

Chief. Nike Davies-Okundaye

Chief. Nike Davies-Okundaye is the woman behind the Nike Art empire. Madam Nike is one of the most respected internationally known female artist from Nigeria, who has made astounding strides in textile, visual arts and mixed media painting. Some of her work can be found amongst the collection of George Harrison (Beatles pop group member), the White House (seat of power in the United States of America), and museums worldwide. There is hardly any important museum in the world that does not have Madam Nike's work. She is an artist of many parts - she drums, directs plays, dances, paints, and trains young adults to do all of the listed. However, she is most outstanding in paintings and designs of adire, beadwork and batik. She was once described as an artist who used detailed and arresting batik images to chronicle her society's contradictory views towards women. 'Nike' as she likes to be known, has won countless awards from around the world, not only for her artwork, but her contribution to her community at wide and the impact she has had on people's lives...

One of Nike's proudest achievements was in the year 2000, when she was invited to Italy by the Italian government to train young Nigerian sex workers how to use their hands to engage in creative ventures. Most of the young complained to the Italian government that they left Nigeria in search of work, not knowing what they would be forced into. When Nike got to Italy, she taught them skills in craft making and many of the women became self-reliant in no time and stopped their old means of income.



Background:

Born in 1951 in a small village called Ogidi-Ijumu in Kogi State, Nike was brought up by her great-grand mother and an aunt who was an artist. She tells the story of her humble beginning: "I come from a culturally oriented background. I lost my mother at a very tender age. My grandmother took care of me until she died. The lot now fell on my great grandmother, the Iyalode of Ogidi, to raise me. Art runs in my family. My aunt, who also raised me, was an artist. My late mother was an artist, and my father was a trumpeter.

"As a child, there was no money to further my education. So, I started working at an early age to support myself. I started working with an Indian family in Kabba, Kogi State. Kabba is a bigger town than Ogidi. It was while I was working for this Indian family that I discovered my talent as a creative artist. I started producing embroidery and paintings."

The Indian couple saw the talent in Nike and encouraged her to continue painting. She went on: "The Indian couple started selling my works to teachers, Rev. Sisters and Rev. Fathers who were living in the neighbourhood. It made me happy that they were buying my works and that I was making a living out it."

She said of her going to Osogbo, her meeting with Susan Wenger and the influence on her work as an artist: "I left Kabba village to stay with my aunt at Osogbo. In Osogbo, I learnt how to make adire and other crafts and met the famous Susan Wenger who had a great influence on my work."

For a woman who ended her education in primary six, she embraced art and her talent blossomed. Today, Nike's paintings sell for between N500,000 to N4 million. In 1983, she opened an art centre known as Nike Centre for Art and Culture, world-renowned for craftsmanship in Osogbo, Osun State. The centre has provided training for hundreds of aspiring young men and women. Teachers instruct students in sculpture, paintings, bead work, mosaic, batik, adire, appliqué, pen and ink paintings; quilting, drum making and dancing.

Considering her background and where she is coming from, Nike says she does not want to see any young woman go through what she went through in her early life. "I want these girls to understand that they can make a living; a good living with their hands. They should come and join the centre and learn some crafts. Let them come and get trained. The training is free of charge, and accommodation is free. And after their training, I expose their works and products to the outside world.

Some Awards and Merits:

2002 - Nike was awarded and admitted as a fellow of the institute of The Pan – African Circle of Artists of Nigeria in recognition of her commitment to the promotion of art education in Nigeria.

2002 - Nike was bestowed with an award of distinction by the National Association of Kogi State Students in recognition of her efforts in promoting Art awareness among the youths in Nigeria.

2003 - a certificate of merit was awarded to Nike by the Okun Yoruba people of Kogi State of Nigeria in recognition of her efforts in youth development in Nigeria.

2004 - Nike was awarded an honorary certificate of merit by the Nigerian Union of Journalists, Osun State Chapter in recognition of her contribution to the advancement of Nigerian cultural heritage.

2005 - the National Commission for Museum and Monument of Nigeria awarded Nike a certificate of excellence in recognition of her efforts in the development of Nigerian cultural heritage.

2005 - the Department of Fine Art, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile – Ife awarded Nike a certificate of merit in recognition of her efforts in the promotion of art education in Nigeria.

2006 - Nike was awarded 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.

