



Chuck Gallery Presents

BOLAJI OGUNWO

# SPILLAGE

29TH APRIL - 19TH MAY

## Foreword to Bolaji Ogunwo Exhibition – Chuck Gallery

I first became enthralled by African art when I bought a series of paintings from a street artist in Capetown some years ago. The rawness of the colours and lack of pretence evoked a sense of honest sophistication that truly moved me and changed forever the way I saw art.

However, this appreciation, derived in no small part from the philosophy that 'less is more', was taken to an entirely new level when I first encountered the stunning work of Bolaji Ogunwo. Walking into a display of paintings from the Chuck Gallery, I was drawn immediately to Bolaji's 'The Charge', capturing the king's horsemen from Northern Nigeria celebrating the historic Durbar festival with a thrilling racing display.

To say that I was drawn to it is something of an understatement, for I felt physically grabbed and shaken by its uncompromisingly stunning shock of colour and movement. I have since had the privilege of seeing further examples of the artist's true genius, the ability to combine vivid reds, blues and yellows in bold strokes, yet retain a subtlety of tone and depth that draws the eye deep and beyond the primary subject.

In 'The Conference' the principal focus is totally subsumed by a joyous background celebration of conversation and activity, while the dominant horseman in 'Sai Baba' is supported by a phalanx of riders that are both subtle and understated, emerging from a soft palette of atmospheric shades that wouldn't look out of place in a work by Monet or Valette.

The noble elegance and beauty of the subject in 'Rhapsody', the cover image of this catalogue, is again evoked by the skilled but minimalist use of vivid colour, while in a slight change of genre, 'Arena' captures the demise in recent gales of two ancient oak trees, the signature symbols of Ringway Golf Club, a wonderful example of art immortalising objects that would otherwise be lost forever.

Visitors to this latest remarkable exhibition at the Chuck Gallery will, I'm sure, come away invigorated and stunned by the brilliance of Bolaji's work. Enough words. Now go and enjoy!

Vincent Sweeney is a former Assistant Chief Constable of Greater Manchester Police, now Director of Communications for a global IT Company and a freelance writer. Having fallen victim to Chuck Gallery Founder and Director Chukwudi Onwudiwe's charismatic charm and enthusiasm, he has become a firm supporter, and is now a huge fan of the paintings of Bolaji Ogunwo.

## Gallery Owner's Statement

Indisputably, putting human imaginative skill and its associated aesthetics to good use can improve our lives. They bring us happiness, and shed light on our life journeys and make us appreciate experiences of others.

Art helps make a difference as was evident when a clinical consultant friend of the gallery, brought Ayanfe his daughter to visit the gallery and be inspired by the collection, in preparation for her fine arts competition organised by Stockport Grammar School, with entries of 114 budding artists from surrounding elementary schools. The young artists were required to produce self portraits deploying a variety of styles, media and techniques. Ayanfe was judged overall best and came away with first prize. The ecstatic father sent me a picture image of his daughter receiving the prize. It is arguable that a visit to the gallery and her interaction via engagement with staff and gallery objects awakened creative impulses that spurred her to success.

So it always gives us great pleasure to present fresh body of works by talented artists, with varying painting styles, exploring life and experiences and interestingly evoking multiple emotional messages. As can be observed Bolaji achieves brilliant cultural narratives imbuing his pieces with vigour and atmosphere by painting with luminous primary and secondary colours. The images are skilfully enlivened and robustly animated. They are brought to life in a beautifully realistic way. A look at his works always opens up close or distant emotional associations with visual images. They remind us how artistry can brighten our inner lives and make abundant our emotional riches.

