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**PHCN, Please Help Clean Nigeria. “Ise Ni Ounise, Mura Si Ise Ore Mi” - Work Is an Antidote for Poverty: An Exhibition of Paintings by Master Water Colourist/ Artist and Social Critic, Ijalobomo**

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## **Abstract**

This essay is a critique of the “Nigerian condition” engaging the medium of painting. Categorising Ijalobomo’s water colours as “Windows” enables an understanding of messages captured within the paintings’ frames; and what statements they make as artifacts. Hence, it makes possible an analysis of the data, and evaluation beyond contemporary margins of subject matter in art, to understanding their functions as social symbolisms. In an empirical analysis, therefore, that is kernelled on the hermeneutic, specific images are looked at and evaluated beyond the customary margins of subject matter, to the understanding of their function as social criticism. Hence, subsequent information on statements about subject matter, medium and form engages Erwin Panofsky’s style Iconological/Iconographical analysis to give meaning to the paintings contents through a coherent merging of original, internal and external contexts. This coherent merging takes into consideration the subject matter of the picture,

Ijalobomo's social background, cultural conventions lyricised in a tableau of versed wisdom; and how such conventions have informed his themes. With a combination of theoretical frames drawn from Marxist and materialist perspectives on art are employed to address culture and economics as it functions in society. The strengths of the methods of interpretations of the images yield insights for critical social commentary. The PHCN water colours reveal Ijalobomo's effectiveness at engaging a discourse of "change in the Nigerian condition" via the genre of tragedy lyricised in versed form, but couched in the vitality of painting. A return to the choreographed values rhymed in childhood and the hard work ethos is the recipe for change!

**Key words:** critique, "the Nigerian Condition", Windows, Mirrors, Contexts, Change

The themes and subject matter of Ijalobomo's Water Colours embody narratives of the diverse contexts that inflect the identity and history of the Nigerian nation in general. This essay, therefore, engages in a quest for explication and in an enquiry asks the question: how Painting in the narrative discourse of Nigerian life and history serves as an agent of truth. In furtherance of truth what is the place of the painted image within what may be alluded to as the "*linguistic/pictorial/cultural turn*". As David Philips (1998, 155) while commenting on the quintessential visual medium, Photography, puts it succinctly: "*the visual media's capacity to signify cannot be underrated*". This I think is the grounding upon which to foist the mainstays of Ijalobomo's (henceforth, IJA/ IJA's) paintings in this essay. Hence, in a combined narrative scheme that engages both childhood moral lessons encrypted in words and the vitality of painting, IJA directs a discourse that interrogates the loss of the values of hard work and its morals encoded in childhood values. The subtitle of the PHCN exhibition: *ISE NI OUNISE "MURA SI ISE ORE MI" WORK IS AN ANTIDOTE FOR POVERTY*, captures it all, taking its line from moral rhymes, below:

ISE NI OGUN ISE	Work is the antidote for poverty
Mura SI ISE RE OREE MI	Work hard my friend
ISE NI A FI I DI GIGA	Work is what elevates one in respect and importance (Aspiring to higher height is fully dependant on hard work)

BI A KO BA RENI FEYIN TI, BI OLE LA A RI	If we do not have anyone to lean on, we appear indolent)
BI A KO RENI GBEKELE	If we do not have anyone to trust (we can depend on)
AA TERA MO ISE ENI Iya re le lowo lowo	We simply work harder your mother maybe wealthy
BABA SI LE LESIN LEEKAN	Your father may have a ranch full of horses
BI O BA GBOJU LE WON	You may end up in disgrace, I tell you
OHUN TI A BA FARA SISE FUN	Whatever we gain one does not work hard to earn
SI KI LO TOJO	Usually does not last
OHUN TI A BA FARA SISE FUN NI I PE LOWO ENI	Whatever gain one works hard to earn is the one that lasts in ones hands (while in ones possession)
APA LARA BA NI, IGUNPA NIYEKAN	The arm is a relative, the elbow is a sibling
BI AYE BA N N FE O LONII	You may be blessed by all today
BI O BA LOWO	It is when you have money
WON A MAA FE O LOLA	That they will love you tomorrow
TABI KI O WA NI IPO A TATA	Or you are in a high position
AYE A YE O SI TERIN-TERIN	All will honor you with cheers and smiles
JE KI O DI ENI N RAAGO	Wait till you become poor or are struggling to get by

