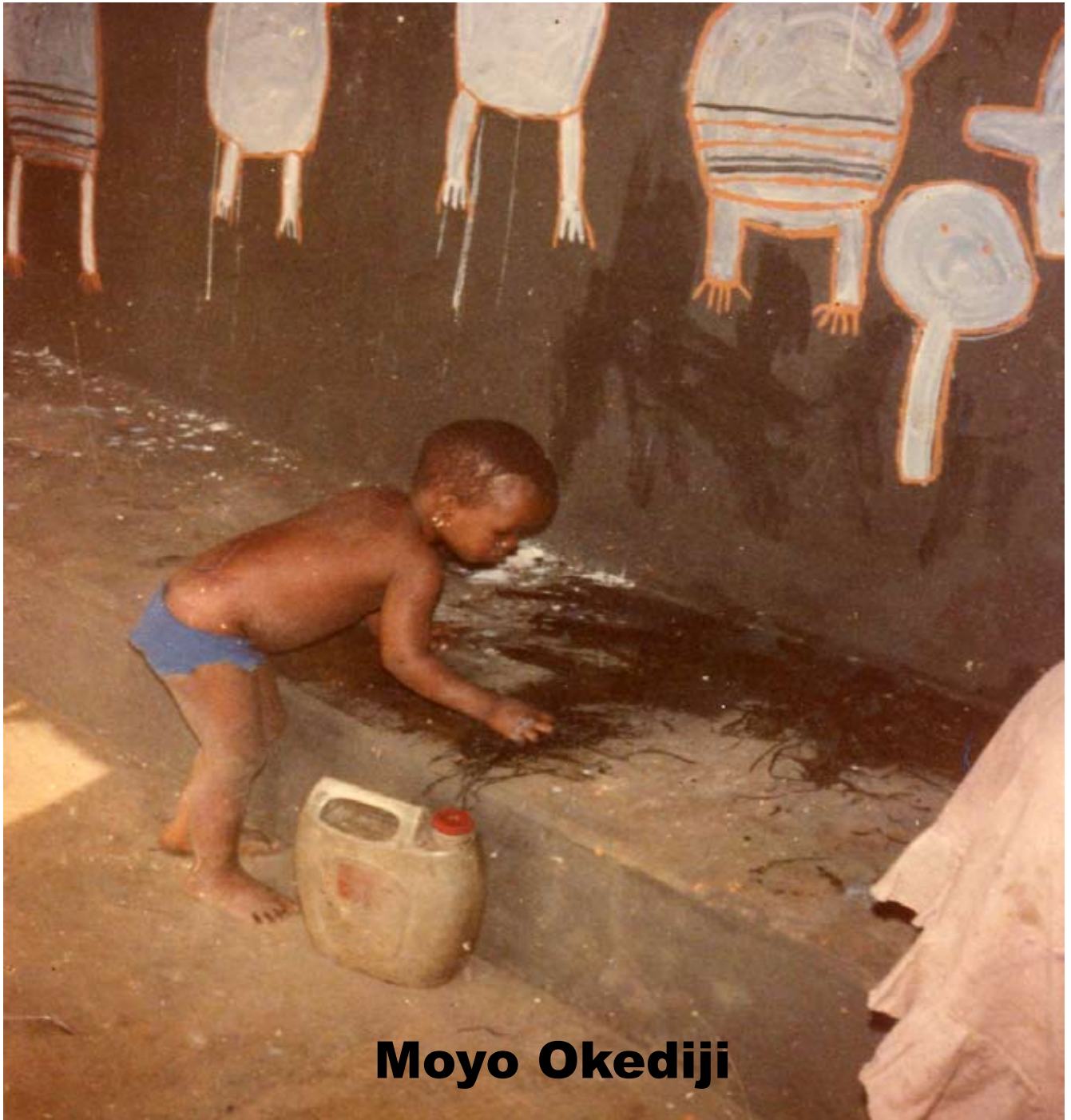


# Beautifiers and Healers

## Art, Theology and Pathology



**Moyo Okediji**



## The University of African Art Press.

© 2007 by Moyo Okediji

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be consumed, reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, downloading, forwarding, linking or otherwise without the written permission of the publisher.

Catalog index:

African art, contemporary art, ethnography, medicine, mythology, painting, pharmacy, religion, sacred art, visual arts, visual culture, women's art.

The University of African Art Press Electronic Book Media.  
Africa eBooks

TUAAPEB.0001

# Table of Contents



Introduction 4

**Invocation 15**

Divination Consultation 27

**Prayer, Poetry and Painting 28**

Good and Bad Birds 38

**Words 39**

Clinic, Shrine and Studio 48

**Living Pictures 52**

Healing Pictures 53

**Images of Power 57**

Music 58

**Talking Drums 60**

Musical Meals 61

**Catalogue of Paintings 71**



## Introduction: Mask and Medicine



In the ancient city of Ile Ife, Nigeria, is a textile<sup>1</sup> cultural practice that combines art, religion, and medicine. Artists integrate metaphors of iconology, theology, and pathology to extend images beyond visual forms into medical dimensions for healing purposes.





This textile therapy or woven medicine is the crossroads or weaving of image, music, and poetry, embellished with choreography, for health purposes. Akire artists of Ile Ife practice this mytho-medical textile culture.<sup>2</sup> By integrating benevolent warps and wefts of religion and medical work, they use their works for sustaining the physical and spiritual health of entire community. Not regarded as visual culture, art, for them, is a textile cultural medication.



The texts of the textiles are invisible.<sup>3</sup> Artists prepare each canvas by blessing and infusing fabric with poetry, songs, and prayers that confront pathology. Omolajaye Olapekun, chief priestess, leads invocation that weaves iconography, faith, and pharmaceuticals.



Exchanging utterances of incantation, artists fill empty canvases with divine energy for healing patients. On canvases spread on the floor between artists' feet, they submit self and communal pathologies before divinities for diagnosis and remedy.





Art is the loom of their orthodox and orthopedic textile. The artists are called “Beautifiers and Healers” because they regard the struggles against pathology as the primary end of art and theology. While it is important for them to make art forms that beautify the environment, the artists regard beautification as an essential ingredient of physical and emotional health. Their artworks beautify their environments in the process of healing the individual and collective pathological minds and bodies in these artistic communities.

The all-women artists start the processes of making art with carefully rehearsed rituals. Here, objects inside covered gourds are part of their sacrifices to divinities during rituals. Sacrifices are liturgical investments that ensure that divinities bless and accept rituals, and are willing to support the sick.



A famous healer, Bolaji Adefioye led the Akire artists until her death in 2000. She practiced a wide range of medical work, from gynecology to epidemiology, specializing in smallpox treatment. She also did counseling ranging from psychiatric to marital complications. Her fame as a healer was connected with her theological offices as Lorigbo of Ile Ife. During the annual Edi festival in Ile Ife, the Lorigbo leads a group of masked invaders into the central market, in a dramatic re-enactment of Ile Ife history. Adefioye led the dramatization until her death. She inherited the position from her mother, who was also a highly respected healer.



Adefioye is seen here in 1984 coming out after fasting for seven days and night before beginning to paint. Her eyes have a blank stare acquired from rituals accompanying fasting. The fast intensifies her iconological vision, theological transcendence, and pathological competence. Egbeyemi Akingbade is in the foreground with the baby strapped to her back.





In 1984, patients, clients, and devotees pay respects to Adefioye, after she successfully completes a festival of painting and fasting. Adefioye is triumphantly holding two white fly whisks in her hands, as a sign of her victory over spiritual enemies who engaged her during her period of fasting and praying. A younger Olapekun, holding a white flywhisk, flanks Adefioye on one side. On the other side, Tinuade Arayemi and other priestesses support Adefioye. Behind them is the newly-completed mural, and the shrine installation, after it was freshly re-arranged at the beginning of a new calendar year.

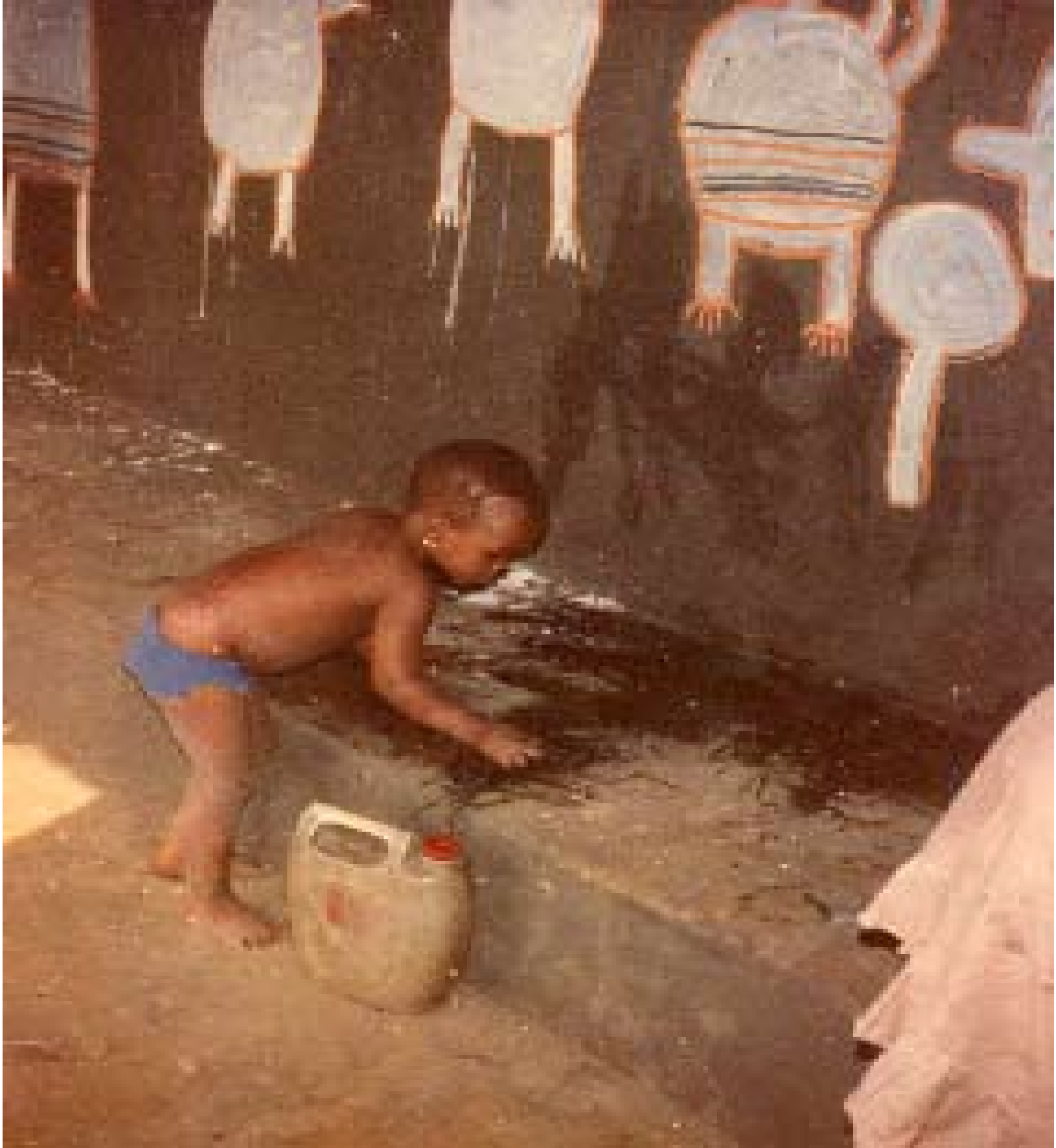


Between Fagbemi and Arayemi, Adefioye leads a painting session in 1982. Her art and spiritual power stem from her vision during fasting, in which the events of the new year are revealed to her.



