
WE WEAR THE MASK
FELIX OSIEMI

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Mixed media works on canvas by Felix Osiemi
September 12 – September 26, 2015

FELIX OSIEMI

“Out of Africa,” out of Nigeria, out of her multitudinous generations of migrants and pilgrims, into the US and insistently returning to his homelands, Felix Osiemi brilliantly intertwines the abundant knowledge and “common sense” of Africa’s rich artistic traditions with his own story of journey, vision and re-cognition, in this gathering of paintings which he calls “We Wear The Mask.” Donning the spiritual radiance and the mythical coat of many colors he has fashioned along the way, Osiemi’s vibrantly multi-layered paintings inscribe and embody the physical and metaphysical landscapes of his contemporary African diasporic imagination. His is the journey story of “a country man,” a native son, straddling the old and new divides between “north and south,” staring down the “Corridor of Power,” longing for Lagos, remembering Biafra, lamenting Chibook, grieving for Borno, and praying artfully for Africa, for Nigeria.

Figures in fiery motion and metamorphosis burst from Osiemi’s canvas, traversing time and space, their luminous forms ritualized and glistening with cowries and kente, batik and adinkra, gold and bronze, pigment and patina, the cartography and codicil of memory and history. Osiemi’s figures dance, hurling themselves in bold color and rich elaboration, from the fetters, the masks, the exile, the violent rent of both past and present. Osiemi’s figures dance, writhe, leap, and watch, from the vortex of his brush strokes, like ancestral sentinels jeweled in the market places of the global digital, in myth and dream, the sounds of the drum, the sounds of rocket and mortar, loss and confusion. And in the cacophony of their motion, they offer bold, fierce, resonant, recognition of the heart wrenching complexity, pain and possibility, wonder and beauty, of this moment in the human journey story.

Welcome.

Gale Jackson August 14, 2015.

WE WEAR THE MASK

"Love takes off masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within," James Baldwin
We Wear The Mask is about the fear that stalls advancement. It is about the mask of deception behind which, we hide our fears and pain. A smile is not always a reflection of joy; on occasion it is a way to conceal sadness. *We Wear The Mask* is about the oppression, despair, melancholy and deprivation that fuels chaos, violence, and terror. Wole Soyinka's Kongi's Harvest influenced this work: a world of maladministration and blatant violence. It raises the challenge that hiding our intentions behind masks may be a form of slavish submission to the forces that shape our future.

I integrated African textiles and symbols on prints; Ankara, Adinkra, and other elements as part of my art-making process and sustained inquiries into identity. The fabrics, the shifting dark lines, the form and movement connect with cultures of human experience. They dance with contemporary palettes.
Can we remove the masks to find the door and 'occupy' the space between the walls that confine us, whether real walls or the walls circumscribing our minds? Do we dare to engage and speak from our most intimate space and place? I believe that within the space between our masks and our fear is a true creative freedom that may lead to a bountiful harvest. These artworks create a conversation in response to the issues of our time. May I have this dance with you?

Felix Osiemi 2015

As we open the door to that previously concealed the light strikes us, we stagger back in fear, is it better to cower in the dark? To allow others control? Or do we dare step forward to claim the light, to claim the right to a brighter destiny? You'll note our traditional figure on the right carries a shield, demanding justice is rarely without challenge and so we step forward wisely protected



Behind the Screen 2015 mixed media on canvas
96½ X48 inches



Alter of Power 2015 mixed media on canvas 85½ X60½ inches

The alter of power is not the altar of power. It is not a testament to those who rule, it is a tribute to those who seek change. It is the blue of water that washes away, that cleanses, that allows new beginnings.

Distance creates fear. And longing. Once reconciled it is the touch, that first embrace, the tender yet anxious touch. But once done, once we reach out, once we forgive, the world lights up, it is awash in the gold of healing.



Reconciliation 2015, mixed media on canvas 72X33½.inches

The djembe drum dates back to 500 A.D., which means that it has been speaking to us, with us, communicating for 1515 years -that's a lot of talking. A lot of dancing. A lot of living and loving and ways of expressing.



We dance to the drum 2015, mixed media on canvas 67x68 inches

For those who have never wielded power the powerful are most often seen as fools; incompetent, unfeeling. For those who have power there is the fire of daily hell; weighing options, seeking solutions, wrestling with doubt and the eternal question: did I make the right decision?



Corridor of Power 2015
Mixed media on canvas 59x85 inches

Orọ. Mkpaṛịta ụka. We are weak when we do not speak. Our power lies in reaching out, in dialogue.



