

CLAY IN THE MAGIC HANDS OF MAN

Femi Olajire Akande

CLAY IN THE MAGIC HANDS OF MAN

Catalogue of Art Exhibition
of CERAMICS AND POTTERY

by

Femi Olajire Akande

Held @ FOYER OF THE INSTITUTE OF AFRICAN STUDIES,
UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN, NIGERIA.

4th November, 2011 - 31st January, 2012.

Curated by: The Visual Arts Student (Class of 2011)
Supervisor: Dr. O. I. Pogoson

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Clay in the Magic Hands of Man: Femi Olajire Akande

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Cover Picture: Morning by Morning, New Mercies I See.
H: 173cm, 2011, Earthenware

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Curator's Statement

The three-dimensional art pieces on display demonstrate the medium's versatility, inviting multiple interpretations and perspectives. As an art form, ceramics inherently reveal the artist's identity and creative state, making it a poignant reflection of their mental and emotional disposition.

The synergy between cognitive, motor, and visual skills is essential for artistic expression, and Femi Akande's mastery of this synergy is evident in his work. This exhibition provides a platform for scholarly critique and appreciation, showcasing diverse pieces that cater to various tastes and preferences.

Notably, Akande's ceramic works exhibit exceptional skill and artistic vision, with large-scale compositions and portable pieces featuring intricate sculptural expression of African aesthetics and core values. The scholars' expectations were exceeded, and their engagement with the art pieces was enriching and thought-provoking.

Salami Ajani Kolade
MA Visual Arts

Artist's Statement

My work is functional pottery that addresses the visual, powerful, and complex expressions of forms. While working with clay, a unique symbiotic communication exists between my work and my mind. I consistently tune in and let my subconscious guide the evolving shape of the clay. In return, this reveals the latent forms within the clay, giving rise to the expression of visual poetry in my works.

I explore and experiment with a diverse range of forms, integrating influences from Olaleye Seyi Martins, Ben Oyadiran's philosophy, various objects, and nature. I appreciate the beauty of African aesthetics, particularly Yoruba graphic symbolism, which I utilize to craft new designs through individualistic adaptation, blending imagination to bring forth the artistry of human hands in clay.

My creations often take the form of Ceramics-Sculpture, employing methods such as slab building, folding, casting, and hand building using earthenware and stoneware clay bodies, which may contain fine sand or grog. Within my works, surface relief, texture, motifs, geometrical shapes, and imagery inspired by Yoruba semiosis act as catalysts to communicate symbolic meaning and aesthetic pleasure, while projecting the philosophies underpinning my creations. I incorporate white slip to introduce variation and patterns on the surfaces of my works. Subsequently, the works are polished but remain unglazed. My works are titled in Yoruba and English and are fired in a gas or wood kiln between 500°C - 1000°C (degrees Celsius).

Primarily, I utilize my works to communicate messages to the world. My themes revolve around Africanism, intellectualism, expressionism, functionality, and the integration of forms and experiences or thoughts from daily life.

Femi Olajire Akande

My Speech

Director of The Institute of African Studies, Director French Institute for Research in Africa, Curator of The Museum Institute of African Studies, Secretary Institute of African Studies, Members of Staff of The Institute of African Studies, Dean Student Affairs, The Polytechnic, Ibadan, H.O.D. Department of Art, Design and Printing Technology, The Polytechnic, Ibadan, Members of Staff The Polytechnic, Ibadan, Students, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a significant opportunity to display my artworks in this solo exhibition arranged by the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan.

I crave your indulgence to start by borrowing from the opinion of the French dramatist Jean Anouilh who said, 'the object of art is to give life a shape'. This can also be said of clay: clay in the magic hands of man is to give art a shape. Truly, the natural rhythm of clay in human hands has some magic.

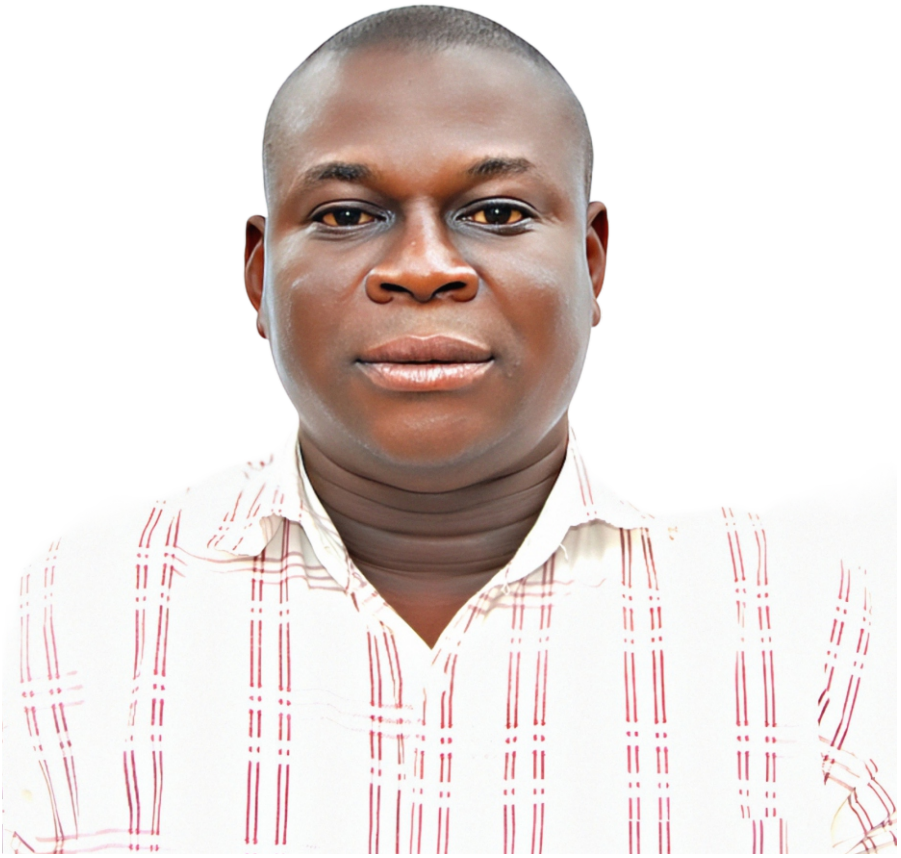
For the past few years, I have been a wanderer, wandering in the jungle of creativity. The artworks you are seeing today are the manifestation of my experience in the jungle. I always express myself in clay, and my artworks are guided by intellectualism, expressionism, and functionality. My aim is to promote good African philosophy through art and add innovation to Yoruba pottery tradition.

