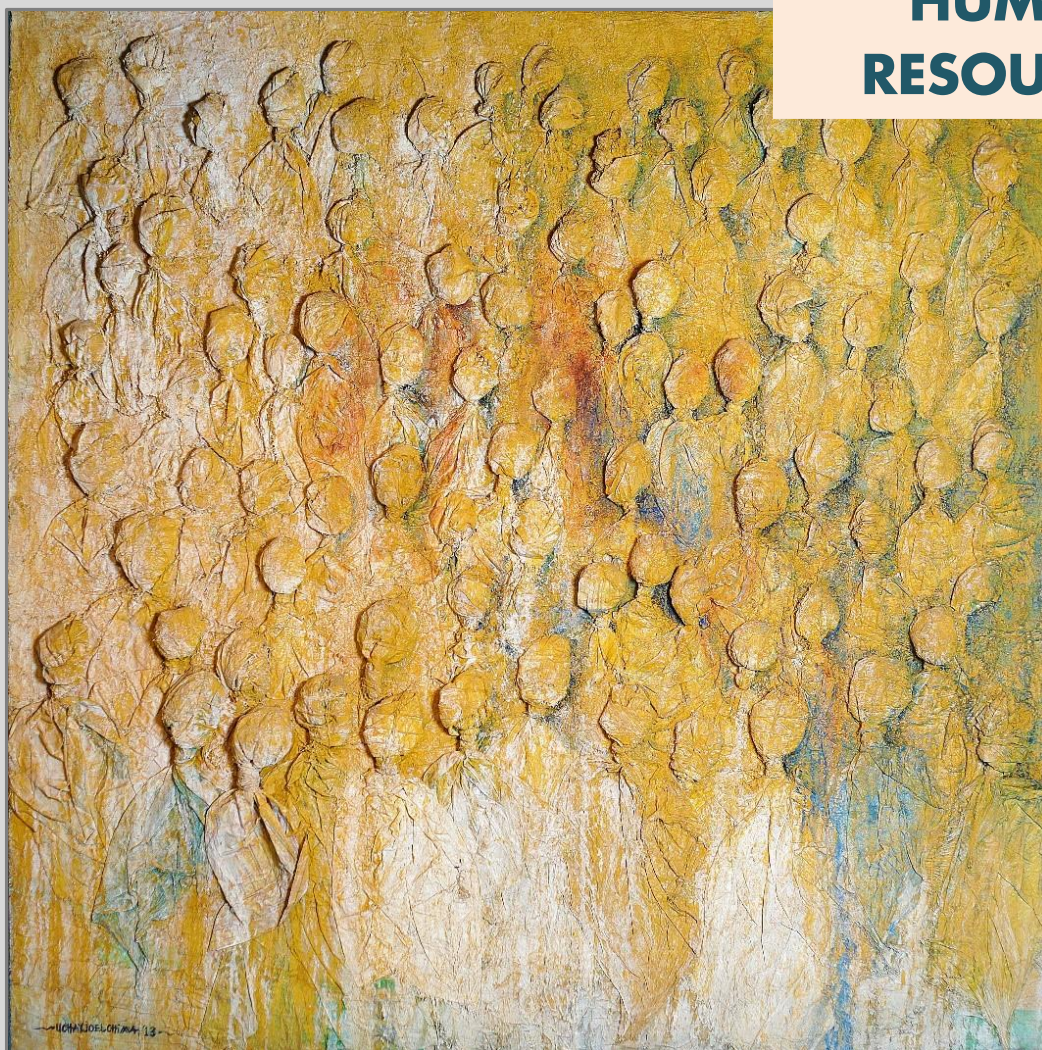


Artwork Information Sheet **26**

UCHAY JOEL CHIMA'S HUMAN RESOURCES



Human Resources I, Uchay Joel CHIMA, 2013, Mixed Media, 300 x 300 cm, ©Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art.

INTRODUCTION

“Home is where the heart is” is a popular saying, but for mixed media Artist Uchay Joel Chima, “Home is where the heart of his art is”. As an artist who draws inspiration from his background, environment and the issues around it, Uchay has developed a unique way of synchronizing his concepts with unconventional medium, which often includes recycled junks.

A typical embodiment of this style is his mixed media piece, “Human Resources” which he uses to expose the concerns of Nigeria’s surplus availability of resources and their lamentable mismanagement, especially the most valuable resource, its people.

ARTIST’S PROFILE

Uchay Joel Chima is a contemporary Igbo Nigerian artist who was born in 1971 and raised in Enugu, commonly known as the “coal city.” Uchay’s strong sentimental affinity to the town is evident in his art as he uses coal as a medium of expression.

In expressing his connection to the town, the artist says,

I have no doubt in my mind that growing up in Enugu, a city with a picturesque backdrop, green landscape, an abundance of parks with perfectly groomed lush grass fields, carved flower beds, and a plethora of fruit trees, played a huge role in molding the artist I am today.

