

PHCN IJA LOBOMO, A Word and Image Discourse

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the implantation of folklore in the PHCN Exhibitions as a distinct practice and production in contemporary Nigerian art. Engaging exhibitions as sites of knowledge production, it examines how IJA LOBOMO (henceforth, IJA/ LOBOMO/IJA'S/ Ija's Ija/ Lobomo's) constructs narratives of artistic modernism, modernity and contemporaneity. Focusing on specific pictures I explore how the implantation of folkloric imagery implodes a shaping of artistic practice, production and discourse in art and history. Placing a reading of artworks as central to the interpretation of pictures, I explore IJA's conscious engagement with historical memory inured in tradition as a recognition of creating space and naming the time experienced. Hence engaging that experience as folklore defines a worldview, Iwa. With picturesque metaphors and expressions IJA seizes what is directly lively and pulls it out of its obsessive twilight, in order to turn it into a palpable free-standing form. Traditional narratives in PHCN imageries implant a reading of postmodernist knowledge and artistic practice in contemporary art.

Keywords: Postmodern, Postmodern, Contemporaneity; Folklore, Folkloric Imagery, Implantation, Implosion.

Introduction

Artists create artworks that shape knowledge and materials into works of unique historical importance. Nigerian artists worked for colonial tabloid presses like *THE WEST AFRICAN PILOT*, a newspaper launched by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe in 1937; for the purposes of the independence of Nigeria and all Africa from British colonialism. Akinola Lasekan's (1916-1974) daily Cartoon pages directed discourses of colonialism and independence through satire and cartoon directed to the literati and a large readership of the population. With independence government created *THE DAILY TIMES and newspapers* with the famed Nigerian-American painter, art historian and cartoonist Dele Jegede (b. 1945) to lead its journalism with satire and cartoon. Lasekan and Jegede created noteworthy artworks that remained visible and legible. This was unlike the art of Nigeria's antiquity with their difficult symbolic codes that encrypt the unique meanings of ancient sculptures that have vexed scholars' worldwide working on these objects for over a century. Contemporary Nigerian artists in assuming their place in the postcolonial

episteme dared to step onto a “*post critical turn*”. Since the 1990s, Wes Hill (2016) and Elizabeth Harney argue that artists have increasingly challenged the essentialism linked with philosophies of “*critical practice*”. This is made plain in the implosion of what were previously considered “*outsider*” art practices, the emphasis on first person accounts of identity over critical theory. Indeed, Uche Okeke (2003) applauds this resort to culture and self, thusly: “*nku di n mba ne yelu mba nni*”, a proverb rightly translated submits that “*a peoples’ wood is their source of cooking fire*”. *LOBOMO’s engagement with folklore* that combines art and production has created artworks that shape knowledge and materials into socially directed works that deal with Nigeria’s national wealth and specifically matters of the day-to-day life concerns of Nigeria for critical social commentary and criticism.

PHCN lambasts the educated, the elite of the metropolis and the corps of the middle-class visitors, who flock *Didi Museum*, located in pristine Victoria Island, an affluent district in Lagos. *PHCN* induces a reflection on the Wisdom espoused in Yoruba rhythms (see catalogue).

In this article I explore how *LOBOMO’s* visual discourse is enriched by the entropment of folklore (drawn from the Yoruba art world) in the emplotment of his narratives; and the engagement of Water Color in the critique of the “*Nigerian condition*”. Considering *PHCN* images as “*windows*”, enables an understanding of messages captured within the paintings’ frames; and what statements they make as convenient agencies that *open our eyes* to the reality of our lives as Nigerians. Reaching a tranche of viewers, *PHCN* assaults on thoughtless citizenry. Water Color is engaged as a tool of investigation, as the exhibition unearths evidence of an entrenched system of corruption in the motherland.

The foregoing groundings make possible a hermeneutic analysis of specific pictures culled from the exhibition. For the purposes of this undertaking, therefore, the following pictures are engaged in the analysis: Fig. 1. *THE REQUIUME*; Fig 2. *OBIOMA BOY “EJIKA NI SOOBU”*; Fig. 3. *KWARRAPTION. “PETROL HEIST”*; Figs.4 &5. *WANTED BRAIDERS NOT RAIDERS*; and Fig. 6. *ELESHIN the horseman*.