Iya Akui could hardly stand up in 1984, yet her hands are amazingly steady as she adds fine contour lines around the figure of a palace slave on the mural. Her memory is keen as she remains a link between the past and the present for the entire group. She remembers the words and sounds of songs, and clearly interprets the meanings of the various figures on mural composition.





Because of the spiritual freshness that she brings to the entire process, a little girl who barely walks joins in the painting. Her young spirit invites lively divinities to the work, ensuring more creative vivacity, which stimulates better release from injuries, and provides fuller therapy to the bodies and minds of patients.

# Invocation



Blood is the biological sign of health among this group of postmenopausal women practitioners.<sup>4</sup> Blood sacrifice is therefore part of their theological elements. Invocation of divinities includes the sacrifice of blood. Women artists work with a few male priests who serve as liturgical officials during rituals performed before actual painting begins.

Young priests assist the women in lifting heavy loads, and in slaughtering animals offered during rituals. The completely black she-goat, as seen tethered here, is sacrificial animal of choice among these painters.



Young male priests are studio hands doing manual work such as stretching canvases on the wall, imitating form of the mural, before women artists paint.





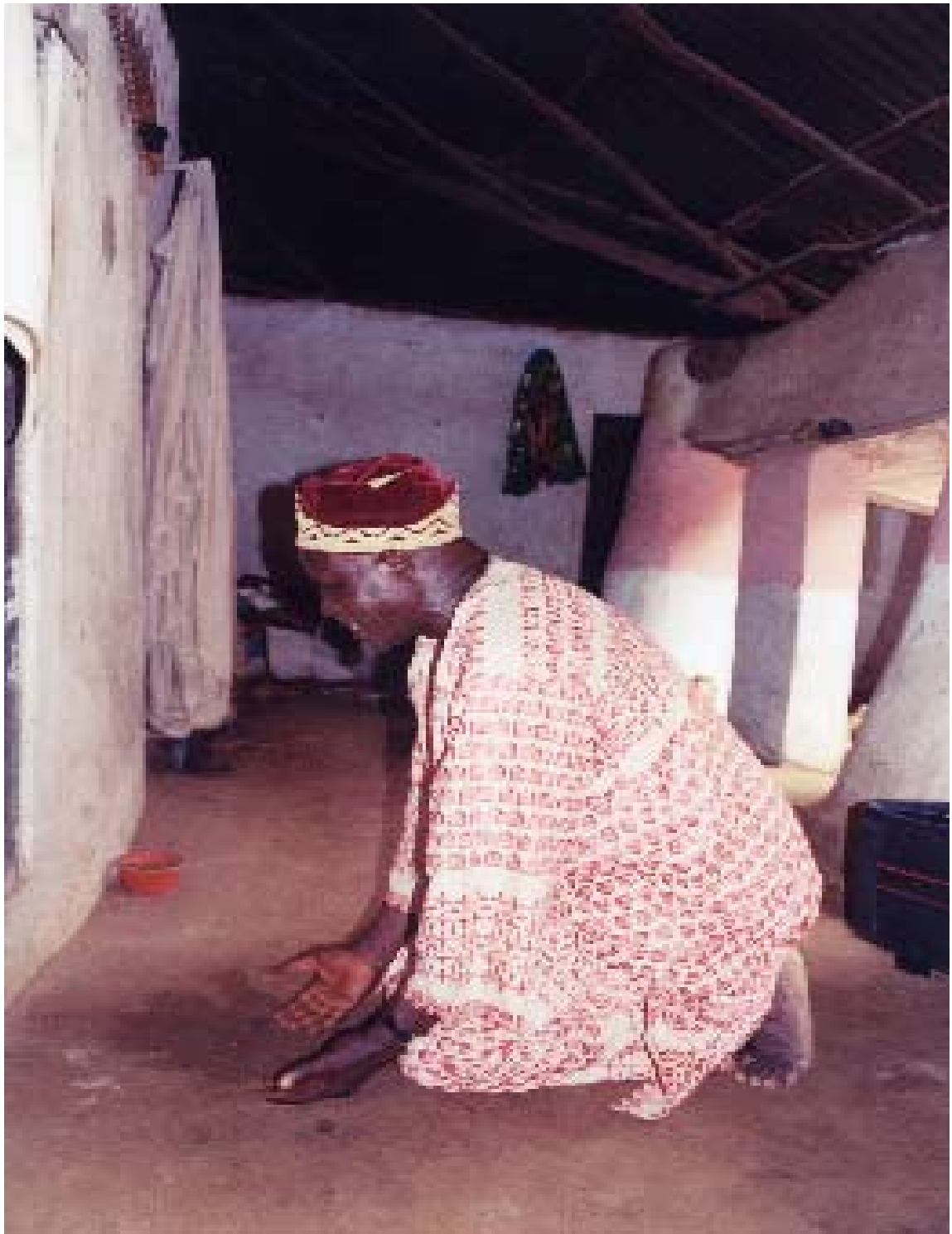
The women's desires for power over pathology must reach the divinities in the forms of painting, songs, chants, poetry, and prayers. Attractive female voices open the door allowing divinities to immigrate and inspire artists during painting processes. Here, the chants of Basorun, male priest, combines with women's voices during invocation, for maximum therapeutic amelioration. The Basorun, standing between two priestesses, does not participate in painting.



Not directly involved with the making of any image, Basorun performs bulk of pathological examination, diagnosis, and treatment of patients. His office of Asajemase (One who openly proclaims his witchcraft) puts him on same theological level as women painters. Basorun observes most of the procedure of painting, in addition to doing health work for the artists. He attends their meetings and counsels them.



With the assistance of a priest called Lasisi, Basorun, in white, has one of the most successful textile medical practices in the city. He treats diseases that are physical and emotional. He is also a counselor who intercedes in minor and major personal, community, or marital crises.



Akanbi Ogundijo, a major priest and healer in the city, visits shrine to offer poetry and prayers to divinities. Ogundijo is on his knees as he prays before enclosed altar. He keeps his hat on to protect his *ori*, or spiritual head. Akanbi treats old and young patients for physical and mind ailments.



Oni Omoleye is a healer who works with Basorun, her husband. She specializes in gynecology, from pre-natal care to infertility treatment. She uses indigenous herbs and indigenous methods in her practice. She joined the group of postmenopausal artists for about three months in 2002 and 2003, although she is a young woman. Exceptions were made for her and two other young women who were also medical workers, and they painted with the older women. The young women functioned as junior artists.





In addition to individual pathologies, the artists also engage in treatment of social or community pathologies. A section of the city of Ile Ife, called Akarabata, lies in ruins, after it was destroyed in inter-clan clashes during late nineties and early part of the new millennium.



Basorun is one of the priests providing spiritual services to heal the communities after the destruction of life and properties during the riots. Completely ravaged by rampaging mobs was Akarabata, the buffer zone between central Ile Ife and the metropolitan outskirts, Modakeke. Akarabata is totally abandoned, and has become a ghost town after the uprisings. Basorun and other priests are exploring spiritual antidotes to the perennial problems that instigate these destructive trends in Ile Ife history. Basorun sees the conflict as a spiritual battle between destructive and creative forces.



Until the spiritual sickness is cured, Basorun and other priests believe that the physical repair of the town is impossible. The destruction of the city is only a symptom of a disease that must be cured before reconstruction is possible, Basorun says. It is symptomatic of a curse for trees to grow in a house within a city, Basorun insists. Until that curse is lifted, the trees--as shown here--cannot be cut without serious repercussions to those cutting them.



The problem of the destroyed and abandoned town brings stress on man, woman, and child, as the Akire mural here shows. The stress threatens the fabric of the family, the communities, and the city in general. Until the healing of the town takes place at such a basic level, the larger historical issue of perennial inter-clan warfare cannot be solved.



“The metaphor of the repair of the city is like that of the ancient potshard pavement,” Bolaji Adefioye, said. “The destruction begins with one loose piece, then two, three, and so on, until the whole design collapses. The healing of the city will take a lot of sacrifices and patience. Nobody has those commodities at the moment. So the disease spreads.”



## Divination Consultation



Adefioye's metaphoric textile of inter-weaving art, religion and health is old, indigenous and formal. Strict procedures give structure to the complex healing process. They begin with invocation, a liturgical process of consulting the divinities. Artists request attention of divinities, and announce their intention to make art that heals people.

## Prayer, Poetry and Painting



Leading artists in invocation rituals, the chief priestess and lead painter of the group use literary style of *Ayajo*,<sup>4</sup> a combination of talking, chanting, and singing. As the two women standing upright lead the process, others participate with vocal responses, often loaded with the word “Ase,”<sup>5</sup> or amen. They persistently ask for protection from the gods. They request presence of divinities throughout creative process to protect artists from forces of evil, enemies, and detractors. They call themselves mere slaves seeking attention and protection of their masters, so they can help heal others.





They ask divinities to fill entire shrine with divine authority, which they also call “*ase*.” The presence of the *ase* is not visible, but its energy is crucial in cosmic struggles against pathology. Artists request authority to create and heal. They need reassurance that the divinities would not abandon them. Repeated they ask for *Isoye*, or inspiration, to descend into entire shrine, and enter the artists’ spirit. Without the *isoye* in the studio, they do not believe the art work has strong aesthetic or healing potency.



In addition to blood, divinities are presented with edibles and other gifts to show artists' appreciation for past victories over diseases and malevolent powers. The artists wrap gifts with music, poetry, and dance before presenting them to the gods. Here, at the feet of the devotees and artists making the offerings, gifts are displayed in their containers. Some of these offerings must be covered, and others left open. The symbolism of covering and concealment is attractive to the divinities who are present, but remain unseen throughout the process of creativity. The artists are visible, but the divinities inspiring them are invisible.



Offerings include kaolin, camwood, deer meat, money, herbs, soils, raw food, cooked food, salt, palm oil, liquor, honey, water, and fresh animal blood. The covered gourds always remain covered.





Red soil, *Ilepa*, symbolizes divinity of the ground, *Ile*, also known as *Ogere Afokoyeri* (The one who combs his hair with a hoe). *Ilepa* is displayed openly during the invocation phase as a sign of loyalty. Those who step on a common ground (that is those who share a common goal or oath) must remain openly loyal. They must not “*da ile*,” (betray the ground): members must remain loyal and open to the group. Closed gourds in the previous page are group secrets that must remain in the group. Cotton wool, an agricultural product, is a symbol of growth. Red soil and cotton wool are also used as art materials, and are being sanctified before use in painting.



Artists offer palm oil, *epo*, to Ogun, god of metals, war, and creativity, as *ero* (antidote) to prevent accidents during the process of creativity. Implements of war rest against the wall. *Epo* is the most common antidote to poisons and allergies.



Because the artists call themselves “*Eye Awom-oye*,” that is “Birds that nurture and heal children,” they use birds to symbolize life and therapy. The *eyele* or pigeon is a favorite reference because it lives in the home, and is regarded as a loyal bird willing to die with its human hosts.

