research and intellectual articulation of both the processes and the discovery. There is no denying the fact that young artists will soon besiege the style once again. If that that happens, what's next?

Mufu Onifade, fsna,
National Gallery of Art,
South West, Nigeria.

Notes and References:

1. Good Reads (2018). Michelangelo Buonaroti. https//www.goodreads.com

2. Editors (2018). Impressionism: Art and Modernity https//www.history.com

3. Oladapo. O. (1975). An LP Record of the poet's Ewi poetry.

4. Olaku, A (2005). Time Will Tell. In Colours, Moods and Feelings, Catalogue of a group art exhibition, Tru View Gallery, Lagos.

5. Obiago, S. (2009). Invitation card of the exhibition titled Stepping Into Universality, a group exhibition by Universal Studios of Art, Communication for Change, Lagos.

6. Latute, P. (2009). Introduction. In The Last Pictures Show VI (Peinture, Sculpture, Poterie), Gondwana, Douala.

7. Oputu, E. N. (2012). Beauty Through Function and as Function. In Togetherness: Art Exhibition, Abraham Studio Limited, Lagos.

8. Adeniyi, D, (2012). Introduction. In Imbued Essence: Exhibition of Contemporary Nigerian Paintings, Sculptures & Craft, Abraham Uyovbisere Studio Limited, Lagos.

9. Chidiac, P. (2015). Curatorial Statement. In Esence: A Group Exhibition of Paintings and Sculptures, Alexis Gallery, Lagos.

10. Castellote, J. (2016). Foreword. In The Genesis: A Charity Art Exhibition, Olisa Daniel C., Lagos.

11. Ogunsanya, S. (2017). A Word From Mydrim. In Ascension: An Exhibition of Oil and Pastel Paintings, Mydrim Gallery, Lagos.

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View Works



Title: "Night Nurse II"
Size: 76Cm X 183Cm
Medium: Oil on Canvas
Year: 2022
Artist: Wallace Ejoh



Title: "Night Nurse I"
Size: 76Cm X 183Cm
Medium: Oil on Canvas
Year: 2022
Artist: Wallace Ejoh



Title: "Her Favourite Tea Cup" Size: 122Cm X 138Cm Medium: Oil on Canvas Year: 2022 Artist: Wallace Ejoh



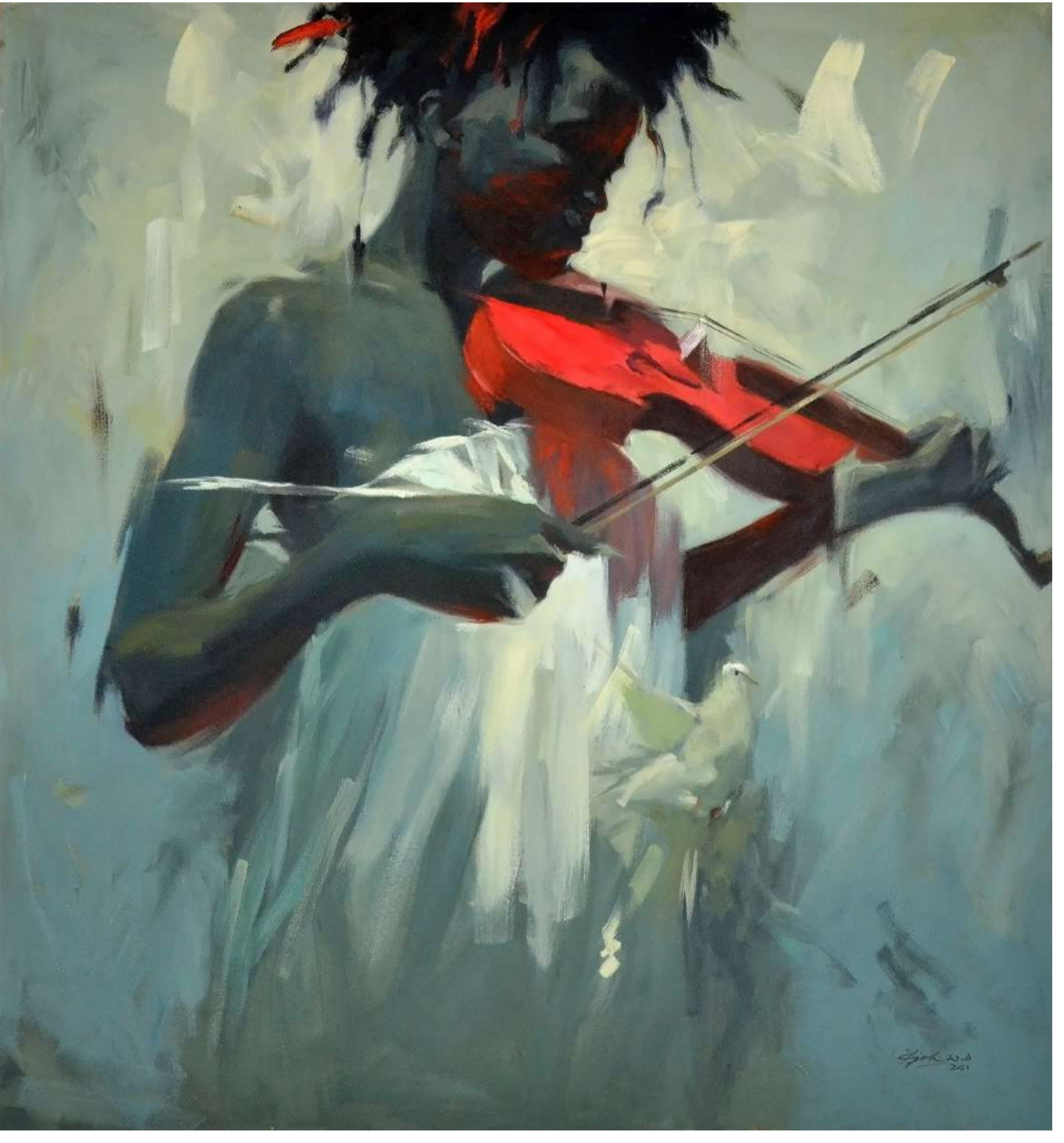
Title: "The Companion" Size: 122Cm X 138Cm Medium: Oil on Canvas Year: 2021 Artist: Wallace Ejoh



