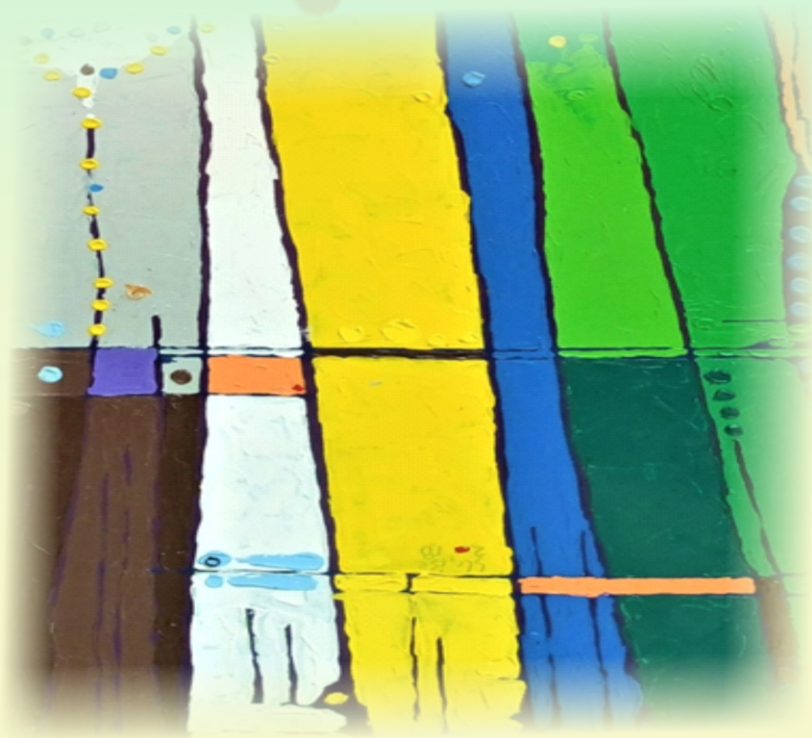




FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF LAFIA
INAUGURAL LECTURE SERIES NO.16
FACULTY OF ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN



**FROM LONG TRAINS IN THE WET SOIL TO SOCIAL IDEATION:
INDIVIDUATIONS ON ART, INSPIRATION AND PROCESS**

PROF. BLAISE GUNDU GBADEN
Professor of Painting
Department of Fine Arts

JUNE 11, 2024



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DEDICATION

This Inaugural Lecture is dedicated to Sweetheart, Dr. Esther Anenge Gbaden, my wife; for standing by me through all the storms, and despite my shortcomings for tolerating me unconditionally; and to Norbert Ngutor, Zacharys Terungwa, Clement Nadoo and Francis Iwanger, my beloved sons, in whom I am well pleased.

THE PRESENTER



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BA Fine & Applied Arts, UN Nsukka, MFA, PhD, Painting ABU Zaria

Professor of Painting

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**FROM LONG TRAINS IN THE WET SOIL TO
SOCIAL IDEATION: INDIVIDUATIONS ON ART,
INSPIRATION AND PROCESS
BLAISE GUNDU GBADEN PhD**

Protocol

*The Vice Chancellor,
The Deputy Vice Chancellor, Academic Affairs,
The Deputy Vice Chancellor, Administration,
The Deputy Vice Chancellor, Research and
Partnerships,
The Registrar,
The University Librarian,
The Bursar,
The Chairman, Committee of Deans, Provost and
Directors,
The Provost, College of Medicine,
The Dean, School of Postgraduate Studies,
The Dean, Faculty of Environmental Design,
Deans of other Faculties,
Directors of Directorates, Centres and Units,
Professors, Senate Members and Heads of Departments,
Other Members of the Academic Communities,
Students (Past and Present),
My Supervisors and Mentors,
Your Lordship, the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of
Lafia,
The Chaplain, St. Gabriel the Archangel Catholic
Chaplaincy, Federal University of Lafia,*

*Priests, Religious and Lay Faithful of the Roman Catholic Church,
The Grand Knight, Knights and Ladies of the Lafia Subordinate Council of the Honoured Order of the Knights of Saint Mulumba, KSM, Nigeria,
The Aren Danka Sarki,
The Group of Five (Go5),
My Sweetheart,
My Sons,
My Immediate and distant family members,
My Ever-supportive In-Laws,
My Mother-In-Law, the Matriarch herself,
My Beloved Friends and Colleagues,
Media and Press Officials,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.*

Preamble

It is by the sheer grace of God that I stand on this most esteemed pedestal today to profess to you, this most august gathering, my modest academic journey of two decades. On this eleventh day of June 2024, proximally four months after my fifty eight year birthday anniversary was established; I am indeed privileged to stand before this community of scholars as the First Professor of Painting emerging from the Department of Fine Arts to inaugurate the Pioneer Professorial Chair of Painting and indeed as the Second Professor from the Faculty of Environmental Design so behooving to profess and indeed the Sixteenth Inaugural Lecturer to emerge from the stables of our most prestigious

University, which epitomises excellence, integrity and innovation.

I sincerely thank the Vice Chancellor, Professor Shehu Abdul Rahman, for granting me permission to deliver this lecture as a fundamental expression of the existence of professorial distinction in the Federal University of Lafia. My immense gratitude is definitively expressed to the Inaugural Lectures Committee for the facilitation of the lecture.

The Story Begins

The story begins from where I intentionally decided to come into the academia. It was towards the completion of my studies for the first degree in Fine and Applied Arts acquired at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka that I made up my mind to join what I considered then to be the highest echelon of the intelligentsia, as was being bandied then by adherents of Marxist ideologies. This choice was vastly influenced by significant human encounters of the first kind and they are worth recounting, albeit with much nostalgia.

It was while searching for subjects to sustain my insatiable thirst for drawing that I ran into the warm, caring and motherly arms of Dr. Ukaego Uche-Okeke (now a septuagenarian), then the Curator of the Museum of the Institute of African Studies, where her husband, the late legendary Professor Uche Okeke was Director. She would guide me on salient aspects of the fine arts

and open the doors to their rich home unto me to visit and interact with the sage himself. For such fond memories of Nsukka I had to want to become a teacher.

Later I would be mentored by Professor Obiora Udechukwu, an amiable lecturer of painting and art theory. He would often invite those of us his students who were interested in studio practice to attend exhibitions and printmaking workshops with him and later work in his private studio located on Ogurugu road, Nsukka. He held annual receptions for his painting students essentially but also invited a few others from other specialisations to his house on campus; this certainly marked a clear path for my decision to become a university lecturer.

For the Master of Fine Arts degree in Painting I sought admission into the Department of Fine Art of the Ahmadu Bello University and was groomed basically by two classmates; Professor Jerry Buhari and Professor Jacob Jat Jari. At first they seemed suspicious of me, having come from Nsukka where I reckoned they felt the tutelage was markedly different from Zaria's cosmopolitan style, but they later warmed up to me and accepted me as part of the Zaria family so to say. They were meticulous mentors; leaving no iota of flesh unblemished during the mentoring process. Professor Jerry Buhari it was who got me the lecturing job in the Department of Creative Arts, University of Maiduguri, after four years of futilely trying to convince such painting graduates as Ayo Aina and Lami Bature to take up the position. About ten years later I would return to Zaria and the twosome would still spearhead the acquisition of my PhD degree in Painting.

Introduction

Mr. Vice Chancellor, Sir, the title of this inaugural lecture is: ***From Long Trains in the Wet Soil to Social Ideation: Individuations on Art, Inspiration and Process.*** The shorter version would have read something like this: ***From bohemia to Social Ideation.*** But for ease of delivery and in order to avoid too much bellicose rhetoric I have settled for the longer version which is more faithful to the naïve perceptions I have had about art, artists and their conceptualisation of society.

I first coined this title in the year 2000 when I was reviewing the trajectory of my artistic career having just begun the intrinsic journey into academia at the University of Maiduguri. The only change is the word *ideation* which replaces *idealism*, which in retrospect I think is too idealistic, see?

The basic premise of this lecture is founded upon the need to provide a comprehensive and chronological account of the progression I have made from the beginning of my academic and artistic scholarship up to the time I merited the distinction of occupying a professorial chair of the prestigious Federal University of Lafia.

Conceptualisation

Three tangents determine the conceptualisation of this lecture, which in fact encapsulates the philosophical thrust of my modest career as a fine artist. The first line

of scholarship is my tacit engagement as an *artist-teacher*; teaching art to a hungry set of young men and women, many of whom are trying to navigate through the maze of academic entanglements. The second curve is that which defines me as an *artist-scholar*; here the preoccupation is with churning out academic papers and publishing the results of strenuous research ventures embarked upon in reputable journals and within acceptable boundaries. The third being that which refines me as being merely a *practicing-artist*, who creates art for the sole consumption of a critical public. I will presently discuss this trinomial perspective in the paragraphs that follow.

The Artist-Teacher, Artist-Scholar, and Practicing-Artist

I do not see myself as being an artist. I grew up into art, embracing it with all the bohemian rhetoric that comes with it as an inevitable reward. But now, having taught art for two decades in two universities in Nigeria, I can no longer justify being an artist. I see myself as being a teacher who uses art as a fulcrum upon which to project my scholarship which rightly emanates from various sets of artistic behaviour; namely teaching, supervision and mentoring; as opposed to creating art itself; the primary aim of an artist.

This reality became more suffused upon embarking on my studies for a doctoral degree in painting begun in October 2010 and completed in June 2014 in the

prestigious Art School of the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria as one among the pioneer set of students. Before our admission the programme had been proposed as a degree in fine arts with specialisation in painting, but upon positioning it, the pioneer conceivers re-conceptualised it to be specific to painting, or sculpture, the other option available, since art history was already being run at the doctoral level.

Having been groomed by Professors Jerry Buhari, B. K. Olorukooba, Kefas Nenpunmun Danjuma and most essentially Jacob Jat Jari, we came out as products of some experiment that Zaria never regretted the risk it took. The norms of scholarship had been broken and we could very well express ourselves in exactly how we felt.

The postulations of my thesis ensured that I perceive painting as a means of production as much as is practiced in the economics of division of labour where people produce food, and other implements of society for the purposes of consumption and application. Painting therefore should not be seen as a *high art* as most philosophies would want it to be perceived.

Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, artists tend to create nimbuses around themselves; slotting their profession into the safety of higher echelons of human endeavour. They exhibit “abstract” art, write and present highfalutin papers barely discernible to their peers and the general public. They fail to communicate the basic premise of their practice even though people deserve to know the challenges they face as individuals or as a collective and

the methods they adapt in handling the social realities which shape their artistic inclinations. This inaugural paper explores who an artist is, what inspires his art, how he works and his aspirations via a personalised vision. Hopefully the information would put a more humane face on art practice.

Growing up I had few aspirations in life: one of them was to be an artist. All I wanted to do was just to be an artist. I remember that as a child I squatted in the mud and drew long trains in the wet soil with my brittle fingers after rainfalls in Vom where I grew up; I would paint beautiful pictures from reality and many times from my fertile imagination and enjoy them. Then I went to the University of Nigeria, Nsukka to study Fine and Applied Arts and somehow got entangled in idealising about social change for the lot of downtrodden humanity.