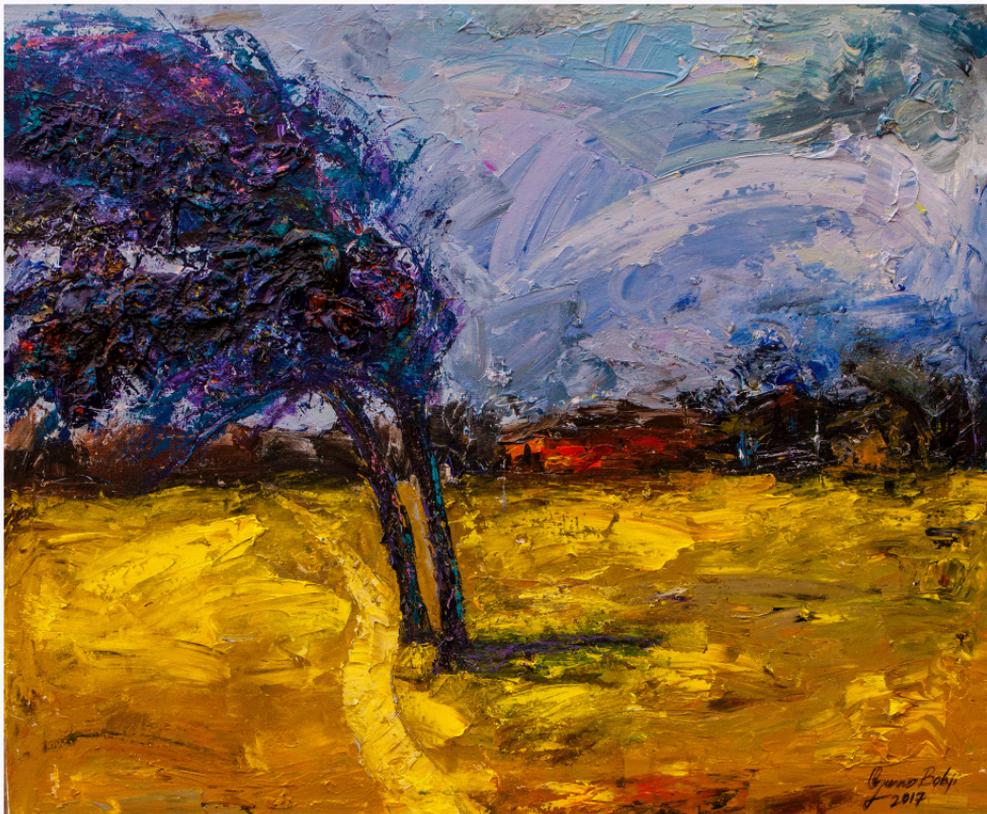
It is delightful how with impasto technique he documents a heritage rich in rites, relics sites and sounds. Bolaji highlights in interesting details in the foreground of his paintings, to record on canvass the riches of the diverse Nigerian cultural life. By opening up contemporary African arts and culture through Bolaji's impressions, we at Chuck Gallery hope to bring joy, reflection, wellbeing and appreciation.

Chukwudi Onwudiwe

### **The Arena** (2017)

This work was commissioned by the director of Chuck Gallery, Chuckwudi Onwudiwe, in honour of the historic playing course in Ringway Golf Club, Hale. The oak tree adorning its beautiful landscape is over a 100 years old is very much associated with the club's lengthy legacy as a sporting organisation.

Instead of retaining the green turf in the course, Ogunwo, in his composition, deliberately bespattered its fine surface with bright marigold, recalling a muddy ground typical of horse racing in Nigeria. The tree, painted to reflect the impact of windy atmosphere or fierce storm, accentuates the blue horizon and ruined turf, perhaps exposing the turbulent political difference in the two countries.



