

Art PANTHEON



“ME & HIM”

BADRU x TÒRÒMÁDÉ

A TWO-MAN ART EXHIBITION



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Art pantheon Gallery
12D Bosun Adekoya Street,
Oniru, Lagos.

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Written contributions from:
Wunmi Adebayo
Joseph Omoh Ndukwu

Design and page layout:
Adewolu Abdul-Kazeem

Catalogue production & photography:
Nana Sonoiki
Adeola Sonoiki
Faniyi Oluwatobi
Adewolu Abdul-Kazeem

GALLERY STATEMENT

When we decide to trace the history of a dog, we cannot but tell the tale of the cooking pot that made the meat tasty, likewise no chef can cook the fireweed vegetables enough to rid it of its scent. These above statements set the tune for the exhibition you are viewing now. It is the reason as you would find out soon that this exhibition is being held in the first place and subsequently carrying the messages with which it has been laden. The number two is significant in a number of senses, I mean "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" the answer to this biblical rhetorical question needs no guessing to answer.

Historically, the artists on display have a long history together. They are graduates of the philosophically aligned Ife Art School, having been properly initiated into the depth of ideology springing forth wisdom from "The Source " as Ife is popularly designated. This is the reason for the dynamism in the approach to the arts that you will find in their works, from materials to medium and execution. They have engaged arts beyond aesthetics while retaining the lure of aesthetics, they have engaged the subject of art as a tool to inspire social debates and address human issues. While some may call them social commentators, these artists are beyond commentary; they are in a manner of speaking society's conscience, drilling deep into the annals of human interactions like engineers to create works that address the hidden issues of man's day to day life, drawing from history and a keen observation of their immediate and larger environment. If art was a coin produced in Ile-Ife, Toro and Badru have by the reason of this exhibition qualified to be the two sides of that coin amongst the numerous prodigious artists the school has produced. While Badru is a textile graduate of the Ife Art School, Toro is a painting graduate and both of them are by the evidence before you, distinctions in their rights.

Two sides of a coin is the parable that exposes the ideals of this exhibition titled Me & Him. It is the interrogation of the decision of two artists and their diversity of expressions using arts as a vehicle. From the theme one may infer that there is a side "Me" and side "Him" of the exhibition coin and that side is not a constant because if you view from Badru's side Toro becomes side him and vice versa. While it may be the intention of the artists to leave the audience to fix the puzzle on who is Me and Him amongst them, it is more revealing for this writing that the exhibition title is a puzzle with two sides seeking answers, as earlier mentioned the number two is important in this exhibition - Two artists, Two Unique expressions and two streams of messages, but the coin remains the same.



Me & Him-A Reflective Pairing of the Personal and Collective.

Me & Him, a duo exhibition by Oluwatosin Toromade and Temitayo Badru at the Art Pantheon Gallery, Lagos, is a display of paintings that take a long lens to our personal and traditional possessions and inheritances. Even when the most ordinary of things are taken as subjects, there is a knowledge of – and a homage to – Nigerian traditional values and historical motifs. It's necessary to think of what interactive energies are created by the pairing of the personal and the traditional (the historically communal) by both these artists.

In *The King Makers* (2022), Badru paints 6 figures against a yellow background. They are holding staffs and their faces are wizened. Badru takes care to show the dignity of their office and the influence they wield by how carefully he renders the details of their attires, headgears, aso-okes, and beads. The expressions on their faces is, perhaps, what is most riveting about the painting. There is puzzlement, consternation, anger, curiosity, and indifference. We are left to guess at what could have them so divided in their expressions and thoughts.

Badru's work brings us into confrontation with the different patterns that could be arrived at when looking at a person against society. His works use mixed media: thread and nails, paint and fabric, acrylic and paper. The quest, it seems to me, is for a form that builds into a narrative of self, identity, and belonging.

"African proverbs, myths, history, traditions, religion and my environment are the sources of my inspiration," he says. There has to be a potency to proverbs and myths beyond their obviousness as pithy, wise sayings. A closer examination reveals them to be "the house of being," to borrow Heidegger's words. Built of language, they hold "being," which is not merely existence but an extension of its various idioms and expressions. "Being" here extends beyond just the individual to the world that shapes his perceptions and his ideas of self.

In *Gele O Dun III* (2021), a woman with a serene and reflective look ties her headscarf. Her blouse is an earthy orange and her lipstick and nails are fuchsia. She has beautiful eyes and the background is a deep mauve.

The frame is partitioned by a line that runs down the canvas, partitioning the woman's hand and face—the painting is a diptych. The line, however, does not create a double plane of meanings as one would expect of a diptych. Perhaps this is to hint at a centrality of theme despite the differing sources of inspiration that may inspire a work of art. Of the painting, Badru says, "The inspiration comes from a Yoruba proverb: *gèlè ò dùn bí ká mọ ọ wé, ká mọ ọ wé, kò tó kó yèni*: the headtie is not as sweet as the skill of tying, having the skill of tying is not as sweet as how well it fits." As much as a proverb is a way into the thinking of a people, it is also a way into the painting and the thinking of a person.

