



ROM ISICHEI

| CONSTANT |
CAPITAL |



The walk, 2019,
charcoal, pastel on paper, 17 x 23 inches

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ROM ISICHEI

Curated by Ugoma Adegoke

7 November 2019 - 20 December 2019
Constant Life
Lagos, Nigeria



(Detail) If looks could kill, 2019,

graphite, charcoal, pastel, colour pencil on paper. 48 x 60 inches

Foreword

The artist is, if anything, a creator of worlds. And it is art, this most absurd and most human endeavour that lays out, in sometimes pleasurable, painful, puzzling, sometimes prosaic perspectives, glimpses of what is always with us – joy, pain, isolation, reconciliation. Art distracts, intensifies, mutes, and amplifies because art creates.

Art is important to us at Constant Capital.

Ideas, imagination and innovation are critical aspects of what our professional bring to every engagement, trade or transaction. At Constant Capital we succeed because our people think more creatively, assess opportunities more astutely and act more quickly than others.

Because art inspires us, we hope to share art with you – our clients and friends- through these events thoughtfully curated by Ugoma Adegoke of Bloom Art.

We hope you enjoy this exhibition and we look forward to seeing you at future events.

Ike Echeruo
Managing Partner, Co-Founder
Constant Capital



Constant Capital

Constant Capital Partners, Ltd is a private pan-African investment firm that specializes in corporate finance and principal investing in alternative assets, private equity and real estate. The firm provides top quality services to privately-held and publicly-traded companies in Africa and to domestic and international institutional investors.

Constant Capital has offices in Accra, Ghana; Lagos, Nigeria; Johannesburg, South Africa and the Seychelles.

Constant Capital provides a full range of financial advisory services, including corporate finance and M&A advisory services, restructuring and reorganizations, private placements and public offerings of equity and debt securities.

Constant Capital's principal investing utilizes the firm's proactive deal origination and execution capabilities to make private equity investments in unique investment opportunities in a broad range of sectors and in real estate.



(Detail) Significations of Negritude, 2019,

charcoal, colour pencil, chalk pastel on paper, 48 x 60 inches

A note from the curator

It is a pleasure to present Rom Isichei for a second time at Constant Capital in a solo exhibition that explores themes like social interaction, urbanism, identity and humanity which tend to preoccupy the artist, but this time, peculiarly executed in large scale and on that challenging but liberating surface, paper.

Rom continues to defend his position as a heavy weight, a favourite, a quintessential painter, the virtuoso - this time delivering pictographic and near monochromatic scenes of everyday life and everyday people. He highlights the sweet and simple human dynamic with short bursts of colour and through his dexterity draws you in to the lives and the living of the *average* Nigerian - affording them their much deserved dignity, evoking empathy and admiration at the same time and leaving the viewer on a celebratory high.

It has been a truly rewarding and meditative experience working with Rom over the last 4 months to birth this exhibition and I hope that you experience the works and the emotions they inspire as much as I have.

Ugoma Adegoke
November 2019

Ugoma Adegoke trained as an economist and corporate finance professional. Today she is a creative entrepreneur, gallerist, and foremost cultural curator. Some might call her a one-woman army. Ugoma is a tireless community builder, arts advocate, a passionate art collector and a dynamic taste-maker. She is the founding director and chief curator of BLOOM Art, Lagos

Ugoma completed a course in Curating Contemporary Art and Exhibition Design in Barcelona facilitated by acclaimed curator Tina Zeigler, co-founder of the Moniker Art Fair. In 2016 she embarked on a course in Art and Finance at the Sotheby's Institute in London and also attended an art writing seminar under the tutelage of Ossie Ward of the Lisson Gallery. In December 2016, she was invited to Paris to speak at the Africa-focused conference of Comite Colbert, France's premier cultural & luxury association. In May 2017, Ugoma was invited to become an Ambassador of The African Art in Venice Forum, a 2-day symposium event which took place during the opening of the 57th Venice Biennale. In the same month, Ugoma was selected by the German Consulate General and the Goethe Institut as a representative from Nigeria to attend a special segment and one-week curated immersion of documenta no. 14 in Kassel, Germany, one of the world's most important modern and contemporary art festivals since 1955. In April 2019 she produced and hosted an historic launch event for the re-published "Art in Development: A Nigerian Perspective" the seminal book by the late Uche Okeke. Also in July 2019 together with acclaimed artist Emeka Ogboh, Ugoma was appointed to curate the art exhibition "Face Me, I Face You" hosted by the Embassy of Nigeria, Germany to commemorate the first ever annual Nigerian Cultural Day in Berlin.