PHCN empowers the viewers, transforming them from being mere passive consumers of the everyday to detectives peering through a well framed documentary, in search for the reality of the loss of culture and the wonderful years of *Iwa*; and a stemming of the story of the looting of Nigeria. *IJA* grounds his discourses in entroping Yoruba childhood Rhymes and Poems, guided by *Iwa dicta* (Olajumoke C. Omole, 2022). Stimulating the viewer’s memories and experiences as Text, while confronting their recitation as Visuals, *IJA* wires a spiritual memory framed *Word and Image* stratagem. This affects a mental fixation of the viewer’s eye in an absorption and theatrical phenomenal gaze (Michael Fried, 1988). Rhymes crystalized as objects stare out as objects in reality.

This is the theatricality. Being revered images, they assume “*transcendentalist*”. In the valorised gaze of encounter with the pictures, therefore, an aesthetic spatial

experience radiates absorption. This exercise smacks of idolatry, as absorbed imageries voyeuristically maintain the illusion that the iconophile is still in the driver's seat as sentient living beings! *Ija's* Word is routed in the *Logos* akin to biblical creation (John 1: 1-3,14).

Toyin Falola (2021:8) put it concisely, *"images produce visual perceptions and lead the eyes to see symbols and imageries that become connected with sensation, a phenomenology of perception"*. There abides a spiritual tie with visual imageries garnered from the Texts that generate instant perception, connecting with mind, the internal and external unseen. Sight and symbolic imageries at first privilege the visual senses and the intangible through the senses into the profound understanding of culture. These images are visual signifiers. *Lobomo's* works generate not just sensations but also conversations on the very act of seeing and what seeing means in terms of culture itself. Suffice it to acknowledge that in the discourse of perception that this exercise entails, technicalities abide. That detail is outside the purview of this essay. Mental perception maybe visualised in the imagery of a Yoruba proverb like *"the chameleon that succeeds on the multiple movements of its eyes to catch flies that approach in all directions; but the flies look back at the chameleon's eyes"*, as the signs and symbols alive in the rhymes and poetry of childhood look back on the viewers. A phenomenal recast of the entire process of art making is enacted weaving the contemporary present and modernist traditional past in postcolonial African art.

With hyperbolic Legends to each picture, made for the *"opening up of the eyes"* of the viewers, *Ija* tells a story that reaches the ordinary people as well as the elite exhibition goers. In self-effacing simplicity *Lobomo's* statements reach all visitors irrespective of class and clime with a trenchant lore of demystification. With a cache of familiar images and imageries crafted in lines and forms hyped in folkloric metaphors, similes and to the very everyday wisdom of the say able and seeable allegories, for example, the subtitle of the painting *OBIOMA BOY "EJIKA NE SOOBU"*, *"the one whose workshop is on his shoulder"* (Fig.2), the miraculousness of the commonplace is affected!

Ija grounds his discourses on the reality of moral decadence and corruption; the breakdown of civil society, infrastructural decay and collapse; indeed, the share misery and destitution amongst the ordinary citizenry. Coined in the acronym *"the Nigerian condition"* with narratives fused in folklore, simulated in child-hood rhymes and cultural conventions lyricised in a tableau of versed wisdom, *Ija* tells his story. A combination of theoretical frames drawn from Literature and materialist perspectives on art are employed to address culture and economics in the everyday. These interpretations of the images are insightful for critical social commentary. *PHCN* reveals *Ija's* effectiveness at engaging a discourse of *"change in the Nigerian condition"* by the emplotment of the genre of folklore lyricized in versed form, but couched in the virtuality of painting. A return to the choreographed values rhymed in childhood and the hard work ethos is the recipe for change!

PHCN expresses narratives of the varied contexts that inflect the identity and history of Nigeria. Engaging a quest for explication, therefore, an enquiry looks at how an artwork in the narrative discourse of Nigerian life and history serves as an agent of truth. In furtherance of truth what is the place of the painted image within what may be referred to as the “*linguistic/pictorial/cultural turn*”? David Philips (1998: 155) though remarking on the quintessential visual medium, Photography, puts it succinctly: “*the visual media’s capacity to signify cannot be underrated*”. In a cache of Water Colors *IJA* deploys graphic descriptions that resonate J.B Yeats’ (1956) “*things fall apart*”, the gradual cataclysmic collapse and tragedy of “*the center not holding*” any more in the motherland, Nigeria.