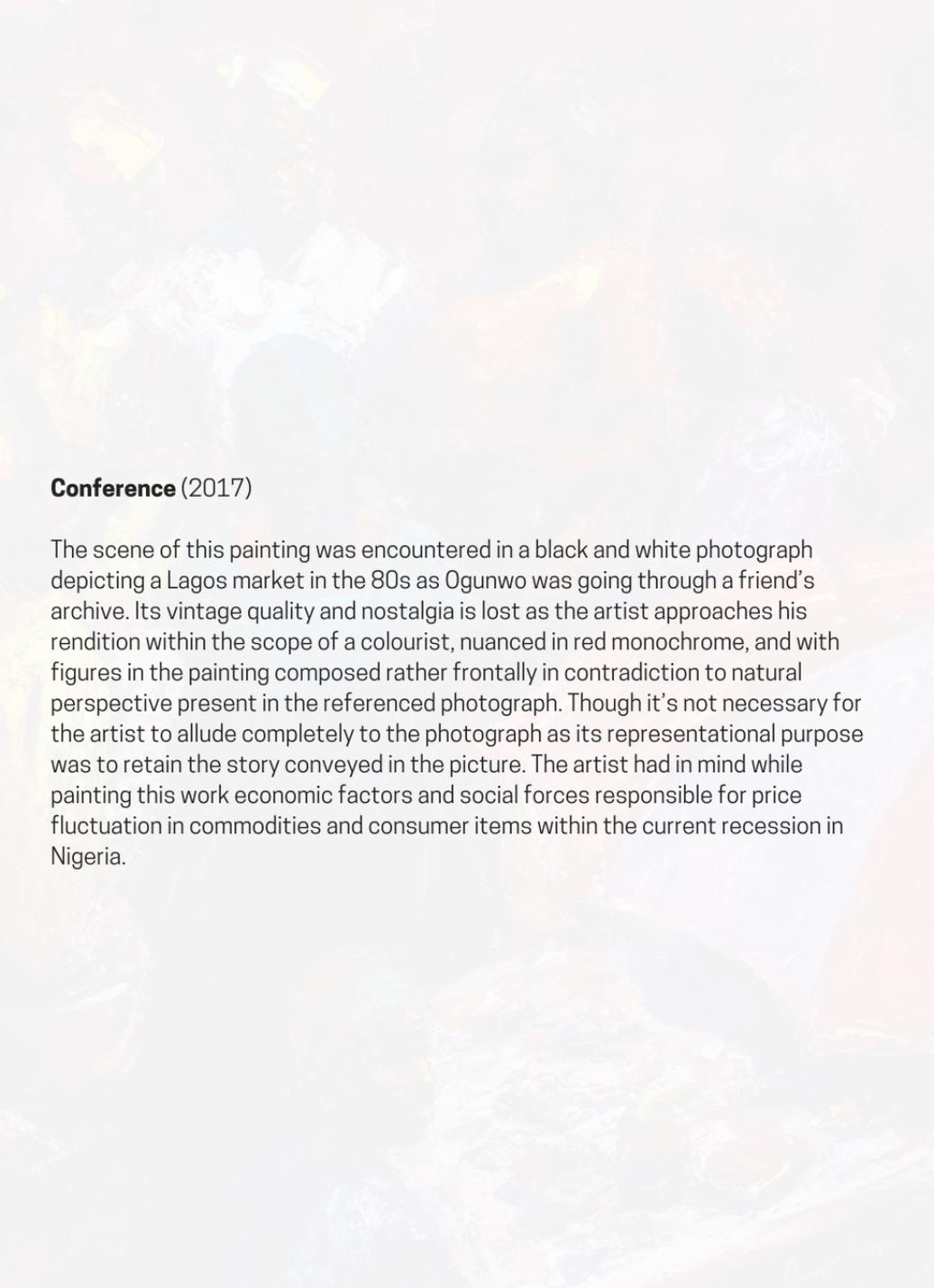
**"The Arena" 2017**

Acrylic on Canvas

35 x 41 inches



**"Conference" 2017**  
Acrylic on Canvas  
47 x 59 inches



## **Conference** (2017)

The scene of this painting was encountered in a black and white photograph depicting a Lagos market in the 80s as Ogunwo was going through a friend's archive. Its vintage quality and nostalgia is lost as the artist approaches his rendition within the scope of a colourist, nuanced in red monochrome, and with figures in the painting composed rather frontally in contradiction to natural perspective present in the referenced photograph. Though it's not necessary for the artist to allude completely to the photograph as its representational purpose was to retain the story conveyed in the picture. The artist had in mind while painting this work economic factors and social forces responsible for price fluctuation in commodities and consumer items within the current recession in Nigeria.



