



YEMISI SHYLLON
MUSEUM OF ART
PAN-ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY

Artwork Information Sheet **28**

OLAWUNMI BANJO'S COMFORTER



Comforter, Oil on Canvas, 122cm x 102cm, Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art, Pan-Atlantic University.

INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, art is a well-known profession. Nigerian artists have demonstrated that pursuing a career in the arts is rewarding. Some have invested in formal training, while others learn the ropes through informal training and continuous practice. Artists with no formal training have shown that great artists are not defined by the kind of training they undergo, either formal or informal but by their ability to be creative and imaginative. Olawunmi Banjo, a realism and conceptualist painter, is one of such artist. While some artists struggle to establish the themes that their works address, Banjo's work "Comforter," in the Collection of the Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art, discreetly addresses real societal issues.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in 1985 to Mr. Akinola Banjo and Mrs. Taibat Banjo, Olawunmi hails from Ijebu Okun-Owa town, Ogun state in the western part of Nigeria. She is the third of four girls. Olawunmi was an art lover as a child who was inspired to produce art by the works of other artists she encountered in books and publications. She observed and replicated the art in the books to hone her creative abilities. Olawunmi had her Primary education at Nazareth Nursery and Primary School in Ijeshatedo, Surulere-Lagos and completed her secondary education at St. Marks College, Lagos (Banjo, 2021).

In 2005, she trained briefly at the Aina Onabolu training Centre in Iganmu, Lagos, where she learned basic drawing and other aspects of Art. At the training centre, she observed other artists and noticed their techniques used to achieve different effects. She began practicing full-time in 2006, mainly exploring acrylic and oil paint, which she has completely mastered and uses in most of her works. To monetize her art, she obtained a certificate in Creative Enterprise from Enterprise Development Centre (EDC) of the Pan African University (now Pan Atlantic University), Lagos, in 2009 (Banjo, 2021).

Olawunmi Banjo draws inspiration from many artists in Nigeria and abroad. From the works of Abayomi Barber and Muri Adejimi, she discovered her love for realism. She learned the art of patience and the ability to look deeply from works of the renaissance masters. From the works of Salvador Dali, she learned how to think out of the ordinary. From the works of Lemi Ghariokwu and Peju Alatise she found the voice to speak and address issues through her art, while the works of Rom Isichei inspire her to be bold. Through observing the works of masters her works have evolved over the years (Sowole, 2014).

She uses pencil, charcoal, acrylic, and oil paints extensively. Her art explores interpersonal relationships, self-image, and life's intricacies. She is inspired by her experiences and those of family and friends. Her works were initially very realistic but influenced by the works of some surrealist artists; they progressively evolved into a more surrealistic experience. In her recent body of works, she paints wire figures portraying the immense energy that flows through every human being (*Sense of Self*, 2021).

THE WORK



Fig 1.1 **Comforter (close up)**, Oil on Canvas, 122cm x 102cm, © Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art.

Fig 1.1 depicts a mother and child. The son places his left arm on his mother's shoulder while he keeps his eyes fixed on hers. The mother sits in a chair with her two elbows resting on the chair's back rest.

She uses her right palm to support her head while wearing a worried expression on her face. The son seems to be consoling his mother and they stare at each other with complete understanding.

Normally, mothers play the role of comforter to their children when they have hurt themselves, are ill or in a bad mood. However, the artist has realistically rendered this portrait of mother and child in reverse roles. Adults are erroneously expected to be tough, to know it all, to be in charge, not showing or talking about their vulnerabilities. Nonetheless, sometimes children observe the distress of their parents and elders and are able to provide pure support and consolation.



Fig 1.2 **Comforter (close up)**, Oil on Canvas, 122cm x 102cm, © Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art.

“An act of kindness is innocent and pure no matter how small, and it can do a lot to restore calm to a troubled soul” (Banjo, 2021). The painting reminds us that any act of kindness, even from children, may make us feel better and put us in a better mood. This piece, which hints at hyperrealism through its meticulous attention to detail, also has a nudge towards surrealism.

The artist attributes this likeness to surrealism in her work as a result of her contact with Muri Adejimi and Salvador Dali's works. The dark background of the painting throws the figures into a great mass of light. This is a popular technique in

Olawunmi's paintings and her form of creative expression. It also gives the works an air of mystery and brilliance (Banjo, 2021). In the words of Jess Castellotte,

“What we are invited to see in her works is what is invisible to the eyes, the interior struggles, pain, longings, joys and hopes of human existence. Olawunmi's works are pleasing to the eye, but below their deceptive compositional simplicity there are insights into the complexity of the individual human person- especially women and children-and their relationship with others” (Sense of Self, 2021).

In producing her works, Olawunmi first conceives the idea of what she wants to create then she tries to achieve it with models, references or sketches. Other times the idea develops while she's working on the piece. Realising her ideas involves a continuous process of applying paint in different layers.

“For my textured painting, the second touch is achieved by laying different tones of oil paint and blending the thick layers of oil paint with a pallet knife on the canvas. The final part is the detailing; I detail all the necessary parts of the work and it helps bring out the piece” (Olawunmi, 2021).

Through her art she responds to the experiences that many people go through across the world.

“Some of my subject matters depict the experiences and contributions of women in our societies, progressive parenting, emphasizing individual and societal empowerment, identity and balance in a digital age, the mind, mental health, sense of self awareness, self-exploration and more” (Olawunmi, 2021).

CONCLUSION

Since art reflects the inner musings of a person's mental and physical state, how do we see or view life? Perhaps we can stop to ponder on this question. Olawunmi's work helps us to think deeply about life and helps to give clarity to how we see and live life. "Creating each detailed piece is a major process of patience and learning for me, because it reveals the simplicity and yet the intricate aspects of life" (Olawunmi,2021).

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