

An abstract painting featuring three stylized faces. The central face is the most prominent, with a yellowish-brown complexion and a blue headwrap. To its left is a smaller, more ethereal face with a pale complexion. To the right is a darker, more shadowed face. The background is a vibrant mix of red, orange, yellow, and blue, with thick, expressive brushstrokes. The overall style is reminiscent of African art and modernism.

The Essential Jimo Akolo:

A Retrospective of
Drawings and Paintings

kó

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February 15 - March 12, 2022

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Mrs. Mercy Feyisola Akolo is younger sister to Jimo Akolo.
Mrs. Grace Yemisi Ukhueleigbe is the youngest sister of Professor Jimo Bola Akolo.
Professor Jerry Buhari, Department of Fine Art, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

FRONT COVER: Boro Dance, 1977, Oil on canvas
BACK COVER: Man on Horse, 1996, Oil on board
Following page: Man on Horse, 1996, Oil on board

“ This is not an opportunity for me to blow my own trumpet but to introduce the audience to the works. They are works I have produced over the years. Some have been left for more than a year only to be picked up and worked on later. Some topics have been abandoned only to be continued in a completely different design.”

*Extract from “My Sojourn in Art World”
In Jimo Akolo eminent scholar and painter.
National Gallery of Art Abuja.*



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I could say that this major solo exhibition project on Jimo Akolo started over twelve years ago when I came into contact with his works as a collector. What stroke me confronting his works for the first time were the unusual colours, and the compositional structure of the artist's picture plane. I was even more fascinated by the aesthetic affinity of Zaria Art School, especially with the palette of late Yusuf Grillo, who I understand happened to have been one of his closest associates. It was however when the exhibition of members of the Zaria Art Society was crystalised that the need to also show Jimo Akolo became imperative to expand the story of these great masters of contemporary Nigerian art. This is Professor Jimo Akolo's major solo art exhibition in Lagos, and we are proud once again to be part of the history of the revelation of this great master with this rich illustration of his creative oeuvre accompanied with this book catalogue. We recall the well-researched exhibition catalogue of the National Gallery of Art on the artist, titled "**Jimo Akolo: eminent scholar and painter**" presented to the Abuja art community in July 2019. We, therefore, consider this show as an affirmation of the artist's place in the annals of Nigeria's contemporary modern art.

Through numerous communications with the artist at Egbe, his wife's assistance, and the patient commitment of his sister Mercy, his son Richard and with Jerry acting as a go-between, we have been able to put together this number of works, drawings, and paintings for the art community in Nigeria and the world over to see for the very first time. The National Gallery of Art played a major role in assisting us to facilitate the movement of the works after Akolo's solo exhibition in Abuja. To us, this is how cultural institutions ought to work together. We commend the National Gallery of Art, through its former Acting Director-General, Dr. Simon Ipkakryonyi, who made the collaboration possible.

kó Gallery in its short lives-pan has had exhibitions of great Nigerian artists both within and outside the country with an impressive success that we are so proud of. With this exhibition of one of the classmates of members of the Zaria Art Society, we believe that we are bringing together historic coherence gaps that often exist in giving the development of our cultural history an incomplete narrative.

It gives me and the kó Gallery team great pleasure to bring to the art community Jimo Bola Akolo, a visionary story teller of our common ordinary lives that we often ignore, take for granted, and, often where time and memory take them away. I believe that this show will ever remain a reference point for the artist's less known, less seen, and overdue artistic legacy.

Kavita Chellaram
Founder, kó Artspace/Gallery



Curatorial Statement

By Jerry Buhari

At last, this exhibition, which has been anticipated by many, has come to fruition. The founder of kó, Kavita Chellaram, has consistently shown a dedicated interest in the generation of contemporary Nigerian artists of the early sixties. Her personal relationship with them built over time has made her an authority of a sort on these great masters. The significance of this interest is that materials are being generated to give invaluable insights for the study, understanding and appreciation of the foundations of contemporary Nigerian art, which this generation of artists represents; this is added to the publications she has sponsored to give historical value to these artists and their works.

Though Jimo Akolo is one of the artists of the Nigerian College of Arts Science and Technology Zaria (1957 – 1961), who had an early vibrant art exposure, with a major large three-piece mural commission at the Northern Nigeria House of Assembly, June 1961 to March 1962, a solo exhibition sponsored by the Commonwealth Institute London in 1964, exposed widely in Europe, and the Northern Nigeria Self-government Celebration Exhibition, 1959, he has not enjoyed the exposure, visibility and representation of some of his colleagues commensurate with his artistic career. This exhibition project, therefore, was set out to reveal Jimo Akolo's artistic engagements with as many works that he has created as possible. Based on a recent interview with him many of his paintings produced in the UK and USA are now lost to time and memory. But this exhibition has brought together a fair representative number of his drawings and paintings from his personal collection, and loaned works from some of his collectors. We were also able to secure permission to use works in museums and institutions. It is with the hope that with this project Akolo's place in Nigerian art history will be better appreciated, properly evaluated and placed on the same pedestal as his peers. In addition to a fascinating reflection from a classmate, Adamu Baikie, we requested some of his students to give depth to our ability to appreciate and evaluate this quiet great master. Being somewhat of an introvert we thought that we should also hear from some members of his family. All put together their insights about the life, and artistic journey of Akolo are given refreshing insight.

Jimo Akolo is a master storyteller of ordinary life. In his paintings he presents to us through northern Nigerian life, ordinary people in such paintings as "Market Scene with Calabash Caver", "Taking a break", "Road to Kufena", among others. In each of these paintings, the artist brings himself into the lives of these familiar subjects to show deep observation, empathy and emotions. In the festival subjects like "Daura Contingent" and "Emblem of Royalty", Akolo takes us into a rare experience of the energy and colours

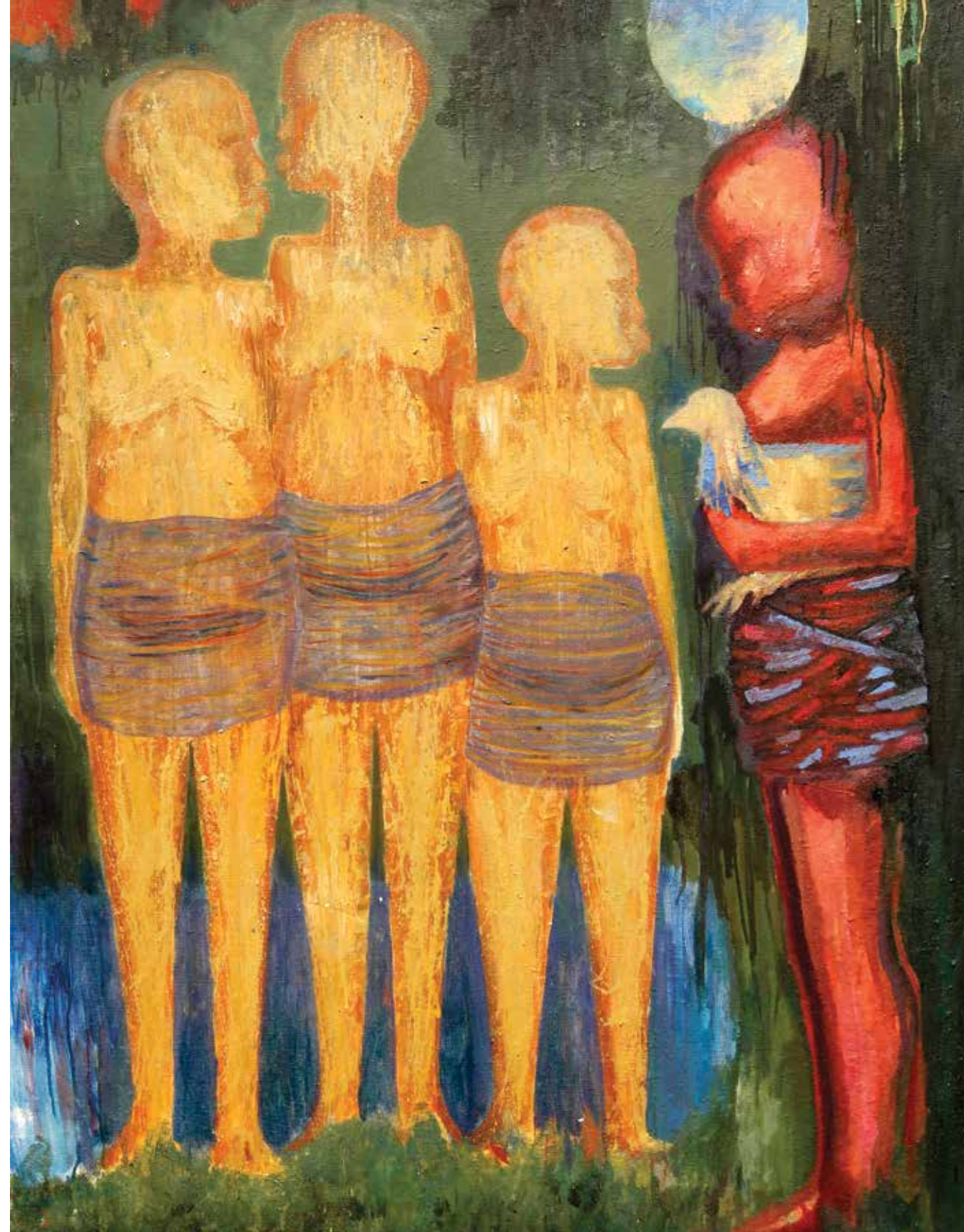
of Durbar. "War, Red War" and "Mobilisation Series I,II and III" show the power of the artist's close observation of the Durbar and how he brings together histories of jihad and Durbar celebrations into a paradoxical harmony. His main colours are deep greens, adire blues, reds and browns derived from observing the mud buildings of Zaria City. His compositions oscillate between Gauguin, Cezanne, with impressionist flavour (offerings from his training under English instructors at Zaria). Yet in a recent interview at his home in Egbe, he would distance himself from any Impressionist connection. His colouring technique combines a graphic, yet painterly rendition of hues and tones contrasted in triangular planes to give what one might refer to as a cubist engineering composition, where design informs his probing of the picture plane for structure and harmony. The faces of his figures always carry quiet and contemplative moods, except for sports and festival scenes. Even with these the movement and expressions of his figures appear measured as if not to waste or exaggerate any expression or movement. In the painting titled " In Dialogue, Not War (Homage to Demas Nwoko)" we see Akolo's dedication to the importance of design and emotional expression in his paintings. Here the three-horse riders are rhythmically arranged even with the use of blues and reds. In symbolic reference to the title of the painting one of the horse riders facing the two backing the viewer is dressed in white and riding a white horse referencing the messenger of peace. The two riders facing this figure dressed in white are clearly contrasted in a dark blue dress. The background is a Hausa vernacular building lighted with a bright blue Van Gogh-ish sky. Akolo is a man of peace and extends this character even in his paintings and drawings. When asked why this painting was dedicated to his classmate, he said he loved the style of Demas and wanted to do a work along that line to honour him.

Akolo's drawings of the sixties clearly show an artist whose pencil lines are deliberate and calculating. The lines that created the works titled, "The Model", 1961 and "The Model Life Drawing", 1984 show calculated use of light lines and tones, to define his model. Despite the minimal use of light and shade the volume of these figures are well captured with much realism. The lines are also delicate to design to conform to the flow of light on his models and by such deliberate observation, both the weight of the models are situated on a picture plane. In his composition, he appears to seek a peaceful dialogue between the figure and the ground. But in his later drawings, especially of the eighties and nineties, like "The Model", 1988 and "Horseman", 1995, a certain vigorousness of charcoal work could be seen. This is not a struggle to draw but a display of mastery of the medium, subject, as well as artist's obsession with the human figure. While the facial expressions on these figures remain calm and serene, the favourite media, charcoal and soft pencil probe and explore the form to display the artist's experimental approach in drawing and the joy he demonstrates in his drawings. In these drawings, Akolo brings us into the spirit and energy that possess him when he draws. Jimo Akolo's drawings and paintings may betray his interest in northern Nigeria's landscapes and peoples. But he also painted scenes of western Nigeria like "Owambe", "Sango", among others to return

to his childhood days in Lagos. “ECWA Church Building in the Early 60s at Egbe” show Akolo as an artist rooted in his past, a neighbourhood where he finds stability and peace.

One of the most curious and fascinating observations made about Akolo's paintings are his constant return to northern Nigeria subjects. He said that in his works he strives for sincerity and honesty. He would not draw or paint any subject he was not familiar with or at home with. He said that while he was in Europe, he stayed indoors most of the time because of the cold weather and unfriendly public around him. Yet the time in the UK was his most memorable period of artistic production. Since his subjects for painting came from his sketchbooks, he had no scarcity of ideas to paint.

In the fascinating essays that accompany this engaging book catalogue, common threads weave and define Jimo Akolo's artistic pilgrimage; among them are: stories of tragedies, disappointments always giving birth to unique opportunities. Alone yet not lonely, Akolo's sketchbook was always there as a dependable companion and few friendly teachers like his mentor Dennis Duerden in Keffi and Clifford Frith in Zaria opened the doors along the creative journey. He was an artist with many disadvantages yet advantaged. Whatever he scarce in human relationship and understanding he found satisfaction in the numerous sketches that would later be translated into colourful paintings of subjects that mirror the rich diversity of ordinary life and connection with our lives. He would not use photographs as reference for his paintings. The palette and compositions of his paintings always evidencing an artist at peace with himself and the world engages with and his personal worlds he creates. Akolo is an artist who has found that above all things, the secret of life is not found in expectations or materialism but in simplicity, honesty and the highest of them all, contentment.



