

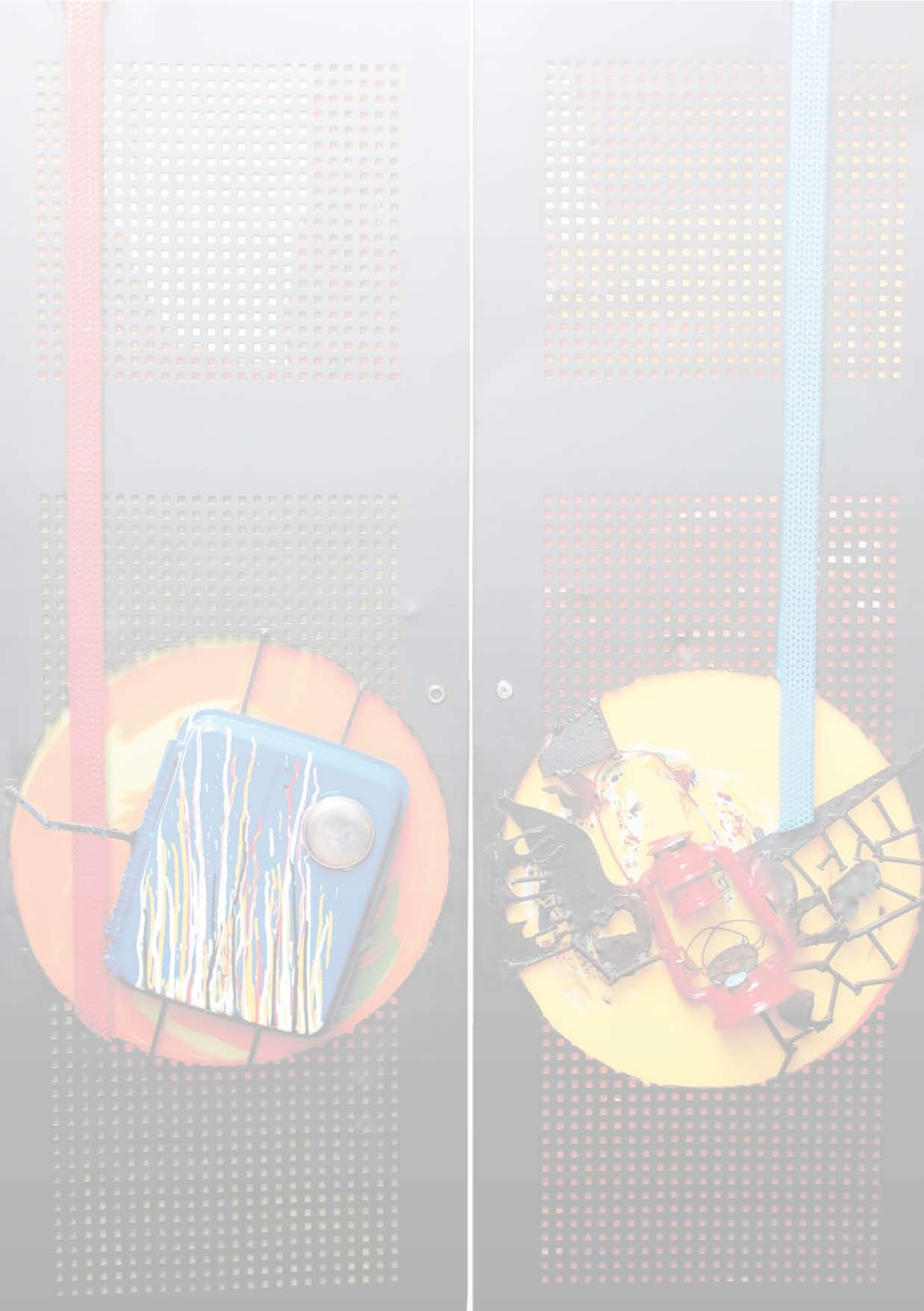
ARTHOUSE  
CONTEMPORARY LIMITED

*presents*

*The* **FORMS**  
*I HEARD*



**RICHARDSON OVBIEBO**



# THE FORMS I HEARD

**Richardson Ovbiebo**  
*Sculptures and Drawings*

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Presented by: **ARTHOUSE**  
CONTEMPORARY LIMITED

Supported by: **cca lagos**  
Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos



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## **The Forms I Heard**

Richardson Ovbiebo

An exhibition of Sculptures and Drawings

Curated by Temitayo Ogunbiyi

@ The White Space,

58, Raymond Njoku, Ikoyi, Lagos

September, 2011

Designed by Adu Opeyemi

Photographs are by Olusola Otori and Richardson Ovbiebo

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Front cover, “Without Borders II” (Detail)

Inner front cover, “I better pass my neighbour” (Detail)

Back cover, “½ Baked” (Detail)

Inner back cover, “Without borders”

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# ARTIST STATEMENT

## THE FORMS I HEARD

This body of work started with my participation in a photography residency at the Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos in 2010 titled "On independence and the ambivalence of promise". It was the first time I had to engage with the word "Ambivalence". What was it for one to be ambivalent? I ended with an installation drawing of an open door on the wall space of the exhibition with photographs taken during the residency inserted within it as my final project for the residency. This served as a metaphor to show how ambivalent, I was about the new form I was engaging with (photography) and also how ambivalent we were as a nation about Independence and all that it meant to be independent. The option of the door and how it could be used came from my study of the works of Marcel Duchamp and Robin Rhodes before and during the residency. Duchamp's No. 11, rue Larry and Robin Rhodes' interactive drawings were quite instrumental.

The doors for me serve first as a point of ambivalence; a state of mind that we carry about issues confronting us and the contradictions that they signify "the inconsistencies, the dishonest compromises and the false truths upon which today's world keeps a facade of stability, a façade because the world is a world of contradictions". (Kasse, 2008)

Knowing that "the heart of any creation resides without doubt in ones capacity to introspect and question ones environment on the pressing need to immerse oneself in one's own history and through the magic of art making it accessible to and shared by all". (Njami, 2008). Through the power of appropriation as a tool, I put forward certain issues like insecurity, the environment and urban planning( without borders), Power(I better pass my neighbor), recycling(bolla), Education (half baked), our will( will out , wheel in), oil (corridor of power).

"It is high time we took works of art with all seriousness they deserve. I feel that most of the solution to global conflicts lay in the canvases, metal sculptures, marbles and the various media used by the artists. The real issue is that messages in these art works are not easily deciphered even by the creators of these works; let alone by the consumers. It will require deconstructing the ideas not the title alone. Most times titles are distractions from the real issues- metaphors." (Amoda, 2003)

As you go through the works, I hope you hear the forms I heard.

Richardson Ovbiebo. Lagos, Tuesday, July 26, 2011.

## REFERENCES

1. Olu Amoda - Laceration, a jagged beauty of metal, 2003.
2. PKPFR Magueye Kasse – Dak'art, 2008.
3. Simon Njami - Dak' art 2008.



# INTRODUCTION

I do not mean to overly praise by declaring that Richardson Ovbiebo is a most unusual Nigerian artist. His unique material selection, his mindfulness in what he is producing and his creative spirit, which allows depth and breadth to his repertoire, are some of the artistic qualities he possesses that I find rare today. Knowing Richardson's body of work I can contend that he *is* a most unusual artist and a thought-provoking commentator on contemporary society.

