



# oju

an exhibition of recent works by  
G B E N G A O R I M O L O Y E





“Gbenga Orimoloye has definitely chosen his path and he has a way with palette knives that is set to take him to even greater heights. Though he works with different media and techniques including watercolour, his love and mastery of palette knives is undeniable.”

- **Bolanle Austen-Peters (Mrs.)** [*Foreword to the catalogue, “Ona” 2012*]

“He keeps pushing the envelope in the area of material exploration and exploitation. The ability to express something in a suggestive way by means of a few brief strokes of the palette knife concisely without giving all the details is the hallmark of his work, yet they have expressive qualities within those limitations.”

- **Kolade Oshinowo** [‘Gbenga Orimoloye and Iwa’ - *Foreword to the catalogue, “Iwa” 2011*]

Catalogue of the exhibition “Oju” by Gbenga Orimoloye  
at Terra Kulture, Victoria Island, Lagos  
4 - 9 May 2013

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

..Many good works have I shewed you from My Father..  
John 10: 32

Cover (detail): My shekere and my daughter’s guitar (1), 2012, oil on canvas, 61 x 46 cm

## FOREWORD

I first encountered the works of Gbenga Orimoloye 22 years ago, at the 1991 Tower Aluminium art exhibition, in the Indian High Commission in Lagos. I liked his work immediately. Here was a young artist recently out of college, painting with a very definitive and mature style. Clearly confident and with a very direct approach to using a palette knife with oil on canvas, he managed to capture so much with the few yet generous strokes that he applied. The energy, the movement, and the flavour of the moment were not lost in his subjects; and yet the faces remained shadows – each part of a story that seemed never to be fully told.

The painting that I picked to buy at that exhibition was not to be mine as it was adjudged the winning painting and was retained by the sponsors. When Gbenga called to offer me the option of purchasing another painting, we struck up a friendship. Off and on, I have been in touch with him all the years since then. His style has remained powerful, consistent and communicative. His passion is even more evident, as are his abilities. It has been interesting watching an already mature young artist, mature even further.

At his exhibition in Lagos last year I challenged him to explore further – with perhaps differing colours, messages, or styles. And he has come back this year seemingly stronger, with a greater variety. This collection is particularly intriguing for its diversity in use of colour and subject matter. I congratulate Gbenga and urge him to continue the journey – to explore and feel the full breadth of his repertoire. I sense that his best is not yet over. Indeed it may still be yet to come....

**Ike Osakwe**  
March 2013



Untitled. Oil on board, 2013. 82 x 62 cm





Oju - a composition. Oil on board, 2012. 123 x 82 cm



Blue in the face. Oil on board, 2012. 123 x 82 cm

## ORIMOLOYE'S OJU...THE DYNAMICS AND PRAXIS OF SPONTANEITY

*"Gbenga Orimoloye, is an artist with contemporary visual poetry, rendered in utmost simplicity and faithfulness. His works provide erudition, delight, freedom and individuality in modern art deliberation." (Rukeme, 1997).*

*"Creativity is inventing, experimenting, growing, taking risks, breaking rules, making mistakes and having fun"  
- Mary Lou Cook.*

The human eye (Oju, in Yoruba language) can be compared to a camera which gathers, focuses, and transmits light through a lens to create an image of the environment. In a camera, the image is created on film; in the eye, the image is created on the retina, a thin layer of light sensitive cells at the back of the eye. The lens of the eye bends, or refracts, light that enters the eye. Visual acuity is the sharpness of vision determined by a person's ability to discriminate fine details, and is measured by using specially devised tests and charts. (AFB, 2013).

In Yoruba cosmology, the eye (Oju) is located in the human head (Ori), which is believed to be the final exit of the human soul or spirit at death. The head is also, perceived to be a sacred organ, with its associated entities, hence the spiritual and moral importance during ones existence in life; destiny or fate, fortune and luck are all aligned to this Ori. The eye then is seen as the window to the head's deliberations.

The eye (Oju) to the visual artist (whether under the traditional (classic) or modern art), performs a vital role. It must be asserted here that the artist's eye (Oju) operates differently from the non-artist. The artist sees things the way he is induced (as in traditional set-up) or personalised and covertly conceptual for the modern artist. This accounts for the different ways artists, under the modern set-up deliberate. This is why we have differentiated art of variations.

The Yoruba hold that a combination of art and ritual remains indispensable to combination between humans and the divine. Further, nature is perceived as being sacred. Consequently, the Yoruba are apt to think of art as an act of creative imagination (Oju Ona), executed with skill and understanding of the subject, rather than see art as object. For the Yoruba, then, artistry is the exploration and imaginative re-creation of received ideas and forms, usually from the divine... the bulging eyes (Oju) in Yoruba sculptures are signs of spiritual power in mythology and religious experiences, depicting a higher consciousness. (Oyeronke, 1999).

