



YEMISI SHYLLON
MUSEUM OF ART
PAN-ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY

Artwork 38 Information Sheet

NWADIOBGU'S JESUS OF LUBECK; JOURNEY MERCIES



Jesus of Lubeck; Journey Mercies, acrylic on wood, and carton, Varying dimension, Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art, Pan-Atlantic University.

INTRODUCTION

Ken Nwadiogbu is a Nigerian contemporary artist known for his diverse body of work, which ranges from hyper-realistic silhouette drawings to expressive, colorful paintings on cardboard cartons. As a didactic artist, his meteoric rise in the African art scene is both remarkable and inspiring to younger artists of his generation. His 2021 installation, "*Jesus of Lubeck; Journey Mercies*" is a notable work donated to the Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art at Pan-Atlantic University in Ibeju-Lekki. This installation features painted cartons with faces and an over 18-foot-long blue canoe adorned with linear and solid *uli* and *adire* symbols. The piece is supported by two metal suspenders at each end of the canoe, with additional boxes placed beneath it. "*Jesus of Lubeck; Journey Mercies*" exemplifies Nwadiogbu's artistic evolution from a master draughtsman to an exceptional painter, whose expressive technique shines in a vibrant chromatic celebration.

THE ARTIST

Kenechukwu Emmanuel Nwadiogbu was born on 12th August 1994 in Lagos Nigeria. He had his primary and secondary school at Lagos before he furthered his studies at University of Lagos, where he studied Civil and Environmental Engineering (Cole 2018). Having loved art before then he started practicing his art intensely while studying, he explained that his father who was a doctor never wanted him to study Art believing it will not be profitable for him. Despite having no formal training, Ken grew through self-learning to become one of Nigeria's finest hyper-realist Artist. He has pushed to become an interesting contemporary Artist from Nigeria and currently holds a Master of Arts from the Royal college of Art in London. He has held numerous exhibitions among them re solos such as *Fragments of Realities 2023* and *Ken Nwadiogbu: A Different Perspective*.

STYLE OF ART

Ken Nwadiogbu presents himself as a "contemporealism" artist. By "contemporealism" the artist refers to his expression of realistic events and persons a style that once flourished in 18th century Europe. He therefore, sees his realism as existing in the contemporary era. Using the hyperrealist technique, he creates images while expressing an interplay of forms and spaces. Majorly his paintings and drawings express eccentric portraits of persons whom the artist is conversant with. These persons' faces are placed in

a supposed silhouette figure as their eyes peek through the silhouette figures which appear on plain white or a monochrome background. His works review concepts on gender equality, African cultures, global politics, Black power, knife-crime and migration. Working with charcoal, pencil, and acrylic, Nwadiogbu creates images that convey his artistic philosophy on surfaces beyond the canvas and paper. Through his art he seeks to create social dialogues that will make his audience to rethink the stance on certain social issues.

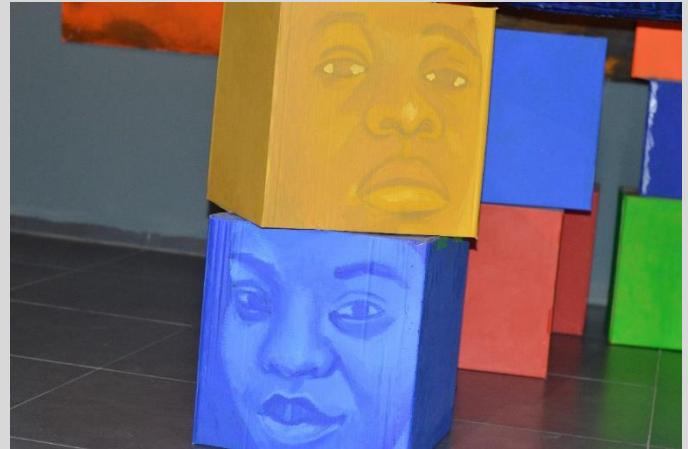


Fig 1.1 Close up image. *Jesus of Lubeck, (Journey mercies)*. Variable, © Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art.

WORK ANALYSIS

Migration is a reality that the Nigerian state is facing. Young citizens are constantly seeking for means to leave the country for greener pastures as they explore all possible means to leave the motherland. In "*Jesus of Lubeck; Journey Mercies*," Nwadiogbu uses carton boxes to symbolize items of distribution and trade. These boxes, typically used for shipping goods from places of production to places of consumption, are often discarded once their contents are removed. By using them as a medium for his art, Nwadiogbu seeks to give these overlooked objects a sense of worth. He paints the faces of people personal to him on the boxes, thus subjectifying them and drawing a parallel to the brain drain occurring in Nigeria, where the country's talents are being 'shipped' abroad through self-effort.

The installation features boxes approximately 1.2 feet by 1.2 feet, painted with monochrome faces in hues of red, yellow, orange, blue, purple, and green. These boxes are stacked on a blue-painted wooden canoe adorned with *uli* and *adire* symbols in lighter blue shades. The arrangement

of the boxes mimics a ship loaded with cargo containers, giving the visual impression of a vessel sailing in the air. Beneath the canoe, six boxes are stacked in pairs, adding to the installation's realism.

At the center of the stacked boxes is a self-portrait of the artist, highlighting his own migration story. Each box represents an individual story, emphasizing the personal connections Nwadiogbu has with the people depicted. The artwork suggests that, like cargo on a ship, each migrant carries unknown personal burdens, and their loss is deeply felt, without the 'insurance' that real cargo might have.

This installation also alludes to the perilous journeys many migrants undertake, particularly those crossing the Strait of Gibraltar to reach Europe. The six boxes at the base symbolize the collateral damage of such dangerous routes, where human lives can be lost without the possibility of recovery. Through this powerful imagery, Nwadiogbu's work raises important questions about migration, identity, and the value of human life.



Fig 1.1 **Jesus of Lubeck, (Journey mercies). Variable**, © Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art.

Beyond the broader socio-economic implications, the artwork also looks into the deeply personal and emotional aspects of migration. Each face painted on the boxes represents an individual story, a unique narrative filled with hopes, dreams, struggles, and sacrifices. These are not just statistics or anonymous figures; they are friends, family members, and acquaintances of the artist, each with their own aspirations and reasons for leaving. Through this intimate portrayal, Nwadiogbu urges viewers to consider the profound impact that migration has on the lives of those who leave and those who remain. The artwork evokes empathy and a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in the decision to migrate. It prompts

questions about identity, belonging, and the sacrifices made in pursuit of a better future. In doing so, Nwadiogbu's installation serves as a powerful commentary on the human condition and the universal quest for a better life. It challenges viewers to see beyond the political and economic factors and to recognize the humanity and personal experiences that underpin the phenomenon of migration. The artwork becomes a bridge between the personal and the political, offering a deep reminder of the individual lives affected by broader societal issues.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the artwork highlights a significant problem facing the country: the departure of its citizens and talented individuals seeking better opportunities abroad. Beyond just a national concern, the artwork invites viewers to reflect on the personal stories of each migrant and how the event impact their lives.

REFERENCES

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