I welcome all of you to this exceptional solo exhibition titled “Clay in the Magic Hands of Man”. I wish to express my gratitude for the financial support I have received from Dr. O.I. Pogoson, French Institute of Research in Africa, Mr. Ellis Oyekola, Mr. Bayo Oyeleke, Mr. Samuel Esanju, Musa Abiodun and Mr. Muili Okunola.

Once again, permit me to acknowledge the encouragement and support I have received from my friends, mentors, and teachers; Dr. Sola Olorunyomi, the family of Prof. Dele Layiwola, Mr. Kola Okanlawon, Mr. Dele Gbolahan, Mr. Olaleye Seyi Martins, Mr. Dapo Eyinade, Revd. Ezekiel Oluwasina, Mr. Remi Olajire and Mr. Felix Egunjobi. The great mutual and financial support I received from the Visual Arts students' class of 2011 is worth mentioning.

I appreciate my wife, Olaide and son Iyiola for their support in this creative adventure. Once again, I welcome you and wish you all a happy viewing. Thank you!

Femi Akande: A Profile



Born on July 28,1976 in Ogbomoso, Oyo State, Nigeria. He attended Masifa Baptist Primary School, Ogbomoso from 1981 to 1987 and completed his secondary school training at Ogbomoso Baptist High School, Ogbomoso in 1994. He was admitted to The Polytechnic, Ibadan (Eruwa campus) to study Fine Art (National Diploma N.D) and graduated with Upper Credit, being one of the best students in the department in 2001. In 2005, he obtained a Higher National Diploma (H.N.D) in Ceramics Technology, from the same Polytechnic with Upper Credit. He served his National Youth Service Corps year in Kwara State as an Art teacher at St. Anthony's Secondary School, Ilorin, from 2006 to 2007.

He has won several awards, amongst which are: The Polytechnic Ibadan Prize Award, Best Overall Student in HND Art 2003/2004 Session, The NYSC/UNICEF Merit Award, Kwara State in 2006; and a cash award - Best twelve in 'LIFE IN MY CITY' Art competition in 2008, by Alliance Francaise – Lagos. He joined the

Department of Arts, Design and Printing Technology, The Polytechnic, Ibadan in March 2009 as a Higher Technical Instructor. He continues to teach Ceramics and drawing courses at the school.

He has participated in numerous art exhibitions in the country. In 2005, he had a group exhibition titled 'Experience Nigeria Art and Craft', at Muson Centre, Lagos. In 2008, he secured the second position in the southwestern zone 'LIFE IN MY CITY' Art competition and came 4th at the National grand finale in Enugu, 2008. He exhibited at the Art Exhibition of 'Nigeria @ 50' held at Alliance Francaise in Ibadan. He is hosting his first solo exhibition titled 'Clay in the Magic Hand of Man'at the Foyer of The Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

The Aesthetic and Iconic Value in Clay

Abidemi Abideen Lamidi

'When working with clay, there is uniquely symbolic
communication between my work and my mind'.
- Femi Akande

The potter, Akande, does not exaggerate his cultural perspective; instead, his background is reflected in the forms he adapts from idioms, proverbs, and folklore.

Generally, it is believed that ceramics is known to exist in Nigeria since around 500BC. As archaelogical dating has proven. Ceramics are a domestic material, and the elements of its usage can be traced to human development in history.

The generally accepted usage of ceramics has evolved from sacred and domestic utensils to either functional or decorative materials due to present-day art appreciation, encompassing flower vases, plaques, masks, and name-tags. In Akandes work, it ranges from two dimensional to three dimensional and is categorized as plastic art.

Femi Akande experiments with different media, ranging from earthenware to plaster of Paris. Being Yoruba, he prefers titling most of his work in his mother tongue. This is believed to have been a result of his cultural heritage. Among his recent art pieces are Ìkòkò Òpéléngé (Slim Vase), another is tagged Ilè tó Sàn fún Wàrà àti fún Oyin. ILÈ TÓ SÀN FÚN WÀRÀ ÀTI FÚN OYIN is an art piece that is full of facts about the act of indiscipline among Nigeria leaders and their wasteful attitude towards the available natural resources in the country. The art piece is highly decorative with traditional signs that are consciously arranged to convey the hidden messages as intended by the artist.