Facing page: *Four Women and a chicken*, Oil on canvas, 1962

Introduction

By Jacob Jari

Writing on living artists and their works has always been an important aspect of the Art History scholarship at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; so much so that it is possible to encounter a situation where postgraduate students who are researching on the works of artists, are themselves, the subject of someone else's study. Kojo Fosu who taught at the University in the 1980s entrenched this tradition, particularly those in consistent practice but with little exposure. His lectures were usually exciting, hypnotic even, as he presented slide after slide of works of African artists from different parts of the continent that were never mentioned in any document. There were few publications, which discussed contemporary African artists and their works prior to the publication of his book, "20th Century Art of Africa" in 1986. He impressed on his students the urgency to shift their gaze from traditional art to include contemporary art and he talked about African artists, many of whom he had met, as if they were cousins living next door. With him, no conscientious and dedicated artist was too insignificant to be discussed.

Several institutions like the National Gallery of Art have imbibed this idea of writing on living artists. Many books on artists have been presented to the public by the Gallery, the peak of which was reached in July, 2019 when books on Jimo Akolo and Demas Nwoko were presented within the same month. This occurred during the short directorship of Simon Ikpakronyi, an alumnus of Ahmadu Bello University, as the Director overseeing the office of the Director-General. The presentations were always escorted with exhibitions of the artists' works. Writing on artists is not however, without its critics especially if public funds were to be spent on such a project. Issues like who and what decides which artist should be documented usually come up. A lead paper presenter at a recent conference in Zaria for instance, declared that a certain Professor had not done enough work to warrant any study. Yet, writing on artists has so many advantages albeit in such writings, particularly the ones published by the National Gallery of Art, one has to sieve through a maze of other contending narratives. Interviewees become overenthusiastic to divulge inappropriate gossips while the interviewers are too eager to propagate them such as the unmitigated exposé on Lukas Bentu in Ikpakronyi (2019). The book published in 2018 by the Gallery on Timothy Fasuyi, the first graduate of Painting from the Nigerian College of Art Science and Technology, Zaria also contains some gripping stories. While a few eminent writers discuss his works in the book, much more is written about other aspects of his life. These other aspects help to construct an almost complete overview of the development of art in Nigeria. The book is an ambitious project, replete with addenda, one of which teaches the readers how to employ Western art formalism in understanding contemporary Nigerian art practice. A few pieces of misinformation such as who painted "Impression Sunrise" exist but generally it is a valuable book in diverse aspects. It contains

the blueprint on how to run a life drawing class; it narrates how some artists used the Society of Nigerian Artists early at its formation for their personal gain and curiously, it provides steps on how to become a professional art critic as propounded by Ola Oloidi's teacher, Jeff Donaldson. Professional art critics, according to him, should be aware that elderly and famous artists are immune "against negative and caustic formalistic appraisals of their works". Writing about Jimo Akolo and his works, by this stance, should attract only sycophantic phrases, not necessarily because he is famous, but because he is elderly. Provenance may help the appreciation of a work and a famous artist could get away with a lot but blanket immunity to a famous or elderly artist appears to be a new teaching because the commissioners of Rembrandt van Rijn's painting, "The Conspiracy of Claudius Civilis", rejected it in 1661; but of course, they could not have been professional art critics!

Discussing Jimo Akolo inevitably puts any writer directly on a collision course with controversies surrounding the founding of the Zaria Art Society in 1958. Sometimes these controversies are so overwhelming that they overshadow any interest in discussing his paintings. The catalyst to them may be traced to Fosu (1986), who strangely omitted Akolo from any mention. Fosu was silent for a long time in 1987 when he was confronted with the issue of his omission. He finally managed to reply that Akolo would be featured in the revised edition. Akolo had three classmates in the Painting class that graduated from the Nigerian College in Zaria in 1961 namely Demas Nwoko, Uche Okeke and Bruce Onobrakpeya. They were all featured in the book, which at the time of publication and several years subsequently, remained the only authoritative reference book in Nigeria on contemporary African Art written by any African. Those who were featured were consequently discussed in classrooms and at conferences while those omitted like Akolo, despite the fact that they were consistent in practice, remained largely unknown among younger artists and connoisseurs. Akolo's classmates were discussed in the book under the subtitle, "Zaria Rebels", a term describing the members of the Zaria Art Society to which they belonged when they were at the Nigerian College. The allusion that artists in the 1950s contributed to the rebellion against colonialism, which consequently led to Nigeria's independence became endearing to younger Nigerian artists who did not witness the "rebellion". The "rebels" suddenly assumed stardom and myths began to grow around them and the Zaria Art Society. Those who did not join them in the "rebellion" like Akolo, suffered neglect. This was the situation at the founding of The Eye Society in Zaria in 1989. Members of this younger Society noticed discrepancies in the stories, which circulated about the Zaria Art Society especially concerning the membership, how long the Society lasted and what exactly the members claimed they rebelled against. The Eye Society therefore, decided in 1994 to interview Akolo. This interview was published in the Society's journal, "The Eye Journal" volume 3 number 1 of June 1994. It was encouraged to provide visibility to Akolo based on his revelations during the interview, which he granted when he was 59. It went into discussions with the

National Gallery of Art towards sponsoring a conference and a retrospective exhibition of Akolo's works the following year to mark his 60th birthday. It suffered a devastating loss of one of its founding members, Gani Odutokun, in 1995 but the conference still held in the same year at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria while the exhibition held at the National Gallery of Art, Lagos.

The National Gallery of Art was motivated to sponsor a conference on the Zaria Art Society in 1998 after the events organized by The Eye Society, which led to the publication of the book, "The Zaria Art Society, a New Consciousness" by the Gallery. Subsequently, more art commentators and critics have taken keener interest in establishing the facts about Akolo's relationship with the Zaria Art Society as well as the motive behind founding the Society. Writing in Dike and Oyelola (2006), a book celebrating the works of Yusuf Grillo, Fasuyi observes that there were no rebels among Zaria students. According to him, the students who found compulsory courses difficult to pass such as Perspective Drawing and Life Drawing were the ones who wanted to avoid them by agitating for African art courses to replace them. The students who were good in these difficult subjects, on the other hand, had no need to rebel, he concludes. Fasuyi was more explicit in Muku and Ikpakronyi (2018), the book published in his honour. He attributes the reason for the founding of the Zaria Art Society to ethnic bigotry. According to him, Cyprian Ihejiahi became the first President of the Association of Fine Art Students at the Nigerian College, Zaria. He served his term and was to be succeeded by Irein Wangboje when the Igbo students in the Department protested and formed a parallel association, which they called the Zaria Art Society. He believes that they were brainwashed by Ulli Beier, a German anthropologist engaged as a Professor at the University of Ibadan, who at the time had won a grant from the Ford Foundation and was paying constant visits to Zaria to meet with the students who formed the Society. Akolo himself was to corroborate the point that the Society was founded on ethnic grounds in Ikpakronyi (2019). "I couldn't be talking about what I didn't know", he states; "about 'Ikenga' and I didn't want anybody to be talking to me as if I was just a kid, we should be partners, I had my own culture too". Ikpakronyi explains that Akolo's reference to "Ikenga" infers that the Zaria Art Society was an Igbo contraption.

Beier's relationship with members of the Zaria Art Society should raise some interest particularly because he tried desperately, and in vain, not only to teach at the Nigerian College in Zaria but to be appointed as the head of the Department of Fine Art of the institution as reported by Fasuyi in Muku and Ikpakronyi (2018). Chinua Achebe was his student at Ibadan. Achebe (2012) narrates that together with Christopher Okigbo, he and Beier set up the Mbari Club in 1961 in Ibadan to which the Mbari Mbayo Workshop in Oshogbo, set up in 1962, was linked. "Mbari", according to him, was an Igbo term for art as celebration. Achebe and Okigbo were later involved in the Biafra cause; so

was Simon Okeke a member of the Zaria Art Society who became one of the designers of its currency and postage stamps. Some members of the Society attended the workshop. Uche Okeke, one of the founders of the Society later became the director of the Mbari Art Centre Enugu from 1964 to 1967. He also illustrated Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" in 1965. Okeke (1982) reports that during the Nigerian civil war in 1969, he organized exhibitions in seven cities (Cologne, Dusseldorf, Bonn, Trier, Dortmund, Essen and Munich) in Germany, Beier's country. The Zaria Art Society's "Natural Synthesis" manifesto was a mirror of Achebe's political view: "And still others like me", states Achebe (2012), "preferred democratic institutions not in the purely Western sense but in a fusion of the good ideas of the West with the best that we had produced in our own ancient African civilizations." This brings the true identity and intention of Ulli Beier to question. Was he simply an anthropologist who loved the "primitive" African art expression or was he an agent of a Western secret service interested in indoctrinating the political minds of young African intellectuals? At the time he was active in Nigeria, there were many expatriates with similar art interests as he in different parts of Africa whose art activities are documented by several authors in Kasfir and Forster (2013). There were however, a few exceptional ones whose agenda could have been different. One of them was Dennis Duerden whom Akolo met at Government College, Keffi in 1951. Although a historian, he liked making art and would constantly be seen drawing and painting objects in the landscape. He began an art club, which Akolo joined. He soon realized that Akolo was promising especially in drawing objects in perspective, so together they explored festivals and other outdoor locations for subjects of interest to draw and paint. Duerden's influence on Akolo, apart from insisting that he should study Fine Art rather than Civil Engineering at the Nigerian College Zaria, would be seen in the manner that Akolo later taught drawing. His entire working career at the Ahmadu Bello University was spent at the Institute of Education but he taught the Fine Art course of the Postgraduate Diploma in Education programme and took drawing courses at the Department of Fine Art of the University. He would arrive at a drawing class with his drawing board and materials and sit on a donkey like his students. He would draw the model with them but occasionally he would go round and inspect the students' drawings as well as instruct them on how to overcome their drawing challenges. He encouraged his students to discard the eraser because, according to him, a drawing, which showed all the struggles the artist went through was richer; besides, students usually recreated the same mark they earlier erased. He also discouraged students from what he called "wiring" a drawing, which meant drawing the outline before shading. He preferred the students to shade as they drew and to try and develop the different parts of the figure at the same time rather than finish one part before another. He also instructed students to stop "polishing" their drawings meaning while shading, students should create strokes rather than smudges. These characteristics, which he tried to impart, are the hallmarks of his drawings as can be seen in "The Model", "Horseman I" and "Horseman II".

Babalola (2004) and Ikpakronyi (2019) have extensively documented the life and times of Akolo as well as analyzed his paintings. According to Babalola, Akolo's "painting has something of the cool, detached dignity of the North. He seems preoccupied with composition and his paintings usually achieve a perfect balance and radiate a smoothing calm." Uche Okeke in Ikpakronyi (2019) describes him as unimpressed by "fads and fancies". Akolo himself during the 1994 interview referred to earlier, compared his process of painting to that of a poet. "You are going along", he observed, "you may not be thinking on a particular subject. You see something that interests you and it brings out something else." His paintings mostly portray human figures at markets, festivals or everyday activities. They do not overtly betray any ostentatious expression even when they are engaged in expressive activities like the "Test of Manhood (Sharo)" or "Owambe". The point made by Babalola about Akolo's paintings, on the strength of the evidence embedded in them, appears to be factual. It is as if he strips the paintings to their structure. In the work entitled, "Boro Dancer", for instance, three female figures are portrayed carrying calabashes on their heads. The calabashes and the heads of the figures are spherical while their torsos are cylindrical. The background to the painting is embellished with varied colourful, conical and spherical motifs. The reflection of light on the calabashes including the faces of the figures is realized by an almost graphical representation giving the painting a geometrical outlook, as though the figures are carved in wood. This geometrical outlook affects many of his works especially the landscape entitled "ECWA Church Building in the Early 60s at Egbe". This is as a result of keeping his backgrounds shallow and interweaving motifs and patterns with the figures in the foreground. While the subjects portrayed may be expressionless, the motifs and patterns are quite expressive. The melodious sounds of the horns, as well as the lively mood of the musicians in "Horn Blowers From Southern Kaduna Welcoming the Governor", for example, are conveyed by the concentric lines and patterns on the figures and in the background.

The comparison of Akolo's paintings to a postimpressionistic structural format may seem inappropriate considering the huge time gap but in the context of describing the works of an artist who has not seen any fault with what his teachers, who were mostly Europeans, taught him in Zaria and elsewhere, it may not be entirely misplaced. Many other graduates of his time have found no fault with the training they received as insinuated in this statement by Babalola (2004): "...majority of students in Zaria Art School were not asleep while only eleven or so of them were alive. It must be emphatically stated that art was [agoing] in Zaria in those early years up to date." The Zaria Art Society discourse is played up more by myth seekers who were not remotely related to the experience than by those who attended the College at that time. Akolo therefore, is a myth buster. The structure of his paintings, the harmonious combination of the elements and principles of design especially as seen in his well-constructed compositions and choice of pallet,

and his ingenious synthesis of geometric motifs with representational forms, all point to a painter of exceptional skill. Akolo is without a doubt one of the most creative painters who ever graduated from the Zaria Art School.

