

REFLECTED TRUTH

A PhD. Exhibition

By

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COVER WORK: "*Aie Lu Myer Ga*" I (*Unhidden Truth*),
Fabric Cutouts on Canvas, 177.5 x 148.5 cm, 2017.

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FOLKLORIC FATALISM IN ALICE MAMLU APEYUAN'S FABRIC PAINTINGS

Folklore apparently seems to have a central status in Tiv cosmology. In this universe, animal and human players take on the semblances of masks and masquerades and mingle with the living on the stage of life to depict the aspirations, ills and fatalities of human existence. For some reasons, which one may venture to call political, Tiv artistes over time have used satire guised in fluid vocalizations, folkloric garb, entrancing musical renditions, captivating dance steps, adroit puppetry and dream-like attires to address social ills. These subtle commentaries are perhaps rendered in this way to avoid hurting the government of the day or to induce more interest from the inevitable avidness of spectators during their mostly nocturnal public performances. Here in this theatre held on the fringes of some village, under the dimness of the moonlit night, fires blazing from swinging raffia torches are held to direct the tumbling and intriguing masquerades as they perform other worldly gyrations to the awe of an intoxicated audience.

For her doctoral thesis, Alice Mamlu Apeyuan, leaving out the more popular *Kwagh-Hir* Tiv masquerade, chose the less known form of the *Nyamtswam* which has presented her its many visual, aesthetic and philosophical perspectives for exploration in the rather challenging architectonic realm of studio painting. And due to its vista of grandeur, where multi-coloured fabric parchments and several other paraphernalia such as mirrors, metal, ropes ensemble complete the rich outfit, the direction of her paintings had to be loaded with metaphors for different facets of visceral expression.

On many occasions she deviated from the conventional norms of canvas painting as it is traditionally practiced and advocated in the Zaria Art School to a rather risky embrasure of postmodernist kitsch much to the chagrin of the establishment. Mirror surfaces assumed the persona of canvas supports and dangling fabrics three dimensional thresholds for expatiation. And yes, this attracts questions of validation and sometimes rejection. But this is the price one has to pay for daring to make a point, for daring to accept change, even if one were not sure where the results would lead to. In this case the result is a successful crown of a PhD degree in Painting from the revered stables of the Fine Art

Department of the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

How consciously Alice chose the fame fatal of the masquerade form to perform for this audience I cannot tell. She most likely wanted to explore her cultural setting, believing that she would garner better understanding of the workings of the art form from a perspective grounded in local familiarity. What she encountered was an intriguing conglomeration of art, dance, performance, prestige, and a generous dose of philosophy.

It is this philosophical trait that informed her decision to use fabrics and mirrors as the principal elements in her ephemeral renditions. These mirrors call on us to re-look at our images reflected in the mirrors of her canvasses and re-assess how we value our lives in the midst of the mitigating circumstances that we now find ourselves. Here in front of Alice's mirrors you do not need a shamanic sage to tell you your truth or your lie. You simply know it. And the onus is on you to make a change for the better, it is hoped.

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