

Abdulrazaq Awofeso's "Broad Streets" tells a story of interconnectivity and wins over crowds at the 1-54 Contemporary African Art Show

By Vee L. Harrison

When we realize the interconnection between human life, we tend to have a better understanding of ourselves, and other cultures that struggle to understand our own.

[Abdulrazaq Awofeso](#) may have found that sweet spot in humanity; that sweet spot that joins together cultures from different longitudes, different latitudes.

Awofeso, was for the first time, represented by London-based curator and gallery Ed Cross at the 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair. His sculptural portraits were masterpieces made from thrown away wooden pallets the artist had collected during his travels. The pallets were, in several cases, used to transport goods all over the world, indicative of the various people Awofeso had come across in Birmingham, England and in Lagos, Nigeria. Each place, despite their stark differences in environment and culture, still created some type of synergy, each taking the artist on a personal journey of corruption, broken public policies, human migration, and community.

Awofeso, originally from Lagos, Nigeria, currently residing in Birmingham, England, had something different for this year's 1-54 Contemporary African Art Show. His work on wooden planks, as opposed to traditional canvas, was memorable. The moment someone turned the corner of his booth, their eyes met painted planks, hues of grays, browns, crimsons, yellows, burnt oranges...nothing bright or fluorescent, but certainly bold, in its own right

"Pallets have a history of transit, migration, they are used to transport goods, from one place to another, and the transitions tell a story," said Awofeso.

ArtNews named Awofeso's series "Broad Streets", one of 1-54's "Best Booths" at the show. It gathered quite a crowd on opening day, February 8, 2023. That day, against white walls were stories of faces and places Awofeso had recalled during his time in Lagos and his recent time in the UK. He said that Lagos is where he gets many of his materials from to make the art, but it's different environments that he's used to sharing the narrative. It all seemed simple, but the stories behind the painted pallets were actually complex.

"This is a crossroad between my interactions between two famous traits that exist in Birmingham, and in Lagos," Awofeso explained. He shared his experiences while living in Lagos and in the UK.

"Both of them are epi-centers of trades, markets, businesses, and the hustling and bustling," Awofeso said, regarding Nigeria and England.

What Awofeso wanted to show in “Broad Streets” was the realization that countries like Nigeria have the largest market in Africa with a population of over 200 million, according to the International Trade Administration.

Over the course of this work, Awofeso developed relationships with market owners, traders, sellers, customers... all faces that he recalls, voices that he’s heard.

“Over my travels, I made friends, I would sit, and people watch. What I remember was having conversations with different nationalities and feeling so many different things. All of that stayed with me.”