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# Seeing in Black and White



Damola Adepoju

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Manchester, UK.

**CHUCK**   
**GALLERY**

# FOREWORD

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## CHUCK GALLERY – THE FOURTH DIMENSION

SEEING IN BLACK AND WHITE is the third Art Exhibition by Chuck Gallery within a period of six months. For anyone who understands the intricacies of identifying the artist(s) to showcase, putting up an art exhibition and attracting art lovers and collectors, Chuck Gallery is moving at the speed of light. How does this happen? It is obvious that art galleries do not curate themselves. So who/what enables the artist, his work and art lovers to interface within the space which we know as CHUCK GALLERY?

The latest paradigm in Community Development which is taking the world by storm is the ABCD model, a.k.a Asset Based Community Development model. Its primary tool is “asset mapping”, which simply means the identification, mobilization and utilization of local assets in order to improve community cohesion. The model works with four key assets namely: individuals, associations, institutions and physical assets. These assets share one commonality – their existence in a human world of five senses. However, there is a 'hidden' component – the CONNECTION - the lighting rod which enlivens and harnesses the Intention set, ab initio; the dream dreamer or the dream keeper. In the Native American Sweat Lodge tradition, she/he is called the Fire Keeper. This is the individual who arrives hours ahead of everyone to set up the fire which “cooks” until red hot, a minimum of twenty-eight granite boulders, ladles them into the Prayer Circle, and stands alone outside in the darkest of coldest nights, keeping watch and working effortlessly so that others

may experience, undisturbed, the ecstasy of the Sweat Lodge.

It is right to say that every successful endeavour has a Fire Keeper and, it is my sheer delight to write about the Dream Keeper, the human face of Chuck Gallery - Mr. Chukwudi Onwudiwe.

When he asked me to write this Foreword, he sent me two seamlessly crafted samples from the first two exhibitions. However, I choose instead to use this space to say “thank you” to him for two reasons. First, gratitude is the key to the Heart of God for it enables access to the Fourth Dimension or the zone of Infinite Possibilities. Second, for the passion and expertise with which he runs Chuck Gallery, thus ensuring that we can gather, meet with, build functional human networks and be part of a magical experience; within an ambient and welcoming space, which when you step in, you do not want to leave in any haste.

In actualizing the vision of Chuck Gallery, Onwudiwe answered the yearning of the artist (and his/her work) for visibility; and ours, for the opportunity to be part of a wider community of like-minded individuals with access to works of art which, may otherwise have not come into our peripheral vision. I have witnessed Onwudiwe at work and it is easy to see he has no vision of the potentials of Chuck Gallery . . . the vision has him! His zeal, attention to details, professionalism and willingness to ensure that we get the best from his collaborators are amazing. The strong suites which I find most admirable about this young man are humility, teach-ability and sense of gratitude for patronage, no matter how small.

A look at the pieces on exhibition speaks eloquently to his eyes for good arts. How does he know which ones to chose? I find myself musing. Good art is the 4th Dimension stuff... pure space unhindered by human time constructs... the sacred meeting point where past and future interface in NOW... albeit for a split second. Good art, at its best can be starkly and unpretentiously eloquent, it gently coerces us to stop... albeit for a split second and experience the magic of being alive. It unlocks something powerful in us, enabling the heart to sing with it, dance with it, cry with it and die, joyfully, with it. It remains a part of you once you have experienced its eternal radiance and beauty. You may not take it home yet you are joy-filled for the one who does - it binds us together and it will not let you forget. In a good piece the artist, his medium and the appreciator become one triune of (W)holiness, co-existing in timelessness and all isms are obliterated. Chris Echeta, one of Nigeria's foremost ceramic artists articulates these sentiments when he writes:

*The primordial vestiges of form exploration reside in the mental environment. It is the intangible arena where all designs, a part of which form exploration is, are negotiated. The explorative restiveness of this terrain cannot be accessed by the five physical senses. Until these thoughts are "downloaded" into the physical world, they remain private and unshared property of the creative plenipotentiary (the artist) and, in this case, the ceramic artist. (The ceramic artist and his clay: Chris Echeta discusses the relationship of form exploration, 2011).*

Good art must haunt the viewer out of every day complacency. I heard in every brush stroke of Damola Adepoju, Mother's voice calling me home to roost...Unleashing relentless tidal waves of longing reminding the prodigal that...I must go from this aching loneliness of my self-imposed exile.

Finally, we know that behind every 4th Dimension is a 5th, the rudder which steadies, the friend who believes in and orchestrate the best; the lover who affords one the space and peace of mind for creativity to thrive. IFEOMA, just writing your name brings smiles to my lips. You hold the fort while he forages to bring beauty into our homes. You take the prize for silently and seamlessly juggling demanding roles – friend, wife, lover, mother, medical doctor and quintessential cook. Girl, you make me proud to be an Igbo woman. Ifeoma Onwudiwe, you are the Fire Keeper's FIRE. Thank you.

