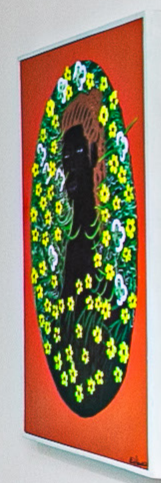
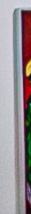
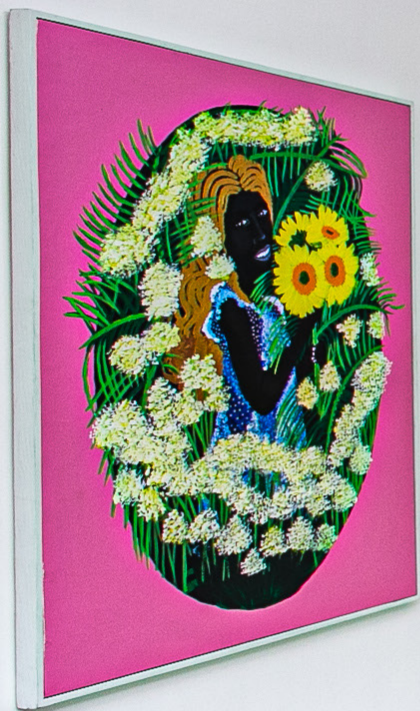




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Σ. Α. Αβραόκης



E.D. ADEGOKE

The Age of Dreams

August 7-26, 2021

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FRONT COVER: *Sisi Èko*, 2021, Acrylic on canvas

FRONTISPIECE: Exhibition Installation view

BACK COVER: *Wishes and Butterflies*, 2021, Acrylic on canvas

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The works in E.D Adegoke's *The Age of Dreams* are conceived in two broad categories: the first set which are formalised poses and less richly decorated than the second set, whose costumed figures suggest an elevation from literalism to the metaphorical. Rather than a calculated approach to centralise the "black figure" in the western canon, the paintings in *The Age of Dreams* exist in a redoubtable black context, considering Nigeria is the most populous black nation on earth.

These paintings are guided by the formal rigour of portraiture, as well as a creative desire to further foreground "blackness" in the discursive conjectures of art history. They no doubt work to strengthen the history of transformations in contemporary Nigerian portraiture.

Adegoke's paintings function as aesthetic strategies which aim to regularise an extremity of colour and perceptions of it. Hyper-blackness is deployed as a rhetorical tool within the space between realism and representation.

In Nigeria — as in Greater Africa — the contested constructs of power and agency are drawn less along the lines of race and colour, and more frequently dictated by gender and ethnic differences. Even without the friction and weight of race-based ideologies in the global north, Adegoke's hyper-black figures retain the urgency and importance in relation to self-esteem and self-determination by challenging received notions of beauty, gender and identity.

-Sabo Kpade, Curator

Q & A

E.D. Adegoke and Sabo Kpade

What is your starting point for painting? Is it a mood, gesture, composition or glance?

When I started this series I actually came up with titles and subjects I wanted to discuss with each work. My starting was just like I always do: I sketch, I paint. I'm a fast artist, I work fast. That's why I work with acrylic as a medium.

As for the mood, I'm always happy when painting. Even when I have a lot of things on my mind, painting it is more like therapy. Painting is a therapy. Art on its own is a therapy. And I think all artists are like that because it makes you free your mind. It is something you do with joy and happiness. No matter how heavy your heart is.

When you're creating it's like you're a god in your own world. That's the feeling. As for the composition and glance, there's something about art. In Yoruba we say art is *ise oluwa* which means "art is the work of God". It is a process whereby at one point you have to believe in God. I should speak for myself. Each time I paint, I really don't know what it is going to look like in the end. I'm that kind of artist. I just started creating, decorating and decorating. You see the flowers on works like *Sisi Eko*, the background, designs, flora and fauna: they're more like a freestyle to me. I really don't know what I want to paint. I just started decorating. I don't always think my subject must look like the reference. I don't give a fuck about that.

