

Chief (Mrs.) Nike Monica Okundaye popularly known and called “MAMA NIKE” by her numerous fans, was born on the 23rd May 1951 in a very quiet and hilly village of Ogidi-Ijumu in Kogi State of Nigeria. Nike is a multi talented individual with a wide range of enduring fortitude. In her early life as a village girl, she was a stage dancer and later became an actress featuring as a lead actress in a local Yoruba film, “Ayaba”. In addition, she has also participated in many documentary films including “KINDRED SPIRITS” sponsored and produced by Smithsonian Museum in Washington DC and a CNN feature documentary film “AFRICAN VOICES”. In January 2016, the CNN again featured Nike in another documentary film “INSIDE AFRICA”. Nike then walked up the ladder to become a rare international icon in art. She is an accomplished professional artist; a painter, a textile artist, weaver, embroider and an awards winner at many national and international art shows. Nike is a member of many national and international professional bodies. She is also principally a social entrepreneur and a well-known philanthropist championing the cause of the neglected Nigerian rural women using art as a tool to accomplish these noble missions. Nike is happily married with children.

Nike is the Managing Director of Nike Centre for Art and Culture, Osogbo where she offers free trainings to all Nigerians in various forms of arts. The centre was established in 1983 by Nike solely from her earnings as an artist and without government assistance. Nike opened this centre with 20 young girls who were marching the streets in Osogbo aimlessly and who had no hopes for the future. In their tender age, Nike withdrew these girls from the streets and provided them with free food, free materials and free accommodation at her residence in Osogbo and taught them how to use their hands to earn a decent living through the art. So far, over 3000 young Nigerians (mainly violated and abused young women) have been trained in the centre and who are now earning their decent living through art. Many African countries now send their students to study textile art at the centre.

The Nike Centre for Art and Culture, Osogbo now admits undergraduate students from many universities in Nigeria for their industrial training programs in textile design. Over the years, this centre now admits students from European countries, Canada and the United States of America. International scholars and other researchers in traditional African art and culture also visit the centre from time to time for their research works in Yoruba “Adire” fabric processing and African traditional dyeing methods.

Nike is also the Owner/Curator of the Nike Art Galleries in Lagos, Osogbo, Ogidi-Ijumu and Abuja. In 1996, Nike established a textile (Aso-Oke) weaving centre at Ogidi-Ijumu near Kabba in Kogi State for the women of the village, employing and empowering more than 200 rural women in the weaving centre. In June 2002, Nike established an Art and Culture research centre at Piwoyi village, FCT Abuja with an art gallery and a textile museum, the first of its kind in Nigeria which will provide a functional platform for research into Nigerian traditional textile industry in the Federal Capital Territory area of Abuja. In furtherance of these noble endeavors, Nike is currently the Managing Director and Founder of the

following organizations in Nigeria; “Nike Art Productions Limited” which she incorporated in 1994, “Nike Art Gallery Limited” which she incorporated in 2007 and the “Nike Research Centre for Art and Culture Limited” which she incorporated in 2007.

Also in 2007, Nike founded the “Nike Art and Culture Foundation” with some notable eminent Nigerians as trustees, with the main aims and objectives of fostering Nigerian cultural heritage. Nike has earned for herself numerous laurels for her hard work, devotion and dedication towards the promotion of art and culture in Nigeria. Just to mention a few of her recent awards and public recognition for her noble efforts in developing the society and mankind, in May 2006, Nike was awarded “Ordine Della Stella Della Solidarieta Italiana” one of the highest Italian national awards of merit by the government of the Republic of Italy in appreciation of her efforts in using art to address and solve the problems of Nigerian prostitutes (sex workers) in Italy.

Nike stopped schooling at primary 6 school level at her village in Ogidi-Ijumu in Kogi State of Nigeria. However, Nike went ahead to teach herself English at home. She never went to school to study art which had brought her to global spotlight. Vocational training in art was passed down to her by her great grandmother, late Madam Ibitola who was an "Adire" textile maker and a dyer of fabric during her days in the village of Ogidi-Ijumu, Nike's birth place. Watching her great grandmother in the art of “Adire” textile processing and helping her out in “Adire” making, Nike walked up the line to become an expert in “Adire” textile making, dyeing, weaving, painting and embroidery. This was the way vocational training was passed down from parents to children in Yoruba communities in those days in Nigeria.