Of the numerous benefits emanating from the decompositious arguments concerning “art for art’s sake” is the emergence of the realisation of the importance of process and technique and the prominence of materials of execution; above all, studies into the “why” of art, the substance, the sources of inspiration for creating conceptual and multidimensional ventures are on the increase.

The revelations contained herein, though highly personalised individuations are expected to present new vistas and perceptions to further enrich the knowledge of creative immersion into the fine arts. Of significance is

the strength of this contribution, springing forth from an artist's standpoint, targeted at improving literature on the contemporary art experiences of sapling artists on the African continent.

Sources of Inspiration¹

Not once since the formative years of my painting career have the questions been asked: “why are your works so bright?”, “why do you use so much red?”, “why are your paintings so raw?” My responses have always been brief and cautious: “because I feel inspired to do so”.

The sources of inspiration for my paintings are not far-fetched. They are found in the very elements that surround my African birthplace, Nigeria.

Have you ever beheld the brilliance of the Nigerian landscape, with her rocks, hills, lush green plains, tall trees and polychromatic horizons that stretch endlessly into infinity? It is a landscape where the sun shines bright, where no mid-tones exist, only glaring colours; red, blue, green, purple, ochre, yellow, orange and that ever present burnt colour, black. The equator along which axis we lie presents a scalding sun to her inhabitants.

¹ Most ideas here were first postulated in 1999 based upon my long standing ideas on art and inspiration. See also Gbaden, B.G. (1999). “Mindsapes” Catalogue of Group Art Exhibition. Kaduna: Alliance Francaise, December 7-14.

Such is the intensity of life that gives no room for tranquility or sublimity, only harsh realities, cold winds, hot humid nights, famines, chaos, the lines that clash, the shapes and symbols of variegated colours that seem to form a gyre of confusion; the voids that must be filled.

Social Paradoxes

My beloved country is one full of paradoxes. There exists a social divide where the rich get wealthier at the expense of the poor and marginalised who seem destined for Golgotha. Yet in the midst of all this the people find time to dance in the sun, play on sand dunes and weave tales by moonlight.

So then in my artist brain, naïve as ever, it is a psychological mix-up trying to grapple with and visually represent the social realities of gun point submission to military tyranny and sycophancy on one end and snail pace democratic processes and hypocrisy on the other.

Such philosophical preoccupations were hardly my ambitions when I set out to study art in the university. All I wanted was to paint colourful pictures, life and organic shapes. I wanted to create order but all I saw was bitterness, pollution, immorality, corruption, crime, violence, genocide. I would pick up a pen to draw but ugly monsters would appear with big mouths, bearing ivory canines, devouring the poor. There was therefore the temptation to move away from the merely figurative.

In my art therefore, these contradictions come to the fore as the major themes tend to oscillate between gay configurations, organic forms and in some a mixture of the two extremes.

Periodisation

Through the short years of my artist career the imagery which informs my perception consequently, spurring tangible creations derive from this defined social region, Nigeria, constructing my conceptions, focusing my diverse visions, shaping my world view and improving, hopefully, my technical proficiency.

The periodisation of my prolific career presented below is not necessarily as rigid as it appears for some stages have osmosed into others and others continue to morph and resurge to this day.

They are, roughly assembled, the following:

- The naïve or childhood period;
- Pre-academy period;
- The academy period;
- The conceptual art period;
- The *postmodernist* art period;
- The *artist-teacher* period.

The Naïve or Childhood Period

This period can definitely be defined in the past tense as it represents the charm and gentle magic of childhood,

lost, never to be recaptured except of course in dreams and the “persistence of memory”.

I remember lying on my back in the torrential rains in Vom² counting raindrops as they fell off the corrugated roof of our Simon’s Way home. My younger brother Terver³ was almost always by my side then.

I remember drawing long trains in the wet soil with my brittle fingers. The walls of our house were defaced with charcoal scribbles and scrawls of both discernible and illegible figures.

As mother was a teacher I had learnt how to recite the alphabets and count some numbers while still strapped to her back and so by Primary One I found listening to the teacher (my mother, who else!) boring. Instead I drew several figures on my black slate. Empires and warriors were created. Later I advanced to film (cartoon strips) production utilising discarded packs of St. Lois⁴. These I showed free of charge to less artistically endowed children, especially of the lower classes. Even if one’s art was naïve then, one knew the value of cartoons and at that tender age range created comic strips, inspired

² Vom (also called Vom-Vet or Kaduna-Vom) is a small village on the Jos Plateau where I was brought up. Father was a technologist while mother was a primary school teacher specializing in teaching the lower classes, primaries 1, 2, and 3 basically.

³ The late Boniface Terver Agyobo (1969-2001) a graduate of History from the University of Jos, was also an artist and poet. We practiced rudiments of art together.

⁴ A brand of cubed sugar popular in those childhood years.

basically by musicals and watching of such films as “Space 1999” and “Star Trek”⁵.

I remember that this childhood was glorious and colourful and that even though one got occasional spanks on the buttocks and hard knocks on the head from teachers who frowned at our artistic exploits (what with the manner we wasted chalk drawing on school blackboards in class at break time – why not?) my parents never discouraged my artistic inclination.

The Pre-Academy Period

This period encompasses that phase in my artistic development prior to gaining entrance into the art academy at the University of Nigeria Nsukka. The art produced in lower and higher secondary school and at home with the aid of the popular series of Walter Foster art books form the core of my early art.

Being that I had not yet been introduced to formal art training, I concentrated on drawing and painting with oils on hard boards. The themes ranged from the usual common place mundane artifice and eventually tentative gusts of creative abstract configurations.

At this time too, creative writing was forging its way through, manifesting in criticism, poetry and short

⁵ I still have in my private library science fiction books written by Anderson and C.S. Lewis which inspired such television and film series.

stories (some published in local and national dailies such as the Standard Newspaper of Jos).

I regard this era as the grooming period for it prepared me for the real academic enterprise I was to later embrace. I encountered few teething problems when I eventually gained admission into art school.

The house in Vom was a bee-hive of activity as scores of children from the neighbourhood swarmed there to admire and at other times work under my tutelage. I sold a few pictures and executed some commissions that by the time I had made illustrations for the final year project of Emmanuel Chukwuma (then an undergraduate student of Mass Communication at Nsukka whom I admired passionately) I had no doubt that art was going to be a fulfilling career choice.⁶

The Academy Period

This stage obviously denotes formal art training under the aegis of art professors at Nsukka: Obiora Udechukwu, Ola Oloidi, Chike Aniakor, Chuka Amaefuna, El Anatsui, Ray Obeta, Ndu Okonkwo and later Chika Okeke-Agulu and Chijioke Onuora. It was a

⁶ Emmanuel Chukwuma (elder brother to my childhood friend Anthony) now late, graduated and became a pastor of a Pentecostal congregation in Jos; he would hardly have believed that he had such influence on my eventual choice of career as his encouragement that art was a noble profession and was taught at degree level in Nsukka, unleashed the yearnings hidden inside me, Thank you Emma.

whirlwind of creative fervour. They inspired us; opening up new vistas of experiences.

I can never forget what late Professor Chuka Amaefuna told our freshman class in the introductory basic design lecture: “Here we do not believe in talent. You can learn art. Begin from the unknown to the known.”⁷ From then on all we did was fresh, original and innovative. It was not self-conscious or inhibitive; enabling a sound foundation which guided our art throughout university education and beyond.

This period was characterised by the conventional art academy training of drawing life models, doing life paintings and landscapes. The most memorable experience remains the adaptation of the *Uli* idiom and subsequent explorations of line, negative and positive spaces and the inculcation of idea, theory, poetry, writing, and an imbibition of social consciousness as parameters for formulating relevant art.

That I was a Tiv person in a dominantly Ibo society did not deter me from progressing as the challenges of accepting *Uli* standards stimulated research into Tiv art culture; a whole new way of perceiving art.

⁷ Striving to understand art making from the known to the unknown and conversely from the unknown to the known was a basic method of introducing students to art in Nsukka. It formed the foundation for the artistic directions we took as artists when specialising in painting or other fields of fine and applied arts.

The Conceptual Art Period

The conceptual art (and related concerns) period evolved from encounters with the reality of exhibiting art to the public. It was formally given birth to when I offered my solo art exhibition of installations titled “The Emir’s Palace” at the Goethe Institute in Lagos.⁸

Its basic premise was definitely first conceived at Nsukka and later more extensively while studying for the MFA in Painting under the supervision of Professors Jerry Buhari and Jacob Jat Jari at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Under this dispensation my art moved from mere advocacy and morphed into the realm of multimedia techniques of installations, assemblages, found objects, poetry recitals, performance, video, photography and other unconventional media of expression, all meddling to create a more cogent art form; not merely concrete but also transient and yet able to trigger off varied tangents of experiences.

This fusion is born of the dictates of the present times where the exigencies on the African continent tend to demoralise human ambitions and are evidently stagnatory to growth. Social values have been trodden under the stampeding feet of democratic demi-gods, who

⁸ See: Gbaden, B.G. (2001). “The Emir’s Palace”, installation, drawings, poems, paintings, Goethe Institut, Victoria Island, Lagos, February 3-March 9 , 2001.

the people elected into office but now suffer injury and deprivations of gargantuan magnitude.

Conventional art forms can no longer tame these times. Where they fall short however, conceptual art in its multifaceted embrace can cope with the excesses of society.

The *Postmodernist* Period

The *postmodernist* period sprang forth from the illuminating studies I engaged in at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria when I returned there for my doctoral studies in Painting, ten years after acquiring the Masters degree. Here I once again I encountered my mentors, Professor Jerry Buhari and Professor Jacob Jat Jari, but this time on a much higher tuff of engagement. Having gone through art studies that sought to engage societal values at the peripheral and conceptual levels, at this PhD level, I was then spurred by the desire to “identify, analyse and criticise those negative forces which constitute bottlenecks in human beings’ finite search for peace and harmony in a universe so challenging survival itself seems daunting most times.”⁹

The art of this period is predominantly characterised by the creation of “wall hangings”, essentially as a way of

⁹ See page 2, Gbaden, B.G. (2014). “A Postmodernist Interrogation of Walls of Partition”. Unpublished Ph.D Thesis. Department of Fine Art. Faculty of Environmental Design, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

expressing discontent with the way human society inundates itself “with tangible and intangible walls, barriers, boundaries, restrictions, fences, laws, stratifications and strictures which constrain the ability of human beings to fully express their rights as citizens of their country, and realise their full potentials and ultimate goals in life.”¹⁰

The field of research for that PhD degree was “premised on *postmodernist* art essentially as it attempts to re-structure the practice, theorisation, and understanding of contemporary painting in Nigeria.”¹¹ *Postmodernism* as a style in architecture, art, literature, and criticism evolved in the 1970s as a reaction to modernism, the dominant theory of that period. *Postmodernism* was characterised by the adaptation of ideas and philosophical thrusts of periods or styles in a self-conscious way and had a purposeful rejection of the notion of *high art* as initially espoused by the Renaissance artists. *Postmodernism* emerged as an answer to the inability of modernism to face the criticisms central to the tenets of its discipline. *Postmodernism* advocates a total negation of all core foundationalist theories found in the major disciplines of study including the visual arts. In this wise therefore the ideas it bears are regarded from the fringes of mainstream theories since anyone could identify with its nascent nature, which seems to be in formation and often

¹⁰ *ibidem*, page 1.

