

ARTHOUSE
THE SPACE

LAGOS
D-ARTIST



S'Art
the art of Diseye Tantua



ARTHOUSE
THE SPACE

presents

S'Art
A Solo Exhibition of recent works
by Diseye Tantua

Opening Reception
Saturday, April 22, 2017, 6 PM

Exhibition Runs until May 6, 2017

Venue: KIA Showroom
43B Akin Adesola Street
Victoria Island
Lagos

ABSOLUT.



The Power to Surprise

SCAVI & RAY
PROSECCO

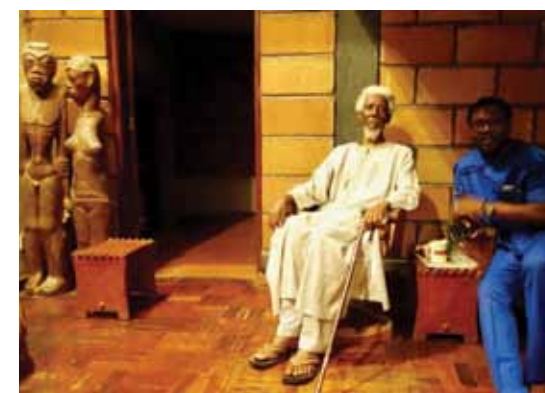
Cover: 'Daddy's Car', installation by Diseye Tantua, 2016.

Inside cover: 'Waiting for an engine', VW beetle seat (Turquoise & Red) functional sculpture assemblage, 2017.

Back cover: 'No Standing', lorry back with Slogans-installation.



Demas Nwoko & Diseye Tantua



On behalf of Arthouse-The Space, I am pleased to present a solo exhibition by celebrated painter and mixed media artist, Diseye Tantua. Entitled *S'Art*, this exhibition charts a new chapter in the artist's practice as he extends his work in painting and experiments with furniture and functional sculpture.

Diseye Tantua is best known for his iconic style of "Afro Pop Art," combining graphic symbols, bold colours and expressive text. His drawings are based on traditional proverbs that are made popular by headboards and bumper stickers on buses, taxis, tricycles and street signs. Tantua focuses on social groups in urban spaces around the city, often depicting forms of transit and movement. These scenes are overlaid with popular local expressions that speak to the energy and dynamism of the city's inhabitants.

This exhibition brings together Tantua's recent paintings alongside his new experiments with three dimensional forms. Tantua's longstanding relationship with master artist and architect Demas Nwoko has resulted in collaborative works, whereby Tantua paints atop Demas Nwoko's iconic chairs. Inspired by his visits to Nwoko's studio, Tantua began experimenting with three dimensional objects, forming the subject matter of his paintings in the round. Using vintage cars, among them his father's classic Mercedes Benz, Tantua has created chairs, couches and tables that have been welded and painted to breathe new life into the salvaged car parts.

The title of the exhibition, *S'Art*, refers to the past tense of "sit" as a way of highlighting the influence of Nwoko's chairs on the artist, as well as celebrating the life and works of Demas Nwoko at 81.

This powerful collaboration brings together two generations of artists in dialogue with each other, reflecting how contemporary art is shaped by its modern predecessors and its continuing relevance today. We commend Diseye Tantua on this new body of work as he continues to invigorate his artistic practice.

Sincerely,

Kavita Chellaram
CEO, Arthouse Contemporary



Demas Nwoko & Diseye Tantua

I started building my studio in 1966 and furniture was part of my architectural designs as far back as 1967. I continued in the seventies after the Biafra war ended. The first set of chairs was designed for my senior brother, for his small sitting room back then in 1975.

I am happy making doors, as I want everybody to have good doors in their house and chairs that are comfortable to sit on.

I made the chairs for their aesthetic value and Diseye decided to use them as a backing for his own artwork. He transformed these chairs by painting on them and for me this is a new dimension in creativity.

You see, it's like those musicians that are already stars and famous in their own right with millions of copies sold, then they do collaboration with other artists to produce a new record. It has its own added value.

Diseye is simply calling attention to my own work while also enhancing his own work.

That's what artistic collaboration is. So I see this as an exciting collaboration and time for the art world.

My chair designs are made with comfort in mind, designs made for the human

being to be comfortable, even for those physically challenged like me.

It was as if I designed them for when I would be disabled.

If I have to build a chair, it should speak for itself! The worse thing that can happen to an artist is to lie to himself.

For my work, all my work (architecture or furniture) I pick the most ordinary workers, I don't employ experts. When you say experts, that would have meant employing Italians because these are the people we call experts, but they are craftsmen really.

I consciously want to train up Africans: Nigerian craftsmen, rather than use the readymade European craftsmen. I see it as an opportunity to impact skill on our people.

It has helped me to invent and improve on technology of production by trying to create a means of mass production that are within the control of our unlimited craftsmanship or technology.

You will find out that I use a lot of clamping jigs to enable these average competent artisans and craftsmen to achieve these levels of quality of the jobs I do in my architecture and furniture.

The Truth about it is that with our

Government... they think they can buy development! You cannot buy development. Development has to be from within.

To achieve the desired level of development you have to use your money to develop the human capacity, and only through that will true development come.

That's why all the money we have thrown away and spent has not developed us. In fact, that has only aided the misappropriation of our material resources.

We are yet to develop our human capacity; a little was started at first before the Europeans left. There is no manpower and the local manpower we have is not recognized. If even, it's not by default, meaning local manpower developed by itself somehow. The system makes it impossible for you to work. The problem is serving, to use our manpower and creativity to produce a concrete built environment that would serve. And you can only do it if you are using yourselves, you can't buy it.

*Demas Nwoko,
24th February 2017.*

When I was offered a solo exhibition by Arthouse Contemporary, my response was that I was due for three separate shows; one on my fabricated furniture and painted chairs, the second on my trucks & slogans, while the last on my photography of different artists. We ended up settling for the first two as one which gave birth to 'S'Art' from the past tense of 'sit'.