I have known Richardson and his work since 2007, when during preparations for the first ArtHouse auction he made his presence invaluable. He was a young graduate of Yaba Tech and it was apparent that he left a positive impression on Ndidi Dike and Olu Amoda, both tirelessly dedicated artists, who's references of him led to us consigning two of his sculptures for the auction. To me, we did this as if it was a favour to the young man. However we soon stopped thinking of him as an art-school graduate, and recognized his innate talent to sculpt and to create, as those two works – a figurative portrayal of a lady in a dance movement and a larger work inspired by the Argungun Fishing Festival – drew a magnificent response and sold much beyond our estimates.

After a few years and much further exposure to Richardson's body of work I find his pieces have taken on new layers of meaning; that there is a language and a code which is in some parts direct and obvious, but otherwise fundamentally very challenging. One gets the sense that Richardson knows what he is trying to present and is continually trying to add complexity to the same messages.

His choice of the bicycle wheel as a central element for the works in this show, for example, stimulates many thoughts in my mind –it is a multi-component product, presented as a “found” waste item; it is displayed in isolation with no allusion to the bicycle it was designed for; it is by itself a most elegant human machine; it is seldom seen in Lagos today, bordering on in the “defunct technologies” category; and so on. In (*insert title of work at my office*) the wheel is not merely an example of itself but a tool in abstract representation, perhaps depicting the blossoming bulb of a flower or the authoritative immediacy of a traffic sign. Works in this show convince me that Richardson uses his art in equal parts to depict the beauty he *sees* in

nature as well as in the urban landscape. The title of his show – “The Forms I Heard” – however, implies that his relationship to the objects and the ideas that stem from them are more intimate. But fundamentally it is his material selection and the treatment of these objects in his work that reveals some of his natural talents.

I am very happy for Richardson as he embarks deeper into his artistic odyssey. He has determinately put together this, his first solo show, with patience and faith and I wish him the very best.

Thank you for attending this show and encouraging young and intrepid artists.

**Aditya Chellaram**

**Director, ArtHouse Contemporary Ltd.**

## FRAGMENTED REFLECTION *by Temitayo Ogunbiyi*

Richardson Ovbiebo works in many mediums, but is best known for his sculptures. Composed with colors and forms that flirt with international art movements, these works remain entrenched in a context that undoubtedly of Lagos. Using materials purchased at landfills, industrial scrap yards and fine art stores, Ovbiebo's work is hybrid in process, and conceptual reference. His particular perspectives and techniques congeal to channel universal tropes of humanness and various art histories. Rather than go the typical route, bolstering this practice in historical frameworks spliced with snippets from the artist, I have collaged several excerpts from my published and unpublished writings about his practice. So doing, I aim to address an arrayed audience with varying degrees of familiarity with his work.

### Recalling Isolo

*Ovbiebo and I were among a group of eight artists who participated in a workshop at the Oke-Afa landfill (Isolo, Lagos) in March of 2011. He and I had met by chance, just a week or two prior, at the Contemporary Center for the Arts Lagos.*

At one point, Ovbiebo mentioned taking note of the many modes of movement on-site, specifically how persons living and working on the landfill shuffled themselves and their respective goods in and out of the community. During our many conversations, he had spoken about observing those with whom we had regular contact and passersby. As some arrived from far away collection points with what seemed like rusty, dusty junk, others would sort through such findings and resell, at times by the truckload. After a few more chats, I would realize that Ovbiebo's interest was far deeper than simply watching people mosey around with hunks of refuse. As he observed materials changing hands day-in and day-out, he spoke of a larger picture, that the individual efforts that he had seen were actually part of an elaborate process, the extent of which was likely unbeknownst to the parties involved. Moving car doors and hoods, generators, assorted plastics, and other discarded materials, those working in Isolo each play a significant role in recycling and thereby Nigeria's economy, a faction of the global one.

*Bolla* (2011) emerged from this workshop and was informed by the aforementioned observations. The title is a term used to refer to landfills, such as the workshop site, and the persons working therein. Composed of two car doors, which are painted with the same colors and displayed as though they were being forced together, *Bolla's* physical properties emphasize the shared fate of these doors, their being melted together and molded into various steel objects. And as the title speaks to the site and its workers, one must consider the connection between that which is collected and those who collect. Like the doors, are the paths of these persons also pre-determined? Have they become rigidly fixed in a system, a cyclic process like the very recycling they engage in everyday? And

how, if at all, does Ovbiebo's gesture with this work present alternatives for the doors and those by whom they are handled?

Watching people with these car parts and other goods, Ovbiebo also recorded many ephemeral moments in photographs and charcoal drawings. He used his camera to capture various happenings, most of which depicted scales used in most interactions that took place on these grounds. He recorded everyday tasks and happenings in charcoal drawings rendered on sheets torn from a book, which surveyed recent entrepreneurial efforts in Nigeria. Ovbiebo's sketches highlighted the irony that such books, with text that spoke to extensions of the business conducted on this landfill, were only worth the weight of their pages to those whom had sold them to him.

As we came to know this ordered community in Isolo, the environment became a microcosm of greater society. This comparison withstanding, the transformation of materials as previously mentioned also speaks to the role that we as individuals play in our respective societies and also our limited awareness of how our actions might come to affect others. This idea came to inform *Who the Cap Fits* (2011), the third work in a series that deals with the adage of many hats, metaphors for responsibilities that one might wear. Formally influenced by the unique horns of animals at the Oke-Afa landfill, *Who the Cap Fits* (2011) hinges on personal responsibility and requisite action based on one's given ability. While the concerns behind these works began with politics—the first of the series was produced in 2008 during the Nigerian elections, their reach is much more expansive as each of us has been endowed with unique gifts that enable one to affect change. And again, the change, any collective movement—forward or backwards, depends on each individual's contribution to society.

### *An excerpt from our first interview*

**Temitayo Ogunbiyi:** *To begin, describe your practice in terms of ideas and materials.*

**Richardson Ovbiebo:** I'm an artist. I'm a sculptor. I work with metal as a primary material, but I also like to work with found objects. I believe materials have stories in them already and can be used as metaphors for particular issues that aren't just local, but very global.

**TO:** *You had previously mentioned Brancusi and paraphrased his quote saying, "We must try not to make materials speak our language. We must go with them to a point where others will understand their language." In conceiving of work and reflecting on your practice, speak a bit about your engagement with non-Nigerian artists and art theory.*

**RO:** I'm a very big fan of Marcel Duchamp.

**TO:** *When did you first hear about Duchamp?*

**RO:** I think late 2007. I was reading a book called *Artforms*. He was one of the artists featured in the book. Duchamp said that he felt that commercialism compromised the idea of art, which was the opposite perspective of people like Warhol. Duchamp was someone who was interested in ideas. He kept playing on the idea of contradiction and considered art to be intellectual property.

**TO:** *Can you speak a bit about some viewer responses to your works?*

**RO:** I'm not like many other artists. My parents supported me and they wanted me to be an artist. When I left school, all the pieces that I had made, they didn't really understand them. There was one work called *Lighthouse* and my Dad asked me what happened to it. When I told him it had sold, he said, "Wow, someone would buy that?" And we laughed. You know, I've been criticized for what I do. But that's what art is about-- what I think.

