

# ona

exhibition of paintings/drawings by  
G B E N G A O R I M O L O Y E



“Gbenga Orimoloye has an amiable but quiet disposition, but still water runs very deep. Behind that quiet façade is a creative aggression and energy quite visible in his works. I have followed his development since his student days, the commitment, hard work and determination he showed then is still very much visible.”

- **Kolade Oshinowo** [Gbenga Orimoloye and Iwa, 2011 - *catalogue foreword*]

“It is impossible to view his work and not feel uplifted, with a fresh hope in potential of the human spirit. Most of his portfolio can be viewed simply for the beauty he commits to his art, but there is a strong allegorical and metaphorical dimension to his painting that offers even more to the viewer who spends longer savouring the images he has created.”

- **Colin M. Blakely** [Orimoloye; the voice of the artist, 2006]

Catalogue of the exhibition “Ona” by Gbenga Orimoloye  
at Terra Kulture, Victoria Island, Lagos  
26th May - 1st June 2012

Photography and design by Gbenga Orimoloye.  
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[www.orimoloye.com](http://www.orimoloye.com)

On twitter: <http://twitter.com/orimoloye>

.. My Father worketh hitherto, and I work..

John 5: 17

Cover (detail): Onigele pupa, 2012, oil on board, 123 x 82 cm

## FOREWORD

**Ona** is a Yoruba word meaning “Road” or “way”.

Life they say is a journey. The paths that we walk can take us many places. In making our choices in life, we may choose to take a broad road that has been well travelled, or we may strike out on our own into territory that few have dared.

One very important thing stands out, the road (Ona).

Gbenga Orimoloye has definitely chosen his path (Ona) and he as a way (Ona) with palette knives that is set to take him to even greater heights. Though he works with different media and techniques including water colour, his love and mastery of palette knives is undeniable.

Though traditional Nigerian and indeed Yoruba influences were paramount at the beginning of his career, gradually, other influences resulting from his association with other cultures have brought about a body of work that is unquestionably world class.

His vibrant colours and texture have a way of gaining your attention and keeping you mesmerised whilst pondering the different activities going on on the streets.

Gbenga’s works are remarkable in quality and focus, giving special emphasis to the typical Nigerian way of life; our style, the struggle for survival resulting in street hawking and in the ever popular “gele” that defines a true Nigerian woman. His figures are bold and beautiful leaving a strong impression that stays with you.

From “IWA” his last exhibition in Lagos, meaning “Character” in Yoruba language to “ONA”, it is evident that Gbenga’s character and resilience has indeed forged a path (Ona) for him and many will walk down that path with him as his works lead the way.

**Bolanle Austen-Peters (Mrs.)**

Terra Kulture



Ona (2) Oil on board, 2012 123 x 81 cm.

## LAGOS JAMMING

In July of 2011, the Nike Gallery in Lagos hosted an exhibition of recent painting by Gbenga Orimoloye, a Nigerian artist resident in the United Kingdom. Prior to seeing the display, I learned from gallery officials that the title of the exhibition was, “Iwa.” I did not know Orimoloye at that time, but I went to see the show all the same because the title was sufficiently eloquent to pique my curiosity for two significant reasons. First, the economy of the mono-verbal title insinuated that the artist has probably cultivated the sensibility of an author who wastes no forms, but cuts directly to the core of the content. Second, the linguistic references and axiomatic ramifications informing the title suggest a hybrid vision that grounds its sources in an indigenous African aesthetic idiom.

When I saw the paintings, my hunch was confirmed on both grounds. Orimoloye, unlike the legendary Twin Seven-Seven, does not lavish extensive phrases that are as lengthy as a London municipal railroad on his compositions. Neither does he mince words on his canvas. He does not draw his content from the esoteric world of the Oshogbo school, in which artists like Jimoh Buraimoh and Muraina Oyelami excavate images and figures from the mythological realm of fantasy and the open-ended world of unbridled dreams.

To compound his penchant for a formalist aesthetics, Orimoloye, from the onset, asserts his belief that the art of painting is not chained to the vision of an unmitigated dose of reality. His painting relentlessly explores the architecture of “paint.” This implies that his work leaves viewers in no doubt that a painting is in fact an article produced with pigments in such a manner that the medium of fabrication is not masked or faked to trick the eye. His style is unapologetically antithetical to the “trompe-l’oeil” tradition of painting that ruled Western art from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century. Neither does Orimoloye work in the life-imitating palette of Abayomi Barber, whose paintings ally with Erhabor Emokpae’s mimetic expressions of painterly copies from verifiable reality.