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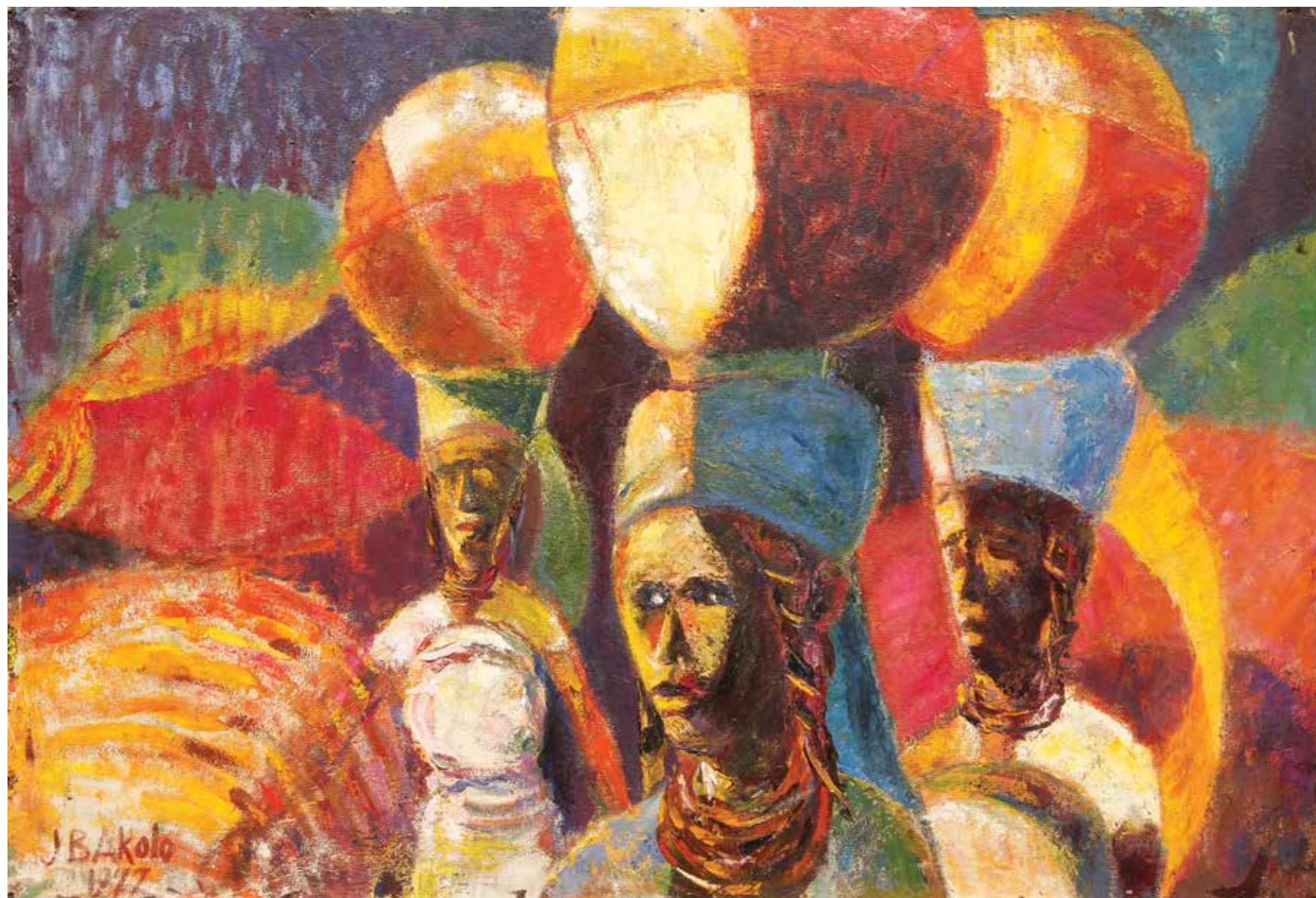
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Jimo Akolo
Ayo Players
Oil on canvas
1969
62.5 x 90 cm. (25 x 36 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower left



Jimo Akolo
Boro Dancer
Oil on canvas
1977
81.5 x 122 cm. (32.2 x 48 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower left



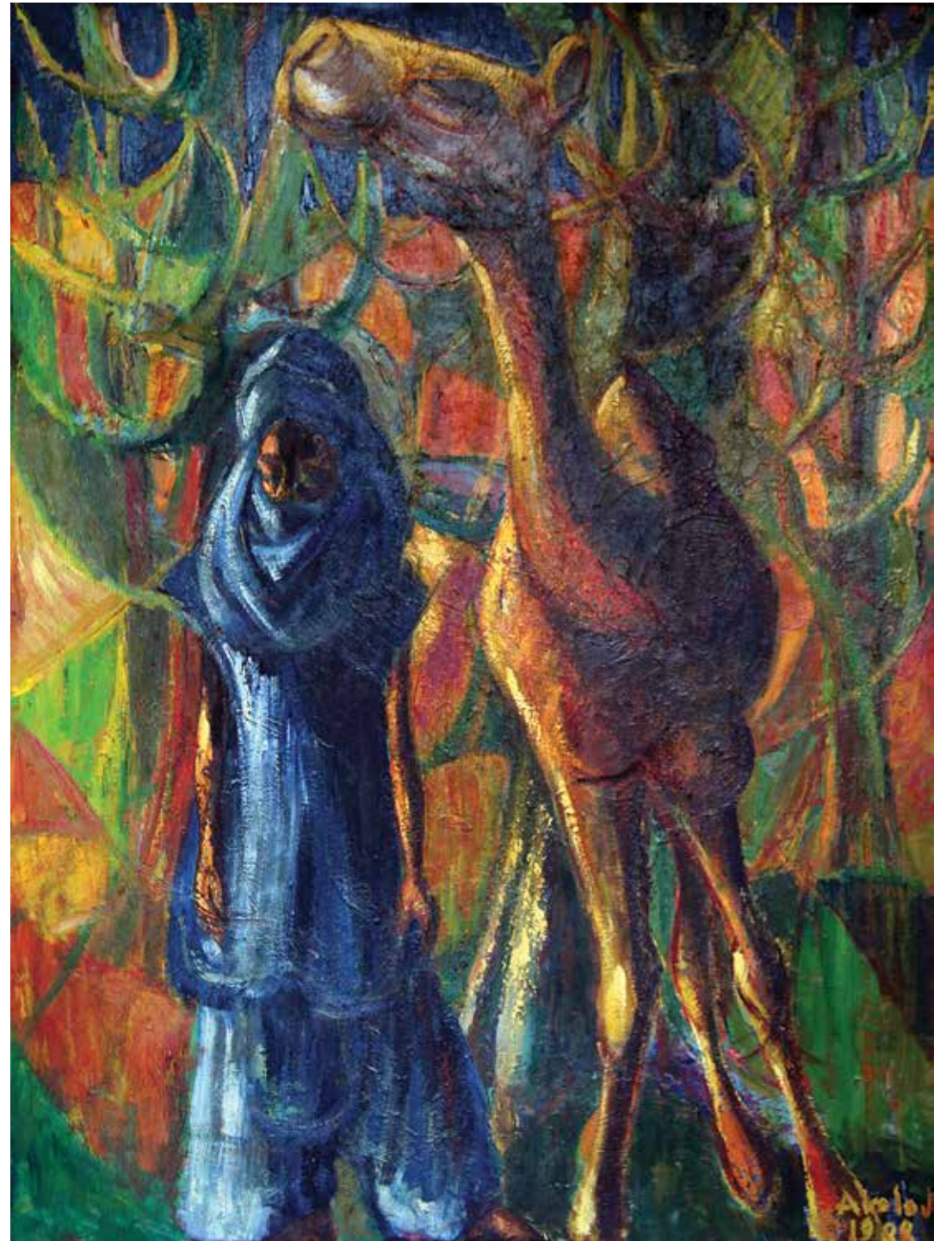
Jimo Akolo
Test Of Manhood (Sharo)
Oil on board
1972
71 x 118 cm. (28 x 46.8 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower left



Jimo Akolo
*Horn Blowers From Southern
Kaduna Welcoming The Governor*
Oil on board
1984/1986
76 x 101.5 cm. (30 x 40 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



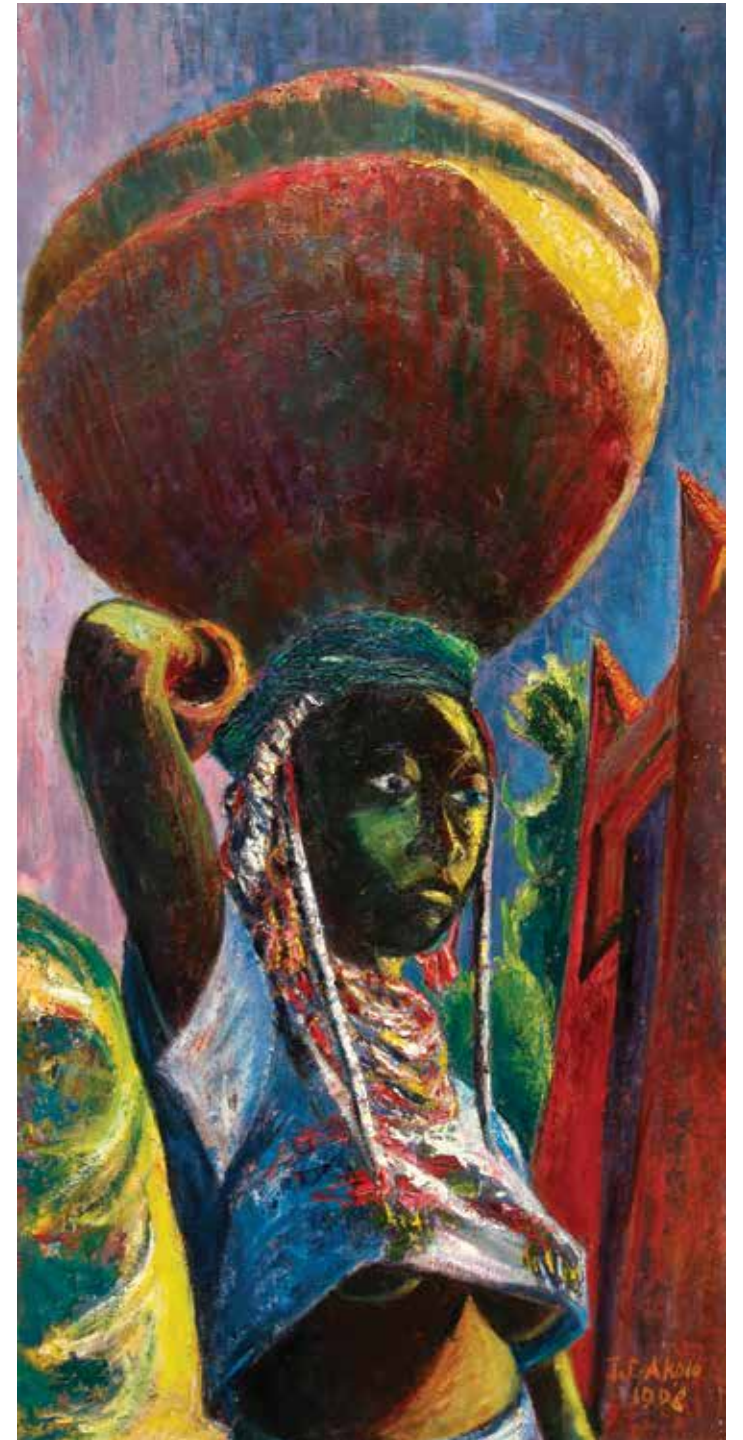
Jimo Akolo
Untitled
Oil on board
1988
122.2 x 91.4 cm. (48.1 x 36 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right





Jimo Akolo
Road to Kufena
Oil on board
1995
61 x 122.5 cm. (24 x 48.2 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right

Jimo Akolo
Milk Maid (Fura da nono)
Oil on board
1998
123 x 61 cm. (48.5 x 24 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



Jimo Akolo
Daura Contingent
Oil on board
1997/98
122.5 x 91.5 cm. (48 x 36 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



Jimo Akolo
Market Scene with calabash caver
Oil on board
1994
61 x 122 cm. (24 x 48 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



Jimo Akolo
Untitled
Oil on board
1995
89 x 58.5 cm. (35 x 23 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



Jimo Akolo
Mobilization Series (II)
Oil on canvas
1999
122 x 84 cm. (48 x 33 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