¹¹ *ibidem*, page 2.

times a futuristic tenet still evolving and embracing the thoughts of its parent period.¹²

Postmodernist art is an offspring of this thought-process whereby it has embraced topical and contemporaneous issues in society by using styles and conventions derived from a variety of sources which provide answers to its enquiries about the nature of the human being's quest for change in society. Whereas other modernistic styles are individualistic, targeted at programmes which promote the self, *postmodernist* art looks outward at what challenges society is undergoing and proffers solutions. This is the justification for the inclusion in its art forms such recurrent social issues as justice, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity and politics.¹³

So what *postmodernist* art offered me was its various "concepts, precepts, ideological stance, techniques, and methodologies" which best suited a schema upon which I could interrogate "the social inequities found in Nigerian society"¹⁴. Thus all the artistic expressions then evolved from "creating *hangings* amenable to *kinetic* possibilities. For the methodology a *visual arts based* approach' was "advocated since its parameters adequately" addressed the "creative processes of practice done in *pari passu* with theorization."¹⁵

¹² *ibidem*, page 3.

¹³ *ibidem*, page 3.

¹⁴ *ibidem*, page 3.

¹⁵ *ibidem*, page 4.

So therefore I further advocated for an *egalitarian* art form to emerge, entailing breaking off from the acceptable nominal rules and conventions of institutionalised painting structures.¹⁶ In a *postmodernist* dispensation, therefore, there is a blurring of the hard edges of materials and formats especially as media, matter, text, time-based art, multimedia techniques, computer-generated imagery, virtual kaleidoscopes, and performance art now abound.¹⁷

In manifesting this ideology in physical form therefore nine social indicators were used to determine the themes suitable for exploration within permissible *postmodernist* limits. They were *race, gender, power, religion, ethnicity, politics, poverty, illiteracy, and class*. Having accomplished these nine walls, a finite wall, striving to combine elements from all the walls done and the totality of the experience gained in the period of research culminated into a single enterprise: *the mother of all walls*. Materials, methods, ideas, concepts and the generic philosophy which propelled the series combined to build this singular *masterpiece*. In size, magnitude, grandeur, conception, and ideology it surpassed the limits of all the walls produced in the course of the challenging research. This then formed the culmination

¹⁶ See Oguibe 1989.

¹⁷ As clearly asserted by Kleiner and Mamiya 2005; and Sullivan 2005.

of the wall building practice as a resolution agenda to the interrogative process of the research.¹⁸

The *Artist-Teacher* Period

This is where I am now. And what I can say to adequately explain this phase is the fact that teaching is truly a vocation. It is a calling much akin to being a Catholic priest, a reverend sister or a religious; at least from the perspective. This is why teachers are contented people who seem to the world like self-sufficient people who do not go cap in hand begging for peanuts. If it was not a vocation the University system in Nigeria would have collapsed decades ago and even in the last few years where it has suffered persecution of the worst level.

Wanting to be a University lecturer for me was prompted by the lifestyle I saw my teachers such like Professor Obiora Udechukwu exhibit in Nsukka. They had a dedication to duty that was very determined; they were committed to studio work and mentoring; they lived on the University campus and were accessible to us both in the classroom and at home. They gave us tutelage of a high order. They led simple lives, were not overly ambitious, were open and truthful and did not go around the whole place playing politics and lobbying for positions in the University or in the government.

¹⁸ Ibidem, page 8.

At Nsukka in those years, even the senior art students we met were mentors. They would go around formative drawing classes scrutinising the drawings of freshmen and offering suggestions here and there and encouraging creativity. I fondly remember the likes of Professor Chijioke Onuorah and Professor Olu Oguibe; these are persons who epitomised essences that had to be emulated despite being students themselves. It was easy to see why one would like to follow this direction for a career.

It is true that the ideal is different from reality. I had no inkling that some day would come when the burdens of Nigeria would be mirrored in our lives. But then here we are still standing as lecturers going through the rigours and even though barely staying alive, still forging on with teaching, research and the inevitable mentoring of not only students at the undergraduate and postgraduate level but also of colleagues willing to offer themselves.

At the onset of my career in Maiduguri in the year 2000, I could spend say 80% of my time painting pictures of horse riders in desert storms rousing gold dust in their wake during rampaging crusades in the Sahel. Now decades later I would say teaching has taken over almost all my time and I can hardly muster 10% of my time to create art of any form whether be it paintings or installations or assemblages. Poetry has departed from my soul and the muse stands from afar off wondering if she had made some vital error in wooing me from the sublime hills of Nsukka.

Now I find myself only thinking about two things; the classroom and the office. In the classroom I encounter my students having rigorously prepared their lecture schedules, since most of my teaching comprises of about 60% practical encounters and 40% of theoretical engagements. Recently a new dimension has been added: administration. It began as headship of a department; then deputizing for a directorate and now I am a dean of a faculty. What it means is that my routine at the University is based on teaching and administration, attending meetings, signing memos and attempting to beat deadlines. Under such a circumstance art suffers; for there is no time to consider new art projects like I used to do. I need to teach students who rely on me for their knowledge grasp. When not doing that I need to answer to the call of management who put me there to achieve set goals and objectives for the forward movement of the University system, whose aspirations sometimes seems far from summation.

So now I term myself a teacher of art, who happens to be an artist, and so I am not really worthy to be called an artist in the true sense of the word where I could possibly have had to create art on a continuous basis, day after day, week after week, and eventually exhibit, as I used to in the prime of my art practice. Now I basically teach art students and attend to administrative matters in the University. Art production is now a secondary vocation, weighing far higher than the artist I perceived myself to be. This knowledge has helped me to understand my place in society. That what I set out to be can only be

achieved if I have perfect understanding of the dynamics of life. And I give credit to the *postmodern* ethos which gives room for reflexivity and accepts at all points in time that life is an evolving phenomenon.

Studio Practice

I have always maintained a studio of some sorts. As a bachelor I lived mostly in apartments that contain just the one person and I had to practice my art within the confines of my living space; on the floor, on the porch with canvasses hanging on make-shift easels from the walls, drawing on table tops; not the most comfortable but still very productive experience. (At the academies in Nsukka and Zaria the equipped studios had adequate space). As a married man I have worked mostly outdoors, being conscious of interfering with the domestic regime of the rest of my family.

My work etiquette has never really faltered as I could produce an average of three to five conventional paintings in one week (i.e. Sunday to Saturday). I remember once producing eight paintings while working in Abuja in early 1999 soon after my MFA degree and while waiting for a permanent job. I reckon that I must have been possessed by the creative spirit of the muse then.

Materials

I consider myself a multimedia artist who has in more recent years transmuted his goals into *postmodernist* concerns. In my corpus I have incorporated diverse

materials and adapted various techniques that suite my inclinations or for quite practical reasons fit the chosen material categories or even dictate the compositional leanings of the artwork produced.

One guiding principle I do not discard is Professor Obiora Udechukwu's advice to us his undergraduate painting students: "Make use of whatever materials are available to create art. Do not wait till you can afford oil colours". So I have followed this dictum religiously, sourcing materials from my immediate surroundings, wherever I find myself.

Academic training, intuition, art workshops and environmental circumstances have made me adept in the use of a large retinue of art materials and resources. My favourite medium of expression remains the pencil, that primordial tool of ancient childhood. It retains the originality of my drawings. Colour pigments tend to bury the drawn lines on canvas. Since attending the first printmaking workshop at Nsukka in 1986 I have continued to make prints of lino cuts and etchings. They bear closer cords to drawing than the other mediums.

I use oils and acrylics on canvas, either in combination or separately, most of the time. A larger percentage of my art has been done with oils on canvas. Mirrors, animal hide, pebbles, marble, twine, glass, fabric, gouache, metal, [poster paints, plastic, pieces of wood, paper, P.V.A, clay have featured on my pictorial surfaces solely or independently as art in the third dimension. I have also used watercolours which I find fluid and

flexible to manipulate; the drying time is fast and it answers that need to put down the message urgently.

A painting composed with mixed media objects bears a tactility, which is appealing to me, as it resembles three-dimensionality as opposed to the illusion created on flat canvas surfaces. The palette knife is my weapon for stabbing and pasting thick paints onto available canvas surfaces.

The greatest measure of achievement (real or illusionary) that *postmodernist* art has added to my career is manifested in my ability to translate ideas into tangible form and yet open up space for speculation, for introspection, for further inquiry into the soul of the issues raised by the very immersion into the presence of material evidence in the installation area/arena. It is like concretization, creating illusion and form begetting idea rather the reverse.

Albert Einstein's formula $E=mc^2$ looms large in our consciousness when we consider that energy begets matter that conversely matter can disintegrate into energy.¹⁹ Understanding this scientific principle sets us

¹⁹ In 1905 Albert Einstein published his special theory of relativity. According to this theory, the relation between mass and energy is expressed by the equation $E = mc^2$, which states that a given mass (m) is associated with an amount of energy (E) equal to this mass multiplied by the square of the speed of light (c). A very small amount of matter is equivalent to a vast amount of energy. For example, 1 kg (2.2 lb) of matter converted completely into energy

free to view the installations I create as social triggers that implode in our mind consciousness and makes it easier to view our world in a more appreciably holistic manner.²⁰

Themes

My choice of themes has oscillated between traditionally sourced archetypes and contemporary issues of social relevance. This confirms the social paradox issue I am deeply concerned about. An important aspect of my art is that the pictures usually generate fresh areas of exploration stretching one theme to the limits of its elasticity. Thus most of my paintings are better appreciated in the several series of unifying themes which they generate.

The major compositions are loosely listed below:

- “*Mamiwata*” series
- Dream gods series
- Motherhood series
- “*Takuruku*” series
- Tiv dance series

would be equivalent to the energy released by exploding 22 megatons of TNT.

²⁰ Do not be disturbed if upon encountering my artworks you fail to see anything. Admitting our deficiencies or ignorance creates room for acquiring knowledge that is new or alien to us. The biggest failure of art, essentially on the African continent, but most definitely in Nigeria has been the inability of the people to appreciate it and go on to accept it as an integral part of their social structure as it once was in traditional society.

- Mosaic patches series
- Armageddon series
- Walls of Partition series
- Visual Psalms/Poetry series.

“Mamiwata” Series

The “mamiwata” series emerged from an earlier series of watercolour paintings, executed mostly between 1988-89, focused on half nude female figures that were obviously seductive and carried snakes around their necks and held apples in their hands. I am not too sure about the source or implication of the symbolism anymore but they were quite profound and alluring and may have stemmed from a personal craving for sexual fulfillment or loss.

When I picked up the brush again in 1991, the women had transformed into water maids; this time completely naked to their beaded waists and possessed of fish tails and scales. Their thick black hair was tied up with beads and pulled together in a bunch much like a pony tail. They often appeared in pairs or in threes with a leader at an elevated angle exuding infectious ambience. Fishes flowed towards and away from their tails. There was always a full moon above them and auroral colours encompassed them. Their usually outstretched arms seemed to be an invitation to join them.

The paintings caused quite a stir of excitement in Nsukka when they were exhibited in 1993.²¹ There is a poem somewhere composed by a student of English Language in that year inspired by the mermaids.

