African:
The land for Ubuntu and iwa I ewa?

A solo exhibition by Samuel Idowu Oyebode in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the M. Tech Fine Art Degree from the Department of Visual Arts, University of Johannesburg

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Artist Statement

Igi kan ko s’igbo - one tree cannot make a forest (a Yoruba proverb)

I am an African, a Nigerian and a contemporary Yoruba artist currently studying and living in South African society. My body of works synthesises the Yoruba iwa l ewa philosophical word that reflects on the inherent qualities that determine good or bad characters in historical Yoruba society. I believe that iwa l ewa and ubuntu are traditional knowledge systems that buttress the objectives of African humanist philosophy. Furthermore, I believe that and African humanism and communalism emphasises human relationships and communication in African society. This has been a challenge for people born in South Africa dealing with migrants, born elsewhere in Africa, living in the country. I argue that the recurrent incidents of xenophobic violence in urban South Africa, betray the objectives of African humanist philosophy. This is the reason why I am using visual art as a tool to rebuild and reconstruct a communalist spirit in African humanist philosophy in South African society and other African countries. I believe that African people should draw on and from the philosophies of iwa-pele (calm character), suuru (patience), Imoju-mora (sensibility), Ifarabale (calmness), iluti (good hearing) and tito (preservation of culture), to promote love, humanism, communalism and ubuntu in South African and other African societies.
**Introduction**

In my body of works, I relate Yoruba *Iwa I ewa*, to the South African concept of *ubuntu*, using visual symbols to express a response to xenophobic violence perpetrated against migrants in South African society. *Iwa I ewa* is a noun that can be separated into *iwa* - which means ‘character’, *i* - which means ‘exist’, and *ewa* - which means ‘beauty’. *Iwa I ewa* means that a person’s beauty is the expression of his or her character. Within this conceptualisation, beauty is judged based on character, and there are inherent qualities that determine good or bad character in historical Yoruba society. Examples of inherent qualities are *ifarable*, *imoju-mora*, *iwa* in which I created seven symbols that I discuss below.

**First series: Index section**

A. *Iwa* (The purpose if living or being): *Iwa* is a Yoruba theoretical word. *Iwa* can be separated into *i* which means ‘exist’ and *wa* which means to be and together. The symbol of *Iwa* narrates the importance of understanding one another to create a culture of communalism in the society.

B. *Iwa-pele* (Patience): *Iwa-pele* is a symbol that explains the importance of patience in the society. Yoruba people say *suuru ni baba iwa* (patience is the father of character). A person who exercises patience avoids brutal force and has endurance.

C. *Ifarable* (Calmness): *Ifarable* reflects on the ability to control negative feelings towards another person; to act in a considered manner as opposed to the unmediated reaction.

D. *Oju-inu* (Inner spiritual eyes): *Oju-inu* in the research reflects on the ability to contemplate a situation and make a considered decision.

E. *Imoju-mora* (Sensitivity): *Imoju-mora* is the quality of sensitivity which speaks to the needs of the moment and responding with a sense of propriety and from a position of measured consciousness. It is founded on the ability to adapt and change without being formally told to do so.

F. *Iluti* (Understanding): *Iluti* explains the importance of understanding one another in the society.

G. *Tito* (Durability): *Tito* is the ability to preserve and keep culture alive.
Second series: Analysing to concept iwa I ewa in the paintings

The second series is a combination of one or more symbols in a painting. For instance, I juxtaposed iluti, iwa and oju-inu symbols in aro-meta painting. In this section, there are aro-meta and eji ogbe series. Aro means a traditional stove and meta means three. A literal definition of aro-meta is the arrangement of three stones to create balance for a cooking pot. The metaphorical meaning is that the collaboration of people permits stability and balance in Yoruba society. The ideology of aro-meta relates to another Yoruba proverb that says igi kan ko s’igbo, which means one tree cannot make a forest. In the narratives, a stone cannot balance a pot and a tree cannot make a forest, trees support one another to grow. These ideologies advocate African humanist and communalist philosophies such as ubuntu in society. Ubuntu states that a person is a person through other persons. Eji-ogbe is a verse in ifa divination. There are several verses that support African humanist and communalist philosophies. These verses encourage people to relate with one another peacefully in Yoruba society.

Third series: Analyses of ubuntu in South African society.

"with African ubuntu philosophy, the entire planet is viewed as a living being" (Berg citing CG Jung (2012:viii).

In this section, I discuss and analyse ubuntu in post-apartheid South African society. I am discussing an understanding of human dignity that corresponds with ubuntu. In my dissertation, I discussed that the concept of ubuntu as a moral corollary to xenophobia isolation and discrimination in South African society. I suggest that the south African Bill of Rights was developed in the spirit of ubuntu and that spirit should be extended to all the people living in South African society. The Bill of Rights gives a foreigner access to social security, work, education, medical care and life in South African society. In summary, South Africans has no place differentiate between a person born in South Africa or one who us not born in South Africa, but lives here, in as much as they are humans living in society. Xenophobic violence distorts the structure of ubuntu in post-apartheid South African society.