S'Art is my way of celebrating the life and great works of Demas Nwoko at 81.

My relationship with Demas Nwoko grew from day one. On my first visit to his home in Asaba, He offered me a seat and we talked into the night, continuing till the next day before I hit the road.

I kept pondering on what made this simple wooden seat so comfortable, or was it our discussion? So I persuaded 'Daddy' to give me one of his chairs and I refused to go without his signature on it, which he finally did sign.

Excited about my most valued seat signed by the great Demas Nwoko, I moved it from the living room to the bedroom and still did not like anyone sitting on it or playing with it, so I took it to my office.

Each time I sat on it, the artist in me wanted it to be more than just a comfortable signed chair and from that the idea was born. I moved the chair to my studio after calling Daddy for his permission to paint over it. On completion I drove back to his village and yes it was priceless to see his expression as he saw my painting on his seat...

...Today I celebrate his outstanding dedication, craftsmanship and genius with his chairs dipped in my paint. I learnt so much from my close contact with him and enjoy every second of his

company to the point of asking to be adopted by him. I would love to say a thousand and one things about Demas Nwoko but I believe 'A GENIUS LIVES AMONG US' pretty much sums it up. It's been a great and humbling experience having to collaborate with the grand master artist/ architect Demas Nwoko.

"To own a piece of Demas Furniture is to own an artifact as important as one made by Gordon Russell, that well respected designer associated with the Arts & Crafts movement in England." -John Godwin, Gillian Hopwood : THE ARCHITECTURE of Demas Nwoko.

Growing up my brothers, sisters and I all knew how much our father loved his Mercedes Benz...

...In fact we had a joke about it -"clap your slippers before you enter". For some strange reason, among the cars my father had, his Land Rovers and Benz where his favorite. The Land Rover is a story for another day as he kept on pimping it till his very end. The Benz was his all time favorite which he passed to my brother just so he could still have it in sight.

My brother used it for years and the car would simply not die! Tari gradually outgrew the old Benz and dumped it like a bad habit, so I decided to make my 'Art' out of it or at least what was left of it.

'If only daddy could see it now... ...With a new number plate'. Inspired by my constant visits to Demas Nwoko who taught me the true meaning of being a creative artist, I dusted myself and deviated a bit from my two dimensional forms and paintings to working in the round. In creating space to fully practice I built a metal extension for my studio to accommodate production of my metal and wood ideas. Employing various

artisans : from welders to spray painters and carpenters to say the least.

Like my father I also have a love for motorbikes and cars (classic cars especially) but my major problem with collecting these cars has been it's maintenance.

From creating furniture pieces from daddy's old Benz I continued with my VWBeate among other cars In my collection. I also bought salvaged parts to build my chairs, couches, tables etc.

For years I made furniture on a small scale, mostly out of wood, but adding car parts was a new dimension, creating designs that would keep anyone enthralled and starting a conversation from them. For each design it's been quite exciting as they all don't follow the same pattern and are designed from what is available. All fun in its production, I learnt and am still learning a lot from the regular artisans I employed (most mistakes they made from my directions became a new pattern and style).

Speaking of my paintings/ drawings... ...Who pays attention to slogans on cars ,trucks and tricycles ? Who collects Slogans? Why do people put these texts on their car? Is it to stand out or give an identity to the car? A proclaim political, social message? An expression of aesthetics, humor or simply advertising? What is the role of religion? Is it a form of missionary? Are the car slogans really based on proverbs and is there a historic development in the kind of text? Most language groups in Africa were only spoken and not written but those written have been an enrichment of the language and its use. This is seen on the inscriptions in stores, churches, on motorcycles, buses, lorries, taxis, tricycles, cars, wheelbarrows, basins and even entrances of some homes.

As a visitor the same questions still

come to mind: just where do they come from?

I have pondered on these questions for years while painting and writing with the hope of finding answers; the humor and the rich relationship with the culture of proverbs have kept me going all these years.

Proverbs have a prominent role in our oral culture; they are strong sharp sayings in which a metaphor is used as a manner to make things clear. It is a very dynamic way of expressing oneself. They can be traced back to popular stories, tales or myth and can be found in songs, poems and drums.

In proverbs one is able to express commentary, criticism, characterizes, confounds or ridicules as well as using them to give advice about life.

A few books and articles have tried to give answers to these questions and in all, my opinion is that the missionaries were responsible for these trends and with time it slowly added the traditional proverbs, advices, experiences with a mark of remembrance which goes to show how creative we have become with words.

Proverb leaves an escape: sarcasm, irony and criticism can be denied by hiding them in a proverb, although they are expressed in the proverb. By using a proverb the speaker hides behind the general and unidentifiable 'it is said'. Sometimes a proverb is reduced to just one word. So the proverbs are a pithy, multi-interpretable way of communicating with other people. Its no wonder the connection between the tradition of proverbs and the car slogans has been made emphatically by motorist and guess what... ...'Proverbs' is my best book in the bible.

My father had his favorite sayings as, "honesty pays" and "good name is

better than riches", which are very popular as tailboards and headboard on lorries in Ghana.

For Demas Nwoko (my adopted father), 'everybody is a person', when I asked for an explanation ...

...he went further to say, "everybody, man/woman is a person in this town!". When a town hall meeting is called, everybody gathers, even the mad man who would not wait to get an answer for his raised question and walks out on the meeting, when he goes you would see the elders puzzled by his question taking long hours on it. You see, everybody owes his community, his county some form of contribution in its growth.