Oluwatosin Toromade builds stories onto each other in successive layers. Writing this, I am thinking of the power of montage to build up in us a way to defamiliarize visual experience. Writing about Andy Warhol, Geoff Dyer explains that the pop artist takes what is familiar—images from adverts, newspapers, and popular media—and reinvents them, as though they were things we had never seen before, teaching us anew how to see. What had become invisible due to their banality, had now been given renewed visual force, had been made, in fact, into sites of uncomfortable truths. Toromade is not Warhol. Their styles are as distant from each other as possible, but at the heart of his work is a similar question: How do we see ourselves anew? How do we look again at our familiar joys and everyday struggles?

Art is looked to, almost universally, for beauty. But beyond beauty, the paintings in *Me & Him* appear to prod. Prod may seem a rather unusual word. But I use it in the sense of an earnest and well-intentioned challenge. When we fail to truly look at ourselves and appreciate what we have and who we are, then we could do with some prodding, some chastising even. The paintings push us toward self-examination and reclamation. Paintings like Toromade's *Ayaba I & II* (2021) show portraits of feminine faces staring right at us, as if in direct metaphor. The gaze that stares is the gaze that invites as well as enjoins. By their looking so directly at us, we get the sense, almost like an instantaneous reaction, to look at ourselves and try to see.

"In this exhibition, I have chosen to celebrate," Toromade says, explaining the presence of balloons in his work. "Balloons are symbolic of celebration, yet they have a short lifespan that can be easily interrupted." This fullness of vision—one that holds, as if in one breath, celebration and its abrupt cessation—is how the stories of persons are told.

Balloons with big grins float by young men with glum faces in Toromade's *Modern Happiness I & II*, two of the most reflective paintings in his *Balloon Series*. One of them stands, with his hand on his waistband, while the other sits slouching to the side. As if in a musical score, the cherry balloons and the glum faces, work in counterpoint, building towards a single, intense harmony. It reminds me of Fela's suffering and smiling. Perhaps, this is the overarching melody: Every life is a motley of both the cherry and the gloomy.

In the *Sojourner Series*, we see men with shaggy hair moving toward some destination. They are painted in profile, a technique employed to help us appreciate their progression. On closer looking, we are almost convinced that the figures are one man. One man in the different stages of his journey.

Badru's *Breathe, Problem No Dey Finish* (2022) shows a figure, still in profile, bearing his head out of water. The water, patterned on the canvas with lines, cheques, and triangles, are the problems in which a person can be submerged and suffocated if they don't allow themselves to breathe. Again, the pairing of defeat and struggle with triumph and respite.

When Toromade and Badru had reason to have a duo exhibition, they likely may have called to mind the image of two sides of a coin, or more accurately, as seen in the show's promotional design, two halves of a frame. They decided on works that address this duality: the personal and the collective. They insist on the wisdom of looking at the personal through the collective, and the collective through the personal. The collective gestured at by *Me & Him* branches across history,

tradition, and the broad collage of identity made possible by society. For Toromade and Badru, it is clear that taking this dual and interlinked approach to self-examination is the only way we can reap any real insights.

Joseph Omoh Ndukwu is a writer and editor living in Lagos, Nigeria.



TWO SIDES OF A COIN

When we decide to trace the history of a dog, we cannot but tell the tale of the cooking pot that made the meat tasty, likewise no chef can cook the fireweed vegetables enough to rid it of its scent. These above statements set the tune for the exhibition you are viewing now. It is the reason as you would find out soon that this exhibition is being held in the first place and subsequently carrying the messages with which it has been laden. The number two is significant in a number of senses, I mean "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" the answer to this biblical rhetorical question needs no guessing to answer.

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Badru's Side of the Coin.

If you are familiar with Badru and his sojourn as an artist, one thing you cannot deny is the obvious and continuous evolution of his style. In a way of description, Badru is an "Alara" and Ara ii tan nile alara which could be translated as "there's no end to the wonders in the mind of a creator" but in a more grammatically acceptable sense "wonders never end". Badru is a potpourri of restless experimentation always trying his hands on new things especially in the combination of materials and mediums to express his ideas. However, one constant in his evolution has been the deployment of African inspired motifs as a unit of inspiration for his many expressions. The bond between Badru and the use of these African motifs is inseparable as he has evolved the use of these traditional motifs, finding meaning for them in contemporary themes, when you thought to have seen the most of Badru, his styles and bond with African motif (chiefly Adire), he brings up a new one and you wonder How come?