*Okalete, May-Blossom Brown, Ph.D. describes herself and the "City Hermit". She is an ordained Minister from the Barbara King School of Ministerial Studies in Atlanta. A Reiki Master, she teaches healing as an integrated process which aligns the body and mind with Spirit, thereby creating Wholesomeness. Mother and grandmother, she is a firm believer in Traditional African healing methods. She works one-on-one enabling people to access latent inner potentials as a tool for peace, joy and self actualization. She lives in Bolton.*

# **GALLERY OWNER'S STATEMENT**

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The African continent, Sub-Saharan Africa in particular, is known for its diverse and robust cultures, these finding expression in varying creative media. The fabric of African culture, as revealed in colourful stripes through dance, music, poetry, visual art, theatre and other forms of expression, cannot be ignored. African artists, being also witnesses to society and posterity, endeavour to capture the experiences of their time and clime, while introducing an aesthetic that is identifiably African, so much that it warrants the term "African aesthetic".

A debate around the term "African aesthetic" is ongoing in the scholarly art community. What differentiates creative content from Africa? What peculiarities abound in creative form originating from the continent? Is there a uniquely structured style that originates from the region, for expressing African experiences? Wherein sits the continent in relation to western or eastern aesthetics? How significant is African aesthetic in global academic cultural conversation?

The gallery stands on the shoulders of preceding academics and a scholarship that has proclaimed indigenous identity for African cultural produce. We call for more appreciation and aestheticizing of creative objects from the continent. Agreed, the global art market is dominated by European, Asian and American artistic produce. Nevertheless, it is necessary to push

that African identity as reflected in African arts. Understanding the African aesthetic and how it is applied to artistic output and appreciation is important. This will invariably support efforts to market and promote African cultures and traditions to the world. When we are clear about what distinguishes we Africans in terms of our identity, it helps to present and paint Africa in the light we want it seen. So, by unceasing exposition of our aesthetic, the continent's art history and cultural values become deeply entrenched in the collective memory of society.

We believe our visitors will be delighted and disposed to creative content developed from outside UK, especially as we bring that fresh artistic voice to bear. More so, Africa's past resounding quiet when it comes to artistic production is undergoing renaissance.

Chuck Gallery fills that gap.

Though this is our opinion, it lends to the notion that, there is indeed demand for a difference in creative material. By the gallery's recurring exhibition of works by African artists, we are a step toward fulfilling multiple needs.

I wish you all an enjoyable contemplation of Damola Adepoju's paintings.

**Chukwudi Onwudiwe**



## CURATOR'S NOTE

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In contemporary times, the dominant trend in art has been to emphasize the intellectual over the visceral, and abstraction over naturalism. Aesthetics has become the ingredient for the soup that takes a leave of absence, with a promise that the worth of the soup would be preserved. Whether this promise is normally kept or not is a complex struggle of ideas, thought and criticism that's perpetually in focus.

At Marvel Arts, we are building up a challenge to this premise from a decidedly African perspective. *Seeing in Black and White* is an opportunity to explore the intellectual and visceral worlds of human experience, from the eyes of one artist who captures the world around him in ways that please the eye as well as the mind.

Permit me to make comparisons with one of modern art's dominant figures. Between 5th October 2012 and 23rd January 2013, The Guggenheim Museum, New York, hosted *Picasso Black and White*, an exhibition that showcased the "remarkable use of black and white throughout the Spanish artist's prolific career."<sup>1</sup> Picasso, who began with naturalistic expression in his art before veering towards a much more abstract style, believed that colour weakened the impact of a painting. The result of this belief was his emphasis on line, form

and symbols in communicating emotion and intelligent thinking.

Like *Picasso Black and White*, *Seeing in Black and White* will treat your sight and intellect to an assemblage of monochrome paintings that showcase Damola Adepoju's vision of Lagos and Nigeria, as well as his great skill with brush and acrylic. We have, however, introduced a few works of Damola's that use colour to great effect in communicating to us. In *Hope Passage*, for example, colour transcends the oft pedestrian clime of visual delight, and breaks into that zone where it becomes an active symbol representing the divergent—albeit intertwining—worlds of anguish and comfort.

In Damola Adepoju's works of art on exhibition today, we can connect dots of similarity with the art of Picasso—the man who invented collage in painting and whose scintillating intellectual curiosity and astounding achievements, have deeply influenced the culture of the 20th Century. In Picasso's *Guernica*, a 1937 black and white painting that triumphed as a strong response to the casual bombing of the Spanish town of Basque by Hitler's Nazi forces, the central figure of the painting—a bull—is filled with tiny vertical lines resembling the text of newspapers. This technique helped bring immediacy into Picasso's visual

commentary on the massacre at Basque, and the horror of war, by asserting that the message and context of the painting was newsworthy and deserving of global attention.

Damola has also brought that stamp of newsworthiness to bear on these masterpieces on display. In *Anonymous*, crumpled newspaper eclipses a refined naturalistic rendition of a human face to become a powerful expression of the anguish ever present in our world today.

While Damola's elegant naturalism stands in stark contrast to the Spanish master's fundamentally abstract style, he has made sure to tap deep into that raw power of monochrome, strokes and form that Picasso so excellently utilised. This approach to painting altogether imbues Damola Adepoju's paintings with the power to exuberantly express the beauties, horror, complexities and simplicities, that still punctuate our shared human experience today.

Samuel Okopi







Damola Adepoju  
"Home Sweet Home"  
38 x 25 inches

Mixed Media: Acrylic and newspaper on canvas

It is said that home is where the heart is. But what is home to us—a house or a heart? What leads our steps and memories back to our cabin of warmth, away from the pursuit of fantasies seemingly obtainable in faraway places?