**"Sai Baba" 2016**

Acrylic on Canvas  
25.5 x 33.5 inches



## **Sai Baba (2017)**

The slogan “sai baba” was a compelling iconography designed in the 2015 election campaign ad of APC that brought president Muhammed Buhari to power. While acceptance of the parlance reaffirm sentiment and support built around Buhari, it gave rise to a populism that heralded the figure of a highly revered sage, so that the root of this conservatist admiration culture for bigwigs in the north where Buhari comes from is transmitted to reflect partisan vocabulary in other parts of Nigeria. The figure of Buhari on elaborately decorated horse is compositionally emphasize by Ogunwa.



**"Bright Future" 2017**

Acrylic on Canvas

35 x 41 inches

## **Bright Future** (2017)

This work reaffirm deliberate compositional disparity largely dominating Ogunwo's portraiture featuring commissioned oil works on board and acrylic paintings since 1998. The board works, culminating in medium scale miniatures and enamoured for their rub-off simulation, loosely referential details, biopictorial synergy, have been finely appraised as important studies revealing stunning complexities buried within the personality of their subjects. Equally interesting but differ from his board works are his canvas portraiture. They've been beautifully grounded on the harmony of exquisitely applied colours as the work Bright Future offers classic demonstration to this compositional method.



**"Riverine" 2017**  
Acrylic on Canvas  
24 x 29.5 inches

### **Riverine** (2017)

Neighbourhood slums of Tolu, "boundary waterside" at Ajegunle, Kio-Kio village, Majidun at Ikorodu, Ejigbo, Oke Afa Babasale, Makoko, are surrounded by water flowing in from major lagoons. Ogunwo evoke abstract imageries of these places with earthly colours pointing to their squalid state and condition. This work is one of a series of paintings engaging the subject of slum settlement known for wood and zinc houses built on canals.