Tam Fiofori called them 'classic one liners' in his write-up 'Have Art Will Travel', which was part of my LOOK & LAUGH exhibition in 2009 (my first major exhibition on slogans in which we coined the word-Afro Pop Art). Tam recalls the childhood games of slogans on lorries they played knowing the few transport vehicles that go to and fro Benin City. Olu Amoda also wrote about the 'Text Based Vehicles' which have never been prosecuted by the vehicle inspectors (VIO) for these text based visuals assault as they look and laugh. I also wrote about my early involvement with slogans growing up in Ghana as a child. Between then and now; I have collected a few more from Ghana and different parts of Nigeria where I have roots; "cool kobo is better than hot naira", "after God fear woman", "money na man", "if you pass me, you pass God" and so on.

For some strange reason, my love for slogans have grown from writing them down in my diary to building a photo bank as my joy is that photography is also an important form of Art.

I don't go out of my way with a camera hunting for slogans, they just appear and I am always ready to shoot with

my phone camera or if my professional camera is at arms length.

Being on the road often, either with my motorbike or my car, criss crossing the country on one mission or the other, once I spot a truck with an inscription, I get excited and in minutes, I get to its back to take a photo but on the bike, I over take it, park and bring my camera out to set for the shot. I've had cases where I had to turn around to hunt a lorry I passed just to take a better photograph of its tailboard inscription. I prefer to drive or ride alone mostly, that way I don't have someone to hurry me up when I find an interesting collection.

My art is mostly text based as I share with more people slogans I have collected so far.

I try to draw attention to viewers with my intricate designed technique on the background, in most cases vibrant colors and messages with simple basic drawings/ illustrations.

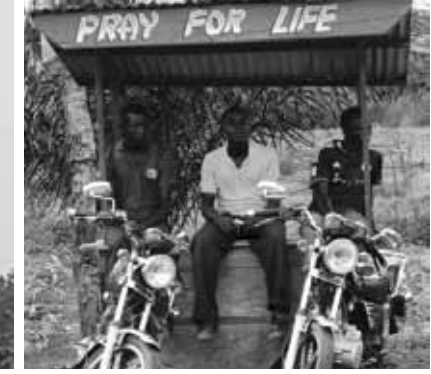
I would prefer to paint or sculpt rather than explain my thoughts verbally or writing. The time I will spend explaining or writing about them can produce for me one more work.

Let me end by quoting Abraham Maslo, 'A musician must make music; an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be at peace with himself. What a man can be, he must be.'

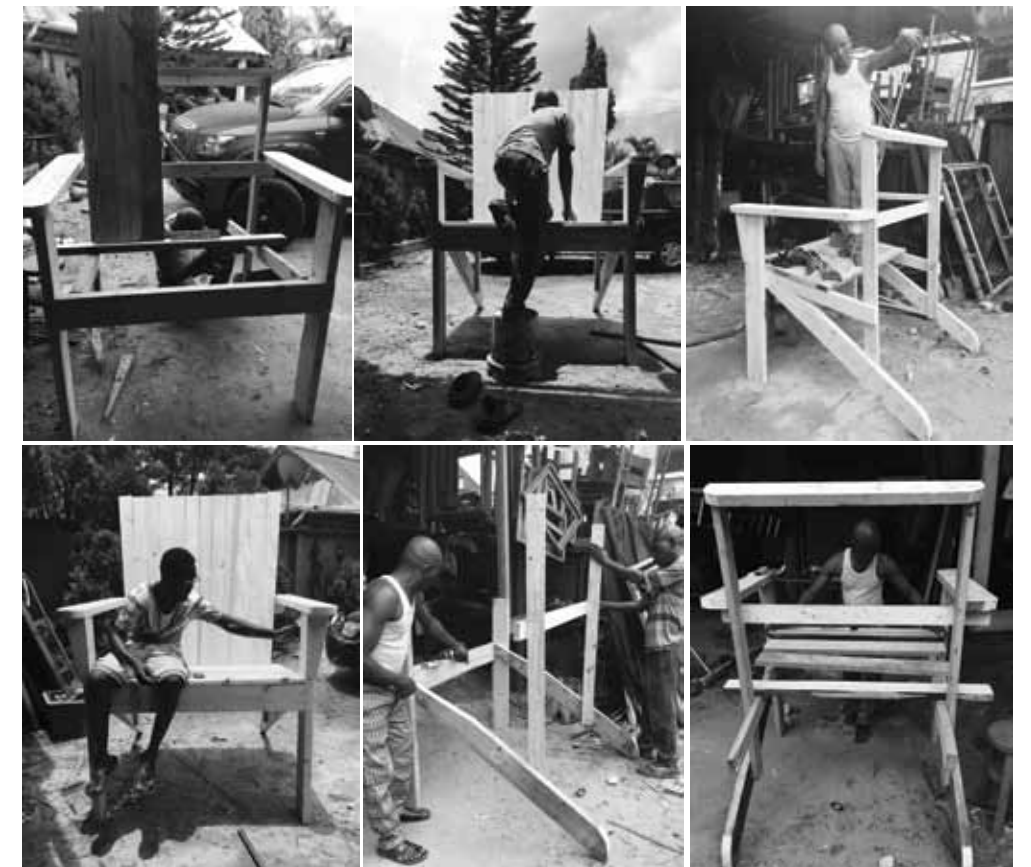
Happy Viewing,

*Diseye Tantua
11th April 2017.*

'Slogans', -black & white photographs by Diseye Tantua



Wooden Chairs



Left: 'Pop Art portrait of Chinua Achebe on a Painted wooden chair by Demas Nwoko

Right: THE PROCESS: making the number one big chair.



Left: 'Pop Art portrait of Wole Soyinka on a Painted wooden chair by Demas Nwoko.

Above: Antique two seater wooden chair by Demas Nwoko with a Pop Art portrait of Demas Nwoko atop.

