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Ìlànà Òrì-òkè Àtiyanrìn: T(h)reading Sands and Mountains

A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Art & Design

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Fine Arts in Studio Art

by

Akintayo Akintobi

August 2024

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Keywords: storytelling, history, identity, patterns, culture, storytelling, Appalachia, Yorùbá

ABSTRACT

Ìlànà Òrí-òkè Àtiyanrìn: T(h)reading Sands and Mountains

by

Akintayo Akintobi

The artist presents his Master of Fine Arts exhibition, entitled *Ìlànà Òrí-òkè Àtiyanrìn: T(h)reading Sands and Mountains*. The exhibit was mounted in Tipton Gallery in downtown Johnson City, TN, from February 1 to February 9, 2024. The exhibition consisted of 13 artworks, including mixed media paintings, fibers, sculptures, and installations. In this thesis, Akintobi discusses his life experiences growing up in Nigeria and traveling to the United States for his MFA, and how these experiences have affected his art over the past three years.

Through the exhibition, the artist delves into the intersection and variances of cultural perspectives, exploring identity and creativity within the dynamic context of these two cultures. This body of work is a visual translation of his observations and comparisons of his everyday life in southwest Nigeria and his everyday life in Johnson City, TN, USA.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout my artistic journey, spanning from childhood to graduate school, I have utilized various materials based on their proximity, their availability, and the financial condition of my family. At best, pencil on paper was the medium to which I had access, although that was also considered precious as I used the medium for my classwork and assignments. Other than that, sand was always readily available. I could recall building sandcastles and creating all forms of animals from sand. This resourcefulness has revealed itself in my art as a child in the Yorùbá culture and as an adult in the Appalachian culture. The use of sand as a medium has come full circle, having found its way into my studio practice and my MFA thesis work.

One afternoon in Ibadan, Nigeria, during one *Egungun* festival, a male youth is dressed in a masked costume to revere the Yorùbá¹ ancestors. He is joined by members of his clan as he dances through the village to the king's palace, where a ceremony is to be held. This masquerade is popularly known as *Adinilodo*² within the Yorùbá community. The *Egungun* Festival is an annual event in Yorùbá land where people from various clans come together to celebrate their ancestry. Drummers accompany each *Egungun* from each clan and beat the *Gangan* drum to extol him, and his clan members respond by jumping and dancing joyfully. When the ceremony ended, I replayed *Adinilodo*'s costume in my mind and sketched it out on the sand. I had this encounter at the age of seven, but because it spurred me to make art, the experience has remained etched in my memory. After this event, I began to draw or sketch on sand and other surfaces I

¹ Yorùbá is an ethnic group that originated from the West African region which is primarily southwestern people of the present-day Nigeria.

² Adinilodo is the name of a masquerade in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria.

found around me like walls, doors, chalkboard in school among others. These media and substrates enabled me to make art more frequently and gradually made art my close companion.

During my undergraduate study of fine arts at Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), the approach of teaching art constrained individual creativity and limited self-expression. I learned how to make art through media like oil and acrylic on canvas. At this time, naturalism and the *Yorùbá* culture were taught at the Ife art school. Naturalism emphasizes the rendition of colors, forms, shapes, lighting, and shadows. The Ife art school was driven by the need to revive the Yoruba Indigenous form of pictorial representation. Students were encouraged to make creative use of traditional African forms and symbols in their works (Sehinde, Ajiboye & Folaranmi 83). Therefore, my undergraduate education was focused on naturalism and Yorùbá form of pictorial representation. However, I decided to be adventurous by choosing to use saturated colors from my palette, without paying much attention to using colors for descriptive ends. An example of such works can be seen in *Self Portrait*, 2015, one of my first undergraduate oil paintings, paying attention to representational form while also forming my own visual sensibilities.



Figure 1. Akintayo Akintobi, *Self Portrait*, 2015

Furthermore, at OAU, we were also taught traditional Yorùbá art comprising mythology, philosophy, folklore, proverbs, and traditional painting techniques on canvas, as well as cultural symbols and patterns. These symbols and patterns are drawn primarily from the Yorùbá culture in Nigeria, primarily from the *Àdìre Eléko* fabrics (designed in Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria) and *Onaism*³. After my undergraduate studies, I wanted to invest my art with deeper meaning and communicate concepts and ideas through forms and colors. Symbolic elements like flowers, cowries, dice, and Rubik's cube were gradually incorporated into my works. To further explore other forms of figuration, I began to ponder the differences between abstraction and naturalism, questioning their usage. At this stage, my works tended in varying degrees toward abstraction of form. In 2020, I started reading about Pablo Picasso and became familiar with his body of work. During my research on Picasso, I discovered his appropriation of abstract formalism from African forms (Leighten 610). This created more interest in looking more into how his work evolved from realism to cubism. His use of geometric angular shapes inspired me to paint some portraits by using simple basic forms. I am interested in breaking the portraits into geometric shapes, characterized by flatly painted saturated and de-saturated colors with clean edges and facial forms (see Figure 2).

³ The contemporary recreation of the forms and philosophies of traditional Yorùbá art and design.



Figure 2. Akintayo Akintobi, *Untitled*, 2020

Commencing the graduate program at ETSU in fall 2021, I realized that there was an emphasis on individuality and artistic freedom, even within the framework of guidelines and rules. I moved away from naturalistic painting to working more abstractly, even though I had started exploring abstraction personally before my arrival at graduate school. Furthermore, I wanted to have more intentionality and individuality in my work, delving deeper into the nuances of color theory and symbolism. Learning how to limit my palette and use fewer patterns, only infusing them in my works where they bear layers of meaning. The goal was to be more concise with the themes in my work but also depend on the visual literacy of the viewer. Throughout my time in graduate school, my work has gradually moved away from traditional modes of painting on canvas to use of materials like fabrics, placemats, insulation foam, denim jeans, wood, and sand as symbolism.

CHAPTER 2. MATERIALITY

I am fascinated by how materiality shows the relationship between people and objects and the ability of objects to change meaning as they move through different social spheres (Kearney 234). Before pursuing my MFA degree, I worked as an art teacher in Lagos, Nigeria. While teaching a topic on Mat weaving, I visited a local weaver's workshop to learn more about it. These mats are woven in myriad shapes, and sizes and are dyed beautifully. Seeing that dye could stay on dry mat stalks and seeing the output of using canvases with various textures, animal skins, and other surfaces as painting substrates, I decided to explore traditional Yorùbá mats as supports for my painting.



Figure 3. Akintayo Akintobi, *Woman*, 2019

I painted a portrait of a woman on the woven mat, creating a new form of materiality in my work. The act of painting on a nontraditional surface caused me to start to think about the expanded possibilities of painting. During my first semester as a graduate student in Fall 2021, I created a series of saturated paintings based on proverbs from my Yorùbá culture. I combined simple geometric shapes, vivid colors, and Àdìrè Eléko batik patterns to create abstract portraits that represent proverbs.

Abstract works are visually represented through different processes. As a result, abstract art takes multiple forms, which include deconstructing from nature. (Crowther and Wünsche 241). My works align with Picasso's in the sense that his works were mainly abstractions from nature. Known for his abstraction and distortion of objects in his works which he executes through interposition, linear perspective, aerial perspective, and size constancy. Via cubism, Picasso used infinite vanishing points which allowed for the possibility of viewing and rendering objects from different positions at the same time. Thus, his work was basically drawn from observation of natural and physical objects. He did not seek to annihilate reality but instead to represent it differently (Kozbelt 24). While my paintings do not retain elements of surface modeling like Picasso's nor was I trying to combine multiple perspectives into a single composition, my works are geometric abstractions of nature. I wanted to simplify my manner of representing forms by using shapes, colors, and patterns as symbols to assemble cultural narratives.