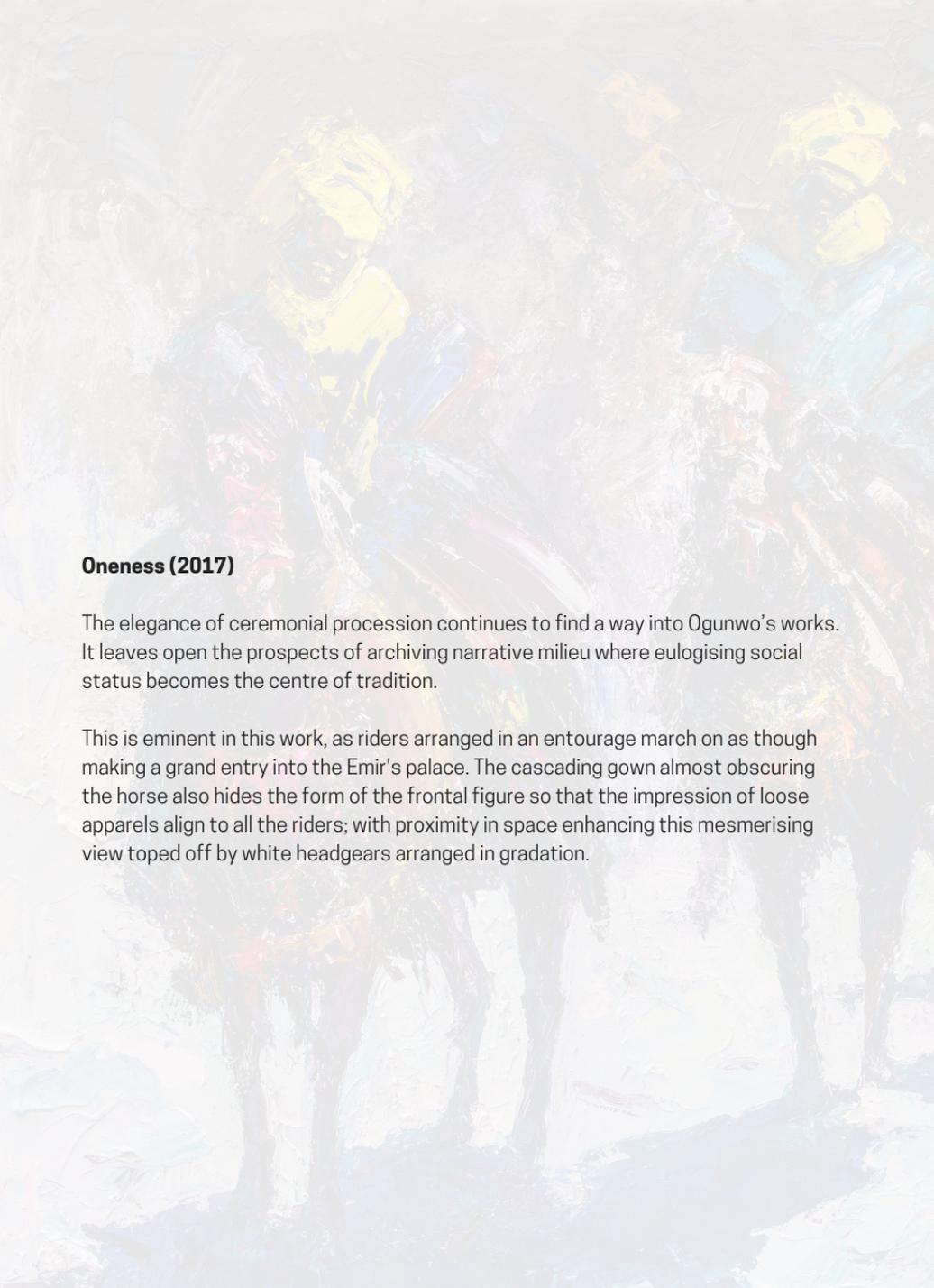
**"Tunes" 2017**  
Acrylic on Canvas  
35 x 41 inches

## **Tunes** (2017)

Ogunwo's admiration for players of musical instruments covers the full range of African virtuosos whose adroitness and talent becomes enlarged in his works — whether spotlighting Obrom slit set; the Lamellophone known as Agidigbo in western Nigeria or the Xalam common with northern mistrals or the Gudugudu popular amongst Apala, Juju, and Fuji musicians. His painting resonates from brilliant tunes designed in these melodic objects. In this painting from Igbo lute reveals the extensive and diverse knowledge of the artist in the enduring theme of traditional musical performance that we encounter Ogunwo's practice.



**"Oneness" 2017**  
Acrylic on Canvas  
47 x 47 inches



### **Oneness (2017)**

The elegance of ceremonial procession continues to find a way into Ogunwo's works. It leaves open the prospects of archiving narrative milieu where eulogising social status becomes the centre of tradition.

This is eminent in this work, as riders arranged in an entourage march on as though making a grand entry into the Emir's palace. The cascading gown almost obscuring the horse also hides the form of the frontal figure so that the impression of loose apparels align to all the riders; with proximity in space enhancing this mesmerising view topped off by white headgears arranged in gradation.