Ugoma avidly promotes and supports the work of artists and creatives as curator and director through BLOOM Art, her portfolio gallery. She has curated and produced art exhibitions with the most exciting and accomplished modern and contemporary artists including Uche Okeke, Obiora Udechukwu, Muraina Oyelami, Tam Fiofori, Victor Ehikhamenor, Olu Ajayi, Angela Isiwe and Marcia Kure to name a few.

Ugoma's personality inspires trend-setting directions in design, art, culture and lifestyle. She is pushing the envelope on the African cultural experience and its receivership.

Artist's Statement

Some traits are immune to erasure

We are all unique bearers of ethnic and social significations that kindle rules of order and formulas of behaviour. Human actions, inactions, and their attendant aftereffect are mostly the impulses that formulate my visual compositions.

Art school teaches us not to use erasers while drawing, as every mark delineates the process and that erasers are tools for designers and architects -they expound. But often times in art, rules - like borders are made to be pulled down, broken, bent or re-directed, as in this case.

The process of marking and the act of erasing are collaged in these compositions to delineate covenants of social structures and the nuances of everyday life. They construct moments of habitual authenticity and watershed times when pretence is obscured and frankness, personified.

Life is in constant flux, but certain traits endure; as we are all creatures of habit and beliefs. These pictorial compositions are unscripted visual snapshots of everyday life that enact our shared humanity, celebrate the vibrancy of unrestrained emotions, and overwhelming sense of nostalgia and resonance. And where silence speaks volume.

They are celebrations of our complex diversity and compatible characteristics that shape our socio-cultural identity.

They afford me a new visual language that strips my technique off normalcy.

These habits are immune to erasures.

Rom Isichei
Lagos, October 2019

Rom Isichei: Interpreting the Zeitgeist

by Toni Kan

Chatting recently, via WhatsApp, with an artist friend, he shared his new work with me.

When I commented that it was different. He sent a terse reply – Innovate or die!

Every great artist produces works that are constantly in flux, always dynamic, constantly evolving.¹

This is important because as Jhumpar Lahiri wrote, artists are interpreters of maladies, they are auguries of new epochs as well as chroniclers of the zeitgeist. They define not just the present but anticipate the future

This is important in contemplating Rom Isichei's oeuvre which has been defined by change and evolution as he constantly engages with all that is new and fresh and novel.

At the 2016 edition of Art X, Isichei represented by Bloom Art, exhibited a body of works depicting subjects interacting with their mobile phones. It was a casual nod to a device that has become, in many ways, an extension of our arms. It was a timely commentary that defined the times and which riffed on Banksy's 2014 mural - Mobile Lovers - in a manner that was clearly Rom Isichei's.

Rom Isichei's new body of work executed all on paper and presented by Ugoma Adegoke of Bloom Art continues on that trajectory of the innovative. Why paper? Why not paper?

Every medium, every hue provides the artist with a new visual language, one of communicating with his audience because to borrow from Mikhail Bakhtin, the best art is dialogic.

Rom Isichei's visual language, his iconology if you will, that which he calls his visual compositions could be essayed as having been taken straight out of babel but without the incoherent babble. His visual language is heteroglossia, a collage which has seen him communicate in the language of the canvas, of found objects, of metal, of pencil and coal on paper and many other iterations.

But all in this he has remained fluent and eloquent in the language of beauty which is all that matters, that which endures ultimately.

In the body of work on display, Rom Isichei presents works which, as he explains in his artist's statement, are mined from a place of nostalgia – “visual snapshots of everyday life that enact our shared humanity, celebrate the vibrancy of unrestrained emotions....”

The subjects are filched from the everyday, but there is beauty and something ennobling in their monochromatic and quotidian ordinariness as Rom Isichei outlines them using pencil strokes, graphite powder and chalk pastels.

Because the works are executed on paper, the images and subjects acquire a flatness that insists on not being one dimensional. The works then become, in that sense, a masterclass in symmetry, form, rhythm and fluidity.

That is at the core of Rom Isichei's visual interpretation of our times.