Dialogue 2015, mixed media on canvas 96½ x 48 inches

Collaboration means we have sinewy strength of angels as we find ways to work together, to play, to ta k, it's the way we develop the partnerships that allow goals to be met. in Nigeria we know this well, we do this well.



Collaboration 2014mixed media on canvas
38x32 inches



We wear the mask and Dance II, Mixed media on canvas 66X60 inches.

We Wear the Mask

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties…
We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
We wear the mask!

Paul Laurence Dunbar

Most of the top rated wedding videos on YouTube are Nigerian. We're African, we love to dance, we love to feel the music move through our bodies,the way that love moves through us, touching every cell, making us come alive.



Love Dances 2014, Acrylic on Canvas 64X42½ inches

In this most sensual of works Osiemi takes us behind the curtain to the toilette of a woman, free, so she believes, from watching eyes, she fills the canvas with color, movement and symbolism.



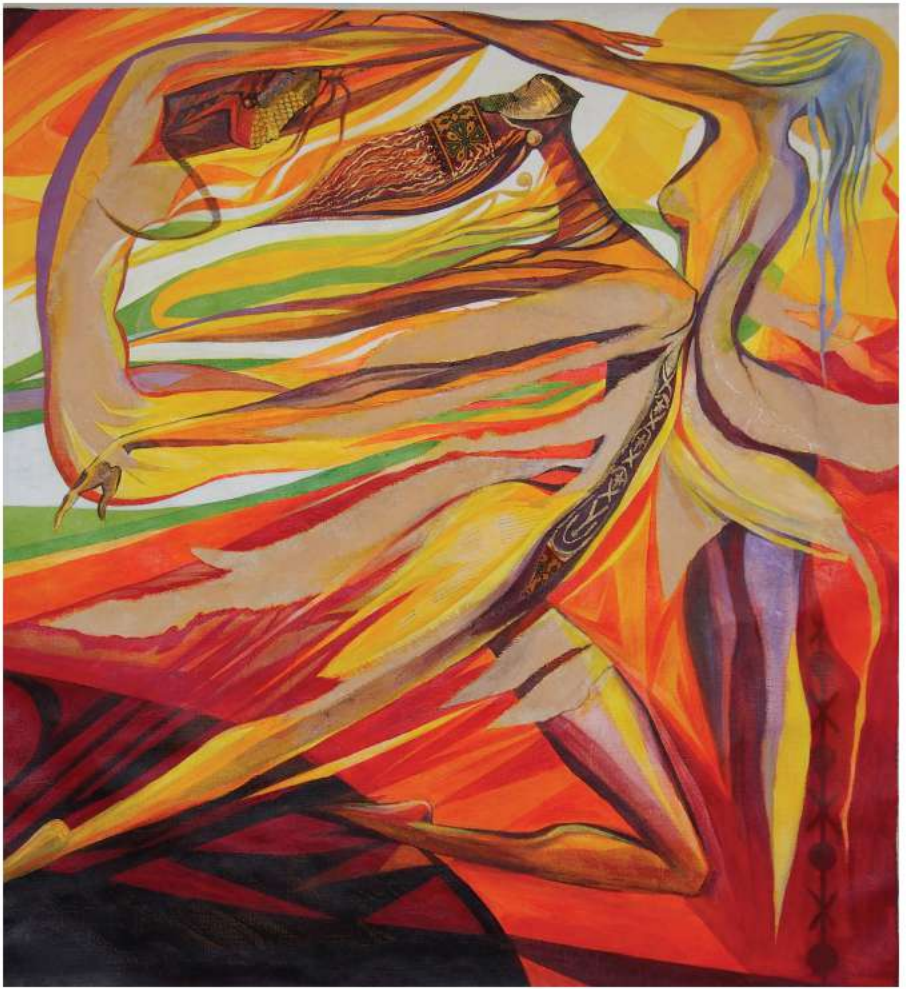
Behind the Curtain 2014,
mixed media 60X65 inches



Across the sea we dance 2014, acrylic on canvas 89 x 56 inches

Over the course of nearly 20 centuries, millions of Africans crossed the oceans, their seas and adjoining bodies of water in their journey to distant lands. These men, women and children helped shape the societies they entered and made their own. Free or enslaved, soldiers, servants, sailors, merchants, mystics, musicians, commanders, nurses, or founders of dynasties, they contributed their cultures, talents, skills and labor to new worlds. We are away, across the seas, yet we are always close, our Africanness defines us.