In other words, Orimoloye does not construe the painting of a person, place, or thing with the subject or model of representation. His work convinces viewers that the painting of a person is not a person, but merely a personal translation that informs reality without copying nature. He truthfully displays the tactile quality of patterned surfaces, in a manner that encourages the audience to interact with the complex process of creativity, within the allowance of simple tools and narrow range of hues available to the painter.

Orimoloye, in his latest work, explores the meanings of the city of Lagos. What becomes fascinating, therefore, is Orimoloye’s ability to reveal a radiant range of truths about the quality and substance of Lagos reality, without enslaving himself to the colors and textures inherent in the mundane manifestation of urban life.

The pursuit and rendering of Lagos realities on Orimoloye’s canvases therefore transcend what lies before the eye of the beholder. There is an extraordinary layer of truth hiding behind the ordinary appearances that interests Orimoloye, a truth that invests Lagos life with meaning outside the material veneers of surface interactions. A major pursuit of his work, therefore, lies in excavating the buried truth behind the curtain of Lagos life, in a world that has become a stage on which characters act different roles and play several parts according to the shifting demands of momentary cues.

When life in Lagos becomes pretentious, especially in an era that is increasingly secular, time loses the authentic essence of its ticking hours, and what remains is a mutual exchange of banal deception. Even when people prefer to dwell on the physical body of matter, within that frame of existence is the substance that forms the core of a Lagos reality that Orimoloye draws upon. Orimoloye’s work convinces the viewer that only the visionary eye of the artist, the prophet, and the seer retains the courage to locate and map the distance between fact and fiction in the exploding city of Lagos.

It is therefore not surprising that Orimoloye has packaged his recent study of Lagos under the title of “Ona.” Meaning the road, “Ona” is a Yoruba bi-syllabic term that is loaded with metaphysical, poetic, and factual condiments. If the world is a journey or a sojourn (as Yoruba people are fond of saying), then life itself is the highway along which people in Lagos must travel. When idiomatically configured as a passage, life in Lagos is paved and illuminated with varying moral and ethical convictions, without which the traveler is lost. In addition to the metaphoric light, the traveler along the way of life needs milestones, traffic directions, good

bridges, and clement weather to move safely through the passages of existence. But equally important are the qualities of the road and the pleasures of traveling companions, when voyagers journey through life, in a trip without a beginning, toward an uncertain eternity.

Using Lagos as the point of departure, Orimoloye takes viewers along an allegorical journey with the large vehicle of his artistic and philosophical palettes. The conviction of his painterly argument lies in the ease with which he wields his palette knife to empower viewers to remain inside the emotional world that he maps, while providing them the tools to navigate the landscape within and outside the vistas that unreel as the journey progresses from one milestone to another.

Along the “Ona” that Orimoloye travels, he maintains a commanding control of the artistic vehicle that conveys his audiences as passengers who see through the open windows of his patient vessels. He simultaneously allows the passengers to enjoy the unfolding views with the rational and emotional lenses of their own eyes and minds. The avenues along which he carries his audiences are mostly familiar terrains. The journeys therefore become potentially boring without the innovative forms and the poetic phrasing with which Orimoloye introduces materials which fellow travelers have seen countless of times. The subjects and objects are so familiar that they run the risk of being jejune. But the commanding presence of Orimoloye’s masterly conviction elevates the prosaic properties to proverbial proportions.

What are these prosaic references that Orimoloye translates into timeless experiences? The subjects are simple, and the titles are accessible to anyone who has visited an African city: “Girl reading,” 2011; “McNeil Road, Yaba,” 2012; “Groundnut seller,” 2012; “African women,” 2011; “Figure studies,” 2011 and 2012; and “Market women,” 2012. Sometimes he titles his work in the Yoruba language: “Aje la wa o,” 2012 (May fortune call); “Awon meji lori ona, 2012 (Two travelers on the road); “Eti okun,” 2012 (Beach); “Onigele pupa,” 2012 (Woman with vermilion headgear); “Onidiri meta,” 2012 (Three women plaiting hair); “Olororo,” 2012 (Vegetable oil seller.) These are subjects and titles lifted from the mundane lives and urban dwellers of Lagos

But what elevates these ordinary events and scenes to extraordinary experiences are the colors that Orimoloye combines to render them, the painterly movements of his hands, the buttery application of his palette, and the



“Pit stop” Oil on board, 2011 123 x 81 cm.

detailed keenness of his eyes. His work is not silent. There is a musical component that borrows from the voluminous voice of Lagos in Orimoloye's work. He projects Lagos as a percussive city. But the auditory experience is not merely noisy. It is a persistent voice that highlights the simplicity of the people within the complexity of their Lagos.