Damola deploys newspaper clippings to bring about a dramatic effect: a squeeze that works like a mirage. It is interesting to see that he has concentrated this stylistic application on the footpath. Without much reflection, one can appreciate the reminder that tracing our way back to the spirit of our beginnings is not assured to be a smooth journey. Squeezing through the dark cracks of a broken heart and feeling for the bliss that once illuminated a seemingly perfect union, is one way an individual can tortuously trace his way back to his 'home'.

The most vibrant portion of the painting is the footpath. The squeeze indeed feeds our eyes a mirage; one that reminds us that though the journey home may be desirable, the heat from the sun as well as the clay baking beneath our feet, remain potent threats to our return to sweetness.

The mud-roofed earth buildings of Hausa traditional architecture represent the zenith of Northern Nigerian architecture. Hausa architecture is not famous for nothing. Ingenious construction techniques were developed over centuries by the locals in response to prevalent environmental concerns. High diurnal temperature variations necessitated the development of mud roofs held in place by palm trunks that were set in herringbone patterns. Together with the small windows, these mud roofs kept out, during the day, the dust, dry hot air, flies and bright day light, while allowing cool air come in at night.<sup>2</sup>

While **Northern Roofscape** visually celebrates the architectural heritage of Northern Nigeria, Damola captures the scenery with a strangely eerie rendition; one that differs considerably from what obtains in his other paintings on display.

The buildings are vertically stretched and the sky folds out like ghosts besieging a city. Perhaps the artist has, while documenting a heritage he takes pride in, unconsciously portrayed the fate of many African relics and historical sites which, once glorious, now stand as bleak testaments to the ingenuity that brought them to be.



Damola Adepaju

"Northern Roofscape"

38 x 28 inches

Mixed Media: Acrylic and newspaper on canvas



Damola Adepoju  
"Make Up"  
49 x 26 inches.

Mixed Media: Acrylic and newspaper on canvas

*She wakes up. A cloud of dread hangs upon her head. She heads to the dressing table. Once seated, she begins the ritual of masking her insecurities, one layer at a time.*

*She wakes up. Her heart flutters with the excitement of a girl who feels alive, free and indomitable. She heads to the dressing table. Once seated, she begins to pamper her face, ready to take on the world.*

In **Make Up**, Damola uses colour and texture in ways that maximise the potential for serious debate. Black transits to white behind the subject, portraying makeup as having the power to take a woman from a place of insecurity or inconspicuousness, to the bright spot of appreciation or recognition. We can also see this woman as taking charge of the narrative that will surely form around her new look, if we understand that the white area is a buffer that separates the judgement of society (represented by the patterned strip on the left) from the real person behind the veil.





Damola Adepoju. "Silent Contemplation." 25.5 x 37.5 inches  
Mixed Media: Acrylic and newspaper on canvas

Dejection. Depression. Despair. **Silent Contemplation** bears its meaning on its face. There is more, however, when we probe deeper.

Something is to be said about the news being the covering of this woman. The tabloids have broken many hearts by splashing their most private and sordid moments out in the open for public consumption. With this woman, it may be that her private matters now hang in the open like dirty laundry drying out in full glare of neighbours and strangers.

If we must judge, who are we going to blame for all that has led to this moment of shame and despair? A spouse that batters

body and heart? A government that hands down poverty instead of job opportunities? How about perennial failure in the pursuit of happiness? Is this to blame for her woes?

Maybe, in the end, the blame rests on the choices this woman—a mature, right thinking individual—has made.

And who knows if the debate, really, concerns a mature individual weighed down by mental health issues and the distress that comes with it?

Damola Adepoju  
"Sweetcorn"  
38 x 38 inches  
Mixed Media: Acrylic and newspaper on canvas







The trick of selective colour photography has been around for some time and it's been hugely popular among many photographers. But abuse of the technique has given voice to detractors even though some photographers with a keen eye for art still deploy this technique to elevate black and white photography to interesting heights.

It is delightful how Damola has borrowed a leaf from photography. He has incorporated this trick in **Sweet Corn**, like many other paintings on display, and made it his own. Importantly, the artist uses this technique to concentrate our focus on the subject matter of the painting. As the golden tones are true to the colour of corn, the sweetness of this roadside meal comes alive to our senses and we begin to understand why the well-dressed woman standing right in front of the rows of roasting corn, waits ever so patiently for her own sweet corn.









Damola Adepoju  
"Lights from Isale Eko"  
26 x 38 inches  
Mixed Media: Acrylic and newspaper on canvas

Lagos is indisputably the busiest Nigerian city, and Isale Eko contributes significantly to this reputation. Isale Eko, has been described by one Nigerian Daily (Vanguard) as the "commercial nerve centre of Lagos."<sup>3</sup>

Damola highlights interesting details in the foreground of this painting—danfo buses, rusted roofs, a lone shack at the edge of the highway—but does something more significant: He screens the subject matter from our view with a dividing curtain of newspaper clippings that hang from the sky.

It is a neat trick because these hanging columns of text become a portal through which we get a sense of what vibrant community must exist on the other side of the bridge. Isale Eko must be a beehive of activity we think, and maybe, when next we are in Lagos, it might be worth our while to board a danfo and head out to Isale Eko.