Gèlè ò dùn

In this exhibition, Badru has chosen to present works drawn from simple everyday activities to reveal his messages. Taking a look at Gèlè ò dùn IV & V, he captures the stylish age long tradition of tying headgear amongst women in a style that is painterly yet graphic enough to capture the sight of any viewer. Gèlè ò dùn is a portrait of a young lady attempting to tie her elegant headgear into a fashionable complement for her outfit, the title gives a context to what might be happening beyond the simple fashionable act.

The complete words from which this work derives her title can be traced to a yoruba maxim turn chorus

"Gèlè Ò dùn, bí ká mọọ wé,
ká mọọ wé, kò dàbí kó y'èni,

when used in a lyrical context there's a response to these lines

"Èyí yẹ ẹ o, Baba ta ló sọ pé kò yẹ ẹ."

These yoruba words reveal that tying the headgear is a form of art in itself, so much that the very action of tying is ascribed its own adjective in yoruba "wé". The knowledge of the art and skill of gèlè wíwé was a highly coveted one among traditional women and it is still so till date. The beauty of gèlè can only be appreciated when gorgeously wrapped to adorn the head of any female with style and poise. It is worthy of note here that possessing the skill of tying the headgear is the first step in the process, having an eye for the befitting style that best compliments the dressing or person is where sweetness lies, and that's where every woman

wants to be. It is this eye for the perfect fit that produces a bountiful harvests of compliments from admirers. In this series of hand embroidery paintings, Badru reveals the struggles that humans go through before becoming the appeal of all eyes. He captures the ladies in the process of tying (which might be deliberate), showing that before the gèlè became an adorable object the wearer has been through a chain of decisions and attempts from flapping to rolling or even squeezing and others that you can imagine. Before the gèlè can be complemented with the chorus "è yí yẹ ẹ o" the wearer must have gone through a process that is hidden to the admiring public. Badru brings that process into light through this painting for us to appreciate the process of gèlè tying as a metaphor for the everyday processes we undergo as humans working towards our goals.

Could this be breakfast?

Could this be breakfast? (Taste & Feeling series), is Badru's address to the rampant and contemporary matters of heartbreak that has now been colloquially tagged "Breakfast" and is being served daily to male and female alike. In this painting, another young lady is seated in a leisurely manner engrossed with her mobile phone with a glass of wine in her hands. The title connects that she is about to open a message that could be a "Breakfast" she is about to be served by her lover. It is no news that human relationships in the 21st century are facing new challenges and relationships between lovers have not been spared of these challenges. For the younger population growing in a digitally influenced world, the connections to reality that they can lay claims to is very lean in actual fact the virtual world is their reality. Decades ago this phenomenon called Breakfast wouldn't have been an issue, because of the limited access to interconnectivity witnessed today, the breakfast would have been served via a handwritten letter posted weeks ahead of its reception. In this digital age it is served and received instantly through instant messaging platforms. "Breakfast" as a subject isn't a new idea but the alarming rate at which it is fast becoming part of a generation's norm and a likely outcome for most romantic relationships is what calls for concern. The demeanor of the lady especially her facial expression suggests an indifference in the outcome of the message she's about to receive as they say "I cannot come and kill myself". She is obviously a "baby girl" (a word used to describe ladies whose concern is how they would enjoy their lives to the fullest without the encumbrance of any emotional entanglement) adorning a premium gold chain. She seems ready as she sits and sip wine to the messages. Badru's choice of earth and skin toned colors here add to the mood of the painting and one isn't sure if that is done with intention. The surrounding environment screams of some dizzy, not fully conscious/sensitive to reality here and uncertainty.

TORO'S SIDE OF THE COIN

Toro is a draughtsman and this is perhaps his most valuable asset after his artistic mind. I dare to say, anything Toro cannot express in drawing cannot be expressed. He painstakingly interprets ideas using lines and shapes. He combines this with an understanding of the interplay of light on objects and you cannot but notice this seeming obsession in his works laying one brush stroke against another. These two attributes have continually dotted the face of his alluring oeuvre. As a young graduate in his early days out of school, Toro in a frantic search to distinguish his realistic approach to painting found the exploration of combining acrylic and charcoal fascinating and he would spend the next decade expressing his themes using this new found medium. Known for striking portraits with facial expressions capable of sparking conversations within his viewers, his brush wears an unseen cassock that qualifies him to be a preacher, creating works that generate conversations that call society back to the place of introspection. In this exhibition, he has presented works that leave one with questions unending.

'The Sojourners' exemplifies his signature use of monochrome renditions to engage a thematic aspect of human sociology presenting a visual puzzle that is yet appealing with droplets of colorful balloons flying in the sky either held by the human figures or just above their heads.