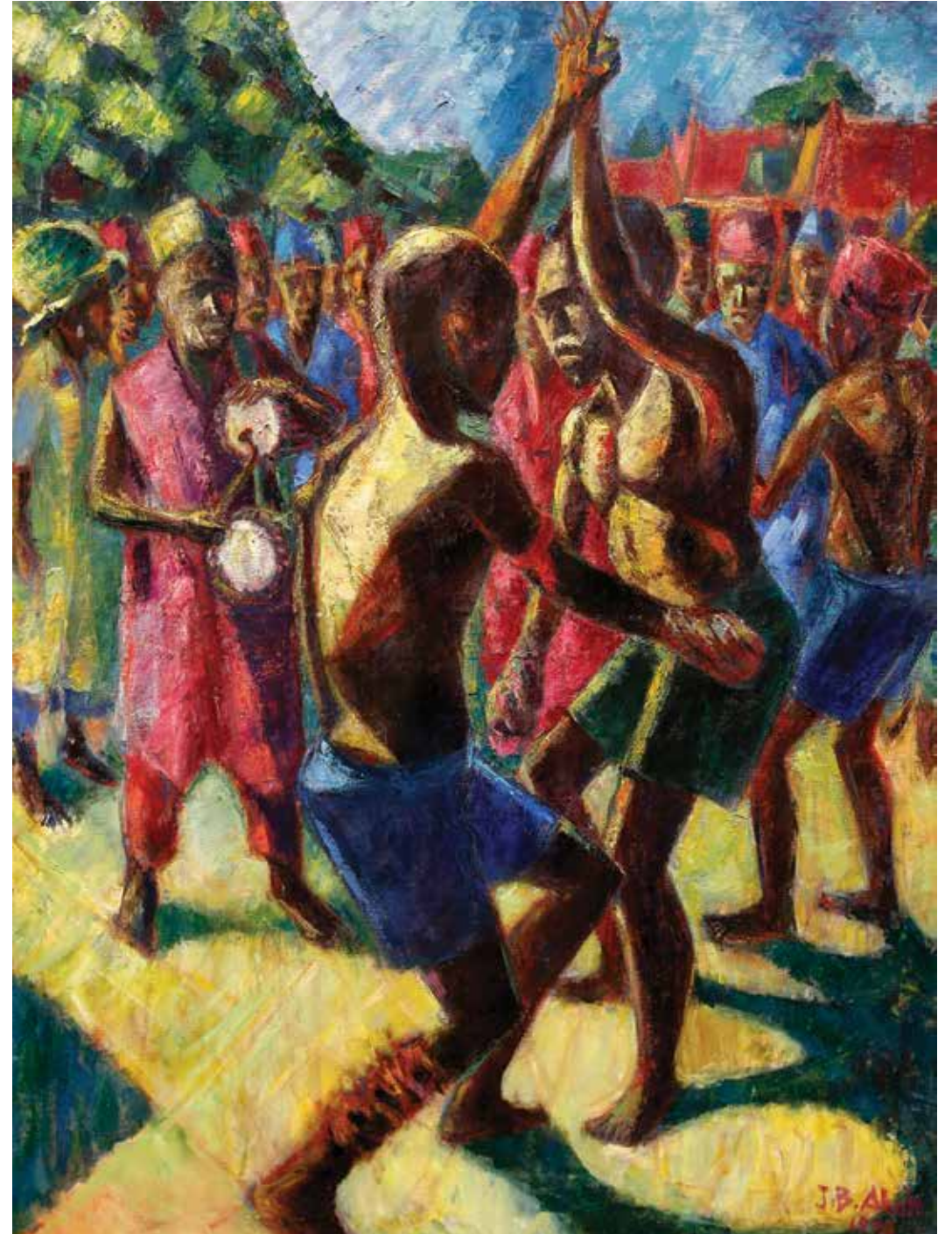
Jimo Akolo
Man on horse
Oil on board
1996
122 x 91.5 cm. (48 x 36 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



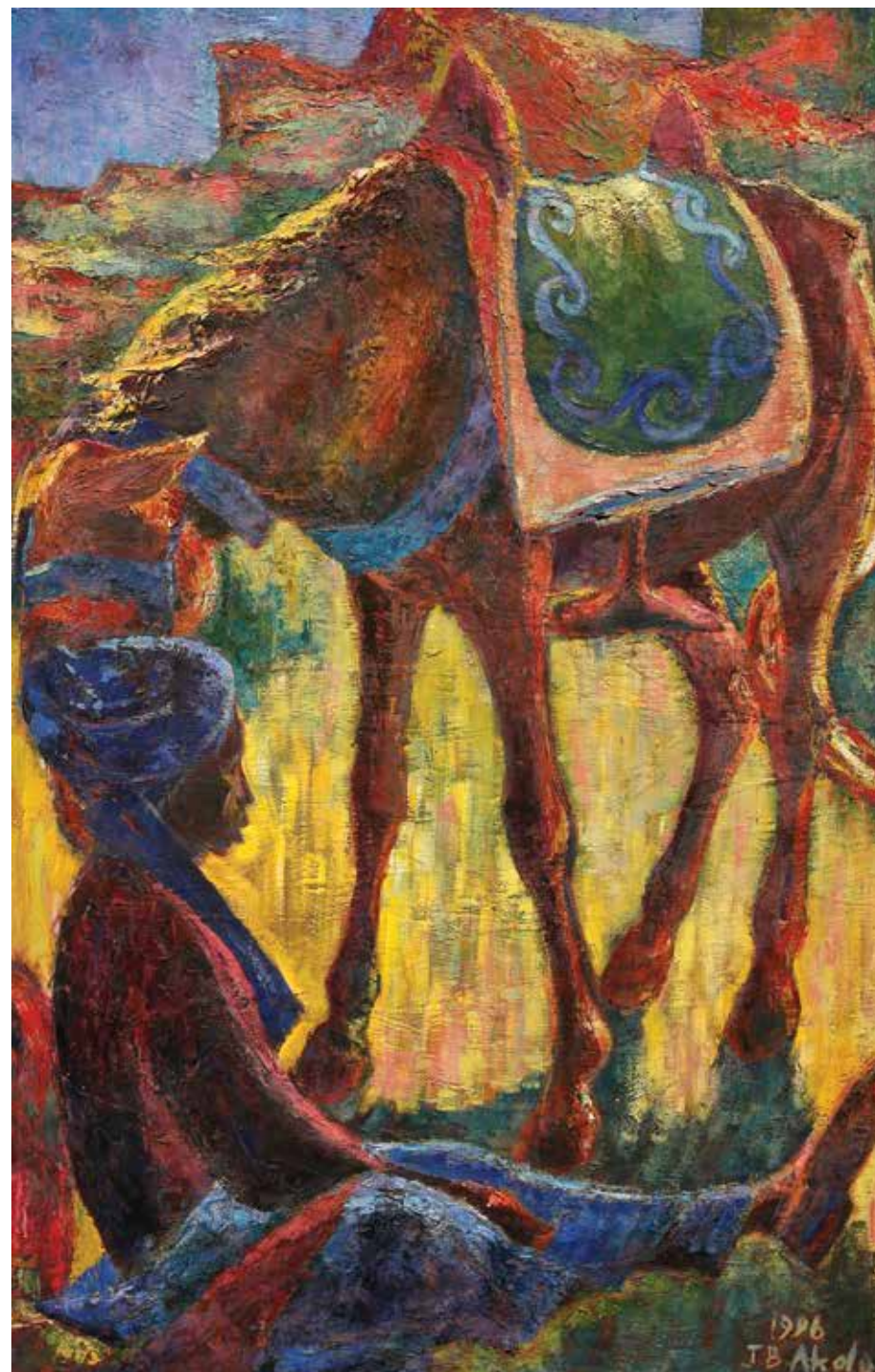
Jimo Akolo
War, Red war
Oil on board
1996
122 x 76 cm. (48 x 36 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



Jimo Akolo
Dambe (Native boxing)
Oil on canvas
1998
120.5 x 91 cm. (47.2 x 35.8 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



Jimo Akolo
Untitled
Oil on board
1996
122 x 76 cm. (48 x 30 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



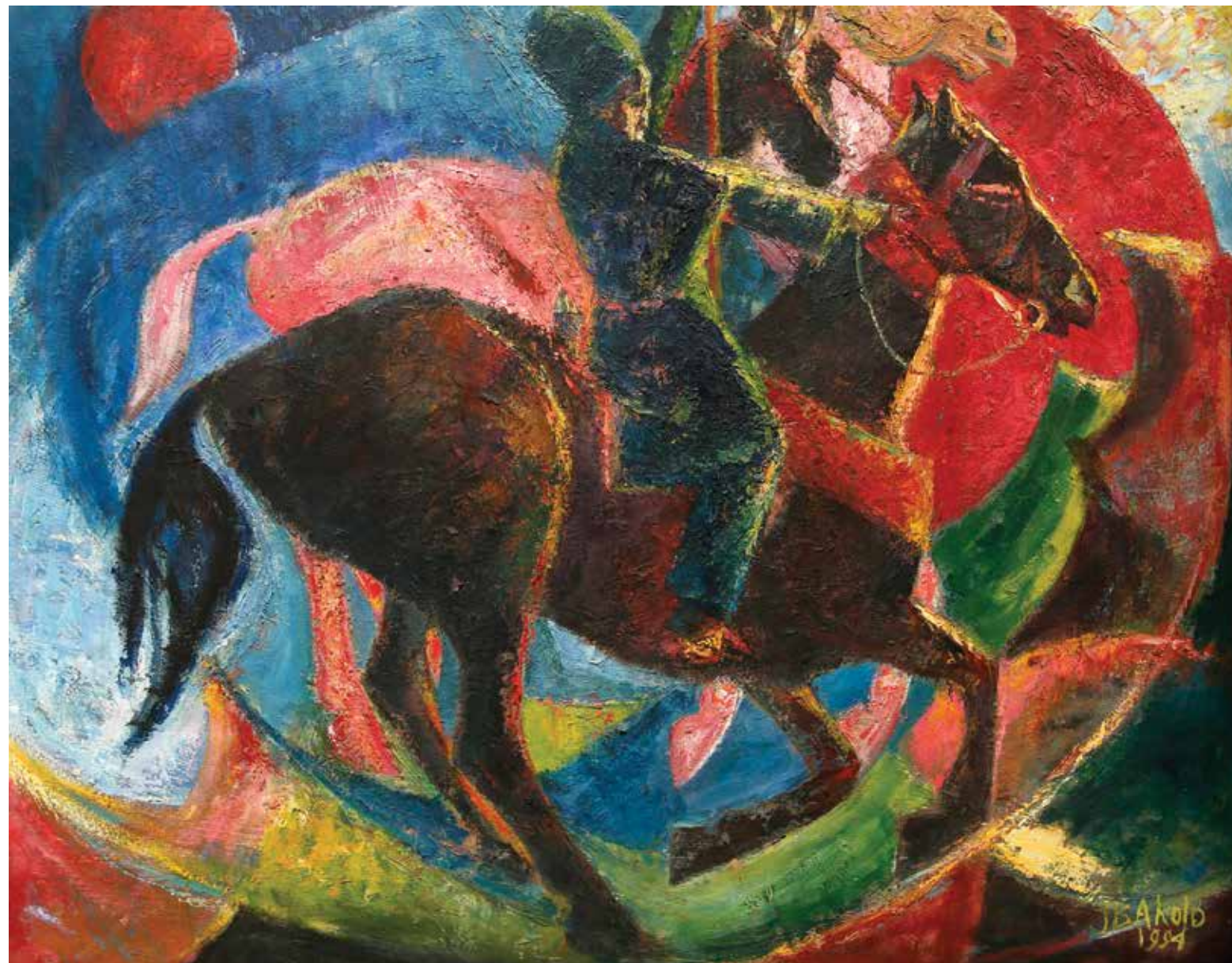
Jimo Akolo
Untitled
Oil on canvas
1998/1999
92 x 122 cm. (36 x 48 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



Jimo Akolo
Mother & Child
Oil on canvas
1998
76 x 102 cm. (30 x 40 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



Jimo Akolo
Untitled
Oil on board
1994
91.5 x 117 cm. (36 x 46 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



Jimo Akolo
The Conspiracy
Oil on canvas
2000
60.5 x 91 cm. (23.8 x 35.8 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



Jimo Akolo
ECWA Church building in the early 60s at Egbe
Oil on canvas
2003
89.5 x 120 cm. (35.2 x 47.2 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



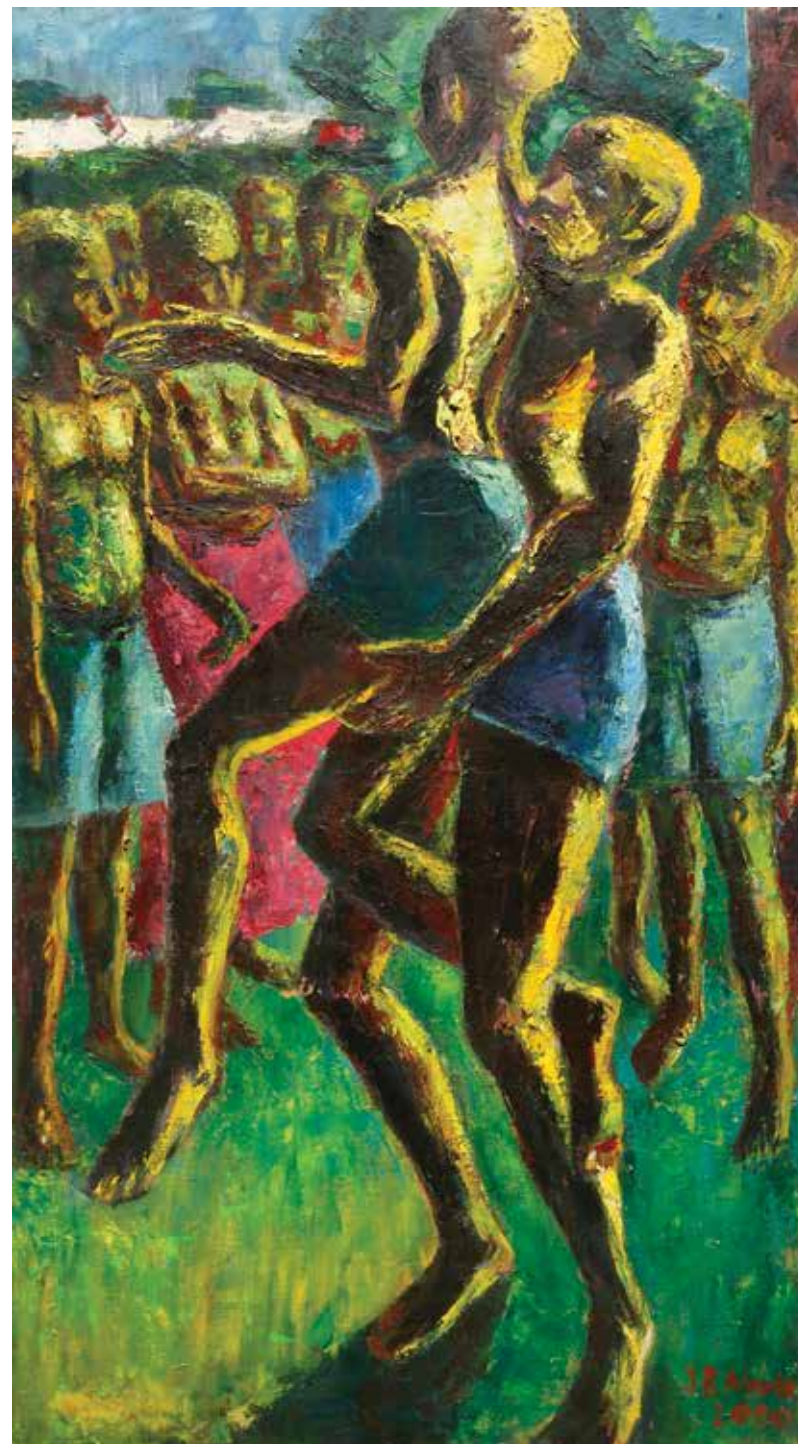
Jimo Akolo
Mobilization Series (I)
Oil on canvas
2001
91.5 x 122 cm. (36 x 48 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