Toni Kan

October, 2019

Toni Kan is a Lagos based novelist, biographer and culture critic. He is co-founder of thelagosreview.ng



(Detail) Recrimination and refusal, 2019,

graphite powder, charcoal on paper. 48 x 60 inches

Rom Isichei: Bringing People to Life on Paper

by Roli Afinotan

Being one of Nigeria's leading multi-media artist in contemporary times, Rom Isichei has created works across painting, sculpture, collage and photography to explore figurative expressions. In observing the trend of his practice over the years, one can deduce that media, as well as techniques are primarily tools consciously employed by the artist to enhance his primary visual narrative, which is, telling stories of human experiences that harps on the complexities of be-ing. It is perhaps for this reason that Isichei continuously and tirelessly, experiments with material and medium to tap into a new visual language. Some of his most popularly successful works have been rendered in oil painting, collage, installation and mixed media in which he sometimes, incorporates found objects like corrugated iron, archival prints, corks, wire, plastic, candy wraps, soda cans and even saw dust, which also emphasizes his appeal for texture in his works.

For this exhibition however, Isichei has kept it quite simple, taking us back to the very basics of art, with drawings on paper. Despite this seemingly simple medium, Rom's brilliance lies in his sheer skills. His ability to combine and apply techniques in measured doses, such that they neither overwhelm nor underwhelm, is one of the things that makes his works remarkable. A shade here, some colours there, and maybe an etching elsewhere, all come together in an almost perfect blend, leaving just enough room for questions from viewers engaging with the works. Even in instances where he may seem overly generous with colours, the eyes of the viewer are bound to be fixated on the piece, in agreement.

The subjects in Isichei's drawings are caught in various poses of interaction with fleeting nuances frozen in a moment. Gestures, facial expressions, movement, and emotions contribute to the life force felt from the works. The mood emanating from the works is infectious, and curiosity is instinctive as one observes the works. 'Who are these people?', 'What are their stories?'

In *'Natal Grace'*, a man and a woman with a baby strapped on her back, hold hands while walking with bowls of something heavy on their head. One can tell of this weight by how the man balances the bowl with his palm and the lower part of that arm. And the woman, by the tautness of the arm that keeps the bowl in place. The lives of these subjects, bleed beyond this large-scale paper that is too little to contain all the details. Yet, the artist has offered enough to allow the viewer's imagination travel with them; wondering if they are lovers or something less. Wondering where they may be going with all the weight around them, including the child.

'Animated by a Tell-Tale' evokes humour. Three men standing with a jerrycan and two buckets, probably on their way to fetch some water, are enthralled in a conversation. Two of them have their heads tilted towards the third, with mouths slightly ajar, indicative of the rapt attention being stolen by this storyteller. The disbelief or surprise from the listeners is almost palpable, as we see a rare depiction of how men are seldom thought of in our society – as gossips.

Depending on where you hail from, works like *'Eventide'* and *'Village Villa'* may take you back home or remind you of places encountered during journeys. While *'Reading Between the Lines'* and *'Repose'* may remind you of an estranged lover. One would also appreciate the distinct way he combines pastel with either pencil or charcoal, to add colour to the monochrome, to give even more life, to the subjects.

With Isichei's composition, contemplation is inevitable. We see snippets of ourselves or someone we know, or people we have come across, and places we have been however small, in his depictions. And this, is part of what compels us to engage with the works; not just for their aesthetic appeal but for all the ways they articulate the human condition.

Roli O'tsemaye Afinotan
October, 2019

Roli O'tsemaye Afinotan is a writer, art critic and curator. She lives and works in Lagos.