The elegance of Lagos women comes through in their portraits, especially in "Onidiri Meta," where three standing women arrange themselves around a seated figure that allows them to demonstrate their hair-plaiting craft on her head. In "Olororo," he depicts a seller of vegetable oil as she pours the liquid from one container to another. In these and other paintings, Orimoloye convinces the viewer that he fluently understands the body language that Lagos speaks with somatic eloquence. In other paintings including "McNeil Road, Yaba," and "Eti Okun," he displays his familiarity with the minute details of street life in Lagos, where one frequently encounters the fulvous municipal buses that seem to constantly break down (see "Pit stop," 2011), even as the rhythm of the city keeps its beat in the worst of unpredictable weathers (see "Ona—I, II, and III").

But nobody has more convincingly enunciated the intrinsic nature of Lagos with fewer colors than Orimoloye. He insists on the unity of a few hues, which he infinitely stretches with tints and shades that are layered with generous endowment on the canvas. Orimoloye's work theorizes painting as a medium that transcends the optic dimension. He has discovered a style that elevates ordinary life to the rhythm of a painter's palette in his desire to bring dignity to the humdrum of daily existence, as he highlights the humanity of ordinary people in Lagos.

**Moyo Okediji, Ph.D.**

Professor of Art and Art History.

Director, Center for the Art of Africa and its Diasporas

University of Texas at Austin



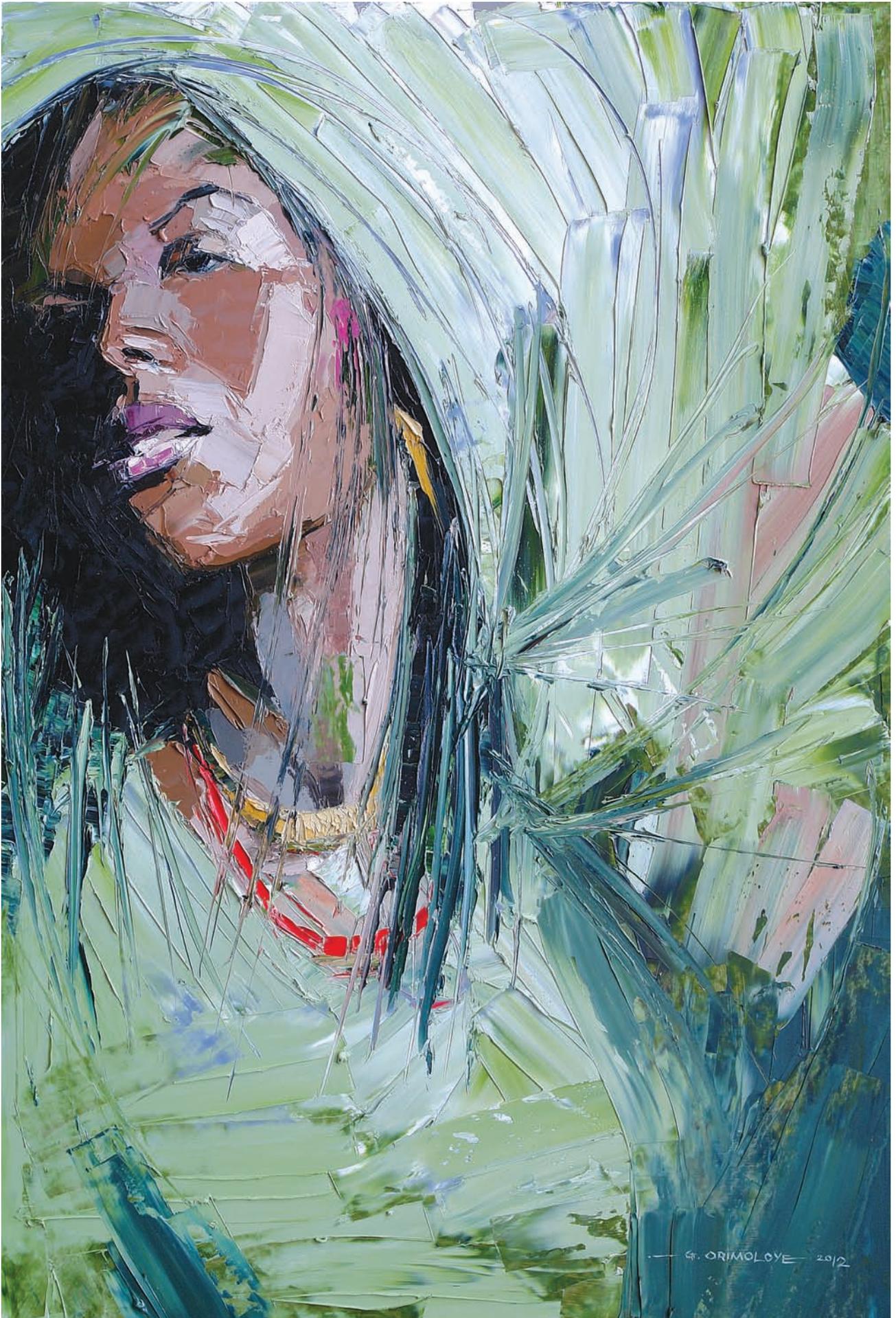
The road Watercolour, 2011 73 x 52 cm.