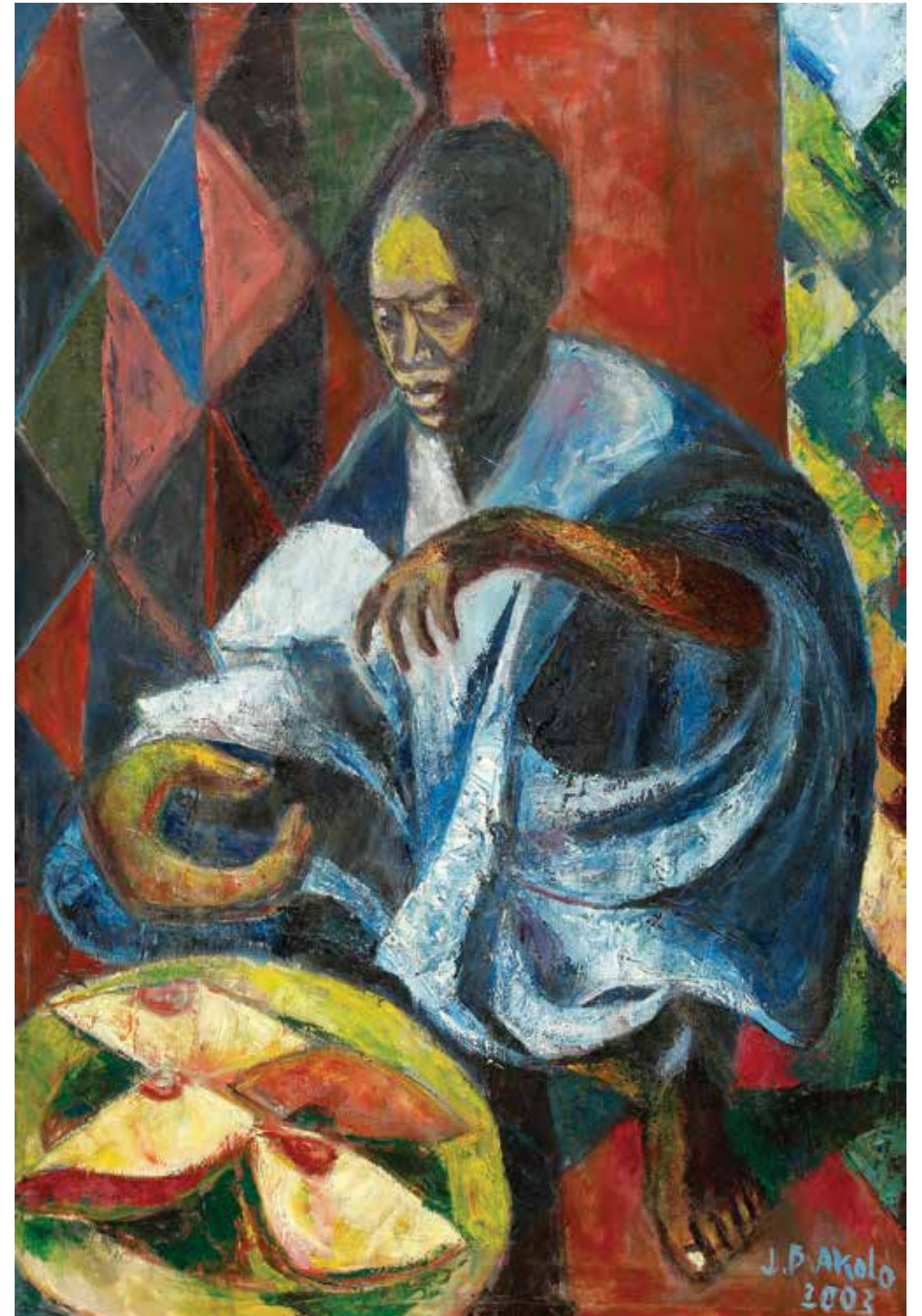
Jimo Akolo
Taking a break
Oil on canvas
2000/03
81.5 x 122 cm. (32 x 48 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



Jimo Akolo
Wrestling Match
Oil on canvas
2000
122 x 67 cm. (48 x 26.2 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



Jimo Akolo
Untitled
Oil on canvas
2003
120.5 x 80 cm. (47.5 x 31.5 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



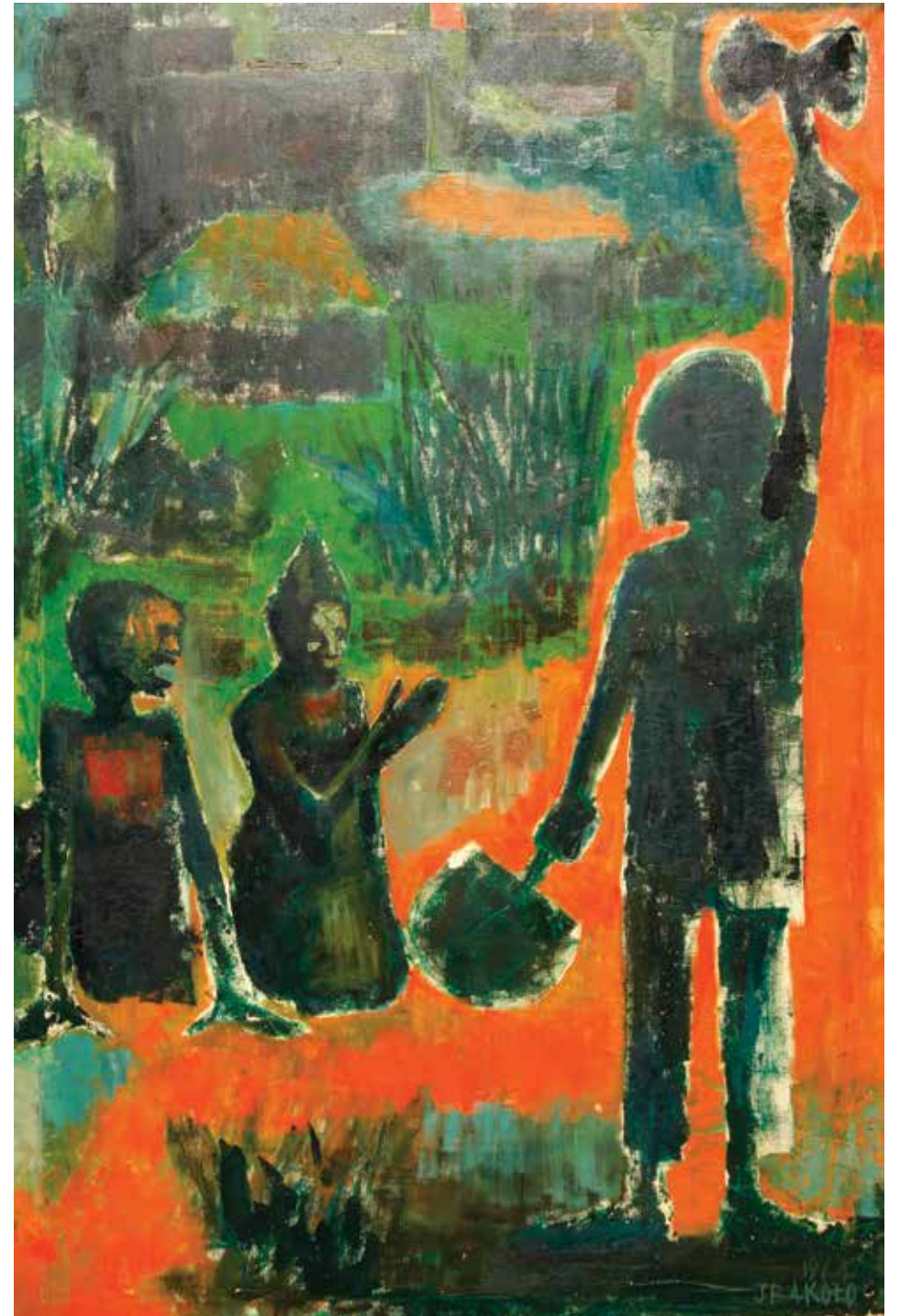
Jimo Akolo
Owambe
Oil on canvas
2002/03
107 x 77 cm. (42 x 30.2 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



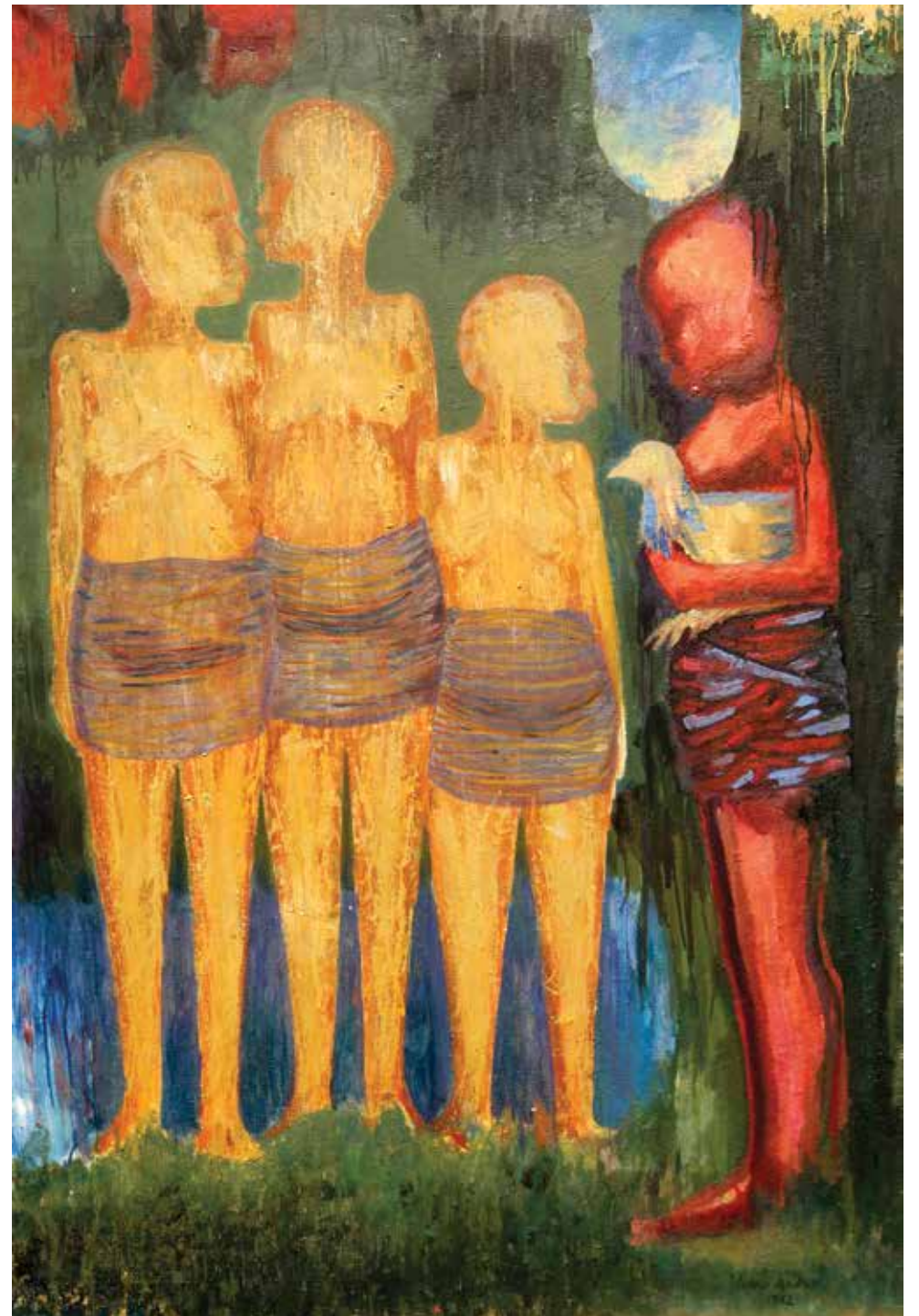
Jimo Akolo
Time For High-life (Shake Your Body)
Oil on canvas
122 x 81 cm. (48 x 32 in.)
Signed: Lower right



