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MUSEUM OF ART  
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# Artwork 37 Information Sheet

## AZEKWOH'S NO VICTOR, NO VANQUISHED



*No Victor, No Vanquished*, Digital Painting, 55 x 77 Inches, Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art, Pan-Atlantic University.

## INTRODUCTION

In contemporary Nigerian art, it's not uncommon to find a significant number of self-taught artists. However, finding a self-taught artist with the level of mastery and skill in draughtsmanship that Anthony Azekwoh possesses is a rare feat. Working primarily in the digital medium, Azekwoh's self-directed journey, guided by online resources and influenced by artists like Sam Spratt, has resulted in a diverse portfolio. His works include dynamic portraits, historical depictions, and culturally rich narratives. We explore his piece "No Victor, No Vanquished" to uncover the historical and cultural themes embedded within.

## THE ARTIST

Anthony Azekwoh, based in Lagos, Nigeria, is a multifaceted artist and writer. His journey began in Surulere, Lagos, where he grew up. He completed his secondary education at Whitesands Secondary School and pursued higher education at Covenant University. Azekwoh started writing at the tender age of thirteen, with some of his works being published online. His deep love for literature profoundly influences his art and the narratives he creates.

Primarily working in the digital medium, Azekwoh skilfully uses pixels to replicate the textures of traditional art materials. His venture into digital painting began in 2016, utilizing Adobe Photoshop to create his pieces. His portfolio includes dynamic portraits and exquisite depictions of historical Black figures. A self-taught artist, Azekwoh learned through books, YouTube tutorials, and other online artists. His adaptation to digital painting was driven by the high cost of traditional materials, prompting him to seek an affordable way to learn and experiment. His artistic journey began when his laptop broke four years earlier, leading him to draw with ink pens on leftover A4 paper (Esomnofu, 2021).

A significant inspiration for Azekwoh was the work of Sam Spratt, an American designer whose digital paintings retain the brushstrokes of traditional art. This influence, coupled with Azekwoh's passion for storytelling, drives his artistic endeavours. His works explore cultural and heritage themes, delving into Igbo and Yoruba roots, aiming to bring these narratives to contemporary audiences. He seeks to fill the gap in knowledge about traditional cultures and

contexts, giving prominence to historical figures in his art (Dealers, 2020).

In 2020, Azekwoh illustrated the artwork for Adekunle Gold's song "AG Baby." As a writer, he released his first long-form book, "Star," in May 2020, alongside numerous short stories and essays.

Embracing innovation, Azekwoh has ventured into the realm of NFTs (Non-Fungible Tokens), a trend among Nigerian artists. This cryptocurrency-based medium has the potential to revolutionize art transactions by eliminating intermediaries and facilitating direct exchanges between buyers and creators globally. Azekwoh highlights the benefits of this system, emphasizing its potential to solve international communication issues in art transactions. "Just imagine being an American trying to pay me for my work. Typically, you'd pay me in dollars, and I'd have to convert it to naira, with the platform taking a hefty percentage as transaction fees. But picture this: you need to send a thousand dollars, and you do so in crypto, and I receive the exact amount. If it were more widely adopted, understood, and possibly regulated, it could serve as a perfect solution to the international communication problem" (Esomnofu, 2021).

Azekwoh's breakthrough came with his painting "The Red Man." This piece, initially a black-and-white study of a photo, evolved unexpectedly as he continued working late into the night. Despite his initial uncertainty about its unfinished look, he decided to share it, and it quickly went viral on social media in 2020, garnering global attention and transforming his career.

Currently, Azekwoh is involved in the "Ūmu Biafra" project, collaborating with a friend to retell the events of the Biafran genocide to a generation unfamiliar with this history. His works often explore themes of self-empowerment through life's struggles and trials, drawing inspiration from various cultures (Ihekire, 2023).

## NO VICTOR, NO VANQUISHED

Fig 1 below, presents a vivid and chaotic composition filled with symbolic elements and historical references. At the heart of the piece stands a central figure, enveloped in an expression of confusion and wonder. Surrounding this figure are various individuals in differing poses and actions—some observing the scene with curiosity, others in states of contemplation. A child seated on a chair appears in the background, adding depth to the narrative.



Fig 1.1 **No Victor, No Vanquished**, Digital Painting, 55 x 77 Inches, © Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art.

Symbolism permeates the artwork. Flames and a cross suggest themes of destruction and redemption, while the figures are dispersed across the canvas, contributing to the sense of chaos. The cloudscape, a mix of deep grey, green, and white, features a striking streak of white light illuminating the central figure. In the top right corner, the red, black, and green of the Biafran flag stands out, signifying the historical context of the Nigerian Civil War (Azekwoh, 2023).

Central to the piece is a shadowy ship, fading into the background, alongside birds and a distant plane plummeting from the sky. These elements hint at the turmoil and despair associated with the conflict. The artwork is also adorned with Nsibidi symbols, traditional Nigerian ideograms, enriching its cultural depth.

The phrase in the top left corner, written in Igbo, translates to "however long the night, the dawn will break," offering a message of hope amidst suffering. The Biafran crest

appears on a soldier's uniform, and the half-yellow sun mirrors the Biafran flag. Two flags are depicted: the Nigerian flag emerging from the wreckage and the torn Biafran flag fluttering in the wind, symbolizing dichotomy and division (Azekwoh, 2023).

The painting poignantly addresses the starvation of Biafran children during the war, illustrated by a child afflicted with kwashiorkor. Two children accompany an unknown soldier—one appearing frightened, the other embodying the Ogbanje, a cursed child doomed to a cycle of rebirth until justice prevails. In one corner, Bruce Mayrock is depicted, a Columbia University student who self-immolated at the United Nations Headquarters in 1969, protesting the Biafran genocide (Azekwoh, 2023).

Azekwoh, an admirer of neo-classical art, draws inspiration from Jacques-Louis David, evident in the composition's grandeur. He also credits Sam Spratt for influencing his use of form, light, and symbolic imagery. Spratt's painting for Logic's album "Everybody" notably shifted Azekwoh's perspective on the potential of this medium (Azekwoh, 2023).

The color palette features bold contrasts: red and green, along with black and yellow, reflecting the Biafran flag. Through these colors, Azekwoh not only captures the eye but also invokes the historical and emotional weight of the Biafran War.

## CONCLUSION

Anthony Azekwoh's work vividly portrays his dedication and innovative spirit. His painting "No Victor, No Vanquished" is a poignant exploration of the Nigerian Civil War, rich with symbolism and historical references. It highlights the importance of preserving and sharing cultural narratives in a rapidly evolving digital age.

Through projects like "Ümu Biafra" and his engagement with NFTs, Azekwoh continues to push the boundaries of how art can be created, shared, and understood. His commitment to storytelling, whether through visual art or literature, bridges the gap between past and present, offering a platform for cultural heritage to resonate with today's generation.

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