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PRESS RELEASE

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Jimo Akolo, *ECWA Church building in the early 60's at Egbe*, 2003, Oil on canvas, 120 x 90 cm.

kó Gallery is very delighted to present *The Essential Jimo Akolo: A Retrospective of Drawings and Paintings from 1961 to 2015*. The exhibition will open on Tuesday 15th February through 12th March 2022, at kó Gallery 36 Cameron Road, Ikoyi, Lagos NIGERIA.

For the first time in Lagos, kó Gallery will be presenting a rare Zaria Art School graduate of 1961, a member of the Zaria Art Society. Considered by some scholars as a rebel of the “rebels”. Over thirty-one drawings and paintings of the artist’s collection will be featured. The exhibition also has works loaned from some private collectors in Nigeria that are also included in this show. In addition, images of his early works in the collection of Bristol Museum, the University of Sussex, in Britain, and Yemisi Shyllon Museum Nigeria will be included in the well-illustrated catalogue to give the art community a rare glimpse into the artist’s creative oeuvre and his unspoken place on the stage of contemporary Nigerian art.

Jimo Akolo is a retired professor of art education who combined art teaching, administration, and a vibrant art career like any of his contemporaries. Because of his quiet personality and one shy of public attention, his works and life as an artist received little public exposure. This is one of the reasons kó Gallery decided to put together a show in his honour and for the art community in Lagos and around the world to experience and share in this visionary visual creator who lived a life of quiet but vibrant art practice.

Born at Egbe, Kogi state, 20th September 1935, Akolo started his education in Lagos in 1942; later, at Sudan Interior Mission (S.I.M.) School Egbe, 1946, Government College Keffi 1955 and at the Nigerian College of Arts Science and Technology Zaria, 1957-1961. Jimo Akolo proceeded to Indiana University Bloomington U.S.A., where he obtained a Masters of Science in Education in 1966 and a doctorate degree in Art Education in 1982. He joined the staff of Ahmadu Bello University in 1966 and retired in 1998. Because of his invaluable service to the University, he was requested to take on a contract appointment. He accepted and voluntarily disengaged after three years to return to Egbe, his hometown.

Jimo Akolo's artistic disposition was sparked-off by his grandfather, a master weaver of exquisite baskets at Egbe. Later at Keffi, with his encounter with the famous expatriate educator, Dennis Duerden, his interest in engineering was shifted to art. Akolo's artistic talent won him several prestigious awards. For example, he won the First Prize for Drawing and painting at the Northern Nigerian Self-government Celebration Exhibition in 1959 (it came with cash) and The Best Artist of the Year in Sao Paulo Biennial Mention of Honour 1962.

Akolo has had several exhibitions in Nigeria and abroad. A few of them are worth mentioning here. On the international scene, he was honoured with a solo art exhibition at the Commonwealth Institute London in 1964, participated in a group-touring exhibition in London and Edinburgh in 1965, and also participated in the Second Biennial Arts Exhibition in Havana, Cuba in 1986. In Nigeria, he had a solo show at the Nigerian Arts Council, 1970, participated in the All-Nigerian Festival of Arts, Ibadan in 1971, and Visual Arts Exhibition of FESTAC 1977.

Jimo Akolo is a compulsive draughtsman and obsessed with painting, especially outdoors painting after the Impressionist tradition. Almost every weekend off Zaria-Kaduna Road, you would see the top of an easel protruding off the savannah grass of the outskirts of Zaria city, it would be Akolo deeply engaging with the enchanting Zaria city scenery, drawing, or painting. The northern Nigeria landscape and peoples have not only become his interest but his artistic fascination, where he draws his inspiration and creative energy. Ordinary people doing ordinary things and subjects such as the Fulani herdsmen and culture have preoccupied his interest. And, he would return to these subjects over and over again with such a refreshing aesthetic and philosophical perspective. Looking at Jimo Akolo's Fulanis today, like other ordinary minority peoples of the country, we are suddenly confronted with a people whose transforming lives weave around

ours that we often neglect which often become a source of national concern and crisis. Other subjects of Jimo Akolo are horse riders at festivals and at war, festive dancers, sportsmen, and landscapes. Akolo is also fascinated with subjects of traditional heritage and religious worship. When he takes on these subjects, they are interpreted in simple coloured planes in most interesting designs, yet composed in a complex cubic style that may betray his love of engineering design. What Duerden forcefully persuaded him to leave in engineering he brought back into the compositional strategy of his paintings. His paintings can be observed to contain a system of carefully constructed figures, objects, and spaces in compact picture planes where figure and ground are brought to harmonious equilibrium. Akolo's drawings are expressed in strong and bold contemplative lines, like Leonardo da Vinci, engaging the viewer to participate in his creative process. His subjects are familiar models around him. His academic orientation is clearly revealed in these drawings, demonstrating experimentation, adventure, and a quest to explore and expose not only the formal but also the spirit and moods of his figures.

Because the exhibition is a retrospective and seeks to capture comprehensively the life and works of the artist, it is complemented with a video conversation recently held with the artist at his home town in Egbe, Kogi State, Nigeria, and with scholarly essays and reflections of people who have walked and worked closely with the artist. Some of these include Professor Sunday Ogunduyile (Vice-Chancellor, Ekiti State University), Professor Jacob Jari (Department of Fine Art, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria), Professor Tonie Okpe (Department of Fine Art, Ahmadu Bello University), Dr. Simon Ikpakronyi, Director and Head of Curatorial Services, National Gallery of Art Abuja, (Dr.) Bruce Onobrakpeya, his classmate at Zaria, Professor Adamu Baikie, his classmate and former colleague at the Faculty of Education, Ahmadu Bello University, Richard Deji, his only son, Mercy Feyisola Akolo, his younger sister and their youngest sister, Grace Yemisi Ukhueleigbe.

Professor Jerry Buhari of the Department of Fine Art, Ahmadu Bello University is the curator of the exhibition.

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