### **The Forms I Heard in conversation, an interview with Ovbiebo about this moment**

**Temitayo Ogunbiyi:** *Why the solo show at this time?*

**Richardson Ovbiebo:** I feel I have a body of work now.

**TO:** *And why 'the doors' by themselves?*

**RO:** Well, I want to emphasize why I chose to use them and I felt doing this without showing works from other bodies would help achieve this.

**TO:** *So, you wanted to highlight the issues raised by the doors, rather than your development as an artist? Or how are you thinking about the show, in terms of how it will function for you and the viewing public?*

**RO:** No, I also would love to talk about my development as an artist as it is part of why I chose to show them. On the one hand, the works all address different social challenges but with regard to the public response, I am not sure how it will turn out because the works are not conventional sculpture; however, the boundaries of sculpture is consistently blurred and the art community seems to gradually accept this reality.

**TO:** *Could speak about the doors in the context of your practice, generally?*

**RO:** Yes

**TO:** *Okay...go (when you're ready)*

**RO:** The doors to me are like a summary of my practice in context and in form. How much I have been able to engage with my environment and through my art reflect my thoughts by using one theme (the doors) in different ways. Also how much impact or influence the works of other artist and various readings that I have engaged with has assisted in my growth as a person and an artist; for example, my understanding and use of materials or how materials and objects can be used as metaphors.

**TO:** *Why did you choose 'The Forms I Heard' as the title for this show?*

**RO:** I saw a catalog in the [Contemporary Center for the Arts Lagos library] with the title " *The Sound I Saw*". For me, that [title] was great because it was a contradiction to see sound, although I haven't read the book. I thought about my works and how I interrogate spaces and issues through my interaction with materials or objects as the case may be. So to an extent, I hear [components of my works] and I try to make others understand their language. But then my work over time has evolved around the idea that things suggest more than one meaning and sometimes they are only used to say one thing. With close observation, they can actually mean something else.

### ***And, finally, as I see (and hear) it...***

'The doors', as Ovbiebo refers to the kind of works displayed in this exhibition, encompass a *mélange* of art-making techniques and social commentary. They engage contemporary issues, often beginning with terminologies that originate from Lagosian layman's terms. In this way, Ovbiebo's point of departure is one that is accessible to an audience that is diverse, yet begins with one that is quite specific.

*Half-baked*, a term that Ovbiebo explains is used in Nigeria for less-than-adequate graduates is the title of a work that seeks to highlight the system that labels graduates as underdeveloped, yet is the very system that informs their state. In the process of making *½ Baked* (2011), Ovbiebo plays the role of this system, producing several casts of figures representing these graduates. He, driving the system of creating these multiples, pours in different ways so as to alter the degree of each figure's completion; some are missing a limb or two. His admission that he intentionally varies his process metaphorically draws attention to the impact of a system that is flawed, perhaps for lack of awareness and self-reflexivity. Power distribution—vacillating between the individual and collective and social responsibility are reoccurring themes in Ovbiebo's practice that resonate with each work in this exhibition.

And inasmuch as Ovbiebo considers this body of work to be a distinct one, and in many ways this is evident, there are connections between the selections in this exhibition and his previous works; namely, his interest in the social dynamics that emerge in his surroundings. Grounded in his acute observations, his works resonate with living in this contemporary moment from conception through execution. And more specifically, they come to reflect social constructs, which inform human action or inaction, and pervade every facet of our existence. Acknowledging this, Ovbiebo uses salient signifiers to shed light on arrayed systems, of which humans may blindly become a part. Exploring roles of individuals as reflective of and informed by systemic constructs, Ovbiebo engages with subject matter that is as much engaged in his personal experience as with those of persons elsewhere on the globe.

RICHARDSON OVBIENO *in*

## “THE FORMS I HEARD”

This artist Richardson Ovbiebo has aptly entitled this exhibition “The Forms I Heard.” A façade of a sort; the reality of what one encounters here is simply gateways or entrances and exits. But is this not the reality after all. If one is to pay particular attention to what is ahead or beyond seen? Do we succumb to surface effects as gates would always bar us or allow us out? Or we elect to take surfaces as deflections that are bound to derail from reality? In other words, is it not proper to be inwardly reflective and with the caution proposed by the age-long aphorism that says “all that glitters is not gold,” always negotiate reality with some apprehension? And in this regard, therefore, make efforts to understand what a façade shields. These thoughts I think undergird the allegory “The Forms I Heard.”

That we can actually be goaded by surfaces is reflected in a contemporary joke on Bill Gates. The story goes thus: Bill Gates decided to retire from this world to live with God his maker. On getting to the celestial dwelling place, perhaps for his help to humanity, he was given the privilege of electing where he would like to retire for eternity. Unsure of the nature of the environment, he requested to be shown the places available and probably get acquainted with what they looked like. I hear he was first taken to hell’s gate and he found at the gate a band of wild folks in merriment and dancing. He took note and requested to be shown other alternatives. Eventually he reached the gate of heaven. What he found was too serene and tranquil and a given impatience made him request to go back to the first scene where men and women in wild orgy contrasted with this latter scene. Soon he was admitted into “hell fire” and he yelled; what? This was not what was shown to me? But the angel, his guard all the while, merely retorted, but all that had been shown to you all along were all SCREEN SAVERS!

An illusion of reality is a bane of the human. This is why the best of scientific inventions are soon recoiled from; with stern warning of harm with which such invention traps humanity. But the human, as fundamentally disastrous and awful in nature, has always been in need of a redeemer. And this is where the artist is of value to his fellow humanity. In the use of metaphor the artist has often emerged as the purveyor of the “sacred truth” of the people. And as Wassily Kandinsky notes, the artist is the secular prophet, the spiritualist or seer of the collective, the echo of the people’s probity and honesty, while also highlighting the hopes and aspirations of the people. Like the Bill Gates’ metaphor

above we are often under the awesome power of surfaces and their enchantment – a given powerlessness before the illusion surfaces offer.

Richardson Ovbiebo in this exhibition thus takes us back to the need to be inwardly reflective before surfaces and rather urges, in other words, an agenda of cautious enchantment with surfaces. This is the allegory “The Forms I Heard” propose; that there is often a snare that is vestigial to any given surface. The main themes here; “Will out, Wheel in,” “Without Borders,” “I Better Pass My Neighbour” and “Half Baked” are symptomatic of our collective psychosocial bearing today, and that mind-set reflects the values of a collective living through spiritual poverty. As collective we appear to shed mere tears about corruption, insecurity, debased standards and crass opportunism and a host of vices that are now endemic in our nation, because, in spite of these cries, life appears to go on. Are the complaints we make mere rituals? In this exhibition the point at issue as far as our society is in focus is this; that what rot is usually hidden under surfaces is made open in the titles above and the appearances they embody. They epitomize our cries, which we do nothing about; hence, the artist calls our attention to the fact that what after all is audible to us as spoken words like surfaces can be misread in our interpretations. Like hallucinations real or unreal our understanding of contexts under gird our reactions to contexts of reference in the society we live in and our reactions define our time.