Using the classification from the "Family Ties Art Corpus", December (1996), Orimoloye falls within the main stream of "Spatial Spontaneity and atroupement". This is because of his pre-occupation with the structure and spatial relationships, clustering of organic and inorganic masses, the spontaneous application of thick (impasto) or thinly applied paints in colourful, but recessed tonal patches.

William Faulkner(?), once said "the aim of every artist is to arrest motion, which is life, by artificial means and hold it fixed so that a hundred years later, when a stranger looks at it, it moves again since it is life". Orimoloye best typifies this assertion.

My first encounter with Gbenga Orimoloye's art works was in 1996, precisely five years after his graduation from the famous, first art School in Nigeria, south of the Sahara, north of the Atlantic; Yaba College of Technology. A School that was structured, nurtured and well academically streamed by Professor Yusuf Cameron Adebayo Grillo, Kolade Oshinowo, the late Isiaka Osunde, Pa Salu and a host of others. In Orimoloye, I saw boldness, the audacity of an artist with a mission; to create a salient visual identity for himself, which is the nucleic propensity of every modern artist. Seventeen years after, this same artist has eventually carved a niche for himself, as a fulfilled and established artist with audacious dexterity.

A concise visual analysis of his current paintings has always remained an exciting one for me because, this artist uses the overt qualities of the "sensational"- tactile perception. From this apparent classification, we have basically threefold experiments: His **Figure compositions**, (not more than three figures), **poly-portraits** and **mono-portraits**.



One notices a unique attention to the figurative, drapery and spatial relations in his current paintings. Depicting the drapery with patches of colours, in itself, is self-tasking, but it also shows an evidence of a mastered skill.

“Social Networking” depicts three male figures in apt attention to a tablet hardware, for browsing the internet. The drapery of the fore-figure reveals an excellent rendering of the shirt. Proportion and design formation in this composition is remarkable. The artist’s introduction of a cloudy, misty and patchy background enhances the overall spatial qualities.

“Untitled” is a painting depicting a woman at the stream washing her clothes. The spontaneity in his patchy palette knife strokes is lively. The artist’s capturing of the woman’s pose and form, is realistic, but with swiftly and flickering of strokes, reflecting the concentration and activity (action) of the woman. The reflection of water, transparency and “stilled” motion, are faithfully captured. A closer gaze at the work reveals a drastic tactile sensation. Howbeit at a distance, one is bound to enjoy the fusion of these patches, resulting into composite picture in realism or exactitude.

Recessed green hue, burnt umber are dominant colours in “Figure (4)”. This is a life painting, depicting a man in deep concentration. Balance, harmony and symmetry are the artist’s main tools in achieving an overall captivating composition.

In “Figure (2)”, the dominant red hue and blue are well manipulated to give an expressionistic rendition of a female figure, in a sited posture. One salient feature in this work is the marriage of the background and the subject matter. The artist utilized the concept of hued “sfumato” (blurring effect) reminiscent in Michael Angelo’s drawings, where the subject matter is fused to the picture plane, in this case, the artist canvas.

“Oju”, is a Yoruba word for the eye. This painting remains unique and a master piece, because of its slight deviation. The emphasis here is on group portraiture. The work depicts three pretty ladies, in a lively, exciting mood. The coloured patches of strokes are heavier and more with penchant details (more pronounced). Perspective, mood, Africanness, is well reflected. There is a stimulating depiction, manipulation of a mood and flesh tones. This composite portraiture is accomplished with remarkable dexterity and verdure.

“Facebook and Realbook”, is conceptual, a kind of visual allegory. - The artist here was trying to draw comparative inferences between, the internet browsing and the physical book. His apparent message is a call for a re-visitation, resurgence to the reading culture, and library services, which most youths have long abandoned for the less tasking; the e-services on the internet. The artist in creating this composition has aptly and deliberately emphasized the human head in a detached (cut-off) visual module, - ‘why’, one may ask. This is creativity; it is all about fun and suspense for the beholder. The artist, in using this technique, has been able to force the consumer (beholder) to be part of this painting, hence one is forced to view the heads one at a time and then as a composite unit. The most exciting visual phenomena, is latent imagination, - where the beholder is forced to place his head into each of the figures, thereby been part of the overall composition. This is what I call *latent participation*.

The indefinable knack which is intuitive practice called genius. This is artistic judgement in the practice of painting when one just knows instinctively what to put or where. This knack is the artistic eye, artistic judgement and it is a non rational process - it is intuition or instinct and it is this that trained and developed technique realises.