In a combined narrative scheme that engages both moral lessons encrypted in folklore and Water Color, *IJA* directs a discourse that interrogates the loss of the values of hard work and its morals encrypted in childhood values. The subtitle of the *PHCN* exhibition: *ISE NI OUN ISE “MURA SI ISE ORE MI” Work is the antidote for poverty*, captures it all, taking its line from moral rhymes, below:

ISE NI OGUN ISE Work is the antidote for poverty
Mura SI ISE RE OREE MI Work hard my friend
ISE NI A FI I DI GIGA Work is what elevates one in respect and importance (Aspiring to higher height is fully dependent on hard work) *BI A KO BA RENI FEYIN TI*, If we do not have anyone to lean on,
BI OLE LA A RI we appear indolent)
BI A KO RENI GBEKELE If we do not have anyone to trust (we can depend on)
AA TERA MO ISE ENI We simply work harder
Iya re le lowo lowo your mother maybe wealthy
BABA SI LE LESIN LEEKAN Your father may have a ranch full of horses
BI O BA GBOJU LE WON You may end up in disgrace, I tell you *OHUN TI A BA FARA SISE FUN* Whatever we gain one does not work hard to earn
SI KI LO TOJO Usually does not last
OHUN TI A BA FARA SISE FUN Whatever gain one works hard to earn is the one that lasts in ones hands (while in one’s possession)
APA LARA BA NI, IGUNPA NIYEKAN The arm is a relative, the elbow is a sibling
BI AYE BA N N FE O LONII You may be blessed by all today
BI O BA LOWO It is when you have money
WON A MAA FE O LOLA That they will love you tomorrow
TABI KI O WA NI IPO A TATA Or you are in a high position
AYE A YE O SI TERIN-TERIN All will honor you with cheers and smiles *JE KI O DI ENI N RAAGO* Wait till you become poor or are struggling to get by
Words of wisdom culled from Yoruba childhood rhymes (*PHCN Please Help Clean Nigeria*, 2015: 1)

These rhymes are simple childhood testimonials that underr- gird the world view of the Yoruba sibling.

PHCN queries the *status quo* with documentaries that substantiate each picture's subject matter and theme. Charged with emotional significance and deep meanings, these images are geared to honest reportage. For example, the picture *OBIOMA BOY "EJIKANI SOOBU"* (Fig. 2) virtually enacts the reality of the moral values of thriftiness and hard work. Though conveniently lodged as "Mirrors" and romantically self-expressive, as "Windows" they reflect subject matter specific to realistic explorations that encrypt descriptions that deal with substantive subject matter. These artworks also reflect specific time and place. In selfeffacing simplicity undergirding the miraculousness of simple line work and water color, in ludic subversion *IJA* takes subject matter and themes from the everyday for true life evaluations, creating aesthetically pleasant images.

Reading the Pictures

With a hermeneutic analogy; empirical and an iconographic analysis of the pictures: *OBIOMA "EJIKANI SOOBU"* and *WANTED BRAIDERS NOT RAIDERS*; and other images picked from the Shows, it is convenient to glean the subject matter and ideas that under gird the narratives. The images present a reading of *IJA*'s perspectives for an accounting of the dynamics of the ordinary Nigerians' daily life in spite of the collapse evident in the country's infrastructure and the loss of social contract with society.

Lobomo tells a story of intervention and faith; daring to capture the dramatic in an artistic, even romantic fashion. These are tales of hope, faith and survival; even bravery and bewildering acts, labels and stereotypes; and attitudes to life's outcomes. Conversations with the artist revealed his keen nostalgia for his childhood and early beliefs in thoughts expressed in the Wisdom of the everyday folks of his country. Pursuing the same purpose as social criticism and discourse, the artworks document the way ordinary folks, react to their environment in the course of the everyday. *PHCN* reflects the template upon which to foist a framework for an accounting of the freezing contour of the world of the ordinary people with unnerving distance and clear-headedness.

IJA's script in its cartoon-like urgency, thunders down to the public, "like a sergeant-major to a new recruit, to use a phrase attributed to Theodor Adorno (1995:137). The share dimension of the images in their plain frames pop out billboards-like on exhibition wall; while the frames rumble down the sharp messages of the reality of the condition of the nation. These artworks confront/address the elite. The provincials, usually unlettered, are merely pawns in the un-chequered experiences of their own country. Time and space are the two basic means of experiencing history. The message is writ large on the pane of each frame: "the Motherland", loss of democracy, the entrenchment of fascistic rule; irresponsible citizenry on the prowl, "in spite of the Law and even in the presence of the Law enforcers" as the wig and gown; and the epitome of all, the Nigerian Flag and attendant corporate colors in the seminal painting *THE REQUEIM* (Fig.1). Regarded here as a *punctum* connecting *PHCN I & II*, this is a well-designed coffin, finished in luxuriant ebony lacquer; deeply padded in silk for the "journey from here to eternity".

Reminiscent of an urban funeral, not the rural, *IJA* employs a key icon of urban life to address the viewers. *REQUIEM* bears no dead body, only the seal of state symbolized by the worthless denomination of currency, the One Thousand Naira Currency Note (N1000). With these, *Lobomo* derides and satirizes the irony of a nation where money and material things of life are of primary importance, the human person is really of no importance.