I stopped painting the series after it was suggested to me that the real mermaids might be enticing me through the artforms.²²

Dream gods series

The first “dream god” painting titled “Compassion”, done in Nsukka in 1991, was a very small 30 cm² reddish picture depicting the head of a human male. It triggered off the production of several pen and ink drawings and subsequently a series of very fulfilling paintings. At the height of it all people postulated that I could possibly be seeing the gods in my dreams. It was not so.

²¹ The exhibition was a joint one titled: “Amidst the Dreams” with Chimezie Chuta, then my mate in painting major. The “mamiwata” paintings were all sold. See: Gbaden, B.G. and Chuta, C. (1993). “Amidst the Dreams”. Nsukka: Continuing Education Centre, C.E.C., University of Nigeria, Nsukka. November 22-26, 1993.

²² This was a theory put forward by Inameti Archibong, now a sculpture lecturer at the Cross River University of Technology Calabar where I have been external examiner for some four academic sessions now. In fact in the case of Ayo Aina, he returned one of the mermaid paintings to me after claiming that he could not sleep at night. That ended our deal to exchange paintings instead of buying from each other.

The truth was that in the course of my studies I came to encounter traditional art of the spiritual kind. I appreciated the power of visual objects of human material culture as being possessed of ethereal elements. But I also wondered where the essence – or soul as it were – of these objects (i.e. Ikenga, Imborivungu, Mbari figures, masks, masquerades, etc) went to after they had outlived their potency and had become abandoned to be ravaged by termites in our shrines or on the outskirts of our village settlements.

Did they not go up to the firmaments to join that eternal realm of beings that condense their energies to form that universal pantheon of gods who rule over the affairs of humankind and those of nature?

In my philosophical quest I came to the realization that these gods had powers in them that could be tapped, at least metaphorically to heal humankind of its ills. The gods of fire, of rain, of the harvests could come to our aid.

Then with the discovery that it is our psyche that is most injured, not our material body, I invented new gods, those of compassion, of empathy, of patience, of kindness, of love, of benevolence, etc.

This is the stage where it seems almost as if my art most certainly had a touch of the supernatural.²³ The truth is I only sought to help humankind climb up the pedestal of hope. Some sort of desire to free the human from being merely plebeians to becoming patrician citizens. The last painting I did in the series was in 2001 and is titled “Nimbus”.

Motherhood series

“Motherhood series” was originally conceived to pay homage to the woman as mother, as lover, as companion, wife, sister, helpmate; woman as a symbol of sensuality, fragility, fertility, procreation, sexuality; woman as the epitome of the aesthetic predilection of human values and dreams.²⁴

The woman icon thus goes far beyond the superficiality of pictorial grandeur to embrace a generic ideality of human aspirations.

The beams have been focused on the African woman as she offers me familial linkages. She has been depicted in

²³ Krydz Ikwuemesi’s reviews of my art of that period pointed towards this metaphysical direction. See: Ikwuemesi, C.K. (1994). “Homage to Tutelage”. PortHarcourt: Weekend Special SUNRAY, Saturday, March 5, page 18.

²⁴ Only recently my longtime friend, Dr. Sukhanty Egharevga, collaborated with me to publish a paper on the female essence as expressed in paintings. So this preoccupation with the male subject matter is an old one.

both the traditional and modern based society with the Nigerian locus as a reference point.

Whether she is seen dancing, carrying firewood, nursing babies, poised regally like a royal personage or a bewitching jezebel, the story is that of glorification of her indispensable role in society. Even if at times she is perceived as a necessary evil, she is a subject attractive to most artists, male or female.

***Takuruku* series**

Takuruku series sprang out of my deep immersions into Tiv cosmology while studying for the MFA painting degree in Zaria. *Takuruku* is accepted as the progenitor of the Tiv race. He is a regal timeless personage; wise beyond wisdom and packed full of spirit essence in the wrinkles on his face.

The imagery I conceived for *Takuruku* is a bare figure with a strip of *anger* cloth wrapped around his loins. His hair is disheveled; his muscles well-formed. He is tall and has a warrior's stature. In his right hand is to be found an *imborivungu* ritual object clenched tightly in his fist.

He is the shaman of his community, a farmer, a rainmaker, the consortium of tradition, the interpreter of dreams, the judge, the arbiter, the father, the dependable ally, the brutish avenger. He has been depicted variously as a young man, a married man and a lone old man bent over with age.

Tiv dance series

The motivation to paint Tiv dance forms grew out of the same conditions that conceived the *Takuruku* series. It was a realization of the burning desires, almost ordained, to capture the essence of this dance form on canvas for posterity.

The charm, the gracefulness, the synchrony, the uniformity of purpose, the determination of movement and the dynamic rigour of the almost boneless gyrations of the dancers is so enticing one can be easily hypnotized.

This material attraction does not undermine the spiritual dance aesthetic of Tiv culture where the slightest opportunity provokes an atmosphere for song and dance festivities to flourish: births, deaths, marriages, etc. The series then is celebratory in nature, depicting groups, couples and individual dancers in different postures doing mostly the “swange” dance and are often dressed in “anger”, the black and white striped woven cloth the Tiv are known for.



Fig. 1: Blaise Gundu Gbadem, *Swange Dance*, Tiv
Dance Series, 2000, 59 cm x 90 cm

Mosaic patches series

The mosaic patches series is a direct response to the negation of the social responsibilities of man caught up in the webs of a global world. These profound paintings are characterised by the deep crisscrossing, flowing black paint lines reminiscent of the stained glass technique, which divides the pictorial surface into patches.

Non-formalistic in aspect, they question the issues of pollution of the water world and earth's biosphere with the waste of technological advancement.²⁵

Some of these paintings contain mirrors, glass shards and pebbles; questioning the placement of our value judgments; asking us, when we look into mirrors, if we do not see our faces in the midst of environmental squalour we ourselves have aided, encouraged or created.

The series was born in 1999 and the first set of paintings was exhibited in Kano and Kaduna in the same year at the Alliance Francaise institutions.

It is an ongoing adventure, a satire of the posturing of wisdom against the backdrop of fallacy. The lesson is that in the midst of the patches we can get lost if we do not get hold of our mission on this earth as human factors that can enrich and enliven it.

²⁵ I accept the influence of Jerry Buhari whose concern for the environment is at the core of his art career. The style is however radically different. Buhari, J.A. (1999). "Conversations with Mother Earth." Kaduna: Alliance Francaise, June 8-15, 1999.

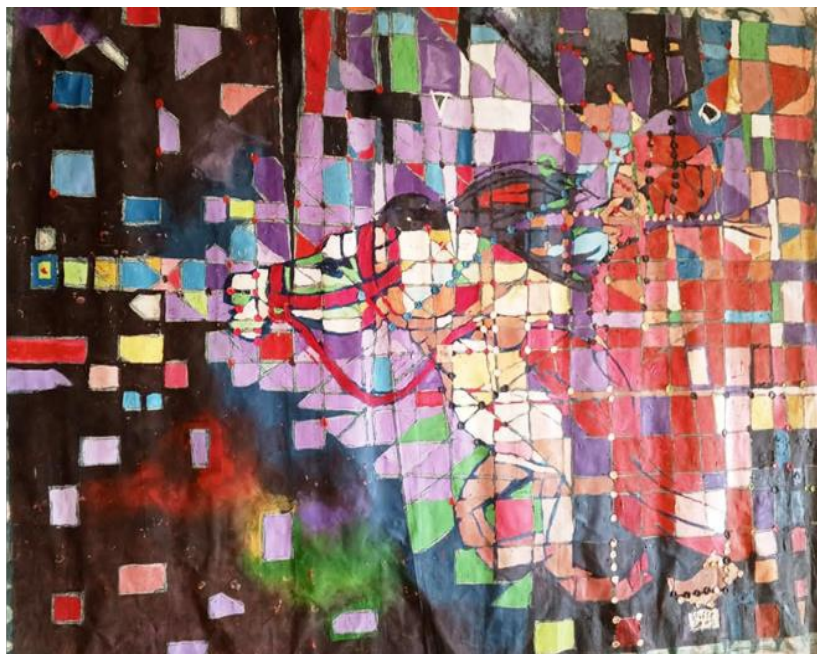


Fig. 2: Blaise Gundu Gbaden, *Horseman*, Mosaic Patches Series, 2007, 90 cm x 121 cm

Armageddon series

This disturbing series, limbo-like in nature and soul searching in approach was borne out of a desperate attempt to heal the wounds of the religious riots that first rocked Kaduna in February 2000 and the reprisal killings in the south east of Nigeria.

The mutilation of the human psyche is hardly inspirational, but it awakens listless feelings, angst and anxieties which are indescribable yet palpable.

My self-esteem and vision of a nation at that time became so corrupted that the pictures I painted were of half-naked beings, mutilated bodies, blood and crimson fires consuming human flesh and souls along with it. In some instances I blended poetry with the pictures to re-emphasize the messages.

I do not wish ever again to revisit such art for whatever reason: It is too gory.

Walls of partition series

“Walls of partition” series was directly birthed during the research engagements leading to the award of a PhD degree in Painting. Lucid illustrations as captured below provide better pictorial conviviality.



Fig. 3, Blaise Gundu Gbadem, *Wall of Racism*, 2010,
hanging, canvas, acrylics and ropes,
305cm x 550cm



Fig. 4, Blaise Gundu Gbadan, *Wall of Gender*, 2010,
hanging, canvas, acrylics and ropes,
336cm x 503cm



Fig. 5, Blaise Gundu Gbaden, ***Wall of Resolution (The Mother of All Walls)***, (1st view), 2012, hanging, lace curtains, wire, assorted cloths, electric bulbs, wool, threads, 122 cm x 386 cm



Figure 6, Blaise Gundu Gbaden, *Wall of Resolution (The Mother of All Walls)*, (Electrified Version, Detail)
Accidented Series



Figure 7, Blaise Gundu Gbaden, *Ridder*, Accidented Series, Oil on Canvas, 2013

The non-categorical series

To some extent the categorisation of my art is a vain exercise as many other paintings have defied stratification. There have been portrait paintings, landscapes, still-lives, abstract configurations, or colour explorations that do not fall into strict facets as enumerated above. The common bond has always been the sense of colour, the thickness of the pictorial surface and an unbounded zeal for experimentation.

There is a signature that is indisputably “Blaisean” which runs through the art works whether they be installations or a simple portrait painting; whether they be illustrations of poetic ideas or dream interpretations.

Unexpantiated themes worth taking note of are the “anxiety”, “state of the mind” and “angst” series.

Academic Scholarship

The trajectory of my academic career can be absorbed in two ways:

1) The projectile of academic writing chiefly centred on postulations which are concerned with sources of inspiration for the creation of art and paintings basically from traditional and cultural sources and contemporaneous ideologies and how these apply to the philosophical thrust of various art ventures.

2) The projectile concerned with my mentoring of students (and perhaps colleagues with whom we have cross-fertilised ideas) in the past few years. Some of these influences may not even be known to them, but they are there.

We touch people’s lives in ways that are sometimes unfathomable.

Academic Writing

My academic career rightfully spans over twenty four (24) years of modest academic accomplishments; this covers my teaching career, academic credentials,

certificates, letters of appointments to administrative roles and University committees, publications, art exhibitions, creative works such as poems and poetry performances, designs of uniforms and bishopric coat of arms and a series of drawings, paintings and installations.