The vase Ilè tó Sàn fún Wàrà àti fún Oyin is not only aesthetic but also functional, suitable for holding flowers or serving as a container for trinkets and jewelry. The vase is made of terracotta, i.e., fired clay, cylindrical, and in two segmented parts. The upper part serves as the cover, and if it is separated, it will alter both the function and theme.







Ilè tó Sàn fún Wàrà àti fún Oyin
(Land Flowing with Milk and Honey)
H: 96cm, 2009, Earthenware

The vase symbolizes the Nigerian Nation. Its back depicts the fruitful resources the country is blessed with, while the front illustrates struggles, wastefulness and stampeding of unpatriotic leaders who milk the resources for personal gain. At fifty-one, Nigeria is still gambling for good leadership, corruption and injustice.

The ability to incorporate both the social and political happenings within and outside the artist's environment upon the artist's opportunity to have been trained and employed by a reputable vocational –oriented institute such as The Polytechnic, Ibadan. This is undoubtedly a credit that promotes his talent. These qualities can be seen in the vase Ilè tó Sàn fún Wàrà àti fún Oyin.

Possessing formal education, staying current, and being attentive to daily events likely enhanced his capacity to address crucial societal issues through his artworks. Furthermore, the artist's experience as a Youth Corper in Kwara State, as revealed by the artist, may have influenced his pottery craftsmanship, considering Ilorin's long-standing pottery tradition.

The gestures of the figures in the vase convey significant messages, and the forms in the artwork exhibit a unique quality. The creative use of wavy lines and scribbling embellishes the vase titled Ilè tó Sàn fún Wàrà àti fún Oyin, portraying the unjust living conditions of Nigerians.

The deeply incised lines on the vase suggest that Nigerians are closely connected to their richly endowed country. Visibly, the mineral resources are visible and legible incised all over the vase, crude oil, salts, gold, and more, symbolizing the blessings Nigeria as a nation possesses.

The experimental approach being adopted in producing the vase is outstanding. The use of important objects like cowries shell means the commercial activities in Nigeria. It further brings to memory the past activities engaged in Nigeria in the past.

Additionally, the portrayal of human figures reaching for the overflowing breast on the front of the vase symbolizes the abundance and blessings of Nigeria as a nation.

The smaller male figures deserve attention as they depict male domination over females, reflecting the power dynamics in the corridors of power in Nigeria today. These figures further suggest the survival of the fittest. Thus, there are some figure apparently being strangled on the floor, while some are portrayed as being stampeded. Ironically, some have access to keg, jar ,bucket and the like.

Being a Nigeria, the artist is able to incorporate the confluence i.e. the major rivers (River Benue and River Niger) that join the south and the north regions. This, symbolizes unity in Nigeria.

The use of icons is moderately used in the upper segments of the vase by the artist, as he represented the generational transition with the breast. The elaborate head figure of the vase closely resembles Nok terracotta figures, showcasing stylized facial features and an elongated form. The head in the vase, serves as the complementing part to the vase such that, if removed ,it will change the total meaning and the function of the vase.

Upon closer inspection of this art piece, the artist integrates the wood carving method into his ceramics, reflecting Yoruba wood carving, door panels, and ceremonial stools, all skillfully executed through the subtractive method. Another distinctive style of Femi Akande involves portraying long and slim hands in his images. The application of intricate ornaments, through incisions, enhances the beauty of this art piece. This, he may have adopted through his careful study of the body art of the Yoruba's (Tattoos).The use of various colors further enhances the exceptional beauty of this vase, Ilè tó Sàn fún Wàrà àti fún Oyin.

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African Planter by Femi Akande

Adenuga Racheal Olubunmi

Femi Akande is a prolific ceramic sculptural artist whose main focus is creating African ceramics using his preferred materials, clay and plaster of Paris (P.O.P.).

The artist, with his young talented mind, designed an African planter. His social life and the environmental influence of his surroundings dictate his type of artwork. These influences are clearly seen in his works.

For instance, one of his works titled Àlùmónì tó farasin (Hidden Treasure) promotes morality among women. Most notably, he discourages teenage girls from aborting unwanted pregnancies. In his work titled Ilè tó Sàn fún Wàrà àti fún Oyin (Land Flowing with Milk and Honey) he exposes the selfishness and greed of the political class, particularly the political office holders to be precise. This shows the diversity of his works. Thus, there is no denying that Femi Akande's work promotes not only African culture but also incorporates the social activities embedded within it.

According to the artist, the 'African planter took him twelve months to complete in his pursuit of creating the best.

Like any other artist of African background, Femi introduces different forms of African symbols, icons, and rhythms that can be seen in Mufu Onifade's paintings. He succeeds in introducing simple but profound African philosophy and expression, which he represents with figures and images.

African Planter is made of earthenware and has three segments of decoration. The upper part is heavily decorated with images, icons, a scorpion, a bull's head, and leaves that depict nature and the eye, which could symbolize the ever-watchful eye and presence of Elédùmárè.