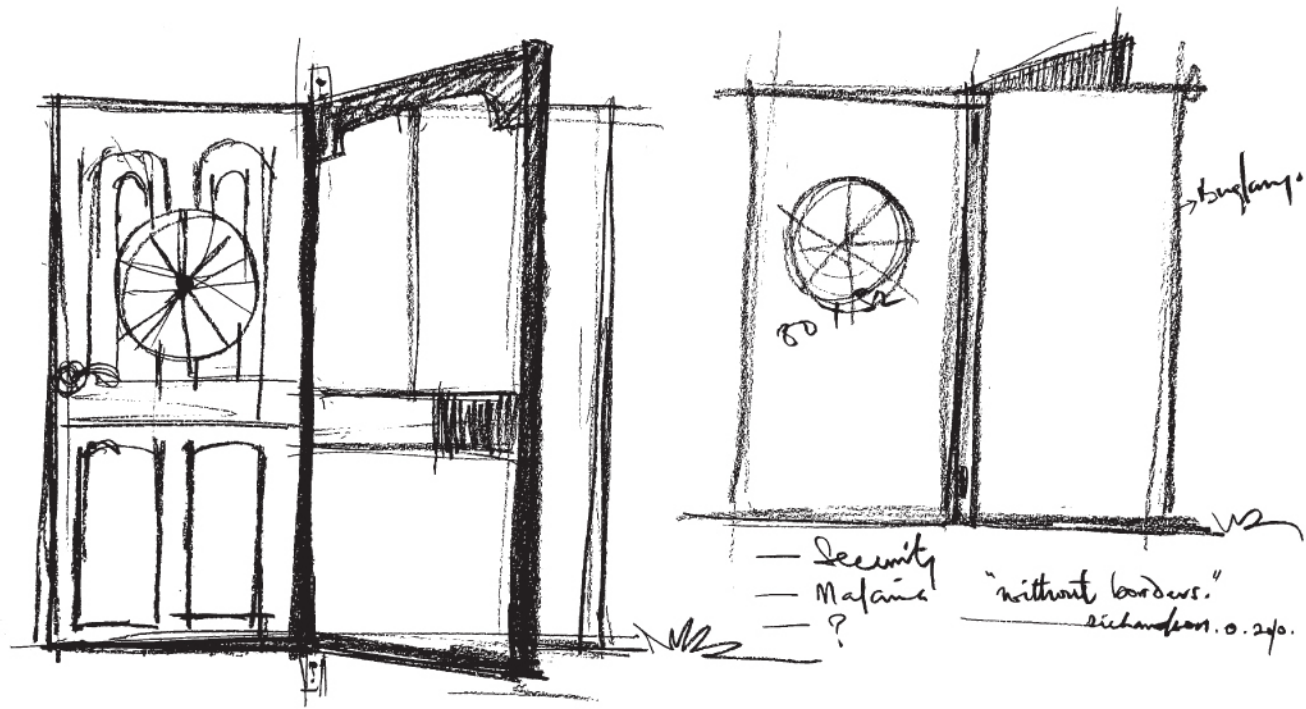
I propose that we are not totally taken in by these words as prefatory comments on the works in this exhibition, as they equally are surfaces. They are bound to detract from the message the works hold out for us as unique individuals. As these gateways and exits stair your mind, I urge that you negotiate your meaning with these allegories that enchant as they query our conscience regarding our collective actions and inactions towards making our society humane.

*Frank A. O. Ugiomoh, Ph.D; msna  
Professor of Art History and Theory  
University of Port Harcourt  
Port Harcourt*