(Words of wisdom culled from Yoruba childhood rhymes)

These are simple childhood statements that under gird the world view of the *Yoruba* sibling, for example; all imbibed at the formative years of childhood. These were the values maintained all through life. In fact, the Nigerian child, irrespective of class and clime had this dye-stamped orientation at the formative

years at home, church and school. In a cache of Water Colours, a medium suggestive of the ephemeral in so called sacrosanct values, beliefs and morals (since independence from the Imperia) IJA deploys graphic imageries that recite J.B Yeats' (1956) reality: "*things fall apart*", the gradual calamitous collapse and tragedy of "*the centre not holding*" any more in the Nigerian society.

IJA engages the single image portraiture, a mode reflecting theoretical frames of deliberation. Furthermore, concepts like cultural capital, social capital and economic capital, as well as notions of *habitus* and field revealing the dynamics of power relations and cultural formation in social life particularly inflected in the discourse. These are portions in a multidimensional social space; each is framed not only by the social class membership, but by actions of each kind of capital possessed by each individual. That capital includes the number of social networks. This can be used to either promote inequality or replace it. Economic capital is likened to an individual, who possesses command over resources like wealth, assets, property, *etcetera*; while social capital under girds its resources on group membership of reliable networks of institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintances and recognition. However, cultural capital resource is based on knowledge, education, skills and advantages persons acquired by dint of hard work. This gives them status in society. The exhibition stands to query the *status quo* in the motherland, Nigeria.

IJA's portraits in this study are conveniently categorised as Documentaries that substantiate each picture's subject matter and themes; even suggest the titles to each picture. Charged with emotional significance and deeper meanings, these images are geared to honest reportage. In fact, employing terminologies culled from Photography, IJA's paintings conveniently lodge as "Mirrors". They are romantically self-expressive and insinuate artistic style. Moreover, as "Windows" they reflect subject matter that is specific to realistic explorations that encrypt descriptions. More effective as explanations that deal with substantive subject matter, the art works reflect specific time and place. The artist engages both Mirrors and Windows in a conscious interplay while delivering the *PHCN, Help Save Nigeria* project. Being descriptive, interpretative, true life evaluations, aesthetically evaluative and theoretical images, this categorisation of images is sufficient grounds for a location of IJA's work.

### Reading the Images

Reading IJA's perspectives for an accounting of the dynamics of the lives of ordinary Nigerians' day to day engagements in spite of the collapse evident in the country's infrastructure and the loss of social contract with society, is the purpose of this analysis. It is convenient to glean through the themes, subject matter and ideas that under gird his pictures. Firstly, through a general hermeneutic analogy; empirical analysis and an iconographic analysis of specific images culled from the Show itself. The artist tells a story of intervention and faith. He captures the dramatic in an artistic, even romantic fashion. These are tales of hope, faith and survival; even bravery and bewildering acts, labels and stereotypes; and attitudes to life outcomes. Conversations with the artist revealed his keen nostalgia for his childhood and early beliefs in thoughts expressed in the Wisdom of the ordinary folks of his country

IJA's pictures (in approximate frame specifications of 30'' x 20'') are all water colours, except for a lone mixed media work. Ijalobomo's PHCN is really a satire on the Nigerian condition. At the same time the artist deploys the pictures as censures that reflect and address the beauty and good life that every Nigerian, irrespective of clime and place of birth enjoyed. Utilising the rhymes and Stories from childhood days, avowed days of innocence, the artist draws attention to morality, the beauty and rewards of hard work. The impression created, therefore, is that of a people who have abdicated their rights as citizens of the here and now; cringing instead to the motherly arms of heaven. Instead, it is possible to perceive these images as reporting the sorry state of affairs in the country. However, the artist metaphorically inserts a message: man must assert his will against the dispirited world that has scattered its own dizzying arbitrariness like stumbling blokes on his path. The individual must not lose his/her identity. Assertion of individual will power against an overwhelming fate that threatens, to swallow up its victims with ferocity. It is such steadfastness at pursuing dreams and goals in the face of all the practical travails of life, even in the folly of failure should be the overriding ethos that installs the true status of citizenship.