How much improvisation takes place while painting? Does the final work differ much from the conceived work?

Like I said, painting to me is *ise oluwa*. The outcome of a painting may be different from what I imagined for it but I still try to stick to the storyline for it. I still make sure the result is not outside the box of my expression. The painting has to go with what you're trying to express. That is exactly how I paint. You get what I'm saying? I don't have a perfect way of how a work is going to look.

Do you assume intimate knowledge of a figure's life and persona or is it easier to view them as strangers? How much does this imaginative work influence the final works?

My paintings don't have anything to do with real life. It is easier for me to view them as strangers. I just put them in my work and I don't know them. I hardly paint people who can be recognised. I source images from the Internet and sometimes they can

be imaginary. It's much easier for me to paint human beings. I'm used to humans. I then attach my own story to that person, that figure. I give them an identity, an experience. That's how I give art life.

Do you often think of the physicality of paint? Please describe what this means to you?

I think of the physicality of paint in the sense of how I want to represent my paintings. Although, I sometimes, intentionally, do not want the oval (frame) to be in the middle. I sometimes want it to be close to the corner, close to the left side, close to the upper, close to the bottom. My major aim is that whichever way I'm representing the figure, the oval should bring out the subject profoundly.

One set of the portrait paintings is less decorative than the other, less idyllic than the other. How do you distinguish these two bodies of work thematically or philosophically?

Take for example my older works from the *Black Mereki* series, the concept of that work is very different which must mean I'm evolving. It is a continuing story about racism and better life for black people: the survival mechanisms for black people because the story hasn't changed yet. There is the African map on the smaller works. It is always in red. It is to appreciate African people. That is the major purpose of the work while the recent, decorative works have personal stories behind at their core. There's an evolution in the practice of an artist but it is a gradual process.

Who are the portrait painters you return to from art history in Nigeria and elsewhere?

Some are my colleagues like the Nigerian painter Eniwaye Oluwaseyi. I'm a big fan of Gustavo de Nazereno, the Brazilian artist. I really love the way he represents black people in his work. He is a white Brazilian artist but he practices spirituality and he does it with his heart. He represents Eshu, the Yoruba deity in the human form.

The figures you paint are proud, dignified or self-possessed. In the West, they would be seen as corrective to unflattering clichés about black self-esteem and socio-economic well being. Are your paintings corrective measures of any sorts? Is it possible for aforementioned qualities to exist and resonate without a race-based context?

As a pan-Africanist, a promoter of African culture and tradition, I believe in re/writing our stories. We have been represented (in our recent world history) in a very, very diminishing manner through religion, racism and all of that. I'm trying to promote the

black race, my race, in my work. That's what I'm passionate about, promoting self-esteem, black power, Black Lives Matter and all of that in my painting.

When you look deep into Africa, we still have our own problems besides racism. There's also colourism. Forty percent of African women bleach their skin, according to the World Health Organisation. This is because of body shaming, colour shaming from even fellow Africans for being too black, as if it is a disgusting attribute. These are my pains. They're the things I'm willing to change with my heart. That is why I use very, very black figures in my paintings.

So your hyper-black figures aim to correct a long held mis-apprehension which is a form of activism. Do you see yourself as an activist-painter?

In my early days as an artist at the Kuta Art Foundation (Ogun State), all my works were based on political painting and religious bigotry. Just that I want my work to be understandable. I want my work to be closer to the people. I want them to understand it. I don't want my art to be cumbersome. I want them to see the work and understand the message just with three strokes of colours. That's what I said about evolving. Even in my published articles for journals like Sahara Reporters and Opinion Nigeria, I discussed human rights and civil liberties. All these, including the art I make, are my contributions to the struggle.

Was the “#endsarsprotests” of 2020 against state-sanctioned violence and income inequality a failure or success?