Damola Adepoju  
"Butterfly Love"  
50 x 25.5 inches

Mixed Media: Acrylic and newspaper on canvas

The beauty of butterflies straddles a spectacular range of variation that makes these insects irresistible references in popular culture. But the beauty of the butterfly is a fleeting, surface beauty; a stranger to the kind we associate with virtues like commitment, contentment, responsibility and self-discipline.

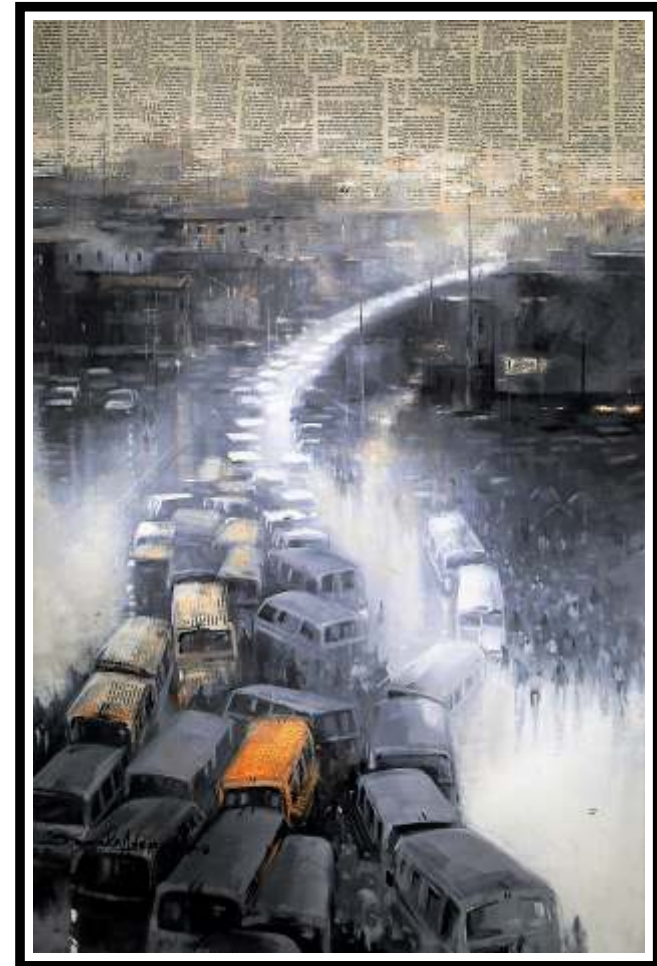
Many men, like butterflies, do not stick to the nectar of one beautiful flower. They come with colourful promises and gifts but fly away anyway to some other flower before fantasies promised their host, mature to reality.

In **Butterfly Love**, Damola invites us to ride on the strength of strokes and colours, into his powerful imagery. We take this ride deep into reflections of exploitation and promiscuity, and examine how these intersect with the concepts of freedom and consequence in a modern world as ours; where patriarchy stands in the dock and the voices of feminists rise to challenge the status quo.

One abiding trait of Lagos is its infamous traffic jams which force many Lagosians to leave their homes as early as 5am, every working day, if they ever hope to get to work on time.

The journey back home is another mad rush; where bright lights from street lamps, blaring horns tortured by impatient hands, and the commotion of thousands thronging streets and bridges, all combine with the night to unleash a magnificent kind of chaos that's distinctly Lagos.

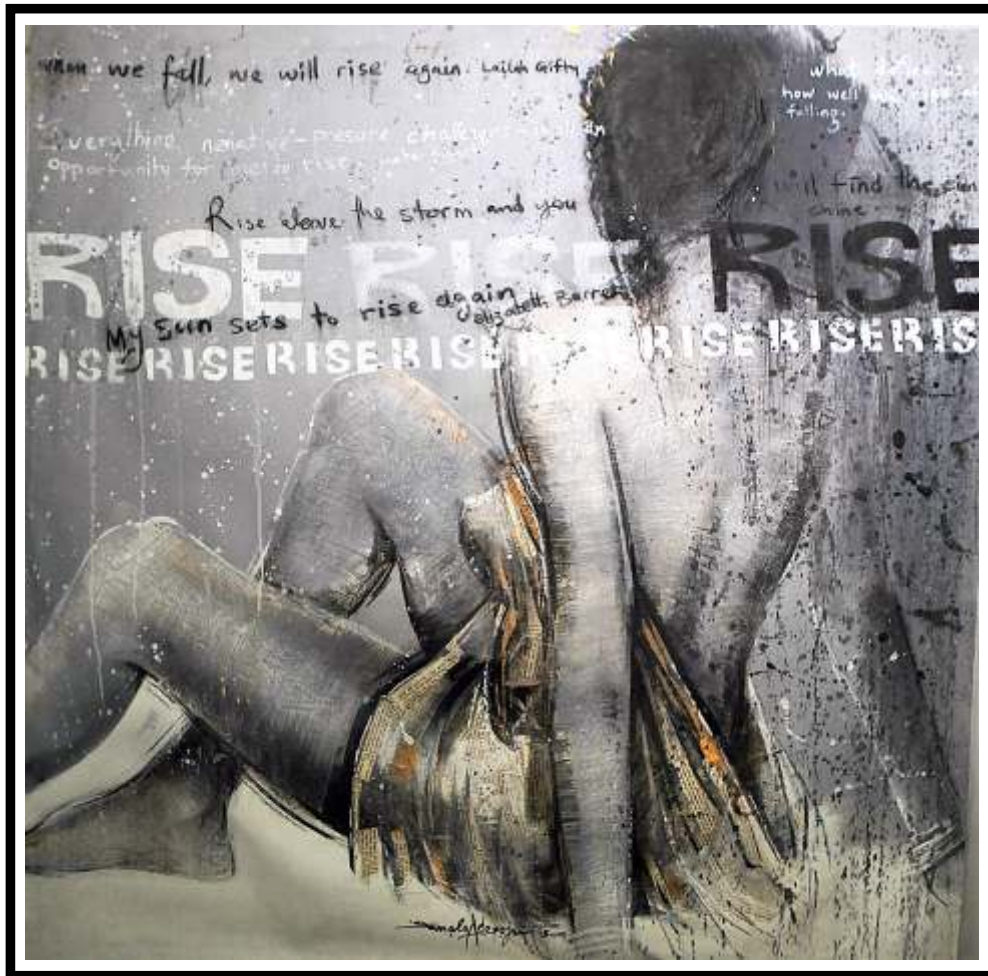
Again, Damola employs a curtain of newspaper clippings to great effect in this painting. Though the disorderly cluster of danfo buses and the crowd by the side visually buttress the chaos of the homeward journey, the drama gets a bit toned down by the neutral colours. But the mass of tiny writings hanging from the sky compensate for this understatement and add visual force to the prevailing narrative of chaos. In the end, the entire composition works perfectly; to mirror the bitter-sweet magic that typifies the homeward journey undertaken each night by the average Lagosian.



