



J.D. 'OKHAI OJEIKERE

Sartorial Moments and the Nearness of Yesterday

The Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos and foto ojeikere cordially request the pleasure of your company at the special opening reception of the exhibition celebrating the 80th Birthday of J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere and the 50th Independence of Nigeria.

Opening, Friday, 1 October, 2010, 3.00 PM

Exhibition, 1 October – 14 October, 2010
Monday – Friday, 10.00 AM - 6.00 PM
Saturday, 12.00 PM - 4.00 PM

Organised by Bisi Silva
in collaboration with foto ojeikere.

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Cover: J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere: Untitled (1963).
Courtesy foto ojeikere.

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J.D. 'OKHAI OJEKERE

Sartorial Moments and the Nearness of Yesterday

Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos
October 1 - 14, 2010

J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere:

Sartorial Moments and the Nearness of Yesterday

The Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos has, over the course of the last year (2009-2010), tailored all of its programming to interact with notions of post-coloniality and its related ambivalence. In so doing, we developed a series of projects under the thematic rubric of "On Independence and the Ambivalence of Promise." One such project concerns exploring the intersections of Art, Fashion and Identity, and how these relations might enable us to critically interact with the present while remaining mindful of both our past and future. Given this, we present J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere: Sartorial Moments and the Nearness of Yesterday, a vibrant, yet topical, exhibition that celebrates Nigeria's Independence and cultural heritage from the perspective of one of the country's most esteemed and talented artist.

October 1st 1960 marked Nigeria's independence from British colonial rule. The landmark event triggered a new level of consciousness and national identity. Photography's attraction as a medium, its historical connection to the production and fixation on identity, globalization, and culture proved a particularly essential tool in post-colonial Nigeria. The ability to archive moments in history and the ability to seize the imagery of Africa from the colonial observer made photography a notable medium both within Nigeria and across the continent. J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere's (b. 1930) first encounter with photogra-

phy came in 1950 with the purchase of a Kodak Brownie Model-D camera, which he subsequently learned to operate with the guidance of a neighbour. Over the years his passion for photography would lead to employment within the government, media and later on as a commercial photographer.

During the 60's photography was primarily a commercial pursuit, yet Ojeikere had other ideas, and in 1968 a year after joining the Nigerian Arts Council he shifted his photographic practice in order to document the cultural life of his country. At the time there was very little interest in documenting fashion, with most of the imagery serving only to represent colonial perspectives. Ojeikere however chose to document his subject matter from his own perspective, providing a resource for referencing aspects of visual culture he deemed "ephemeral." With a body of photographic work spanning sixty years, he captured a glimpse into the post-colonial Nigerian identity as represented through fashion and style.

"Just after Independence, we were full of ideas and energy. We were going to conquer the world."

— J. D. 'Okhai Ojeikere

Fashion photography goes beyond merely documentation. As evident by the works

contained within this exhibition, it is a genre that enables us to ascertain visual notions of the social, economic and political dimensions of particular periods. Like his contemporaries Seydou Keita and Malick Sidibé, Ojeikere's work reveals an astute sensibility and keen willingness to capture the subtle transformations in style and dress. Sustained engagement with Ojeikere's oeuvre reveals that much of his work can be situated at the intersections between Western and traditional styles of dress. Having noticed a shift in hair trends, during the fifties and early sixties, of women increasingly wearing wigs, Ojeikere believed that traditional hairstyling might disappear all together. However, indicative of trends, these hairstyles did return. Believing photography to be the best tool for archiving such styles, he began working on his most well known body of work—the 'Hairstyles' project. As a series, 'Hairstyles' is composed of approximately one thousand images. The taxonomic methodology of his practice meant that in addition to photographing the various styles, he also studied their cultural and historical significance.

Okhai Ojeikere has achieved a great deal in documenting, through photography, the innumerable shifts in cultural trends within Nigeria. His work with individuals and group subjects makes for a cultural commentary on people's behavior, cultural identity and social relations,

providing an insight into understanding the many changes in style that have occurred over time. On display is a selection of images relating to trends in hair, gele tying and clothing styles. In the exhibition we encounter a selection of large studio-based images that, with their visual resemblance to the blaxploitation movement, depict women donning dresses of Western influence. These works are supplemented by a section dedicated to images depicting men in various styles of dress, thus signaling that these sartorial transformations were in no way exclusive to women. Images from important events—those capturing traditional 'Aso Oke' at weddings, husbands and wives in their often matching garments, and various group gatherings where dress played a role—trigger off memories like pictures in an album.

The notion of the photo album is quite germane, for it calls to mind impressions of the past and memory, or documentation and archive. Such thoughts highlight the intimacy that often results from processes of reflection. It is with this sense of proximity that this exhibition—in broaching history through its various sartorial moments—attempts to inspire the viewer to establish a sense of nearness with his or her own past, as well as the past of Nigeria.

Oyinda Fakeye



Exhibition History

Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 2005 "Hairstyles," Maison de France. Lagos, Nigeria
- 2005 "Hairstyles," Blaffer Gallery, Houston, USA
- 2002 "Hairstyles," Wedge Gallery, Toronto, Canada
- 2001 "J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere," MAMCO, Genève, Switzerland
- 2000 "J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere," Fondation Cartier, Paris, France
- 1996 "Nigerian Traditional Hairstyle," Goethe-Institut Lagos, Nigeria
- 1995 "J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere," National Arts Council, Lagos, Nigeria

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2009 "Chance Encounters: Seven Contemporary Artists from Africa,"
CCA, Lagos/Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai, India
- 2008 "Disguise: The Art of Attracting and Deflecting Attention,"
Michael Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2007 "Documenta 12," Kassel-Germany
- 2006 "100% Africa," Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Spain
- 2006 "Vive l'Afrique," Galerie du Jour - Agnès b., Tokyo, Japan
- 2006 "About Africa, part one," Fifty One Fine Art, Antwerp, Belgium
- 2006 "Arts of Africa," Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of African
Art, Washington, DC., USA
- 2005 "African Queen," Studio Museum in Harlem, New York
- 2005 "Arts of Africa," Grimaldi Forum, Monaco
- 2005 "African Art Now: Masterpieces from the Jean Pigozzi Collection,"
Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Houston, USA
- 2004 "Joy of Life -Malick Sidibé and Ojeikere, Two Photographers from
Africa," Hara, Museum, Tokyo, Japan
- 2001 "Collection in Context," Studio Museum in Harlem, New York
- 2001 "Century City: Art and Culture in the Modern Metropolis," Tate
Modern, London
- 1995 "1st National Creativity Exhibition," National Theatre, Lagos - Nigeria
- 1983 "Ten Top Photographers," National Museum, Lagos, Nigeria
- 1978 "Photography in Advertising, 50th Anniversary of Lintas Limited,"
Lagos, Nigeria