It is not a day's job. It is not one man's job. Protests are not always successful. Nobody likes protest. Check about the history of protest everywhere. There's always pain. There's always fighting. There's always bloodshed. It always brings “sorrow, tears and blood”. That's the trademark of protests. You're going against tyranny. It is not easy.

The fight for change, for equality, is the work for everybody. It doesn't make sense if some people risk their lives and go out to protest while some sit at home and watch *Big Brother*. It makes no sense. Look at some of the so-called activists, where they started and where they are now, just from organising protests. A lot of them here in Nigeria should be in jail. They've made a lot of money from these protests. I just can't start mentioning their names. Some people stay back home and say they're supporting them on Twitter and Instagram. It is not going to work like that. A nation cannot be totally free from poverty but however things can be better.

Are you committed to portraiture and figure painting for the near future? Or do you see yourself moving into abstraction as a new challenge or area of interest?

The use of portraiture in my work means a lot because my work has a lot to do with humans and humanity. So I need to paint humans. This is something I can profoundly say that I will continue to do in years to come, over and over again. I'll definitely evolve because art is all about evolving. The same goes for technology and civilization. So definitely I want to keep evolving in art and still stick to this pattern of art. This is a representation of who I am. This is my truest self.

You studied performing arts at university and not fine arts. As an artist, are you self-taught?

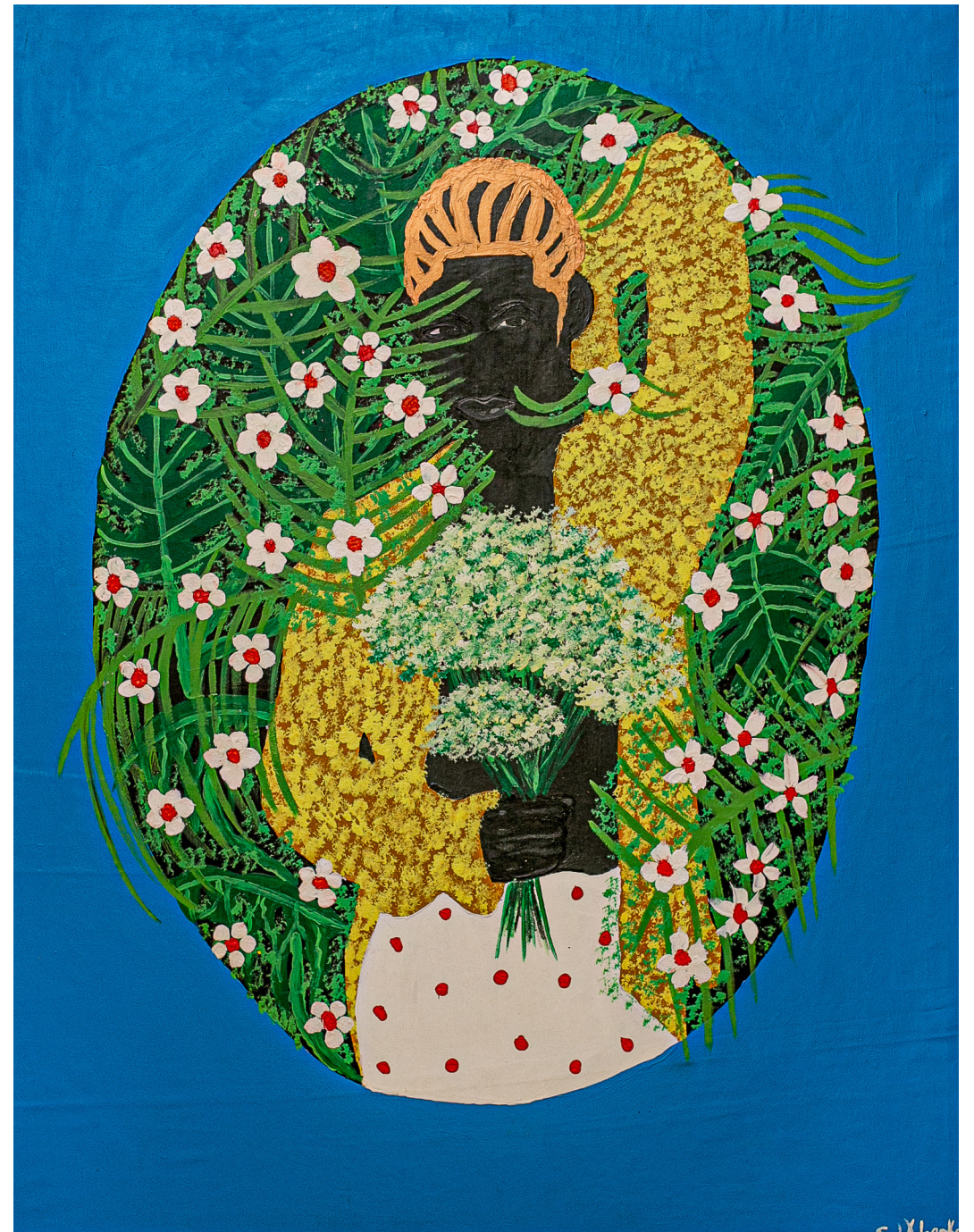
I'm not completely self-taught. In my first and second year in university, I designed stages for theater productions like Ahmed Yerima's *Orisa Ibeji*, Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame*, Wole Soyinka's *Kongi Harvest and Death* And *The King's Horseman*. I did it as nothing but fun. I wish I kept photos from that time. I wasn't thinking of having a portfolio or a CV. I was just making art because I loved it. After school I joined Kuta in 2018/19 where we were taught art as a career. That was when I started focusing on painting as a career. There wasn't a certificate but it was a class taught by professionals with masters in art. They were in their 30s, so all in all it was still a gathering of young people. Another person who taught me how to make art is a graduate from Auchi Polytechnic (Edo State, Nigeria). He stopped and now only does carpentry work. It makes me sad because he is someone whose art I really, really love.

