DIARY OF THE IRON BENDER

a solo exhibition by

Steve Ekpenisi

VENUE:
Signature beyond art gallery
107 Awolowo Road, Ikoyi Lagos.

STEVE EKPENISI

DIARY OF THE IRON BENDER

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at

Signature beyond art gallery
107 Awolowo Road, Ikoyi, Lagos

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FOREWORD

The happenings are daily; you have to work, really bend iron to live, to justify your artistic value and worth. It is not for nothing that the studio artists keep busy all the time, creating varieties of works. No day should pass by without you producing at least one work, no matter how little. The only thing that works is work.

These few words are from Steve Ekpenisi, one of the most exciting contemporary sculptors in Nigeria who embraces metal and discarded objects as a primary medium. These words set the tone for his first solo exhibition, which takes place from March 14th to 24th at Lagos-based Signature Beyond Art Gallery. More importantly as the artist asserts, they offer encouragement and advice to budding artists on the importance of active practice and attaching value and worth to one's work.

The title of the exhibition, 'Diary of the Iron Bender' is apt and as it implies, is a memoir of his journey; the rigorous routine of sourcing material, conflating events and scenes, as well as rolling, hammering, twisting, soldering and welding metal— methods that at once define his practice and allude to Africa's age-old traditions of art and craft-making.

The exhibition features 15 works, mostly predictably sculpted in metals, incorporating such found materials as automobile parts and household paraphernalia. Strongly figurative, the works can be loosely classified into human and animal forms. According to the artist, it is easier to see the form at the beginning unlike with other mediums of the visual arts.

Interestingly, the works are united by two distinct elements. First, an unconventional personal style that ignores the use of an armature— a framework around which the sculpture is formed—in favour of a methodical and slow process of fabrication, with smaller pieces sliced from a larger metal sheet, beaten into flat bars, which when intertwined, form a whole. Secondly, is the clearly visible structure of networks and voids that embellish each individual work.

The majority of the sculptures are inspired by socio-economic realities, contemporary politics and indigenous traditions from which they draw their titles. A fine example is 'ANUN NHU' (thou can't eat alone), represented by the kudu bull. Inspired by the cultural traditions of his native Abavo, Ika South of Delta State, Nigeria. The work's underlying philosophy emphases the importance of sharing, peaceful co-existence and communal living.

I am using my art to enlighten and to bring to the notion of the world, the cultural heritage of my people, which has promoted peace, unity and love.

Of particular interest are the figures vaguely reminiscent of the work of celebrated modernist, Ben Enwonwu MBE, their similarities arising from the exaggeration of several facets of the human anatomy. Significantly, their strength lies in the clever juxtaposing of their elegantly distorted proportions and stance, which imbue their fluid forms with a rhythm and balance that defies the law of gravity.

This sense of rhythm is amplified in the seeming incompleteness of each piece that tends to leave the viewer to form the finished image in his mind, ultimately lending to its power. This treatment is also common in his portrait heads and busts of not only humans but also animals—the latter expression typically uncommon amongst artists. Perhaps, the incompleteness in Steve Ekpenisi's work alludes to the fragility and the fleeting qualities of life. However, for some other sculptors, it is about a particular concept they are trying to achieve. Noteworthy is 'The Flow' by visionary artist Gil Bruvel, well-known for translating complex ideas and fleeting impressions into stunning portraits.

Born in 1978, Steve Ekpenisi's journey began when he was five, creating art from household items much to his parent's disapproval. Despite the absence of an external artistic influence, he was resourceful and determined. These early successes inspired him to study at Federal Polytechnic, Auchi where he earned a National Diploma in painting and general arts (2003), and completed a Higher National Diploma in sculpture (2008).

Today, what began as a childhood adventure has blossomed into several group exhibitions and monumental commissions. Indeed, 'Diary of the Iron Bender' marks an important chapter in the trajectory of a gifted artist, one that is filled with hope, promise and potential.

Oliver Enwonwu
President, Society of Nigerian Artists
March 2020

REVIEWS

STEVE EKPENISI'S DIARY OF THE IRON BENDER: *A LINEAR CONSTRUCTION OF THE ARTIST'S MIND*

"There's no art to find the mind's construction in the face."
– William Shakespeare.

Discerning the thoughts of human mind is an art almost reserved for the clairvoyant. However, visual art is a creative skill by which affective and cognitive, emotive and intellectual skills are synthesized and expressed through the use of colours, images, sounds, forms and movements (Spore, 1990). Hence for an artist, a visual excursion through the diary of his creativity is a window into revealing the mind, thoughts and contemplations of the artist. Such opportunity is what is presented to us through Steve Ekpenisi's- Diary of an Iron Bender; a sculptural narrative that bears no pretense to established stylistic systems and traditional landmarks. The mode of communication is sculptural through use of linear construction of forms in fluid but analytical definition of anatomical forms presented in a spatial synthesis of design elements. It is a creative exploration that defies traditional encumbrances of mass and impenetrable visual weight. Before the 20th century, sculpture was considered primarily an art of solid form, or mass. Mass, weight and static forms constitute challenges that traditional sculpture had to contend with before the advent of industrial revolution which opened the art/ material space to a world of possibilities for the artist, especially sculptors.