(Detail) Animated by a tell-tale, 2019,

charcoal, chalk, pastel on paper, 22 x 30 inches

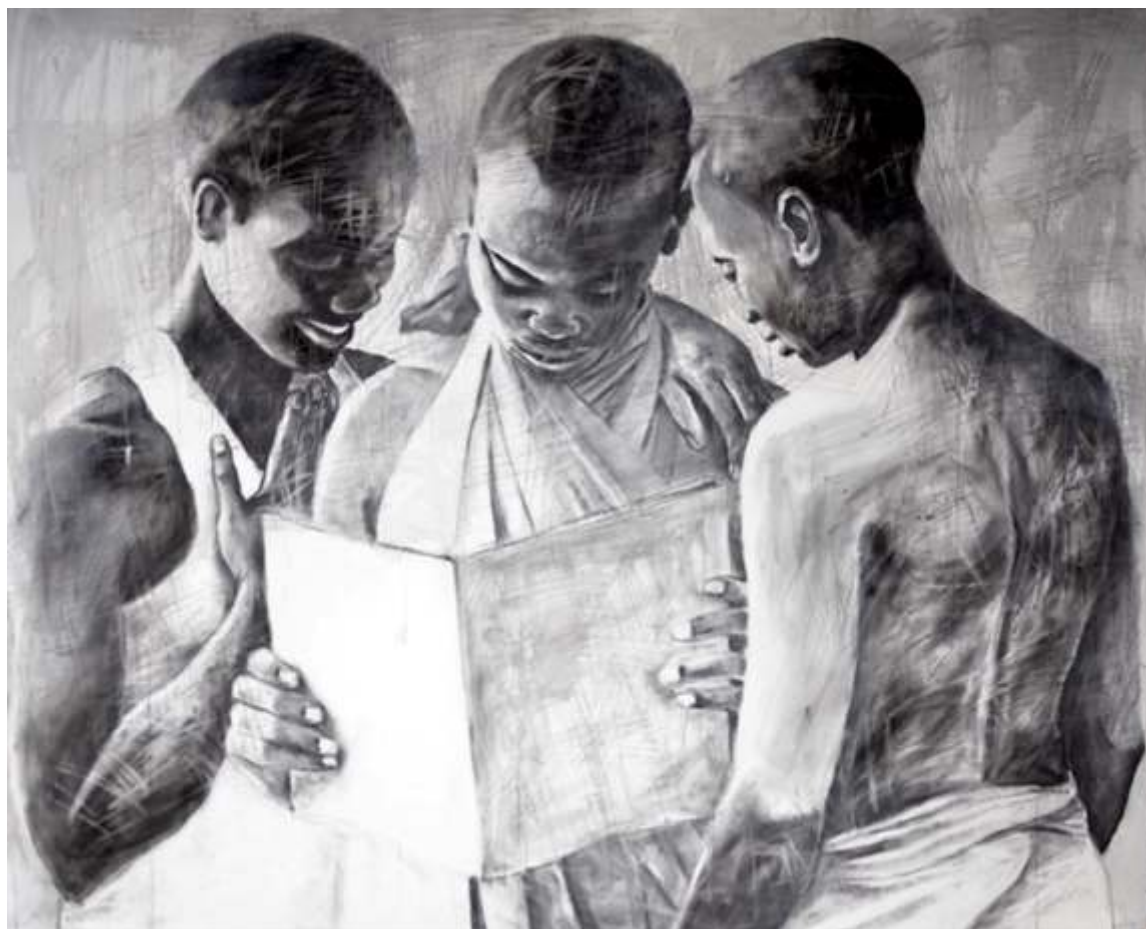


Effusions of delight, 2019,

charcoal, pastel on paper. 48x60 inches



Three sisters, 2019,
graphite, charcoal, chalk pastel on paper, 48 x 60 Inches



He chuckles as the glimpse the centre spread, 2019,

graphite powder, charcoal on paper, 48 x 60 inches



He spun a yarn that outdid any he had ever heard, 2019,

charcoal on paper. 48 x 60 inches



Recrimination and refutal, 2019,

graphite powder, charcoal on paper. 48 x 60 inches



Admonition, 2019,
graphite on paper, 48x60 inches



Significations(I), 2019,

charcoal, colour pencil, chalk pastel on paper. 48 x 60 inches



Significations of negritude, 2019,

charcoal, colour pencil, chalk pastel on paper. 48 x 60 inches.

In Conversation with Rom Isichei

Rom Isichei in a nutshell is...

I am a visual artist using my works to tell stories that are universal to the human experience with stylistic colouration that is decidedly contemporary. My practice is process-based and rooted in a commitment to material exploration and integration.

What are some of the themes you explore in your work?

My works are often social commentaries that offer snapshots of our ecosystem, our multiform and the peculiarities' of our common humanity. Ethnicity, complexities of identity and mediations between the 'self' and the 'other' are also recurring themes in my works.

How did you first get interested in this medium - drawing and what attracts you to it specifically?

There is no 'first' as drawing has always been integral to my work process. Scribbling, doodling, sketching, or drawing- depending on which is convenient at the particular time and place, exteriorises a thought process that generates my compositions. It's an attraction that affords me multiple perspectives in developing the end piece, and as well gives a conjecture on potential media and materials for use in realising the composition.

This exhibition is comprised of large-scale works on paper, a medium you are not readily known for. What led you to explore this medium?

An African idiom states that you don't watch a masquerade from one spot. To evolve and adapt are constants in my practice. I was seduced by the sheer size of the paper when I first laid my eyes on it; its gravity, its surface texture and above all, its' latent ability to incarnate a new visual vocabulary in my practice.