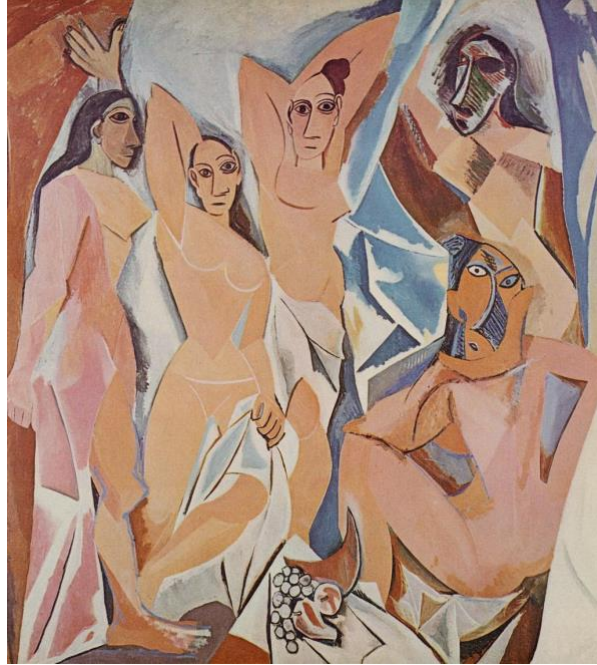


Figure 4. Pablo Picasso, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. Version O)*, 1906-1907

The modernists' discovery of the primitive gave birth to modernism just as the rediscovery of Greco-Roman art birthed the Renaissance. Modernism emerged as a dialogue between the West and the primitive cultures (Flam, 8). The interest in the art of Africa, Oceania, and Native America in the 20th century influenced Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. Version O)*. Picasso included African masks on the heads of the two femmes on the right side of the canvas, the two faces of the women along the right margin of the painting are drawn from African masks (likely from the Entoumbi region of the Congo and the other from the Pende region of Zaire) while those on the left from Iberia (Hummer, 45). Picasso potentially added primitive elements in the femmes as a response to his trip to Trocadero in June 1907 (Rubin 278). The Africanized femmes are often associated with forms on the Fang Mask from Vlamick, Kota reliquary figures from Gabon and Baga d'mba of Guinea. Picasso was inspired by these motifs in

tribal art which he appropriated, metamorphosized, and fused into creating his version of tribal art. It was not just a mimicry but a fusion of different forms (Rubin, 278).

Despite these African elements in *Les Femmes d'Alger*, Picasso denies the place of African art in his work when he famously answered “L’art negre! Connais pas” (African Art? I know no such thing) (Howlet 1951 cited in Ekpo 8). African art was not given its due place in its contribution to the development of Modernism. African artistic elements were appropriated and incorporated into European art forms. Traditional African artists already had a concept of deconstructing forms long before Europe “discovered” it. In addition, European modernists incorporated African art forms only in their formal qualities and lost the intrinsic meaning of these forms. African modernism sought to synthesize African content with European modernism. It was an aesthetic-cultural crossbreeding of African contents or motifs with European modernist formal procedures and styles. Thus, many African artists only sought to Africanize modernism. This is a copycat attitude which sprang from a place of ignorance (Ekpo 8).



Figure 5. Akintayo Akintobi, *Tita Riro*, 2021

Attending graduate school in the USA, I was intrigued by how Picasso incorporated African elements in his work and this motivated me to start my explorations. However, after gaining an understanding of modern art, my goal is to reclaim African art forms by using them in their original sense to tell my stories. From a position of my African art and culture, I am using modernism to project African art in its original form and context by exploring African proverbs, signs and symbols. Symbols are used to express and emphasize deep complicated realities which are desired to be told more powerfully (Sağlık 2). Seeing the importance of symbols and their prevalence in African art, I also deconstructed my forms by utilizing symbolism to depict my ideas, experiences and stories.

After my first semester in graduate school, I began to paint experiences from my personal life and different figural compositions, I wanted to introduce spatial depth formally and conceptually. I started to create depth by adding familiar spaces from home in Nigeria as I was feeling nostalgic. In spring 2022, Professor Christian Rieben guided me on how to express and communicate my feelings and experiences through formal elements like texture and 3D illusionistic shapes.

In *Dinner Table, 2022*, the first painting that resonated for me in graduate school. I painted an abstract work of my father, mother, and I at a dining table in our living room to describe the memories of eating with my family in Nigeria. Using rudimentary and complex geometric forms, my father was characterized with well-defined angular shapes, detailed rough textures with saturated dark blue and red color. While my mother was painted with softer textures, round, and angular shapes with both desaturated and saturated colors. In between the two figures, I represented myself with round and angular shapes in green, purple, light brown, pink and a blue bowl. Shapes, forms, color, and texture were chosen to qualify the character of

each person while patterns became more playful around the figures and background. This painting conveys nostalgia for the way my parents and I ate together from a simple bowl, which, as I quickly discovered, starkly contrasts with the way people eat in America. Cultural changes like dining habits (Americans' solitary style versus Nigerians' communal dining), neighbor relationships (Americans don't view neighbors as close kin), and greetings (handshake in America versus prostration and kneeling in Nigeria).



Figure 6. Akintayo Akintobi, *Dinner Table*, 2022

To introduce other materials into my work, I started looking at formal connections between my works and other media outside paint. I was introduced to insulation foam as a material in an independent study with Professor Andrew Scott in Fall 2022. I began to cut out different shapes and later found other ready-made shapes of this material. This motivated me to create the piece titled *The Artist*. It is a self-portrait in my studio - a relief piece using similar shapes, textures, colors, and forms in *Dinner Table 2022*. Created out of paint, insulation foam and found objects in my studio, I combined two dimensional and three dimensional sculpted and painted forms, alongside Yorùbá patterns used in my previous works. Hence, the blue bowl and

the pink 3D-shaped semi-circle became a personal motif for representing myself as opposed to naturalistic forms in *Self Portrait*.



Figure 7. Akintayo Akintobi, *The Artist*, 2022

While in the Independent Graduate Study with Professor Andrew Scott Ross, I learned how each material has its meanings and associations alongside how combining different materials can generate further meanings:

In a contemporary context, materiality is particularly relevant in that contemporary art is understood to be a relic of the artist's process of investigation into the nature of things, via objects' materiality and artists' work to reframe meaning through aesthetic juxtapositions. (Mills 2).

Thus, the goal was to create meaning from the combination or juxtaposition of objects sourced from my surroundings. This inspired me to create a wall sculpture titled *Mother and Child*, utilizing fabric, burnt wood, and pieces or fragments of collapsed branches that I found behind my studio, a small house at the edge of campus, known affectionately as *The Cabin*⁴. Looking at the piece of wood, I immediately connected to the textural surface reminding me of how much sacrifice my mother made to raise me. I craved this piece of wood, also viewing it as a representation of who I am to my mum as well, the care and sacrifices I go through right now as an adult to make her comfortable in her old age. I wanted to create a work that serves as a reminder of the sacrifices and bond between myself and my mother. Therefore, I created a representational image of a Yorùbá mother and her baby. Making art with the use of a found object was in effect, a return to the resourcefulness that I had gradually developed since my childhood. In addition, the work reflects my adaptability to my new environment.

