

Kelechi Nwaneri: West African Iconography, Psychology, Environmental Issues...

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Portraits of the human heart and brain, signs of the zodiac, floods, black skin with signs impressed upon it that look like the constellations above—self-taught Nigerian artist Kelechi Charles Nwaneri (born 1994) shows us a unique dreamy world that explores mental health, social situations and environmental issues. The mystical, metaphysical, allegorical imagery is seamlessly blended with symbols from West Africa—mainly Adinkra (from Ghana), Uli (from southern Nigeria) and Nsibidi (also southern Nigeria).

The indigenous iconography reflects and preserves heritage but also alludes to identity and psychology. Kelechi says about his black figures: “I chose to represent them that way because I’m scarred, emotionally. If you see someone on the road who has a big scar on his head that mark is part of him; it tells a story about that person. Tribal marks in African tell a lot about a person’s identity. That’s why I started marking my subjects. I’m symbolically telling you something about them. Along the way, I also started using the marks aesthetically, for what they add to the overall image.”





Kelechi Nwaneri. Courtesy of Ebony/Curated.



There is a greater narrative in Kelechi's work, going beyond self and culture. The artist continues: "There are things affecting the world around me that I also find troubling. The deforestation in Brazil and fires in Australia and the United States are related to global warming. The rising oceans have caused flooding around the world. I made paintings in response to flooding in Lagos. I've also represented these concerns through the addition of wind towers, which provide clean energy, and flowers and plants, which are needed to protect the environment against climate change."

Kelechi focussed on the sciences during his school years and went on to obtain a bachelor's degree in Agricultural Extension from the University of Nigeria in 2015. Inspired by pencil artists such as Kelvin Okafor, Arinze Stanley and Ken Nwadiogbu, he initially tried pencil realism, later evolving to experiment with collages, watercolours, acrylic and oil paints. His works stand somewhere between the genres of photorealism, surrealism, post-modernism and contemporary art but perfectly fits into what he calls "contemporary surrealism".

In 2020, the artist participated in a residency for AKKA Project in Venice, Italy. Kelechi was also a winner of the annual “Visual Art competition 2018” organised by the Spanish embassy in Abuja, Nigeria. His work is held in the Beth Rudin DeWoody Collection (USA), Susan Goodman Collection (USA), Arthur Lewis Collection (USA), Africa First Collection, Tel Aviv, (Israel); Easton Capital Collection (USA); Embassy of Spain Abuja, (Nigeria). He is represented by Ebony/Curated (Cape Town and Franschhoek, South Africa) and Kristin Hjellegjerde (London, Berlin and Nevlunghavn, Norway). He currently lives and works in Lagos state, Nigeria.

Links: Instagram (www.instagram.com/kaecyart)



Serenade © Kelechi Nwaneri.



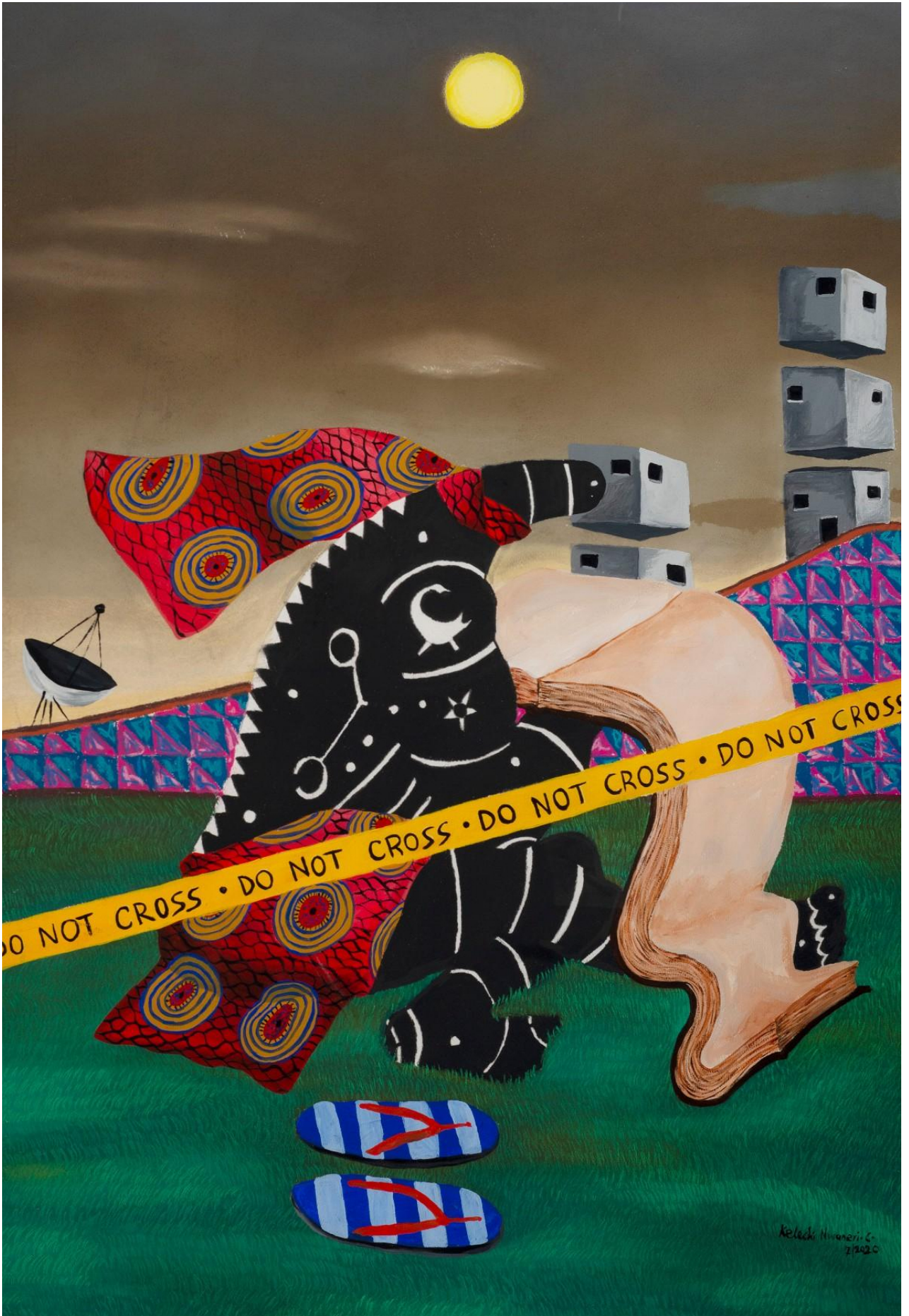
Portrait of a Human Brain © Kelechi Nwaneri.





Empty Pockets, Dreams and Helpers © Kelechi Nwaneri.





Retreat and Perseverance © Kelechi Nwaneri.





The Kiss © Kelechi Nwaneri.





Force a Smile © Kelechi Nwaneri.





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