Jimo Akolo
The God of Thunder
Oil on canvas
1964
147.5 x 105 cm. (58 x 39.5 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



Jimo Akolo
Four Women and a chicken
Oil on canvas
1962
150 x 99 cm. (59 x 39 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



Jimo Akolo
Untitled
Oil on canvas
2000
122 x 91.5 cm. (48 x 36 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



Jimo Akolo
Untitled
Oil on canvas
2001
120.5 x 91 cm. (47.5 x 36 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



Jimo Akolo
Untitled
Oil on canvas
1999-2000
122 x 91.5 cm. (48 x 36 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



Being In and Yet Out: Reflections on Jimo Akolo's Art Practice

Tonie Okpe*

In Middle English the word conversation means, "The action of living or having one's being in or among". This sense of community with, or being a member of (of belonging), is extremely important to the kind of understanding...it implicates the character of one's life in the community of art, the quality of one's conversation or impedes or renders mute the dialogue...Critical to this discussion are three other important definitions: Community, Comfort, Discomfort...The definitions of community and conversation share the notion of being together. Thus, I propose that when we do not take part in a conversation, we are not members of the community involved in that conversation. (Jennifer Eisman, 2001)

Although art was not on the curriculum while Jimo Akolo was at the Government College, Keffi but not being in an art class was not so much of a problem for him, because there was no such a community of art students being taught in a formal art class setting, that he was missing from. Mr. Dennis Duerden, who was a history teacher in the College then, painted as past time while accepting Jimo and other classmates into his informal art classes which eventually led them to produce, first, it was greeting cards then gradually this led to painting, climaxing into taking part in art exhibitions and competitions both at home in Nigeria and abroad in Britain and America winning accolades. This singular circumstance, therefore, created a context that fostered conversation[s] as well as creating hitherto unavailable opportunity[ies] early in his artistic career between 1954 and 1956. So, although Jimo was not in a formal art class early while in Keffi, he was indeed in an art exposure and experience setting which later, will provide the impetus and confidence to apply to study art at the Nigerian College of Art, Science and Technology, Zaria.

Soon after starting to study art in Zaria in 1957, both the content and context of study at Keffi changed from being in, yet out of a formal art class to being in a formal art class and learning, which later affected the 'community' and the 'conversation' imbedded in the then company of his fellow students, who eventually started a society. The European content of the curriculum they were then exposed to, created, a new vista of understanding and reactions, and understandably so, because Adepegba (1995), opined that "Art school training in Africa is essentially Western in orientation and products. But early artistic training in Africa could not be exactly the same as it was in Europe. Even if the syllabi were the same as in Europe, the out-of-classroom artistic exposure could not be the same. The actual western art forms which art students in Europe must have grown up with, seen always and be motivated by in museums, galleries, and other public displays could mostly be seen and experienced as pictures on pages of books and

magazines especially by pioneer students in African art schools...The limited out-of-class exposure of students in African art schools could normally leave students groping as to what art was and what was expected of them as trainees or later as artists. It was also responsible for the unjustifiable contempt the pioneer products went through in some cynic quarters."

Little wonder, therefore, that although Akolo was in the same class with mates that started the society of their time, he was actually, in reality out because of some form of perception and or disagreement with his peers as to what form, content and desire the society should take. He, soon after, left membership of the society before it wound up eventually in 1961. He was and is still frequently either left out or forgotten in the credits and stories of the Society because he was clearly not listed as a member, because of his inhibitions, and especially that the Society was not meeting to draw or paint but to discuss issues pertinent to their studies. He is however, not alone in being counted out of the stories and glories because a female member of the Society for one and last year [I.M. Omagie] is still being left Out despite the fact that she was indeed In and listed.

Despite being 'Out', he was already ahead of his colleagues, because as early as 1959, he had won first prizes in drawing and painting at the Northern Nigerian self-government celebrations exhibition, showed works at the Nigerian Independence Exhibition in 1960, not to mention his works haven honourable mention during the 6th Biennial Sao Paulo in 1961. According to Akolo (1994), "Well, I consider myself part of them because although you see, my only difference with them was that I felt I should really be open and listen to those people and not jettison whatever they were saying. But I still worked like my other colleagues on my own and we worked in the same way but just that disagreement of not listening to those people. I will consider myself as being part of them although I didn't continue as a member of that society...I had some problems in that the Society was trying to decide what people should do and how far you could go and I felt, at that level of development, I just felt I wasn't comfortable with it. That was how I backed out of the Society. Initially they tried to isolate me, but it was really not amusing because I felt even more comfortable being isolated. They saw that it didn't work and we became friends all over."

Soon after graduating from the Nigerian College of Art, Science and Technology, Zaria in 1961, by 1962, Akolo continued with his studio practice, and the first commission was the three-part mural decoration at the Members' Lounge of the Lugard Hall, Kaduna. He then had two one-man shows, first at the Mbari Mbayo Club in Ibadan and second at the Lagos Exhibition Centre, Lagos during the same year. Later in the year – November to be precise - he was awarded a British Council Scholarship to paint and study art and design at Hornsey College of Art, London in 1963. On his return to Nigeria after the studio practice stint in London, he continued to be prolific in his drawing and painting,

resulting in a one-man show at the Commonwealth Institute, London in 1964, as well as participating in group shows in London and Edinburgh in 1965. He joined Ahmadu Bello University in 1966 and started working at the Faculty of Education, out of the Department of Fine Arts as it was then called but continued with his studio practice, resulting in, yet another group show in Moscow and Warsaw in 1968. During the period of Being In the Faculty of Education and Yet Out of the Department of Fine Arts, the quest to continue with his studio practice, alongside teaching, research, and administrative duties became awesome - more like true to art practice dexterity, blossoming and, resulting in several exhibitions during the 70s, 80s and 90s. It is during this period, that he taught drawing and painting to generations of students of the Department of Fine Arts, prominent amongst whom are Jerry Buhari, Jacob Jari and Emmanuel Irokanulo.

Although he retired from the services of Ahmadu Bello University in 1999, he since, settled into full-time studio practice at his hometown studio at Egbe in Kogi State, remaining resolute in his art practice, while insisting on subject matters and titles, devoted to his cultural conviction, and this is evident in several old and recent figurative paintings that may not be obvious to the public, akin to a comment by Ikpakronyi (2019), that “Jimo has not been sufficiently documented for the younger ones to read and know how much he has done.” Similar, Okpe (1998) stated that “It is safe to insinuate that because he “rebelled” against the “rebels he got frequently left out of discussions that bother on contemporary Nigerian art”

“Many who knew Jimo Akolo as an up and coming artist in the sixties must have been wondering whatever became of him. The good news is that he has not only been alive and well, but he has all through these years been drawing and painting too, ...for the records!” (The Eye, 1994)

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2. Akolo, J. (1994), Interview: Jimo Akolo *The Eye: A Journal of Contemporary Art*, Vol.3, No.1, The Eye Society, Zaria, p.14.
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5. Ikpakronyi, S.O. (2019), (ed.) Jimo Bola Akolo: Odyssey of Unsung Art Scholar, Jimo Akolo, eminent scholar and painter, National Gallery of Art, Abuja, p.1.
6. Okpe, T. (1998), Foreward, *Homage*, An exhibition catalogue, Department of Fine Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, p.2.



DRAWINGS

Jimo Akolo
Life Drawing (Delu)
Charcoal on paper
1966
51 x 35 cm. (20 x 13.8 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



Jimo Akolo
The Model
Pencil on paper
1961
35 x 23 cm. (13.8 x 9 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



Jimo Akolo
Infantry
Charcoal on paper
1965
40.5 x 34 cm. (16 x 13.5 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



Jimo Akolo
The model (Life drawing)
Pencil on paper
1984
38 x 28 cm. (15 x 11 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



Jimo Akolo
Plant life Series (I)
Pencil on paper
1988
41 x 30 cm. (16 x 12 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



Jimo Akolo
Plant life Series (II)
Pencil on paper
1990
41 x 30 cm. (16 x 12 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



Jimo Akolo
The Model
Pencil on paper
1994
51 x 35 cm. (20 x 13.8 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



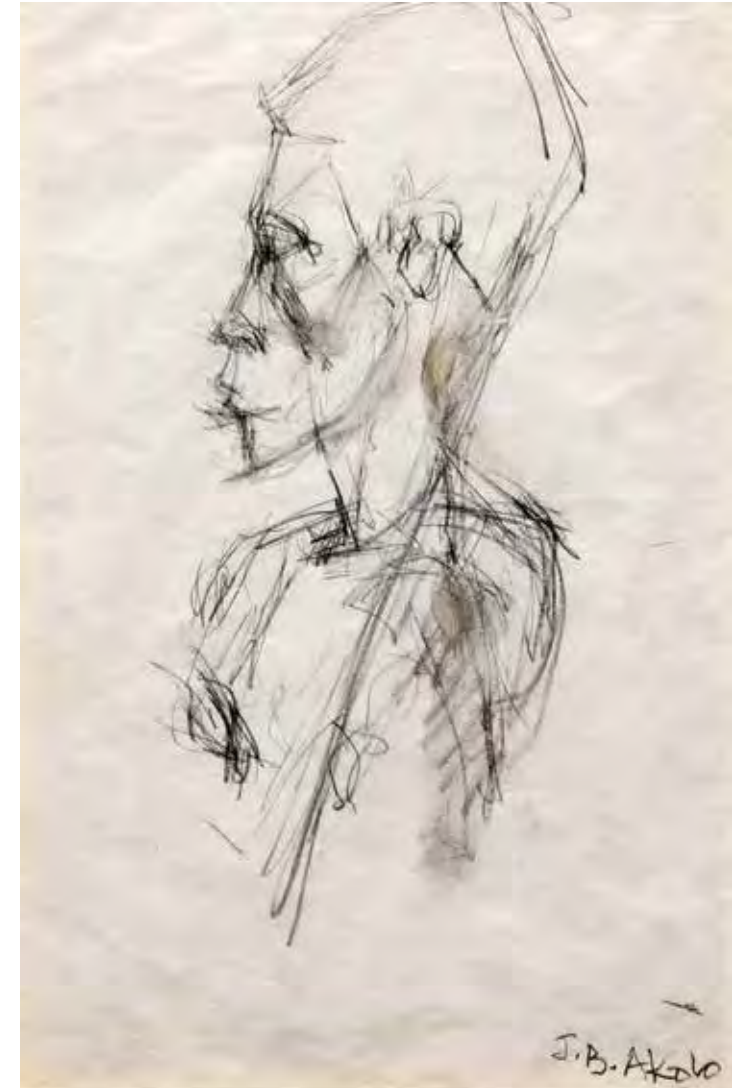
Jimo Akolo
Horse Man I
Pencil on paper
1995
40.5 x 56 cm. (16 x 22 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



Jimo Akolo
Horse man II
Charcoal on paper
1995
55 x 41 cm. (22.5 x 16 in.)
Signed and dated: Lower right



Jimo Akolo
Impression
Pencil on paper
35.5 x 23 cm. (14 x 9 in.)
Signed: Lower right



Jimo Akolo
Tiger
Pencil on paper
23 x 36 cm. (9 x 14 in.)
Signed: Lower right



Jimo Akolo
Man on Horse
Pencil on paper
22.5 x 35 cm. (9 x 14 in.)
Signed: Lower right



Reflections of Adamu Baikie

(21.11.2021)

Jimo Akolo is an enigma.

Virtually a loner, Jimo never took part in any frivolities.

He is not interested in girls either.

He would often grow a beard and would not shave for a long time.

He has a great and dry sense of humour and would laugh off whatever you bring up and follow up with a few words.

He is a great artist. His best friend was his sketchbook. His social life is minimal, preferring to pour all his interest and energy into his sketchbook.

His life drawings in Zaria tilted towards cubism.

Jimo Akolo shares some painting nuances with Yusuf Grillo.

Jimo Akolo in Zaria was a sportsman. He was a good footballer and boxer. He was also in the school's cadet club.

I am delighted to be part of the process that brought him back to Ahmadu Bello University.

Down memory lane with my father

Ayodeji Richard Akolo (son)

Going down memory lane and penning down my thoughts with delight and so much nostalgic memories of the beautiful, wonderful and loving years and the journey together with my father, Prof. Jimo Bola Akolo.

The very best years of my life as a child were filled with sweet memories of having various art works, artefacts and books in every nook and cranny of our home. Paintings were displayed on the shelves; finished and unfinished ones undergoing different phases and without the slightest knowledge of what they meant and its relevance. My father meticulously completed every single painting to the highest degree of artistic perfection. Adding several stages of finishing touches to them. Leaving me baffled as to why daddy kept painting the same thing repeatedly, while to my little mind the paintings had long been completed.

As I grew older, I became more aware of the hours my father spent on the patio, painting from already sketched drawings he had. Daddy sometimes had me and my late younger brother (Ayokunle) model for him while he sketched and painted over the weekends. I remember the beautiful displays of oil colours on the palette and the different sizes of brushes, the smell of turpentine...

