

## Alimi Adewale- reflections of life and love.

Alimi Adewale stands out among the new generation of artists rising up through the art world in Nigeria. Not because he is breaking new ground in technique or subject matter- unlike many of his peers he has not embraced the contemporary trends of the so-called 'post-modern' art world, the world of mixed media and abstracted states of reality. 'I just want to paint', he says to me with a wistful look.

Nor is it because he has anything overtly political to say about the current state of Nigeria or indeed the art world within it. His paintings speak more to memories than future worlds, to everyday life and people than to grand ideas or political statements- images in passing, loves, things that give life its texture and beauty.

So what is it that makes his work so special? In the first instance I think it is just pure aesthetics at work. Alimi may have avoided the post-modern turn, but he has embraced the more traditional forms and techniques with a passion and love that one can help but fall for. Alimi's love of colour comes through every painting- the hues, the tones, the layers of riches, the layers of life. But he is as comfortable with the vibrancy of Lagos carnival scenes as he is in Black and White, for it is play between the different tones in his work that really sets a picture alight. Light. That is key. Many of his pieces shine, again reminding us of the life within.

As the name of a recent exhibition indicates, Alimi reaches for the sublime- a beauty he says that takes us beyond the everyday that allows us to dream and survive. As such, he tells us that his art is not political. But this is where I see a line between the artist and his audience.

To me Alimi's work speaks to many things beyond pure aesthetics. In fact, what draws me to his work is the very beauty he finds in the everyday, not beyond it. His recent series- 'anonymous'- reflections and images of men and women that make up the faces in Lagos streets, or indeed the streets themselves where people live, eat, love, dance and survive, reflect the beauty that is all around us- even in what might be seem to others as the most congested and dirty of cities. Lagos is beautiful. Nigerian's are beautiful. Alimi's work reflects and celebrates this. It is clear he loves those he reflects, and in turn we love them too. The woman with a red scarf that sits in my living room looks out at me every day- something about her soothes and calms me as I leave for the day; she is beautiful, it is true, but she also exudes an inner strength and presence that makes me love her more and more each day.

In the current context where there are few positive reflections of Nigeria and Nigerian's, let alone of the African Mega city of Lagos- the love of the city and the people that shines through Alimi's work may very well work at a much deeper level of politics than his more direct counterparts.

So what makes Alimi stand apart? He might tell you it is about beauty, colour, draftsmanship and light. Perhaps it is. For me it is about the love and the life that shine through and beyond the images.

Caroline Sage

Senior Social Development Specialist World Bank & Art Critic