Ija routes his analogy in a visual historical framing of the decay in social values and loss of even man in the urban with the morbidity in thought provoking images: “*O SAMBISA*” and “*THE SILHOUTTE WITH AK47*”; and “*PAINFULLY EMPLOYED I & II*”; “*WHAT LEGACIES!*”

1960’s AD AND 2010 Ad”. These are pictures that reflect the state of the nation as *aides-mémoires* to the gifted public of aficionados and collectors. It is from this class of citizenry that the oppressor classes emerge. The artist addresses the same oppressor class for the looting of the treasury symbolized by unambiguous images: “*TO HAND UNTO OUR CHILDREN...A BANNER WITH ALL PAIN*” and “*LLPC... LOOT LOOT PETROLEUM CORPORATION*”, (*PHCN I*, 2017).

In approximate picture frame specifications of 30” x 20”, *PHCN* is a satire on the *Nigerian condition*, reflecting in myriad images *IJA*’s employments of pictures as censures that echo the beauty and good life that every Nigerian, irrespective of clime and place of birth enjoyed at childhood. However, with reminiscences forged in rhymes and stories of innocence, *LOBOMO* draws attention to the thrust of the discourse: morality in verses that undergird the beauty and rewards of the ethos of hard work; perseverance and the spirit of entrepreneurship.

However, *IJA* metaphorically inserts a message, “*man must assert his will against the dispirited world that has scattered its own dizzying arbitrariness like stumbling blokes on his path. The individual must not lose his/her identity*”. Affirmation of individual will power against an overwhelming fate that threatens to swallow up its victims with ferocity is the moral lesson. *OBIOMA*, “*the one whose workshop is on his shoulder*” is the iconic image in the childhood rhymes. Deft determination at pursuing dreams and goals despite the travails of life, is the ethos of citizenship.

Obioma “Ejika Ni Soobu”

Obioma, a popular Nigerian word of Igbo extraction, elicits the image of a kind hearted *persona* who keeps a cheerful smile and carries on with the grind of the everyday. That attitude of purposeful indifference to fate and the realities of the hardships of life with perseverance is aptly described by the Afro-beat maestro, Fela Anikulapo_Ransome-kuti in a song “*Suffering and Smiling*” (1977). *OBIOMA BOY* draws attention to the virtue of hard work lyricized thusly: “*Ise Ni Ounise, Mura Si Ise Ore Mi*”: “*Work Is an Antidote for Poverty*”. *BOY* is a stock itinerant handyman tailor popular on every Nigerian townscape. *Lobomo* engages the Yoruba knack for simple but witty acronyms to further the message of entrepreneurship as a way-out of the youth unemployment saga: *OBIOMA*, “*EJIKANE SOOBU*”, *the one whose workshop is on his shoulder*.

Obioma Boy (Fig. 2), is a stock itinerant “personality” in Nigeria’s burgeoning economic urban landscape, youthful and in trade-mark ever ready smile, in spite of the grind of the everyday. *OBIOMA*, icon of the working man, now a popular Nigerian generic terminology epitomises the virtues of the genuine working man. Fittingly translated, *OBIOMA* means “*the good heart*”; directs a discourse interrogating the loss of the values of hard work and its morals encoded in childhood values. The subtitle of the *PHCN II: ISE NI OUN ISE “MURA SI ISE ORE MI” Work is an Antidote for Poverty* (rooted in Moral Rhymes (above Pp.56) captures it all! Spartanly clad with a prominent collar; this chubby cheeked lad with a well gestured smile choreographs the proverbial jolly hard-working buddy in search of “*daily bread*”. With a *Singer* Sewing machine, patent of a colonial time and place, elegantly positioned on one shoulder and appropriately affixed to the MC body is the workman’s giant scissors, *OB* reports to duty!

IJA subversively steals in a pair of spectacles, the *leit-motif* of the highly trained and intellectual masses of unemployed youth; onto *BOY’s temples*. These are spectacles with polychromic lenses. All a ludic reminder to the so called graduate unemployed, who yearn for menial jobs in companies like the *Dangote* Group; that entrepreneurship, however, humble makes sense!..... *OBIOMA “EJIKA NI SOOBU”*, alias “*the one whose workshop is on his shoulder*”, is the exemplar *per excellence*!