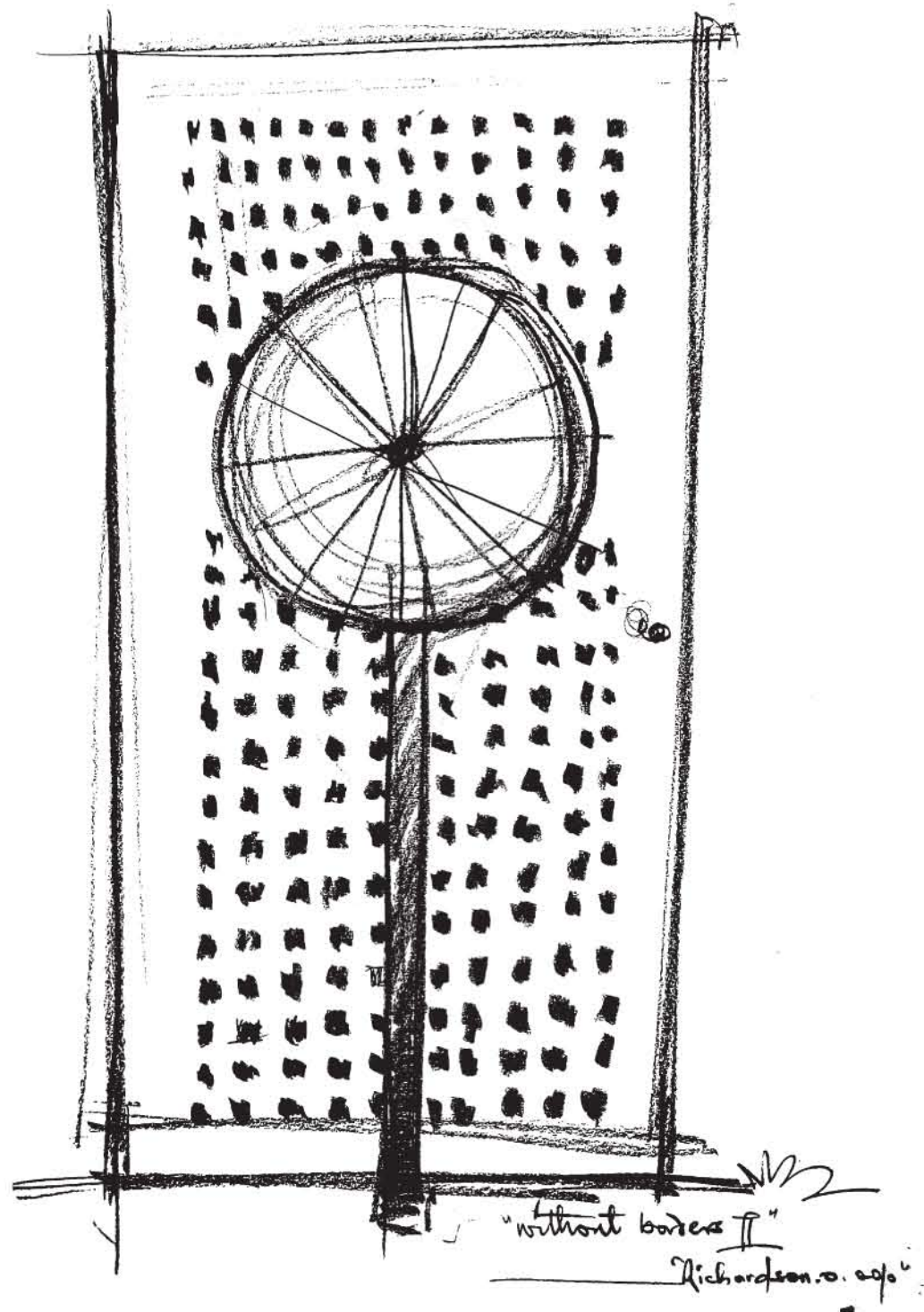
WITHOUT BORDERS

WITHOUT BORDERS



17 x 11 ½ Inches  
Charcoal on paper  
2010

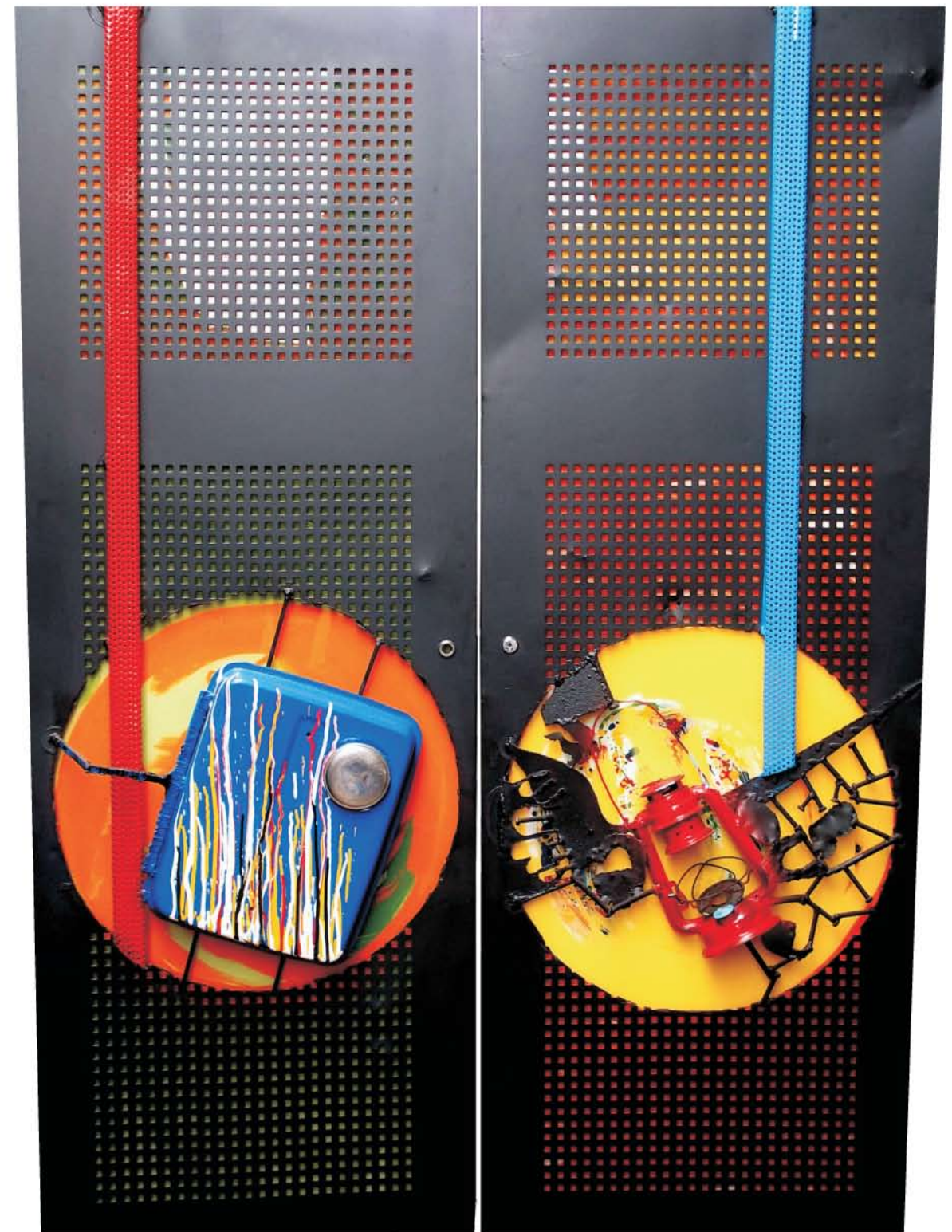
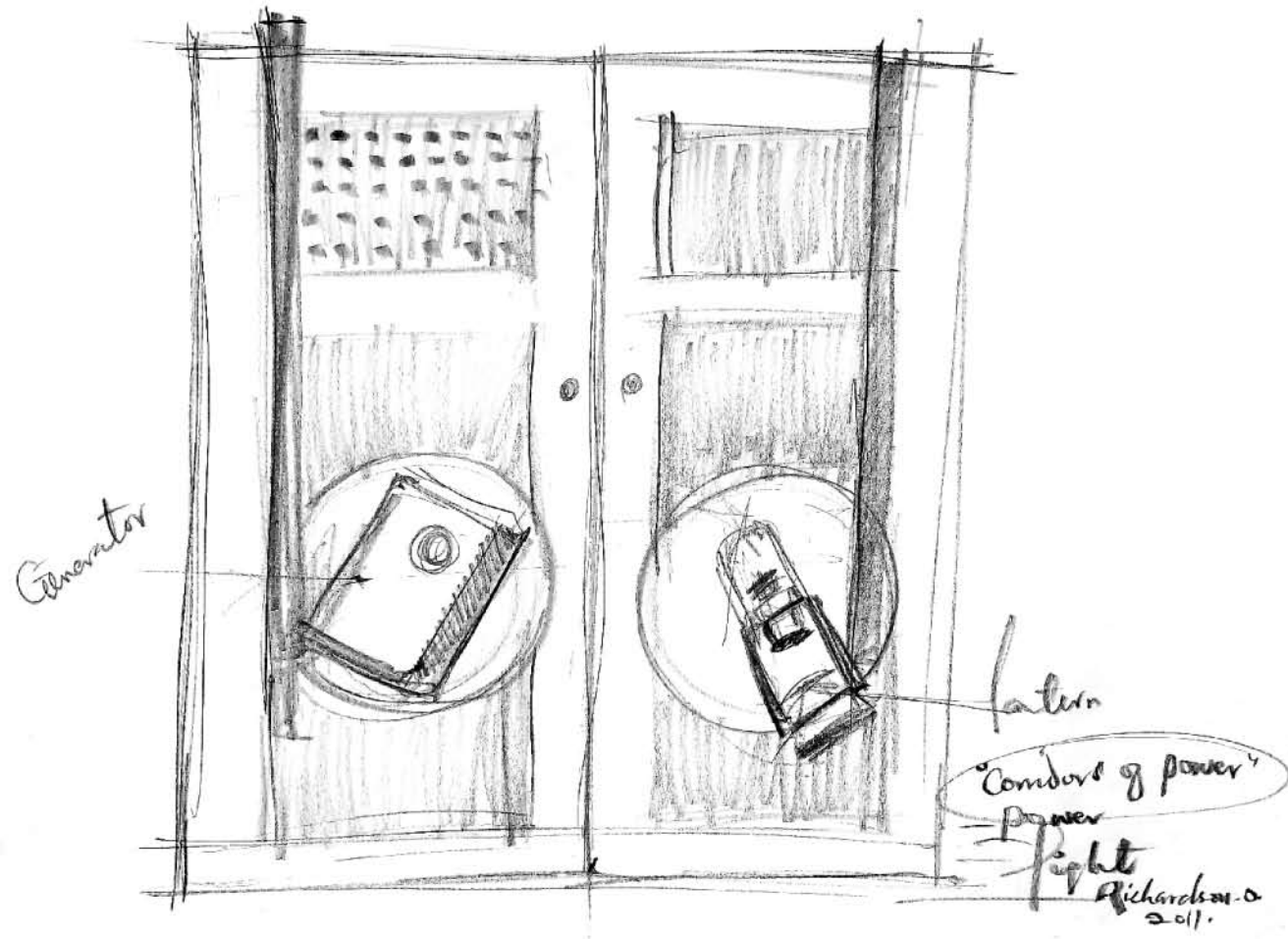
80 x 66 x 66 Inches  
Wood, mosquito net, bicycle wheel, newspaper and acrylics  
2010