In the central section, vertical and horizontal lines depict African ethnic marks, serving as delineations between the different design patterns in the artwork. The lower section features geometrical patterns around the object. The African Planter, promotes African culture in terms of agriculture and art. It serves as both a flower vase and a planter, measuring 36cm.







African Planter/Vase

H: 36cm, 2011, Stoneware

It exhibits beauty in Yoruba traditional motifs.

The Theme, Style and Materials of Artist Femi Olajire Akande's Ìkòkò Òpéléngé

Moronkade Nureni Aderemi

Introduction

When examining the themes, style, and materials of Femi Akande, it is essential to consider the novelty and uniqueness of the artworks, along with the background of the artist. Femi Akande is a prolific ceramist who creates functional pottery exploring visually powerful and complex forms.

The artist works with secondary clay and kaolin, establishing a unique symbiotic relationship between his work and his mind. The medium used is earthenware with kaolin, and the vase was constructed using the slab and pinching method. However, the flower vase is undercoated with a white clay body and then polished.

Ìkòkò Òpéléngé is a Yoruba term that suggests slimness; however, the vase is quite robust, raising questions about the title. The vase Ìkòkò Òpéléngé is a good attempt that can be improved upon in the following areas: Unity may be a central message of the work as the outer appearance shows a blend of colors (Colour gradation) and finishing change may be another theme as the work progressively changes from bottom to top.

Femi Olajire Akandes' Ìkòkò Òpéléngé

The vase Ìkòkò Òpéléngé is an experimental shape. It is evident that it is not cylindrical or conical but in a rectangular form. The usefulness of the vase should not be limited to flowering; rather, it should be multifunctional as it can serve as a water pot/ jar, ornament, and container. The artist demonstrates his masterful use of forms and design on the outer part of the vase, featuring a segmented design. The first layer depicts a cross- hatching which incision that is carefully arranged. The lower layer features a zoomorphic design resembling a coarse crocodile hide; the base reflects the incorporation of designs like diamonds, designs like diamonds, lines, and square shapes. True to its name, the vase functions as a flowerpot.

Akande's works are at times exuberant both in forms and materials, and his works illustrate Nigerian environments and some indigenous ideas. He uses unconventional materials.







Ìkòkò Òpélengé (Slim Vase)

H: 69cm, 2011, Stoneware + Earthenware

Outer play of colour and texture on the surface body.

Hidden Treasure: A Sculptural African Ceramic Pot by Femi Akande

Igieorobo Osasumwen

Femi Olajire Akande, a contemporary prolific ceramist, creates functional pottery that is visually powerful and complex in form. He explores a wide range of forms, incorporating influences from Ben Oyadiran's philosophy, various objects, and nature, where he derives most of his inspiration. He appreciates the beauty of African aesthetics, particularly Yoruba graphic symbolism, to create new designs that are individualistic. According to Adepegba (1995:90), the earliest and main sources of inspiration for contemporary Nigeria artists are their environments, which include individual experiences, acquaintances, important events, people, as well as their social life and world views, which they interpret and represent in individual but discernible ways.

Akande believes that when working with clay, there is a uniquely symbiotic communication between his work and his mind. He expresses himself through different methods like slab building, folding, casting, and hand building from earthenware and stoneware clay bodies, containing fine sand or grog. In his works, surface relief, texture, motifs, geometrical shapes, and imagery derived from Yoruba designs serve as catalysts to convey symbolic meaning and aesthetic delight, which help to project the philosophies behind his works. Although ceramic pieces created by most artists may serve aesthetic or utilitarian purposes, Akande's works surpass these functions. His works encompass these functions and also convey messages to society. This has positioned the artist not only as a ceramist creating flower vases but also as a sculptural ceramist who values continuity and change. He introduces innovations by primarily creating sculptural works, emphasizing the uniqueness in his pieces. Continuity exists as this prolific artist consistently introduces variations and patterns on the bodies of his works, which are subsequently polished but left unglazed. All his works are titled in Yoruba and English, and they are fired in a gas or wood kiln between 500ºC and 1000ºC (degrees Celsius).

The selected ceramic work to be discussed is Hidden Treasure, also known as Àlùmónì tó Farasin in Yoruba. It is a ceramic sculptural piece produced using the hand-building method of ceramic production.







Àlùmónì tó Farasin (Hidden Treasure)

H: 86cm, 2009, Earthenware

It is an artistic means of communication, i.e., food for thought for ladies and women who undergo abortion to desist from it. They might be killing a president, teacher, doctor, etc. Babies are hidden treasures from God to man.

Hidden Treasure: Àlùmónì tó Farasin is an earthenware pot with a brown color, a spherical shape with a rough texture, and many geometrical patterns inscribed on the body. It is about 86cm, making it the fourth largest among the artist's works. At the top of the pot is a nude pregnant female figure with an elongated neck, sitting on the cover of the pot. The figure and the pot are shown in a three-dimensional view, which can be seen from different angles. She appears to be looking at the front and places her hands by her sides. The pot can be opened and covered with the woman still attached. The front of the pot features inscriptions of various occupations such as teacher, engineer, musician, artist, nurse, and pilot, along with a carved embryo and the navel drawn up towards the pregnant figure. At the back of the work, there is an inscription of the word "president," a carved stylized facial mask, a symbol of love with the inscription of figures 12, 9, 6 and 3; a bag of money with symbols of naira, pound, and dollar also carved out of the pot. There are also triangular shapes. The left side of the piece mentions professions like doctor, teacher, musician, and engineer, with a side view of the human embryo on the body of the artwork. Additionally, the professions ambassador, lawyer, writer, a star figure carved on the body of the pot, and two human eyes are also depicted.