Engaging the primary purpose of Painting, telling a story, using the visual and making critical statements, IJA's *oeuvre* is explicated in the light of

critical scholarship with expositions of plausible inflections of meanings in his work to be evaluated here.

With a tabloid press that is deeply “talkative on the condition of the motherland”, Painting offers another way of seeing the Nigerian condition. The openness of the painted image is of the prime value, beyond the tabloids, at evaluating the very day to day as the subject of this essay will show. The paintings serve a relief from the vexatious reflections of the talkative discourses of the Nigerian condition (Wole Soyinka 2005). The issues that engage them consist of matters of the existential day to day: national survival down to the matters of the ever recurring moments of nostalgia for a wonderful time gone by. Yet what value to the real folks!

A reading of specific works selected from the exhibition inspires subsequent commentary. The images focus on the condition of the nation from the days of the collapse of real values and morals since independence. The painted medium is perceived as symbols in one medium pursuing the same purpose of social criticism and discourse. These art works document the way the real people/ the ordinary folks, react to their environment in the course of the everyday, both passively and actively. Art reflects the template upon which to foist a framework for an accounting: the anestheticising contour of the world of the ordinary *people* of my country with unnerving distance and sobriety.

IJA’s script in its cartoon-like urgency, thunders down to the public, “*like a sergeant-major to a new recruit*”, to use a phrase credited to Theodor Adorno (1999). The share dimension of the images in their plain frames pop out billboards-like on any exhibition wall. These frames rumble down the sharp messages of the reality of the condition of the national state, its uses and abuses. These art works confront and address the Nigerian elite. The provincials, usually unlettered, are merely pawns; in fact, victims in the un-chequered experiences of their own country. Time and space are the two basic means of experiencing history. The message is *writ large* on the pane of each frame: “the Motherland”, irresponsible citizenry on the prowl, “in spite of the Law and even in the presence of the Law enforcers” as the wig and gown and the quintessence of all, the Nigerian Flag and attendant corporate colors in the painting *THE COFFIN of STATE* (Fig.1) exposes. IJA engages this commonplace corporeal symbol of transition. It is a well designed coffin, finished in luxuriant ebony lacquer; well padded in silk finish for the “journey home”, from here to eternity! The icon is

reminiscent of a burial in a metropolis, not the rural. The artist employs a key symbol of urban life to address the viewers. But it bears no dead body, only the seal of state symbolised by the worthless denomination of currency, the One Thousand Naira Note (N1000). With these, Ijalobomo lambasts and satirises the irony of the nation where money and material things of this life are of prime significance, the human person is really of no consequence.

Confronting each painting as a rude reminder of the reality that he/she languishes in, the viewer/viewers simultaneously are faced with a cinematographic array of imageries that roll out the real situation as it downs on them. That exposition jolts the viewer to the realm of fictionalisation. In the process a narrative of the discourse of the messages each in painting ensues. By recognising what has been defined by time, IJA assumes his own space in the narrative discourse of the Nigerian condition. That initiative approximates Beat Wyss' (1999, 194) reflection on the artist and the value of his/her work thusly "*Creating space means naming the time that one has experienced. Anything that defines things binds them; it seizes what is immediately lively and wrenches it out of its obsessive twilight, in order to turn it into a tangible free-standing form. Art is a naming signifying act.*" IJA's paintings make the perception and experiences of the Nigerian time especially discernible by a deliberate coercion that forces the images that the artist's peculiar memory has captured, which otherwise may have gone unnoticed (in the Nigerian existential indifference to fate and memory: History repeats itself) into a composed agenda or symbol. The symbol is the tangible referent that finds signification in the framework of time and space, the two inviolate means of experiencing history. This painter addresses cosmopolitans not provincials. Like a school head master, IJA castigates the elite for the ruin and mess the ordinary folks/ the real people are mired in. It is the survival of the fittest for those who dare muster the audacity to face harsh survival.