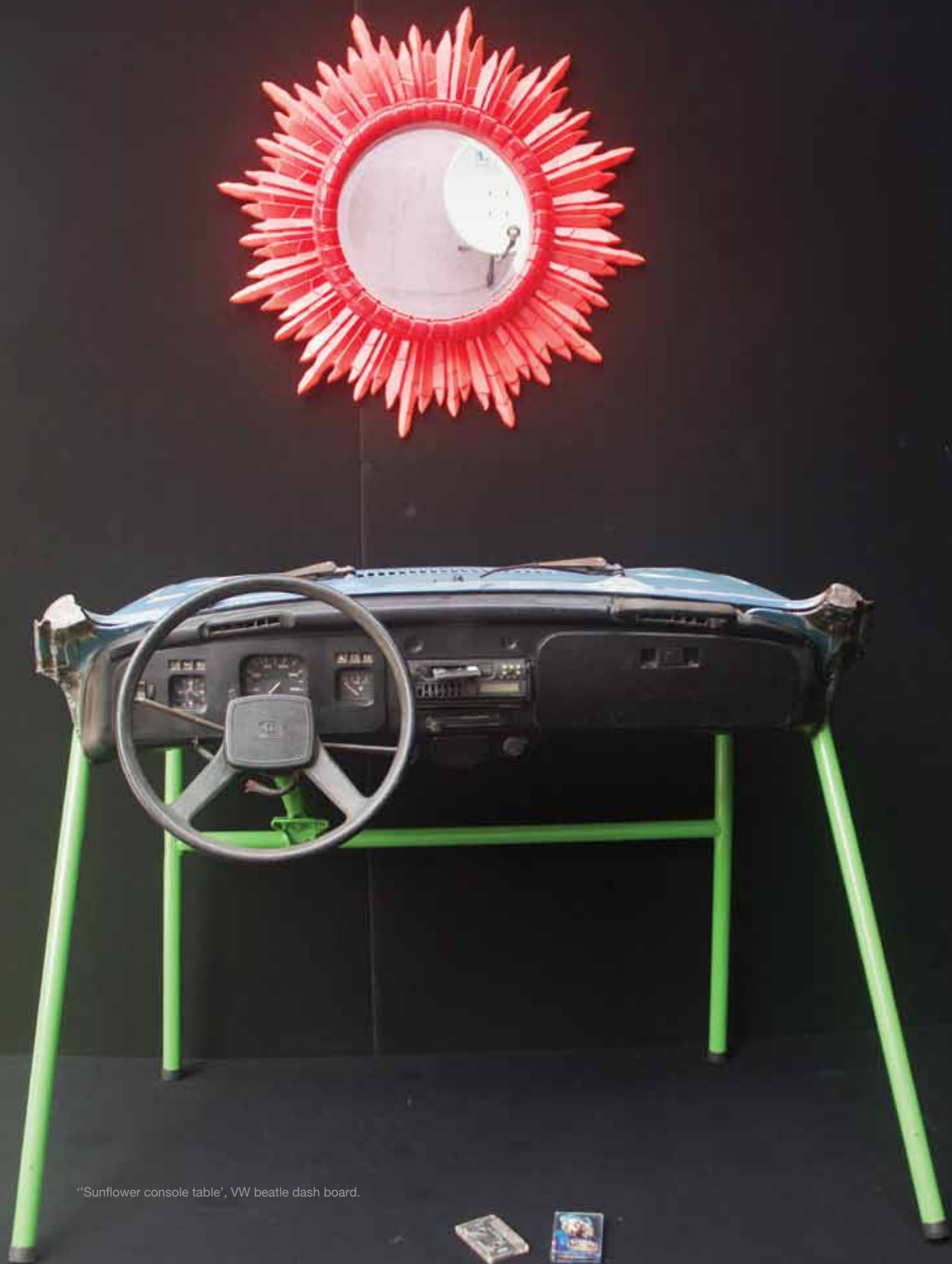
Right: 'Pop Art portrait of Rex Jim Lawson atop chair by Demas Nwoko.





I AM AN ARTIST
THIS DOES NOT
MEAN I WILL WORK
FOR FREE
THANK YOU
FOR UNDERSTANDING

Pop Art Portrait of 'FELA KUTI'
atop wooden chairs by Demas Nwoko.



"Sunflower console table", VW beetle dash board.



KIA couch, from salvage parts.



Front VW beetle seat (rat rod style) and the making.





Blue Office table (left), purple couch (above) and the rainbow couch all made from benz 200 flat boot.





The Artist blue office table, made from his fathers benz 200 flat boot.



Red Benz 200 table and chairs.



'LAGOS' Eko 4 Show, yellow flat boot table (called the executive conductor).



'The sunflower console table', (close-up view), from a VW beetle dash board.



Lemon green VW beetle door couch.



Process of build.



The brown flat Boot Couch



The Rainbow Couch



The original brown leather drivers seat with a swivel leg.



Process of build.