⁴ The Cabin is further discussed in chapter 4



Figure 8. Akintayo Akintobi, *Mother and Child*, 2022

When I found this piece of wood, I viewed its inner part as a hollow stomach, and its outer part as the back of a human. Then, I combined the wood with a fabric and a diamond shape carved from lumber to represent a baby. The fabric was torn and folded to fit the way it's being used to hold a baby on the back in Nigeria. It was intentionally wrapped around the wood and diamond, therefore representing the tight bond between my mother and myself. Treated carefully like a person, the wood was also carefully cleaned, polished, and shaped.

My mother gave birth to me at an age considered late of childbearing. Growing up as a young boy and her only child, I am everything that matters to her, therefore, I depended on her for many things: care, money, and guidance. Now that I have become an adult, much has changed. She is older now and relies on me for the same things that she once provided me with. This role reversal, which plays out decades apart, is precious to me as I see myself taking the position of my mother symbolically. To present this, the diamond shape from the lumber was burned with fire till its color turned to charcoal black. I consider both the shape and color of the object to be a “black diamond”. I intentionally connect this back to my mother. The ways in which I treasure and value her are symbolized through the black diamond motif. This represents the preciousness, love, and importance of a non-shining object, and in this case, the value of my mother and me to each other.

CHAPTER 3. SYMBOLS & PATTERNS

I frequently employ the *Àdìre Eléko* patterns in my work. Through this, I can provide a look into the Yorùbá worldview, including our religion and socio-cultural values. As a Yorùbá living in another nation, these patterns serve as an identity, a representation of my heritage, and a soothing reminder of home. As a result, I incorporate these motifs into a variety of my works. My first introduction to patterns was in an African art history class that I took as a student of Fine Arts at OAU. There, I learned about the patterns of *Àdìre Eléko* fabric which originates from the Abeokuta people of Ogun State and how it is utilized across the Yorùbá land. “The Yorùbá term *Àdìre* consists of three words, *à* (to take) + *dì* (to tie) + *re* (to dye)” (Renne 3). *Àdìre Eléko* is a type of dyed fabric produced by using a combination of *èko* (a starchy substance from corn slurry) and *láfún* (a cassava flour) to prevent dye penetration and peeling during dyeing. Patterns are applied freehand or with, stenciling, splashing, and lacing, or pattern creation technology (Areo and Kalilu 98).

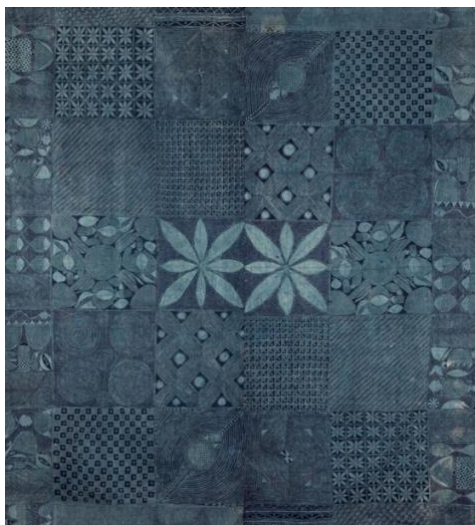


Figure 9. Yorùbá People, *Cloth with Olokun, Goddess of the Sea Motif (Àdìre Eléko)*, 1973

These patterns often seem like mere lines or shapes for decoration but to Yorùbá people, each line or shape forms a meaningful motif:

The study of the motifs of Àdìrè enables one to understand the deep undercurrent of this visual art tradition. It goes beyond mere representation and thus becomes a facilitator of the people's language. The motifs thus become a voiceless semantic of a visual language, to be appreciated and enjoyed by all but only to be decoded by those with knowledge about the people. (Areo and Kalilu 30)

Another set of patterns I use often in my works is *Onaism*. Simply put, *Onaism* entails patterns and shapes encrypted with meaning within the Yorùbá art community:

Onaism is characterized by the use of significant symbols charged with related motifs to give verbal luminosity in such a manner that there is scarcely any surface of the picture plane without action. It is pattern-oriented with ornamentation, which is dominant in *Ona* art, giving attention to details. Furthermore, it is built up with symbolic images that convey several meanings which are often masked away from the viewers at first glance. Motifs from which patterns/designs are made could be derived from geometric, organic, xenomorph, animal, and bird motifs. Others include motifs derived from nature, utilitarian objects, lettering, and sculptural forms. (Irivwieri 236)

I started to incorporate *Nsibidi* and *Onaism*—commonly used patterns and encrypted symbols in the Igbo and Yorùbá culture of Nigeria—into my series of paintings. I initially referenced *Àdìrè Eléko* fabric patterns created with starch-resistant paste and indigo dye. “*Nsibidi* is the native

name for writing used in the Calabar, Cross River, among the Igbo people” (Macgregor 209). As soon as I got acquainted with these patterns, I began to use them in my work.

In addition to my use of these patterns, I have started to design patterns for my paintings. This can be seen in *Mix or Match* and *Flag*. I created a frame of symbols that included cassava leaf, a deer, an antelope, a quilt symbol, and zigzag lines. The motifs and patterns are a mix of both cultures which can be seen in Figure 10. The antelope is a common animal in the forest of the Yorùbá region just as the deer is also a common animal in the Appalachian region. Cassava represents the Àdìre Eléko indigo fabric of the Yorùbá textile culture. The quilt symbol also represents the quilting culture common in America, while zigzag lines represent both Yorùbá and the Appalachian mountains and rivers. In *Mix and Match* these symbols were screen-printed as repeated patterns on deconstructed blue jeans fabrics sewn together. This is a visual representation of how two entirely different worlds have similar patterns and colors of fabrics, as this contrast can also be the basis for their similarities. Despite the geographical and cultural distances that separate these traditions, they remind us of the common threads that bind us together as global citizens.



Figure 10. Akintayo Akintobi, *Screen-print Module*, 2023

Without a doubt, moving from my country has complicated my perception of who I am and where I belong. Therefore, there is a need to rebuild my identity and convert it to match the local culture. I put this upon myself because I must find a way to understand the people in this society and co-exist with them peacefully and build solid relationships. This resulted in absorbing my current environment and feeling the need to fit into the norms and culture while evaluating who I am.

Patterns in my works have also transcended the forms of indigenous traditional Yorùbá motifs. Such is seen in *Cycles* where spirals were used repeatedly. These spirals, though drawn large and created in simple lines, are used to indicate or emphasize themes in the same way traditional patterns are used. My thesis work embraces minimalism as a form of abstraction through the creation of large-format sand paintings of single symbols enlarged to occupy most of the canvas. The process of creating a pattern in a repeated matrix or a singular instance involves numerous decisions that shape the spatial and color relationships in an artwork (Loeb 339). These decisions are pivotal in determining the overall composition, balance, and visual impact of the artwork.

CHAPTER 4. T(H)READING SANDS AND MOUNTAINS

During my time in graduate school, I have shifted from traditional painting methodologies and geometric portraiture to minimal abstraction, dense and repeated patterning to symbols and mixed media, conveying symbolism through materials used in less traditional ways to describe pure, distilled shapes. I drifted towards minimal abstraction and symbolism because I wanted my works to emphasize simplicity, materiality, and spatial exploration.