Damola Adepaju  
"Homeward Journey"

38 x 26 inches

Mixed Media: Acrylic and newspaper on canvas



Damola Adepoju

"Arise"

50 x 25.5 inches

Mixed Media: Acrylic and newspaper on canvas.

The textual and the visual combine in ARISE to give this painting the sort of power that art can assume in giving force to mass street protests. Without abandoning the evocative power of newspaper clippings, the artist has gone ahead to pull out text from where we would normally find them, making them rise to a place of intelligibility.

This act in itself is symbolic. The layout of the text is not uniform in size or shape. Together with the dripping paint and splotches of white, the text echoes the voices of many women screaming out for emancipation, as they rise each time from the defeat of their purpose.



Our world has become a very dangerous place. 49 gunned down in Orlando, United States<sup>4</sup>. 84 murdered in Nice, France<sup>5</sup>. Hundreds slaughtered in Agatu, Nigeria<sup>5</sup>. 4,780 killed by Boko Haram in 2015 alone<sup>6</sup>. 400,000 killed in Syria since March 2011<sup>7</sup>.

Anguish has become mankind's bed mate.

Horrific statistics gush out from our screens every day, numbing our minds with news of what latest brand of cruelty man has unleashed on his species. Again, here, the newspaper rises above the mundane to become a powerful medium that vividly captures the suffering and anguish experienced by millions of individuals today.

As world powers issue threats and counter-warnings, as proxy wars rage, as terrorists maim in the name of religion, Damola reminds us with his work that behind the contorted mask of statistics objectifying the dead and suffering, stand unique human beings with families, dreams and passions they hold or once held dear.

If we examine the issues this way, this work becomes a call to journalists and the media to make the news more humane, and much less about reducing the shattered orbits of existence around human lives to figures.



Damola Adepoju

"Anonymous"

37.5 x 25 inches

Mixed Media: Acrylic and newspaper on canvas



Damola Adepoju  
"Dialogue"

38 x 28.5 inches

Mixed Media: Acrylic and newspaper on canvas

Dialogue showcases, with bold strokes and vibrant colours, Damola's philosophical inquiry into family concerns.

We can make out the profiles of three women and a man. The man's head is crooked into a halo, and he seems in a state of anguish, caught up between his fondness for the woman by the left and the nit-picking of the lady by the right. It seems his entreaties for peace are falling on deaf ears.

The image of the woman at the far left is captured with gentler strokes. Perhaps the woman suggests a demanding mother who demands her son's total devotion. But then there is the story of the other woman: the one who lurks in the shadows and satisfies the fantasies of a man who, while married to two beautiful women, still searches for happiness outside the ring of wedlock.

In this second version of the Dialogue pair, there is less tension. Colour tones are cooler and the composition lacks one figure which perhaps, as presumed in Dialogue I, was the genesis of strife in this union between man and women.

We can tell that the man is now more relaxed as he joins the hands of his wives together, urging them to embrace peace. He has taken care to either keep third-party interference in family matters at bay, or become faithful to his wives.

While Dialogue I casts our focus on the place of infidelity and undue interference in marriage, Dialogue I extends the engagement to cover the true subject: that in all of this, the power in wise words still reigns supreme. And maybe this is a lesson for the global family of humanity to fight less and talk more.



Damola Adepoju

"Dialogue II"

38 x 28 inches

Mixed Media: Acrylic and newspaper on canvas





The power of this beautifully realistic painting is rooted in memory. A close look will ferry any Nigerian in the diaspora down the enchanting lake of memory as he or she absorbs the conjured images. They will recognise in the pot and firewood ensemble, an indirect reference to a significant part of Nigerian culture: 'Mama Put'.