Paintings

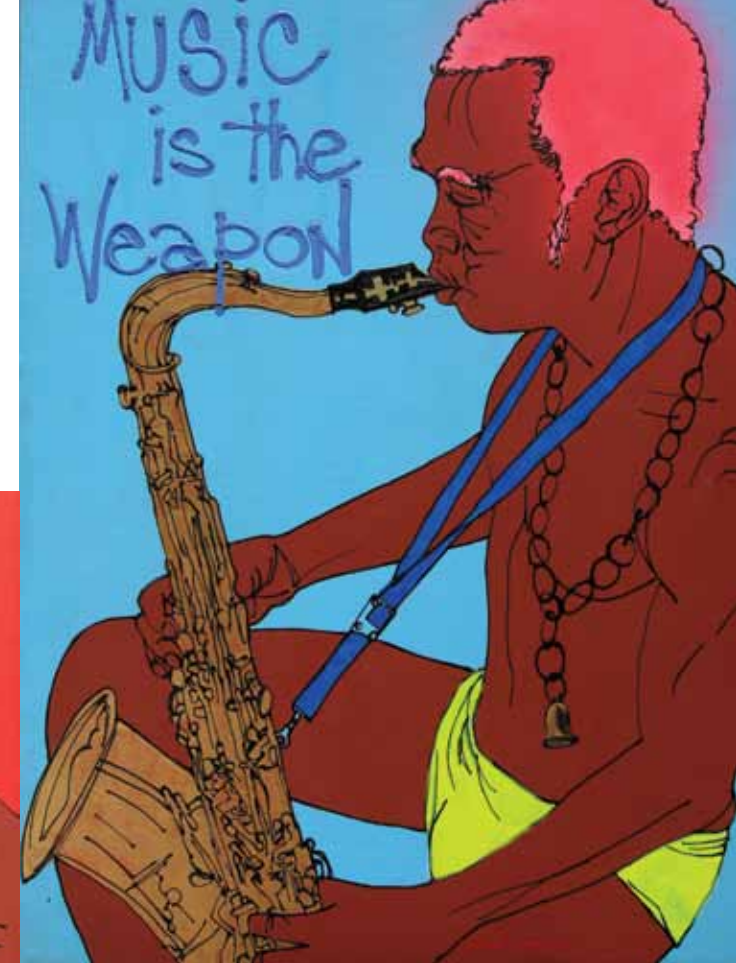
Left: 'Deffern' defferen' fever', acrylic on canvas, 92 x 92 cm.



FELA (purple & gold), acrylic on canvas. 92x122cm

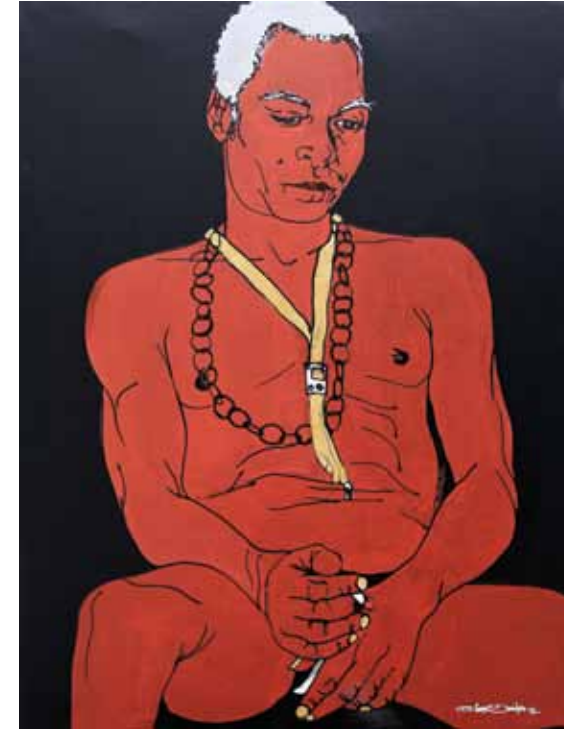


FELA, Music is the weapon, Africa must unite and all about Afro beat, acrylic in canvas, 92x122cm each.

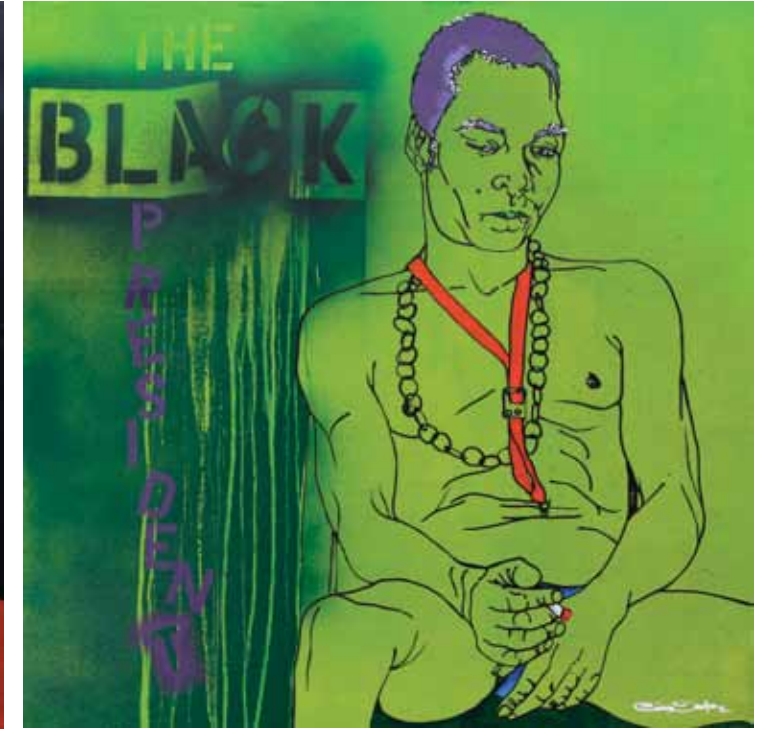




All about the music -FELA, acrylic on canvas, 92x122cm



The black president i, acrylic on canvas, 92 x122cm.