My scholarship, as vastly published in local peer reviewed journals has majorly focused on providing viable sources of inspiration for art generation derived chiefly from cultural sources. They engage figurative art from the graphological, social and political perspectives and argue persuasively that contrary to modernist tendencies of preservation of art, it must not last forever.

Furthermore my scholarship attempts to prove that traditional art was created to fulfill religious persuasions, to be objects that embolden fertility, that encourage procreation, progeny and that act as potent conduits for the recrudescence of life. At many points in time it provides a series of examples of how oral lore has influenced the ideation of modern Nigerian art.

The thrust of my writings also examine the process of bringing to artistic fruition the various themes of socio-economic quagmire as found in the cultural deterioration of Nigerian society. They tend to depict artists' ability to transform ordinary human subjects into enigmatic personages and at other points attempt to unravel why the female form so fascinates male artists.

Investigating the uniqueness of African visual art in terms of the intrinsic expressions that are registered in them as a medium of communication, aesthetic expression of symbols, and as dialogue with the supernatural world is key to my philosophical inquests.

My scholarship contends that contemporary Nigerian paintings are replete with images and notions of power and power relations among the ethnically pluralistic peoples of Nigeria and so require strenuous scrutiny. In the same vein I have discovered that power is illustrated in the paintings of artists in different ways and influences the social life of people without necessarily distorting the aesthetic value of the paintings.

I posit that drawing is taken for granted by most artists who tend to use it as a process to an end rather than a finite art form in its own right and therefore go on to affirm that drawing can be used as an instrument to navigate the understanding of modernism within the contemporary art context of Nigeria.

Not being merely satisfied with investigating the vagaries of the fine and applied arts I have dared to survey the similarity between painting and philosophy whose common goal is locating the truth, the essence, the abode of lasting peace. I also present John Berger's (1972) theoretical precept that oil paintings are representative of the aspirations of the ruling class and so use this Marxist stand point as a basis for presenting paintings of Nigerian origination which seem to fit into Berger's convincing class codification.

Based on the collaborative and multifaceted nature of my research output I examine the similarity between the scholarships of ceramics and painting and how they bear a convergence of technique and idea way above their obvious physical differences and approaches.

In furtherance of my *postmodernist* posture I have highlighted the nuances and techniques of the paintings of some select Nigerian artists such as Olu Oguibe, El Anatsui and Obiora Udechukwu, whom I then labeled *postmodernist* even though they have not clearly pronounced themselves as bearing such an inclination.

I have consistently presented derivations of fecund imagery from almost any source, ancient or modern or far removed from their cultural contexts for imbibition by artists who are ready to utilise them. In other multi-disciplinary collaborations I present textiles as viable, creative, ingenious alternative to using expensive oil paints to create art.

Most of my publications in peer-reviewed foreign international journals posit in certain instances that the horse rider and equestrian form, having been immortalised in wood, ivory, bronze and recently on canvas, provide an enduring source for modernist expressions. Aside from these derivations from the Holy Scriptures provide challenging archetypes of animal symbols for contemporary painters in Nigeria and elsewhere.

Essentially they question if the body of knowledge in the visual arts manifest a clear process of critical thinking, debate, and create a clear methodological process of creating new knowledge within the university system. Following from the currency of computer usage some papers highlight the impact computers and technological devices have made on the art practice of painters.

Within this international space, I was commissioned to do the review of a book titled “Victor Forestier Sow: A Pioneer Malian Painter edited by Pascal James Imperato and Austin C. Imperato” by the book editor of the ACASA in 2016. This is a critical review of the catalogue of an art exhibition of the paintings of the late Malian painter, Victor Forestier Sow and it was published in *African Arts*, a high impact factor Art Journal.

Most of my contributions to book chapters have largely been tributes, interviews and conversations with mentors. Some have been descriptions of the act of borrowing elements from existing artworks to create new paintings, sometimes as valid cultural, social and political statements and at other times as compositional manipulations aimed at satisfying purely aesthetic quests. A survey of the panoply of nude painting within modern Nigerian art context from the era of Aina Onabolu (1886-1963) to the present time, form a basis for a collaborative publication. Two or more papers recommend that artists look to nature as it offers enormous and inexhaustible opportunities for creativity;

while others advocate for production of art that should provoke thoughts about morality and the human polity rather than embracing an insatiate hunger for the mundane populist genres and blind acceptance of voguish currents.

Edited books have mainly been Festschrifts in honour of my teachers and mentors; Professor Jerry Buhari - Professor of Fine Art; Professor Alamveabee Efihrain Idyorough - Professor of Sociology.

Articles written for inclusion in exhibition catalogues prove that my scholarship includes writing of academic articles published in art exhibition catalogues and numbering about twenty two (22) in total at the time of presenting this lecture. Some of the artists are even my own teachers: Professor Jerry Buhari, Professor Jacob Jari; my colleagues: Ginigeme Nnochiri, Erasmus Onyishi, Dr. Chike Obeagu, Dr. John Oyedemi, Onyilo Uloko, Emmanuel Abu, Tom Sunday, etc.; my students: Joshua Avav, Dr. Jonathan Okewu, Deborah Jonathan, Dr. Alice Mamlu Apeyuan, Ocheche Agbo, etc.; some are even for international exhibitions held in Singapore and Abuja.

Art Exhibitions

Art exhibitions are intrinsic to my scholarship as an artist-scholar. In them the original essence of creativity is expressed, raw, unrefined, in colour fields that challenge aesthetic predilections and conventions. The

works of art that emanate from this corpus seem most times to create philosophies around them that defy codification or classification and at other times give room for philosophical enquiries to spring forth. The works are philosophical projections and also projections that are based on philosophical grounds.

Solo Exhibitions – I have held about six (6) solo art exhibitions in Nsukka, Lagos, Kaduna and Zaria between 1994 and 2014 when I bagged the PhD in Painting. This inaugural would make the number the seventh. They showcase my pedigree in theoretical, formalistic and visual engagement with my environment, cultural background and the place of the human person in society. Above all else they prove my worth as an artist, an art teacher and a scholar; and in many cases a combination of all three elements.

Joint Exhibitions - Three (3) major joint exhibitions are worth mentioning; one of these is with my own teacher, Professor Obiora Udechukwu (who now occupies a chair in St. Lawrence University Washington DC, in the USA), who assembled Uche Edochie, Nkechi Nwosu-Igbo and myself at the Goethe Institut in Victoria Island Lagos in 1997; and the other two are with Chimezie Chuta, my undergraduate mate at Nsukka, now a graphic designer working and living in Port Harcourt.

Group Exhibitions - My art practice has been active over the years involving participation in approximately nineteen (19) group exhibitions. For the purpose of this inaugural I wish to state that only the ones that have

evidence of being properly documented are considered. It shows a large repertoire of participation; many of these exhibitions have been initiated by me and cover a wide range of my academic career. This range covers those done locally within Nigeria.

International Exhibitions - Two (2) international art exhibitions are here projected from outings that emanated basically from an art summit and an artists' workshop held in Abuja and Jos and sponsored by the National Gallery of Art and the Aftershave Artists' Workshop.

Creative Works - Several poems, some in the Tiv language, designs of uniforms for societies and clubs and even bishops coats of arms are some of the creative works I have engaged in.

Curatorship of Art Exhibitions - Over the years I have curated several art exhibitions; but only three stand out, encompassing curatorships in Lagos, the University of Maiduguri, and the Federal University of Lafia.

Drawings - Drawings, principally of the human figure and portraits, executed mostly in graphite and pencil, are presented for scrutiny.

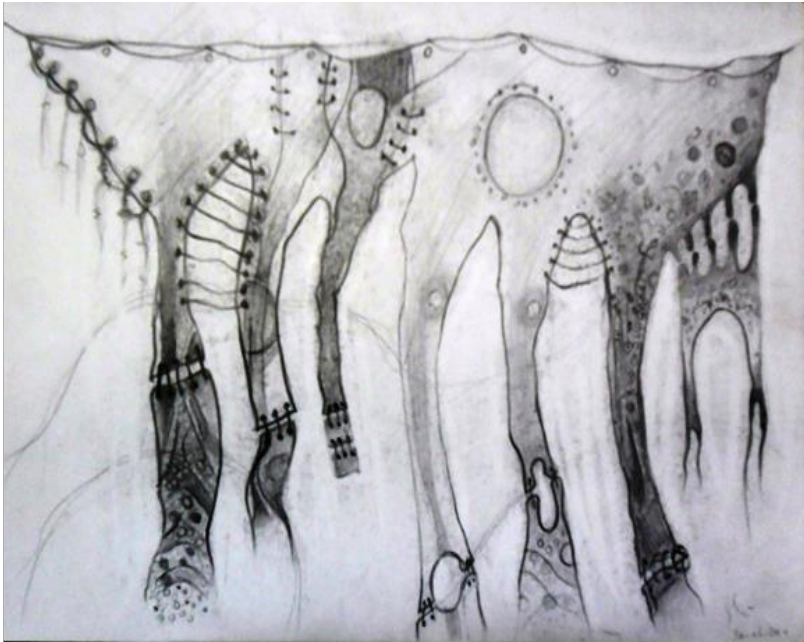


Fig. 8, Blaise Gundu Gbaden, *Preliminary Drawing I*,
Pencil, 2010, 21cm x 29.7cm



Fig. 9, Blaise Gundu Gbaden, *Preliminary Drawing VII*,
Pencil, 2010, 38 x 28 cm



Fig. 10, Blaise Gundu Gbaden, *Drawing of a Model's Face*, Pen and Brush, 2019, 38 x 28 cm
(Drawn during Advanced Drawing class with 400 Level Students of Federal University of Lafia)



Fig. 11, Blaise Gundu Gbaden, *Abstraction of Human Face*, Pen and Brush, 2019, 38 x 28 cm
(Drawn during Advanced Drawing class with 400 Level Students of Federal University of Lafia)



Fig. 12, Blaise Gundu Gbaden, ***Drawing of a Semi Nude Model***, Pencil, 2013, 38 x 28 cm



Fig. 13, Blaise Gundu Gbaden, ***Drawing of a Semi
Clothed Model***, Pencil, 2013, 38 x 28 cm

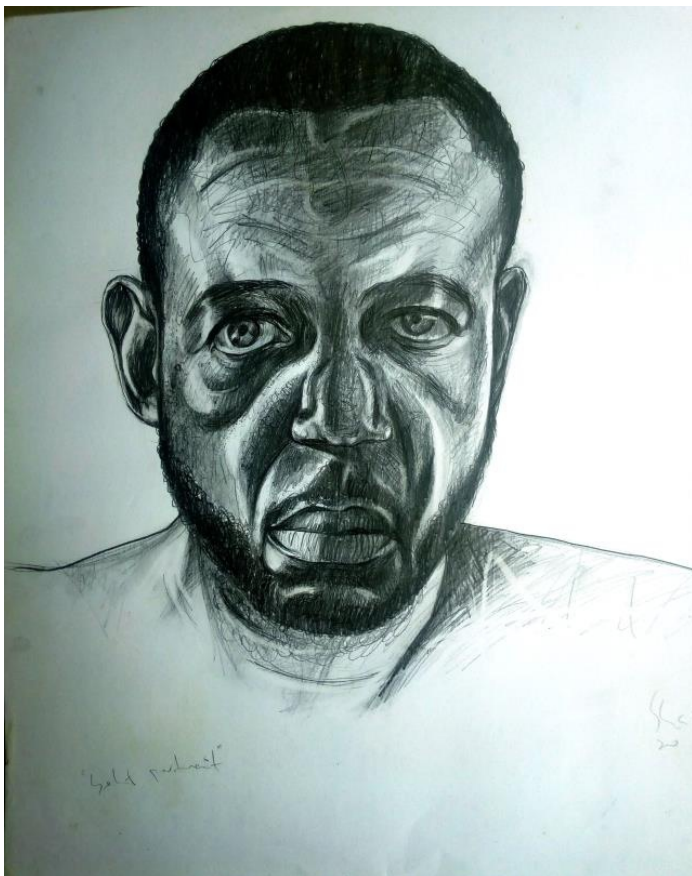


Fig. 14, Blaise Gundu Gbaden, ***Self Portrait from a Mirror***, Pencil, 2013, 38 x 28 cm



Fig. 15, Blaise Gundu Gbadu, *Zacharys*, Pencil, 2013,
38 x 28 cm

Paintings - Most of my recent paintings are on the circular format executed with the acrylic medium on canvas and in some cases with ropes tied on them; basically to attempt cohesion of fractured entities as identified in our gradually fragmenting nation state.