McNeil road, Yaba Oil on board, 2012 81 x 62 cm.



Aje a wa o Oil on board, 2012 123 x 81 cm.



Onigele Oil on board, 2012 123 x 81 cm.



Figure in oil Oil on board, 2012 81 x 62 cm.



Girl reading Oil on board, 2011 81 x 62 cm.



Meeting Oil on board, 2011  
81 x 62 cm.



Figure studies in oil (1) Oil on board, 2011  
81 x 62 cm.



Ona - near Ogunlana drive Oil on board, 2011 123 x 81 cm.



Eti okun Oil on board, 2012 123 x 81 cm.



Figure studies in oil (2) Oil on board, 2011 81 x 62 cm.



African women Oil on board, 2012 123 x 81 cm.



Olororo Oil on board, 2012 123 x 81 cm.

## PROFILE

Place of birth: Lagos Nigeria, 26 November 1966.

Married: Three children

### **Education:**

University of Lagos Staff School (Primary).  
Govt College Ojo, Lagos / St. Finbarrs' College, Akoka Lagos (Secondary).  
The Polytechnic Ibadan (Eruwa Campus) Nigeria.  
Yaba College of Technology, Lagos Nigeria.  
University of Westminster, London.

### **Qualifications:**

National Diploma (Upper Credit) General Art. 1988.  
Higher National Diploma (Upper Credit) Painting. 1991.  
MSc. Interactive Multimedia. 2003.

### **Awards:**

1990. Academy Press Award for excellence in painting.  
1990. First prize, Lagos State Council for Arts and Culture Painting Competition.  
1991. First prize, Tower Aluminium Art Exhibition/Competition.  
1991. Lintas Award for best final year art student.

### **Professional Experience:**

To date: Studio practice.  
1999. Judge at The Annual Milldon Art Society Exhibition/Competition, Mill Hill, London.  
1998 Nov -1999 Apr. Watercolour painting Lecturer, Adult Art Classes, Triumph Press Art Club, Edgware England.  
1992-1994. Lecturer in Life Drawing, General Drawing and Painting, Yaba College of Technology, Lagos.  
1989. Illustrator, Graphic Advertising and Associates Ltd, Lagos Nigeria.  
1987. Sculpture apprentice, Art Studio, Centre for Cultural Studies, University of Lagos.

## EXHIBITIONS

**2012 - A Parents' Eye View, 'Education' and 'Cheltenham'** - Exhibition of paintings by Cheltenham Ladies' College Parents. The Parabola Arts Centre, Bayshill Rd. Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, England - May 2012.

### **2012 - IMFFA Winter Art Exhibition.**

At the International Monetary Fund (IMF) HQ1, Washington DC, United States - February 2012.

### **2011 - "Iwa"**

Solo exhibition of paintings hosted by Nike Gallery, Lagos Nigeria - July 2011.

### **2005 - A Tale of a Continent; Africa.**

Exhibition of Contemporary Art - June 2005. North York, Ontario Canada.