Attention is drawn to the graffiti needle-stitched background from which *BOY* stands-out! It is a *pastiche* of graduate labels: *M.B.A s*, *M.Phil s*; varied Masters and *H.N.Ds* from Nigeria’s higher education institutions. A catalogue of the unemployed, that *graffiti* is a telltale of misery and woe in a nation rich in oil and gas! In despair and apathy, these graduates are ready to take on positions in *Dangote* Cement Company, the dominant employer of labour in Nigeria, as trailer drivers. In fact, graduates have readily accepted menial jobs as clerks and attendants in the name of “*getting on*” for *Dangote* offers opportunities for *smart Alek’s* and hustlers.

With bright eyes and a bold gaze, *OBIOMA* threads the path less travelled by the folks of his generation: he is the lone ranger with bold and unbending faith in the future. Grounded in the age-old ethos of work and the principle that “*Work is an antidote for Poverty*”, *OB strives on*. *BOY* fits comfortably in the shoes of the *legendary persona OMOLUABI*, aptly translated profiles the phenomenal youth: “*to the child begotten of the deity of good behavior and impeccable character*” (*IWA*). This is the model for the future Braiders of the society! *Lobomo* alludes to the Yoruba philosophy of “*IWA*”, the Moral character, as the pivot of human personality and well-being.

Wanted Braiders (Fig. 4)

Fittingly described as one of “*the in-betweeners putting Nigeria together*” by the social critic and writer Newton Jibunoh (2022) *Lobomo* to stem the rampant looting in the land smuggles in the metaphor laden artworks *Wanted Braiders Not Raiders* (Figs. 4 & 5). Beads and cowries were valued ancient currency. However, alluding to modern Nigeria, the artist employs a familiar imagery: the braiders in a marketplace saloon. Reminiscent of the beaded crown, “*foremost attribute of ancient Yoruba monarchy*,

modicum of prosperity and order, leading symbol of flourishing climes of antiquity” (R. Farris Thomson, 1973:227-229,) IJA borrows regal imagery from tradition and culture, foists a minimalist bead-crown unto the model. *BRAIDERS* simulates an incarnation of ancestral force, revelation of moral insight in the person hereby adorned and the glitter of aesthetic experience. The beaded hairdo is the quintessential iconography of beauty, “*God is in the details*”!

With keen hands braiders select the best colors of beads to embroider onto the weave of the woman’s hair do. Long hair is a symbol of femininity, but the braided hair is the model of sophistication. Braiding the hair is a ritual; family jewelry and varied adornments, even valuable coinage are part of the make-up, all to affect the most attractive features of modern looks.

The figure is a youth clad in a *Fulani Kaftan/ Dan chiki /Danshiki* top (Fig. 4). This *Kaftan* is no ordinary one for it is adorned with motifs of the national flag in a continuous all-over pattern. Swaths of *Lalle patterns*, simulacra’s of *Hausa-Fulani* body adornment evocative of wall decoration and calabash design ornately cover the body. Distinctively, this model wears a *Fulani* elbow tethering on the upper right arm. A sign of recognition to membership of age-grade ranking for character and achievements. A decorative gag adorns her lower lip wittingly symbolic of the imperative for shrewdness and the verve for caution. These are markers of character, features used to distinguish youth into categories.

Tethering’s are distinguishing markers of baptism, in the Christian church, traditional African society; and Royalty. Reflecting a principle of dignity and causality, a tethering draws attention to readiness “*to be an instrument of the work at hand*”. This is the subversive art way of inserting an ancient iconography that symbolises readiness to forsake all personal ambition for the purposes of nation building likened to the message of Palm Sunday inured in the line “*the master has need of It.....*” (Mathew 21:1-11). Like a humble animal meant for work, the master expects total surrender for the salvific purposes. At baptism the candidate is tethered with a brand, a common practice in the Roman army; as a marker of character and “voluntary belonging to Christ”. In the Aquinas an principle of causality everything about the baptized is revolutionized. Indeed, likened to the person with character *Iwa*, as an *Omoluabi*, the candidate for the task of remaking the nation offers himself/ herself, talents and gifts for the task at hand.

A profile view of the model (Fig.5) reveals facial beautification using simple rosette concentric circular petals. Diadem-like, that icon is taken from ancient *Ife* tradition of royal decorative motifs. Susan Preston Blier (1976:75) suggests that diadems are popular as markers of social ranking in Yoruba art world. However, diadems have become popular in the body adornment *repertoire* trendy in both body adornment and fashion design in Nigeria. The most distinguishing attribute of this beauty is her beaded hair-do. In alternate patterning flows an inter-face of prominent Green and White rows of beads create a montage of the Nigerian flag. Meticulously each bead and accompanied attachments is carefully weaved-onto lengthy “*attachments*” to the model’s natural hair.