Only a few Nigerians can claim to have never eating at a 'Mama Put' joint. It is not an unusual sight to see bank workers straddling benches, their hands transporting to their mouths, fufu or some other 'swallow' prepared by 'Mama Put'. For them, her food tastes better and is far cheaper than what obtains in the big franchise restaurants. And, acting on that belief, many of these white collar workers step away, each day, from the sophistication of their offices, and slither into shacks where the smoke, heat, flies or unkempt dogs, have no power to bridle a lust for satisfying food.

Damola Adepoju  
"Sweet Aroma"  
36.5 x 28 inches.  
Acrylic on canvas.



The Durbar festival, an exclusive preserve of Northern Nigeria, is a colourful procession that celebrates the Muslim holiday of Eid-al Fitr. One cannot help notice in this work, the leisurely brush strokes, the muted colours and the dominant spread of newspaper clippings.

It may be that Damola, born and bred in Lagos, wants to communicate that though he loves his country, he possesses a limited knowledge of certain aspects of its cultural framework; a truth which he cannot but faithfully record on canvas. The generous spread of newspaper clippings may be seen as the artist's acknowledgement that much of what he knows of this colourful festival has been gleaned from the media and not from leisurely travels to northern Nigeria.

On the whole, we can muse on the purpose of **Durbar Festival** as not merely a celebration of culture. We should see this artwork as representing a continuing dialogue of what progress Nigeria has made on its march to nationhood since the amalgamation of 1914.

Damola Adepoju  
"Durbar Festival"  
49.5 x 26 inches

Mixed Media: Acrylic and newspaper on canvas







Daniel A. Depozi





Damola Adepoju  
"Spirit of the Day, Egungun Festival"  
26 x 38 inches  
Mixed Media: Acrylic and newspaper on canvas

The Egungun Festival has been described as the most colourful of Yoruba festivals.<sup>8</sup> Not surprisingly, Damola, for who Lagos provides an exuberant milieu, has freely used colour in this painting to capture the spirit of the famed festival.

But it is the artist's incorporation of fabric that does more to deepen appreciation for the festival. Costuming is a key aspect of the Egungun Festival. Great effort goes into the choice of fabric that will be used in creating the many layers of clothing the masquerade will put on.<sup>8</sup>

Layering plays a significant role because as the masquerade dances and spins around, the layers of clothing swirl at different heights, adding to the majesty of the masquerade and his dance.



Damola Adepoju

"Isale Eko"

38 x 28.5 inches

Mixed Media: Acrylic and newspaper on canvas

Damola's fascination with Lagos seems to find strong expression in the vibrant district of 'Eko' called Isale Eko. It must be that for Damola, Isale Eko embodies the most captivating qualities of Lagos.

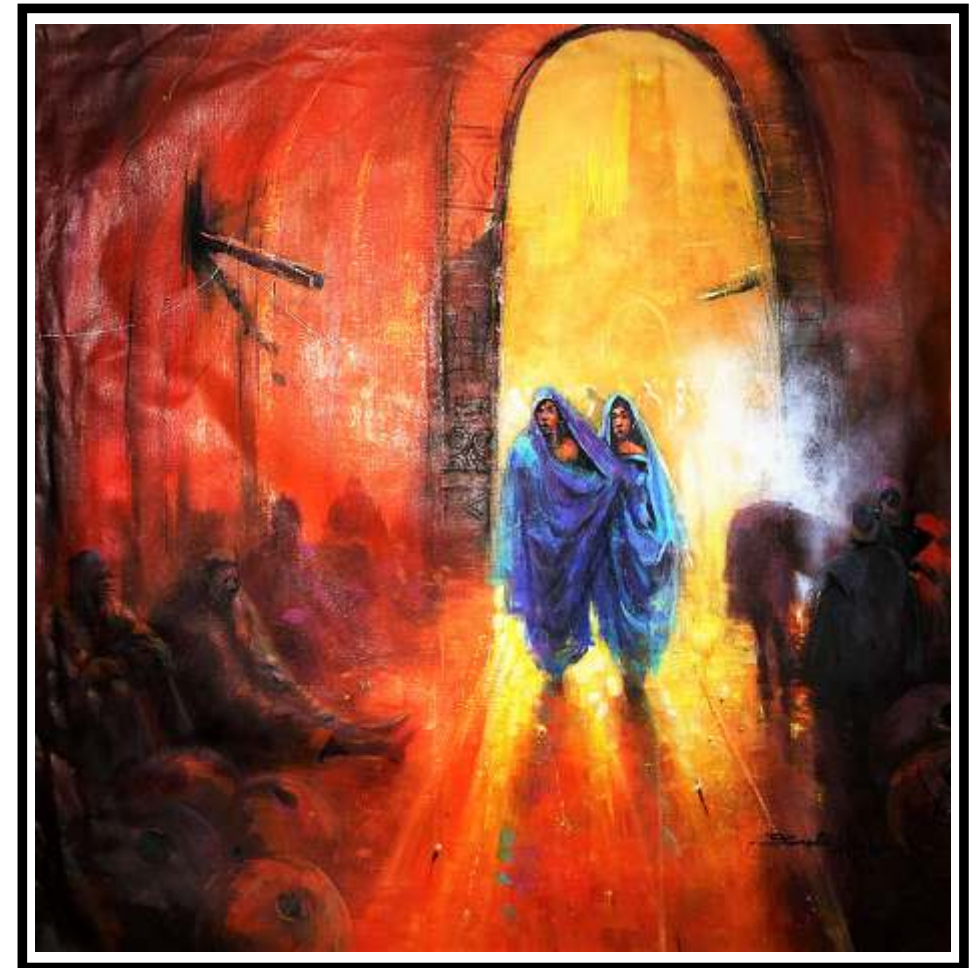
It is interesting that this painting has two names. The first we can assume without much deliberation: LAGOS. We know this from the newspaper cut out plastered on the painting like a beckoning signage so much that it becomes one with the vision of the artist.