What do you remember learning about the practicalities of painting during your time as a “set painter”? Was it how to handle large scales or surfaces?

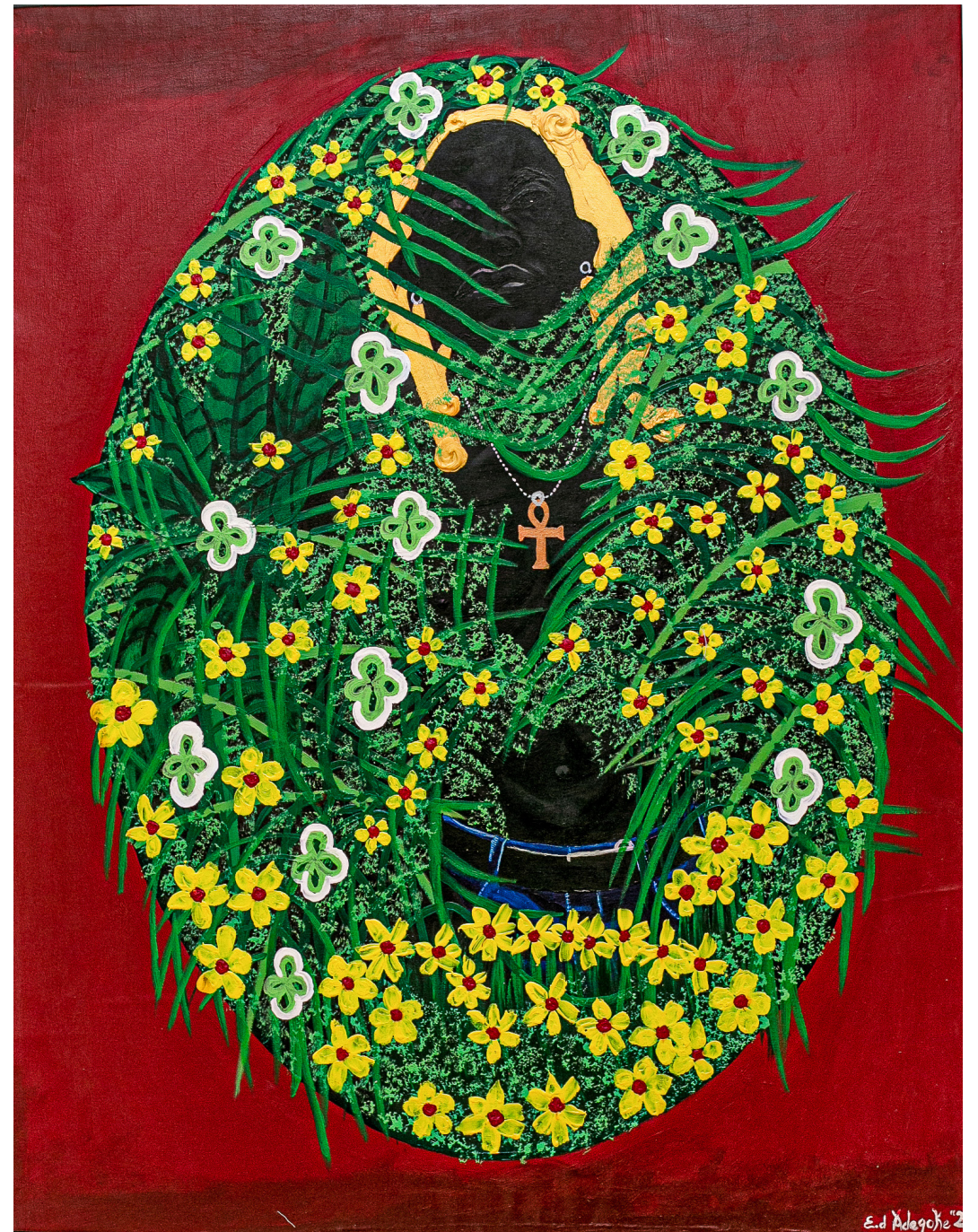
Yes. It was a serious job. I was even given money to buy the paint and I had some assistants. It gave me the courage to work on large surfaces. It was such a wild experience for me. It was fun. That's all I can say.

** This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.*

E.D. Adegoke
Wishes and Butterflies
Acrylic on canvas
2021
92 x 121.1 cm. (36.2 x 47.7 in.)



E.D. Adegoke
In Between
Acrylic on canvas
2021
92 x 121.1 cm. (36.2 x 47.7 in.)

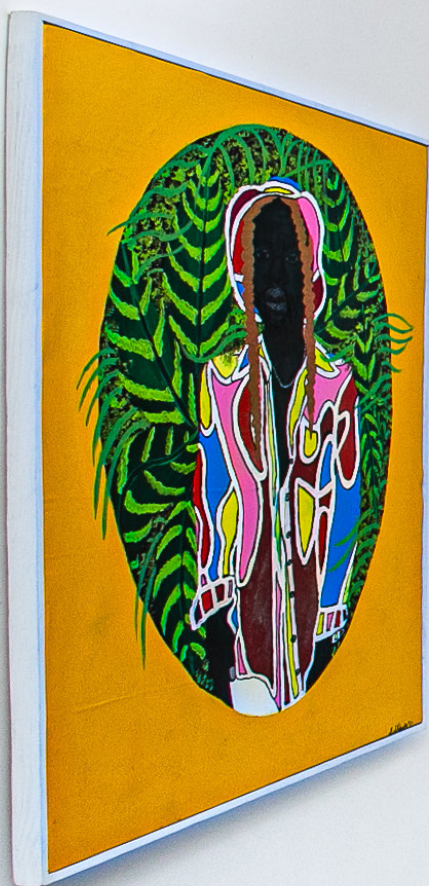


E.D. Adegoke
Existential Living
 Acrylic on canvas
 2021
 92 x 121.1 cm. (36.2 x 47.7 in.)