Here chief priestess prepares a pigeon with a black head and a white body for sacrifice. Bird will carry away pathogens from people, and return from divinities with *ero* or antidotes and solutions to ailments.





Holding a pigeon in her hands, Iyawo follows ritualized steps prescribed by Omolajaye Olapekun, chief priestess of the group. The young woman is visiting for solutions to certain pathological issues that she believes can only be solved with textile medicine.



Iyawo touches canvas three times with gray pigeons' beaks to increase her artistic inspirations and solve her health issues.





Bird symbolism is powerful in the Yoruba culture in which these women practice. The bird is the only animal that can walk, fly, and swim. Attainment of full bird identity is one that artists earn here in postmenopausal years. There are two types of birds: protective birds, or *Eye Awomoye*, to which these group belongs; and pathology birds, *Eye Asamopa*. These are birds that peck young ones to death, birds that are regarded as dangerous and undesirable in the community, birds of pestilence and poverty.

## Good and Bad Birds



Because artists identify as birds, one of their favorite dishes is chicken, which they sacrifice frequently to divinities as part of creative rituals. Chicken are usually slaughtered and cleaned before painting starts. They smear blood of chicken on parts of building, including entrances and door to the main altar. Feathers are buried or burnt, because of the potency of the wings of birds that have already been sanctified before being sacrificed. Artists carefully guard the feathers from being blown by wind, ensuring that they dispose of every feather. They do not want their enemies or rivals to pick up the feathers, which may be used to counter or weaken efficacy of their mytho-medical work, or block flow of inspiration from divinities to artists



## Words



An important part of mytho-medical textile is weaving of words, called *Oro*. Knowing names of people, things and places is regarded as powerful information. Without knowing the names, it is impossible to exert any influence on the bearer. Here, the chief priestess recites names of divinities, and she attracts them by embellishing the names with poetic modulations.



The oldest member of the group, Egbeyemi Akingbade, is now the keeper of the group's words. Too frail for rigorous painting, she still has final say in all matters because of her understanding and mastery of group's history, language, and literature. Egbeyemi is shown at a younger age on page 10.



Olokose with raised arms uses poetry and gestures to invoke the power of the divinities by describing them in gigantic proportions. With deftly woven words, artists transform shrine premises into a studio filled with divine inspirations. Although she is not considered a highly talented visual artist, Olokose's position in the group is to mediate between keepers of sounds, led by the chief priestess, and keepers of images, which she leads. Alawoekun therefore balances words and images among the group.





When Olokose is working with other keepers of images on preparation of materials, she is constantly chanting incantations, praise names of divinities, and poetic verses, to fill empty spaces with theological figures of speech. These words are spirits that drive out malevolent forces and occupy the space of the studio, thus leaving no room for idle or negative forces.





As Tinuomi Arayemi, prepares *dudu* or dark color, she infuses the material with words, in form of prayers and poems, asking the gods for energy and inspiration to enable her to make a fine work. She requests health and healing for the sick, prosperity for community, and peace for country. Her invisible words mix with body of pigments that she prepares. Words are then fixed permanently into art works that artists make. Although invisible, words help to activate visible artworks, thus contributing to the efficacy of textile medical practices.



Although she participates in the making of visual marks, Moronmuyin Sooko's focus is on manipulation of words with *ogede* (incantations) to prepare the way for actual painting. When painting is done, she continues her work of infusing visual culture with mytho-medical healing power. She has remarkable command of *ayajo*, a poetic form of invocation.





Because her deep voice adds resonance to the relatively high voices of the other artists, Tijuara Elurele provides variety and volume to the combination of words that appeal to divinities. The lightness of her personality compliment the serious demeanor of most members of the group.



Spoken words help artists to weave the textile of sound, images, and movements. They use words to focus their multi-dimensional activities on health. Although images are what viewers see when entire creative process is completed, words are already infused into wet paint during preparation of pigment, and application on paints on grounds. The visual products are texted images woven with invisible words in forms of poetic phrases inviting benevolent spirits into the compositions, to facilitate artists' therapeutic intentions.





Spoken words indefinitely extend the power of the images because the words activate the works. Words give invisible dynamism to the images, extending the art work into theological and pathological dimensions, beyond pleasures of visual aesthetics forms. Artists continue to infuse images with words well after completion of painting process, whenever artists meet to perform rituals that address the health of an individual in particular, or of community in general.

## Clinic, Shrine and Studio



*Ogede* and *ayajo* words transform space in which artists work into a fusion of clinic, shrine and studio. Clinical aspect of space defines the building as an arena of healing. Shrine aspect defines building as a sacred space. The studio aspect of the building defines it as a center of art making. People with ailments find remedy in the building. Those who desire meditation with divinities find sanctuary in the building. Others who desire aesthetic experiences satisfy their need for this pleasure in art works in the building. The ancient architecture of the building is in the form of a palace, the formal designation of the building.





The facade of building has a narrow corridor that artists use as studio and sitting space for informal meetings and entertainments. Images adorn the long wall of the corridor. The images are calligraphic, because they function as readable visual texts for a culture that did not autochthonously develop a form of writing. Although the images are not words, they signify ideas and concepts that evolve within linguistic formulations. The images therefore narrate stories without using words. The stories are both general to the history of community, and specific to healing of particular individual painters who make the images.



The images are not representations or mimetic reproductions of real world. To function as implements of healing, images act as substitutions or equations for real life. The *ayajo* and *ogede* incantations have transformed the images from inanimate to animate things. These non-biological lives shown here are therefore plastic combinations of medicine and liturgy that balance the totemic autobiographies and self-portraits of artists who painted them. The adobe ground is the mythological world in which characters interact in this theo-medical textile.





There is therefore a visual equation between actual lives of the artists and the created lives of the images on the walls, images that are mythic surrogates for the artists. Because both artists and their self-portraits are alive, there is a fluidity of boundary among the various lives. The living paintings of artists possess a sense of reality and life from the divinities that the artists have invoked into the composition before, during, and after actual physical mark making.

## Living Pictures



Because the images are alive, they are visual vicars that function vicariously through artists and others who view them. Since these images are equations rather than representations of real life, they operate on the performances of real people. When Tinuade Arayemi and Omilabu Olokose eat corn in front of these non-biological lives, the images are also feeding on the corn by sharing the food with the artists. Images are sharing the organs of breathing, seeing, hearing, thinking, and so forth, of both artists sitting in front of them.



## Healing Pictures



The images apply people's organic parts to perform their icono-medical functions. Behind the scenes, in inner chambers further partitioned with sacred curtains, active group images function as keepers of concealed bio-medical cultures. These bio-medical cultures are developed for treatment of epidemic diseases, including smallpox, for which group is famous.





Some of the cultures are stored in pots, chambers and holes accessible only to these practitioners. Visitors are not allowed into these spaces. Images on walls guard bio-medical cultures from seen and unseen forces that might neutralize, weaken, or steal the powers of these aged cultures.



Artists who freely enter these bio-medically active chambers feel totally protected by the images guarding the cultures cultivated in this room. These cultures have been in cultivation for generations, and they have been passed down from the past to the present. Since she was a child, Olokose, above, has been interacting with the cultures and the images that protect them. Whenever she enters the culturing chambers, she feels welcome by the images who protect her from the potential harms of bio-medical cultures in various chambers. Pictures surround and guide her.





Images directly indicate and tell her names of various cultures in every pot. She is confidently able to identify what is in each pot as soon as she enters culture rooms. If she needs to treat any patient, images tell her what container to open for the right medication to heal the ailments of patient.

## Images of power



But just as images surround and protect artists when they enter the chambers, the pictures also confuse and intimidate strangers who enter room. The profusion of marks floating on the wall comes alive as soon as an intruder enters room. The images anticipate the actions of intruder because they share the same thinking and other organs of intruder. They therefore have total control over intruder, who falls under their spell, and becomes totally vulnerable to their manipulations.



## Music



Drums hang on the walls of the shrine when not being played. Music is central to the structure of this theo-medical practice, as part of textile of sound, visual, and motion. Drumming and singing combine with poetry, chanting, and praying to constitute the sound. The most important musical instrument of these painters is the *bembe* drum, a double-membrane instrument that the artists play by striking membrane with drumsticks, and deft finger movements.





Olokose displays a drum to show the circular face. “It is alive,” she says. “It has two faces. It is like the face of the sun and the moon.” Olokose says the drum is a divinity of celebration. Without drumming, it is difficult to celebrate. Akire artists use drumming as an important element in their textile health practice.

## Talking Drums



Two artists play special instruments that have been blessed and devoted to the divinities. Dressed in fine garments, they are living drums, fashioned out of hides and wood. Just like images, the drums activate their lives through artists and their audiences. “The drums want to talk to the divinities,” says Sooko playing right above. “But they need us to make use of their tongues.” By modulating the membranes of the drums, artists play the drums to imitate human voices, and praise divinities.



# Musical Meals



Akire artists say that music is the choice meal of divinities. Although divinities accept sacrifices of food, water, and liquor, without music the divinities' hunger will remain, however large the quantity of real food. The drum is irresistible to both divinities and humans. As soon as the drums begin to sound in the Akire shrine, all types of people congregate, including the young, old, male and female. Drums have similar effects on divinities who frequent the shrines because of the constant playing of the drums that takes place in the premises.



Moronmuyin Sooko comes alive when she plays the drum. Although she actively participates in the incantations and chanting of poetry, her skill is humble in visual arts. Her drumming and singing skills are quite impressive. Above, she uses fingers to manipulate the goat skin membranes of drum to modulate sounds that imitate praises and celebration of divinities, as a child watches her in admiration.





Tinuomi Afilaka, one of the most gifted visual artists in the group, is playing a metal gong with wooden stick, to back drum player in front of her. She is playing the *ko-n-ko-lo* beat. The high tones of the metal gong, called *agogo*, quickly catches and keeps the attention of divinities who reward artists by giving them inspiration, protection and health. Repetition of *ko-n-ko-lo* beat by the *agogo* drummer keeps the rhythm for the drum player, who is then freed to add variety and experimental beats to music.



As Afilaka shows here, playing the ko-n-ko-lo beat on *agogo* metal gong demands concentration, because rhythm must be constant and steady. If *ko-n-ko-lo* player misses the beat, entire orchestrar music falls apart.



Akire artists sit here clapping and singing. Most of the time, the artists clap and sing while painting proceeds. As some members focus on painting, others assist those painting by singing and clapping to mix musical rhythms into wet pigments.





Omolajaye Olapekun, Olaomoju Fagbemi, and Egbeyemi Akingbade sing and clap behind Tinuomi Afilaka, who is busy painting (outside picture frame). The artists draw on a seemingly limitless repertoire of songs.



Dancing is one of the ways by which artists express their gratitude to divinities, after a task is accomplished, or a request by devotee is granted. A highly gifted painter, Tinuade Arayemi, dances as others provide music. She dances by herself, and displays stylish control of her body, easily moving each and every part. She slightly bends forward from the waist as she dances, sometimes moving forward toward the musicians and nearly touching them, before she moves backward. Occasionally she moves around in a circle, all the time keeping to lead drummers' changing beats.



Immediately music begins, all artists jump up and start dancing. Although they all like music, they also are imitating the actions of divinities who are unable to resist the sound of music. As they dance, it becomes obvious that it is not free-style, and that each dancer has a set pattern of choreography.