In the complexity of the braiders processes *IJA* toughens the metaphoric imagery in *BRAIDERS NOT RAIDERS* (Figs. 4&5). These complex creations demand creativity and patience on the part of the braiders, epitome of symbolic youth drawn from all Nigeria working together for one purpose. The image is affected in this persona's three-quarter view poise: simply shrouded in a conical *Obatala-esque Hijab*-like veil, a *simulacra* of the beaded crown worn by ancient monarchs; concealing her facial identity. Only a *silhouette* below the hood betrays an aquiline nose, stiff upper lip and pursed lower lip of the model suggest a gesture of stern discernment.

In that tense moment, a Braider's well-manicured left hand symbolically parts-on comfort and encouragement to the seated woman for perseverance in the lengthy processes of this styling procedure. That signal implicates "*BI A KO BA RENI FEYIN TI*", "*If we do not have anyone to lean on*"..... (Page 5)... "*As mother cat licks the kittens' body in gentle caress with her tongue not to clean its body but to stimulate and trigger her body inner functions; so does human babies require motherly touch to begin the processes of intelligence and affection*". The model is a Nigerian Woman, symbol of the motherland being recreated through the tortuous process of braiding!

The braiders' engagement signifies the process of getting the task of nation rebuilding done. Symbolized by the head of a Woman being adorned with colorful beads, indeed, Nigeria being remade by all irrespective of ethnic affiliations. In fact, this is the country undergoing the needed processes of rebuilding of intelligence and affection. The sensory faculty of touch *via* the fingers and the instrumentation of *Iwa* (through rhymes and poetry) touch and rejuvenate the artistic calibrations of living cultures celebration of pleasure.

The capillary streaming of power as the mainstay from the first *coup d'état* 1966 through the throes' of civil democratic attempts at ruler-ship is *Ija's* metaphor on the power structure in Nigeria. Like a Foucauldian thread the braids stream-like take off from the brow, this alludes to the beginnings of the collapse of the social order and the loss of values imploded in the 1966 *coup d'état*. With unconscious "*replays, repeats and recalibrations*" (Michel Foucault: 1995) in spirals characteristic of the python's spool is manifest in the nation's history. Hence, *RAIDERS* reports directly the significant break down of order and its replacement with the chaos, collapse of the socio-economic system of old Nigeria, and the implantation of corruption and decay.

Braids express a new aesthetics that celebrates the "head" as a source of beauty, but also of deep intellectual activities. In expression by way of symbolic fictional figures and truths about human existence and experiences directed to meet desires of the eyes but producing artistic awareness celebrating home-grown forms of rejuvenations in Yoruba culture; *Ija* invents and recalibrates a new aesthetic.

The metaphysics of the woman's hairdo is a censure for the rehabilitation that the nation deserves. The narrative stated starkly may read thus: "*today generations later, raiders and robbers who seek to take anything by force even when it does not belong to them, resort to the use of the almighty AK47...And their other counterparts who would not use the AK47, use the pen, and the power of their offices most often than not, to inflict same or greater injury*" (*Ija Logbomo* Interview, 2022).

Confronting each painting as a rude reminder of the reality that he/she languishes in, the viewers simultaneously are faced with a cinematographic array of imageries that roll out the real situation as it downs on them. That exposition jolts the viewers to the realm of fictionalization. In the process a narrative of the discourse of the messages in each painting ensues. By recognizing what has been defined by time, *IJA* assumes his own space in the discourse of “*the Nigerian condition*”. That initiative approximates Beat Wyss’ (1999:194) reflection on the artist and the value of artworks, thusly, “*Creating space means naming the time that one has experienced. Anything that defines things binds them; it seizes what is immediately lively and wrenches it out of its obsessive twilight, in order to turn it into a tangible freestanding form. Art is a naming signifying act.*”

IJA’s paintings make the perception and experiences of the Nigerian time especially visible by a measured coercion that forces the images that the artist’s peculiar memory has captured, which otherwise may have gone unnoticed (in the Nigerian existential indifference to fate and memory into a composed agenda or symbol). The symbol is the tangible referent that finds signification in the framework of time and space, the two inviolate means of experiencing history. Addressing cosmopolitans, not provincials; like a school head master, *IJA* rebukes the elite for the ruin and mess the ordinary folks are stuck in. It is the survival of the fittest for those who dare muster the audacity to face stark survival.