The leader of this group is wielding a staff in his hand and is more clothed than his followers, suggesting a shepherd leading his pasture. The brush strokes used here are left in a seeming rough style that one would think that it is an unfinished work. This is a decision that might be reinforcing the title of the work. A conscious interweaving of brush strokes blurred into each other creating the impression of an alternate form of reality within which humans can be represented, while retaining the familiar reality of the human forms in motion. A first look at the paintings suggest a number of visual dimensions to the viewer, from the converging blurry brush stroke fusing into human forms, to the suggestion that the painting exists beyond the reality of moving people, coupled with a pictorial title, there is a beyond what you see in this painting presented by Tòrò.

The word Sojourners in the title is instructive of the temporary state or estate of a particular subject, interpretatively, the continuous movement of a subject from one state to another. The common denominator in these two definitions is a temporary state occasioned by movement. This attests to the first biological characteristic of any living matter - movement.

The sojourner is a sociological metaphor, reinforcing the fact of nature that humans are constantly changing by moving from one state of mind to another and that the very nature of our movement as humans is responsible for our designation as 'The Sojourners'. The addition of balloons in this particular painting makes a statement, balloons are symbolic of celebration, yet they have a short lifespan that can be easily interrupted. As we sojourn through life, we find reasons to rejoice at some point without losing that part of us that is always in motion. This can be summarized in the common slang "we move". Whenever the balloon is bursted and the cotton seems to wind down on celebration, "We move"

Tòrò's use of brush strokes in a flowing manner is reminiscent of poetic enjambment and suggestive that in our journey as humans we are likely to flow into each other, and touch each other in different states. This borders on a yorùbá saying 'omi lè'yàn' and another pidgin saying 'No condition is permanent'. While the former is a testament to the unrestricted nature of our human connections, the latter speaks of the power in human motion.

Untitled (Ballon Series)

This particular painting in the Balloon Series is a deviation from the norm for Toro. In this painting, he goes out to show his dexterity in the use of color to achieve a full scale painting. This piece is both powerful and strange at the same time coming from Toro. The reasons being that he painstakingly embellished the lady's gown in a rendition that is more graphic than painterly (a more realist than impressionist approach), revealing a temperament of Toro in painting that has not been known to the public before now. Additionally for an artist notorious for painting portraits, the use of a mask as face for a human figure here calls for some purging. In an encounter with Toro in his Ibadan studio while he was making the sketch of this work, he affirms that this is a new introduction into his body of work but the message chooses him and not the other way round. A masked lady in a flora patterned gown holding black balloons flying in the air. When considered as an idea, the Mask within the context of African heritage is a symbol of many things; entertainment, religion and many others. One common marker is that the mask conceals the identity of the wearer and gives him/her a new identity within which there are new possibilities. The choice of a feminine looking mask might not be unconnected to the gender of the wearer and could be making a case for the scarcity of female masks in the African records. The message is not lost to the dramatic presentation of the painting; it is a grown lady using the identity that the mask avails to reach for things that her real identity has denied her. This is how most of us are today, in a fast paced world with so many things happening at the same time, we develop and hide behind coping mechanisms that avail us the platform to reach for what reality has failed to give to us. A lot of us put on our mask as new identities and it is unfortunate that the reality that those who encounter us know is the masked version of us.

Ayaba

In the Ayaba series Toro brings onboard his signature portrait painting with almost living facial expressions. In the Yorùbá language, Ayaba is the product of two words "Aya" (wife) and "Ọba" (King) which is literal for wife of the king. Traditionally, Yorùbá Obas were powerful and wealthy; in charge of all resources of the state. It was therefore some special kind of privilege to be associated with the royal lineage, talk more of being the wife of the king. It was some sort of Olympics amongst the women to be wifed by the King, the competition was stiff, it was almost the dream of every woman young and old alike to become a wife in the king's palace. Women went to any length to make sure they were named in the number of them that became wives to kings, younger women had the option of befriending an Àrẹ̀mọ - the crown prince in lieu that they will become the choice wife when he finally ascends the throne. The admiration, respect, honor and panache that accompanied this status was a craving almost every woman aspired to. It was an anomaly that any woman wouldn't aspire to this. Having gone through the trouble to be noticed by the king, the women enter into the palace and another phase of life unfolds right before them. Toro presents an oxymoron before us in this series, the facial expressions of these ayabas deny the glitz and glamor that their status is famed for. With emphasis on bold eyeballs staring directly at the viewer, almost capable of piercing through the viewer, the eyes seem to be carrying a message that is clear enough by the illusion created by the painter, like it was meaning to say uneasy lies the head that wears the crown in this case the head that bears the beads.

In conclusion, Me & Him is a product of the ingenious labor of two audacious art talents whose interaction with their physical and digital environment pushed them to frequent their studios for the purpose of presenting a body of work worthy to stand among the hall of fame of global art talents. It is also the intentional efforts of an emerging global art gallery in the struggle to showcase original art talents on the continent especially in Nigeria.

Congratulations to Art Pantheon, Badru and Toro for giving us this great show.

