

# Artwork Information Sheet **13**



## **CHRIS AFUBA'S ADAMMA MASQUERADE**

***Adamma Masquerade***, Cement, 25.9 cm (H), © Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art, Pan-Atlantic University

## INTRODUCTION

Monumental artworks date back to the times of ancient monoliths, the great Egyptian pyramids and the Roman sculptures. They are usually big, remarkable and show the skill and ingenuity of the artist who made them. Just as great sculptors like Skopas, Praxiteles, Phidias, and Lysippos made some Roman monumental sculptures, the mastery of Chris Afuba shines through the monumental pieces he has created for both private and public institutions.

Chris Afuba's experience as an artist cuts across generations due to his early exposure to some renowned personalities in Nigerian Art history such as Uche Okeke, Bruce Onobrakpeya among others. His artwork, the "Adamma Masquerade" gives an interesting twist to the physique and notion of the traditionally known "Adamma masquerade". Afuba is known today for monumental sculptures like "Otigba", the impressive statue of a drummer that decorates the roundabout connecting New Haven and Ogui Road in the Coal City.

## THE ARTIST

Christopher Nwankwo Afuba was born on the 3rd of June, 1947 in Nimo, Njikoka Local Government Area of Anambra State. He attended two primary Schools in Nimo before moving to Enugu to stay with relatives where he completed his primary education at Holy Ghost Primary School. Exposed to art from childhood, he had contact with traditional artists under whose tutelage he honed his artistry. After his primary school in Enugu, he apprenticed as an auto mechanic but this was disrupted by the civil war in 1966. When the war ended in 1970, he opened an art studio where he practiced with his late elder brother. A lecturer at the University of Nsukka at that time, Uche Okeke, heard about this young artist and came looking for him in his hometown, Nimo. From this encounter, Chris Afuba went to live with Uche Okeke in Nsukka where he assisted him in his studio.

Afuba was glad to join Uche Okeke because of his interest in studying Arts at the university. However, this was hindered because he did not meet the entry qualification of having a Senior Secondary School Certificate (SSCE). It was while living with Uche Okeke that Afuba was introduced to Demas Nwoko and Bruce Onobrakpeya and from them, he learned a lot. After 11 months of living with Uche Okeke, Chris Afuba enrolled in extramural classes at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) to help him prepare for the General Certificate Examination (GCE). While in UNN, Chris Afuba made friends with great artists like Obiora Udechukwu and Paulinus Emejiu, who were instrumental to his ambition of studying arts in the university. In 1975, he got his GCE certificate and immediately, applied to the Institute of Management and Technology (IMT), Enugu where he studied Fine and Applied Arts.

While in the University, he was in contact with other good art students and they started the Aka Circle of Exhibiting Artists. This group began at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka but was comprised of students from UNN and a select few from IMT. There was no stylistic drive but a desire to encourage each other and constantly fuel their creative abilities through exhibitions and workshops. Since the group was comprised of people from various backgrounds and training, they influenced one another naturally. Each one improved on his style and technique by observing the works of the others but still maintaining their unique style. As a member of this group, he participated in several national and international art programs, including residencies and workshops. Chris Afuba obtained his HND in sculpture in 1981 from the Institute of Management and Technology, Enugu.

After his Youth Service, Chris Afuba returned to Anambra state and taught briefly at Queen of the Rosary College, Onitsha. Subsequently, he taught at the Girls Secondary School in his hometown. Afuba later applied for a teaching position at Anambra State College of Education where he taught until he got another teaching appointment with IMT in 1990.

In 2006, his department was separated from the institute and became a separate institution which was called Enugu State College of Education Technical (ESCET). He taught at ESCET until he retired in 2012. Since then, he has been practicing as a full-time studio artist.

## THE WORK



Figure 1. *Adamma Masquerade* (detail), Cement, 25.9 cm (H), © Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art.

Figure 1 represents a feminine form. A little head sits atop an elongated neck. A string of beads rests on the collar of the figure. The neck slopes down to arms that rest, one atop another just beneath the breasts. The breasts are conical in shape. The torso of the figure stops at a layer of linearly strung beads which depicts her waistline and from which the legs erupt. The initial swell of the figure could perhaps represent her hips. The figure appears to have a circular form resting on the top of its head which could be a headgear or hairdo. There appear to be two ear lobes on different angles on both sides of the face. The eyes appear like two round sockets with a slight dent in-between to signify the mouth. Beneath one of the ear lobes on the left rests a pendant that perhaps signifies an earring. Lines constantly run across different parts of the figure.

In Africa, there is a typical idea of beauty; a beautiful maiden has certain attributes that characterise her. She has a long neck, bold eyes, firm and pointed breasts. Chris Afuba has exaggerated these typical features and rendered the Adamma masquerade in his style, with the hope of creating a monumental piece that can be outdoors and appreciated. The artist used his regular carving tools like the chisel and mallet to create textures that reflect the body decorations that are usually seen on a lady in traditional Igbo society. He attributes the irregular placement of the ear lobes to “dynamic experimentation” which is a trait the Institute of Management and Technology (IMT) is known for. It is a process of creating artworks by playing with the elements of design and exploring different forms. The artist creatively incorporates the form of animals in his rendition of human figures. According to the artist,

*The main thrust of Adamma is zoomorphic in interpretation. This means that I incorporated the features of animals to make a lady which you wouldn't notice if you don't look closely. Thinking far, you would also recall that some parts of lizards look like that (Afuba, On Adamma Masquerade 2021).*

Here, the artist refers to the lower body of the form; from the waist to the legs. The legs give an inkling to the probable zoomorphic form the figure is likened to because it looks like the hind legs of a lizard. This manner of representation gives the figure the quality and character which the artist intended to achieve with his work. The artist has used cement to depict this sculptural piece. First, a solid wire mesh frame was constructed then cement was plastered around this wire mesh frame to give it its sturdy structure. After this, the artist carved out the features; the linear lines, and the well-angled forms visible on the artwork using his local tools for carving.

## CONCLUSION

From his adventurous childhood which involved moving from one place to another, Chris Afuba became an artist of diverse experiences which reflect and culminate in his art. The Adamma masquerade has been subverted and portrayed radically and interestingly. It has been portrayed in the form of an animal. The artist propels us to think deeply, to interpret creatively, and to observe the world around us.

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