KWARRAPTION (Fig. 8)

Directing attention to the collapse of public institutions and general infrastructure, *IJA* points the search light on the *Loot Loot Petroleum Corporation, LLPC KWARRAPTION* (Fig. 8). In satiric imagery, it points to the betrayal of national trust rampant in the monoculture economy, Oil and Gas. Key persons, male and female swimmers, are on the run with their visibly stolen barrels of oil. They are aggressively caught in the rough and wild sea. Their attempt to runaway causes giant bubbles to form creating a starry night-mere scenario. An immersive atmosphere suggests late sunset somewhere in *Forcados*, in the remote Niger delta smaller bottles’ repeats are presented as capsules replicating the scenario of bunkering and symbolic “*running away with the property of us all*”. In almost life-like reflection that *seascape* reports the reality of pollution; and the harshness of daytime experienced in the Niger delta as a result of illegal petroleum production. Ordinary locales are caught as onlookers in the spectacle that would claim their lives. The artist says to the exhibition viewers for how long would ordinary folks remain as on-lookers in matters that determine their health, fate and family?

In *KWARRAPTION*, the artist makes Oil and Petroleum the bane of corruption. Prominently featured are two giant patent product carriage drums; the rest of the immersive seascape is dominated by a kaleidoscope of satellite imageries that capture myriad commercial activities in the waterways of the Niger delta. The principal characters of two bold swimmers report the domination of a minority few in the scourge

of the land. With its imageries *KWARRUTION* reflects on the hardship and suffering of ordinary folks in spite of the tremendous blessings the rich land possesses. Pursuing the discourse of the denial, hence the hardship of ordinary folks from the good life in, an otherwise, oil rich nation draws attention to a more gruesome scenario: War, Civil strife and destruction.

In spite of its melee of vexatious images, *PHCN* offers glimmers of hope in an ever kind God. Engaging symbolic imagery of change represented by *THE MYTHICAL ELESHIN, THE HORSE MAN* (Fig. 9) mystic statements of hope are rejuvenated. These are symbols of Apocalypse and Change, all celestial glimpses of light that reflect the real peoples' predilection with the Merciful God, the citadel of hope, faith and charity. These images undergird "aboutness" and demand interpretations for the story takes a definite cultural turn. *Lobomo* moves his narrative on the matter of probity and the restoration of the derailment of values to the sphere of the intellectual, the esoteric and the spiritual threshold; calling forth the reality of *habitus* in the discourse of cultural capital.

MYTHICAL ELESHIN, THE HORSE MAN (Fig. 9)

Citing Wole Soyinka's *Eleshin, Death and the King's Horseman* (1975) *IJA* engages a proverb in proffering a solution "*Ati je asala (awusa) ko to nu omi sii*", appropriately translatable as, "*Eating the awusa nut (Hausa Gworro) is not so difficult as drinking water afterwards*".

ELESHIN is symbolic for the needed cleansing of the stable, the motherland, and a repositioning of the nation on a path for restoration. In a word, *IJA* puts forward that the *bourgeoisie* volunteer suicide. Like *Eleshin*, the king's principal officer, the elite should accept ritual suicide as a condition for the spiritual transition of the nation from the cesspool of failure and disruption for the beauty of a greater tomorrow.

The prescription is most appropriate: the breaking of the cosmic order of the Nigerian universe and the loss of the ideals nurtured in childhood verses, hence the collapse of the ethos of hard work, reflected in the idealism *Ise ni o unise* "*Mursi ise ore mi*", "*Work is an antidote for poverty*". This loss is a consequence of the loss of well-being and the future collectivity of the peoples of the motherland. This is the tragedy that befell the nation. Openly advocating a Marxian style change as a recipe for the new turn desired to restore the honor and dignity of both land and citizenry, *IJA* confronts the powers that be.

The Nigerian condition is nuanced in a metaphysical fashion in the mythical human vehicle, *Eleshin*, and the world of the Yoruba mind: the entity of the living, the dead and the unborn; and the numerous passages which link it all. The essence of the prescription is a threnody for the lost world of real values and its propensity for the ethos of hard work, and dignity of labor.

Thus, *Eleshin*, depicted here as an oversized turbaned rider atop an epileptic ass, an epitome of the elite and privileged, overweight and exuding the excesses of enjoyment and a personification of the *bourgeoisie*, is the lamb that must voluntarily accent to suicide. This is a tough choice inflected in a Yoruba proverbial admonition to

force compliance: *Awodi to'o nre Ibara, efufu ta a nidi pa o ni Ise kuku ya*, aptly adaptable as *The kite makes for wide spaces and the wind creeps up behind its tail; can the kite say less than thank you, the quicker the better!*

Conclusion

PHCN is a relief from the vexatious mirror image of the talkative discourses of the sorry state of daily life in Nigeria (Wole Soyinka: 2005). The issues that engage them are troubles of the existential everyday: national survival and the plights of the ever-recurring moments of nostalgia for a great time gone by.