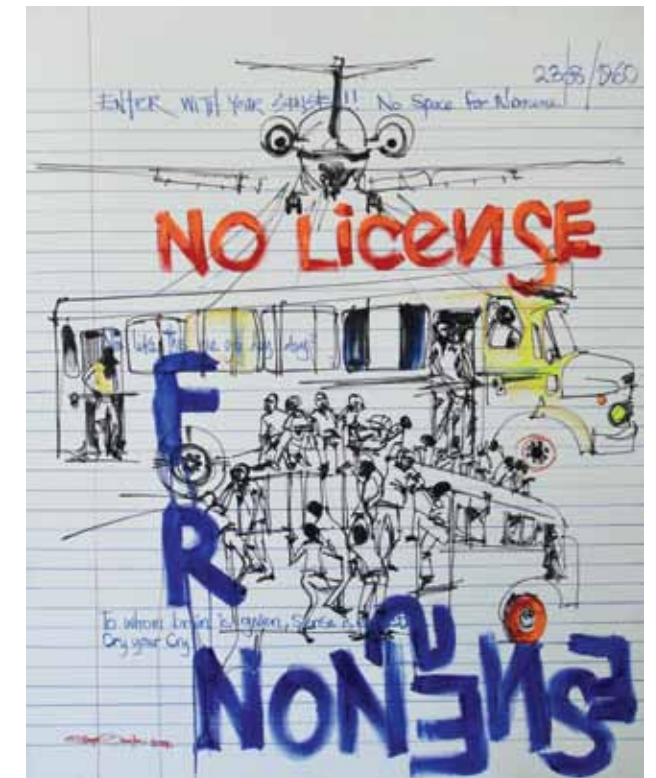
The black president ii, i, acrylic on canvas, 92 x122cm.



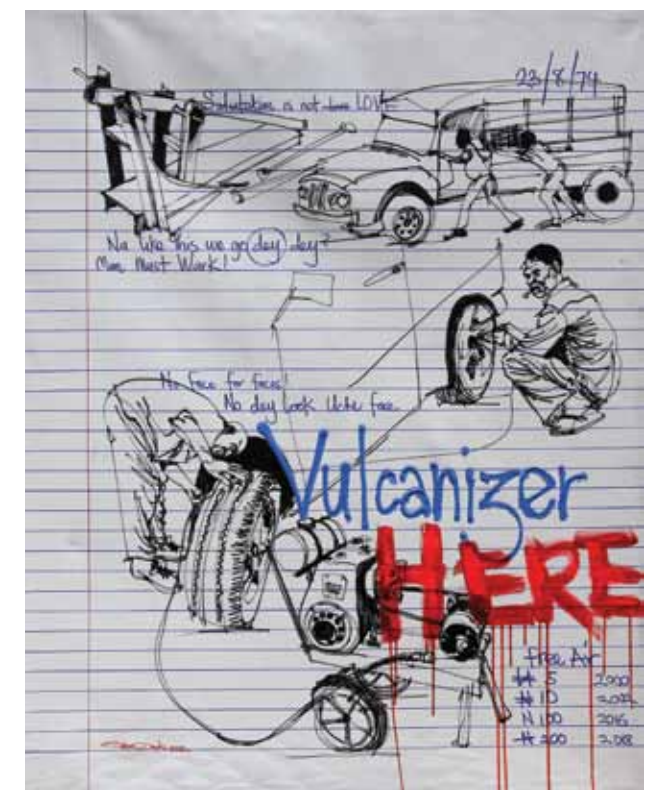
'TRAVEL & SEE', acrylic on canvas, 122x153cm.



'MANY HAVE GONE', acrylic on canvas, 122x153cm



'NO LICENSE FOR NONSENSE', acrylic on canvas, 122x153cm



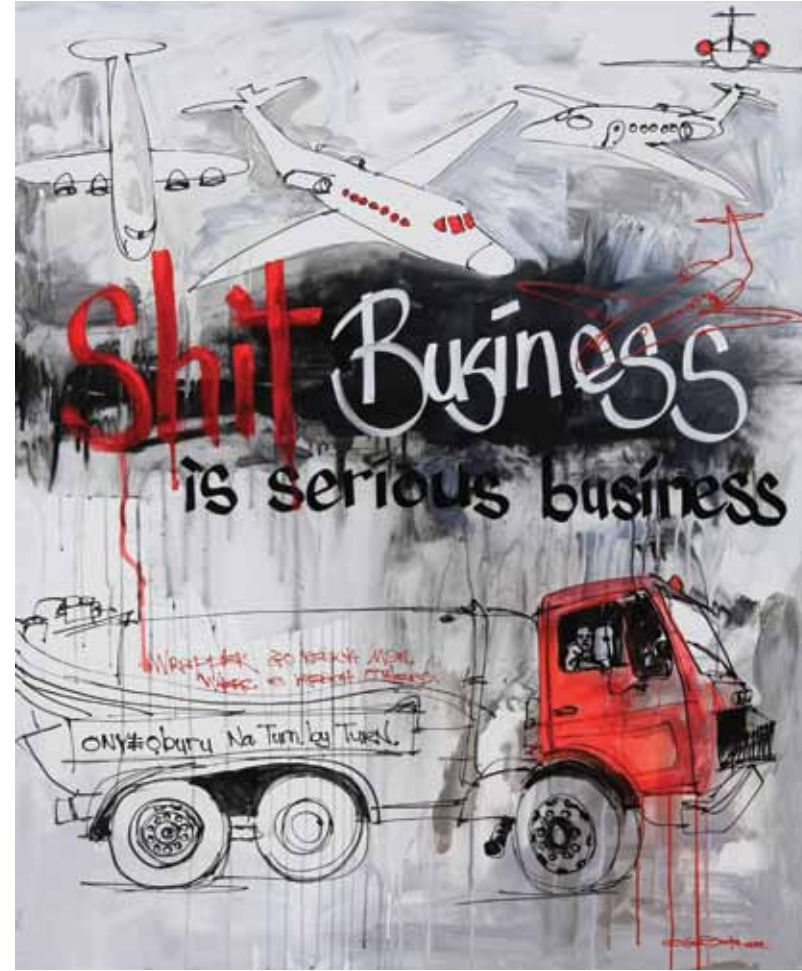
'VULCANIZER HERE', acrylic on canvas, 122 x153cm



'No Time', acrylic on canvas, 122 x 153 cm.



'Stay your Lane', acrylic on canvas, 122 x 153 cm.



'Shit Business is Serious Business', acrylic on canvas, 122 x 153 cm.



'No Paddy 4 Jungle', acrylic on canvas, 122 x 153 cm.