As dancers move to the rhythm of music, entire space turns into a dance drama, as each artist begins to perform steps associated with her specific characters. These characters, mostly birds, take steps that have been passed down the generations, with minor individual adaptations. They move their hands to demonstrate actions of birds.



The visible products of the Akire artists, the paintings in the catalogue, do not betray the multiplicity of invisible elements such as stories, poetry, music, choreography, and prayer, permanently woven into the fabric of the canvas. These non-visual contents, like chief priestess Olapekun's penetrating divine stare into the painting here, take the work beyond the dimension of visual culture, into the textiles of iconology, theology, and pathology. Egbeiyemi dances in the background.

# Catalogue of Paintings



## Featuring:

Tinuomi Afilaka

**Tinuade Arayemi**

Egbeyemi Akingbade

**Tanimola Omoleye**

Oni Omoleye

**Omilabu Olokose**

Iyawo

**Akire GroupWork**



# Tinuomi Afilaka





1. 2003.000X  
Tinuomi Afilaka  
Rosetta Stone I  
Terrachroma on canvas  
24 x 31"  
2002





2.2003.0001

Tinuomi Afilaka

Celestial Words

Acrylic on canvas

93 x 57"

Horizontal composition in tones and shades of purple and blue, executed in the letter-writing format, from left to right by Tinuomi Afilaka, who claims to be writing a letter to God.





3.2003.0004

Tinuomi Afilaka

Leaves of Goodness

Acrylic on Canvas

88x57

Letter writing format in a horizontal composition in shades of brown, red and orange.



4. 2003.0033

Tinuomi Afilaka

Blessings of Wealth and Health

Acrylic on canvas

Horizontal composition in tones and shades of light and dark blue, executed in the letter writing format.





5. 2003.0005

Tinuomi Afilaka, assisted by Oni Omoleye and Iyawo

Happy Meeting

Acrylic on canvas

94x59

Letter writing format in red atop bright circles and organic shapes in yellow, blue and purple on a black background.





6. 2003.0006

Tinuomi Afilaka, assisted by Oni Omoleye and Iyawo

Protective Fences

Acrylic on Canvas

70x58

Organic figures and writing in tones of red and light blue atop green and yellow circles on a dark blue and green background.



7. 2003.0010  
Tinuomi Afilaka  
Stolen Glances  
Acrylic on Canvas  
52x57  
Letter writing style in red and black on a bright turquoise blue background.





8. 2003.0012  
Tinuomi Afilaka, assisted by Oni Omoleye and Iyawo  
Happy Places  
Acrylic on Canvas  
58x55  
Bright geometric figures of blue and green rendered atop a dark red background with lighter orange and organic shapes and circles.





9. 2003.0016

Acrylic on Canvas

42x30

A horizontal composition of the letter-writing format in light blue on a background of light and dark red.



10. Tinuade Afilaka, assisted by Oni Omoleye and Iyawo

Rosetta Stone II

Acrylic on canvas

24x31

Two blue circles on a yellow green background under the letter writing format in red and black. .



11. Tinuade Afilaka, assisted by Omilabu Omoleye and Iyawo  
Forged Machete  
Acrylic on Canvas  
31x22

Letter writing format and organic figures in dark brown rendered over an orange background with bright pink and yellow circles





12. 2003.0020  
Tinuomi Arayemi  
The Hunter's Path  
Acrylic on Canvas  
44x30

A mass of orange, red, brown and yellow mixed and layered in the center of the canvas with geometric red and yellow shapes, and bordered with the off white of the unpainted canvas.



13. 2003.0022

Tinuomi Afilaka

The Hero's Yard

Acrylic on canvas

42x31

Organic and geometric triangular and circular shapes rendered in the letter-writing style in a background of dark greens and blues.





14. 2003.0025

Tinuomi Afilaka

I Will Tell

Acrylic on canvas

61x33

Organic shapes in yellow anchor the lower half of the dark blue and green canvas, layered in geometric shapes corresponding with letter writing in bright red.





15. 2003.0027

Tinuomi Afilaka, assisted by Oni Omoleye and Iyawo

Here I Come

Acrylic on canvas

58x31

Shades and tones of blue and green painted against off-white creates a background for the letter writing format painted in bright blue with black and black with off-white.



16. 2003.0028

Tinuomi Afilaka

The Hero's Fence

Acrylic on canvas

31x32

A horizontal background with shades of dark blues and greens below white triangular geometric shapes executed in the letter writing format.





17. 2003.0028

Tinuomi Afilaka

The Hero's Letter

Acrylic on canvas

31x32

Horizontal composition of dark blues and greens beneath letter writing format in off- white.





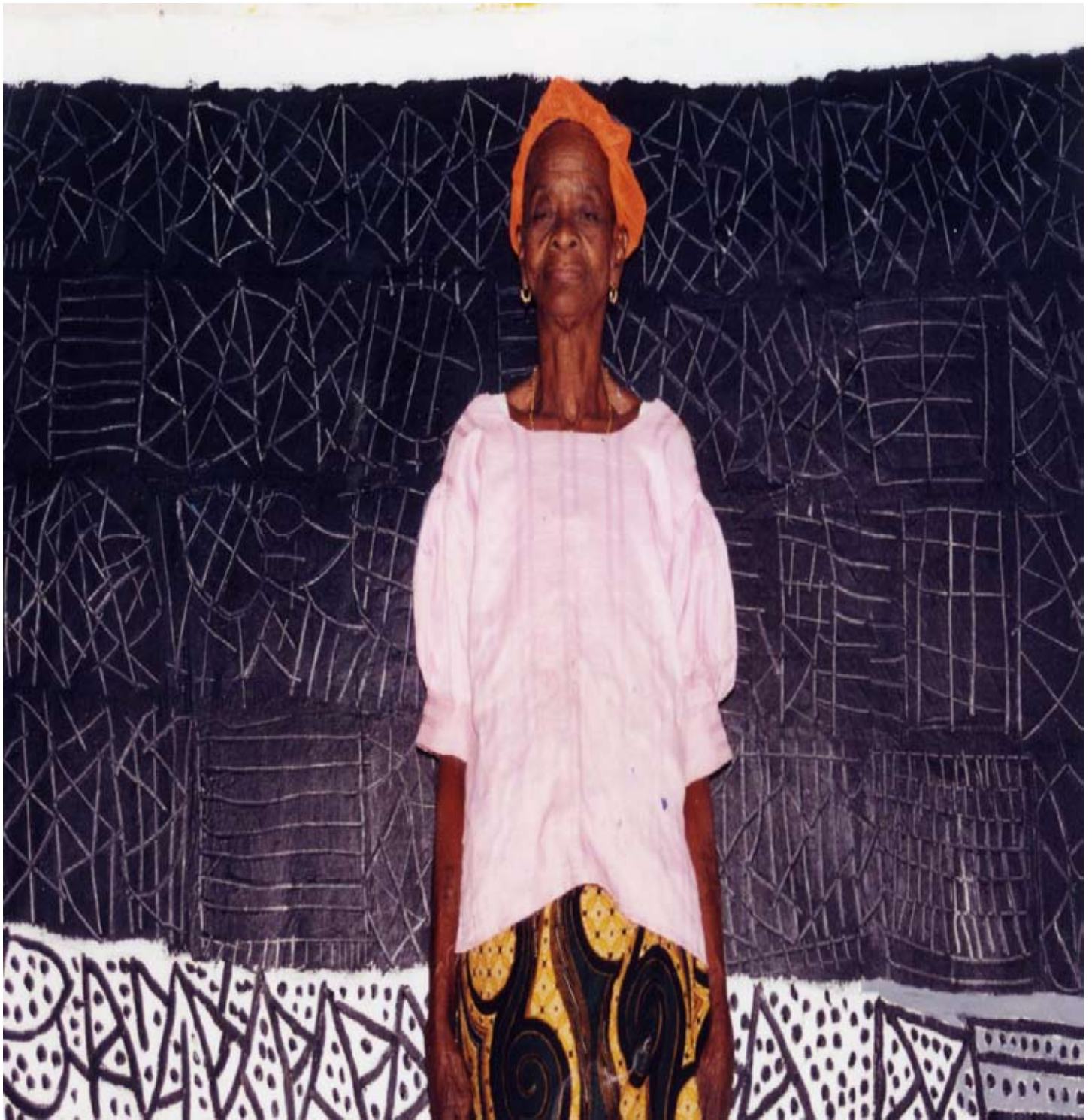
18. 2003.0034

Tinuomi Afilaka

Pretty Baby Vipers

Acrylic on canvas

Letter writing style in bright green and black, executed on a tonal background of red and orange with an off-white border.



Tinuomi Afilaka, priestess, healer, painter.





19. 2003.0046

Tinuomi Afilaka

A Short Prayer

Terrachroma on canvas

An off- white background, with the letter writing style at top and bottom, centrally framing multiple figurative shapes, all in colors of black and dark brown.





20. 2003.0061

Tinuomi Afilaka

Floating Leaves

Terrachroma on canvas

Vertical composition of curvilinear marks creating a pattern of organic shapes in an abstractly painted pattern of symmetry and balance in brown, black and white.



21. 2003.0071

Tinuomi Afilaka

The Devotee's Prayer

Terrachroma on canvas

Thick white lines at top and bottom section the canvas, leaving edges of vertical stripes with a background of figurative half circles with lines ascending in a vertical orientation, all in black, brown and white.





22. 2003.0093

Tinuomi Afilaka

These Goddesses Are Ours

Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

Half circles with lines in a downward vertical orientation in off-white and black, rendered on a blended background of oranges, yellows and browns, divided by borders with thick lines and geometric shapes at top and bottom.





23, Tinuomi Afilaka

Good Folks Fret Not

Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

Organic circles with lines extending in a vertical orientation, outlined with bold red marks on a black and white background



24. 2003.0095

Tinuomi Afilaka

The Path of Divinity

Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

Letter writing format on a white background with red and black script.





25. Tinuomi Afilaka

Your Hand Is Your Friend

Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

Vertical composition of the letter-writing format in black, red and white.





26. 2003.009

Tinuomi Afilaka

Divination Rites

Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

Abstracted background in tones of brown, yellow, red and green, under the letter writing format in white and black.



27. 2003.0098

Tinuomi Afilaka

Only the Head Knows

Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

Organic shapes and symbols in white and black executed on a background in tones and shades of red.





28. 2003.0099

Tinuomi Afilaka

Recurrent Numbers

Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

Horizontal composition of the letter-writing format executed in shades of brown, black and white.





29. 2003.0102

Tinuomi Afilaka

They Belong To Us

Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

Letter writing format in brown, white and black.



