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## Nike Davies Okundaye: Promoting Art practice, Art Security and Entrepreneurial Development in Nigeria

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### **Abstract:**

*Nike Davies Okundaye probably destined to be a textile designer and a painter; the foremost female, Nigeria artist, emerge from the complexity and form structure of her humble beginning on how she learned the art of weaving and textile design from her great-grandmother from the age of six today she is a renowned female artist, internationally acclaimed and a prominent entrepreneur. This paper will focus and examine on Okundaye's art practice, art security and her role on entrepreneurial development in empowerment of rural community women and young people, income generation, environmental stewardship, socio-cultural, religion and political implications of her works in entrepreneurial development in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Textile, batik, dye, Adire, Oshogbo

### **1. Introduction**

Nike Davies Okundaye is one of the Nigeria's most famous veteran traditional textile designer, painter and cultural icon. She emerged in the contemporary art scene when she heard her first one-woman exhibition at the Italian Goethe Institute, Lagos in 1968, showcasing her native multi talents and became popular with her traditional textile style and techniques, an exponent in production of colourful batik, embroidery, weavings appliqué indigo dyeing leather work and painting of wax batik on canvas.

She draws her subjects and themes of her dynamic composition from the methodology of the Yoruba culture base on folklore and event of her own daily life experience. Her artistic artworks in this context of her compositions are very descriptive and narrative with the used of traditional Yoruba motifs in repeat patterns, that form the basis of her vibrant styles and techniques, resulted from her hard work, that is aesthetically appealing to art collectors who buy her works and made the textile designer famous in wealth of history that emanated from production of batik, and indigo dye painted cloth. This has give inspiration in contextualize the making, consumption and analysis of her art gear towards gender, mentor generation of women artists, through workshop practice, her philanthropy activities and entrepreneurial development among young people made her to excel in the development of art and in African art history. (OnyemaOffoedu-Okeke2012.p196) Rightly noted: "A woman of many talents, she ran adire workshop for many years as her modern cloth piece progressed from indigenous adire inspired textiles to her current techniques of painting made of wax batik on stretched canvas". The above statement confirmed Nike Davies Okundaye promoting art security and show of entrepreneurial development in Nigeria.

Nike Monica Davies-Okundaye, popularly called by women Nike or "Mama Nike" was born in May 23,1957 raised in her native village of Ogidi in Western region, now Kogi State, Nigeria. Her artistic skills were highly influence by Yoruba culture, expressive in arts and craft she was nurtured by her parents, her father was a basket weaver, create works with leather and a musician (a trumpeter). Nike Okundaye was brought up her great grand mother and her aunty who was a traditional artist taught her weaving, adire production, indigo dying and leather work at the age of six. Her creative energy in her younger age gave room to her braking new ground in textile design and entrepreneurial development in nation building explore her ability to exhibit and selling her productions. Okundaye asserted:

- I come from a culturally oriented background. I lost my mother at a very tender age; my grandmother took care of me until she died. The lot now fell on my great grandmother, the Iyalode of Ogidi, to raise me. Art runs in my family, my late mother was an artist and my father was a trumpeter. (Okundaye 2015)

(<http://www.nikeartcenters.com/meet.nikehtounl>)

Her level of poverty at a younger age, denies her basic education and to make end meet she started working for an Indian family in Kabba township in Kogi State. While she was working for the Indian family she then discovered her talent as an artist, she was creating embroidery and painting, the Indian couple took interest in her creative works, and started selling to individuals, teachers, Reverend Fathers and Reverend Sisters, who were living within the environment (Okundaye 2015) "It made me happy that they were buying my works and that I was making a living out it"

Nike Okundaye promoting women through her artistic works and her immediate commitment in ensuring her entrepreneurial programme she develop woman to be self reliance, self empowerment, reduce level of poverty among youth give rise to national economic growth and sustainable entrepreneurial development in Nigeria. (Okundaye 2010) Opines I left Kebba village to stay with my aunty at Osogbo [Oshogho]. In Osogbo I learnt how to make adire and other crafts, and met the famous Susan Wenger who a great influence on my work.

The Oshogbo informal school trained Nike in various vocations, such as textile design, batik, tie and dying, embroidery, weaving, painting, pen and ink painting quitting drum making bead work, mosaic music and dance. This training was encouraged by woman who had only primary six western education open up a workshop centre known as Nike Centre for Art and Culture and Worldwide for advance craftsmanship in creative art located art located in Oshogbo in Osun State, Nigeria. Where she started her entrepreneurial development with about one hundred and fifty women including youths who now earn living on self reliance, sustainable livelihood and help to reduce level of poverty and gameful employed.