The nude, female figure symbolizes women in general, serving as a thought-provoking symbol, particularly for individuals involved in abortion, to caution them against it. They might be ending the life of a potential future president, pilot, artist, ambassador, lawyer, and more. The symbol of love drawn on the body of the pot signifies the love that women should show to their unborn babies instead of terminating pregnancies. The clock on the artwork symbolizes time, suggesting that women should realize the embryo in the womb today will grow into a prominent figure in society tomorrow. The transformation is simply a matter of time for it to take place. The embryo on the front of this pot symbolically represents the unborn child in the womb of the pregnant human figure atop the pot. The legs of this figure are submerged in the pot. The star on the left-hand side of the work symbolizes unborn stars that are being aborted by women. The bag of money depicted at the back symbolizes the potential wealth that could have been

generated by children who were aborted. Children in African culture hold significant importance; a woman without a child is deemed unfulfilled in life, irrespective of her societal status. Hence, it is crucial for the younger generation to comprehend the repercussions of abortion. This explains why the artwork functionsas both an aesthetic creation and an educational message, urging women to contemplate thoughtfully and acknowledge children as divine gifts.

The nude pregnant female figure in Akande's ceramics artwork illustrates the affection and care a genuine African has for children, highlighting the fertility of African women. This conveys a message that reflects the past, present, and future. His themes center on Africanism, intellectualism, expressionism, functionality, the integration of forms, and the philosophies of the Yoruba people.

This work, Àlùmónì tó Farasin(Hidden Treasure), can also signify an Africa woman who is pregnant with many nations and also a human being who is pregnant with many ambitions yet to be fulfilled.

Write up on Ceramic Piece titled
'Morning by Morning New Mercies I See'

Salami Ajani Kolade

Akande Femi is undoubtedly an experimental ceramist; hence, the newness and uniqueness are his style and forms. Born in Ogbomoso, Oyo State, the young artist draws inspiration from his experiences and background. A graduate in art with a special interest in Ceramics from The Polytechnic, Ibadan, Akande, in most of his renditions, displays the phenomenon that Adepegba would describe as "Abstraction beyond common understanding". This is a common feature in his style and form.

Decorations on his works are depicted in heavy abstraction which may not be easily seen in any contemporary pottery except in paintings of the Osogbo School, say, by the likes of Jimoh Buraimoh, Muraina Oyelami, Twin Seven Sevenand a host of others. Mastery of the medium is another factor that benefits the young and talented artist, enabling his work to flow like a fluid slip of clay, with which he interacts seamlessly.

Adepegba, in his work, Nigerian Art, its Tradition and Modern Tendencies, listed a number of masters of the art of pottery (like Abatan of Egbado and Ladi Kwali of Abuja who were female potters in their own right, and Ben Enwowu, Yusuf Grillo, Demas Nwoko who are consistent personalities). The same could be said of Akande if one is permitted to do so, as he shares common characteristics with these masters.

The work Morning by Morning New Mercies I See stands 173cm. It depicts a beautiful African damsel adorned with real beads on her neck and ears, complemented by a Yoruba traditional hairdo (Adimole).

The title of the piece "Morning by Morning New Mercies I See was carefully chosen by the artist, Akande, who claims to be an African artist and expresses himself through malleable earthen natural resources. Like the large-hearted, internationally acclaimed painter of repute, Moyo Ogundipe, when asked if his paintings were done with human hands, Moyo said an affirmative "No." "I am merely a medium of expression being used by some forces larger and more demanding than me." I hold the brush; they do the painting." The same is true in Akande's.







Morning by Morning, New Mercies I See
H: 173cm, 2011, Earthenware

An abstract symbolic reflection of the dynamic ways, forms, shapes, and dimensions of God mercies experienced daily in our life.

The impetus behind the manipulations of clays through his hands for perfect craftsmanship is “Olódùmarè (The Almighty God)” as he claims. His assertions of being an African artist are not far-fetched. It is evident in the Afrocentric mentality exhibited in all his works. This claim is supported by the work under discussion, "morning by morning new mercies I see,"which is a free-standing,life-size edifice, on which he worked on the head of the African woman in close-to – life realism with features typical of African art.

The entire structure of the piece is defined by a cylindrical form, a hallmark typical of his trademarks. Various decorative techniques are employed in the Afrocentric realm, including high reliefs of African images and icons, along with incisions depicting African combs like Ooya, birds such as Olumeye, fish, and lizards. The composition and combination of these images evoke the Yoruba Adire Eleko, renowned for being the traditional medium linked to these designs. The textures and the images make the whole piece lively, full of activities and rich, typical of Olaku's market scene on canvas.

The piece, more than just an aesthetic creation, serves as a lamp stand for conference rooms, executive offices, reception halls, and hotels. Therefore, the random perforations for light emission are divided into three parts, allowing for detachability. Only astute observers will notice the skillful segmentation, a result of the artist's adept handling of the medium.