E.D. Adegoke
Golden Girl
Acrylic on canvas
2021
92 x 121.1 cm. (36.2 x 47.7 in.)





E.D. Adegoke
Boy Dreamer
Acrylic on canvas
2021
69 x 90 cm. (27.1 x 35.4 in.)



E.D. Adegoke
Boys in White
Acrylic on canvas
2021
76 x 86 cm. (29.9 x 33.9 in.)



E.D. Adegoke '21

E.D. Adegoke
Sisi Èko
 Acrylic on canvas
 2021
 69 x 90 cm. (27.1 x 35.4 in.)



Style Analysis of *Sisi Eko*

By Sabo Kpade, Curator

The line between the decorative and the decorous is carefully straddled in E.D Adegoke's *Sisi Eko* (2021). The term translates to “Lagos lady” or “big city lady” given that Lagos is Nigeria's most cosmopolitan city. The work is a three-quarter portrait whose figure is staring directly at the viewer: an intense gaze that is both public because it is inviting to the spectator, but also private if it is assumed that she is staring at a reflection of herself in the mirror. It may simply be an open invitation to a private audience with the figure.

The blacks of the figure's eyeballs have been shaded with light grey, which creates the luminous illusion of light being reflected off her eyes. Deep shades of grey suggest the root, nasal bridge and nasal base of the nose which is emphasized by the crystal of the nose ring. The choice of nose ring -- combined with the pair of piercings near the pinna on the external ear and another tinier pair closer to the lobule -- is suggestive of the individualised sartorial distinction explored in *Sisi Eko*. The costume earrings on her left ear are ringed with crystals in grey and green, which brings glitz and glow to the image, and would sparkle under bright lights.

The nose is emphasised by two grey splotches at the root, as well as a vertical line in the same shade which progresses down to the nasal base, and where it is joined by yet another splotch. A deeper shade of grey is used to emphasise the anatomy of the figure's face which includes the forehead and the contours that make up the chin and cheekbones. The curves of the figure's lips are defined by a brighter hue of grey than that which is used on the nose, so that they look glazed like applied lipstick. Thick splotches of black paint are used to indicate the figure's eyebrows and eyelids. These features play against the extreme blackness of the figure's face which is deep and opaque; it appears smooth and luxurious like suede.

The erect Mandarin collar of the figure's pink undershirt makes for structured and proprietary charm. The panels of the undershirt that are exposed on the chest appear to be made from a soft and lush fabric like silk. Continuous curvilinear lines in crimson red form oval ribbons of comparable sizes and connecting lines that are equidistant to each other.

What appears to be crimson red lapels on her coat are in fact embroidery that has been cut from a fabric, rather than the woven and sewn thread-work otherwise expected. The fabric has the smooth, granular richness of velvet and patches of it -- no two of equal

shapes -- are repeated over the white panels of the coat. Each of these velvet patches have smooth and rounded borders like the close-up look of an amoeba. They are fixed to the white panels of the coat by tiny stitches. This pattern, especially when repeated all over the jacket, and in no specific order, adds to the complexities of visual texture on display.

The figure's wig of hair is impressively coiled and tasselled. Two strands of knotted cords extend from her head, down her face and stop just over the stomach. Bronze impasto is applied, even more thickly here than elsewhere in *Sisi Eko* so that it looks like bunched-up, knitted wool.

The figure is set against a background of verdant gardens. Dotted around her are thirty one sunflowers, each of which has precisely five white ray florets and peach seeds. The broad basal leaves on the left of the portrait number up to eight. Each one has an external layer in forest green which envelops another layer of near-equal width. The mid-section on each leaf has the widest width and it would be the same vanta-black of the canvas if it was not faintly brushed in forest green. The improbable combination of black, green and white on the broad leaves suggests they are Adegoke's own inventions, his own cultivars. The intense composition of portraiture and still life in *Sisi Eko* is increased by an inner oval frame as well as the sharp transition to a blank olive-green border, whose only mark is the artist's signature at the bottom-right of the painting.