Nike Okundaye she is member of so many professional bodies, society of Nigeria Artists, SNA, ASA of USA and Canada, ACASA, Society of Nigerian Women Artists, Member of the Board of Trustee of Osun State Center for Black Culture and hard numerous Awards and merit to her credit.

### *1.1. Nike Art Practice and Entrepreneurial Development through Art*

(Onyekezini Peter 2004 p.19) Opines,

- The practice of the textile art is about the second oldest profession since the creation of man, only to agriculture. The textile art ministers to man's second most basic need which is clothing. It thus ranks as one of the most cherished needs of the human race.

(Onyekezini Peter 2004. p19)

The above statement in line with Nike Okundaye's art philosophy and mission statement and her flagship programme setting up art workshop centres in Nigeria. Nike Galleries at Lekki Lagos, Oshogho, Ogidi-Ijumu and Abuja, Nike art practice address a lot of social issues and solved the problems of Nigeria prostitutes (social sex workers) through her art programmes in vocational training that was passed on through her aged parents-great grandmother to her and to women and youth in Yoruba land that existed in those day in Nigeria. She has socially and economically used her art practice to empower many women from various villages within her communities that learn her artistic trade.

In 2009 Nike Okundaye built a five story building complex, ultra modern cultural art centre housing at Art Gallery at Lekki Peninsula, Lagos with purpose of promoting art and cultural capital of the Yoruba people in Nigeria. (Nike Okundaye 2009) asserted "I dedicated this building to the glory of God and to the Nigeria cultural heritage"

Nike Okundaye from her humble beginning in a positive direction in art practice, she impacted knowledge in the live of many upcoming artists' men and women, including less privileged people within the society. Her hard work brought and expose array of dedicated people who applicate her artistic work across global boundary necessitated her begin recognized as ambassador for sustainable good will for promoting contemporary African art and cultural heritage in Nigeria and to rest of the world.

Her artistic practice was highly noted when she first exhibited her art work in Americans in 1994. The exhibition offers her an enabling opportunity to interact with personalities of all works of life, ranging from business men and women, public servants, politicians, diplomat's children, tourist scholars, and researchers. The interaction with the above mentioned people, result in flow of visitors to Nike Okundaye's Nike Cultural Art Centre in Lagos, Oshogbo and Abuja. Her artistic works blossom, specially among the ten African artists, their works was show case in exhibition tours and taught arts in different art/crafts institutions in the fifty states of America, including virgin Island and Alaska, where she conducted art workshop in batik, embroidery and dying and delivered lectures in various schools and community centres. Her art practice entails high level of sophisticated styles and techniques render in her creative works, colourful batik Adire and painting. (Okeke-Offoedu 2012. p196) Rightly noted "Nike learned the traditional method of adire production, which involves extracting natural dyes from tree bark, vegetables and other plants to obtain various colours for her batiks, she continues to teach this traditional method as part of a national efforts to preserve Yoruba culture by incorporating its protocol and forms into contemporary art.

In her career she used tradition Yoruba methods of weaving and dying as a source of inspiration relaunchdieing and fading artistic weaving culture of the Yoruba people to the international adirdance, that re-evaluate, appreciate it aesthetic importance to our society. Her batik is a process which can be found around the world, the art practice is base on using cassava paste techniques, she opined "I discovered batik by accident, while lighting a candle the melted wax fell on the adireeleko I was working on, after dying the fabric, I discovered the colour was bright and I started to experiment from there. (Nike Davies-Okundaye) (<http://www.okayafrica.com>) In recent time, her adire is being used by shoe maker and jewelry maker, to make shoes, cloths, bags, earring, bangles, tie, T-shirts etc.

One of her amazing methods adopted in creating the batik-style T-shirts, it is by heating wax on a lot plat, then apply the melted wax with help of a foam sponge on the surface of the shirts into areas of choice, when the process is completed, the shirts are transferred and immersed into a bigger pots with natural dyes mixed with hydro-solvent mixed with caustic soda for 3 to 5 minutes. This process is repeated until the result of aesthetic finish effect of creative work is achieved.