I think John Dryden captures it: “But genius must be born, and never can be taught.” It is the technique that is taught not the genius which is inborn as the qualities that make a work art are intrinsic to the work, neither external nor contingent on where the work is put. (Hamilton, 2010).

**Rukeme Noserime** (FCIDA)...2013. Chief Lecturer. Yabatech, Lagos.



Face-book and Realbook Oil on board, 2013 82 x 62 cm.



Oju (4). Oil on board, 2012. 123 x 82 cm



Oju (3). Oil on board, 2012. 123 x 82 cm





Shekere and glass of water. Oil on canvas, 2012. 61 x 46 cm



Figure (4). Oil on board, 2012. 82 x 62 cm





Figure (3). Oil on board, 2012. 82 x 62 cm



Oju (6). Oil on board, 2012. 123 x 82 cm





Oju (2). Oil on board, 2012. 123 x 82 cm



Yellow landscape. Oil on board, 2012. 82 x 62 cm



Face-booking while walking. Oil on board, 2013. 82 x 62 cm

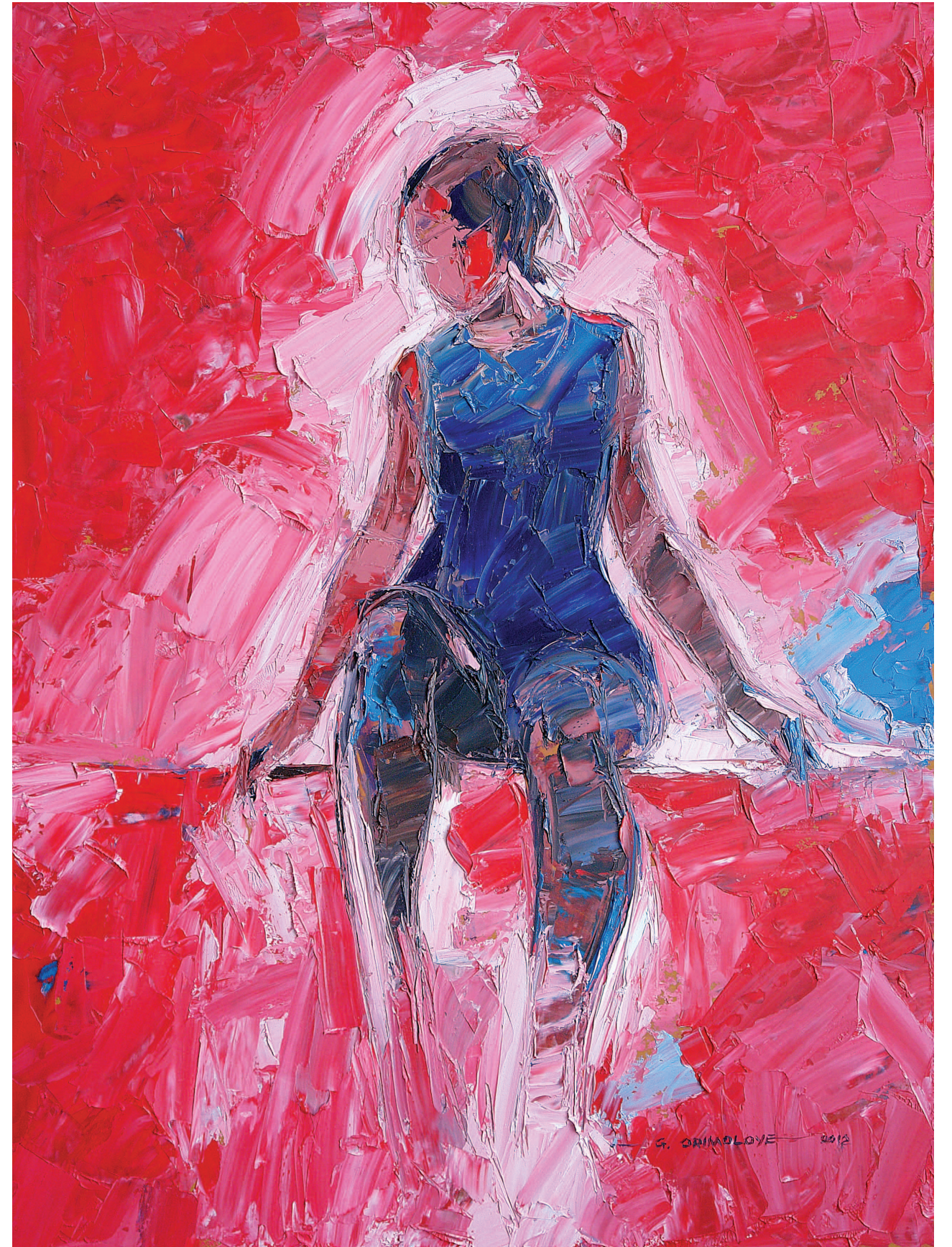


Figure (2). Oil on board, 2012. 82 x 62 cm





Girl in blue dress. Oil on board, 2012. 123 x 82 cm



..in green and brown. Oil on board, 2012. 123 x 82 cm



Oju (5). Oil on board, 2012. 123 x 82 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.