17 x 11 Inches  
Charcoal on paper  
2010

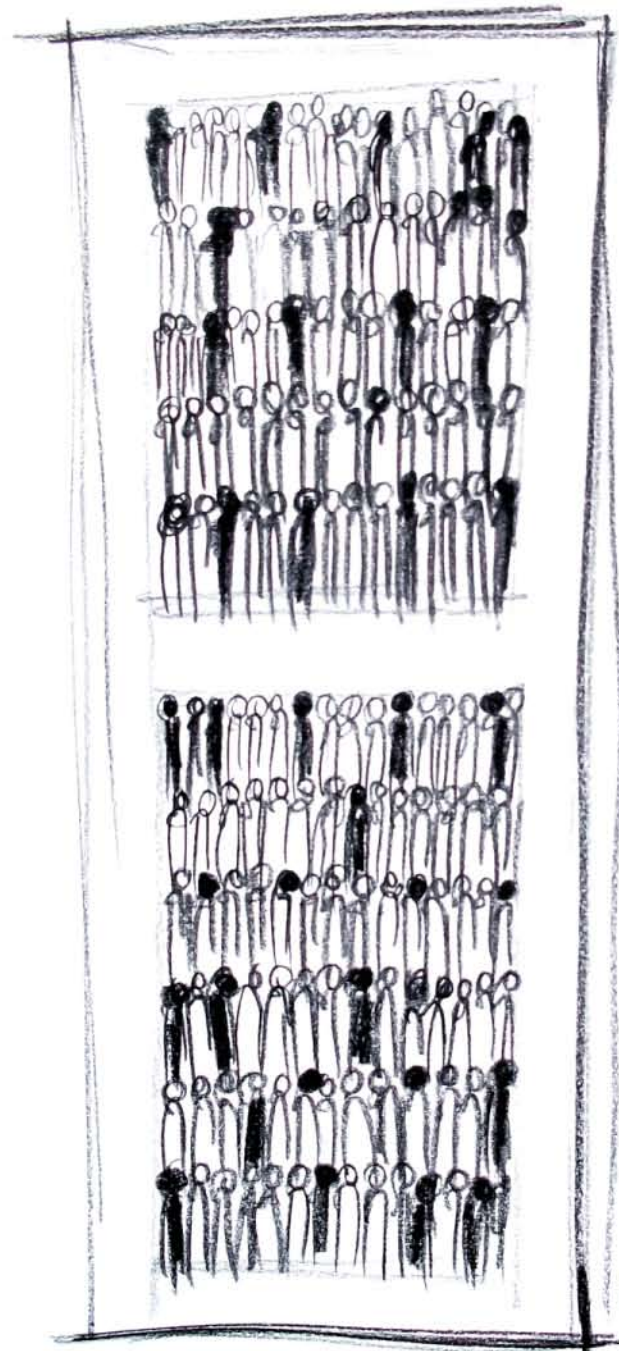


74 x 31 1/4 Inches  
Metal, perspex and acrylics  
2010 (Collection of Mr Aditya Chellaram)



17 x 11 ½ Inches  
Lead on paper  
2011

65 ½ x 47 Inches  
Metal, perspex and acrylics  
2011

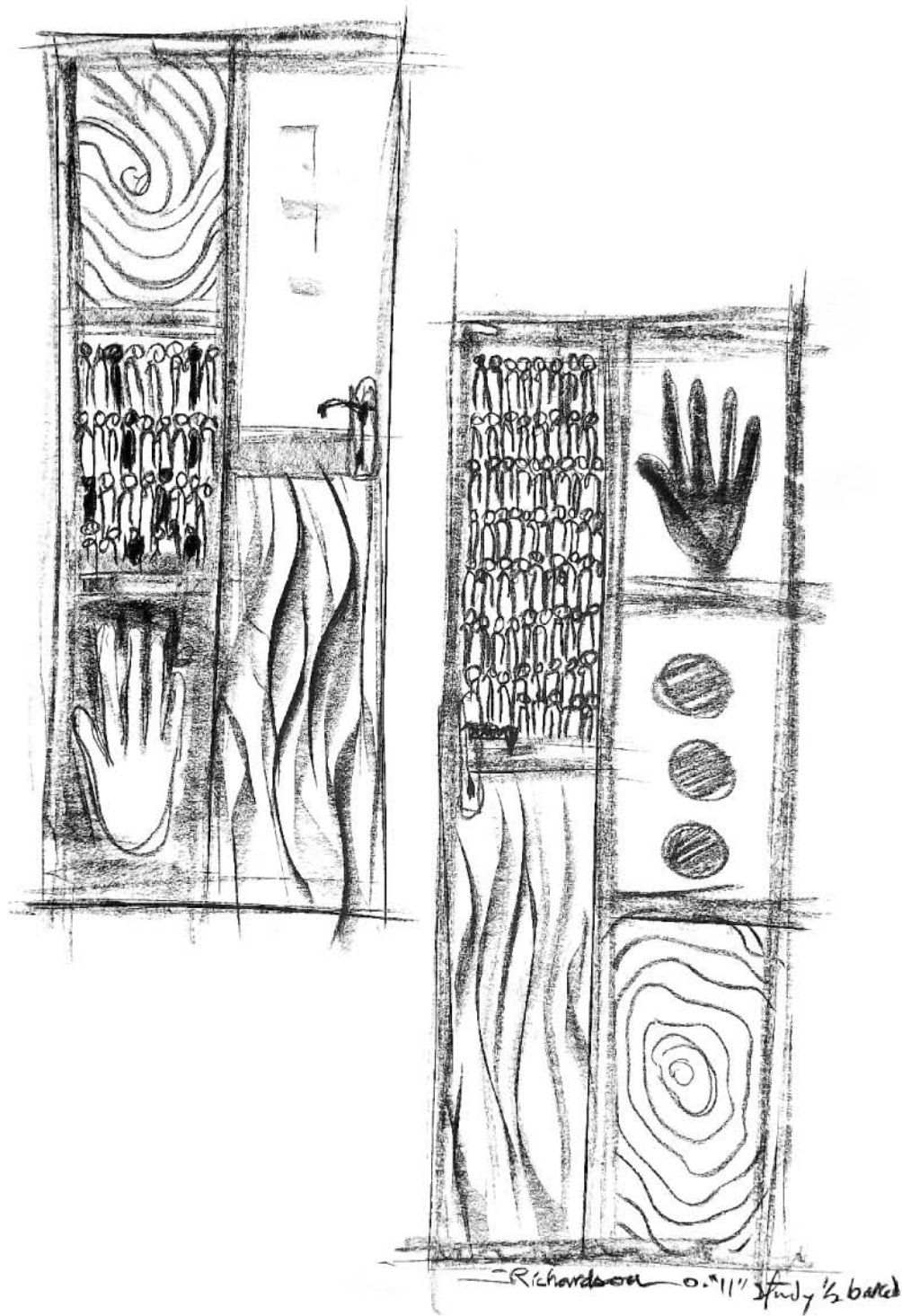


1/2 baked.  
Richardson. o. 2010

17 x 11 1/2 Inches  
Charcoal on paper  
2010



76 x 15 3/4 Inches  
Metal, resin, perspex and acrylics  
2010 (Collection of Development Initiative Network)