Wùnmí Adébáyọ, is an artist that writes with interests in culture, arts, politics and development. He leads an emerging creative agency @Lupitan and writes from Nigeria.

Wunmi Adebayo



Temitayo Badru

Temitayo Badru is a multimedia artist whose oeuvre ranges from work done in Textiles (using acrylic threads to create hand embroidery), sculpture, and installation. Badru earned a Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts (both in Textile) from Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Osun State, Nigeria.

A signature element of his works is his use of imagery and symbols from African wall murals and fabrics, most especially Adire Eleko fabrics, in creating works that have gone on to adorn private homes and institutions both in Nigeria and abroad.

Badru has participated in several successful joint exhibitions, art fairs and a solo exhibition. He's a recipient of many awards and was part of "LIMCAF 2017 top 4 artists" sponsored to 13th Dark'art Biennial in Senegal by professor ElAnatsui.

Badru has been able to assert himself in the Nigeria's creative space through the development of his unique style and constant experiments by creating linear abstracts and figurative works to evoke his ideas and feelings to the viewers.

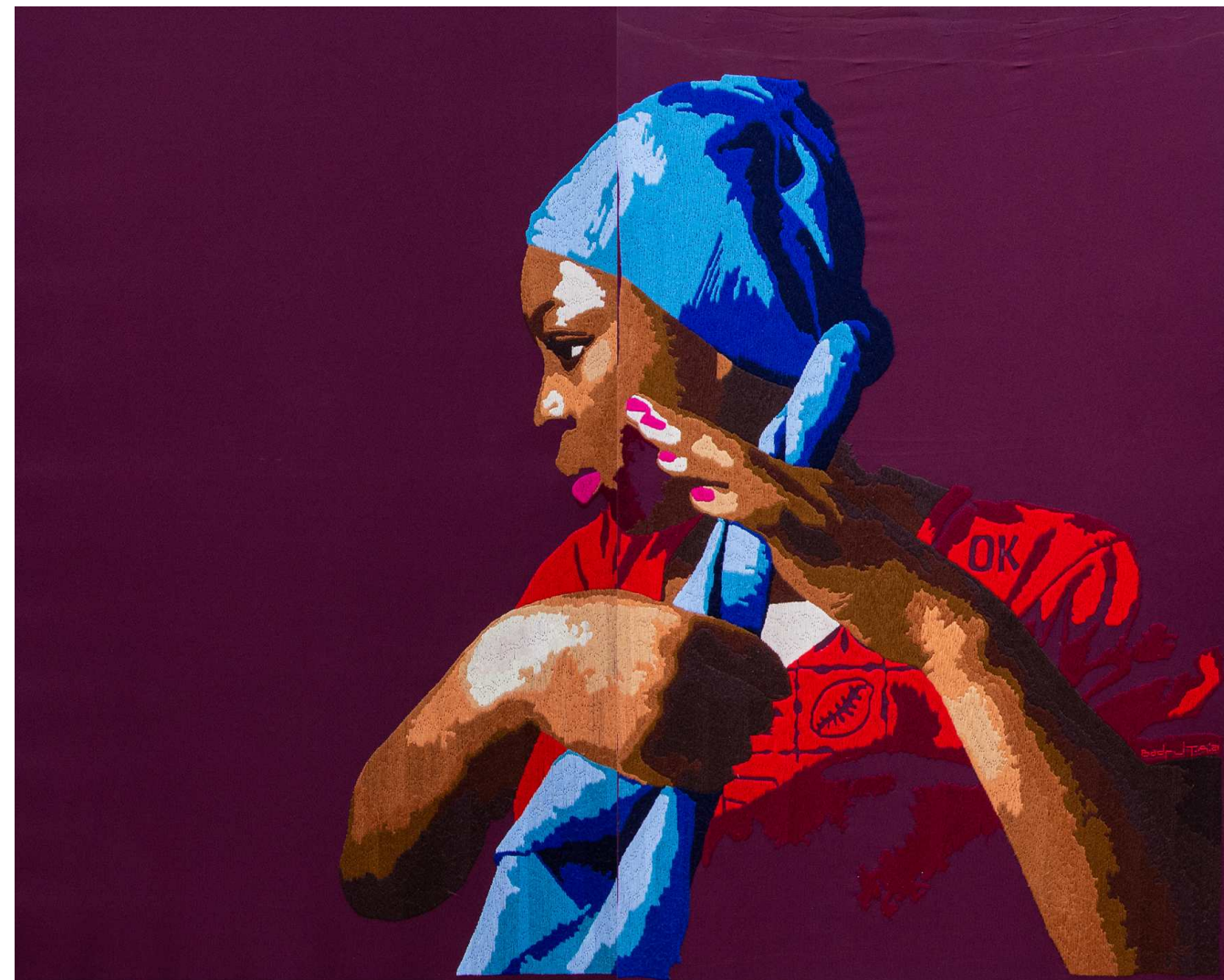


KING MAKERS (THE OSUGBO)