Uchay was also inspired by the troupe of artists that practiced in Enugu. At the age of fifteen, he had the opportunity to see the Aka Group show at the Presidential Hotel, Enugu. At that age, he was fascinated by works of great masters like Nsikak Essien, El Anatsui, Bona Ezeudu, Chris Afuba, Obiora Udechukwu, Tayo Adenike, Boniface Okafor, Obiora Anidi, Tony Umunna and dreamed to become like them.

This motivated him to study Fine Arts at the Institute of Management and Technology Enugu, where he obtained his Higher National Diploma (HND) in 1997. His early contact with the artists significantly influenced his works on canvas and the motivations from the Coal City, his home, inspired his early works which consisted mostly of landscapes, human figures and life compositions.

After graduation, he struggled to find a unique identity, which made it difficult for him to fit into Nigeria’s evolving art narrative. Consequently, he was turned down many times by art galleries that he wanted to work with. Uchay, however, made relentless efforts to explore the potentials of materials ranging from paper/ newsprint to ropes, strings, sac bags, cloth, charcoal, sand, wax and other ordinary materials, searching for ways to convey meaning through his works as he developed a more personal style to establish relevance in the art space.

Ofubaraboye (2019) notes that Uchay weaves a tapestry of memory, imagination, societal happenings, and emotion, by uniting various found objects in an artistic manner which are often very thought-provoking and engaging. Similarly, Jess Castellote, in his review of Uchay’s exhibition, *The Earth and The People That Live in It* states that his works are not easily comprehended with a cursory look as they have a strong formal presence and character, but are equally rich in embedded narratives (Castellote, 2015).

The artist is very particular about establishing a link between the material and his subject while addressing issues that he is most concerned with; therefore, one could say that by combining conventional with unconventional art forms, Uchay conveys relatable themes through his art.

Evolving further, Uchay has created many experimental performance art videos and two-dimensional sculptures made from found objects. In 2009, he received the award for best video art project from the Centre for Contemporary Art in Lagos. The works of Uchay Joel Chima have been exhibited in prominent galleries and museums in Nigeria, South

Africa, Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States.

HUMAN RESOURCES



Fig. 1 Human Resources I, Uchay Joel CHIMA, 2013, Mixed Media, 300 x 300 cm, ©Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art.

At first glance, Uchay's mixed media piece "human resources", implies a gathering of people as abstract-looking heads of various sizes occupy the surface area. The artist began exploring the theme as a series in 2008, and the works were first featured at his solo show "Much Strings Attached", in ARC Gallery, London in 2009.

The works depict the abundance of resources in Nigeria, as the artist manipulates sac bags (grain sacs and Ghana must go bags) and twine to depict people. Uchay in his usual bid to attach his materials to his subject, uses food sacs to imply "beings" because "we are what we eat". He also employs the twine to indicate the notions of friendship, bonding, togetherness, intimacy, entanglement and oneness, since they resonate sayings like "a three-fold cord is

not easily broken", or "Igwe bu ike" meaning "there is strength in unity".

Depicting human beings by knotting and tying, the artist arrived at bulging sacs which formed the head, neck and draperies of the relief abstract figures. According to Achugwo, (2019), the knots and draperies represent Nigerians dressed in traditional attires. The artist makes the heads at the bottom the largest, reducing the sizes as they go up. Some heads come together more than others, suggesting whispering and conversations.

Uchay suggests in this presentation that every human being has a goldmine of limitless potential, but while some people are aware of it, many others are unaware of it and end up lost in the crowd.

The artist emphasizes Nigeria's current situation of having more focus on resources like crude oil in the southern parts, than the much-needed investment in manpower development. Since we live in an era where many jobs are being automated, the consequences are ominous. Being a nation blessed with 212,543,037 people, the state of the Nigerian school system is disheartening as it lacks adequate funding and adequate tools to prepare the next generation for the world they will inherit.

The colours that feature in Uchay's works reflect his mood but it is normal for critics and observers to attach diverse meanings to them. Orange and yellow ochre pigment dominates a major part of his work while dark shades of red and blue feature in certain areas at the background to emphasize depth. Slight applications of green can be seen in inconspicuous places while more obvious whites are applied in various parts for highlight. The application of the dull and subdued colours against superfluous bright and aureate colours may symbolize the opposing forces of bad education, infrastructure, and joblessness affecting the priceless human resources that abound.

According to Achugwo (2019), the colours which Uchay has used are a metaphor for the artist's interpretations. In his words, "the bright colours of yellow and orange express hope for a brighter future

for the nation while the White colour patches depict the dressing and convey the message of peace.”

Proffering a solution to the negligence of human resources through the qualities of his materials and positioning of forms, Uchay emphasizes the need to re-evaluate and strengthen our relationships with those around us despite our dire circumstances, supporting one another through current global difficulties and challenges.

Furthermore, the artist resolves that when the people are empowered, great opportunities abound, the nation grows stronger and in his words, “the 'Giant' ceases to walk on crutches.”

CONCLUSION

Uchay Joel Chima is one of the artists who is continually working to keep Nigerian art evolving, through unceasing experimentation that result in the invention of new art forms and techniques. In this case, he is able to dig into and implant topic themes into salvaged objects, allowing his audience the ability to connote important interpretations through an aesthetic connection with them.

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