Akande's forms and style are unique in his chosen field - ceramics, due to his ability to blend sculptural forms with pottery. The importance of anatomical representation in all his works is crucial, and one could classify his ceramic sculptures, if such a category exists in the field of visual arts.

The title of the work "Morning by Morning New Mercies I See is prominently displayed in the content and context of the composition, where abstract items representing mercies of various degrees are intricately integrated into the cylindrical monument of an abstracted human figure, which could only appeal to the inner minds of those who can perceive beyond the ordinary. One of the items engraved on the piece is the symbol of the naira, the Nigerian currency. This could be interpreted as suggesting that possession of naira is also considered a form of mercy.

The piece is visually appealing and enticing, offering comfort.



OPÉLÓYÍMIKÁ: An Expression of Femi Akande

'Femi Oose

Pottery is a prominent art in Nigeria and the decorations on pottery works are often reminiscent of the culture in which they are produced. This pot by Femi Akande entitled Opélóyímiká meaning 'Endowed with Thanks' is typical of a ritual pot among the Yoruba. It is crucial to investigate why the artist named it Opélóyímiká and referred to it as both a flower and a storage pot. The artist belongs to the category of Nigerian contemporary artists who integrate traditional forms into their work, although they may not always explore philosophical contexts. His formal training is apparent in his artistic expressions, and his religious inclination is clearly reflected in his interpretation of forms.

Method and Stylistic Forms

Opélóyímiká is a ceramic sculptural piece. This assertion is supported by two observations:

The piece consists of separable segments. It includes the cylindrical drum-like pot (lower segment) that comprises approximately two-thirds of the artwork, with a cyclical base serving as the pot's cover.

Secondly, the artistic method used in creating the artwork is sculptural, involving the addition of clay bits prepared with grog. The glossy surface is achieved through polishing instead of glazing. Possibly, the artist created the two segments separately and assembled them after aging to prevent collapse.

The forms in Opélóyímiká can be categorized into two groups, following the segmentation. The first category includes the three dimensions of the figure, which is the upper segment consisting of the hands, neck, breasts, belly, beads, and the head with its components. The second category is the relief on the cylindrical drum-like pot, which is the lower segment.

The figure is depicted with her head bowed and leaning to the right in a contemplative pose, her hands resting on her belly, and a facial expression conveying maturity. However, her breasts remain upright despite her facial expression. Her breasts are covered with a cloth tied to her back. Her ears are pierced to hold the beadsin place, and she also wears a chain of beads around her neck (some Ife figures were created with holes for attaching ornaments).







Opélóyímiká (Endowed with Thanks)
H: 153cm, 2009, Earthenware

It depicts a skillful representation of a woman's wish: that she will succeed in Nigeria, without traveling abroad. All over the body of the pot is a testimony to her wish came through i.e. destiny-changing blessings.

Her slightly swollen belly is nestled in the circular base resting on the uppermost edge of the pot. Viewing the figure from the front shows balance on both sides, except for the bowed head bent to her right. The space between both hands and the sides of the belly is aesthetically pleasing; these hands also function as the handles of the cover.

The pot, while not perfectly cylindrical, bulges slightly towards the middle and features three types of relief: intricate designs, discernible abstracts, and stylized human figures all depicted in low relief. Inscriptions in both Yoruba and English are visible; some of the icons in relief include keys crossing each other, the sun with about twelve long rays stretching downwards, a local comb, fingers, footprints, masks, eyes, fish, birds, and human figures in stylized forms suggesting supplication.

Contextual Clues

The ornaments on the ears and neck of the figure suggest a woman of prestige and wealth, but the icons in relief on the pot indicate 'needs' or 'desires'. This posture further suggests a person in sober reflection and supplication. She appears to be praying for the fetus in her womb. Her face does not suggest that she is a damsel, but the erectness of her breasts despite her facial look exemplifies a woman who has not put her breasts much use; she may be having her first pregnancy.

A thorough examination of the iconography of the pot will unveil its contextual meaning and deepen our comprehension of the artwork.

The key in Yoruba cultural context symbolizes 'access', and it is believed that the key to open the door of prosperity is in the hands of God. The local comb 'Ooya' is used for patting hair and it symbolizes a break and separation from evil. The pantheon behind Ooya is believed to guide individuals towards prosperity and ward off all forms of evil from entering their lives.

Fish and birds are also associated with this metaphysics. In African cosmology, it is believed that physical occurrences are influenced by metaphysical forces. Fish are connected to water spirits and symbolize wealth, while birds are linked to the spirit of the sky and symbolize power.

The sun 'Òorùn' with its rays represented as long – tiny hands symbolizes God (the sun is not often associated with man unlike the stars). The human figure depicted in relief, with hands stretched towards the sun, can be interpreted as a supplication to God.

Another look at the figure (upper segment) from the right view suggests a woman in her early pregnancy stage, guiding her relatively swollen belly with her hands. The pregnancy may be interpreted as the conception of good fortune, as expressed on the pot in relief. In Yoruba culture, fortune is personified; it can be conceived, believed, and nurtured to maturity. An individual aspiring to wealth conceives of it, and upon achieving it, signifies the realization of their conception, thus requiring guidance (nurturing) to prevent its loss.

The artist's choice of a female figure is not far-fetched; the success of an individual wouldn't have been possible if a woman had not conceived, delivered, and nurtured such an individual. This is in consonance with the artist's statement: "I wouldn't have become what I am today if my mother had not given birth to me".