Her works has details of intricate designs of geometric patterns with motifs of the western Yoruba cultural heritage that can be seen in her adire and batik. Some are monochromatic and polychromatic and most of her paintings showcases in detail water colours in self portraits and landscapes that emanated from event of daily life. Her work is full of forms and shapes (Ocivik 1998:98) asserted shape are used by artist for the two fundamental purposes mentioned in the preceding paragraphs to suggest form they have seen or imagined, and to give certain visual qualities or content to a work of art.

In my submission of an Okundaye's art practice in Nigeria, she has developed rural women within her communities and Nigeria people, and promote the Yoruba western culture, putting it in the world map, through her numerous exhibitions local and international, that resulted her winning awards and merit in the development of contemporary art in Nigeria.

### *1.2. Art security and Her Role in Entrepreneurial Development*

Art security in this context can be defined as artistic work created with appealing aesthetics value, put up for art exhibition for sale, at art saloon or art auction and it is purchase for a fee, such money can be used by individual artist for sustainability in all ramification of livelihood to ensure art security toward credit for entrepreneurial development in Nigeria. Art securities continue to attract level of attention and it is only the unwary that should treat it with levity in country such as Nigeria. This will help to reduce level of poverty and the level of unemployment on our security. (Ubogu 2015) Youth can be define as the time in a life time when a person is young especially the time before a child becomes an adult (18-30 years) (Ukwa and Okehe 2014).

Nike Okudanye, she is a social entrepreneur and a philanthropist using her creative works to make waves in the international circle which has generated a lot of discuss among scholars, researchers, individuals, cooperate bodies, institutions, galleries, museums and exhibitions even at art auctions and art saloons. Okudanye she as the managing director and Chief Executive Officers (CEO) of four art centre namely Nike center for Art and Culture, Oshogbo built in 1983, solely foundation by her from income generated from her earning, from professional practice as an artist without funded from cooperate bodies, individuals and government assistance of all level. This shows the level of art security being able to earn money to meet her needs and provide good standards of livelihood. At the centre in Oshogbo she offered free training to Nigerian youth and women without paying money in various vocation in different areas of the arts. She started the center with twenty young girl's roaming the streets and no hope of livelihood in Oshogbo. These young girls in their tender age bracket, she provides them with food and shelter at her residence at Oshogbo. She taught and mentors them on how to be skillful and to earn a living through creative art. Well over 3000 young Nigerians have benefited from the training at Okundaye art center in Oshogbo now earning minimum standard of good live through art. The centre is also open to African countries their now sent them students to study Okundaye textile art at the Oshogbo in Osun state.

She was able to ensure art security and entrepreneur development at the Nike center and offer opportunities by admitting students in undergraduate programme from various Nigerian universities a place for their industrial training in textile design. The mentorship, training, entrepreneurial empowerment and sustainable development is extended by admitting student from Europe, Canada and the United state of America. Both local and international researchers, scholars visit the center on regular basis for their research works into Yoruba "Adire" fabric processing and African traditional dyeing methods. (Okundaye) creative works in textile design are unique and embrace the Yoruba art forms including their cultural traditional African motifs of advance craftsmanship of the artist hence the international participation in her training and mentorship programme in making Batik and "Adire" (OghalaOkpu 2014:58) rightly noted.

- Most textile artist is fond of copying other artist's visual impression or representations. The excellence of one's craftsmanship is extremely important and is always considered as a good factor in textile designing. Customers always go for unique or original design that are not common in the market, even though it may sell at a higher price: People also prefer recognized motifs that rooted with cultural meanings.

(OghalaOkpu 2014. p58)

In 1996 Okundaye established Nike Art Galleries at Lagos, Oshogbo, Ogidi-Ijuma and Abuja in 1996 her entrepreneurial skills in textile became more prominent in the area of textile (Aso-Oke) weaving center was established at her village Ogidi-Ijumu near Kabba in Kogi State by employing and empowering well over 200 women in the weaving centre, improving the standard of living of the rural woman and sustainable development through her art and ensuring their art security and entrepreneurial and help to reduce the level of poverty and social vices.