Ever since the floodgate of material and technical possibilities was opened through industrial revolution of the 18th century, artists have been able to chart individual and sometimes deviant paths of creativity, and it behooves us therefore to come to terms with new stylistic and material forms of creativity, if we are to be part of the new age. Hence we must yield to Rosenberg (1971), position that "a mind blind to radical material, social and intellectual innovations upon contemporary modes of creation can only respond to significant modern artworks with confusion and/ or bitterness". No doubt sculpture has veered off its historical and didactic course as it has become increasingly devoted to creating new forms and experiences which are valid in themselves (Feldman, 1981). Explorations has become the prevailing character of post- twentieth century art with its persistent tendency to question age long traditions through experiments and explorations into materials, technique, concept and manner of presentation (Rush, 2003). Hence old definitions become inadequate to aptly define contemporary art space, methods, and techniques necessitating a re-defining of terms, techniques and styles. For instance, there is a growing creative norm within Nigerian extant sculpture space revealing that casting process, a method hitherto exclusive of direct metal construction now feature prominently in the process of direct welded metal construction while cast metal now bear features of direct welded metal construction (Kukoyi, 2017). With majority of explorations dwelling within the realm of materials and techniques, Steve

Ekpenisi's sculpture explores the stylistic realm of transparent fluidity in presentation, employing the use of strips of metal bars to construct transparent forms reminiscent of Vladimir Tatlin's (Gardener, 1980) forerunner- Monument to the Third International (1991-1920) though through biogenic representational approach. While his technique of expression is essentially constructivism of forms using flat metal bars or sheets stripped into bars that enabled visual transparency, he also indulges in utility of assemblage of found objects to enrich his compositions. His presentation of forms challenged traditional paradigm of visually obstructive forms, rather, his forms presents a spatial interaction of visual transparency whereby voids, positive and negative spaces interwoven. While his outline of forms remains definitive, the forms in themselves are only suggestive. They're sometimes transient and inconclusive with some lines disappearing into oblivion, thereby engaging the beholder in participatory observation.

Overall, Steve's compositions bares a reflection of high level draftsmanship and excellent rendering of anatomical forms and somber but dynamic movement, even the pedestal on which the works glides (seemingly) are not static but dynamic; an unusual disposition with sculpture. In Mental Slavery, we're confronted with a psychology of self- induced bondage in a visual presentation of a mind in chains and we're, as it were compelled to interrogate the concept of emancipation embedded in Bob Nester Marley's (1980), Redemption Song. The piece- Mental Slavery- depicts the lower trunk of a man in motion, en-shackled and gagged with cuffs, chains and padlock. A chain running from the waist to the legs provides a visual link between the upper part of the composition and the lower part terminating not just on the pedestal but on the floor thereby extending the space of visual engagement even beyond the composition spatial format to the exhibition floor. While the lower part of the composition presents a mastery of anatomical proportion, the upper trunk disappeared into oblivion. The use of strips of flat metal bars crisscrossing the anatomy is suggestive of a human body with the skin stripped off, revealing a network of veins and muscles that enabled a visual penetration through the forms thereby appropriating a synthesis of form and depth technique of expression. There's an unusual but effective presentation of highlight of colours, though buried underneath the forms yet performs a trick of sudden highlights in the composition. Symbol of Honour I (full figure) and Symbol of Honour II (portrait) are more strategic to aesthetics of anatomical studies than in concept. The insignia of honour and accomplishment is represented by neck beads suggestive of garlands. While Symbol of Honour I is suggestive in manner

of presentation, Symbol of Honour II is an attempt at detailed presentation with the two compositions in unusual highlights of colours, something unusual in sculptural presentation.

Steve's sculptures also oscillate between human and animal figural compositions. Some of the animal figures includes- Oken Anu Kewe Esan Aza Efan (human affiliates with animals) 1, 2 and 3 and Ugon I (Eagle) and Ugon II (Eagle). As usual, all portray a show of strength characteristic to individual animals presented in good anatomical constructions using his essential medium of expression- flat metal bars. The eagle reflects a set of penetrating eyes of while the strides of the cat figure are presented in majestic strides. Among the pack, the lion figure- Oken Anu Kewe Esan Aza Efan I has potential of being a collector's item. The graceful stride of the lion and the anatomical rendition is aesthetically impactful. Sometimes, as in the lion figure, construction of his composition suggests a dual approach in techniques of direct and cast methods. Curiously, it is the animal figure compositions that are titled in his native Ika dialect of Delta State (Nigeria), implying a deep conceptual interpretation that is beyond the superficial.

What is before us in Diary of The Iron Bender is a culmination of years of devotion to practice, training and astute craftsmanship. The personality of the artist, being a humble and unassuming character coupled with his physical attribute may belie his outstanding potentials, but don't be deceived, Steve is a multi- dimensional artist and a master craftsman, be it in sculpture, painting or any area of visual arts. He has been involved in a number of sculpture projects in public spaces and his contributions are of great impact. As you flip through the pages of Diary of the Iron Bender, be sure to take something with you as I can vouch that this is one artist going places. Thanks for viewing.

Kukoyi, Ayodeji Olushola (Ph.D)
Gen. Sec. Sculptors Association of Nigeria (ScAN)
Auchi. 2020.

Notes.

1. Bob Nester Marley's Redemption Song. Released 1980.
2. Feldman Edmund Burke (1981). Varieties of Visual Experience. New York:
Harry N. Abraham Inc.
3. Kukoyi A. Olusola (2017). Typology of 21ST Century Nigeria Contemporary
Ferrous Metal Sculptures: A Morphological Analysis. The Artist Journal vol.2, no.1. April. 2017. The Artist Journal vol.2, no.1. April. 2017. Faculty of Environmental Studies. University of Uyo.
4. Gardner Helen (1980). Art Through The Ages (7.Ed.). London. Harcourt
Brace Jovanovic Publishers. Pg.843.
5. Rush Michael (2003). New Media in Lte 20th Century Art. London: Thameson & Hudsonson
6. Rosenberg, Harold (1971). Quoted by Filani Olakunle in Bruce
Onabrakpeya's (2014). Masks of The Flaming Arrows. Lagos. Bruce
Onabrakpeya Foundatio. Ed. Dele Jegede.
7. Spore, J. Dennis (1990). The Creative Impulse. N.J: Prentice Hall
8. Quote from William Shakespeare's character (King Duncan) in Macbeth.