Title: "Knock Knock" Size: 121.5Cm X 152.5Cm Medium: Oil on Canvas Year: 2022 Artist: Wallace Ejoh



Title: "Poise" Size: 122Cm X 138Cm Medium: Oil on Canvas Year: 2021 Artist: Wallace Ejoh



Title: "Morning Glory" Size: 122Cm X 138Cm Medium: Oil on Canvas Year: 2021 Artist: Wallace Ejoh



Title: "Diary of a birthday Girl" Size: 122Cm X 138Cm Medium: Oil on Canvas Year: 2022 Artist: Wallace Ejoh



Title: "Lady With A Cowrie Pendant" Size: 122Cm X 168Cm Medium: Oil on Canvas Year: 2022 Artist: Wallace Ejoh



Title: "Sleep, Study, Repeat" Size: 122Cm X 138Cm Medium: Oil on Canvas Year: 2021 Artist: Wallace Ejoh



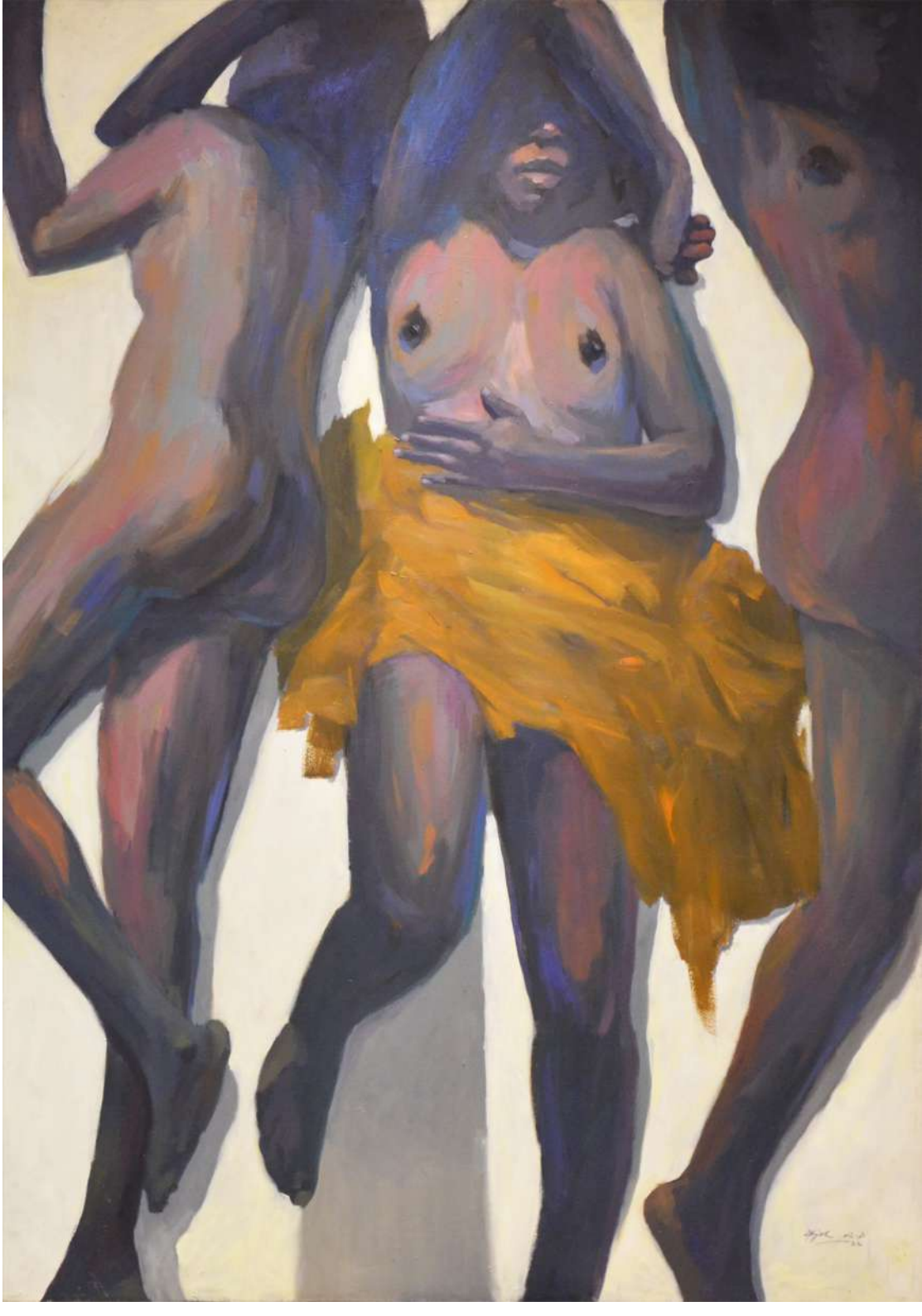
Title: "Cherish The Moment" Size: 122Cm X 138Cm Medium: Oil on Canvas Year: 2021 Artist: Wallace Ejoh