30. 2003.0100

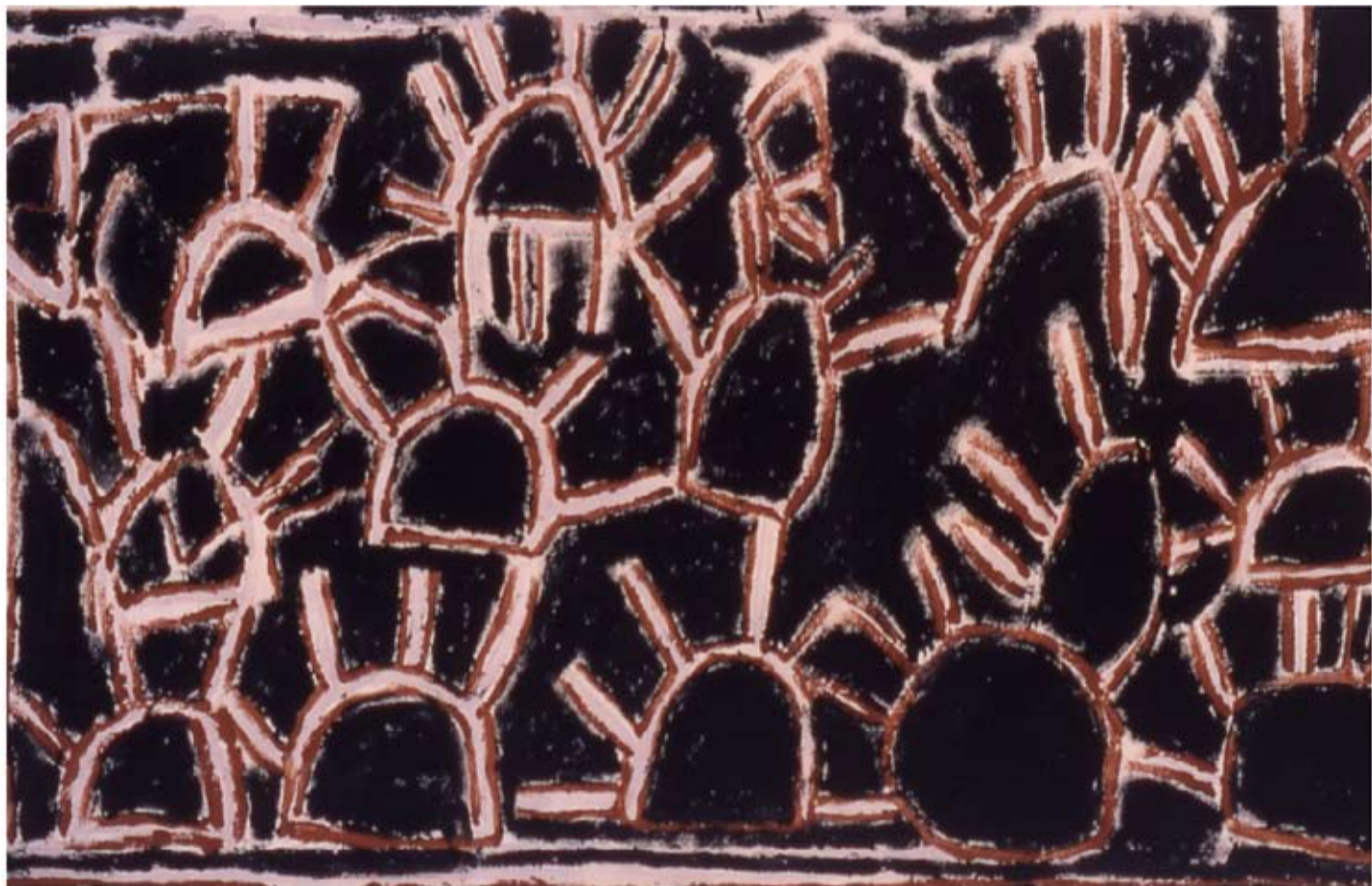
Tinuomi Afilaka

End of Tomorrow

Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

Letter writing format in white and black executed on an abstracted tonal background of reds, greens, browns and yellows.





31. Tinuomi Afilaka

We Jointly Own Them

Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

Organic circular shapes and symbols with upward extending vertical lines, all in black, brown and white.



# Tinuade Arayemi





32. 2003.0007

Tinuade Arayemi

Water of Life

Acrylic on Canvas

90x65

Varying tones and shades of blue and green mixed and layered



33.2003.0011

Tinuade Arayemi

Wearing A Thousand Eyes

Acrylic on Canvas

65x58

Seven mythological figures in bright primary colors surround a central figure in yellow on an organic shape rendered over a black background in the letter writing format.





34. 2003.0032

Tinuade Arayemi and Akire Group

The Sacred Trade

Acrylic on canvas

Vertical composition of four mythological figures rendered on an abstract background in shades of green, brown and yellow.



35. 2003.0035

Tinuade Arayemi

The Sacred Forge

Acrylic on canvas

Imitation of Afilaka's letter writing style executed on a vertical background in shades of blue and yellow with a border of lighter blue.





36. 2003.0036

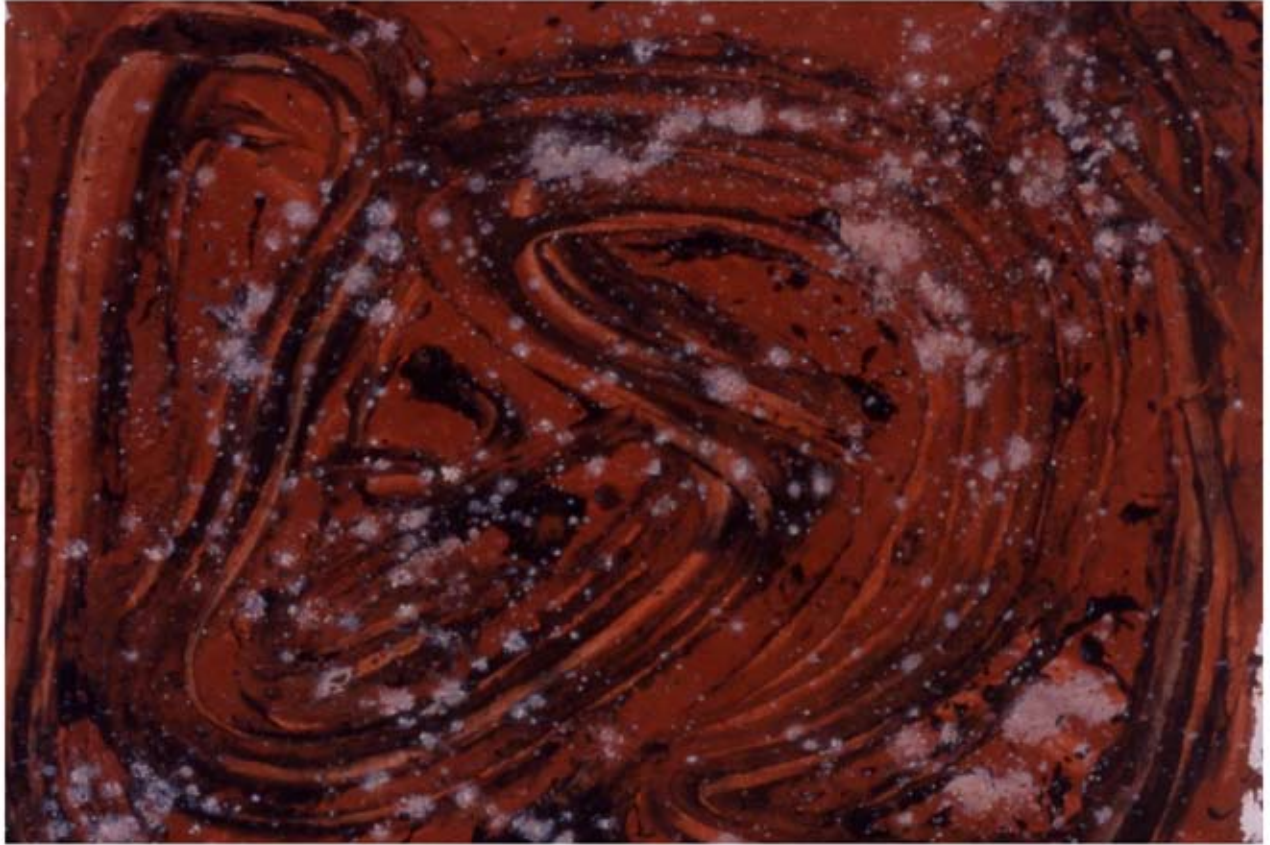
Tinuade Arayemi and Iyawo

Mystery of the Pot

Acrylic on canvas

Two mythological figures beneath a tricolor figurative vessel executed over shades and tones of reds and oranges with a blue border.





37. 2003.0047

Tinuade Arayemi

Drops of Rainfall

Terrachroma on canvas

A deep red-brown background brushed with multiple black curvilinear lines, accented with thick white paint splatters.



Tinuomi Arayemi, priestess, healer, painter.





38. 2003.0048

Tinuade Arayemi

The Longest Quest

Terrachroma on canvas

Horizontal composition of black and brown, bisecting the canvas in an abstracted pattern of swirls, with traces of white paint drips.





39. 2003.0049

Tinuade Arayemi

The Morning Storm

Terrachroma on canvas

Diagonal composition in shades and tones of brown rendered under thick black paint splatters in an organic blending of line and form.



40.2003.0050

Tinuade Arayemi

Radiant Leaves

Terrachroma on canvas

Large black organic shapes of varying tonal coloration and thickness swell onto an earth toned canvas with off-white splatters.



41.2003.0051

Tinuade Arayemi

The Last Conversation

Terrachroma on canvas

Multiple black lines intertwined with thick black splotches into four quadrants on a deep orange and brown surface.





42. 2003.0052

Tinuade Arayemi

The Call of Silence

Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

Sweeping black marks of varying thickness oriented to the left side of the canvas creating a swirl of pattern and texture over a terra cotta toned background.



43. 2003.0053

Tinuade Arayemi

My Time Is Now

Terrachroma on canvas

Organic forms of black and brown intersect in a horizontal composition bisecting the canvas vertically, in an amalgamation of tones and textures.