THE WILL IN A WAY... STEVE EKPENISI *THE IRON BENDER.*

"What we hope ever to do with ease, we must learn first to do with diligence"
- Dr Samuel Johnson. (Worldrenowned English Poet, Writer, Philosopher and Humanist – 1709 – 1784)

Of course, with all available proof at our disposal, we couldn't have found a better exemplification of Dr Samuel Johnson's counsel outside of Steve Ekpenisi's situation as a case-study – More so with his inaugural exhibition, 'IRON BENDER', as an inalienable proof. In fact, the range and depth of techniques, philosophy and intellect encompassed in this august presentation, (presented by Signature Gallery, Ikoyi, Lagos), probably lends the most veritable opportunity to test the veracity of this claim. The inimitable quality that Steve's art exudes, as pleasurably observed in this body of recent works, is no mean feat, and can easily be adduced to consistent diligence, as well as unbridled enthusiasm and adventurism behind the scene, while he steamed and primed himself for about twelve years, after graduation from the famous Auchi Polytechnic, for uncompromising professional excellence in artistic enterprise, within the creative sector of the economy. Now, we can confidently assume that he has succeeded in establishing a lasting brand of art that is loaded with a pleasing density of emotions and stimuli that have the potent power to snare followers effortlessly.
In relating the much-touted maxim that, art works are an essential extension of the creator's personality, Steve's case might be deemed a slight exception, as his quite 'brief 'physical stature and very calm mien actually belie the majesty, eminence and usually electric energy of his captivating pieces .This was pretty much my summation about him and his work, when we became acquainted a few years back. The truth is that the strength and essential capability of an artist far transcends his/her physical attributes. That aside, the pristineness of Steve's artistic legacy is assuredly inherent in its uniquely-stimulating philosophy, and creatively-innovative style which thrives on the allembracing and infinitely-elastic possibilities of the human experience. He is a tightly-woven organic specimen - A compact capsule of creativity, daring, vision, spirituality and humanity. All rolled into one.

With the blast-off of 'IRON BENDER', I hereby join the league of Steve Ekpenisi's fans and admirers in fervent anticipation of his next explosive presentation. No doubt sounds early and pre-emptive, but the after-taste of this breath-taking package is bound to leave many breathless, and compulsively asking for more.

To the ascending success of Steve Ekpenisi we clink our glasses in deafening toast!

ABIODUN OLAKU
Lagos, February 2020

STEVE EKPENISI - *ALCHEMIST, MYSTIC AND MASON*

"For we can do nothing against the truth, but only for the truth." - 2 Corinthians 13:8 NIV

God walks the earthly isles every once in a curious while, miles and miles, without the knowing of mere men. I met him once on such stroll, hand in hand with Steve and we said 'Hi'. What I didn't understand then, was why he chose Steve, forgave Him and blessed Him. Why?

I sat to meditate on this, and fell into an experience. Again I saw Him and Him, God and Steve, Father and Son. On and on they went, moving with great speed, quietness, and noiselessness. And they came to a desolate place, a trash camp, a dumpsite, filled with useless stuff, thrown-away things, junks, iron, steel, sheet metal, waste bunkum and rubbish. Then He said to Him, 'Can these metals and irons live again?' I think Steve muttered a 'yes' and then He said, 'Astonish me!' Then I opened my eyes. This was way back in 1307.

Fast forward to 2020, Steve and Signature sets up a solo show, and calls it 'IRON BENDER'. My first reaction was an eagle's giggle, a fusion of perfect sight and perfect sense, as I had the benefit of hindsight and foresight, a marriage of fiction and vision. When I saw glimpses of the show, it dawned on me that I had missed out an important part of the of 1307 experience. And that was the part where He gave Him something, and whispered things to His ears.

I have now concluded that He must have given Him the philosopher's stone, and taught Him to remedy alchemy, and to read the emerald tablets in new tones. As I see Him now turning trash to cash, junk to jewels, and lead to gold, I say to myself, 'this is alchemy, Steve is an Alchemist'. So pipes have become horns and poles bones. Sheets are skins, bolts are eyeballs, bulbs are eyes, and yes rods are bones as in bones. I see muscles of nuzzles, ankles of bangles, backs of tanks, and whiskers of spokes, meow!

Iron Bender? I wonder. In an age where mere men pillage and plunder, where weak characters break asunder, this one still plays with thunder, afraid no longer. A lot has been said about stone masons, cavers, and master craftsmen, but not much about Steve. He is an IRON MASON, and iron masons are great because they build civilizations. Even though he is a mason, it is still amazing how He made it through the maze of his time, and now walks on light on a path that is all maths. Reviving lost symbols with encrypted codes in great conversations with the elements.

Iron Bender? Again, what kind of child is this? But Steve and I are related, so I know the colour of oranges, seeing that we shared blenders when we were children, much tender. These are Indigo children to whom the hiding places of the wind have been revealed, so they can always enter. These are air benders, water benders, earth benders, now Iron Bender.

Who is Steve Ekpenisi? He is a child of God! Behold the Son of God! Behold His works of wonder! Behold the IRON BENDER!