Three themes are embedded in this work: reflection, supplication, and submission. Reflecting on her state or past experiences, supplicating for her desires, and submitting to God who is able to grant her requests.

Instead of the artist's 'Opélóyímiká', 'ebe mi' (my supplication) would have been a more appropriate title.

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Versatility of Cultures: In Femi Akande Artistic Expression

Sandra Isagua

Introduction: The Artist and His Style

Femi Akande is a prominent Nigerian ceramic artist in the western region of the country, specializing in capturing the distinctive imagery of his surroundings. He experiments with techniques and materials such as clay and plaster of Paris which are conventional materials. His primary artistic focus is ceramic sculpture; thus, his art pieces are notable for their monumental forms. His works consist of figures with strongly outlined forms filled in with inner patterns that he decorates. One of his sources of inspiration is his immediate environment, which includes people, their social life, and their world views, interpreted and represented in his works by the artist.

An intriguing aspect of Femi Akande's art is that his ceramic works are not just functional household utility objects; they are primarily sculptural ceramics that convey messages to the world. His subjects or themes center on everyday life and human activities. They are constructed in a way that sets them apart from what is typically found in the works of most ceramic artists. Atypical example among his works is the piece titled "Àlùmónì tó Farasin (Hidden Treasure), which conveys a message to teenage girls and damsels who engage in the unwholesome practice of terminating pregnancies. His message is that such actions are immoral. By the same token, another of Akande's workstitled "Ilè tó Sàn fún Wàrà àti fún Oyin (Land Flowing with Milk and Honey), exposes the selfish nature and tendencies of African leaders who do not show any readiness to allow the masses access to the good of the land. It is of further interest to note the creative way in which Akande themes are interconnected from one work to another, a feature that underlines the ingenuity of the artist.

Undoubtedly, Femi Akande is skilled in working with clay and P.O.P. as he demonstrates adept manipulation of these materials. He skillfully employs the coil method, the pinch method, and slab method, each incorporating both additive and subtractive techniques.

"Benin Today"

Benin Today represents Femi Akande's exploration of Benin art forms. The artwork consciously focuses on Benin facial marks through the medium of ceramic sculpture made with P.O.P.







Benin Today
H: 85cm, 2011, P.O.P.

It demonstrates innovative expression and functionalism in contemporary Benin court Art.

'Benin Today' is uniquely different from his other works, and a closer look at the style reveals a touch of Femi Akande's typical artistic impression. This specific piece mainly uses molding and casting as the primary methods employed in completing the work. A mold of the desired shape is created, and a mixed slurry of P.O.P. is poured into the mold and left for some time to solidify, while the negative mold is destroyed. This leaves the P.O.P. with the shape of the desired mold.

In addition, 'Benin Today' is a three-dimensional artwork that has length, breadth, width, and depth. It can be observed from the front, back, and the side. The piece is characterized by a symmetrical form, where the same form (pseudo-FESTAC 77 face) makes up each half or side of the whole.

Benin Today is a modern decorative art piece, drawing inspiration from the styles and forms of the Benin Ivory Mask of the FESTAC 77 symbol. The FESTAC mask is of a sixteenth-century Benin Queen Mother, and is now found in many contexts, and has become a symbol of Africa, not only in Nigeria, but in West Africa, the Diaspora and around the world.

Benin Today embodies the functionality of African art, serving as a genuine and meaningful continuation of traditional African art. It portrays modern-day Benin. The majority of Benin artworks are primarily court artworks, with some being ritual and festival arts. The artist assigns a new function to the form beyond the royal court, festivals, or rituals. Interestingly, not only Akande but contemporary artists in general view their art not only as ritualistic but also for aesthetic appeal.

A critical examination of the work reveals the representation of Benin icons, including the high collar, bead cap, eyes, and markings on the forehead. The nose depicts a change from the usual flat nose of most Benin figures, which the artist explains “people are being given birth to with pointed noses in contemporary times." "Moreover, there is a stylistic change in the materials used by the artist. Hence, the bead worn on the head and neck has a connection to the Edo people. Beads symbolize royalty and are primarily used during ceremonies like the coronation of Chiefs and Obas. Theyare also frequently worn by brides and grooms during marriage ceremonies. Similarly, the bead is not only significant to the Edo, they are also of great value to the Yoruba and other ethnic groups. In Akande's piece, the beaded cap may symbolize a knotted or twisted hairstyle worn by past and present chiefs and Obas of Benin.

The facial masks also have two vertical marks incised on the forehead. On the left side of each of these two broad vertical marks are tiny lines that symbolize tattoos and are mostly used by the Edo, Bayelsa, Rivers, Itsekiri and Ijaw people during festivals.

Benin Today is a decorative piece that holds value for use and serves an aesthetic purpose. The work indicates that Benin art pieces are not only created for art's sake but more importantly, they serve a purpose in life. For instance, the art piece bears an embedded hole that has the capacity to function – to hold flowers, therefore serving as a flower vase. It also demonstrates that a work of art is the unique outcome of a unique temperament. Its beauty comes from the fact that the artist acknowledges and appreciates his own individual uniqueness; he is not a product of what others in his environment want him to be.