Fig. 16, Blaise Gundu Gbaden, *Prayer Poem*,
Acrylics, 2018, 38 cm Diametre



Fig. 17, Blaise Gundu Gbadan, *Prayer Poem 11*, Acrylic on Canvas, 35 cm in circumference, 2018



Fig. 18, Blaise Gundu Gbaden, *Untitled*, Acrylics and mixed media, 2015; on loan to Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art, YSMA, Pan African University, PAU, Epe, Lagos



Fig. 19, Blaise Gundu Gbaden, *Habitat*, Corona Series, Acrylics, Canvas & Twines, 47 cm diameter, April 2020; on loan to Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art, YSMA, Pan African University, PAU, Epe, Lagos

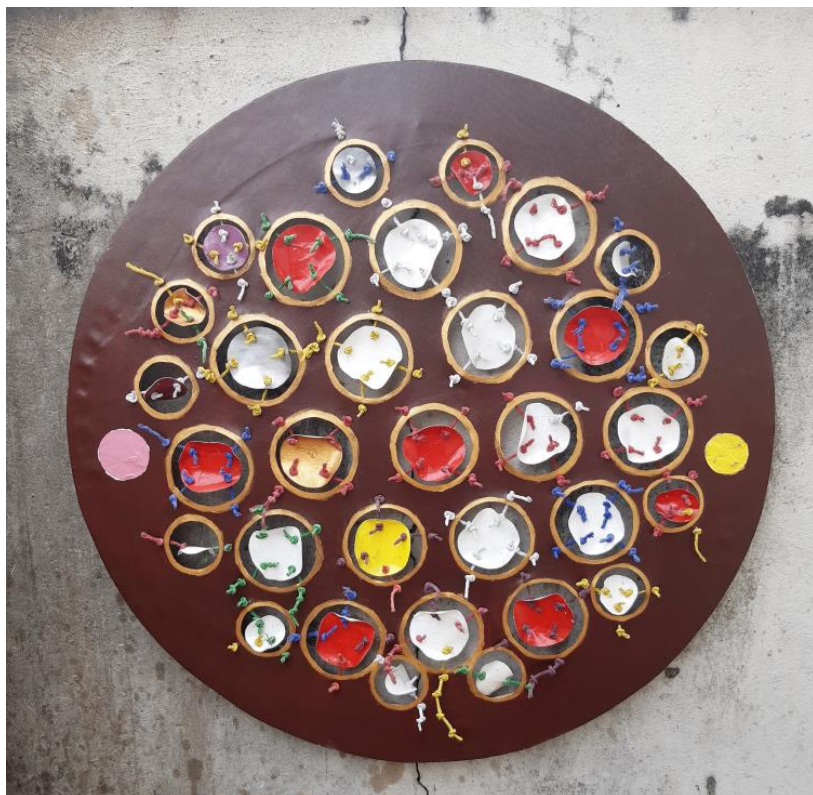


Fig. 20, Blaise Gundu Gbaden, *Containment*, Corona Series, Acrylics, Canvas & Twines, 35 cm diameter, April 2020

Influences and Cross-Fertilisations

As an artist, an artist-scholar and artist-teacher there have been concomitant influences that have determined my career pattern that I want to acknowledge. I have previously mentioned the fecund mentorship within the Nsukka art School space. This can never be paralleled as

it formed the very foundation of my art scholarship. This was consolidated during my MFA studies in Zaria and continued into the PhD period also in Zaria. So even though this mentorship was handed down from my teachers and seniors it did not remain there. Cross-fertilisations took place among us as peers. I remember the silent mentorship people like Wale Ajayi and John Oyedemi and some of their classmates offered us upon learning that the MFA painting class was re-invigorated by the presence of Steve Achugwo and myself, and were encouraged to return and complete their own MFA studies.

I will be ever appreciative of the friendship of Emmanuel Irokanulo and Emmanuel Abu, who even though were undergraduate students at the time I began my MFA programme, introduced me to the use of the canvas and were ever present to guide and direct me and introduce Zaria to me. This friendship remains and the experiences are ever fertile in our relations.

Emmanuel Irokanulo eventually convinced me to enroll into the newly floated PhD Painting programme and I can say that we have always shared our knowledge and exchanged academic ideas all through the years. In various dimensions it is with Emmanuel that I can truly say that peers can mentor each other and so survive the terrain of academia. And how have we done so? It is through critical engagements of our writings, reviewing, revising, editing and advising on roles to take and decisions to make that has sustained our artistic scholarship.

About five of my students from undergraduate days in the University of Maiduguri are here in Lafia with me. Joshua Aondona Avav, Dr. Jonathan Ebute Okewu, Deborah Jonathan, Alhamdu Musa Moda, and Ibrahim Amali will all attest to the tutelage I offered them from their 100 level of study up to graduation. Most of them, except for Amali who studied in China, went to Zaria to pursue their Masters degrees due to my encouragement. Dr. Jonathan Okewu's PhD in Creative ceramics was founded upon the basic understanding of my own precedents set in acquiring the PhD in Painting.

As for Joshua Aondona Avav, if you were not observant, in most of his colour field paintings, also done on circular canvasses you would think you are looking at my own paintings. He does it exactly as I would and I believe earnestly that he has not only imbibed the spirit of colour composition that I have but also some level of philosophical understanding of painting that I have. And I know that not he or any other person needs permission from me to create paintings on circular surfaces, since I too did not seek the permission of Jerry Buhari to begin painting on these circular surfaces. I want it to be known that it in direct response to Jerry Buhari that I use circular formats. It gives me much pleasure to present Joshua Aondona Avav as one of my current PhD students in Painting who is about rounding up his Thesis. Since I am the one who supervised his undergraduate project it is only fitting that I complete his academic dossier by graduating him at the ultimate degree level.

Dr. Amos Saghevwua Agaku, my undergraduate student from Maiduguri also went on to acquire the MFA and PhD degrees in Painting as a direct response to my tutelage. His artistic and philosophical thrust was basically founded upon my mentorship and we have sustained our relationship.

Sor Sen, a very successful professional studio artist living and practicing in Abuja in a very thriving academic atmosphere is an excellent example of indirect influence. This is not so only because he too is Tiv but probably because being Tiv like me he saw the need to articulate his highly symbolic and philosophical painting practice on influences driven by societal needs and deep personal individuations.

There are other positively impactful influences that even though do not require strenuous documentation here, are definitely perceivable in my colleagues, peers, students at the undergraduate and postgraduate level, and elsewhere that my art may have reached through personal encounter or third party encounters. For all these I am most grateful and consider it a privilege that my scholarship, artistic and academic can make meaning to anybody at all.

Where I am Now

Now I have reached a stage in my life where the paintings I am doing (whenever I am privileged to) are visual poems. There is no satisfaction in trying to please humanity. I have seen the futility of trying to be a change

agent. Life is a vanity full of depleted ambitions. What I now paint are poems that tell visual stories about the trials and travails of life we cannot change. Only the colours seem to convey hope for humanity which has suffered fragmentation from its epistles of damnation. Triumphs can only come with contemplation on the deep essences of human life. Such that at this stage in my painting career I attempt to convey the vagaries of life's frailties and the triumphs of human persistence.

Conclusion

The discipline of Painting is one that rightfully belongs to the fine arts and is placed on a high echelon of society. "What is the way forward?" sounds too predictable. In a *postmodernist* dispensation the only predictable matters remain the changes and experimentation artists shall continue to engage in. The will to project one's self beyond the bounds of creativity and embrace multidisciplinary approaches to solving mankind's issues have taken hold of artists too. The gains of globalisation are numerous. Without discarding very vital African traditions that give room for codification and articulation of the world order; my embrace of *postmodernist* modes is an expansion of my world view and an acceptance of the positive aspects of globalisation.²⁶

²⁶ Most of these broadminded ideas were brought to the limelight in 1995 during the "Africa '95" London outing. See: Deliss, C. (Ed.). (1999). "Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa". London: Whitechapel Art Gallery. The shrine installations of Bruce

I believe that the world's acceptance of my art: borne out of years of anxiety, of inadequacy, of scholarship, of want, of lack, of economic deprivation and a sheer will to survive, would in essence be an acceptance of other individual Nigerian artists' contributions to the all-embracing global question of sustenance.

But I must sound a word of caution: To present these issues the way I have done is to make it seem as if I am some sort of social idealist in search for an elusive utopian state; which of course we all know the most ambitious socialist-Marxists failed to attain.

The truth is that I love art. Love itself is inadequate to describe this relationship I have with my art. But it does give me fulfillment beyond measure to stand and paint all day; to perceive the smell of oils and linseed; the sound of palette knives crushing pigments on canvas surfaces; the sight of indescribable colours shutting out the rainbow; the poetry of dancers; the wisdom of ancestors; the hope of a regenerated world; more peaceful, more loving and more forgiving. These are the truths that keep my art alive.

I love art.

I enjoy creating art.

Join my world.

Onobrakpeya and the works of the Laboratoire Agit-Art were quite enlightening.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost I give God Almighty the ultimate thanks for the privilege of life; one that has been largely full of healthy bubbling vivacity.

I wish to show my appreciation to those who have shaped my life in a chronological order from childhood up to the age where I consciously chose art as a career up to this day when I can profess my vocation.

Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, I would begin from appreciating my late mother, Celine Alutembe Agyobo, nee Anye-Agbatse, who was my first teacher and inevitably the one who passed on the talent of art to me from those early days in primary school. She had the most wonderful handwriting, I suppose gotten from studying under Irish Catholic nuns in a teacher training college somewhere in Adoka. She would draw simple shapes like cup, pot, orange, ball on the black board and label them and instruct us to copy them and also label them in our note books. Of course I sincerely appreciate the acceptance and support my father, Boniface Gbaden Agyobo, gave me when I decided to study art in the University as against their deep desire for me to study Law. My mother would tell me years afterwards that I was eloquent in speech and they felt I could make a good Lawyer. But I had my eyes focused elsewhere.