Little did I understand the amount of time, care, patience and love he put into every single piece of art was a careful chronicle of life, his life and our lives. My father put his heart and soul in each and every single painting he produced. There was a lot of passion emoted while he worked, watching him work.

After all this glorious years, I now better understand my father's artistic passion and ideologies, despite finding some of them vague earlier on in life. I have learnt valuable life lessons from Dad, objectively as a professional academician and artist extraordinaire. And even more recently when he recounted so much lovely memories of his past times, his humble beginnings and attributes all this to God Almighty who helped him meander life's conflicting pathways, especially having come from the pre-internet old school generation and idealism.

I sometimes wonder how it is that my father never imposed fine arts on us considering the fact that African parents often expressly impress their children what career pathways they should follow, even though we had the natural art inborn instincts of drawing and appreciating nature from an in-depth artistic ideological perspective.

My father is a man of little words and has oftentimes been misunderstood as a result of his averse views to a lot of societal philosophies. My loving father, who is also a grandfather, professor and highly talented artist, has attained a great level of professional excellence in all spheres of life. He has made invaluable contributions globally to the art world, participated in numerous exhibitions all over the world and has been a driving force to reckon with amongst his contemporaries.

My father is undoubtedly my number 1 hero and will always be an inspiration to myself, my children, extended family and friends. I am proud to see a very large number of my father's ex-students are now themselves internationally renowned professors of fine arts and top academicians e.g., Professors Sunday Ogunduyile, Jacob Jari, Jerry Buhari, amongst others.

As we look to setting up an Arts Foundation in my father's honour, with the intention of supporting upcoming talented fine artists and community developments (being some of his core values), by the special grace of God, we will successfully accomplish this onerous task to the benefit of the global arts world.

The Making of An Icon

Mercy Feyisola Akolo

My brother, Professor Jimoh Akolo is the first of 8 children born into the family of the late Mr. Joseph & Margaret Akolo. Between my brother and I were 4 siblings, 3 who died very shortly after birth, and a fourth, my immediate senior, who was a graduate of mathematics from ABU Zaria and a Major in the Nigerian army before he too passed away. So although I was his next youngest sibling, there was such a gap between us, and by the time I knew my brother, he was in secondary school. In addition to the age gap, my brother was too quiet for my liking so I couldn't approach him directly and would either go through our grandmother to talk to him or write down a list of things I wanted him to get for me, drop it on his table and disappear. He was the kind of person who took care of all of us and he made sure he put us through school.

But my brother was not only selfless but also very unassuming.

Growing up, we used to hear his name on the radio when he would go abroad for exhibitions but he was such a modest and principled 'father figure' to us that we didn't realise just how important he was outside our family. In fact, my daughter's first idea that her uncle was famous was when she came across his name on her WAEC exam question paper.

Prof's interest in the arts began from watching our grandfather, a special basket weaver that made baskets with especially good lids. For his final year school project in primary school, Prof's replica of the basket earned a score of 95% but his teacher omitted it, choosing to record a similar score in arithmetic instead.

When he got to Government Secondary School Keffi, there was no art subject in the school curriculum but there was an art museum club where he met an expatriate teacher, Mr. Duerden, who was an instructor there. Prof was so good that Mr. Duerden took note of him and would come to influence his future career as an artist.

By Prof's final year in secondary school, he decided to apply for a scholarship to study civil engineering in the university and asked Mr. Duerden to be a referee on his application. By this time Mr. Duerden had left Keffi, but he travelled from Jos to Keffi to convince Prof to take up fine art instead of civil engineering and only agreed to give him a reference if he obliged. Duerden also gave him a long vacation job in the museum to prepare him.

So Prof started his studies in the Nigerian College of Arts, Science, and Technology, which later became Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. While there he won a national cultural trophy

for creating a display at Lugard Hall House of Assembly and was awarded a mention of honour in São Paulo Biennial, the second oldest art biennial in the world.

Mr. Duerden continued to play a nurturing role beyond his university studies, getting him into a one year British Council art practical training in London where his works were exhibited at the Commonwealth Institute London and earned him an award from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the rest is history.

Prof is as highly talented as he is extremely simple. Always more interested in the work than in calling any attention to himself, so as a family we are proud of the recognition being accorded him through this auspicious event and pray that his work and legacy continue to speak long after him.

Thank you.

Artworks from University of Sussex



Jimo Akolo
Hausa Drummer
Oil on board
1961
122 x 81.4 cm. (49 x 32.5 in.)



Jimo Akolo
Northern Horsemen
Oil on canvas
1963
147.3 x 94.4 cm. (59 x 38 in.)



Jimo Akolo
Hausa Procession
Oil on board
1962
94.4 x 182.8 cm. (38 x 73 in.)

Professor Jimo Akolo at a Glance

Grace Yemisi Ukhueleigbe

Professor Jimo Akolo was born to Pa Daike Akolo and Mama Margaret Igunnu Akolo, in Lagos in 1934. He started his early primary school in Lagos. He later ... and continued and completed his primary education at Egbe, his home town in Yagba Division of present day Kogi State.

When in Egbe, he got fascinated with artwork through his grandfather who was a specialist in basket weaving. His expertise in replicating the basket of his grandfather earned him 95% in craftwork in his final year, though he was equally good in Arithmetic.

From his primary school, he proceeded to Government Secondary School at Keffi, where he met one Mr. Duerden, an expatriate teacher who was an instructor at an Art Museum Club in Keffi, where he joined the Club as a member as art was not in the school curriculum.

This man, Mr. Duerden, was instrumental to the eventual career in arts instead of civil engineering, which Professor Jimo Akolo had earlier indicated interest. Professor Akolo was on the verge of obtaining scholarship for his engineering course, but was convinced by Mr. Duerden to take up fine arts, at the College of Science and Technology Zaria, now Ahmadu Bello University. In his final year at the University, he was selected to do a mural decoration, at Lugard Hall House of Assembly Kaduna, for which he won a national cultural trophy. He also got an honour for his works in Sao Polo, at Biennial Brazil Festival.

Mr. Duerden, after all these years, aware of the potentials in Professor Akolo, influenced a British Council scholarship to do art practice training at London for one year. The resultant exhibition by Professor Akolo was beamed over Europe. An award also followed the exhibition from USAID, for his doctorate studies in art education at Indiana University, Bloomington, USA.

Professor Jimo Akolo is a family man, who played a great role in the secondary school education of his siblings and ensure that their studies were taken with seriousness. He is a man of few words, a recluse who associates scantily with people, but loved by the people of his community.

He is a colossus in Art Education/works, which he earned through his great works over the years.

Professor Akolo is a classical example of a core academic who is mainly engrossed in his works than enjoying the distractive luxury of life. This is exhibited in his modest living; his house in Egbe, where he lives till date, is a two- room bungalow and a large room BQ, which serves as his studio and contains lots of works. One of his famous productions is the metal sculpture named "AJAFORUNTI", he planted at a major highway junction inside his home place Egbe. As whenever the mood arises in him. As a human, he also has his weakness, a topic for another day.

In recognition of his contribution to Art Education, his history/achievements is taught in secondary school social studies subject.

He has undoubtedly left a lasting and indelible mark on Nigerian art.

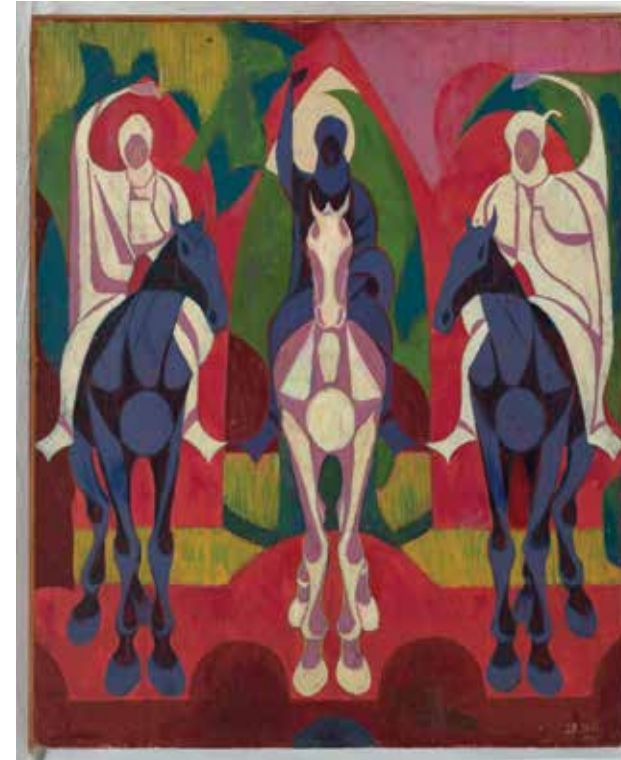
Finally, he is happily married and blessed with a surviving son, Richard Ayodeji.



Artworks from Bristol Museum



Jimo Akolo
Two Figures in a Landscape
 1963
 Collection: British Empire & Commonwealth



Jimo Akolo
Fulani Horsemen
 1962
 Collection: British Empire
 & Commonwealth



Jimo Akolo
Untitled
 1963
 Collection: British Empire
 & Commonwealth



Jimo Akolo
Untitled
 Collection: British Empire
 & Commonwealth

Acknowledgements: ©British Museum, Galleries and Archives

Professor Akolo J. B., a Citation

Sunday R. Ogunduyile

Every great house rests on great pillars. Sans its spirituality, the imposing dignity of a great cathedral has little pride beyond the diligence and power of its pillars. It is meet then that my citation centres on the pillar of humanity in Nigeria, Professor Jimo Bola, Akolo, who finds fit the art education an intellectual fountain to pour more than half a life-time into.

Perhaps, I should begin the citation of this consummate long-standing ambassador of humanity, mentor, adviser and highly valued administrator with the former Nigerian National Anthem:

*Nigeria we hail thee,
Our own dear native land,
Though tribe and tongue may differ,
In brotherhood we stand,
Nigerians all, are proud to serve
Our sovereign Motherland.*

*Our flag shall be a symbol
That truth and justice reign,
In peace or battle honour'd,
And this we count as gain,
To hand on to our children
A banner without stain.*

The contextual substance of this anthem is vested not in the Nigerian nation but in the patriotism represented in one of Nigerian finest minds who saw and had the dream, the vision of a great nation at birth and was determined to drive the dream, the vision to fruition; so he sang the anthem with the piety and innocence of xenophobia and tenacity to purpose. It is within this matrix I situate the protagonist of our citation, Professor Jimo, Bola, Akolo, a huge hill in artery, enfolded by honour; demon, flapping *fans of intellectual war*... who snaps tree branches into pieces and moves on to the forest farm!

When I was told to do a citation on Professor J. B. Akolo, I asked a friend to help me Google him. I was shocked when he said the biographical information about him on the Internet was very scanty. I lifted up my head to look at my friend in disbelief with my mouth wide open in muteness. Only the tears from my eyes spoke the anguish in my heart – the untold anguish in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* – where a

sensitive, thoughtful boy, Stephen Dedalus, who runs into deepening financial difficulties, as his parents managed to send him to prestigious schools and eventually to a university, grapples with the nationality, religion, family, and morality, and finally decides to reject all socially imposed bonds and instead live generously as an artist – giving his best to repair a nation in decay.

Professor Akolo was born at Egbe in the present Kogi State on September, 20th, 1935. One significance about this particular date and year is that, famous bishops, writers and artists such as André Fort: French Catholic clergyman, the Bishop, Keith J Roberts: England, United Kingdom – Writer, Lubos Fiser: Composer, Hansjorg Wyss: Businessman and Keith Roberts: English author and illustrator, were born. *Great men don't walk alone*. In other words, *Egbe eja ni eja nba we*.

Professor Akolo underwent several crucial transformations over the course of his existence. The first, which occurred during his first academic experience at private lessons in Lagos between 1942 and 45, was from a sheltered little boy to a bright student who understood social interactions and could begin to make sense of the world around him. This graduated to his enrolment at Sudan Interior Mission School, Egbe, 1946-1950; the third, which occurred with a great history to its credit.

In July 1948, a five-year supplementary plan for educational development in the Northern Provinces was adopted at the Northern House of Assembly. The resolution was still a part of the speedy move by the government of the Northern Region to close the educational gap between the North and the South. About a year later in January 1949, during a regional council debate, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, then a provincial member from Bauchi, raised a critical question that “is the Northern education expansion and development plan progressing according to schedule?” Expectedly, with the calibre of leadership which the country had enjoyed then, the regional Deputy Director of Education, Mr. J. B. Gott, who himself was the brain behind the Educational Bill, answered inter-alia: “Indeed, things worked according to plans as Kaduna College moved to its permanent site in Zaria in February, while the first intake of Keffi Secondary School reports at Kaduna Junction compound with 49 students.” Thus in 1949 with 49 students, against all odds, another Premier school in Northern Nigeria, being-Government College, Keffi, was born. And between 1951 and 1956, our own J. B. became a graduate of that school. Meanwhile, Professor Akolo was one of the young students who fought for the independence of the school.