E.D. Adegoke
My Brother's Keeper
Acrylic on canvas
2021
76 x 87 cm. (29.9 x 34.2 in.)



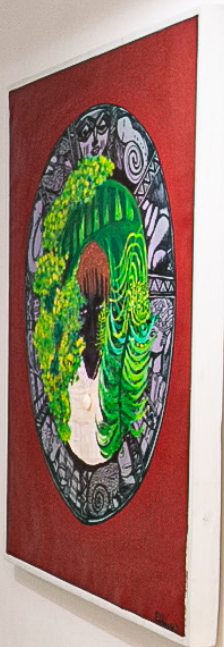
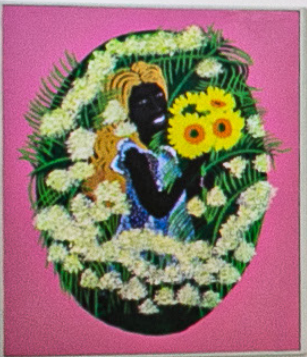
E.D. Adegoke '21

E.D. Adegoke
Èmi lòrìsà (I'm the god)
 Acrylics, acrylic marker, fabric
 and cowries on canvas
 2020
 86 x 77 cm. (33.9 x 30.3 in.)



E.D. Adegoke
Black Boys
Acrylics on canvas
2021
77 x 86 cm. (40.3 x 33.9 in.)





E.D. Adegoke
Lady with Nine Lives
Acrylics and burnt newspaper on canvas
2021
39 x 52 cm. (15.4 x 20.5 in.)

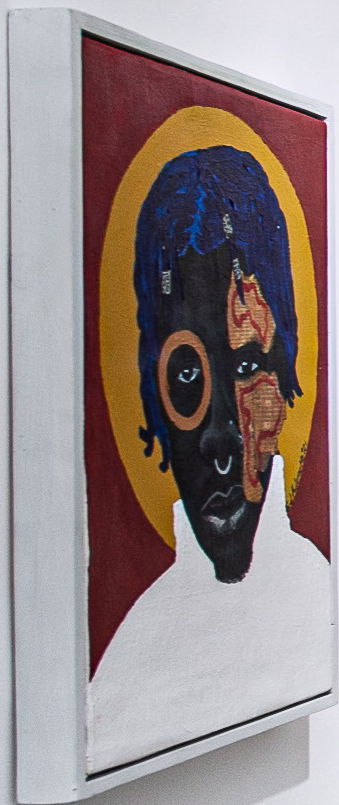


E.D. Adegoke
Boy with Nine Lives
Acrylics and burnt newspaper on canvas
2020
39 x 52 cm. (15.4 x 20.5 in.)