I thank my siblings for their understanding and giving me the space to go to school. I think I am the one person in my family who spent the most time away from home

since I was always schooling. I would hardly spend much time with them, always having to be in Gindiri, Nsukka or Zaria. So I appreciate the love shown me through the years by Mrs. Elizabeth Aluyaa Tsavbee, her spouse, Terver, and their children and grandchildren; Mrs. Mary Moom Akinsuki, her spouse, Engr. Kolade, their children and grandchildren; Paul Ahemba Agyobo; John Terwase Agyobo, his spouse, Priscilla and two children; Joseph Terngu Agyobo, his spouse, Afa, and daughter. Fondly remembered are my late siblings, Boniface Terver Agyobo jnr, with whom most of my childhood escapades were carried out; and Victoria Terdoo Agyobo.

I really thank God for the secondary school I attended; Boys' Secondary School, Gindiri; essentially for the simple fact that art was taught there as a subject at the GCE level. Aside from art, technical drawing and woodwork were also taught. This made us develop an ability in self-sufficiency where we became little *Mr.-Fix-Its* without having recourse to call for help except in instances where technical capacity went way beyond us. It was such an environment that inspired talent in our nascent brains. I fondly remember my favourite art teacher the impeccable Mr. Z. Z. Zitta who encouraged us his students with proper grooming in the art class and in other activities in the whole school.

I cannot fail to acknowledge the role students played in shaping us their juniors. Speaking in the vernacular (be it one's local dialect or the popular Hausa lingua franca)

was abhorred. We albeit indulged in it habitually. A particular set of seniors would severely punish you if they found you speaking anything outside of English Language. I remember Samuel Orbunde and Nansel Nimyel (both of whom later became broadcasters with the NTA while Nansel even rose to become Manager NTA Lafia) as such sorts of persons. They could see you commit grievous offences and turn the other way but never when you spoke vernacular in their presence, or God help you, badly constructed English.

We had a system of having seniors play the role of caretakers for junior students and for me the role someone like Bunu Isa Gambo, fondly called BIG played in my life definitely transcended senior-junior relationship. He brought me close to his family unit and introduced me to his parents and the life of the Pyiam people of Gindiri.

Allow me acknowledge the various friendships and acquaintances I made at this exuberant stage in my life. Bitrus Dung my first friend and roommate from Form One, who remained my close ally until graduation; incidentally we have never again met since then. With Bitrus and Abbas Bappa we enrolled into the art class together and gave each other healthy competitions; upon completion of secondary school while Abbas would later go to study Glass Technology in the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and Bitrus would immediately get married and start work with the newly established Jos Breweries, I went to Nsukka to study Fine and Applied

Arts. I remember Elisha Daniel, now a Medical Doctor, who would always top the class no matter the circumstance; Emmanuel Yakubu, my roommate in Form Five with whom we occupied the old HSC segment of the hostel; Edward Abah (Eddie); Emmanuel Hala Kwon-Ndung (Emmy Ndungs); and Ademola Adisa Bello; these last four listed above are all professors today. It is at this stage in secondary school that I met Rommy Mom, now Barrister, who was a student of St. John Vianney Minor Seminary and, as a member of his school debating club, would often visit Gindiri during debate competitions where I was a member of the school's debating society. This friendship would build up to University days and beyond.

The guidance of several meticulous teachers was a guiding factor for directing our lives in Gindiri. I fondly remember Mr. Dawulung, the Principal who admitted me into Form One approximately two weeks late into the first term and was just about to strike out my name and offer my slot to another student. This delay in my coming to Gindiri was due to my having to wait for the return from vacation in Ireland of Revd. Fr. Maurice Henry SMA, the then Vice Principal of St. Joseph's College (CSJ) Vom, where even though I had passed my entrance examination and interview my admission letter never materialised. So having waited for that long I had to go to the school that had clearly offered me admission rather than the one where I thought I should since it was status quo those of us who grew up in Vom had to study in CSJ. Little did I know that I was billed to get classic

education in Gindiri. I remember Mr. Yakubu Dimka, the Vice Principal; Mr. Dongbin; Mr. Z. Z. Zitta my impeccable art teacher; Mr. Bitrus Bewarang, the Integrated Science teacher who introduced basic science to all of us in an interesting and practical manner and who was also the sports instructor; Mrs Brenton was the Mathematics teacher; and all the other interesting Biology, Bible Knowledge and Geography teachers who were often expatriate missionaries from Denmark and Britain.

I remember with much tearing nostalgia, Nsukka. I went to study art at the University of Nigeria Nsukka at the tender age of seventeen and at the time of graduating in 1994 I was already an adult. That quiet town tucked away peacefully under seven hills spurred inspiration in me and formed much of what I have become. For this well-rounded education I must thank my most amiable teachers, Professor Obiora Udechukwu, Professor El Anatsui, Professor Chuka Amaefuna, Professor Ola Ololade, Ndu Okonkwo and Ray Obeta. I deeply appreciate the mentorship offered by Professor Olu Oguibe, Professor Chijioke Onuorah, Professor Sylvester Ogbechie and Professor Chika Okeke-Agulu. I can never forget the friendship offered by Ada Udechukwu, Greg Mbajiorgu, Dr. Emeka Okpara, Dr. Sukhanty Egharevba, Marcia Kure, Chimezie Chuta, Dr. Ifeanyi Asogwa, Professor Ozioma Onuzilike, Amaechi, Brent, the American Fulbright scholar and several others. I never believed I would survive outside of Nsukka, but by the Grace of God here I am.

The Art School of the Ahmadu Bello University Zaria completed my formation due to the fact that I earned my masters and PhD degrees in Painting from that prestigious place. I am very grateful for the mentoring offered by my teachers Professor Jerry Buhari, Professor Jacob Jari, Professor Mu'azu Mohammed Sani, Professor B. K. Olorukooba, Professor Kefas Nenpunmun Danjuma, and Professor Philip Gushem. I am indebted to the friendships offered by my friends and classmates, chiefly Dr. Emmanuel Ikemefula Irokanulo, Emmanuel Abu, Dr. Wale Ajayi, Dr. John Joshua Oyedemi, Dr. Amos Akpara, Dr. Talatu Adiwu Onkala, Leni Satsi, Professor Emmanuel Wesley Okachi, and Professor Duniya Giles Gambo; Ben Ibebe, you who fell out of our MFA Painting class to concentrate on your professional painting career, I have appreciated your friendship over the years.

I am highly appreciative of the management of the University of Maiduguri who granted me employment as Assistant Lecturer in the year 2000 which was soon after graduation from the Ahmadu Bello University Zaria with my MFA degree. The Vice Chancellor then was Professor Abubakar Mustapha and the Registrar Mallam Lawan Alhaji Bukar. These were very powerful entities. Even though the interview panel headed by Professor A. L. Satti had recommended me for Lecturer II when the letter of appointment came it was Assistant Lecturer I got. So I thank most profoundly late Professor Adamu Mbahi, Professor Chris Mtaku, Professor Ahmed Isa

Tijani, Professor Sunday Ernesi Ododo, Professor Zainab Bala Mohammed, late Botul Grema, Professor Peter Saleh, Professor Ashiedu Ogboli, and Dr. Audu Ahmed. Then gratitude goes too to Dr. Bello Usman Amsami, was my office mate and we shared quite a bit of camaraderie; later Dr. Jennifer Nkechinyere Anyaoha would join us in the office and it was quite a bit of a mix all the way.

I also remember fondly some of my students of this Maiduguri era, John Zaitu, Dr. Amos Saghevwua Agaku, Somo Magayaki, Collins Chima, Naomi Haruna, Abdulmalik Adakole Amali, Anthony Okoye, Harrison Idahosa, Walter Okpogor, Joshua Aondona Avav, Dr. Jonathan Okewu, Deborah Jonathan, Alhamdu Musa Moda, Ibrahim Amali. Most of them are now my colleagues in the Art School we have begun to run here in Lafia as co-creators of future generations of artists.

I made other profound friends as well in Maiduguri: Dr. Pastor Daniel Kawahya, who showed me around Maiduguri town and also taught me how to drink hot tea in the scalding afternoon heat of Maiduguri; he is now a lecturer in Modibbo Adama University of Technology Yola doing good to several soils there. Dr. Habiba Musa was also there, and I had no clue that one day she would come to live in her own state with my family; she is an Associate Professor of Law at the Nasarawa State University, Keffi; Sewuese Agabi; Ngutor Ihyuman, Greg Akpah (who was actually a childhood and family friend from Vom) and several others of good calibre.

And then there was the crop of lecturers who were available to mentor me out of their own freewill; late Professor Charles Counts, the American potter and professor of ceramics, he who was responsible for recruiting me into Maiduguri, and later accepted me into his home and along with his German wife Hedi Bak, made me understand clearly the magnitude of accepting academic life in an arid a zone as Maiduguri; Professor Naganami Karta, professor of Kanuri linguistics, who first opened up the secret of academic excellence to me by advising me to write and publish journal papers periodically; he later became the deputy Vice Chancellor Academics. Professor Idris O. O. Amali, who was my Dean in the Faculty of Arts and introduced me to several tasking committee schedules; I remember fondly Professor Idris Okpanachi with whom I spent several afternoons ruminating over academic foibles, poetry, literature, politics and the eating Mallam Odi's suya in the evenings while gulping the chunks down with Fanta and Coke.

It is vital to point out that it was while waiting to be employed at the University of Maiduguri that I prayed for a worthy wife and life companion. In this wise therefore I wish to acknowledge my Sweetheart, Dr. Esther Anenge Gbaden, my beloved wife the result of that answered prayer. Incidentally we met at the All Saints Catholic Chapel on the University campus. And even though we met in the very first year of our stepping foot on the university campus, she as a Direct Entry student of Sociology and me a young lecturer of Creative

Arts, it would take three years before we would eventually get married in the year 2003 in the month of her birth. I want to point out that, being a woman of substance that she is, she has been supportive of my personal ambitions and academic career all these years. For the unconditional belief in me and despite my numerous shortcomings, both in character and being, has firmly stood by me and stoked the fire of my progress. Thank you. God bless your own path. In a similar vein I do acknowledge all the sons we have been blessed with; Norbert Ngutor Gbaden, the first born; Zacharys Terungwa Gbaden, the second born; Clement Nadoo Gbaden, the third born; and Francis Iwanger Gbaden, the fourth born. I am grateful to God for these gifts in my life and pray for God's ultimate blessings upon them in all ramifications of endeavour.

