



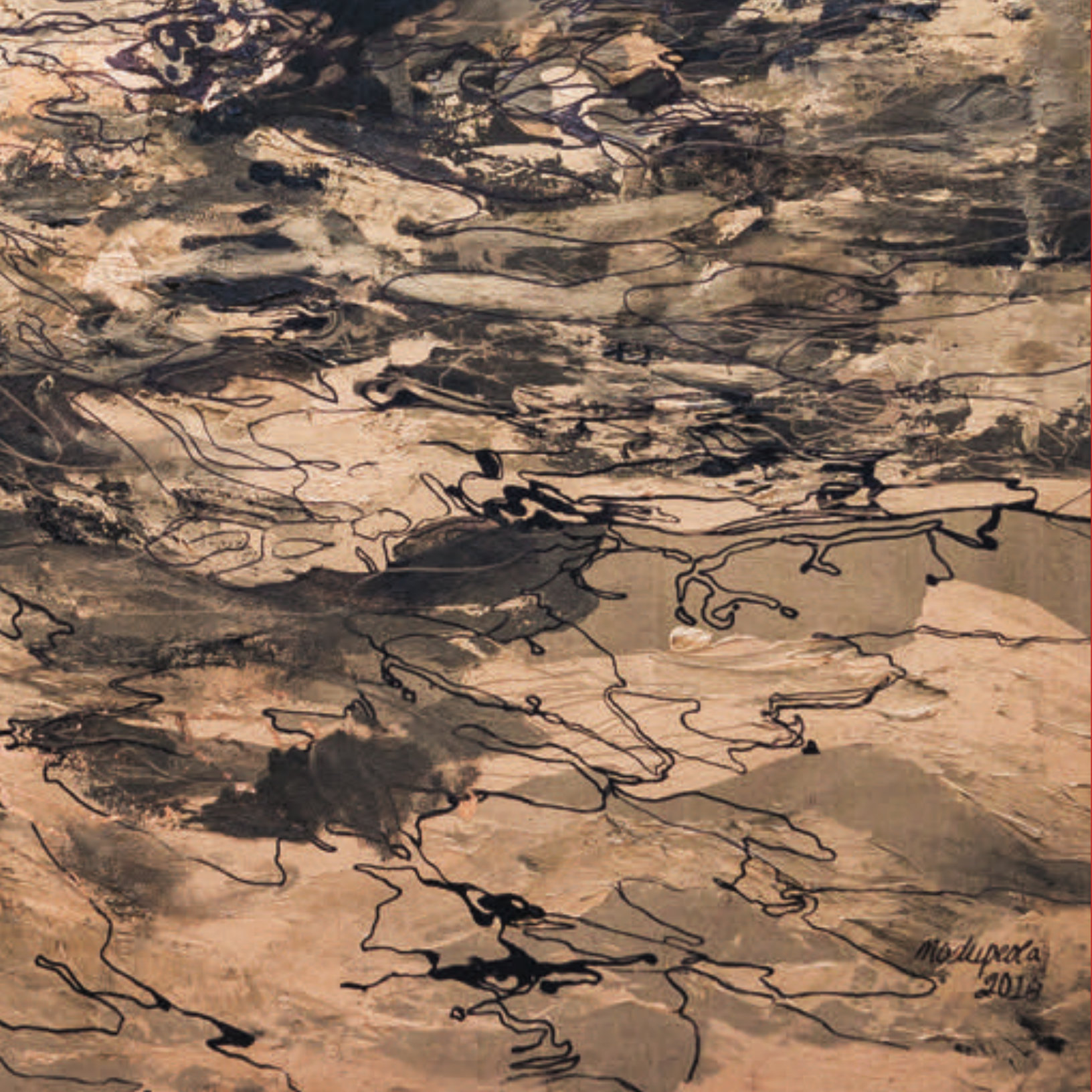
like play,
like play

modupeola fadugba

Dak'Art
Biennale

2016

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Modupeola
2018

like play,
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Like Play, Like Play
Modupeola Fadugba
Dak'Art Biennale of Contemporary African Art
May 2016

Exhibition sites:
Ancien Palais de Justice
Le Phare des Mamelles

Foreword
By Azu Nwagbogu

Artists from and working on the continent of Africa are often unfairly, I would argue, expected to make art that is politically charged or otherwise socially engaged but this bearing denies the full range of human expression which art serves and somewhat diminishes the power of the message to another didactic dictum. But the message and the experience of *The People's Algorithm* by Modupe Fadugba whilst being both politically charged and socially conscious is powerful and, what is more, atavistic - a reversion to the participatory nature of art practice in Africa that involves partaking in the experience whilst engaged in the observation. A genuine case of art as experience.