How would you describe the experience of creating works on paper? Is it a medium you are likely to explore further?

Extraordinarily liberating; in the sense that it affords me the opportunity to break from the norm. It's a media with collaborative disposition to varied materials and undoubtedly will be a constant in my practice.

For the works in this exhibition, what was the average time spent on one work?

It'll be a bit difficult to infer a precise or average time frame spent on each piece as I simultaneously work on more than one piece at any given time. This routine gives me considerable leverage to intersperse the drawings with sundry finishing options.

What are some of your favourite experiences as an artist?

The ability to actualise a thought process into a visual form, imbued with certain emotions that absorbs and entraps a viewer's consciousness, disrupts their notion of what is normal, and catapults them to realms of nostalgia are momentous in validating my artistic value.

The exhibitions I've had- both local and international, the people I'd met, friendships forged, cities visited are among the sublime regards being an artist has accorded me.

How has your style and practice changed over the years? How do you see it evolving in the future?

The future is forever rooted in the past, and old habits regularly flares anew. My inspiration as an artist keeps developing as I continue searching for new modes of visual expression. My techniques over the years has not drastically deviated, but gradually advanced in spatial dimensions, material strength, textural depth and tactual realities.

I am open-minded on future gravitations, as I will prefer practical impulses to goad my creative inclinations. I'll rather go with the flow than force the rhythm.

What are some of the reactions you think or hope these works will evoke?

Art is subjective and impresses our sensibilities in different ways. I try not to pre-empt or create expectations and possible feedback from my viewers. I have overtime cultivated an attitude of broad-mindedness and receptive to critical evaluation and arguments that foments new ideas.

Who and what are some of your biggest influences?

Linear forms, surfaces, objects and materials nuanced in history, memory, texture, form, colour and other embodiments rouses my curiosity.

Individuals artists includes- Bruce Onobrakpeya for his consistency, Pablo Picasso for his ingenuity, Jenny Saville for her compositional facility, and other creatives whose aesthetic vision transcends the everyday.

Why art? Why did you choose this path?

This path chose me!

I can't think of any other pathway that would've steered me to the realm of sanity. Being an artist wasn't a choice: it was a divine ordination that offered no second or third option.

What new project are you working on?

I am still on course to realise my designated projects for the present year and at such, not given heed to new ones.

Describe your ideal environment or ambience to work in

My ideal work ambience is sedate, lots of light, and unaffected by external fanfare of any kind, devoid of human presence (except you're the subject of my on-going composition), soothing rhythm that invigorates the moment.

It's that one place where I do not have to explain my actions to anyone- even to myself. It's an incubation space where thoughts and ideas are hatched to reality. It's my sanctuary.

How do you decide on what materials to work with?

Visual art is like literature. The ideas and issues you wish to explore determine your choice of vocabulary. Your pick of words that characterises beauty and celebratory themes obviously will differ when enacting indignation, maladministration and other anti-social vices.

If you had to choose just one art material to work with, what would it be and why?

A sketchpad, because it foregrounds the journey to the finished line.

Describe your art in one word.

Evocative.



Animated by a tell-tale, 2019,
charcoal, chalk pastel on paper, 48 x 60 inches



If looks could kill, 2019,

graphite, charcoal, pastel, colour pencil on paper. 48 x 60 inches



Reading between the lines, 2019,

graphite, charcoal, pastel on paper. 48 x 57 inches



Natal grace, 2019

charcoal, pastel on paper. 48 x 60 inches



In repose, 2019,
graphite, chalk pastel on paper. 22 x 30 inches



He reads the third line a second time, 2019,

graphite, chalk pastel on paper. 22 x 30 inches



Eventide, 2019,

charcoal, pastel on paper, 17 x 24 inches



Village villa (ii), 2019,
pencil, graphite powder, pastel on paper. 22 x 30 inches



Village villa, 2019,

charcoal, pastel on paper, 17 x 24 inches

Rom Isichei's Vanishing Viewer

by Papa Omotayo

*Almost without noticing
Without thinking, it seems,
You've arrived where you see far
Thirty years back, more, the path vanishes
And you're forced to sit down in your shadow
To think
Memory
Mother of truth and myth,
Tell how the terrain divided the stream.*

Unknown

These are the words that came to mind when i first saw this series, *Some Traits* are *Immune to Erasure* by Rom Isichei. A new series of illustrated vignettes of 'authentic everyday traditional Nigerian life'. filled with the quiet erosion of memory, time and place. Staring at these drawings, images whose over familiarity have made us view them as the artistic trope of African tourist art and caricature. As the artist appears to be using each scene as a construct for provocation. A challenge to the modern art viewer, why these everyday subjects and lives need reinvention and abstraction.