In classic Marxist discourse, the painting engages the dicta of *reale* economic condition and the politics of equitable sharing of the national wealth of a country like Nigeria. Two distinct personalities: the *OBIOMA BOY* (Fig. 2), a common itinerant feature in Nigeria's burgeoning urban landscape, youthful and ever wearing a smile in spite of the everyday grind; and the ever present hawker of seasonal fruits, the *ORANGE SELLER* (Fig.3) are key images reflecting the mainstay of the story: inequality and cultural socio-economic differences in the everyday. The rude and ordinary folks, pitiable, are at the

mercy of the crushing fate of decay and death in the face of collapsing infrastructure as the images *BABY HELD UP* (Fig. 4) shows. Again the symbol of hope and faith in a country is presented as tattered and torn, even held together in loose stitches. This contrasts with the figure of a stout motherly nanny hands holding up a chubby cheeked baby. However, IJA reminds us of the wonderful world of the days of well-maintained and operational infrastructure with portable water in the painting *DRINKING STRAIT FROM TAP, 1960s* (Fig.5). this is put in sharp contrast with the present. Here portable water is no more! It is now a time of factory produced packed water: *DRINKING FROM PLASTIC PURE WATER, 2010* (Fig.6). These are stark reminders to the gifted community of aficionados and art collectors, the *élan vital!* These are the real culprits that the paintings address. It is from this category of citizenry that the oppressor class emerges. But these images equally implicate the artist's key purpose of using the medium to draw the attention of the dominant classes. The images reflect and underscore class relations. these images indict the artist of his revolutionary motives directed at both exposing the power structure in society, as well as daring to undermine it.

The artist address the same oppressor class for (i) the looting of the treasury symbolised by the stark image *TO HAND UNTO OUR CHILDREN ...A BANNER WITH ALL PAINS* (Fig. 7) and *LLPC, Loot Loot Petroleum Coporation* (Fig. 8); But (ii) another set of Water Colours are both indictments of the oppressor class for the loss of the once beautiful country, as well as a reflection, almost a longing for a time long lost to memory: Images reflecting the invasion of the, otherwise, rich country where culture and the beautiful life persisted, for example, the pictures *GIRL BY THE PARROT CAGE* (Fig. 9 ), *EYO DANCERS* (Fig. 10), *THE FLUTE PLAYER* (Fig. 11), *THE BEADED DANCER* (Fig.12 ) and a host of others.

The invasion of the motherland by strange ideologies and evil forces is defined in soul wrecking starkness: the images *THE SILHOUTTE WITH AK 47* (Fig. 13); and *O SAMBISA* (Fig.14) IJA's agenda is mapped by a personal vision to bring to the public attention the "sorry state of things" in the nation. Immortalising the school girls abducted and forced to captivity and debauchery in the war torn north-eastern Nigerian forest reservation, Sambisa, brings attention to the new condition for the burgeoning youth of the country: the loss of childhood innocence and the dream of youth. The giant Matisse style silhouette figure in the picture *THE SILHOUTTE WITH AK 47* (Fig. 13)

distinctly shows off a *Kalashnikov*, a vintage Russian weapon of mass destruction. This is a grim cartoon character dominating the Picture Page. Other silhouettes reflect desolate homesteads and rampage signified by the locales in different postures of disarray running away in the face of mayhem and destruction. In fact, two tardily clothed figures prominently positioned in the right foreground of the picture give a graphic reportage. *O SAMBISA*, a Mona Lisa style portraiture, culminates a picture of the grave fate of the Nigerian child from the north east, albeit all Nigeria. In a sea of veiled heads, in fact, *Hijabs* style Muslim head gear for the females, one prominent one is the *O SAMBISA* woman. She is wearing a tight non-smiling gaze, framed in a dominant giant *Hijab*. In her hard work and strangely manly fingers' grip is a concealed *Kalashnikov*. Her giant fingers bare the stout contours and imprints of hard guerilla warfare military training. A string of rounds of ammunition waist band is prominent below her grip. For emphasis and attention, the *O SAMBISA* woman is projected on a montage of *veiled* faces in the foreground of the Picture Space paste-up like in billboard fashion on a diminishing, if not distant sunset cast landscape. A distinctive winding foot path, in the background landscape, suggests the long distant march from which the damsels have emerged. This is the artist's way of pointing to the symbolism and importance of the picture.