I recently came across a meme that inquired: what if Mark Zuckerberg was born in Lagos, Nigeria, to parents from Mushin (a notorious area in Lagos Mainland) would we have Facebook? Chance surely plays a role in shaping our collective and individual destinies but knowledge of what we need to do in creating the right environment to nurture talent is not down to destiny. For indeed this knowledge grants us power and the need to invest in education is paramount especially for rapidly exploding populations as is the case in Nigeria and all over Africa. This is my take away from Fadugba's *The People's Algorithm*.

Modupe came to nationwide attention in Nigeria at the 2014 National Art Competition organised by the African Artists' Foundation with Prof El Anatsui as the head of the artistic selection committee and jury. Her prize was for 'outstanding production' and in the short time since winning this prestigious award her art has travelled across the world. It is very heartwarming to see that others across Africa will have the opportunity to engage with Modupe and her art at the 2016 edition of Dak'Art as Dakar becomes the centre of the art world.

Azu Nwagbogu

Director, African Artists' Foundation

There are **10.5** million
out of school in

What do we do?

A. The government should build more schools

B. Private enterprises should create more affordable private schools

C. Teachers should be better trained



Weighty Games
By Allyn Gaestel

Modupeola Fadugba's work is beguilingly beautiful. It shimmers. It enchants. It lures you in and if you stay on the surface, it pleases. Like water on a sunny day, it glistens.

But you don't comprehend the depth of a pool until you jump. You only feel the strength of the current once you wade into the sea.

In *The People's Algorithm* (2014), featured in the 2016 Dak'Art Biennial of Contemporary African Art, the viewer enters a larger than life cube with a game board on the floor. You pick a role. You throw dice. You spin a coin: heads or tails. It looks like child's play. But you are actually gambling with the fate of a nation. Modupeola turned Nigeria's education crisis into a toy. As in the real world, you are subjected to chance and dismal odds, but you try to strategize as best you can. Maybe you will win a scholarship to Harvard. More likely you drop out of primary school. If you somehow scratch your way to university you may languish for years amid strikes. If you graduate, you face mass unemployment.

Modupeola studied engineering, education and economics and has worked in education for the last decade. Her artistic work reflects these concerns as she explores games, calculation and value. She works in series, her ideas developing and deepening during the production process. The series lead into each other as well. She is early in her career but already she has identified themes that intrigue her, and through her work her questions deepen.

Her interest in education translates into an almost pedagogical relationship to the viewer. She draws you in sweetly, then wave by wave, the depths of the work reveals itself. Like Nigerian soul singer Asa sweetly crooning, "I'm a prisoner, you're a prisoner too Mr. Jailer" over a lilting melody, Modupeola paints her moral quandaries in silver and gold.

These bedazzled images of oppression reflect what the esteemed late Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe termed "life's intimidating complexity."

Modupeola's OFF Exhibition Like Play, Like Play at Le Phare des Mamelles in Dakar furthers the investigation into dualisms. The Tagged series (2015-6) is a picturesque and deceptively leisurely illustration of two potentially weighty games. At first glance the work appears to depict a bright, gold leaf encrusted pool party. But symbolically, the floating red dots represent the stickers placed on the labels of sold artworks. The art market is a complex game, where money, value and worth are intertwined, but also taboo. An artist blatantly motivated by sales or money is considered impure, or said to have sold out. Yet the price of works sold undoubtedly ranks artists and translates into (and reflects) the less tangible concepts of prestige and respect. Modupeola writes, "In the game, there are only two rules: 1. Stay in the pool. 2. (Pretend to) ignore the red ball."

The pictorial inspiration for the Tagged series drew in part from another morally ambiguous game. On her last visit to Dakar, Modupeola was on the boat to Gorée Island, the infamous slave port. As the boat neared the shore, she was entranced by the sight of nimble boys swimming and diving near the bough. Then she realized they were diving for gold. The (mostly White) tourists were throwing coins from their seats as if into a wishing well.

In this game you can't pick a role. You can't switch places. Perhaps this is a sinister and dehumanizing relationship, a distant and much less violent echo of the hierarchical master/slave relationship memorialized on the island.

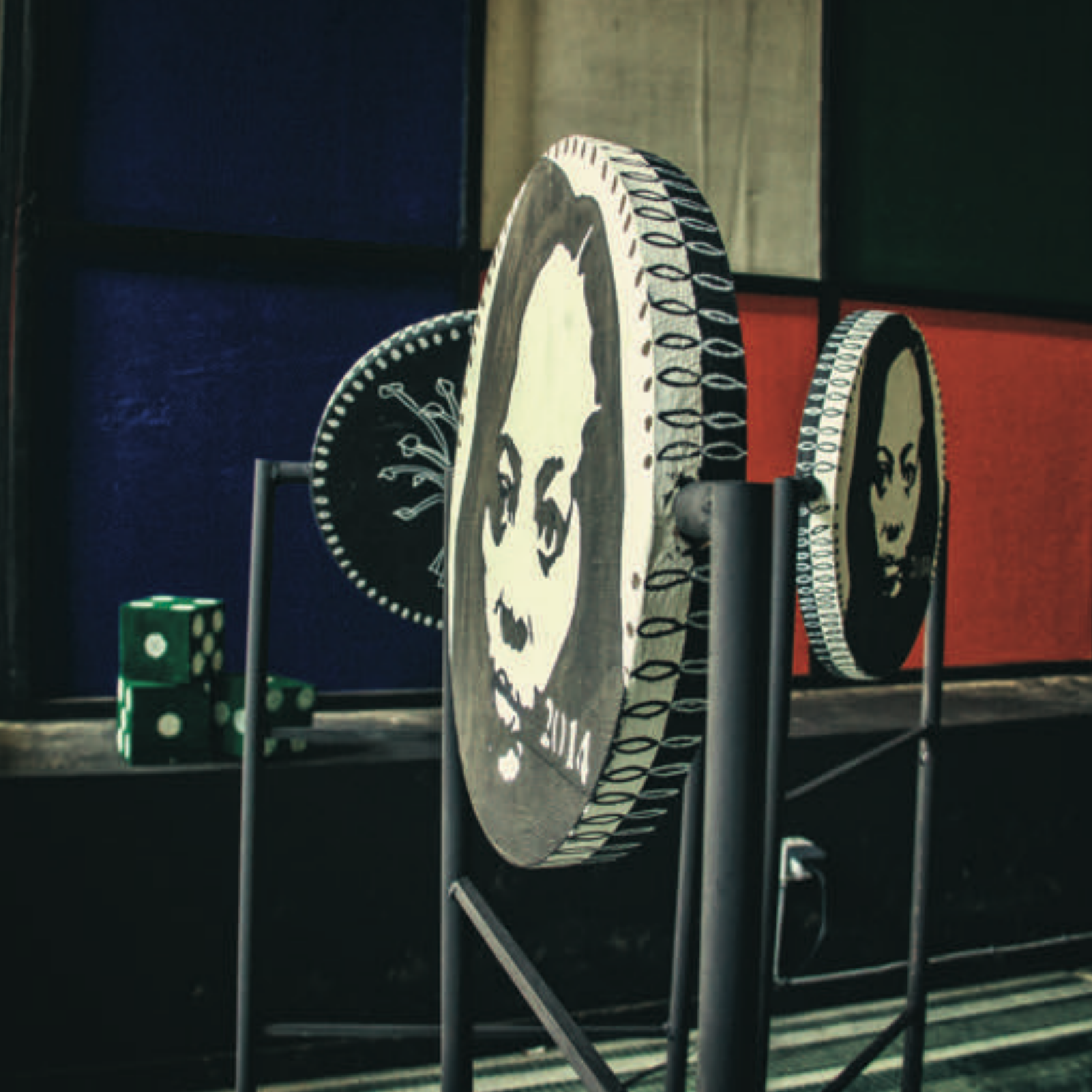
But then again, the coins thrown are often foreign and so worthless in Senegal. Modupeola observed the boys quizzically examining the coins once they caught them. Maybe, after all, this was just a game: a leisurely sport, a friendly competition on a Sunday afternoon. What is the point of swimming for something that isn't even valuable? Well, that's what games are. Perhaps the boys were diving not for valuable currency, but to build a coin collection at home. The work does not answer.

If they were doing so, they would fit well into Modupeola's aesthetic relationship to the world. Her third series shown in Dakar, Heads or Tails (2014-6) was inspired by her childhood fantasies around currency. When she moved to England as a teen, she was captivated by the aesthetic of the pound coins. She particularly liked the bust of one perfectly coiffed white woman: Queen Elizabeth. It is a similar aesthetic to coins in the United States, also featuring profiles of white busts, though the American ones are exclusively male. In Nigeria there are Black men on Naira notes, but few women. In fact, women of color are almost never printed on money. "This perhaps plays into how we perceive ourselves when we think about our worth," Modupeola observes.

This series, through intricate graphic imagery, reimagines money with Black women as the busts. Braids replace tiaras and wigs. The fact that this is abnormal, in Modupeola's view, is a question of chance, fallout from some imagined coin-flip centuries back. This series questions whether Black women are, or must be, heads or tails.

Must the tourists tossing the coins be white? Must the boys diving to retrieve them be Black? Can the coins they collect reflect a likeness of themselves? Is it all just a game?

Perhaps life is a game, or a series of games. The final outcome may be death, but before that there are few clear victories or losses. Our trials strengthen us; our success can torment us. Modupeola's games, similarly, don't end with a straightforward victory or loss. The results are inconclusive, dualistic, and endless. She leaves us to question.



Biography

Modupeola Fadugba is a Nigerian multi-media artist whose practice includes painting, drawing and installations. The self-taught artist holds her M.Ed. (Harvard Graduate School of Education), as well as her MA, Economics, and BA, Chemical Engineering (University of Delaware). Modupeola was born in Togo and has lived in the US, the UK, Rwanda, and Tanzania and currently lives in Abuja. Her peripatetic life experiences have fused into a diverse and unique perspective manifest in her work.

Modupeola's work uses vibrant colors and a graphic quality to overlay intellectually rigorous and socially conscious subjects. Both the works on paper and painting series emphasize texture and surface, including beading and patterning that reflects traditions of artisan textile design. Women feature prominently in the work and the images are often self-portraits. At the nexus of science, politics and fine art, Modupeola is a true polymath. Her diverse body of work creates an active dialogue about issues of social justice, identity, education and the use of art as a vehicle for activism.

Her work has a global reach. Select exhibitions include solo and group shows such as the Harvard Business School Africa Business Conference (2016), The Female Artists Platform at the Ford Foundation with the African Artists' Foundation, Lagos (2015); Red Door Gallery/Art Energy Exhibition, London (2015); The Association of Female Artists in Nigeria (FAAN); "Women in Development" French Embassy, Abuja, (2014). Modupeola has also participated in art fairs such as the Johannesburg Art Fair (2014). Her works have been included in national and international auctions and are held in over 60 private collections worldwide including: Canada, China, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, the UK and the United States.





Like Play Like Play
By Modupeola Fadugba

Like Play, Like Play is a body of work exploring play as a form of resistance to the suppression of freedom of expression and other forms of control. These works, centered on play and games, depict mental and physical playgrounds in which swimming, jumping and the flipping of cards and coins represent alternative viewpoints. Beneath the surface are far more serious undertones: The works mirror challenges that exist -unspoken or spoken- in any social or physical space. Throughout the works, I have loosely applied elements of Game Theory represented by multiple players, who while limited by the presence of other players still try to further their own interests and gains.

Beyond fun and games, the title, Like Play, Like Play bears dual significance: In Nigerian parlance, it is an expression used to describe a sequence of unnoticed events that culminate in an unexpected yet important outcome. I attempt with these works, to take a closer look at largely unnoticed events over time. For me, the beauty of creating artwork in thematic series is the way in which the ideas, concepts and visualization emerge, engage and transform. During the process, I revisit the first works in a series, and this feeds into new works. As such, this exchange is part of the metamorphosis of my own creative process and ideas and allows me critical distance and insight.

Aesthetic quality is a priority, but my work also seeks to move beyond this visual appeal. I intend to engage my audience in a dialogue about Nigeria's current social and political landscape to perhaps incite both individual and collective change.

The People's Algorithm

My education spanned four countries and three university degrees. I have always known this was a result of incredible luck. Working in education in Nigeria I saw just how stark the other possibilities are. There are 10.5 million children out of school, 20 million unemployed young people and interminable university strikes. The People's Algorithm is an attempt to bring Nigeria's enormous and complex education and unemployment crises into an accessible format as a board game. It is childlike in its aesthetic, but the game is serious, a reflection of life-altering chances and choices.

Participants have the option of playing one of three games as teachers, students, or policymakers. The "Did you know," "Heads or Tails" and "Intervention" sections of the game give participants the opportunity to collect data, experience challenges and present solutions, respectively. Ruled by chance, players roll dice to move along the game board, learning facts and taking actions to try to win the battle against under-education and under-employment. It aims to show that everyone—teachers, students, parents, and policymakers alike—can contribute to the nation's problem-solving efforts.

The People's Algorithm won Prof. El Anatsui's Outstanding Production Prize in the 2014 National Art Competition, Nigeria, and was selected to exhibit in the Dak'Art Biennial of Contemporary African Art in 2016.



The People's Algorithm
Mixed Media Installation
10' x 10' x 10'
2014

1. CHOOSE A ROLE. PICK A DICE

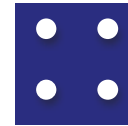
STUDENT



TEACHER



POLICY MAKER



Note the color of the dice you chose, as it will tell you what role you are to play in the game. Note: Your role will not change throughout the game.

2. STARTING FROM

START HERE

ROLL DICE AND TAKE NUMBER OF STEPS INDICATED

You can land on any of the following:



DID YOU KNOW

This light blue block will give you information about the current state of education system in Nigeria. These are facts and statistics that may help inform subsequent decisions in the game.



HEADS OR TAILS

This block tells you, by the flip of a coin, what might happen to you. Sometimes you get lucky, and other times you don't. You will find a coin above your head. Tap lightly to spin it. When the coin stops spinning, it will land on heads (face) or tails (buildings). Look at the chart on the wall beside you to understand your fate. For example, if you are a teacher and you land on heads, open the red book under HEADS.



INTERVENTION

When you land on a yellow box, you will be prompted with a problem and a possible set of interventions. Choose a butterfly-shaped sticker that corresponds to the color of your dice and place the butterfly next to the intervention of your choice.

For example, if you are a student, you will choose the green sticker and place it next to the best course of action.

Heads or Tails (2014-2016)

Several months before our departure from Togo, my parents told my siblings and me that we would be moving to America. I was five years old and had not heard much about America before that point. In fact, my only reference was the green dollar notes my father earned from interpreter jobs at the United Nations. It was quite the departure from the colorful Togolese francs I had grown to trust as valuable.

When I moved to England I was similarly captured by the aesthetics of the pound, particularly the perfectly coiffed older white woman. The Naira has former presidents of Nigeria on the notes, but seldom do you have Black women featured on any type of money.

Does this negative space play into how we as Black women perceive ourselves when we think about our worth? The Heads or Tails series asks whether the Black women I depict are heads or tails. Are they at the top or the bottom of the food chain?

It seems to me that the current hierarchy is another instance of chance. In the beginning of time, if Eve came first and Adam was created from her rib, or if light was bad and dark was good, our perception of gender and color might be different. Maybe the Black woman would have been heads and the White man tails.

My captivation with the faces on money started from an aesthetic draw. But it grew into a pondering of the value entrusted in the decorated paper and metal. People placed such weight in such flimsy objects. My paper coins are burnt in places to reflect my musings on the impermanence of monetary value.

These days, as I explore concepts of value, my paper coins evoke my early and evolving understandings of worth.

“In the beginning of time, if Eve came first and Adam was created from her rib, or if light was bad and dark was good, our perception of gender and color might be different.”



Heads or Tails: Salve Regina II
Colored Pencil and Ink on Burned Paper
20" x 25"
2015



Heads or Tails: Untitled II
Colored Pencil and Ink on Burned Paper
20" x 25"
2016



Heads or Tails: Untitled III
Colored Pencil and Ink on Burned Paper
20" x 25"
2016v



Heads or Tails: Untitled I
Colored Pencil and Ink on Burned Paper
20" x 25"
2015

Tagged (2015-2016)

I believe that for any artist, their art is an extension of themselves, a part that the artist surrenders in exchange for monetary compensation. But I often wonder what the true value of that part surrendered is—and whether this should even preoccupy the artist at all.

In the art world, the elusive “red dot” represents the sale of an artwork and is part of a complex system of approval, status and taste to collectors, dealers and artists alike. In this series, I explore the idea of visibility, exclusivity, ownership and selling artwork as competing interests.

The decision to use the pool, as the context for play is deliberate, as feelings about it differ vastly. In Nigeria the pool is both a symbol of luxury and of risk. One assumes that if someone has enough money for a pool they have enough money for all their other needs. At the same time, even those who can afford it sometimes refuse to build a pool out of fear that someone may eventually drown.

Since my work broadly uses themes of games and play, my paintings display a red ball with swimmers engaging in a game to get it. It implies survival: the competition for resources, the battle faced by women trying to create space for themselves, the struggle to swim from Africa and the Middle East to Europe; swimming to attain dreams otherwise elusive at home.

Large bodies of water, like art, represent our internal capacity to be deeply moved by something. When someone commits money to buy art, it is an indication, that they were moved by an aspect of the work. But because artwork is so often an intense expression of the artist’s most profound feelings, the artist’s need for the external validation is perhaps the most dangerous game of all.

There are many players determining this symbolic value - both active participants and observers. Blissfully unaware of the gatekeepers that govern this space, they swim, float, and coast along in the water.

In the game, there are only two rules:

1. Stay in the pool.
2. (Pretend to) ignore the red ball



Tagged: Women and Children, First
Acrylic and goldleaf on canvas
60" x 60"
2015





Madu...
2026

(previous page)

Tagged: The Race

Acrylic and gold leaf on canvas

48" x 96"

2016



Tagged: Senegalese Boys
Acrylic on canvas
60" x 60"
2015



Tagged: Silver
Acrylic and silver leaf on canvas
48" x 48"
2016



Tagged: Look, Very Well
Acrylic and copper leaf on canvas
60" x 60"
2016

Dak'Art

The Dakar Biennale, or Dak'Art - Biennale de l'Art Africain Contemporain, is a major contemporary art exhibition that takes place once every two years in Dakar, Senegal. Dak'Art's focus has been on Contemporary African Art since 1996.

The Dakar Biennale was conceived in 1989 as a biennale alternating between literature and art. The first edition in 1990 was focused on literature and in 1992 on visual art. In 1993 the structure of the biennale was transformed and Dak'Art 1996 became an exhibition specifically devoted to Contemporary African Art. In 1998 the structure was consolidated and in 2000 there was considerable change: Abdoulaye Wade was elected president of Senegal a few months before the opening of the event.

The new president confirmed the support of the Senegalese government for the event and since 2000, Dak'Art has taken place bi-annually. Dak'Art 2002 was characterized by new staff and new partners. Dak'Art 2004 received more international visitors and wider press coverage; during the opening the president announced his intention to organise a new edition of the World Festival of Black Arts. For the first time an artistic director was appointed for Dak'Art 2006 and the event was organised with the participation of many artists and a more consistent budget. In 2008 the biennale decelerated. The event took place on a smaller budget and was organised at the last minute. In 2010 the European Commission - a major financial partner - did not support the event. In December the third edition of the World Festival of Black Arts was organised in Dakar. The 2014 edition was curated by Abdelkader Damani, Elise Atangana and Ugochukwu-Smooth Nzewi.

Dak'Art is the African continent's longest running grand-scale art event. In 2014, it was opened to non-African nationals for the first time, with the exhibition 'Cultural Diversity' at the IFAN Theodore Monod Museum including invited internationals.

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Our service portfolio and knowledge gained from the accomplished projects have positioned the company as a market leader in the network consulting services industry.

Modupeola's ON and OFF exhibition graciously being supported by the Dak'Art Biennale, Zircon Marine Ltd, Tellino Consulting, and Nespresso Dakar.





TABLES