With the power of dancer's legs, one dancer, three dancers, lift their heads, spread their bodies, dance, a salute to the spirits, a homage to life. The princess's crown belongs to us all.



Dance of the Crown Princess 2013,
mixed media on canvas 66x60 inches

Hey, my brother, your brother, my sister, my people. North, south, we travel far. We stay close. We remember. We forget. We start anew. We come back. We come home.Africa



North South 2013, mixed media on canvas 72X33½ inches



EDUCATION

2014 Goddard College – MFA Interdisciplinary Art
1983 Yaba College of Technology Lagos, Nigeria - Higher National Diploma in Painting

WORK EXPERIENCE

(1983-2013) Art Instructor. Painter, Sculptor, Illustrator, Mural Artist.
(2004 2006) Philadelphia Mural Arts Program (Lead Artist/Instructor)
(1989-1990) Trainer/ Supervisor Student Industrial Workshop Experience (SIWES), Ahmadu Bello University.
(1983-1984) Fine ArtInstructor, Yaba College of Technology, Lagos, Nigeria.

SOLO EXHIBITION

2015 "Transposition" Sheen Center, New York,NY,
2010 "Ebullition" Artjaz Gallery,Philadelphia 2004 " Harmony" Lucien Crump Art Gallery, PA
1995 "La Femme" Fenchurch Gallery, Lagos, Nigeria.
1992 "Out of Africa" StudioG, WashingtonDC

SOME GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2014 Visions: Contemporary Art of Nigeria, Chicago,
2013 Art Crawl, Goddard College
2012 Art Crawl, Goddard College
2010 Artful Intentions - Philadelphia African American Museum of Art
2004 International Art Expo, Philadelphia, PA
2003 International Art Expo, New York

2002-2011 Art Jazz Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
2002 “Endless Light” Parallel Gallery, Philadelphia,
1996 Essence Festival, New Orleans 1991 “Collage” Cinque Gallery, Broadway, New York
1989 “ Zeitgenosische Nigerianische Kunst”, Bonn, Bocholt, and Monchengladbach Germany1989 “For Art Sake” Soviet Cultural Centre, Nigeria
1988 “From Our Minds” Goethe Institute, Nigeria
1988 “Reflections: Society of Nigerian Artists
Exhibition, National Gallery of Modern Art, Nigeria
1983 International Art Exh bitions, USA and Belgium