'Keke Today, Private Jet Tomorrow', acrylic on canvas, 122 x 153 cm.



'Don't Worry be Happy', acrylic on canvas, 152 x 153 cm.



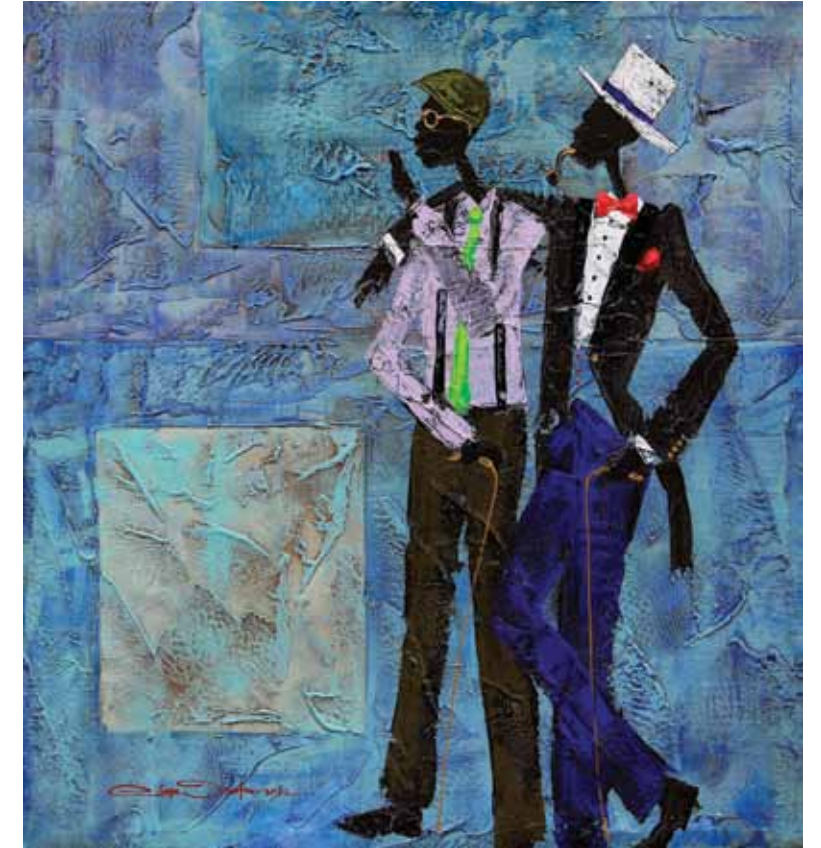
'After God Fear Woman', acrylic on canvas, 122 x 153 cm.



'Slow Down', acrylic on canvas, 122 x 153 cm.



'Fresh flowers 4 you', acrylic on canvas, 76 x 76 cm.



'Gentlemen's Club', acrylic on canvas, 76 x 76 cm.



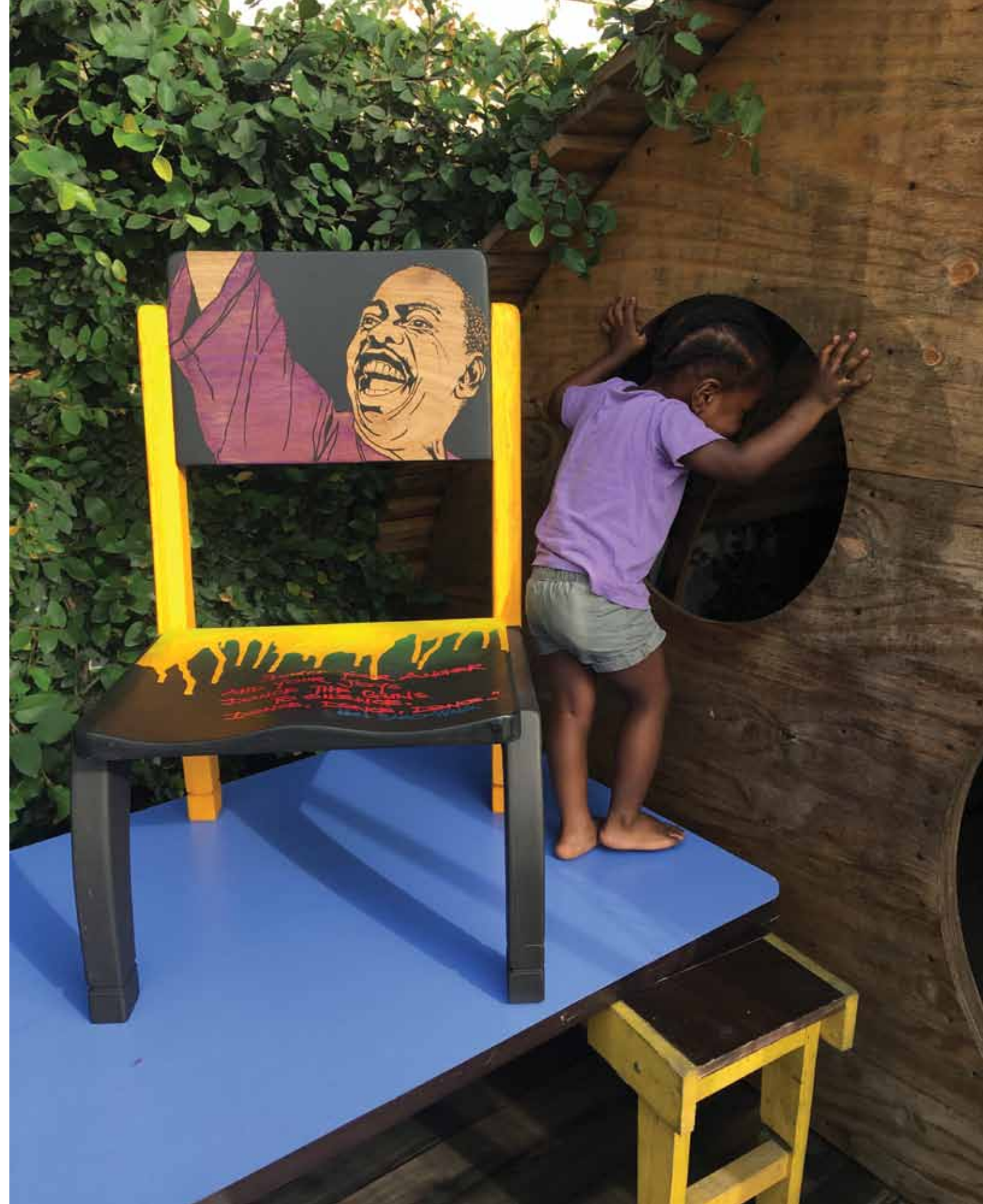
'My Rose', acrylic on canvas, 76 x 76 cm.