*THE SILHOUETTE FIGURE WITH AK 47 and LLPC* speaks to the viewer most photographically. Both images underline the failure and sorry state of affairs in a once prosperous rich land, where Discipline and Hard work simply paid! This is the key message to even the ordinary people who may pass by the poster for this show. The pace of insecurity in the rural is called forth to the metropolitan viewers' attention. The artist utilises the key symbolisms of the beautiful young woman, definitely a mother to be and the silhouetted image to reflect the break in the true condition of life of the real ordinary peoples of the nation. Motherhood has been replaced with the inevitable violent life of the war front and its hazards. With the female image, the artist underpins the tragic situation of insurgency in the north east of Nigeria. Here religion is the cover for the mayhem of the *Boko Haram* terrorist insurgency. However, a display of ingenious creative imagination captures the reality of incendiary combined with the thematic texturisation of irresponsive Aso Rock Abuja government is re-enacted in the Mona Lisa look alike character in the painting *O SAMBISA*. This woman is carrying a war and destruction weapon, a *Kalashnikov* and a stock of bullet cartridges; and not the traditional visuals of womanhood suggestive of

cool dispositions and domestic flair. This is a stern faced Gorilla fighter leading the pack of fellow female soldiers, all adorned in Hijabs. It is the national scarf made famous by the still unresolved school girls' abduction saga known as the Chibok Girls. The landscape is arid desolation. The once lush farm greenery is not only symbolized by the empty winding path disappearing into a wasteland instead of the farm and homestead. But the face of the *O'SAMBISA* woman bears ethnic marks of Kanuri stock. That locates the scenario as the north-east agricultural food basket of Nigeria. Here all the condiments for soups, foodstuff and the mainstays of meat products for feeding the nation, in the erstwhile Borno Empire, depended.

The Images *DRINKING STRAIGHT FROM THE TAP*, *DRINKING FROM A PLASTIC BOTTLE* are nostalgic. The viewer is drawn to look at both images and tell the story for himself/herself. It is a self-reflection and personal conversation that is called forth. Look at the image and tell it to yourself sir/ma! The other images *THE FESTERING COCKERAL* (Fig. 17), *TO HAND TO OUR CHILDREN A BANNER WITH ALL PAINS* and *O' SAMBISA* clearly symbolise the broken state of the nation. *THE FESTERING COCKERAL* symbol presents the reality of slow but gradual decay and collapse of the nation like a poorly managed leprous sore. Even more pathetic is the human condition represented by a giant set of hard worn motherly hands lifting up a little innocent child unto the threshold of a worn out, tattered and thorn flag that mere stitches hold together. These graphic symbolisms, in fact, grotesque imageries speak volumes on the state of the nation. This is aptly chronicled in the phonographic media song "*Sweet Mother I no go Forget you, For the Suffer wey...*"

Marxian in focus, the artist directs attention to the collapse of public institutions, facilities and general infrastructure, IJA points the search light on the *Loot Loot Petroleum Corporation, LLPC* (Fig. 8). This is a direct satiric image. It points to the betrayal of National Trust rampant in the monoculture economy, particularly the Oil sector is fingered, all perpetrated by the select ruling elite of the country. Key persons, male and female swimmers are presented on the run with their obviously stolen barrels of oil. They are aggressively caught in the rough and wild sea. Their attempt to runaway causes giant bubbles to form in the open sea. The atmosphere is that of late sunset in the open sea somewhere in the Forcados or some distant remote Niger delta. Other smaller bottles are presented as capsules replicating the scenario of bunkering and running away with the "property of us all" citizens of the nation

Nigeria. In fact, this work reminds the viewers of the unprecedented squander of the Oil revenues and resources of the commonwealth called Nigeria by a criminal few. The search light is directed straight on to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). But look at the *LLPC*, the artist seems inclined to make Oil and Petroleum the bane of corruption. The loss of values of discipline and integrity as national ethos, coupled with gross mismanagement of national resources, such as oil, is fingered as a national malaise. This painting with its symbolisms reflects on the hardship and suffering of ordinary folks in spite of the tremendous blessings the rich land possesses. The artist follows up the discourse of the denial, hence the hardship of ordinary folks from the good life in, an otherwise, oil rich nation should provide with a more gruesome scenario: War and destruction.