44. 2003.0054

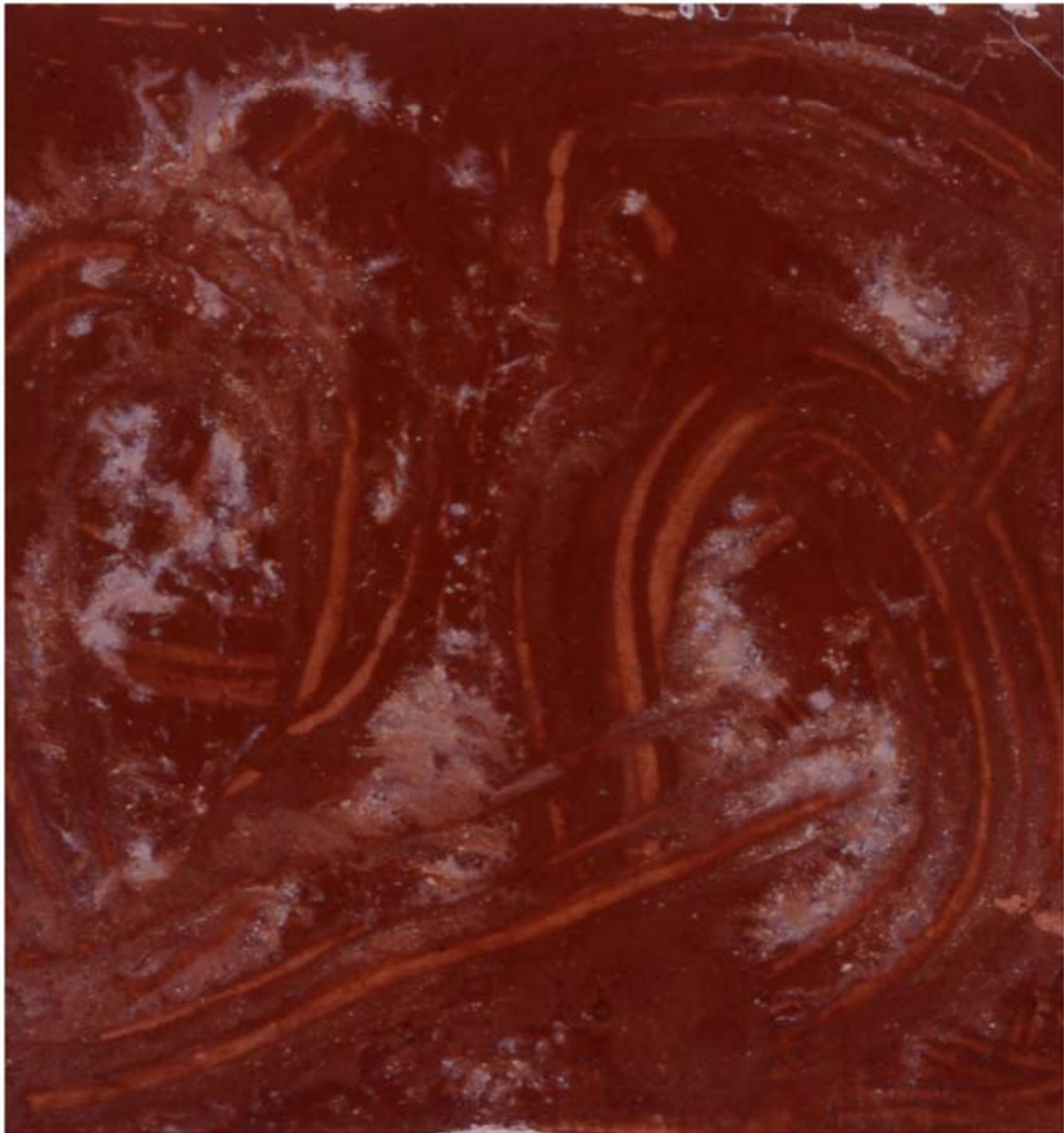
Tinuade Arayemi

Enduring Truths

Terrachroma on canvas , 2002

A rich burnt sienna background with curvilinear lines in black, intertwined in a central pattern with groupings of white splatters.





45. 2003.0055

Tinuade Arayemi

A Day of Songs

Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

Varying tones and shades of terra cotta mixed and layered with off-white in an organic composition.



46. 2003.0056

Tinuade Arayemi

Endless Deluge

Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

Thick black lines coil and intertwine atop a background in tones and shades of orange and red.





47. 2003.0057

Tinuade Arayemi

Divine Protections

Terrachroma on canvas

A central mass of thick black curvilinear lines and white splatter in a circular formation rendered on a terra cotta toned canvas.





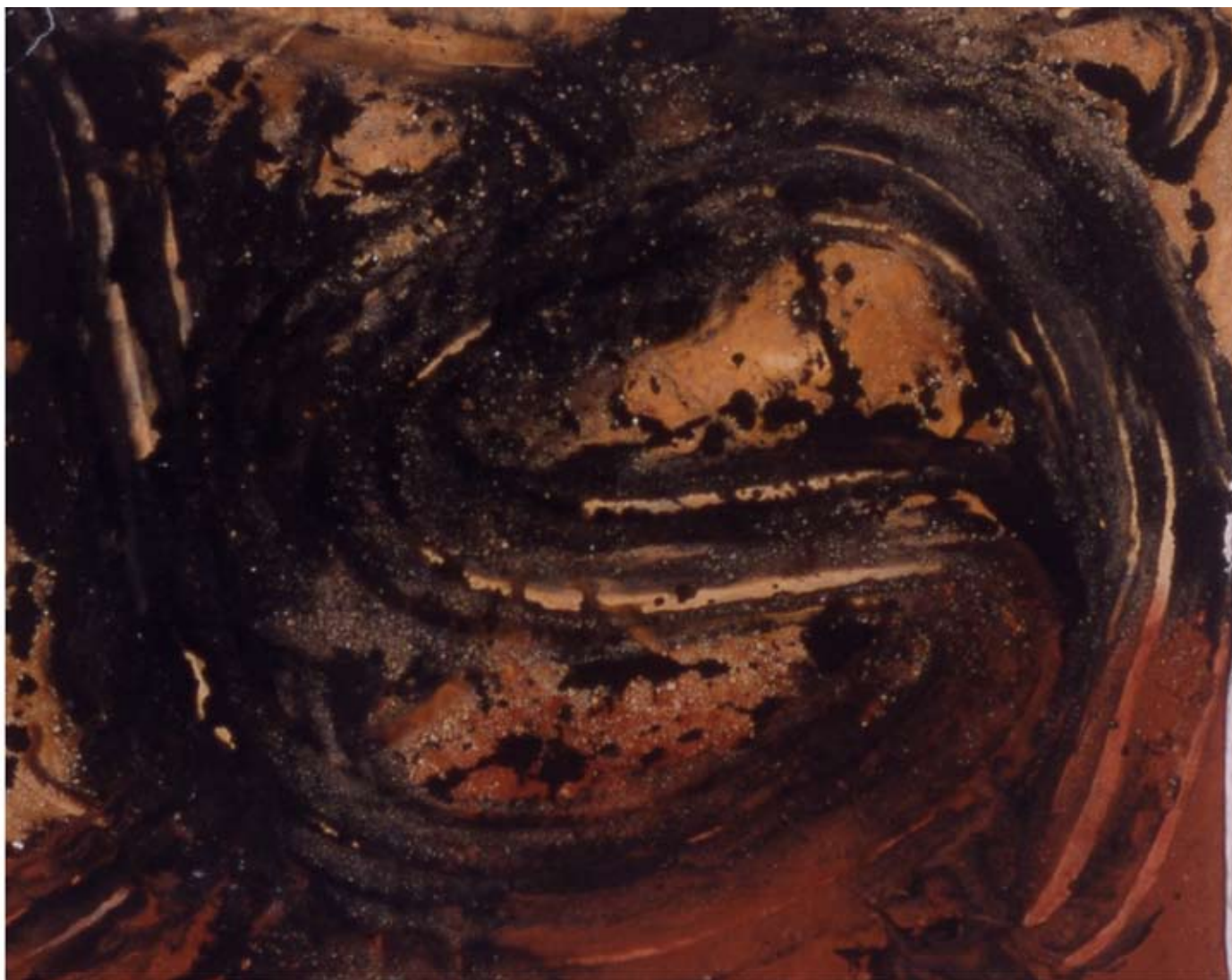
48. 2003.0058

Tinuade Arayemi

Speaking With the Ancestors

Terrachroma on canvas

Vertical composition of light yellow and dark brown, intersected by curvilinear black lines and splatters.



49. 2003.0059

Tinuade Arayemi

Calling all Ears

Terrachroma on canvas

Horizontal composition bisected by tones of yellow and brown rendered under bold undulating black splatters and lines.



50. 2003.0103

Tinuade Arayemi

The Fire of Courage

Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

Bold black paint splatters in a vague circular pattern, on a tonal background of reds, yellows and browns.





51. 2003.0104

Tinuade Arayemi

Before the Twilight

Terra Chrome on canvas, 2002

Horizontal composition in tones and shades of brown and yellow with white paint splatters.



52. 2003.0021

Egbeyemi Akingbade

Watching From Afar

Acrylic on canvas

63x33

A composition of two mythological figures and leg shackles in orange, blue and yellow rendered over a light blue canvas with layered red, orange



Egbeyemi Akingbade







53. 2003.0027

Egbeyemi Akingbade

The Morning Rain

Acrylic on canvas

A vertical composition of three mythological figures in brown, red and blue on an abstract background of green, yellow and orange.



Egbeyemi Akingbade, priestess, healer, painter.





54. 2003.38

Egbeyemi Akingbade

Seeking the Last Prophet

Terrachroma on canvas

Mythological figure with organic shapes in shades of brown and black on an off- white background patterned with light brown marks.





55. 2003.0038

Egbeyemi Akingbade

Children of the Crossroads

Terrachroma on canvas

Bold black background with mythological symbols and figures in white edged in dark brown.



56. 2003.0068

Egbeyemi Akingbade

From A Distance

Terrachroma on canvas

An abstract background of black and brown with two mythological figures in white with brown spots, above figurative circular and vertical shapes.



57. 2003.0072

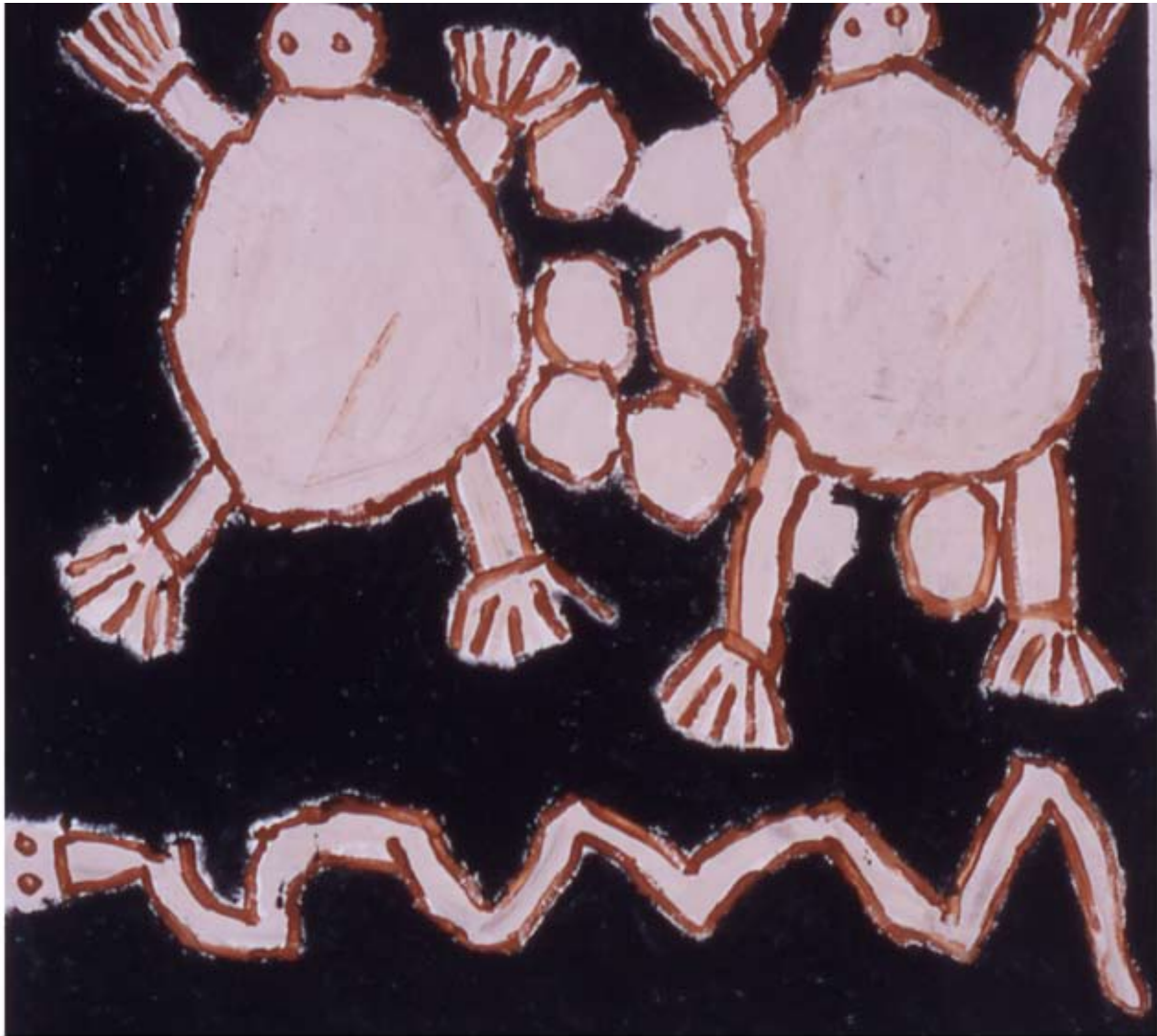
Egbeyemi Akingbade

A Rush of Feet

Terrachroma on canvas

Intertwined mythological figures alongside organic shapes all in white with black outlines, rendered on a background in tones and shades of terra cotta.





