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MUSEUM OF ART
PAN-ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY

Artwork Information Sheet 32

PEJU ALATISE'S NINE YEAR OLD BRIDE



Peju Alatise, *Nine-Year Old Bride*, Mixed Media, 48 x 44cm, Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art, Pan-Atlantic University.

INTRODUCTION

Art could be a means of confronting societal issues and a means of escape into a Utopian world. For Peju Alatise, it is a mix of both worlds, an escape as well as a tool for confronting societal ills. Peju is said to have the “Messiah Complex” (Art X Media, 2018). This is seen in the issues she addresses with her works, her passion for her country, her belief in its potential to grow as well as her desire to be a change-maker. These beliefs feed her bravery in exploring numerous media to tell compelling stories that are pertinent to her society. “The Nine-Year-old Bride” is one of such stories Alatise tells in a remarkable way.

THE ARTIST

Peju Alatise is an artist, architect and author. She was born to Tunji and Yemisi Alatise in 1975 in Lagos, Nigeria. She is one of seven children born into a traditional Muslim family. She started practicing art as a child, making things out of everything she found. Never considering a career path in Arts, Peju decided to study Architecture. However, her first contact with David Dale’s work in a gallery kindled her decision to pursue a career in Art. Her father did not support this decision due to his belief that Art wouldn’t give her a steady income but her mother thought otherwise. She had faith in Peju’s dreams and believed she would be successful in pursuing Art (Unknown, 2019).

Despite her love for arts, she followed through with her studies in Architecture and graduated with a Bachelor’s Degree in Technology, from the Department of Architecture, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomosho, Nigeria in 1998. (Alatise, n.d). She began practice as an independent studio artist in the same year, teaching herself art; practicing with different mediums while also working at an architecture firm. She began her art career as a painter, and later explored other materials like beads, fiberglass, resin, cement, cloth, and metal. Peju presently is engaged in making sculptures.

The influence of her architectural background can be seen in her works in the way that she manipulates the materials that she works with. Despite the complexities of some of these materials, Peju leverages her architectural skills to bring ease to using these materials. This is not surprising as it is said that Architecture is simply art that we live in. Interestingly, some critics initially had unfavorable opinions on Alatise sculptures. However, this did not hinder her from exploring her newly found interest, as she firmly believes that when art is made to cater to people’s preferences it becomes a craft and not a passion, and she is too passionate about her work to give it up (Diamond Woman, 2014).

Alatise preferred to be versatile than to be known as an artist in one particular medium either as a sculptor or a painter (Vaughan-Richards, 2018). Consequently, her works portray her as an artist who employs different media to tell stories. She uses her art to start conversations about societal issues and its effect on members of society. This has also contributed to the negative criticisms that her works get, as some critics do not agree with the causes she aligns herself with. Some other critics believe that advocating for causes is cliché, and she should make art for the beauty of it. It is Alatise’s belief that these critics prefer artworks that help them escape from the issues that her art addresses but for her a work without meaning would be pointless.

THE NINE-YEAR-OLD BRIDE

The artwork, four meters high and two meters wide depicts seven figures, six of which are headless, all completely wrapped in ankara fabric (Lesley, 2022). The third figure from the left appears to be a little girl (perhaps the nine-year-old bride), four of the figures look like women and two of the figures seem to back the viewer. The sculpture is made with fiberglass cloth, resin, bits of ankara fabric and paint. Fiberglass cloth is a delicate material made from glass and used for reinforcement. Its flexibility allows for the creation of complex shapes. It is used in the

automotive industry as well as in architecture, electronics, and medicine.



Fig 1.1 Peju Alatise, **Nine-Year Old Bride**, Mixed Media, 48 x 44cm, © Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art.

To create this work, the artist placed a canvas on human like structures strategically forming ripples and the canvas was in turn covered with fiberglass cloth. Resin, which can be used to harden fiberglass cloth, was mixed with a catalyst and applied all over the sculpture and left to solidify. Afterwards, the human forms the canvas was placed on was removed, and the fiberglass cloth, now called a fiberglass assumed the shape of the human forms. Bits of ankara fabrics are glued onto some parts of the works and other parts are painted in the motifs of the ankara fabric.

The artwork addresses the infringement on women's rights, and particularly touches on the issue of child marriage as we see the "Nine-year-old" girl who appears to struggle to be freed from the fabric that keeps her in place. This work was part of a solo exhibition called Material Witness that Alatise held at Nike Art Gallery in Lagos in 2012. She says that the exhibition was inspired by an idealistic yearning for justice and truth, where it seems there is neither fear of retribution about issues concerning corruption nor caution in the infringement of human rights (Japhet, 2012).

CONCLUSION

As Nina Simone said, it is an artist's responsibility to reflect the times; a responsibility Alatise takes seriously (Art X Media). This is seen with the issues she addresses in her work like the "Nine-year-old bride". She believes that her job is to make artworks that serve as a mirror for people to view themselves as well as their reactions and learn who they are. Alatise is a phenomenal artist who seeks to make her country, Nigeria, a better place, and inspire others to do the same through her art.

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