### **2005 - Millinery Works Gallery.**

Exhibition of Contemporary British Art - January 2005. Islington, London.

### **2004 - Rainbow Art Exhibition** (40th Anniversary, African Development Bank Group - September 2004 ).

African Development Bank Headquarters, Rue Pierre de Coubertin BP.323 - 1002 Tunis Belvedere, Tunisia.

### **2002 - "Iya ni wura" Didi Museum, Lagos.**

Exhibition of paintings & Drawings.





Ona (1) Oil on board, 2011 123 x 81 cm.

**1998 - "Africa at Whiteley's" London.**

Exhibition of Paintings and African Sculpture, The Atrium, Whiteley's, London, United Kingdom.

**1998 - Maria Assumpta Centre, Kensington, London.**

Exhibition of Paintings and African Sculpture.

**1998 - The 198 Gallery, Herne Hill, London.**

Art Exhibition.

**1997 - "Colourful Moments" Didi Museum, Lagos.**

Solo Exhibition of Drawings & Gouache Paintings.

**1996 - Texaco Exhibition of Young Nigerian Artists, TOPCON Building, Ikoyi, Lagos.**

Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings.

**1995 - Texaco Exhibition, TOPCON Building, Ikoyi, Lagos.**

Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings.

**1993 - Private show at The Syrian Club, Ikoyi, Lagos.**

Solo Exhibition (Salon) of Paintings.

**1992 - "Vivid Impressions" Russian Cultural Centre, Lagos.**

Solo Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings.

**1992 - The Artist Now, National Museum, Onikan Lagos.**

Exhibition celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Society of Nigerian Artists (SNA).

**1992 - Blossom FlowerShop, Victoria Island, Lagos.**

Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings.

**1992 - Salon, Chief Arthur Mbanefo's residence, Ikoyi, Lagos.**

Exhibition of Paintings, Sculpture and Drawings.

**1991 - Young Masters Art Trust, The Shonugas' residence, Victoria Island, Lagos.**

Exhibition of Paintings, Sculpture and Drawings.

**1991 - Tower Aluminium, Indian High Commission, Lagos.**

Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture.

**1990 - Young Masters Art Trust, Quenelle, Lagos.**

Exhibition of Paintings, Sculpture and Drawings.

**1990 - Exhibition of Sculpture and Painting** at Master Craft Surulere, Lagos.

**1990 - Ashbee Art Exhibition, Opebi, Ikeja, Lagos.**

Exhibition of Paintings, Sculpture, and Drawings.

## WORKS IN PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Shell, Chevron / Texaco, Statoil, Tower Aluminium, Lagos State Government and several other public and private collections all around the world.

## LISTING

Two paintings featured in McDougal Littell Literature book (hardback, ISBN-13:978-0618-98379-7 / ISBN-10: 0-618-98379-1), published in the United States. Orimoloye's paintings are featured on pages 899 and 903 respectively.

## ART AUCTIONS WITH WORKS SOLD

2011 (November). **Art House Contemporary, Lagos.**

2011 (March - "Africa Now"). **Bonhams, New Bond Street, London.**

2010 (November). **Art House Contemporary, Lagos.**

## SELECTED NEWS FEATURES

- Lagos realities on canvas – **The Nation**, 29th February 2012.
- Life as he knows it – *Arts & Review*, **This day**, Sunday July 10 2011.
- Gbenga Orimoloye's objects of beauty - **Next on Sunday**, 10th July 2011.
- How Gbenga Orimoloye's Iwa speaks on human manner - **Vanguard**, 30th June 2011.
- Orimoloye shares character-essence at Nike Art gallery - **The Moment**, 27-28th June 2011.
- Character in the beauty of Art – *Arts & Culture supplement*, **Next on Sunday**, 26th June 2011.

## CONTACT DETAILS

[www.orimoloye.com](http://www.orimoloye.com)

## ONA

**Ona** (in Yoruba) means 'road' or 'way'. Life on earth can be metaphorically referred to as a journey. Just like journeys have a beginning and an end so does earthly life.

Roads daily facilitate our journey. Often this happens so naturally that we do not even think about them. Yet a road is a very significant reality in our daily deliberations. Some roads are paved and wide, others are dusty and rough, others are very narrow while others are an interesting combination of all of these and more. Each will ultimately lead you to a destination. Ultimately the road or your use of it will come to an end. This mirrors the reality of life and the fact that we are all on a part of the road or the other as we carry on in our time.

