



Abu Dhabi Art

November 19-23, 2025

Osogbo

Jimoh Buraimoh

Adebisi Fabunmi

Rufus Ogundele

Muraina Oyelami

Twins Seven-Seven

Booth **AT8**

kó is pleased to participate in Abu Dhabi Art 2025, featuring a group presentation of pioneering modern artists of Nigeria's Osogbo School. The Osogbo School was a movement that emerged in the early 1960s at the dawn of Nigeria's independence when a new cultural confidence fused indigenous traditions with contemporary forms. Bringing together key works from the 1960s-1990s, this presentation includes Jimoh Buraimoh, Adebisi Fabunmi, Rufus Ogundele, Muraina Oyelami, and Twins Seven-Seven. This presentation is featured in the *Focus: Nigeria Spotlight* at Abu Dhabi Art.

The Osogbo Art School, as it came to be known, developed informally from the restless creative energy of the post-independence era in Nigeria. The movement grew at a time when Osogbo, a small Yoruba town, was becoming a vibrant counter-cultural center. The Osogbo School emerged from a series of experimental art workshops held between 1962–1966 at Mbari Mbayo, an informal club formed to promote theatre and visual art, in collaboration with several international artists and intellectuals living in Osogbo at the time: German professor Ulli Beier, British artist Georgina Betts Beier, Nigerian playwright Duro Ladipo, and Austrian artist Susanne Wenger. The workshops provided participants with materials, studio space, and mentorship that encouraged individual expression over academic instruction. These artists all participated in the theatre troupe of Duro Ladipo and developed their visual arts practice alongside their performative work.

Largely outside formal art-school training, the artists forged highly original approaches to painting, printmaking, textile, and mixed media, drawing on Yoruba mythology, performance, and modern life. From this setting arose a generation of artists who developed distinct personal styles while retaining a cohesive visual language rooted in Yoruba culture.

After their international debut in 1965, the artists of the Osogbo School had a meteoric rise to global art stardom. They exhibited extensively throughout Europe, Britain, and the United States over the next three decades, participated in numerous residences and fellowships, and were included in landmark exhibitions of contemporary African art. The artists of the Osogbo School became some of the most visible African artists on the international stage.

Jimoh Buraimoh (b. 1943, Osogbo, Nigeria) is best known for his innovative adaptation of traditional Yoruba beadwork techniques, establishing him as the first modern African artist to use beads as a primary medium. Buraimoh grew up in a Muslim branch of the town's royal family, custodians of the Egúngún masquerade tradition. Disenchanted with painting in a manner similar to the other artists, Buraimoh took a six-month break after the Osogbo workshops before returning with the groundbreaking idea of incorporating beads into his compositions, a technique that would come to define his career. Buraimoh's bead paintings draw deeply from the ceremonial and spiritual traditions of Yoruba art, particularly the ornate beadwork of royal crowns, cloaks, and regalia. Using a method that tightly layers beads onto board with araldite adhesive, often combined with cowries, broken glass, and oil paint, he creates richly textured, multidimensional surfaces. His compositions feature symbolic faces, masks, and mythic forms that evoke Yoruba cosmology.

Adebisi Fabunmi (1948-2024, Takoradi, Ghana) was only sixteen years old when he joined Georgina Beier's Mbari Mbayo Workshop in 1964. Born to a Nigerian family in Ghana, his parents sent him back to Nigeria to live with his uncle as a young boy. Fabunmi relocated to Osogbo, where his sister worked at a petrol station near Mbari Mbayo and was dating Duro Ladipo at the time. Ladipo, then managing the Ajax Cinema, enlisted Fabunmi to paint the cinema's signboards advertising current films. Fabunmi later joined Jacob Afolabi as a bartender at the Popular Bar, before becoming an actor in Ladipo's theatre troupe. Fabunmi's early works were dominated by linocuts. Fabunmi's signature works, especially his "city prints, are characterized by dense, puzzle-like compositions filled with houses, animals, symbols, and scenes of urban life, interwoven in intricate black-and-white linocut patterns. He also created large-scale paintings on board that were used for theatre backdrops in Ladipo's plays.

Rufus Ogundele (1946-1996, Osogbo, Nigeria) was the second artist of the Osogbo Art School, joining his classmate Jacob Afolabi for Mbari Mbayo's second art workshop in 1963, led by Denis Williams and Jacob Lawrence, and later participating in Georgina Beier's 1964 workshop. Ogundele initially working with powder paints on large sheets of brown paper before shifting to emulsion paint, setting the foundation for his distinctive approach. Ogundele's compositions are defined by strong black outlines and rhythmic, compartmentalized structures. Often described as semi-abstract, his imagery merges fantasy and figuration, drawing from Yoruba mythology and oral traditions. Though raised

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in a Christian household affiliated with the Anglican Church Mission Society, Ogundele maintained a personal devotion to Ogun, the Yoruba orisha of iron, war, and transformation. His family name itself means “Ogun has returned.” This spiritual alignment permeates his work: his palette of deep reds, rich blacks, and rusty earth tones has been said to evoke fired metal and the red glow of molten iron.