The College, as a matter of fact, started in Kaduna State as a Middle School with the name “Government Secondary School, Keffi,” with Edward Arthur, a Briton as the founding principal. A middle school then was an intermediary class, and a transitional

qualification between primary and secondary schools. And so, like a toddler with unsteady steps, Government Secondary School, Keffi had struggled along in the mud and thatch of a few classrooms in Kaduna, where indeed there was no Keffi, until five years later in 1954 when it eventually became a full-fledged secondary school, and was moved to the old Benue - Plateau (now Nasarawa) State where Keffi really exists. On completion of the relocation exercise in 1955, the school was officially opened by the then Northern Regional Minister of Education, Alhaji Aliyu Makaman Bida and renamed Government College Keffi. This time around the school began to enjoy modern classrooms constructed by the colonial civil engineering firm, Costain, West Africa Limited.

The young Akolo went to the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology in Zaria, in 1957. At that time, the syllabus approached African art from an anthropological perspective, rather than as objects of fine art worthy of appreciation and criticism. The young but ever vibrant but meek Akolo, along with three of his fellow students, Uche Okeke, Demas Nwoko, and Bruce Onobrakpeya, determined to redress this. Originally an informal association, they were soon joined by students from the previous class - Yusuf Grillo, Simon Okeke and William Olaosebikan. This injection of support allowed the group to push for formal recognition from the academy. In 1958, the Zaria Art Society held their inaugural meeting with the aim of encouraging “the study of Fine Arts” through “weekly discussions on varied aspects of West African culture with special references to Nigerian culture”. Topics ranged from folktales, burial customs, marriage ceremonies, to body marks and mural symbols. In 1961, Akolo graduated. In a class that boasted of both Uche Okeke and Demas Nwoko, Akolo was lauded as one of the most talented students.

Professor Akolo has never been an idle hand. His strong belief that art education has the capacity to demonstrate positive effects of arts education in several areas including students’ intrinsic enjoyment, art form knowledge and skills, social and cultural knowledge, creativity and thinking skills, communication and expressive skills, personal and social development, effects that transfer to other contexts (e.g., learning in other subjects, work-related benefits such as teamwork), culture of the school, and benefits to the local community, inspired him to take up the job of student-teacher at Bauchi Teachers’ College in 1957. His acquisition of knowledge has never been to make money but to invest in humanity. Consequently, between 1961 and 1962, Professor Akolo became a Freelance Artist at the Lugard Hall, Kaduna, where he exhibited a number of his arts works.

After his Zaria experiences, this great man of vision proceeded to Hornsey College of Arts and Craft, University of London in 1963. Still very thirsty for knowledge in the

most effective and illustrative profession of human transformation, rejuvenation and regeneration, Professor J.B. Akolo proceeded to Indiana University, Bloomington, U.S.A. from 1964-1966 and 1980-82. These have earned him prestigious academic qualifications such as Diploma in Fine Arts, 1961; Diploma in Educational Media, 1965; Master of Science in Education, 1966; Doctor of Art Education, 1982.

Professor Jimo Bola Akolo studied under Dennis Duerden, an education officer in the Nigerian colonial service. He was a founding member of the Zaria Art Society (1958-62), along with Yusuf Grillo, Bruce Onobrakpeya, and other art students at the Zaria branch of the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology. In providing an alternative forum where experiences and information about indigenous Nigerian cultures could be shared, Akolo and his peers successfully attempted to counterbalance the academy’s Western-oriented curriculum. The subject matter of the current lot demonstrates Akolo’s commitment to creating a distinctly Nigerian contemporary aesthetic. From 1963–66, the young and visionary Akolo became the Artist/Education Officer, Ministry of Education, Kaduna. From there, he joined the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, in 1966 as an Assistant Lecturer where he rose to the highest academic rank of professorship.

Exploration of Arts

Following his knowledge of the impacts of art instructions on children, young adults and adults with the development of motor, language and social skills, decision-making, risk-taking, and inventiveness, Professor Akolo invested in arts religiously to educate people for positive existence in the society. Visual arts teach the metaphoric significance of colour, layout, perspective, and balance: all techniques that are necessary in presentations of academic, intellectual, business and administrative works. Hence, as a great artist and art educator, he has many publications and exhibitions to his credit. His major exhibitions include:

1. Mural Decoration in the Lugard Hall, Kaduna, 1961/62.
2. One-Man Shows at Federal Exhibition Centre, Lagos, and Mbari, Ibadan, 1962.
3. One-Man Shows at the Commonwealth Institute, London, 1964.
4. Joint Exhibition in London and Edinburgh, 1965.
5. Joint Exhibition at the Society for Nigerian Artists, London, Moscow and Warsaw, 1968.
6. One-man Show at the Nigerian Arts Council, Lagos, 1970.
7. Joint Exhibition at the All Nigerian Festival of Arts, Ibadan, 1971.
8. Joint Exhibition at the **All Nigerian Festival of Arts**, 1972.
9. Participation in the **Visual Arts Exhibition of FESTAC**, Lagos, 1977.

10. Participation in the Exhibition Organised to mark 25 years of the Fine Arts Department, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 1980.
11. Participation in the **African Arts: Past and Present Exhibition** of the Ohio State University Annual Symposium on African and West – the Challenge of African Humanism, 1982.
12. Nigeria's Participation of the **Second Biennial Arts Exhibition**, Havana, Cuba, United Nation General Assembly. The Celebration of the Peace Year, 1986.
13. **Arts and Craft Exhibition**, International Symposium on African Literature, Lagos: Federal Department of Culture. 1988.
14. Art Exhibition at the Annual Conference of the Society of the Nigerian Artists, Kaduna, 1990.

Professor Akolo authored several books including, *A model for teaching the aesthetics of Yoruba sculptures in Nigerian elementary schools, (1987)*, *Evaluation of an arts and crafts program in the fourth and fifth years of teachers' colleges in ten states of Nigeria**1982; 1985)

Professor Akolo belongs to the class of the very few Nigerian artists and writers such as Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, Dapo Adelugba whose artistic works attracted the intellectual prowess of the white critics, Ulli, Beier and Highet, Julie in the 60s, and inspired several books such as *Three Zaria Artists*, 1960 and *Five Nigerian Artist*, 1969 respectively.

Awards

Professor Akolo has received pool of award nationally and internationally. Some of his awards include:

1. First Prize in Drawing and Painting at the Northern Nigerian Self-government Celebrations Exhibition, 1959.
2. Nigerian Cultural Trophy for the Best Artist of the Year in Sao Paulo Biennial Mention of Honour, 1962.
3. Certificate of Participation, FESTAC, 1977.
4. Asele Institute Award for Contribution to Art and Education, 1986.

Unquestionably, the life of Prof Akolo J. B. is a whole book in living a worthy life where every phase is a chapter in humility and every point is a page in modesty. He is one of the early art educators in Nigeria. I joined Professor Akolo at the Institute of education, arts and materials section in 1982 as a graduate assistance. As the head of the section, Professor Akolo was loved by all. He was a supervisor to many postgraduate students in fine arts and education. He was an Apostle of Peace who could stop at nothing to achieving peace. Professor Akolo was a jinx breaker to many

for resolving educational research issues that were considered unsolvable. He, indeed, is an astute administrator as well as management guru. He was committed to selfless service, students' Counselling and often ready for excellence in all ramifications. He was referred to as oasis of humility and could hardly be bothered by fearful things happening around him.

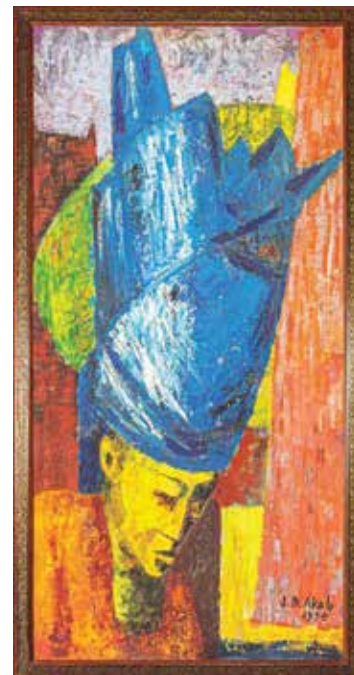
Professor Akolo is one distinct educator and administrator of the personage of George Washington seen by many, particularly, admirers of benevolent leadership, as the "indispensable man," who will never compromise his integrity, charisma and dignity. Professor Akolo always hangs "a lantern" on individuals and national challenges, presumes his ideas of individual and nation effectively, and gives them decisive and pivotal pursuits to fruition.

Professor Akolo is a great leader of the standing of Ghandi, whose leadership philosophy of, "You have to be the change that you want to see", remains sacrosanct to the Nigerian political idiosyncrasy and eccentricity. He is one of the few art educators who understand the intricacies of the situational leadership in Nigeria, and never descends so low to the inanity of tribal sentiment because he shares the dream embedded in the anthem.

Yemisi Shyllon Muesum



Jimo Akolo
Honorable Man
 Oil on Canvas
 1971
 120 x 71 cm. (48 x 28 in.)



Jimo Akolo
Untitled
 Oil on board
 1975
 130 x 68 cm. (52 x 11 in.)



Jimo Akolo
The Sojourners
 Oil on board
 1975
 68 x 130 cm. (11 x 52 in.)



Jimo Akolo
The Guard
 Oil on canvas
 1967
 75 x 117 cm. (30 x 47 in.)

Jimo Bola Akolo



Selected Biography

Born, 20th September 1935

Education

Exposed to basket making by grandfather early in life.

Private lessons in Lagos, 1942-1945

West Yagba Central School, Egbe, (Now ECWA Primary School, Egbe) 1946

Studied art under Dennis Duerden at Government College Keffi

Government College Keffi, 1956

Nigerian College of Arts Science and Technology Zaria, 1961

Hornsey College of Arts and Craft, University of London, 1962-1963

Master in Science Education, Indiana University Bloomington, U.S.A., 1965

Doctor in Art Education, Indiana University Bloomington U.S.A., 1982

Professor, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, 1983.

Major Art Projects and Exhibitions

1959 Participant, Self-government Exhibition

1961-62 Three murals, in the Lugard Hall Kaduna

1962 One-Man Show, Federal Exhibition Centre Lagos, and Mbari, Ibadan
Participant, Sao Paulo Biennial

1964 One-Man Show, the Commonwealth Institute London

1965 Joint Exhibition, London and Edinburgh

1968 Joint Exhibition, the Society for Nigerian Artists, London, Moscow and Warsaw

1970 One-man Show, the Nigerian Arts Council Lagos

- 1971 Joint Exhibition, All Nigerian Festival of Arts, Ibadan
- 1972 Joint Exhibition, All Nigerian Festival of Arts
- 1977 Participant, Visual Arts Exhibition of FESTAC Lagos
- 1978 Statue, Ajaforunti, Egbe
- 1980 Participant, Art Exhibition, 25 Years of the Fine Arts Department, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria
- 1982 Participant, African Arts: Past and Present Exhibition of the Ohio State University, Annual Symposium on African and West – the Challenge of African Humanism, 1982.
- 1986 Participant, Nigeria's Second Biennial Arts Exhibition, Havana, Cuba, United Nation General Assembly. The Celebration of the Peace Year
- 1988 Participant, Arts and Craft Exhibition, International Symposium on African Literature, Lagos: Federal Department of Culture
- 1990 Participant, Art Exhibition at the Annual Conference of the Society of the Nigerian Artists, Kaduna
- 1992-93 Mosaic, First Floor Senate Building, Federal University of Technology, Akure
- 1995 Jimo Akolo 60th Anniversary Retrospective exhibition. National Gallery of Art, Lagos
- 2019 One-Man exhibition, “Jimo Akolo Eminent: eminent scholar and Painter.” National Gallery of Art Abuja, Nigeria

Works in the collection of private individual, institutions and museums within Nigeria and abroad

Acknowledgements

kó would like to thank those who have played significant roles in bringing this exhibition to fruition. The idea of this exhibition developed slowly with Mrs. Kavita Chellaram's interest in the artist's works over twelve years ago. Her interest in members of the Zaria Art Society, who are contemporaries of Jimo Akolo expanded her interest in the artist and his works. The National Gallery of Art, through its former Acting Director General, Dr. Simon Ikpakryonyi deserves special mention for facilitating the movement of most of the artist's works from the exhibition the Gallery held for him in July 2019. This relationship built a collaborative relationship that has brought this show to reality.

In search of more images of the works of the artist, Richard, Akolo's son, got in touch with Bristol Museum, University of Sussex in Britain, and Jess Castellote gave us images of Yemisi Shyllon Museum in Nigeria to enrich the catalogue. They granted us the permission to include the images of the works in their collection in the publication. We thank other individual collectors who generously loaned us some of their works also. Through efforts such as these we are able to present to the art community for the first time such a large exposure of the artist expansive creations – in what we refer to as The Essential Jimo Akolo.

The Team: Kavita Chellaram, Jerry Buhari, Otsholeng Poo, Sumbo Biobaku-Baderin, Joseph Gergel, Chilaka Emmanuel, Stephanie Omenai, Favour Ritario, Bisola Folawiyo, worked tirelessly, as usual, under challenging conditions to see to the success of this exhibition.

Finally, we thank the artist and his family for the confidence reposed on Mrs. Kavita to build a relationship of not only collection the artist's works but in promoting this shy and unassuming creative personality. We wish to specially note the assistance of Mrs. Mercy Feyisola Akolo, facilitated communication with the artist at Egbe. Richard was instrumental in liaising between his father and the National Gallery of Art to transfer the works to kó gallery in Lagos for the exhibition. There are others who worked behind the scene too numerous to mention. The success of this exhibition is also to their credit.

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



kó