

Artwork Information Sheet **14**

KOLADE OSHINOWO'S NOMADS



Nomads, 1993, Oil on Canvas, 83 x 150cm © Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art, Pan-Atlantic University

INTRODUCTION

Kolade Oshinowo (b. 1948) is known for his impressionistic and expressive naturalistic scenes. In Sam-Duru (2013), Prof. Jerry Buhari describes Oshinowo's style as "Romantic expressionism" which implies that the artist "fuses the transcendental with tangible reality." Oshinowo often transforms mundane activities into dream-like blurriness, taking daily occurrences to a surreal realm. In his painting *Nomads*, the Ibadan-born painter uses soft brush strokes and a dull palette to represent migration or homelessness. The painting was produced at a time when Oshinowo had made his marks in the Yaba College of Technology, serving in the position of Deputy Rector of the college, and a member of the college council. Nonetheless, rather than drawing inspiration from his present environment, the painter focuses on a social and cultural phenomenon.

THE ARTIST

Being one of the leading figures of the well-known Yaba School of Art and popular in accounts of modern Nigerian art for his strong figurative style, Kolade Oshinowo is known by many as the "Father of the Lagos School of Art." According to Igweze (2020), Oshinowo's skilled character, ability to express his vast knowledge of art, and genius as a painter turned a talented yet sleepy art school into a force in Nigerian art. He did not gain all of his achievements in one fell swoop. To be a great school teacher and a master artist, a height many artists aspire to attain, it took Oshinowo years of consistency. The Elites (2018) opined that his talent for producing timeless paintings, despite the challenges of being productive in the Academia has earned Oshinowo a space in the Nigerian art documentation.

Kolade Oshinowo is a native of Ikorodu, Lagos State, but he was born and raised in Ibadan, Oyo State. His father discouraged him from studying Arts in his early years. He would have preferred that he pursued a career as a doctor, lawyer, or engineer. Unfortunately, Young Oshinowo was moved to Ibadan Grammar School, where art flourished and

his passion for it grew. Following his secondary education, he worked as a clerical officer for the Cooperative Bank of Ile Ife for a short time. With the support and encouragement of his sister, he pursued his higher education at Ahmadu Bello University, (A.B.U) Zaria, where he studied Fine Arts with a concentration on painting. Before the death of Oshinowo's father, he came to appreciate his knowledge of arts (This Day, 2018). After graduating with a Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts, in June 1972, Oshinowo was hired by the Federal Ministry of Education and assigned to Kings College in Lagos, where he taught for two years before moving to Yaba College of Technology as an assistant lecturer in Drawing and Painting in April 1974. Oshinowo was 25 years at the time Yusuf Grillo invited him to work at Yaba College of Technology. On this job, Oshinowo made an impact in Nigerian art. In 1986, he was appointed head of the department of Fine Arts and in 1990, he became the Director, School of Art, Design and Printing, in Yaba College of Technology.

Oshinowo favours expressive naturalistic scenes and figurative portraits. His work is sometimes referred to as "impressionist," "expressionist," or "romantic expressionism." This is because the suggestive character of Oshinowo's paintings is romantic, according to Prof. Jerry Buhari in Sam-Duru (2013), and engages viewers in an immersive dialogue with the artist where their imaginations are busy on the picture plane, but in a free and individual exploration of the universe.

He loves conveying the wonderful world around him through his brilliant and often muted palette, from quiet landscapes in rural communities to the hustling and bustling of market scenes and urban neighborhoods.

The artist enjoys drawing human figure portraits of women, with a focus on their beautifully patterned clothing. The women in Oshinowo's paintings are usually dressed in Yoruba "Iro" and "Buba," with stylistic headgears known as "gele." By depicting women, Oshinowo believes he captures the beauty and challenges of womanhood (Sam-Duru, 2013). This does not mean that he neglected other human forms. He painted traditional drummers, dancers,

and made portraits of leaders like the Oba of Benin (Omo N'Oba Erediauwa II), Chief S.L. Edu, Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe and Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa-Balewa (SNA, 2017).

In his portrait of Ajayi Crowther, in his normal impressionistic manner and fluid brushstrokes, Oshinowo depicts the clergyman in full regalia of a priest carrying a book, most likely the bible, with a dreamlike landscape behind him, (Folaranmi, et.al, 2018). All of his works focus on the lives of ordinary Nigerians, their struggles, dreams, joys, and sorrows.

As a result of Oshinowo's dedication to his career, he has put up over 25 solo shows, each of which features a new body of work. He has also taken part in a host of group exhibitions both at home and abroad.

THE PAINTING



Fig 1. Nomads (Detail), 1993, Oil on Canvas, 83cm x 150cm© Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art

As the title suggests, the subject of this painting, 'Nomads,' is a group of people who have no fixed residence and travel from place to place. The painting portrays a group of silhouette people, including men, women, and children of various ages and sizes, carrying their belongings on their heads as well as cattle, in the foreground of a landscape with sparing trees arranged asymmetrically and irregularly in the background.

As the title suggests, the people are on the move. Patches of gray, blue, and red show the sky's dullness and could indicate dusk, dawn, or unpredictably bad weather. As the painter's impasto palette indicates,

the dominant brown earth in the foreground gives the impression that the Nomads are passing through muddy ground. The clothes of nomads come in a variety of dull blues, reds, and oranges that complement the murkiness of their brownish surroundings. To create rhythm, the artist arranges human figures and trees in an ordered manner, systematically varying their sizes. Nomadic people are portrayed as people who lack access to adequate food, clean water, health care, clothes, and shelter. They typically lack basic reading skills, and as a result, their children are unable to receive basic education.

In addition to the fact that the images are too small to begin identifying physical features, the artist's earlier depiction of the Nomads in silhouettes may be a way of expressing their state of uncertainty. The painting provides an insight into the Nomadic lifestyle of some Nigerians. The Fulani, the Shuwa, the Buduman, the Kwayam, the Badawi, and the Fishermen are the six nomadic groups identified by Aderinoye et al. (2007) in Nigeria. These people can be divided into three groups: hunters/gatherers, itinerant fishermen, and pastoralists (a.k.a., herdsman).

Although it is unclear which nomadic group Oshinowo portrays in his painting, the nomads are most likely pastoralists, as there are a few cattle among the people. The Fulanis are Nigeria's pastoral nomads. They are usually seen with more cattle and fewer belongings than in Oshinowo's painting. They migrate mostly for the benefit of their cattle.

At the onset of the dry season, they drive their cattle from the arid pastures up north to wetter areas farther south where grassland, fallow fields and surface water provide suitable grazing for their stock (Lambrecht, 1976).

CONCLUSION

Through his painting, Kolade Oshinowo has demonstrated keen observation of the Nigerian people's lifestyle, in this case, the nomadic people. Aside from his passion for Nigerian culture,

Oshinowo is particular when it comes to art representation. This was mirrored in his naturalistic approach to art to a large extent. His everyday scenes evoke nostalgia in his audience.

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