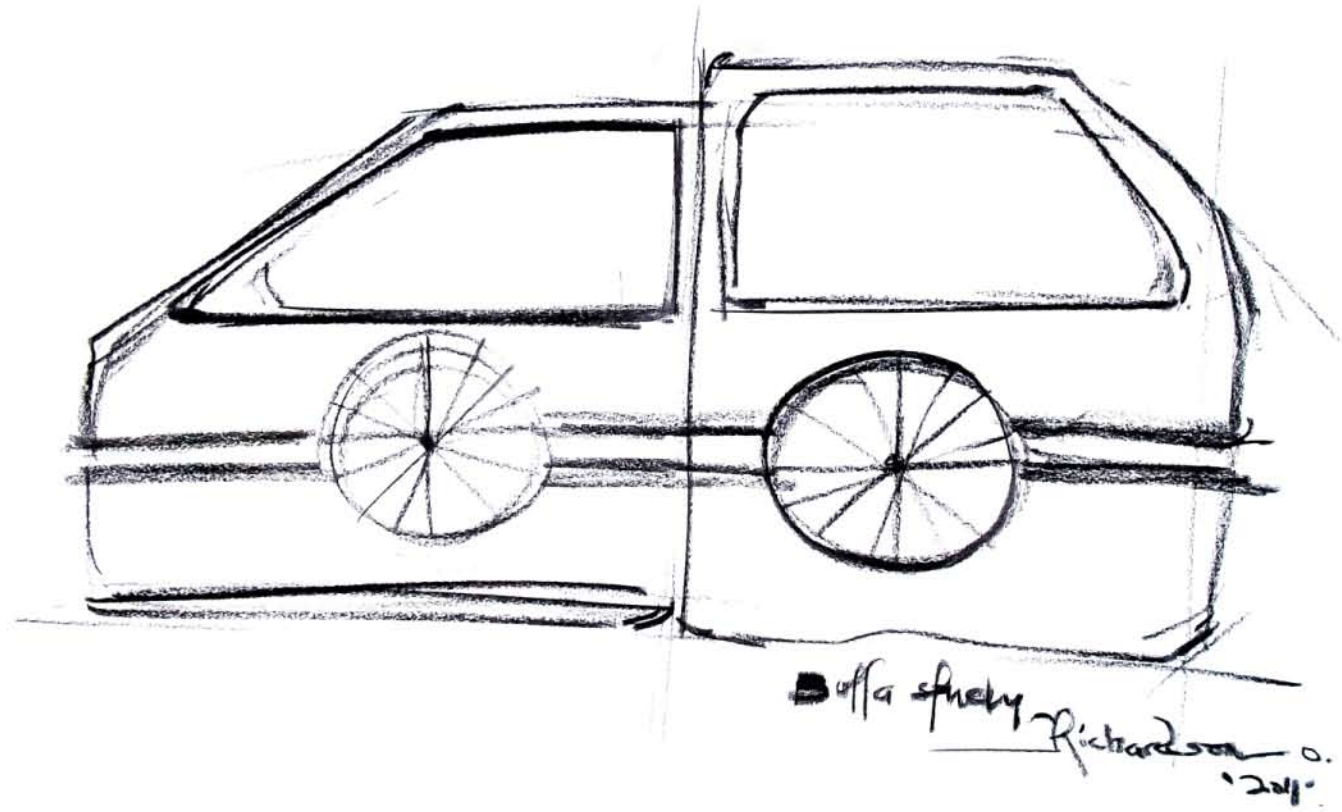


FRONT

BACK

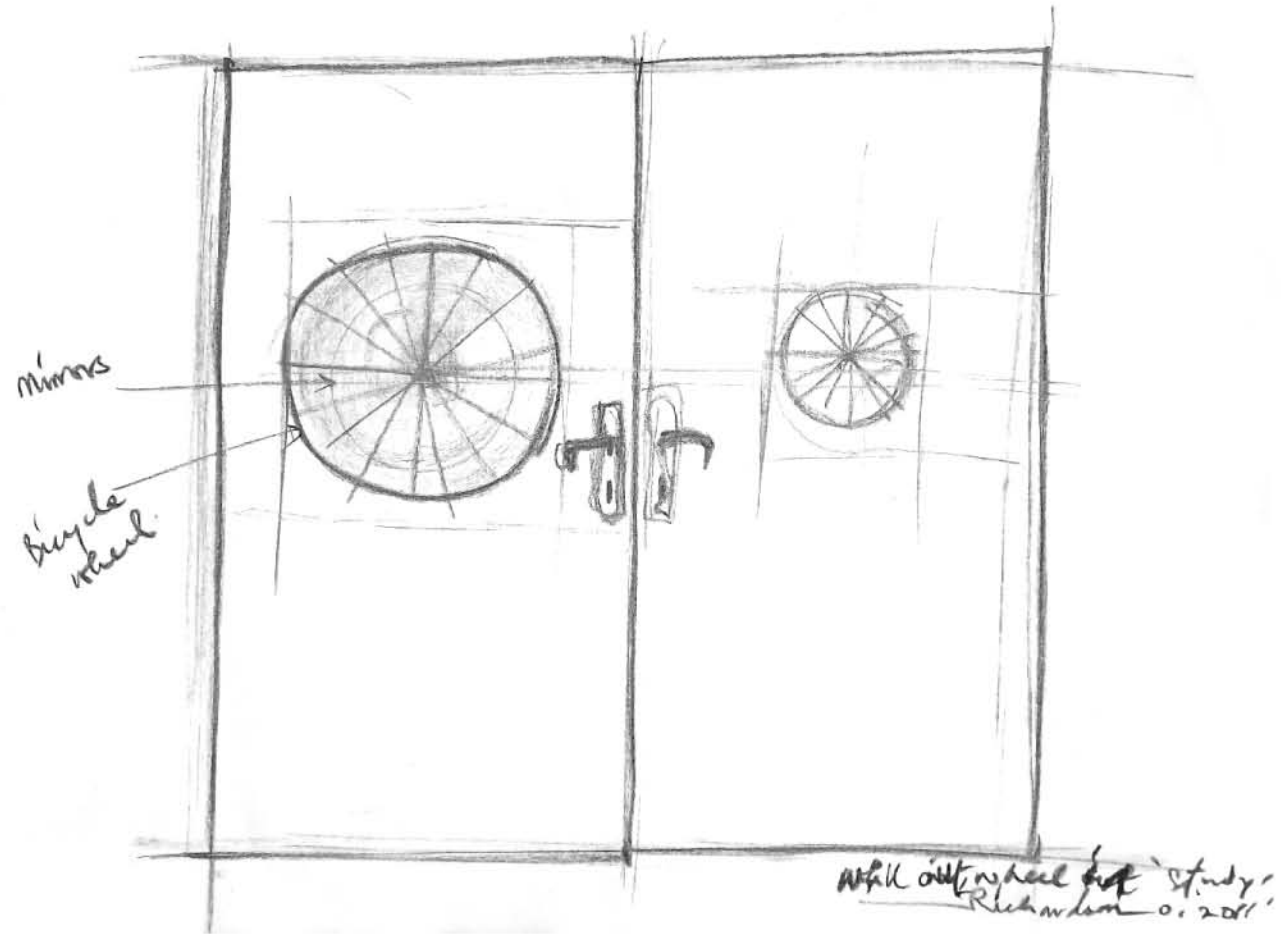
23 1/2 x 16 1/2 Inches  
Charcoal on paper  
2011