"For we can do nothing against the truth, but only for the truth." - 2 Corinthians 13:8 NIV

Ezekwesili Nnaemeka Nnam
Abuja, February 2020

WORKS

Ulaga “teenage masquerade” 103cm(H)×54cm(W), 2019

Nkité ikpo “hunter dog” 197cm(H)×165cm(W), 2019

Symbol of honor I

216cm(H)×105cm(W), 2019

Symbol of honor II

178cm(H)×71cm(W), 2019

Oku égéde “the drummer”

197cm(H)×47cm(W), 2020

Mental slavery

210cm(H)×110cm(W), 2019

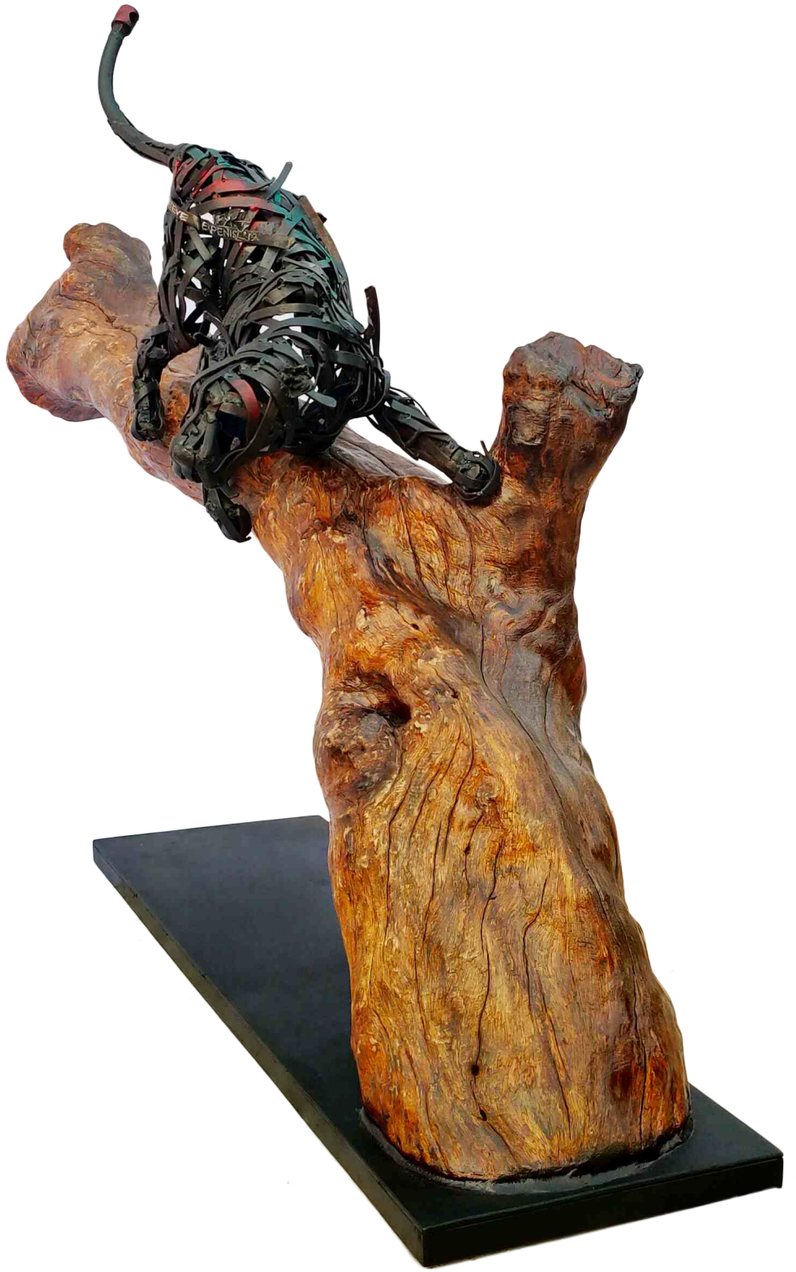
Jealous defender 226cm(H)×150cm(W), 2019

Okeñ anu kèwé eson aza ëfan I “humans affiliates with reputable animals” 120cm(H)×250cm(W), 2019

Okeñ anu kèwé eson aza ëfan II “humans affiliates with reputable animals” 146cm(H)×110cm(W), 2019

Okeñ anu kèwé eson aza ëfan III “humans affiliates with reputable animals” 173cm(H)×97cm(W), 2019