In June 2002 she further established an Art and Culture Research Center at Piwoyi village, FCT Abuja housing a textile museum and an art gallery to her credit it was a unique idea in Nigeria, it was a step stone and a pass to researchers to know more about traditional textile industry in the Federal Capital Territory and positively promoting entrepreneurial development through research and ensuring art security its eventually generate job opportunity through art. Okundaye business interests promote her entrepreneurial programme through her art practice; she evidently incorporated numerous organizations in Nigeria, namely Nike Art Production Limited in 1994, Nike Art Gallery Limited in 2007, Nike Research Center for Art and Culture Limited and Nike Art and Culture Foundation Incorporated respectively in 2007, with prominent Nigeria as board of trustees. Her mission statement, aim and objective; to fostering Nigeria cultural heritage, her art security is aimed at empowering disadvantaged young people and women using her creative works to develop them freely without paying for the serves render by her, but they earn a living as artist she arranges art exhibition for them to enable them sell their works for sustainable development which ensure art security.

### *1.3. Income Generation Promote Art Security*

Her living in Osogbo [Osogbo] affected her highly in the style of her work, that she is a member of the Osogbo School of Art. She started her first Art Gallery at Osogbo in 1968. (OsaEgonwa 2011.126)

Okundaye's natural talent soon blossomed, but her foray into the art world wasn't easy. In 1968, she began selling her creations from her she began selling her creations from her bedroom, which served as a make shift gallery. (<http://edition.com/2011/worls/africa>)

The above statement confirmed that Okundaye generate income for her sales of adire and batik through her initial makes-ship gallery, art exhibition, at art-saloon, art auctions and personal contacts. Her art practice earns Okundaye a lot of money (Okundaye 2011) asserted "My great grandmother started teaching me how to weave from weaving to embroidery, embroidery to adire, adire to

painting, painting to patchwork". Another angle to Okundaye art practice that made her intricate styles and techniques famous was the informal Oshogbo School she attended and train as an artist in her early age. Her hard work paid off, earned her a lot money to ensure art security "She is the owner of the largest art gallery in West African comprising over 7,000 artworks the centres also serve as a rich source of knowledge for traditional arts and culture to scholars and institutions Nike is known all over the world for promoting her designs through exhibitions and workshop in Nigeria USA, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Italy and United Kingdom Chief Nike live and works in Lagos Nigeria" (<http://www.contemporaryand.com>) The above assertion shows that Okundaye earn income through her exhibition, in local and foreign currency base on the countries where she showcases her artworks.

Okundaye has chains of business interest base on her creative works and entrepreneurial development working with young people to increase her production out put which I referred to as mimi textile traditional industry located in Lagos, Abuja, Oshogbo and Kogi State. Her business empire earned her a lot of revenue yearly. Evidently a proof of art security that further generate income security through art practice, however her standard of living put smiles on less privileges people or disadvantage young people from generated from her artworks.

#### 1.4. Environment Stewardship

Nike Okundaye through her art empowerment programme and youth development, she has empowered and sustain many young girls ruming streets within their immediate environment into her vocational art training, in Lagos, Oshogho, Ogidi-Ijume, Kogi State and Abuja in Nigeria. She cares from them, they learn her skills in craft and making many of them to self-reliant and gamefully. Eventually have means of livelihood and means of income. Nike says she does not want to see any young woman go through what she went through in her early life "I want these girls to understand that they can make a living" a good living with their hands. They should come and join the centre and learn some crafts let them come and get trained. The training is free of charge I expose their works and products to outside world. (<http://www.nikeartcenters.com/meet-nike.html>)

Nike Okundaye pool a lot of youths from their immediate environment specially from their comfort zone, to avoid social vices, such smoking marijuana "wewe", discourage gangsterism, criminality, social violence, drug abuse, and child trafficking, ventalization, illegal fuel sale, illegal arm, rape, kidnapping, issue of fraud stars, impersonation.

Okundaye made impact on environmental stewardship by engaging youths in her entrepreneurial development programme take young youths off the streets in Nigeria. In 2010, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) of Nigeria gave her award of recognition of the part she played in the fight toward drug free Nigeria Society using her art empowerment programme. (Harrison and Wood 2003) asserted:

- One of the main supports of this new art had been the concept of expression. Expression took on a vanity of guises, but the one thing it needed was a notion of the 'self' of the artist, which could thus be expressed. In turn this self had to have the attributes of authenticity.

(Harrison and Wood 2003: p27).