80 x 33 Inches  
Wood, perspex, metal, resin, newspaper and acrylics  
2011



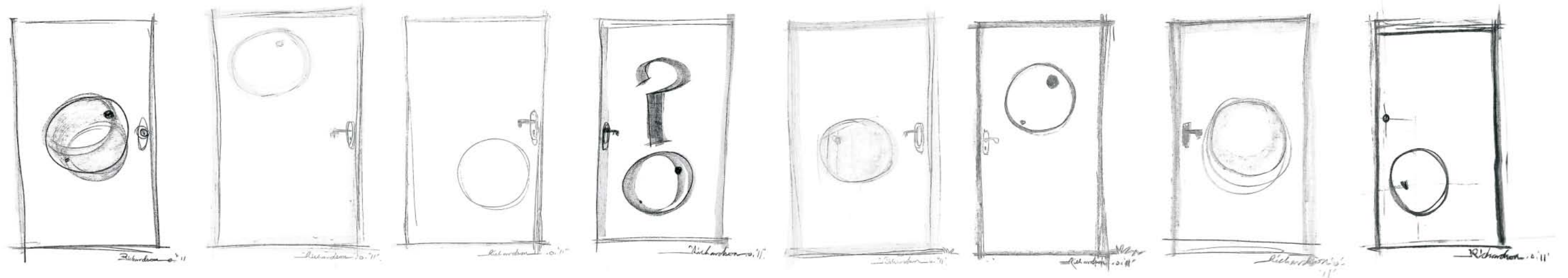
23 ½ x 16 ½ Inches  
Charcoal on paper  
2011

82 x 49 ½ Inches  
Car doors and bicycle wheels  
2011



23 ½ x 16 ½ Inches  
Charcoal on paper  
2010

66 x 64 Inches  
Wood, bicycle wheel, mirrors and perspex  
2011



96 x 17 Inches  
Charcoal, conte and lead on paper  
2011





## PROFILE

### *Richardson Ovbiebo*

Richardson Ovbiebo hails from Igbanke in Edo state, born on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March 1982. He graduated from Yaba College of Technology as a sculptor.

#### PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS:

Yaba College of Technology - OND - 2004  
Yaba College of Technology - HND - 2007

#### FELLOWSHIPS:

Society of Nigerian Artists, Lagos (SNA) - member  
Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos (CCA) - member  
African Artist Foundation, Lagos (AAF) - member

#### WORK EXPERIENCE:

National Youth Service Corps' - 2009

#### PRESENTATION (SELECTED)

Pecha Kucha Night Vol. 1, Lagos - Terra Kulture Gallery - December 2009

#### RESIDENCY

**Lost in Lagos:** The Artist's experience - The White Space, Lagos - March, 2011

**On Independence and the ambivalence of promise** - International art photography residency project - Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos - February 8 - March 6, 2010.

#### GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

- **Nigeria, our Nigeria** - Shehu Musa Yar'Adua centre, Abuja - May, 2011
- **A Kilo of hope** - Yusuf Grillo Art Gallery, Yaba College of Technology, Yaba, Lagos. - April - 2011
- **Green Summary** - Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos - December, 2010.
- **Art House (Auction)** - Lagos - November, 2010.
- **Nigerian Breweries and African Artist Foundation (chronicles of a great nation at 50)** - Civic Centre, Lagos - July 2010
- **Old News Project No. 6** - Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos - December, 2009
- **Nigerian Breweries and African Artist Foundation (Nigeria the Future I See)** - Civic Centre, Lagos - December 2010
- **October Rain** - National Museum, Lagos - October, 2009
- **Summer Breeze** - Centre For Contemporary Art, Lagos - July 2009
- **Art House (Auction)** - Lagos - April, 2009
- **Art House (Auction)** - Lagos - November, 2008.
- **Moulding Matter** - Pan African University, Lagos - October, 2008.
- **Art House (Auction)** - Lagos - April, 2008.
- **Beautiful Nigeria** - Ovuomaroro Gallery, Lagos - 2008
- **Beautiful Nigeria** - National Museum, Lagos - 2007
- **Art fair 2007** - SADP Gallery, Yaba College of Technology, Yaba, Lagos - March, 2007
- **Within Our Grasp** - National Museum, Lagos - 2005
- **Where Gods and Mortals Meet** - Niger-Delta Cultural Centre, Agbarha-Ottor, Delta State - 2004
- **Installations- 6<sup>th</sup> Harmattan Workshop Exhibition** - Pan African University, Lagos - December, 2004
- **Gods of this Age** - Didi Museum, Lagos - December, 2002

#### WORKSHOP EXPERIENCE

- A kilo of hope - Oke afa, Isolo, Lagos - March, 2011
- Facilitator (metal construction) 12th Harmattan workshop - March, 2010
- Artlaw Training Workshop on Principles and Practice of Copyrights and Trademarks - 2009
- 11<sup>th</sup> Harmattan Workshop - February, 2009
- In God We Trust - Lagos - 2008
- 10<sup>th</sup> Harmattan Workshop - Agbarha Ottor - 2008.
- Lagos Open-Emeka Udemba - 2005.
- 6<sup>th</sup> Harmattan Workshop - Agbarha Ottor-2004.

#### STUDIO EXPERIENCE

- Francis Denedos Studio.
- Hyman Construction Company, Lagos.
- Wotaside Studios of Art
- Osahenye Kinebi's Studio, Lagos
- Ndidi Dike's Studio, Lagos

#### AWARDS

- Finalist (creative artist of the year) - **Future Award Nigeria**, January, 2010.
- First Prize Winner (sculpture) - Nigerian Breweries and African Artist Foundation, National Art Competition "**Nigeria the Future I See**" - Civic Centre, Lagos - December, 2009.
- First Prize Winner - Fashion Designers Association of Nigeria and African Artist Foundation Exhibition, "**Design inspired by Fashion**", Civic Centre, Lagos - November, 2009.

#### CONTACT

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# Appreciation

At this point I will like to acknowledge God

Almighty for his grace and also

everybody who has generously contributed

in no small measure to the making of this

exhibition, those who have offered

advice, words of kindness, moral and

financial support

My Sincere appreciation to you all,

is boundless. Thank you and God bless.

*Richardson, 2011*





[www.greybagstudios.blogspot.com](http://www.greybagstudios.blogspot.com)