In conclusion, these aspects emphasize Femi Akande's role as a global artist who values his culture while also embracing and highlighting the beauty and relevance of other cultures' art.

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Femi Akande Ceramics: A Traditional Reinvention and Cultural Revisitation in a Global Perspective

Ayinde Johnson Ajibade

Femi Akande without a doubt one of Nigeria's ceramists or potters. He is a graduate of The Polytechnic, Ibadan, where he also lectures in the Department of Art, Design and Printing Technology of the school. He has participated in numerous art exhibitions in Nigeria. For Femi, art is a profession passed down through generations, as his mother engaged in various crafts during her time at Modern School. He also integrated influences from his mentors Olaleye Seyi Martins and Ben Oyadiran's philosophies, a variety of objects, and nature.

The reinvention of multi-functional ceramics/potteries embellished with assorted Africa traditional motifs (Yorubas) has established Femi Akande as a prolific ceramist and astute artist. His eight ceramics works on exhibition not only showcase geometric and prominent Yoruba motifs and symbols but also draw the viewer's attention to the importance of embracing traditional values. Furthermore, he raises awareness among the audience about the land, encouraging them to embrace the simple life of their ancestors.

Interestingly, all the ceramic potteries created by Femi Akande convey numerous messages to the audience. The artist mentioned that he used to find beauty in the aesthetics of Africa especially Yoruba graphic symbolism, to create new designs.

Apèrè Oba (Royal Stool)

The aim of this analysisis to examine the work Apèrè Oba (Royal Stool) from the perspective of the artist's cultural background and diverse experience.

When we look at this ceramic stool titled Apèrè Oba (Royal Stool) one will see that it can be collectively called a festival of strong Yoruba motifs and masks.

Apèrè Oba (Royal Stool) is a ceramic stool crafted from polished and fired earthenware,combined with stoneware. Standing at approximately 48cm in height, the work portrays the beauty of the variousfacets of African masks.







Apèrè Oba (Royal Stool)

H: 48cm, 2011, Earthenware + Stoneware

It shows the aesthetic wealth of Yoruba masks and motifs.

Adepegba (1995) argues that traditional African art primarily consists of figures and masks. He further explains that contemporary Nigerian artists not only adapt traditional forms of figures; masks hold particular interest for many of them. While specific Nigerian masks are occasionally depicted, the majority of mask forms in contemporary Nigerian art are unique creations by individual artists.

This assertion is evident in Akande's Apèrè Oba (Royal Stool). The stool showcases various strong African Yoruba masks adorned with geometrical shapes/motifs that enhance its beauty and functionality rather than being solely an aesthetic object. The stool serves two purposes: as a convenient seat for an Oba and as an object of beautification (flower vase).

This Apèrè Oba also reflects a blend of images and motifs from both Yoruba and non-Yoruba cultures, as the small motifs surrounding the stool are reminiscent of the Igbo Akwete broad weave cloth pattern (Adepegba 1995 plate 63).

The mask surrounding the stool reminds me of a facet of Yoruba art and culture, from masquerade performances to intricate wood carvings and patterned textiles. He then incorporates these traditions into the ceramic stool to create his unique art form, which can be seen as a revisitation and adaptation of his cultural background (Yoruba).

The holes created around the stool also evoke the Zaire Pottery artifact known as Mabondo (singular dzibondo) in its various shapes, featuring geometrical and anthropomorphic decorations or iconography (Werner 1984 plate 200). These influences can be seen as stemming from the diverse experiences of the artist.

Akande's ceramics/ pottery have similarities with that of Ladi Kwali, a Nigerian renowned potter who worked in the Gwari tradition and made large pots decorated with incised patterns. Her works are intriguing hybrids of traditional African and Western studio pottery, and they may also be classified as influenced by various experiences.

Akande incorporates references to his strong Yoruba culture through motifs incised around the stool using earthenware and stoneware clay body. The various zigzag, geometric shapes, and spiral motifs incised on the work have long histories within Yoruba art and provide meaning to items ranging from Ifa divination trays to Adire textiles.

The original functions and meanings of some motifs have been retained. In these instances, Akande ingeniously adapts them to fit new contexts, like the zigzag motifs incised around the stool edges. It is a clear reference to the seriated fringe, known as Gbala, which is present along the edge of the lappets of Egungun costumes, although it is widespread in Yoruba art.

In its original form, Akande's ceramic stool conveys the blessings of the ancestors. The zigzag pattern likely symbolizes the broader significance of preserving cultural heritage. The motifs resonate with past values, customs, and traditions due to their extensive history in the arts, carrying precedents that can serve as the basis for cultural negotiations. In fact, this Royal Stool exhibited symbolizes the emergence of the past in the present.

Ultimately, it represents a display of re-engineering and reawakening our traditional African culture, showcasing the talent of a dedicated artist who appreciates the beauty of African motifs.

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Other Works







Ìkòkò Olójúméjì (2 face vase)

H: 49cm, 2011, Earthenware + stoneware

It depicts the beauty of lines and form on the surface.







Amorphous Form

H: 36cm, 2011, Stoneware + Earthenware

It shows the beauty in amorphous form of an object.







African Mask

H:62cm, 2011. P.O.P.

It depicts the beauty of an African mask.







Ife Today

H: 56cm, Earthenware 2004

It shows innovative expression and functionalism in contemporary Ife Art.

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