**Isale Eko**, the other name, exists outside the painting. When we read or hear this name, and then cast our eyes on the visual impression it is meant to describe, we begin to see a sort of father-son relationship between Lagos and Isale Eko: the latter, a blooming seed, and the former, a proud primogenitor.

The concept of a heaven and a hell is firmly entrenched in the two competing religions practiced in Nigeria. The streets of heaven are paved with gold. Red pools of fire will never cease to burn in hell.

**Hope Passage** is essentially Damola's vivid way of giving form to the convergence of heaven and hell on earth. He says he wanted to portray how the less privileged in the society look onto the compassionate passer-by for succour. And so he floods the path of the two women with the gold of heaven's streets and shrouds the street beggars in the reds of hell. He is particularly intent on bringing our attention to the internally displaced persons lucky to have survived the terror of Boko Haram.

But what is the value, we should ask, of a kind of luck that robs you of your livelihood, invokes nightmares of loved ones lost, and leaves you at the mercy of a compassionate few? It's an ironic kind of luck that mirrors the brimstone of hell--which while luminescent like the glorious streets of heaven, is nothing more than fuel for perpetuating the pain and anguish of the lost.



Damola Adepoju  
"Hope Passage"  
38 x 37.5 inches  
Acrylic on canvas

It is delightful to see one painting by Damola dedicated to the subject of tricycles. Danfos have perpetuated themselves in artistic output expressing Lagos society. So, this work is a welcome relief as tricycles are an equally important mode of transport. In Nigeria, the three-wheeled transporter is commonly referred to as Keke Napep. In what was deemed by many as a laudable scheme at eradicating poverty, the then Olusegun Obasanjo led government, in year 2000, injected a substantial number of tricycles into society under its National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP).<sup>9</sup>

And the name stuck to this day.

Again, it is illuminating that the only hue Damola allows in this world he has recreated, maps to the true colour of Keke Napep. Perhaps, the artist, in focusing our attention on this lone Keke Napep and the serene environment he places it in, seeks to present this vehicle as a more intimate and convenient mode of transport able to take the

Damola Adepoju

"Oyingbo"

29 x 38 inches

Mixed Media: Acrylic and newspaper on canvas





Samolajdepajin





Damola Adepoju  
"Eko: Evening Mood"  
38 x 25 inches  
Acrylic on canvas

Rem Koolhaas, the famous Dutch architect who won the Pritzker Prize—architecture's own Nobel—in 2000, set out in the late 1990's with students from the The Harvard Project on the City to study Lagos. For four years, they visited Lagos regularly to find out what makes the mega city work<sup>10</sup>. Rem's comments in his interview with Guardian Cities summarises the magic of Lagos this painting has so vividly captured:

"...the state had really withdrawn from Lagos; the city was left to its own devices, both in terms of money and services. That, by definition, created an unbelievable proliferation of independent agency: each citizen needed to take, in any day, maybe 400 or 500 independent decisions on how to survive that extremely complex system. That was why the title [of the unpublished book] became Lagos: How it Works, because it was the ultimate dysfunctional city – but actually, in terms of all the initiatives and ingenuity, it mobilised an incredibly beautiful, almost utopian landscape of independence and agency.

"It [Lagos] looks like total chaos, but after a while you learn to recognise that it's not total chaos, because here are green things together, here are rusty things together, here are plastic things together. There's a constant ordering going on, and a constant disordering at the same time."<sup>11</sup>

But there is another subtle aspect to this painting that deserves recognition. At the very core, it is a tribute to the streetwise market woman and the role she plays in supporting her family.

As our minds rove the landscape of the market, as the figures become animated and the haggling and commotion take form in our mental world, the daily struggles of the modern day woman attains a new level of significance.

No longer do we take for granted, the effort she expends in juggling entrepreneurship and career with domestic duties.





Damola Adepoju  
"Eko Ile Evening Light"  
31.5 x 39 inches  
Mixed Media: Acrylic and newspaper on canvas

*The hustle and bustle of Lagos.* That's the common aphorism for Lagos that encapsulates the reason some abhor the city and others cannot see themselves living anywhere else.

The ambience of this painting is a calm one. Damola has captured the spirit of entrepreneurship possessed by those who cannot afford the rent of stalls but must do business anyway. Umbrellas shelter these traders from the heat of the sun and the unpredictability of the rains.

Danfos, striking symbols of the interesting kind of chaos that characterises Lagos, are absent. Instead we have taxis, and this frees us to focus on the calmer side of the Lagos hustle. In all of this, what is most thrilling is the artist's elevation of the umbrella. It now transcends functioning as shelter from inclement weather, and becomes a representation of all streetwise entrepreneurs whose economic circle lies on the fringes of the formal sector.





Damola Adepoju  
"Figure in Figures"  
31.5 x 39.5 inches  
Acrylic on canvas

**Figure in Figures** continues Damola's investigation into femininity. This is a haunting picture. Digits force a sense of urgency and alarm as we wonder what internal conflicts the central figure wrestles with as Time ticks away.

