

# Made in Lagos

With a title that evokes both local roots and the paradoxes of globalisation (a world where fewer and fewer goods, services and ideas are consumed where they are produced), this exhibition presents an introduction to Lagos, Africa's biggest metropolis.

Following up on the show *Cargo Cults Unlimited*, the Nigerian artist Osaze Amadasun has transformed the MEN's grounds by installing some fifty works created for this occasion, a combination of drawing, painting, graphic design and street art. The result is a striking portrait of Lagos seen through the lens of its economic activities. From traders to barbers, the music industry to the oil industry and upmarket districts to working-class streets, Amadasun shares his vision of this sprawling city whose influence is increasingly felt internationally, in politics, culture and commerce.

Borrowing the aesthetics of the yellow and black minibuses that criss-cross the Nigerian capital, this exhibition is organized into nine stages, first navigating through the business world (major import-export companies, banks and hi-tech enterprises) and then exploring the way that people's daily lives are imbricated with global economic issues.

This project upends stereotypes and deliberately blurs categories, challenging our perception of globalisation. These absolutely "made in Lagos" pieces arose out of the constant flow of exchanges between the artist and a European study, conservation and exhibition design group based in Switzerland. The presentation is punctuated by expressions in Pidgin, the popular Nigerian dialect that blends English, Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa and Portuguese.



Osaze Amadasun (1994) was born and raised in Benin City, in southern Nigeria. After studying architecture at the University of Lagos, he was able to free his talent from constraints through a freewheeling artistic practice combining drawing, painting, digital art, graphic design, pop culture and references to traditional Edo court art. His interest in history and the restitution of heritage objects never distracts from the present, on which he casts a keen, sometimes critical but always sensitive eye. He works with museums and associated organizations (including the Museum am Rothenbaum in Hamburg and the *Digital Benin* international research project) and major companies such as Facebook, Adobe, WeTransfer and Nestlé.

# SHUFFERING AND SCHMILING

Lagos is a city of paradoxes and contrasts. Today, despite disputed statistics, all the experts agree that it has become Africa's biggest metropolis. Its population has been growing at a dizzying pace since the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from 30,000 to almost 17 million (22 million including the metropolitan area).

Living in Lagos means spending your entire life in the middle of a construction site. Exponential population growth makes urban planning a gigantic challenge as the city expands between the lagoon and the Atlantic, a circumscribed area made up of islands linked by bridges, and to the mainland beyond.

Living in Lagos means coping with many difficulties: traffic jams, blackouts, lack of access to water, corruption... It also means showing resilience, strength of character and ingenuity on a daily basis.

Living in Lagos also means witnessing profound changes, despite the initial inertia. Over the last fifteen years or so, the authorities have been trying to develop public transport and promote sustainable energy sources.



# THIS NA LAGOS

What makes a city stand out in the collective imagination is not just its size, infrastructure, economy or artistic scene, but also its architectural boldness. The most famous cities are immediately recognisable with a glimpse at their iconic buildings.

For a long time, African metropolises remained on the side lines in this competition for celebrity status. But since the 2000s the situation has changed in Lagos, driven by ambitious new stand-out structures such as the Lekki Bridge, urban development on an artificial island (Eko-Atlantic), the creation of ultra-modern business districts, the renovation of the national theatre and airport, the establishment of new museums and so on.

Although the city has been constantly evolving for decades, that transformation is accelerating. It's now looking to attract tourists, business travellers and international corporations. Even the poor district of *Makoko*, built on stilts, is being rebranded as a sort of African Venice. *This is Lagos!*





# RELAX: GOD IS IN CONTROL

Religion is omnipresent in Lagos. Throughout society, at all hours and in every conceivable form. The city is overflowing with reminders of the idea of a higher power, from imposing churches to street preachers, posters extolling the powers of evangelists, buses adorned with quotations from sacred texts and processions bringing traffic to a standstill. Lagos resounds with tolling bells, the roar of sound systems calling people to prayer and sidewalk vendors hawking all sorts of devotional objects.

This fervour reflects the country's religious diversity: the north is strongly influenced by Islam and the south by Christianity, with many currents within each religion. Faith is not limited to the major monotheisms. The worship of orishas - intermediary divinities in the traditional Yoruba religion - is still very much alive, even while blending in with other practices. Migration has enriched this mosaic with the introduction of Hinduism by a large population of people originally from the Indian sub-continent.

Religious coexistence has been more fraught elsewhere in the country. Episodic violence has rendered communities since the 1970s. Yet faith is only one aspect of wider issues encompassing politics, economics and ethnicity.

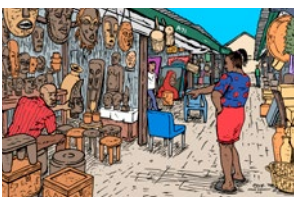
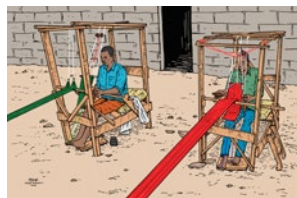


# EKO FOR SHOW

Lagos has established itself as an international hub for cultural and creative industries. While music immediately springs to mind with the success of figures such as King Sunny Adé and Fela Kuti in the 1970s and Wizkid and Burna Boy today, it is only one element of a much broader soft power.