**"Finish Line" 2017**

Acrylic on Canvas

47 x 47 inches





**"The Flight" 2017**

Acrylic on Canvas  
24 x 47 inches

### **The Flight** (2017)

Edosa Oguigo's works depicting polo players inspires Ogunwo's representation of equestrian subjects including horse riders characterised by energetic movement and a heightening sense of motion. Both the figure and horse in this piece is rendered in the abstract with clearly define suggestions highlighting their forms. Horses in northern region of Nigeria are elaborately decorated with leather upholstery, quilt fabrics, handmade patchworks, and this design style has been a constant feature in the representation of horses by Ogunwo.

## **Ensemble (2017)**

Musical maestros, percussionists, orchestra, local church choirs, bata drummers, acrobats, band leaders with guitar or saxophone strap across their shoulders continues to fascinate Ogunwo. The spectacle and grandeur following their display define much of the series of paintings inspired by this experience. In 2015 at Greenhouse Gallery, Akure, in a group exhibition featuring works by Ogunwo alongside Bruce Onabrakpeya, Sam Ovrati, and others, a band of Yoruba music makers entertaining guests were ecstatic in the manner they reduce sounds emanating from their drums into codes of laudation. In Ensemble Ogunwo makes reference to the dramatic power of drumbeats as well as heightening rhythmic gesture following the drummer's engagement with his drum sets.