In spite of its melee of vexatious images, IJA still offers a glimmer of hope in an ever kind God. He engages miraculousness of commonplace symbolisms: a *BUNCH OF FLOWERS* (Fig. 15) and the reality of a change represented by *THE MYTHICAL ELESHIN, THE HORSE MAN* (Fig. 16). These are symbols of the Apocalypse and Change, all celestial glimpses of light that reflect the real peoples' predilection with the Merciful God, the citadel of hope, faith and charity. These images have "aboutness" (Danto, 1981). This demands interpretations for the story takes a definite cultural turn. Ijalobomo, the college trained artist, moves his narrative on the matter of probity and the restoration of the derailment of values to the sphere of the intellectual, the esoteric and the spiritual threshold; calling forth the reality of *habitus* in the discourse of cultural capital.

In fact, the artist delves into the world of Theatre, citing *Eleshin*, a character in Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975) he engages a proverb in proffering a solution "*Ati je asala (awusa) ko to nu omi sii*", aptly translatable as, "*Eating the awusa nut is not so difficult as drinking water afterwards*".

The *MYTHICAL ELESHIN, THE HORSE MAN* (Fig. 16) is metaphor for the needed cleansing of the stable, the motherland, and a repositioning of the nation on a sound footing for restoration. IJA suggests a most intellectual stance, takes on the exhibition guests, the public and anyone who claims a stake in the motherland, for that matter. In a word, IJA proposes that the bourgeois volunteer suicide. Like *Elesin*, the king's principal officer, the elite should all

perform ritual suicide as essential to the spiritual transition of the nation from the doldrums, the cesspool of failure and disruption that the people and their nation find it; to the beauty of a greater tomorrow. Here all things are made anew, fresh and good. This is aptly reflected in the restoration symbolised by the iconic *BUNCH OF FLOWERS* (Fig.15), and a host of others.

Citing Soyinka's play further, the prescription is most apt: the breaking of the cosmic order of the Nigerian universe and the loss of the ideals nurtured in childhood verses, hence the collapse of the ethos of hardwork, reflected in the ideals *Ise ni o unise "Mursi ise ore mi", "Work is an antidote for poverty"*. This loss is a consequence of the loss of well-being and the future collectivity of the peoples of the motherland. This is the tragedy that befell the nation. Openly advocating a Marxist style change as the only recipe for the new turn desired to restore the honour and dignity of both land and citizenry, the artist confronts the powers that be.

The Nigerian condition is nuanced in a metaphysical fashion, contained in the mythical human vehicle, *Eleshin*, and the world of the Yoruba mind: the entity of the living, the dead and the unborn; and the numerous passages which link it all: transition. The essence of the prescription is threnody for the lost world of real values and its knack for the ethos of hard work, and dignity of labour. Thus, *Eleshin* an epitome of elite and privileged, full of life and its enjoyment; and an epitome of the rich and powerful bourgeoisie, is the lamb that must voluntarily accent to suicide. This is a hard choice reminiscent in a Yoruba proverbial admonition to force compliance:

*Awodi to'o nre Ibara, efufu ta a nidi pa o ni Ise kuku ya, aptly translatable as The kite makes for wide spaces and the wind creeps up behind its tail; can the kite say less than thank you, the quicker the better!*