The city's film industry is flourishing. After conquering Africa, its films are now exported globally via streaming platforms. Its fashion shows, featuring an elegance freed from Western standards, attract attention all over sub-Saharan Africa. Art fairs and galleries are multiplying, rattling old collector networks. New museums celebrate a broader, more Nigerian vision of what matters in art and culture.

Public authorities play their part, but this lively, creative ecosystem is mainly powered by the increasing wealth in the hands of the middle and upper classes who now aspire to set trends rather than follow them.



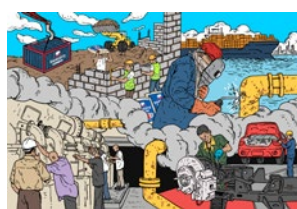


# HOW MUCH LAST?

Lagos has been a magnet for world trade for more than 400 years, even before today's globalization. It started as a strategic port for the slave trade and later for the shipment of raw materials and manufactured goods. By the end of the 19th century it was called "the Liverpool of West Africa" but the modernisation and diversification of its economy soon surpassed that of the English city.

The discovery of immense oil deposits in eastern Nigeria during the 1950s was a major factor in this process. The emergence of the oil business led to the structuring of banking and financial companies. This favoured, indirectly, the rise of telecommunications and information technology businesses and the entertainment industry

Today Lagos is not just the economic capital of Nigeria – it has become the economic capital of the whole continent. Business activities are what makes the city hum. From skyscrapers to corner shops, multinationals to actors in the informal economy, multimillion dollar contracts to daily shopping, Lagos's inhabitants are known for their formidable entrepreneurial spirit. Billionaires and street vendors alike start negotiations by asking "How much last?" (*"What's your final offer"*) and the money goes round and round.



# DIGITAL EKO

Contrary to the clichés that misconstrue Africa as outside of history and untouched by globalisation, Lagos's inhabitants are closely connected to the rest of the world through family members and friends in the diaspora scattered across the globe and devices that allow them to be in regular and close touch.

This degree of interconnectivity is possible thanks to Nigerian entrepreneurs who, despite the disinterest of Western Big Tech, have come up with a range of products, services and infrastructures suited to local budgets, in conjunction with Chinese companies.

Nigeria has been advancing at warp speed in the digital field since the 1990s. Although the arrival of cell phones brought progress, Net access came slowly at first. Then it accelerated in the 2010s with the appearance of start-ups and savvy young bosses who wanted nothing more than to take their place in the firmament of global technologies.



# NAIRAMETRICS

For a long time, Nigeria's national currency, the naira, circulated in the form of banknotes, in large quantities, even for big-ticket items like a car or a house. Savers found banks inaccessible and impractical.

In the 2000s, the Central Bank of Nigeria decided to change this situation and began to encourage paperless transactions. It introduced bank cards and payment terminals on a massive scale. But the results were perverse – people mainly used these ATMs to withdraw cash. Foreign currency exchange is almost entirely carried out on the black market via Aboki (“*friends*” in Hausa). Their networks are so efficient that even the banks use their services.

The state itself doesn't always use the national currency. Most of its revenue comes from the sale of oil, denominated in U.S. dollars, on the international market. The country's crude-oil based export model is not economically rational, given that Nigeria is Africa's top producer, but now that's beginning to change. In 2023, the entrepreneur Aliko Dangote opened the world's biggest single-train oil refinery on the outskirts of Lagos, so that oil jobs and associated industry spin-offs stay in the country where the oil is pumped.





# LOOKING GOOD IS GOOD BUSINESS

Over the last thirty years, the rise of a middle class with money and free time to spend has encouraged the emergence of a serious beauty industry.

Hairdressers and beauty parlours are multiplying in Lagos. Cosmetics, hair extensions and false nails fly off the shelves. The sale of fashion accessories has brought success to both shops and street peddlers. According to some estimates, in 2023 the Nigerian market was worth 7.8 billion US dollars, with an annual growth rate of around 14%. Given these statistics, obviously other players will want to get in on this.

But while most of the products come from abroad, their distribution in Nigeria is based on a local model. Almost all sales are by small and medium-sized companies (employing one to twenty people) rooted in communities, streets and neighbourhoods.



# OMO EKO

Having “street smarts” is considered a typical attribute of Lagos residents, who are said to be more lively, astute and resourceful than their compatriots, no matter whether they are city natives (*omo Eko, children of Lagos*) or recent arrivals.

Beyond the divisions and stereotypes, this selection presents emblematic Lagos characters. What they all have in common is that they spend a large part of the day on the city’s streets, and so are thoroughly accustomed to dealing with that kind of intensity and difficulty.