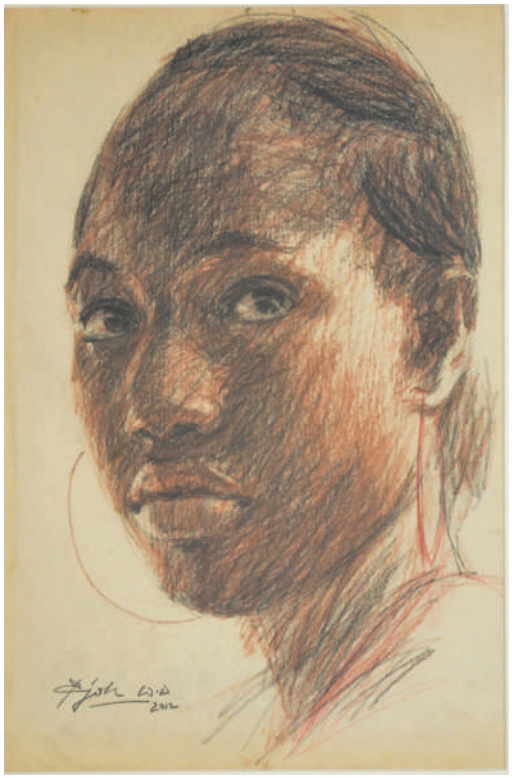
Title: "A Touch of Red" Size: 121.5Cm X 168Cm Medium: Oil on Canvas Year: 2022 Artist: Wallace Ejoh



Title: "Power of the Night" Size: 152.5Cm X 122Cm Medium: Oil on Canvas Year: 2022 Artist: Wallace Ejoh



Title: "Wrapped in Yellow" Size: 122.5Cm X 152Cm Medium: Oil on Canvas Year: 2022 Artist: Wallace Ejoh



Title: "Adesua"
Size: 29.5Cm X 43.5Cm
Medium: Conte on Paper
Year: 2012
Artist: Wallace Ejoh



Title: "April"
Size: 28Cm X 41Cm
Medium: Conte on Paper
Year: 2020
Artist: Wallace Ejoh



Signature beyond Art Gallery
107 Awolowo Road, Ikoyi,lagos



Signature African Art Gallery
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From Ben' Down Select to Art Practice.