Nike steadily built upon what her great grandmother taught her and went ahead to develop her own unique style and technique in textile design and painting, and how to effectively present them for exhibitions. Nike is a multi-talented person who was able to use her natural given ability to assist and help many less privileged. In that quest, she has been able to give hope to the hopeless in our society. In the same vein, Nike has been able to economically and socially empower many rural women by setting up cottage weaving workshops/centres for women in Abuja, Osogbo and Ogidi-Ijumu thereby giving voices to them in their various communities. Nike experienced many challenges since her activities especially sought to empower women in men dominated societies. The men saw her initiatives and activities to be too out in giving the so called liberties to women who were hitherto oppressed in the rural areas.

In her humble quest to further promote, enhance, sustain and provide enabling environment for the growth of African cultural heritage in Nigeria, Nike single handedly went ahead in 2009 and built a five floor ultra-modern cultural art centre in Lekki Peninsula, Lagos with the main purpose of positively

transforming the landscape of the hitherto neglected art and culture in Nigeria. This building was opened to public in September 2009. This building also holds Nike's second textile museum. It also houses the 4th Nike Art Gallery in Nigeria with a large stock of Nigerian and African art of different media. In her keynote speech during the opening ceremony, Nike did tell the world, "I dedicate this building to the glory of God and to the Nigerian cultural heritage". Since the opening of this building, the "Nike Cultural Art Centre" has become a cultural hub and a popular tourists' destination in Lagos Nigeria.

From a very modest beginning without serious formal western education, Nike's actions and initiatives has positively impacted the lives of so many who have come her way. More than giving the benefits of her exposure to the less privileged, Nike's works have meant and become close to a large array of dedicated fans across the globe where she has become an ambassador of good will for art and culture for her beloved country since 1974 when she first took her art works across the shores of this country to the Americas for exhibition. She has had over 50 groups and over 116 solo exhibitions of her works in her professional artistic life. Nevertheless, her works can be found in many public and private holdings all over the world including; schools, colleges, universities, palaces and museums. In fact, many academic papers and articles have been written and produced on her art works by scholars across the globe. Her interactions cut across divide; politicians and non-politicians, diplomats, scholars, business men and women, researchers, children, tourists, etc come on a daily basis visiting Nike and her centres in Nigeria.

- Nike Okundaye On July 13th 2013, Nike was awarded the "SPIRIT OF DETROIT AWARD" by the council of Detroit, Michigan USA in full recognition of her exceptional achievements, outstanding leadership and dedication to improving the quality of human life.
- In the month of June, 2019 Nike was invited to be a special guest of honor at the Smithsonian Institute Museum of African Arts in Washington DC USA to deliver lectures and facilitate workshops focusing on traditional Yoruba Adire textile culture during the period of an Art Exhibition showcasing the artworks of African women. The title of the African women exhibition was; "I Am ... Contemporary Women Artists of Africa". In that exhibition, Nike's artworks and paintings titled "The Liberal Women In Protect March Part 1 & 2" were also displayed for public view.
- On the 21st September 2019, Nike was awarded and conferred with a Doctorate Degree of Art (Honoris Causa) by Osun State University, Osogbo Nigeria and many more awards.

## ARTIST STATEMENT

As an artist, I do not take for granted, every opportunity that I find to create. More so, this chance to present my works to the public and to record how they interact with these works, both as individuals and collectively.

An emphatic element recorded in my practice is freedom - this liberation that comes with the ability to just create and which I inculcate in the subjects of my creation. That fluidity of motifs, the intricate detailing of patterns and a wide palette of earthy yet vivid colors portrayed in each medium and or style that I choose to work with. I am a deeply cultural person and as such, my artistry mostly depicts traditional life/living and its interconnectedness with our contemporary society, thus assuring the memorialization of our collective African heritage.

I am honored to be identified as a Master and to have my works shown alongside other great artists who have made significant contribution to contemporary art. It also signals the impact of female artists and that each day, we draw closer to the age-long clamor for the well-deserved recognition that we deserve.