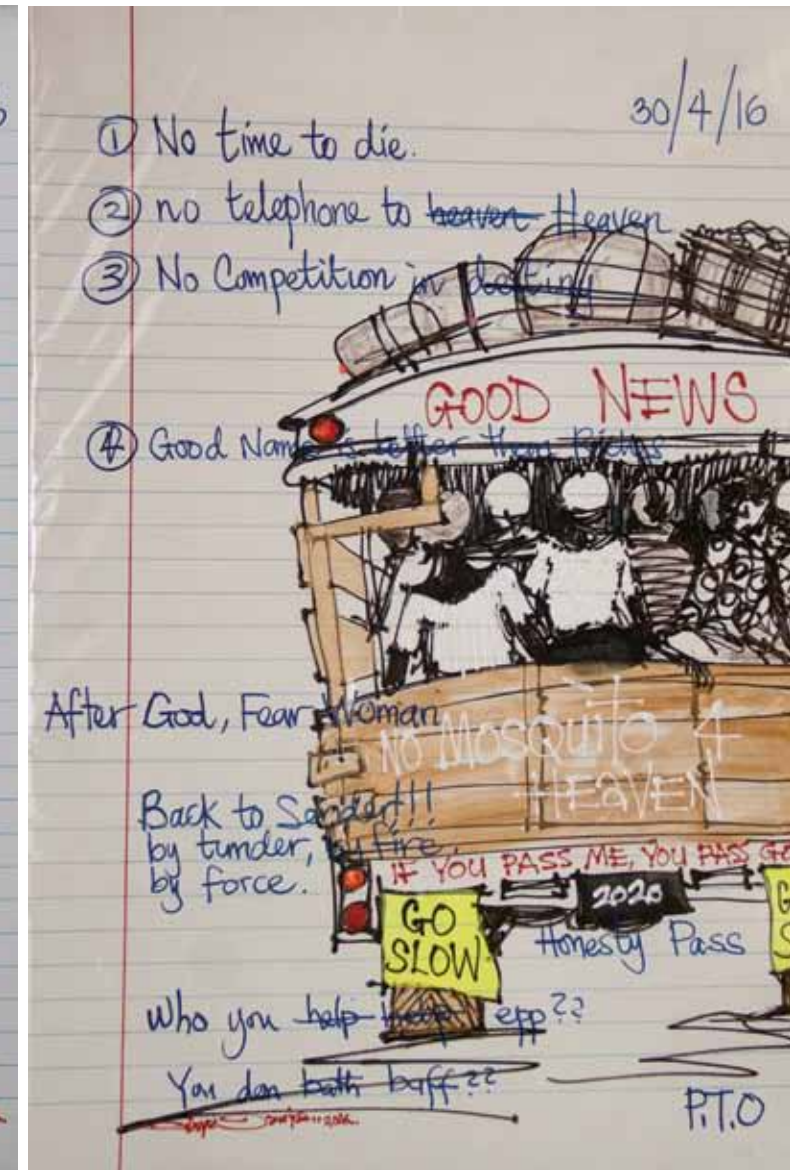
'My Gift', acrylic on canvas, 76 x 76cm.



'Remember Ken Saro Wiwa', acrylic on canvas, 92 x 92 cm.



Right: Pop Art portrait of Ken Saro Wiwa atop a chair made by Demas Nwoko.



'Good News', acrylic on canvas, 61 x 92 cm each.

Left: Pop Art portrait of Demas Nwoko atop a chair made by him.

Acknowledgements



The number one big Chair, with Pop Art painting of Diseye Tantua and Demas Nwoko.



Photo of Artist, photo credit Onome Tantua.

'What an Awesome God'

Many thanks to Mrs Chellaram for her unwavering support all these years and for taking the Art scene in Nigeria to a whole new level. Amisha, for bringing this exhibition to light and the Arthouse family for putting my puzzle together.

Collaborations like this are rare especially with a grand master like Demas Nwoko, if he only knew how much those little moments with him mattered to me...

...'Daddy, Thank you for giving me the opportunity to be grateful. By the way, I am wearing the smile that you gave me after adopting me Laugh*.'

Happy eighty first birthday!!!

Many thanks to all Our sponsors, hugs and kisses to my clients, friends, family, my wife and my special studio assistant; because of you, I laugh a little harder, cry a little less and smile a lot more. God bless and keep us all.

Diseye Tantua

Written Contributions from:
Demas Nwoko
Diseye Tantua
Design: 70PR Design, Mumbai, India

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Catalogue Production & Photography
George Osodi
Diseye Tantua



Miniature lorries, trucks and cars with Slogans written on them- all private collection of the artist.

No Standing

NO CONDITION IS PERMANENT



SPEED KILLS HORN BEFORE
OVERTAKING

LAGOS
D-ARTIST

SLOW
DOWN

GOD
DEY

ARTHOUSE
THE SPACE