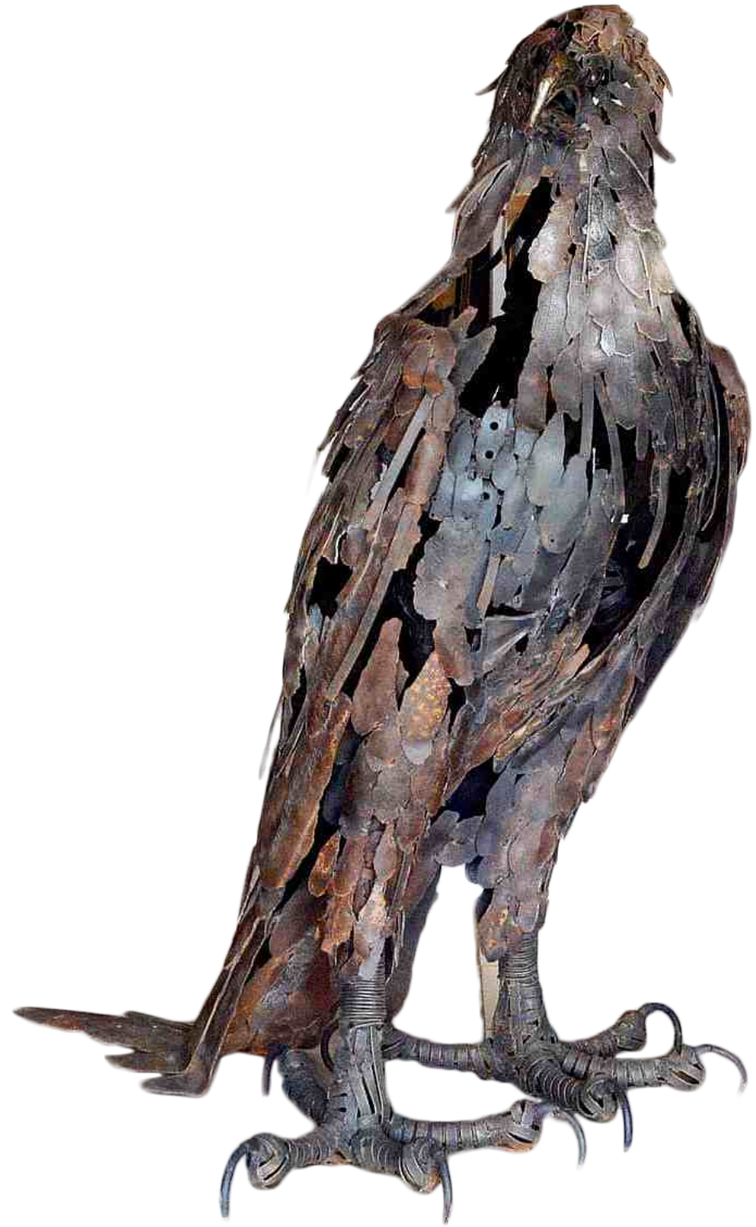
Okeñ anu kèwé eson aza ëfan IV “Humans affiliates with reputable animals” 146cm(H)×110cm(W), 2019



Obiro éka mehn “mind thoughts” 210cm(H)×103cm(W), 2020

Ugon I “eagle”

237cm(H)×117cm(W), 2019

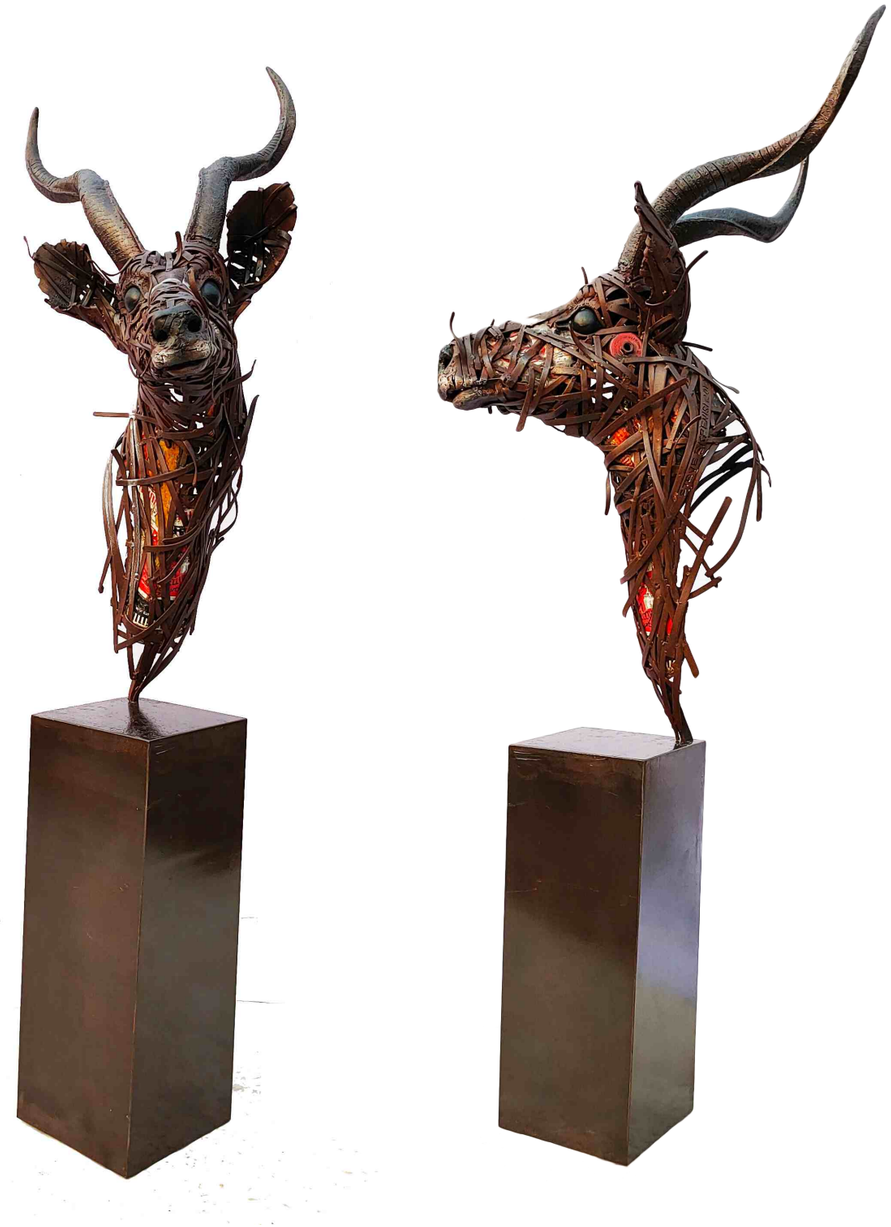


Ugon II “eagle” 110cm(H)×90cm(W), 2020

Against all odds

207cm(H)×40cm(W), 2019

Anu nhu “Never eat alone animal” 227cm(H)×62cm(W), 2019



SYNOPSIS

ULAGA (TEENAGE MASQUERADE)

There's a proverb in Ikaland that says “nwanta amarin ndi munna osi omarin ndi elu mbu” (As long as a child knows his or her parents, he can't admit he/she doesn't know ancient people). Growing up as a child was fun for me because of exposure to some cultural heritage of the Abavo people. During festive periods, especially Christmas and New Year celebrations, my peers and I used to participate in Ulaga masquerade dance. We wore the Ulaga mask with other costumes made from raffia palm and danced from house to house where we will be appreciated with token. However, there were some families that will never appreciate us, no matter the effort we put into the dance. There was little or no crime in those days; people love and care for each other. There was peaceful coexistence among the people. Ulaga dance was never dedicated to any deity, it was just for fun.