Fourth series: The current social problem in south Africa and the iwa I ewa Yoruba people’s concepts

In this section, I discuss my body of work the consists of tie-dyed canvas, screen prints, batik and painting techniques. This section consists of four series and each series is grouped according to the colours blue, yellow, red and purple. Each colour narrates Yoruba traditional meanings. My use of colour follows traditional religious classifications and interpretations of colours in Yoruba society. Blue and purple are classified among dark colours in which the colour indexes the depth of the knowledge and wisdom of the deity known as Orunmila. Red symbolises power and is used most in rituals as shrines to honour the deities. Yellow colour narrates in ifa divination that yellow is use to review the complexities and mysteries of life. In my body of work, I titled the yellow series Asiri (Hidden secret), because the body of work reveal that xenophobic violence generates hatred, distorts human values, creates negative feelings, tension and agony in society. A peaceful African has no place for xenophobic, and for this reason, I incorporate iwa-pele symbols in this series to disclose Yoruba people’s narrative with regard to Orunmila’s intention on the importance of understanding one another to create a culture of communalism that contextualises ubuntu in the society.
Index
Samuel Oyebode, *iwa*, 2019. wax resist on tie-dye, 40 x 30cm

Samuel Oyebode, *Ifarable*, 2019. wax resist on tie-dye, 40 x 30cm

Samuel Oyebode, *iwa-pele*, 2019. wax resist on tie-dye, 40 x 30cm

Samuel Oyebode, *oju-inu*, 2019. wax resist on tie-dye, 40 x 30cm
Samuel Oyebode, imoju-mora, 2019. wax resist on tie-dye, 40 x 30cm

Samuel Oyebode, tito, 2019. wax resist on tie-dye, 40 x 30cm

Samuel Oyebode, iluti, 2019. wax resist on tie-dye, 40 x 30cm

First Series
Samuel Oyebode, Aro-meta II, 2019. wax resist on tie-dyed canvas, 102 x 74cm.

Samuel Oyebode, Aro-meta III, 2019. wax resist on tie-dyed canvas, 102 x 74cm.

Samuel Oyebode, Aro-meta IV, 2019. wax resist on tie-dyed canvas, 102 x 74cm.

Samuel Oyebode, Aro-meta V, 2019. wax resist on tie-dyed canvas, 102 x 74cm.
Samuel Oyebode, Aro-meta, 2019. wax resist on tie-dyed canvas, 102 x 75 cm.

Samuel Oyebode, Eji-ogbe III, 2019. wax resist on tie-dyed canvas, 102 x 74 cm

Samuel Oyebode, Eji-ogbe II, 2019. wax resist on tie-dyed canvas, 102 x 74 cm
Samuel Oyebode, Eji-ogbe v, 2019. wax resist on tie-dyed canvas, 102 x 74cm

Samuel Oyebode, Eji-ogbe, 2019. wax resist on tie-dyed canvas, 102 x 75cm

Second Series
Samuel Oyebode, untitled, 2019.
tie-dyed canvas and screen print,
75 x 50cm

Samuel Oyebode, untitled, 2019.
tie-dyed canvas and screen print,
75 x 50cm

Samuel Oyebode, untitled, 2019.
tie-dyed canvas and screen print,
75 x 50cm

Samuel Oyebode, untitled, 2019.
tie-dyed canvas and screen print,
75 x 50cm
Samuel Oyebo, untitled, 2019. Tie-dyed canvas and screen print, 75 x 50cm
Samuel Oyebode,
tie-dyed canvas, screen print, acrylic paint, dye pigment and sand,
240 x 207cm.
Samuel Oyebode,
Asiri (Hidden secret), 2019.
Medium tie-dyed canvas, screen print, acrylic paint, dye pigment.
240 x 207 cm
Samuel Oyebode,
in Christ, there is no foreigner, 2019.
tie-dyed canvas, screen print, acrylic paint,
dye pigment,
240 x 207 cm
Samuel Oyebode, 
we are one, 2019. 
tie-dyed canvas, screen print, acrylic paint, 
dye pigment, 
240 x 207 cm. 

Forth Series
Samuel Oyeboode, Ori-Olokun. 2019. dye, acrylic paint and sand. 150 x 100 cm.
Samuel Oyebode, untitled. 2018.
dye, acrylic paint,
80 x 75,5cm
Samuel Oyeboade, Untitled, 2017. dye, acrylic paint, and sand, 300 by 280cm.
Conclusion

The objective of my works is to promote the purpose of African humanist and communalist philosophies among people living in the South African community through art. I argue that the seven qualities drawn from Yoruba iwa l ewa theory resonate with ubuntu in South African society. I argue that African people should draw on and from the philosophies of iwa-pele (calm character), suuru (patience), imoju-mora (sensibility), ifarabile (calmness), iluti (good hearing) and tito (preservation of culture), to promote love, humanism, communalism, and ubuntu in South Africa societies.