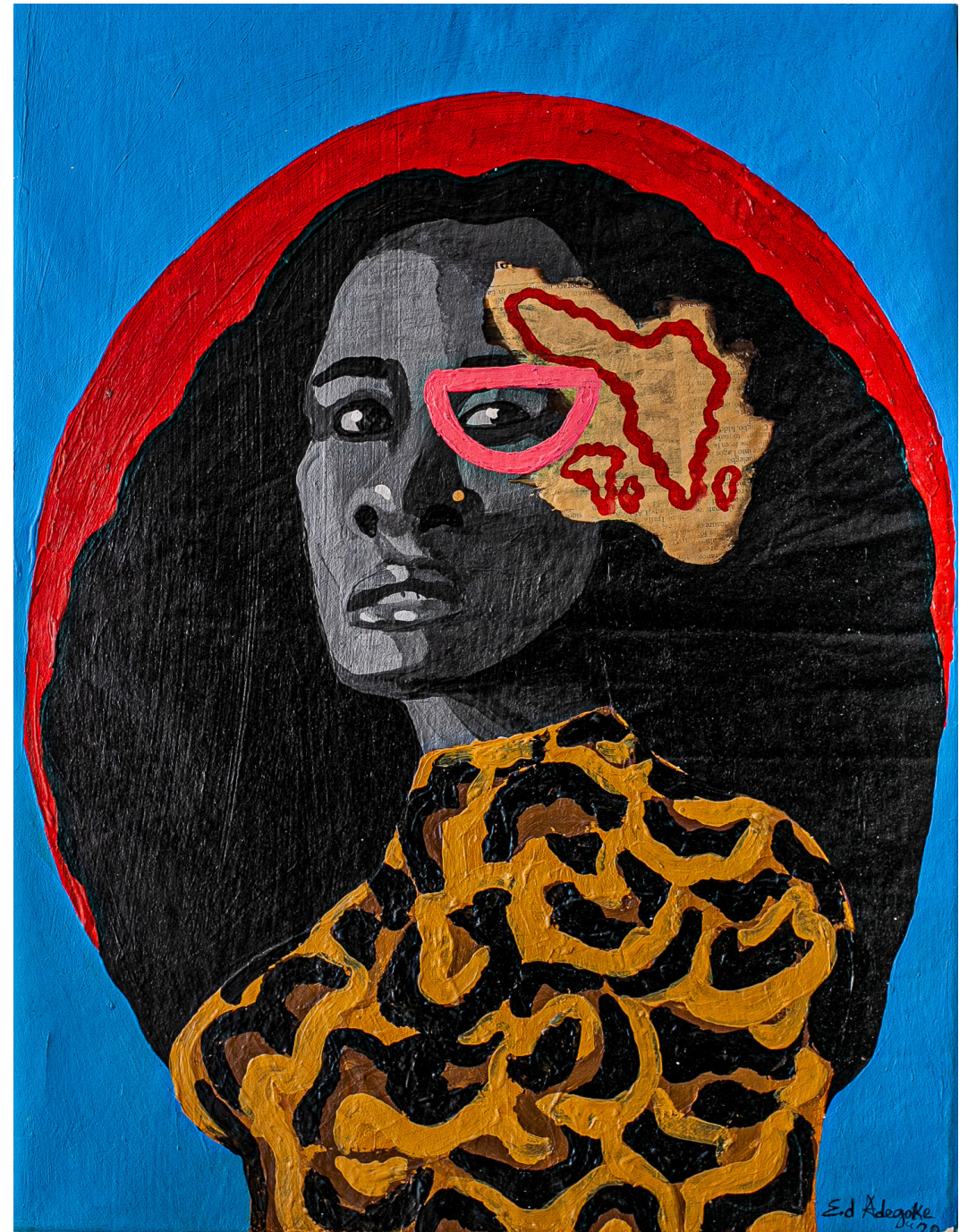


E.D. Adegoke
Native Son
Mixed media on canvas
2021
39 x 52 cm. (15.4 x 20.5 in.)





E.D. Adegoke
Lady with Nine Lives II
 Acrylic and burnt newspaper on canvas
 2021
 39 x 52 cm cm. (15.4 x 20.5 in.)



E.D. Adegoke
Orí (The Head "Destiny")
Acrylics and burnt newspaper on canvas
2021
39 x 52 cm. (15.4 x 20.5 in.)



About E.D. Adegoke

E.D Adegoke (b 1998) is based in Ogun State, Nigeria. As well as developing his practice as a painter, Adegoke studied Performing Arts at the Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ogun State where he has also worked as an art teacher and resident artist at the Kuta Art Foundation. Adegoke has participated in several group exhibitions at venues such as the Moody Jones gallery (US), Bogobiri House (Nigeria) and 21 Euphoria Avenue (UK). *The Age of Dreams* is his first solo exhibition.



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. Through exhibitions, publications, public programming, and participation in art fairs, kó aims to expand conversations about contemporary art in Africa to a local and global audience.

www.ko-artspace.com

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