The Cabin



Figure 11. Akintayo Akintobi, *The Cabin*, 2023

Upon my arrival at ETSU, I was allotted a studio space at The Pit, which as the name suggests, is the basement area of a building made of concrete and illuminated almost entirely by artificial lighting. It was so cold and unfamiliar. I shared the space with fellow graduate students in studio art, who were strangers to me. I felt lonely because I could not bond well with my colleagues. After all, we came from different backgrounds. I craved familiar company and

wanted to feel the warmth of Nigeria’s hot weather. Luckily, at the beginning of my second semester, in the spring of 2022, I moved to *The Cabin*. Unlike the vast space of the Pit, this old house possessed the warmth of a home. I had access to better heaters, a cozy space, and the company of a friend who is also my studio partner. It was the first space where I could talk comfortably to my parents and friends back home in my native language (Yorùbá) with so much freedom. For its homeliness, privacy and as one of its final occupants, this building holds a high sentimental value for me. This work is an ode to it, and just like a barn quilt, I am paying homage to it.

The Cabin is a representation of my barn quilt using the *Àdìrè eléko* patterns and colors painted on a four-foot square panel. The barn quilt is a common tradition I noticed in Appalachia. Barn quilts are said to have originated from Donna Sue Groves, who painted the first contemporary barn quilt square in 2001. Groves’ mother's wish to honor her with a quilt square on their barn inaugurated a county-wide project, now featuring quilt squares on over 3,000 barns along 120 driving trails, creating a long imaginary clothesline (Parron and Groves). Quilts are now found all over North America as a highly visible form of folk art. Barn quilts are made by families and represent their ancestry and connection to place.



Figure 12. Pipeoluwa Adenekan, *At the front of The Cabin*, 2022

This piece represents my connection to this building, the reflections on my studio and its contribution to my sense of belonging to a new community. I arrived at this space at a time when I was in dire need of a warm place that felt like home, as I had yet to adapt to the cold weather in America. I likened this building to a barn as it serves as a home as much as storage. The barn is a building where livestock, agricultural products and possessions are stored and worked. Similarly, my studio in *The Cabin* is a space where I produce artworks, store art materials and artworks. To create this work, I painted traditional Yorùbá indigo fabric patterns in the shape of a quilt star on a panel. The star shape with its compass-like triangular edges was chosen intentionally as it represents journey in Appalachia quilting. Donna Sue Groves' story made me miss home and my mother, and gave barn quilts a nostalgic undertone for me. To represent these feelings of nostalgia for my mother and my Nigerian home, I included the cool blue/indigo colors and patterns of traditional Yorùbá fabrics.

Lagos Bus/School Bus



Figure 13. Akintayo Akintobi, *Lagos Bus/School Bus*, 2023

This work reveals the similarities and subtle differences between American school buses and commercial buses in Lagos, Nigeria. After I came to America, one of the first things I noticed in Johnson City, and found relatable, was the yellow American school buses. It is a large canvas painted in yellow and two lack stripes with a smooth and rough texture, signifying the ease of one and the difficulty of the other. Every time I see them, I remember the popular commercial *Molue* buses and my experiences in Lagos. This piece addresses the dichotomy between societal conduct, education, work, and hustle life in Lagos, Nigeria, and Johnson City, TN.

Back in Lagos, *Molue* buses are characterized by sluggish acceleration, squeaky brakes, and excessive vibrations, most times because of the untarred roads and smoky exhaust. Despite these faults, they remain in usage, commuting more passengers than they normally should. I have

many personal experiences on this bus from squeezing my paintings in with passengers seated, to getting my cell phone stolen, to sitting tightly with strangers on a bus even when Covid struck. The bad conditions of *Molue* buses in Lagos reflect systemic challenges within the city's transportation system, including issues related to safety, infrastructure, regulation, and social dynamics. Unlike Lagos *Molue* buses, many American school buses I have seen in Johnson City are in better condition and are safer according to my observation. This opened my eyes to other aspects of both places with completely different realities. The American school buses are sometimes shipped to Nigeria and converted to public transport vehicles. The similarity in the color of the buses serves as a reflection of the contrasts existing within me as I have encountered these two very different cultures. Capturing my experiences and observations, I used the similar colors of both buses as a synecdoche as these colors are recurring “parts” of the actual buses. *Lagos Bus / School Bus* aims to create a visually striking, minimal image that showcases both similarities and differences. I also began to think about the possibility of abstraction with symbolic colors after paying attention to Mark Rothko's works.

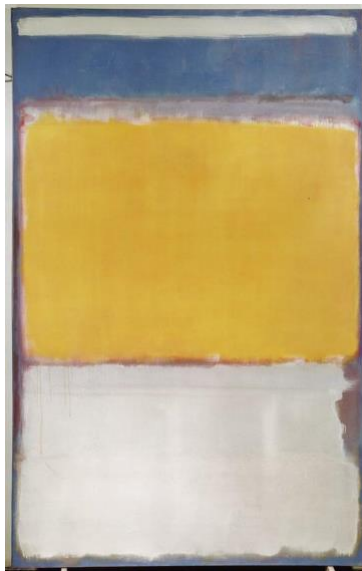


Figure 14. Mark Rothko, *No.10*, 1950

Mark Rothko made a series of color field paintings. These paintings are large-scale canvases which are dominated by expanses of flat color and minimum surface details. One of these paintings is titled *No.10*. This painting is a representation of three rectangular shapes in blue, yellow and white. Rothko fragmented the canvas horizontally into three dominant planes and softly blended them through each other thereby causing an interplay between the warm and cool colors. The goal behind his paintings is to catch the attention of his viewers such that they'd be enveloped and immersed in the emotions the works express. In this painting the interplay of blue, yellow, and white induces a spontaneous luminosity from tone to tone. Rothko's work evokes emotional reactions as expressed by the artist and interpreted in the mind of the viewer (Jankowski, 10). He brings his mind to bear by thinking and representing his ideas, experiences, and feelings while the audience also interprets the works based on their perception and experiences. Rothko is majorly interested in expressing the basic human emotions such as doom, tragedy, ecstasy, anger etc. His works have evoked various emotions from people as he takes them on an adventure in an unknown world thereby stimulating a dialogue between him and the viewer. His paintings are also seen as a form of philosophical thinking because opinions are formulated as people approach his works (Jankowski, 11). Rothko sought to connect with the primordial emotions locked in ancient myths rather than in symbols. His use of color not just in a symbolic manner but in a bid to communicate feelings and evoke emotional responses is just amazing. His style was to do away with any suggestion of illustration. Although I use color and form symbolically, I draw some inspiration from Rothko's work. For viewers who have no idea what the symbols in my works mean, I intend to ensure that the audience can perceive the works based on their individual experiences.

Rothko's emphasis on color as a means of conveying mood or emotion, as in his color field paintings like *No. 10*, inspired me to use a bold, vibrant yellow hue as the dominant color in this painting. Yellow can evoke feelings of warmth, energy, and optimism, reflecting the vibrancy and vitality associated with school buses. It is also used as the main hue of the American school bus intentionally for safety purposes during bad weather conditions as well as to alert motorists and pedestrians to their presence. The two black lines that runs horizontally across the canvas emphasizes the similarity between the Lagos *Molue* buses and the American school buses. These lines demarcate the smooth texture of the upper part from the rough texture of the lower section of the painting using sand. By contrast, Lagos transport buses were depicted using rough surface to convey a sense of ruggedness, weariness, or hardship. Rothko's paintings are arrangements of simple geometric shapes and fields of color. Similarly in *Lagos Bus / School Bus*, the textured halves are representative of the smooth and polished yellow side of the American bus and the rough, coarse texture of Nigerian transportation.