Ona attempts to draw attention to this reality by looking at roads or compositions that feature them, both representationally and metaphorically.

In this body of work, you will encounter wide roads, unpaved roads, flooded roads and even pit stops beside the road. Each is a representation of where we are or can be at any given moment, reminding us that we will ultimately get to a destination.

Incidentally a wide and paved or desirable looking road can lead us where we do not want to be while a rough and perhaps harzadous one can cause us to end up where we are ecstatic.

In many instances we may not have a choice regarding how we proceed, and perhaps what type of road we end up using but destination and intent are up to us.

The journey begins on the inside and the road is actually in our heart. We will encounter crossroads, give way to traffic, overtake and be overtaken. We may even need to reverse along the road sometimes.

What type of road are we on? What is our destination? How do we travel?  
Let us be on our journey with a renewed sense of purpose.

**Gbenga Orimoloye**

March 2012



Onidiri meta Oil on board, 2012 123 x 81 cm.



Onigele pupa Oil on board, 2012 123 x 81 cm.



Groundnut seller Oil on board, 2012  
61 x 36 cm.

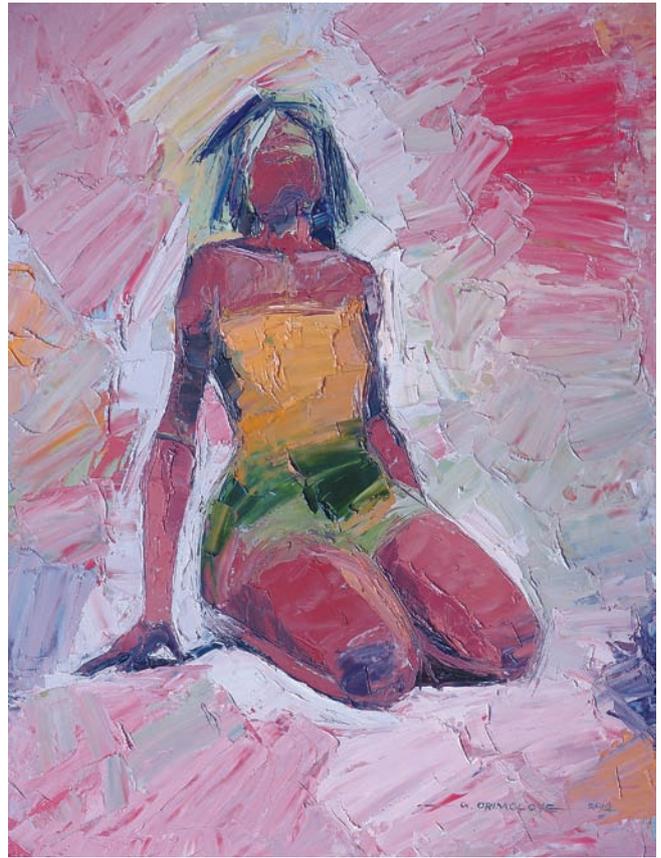


Figure studies in oil Oil on board, 2012  
81 x 62 cm.



Road in Old Yaba Oil on board, 2011 123 x 81 cm.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Jesus Christ, The I AM. OLUWA mi mo dupe o!

To my darling wife, Gloria. As I've said before, you truly are beautiful not just on the outside but on the inside too. Exceedingly priceless. I love you, Sweetness!

Miss Oluwatoyin Zoe, Master Oluwajomiloju Isaac and Miss Faith Oluwafemi; I love you.

Mrs Bolanle Austen-Peters and the staff of Terra Kulture. I deeply appreciate the opportunity to work with you. Thank you very much.

Chief Hope Harriman. Many thanks for your kind gesture.

Thanks a bunch to Professor Moyo Okediji.

My family and my mother, Mrs G. A. Orimoloye. Thank you mum. I love you all.

Dr Chris Imafidon; much appreciation. You are a blessing.

Felix and Brenda Ogbe; I am so thankful to have good friends like you.

Finally, thank you, one and all, from the bottom of my heart for viewing my work; for your warm appreciation and encouragement over the years.

In loving memory of my dad, Mr S. A. Orimoloye 1935 - 2003.

Gbenga Orimoloye





On the road Oil on board, 2012 61 x 36 cm.