On Monday 16th of August, 2021, Mufu Onifade paid a scheduled visit to Wallace Ejoh's new studio at Ikorodu. The world was gradually recovering from the bite of the Covid-19 pandemic, which had confined many people to their homes. The studio was relatively young in operation even though many works already littered the space. The visit eventually culminated in this noholds-barred conversation between Ejoh and his August guest. Please enjoy!

Let's meet you?

My name is Ejoh; Wallace Davies Ejoh.

Give us a sneak peek into your background?
My dad who was known as Davies Ejoh was born in Ghana. He passed on in 2005, although my mum is still alive and living in Ghana where she hails from. She was born in Labadi, Accra. My dad was from Okpe Local Government in today's Delta State, Nigeria. My grandfather was living in Ghana then known as Gold Coast. My dad got married to my mum in Ghana – just like a Nigerian marrying a Ghanaian. That was sometime in 1969 when the then Ghanaian Military Government insisted that foreigners be sent packing from Ghana. Nigerians were no exception.
So, we Nigerians were also compelled to leave for our country. My father, having married my mum, had the right to stay back in Ghana, but my grandfather who was also living in Ghana did not have such privilege. So, he decided to return to Nigeria, and took me along, away from my parents; and off to Lagos we went.

What were your parents into, in Ghana?
When my dad was in Ghana, he worked in a bank and also played Conga drum with a popular musical band (can't remember the name now). My mum - Merley by name - was a full-time housewife. She hails from Accra, Ghana.

Your position in the family?
I am the first child of my mum and dad together. Before their marriage, my mum had a female child already. This was before she met my dad. There was no marriage between her and the man she had that female child for. My dad, too, already had a son from an Urhobo woman before he met my mum. There was also no marriage between him and the woman who mothered that child. So, I have two step siblings older than me, each from my both parents.

Why did you leave your parents to go with your grandpa?
My grandfather said he couldn't return to Nigeria without me. We were two biological children –same father, same mother - in the hands of parents at the time. My grandfather took me and left my younger one, a female child. That was how I came to Lagos with my grandfather, but after some time, my mum could no longer cope with her son in absentia. I was almost 4 years old when she came to Nigeria. That was in the early 70's.

Your mum had never been to Nigeria before then, how did she trace your location?
She got the information of our whereabouts and description to our house from her uncle. That uncle of her was a frequent face in Lagos. So, he knew where we lived. As at the time my mum came to Nigeria, my father was still in Ghana, but he joined us later. By the time he returned to Nigeria, we (my mum and I) were living at my paternal grandmother's room. We all lived in that room, but as soon as my dad joined us, my grandmother left the room for my dad and mum with my young brother she came with. We were now four in that single room – dad, mum, myself and my younger brother.

Let's go into your educational background.
I was born in Accra in 1966 and returned to Nigeria in 1969. I started my elementary school in 1973 at the Christ the King Primary School, Olodi Apapa. After my primary education, my dad enrolled me at a private secondary school, Oria National Secondary Commercial Academy popularly known in Ajegunle as ONSCA. Before then, I had sat for an entrance exam into a college in Delta State. It was called Hussy College. I passed the exam and was now invited for an interview. Unfortunately, I didn't do well at the interview. It was painful, but there was nothing anyone could do about it. That was why my dad enrolled me at ONSCA. I did my

Form 1 and some unexpected happened: the new Civilian Government of Alhaji Lateef Jakande took over most schools in Lagos State, including our own ONSCA. I was now taken to the Government College II. There were two schools of the same name. One was School I while our own was School II. After the take-over, the name of the School I was retained while the School II was changed to Ojo High School. So, I attended Ojo High School and graduated in 1984. If I had proceeded immediately from secondary school to Yabatech, I wouldn't have graduated in 2000.

What were the causes of your delay?
After I left secondary school, lack of finance posed a huge difficulty for my schooling. So, I had to engage myself in jobs that fetched me some money to take care of myself. At first, I used to sell second hand clothes, which I took to hotels to sell. I had someone who brought them for me from abroad.

Bend down select?
That's what people called them, but mine was a bit different. I didn't sell them in the market. I took them to hotels where I had my customers always waiting for me. It was good business with which I made my ends meet. At least, I didn't have to beg anyone for money.