Although, the specific subject matter of the yellow painting with two black lines may differ from Rothko's abstract color fields, the influence of his aesthetic sensibilities can be seen in my minimal use of color and composition. I use the contrast between the smooth and rough sides of the painting to suggest broader themes related to socio-economic disparities through the quality of vehicles. I found the change challenging, especially as I was constantly trying to settle down and adjust to my new environment as a foreigner. This was also reflected in my art practice. Navigating the differences of a new culture, new people, and a new educational system with a new approach to my art impacted my process.

Dinner Table

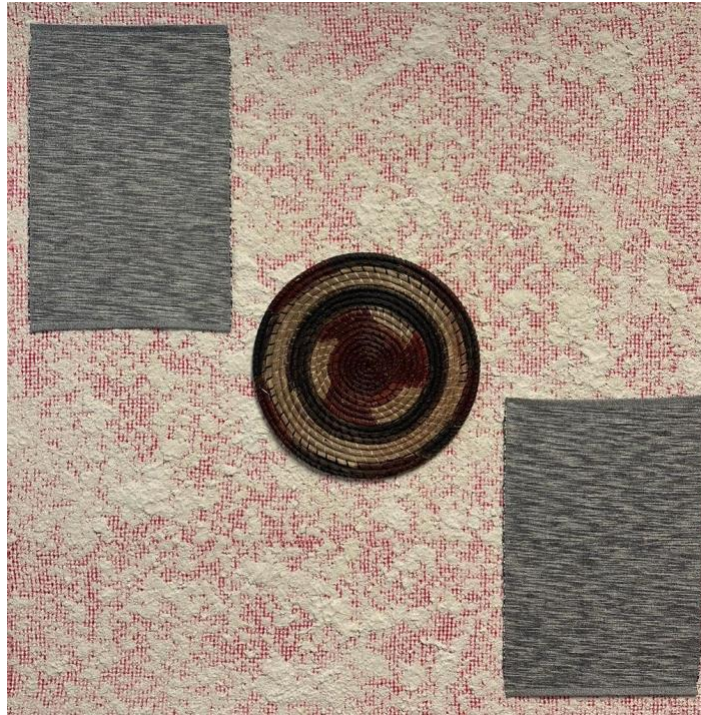


Figure 15. Akintayo Akintobi, *Dinner Table*, 2023

My first few months in the United States was spent observing the structure and infrastructures of Johnson City. Then my observation shifted to the way of life, the culture of the people around me. I took a keen interest in the style of eating as this has always been an important aspect in my family and the Yorùbá culture. Observing the way American families eat separately in comparison with the way Nigerian families eat together from one plate, *Dinner Table* is a metaphor for the differences between American and Nigerian cultures. This painting incorporates two American placemats referencing the boxed security of placemats with which Americans guard their food. The Nigerian placemat is circular and accessible from any angle to indicate the freedom and community of sharing when eating together. The position of the grey placemats indicates the dining style and solitary life that I have perceived of many Americans - everyone only cares about their side of the table, has sole access to their meals, while the raffia

place mat, like the one in my parent's house, on the other hand, represents the dining style and communal life of Nigerians.

The table cover carries symbolic associations related to eating or dining. For instance, a pristine white tablecloth might symbolize purity, elegance, or formal dining etiquette, evoking images of elaborate banquets or special occasions. In contrast, paper-napkins and plastic tablecloths might symbolize neglect, decay, or the passage of time, suggesting a more casual or mundane dining setting. The tablecloth is stretched and warped, making the grid lines wavy and shaky, as a reference to the challenges and stress of belonging to these two cultural spheres. Household objects like tablecloths, raffia placemats in *Dinner Table* allow an implication of the everyday. I am asking viewers to consider their own dining practices and cultural norms. The simplistic composition is structured around the differences between Yorùbà and American etiquettes.

Cycles

In a site-specific installation class with Professor Travis Graves, I explored sand as a material, and that brought about reminiscences of my early childhood when I used to make art with sand. I made a filled space art installation titled *Journey*. This work engages the floor by covering it with sand and stone to create a pathway designed with African and Yorùbá traditional patterns. These symbols are glued firmly to the floor so that it has a dry rough texture. The audience are to traverse over this artwork without shoes or socks. Walking on the pathway allows the viewer to focus on the uncomfortable feeling underneath their feet. This allows the audience to engage with the artwork on a deeper level, by relying solely on their sense of touch through their feet. This process pays homage to the Yorùbá culture, where the ancestors walked

and relied on their foot to get to their destination and serves as a symbolic journey of my challenges of migrating from Nigeria to America.



Figure 16. Akintayo Akintobi, *Journey*, 2023

Some works reflect my exploration of sand as an integral material that is specific to me as an artist and to my personal experiences. Though sand was free and easily accessible, my parents often warned me against its use, especially with my bare hands. This was because we Nigerians eat most of our local delicacies with our hands and it could be injurious to my health if my hands are not properly cleaned. Their caution soon morphed into a strict prohibition against creating art with sand. If I broke these rules, there were consequences, yet I persisted.

Cycles is a series of three different shapes of spiral drawing, each shape is drawn on a five-foot by six-foot canvas using my index finger. The line starts from the middle as I continuously draw inside out from the right to the left. Each work is textured roughly around the corners allowing the viewer to focus on the continuous slow movement of the spiral. These works center on my childhood and the advent of my career as an artist, the changes I have experienced, and my current state of mind. It focuses on minimalism as a form of abstraction and

features the use of sand as a material and as a symbol of my artistic journey over the years.

While I used sand during my childhood, I created my works by drawing with my finger on the ground. Even though passersby walked over them while drawing, I always go back to draw over each line multiple time to keep my works from fading away too quickly.

In this series, I used only one symbol, the spiral. Taking a wide range of geometrical forms, the spiral is very rich in symbolism. The spiral is one of the oldest geometrical shapes formed in nature and used in different cultures but has a similar meaning which makes it a universal language. For example, the Celtic triskelion “spiral represents evolution, motion, progress”, growth, birth, “and continuous development of the human being physically and spiritually” (Constantinos 5). Among the Yorùbá, the spiral symbol is associated with snake. The snake appears frequently in various Yorùbá visual art forms, often depicted as a totem, and featured in numerous folktales. Due to the Yorùbá belief in reincarnation, individuals are thought to repeatedly return to the earth through birth and ascend to heaven through death. This cyclical concept of life signifies an eternal existence with no clear beginning or end, as symbolized by the snake's coiled posture. The serpent's coils, in constant motion, represent the cyclical movement of the earth, influencing every celestial being. In Yorùbá tradition, the snake serves as a representation of anger for many of the Òrìsà (gods), embodying their character and strength. It also signifies various traits including rebirth, longevity, riches, fruitfulness, ferocity, honor, and integrity (Areo and Kalilu 29).

The spiral motif also represents continuity and growth in the Yorùbá culture. The beginning of the line is drawn starting from the middle of the canvas and drawn continuously inside out from the right to the left. I see this gesture as being able to trace back time and memory in *Cycle I*. I use a circular spiral for this painting, created a central focal point that can

be regarded as the beginning of my art career with recurring circular spirals as the continuation of my growth but can still cycle back to where I started. In the Yorùbá culture, sand is associated with creation and the beginning of mankind as it symbolizes origin (Mullen 21). The use of sand on canvas evokes a sense of nostalgia and innocence, suggesting a connection to my early childhood experiences.