58. 2003.0080

Egbeyemi Akingbade

From the Fortress

Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

Three mythological figures in white and brown composed on a black background.



59. 2003.0088

Egbeyemi Akingbade

Deity, Devotee and Dove

Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

Three terracotta-toned mythological figures on an off-white background with light pink and brown organic symbols.



60. 2003.0091

Egbeyemi Akingbade

Travelers To the Final Destination

Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

Two toned background in shades of dark and light orange, with large mythological figures and symbols in light pink.



## Tanimola Omoleye





61. 2003.0042

Tanimola Omoleye

Deer Springs

Terrachroma on canvas

Five Calligraphic figures in off-white and black rendered atop a background in shades of light brown, with a pattern of spots in black and white.





62.2003.0078

Tanimola Omoleye

On You We Rest

Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

Horizontally bisected canvas, in tones and shades of browns, with black spots and white splatters under large, off-white organic figures outlined in thick black.





63. 2003.0089

Tanimola Omoleye

So Will things Be

Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

White organic figures outlined in black rendered on an abstracted background of black, yellow and orange, with black and white spots.



64.2003.0043

Tanimola Omoleye

The Sacred Neighborhood

Terrachroma on canvas

Abstract figures and shapes ornamented with organic marks and lines, atop a multi-tonal backdrop all rendered in earth tones of browns and blacks.





65. 2003.0060

Tanimola Omoleye

The Final Painting

Terrachroma on canvas

White and black mythological figures in rows on a red-brown background with solid black organic symbols and figures.





66. 2003.0062

Tanimola Omoleye

Returning to the Fields

Terrachroma on canvas

Six mythological figures in earth tones alongside organic shapes in brown on a terra cotta background, signed by the artist



67. 2003.0069

Tanimola Omoleye

Gift of A Child

Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

Three large mythological figures in dark brown and white on a dark terra cotta background with black curvilinear shapes and symbols, signed by the artist.





68. Tanimola Omoleye

Flight at Dust

Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

White, brown and black decorated mythological figures on a brown background with symbolic etchings





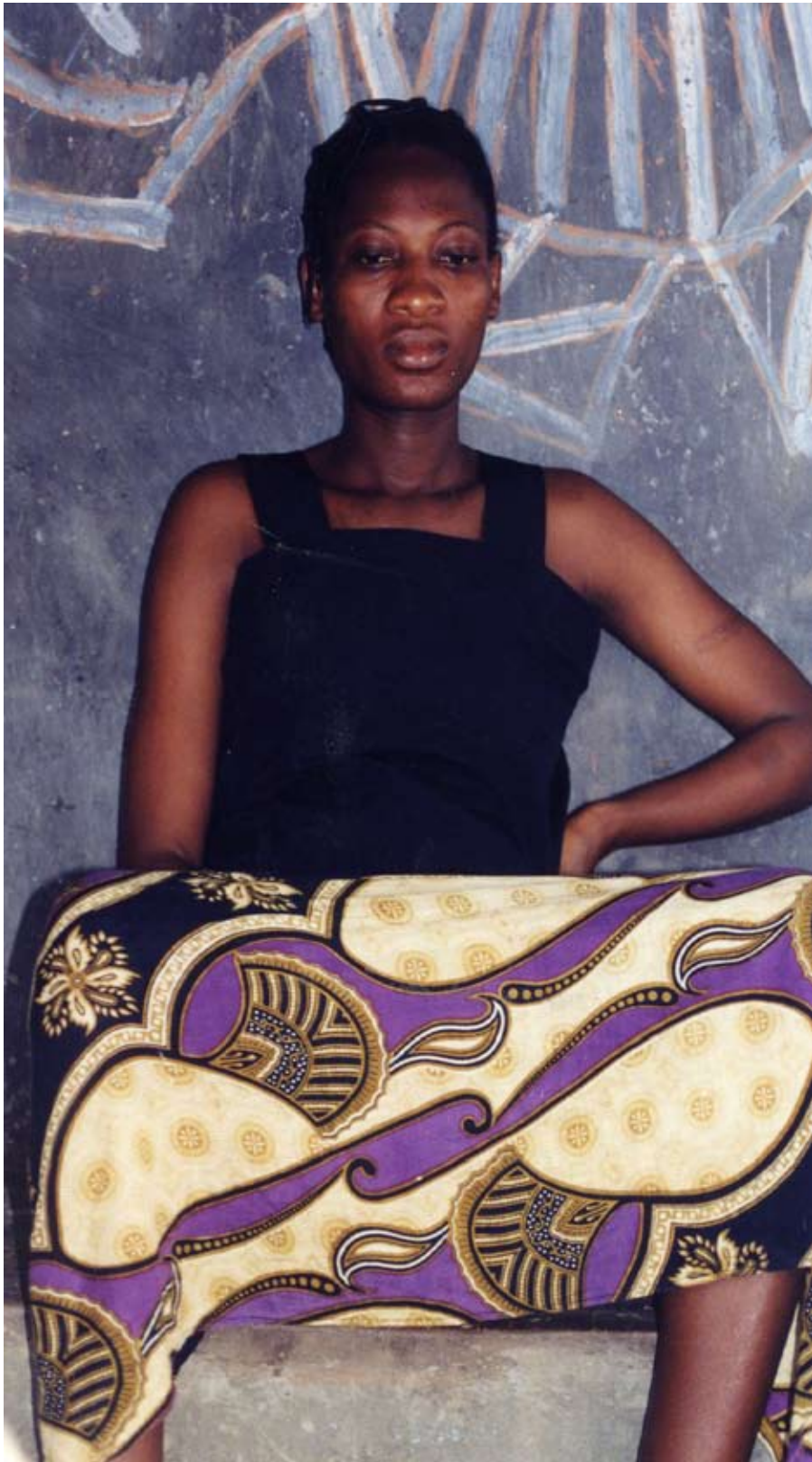
69.2003.0105

Tanimola Omoleye

Children of the Crossroads

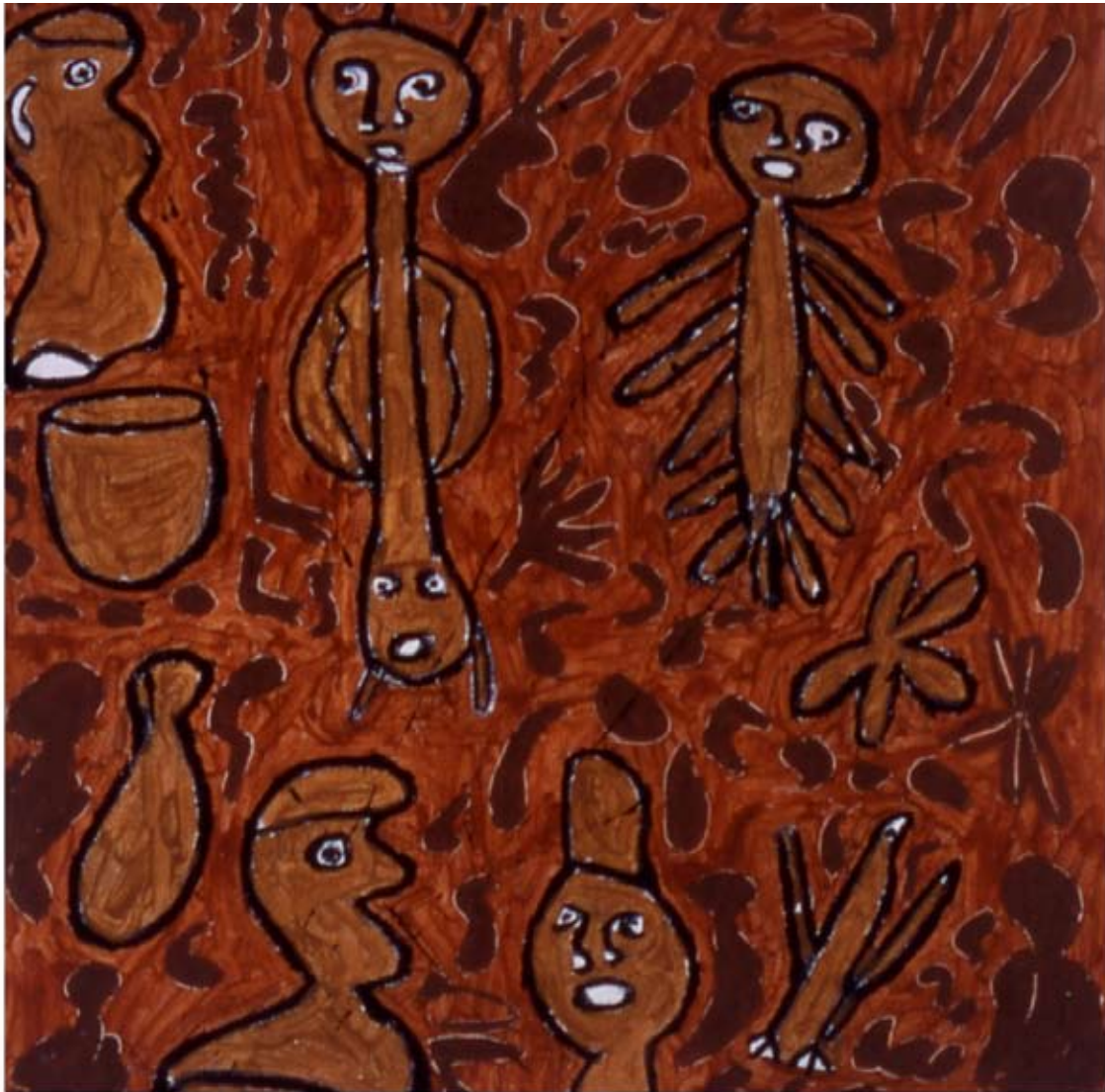
Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

Bold organic and mythological figures and shapes in black and white rendered a background in tones and shades of terra cotta with white paint splatters.



Tanimola Omoleye, patient, devotee, painter.