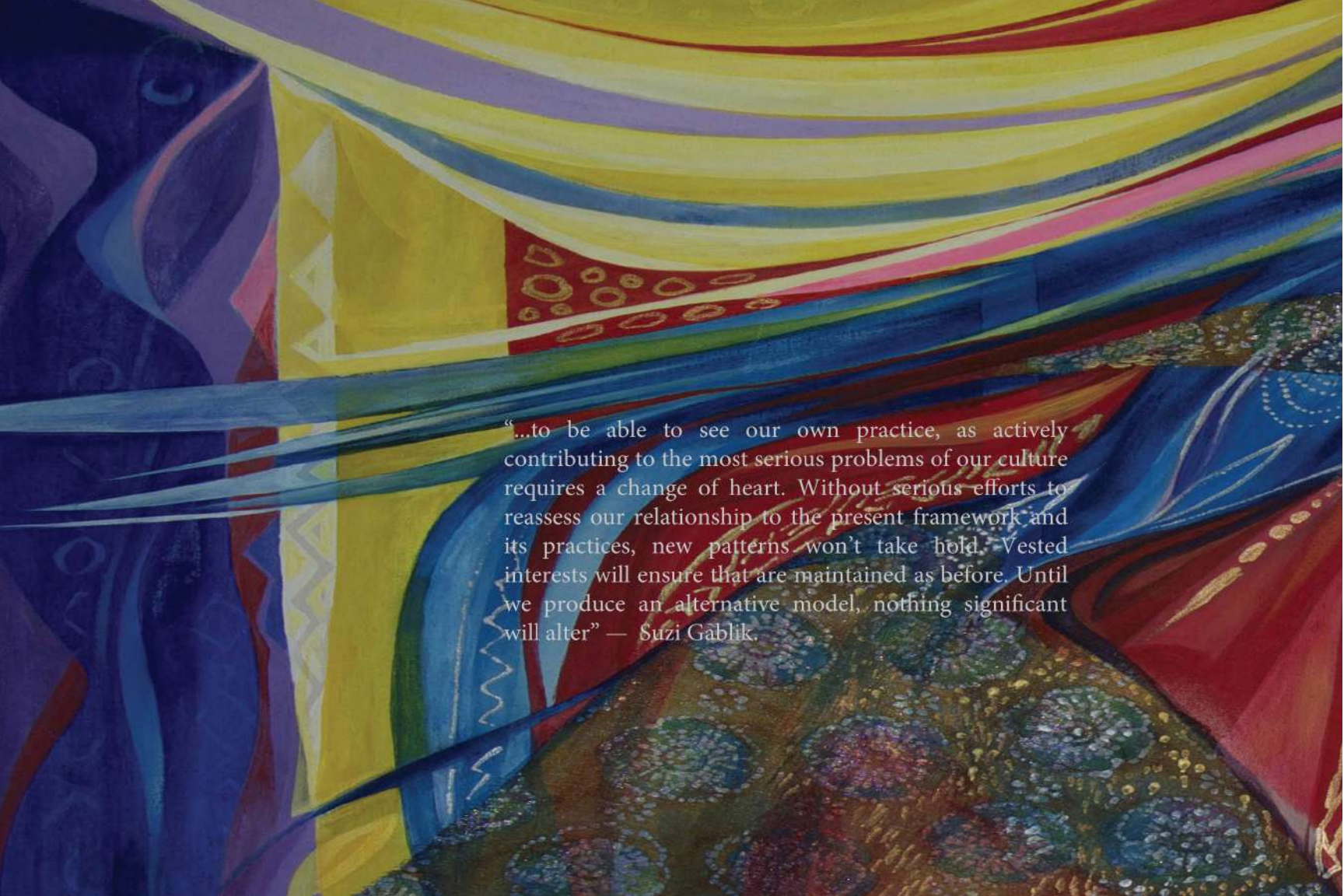
RESIDENCY

2012-2014 Goddard College Intensive Interdisciplinary Residencies, Vermont, USA

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2014 Laoye, Dayo, and Tunde Afolayan. Famous. Visions: Contemporary Art of Nigeria. Chicago: n.p., 2014. Print.
2013 "Felix Osiemi." Signature-Beyond. N.p., n.d. Web. <http://signaturebeyond.com/inner.php?artist=Fel%20Osiemi>.
2013 American Lifestyle Feb. 2013: Page 20. Web.<http:// www.nivek247. com/admin/upload/1358526644Compliance_Proof _MIXED-1.pdf>.
2010 "Arts with Tajudeen Sowole." Review. Weblog post. Unfolding ‘richReality’ in Lagos Private Collections. N.p., 10 May 2012. Web.
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2012 Castellote, Jess. Contemporary Nigerian Art in Lagos Private Collections: New Trees in an Old Forest. Lagos: n.p., 2012. Print.
"2012MUSEAwardWinners."AwardWinners.N.p.,n.d.Web.28Mar. 2011 "African American Iconic Images Collection." African American Iconic Images Collection.N.p.,n.d.Web.26Mar. 2015. 2006 Golden, Jane, Robin Rice, Natalie Pompilio, David Graham, and Jack Ramsdale. "Page 84." More Philadelphia Murals and the Stories They Tell. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2006. N. page. Print. 2005 Beautifying Schools Transforming Lives. Philadelphia Mural Arts Program, 2005. DVD.
2006 Labellel, Patti, prod. "Living It Up with Patti Labelle Show." Philadelphia Mural Arts. Cable TV one. 2006. Television.
2003 "Limited Edition Irish Prints, Artjaz." DECO Magazine Feb. 2003: Page 50. Print.
2002 Art matters, Philadelphia, PA
1999 Lynchburg Ledger,Virginia
1992 Guide to African Arts. Paris: Association Dialogue Entre Les Cultures,1992. Print.
1991 Kelly, Bernice M., and Janet L. Stanley. Nigerian Artists: A Who's Who and B bliography. London: H. Zell, 1993. Print.
1991 "News and Arts." Editorial. New Haven Advocate 1991: n. page. Print. 1990 Noserime, Rukeme. From the Atmospheric to the Transparent: A Progressive View of Osiemi’s Art. Ibadan, Nigeria: U of Ibadan, 1990. Print.
1989“ZeitgenosischeNigerianische Kunst. Germany: n.p., 1989. Print.
1989 "Times International." Revolution or Renaissance: Young Artists Take Center Stage [Lagos] 16 Jan. 1989: n. page. Print

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"...to be able to see our own practice, as actively contributing to the most serious problems of our culture requires a change of heart. Without serious efforts to reassess our relationship to the present framework and its practices, new patterns won't take hold. Vested interests will ensure that are maintained as before. Until we produce an alternative model, nothing significant will alter" — Suzi Gablik.