I wish to acknowledge my ever-supportive in-laws; the family that granted me the gift of a wife of substance; from whom love has emanated beyond compare. So I say thank you to Grandma Regina Kukighir Tough, herself the Matriarch of the Tough family, who now represents the only living parent on both sides of the family and a reliable one at that. I offer thanks to Dr. Victoria Mary Pillah, a Lady of St. John International and her loving husband whose home is mine, Sir Dr. Patrick Pillah, KSS, KSJI and all their sons; Dr. Victoria Pillah has ensured that I enjoy all the rights and privileges of academia essentially as they relate to my career progression, and for this I am eternally grateful; To Mrs. Roselyn Gbaka and her beloved husband Mr. Terry

Gbakaan, in whose house my sons stayed throughout their secondary school education, and for the counsel spanning several years beginning from Maiduguri; and for the love and friendship shown all of us by their children, I say thank you. To Aunty Martina Atsu who birthed a caring daughter called Jemimah (Bibi) Atsu who had always been the willing caregiver of my four sons during the time I was always leaving Lafia and travelling off to Zaria to attend to my PhD studies; Bibi, my prayer for you is to have a happy home when you settle into marriage. To you Revd. Fr. Jacob Atsu, you as a priest is always praying for us to bask in God's favour and blessings; may your work in His vineyard be fruitful. To Mrs. Florence Selumun Kwaza and your husband Stephen and daughter Divine, I say thank you; who am I to be able to repay the generosity and hospitality that brews from your home towards mine? To the two male siblings of that Tough family, Hon. Samuel Terhide Tough KSM and wife Lucia and to Dr. Benjamin Terzungwe Tough and wife Martha, I say thank you for accepting me as if I were your own blood brother and making your houses in Makurdi not only places of abode but also homes into which my entire family is always welcome to stay and fraternise; both of you are truly my friends because you have chosen to be so, rather than remain untouchable in-laws. So I thank you and your spouses and children most sincerely for your unquantifiable offering of love. God bless you all.

Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, permit me to appreciate three enigmatic personalities who have made my stay in the

Federal University of Lafia fruitful. The first is the pioneer Vice Chancellor Professor Ekanem Ikpi Braide who is responsible for employing me into the services of the Federal University of Lafia. In a unique stroke of faith she, along with the then first Deputy Vice Chancellor, Professor Martin Ogbe and the first Registrar and Secretary of Council, Dr. Othman Idris Jibrin, interviewed me in February 2012 and found me worthy of employment. I took up appointment as a Lecturer I in May 2012. Professor Ekanem Braide also granted my wife, Dr. Esther Anenge Gbaden employment as Lecturer II in the Department of Sociology in 2015. For this I am eternally grateful to the pioneer Vice Chancellor. And over the years she has been supportive and must be proud now considering that her decision to employ me was not a wrong one.

The second enigmatic personage that I most sincerely appreciate is the second Vice Chancellor, Professor Muhammad Sanusi Liman. He is the person who first appointed me a Head of Department and promoted me to the rank of an Associate Professor of Painting. He gave me the wherewithal and impetus to work towards gaining accreditation status for the Visual and Creative Arts degree programmes and so I am indeed grateful for this enablement to progress in my career.

Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, I dare to submit that you, Professor Shehu Abdul Rahman, are the third personality I wish to offer my immense unquantifiable gratitude to. You appointed me the pioneer Head of the Department

of Fine Arts, the Deputy Director of the newly established Directorate of Research and Creative Thoughts to serve under Professor Ali Ishaq Shugaba, the present Deputy Vice Chancellor Administration and still went ahead to promote me to the ultimate rank of a full Professor of Painting. It is based on this feat that I stand here today to profess my scholarship to this august gathering. Thank you so very much Sir. And be sure that I, as a mere academic staff in your employ, cannot completely be able to thank you adequately for your capability on all fronts of endeavour and most especially for your leadership style.

I am grateful to the members of the Faculty of Environmental Design, staff and students, who have been so supportive. I took over from Professor Samaila Usman Dakyes, as the third Dean in July 2023. And to show the qualities our faculty possesses he was appointed the Deputy Vice Chancellor Research and Partnerships. His leadership to us in the Faculty is quite visible. I am appreciative of Dr. Solomon Maigari Manzuche, the pioneer Dean and current Head of the Department of Visual and Creative Arts, our mother Department. Immense gratitude goes to Professor Chris Echeta, now retired and yet currently Heading the Fine and Applied Arts Department of University of Calabar; Dr. Ibrahim Hassan Ogiri, Deputy Dean and Head, Department of Building; Dr. Chike Chinazom Obeagu, the hard working Head, Department of Fine Arts and curator of my Professorial Art Exhibition; a person who has always been available to me and several of us on all

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Being a Catholic, Priests, Religious and various lay faithful of the Roman Catholic Church in Nigeria have made profound impact on my life and that of my wife and children. So permit me to offer immense gratitude to His Lordship, Most Revd. Dr. David Ajang, Bishop of Lafia Diocese; to the Holy Ghost Fathers of the Northern Province with whom I spent time as a Seminarian in Yola and Ghana; my mates from that era are priests of several years now. Revd. Fr. Chika Onyejuwa CSSp. thank you for the guidance; Very Revd. Fr. Michael Akange Jaki, thank you for the love you have for my family; Revd. Fr. Felix Usman OSA, since we met in

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I offer immense gratitude to the Worthy Knights, Ladies, Brothers and Sisters of the Lafia Subordinate Council of the Knights of Saint Mulumba, KSM, Nigeria under the leadership of the Grand Knight Sir Augustine Ashikeni KSM under whom I serve as Secretary for the fraternity. I thank Sir Martin Audu-Doma for introducing me to the Order and for being a good mentor.

I am grateful to the prayer life and solidarity of members of the Association of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Immaculate Heart of Mary of the Diocese of Lafia especially at St. William Cathedral and Church of the Immaculate Conception Lafia; Members of the Associate Members of the Via Christi, AMVC, where I am

National President and all the leaders of both societies who have made life worth living.

I offer profound thanks to the Vice Chancellor, the Deputy Vice Chancellors, the Registrar, the University Librarian, the Bursar, all deans of Faculties, all Heads of Departments and Units of the University for the common vision we share of moving the Federal University of Lafia forward to take an enviable place among the universal committee of universities. Thank you.

I acknowledge the indispensable role of the Inaugural Lectures Committee headed by my very own Mummy, Professor Josephine Odey; to other members, Professor David Ugal, Dr. Ahmed Rabi, and Musa Ishaq I say thank you; the dynamism and guidance of your indefatigable team has enabled me to deliver this lecture as a milestone in the achievement of academic excellence in the Federal University of Lafia. Thank you.

Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, this is my story; thank you for listening to me.

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you very much for giving me so much of your time.

Please take some time to go into the exhibition space and behold the art works I have created over the years and that have partially given me the impetus to rise to the rank of a professor.

God bless you all.

Amen.

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**CITATION OF PROFESSOR BLAISE GUNDU
GBADEN BA, MFA, PhD
Professor of Painting and Dean, Faculty of
Environmental Design**

Professor Blaise Gundu Gbaden was born on Thursday 3rd February, 1966 in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria and spent his childhood years in Vom, Plateau State. He hails from the NingeV Clan in Vandeikya Local Government Area of Benue State.

His father, Mr Boniface Gbaden Agyobo, was a Medical Laboratory Scientist while his mother, Celine Alutembe Agyobo was a Primary School Teacher. He claims to have gotten his initial reading and writing skills from his father. It is from his mother, that he believes he developed the gift of art since she taught him basic level drawing at the St. Joseph Primary School, Vom.

Upon moving on to the Boys' Secondary School, B.S.S., Gindiri, he further developed his artistic prowess and even though he was admitted into the University of Nigeria, Nsukka to study for a degree programme in Sociology he would later switch to Fine and Applied Arts after just one session. It is within this period too that he joined the Congregation of the Holy Ghost Fathers and was sent to the seminary in Ejisu, Ghana for training.

Upon his return to Nigeria he completed his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1994. The Master of Fine Arts degree in

Painting was obtained from the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in 1999. About fifteen years later in 2014, he earned a PhD degree in Painting, as one of the pioneer set of students.

Blaise taught Painting and Drawing at the University of Maiduguri for over a decade before transferring his services in 2012 to the Federal University of Lafia, where he now teaches Painting, Drawing, and Art Theory courses to both undergraduate and postgraduate students of Fine Arts and Visual and Creative Arts.

Blaise was elevated to the rank of a full Professor of Painting in 2021 under the watch of the dynamic Vice Chancellor, Professor Shehu Abdul Rahman.

This Inaugural Lecturer has at various points served as the pioneer Deputy Director, Directorate of Research and Creative Thoughts; Head, Department of Visual and Creative Arts (where he secured Full National Universities Commission [NUC] Accreditation status for the undergraduate programme in 2018 and immediately commenced postgraduate studies in 2019); pioneer Head, Department of Fine Arts.

He is currently the third Dean of the relatively new Faculty of Environmental Design, where he led the faculty to gain Resource Verification for the B.Sc. Architecture, B.Sc. Building, B.A. Fine Arts and B.Sc. Industrial Design programmes under the NUC scrutiny.

Blaise has published widely in reputable peer reviewed journals, has edited books, and has contributed chapters to book collections, both locally and internationally. Being an active mentor to several artists, many of whom are his students, and a few colleagues and contemporaries, he has curated several exhibitions and published several essays in exhibition catalogues.

As a prolific artist, Blaise has held seven (7) solo exhibitions and participated in several joint, group and international exhibitions beginning even while still an undergraduate student. He has attended several training workshops, seminars and symposiums within and outside the shores of Nigeria, organised by the National Gallery of Art, (NGA) and the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund), and in some, he has been guest speaker, resource person and facilitator.

Blaise has supervised the research projects, dissertations and theses of several undergraduate and postgraduate students at the BA, MFA and PhD levels drawn from the University of Maiduguri, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and the Federal University of Lafia. He has also been the subject of an MA Art History dissertation.

Having taught first at the University of Maiduguri and later Federal University of Lafia, he has accumulated a wealth of experience cutting across various academic and administrative responsibilities. These include membership on departmental, faculty and senate committees; as well as being resource person for NUC

resource verification of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in four (4) Nigerian Universities.

Blaise is a member of a number of professional bodies, namely the Borno Museum Society (BMS); the Muse; the Group of Five (Go5); the Society of Nigerian Artists (SNA) where he served as Secretary for Borno and Yobe states from 2002-2005; the Arts Council of the African Studies Association (ACASA) an international association; he is the founder and patron of the Maiduguri Art Club (MAC); and since 1999 has been a Registered Artiste with the FCT Council for Arts and Culture. Blaise is a recipient of a Merit Award of the National Youth Service Corps, Adamawa State (1995) and the Willibrord Haas Certificate of Proficiency in Printmaking.

Being a dedicated Catholic he belongs to associations and prayer societies where he serves in various capabilities. They are member, Sacred Heart of Jesus and Immaculate Heart of Mary; patron, altar servers; secretary, Lafia Subordinate Council of the Knights of Saint Mulumba, KSM, Nigeria; National President, Associate Members of Via Christi Society, AMVC.

Blaise considers himself a *postmodernist* painter who is currently exploring expendable ready-made materials to create fabric walls which depict social partitions in human society. He is also interrogating visual poems through the medium of circular canvasses with

predominantly acrylic paints and found objects. Tactility is quite central to his artistic vision.

Aside from writing and reciting poems, he has won a number of commissions and his artworks, which include paintings, drawings and prints are domiciled in public places, private collections, educational institutions, cultural centres, and with religious organizations in Nigeria, Ghana, Australia, Germany, USA, Belgium, Switzerland, South Africa and South Korea.

His hobbies are: Travelling, Driving Cars, Reading, Writing, Watching Adventure and Sci-Fi Films, Listening to Music, Gardening and Cooking.

Blaise is happily married to his Sweetheart, Dr. Esther Anenge Gbaden, a Medical Sociologist and current Head of the Department of Sociology. By the Grace of God they are blessed with four (4) sons: Norbert Ngutor Gbaden, Zacharys Terungwa Gbaden, Clement Nadoo Gbaden and Francis Iwanger Gbaden.

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