

TEXT OF THE SPEECH DELIVERED BY PRINCE (DR.) OLAGUNSOYE OYINLOLA, CHAIRMAN, BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE CENTRE FOR BLACK CULTURE AND INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING, ABERE, OSUN STATE, AT THE EXHIBITION ON “FIFTY YEARS OF OSOGBO ART” AT THE THOUGHT PYRAMID GALLERY, NORMAN WILLIAMS STREET, SW IKOYI, LAGOS ON FRIDAY, 30TH MARCH, 2018

PROTOCOLS

I am indeed greatly delighted to welcome all here present at this occasion of the opening of an art exhibition to commemorate five decades of the Osogbo School of Art. Without any doubt, the celebration of 50 years of Osogbo School of Art is significant; as what started as an innocuous experiment on the elasticity of the creative mind and its innate ability to adapt to the vicissitudes of the environment has become a global phenomenon.

The genesis of what is known as the Osogbo School of Art today is rooted in man’s belief ingenuity of expressions, symbols and representations in form of murals, paintings, sculptures, beads, textiles and other art forms catching the global attention. What we are gathered here to celebrate today is also the fertile imagination of one man, Ulli Beier (of blessed memory) and his partners in thought, late Susanne Wenger and Georgina Beier.

It is very interesting that their experiment in informal education metamorphosed into an art movement that has survived for more than half a century. From early to middle 60s, just after Nigeria’s independence in what we can truly call an age of innocence, Osogbo art began to have a trademark that uniquely distinguishes it from other art forms. The Osogbo artistic movement, as an informal art offering, coincided with the advent of the formal art school referred to as the Zaria Rebels. However, this did not in any way diminish its independent accomplishment.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is highly notable that these two parallel art forms have created their own unique genetic material popularly called ‘DNA’. What started as a routine exercise to engage young boys and girls who were in Duro Ladipo’s Theatre to do some art works during the long hours between play rehearsals, later

translated into an enduring and lasting art form that has survived for over half of a century.

More importantly, Osogbo Art has boosted the corpus of knowledge in the field of creative arts and validated the richness and vitality of Yoruba Culture as part of the common heritage of mankind. So much so that Osogbo art has become a trademark comparable to any other art form anywhere in the world. This is why we celebrate the 50 years of such a unique brand.

According to late icon, Ulli Beier, one of the catalyst of the movement “unlike European art student of comparable age and unlike art historians, critics and anthropologists who have been looking at their work as “Yoruba” or “African” or “Western”. Early prediction that Osogbo artists would soon run out of steam after their European mentors left Nigeria in December, 1966, looks particularly ridiculous...?”

Let me add here that the very high confidence reposed in these great artists is not only sustained but has been proved to be true and right. These men and women with humble backgrounds have become great cultural assets and remarkable reference points as part of Yoruba folklore and the Nigerian Story. In this Nigerian story, they are the true heroes who have inspired generations with their creativity, selfless commitment to community development, hard work, humility, entrepreneurship and their can do spirit. I most heartily recommend these values as solutions for solving some of our challenges concerning poverty eradication and wealth creation.

May I, at this juncture remark that our story will not be complete without artists of international repute like Muraina Oyelami, Jimoh Buraimoh, Adebisi Fabunmi, late Taiwo Osuntoki (a.k.a Twin Seven Seven who later became a UNESCO Artiste for Peace) Jacobs Afolabi, and Rufus Ogundele (both of blessed memory). These geniuses whose activities were moulded by our revered Ulli Beier have carried the flag aloft, and to the next unassailable level of excellence. Eminent artists in this group include the First Lady of Osogbo Art, the inimitable Mrs. Nike Okundaye, Bayo Ogundele, Adeniji Adeyemi, Lanre Ayuba, Kayode Adewumi, David Osevwe, Isaac Ojo, Olufemi Johnson Ogundipe, and Femi Aro; among

many others . Happily, a third generation of the movement has already sprouted and its blossoming.

Ladies and gentlemen, permit me to make an observation. For me as a person, both Lagos and Osogbo holds a special place and fascination in my life. Even though Lagos, the Centre of Excellence and the first truly Mega-City in Nigeria and Osogbo, the burgeoning town transiting seamlessly into a city are different in their pomp and pageantry, the importance of the palace of Arts in the Cultural life of both cities brings about a commonality of interest. It is for this reason that this exhibition has found a comfortable home in Lagos even though the masters of the Art are from the rustic towns of Osogbo and environs. This shared heritage of aesthetics, innate beauty, colours and profound creativity has made the two places tourism destination as well as coveted heritage Meccas.

I want to end this speech in a spirit of celebration that it truly deserves. Therefore, I will ask all of us here present, to kindly stand up and observe a minute's silence in remembrance of the catalysts of Osogbo School of Art-Ulli Beier, Susan Wenger, as well as others like Duro Ladipo, Oyin Adejobi, Twin Seven-Seven, and all those great Osogbo Artists whose souls have departed to be with their Creator. May their souls rest in perfect peace.

Finally, I request that we celebrate the living legends of Osogbo School of Art, who are still contributing to the development of our rich cultural heritage and impartation of their skills to the growing generation, with three heart cheers. Hip! Hip!! Hip!!!; Hurray.

Thank you all and God bless.

Thank you for listening to me
Long live Osogbo School of Art
God bless Osun and Lagos State
God bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria