

Mufu Onifade's Contemporary Visualisation of *Odu Ifa* in *Araism*: A Salutary Sociocultural Confluence of Iconography and Ideologies

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Abstract

Visual communication with art forms and religious iconography functions as a means of educating non-literate devotees, inspiring devotion and spirituality, and developing identity and enculturation. Religions like Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam have for centuries built their identities on enduring symbolic icons and visual representations of abstract beliefs. *Ifa* is a geomantic Yoruba religious system. *Odu Ifa* is an oral literary corpus, consisting of 256 volumes (*Odu*), interpreted for life's guidance. Although art-historically, many iconographers of religious art were anonymous, this paper focuses on eight purposively selected paintings of an *Ifa* iconographer, Mufu Onifade, a contemporary Nigerian artist. For over two decades, Mufu has consistently visualised themes from *Odu Ifa* through a stylistic painting technique called *Araism*, which he founded in 1998. This paper examines the significant iconographic paintings artistically and symbolically to determine the impact and relevance of Mufu's contemporary works on socio-religious and cultural heritage. The methodology adopted was qualitative, necessitating interviews with the artist, *Ifa* traditionalists, and custodians of Yoruba culture. Photographic documentation and literature review also provided data. The vast data collected revealed that the artist creates visual forms for Yoruba cosmology, philosophy and oral traditions that are salutary sociocultural edifices. These include *Ifa* proverbs, adages, panegyrics, and poetry like *iyere ifa* (*Ifa* tonal poetry), *ijala ode* (hunter's poetry), *ekun iyawo* (bridal poetry), and *ewi* (social poetry). Artistically, the paintings categorically characterise Nigerian contemporary art and are relevant in the creative industry, socio-religious portals, Nigerian cultural development and art-historical narratives.

Keywords: *Araism*, Contemporary Nigerian Art, Iconography, *Odu Ifa*, Religious art

Introduction

An early universal apriority given to African art is that its primary purpose and function was religious, ritualistic or simply utilitarian. However more recent research has revealed the cultural relativity and formalistic relevance of African Art. From the traditional genres to the contemporary, African art and artists have in correlation developed aesthetically, particularly in forms, styles, diversity of mediums, techniques and ideologies. Art is a living tradition in Africa, and as Shorter (1998) observed, contemporary African art has continuously derived inspiration from traditional models though employing new techniques and materials. In Nigeria, the exploration of and experimentation with indigenous concepts has been an engagement of many contemporary artists in art production. An example is Mufu Onifade, a contemporary Nigerian artist by classification. Mufu Onifade created a painting technique that metamorphosed to become an art style and movement.

Mufu Onifade was born on October 5, 1966. He attended Saint Joseph Catholic School, Lagos, from 1974 to 1980 and Dolphin High School, Lagos from 1980 to 1985 for his primary and secondary education respectively. He proceeded to obtain a National Diploma in General Arts from The Polytechnic Ibadan, Nigeria, from 1986 to 1998, where he won the Best Student Prize. In 1992 he went through a professional apprenticeship training under a legendary Ethiopian artist, Lemma Guya at the African Art Museum and Training Institute, Debre-Zeit, Ethiopia. He obtained a B.A. (Hons) in Fine Arts in 1997 as the overall best student and M.A. in Art History in 2010, both from the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. He earned his PhD in Art History from The African American University, India, in 2025. Between 1989 and 1996, Mufu Onifade's ceaseless studio experiments culminated in the invention of a painting technique, which he called *Araism*. The concept of *Araism* is structured from artistic technique, philosophy and contextualization, all derived from general African and particularly Yoruba cosmology. The technique was launched with a solo exhibition of 32 paintings by Mufu Onifade at the Goethe-Institut (German Cultural Centre), Lagos, Nigeria, in 1998. His second solo show was held at the French Cultural Centre, Ikoyi, Lagos, Nigeria, in 2005. He has showcased *Araism* in his participation in more than fifty joint and group exhibitions, till date, such as: the first African Regional Summit and Exhibition on Visual Arts (ARESUYA) in 2008, International Art Expo, Las Vegas, also in 2008, and recently, in 2025, the West African Economic Summit Art Exhibition in Abuja

Conceptualising Araism

Araism is a painting style developed from a technique that evolves philosophically from the acronym ARA (Aesthetically Rich Art). As has been rigorously displayed over the years, the bedrock of Araism is aesthetics. The strength of any work executed in the technique of Araism is viewed, first and foremost, from its aesthetic appeal. All other derivatives such as content, theme and context are subsumed under aesthetics. By extension, Araism is developed based on four original Yoruba root words namely Ara (wonder), Ara (thunder), Ara (skin or body) and Ara (relative or relation). These are components conspicuously present in any finished work of Araism irrespective of the artist who produced it. Araism is easily marked by its technique, approach and subsequently style. A style refers to an artist's unique combination of techniques, processes, and decisions. It develops and evolves over the lifetime of an artist (Scot, 2002). Outstanding features as form, colour, and subject matter, are often characteristic of an individual signature, group of people, or a civilization.

So many painting techniques have existed before the emergence of Araism. These include Impasto, a technique often achieved with the use of palette knife or brush or any other tool chosen by the artist. Impasto is a technique used in painting, whereby paint is laid on an area of the surface

thickly, usually thick enough that the brush or painting-knife strokes are visible. Pigments or paints can also be mixed right on the canvas. That the paint must be applied in thick layers account for the description of Impasto as thick application of colour. When dry, Impasto provides texture; the paint appears to be coming out of the canvas. Glazing, which is an exact opposite of Impasto is another technique. It is done by diluting the pigments and layering one colour over another. Glazing lends softness and gracefulness to the surface. It is most effective with an under-painted tone and glazes applied on top. Hence, glazing means thin application of colour. This is often achieved with the use of brush or any other soft tool. The technique of Araism often appears in subtle glazed Impasto, and the palette knife, which is used to apply colour systematically breaks strokes into bits and units that create cracks. Those cracks are the distinguishing characterization of the technique. The strength and spinal cord of Araism is firmly structured in technique. It has been defined as the authentic African painting technique. Ayodele (2023:50) describes the stylistic techniques of Araism as paintings “marked by granules of paint strokes that interrelate to form patterns, textures and images...reminiscent of European Post-Impressionism”

According to Abodunrin (2014), a style may be associated with an entire culture within a particular time and place, a group of artists, an individual, or a particular institution over a period of time. This is in tandem with the position of Getlin (2002). Nigerian scholars have classified contemporary Nigerian art into plausible compartments from where intelligent interrogation could be done. Jegede (1983) gave a broad framework based on two major forms of training methods namely the ‘formal school’ and informal school’ i.e training that occurred in the school system and the training done at workshop centres. Filani (1988) has also proposed classification by chronology where artistic practices are interrogated based on historical sequence. Fosu (1986) ventilates an argument based on historical sequence without reference to form. Adepegba (1995) in different studies classified African art with particular reference to painting into periodic, local, individual, naturalism, abstraction, and expressive styles while Aremu (1989), Osegi (1990), Folaranmi and Oparinde (2005) classified painting into naturalistic, ideal-naturalism, semi-naturalism, abstract, semi-abstract, stylized and expressive styles. Invariably, many artists have developed styles within the framework of a general style and stick to it for personal identity. In most cases, these are achieved through the divergent use of materials, techniques, and media manipulation to create a personal effect and identity in art.

These groups of artists are those who do not follow the strict ideas and philosophy of the formal and informal training. They have self-developed styles through manipulation of material and subject matter. These independent artists must have acquired one form of training either from formal institutions or attended the workshop, but they can be seen with one independent style. They are

consistent with the style and techniques, which make them outstanding among their peers. According to Kalilu et al, (2015), stylistic expressions in Nigerian painting are those expressions which illustrate the scene of socio-cultural and political life of the people irrespective of the location of the artists, with diverse manipulations of subject matter, mediums and techniques. Such paintings portray issues relating to the environment and draws inspiration of style and technique from traditional art forms found in textiles, sculpture, weaving and architecture embedded in the Nigerian society. It also represents the use of symbols, themes and subject matter that is related to Nigerian scenes. A recent survey of the painting in Nigeria shows that figural expressions are very common with diverse styles, especially among the professional artists). Although, the paintings are predominantly figural compositions, still-life, landscape, nature and abstract.

Apart from the mastery of technique, the style of any artwork has much to do with its historical context, subject matter, symbolism and more. Aig-Imuokhuede, (1998) stated that the multiplicity of styles is a recurrent testimony to the development and spread of art and its many practitioners. Despite the diversity of styles and the frequency of their evolution in contemporary Nigerian art, a traceable pattern is discernable. According to Egonwa (1998:3), art could be the evaluation of evolution and historical context of styles or as a technical language. In whatever measure, art historical study of style evolution often addresses the issue of origin, context, distributive patterns, source of style index and the creative exponents of these styles. And such is the case of Araism by Mufu Onifade. However, while his style of Araism is distinctive, there are distinguishing features that define the work of one practitioner of Araism from another. Though the technique of Araism painting was experimented upon and invented by Mufu Onifade while the technique itself is now redefined by various styles by the practitioners of the technique. For the purpose of this essay, the focus is Mufu Onifade's works in Araism and how they interpret Ifa themes and philosophies while also examining their contemporary relevance.

Araism Movement is an offshoot of Araism painting technique, which entails a process of cumbersome technicalities deserving of intense experimentation. The spread of the technique began when Mufu took a decision to teach interested artists who wished to learn it. Having trained more than enough students in a period of eight years, the need for a platform to accommodate all these students naturally arose. This led to the emergence of the Araism Movement in 2006. The movement was born with an official grouping of interested artists who are today known as disciples (all of them sharing a common fraternity). With the emergence of the movement, the reflection on both the styles in, and the techniques of, Araism became imperative. Araism is unique, the diverse styles from the technique are

fascinating, and the Araism Movement is the bond that binds the members together to project a common ideology based on the technique style.

Methodology

This is an art-historical research that requires participatory field investigation. The research methodology adopted was qualitative, necessitating interviews with the artist, Mufu Onifade, *Ifa* traditionalists, and custodians of Yoruba culture. Critical observation of photographic documentation and the review of related literature also provided data. Valuable data was collected from the following important resource persons:

1. Chief Yemi Adeyemi, popularly known in *Nollywood* as Baba Suara, had worked extensively with Mufu Onifade. Several personal communications with him aided Mufu's understanding of the literature on *Ifa* and its essence to human existence.
2. Moses Akintonde, presently a professor of Art History at the Ladoké Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, during a personal communication in 2016. He gave the analysis on the trilogy of *Akunleyan*, *Ayanmo* and *Kadara*.
3. Chief Ajide A. Ifatunji is a successful *Ifa* priest based in Ajah, Lagos. His versatility in *Ifa* oral tradition has been made manifest many times over. In the conversation with Mufu Onifade on November 22, 2025, he offered to support the concept of *Alajobi* with an *Odu Ifa*. He carefully recited the *Odu* that supports the painting of *Alajobi* (Plate 7) He also recited an *Odu Ifa* that supports *Tibi Tire* (Plate 8).
4. Mr. Ifa Dare, a social media *Ifa* crusader who has treated issues of existence from *Ifa* belief system.
5. Mr. Kanmi Ola Falase whose *Facebook* page is dedicated to *Ifa* worldview and belief system. His analysis of *Tibi Tire* (Plate 8) is apt and finds relevance in the concept under discussion.

Theoretical Framework

The paper is hung on the theory of iconology. The theory of iconology was developed by German-Jewish art historian Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968) and is the interpretation of the meanings of forms of artistic objects. In this paper, the theory is applied in the iconographic description, classification, and symbolisms of Mufu's paintings. The paintings are described, and the applicable content is deduced through its symbolisms

Ifa Concepts in Mufu Onifade's Paintings

This paper interrogates eight paintings from Mufu Onifade's Araism. Typically, themes in Mufu's body of work generally derive from Yoruba cosmology, philosophy and oral traditions that are

salutary sociocultural edifices. These include Ifa proverbs, adages, panegyrics, and poetry like *iyere ifa* (Ifa tonal poetry), *ijala ode* (hunter's poetry), *ekun iyawo* (bridal poetry), and *ewi* (social poetry). Mufu's paternal descent from a traditional farmer/hunter and later deliberate interest in Yoruba culture and traditions have aided his enculturation and acculturation, making Yoruba culture his idiom of artistic expression. As he approached themes or stories from Ifa corpus, he embraced enormous materials from Ifa. His interest in Ifa began in 1999 when he was commissioned by the Ifa-Yoruba Contemporary Arts Trust (I-YCAT), sponsored by the London Arts Board, to produce a painting titled Obara Meji (Plate 1). At that time, his knowledge of Ifa was limited. Yet the organisers of the project titled '16 Pieces' had picked him as one of the 16 artists selected from seven countries, namely: Nigeria, USA, UK, Brazil, Trinidad & Tobago, Cuba, and Ghana.

The massive project planned the works to form the content of a touring exhibition. It was ceremoniously opened in London in 2000 before embarking on a tour of many cities majorly Europe and the USA. It was in the course of that research that Mufu discovered that the 16 principal Odu of Ifa were not the only existing Ifa verses. Each of the 16 verses has an additional 15 verses and this means that the total number of Ifa verses present in the Ifa corpus is 256. He was also to discover that each of these 256 verses contains 1,680 stories! Most ifa priests are reputed to be illiterate. That argument is only sustained if illiteracy is viewed from western perspective, but in all practicality, no one is more informed than an Ifa priest. According to Chief Yemi Adeyemi (2016), who had worked extensively with Mufu on Ifa and creativity, "Orunmila was reputed for being the custodian of ancient wisdom and knowledge because he sees and knows what others do not see or know." This accounts for the reason he is central to the spirituality of all other Yoruba deities such as Oya, Sango, Ogun, Yemoja, Olokun, Obatala and their acolytes. The following carefully selected paintings are interrogated within the confluence of Ifa philosophy and oral history and Araisim's ideology, style and visual narration.



PLATE 1: Mufu Onifade. *Obara Meji*. Tempera on Canvas. 152.4 152 X 122 cm. 2000. Source of Photograph: Onifade, Mufu (2025)

i. *Obara Meji* (Plate 1)

There are 1,680 stories derivable from *Odu* of Ifa. One of the stories, *Obara Meji*, is visually interpreted in Mufu's painting (Plate 1) Documented by Ibie (1986), *Obara Meji* is a principal *Odu* which tells the story of Eji-Obara, a personification of one of the 16 principal *Odu*s, who was destined for great prosperity. According to Ifa, Eji-Obara was advised to make sacrifices to enable him properly manage his prosperity. When all the principal *Odu*s went on a mission to the Olofin's palace, Eji-Obara decided to consult Ifa again as an individual. According to the story, he was given additional sacrifices and advice that helped him succeed where the others failed. Ajagunna (2024), commented that *Odu Obara*, particularly *Obara Meji*, is one of the most dynamic and multi-faceted *Odu*s in the Ifá corpus. It represents the themes of transformation, strength or spirit of force, and wealth, while also cautioning coercive or ego-driven actions, betrayal, and the complexities of power. This *Odu* also speaks of resilience and the potentiality for growth after adversity. Mufu's painting is a juxtaposition of several images representing the icons of the *Odu* such as the *opon ifa* (divination board, overlaid with personified forms of Eji-Obara, Olofin, and esu (idolized in Red and Blue, depicting its duality to create good and evil). The passages, challenges, pitfalls and changes of life's journey are represented in the painting as anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms.



PLATE 2: Mufu Onifade. *Iroke* Acrylic on Canvas. 154cm x 91cm. 2008.
Source of Photograph: Onifade, Mufu (2025)

ii. *Iroke* (Plate 2)

This painting by Mufu centralizes on the *Iroke*, an Ifa priest's material companion. Wherever a *Babalawo* (priest/diviner) goes, the *Iroke* goes with him. It forms part of his dress paraphernalia just the way the *Irukere* (horse whisk) embellishes the dressing of a *Ọba* while symbolizing his authority. An *Iroke* is often made of ivory, but some are made of wood. It is carved into a long cone shape that is slightly expanded at the base. The base is hollow and the tip is pointed. The *Iroke* is not just a symbol of an Ifa priest, it is an object with which the priest constantly but gently strikes the *Opón Ifá* (Divination Board) as he recites an *Iyere Ifá* (Ifa tonal poetry). While the oral poetry is going on, the sound of the *Iroke* on the board evokes the spirit of Ifa and the *Odu* being recited. In this painting, Mufu deliberately magnified the *Iroke* bigger than the *Opón Ifá*. This was meant to emphasise its importance in the process of consultation/divination while also not losing sight of the symbolic authority of the *Babaláwo* or *Iyanifa*. The face carved on the round board represents *Èṣù*.

Every *Opón Ifá* must have the symbolic face as a reminder that in every consultation and divination, *Esu* is present. In real life consultation, it is *Èṣù* who carries *Èbọ* (sacrifice) for those tasked

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or directed to make a sacrifice. To this end, the divination must be done in the presence of the deity so he can follow the problem from the beginning of divination while also getting involved in the choice of whatever ingredients are prescribed for the *Ebo*. This Mufu's painting is layered with two groups of people: individuals clinging to the divination board, representing acolytes whose faith in Ifá is unshakeable and mass people in the background depicting other spiritual inclinations, thoughts, religions and philosophies, watching skeptically from afar. The cowry shells in the painting represent *Erindínlógún*. It is with these 16 shells any Ifá priest consults Ifá to capture the revelation of any of the 256 Odus

iii. *Igba Kadara II (Bowl of Destiny) (Plate 3)*

This Mufu's painting is the third in a series. The first one was produced in 1997 and exhibited at the launching of the Araism painting technique in 1998. The painting derives from the Ifa philosophy of human destiny accentuated by the chant:

<i>Bí a bá dáyé –</i>	Once on earth
<i>Bí a ʒe pé a yòò rí –</i>	Our spiritual predestination
<i>Là a rí -</i>	Becomes our physical manifestation

According to Asanee (2024, 24). Destiny runs across many Odus in Ifa Corpus. It is the central frame of being. According to Mufu (2025), his personal communication with Moses Akintomide (2016), presently a Professor of Art and Art History, established that there are three components of human existence in Ifa philosophy. This is called a tripod of the nature or essence of a person. These components are *Akunleyan*, *Ayanmo* and *Kádàrà*. *Akunleyan* (kneel and choose.) is a man's only privilege to kneel down and choose his destiny before embarking on the journey to earth. *Ayanmo* is celestial additions to a man's choice and compliment the choices. *Kadara* is also what many refer to as "Destiny" It is believed to be pre-ordered and cannot be changed in existence. Mufu's painting titled *Igbá Kádàrà* (Plate 3) shows a man in a kneeling position adorned with white beads of the initiate (*Sese Efun*) that symbolises innocence and purity, holds firmly to his *Igbá Kádàrà* (bowl of destiny). He is satisfying the two processes of *Akunleyan* and *Ayanmo*. The painting shows that while the calabash he holds is physically conspicuous to him, the same calabash has transformed into a spiritual object that now precedes his journey to earth. The stylized human figure is deliberately presented in the form of a sculptural piece that captures the core of African aesthetics.



PLATE 3: Mufu Onifade. *Igba Kadara II* (Bowl of Destiny). Acrylic on Canvas. 153cm x 122cm. 2014.

Source of Photograph: Onifade, Mufu (2025)



PLATE 4: Mufu Onifade. *Bara Agbonmiregun*. Acrylic on Canvas. 65cm x 38cm. 2005.

Source of Photograph: Onifade, Mufu (2025)

iv. *Bara Agbonmiregun* (Plate 4)

Bara Agbonmiregun is the other name for *Orunmila*. *Bara Agbonmiregun* is one of the many cognomens often recited by Ifa priests and acolytes to propagate Orunmila's reputation and efficacy. Orunmila is considered a prophet and priest who founded the Ifa religion. In Ifa religion, he is generally reputed as an old man with a long beard. He is believed to be the custodian and sole embodiment of wisdom, ancient knowledge, patience, perseverance and understanding who serves as a model of good character for humanity. Orunmila's characteristics include wisdom because he is revered by other deities as the one who is all-knowing. He is called *Èlérìl Ìpín* (a witness) of man's *Akunleyan* and *Ayanmo*. In this painting, Orunmila called *Bara Agbonmiregun* is seen here in a standing posture. His white beards represent old age as a sign of ancestral vitality. He is dressed in white *danshiki* dress often imitated by many Ifa priests. The white colour is symbolic of the purity often associated with Orunmila. The walking stick, like the white beard is also a sign of ancestral mortality. On his left-hand side is a *Opón Ifá*, (divination board or tray) with his *opẹlẹ* (cowry shells or palm kernel). These formal symbolisms visually substantiate Orunmila as the spirit of wisdom, destiny, and prophecy in the Ifa spiritual system.



PLATE 5: Mufu Onifade *Apeere (Ori)*. Acrylic on Canvas. 91cm x 85cm. 2011.
Source of Photograph: Onifade, Mufu (2025)

v. *Apeere* (Destiny) (Plate 5)

Apeere is a deeper name for *Ori* (Destiny). *Apeere* is often interchangeably used for *Ori* or *Destiny*. In Ifa cosmology, it is believed that beyond the physicality of the human head, *Ori Inú* (Inner Head) aptly captures human spiritual consciousness that must be constantly attended to. The neglect of *Ori Inú* often breeds disruption and disaster. Osunniyi (2022) in his *Ifa Concept of Patterns of Consciousness* asserts the role of *Ori Apeere*, which must not be wished away. He insists that the phrase *Ori Apeere* translates to mean the pattern, the example, or the signs of consciousness whose physical representation is found on the Head. In the painting, the physicality easily comprehensible is the representation of a head. Mufu consciously patterned the facial forms (bulging eyes, protruding lips, elaborate coiffure, large and emphasized nostrils and ear, and a stratified beard) in semblance with the characteristics of Yoruba woodcarving. The result is a threedimensionality that embellishes the meaning of the painting.



PLATE 6: Mufu Onifade. *Asoro Dayo (Harbinger of Joy)*. Acrylic on Canvas 68.5cm x 58.5cm. 2005. Source of Photograph: Onifade, Mufu (2025)

vi. *Asoro Dayo (Harbinger of Joy)* (Plate 6)

Mufu's painting titled *Asoro Dayo (Harbinger of Joy)* (Plate 6) is an artfied symbolism of a *Opón Ifá*, which is a carved wooden divination board or tray used in the Ifá divination system. Ifa priests popularly known as *Babalawo*, use the tray or board as diviners in their intermediation between divinity and terrestrial, by casting nuts or seeds or cowry shells onto the surface, and interpreting the resulting patterns. These trays are in themselves richly ornamented art objects with surface motifs called *Ọnà*. *Ọnà* defines dual functionality of the tray as a spiritual object and a piece of art. Mufu re-created the icons of the *Ọnà* on the tray such as *Ojú Èṣù (Èṣù's Face)*, the image of a chameleon, which spiritually symbolizes adaptability and transformation, a manila, which symbolizes wealth, and the symbolic patterns of *Agbó*, *Ató* and *Àíkú* which are all representatives of longevity. The cowry shells (*Èrìndínlógún*) used for divination is also juxtaposed in the painting. The *Odù Ifá* depicted on the tray in *Asoro Dayo (Harbinger of Joy)* (Plate 4) is *Èjì Ogbè*, the number one *Odù* of all the 256 *Odùs*.

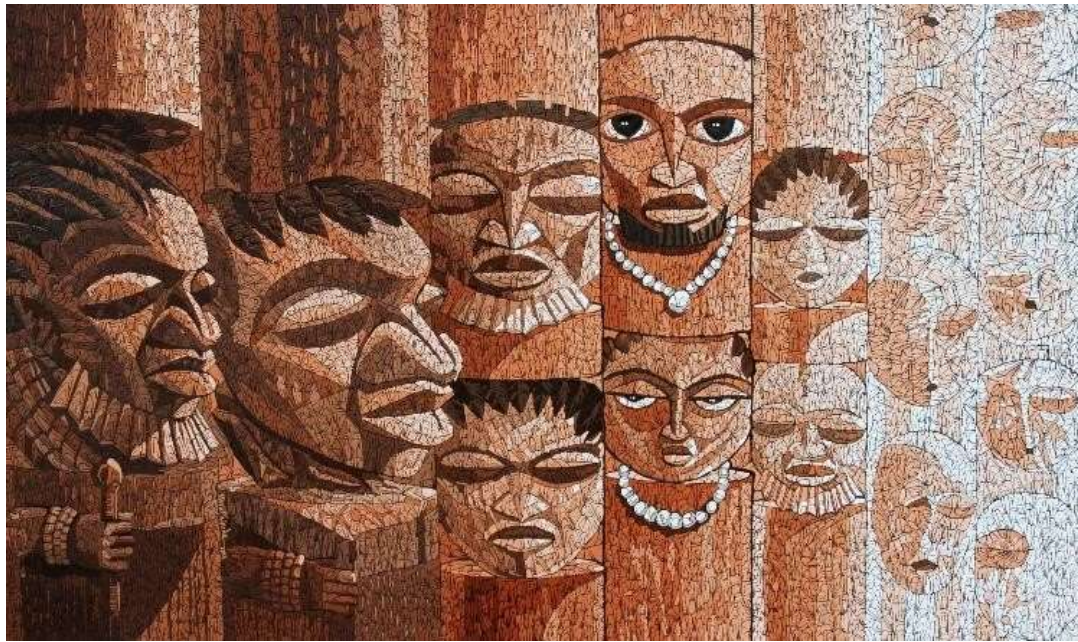


Plate 7: Mufu Onifade. *Alajobi (Ancestral Lineage)*. Acrylic on Canvas / 150cm x 90cm / 2013.
Source of Photograph: Onifade, Mufu (2025)

vii. *Alajobi* (Ancestral Lineage) (Plate 7)

Alajobi refers to the powerful, shared spiritual bond or essence that unites members of an extended family group or lineage also known as *ajobi*. It is a system of ancestral justice and shared destiny. *Ajobi* represent relationships linked by blood and forms the foundation of the larger family, representing extensive family ties that might include distant relatives who still belong to the same family tree. When invoked, *Alajobi* is a spiritual force that intervenes in social crises among lineage members. It promotes rewards to individuals who have a reputation for being good to the family. The reward can even be blessings extended to the offspring of such a good person. *Alajobi* also punishes evil doers whether the spirit is invoked or not. In the painting, Mufu used the compositional principles of repetition and similarity of forms and monochromatic colour tonal gradation to buttress both the bond and longevity in the lineage.



Plate 8: Mufu Onifade *Tibi Tire (Pains and Gain)*. Acrylic on Canvas. 91cm x 61cm. 2014.
Source of Photograph: Onifade, Mufu (2025)

viii. *Tibi Tire (Pain and Gain) (Plate 8)*

According to Ifa corpus, the human existence dwells on the effective interplay of *ire* (good, gain or positive) and *ibi* (bad, pain, and negative) and the earth is rooted with the claws of two major forces: positive and negative. Mufu's painting *Tibi Tire (Pains and Gain)* (Plate 4) is a personified stylization of the philosophical reality exemplified in the human birth process whereby two things are carried in the womb and delivered at the same time: the baby and the placenta. The negativity (placenta) is discarded and the positivity (baby) is embraced. The painting shows a fully pregnant woman ready for delivery. The juxtaposition of the baby in the woman's abdomen and the placenta deliberately presented outside the body conceptually support *Tibi Tire*. The dominant red colour is representative of the blood often lost by women during child birth. It also represents life that both the mother and the baby enjoy.

Conclusion

Several painting styles and techniques have emerged, flourished and metamorphosed on the Nigerian art scene. The niche cut out by Mufu for himself in painting through the invention of Araism technique, style and movement has not only impacted contemporary Nigerian art but also the iconography of Ifa religion and Yoruba culture. Painting, as an aspect of visual arts, is one form of art that expresses information, codifies it formally and allows the audience to interact and objectively interpret the content and meaning. Hence, painting is not only a medium for recording human history, but also a tool for narrating a wide range of real time activities and experiences (Abodunrin, 2014: 7).

Many scholars have classified contemporary Nigerian art into relevant groupings from where intelligent interrogation could be done. Jegede (1983) gave a broad framework based on two major forms of training methods namely the 'formal school' (training that occurred in the classroom school system) and informal school' (the training done at art workshop centres). Filani (1988) has also proposed classification by chronology where artistic practices are interrogated based on historical sequence. Fosu (1986) ventilates an argument based on historical sequence without reference to form. Adepegba (1995) in different studies classified African art with particular reference to painting into periodic, local, individual, naturalism, abstraction, and expressive styles while Aremu (1989), Osegi (1990), Folaranmi and Oparinde (2005) classified painting into naturalistic, ideal-naturalism, semi-naturalism, abstract, semi-abstract, stylized and expressive styles.

These classifications also group Nigerian artists many of whom have developed styles for personal identity and sometimes patronage. In most cases, these are achieved through the divergent use of materials, techniques, and media manipulation to create a personal effect and identity in art. These groups of artists are those who do not follow the strict ideas and philosophy of the formal and informal training. They have self-developed styles through manipulation of material and subject matter. However, impacting society is beyond just creating a style, the art work must evoke intellectual conversations on human life and existence. Mufu's artistic collaboration with an ancient tradition and religion such as Ifa is a classic effort at leaving a legendary legacy

Mufu Onifade's Araism painting technique is rooted in African culture and tradition. His interest in and iconic documentation of Ifa religion and Yoruba culture, visually concretizes oral tradition. The works analyzed in this essay were purposively selected to project the non-visual rhetoric of Ifa philosophy which is the root religion of a very large Yoruba population and how such rich oral, poetic cognomen remains relevant in contemporary thought processes. The *Odu Ifa*, though ancient, has been applicable to contemporary life experiences (politics, kingship, commerce, morality, marriage, work ethics, etc.) Mufu's painstaking visual interpretation in line with his Araism paintings is an eternal iconographic contribution to Ifa religion and the society it sustains.

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