2022

ACRYLIC & NEWSPRINT ON CANVAS

60 x 72 in. (152.5 x 183 cm)



GELE ODUN III

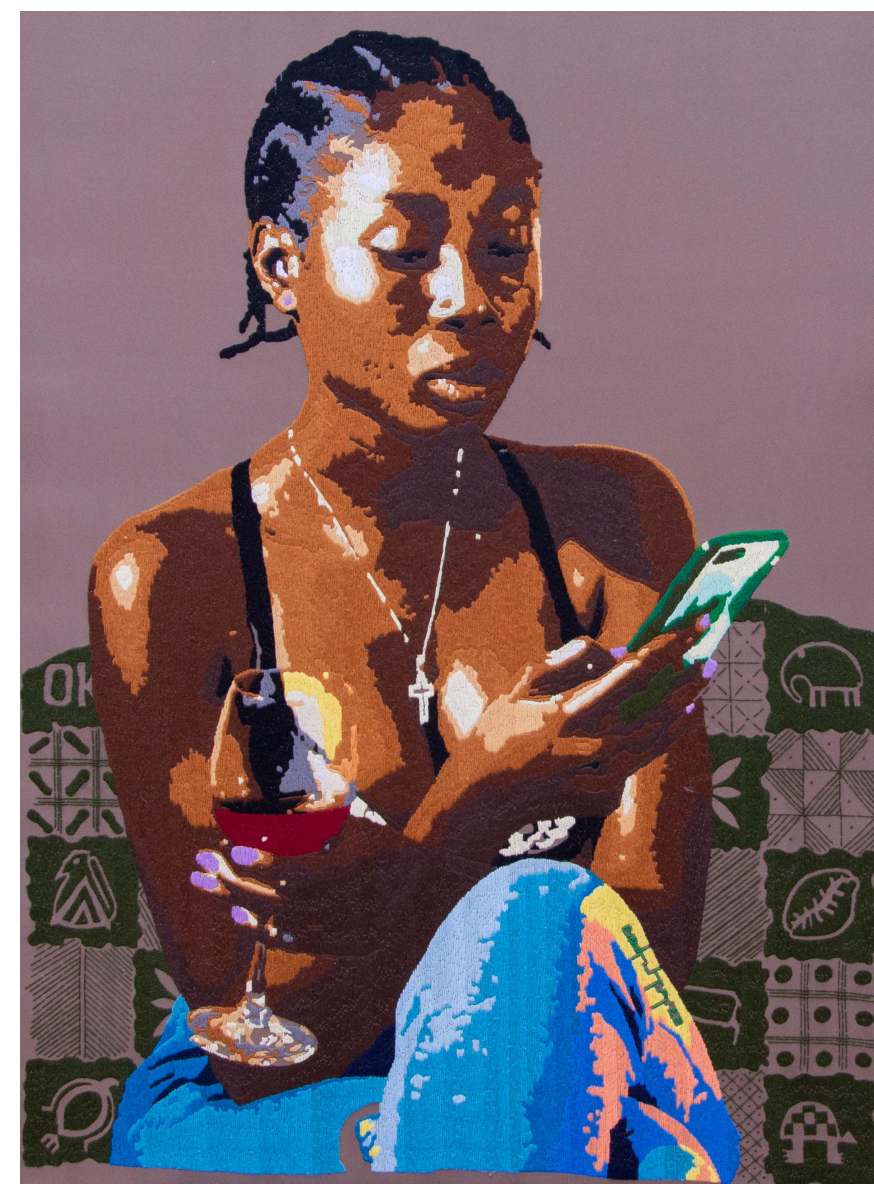
2022

Thread on linen

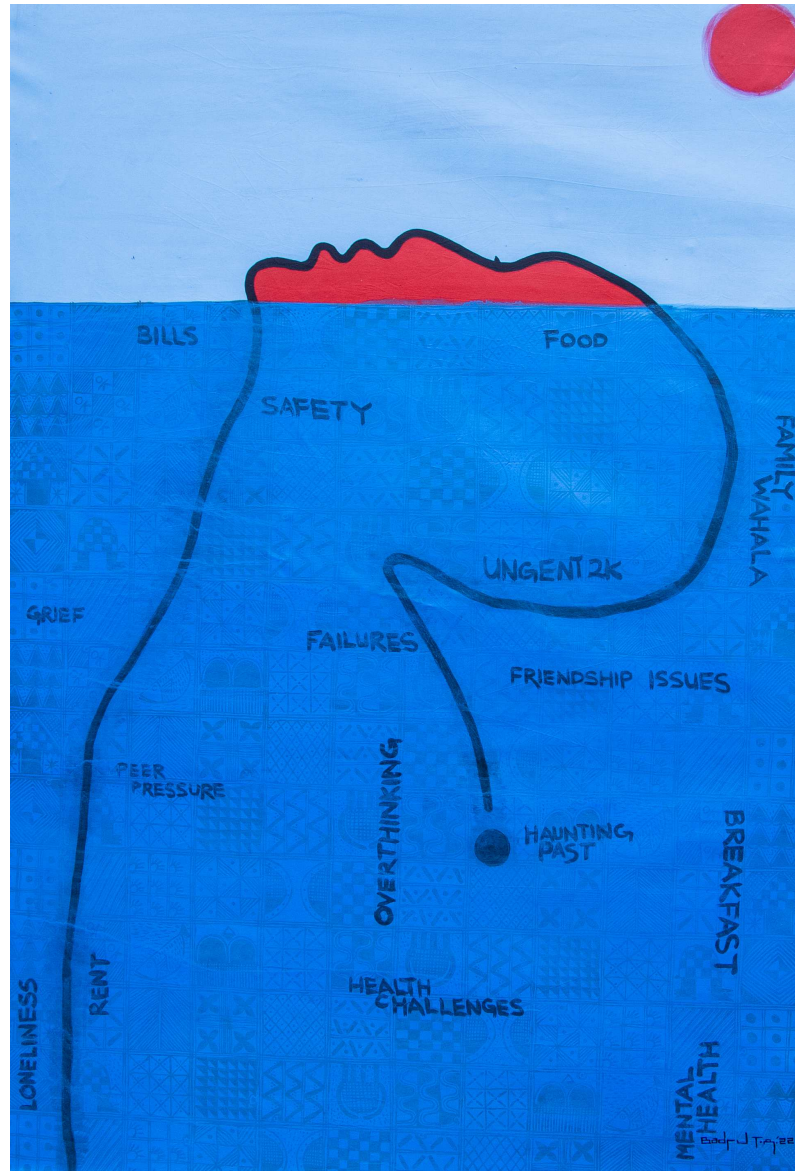
45 x 58 in. (114 x 147cm) (diptych)



ABAMI EDA
 2020
 Thread on linen
 36 x 48 in. (91.5 x 122 cm)



Could this be breakfast (taste & feeling series)
 2022
 Thread on linen
 36 x 48 in. (91.5 x 122 cm)



BREATHE, PROBLEM NO DEY FINISH

2022

Acrylic on canvas
48 x 72 in. (122 x 183 cm)



SELF PORTRAIT (TASTE & FEELING SERIES)

2022

Thread & acrylic on linen
36 x 48 in. (91.5 x 122 cm)