## Conclusion

IJA, a fluent Yoruba speaker, indigene of ancient Abeokuta, the citadel of *Egba* spirituality; and versed in *Egba* ontology, endows his lyrics with traditional Yoruba proverbs. Proverbs and metaphors encase the deep seated truisms of culture and make bold in visual lyricised forms the truths of a culture. This is the vehicle that this artist has utilised in accessing visibility to the themes and subjects of his works. Building solidly on the rhymes and wisdom delivered

at childhood, school days and the dicta of Church, the Exhibition emphasises a return to that time and place. Hence, the reaction to the fleecing and embezzlements of the commonwealth of the motherland is graphically reflected in the painting *LOOT LOOT PETROLEUM COPPORATION (LLPC)*. This is the abuse of economic capital; and command over resources like wealth, assets, property, *etcetera* that only a privileged few control. In a brazen fashion the Master criticises the Presidency's anti-Corruption drive, debunking it as only an attempt to redeem embezzlement. IJA, therefore, asserts that the right thing to do is a national detour to the values that prevailed before the 1960s and a restoration of a national ethos of hard work! That is the message in the Water Colours: *THE MYTHICAL ELESHIN*, *THE HORSE MAN* (Fig. 16); *DRINKING STRAIGHT FROM THE TAP* (Fig. 5), *BUNCH OF FLOWERS* (Fig.15); *1960 BC (Before Corruption)* and the *YEAR 2000 AD (AFTER THE DECAY)*. These are for our attention and immediate consumption.

Fascinatingly, the time frame, "1960 BC - YEAR 2000 AD", is significant. It is fascinating how tradition is enactable in ever present time. Tradition should be perceived not as a set of conventions irretrievably sediment in a fixed past, but as horizons of a particular sort that are still operatives in continuous ways in the present. That thinking restates an enduring truism that the present will always lack meaning when not tied to the past that beget it. It is such that relating within the present and the multiple vistas of refinements that it has shed, these in perpetually in renewal in diverse forms, confounds. This is where IJA's approach for change stands to seek its roots. Lobomo's style and the tactics for the future, which they under gird; are tacitly historical. They are valid translations of the past which we all share as natives of the nation, Nigeria. His stratagem distills the past in tangible synthesis for contemporary appreciation. The Master's methodology may appear gauche/ clumsy, but that is deliberate for it locates us all in the sphere of contemporary cultural production. This is replete in a natural human instinct to always seek essence in things by daring to link back to the roots. For what is the point of a grandiose future if its scheme is not grounded in our past. This is the thrust of IJA's cultural recipe for change establishes in our consciousness as citizens. A proportionate venture and initiate, it is arguably an indigenous Nigerian arrangement that locates our identity alongside the germane internationally acclaimed ones. The past has always been our logical recourse in all attempts at refreshing and renewing the present. IJA subtly reminds us that past traditions

are not a set of sequestered past, not laid down principles but nodal points in a here and now. It is here we all act to bring about fresh understating of that past for the betterment of today; and the future that is yet to come.

The reality that art makes visible maybe likened to so many veils' subject to varied interpretations. A work of art remains both a window and mirror to society (Philips 1998, 167). In this regard, therefore, IJA's paintings are not fixed points of view and are of reference beyond their context of occurrence. Besides IJA's documentations of, otherwise, fleeting moments on the real experiences of the nation constitute the frame work of a symbol for the reader's and exhibition viewer's consumption and enjoyment of the art works. That symbol, a spatial repository for experiencing time in the narrative. IJA's commentary in the exhibition catalogue remains an anchor for the viewers reading of the images, in part by a deliberate tie with an authorial intention. This is of immense value.

That biographic template serves as a formal grounding that mediates a critical deciphering of the layers of meanings and messages in these, otherwise, plain but beautifully crafted pictures. The place of biography as a grounding for the gleaning of artistic substance remains a pivotal point at discourse. That facet of background, largely ignored should be the focus of further study of exhibition images and their invariant imageries.

Exhibitions remain occasions for a stock taking of the "condition of things" in the land. Stern hope, faith in a better tomorrow and a sense of public decency, the images tell us of the ordinary folks (the real people) of Nigeria. This pale sternness is like the sheet that spares us the sight of the overwhelming spectacle of a disappearance as a country. The spiritual is ever present as a means of the cleaning up of the stable of state and the restoration that the nation deserves. This is aptly symbolised by the image *EYO DANCERS* (Fig 10). Again a spiritual cleansing emphatic on a restoration and healing is the desired path for the motherland.