She is sinking into oblivion, obviously. It is only a matter of time before she drowns in this ocean of troubles.

Damola has used the colour blue in a powerful way here. He has employed it to build up a world of gloom, binding it with red—which warns of danger in the little block it takes up on the right—to fill up the figure of the woman with purple. The colour purple has always been associated with royalty. Is the artist saying to us that Woman is a graceful being undeserving of all the ill treatment society tries to drown her with? You be the judge.

Naturalism takes a back seat in this work, leaving the power of abstract expression to communicate what varied disturbing trends affect women today.



Damola Adepoju  
"Fusion"  
38 x 26 inches  
Acrylic on canvas

In the most abstract piece on display in this exhibition, blue strokes launch out with greys from the deep and interpenetrate themselves. Black strokes lurk behind as shadows, and around the centre, they appear in the limelight, encased in a convex of travelling blues and greys, only to be impaled by a strong beam of white. Splotches of white paint gather around this convex, afraid to enter its darkness, preferring to remain as witnesses from a distance.

It's all a melee touching on the fast life and the struggle for survival and recognition that characterises our age. The quest for vainglory pushes some of us in questionable ways into the limelight, where we stand on a pedestal that cannot support us for a long time. And on that stage, the beaming lights blind us; so much that we lose sight of what it really means to be human and live a full life. Ultimately, the bright lights impale a destiny, veering its promising trajectory to the deep shadows of memory.



The elevation of the umbrella from its utilitarian function of providing shelter, to a symbol of industry, enters a second, more vibrant act in **Red Forest**. Damola's superb technical skills shines through in the brilliant way he captures and blends, almost surreally, the figures of the market women and the environment, as seen from a bird's eye view.

Enterprise, or 'hustle' as it is most commonly referred to in Nigeria, can be very high-pitched and chaotic in Lagos and other Nigerian metropolitan cities like Kano, Aba and Port Harcourt. In this painting, colour works actively as fiery reds to communicate the never abating sense of urgency that characterises markets like these. And from the skies, all the haggling, the exchange of greetings, the fights, the pilfering, the nursing of babies while attending to customers . . . they all coalesce into a single, burning red forest of enterprise that tells the African story of unwavering tenacity.



Damola Adepaju

"Red Forest"

38 x 25 inches

Mixed Media: Acrylic and newspaper on canvas

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# PROFILE OF DAMOLA ADEPOJU

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Damola Adepoju, b. 1975; Painter

## Artist Statement

In the search for the perfect expression, my art takes you on a journey where REDISCOVERY and GROWTH, two supposed opposites, blend to create a symbiosis of form. But don't muse for too long as my compositions are known to be strongly highlighted against a direct contrast of soft gold brush work. This usually combines with newspaper collages and relief on textual fonts conveying iconic headings. Elaborating on the subject of the painting, they are layered or worked onto tonal surfaces that flatly absorb the cityscape, architectural mnemonics, and the ever busy Lagos street scenes. Figures of half-nude stylized female forms feature frequently in my work, where the gold tones and newspaper collages elicit an overwhelming sense of tension as gender politics interrogates, heightens and exaggerates the quandary of the female subject.

SEEING IN BLACK AND WHITE is a narrative in warm chiaroscuro that uncovers the soul of a city in transition, the triumph of its population in constant motion and the norm of vehicular procession.

## Education

Institute of Textile Technology Art & Design, Lagos:

1998 Diploma in General Art

Lagos State Polytechnic, Lagos:

2006 National Diploma (Upper Credit) General Art

2011 Higher National Diploma ( Upper Credit ) Painting

## **Selected Exhibitions**

- 1998 *Vision of Africa*, International Cultural Center, Caisa, Helsinki, Finland
- 1999 *Nigeria'99*, National Stadium, Lagos, Nigeria
- 2000 *Discovery*, Muson Center, Lagos, Nigeria
- 2000 *Call of Nature*, NLNG Quarters, Bonny Island, Port Harcourt. Nigeria
- 2001 *Women and War*, Goethe Institute, Lagos, Nigeria
- 2001 *African Experience*, Sheraton Hotel & Towers, Abuja, Nigeria
- 2004 *Saloon Exhibition*, South Africa
- 2004 *Nigerian Cultural Landscape in Perspective (2)*, Nicon Hilton Hotel, Abuja, Nigeria
- 2004 *Dance of the Mask*, Dagenham, United Kingdom
- 2005 *Reflection on Lagos*, Terra Kulture, Lagos, Nigeria
- 2009 *Essence II*, Lycee Francaise Louis Pasteur De Lagos, Lagos, Nigeria
- 2009 *Strictly Watercolour*, Alliance Francaise, Lagos, Nigeria
- 2012 *October Rain*, National Museum, Lagos, Nigeria
- 2013 *Beyond Boundaries*, Nubuke foundation, Accra, Ghana
- 2013 *Miniatures*, Frame Master Gallery, Lagos, Nigeria
- 2013 *October Rain*, Nike Art Gallery, Lagos, Nigeria
- 2014 *Timeless*, Terra Kulture, Victoria Island, Lagos, Nigeria
- 2015 *Unbounded Spirit*, Terra Kulture, Lagos, Nigeria.
- 2016 *Rise Above Terror*, Besharat Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia, USA