



GALLERY OF AFRICAN ART
LONDON

Press Release

Abiodun Olaku, Tola Wewe & Phillip Kotokwa

23rd February – 9th April 2016

The Gallery of African Art (GAFRA) is pleased to present an exhibition of contemporary paintings from Nigerian artists Tola Wewe and Abiodun Olaku, and sculptures from the Zimbabwean artist Phillip Kotokwa. This group exhibition celebrates the artistic achievements of three distinct artists from West and Southern Africa.

Abiodun Olaku works are inspired by his passion for paintings and the city of Lagos. His works capture its landscape and people in a constant state of flux. This activity is encapsulated back to the viewer in compositions of magnificent stillness. His paintings are instantly recognisable for the realistic and dramatic *chiaroscuro*; contrasting an intensely dark and somber background with a brilliant application of light - literally and metaphorically capturing the "resilient vibrancy of socio-economic life in the city". The entire effect results in taking the viewer beyond the picture and effectively rendering them a participant in the narrative.

Olaku states " While I am not a compulsive slave to the 'isms and schisms' of art, it is of deep passionate concern to me that my art communicates, and stirs the spirit of the viewer, irrespective of time and space, I operate with a strong reliance on the principles, theories, formulae, and spirit that have guaranteed the enduring strength and essence of true, evocative art. I try very hard to tell my 'stories' with some reasonably unambiguous conviction. Honesty of purpose always serves me a respectable portion of satisfaction, because I believe that every artist will ultimately submit to the supreme critique of time. Time always tells. Therefore, I tend to be insulated against the various contending forces that trail the contemporary art scene, since I believe they are mostly weak, short-rooted trends".

Tola Wewe is a founding member of the Ona movement that emerged in February, 1989. The Onaism school of thought has its interest in the revival of the indigenous Yoruba aesthetic, with artists committed to pursuing artistic excellence through the adaptation and interpretation of traditional materials and methods, forms and styles of contemporary Yoruba aesthetic - fusing symbols and philosophies and experimentation with local materials, patterns and images.

Tola describes himself more as a witness than an author, "communicating with the spirits of the ancestors, and drawing out the invisible spirits - the anjonnu, emere and the ebora - who make the art works...I am the vehicle, and they are the drivers. We go on these strange journeys to the most remote ends of imaginative experience."

Shona works have come to be synonymous with the largest tribe in Zimbabwe engaged in stone sculpting in the country. Each piece is unique both in the natural patterns found in the rock and the expression made by the sculptor's hands. And, none are more unique than those made by **Phillip Kotokwa**. Working on the most demanding stones including leopard rock, granite, serpentine, and spring stone, Kotokwa explores with zeal his ancient cultural and spiritual heritage, beyond the cosmopolitan realities of his city life.

Phillip feels that a powerful imagination is relevant to the success of a sculptor working in stone: the ways in which the imagination can embellish the facts in such a way that the story becomes more interesting and absorbing to the viewer.

About the Artists:

Abiodun Olaku is an indigene of Ogun State, Nigeria, and was born on December 29, 1958. Abiodun is a respected member of the Society of Nigeria Artists (SNA); a founding member, inaugural vice-president and trustee of the Guild of Professional Fine Artists of Nigeria (GFA); and one of the founders and trustee of Universal Studios of Art, National Theatre, Lagos. He continues to train, mentor and inspire younger generations of Nigerian Artists and also consults widely on professional art matters, among other activities.

Olaku's fascination with lights, reflection and elemental situations in nature as well as man's dynamic romance with his iridescent environment, stimulated by spiritual, religious, social, traditional and cultural activities, continue to fuel his creative oeuvre.

The captivating and stimulating timelessness of the works of great masters worldwide also had a profound impact on his young impressionable mind, and in the process distinctly configured his philosophical orientation and direction as he crystallized into full artistic bloom. A few of the masters whose work have always inspired and propelled his creative instincts include Michelangelo, Leonardo Da Vinci, Rembrandt Van Rijn, Claude Monet, Yusuf Grillo, Ben Enwonwu, and Kolade Oshinowo, to name a few.

Abiodun Olaku works and lives in Lagos, Nigeria with his family.

Tola Wewe was born in Okitipupa, Ondo State, Nigeria in 1959. He trained and graduated with a degree in Fine Art from the University of Ife in 1983. He went on to obtain a Masters degree in African Visual Arts from the University of Ibadan, Oyo State in 1986. Tola Wewe worked as a cartoonist before becoming a full time studio artist in 1991.

Tola Wewe, whose works are widely acclaimed for their originality, simplicity, surface texture, and mastery of colours, is considered as one of the most skilled artistic minds from the African continent. His work is a hybrid of African and western sensibilities and images, reflecting his own training and experience as an international artist. Beyond Nigeria, Tola Wewe's works have been exhibited across Europe and the US.

Tola lives and works in Ondo State, Nigeria.

Phillip Kotokwa was born in Harare in 1972 and received his education in Mabvuku. In 1994, he decided to leave his full-time job and take up a career as an artist. He soon became proficient in representing the human form in stone- a reflection of the skills of drawing and human proportion he had learned at art school. He became the protégé of the well-regarded Zimbabwean sculptor, the late Crispin Chakanyuka. Phillip learned to work on the most demanding studio stones (leopard rock, granite, serpentine and springstone) in order to express the powerful imagination of his sculptures. His ideas about sculpture embrace a worldly view, rather than singularly what is made in Zimbabwe in stone, and was further enhanced by his travels to the UK.

His works are displayed in various galleries in his home country including the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Chapungu Sculpture Park, Similitudes Gallery, Rubwerureva Attractions, African Millenium, etc. Collectors from all over the world have bought his works.

Phillip Kotokwa works from his studio in Zimbabwe.

Visitor Information

Opening times: Monday – Friday, 10am-6pm and Saturday, 11am-5pm

Admission: free.

Gallery of African Art (GAFRA), 45 Albemarle Street, London W1S 4JL

Nearest Underground Station: Green Park (Jubilee, Piccadilly and Victoria lines)

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