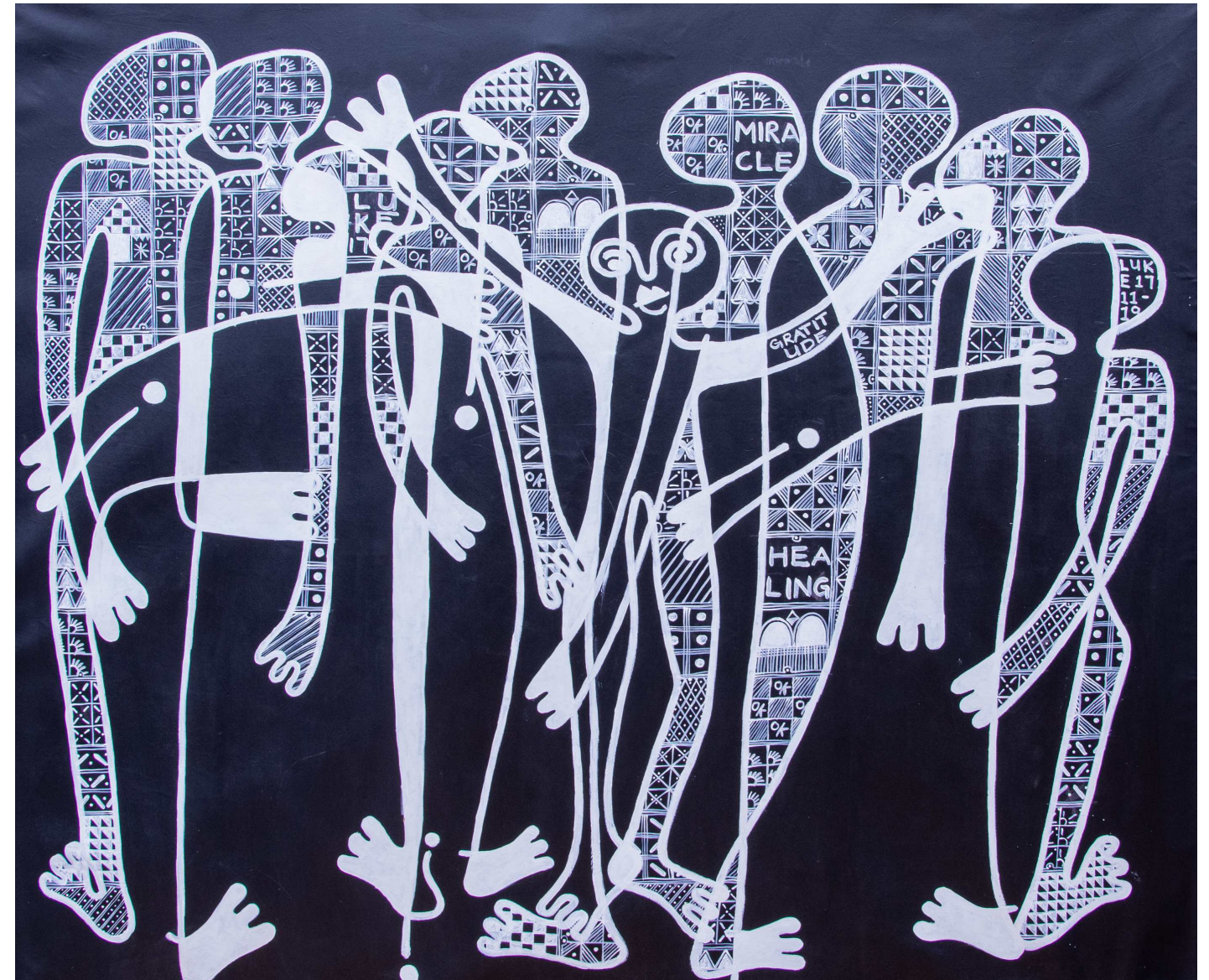


ESE GIRI

2022

Acrylic & newsprint on canvas

60 x 72 in. (152.5 x 183 cm)



TRMW (GRATITUDE)

2022

Acrylic On Canvas

60 x 72 In. (152.5 x 183 cm)



Tosin Tòròmàdè

Tosin Tòròmàdè was born in Lagos, Nigeria, and began drawing at a young age, delighting anyone who came into contact with his creative talents. His love in art led him to seek a degree in Fine and Applied Arts. He received his bachelor's degree with honors from Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

He is a seasoned professional artist, a multidimensional art guru, and a teacher who has chosen to express himself using new media such as photography, digital art, and most recently filmmaking, rather than traditional painting and drawing approaches.

He joined the Tender Arts Foundation as an Arts in Medicine fellow in 2019. His art therapy expertise and experience have also aided him in contributing to the therapeutic wellbeing of patients in a number of Nigerian public and private institutions.

He has carved a space for himself as a portrait and figurative artist with numerous successful group art exhibits and a solo exhibition. Through a blend of symbolism, texture, and iconography, he aims to

represent the shape, mind, mood, and expression of humanity, as well as the problems that come with existence and survival in Africa.

He is now researching visual art as a means of inspiration for everyone.

Tòrò, as he is affectionately known, is continuously seeking for new ways to capture events and make art through constant investigation of alternative creative materials such as charcoal and coffee.

Passionate art enthusiasts, collectors, and galleries have taken up residence in his works.

Tosin Toromade is based in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria, where he also works on his art.

EXHIBITIONS

- 2012 - Badagry Art Exhibition
- 2018 - "Coming out" I
- 2018 - Art west; United States Of America
- 2019 - "Coming Out II
- 2019 - A Piece of my mind - Solo Exhibition, Nigeria
- 2020 - Future Generations Group Exhibition



AYABA I- III (TRIPTYCH)

2021

Acrylic & charcoal on canvas

48 x 144cm (122 x 366 cm)



CELEBRATING SOJOURNERS

2022, Acrylic & coffee on canvas, 108 x 48 in. (274.5 x 122 cm)



THIS GUY (BALLOON SERIES)

2020

ACRYLIC & OIL ON LINEN

48 x 72 in. (122 x 183 cm)



THIS GUY II

2020

ACRYLIC & OIL ON LINEN

48 x 72 in. (122 x 183 cm)



TRIBUTE TO EBEN II (BALLOON SERIES)

2022
Oil on canvas
48 x 60 in. (48 x 152.5 cm)



TRIBUTE TO EBEN I (BALLOON SERIES)

2022
OIL ON CANVAS
48 x 72 in. (122 x 183 cm)



MODERN HAPPINESS I (BALLOON SERIES)

2022

Acrylic on canvas

48 x 72 in. (122 x 183 cm)



MODERN HAPPINESS II (BALLOON SERIES)

2022

Acrylic on canvas

60 x 60 in. (152.5 x 152.5 cm)



MASKED AND PROUD (BALLOON SERIES)

2021

ACRYLIC & CHARCOAL ON CANVAS

60 x 72 in. (152.5 x 183 cm)