Was that the only business you did?
Not really. I later worked as a steward with some Lebanese guys whom my mum also worked for. She worked for them as a cook. I worked with some other Lebanese and Americans. Later, my mum introduced me to one particular Lebanese man. I was meant to work in his house, but the man took me to his office, which was a technical company called Shebli Engineering and Construction Company located on the Apapa-Oshodi Expressway. They later moved to Apapa proper and I went with them.

Were you into technical stuff before now?
Nooooo! (Laughs). I knew nothing about technical or mechanical work. I didn't even have any knowledge of whatever work they carried out in the Company, whether technical or mechanical, but the man made me a spy – to discretely watch some workers. I would secretly keep an eye on them and report their activities back to my boss. With time, I no longer found the job dignifying. I saw it like demeaning myself. I also feared for my life. I then had to complain to my mum about it. She approached my boss to address the issue; and he promised nothing would happen to me.
Instead of continuing the task, I still went ahead to confront him personally, and register my distaste for the job. That was when he heeded my plea and made me Storekeeper. I was now both Storekeeper/Supervisor. I was there for many years. After that experience, I still went into many other things.

All along, what were your dad's responsibilities?
When I was in form 5, boys of my age at that time were still living with their parents, but my dad got a room for me to live independently. I objected to it, but he forced me to accept it because he had already paid for the place in Ajegunle. I graduated from secondary school owning my own apartment. At this point, my dad stopped fending for me. I started doing odd jobs to fend for myself. In fact, I had a locally made Casino that I operated to make money for myself.

A Casino?
Yes, a locally made Casino. It was a popular sight in the ghetto. That ghetto's location made it easier for us to produce it. I used Board and Boris to make it flow with smoothness. I worked in partnership with my cousin. So, we both
operated the Casino and shared the proceeds. It was a mini money-making machine. We made money. Everything was going smoothly without any qualms until the police suddenly started raiding us. The wahala was too much. That was why I abandoned it and did nothing until my mum came to my rescue by getting me the job.

Why then did you leave the Construction Company?
Sadly, my boss died in 1988. His wife took over the Company with her brothers. I was retained as Supervisor, but I had to leave.

Why did you leave?
Well…I went into religion, which took a lot of my time. I joined the Harish Krishna religious sect. Earlier, I had
started developing interest in Hinduism. Joining the Harish Krishna made me go deeper into the practice.

How?
I started attending seminars upon seminars, symposia upon symposia. I researched deeper, and soon joined the Astra Temple, which I started attending in 1992 until I finally gave up on everything and left in 1999. This means that I was actively involved even while I was also going to school. I lived fully inside the temple and was a vegetarian for that whole period. I spent a lot of my time in the religious practice. In fact, I was caught in-between art and transcendental religion, which is different from a church. Transcendental religion had to do with certain occultic practices.

How did you escape unhurt?
I found the truth. I became a Christian in 1997. To be candid, Christianity gave me peace of mind. I have since been at peace with myself. So, when I finally left the Yaba College of Technology in 2000, I was already a Christian. Although I must confess that I was still in the Temple when I entered. I converted fully in 1997.

Let's focus more on the school. Tell us about it?
At Yabatech, I did part time, which took my time. Although there was June 12 crisis and so on. So, instead of 3 years for my Ordinary National Diploma, I spent 5. I entered Yabatech in 1993 for my OND programme and finished in 1998. My Industrial Training programme was observed in 1997. I did my HND between 1998 and 2000 and majored in Painting.

What was your OND project?
For my OND project, I did a painting…I think it was a landscape. I can't recollect fully now.

HND?
For my HND project, I produced a large pastel work on a 6ft x 3ft Masonite Board. I painted polo players. For me to do that, I had to visit the Polo Club at Ikoyi for further research. It was a beautiful work. I framed it later.

What about Industrial Training?
I did my OND Industrial Training at the Universal Studios. I later did my internship directly under Mr. Abiodun Olaku. Although I can't forget Mr. Alex Nwokolo who was also there to train and guide me. That's why when you look at my work, my classical approach is inspired by Abiodun Olaku, but my expressionistic approach derives from Alex Nwokolo. They both greatly influenced my artistic direction, and I remain eternally grateful to them.

What are your other experiences as an artist?
Despite my dedication to studio practice, the most significant thing I have done beyond painting is teaching. I started teaching art students in 2002. The first student that came to me then was Solomon Omogboye. He was my first student, and is now based in South Africa. Since that time till now, I keep accepting students for internship. I have trained more than 100 students. At the USA where I was an Instructor, they often get students as many as 80 (from various higher institutions of learning) at a go. So, I must have trained not less than 100 students.