### Membership of professional body:

Founding member, Nigeria Art Society UK.

## EXHIBITIONS

### 2012 - Ona

Solo exhibition of paintings hosted by Terra Kulture Gallery, Lagos Nigeria - May/June 2012.

**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, Islington** .. continued on page 15





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

**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 and drawings.

**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, The Cheltenham Ladies' College, Cheltenham Gloucestershire plus 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

- The Ways of a Genius – Arts, Books & Culture, Thisday, Saturday Newspaper, May 12, 2012.
- Ona.. a metaphor for life's journey – The Guardian, Sunday, May 20, 2012.
- For Gbenga Orimoloye, it is journey back with Ona - Saturday Independent, May 26, 2012.
- Orimoloye brings ONA to Terra Kulture - The Moment On Sunday, May 27, 2012.
- The Narrow Road - Arts & Review, Thisday, Sunday, June 3, 2012.
- Character in the beauty of Art – Arts & Culture supplement, Next on Sunday, 26th June 2011.

## CONTACT DETAILS

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



Canoes, weed and lagoon. Oil on board, 2012. 123 x 82 cm

## OJU - THE THEME

Today, our generation has become increasingly dependent on our smart phones and other handheld devices. During every free moment in our busy lives, we may be texting friends, checking mail or keeping up with our social networking page(s). In other words, relying less on 'real-life' face-to-face contact and interaction.

It can be fascinating to watch how people have their faces glued to the screens of their handheld devices, especially when on the platform at train stations, in restaurants, at events and even when supposedly in conversations with others.

Oju is the Yoruba word for eye. It is also the same word for face. The face is a very important window to the essence of an individual. The *live* face that is... not an inanimate "facebook" or "instagram" face amongst the collection of photos in a "friend's" profile - indeed some of which may have been 'doctored'.

The title of this show is Oju. It is inspired partly by my fascination with these socio-cultural developments within the context of a generation.

Furthermore, being a figurative artist, I see a face as a landscape. Especially when emotions can be discerned therein. In a sense, valleys, mountains, rivers and indeed other geographical and physical features, each allegorical with it's own respective set of differing opportunities, can all be present in a face.

The more you look at a person's face, the more you begin to realise that what you see is not actually that person, but a transit point. An interface. This is that which helps you to register, in one moment out of eternity, whether by means of a smile, frown or whatever, an understanding of who and what lies beneath.

This exhibition is one result of these observations and thoughts. I am thankful for inspiration and great health to be able to share my work.

Thank you for viewing the collection.

**Gbenga Orimoloye**

March, 2013





The couple. Oil on board, 2012. 82 x 62 cm



My shekere and my daughter's guitar (2).

Oil on board, 2012. 123 x 82 cm



Figure (1). Oil on board, 2012. 82 x 62 cm



Oju (1). Oil on board, 2012. 123 x 82 cm



Figure (7). Oil on board, 2012. 82 x 62 cm



Social networking. Oil on board, 2013. 82 x 62 cm





Late evening mood. Oil on board, 2013. 82 x 62 cm.



Oil on canvas, 2012. 61 x 46 cm

My shekere and my daughter's guitar (1).



African Women. Oil on board, 2012. 123 x 82 cm

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All glory and highest praise to my Father, Lord and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, who enables me by His Spirit.

To my dear wife, Gloria: thank you for being my support, encourager (and much cherished evaluator of my art); love you, Sweetness. Our children: Zoe, Oluwajomiloju and Faith; love you too.

My warmest gratitude to Mr Ike Osakwe and Mr Rukeme Noserime; thank you very much for your kind effort.

Once again, Mrs Bolanle Austen-Peters and everyone at Terra Kulture, I say many thanks.

Dear mum, auntie, uncle and everyone (you know who you are). Big hugs.

Dr Chris Imafidon and family, the Ogbes, the Isas, dear friends, brothers, sisters, collectors... thank you once again, for all the kind encouragement, friendship, patronage and all. I am blessed indeed. It will not be possible to list everyone by name here.. please be fully persuaded that you are appreciated.

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

Gbenga Orimoloye





Hairdressing cannot be done via face-book. Oil on board, 2012. 82 x 62 cm