The Ulaga is a symbol of unity among youth of the various communities in Abavo kingdom. Each sub-community is identified by a particular Ulaga and its Itu Ekpo (masquerade groups). Convergence or the meeting together, of two or more Itu Ekpo, results in a carnival with each trying to outwit/out-dance the other. The funfair is huge, devoid of rancor, full of excitement coupled with the financial benefits.

At the end of the fiesta, (which is usually 25th and 26th of December), the cash reward is shared among members of the Itu Ekpo. These financial reward could cater for the clothing needs of members towards the new year. The Ulaga dance is one of the features of life in the 1980s'

Unfortunately, the story looks different today. the Ulaga dance, if not extinct, has been forgotten and abandoned by the younger generation as they are consumed by today's get-rich-quick syndrome. This metal piece of art (The Ulaga) is created and designed to remind the younger generation and also epitomise the features of the 1980's. The Ulaga dance cannot be totally forgotten; it will always create nostalgic feelings.

NKITÉ IKPO “HUNTER DOG”

Dogs are domesticated mammals, not natural wild animals. They have been best companion of human from time immemorial. The dog by origin is as old as man and is described as man's best friend. The dog has incredible hearing ability, a wonderful eyesight, sensitive body, tail, fast and untiring runner and a highly specialized sniffing ability.

Dogs are used for different purposes and they have helped humans do their work effectively. The “Nkite-Ikpo” in Ika land, is one of the most important tool of the hunter. This dog ab-initio is trained to hunt, kill, drive, pursue and navigate animals towards his master. The bond between the dog and its master is the ikpo(bell) worn around the neck of the dog whenever its time to hunt and the peculiar voice of the master that the nkite Ikpo understands vividly.

Having mapped out the area to hunt, hunters position in strategic places, they deploy the “nkite-ikpo alongside their guide who urge them on with words as “chua, chua, nje, chua, nje, nje, gbue”. these dogs respond to this call, chasing subject animal to other members of the hunting team, who in-wait to pull the trigger.

SYMBOL OF HONOUR

There is an adage that says 'a woman's hair is the charm of her beauty, pride and dignity'. In Nigeria, hair styling is an art form that begins from birth. It played a significant role in the culture of ancient African civilization. It symbolised one's family background, social status, spiritual, tribe and marital status.

As far as the 15th century, different tribes used hair styles to express social hierarchy. Members of royalty wore elaborate hair styles as symbol of their status.

Hair style is a significant part of an African woman's identity.

Centuries of systemic oppression have isolated us from much of our history. It is important to note that hair style is the connection we have to our place of origin.

In our society today, a lot of our ladies give care and attention to the appearance of their hair. They show great concern for hair styling to enhance their beauty and flesh out relevance and value in the society. Women thus adopt varieties of hairdo for beautification, decoration and adornment. They pleat, plait, top-knot as well as apply some extraneous objects in form of elaborately carved woods or ivory combs, strings, beads, and cowries. There are however special hairdo for specific occasions and for important cases like birth date, marriage, burial, initiation to cults or societies and age group etc.

In the past, there was a symbolic hairstyle designated for spinsters, married women, elderly women and childless women.

Hair styles are not only for beautification. In some cultures and traditions, the hair styles can serve other purposes such as religious attributes, show of political power, marital status, mood of the woman and even as an age indicator. In most parts of Nigeria, especially in the typical traditional era and even till this day, the outlook of a woman's hair can tell a lot about her personality.

Some tribes in Nigeria shave off a woman's hair when she is involved in an abominable act. In the south eastern part of Nigeria, for example, the death of a male spouse would mean shaving off the wife's hair as an indication to bereavement.

Throughout France, from 1943 to early 1946, about 20,000 women of all ages and professions who were accused of having collaborated with the occupying Germans had their hair shaved as punishment.

OKU ÉGÉDE “the drummer”

Drums are musical instrument that African music highly rely on to create upbeat and rhythmic-beat that signifies African music. Drums have been an intrinsic part of African life for centuries and countless generations. They are ancient instruments used to celebrate all aspects of life including; physical, emotional and spiritual. Drums hold symbolic and historical significance. They are played to communicate, celebrate, mourn and inspire. Often times played in peace, war, planting and harvesting, birth and death.

Drums can be both musical instruments and works of art. It can be a sculptural form that are often decorated and suited for ceremonial functions.

The importance of African drums cannot be fully discussed in a single conversation but taking time to learn it, live it and having passion for the drum (piece of art) will make you understand its importance.

MENTAL SLAVERY

We live in a world of diverse people with different religions, economic status, ethnic groups and within the last characteristics, we live in a society of people with different skin colours. However, does a skin colour makes a person more or less important?

Mental slavery is worse than physical slavery.

Mental slavery affects how people see their own reality. This manipulation has always been through mainstream media, religion and education.

We should emancipate ourselves from mental slavery because, whilst others might free the body, none but ourselves can free the

mind. The mind is your only sovereign ruler. "The man who is not able to develop and use his mind is bound to be a slave to another man who uses his mind."