Let's talk about your exhibitions?
Generally, the first exhibition I took part in was our school exhibition at Yabatech. Basically, that was my very first exhibition. At a professional level, my first exhibition (after school) was a group exhibition held in 2005. It was titled 'Colours, Moods and Feelings.' The show featured 3 artists and I namely Titus Agbara, Sam Ajobiewe, Moses Obhagbon and my humble self. The last show I took part in was also a group show titled 'Essence.' It was held at Alexis Gallery on Victoria Island, still in Lagos. That was in the year 2021; and that show featured 9 artists: Bimbo
Adenugba, Osagie Aimufia, Akinola Ebenezer, George Edozie, Gerald Chukwumah, Joshua Nmessirionye, Kunle Adegborioye, Segun Ayesan, and Wallace Ejoh. Between 2005 and now, I have taken part in many exhibitions; I can't recall how many in all. Meanwhile, all the shows I participated in, also include the ones organized by the Universal Studios of Art.

Are there other aspects of your practice you find interesting?
As at 2017, I have been involved in teaching expatriates. In fact, I started teaching them in 2012. However, many of my expatriate students stopped coming to the studio due to the pandemic wahala.

Any international exposure?
Sometime in 2016, about 4 years before the Covid-19 pandemic broke out, some of my expatriate students got us involved in an art exchange progeramme, which was held in Holland. The group paid for everything including return ticket and accommodation. The project was titled 'Mutual Art Inspiration' and involved two Nigerian artists – myself and Joshua Nmesirionye –and some artists from Holland. It was a beautiful experience! Joshua and I were taken to Holland where they hosted us for 2 weeks. All the works we produced in Nigeria for the purpose of the project were exhibited in Holland. The high point of the experience is that my teaching of art continued in Holland as I was able to teach some interested candidates while on ground in Holland. I taught them my technique while I also leant from them. A beautiful experience, I must say! In addition to the exchange and the experience, I also now have many friends in Holland whom I have stayed in touch with ever since.

Your studio movements?
I had been in the Universal Studios since 1992. I left in 2019. I went to Apapa where I had my own studio that was …myself and a lady called Chief Mrs. Josephine Oboh-McLeod… we started together. She is the owner of the building that housed the studio and granted me space to produce my works. While I was at Universal Studios, that Apapa studio had always been there. I only moved in fully after I left the Universal Studios in 2019. I started operating fully, again producing my works and training some students from some Nigerian higher institutions of learning. I left
Apapa in July of 2021 because the need to leave became too imperative and I was under intense pressure to do so.



Artist: Wallace Ejoh

APPRECIATION

First, my profound gratitude and appreciation goes to my Lord and Maker, Jesus the Christ for making all these possible.

My mother Aunty Merley and late father Davies. Mr Akar Rahman for accepting to host this exhibition and for his encouragement and patience. Chief Mrs Josephine Macleod thanks for your motherly support. You were there at the right time. Mr Oliver Enwonwu you are a true friend.

Akinola Ebenezer, thanks for the calls and encouragement.

Mr Abiodun Olaku and Mr Alex Nwokolo thank you for your guidance in time past. I am so grateful. Mr Mufu Onifade, Mr Hakeem Adedeji, Miss Juwon Olusanya, of Truviews gallery. I appreciate you all.

Special thanks to my family -my wife Benedetta Ejoh for her encouragement and her belief in my God -given talent. My children - Ovie, Ejiro and Rita for their understanding. My brother Robert, thanks for your support.

Also to my studio assistant and junior colleague Faith Michael (FM) for your support and encouragement.

To Dayo Shonubi and Mr Taiwo Odutola for your financial support. Madam Bernadette Umeri-Mjalli of SACHS Gallery, thanks for your patronage and support.
My special friends -Samuel Ajobiewe, Abdulsalam Abdulkareem and Kehinde Ogunshola, I say maximum respect!

And Orlu Prince Ozangeobuoma, Yes, every 'size matters '. Richard Izege thanks for the video and photo coverage.

My profound thanks to Rob and Vivian Kleinjan and the entire staff of Nigeria Breweries,plc Lagos.

Mr and Mrs Oshin, I appreciate you and your family. May God continue to bless you. Mrs Adeshina, I say thank you and also my greetings to the General.

And to the entire staff of Signature Gallery, I say a big thank you.

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