



## PRESS RELEASE

23 June 2021

kó is pleased to present a solo exhibition by **Demola Ogunajo**, titled *Area Art*, taking place June 24-July 15, 2021. This body of work is influenced by the aesthetics of local sign posters and bumper stickers adorned on trucks, busses, and motorcycles in Nigeria.

Demola Ogunajo is interested in the signs and symbols of his environment, transforming everyday experiences with a spectacular twist. Ogunajo depicts ordinary scenes with an otherworldly dimension, one of angels, astronauts and superheroes. His paintings are metaphors that examine the philosophical complexities of modern life, often with spiritual, religious or political undertones.

Among the busy traffic in Nigeria, it is impossible not to notice the colorful embellishments on many vehicles that dot the roadways. In this informal tradition of street culture, drivers curate their own visual message that projects their personal values and tastes. Ogunajo dissects these popular symbols and re-engages them in surreal and fantastical ways. In *Area Art*, Ogunajo forms a seemingly haphazard selection of symbols —from lions, tigers and birds to clowns, dragons and butterflies. Collectively, they form stories that become signifiers for universal struggles, ones that are biblical in nature. In his canvases, we encounter the mythical battle of good versus evil, alluding to themes of innocence, transcendence and redemption. Ogunajo counters these heavy philosophical dilemmas with humor, often adapting a playful spin that suggests that love might perhaps always win.

Demola's work speaks to identity, the human condition, the exploration of existence and the universality of divinity. He explores themes highlighting deep and profound concepts including heightened consciousness, ascension, divinity and enlightenment - expressed through symbols, archetypes, paradoxes, figures and text. These themes are a direct reflection of Demola's own psyche and spiritual experiences.

The term "Area Art" is defined by the playful adoption of mass signage from contemporary advertising, comic books and consumerist obsession, partly as a rejection of traditional art values, such as historical painting, in favour of the mundanity of popular culture. The word "area" in Nigerian street parlance is used to describe working class communities and the term "Area Art" refers to the mass artistic production that emerges in public spaces. Demola Ogunajo deploys in his paintings the visual vocabulary (maxims, caricature, colours and religious iconography) of such populist images and objects into new forms of knowledge production.



## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in 1973 in Ibadan, Nigeria, Demola Ogunajo studied painting at Obafemi Awolowo University. He works as a freelance artist and is the creative director of FLUX-CITY Studio. He has illustrated for Glendora Review - An African Quarterly Journal for the Arts, in addition to numerous album covers and books.

After early solo exhibitions in Port Harcourt and Lagos, Ogunajo presented *Animystic City* at Signature Gallery in Lagos in 2004. His solo exhibition, *Mustard Seed*, was held at Nimbus Gallery in Lagos in 2014. His artworks have been exhibited at Art Twenty One (Lagos), 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair (London), Goethe Institute (Lagos), the National Museum (Lagos), and Tribes (Lagos).

Ogunajo's work is featured in the anthology *Artists of Nigeria* by Onyema Offoedu (2012) and the catalogue for *Black President: The Art and Legacy of Fela Anikulapo Kuti* published by the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York (2003). In 2005, he served as the main illustrator for the Glendora publication project *A City at Work*, sponsored by the Prince Claus Fund. He has created artworks for creative houses in Nigeria including Jazzhole Records and Bogobiri. His artwork served as the cover art for *Intervention*, an essay by Wole Soyinka. In 2012, he produced the cover art and design for the album *Rocket Juice and the Moon*, produced by Honest Jons Record Label in London. Ogunajo lives and works in Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria.

## 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. For more information, please email us at [info@ko-artspace.com](mailto:info@ko-artspace.com), or visit our website at [www.ko-artspace.com](http://www.ko-artspace.com).