**"Ensemble" 2017**

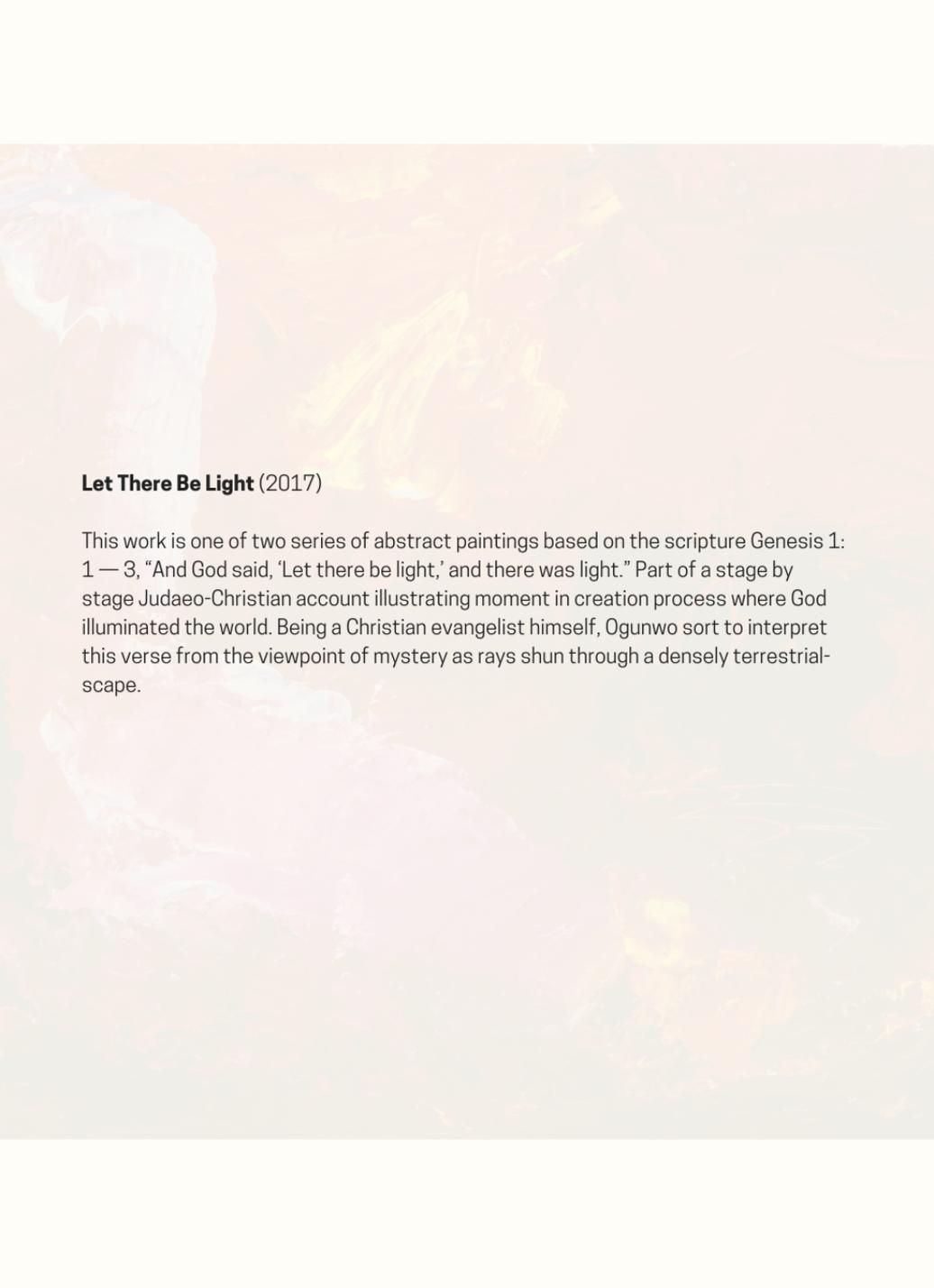
Acrylic on Canvas  
24 x 71 inches





**"Let there be Light" 2017**

Acrylic on Canvas  
24 x 29.5 inches

An abstract painting with a warm, orange-toned background. The composition is filled with soft, ethereal light rays and wispy, cloud-like forms in shades of white, pale yellow, and light pink. The overall effect is one of divine illumination and a hazy, terrestrial landscape.

### **Let There Be Light** (2017)

This work is one of two series of abstract paintings based on the scripture Genesis 1: 1 — 3, “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” Part of a stage by stage Judaeo-Christian account illustrating moment in creation process where God illuminated the world. Being a Christian evangelist himself, Ogunwo sort to interpret this verse from the viewpoint of mystery as rays shun through a densely terrestrial-  
scape.



**"Riches" 2017**  
Oil on Canvas  
29.5 x 35 inches

The background of the page is a large, faint, and somewhat desaturated still-life painting. It depicts a bouquet of roses in various colors (burgundy, yellow, green, and ivory) resting on a white tablecloth. The tablecloth is intricately patterned with what appears to be knife-work or a similar decorative technique. The overall composition is elegant and detailed, focusing on the textures and colors of the flowers and the fabric.

### **Riches** (2017)

Ogunwo continues to show his fascination for nature and interest in the study of exotic flowers in this still-life with bouquet. Set against an ethereal white table cloth with obtrusively manoeuvred knifework, the delightfully arranged bunch are pick of roses with array of burgundy and lightly painted petals consisting of ivory flanked by luminous yellow and green. The absence of jar, wildflowers, knots, or fruits, traditionally introduced beside the bouquet creates a simple imagery of colourful bunch.



**"Alone"**

Oil on Canvas

23.6 x 59 inches

## **Alone** (2017)

Study of a food hawker in Abraka, a town in Delta, south southern Nigeria. The woman on hat pushing a wheelbarrow is rendered in tonal impasto with filled silhouette contrasting its blue flickering shadow. The activity of street trading is commonplace in Africa. This trend also involve sellers of mobile phone accessories, compact disk (CD), alcoholic beverages, fruits, and scrap dealers found in streets across towns and suburbans. Many of the canvases which'd examine this practice in light of social milieu for example Lucky Isiah, Abimbola Adenuga, Mavua Lessor, Olumide Oresegun, had based their work in context of crowded market scenery. It's not unusual for Ogunwo to paint outdoor subjects without referencing paraphernalia associated with its realism. Ogunwo's works are monoclectic. In the past, his profile studies were loosely critique as illustration of textual extracts from epigrams, inspirational phraseologies, and life's insights. Ogunwo acknowledges that his works're backed by philosophies.