Figure 17. Akintayo Akintobi, *Cycle I*, 2023

Sand points to my origin and the primary art material available for exploration during my childhood in Nigeria. In *Cycle II*, color was introduced. The blue and white color represents my Yorùbá origin which is linked to *Àdìre Eléko*. The shape of the spiral is rhombus, and it is a well-known Eléko Motif which means Agbo'lé (Compound) (Areo & Kalilu 33). This is a symbol that signifies the boundary between one compound and another within the locality. It also alludes to constraint and restriction of movement for me as a child and artist. I am not allowed to just wander around while playing. I had boundaries. To also buttress the use of this shape, I

constructed and played with kites in the neighborhood with my peers as child. It brings back memories of how the humble act of creating art has always brought a sense of happiness amid the rules that were given to me.



Figure 18. Akintayo Akintobi, *Cycle II*, 2023

In *Cycle III*, I use the gray color to capture the painful memories I experienced, like being spanked for “playing” with sand, losing my drawings to people walking on the ground, and having difficulty accessing the materials I needed for my work. The pentagon-shaped spiral symbolizes the hard-edge rules that were directed against my childhood art practice. The pentagon represents the search for structure, meaning, and identity within my professional practice. Personally, the pentagon symbolizes a desire to be free from rules. Coming to the United States, I thought I had escaped from the grip of power, rules, boundary, and dominance but this presented itself in a new way. However, I realized that by leaving one structured

academic reality, I have entered another, and this has caused me to consider what freedom means to me. It made me understand that there is no such concept as absolute freedom.



Figure 19. Akintayo Akintobi, *Cycle III*, 2023

I am not just representing Àdìre symbols as a means of reviving culture but also utilizing them to communicate my experiences. Symbolism has helped me transcend the confines of reality into the realm of abstract and conceptual. I infuse symbols to address pertinent issues which revolve around personal experiences. Symbolism as a movement began around the 19th century as a response against realism, naturalism, and impressionism. This approach differs significantly from naturalism, realism or impressionism as these movements still focus on representing the natural world through different styles. However, symbolism is more conceptual, abstract, and imaginary. Thus, the artists in this period used symbols as a developed mode of communication which allows for progressive processing of real meaning. By incorporating symbols, modernists represented contemporary issues as opposed to grand historical and

allegorical themes. Modernists used symbolism to express dissent, provoke thoughts and question norms. Modernists delve into conceptual and abstract realms and use symbols to convey concepts, emotions and themes which transcend the physical world (Nath, 4155). In the 20th century, Contemporary artists revive icons and symbols from diverse cultures and infuse them with meanings that are relevant to present issues. They also use these symbols in a personal way to communicate personal experiences, memories, and emotions. This creates intimacy between the artist and the artwork. It also resonates with the audience and fosters connection and empathy between the artists and the viewers.

Modernism refers to a wide range of experimental and avant-garde trends in the arts which emerged in the middle of the 19th century till the 20th century. It thrived on the idea that individuals must reject previous traditions. It is a form of art that doesn't serve religion, morality etc. rather it upheld the ideals of emperism, libralism, rationalism, humanism, and individualism. It has a lot more to do with intellectualism rather than vulgarity or philistinism (Asadi and Salami, 3). In the early 20th century, artists explored major stylistic trends which served as a way of relating to the world. This resulted in the development of non-representational art. The world became more rational and scientific in its approach, and this made artists rethink the use of traditional materials. It also inspired artists to dissect the process of making art, discover and adapt new techniques as well as welcome influences from other cultures. In my first body of work based on Yorùbá proverbs, Picasso inspired me to conceive art through a modernist approach. However, a foreigner cannot have a good grasp of African forms or how best to use African forms and symbols than a native of the culture. As an African and a Nigerian, I have more adept understanding on how the African masks and symbols should be used in design. I lived most of my life in Nigeria and have a sound understanding of African Art. By honing my

skills in understanding modernism with a deep knowledge of my culture, an Ideological synthesis is formed. I am using African art forms and symbols appropriately using the modernist style thereby carving a niche where African art is featured in modernism in its proper context.

Although spirals indicate evolution, life, consciousness, and creation in many artworks (Caddy 47), artists like Cy Twombly utilize line and color, as means of physical expression and introspection. The lines seem uncoordinated, almost desperate and unsettling. Through his works, Twombly proves that simple, repeating visualizations can form powerful images. In contrast, Twombly's work is somewhat disorganized and spontaneous while mine are meditative, tighter, and more regular.



Figure 20. Cy Twombly, *Untitled*, 2005

Twombly's *Untitled* is an artistic display of big loops of red vermilion acrylic paint on a yellowish background. The red lines are interwoven into one another in an unorganized manner. At first glance, one may be tempted to assume that the artist is communicating the horrors of life. The red color evokes a perception of blood, violence, and wine. Twombly's paintings often refer to literary, historical, and mythological sources but his execution repudiates art's historical analytic methods. He is not just a pure abstractionist because his painting has a history behind his

thoughts (Bontea 35). Twombly was fascinated with historical or mythological figures and classical poetry of the Greco-Roman culture. This work may be a physical rendition of the sensual life of the ancient Greeks and Romans, often associated with pleasures, ecstasy, and violence. In addition, the painting has been associated with Bacchus, the Roman god of wine and intoxication. The painting shows Bacchus' rituals which include drunkenness, ecstatic dancing, and violence. It is a juxtaposition of writing and painting. Twombly's complex works are often situated within various art styles such as abstract expressionism, neo-dada, minimalism, and conceptual art. Twombly's use of continuous curved lines and loops as a pattern of mark-making influenced my use of spirals to create markings through the sand. His work explores multidimensional experiences within flat planes of color. Depending on the visual literacy of the viewer, his paintings can elicit feelings of love and admiration, and at the same time, some viewers can be repelled or irritated. His bold grasp on cultural themes like history, myth, and poetry inspires the belief in art's central role in representing human life. (Schreyach 54). My works project cultural themes by exploring symbols that allude to my personal life and experiences. Twombly's work reflects an understanding of history and culture. Likewise, my use of spiral reflects understanding of the Yorùbá culture (through the understanding of the spiral motif culled from Àdìre Eléko) as well as the historical connection of sand to my childhood experiences. This is a simple, yet profound way of expressing my culture and history through material and form. As my materials change, the process of creating my work has also changed. Fabric, wood, and sand present their own medium-specific opportunities but also challenges. Before creating an artwork, I often engage in a careful analysis of my idea, the materials available, the most suitable media, and the best technique for application. Other times, I simply select a material, work intuitively with it, and discover the meaning later. I desire for my work to

contain meaning that may be accessed through different entry points, from what is depicted to the materials used, and the resulting dialogue they suggest.