-Marcus Garvey.

Mental slavery is a state of mind where discerning between liberation and enslavement is twisted. One becomes trapped with misinformation about self and the world. We become mentally enslaved when we have low self-esteem - as individual, as a people and as a nation. We become mentally enslaved when we prefer foreign commodities to our indigenous products. We are mentally enslaved when our cultural heritage means nothing to us and hold foreign culture in high esteem.

One can claim to be conscious. They can read all the books, recycle the popular rhetoric but still unable to balance real-world priorities and self-interest. They are always negative and suspicious of conscious work, always seeking to tear down and foster confusion.

It has been said that 'If you give them water to quench their thirst, they will use it to drown themselves.'

The question is: why is it so hard for people to just support the little we do?

THE JEALOUS DEFENDER

Mother is the symbol of affection, kindness and sacrifice. Nothing can come close to the love she feels for her children. She goes any length to protect what is hers. She guards them jealously. Most women are inherently excellent mothers. They carry their young ones before birth and continue to nurture them throughout their childhood and even into adulthood.

It is the unconditional love, which a mother feels that drives these feelings. It is hard to describe the feeling that a mother has towards her children. In fact, most people do not understand unless they become a mother themselves. A mother puts her children before anything else, including their own comfort and happiness.

Mothers give an awful lot of support to their children, whether it involves very visible support or simple background encouragement. Not only do mothers support their children, but they also often hold the whole family structure together.

Giving enough description to a mother's love for her child is impossible. It is a feeling that can only be truly understood by those that experience it. Never underestimate the influence that a mother has over a child. It may not always appear this way, but children look to their mother for guidance on how they should deal with situations. Mothers have incredible power over their children. Their love for a child is something that never ends and never dies. Mothers are always hard working, caring, and full of love and respect.

A mother is a counsellor, a finance manager, a health care provider, an activity provider. Above all, a mother is a world changer. Her love is priceless and will always exist.

OKEÑ ANU KÈWÉ ESON AZA ËFAN

Some animals have basic instincts; that is genetically hard-wired behaviours that enhance their ability to cope with vital environmental contingencies. These instincts seemed learned, yet innate and they are passed on from one generation to another. While some animals are endowed with brute force, well structured jaws, strong fore-arms and physicality, wits and agility in order to survive their immediate environment. Others are built with shrewdness, camouflage, tact, cunning and so on.

These are likeable traits and humans tend to be associated with that they rather adopt the names of some of these animals. The lion for instance has strength, power, and rulership. Lion is not afraid to confront other animals irrespective of its size, height or weight. A group of lion is commonly known as Prides. These prides usually consist of as many as fifteen (15) lionesses and their young and three male adults. They hunt larger pray together, nurture and care for each other in a bid to prevent extinction/survive. The lion controls its territory together with all other animals that live on it. The beauty and grace of the lion makes it the perfect king.

Like Lions, human adopt some of these traits and behavioural patterns. They prefer the surfix "lion" after their names symbolizing personality adaptation and characteristics of the lion. A man preferred to be called a lion because of his boldness, power and raw strength with which he vanquish uncertainty and threatening situation. An adult male lion is royal so is human kings in their respective lands.

A man likened to a Dove – this signifies people with peaceful and never seeking trouble wherever they found themselves.

The snake/man – people likened to snakes are shred, wise, crafty and patient. They are never quick or in a rush to tackling obstacles, they wait for the right time to strike with the most poisonous venom that can kill in minutes.

The adage which says "be wise as serpent (snake) and be harmless as a dove is still hold sway.

To be a tortoise is associated with constancy, serenity and steadfastness, shrewdness, a symbol for wisdom, longevity and stability, carrying their burden(home and protective shelter) without complaint. Their lives is but a journey and can easily protect themselves by withdrawing into their shell whenever they so desire or threatened.

When a man is described as a monkey, one trait common to him is restlessness. The monkey is always restless, jumping from one tree to another with such precision and acrobatics.

OBIRO ÉKAME (MINDS THOUGHTS)

The brain is the engine room of every human body. It controls the activities of the body. It processes, integrates and coordinates the information received. The brain is contained, and protected by the skull. It is the mastermind of every idea and projects we execute.

The hand is the executor. Whatever the mind thinks, the hands execute. There are lots of social vices in our society today, that violate our norms and values. They are behavioural activities; heinous in nature, crime against humanity such as ritual killing, robbery, kidnapping, cultism, prostitution etc and all sorts in our society today. As its said 'AS A MAN THINKETH SO HE IS'.

As the brain is the mastermind of both good and evil deeds, we must always give a lot of attention to what goes on in our mind. We have to chose the right part today and curb the menace, social vices going on in our society.

UGON "eagle"

The Ika people of Delta State particularly Abavo kingdom holds this large bird of prey in high esteem. In this kingdom during your teenage/adulthood you are expected to carry out certain obligations (orun Ali) ie clearing of farm, market and other roads in the community, burying of corps (ili ozun) etcetera. But if you catch UGON you will be exonerated from some of these obligations. It sounds pretty cool but this will in a way putting this creature into extinction.

Ugon is one peculiar bird that possess a trait wougthy of emulation. It's Fidel. An eagle stick to one partner unless the partner dies. It also have an eyesight estimated at 4 to 8 times stronger than that of the average human. It's said to be able to spot it's prey 3.2 km away.

AGAINST ALL ODDS

Nigeria is the most populous black nation in the world and referred to as 'African Giant'. However, the country is faced with multi-dimensional challenges, ranging from

insurgence, extremism, banditry, kidnapping, unemployment, bribery and corruption, insecurity, armed robbery, inflation, gross abuse of power and many more.