Perhaps its our need to validate new aspirations which must simultaneously lay claim to and reject the oblivious-iousness and naivety of the characters gathered and the world on display.

We find the women in groups of twos and threes, sharing stories and experience. A couple, with their new born child, carrying their daily toil whilst holding hands. The newly weds dance, two girlfriends get ready, red lipstick

and gold jewelry. We see the fishermen at sunset with burning cedar and kerosine lanterns on the shore. We recognize the earth brown walls and tin roof of that house, standing under a palm tree, with a burst of yellow to usher the darkness within. Perhaps that's where we bare our naked bodies and look to find where time goes. Where boys and girls find the knowledge that will shed them of their innocence. Where the simple illustrative art, marked by the charcoal lines of our mundane lives only find light and form in the parts that will eventually become erased.

Where once the figures would have been outlined and fully formed, the colors radiant in hue and the landscapes awash with activity and action. There seems now only the wind, lifting the blackened residue of charcoal and crayon off the paper, asking us to unravel the myth of desire that seduces to erase the beauty of the everyday.

Papa Omotayo
October, 2019

Papa Omotayo is an award winning, architect, designer, writer and film maker. Papa's work strongly focuses on creating work that explores the nature of culture and context within the contemporary Nigerian and extended African global condition.



Artist Profile

Rom Isichei is a conceptual artist whose practice has persistently engaged object and material exploration. His media alternate between painting, sculpture, collage, and photography, with a leitmotif inextricably linked and continuously intertwined- a consequence of his sustained experimentation, self-direction, and professional development.

Rom's compositions often evoke contemplation and engender dialogue about identity and culture, failures and insecurities, less and excess, loneliness, rapture and gaiety, and other emotional 'gestures' within our contemporary commune.

Dapo Adeniyi, art critic and publisher of Position Magazine opines that "Rom is gregarious in his technique, collaging found objects to tell stories that are universal to the human experience with a stylistic colouration that is decidedly contemporary. He has defined a signature of works that is unique to him. His, is one of those you could tell apart immediately you found yourself in a crowded exhibition hall. He articulates the human condition as few others do."

Rom was born in Asaba, Delta State, Nigeria. He currently lives and works in Lagos. He earned an HND in Fine Arts from Yaba College of Technology, Lagos, a Pg. Diploma and an MFA from Chelsea College of Art and Design, London.

He has exhibited widely- both locally and international. His works are featured in diverse publications and included in numerous public and private collections. Rom is listed in "Who is Who" in contemporary Nigerian Art, Smithsonian Museum of African Art Library, Washington DC.

BLOOM Art

BLOOM Art originated from the visual arts programme of The Life House and was birthed out of a need to use innovative approaches to showcase, expose, and challenge Nigerian artists - particularly in response to the lack of exhibition and expression space in the city of Lagos.

Presenting select and exciting works, BLOOM Art's exhibition program offers pointed perspectives of modern and contemporary visual art, its presentation and its engagement with the receiving public thereby contributing to the development of and exaltation of visual art, cultural consciousness and the experience of creativity in Nigeria. Each featured artist is an important part of contemporary dialogue.

Currently a unique fusion of a portfolio gallery & a private studio, BLOOM Art offers intimate exhibitions of art in an accessible format that is bolstered by acclaimed ancillary programming tailored to each exhibition. These include talks, private salons, performances and publications. Daring to present art in alternative exhibition spaces, BLOOM has enabled an organic interplay with other forms of creative expression as well as the vibrant multi-arts scene in Nigeria.

BLOOM Art proudly represents Muraina Oyelami, Marcia Kure, Olu Ajayi, Chinwe Uwatse, Gbenga Offo, Angela Isiuwe, Lemi Ghariokwu, Olufemi Oyewole, Raji Babatunde, Tega Akpokona and Soji Adesina.

BLOOM Art also actively exhibits and works with artists including Victor Ehikhamenor, Kainebi Osahenye, Tony Nsofor, Rom Isichei, Adeyinka Akingbade, Uchay Joel Chima, Tam Fiofori and Gerald Chukwuma.

BLOOM Art is owned and run by curator, collector and gallerist, Ugoma Adegoke

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