70. 2003.0040

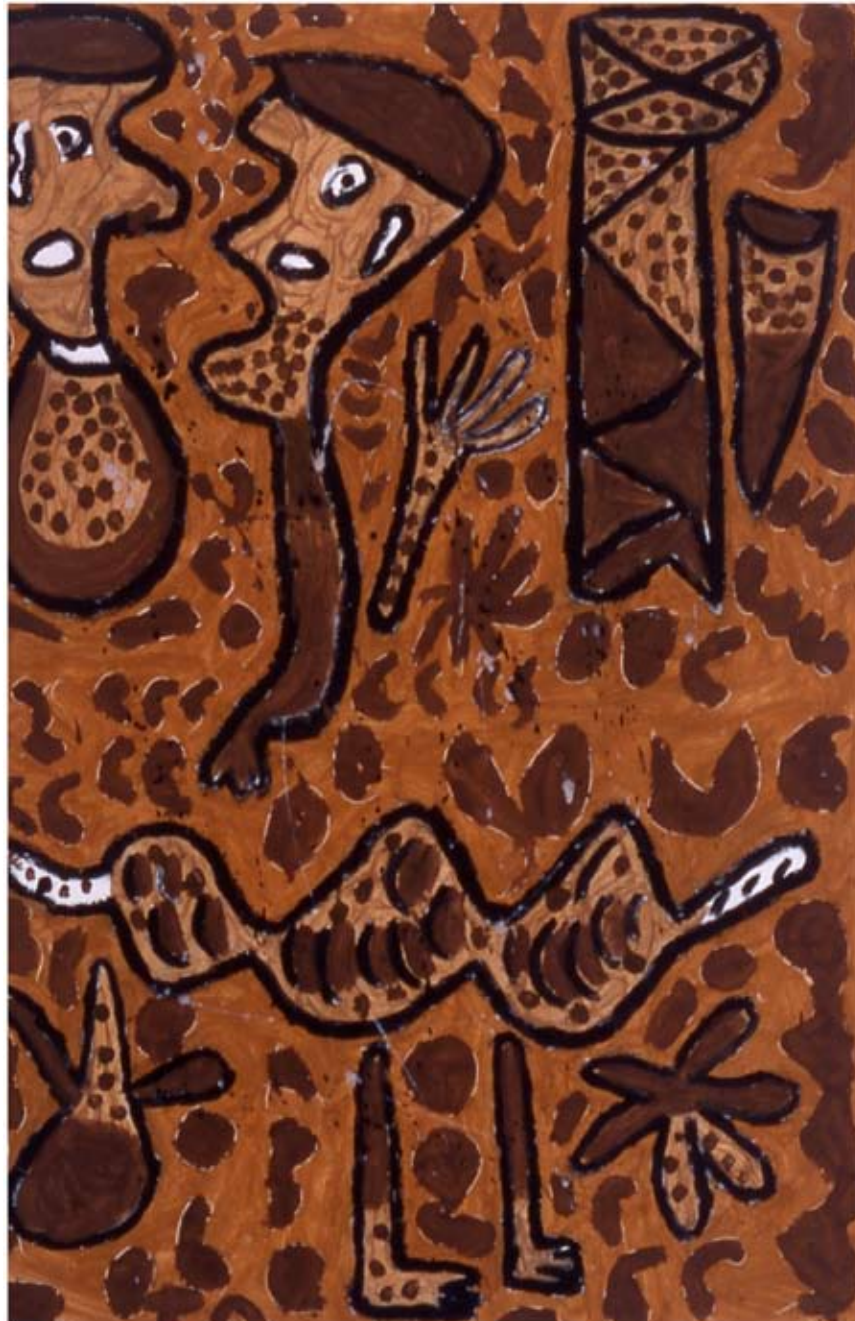
Tanimola Omoleye

The Secret Meeting

Terrachroma on canvas

Symbolic figures in light brown dance on a terra cotta background with solid organic shapes in shades of brown.





71. 2003. 0041

Tanimola Omoleye

The Timeless Stretch

Terrachroma on canvas

Mythological figures on a solid background filled with organic shapes all rendered in shades and tones of brown.



72. 2003.0064

Tanimola Omoleye

A Fortress of Kindness

Terrachroma on canvas

Organic shapes alongside mythological figures in solids and spots of white and brown, on a black background with dark brown shapes and symbols.



73. 2003.0086

Tanimola Omoleye

End of Tides

Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

Horizontal composition of brightly colored mythological figures of red-brown and white, decorated with stripes and spots, on a black background with brown organic shapes, and white paint splatters.



# Oni Omoleye





74. 2003.0076

Oni Omoleye

The Day Is Rushing Along

Terrachroma on canvas

A bold, paint-splattered background rendered under organic shapes and symbols outlined in black, all in shades and tones of browns and tans.





75. 2003.0083

Oni Omoleye

Celestial Kingdom

Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

Four intertwined off-white organic symbols rendered on a multi-tonal background of yellows and blacks with red and white spots.





76. 2003.0024

Oni Omoleye

My Friends Song

Acrylic on canvas

59x26

Mythological figures brightly colored and decorated in orange, red and green, painted over organic shapes decorated in shades of greens and yellows.



77. 2003.0026

Oni Omoleye

Rewarding Virgil

Acrylic on canvas

61x 39

Three mythological figures cover a background of organic shapes all executed in tones and shades of pink, yellow, red, and blue.



78. 2003.0044

Oni Omoleye

Standing Alone With the Gods

Terrachroma on canvas

Three bold terra-cotta toned figures rendered atop a black background with geometric designs in brown and white.





79. 2003.0066

Oni Omoleye

Approaching Storm

Terrachroma on canvas

Six bold mythological figures in burnt sienna with white spots and paint splatters, on a black background with etched designs.



Oni Omoleye, priestess, healer and painter.





80. 2003.0067

Oni Omoleye

From Valley to Fields

Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

Organic figures in light and dark brown beside mythological figures in tones of terra cotta with decorative etching and patterning bordered in white on a black background.





81. 2003.0070

Oni Omoleye

The Perfect Day

Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

Bold mythological figures in ochre yellow, black and white, on a black background with dark brown shapes and symbols, criss-crossed with ochre yellow paint splatters and drips



82. 2003.0081

Oni Omoleye

The Hero Stalks

Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

Vertically bisected canvas executed in the splatter paint style, in tones and shades of yellow and orange, with mythological figures in whites, blacks, and browns.



83. 2003.0082

Oni Omoleye

Without A Doubt

Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

Bold black background with red paint drips, organic forms and mythological figures in tones and shades of brown and white





84. 2003.0084

Oni Omoleye

Forest Dwellers

Terra Chrome on canvas, 2002

Bold mythological figures in brown with bright white eyes, along side organic shapes and symbols in red-brown, executed on a black background with red paint splatters.



85. 2003.0085

Oni Omoleye

Fire of Knowledge

Terrachroma n canvas, 2002

Mythological figures in tones and shades of reds and yellows rendered on a brown background with figurative geometric shapes in black and white, with yellow and white paint drips.

# Omilabu Olokose



Chief priestess, healer, painter.





86. 2003.0015

Olokose Omilabu

The Dawning Day

Acrylic on canvas

31x26

Bold organic shapes in shades of blue, dark yellow and green rendered under mythological figures in bright yellow.



87. 2003.0023

Olokose Omilabu

Children of the Dawn

Acrylic on canvas

56x29

Organic shapes of pink, red, yellow and brown encompass five mythological figures in reds, browns and yellows.



88. 2003.0092

Omilaju Olokose

Learning to Fly

Terra Chrome on canvas

Two mythological figures in light pink, encompassed in spots, and out lined in black, executed atop an abstracted background of browns, reds and yellows.



# Iyawo



Patient, devotee, painter



89. 2003.0003

Iyawo

The Roomy Court

Acrylic on canvas

Mythological figures in light greens and blues on organic shapes and tones of brown, red and orange.





90. 2003.0014

Iyawo

Only Your Head Knows

Acrylic on Canvas

37x31

A central mythological figure surrounded by figurative shapes of animals and symbols in light brown and off-white on a background in earth tones of red, orange, yellow and dark brown





91. 2003.0013

Iyawo

Timeless Twins

Acrylic on canvas

40x30

[Male and female? Two female?] figures in orange, brown and blue atop organic shapes in tones of browns, red, blue and yellow.



92. 2003.0017

Iyawo

The Young Dawn

Acrylic on Canvas

31x23

Three bold mythological figures atop organic shapes in shades of brown, yellow and blue



93. 2003.0030

Iyawo

Sacrificial Beasts

Acrylic on canvas

38x30

Five mythological creatures in primary colors on organic shapes and tones of red, orange, yellow and blue.



## Akire Group Painting





94. 2003.0002

Akire Group Painting

Divine Voices

Acrylic on canvas

84 x 62

Bold organic shapes and mythological figures rendered in light off-white colors on a background of reds, browns and yellows.





95. 2003.0008

Akire Group

All and Sunday Jubilate

Acrylic on Canvas

91x65

Mythological figures in tones of blue, orange and red on a background in shades of green, orange and brown.





96. 2003.0009

Akire Group

Distant Admirers

Acrylic on canvas

98x57

Mythological figures in shades of blue rendered on a background of organic shapes in tones of light and dark purple and blue.



97. 2003.0031

Akire Group

A Calabash Full of Wisdom

Acrylic on canvas

Mythological figures and symbols in shades of blue, yellow and green on a red and orange background with a yellow border.





98. 2003.0045

Akire Group

During My Own Time

Terrachroma on canvas

A figurative black and brown background with thick white rectangular marks, three small circles, a terra cotta toned figure, and a large white circle divided in half and ornamented with black and brown spots.





99. 2003.0063

Akire Group

Confrontation In The Valley of Resolutions

Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

A single mythological figure in white with brown spots on a black background with brown curvilinear lines and shapes



100. 2003.0065

Akire Group

The Quiet Front

Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

A single mythological figure in white with brown spots alongside two figurative symbols in white with brown borders, rendered on a black background with brown curvilinear lines and shapes.



101. 2003.0072

Akire Group

Bearing Witnesses

Terrachroma on canvas

A single, bold mythological figure in white, surrounded by white spots on a black background with brown curvilinear shapes.





79. 2003.0097

Akire Group

Playing Together

Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

Vertical composition of organic symbols and mythological figures in off-white and brown, rendered on a black background with brown nonobjective shapes and forms.



102. 2003.0090

Akire Group

Slave Salutations

Terrachroma on canvas, 2002

Brown geometric shapes out lined in white, on a black background, with organic and mythological figures in white with brown borders.

## Notes

1. Textile as used here does not strictly refer to cloth only. It also plays on text as in text-ile (text-tile, text-isle, text-land), as well as the idea of weaving different threads together to produce various fabrics.
2. Textile culture incorporates visual culture because it contains visual and text elements of music, poetry, dance, health, and others.
3. Rowland Abiodun, John Pemberton, and Ulli Beier have done a brilliant study of Yoruba textiles in their exposition entitled *Cloth Only Wears To Shreds: Textiles and Photographs From the Ulli Beier Collection*, 2004.
4. The little baby in the previous page is allowed to join the postmenopausal group because of her natural asexual energy, which has a spiritual intensity akin to that of a postmenopausal woman.
4. *Ayajo* is the regional poetry from the Ife speaking part of Yorubaland. *Ayajo* is an invocatory and supplicatory poetry. *Ayajo* is associated with positive, theological, and healing verses. See M.A. Fabunmi, *Ayajo Ohun Ife*, (Ibadan: Onibonoje Press), monograph), 1972.
5. Wande Abimbola, Henry Drewal, Jacob Olupona, Robert Farris Thompson, Rowland Abiodun, and many leading scholars of Yoruba culture have addressed the importance of *ase* in Yoruba theology and creativity.