Muraina Oyelami (b. 1940, Iragbiji, Nigeria) began using oil paints and developed a distinctive technique employing paint rollers. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he avoided folkloric or mythological themes, instead focusing on landscapes, cityscapes, and expressive portraits. Ulli Beier described Oyelami as “in many ways the most sophisticated artist to have emerged from Osogbo.” Oyelami’s paintings merge stylised figuration with rhythmic, earthy abstraction, depicting scenes of both urban and rural life. His palette balances warm, tonal colors with vivid accents, and his compositions emphasize flatness, rhythm, and geometry.

Twins Seven-Seven (1944-2011, Ogidi, Nigeria) became a breakout star of the Osogbo Art School after his participation with the Mbari Mbayo workshop in 1964. He was the only surviving child of seven sets of twins, all of whom died in infancy. Among the Yoruba, his survival marked him as an *abiku* child—a child “born to die”. His unusual lineage gave rise to the name “Twins Seven-Seven,” or “Ibeji Meje-Meje” in Yoruba. As a teenager, Twins briefly attended a teacher-training college but dropped out in 1962. He chose a life on the road, first joining a travelling theatre troupe and then dancing with a medicine show that toured villages selling a so-called “Superman Tonic” of river water, spices, and caramelised sugar. Twins drew in crowds on the street with his mesmerising dancing as a way to attract potential customers. It was while travelling with this group that he first arrived in Osogbo in 1962. Twins Seven-Seven first encountered Ulli and Georgina Beier in 1963 when he gatecrashed a party at the Mbari Mbayo Club in Osogbo. At the party, Twins Seven-Seven made an immediate impression with his flamboyant dress, and he startled the crowd with an imaginative dance that soon left him alone on the floor, the center of attention. So struck was Ulli Beier by his charisma that he offered to top the wages Twins Seven-Seven had been earning on the road, assuring him that a place could be found for his talents in Osogbo.

Twins Seven-Seven quickly established himself as a distinctive figure of the Osogbo circle. He produced densely detailed images populated with ghosts and hybrid forms, resonant with Yoruba folklore but with a wholly contemporary, psychedelic tone. By the late 1960s, he developed a technique he referred to as “sculpture painting”, in which he raised the foreground of a painting to create a low relief, giving his images a three-dimensional presence. From the 1970s onward, Twins Seven-Seven’s work was steadily presented by leading museums across the world, including the landmark exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre*



(Centre Pompidou, Paris, 1989) and *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945–1994* (Museum Villa Stuck, Munich, 2001)

This presentation at Art Basel Miami Beach follows Nike's site-specific installation at Al Ain Oasis, UAE unveiled in November 2025, commissioned by Abu Dhabi Art and the Department for Culture and Tourism, Abu Dhabi. In Al Ain, Nike has created a monumental batik installation that ties the history of palm cultivation in Al Ain and Osogbo, Nigeria. Although Nike Davies-Okundaye was not a formal participant in the Mbari Mbayo Art Workshops, she has become one of the most celebrated figures associated with the Osogbo Art School and a pioneering force in preserving and elevating Nigeria's textile traditions. At a time when the Osogbo movement was largely a "man's club," Nike emerged as its central female voice, both artistically and institutionally, deeply intertwined with Osogbo's creative community. Today, Nike Art Gallery in Lagos stands as the largest art gallery in Africa. A leading voice of the Osogbo legacy, Nike continues to uphold its experimental ethos through four art centers across Nigeria, where she trains and empowers young women in traditional textile and craft practices.

Nike's installation, *The Market Square* (2025), consists of two monumental indigo-dyed cloths produced through the wax-resist method. The compositions depict rhythmic rows of palm trees, their trunks rising into dense foliage. Around these forms, ghostly faces and abstracted figures emerge, suggesting the mystery of a sacred forest. The wax-resist technique leaves gestural brush strokes and subtle crackling of the indigo. The title refers to the market square, typically busy, noisy, and crowded with sights, sounds, and smells, and Nike draws an analogy between this vibrant scene and the sacred forest she depicts —both places filled with many presences and energies.

About kó

kó is an art space based in Lagos, Nigeria, that is dedicated to promoting modern and contemporary art. kó has a dual focus in championing Nigeria's leading artists from the modern period and celebrating emerging and established contemporary artists across Africa and the Diaspora.

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