Mix or Match



Figure 21. Akintayo Akintobi, *Mix or Match*, 2023

Mix or Match is an exploration of my cultural hybridity, blending Yorùbá and Appalachia motifs to reflect my expressions, identity and experiences while addressing the themes of cultural exchange, migration, and adaptation. It is a fiber art made from deconstructed blue jeans sewed together in a quilt-like style. Over this repeated are patterns screen-printed using the indigo blue color. The patterns printed comprises of symbols I created from the American and Nigerian culture (see Figure 11). This process of printing is repeated to cover all the areas of the piece. This piece reflects my cultural struggles and engages the tradition of the textile industry of the Yorùbá and Appalachia. Since I arrived in the US, I have experienced certain cultural differences

that have led me to ask many questions. The differences in the ways of life here, the need to adapt to them, and the struggle to remain Nigerian have been a huge challenge. The need to learn, unlearn, and relearn contrasting aspects of two very different cultures is at the core of my thesis work. A few of these include dining habits, relationships between neighbors (knowing that unlike in Nigeria where neighbors are regarded as close kin, Americans do not consider neighbors as friends or kin), greeting and respect (unlike in Nigeria where men prostrate and women kneel to greet older people, a handshake suffices in America). This cultural distinction helps me appreciate the Nigerian culture in this aspect of greeting, respect, and communal living. As such this work portray an expression of my hybrid identity as I choose to retain some aspects of my culture that I value and absorb some aspects of the American culture that I love. Settling down in the United States was challenging but because of the kind support I received from close friends I consider family, I adjusted with time. The denim materials used in this work are mine and my close companions' who made my stay comfortable in the United States.

Apart from the cultural changes I have had to make, I have also had to make certain changes in my art. For example, back at the university as an undergraduate, my art was guided. There were rules for making art, and steps I was compelled to follow, and there was a great limitation on my creative expressions. I was trained and given themes and materials to work with as an undergraduate student. We don't have critiques on our artworks, we were only graded by the lecturers according to the guidelines. However, in graduate school, the case is vice versa. It is based on individuality, there is artistic freedom even in the presence of guidelines and rules, and I am constantly learning how to create works outside the old rigid styles I have used for years. We must discuss and speak about our work before being graded. This fosters more learning and

helps me to broaden my creative horizon. I had much conflict because I had to adapt and learn a new way of living as an artist.

To signify these experiences, I use materials and patterns that symbolize America, Nigeria, and my process of cultural adaptation. The jeans material used represents the pop culture of denim clothing in America. Denim originated on the West Coast of America in the mid-19th century which symbolizes abstract characteristics of the American national identity (Sullivan). It is associated with strength, informality, comfort, classlessness, reliability, and hard work. In the 1950s, denim became a symbol of rebellious youth culture that was opposed to the bourgeois values of American society, such as conformity and consumerism while in the 1960s, denim became the symbol of a revolution of a world where everyone is equal, and clothing no longer expresses social position or gender (Smelik and Feitsma 74-78). The screen-printed pattern was influenced by the *Àdìre eléko* using the indigo blue as it is a similar color to denim. This symbolizes the integration of the textile/clothing culture of the Yorùbá people and the culture of American denim as a representation of my hybrid identity as a Nigerian and American. I bleached parts of these denims and combined the bleached and unbleached parts to present my adaptation process to the American culture. This also represents the learning and unlearning I have done to retain my identity as a Nigerian and adapt myself to the American culture and formal art education.

My approach to telling stories with the use of indigenous representative patterns and symbols was inspired by the works of Njideka Akunyili Crosby. She combines her cultural Identity with her adopted home, the USA, resulting in a hybrid identity. Her sophisticated visual language pays homage to both Western history and African traditions as she uses collage and

photo transfer techniques to examine the cultural divide between her American and Nigerian homes. (Njideka, Akunyili Crosby)



Figure 22. Njideka Akunyili Crosby, *Ejuna na-aga, ọ kpulụ nkọlikọ ya; New Haven (Enugu) in New Haven (CT)*, 2022

This artwork depicts an open closet inside a bedroom. The walls are rendered yellow while the doors to the closet are white. The closet is filled with wax patterned clothing which are neatly hanged one after the other and a wedding dress in a plastic bag. A painting showcasing a market scene where a young girl is buying goods is hanged on the yellow wall at the right side of the closet. Objects are randomly situated on the tables in the scene. The table in front of the painting carries a blue jerry can, a flowerpot, a black and blue colored kettle, a copy of Eddie Iroh's "Without a Silver Spoon". The second table in front of the closet carries a green and white striped kettle from that region. The artist finishes the work in a very realistic manner by introducing shadows, reflections, and interplay of light on the objects. Akunyili' work is so rich in nostalgia that she replicates her former living space in Nigeria. She may have been

remembering her time in Nigeria, where she had objects she was attached to while living within another space. This may also make her remember some people. Akunyili also used the private interior space to introduce the viewer into another space by incorporating a market scene. This is familiar in her work as she depicts private interior spaces, bustling Nigerian markets or lush external gardens.

Akunyili Crosby incorporates elements that are specific to her Nigerian identity and upbringing and shares her experiences in novel ways. Just like *Mix or Match* and *Flag* (see figure 25), She features images of her family and friends, derived from everyday domestic experiences in Nigeria and America. Her works serve as a visual metaphor for the layers of personal memory and cultural history, enhancing the experience of the present (Zelt 216). Akunyili Crosby uses her experiences as a means of speaking more generally to the supra-personal experience of being a person from one place moving to another and learning the culture of the new place. Like Akunyili Crosby's work resonates with me because the combination of her experiences, culture, artistic practice, as well as lifestyle in Nigeria, has inspired me to look inward to find what was truly specific to me and my experiences, thereby affecting my form, content, and concept.

Seat

Seat is an installation that presents viewers with the capacity to draw in sand. The act of drawing is a tactile and meditative experience. It is placed in front of *Mix or Match* and the *Cycle* drawings within the exhibition space. Viewers are invited to sit, meditate, reflect, and observe these works that present my journey as well as my experiences as an artist who is a product of two distinct cultures. Sand is poured on the floor to form a circular shape and a tree stump is carefully placed in the middle of the sand as a form of meditation. The audience are allowed to draw and trample upon the sand thereby engaging with artwork by unknowingly adding to aspect

of frustration that comes from having to make a particular drawing multiple time. The presence of external distractions, such as footprints left by others constantly walking over the drawings on the sand emphasizes the frustration and determination of my passion for artmaking as child. The ritual of sitting and drawing in the sand as a child is a memory of solitude. It allowed me relief from the bustle of a crowded environment.



Figure 23. Akintayo Akintobi, *Seat*, 2024

Sand as a material is a representative of the Yorùbá landscape and homeland, conjuring memories of my heritage and ancestral origin. In contrast, the decaying tree stump is hardened and weathered, connecting to forests of Appalachia, where I currently reside. It is a testament to my transformation within a new land. The juxtaposition of both environments and cultures using sand and tree stumps allows me to create a setting where both worlds can exist together in a place at the time.

Flag



Figure 24. Akintayo Akintobi, *Flag*, 2023

This piece is made from deconstructed denim collected from Americans and Nigerians that are close friends to me. Sewn together to look like a quilt, but also deliberately attached together to have a visual representation of a Nigerian flag. It is displayed vertically to reference the red and white stripes of the American flag. I have made a home in America while holding on tightly to my Nigerian roots. I have the privilege of relating closely with some white American friends as they are mostly my colleagues and faculty in my department. As an international student, it was easy to make Nigerian friends in Johnson City as ETSU has a good number of them on campus. However, doing this was challenging through constant and conscious interaction with my friends in both cultures. It is a piece that captures the acceptance of coming

to settle in Johnson City while still holding on to Lagos, acceptance of coming from Yorùbá culture to the Appalachia region, managing the pains that come with the longing for home, and creating a home in a place that is strange, looking in for similarities between these places but finding differences in the process.