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- Telephone Interview with IJA, Lagos, 10/10/2015.
- "President Mohammodu Buhari is fighting Embezzlement not Corruption". To fight the denizen Corruption, IJA claimed the only recipe is to go back and recover the lost values of childhood and the ethic of hard work

(Tajudeen Sowole, THE GUARDIAN, [www.ngrguardiannews.com](http://www.ngrguardiannews.com), Sunday, January 3, 2016, p. 31)

The exhibition *PHCN, Please Help Clean Nigeria*, was held in the Red Door Gallery, Victoria Island, Lagos, December 2015. Ijalobomo, alias Lobomo, is the pseudonym of a popular water colourist and pastel artist. He wishes to keep his real name a top secret, according to the newspaper columnist Tajudeen Sowole (2016), The Guardian Newspapers, [www.ngrguardiannews.com](http://www.ngrguardiannews.com), January, 3, 2016, p. 31.

All images in this Essay were taken from the exhibition catalogue *PHCN, Please Help Clean Nigeria*, Red Door Gallery, Victoria Island Lagos, 2015.

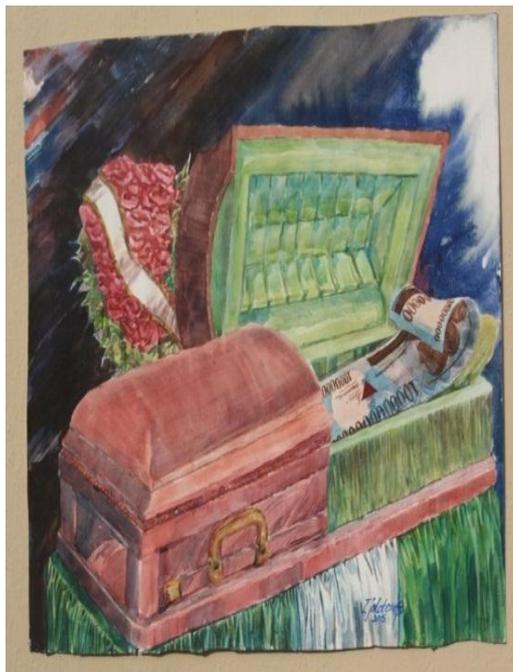


Fig. 1: The Coffin of State / The Requiem

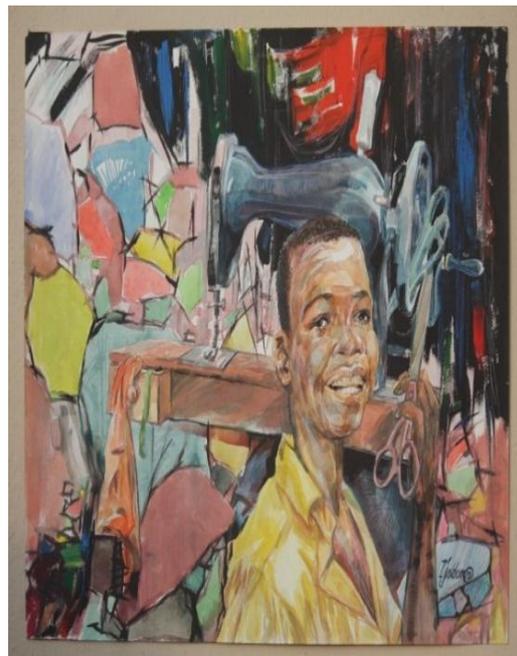


Fig. 2: Obioma Boy



Fig. 3: Orange Seller



Fig. 4: Baby Held Up



Fig 5: Drinking Straight from the Tap



Fig. 6: Pure Water



Fig 7: To Hand onto Our Children a Banner Without



Fig. 8: Loot Loot Petroleum Corporation



Fig. 9: Girl by The Parrot Cage



Fig 10: Eyo Dancers



Fig. 11: The Flute Player



Fig 12: The Beaded Dancer



Fig. 13: The Silhouette with AK 47



Fig. 14: O' Sambisa



Fig. 15: BUNCH OF FLOWERS  
Man



Fig 16: Eleshin, The Horse  
Man