Beyond the reaction to the fleecing and embezzlements graphically reflected in *KWARRAPTION*, *IJA* criticizes the Presidency's anti-Corruption drive, debunking it as only an attempt to redeem embezzlement. *Lobomo* insists that the right thing to do is a national detour to the values that prevailed before the 1960s and a restoration of a national ethos of hard work!

Fascinatingly, the time frame, "1960 AD - YEAR 2000 AD", is significant. It is intriguing how tradition is enact able in ever- present time. Tradition should be perceived not as a set of conventions irretrievably regimented in a fixed past, but as horizons of a particular sort that are still operatives in continuous ways in the present. That thinking restates an enduring truism that the present will always lack meaning when not tied to the past that beget it. It is such that relating within the present and the multiple vistas of refinements that it has shed, *Foucaultian* style renewals in diverse forms, confound.

IJa's style and the tactics they under gird are tacitly valid translations of the past which all citizens of Nigeria share. His stratagem distills the past in tangible synthesis for contemporary appreciation. The master's methodology may appear *gauche*/, but that is sympathetic for it locates us all in the sphere of contemporary cultural production. This is replete in a natural human instinct to always seek essence in things by daring to link back to the roots. For what is the point of a grandiose future if its scheme is not grounded in our past. This is the thrust *IJA's* cultural recipe for change establishes in our consciousness as citizens. A proportionate venture and initiative, it is arguably an indigenous Nigerian arrangement that locates our identity alongside the germane internationally acclaimed ones.

These are not a set of sequestered regimes, not laid down principles but nodal points in a here and now. It is here we all act to bring about fresh understating of that past for the betterment of today and the future that is yet to come.

The reality that art makes visible maybe likened to so many veils' subject to varied interpretations. A work of art remains both a window and mirror to society. In this regard *IJA's* paintings are not fixed points of view and are of reference beyond their context of occurrence. Besides as documentations of, otherwise, fleeting moments on the real experiences of the nation, they constitute the frame work of a symbol for the reader's and exhibition viewer's consumption and enjoyment. That symbol is a spatial repository for experiencing time in the narrative. *IJA's* commentary in the exhibition catalogue remains an anchor for the viewer's reading of the images, in part by a deliberate tie with

an authorial intention. This is of immense value. That biographic template serves as a formal grounding that mediates a critical deciphering of the layers of meanings and messages in these, otherwise, plain but beautifully crafted pictures. The place of biography as a foundation for the sifting of artistic substance remains a pivotal point at discourse. That facet of background, largely ignored should be the focus of further study of exhibition images and their invariant imageries.

Exhibitions remain occasions for a stock taking of the “*condition of things*” in the land. Stern hope, faith in a better tomorrow and a sense of public decency, the images tell us of the ordinary folks of Nigeria. This pale sternness is like the sheet that spares us the sight of the overwhelming spectacle of a disappearance as a country. The spiritual is ever present as a means of the cleaning up of the stable of state and the renewal that the nation deserves.

Ija Lobomo's oeuvre reminds the viewer's gutturally of the simple visual power and responsibility of image making and image reading. While his artistic seduction lies in reinterpreting problematic images from the past. *Ija* merely draws us to his contemporary richly textured compositions that appeal without requiring neither overtly demanding for deep historical understanding nor critiques. These intimate yet cinematic works allow the ordinary viewers to understand an artist's motivation from a biographical perspective, a rich hybrid of multicultural experiences.

References

- Adorno argued that capitalist society produces cheap standardized art that deadens people's minds and makes them focus on fulfilling false needs, such as the desire for consumer goods, rather than their true needs for freedom, social equality, creative outlets, and the opportunity to fulfill their human potential.
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- Telephone Interview with IJA, Lagos, 10/10/2015
- The exhibition *PHCN, Please Help Clean Nigeria*, was held in the Red Door Gallery, Victoria Island, Lagos, December 2015. Ijalobomo, alias Lobomo, is the pseudonym of a popular water colourist and pastel artist. He wishes to keep his real name a top secret, according to the newspaper columnist Tajudeen Sowole (2016), *The Guardian Newspapers*, www.ngrguardiannews.com, January, 3, 2016, p. 31.

Appendix



Fig. 1: The Coffin of State / The Requiem



Fig. 2: Obioma Boy



Fig. 8: Loot Loot Petroleum Corporation



Fig 16: Eleshin, The Horse



Fig. 13: The Silhouette with AK 47