Figure 25. *Nigerian Flag*

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Nigeria

To communicate the symbolic essence of this work, I screen-printed patterns with symbols that represent America and Nigeria on deconstructed denim and sew them together to resemble a flag. Before coming to America, the only flag I could relate to was Nigeria's. Anytime I see its green and white colors, I feel a sense of belonging. Now, a few years after I arrived in the US, I also identify with the American flag. Its red, blue, and white colors no longer feel as alien as they did when I had not yet come to America. As a result of this, I printed the patterns in red, blue, and green using the colors from the flags of both countries in this work to capture this progress. I arranged the colors in such a way that when displayed, the green color is at the top where it can serve as the beginning of the flag. This indicates Nigeria as my origin and perpetual identity.



Figure 26. *United States flag*

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_the_United_States#

The deconstructed denim used have been worn by previously by Americans and Nigerians to reference immigration history of Nigerians moving to America for better education and life. This also talks about my acceptance of both cultures. The sewn design references the American quilt style while the edges of the fabrics are rough to indicate the imperfections of both cultures that I experienced. I can absorb the American culture and adapt to living like Americans, but my origin is still in Nigeria. *Flag* is a symbol of acceptance of my identity of both cultures, a reminder of who I am, where I come from, and where I am now.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

I have always wanted to experience life and art through another perspective before leaving Lagos, Nigeria. Therefore, the past three years has led me to experience a significant shift in my self-awareness and art career in the United States. I have seen positive aspects and encountered some cultural traits that I don't appreciate as a Nigerian in America. Despite this, I must shed some Yorùbá traits to better relate to my new society in Johnson City, I am now a cultural hybrid. My thesis exhibition is the result of all my art explorations talking about my background, experiences, identity, and career development over these years. It also features themes like immigration and cultural differences. I discuss all these through the lens of personal, shared, and observed experiences from people like me who in pursuit of knowledge or opportunities, have left the comfort of their homelands for an unfamiliar place abroad.

The process of creating these works has led me to new artistic techniques and created opportunities to understand my identity amid cultural differences. As I navigate the obvious and obscure challenges that came along with making these works, I find new stories about myself that lead to more art.

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APPENDIX: Artist Statement

Ìlànà Òrí-òkè Àtiyanrìn: T(h)reading Sands and Mountains explores the fusion of my experiences in American and Nigerian culture. These works are a meditation on my life growing up in Nigeria alongside my experiences during my graduate program over the last three years in the United States. I delve into cultural perspectives within and outside of my narrative, tracing identity and creativity within the dynamic context of both countries. This body of work is centered on my observations regarding the differences between my former life in Nigeria and my current life in the United States. I work with a range of materials and imagery including sand, spiral forms, repurposed blue denim jeans, Yorùbá Indigo batik patterns, barn quilt patterns, and other geometric forms. I traverse through themes of history, identity, personal struggles, family, traditions, and culture shock. Working with mixed media has led to a more personal way of describing cross-cultural narratives, raising questions about the strangeness of existing in both worlds.

In essence, I have found myself constantly feeling the need to learn, unlearn, and relearn the various rules of art and culture so that I can articulate my perspectives and emotions about the contrasting ways of life in Nigeria about America. My journey, however unique to me, contains universal resonance while shaping my identity and personality in my life and through my art.

CATALOGUE OF EXHIBITION



Lagos Bus/School Bus



Cycle I



Cycle II



Cycle III



Passage



Coil



Mix or Match



Details of Mix or Match



Front of Flag



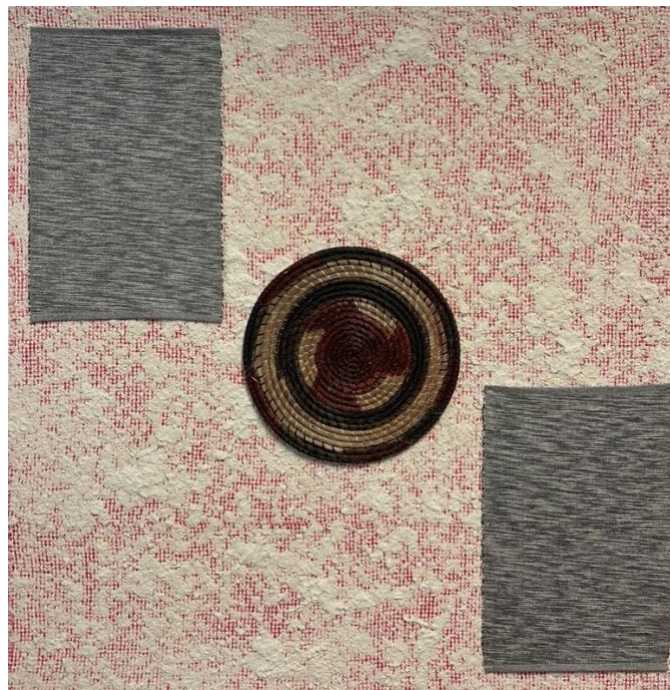
Back of Flag



Details of Flag



Mother and Child



Dinner Table



The Cabin



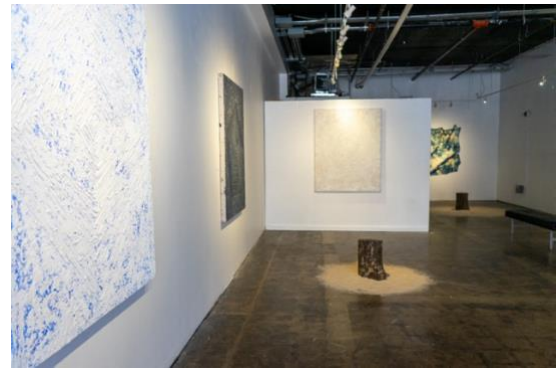
Seat



View of the exhibition in Tipton Gallery



View of the exhibition in Tipton Gallery



View of the exhibition in Tipton Gallery



View of Seat in Tipton Gallery



View of Seat in Tipton Gallery

VITA

AKINTAYO AKINTOBI

- Education: M.F.A. Studio Art, East Tennessee State University,
Johnson City, TN. USA, 2024
- Bachelor of Education Fine Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University,
Ile Ife, Osun state. Nigeria, 2015
- Professional Experience: Graduate Assistant: Instructor of Record, East Tennessee
State University, Johnson City TN, 2023-2024
- Graduate Assistant: Gallery Assistant and Building Maintenance,
East Tennessee State University, Johnson City TN, 2021-2024
- Exhibitions: T(h)reading Sands and Mountains, Mars Landing Galleries,
Mars Hill, NC, USA, 2024
- T(h)reading Sands and Mountains, Tipton Gallery,
Johnson City, TN, USA, 2024
- Traces, Watagua Brewing Company,
Johnson City, TN, USA, 2024
- End of the Beginning, South Rivers Art Studios,
Atlanta, GA, USA, 2023
- Holla if you see me, The Kansas African American Museum,

Kansas City, MO, USA, 2023

Nostalgia Nihilism Necropsy, Tipton Gallery,

Johnson City, TN, USA, 2023

Tales from Within, National Museum of Art Onikan,

Lagos, Nigeria, 2018

So Far final year exhibition, Fine and Applied Art Department,

Obafemi Awolowo University, Osun, Nigeria, 2016

Ifectivity, Cultural Studies Hall, Obafemi Awolowo University,

Ile-Ife, Osun, Nigeria, 2013

Awards and Scholarships: Graduate Assistantship, East Tennessee State University,

Johnson City, TN, 2021-2024