The question: how did we get to this point? Nation-building is the collective responsibility of citizens, both grassroot and urban dwellers. Some citizens go to the extent of sabotaging the nation's growth and development. In every institution, there are people bent on destroying the fabrics of patriotism and efforts of the government. Innocent citizens suffer, and even lives are lost in the hands of bandits and gunmen, villages raised down, women raped and even children violated and adopted.

Despite these challenges, some citizens think outside the box, by awakening the thinking compass that roams the creative instinct. These courageous Nigerians always defeat the weight of setbacks, stimulate the innate creative instinct, take up the power of imagination and do things differently, in progression. This hallmark of distinction displayed by crème de la crème in our nation cut across strata of professions -- The Arts inclusive - and other endeavours that have placed the country on the spot of excellence in the global space.

Challenges such as hardship, poverty, unemployment and insecurity have not deterred us from being happy. Nigeria is ranked No 85 out of 150 of the happiest nations of the world, being among the top in sub-Saharan Africa, according to a 2019 annual Global Happiness Policy Report.

The peculiarity of Nigeria is what makes us unique. Government need to tinker her policy and laws to make us better people dwelling in egalitarian society. Like the generalismo of highlife music would say make we work for better Naija. It is said 'United we stand, Divided we fall.' We must not give up. We must be resilient and hopeful. We will continue to resist and improvise. It is said since the hunter has learnt to shoot without missing, so the bird also learnt to fly without perching.'

We must survive against all odds.

ANU-NHU (NEVER EAT ALONE ANIMAL)

According to Merriam Webster dictionary, Culture is defined as beliefs, customs, creed, arts etc, of a particular society, group, place in a particular time.

It means that there exists a consistent behavioural pattern or attitude expected from inhabitants of such community in relation to a specific issue. It is a way of thinking or working that exists in a place or organization. Culture cannot be overemphasized as man is a cultural being.

In Ika land (Abavo in particular), for example, certain animals are regarded as "Anu Nhu (must not be eaten alone)". Such animals include: The Kudu bull (Ele), Leopard (Edin), Ugon (Eagle) and so many others. When a hunter or farmer catches and kills such animal — if he lives within the community — custom demands that he takes or conveys the animal to the Ogwa Ikeyen-Oba (Elders-in-Council); where it's shared among the clans within the community. But if the individual resides outside, or far away from the community, money is sent home to the same Elders in Council - representing a portion of the ANU NHU. Failure to pay such money attracts fatal consequences.

This culture has been passed on from one generation to another. To me, these ways of life is not designed to afflict the people, rather it promotes Unity, Love and peaceful coexistence among the people.

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

I am very passionate about Art, metal sculpture to be precise. I slice discarded metal sheets into smaller flat bars and units to create or weave into sculptures. My form of metal works are unique and distinct in the sense that I do not create armature for them. Rather, work from one part of the object to another. For instance, when I want to create metal sculpture of any animal, I start from creating the eye balls, and then link them to the body, then work to the limbs. I also use discarded automobile parts, cans of different products and household items for my artistic exploits.

Void is a very apparent element in my sculptures, I deliberately leave unworked areas which is significant to mans' imperfection. God is the only perfect being. This also allows my audience to participate, interact and become part of my sculptures as they try to figure out what's happening in these void areas of my works.

STEVE EKPENISI

Steve Ekpenisi was born 13th of August 1978 in Abavo, Ika south local government of Delta State, Nigeria. Had his primary education in Nkwo Primary School, Udomi, Abavo and post primary in St. Charles College, Abavo. Studied sculpture in Federal polytechnic Auchi Edo State where he graduated as the overall best student with distinction in 2007/2008 academic session.

Over the years, he has taken metal as his medium of expression. He meticulously work with discarded metal plates, rods, stainless steel, mild steel, scrap metal and disposed cans of different products. His sculpture is usually life size or larger than life in both figurative, imaginative, animal and semi-abstract. His creations are of global contemporary standards.
Watching Steve work in his Studio is a delightful theatre. He wrestles with metal, cuts, bends and weaves it into artistic precision then the sparks from the welding machine. It is evident he derives the utmost satisfaction when the creative drama progresses.

His sculptures in all forms of metal medium has evolved with regard to the socio-economic determining factors because we live in an ever-changing society. Yet his works have maintained constant perfect craftsmanship which emits power, strength and wealth. One may say that Steve's general inspiration comes from pleasant shock viewers receive while viewing his finished pieces.

The common denominator in his works over the years have been the strict attention to intricate details and elegant features which lead to perfect treasures.

Steve's journey as an artist began at the age of five. He spontaneously engaged himself in training without knowing what and where it will lead him. Most times, his parents get angry at him because he destroys and put to use their electronics and other gadgets for his artistic exploits.

Steve is a member of Society of Nigerian Artists SNA, Universal Studios of Art, National Theatre, Iganmu, Lagos. He is also; Member of Sculptors Association of Nigeria (SCAN).
His Group Exhibitions include and not limited to:

- ·Oreze 5 and 6. - 2018 and 2019
- ·Faces and Phases 6 - 2018
- ·Saving the Earth- Workshop/Exhibition Abuja. - 2018
- Illumination 3 Lagos - 2018
- Exploring Nigeria-Korea Visuals. Abuja - 2017
- Ambassador's Night; Abuja. - 2014
- Re-Integration of the Roots; Badagry Festival. - 2014
- Illumination. Illuminating the World via Art, Lagos. - 2013
- Aesthetic Bonds, - 2007.
- Select Fellow Artists, Auchi, Edo State. - 2003

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