The above statement shows Okundaye outstanding attributes in the development of young people regard her artistic works. Another important area of environment stewardship, of Nike Okundaye deals with her mixed media painting using reappropriation, reused and repurposing materials in her creative artworks. Most of the material used on her mixed media painting is getting within her environment collect from the street and probably neighbouring market place. Traditional masks 1999-2003 (fig 1) and the Lizard 2001 media. (fig. 2) are typical painting of Okundaye that the themes address issue within our environment and culture.

#### 1.5. Socio-Cultural, Religion and Political Implications of entrepreneurial Development in Nike Okundaye's Work

Okundaye's work deal mostly on art and culture of the Yoruba mythology, folklore, and religion including natural phenomena that exist with the context of her creative works that further enhance and promote the growth of Yoruba culture heritage in African art through economically and socially empower women well over 200 in numbers by setting up and built workshop centers, in Lagos, Abuja, Oshogbo and Ogidi-Ijuma in Kogi State. They learn her skills base on theme derived from Nigeria culture heritage. For so many the veteran batik and adire artist created a lot of art works that glorify the social stratification in art practice and works rooted from the comic drama of the Yoruba tradition and also derived from mystery of Yoruba culture. The social aspect of her creative works embrace the dynamics of the prevailing indigo colour of her textiles works that have some social implication, now day her batik and dye works are used to make dress for social functions such as marriage ceremony dress, for birthday parties formal and informal occasion, some of cloths serve as school uniform for primary and secondary school, security out fit or uniforms.

In hospital especially the batik and adire, they are use as wall dividers in wards. Another important aspect is the use of "AsoOke" cloths for traditional occasions, such as traditional marriage, coronation ceremony, burial ceremony, and installation of Oba or king mostly in Yoruba land. This practice is not only practice by Okundaye but other up coming artist emulate her, (Onwuakpa and Onwakpa 2014: 117) asserted, "She uses cloth to create works in the form of tie-dye, batik and appliqué on which she explores Igbo Uli body drawing wall mural elements. She adopts and adapts these local motifs and symbols as one of the major element in her work". KacgoUcheOkeke draw her inspiration from Uli art form, so Okundaye draw her art forms and the use of symbols and motifs use on batik and adire cloths are base of Yoruba mythology and folklore.

AsoOke cloth (Okeke C.S. 2005:145) rightly noted. AsoOke is the traditional cloth of the Yoruba people of south Western Nigeria the Iseyin people are central to the production of AsoOke from locally procured wild silk combined with cotton.

Okundaye textiles products are evidently used in modern trend in production of shoe, bags, earrings, bangles, business handbags, brief cases, tie, shirts and T-shirts. Okundaye's painting and textile works are base on spiritual and artistic inspiration from Nigeria's river goddess from Osun, appear to her and talk her in dream about her concept and compositions in paintings and textile works. Okundaye

opines “immediately I dream and I wake up I will quickly sketch it, because if I have to wait. It many go off my head, so the rive has made a lot of impact because a lot of what I draw is about female who do the worshipping.”

Another aspect of Okundaye’s artistic work is the political implication most of the textile work created, that are use to promote Nigerian heritage, politically especially from western region of Nigeria. Her work addresses political issues, such solve the problem prostitutes (social sex workers) getting them off the street and engaged them in her workshops. Solve the youth problem on drug abuse, which she received award from ‘NDLEA’ in 2010. Political issue base on her role on promoting education through art, in Nigeria, her role on leadership and entrepreneurship on Nigeria commerce and industry, her role on empowerment of women and generating employment among youths finally her entrepreneurial spirit of self reliance in the development of young people in art security for human endavour in Nigeria and globally.

## 2. Conclusion

Nike Devies-Okundaye a veteran artist of high repute, serve and impacted her artistic skills on young people in Nigeria through her native artistic knowledge acquired from her grand-mother as a teenager growing up in her village environment in Kogi State, Nigeria. Okundaye address the issue of the Yoruba culture seen in her paintings and textile designs, her entrepreneurial programme on art, should be emulated and her role played socially, economically and religion in art should be commended, she also a philanthropist uses her art to ensure art security, in other wise to improve people that come across her as disadvantage person by improving their standard of living.

However educational sector of the Nigeria people should encourage students to learn her skill and emulate her artistic work to jump-start their create endeavours in contemporary art and entrepreneurial development in Nigeria.



Figure 1: Traditional Masks, 1999-2003 Mixed Media, 122 x 183 cm Private Collection



Figure 2: The Lizard, 2001 Mixed Media on Canvas, 61 x 46 cm Private Collection

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