2009 - The "CEPAN Foundation" of Nigeria awarded Nike a plaque of honour for being the African Art Icon of the year.

2010 - National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) of Nigeria presented Nike with a golden plaque of honour in recognition of her noble role in the fight towards drugs free Nigeria society.

2010 - Osun State Council for Art & Culture presented Nike with a golden plaque of excellence for being one of the leading "Patron of Art & Culture" in the State.

2011 - The "Northern States Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture" presented Nike with a crystal plaque of honour for her leadership and entrepreneurship roles in Nigerian commerce and industry.

2011 - The Art Galleries Association of Nigeria (AGAN) in collaboration with the Nigerian National Gallery of Art (NGA) presented Nike with a plaque and a certificate of honour for art dealer of the year.

2011 - the SISI-OGE Foundation of Nigeria awarded Nike a crystal plaque for her outstanding dedication in the promotion of Nigerian cultural heritage.

2012 - The Business and Professional Women of Nigeria Association honoured Nike for her Outstanding and Leadership quality in area of her entrepreneurial spirit and her role as a change agent in promoting art and culture globally and for the empowerment of rural community women and young people.

November 2012 - Nike was presented a plaque of honour ward by the Female Artists Association of Nigeria (FAAN) for her support and contribution to the growth and development of Female Artists in Nigeria.

December 2012 - Nike was presented a plaque of honour ward by the National Council for Art & Culture (NCAC) in Abuja in recognition of her efforts in the promotion of Nigerian Creative Industry and Empowerment through Visual Art.

May 2013 - Nike was presented with a golden trophy by the National Museum, Onikan, Lagos in appreciation of her contributions to the development of the National Museum in Lagos.

June 2013 - Nike was presented with a golden plaque, titled "Life Achievement Award" by the Ogidi Development Union in Kogi State in recognition of her efforts in the development of Ogidi village in Kogi State of Nigeria, her birth place.

March 2014 - Nike was invited by the First Lady of Kogi State under the auspices of "Kogi State Women Association of Nigeria" and she was awarded "Women Inspirational Award – 2014" in recognition of her efforts in motivating and economically empowering the rural women of Kogi State.

Exhibitions:

In addition to the following major international shows, Nike has had over 102 solo art exhibitions and 36 group art exhibitions in her artistic life. Nike's art works can be found in many private homes collections and public institutions collections including schools, colleges, universities, palaces and museums all over the world. Two of Nike's major art works "Liberal Women Protest March (Parts 1 & 2)" were collected by the Smithsonian National Museum Of African Art in Washington DC, USA for permanent display in 2012. Some of the major international shows she participated in are;

1974 - Nike was one of the ten African artists who toured and taught arts in various crafts institutions in the USA. These tours were sponsored by USIS, Lagos. These trips took Nike to the fifty (50) states of America including the ice region of Alaska and the Virgin Islands of America conducting workshops and delivering lectures in schools and community centres.

1981 - Nike's work won the first price during the SOUTH WEST ARTS FESTIVAL in Washington DC. USA. And she was awarded many prizes of honour at the end of the festival.

1983 - The Nigeria Arts Council, Lagos sponsored Nike to represent Nigeria at a workshop held at the Museum of Natural History, New York, USA. During which period, her works attracted many arts collectors.

1985 - Nike was one of the six women artists who exhibited at the African Heritage Kenya during the World Women Conference held in Nairobi. The UN sponsored her trip to that conference.

1986 - Nike was the only Nigeria woman who represented Nigeria in an exhibition featuring African women artists held at the African Centre, London. That exhibition was sponsored by AKINA MAMA WA AFRICA, London. In

1989 - Nike and Sokari Douglas Camp were the only Nigerian women artists who represented Nigeria in an exhibition held at the women museum in Washington DC. USA.

1991 - USIA sponsored Nike's educational visits to many institutions of higher learning and museums in USA. This trip again took Nike to; Washington DC to deliver lectures and conduct workshops at the Howard University, the University of Maryland and the Rhode Island School of Textile.

1991 - Nike and Sokari Douglas Camp co-featured as the only Nigerian women artists in a film "KINDRED SPIRITS" produced by Smith Sonia on Nigerian artists which was a television documentary in USA and Canada.

1991 - Conference of Black Artists held in Toronto Canada to celebrate African identity, Nike was sponsored by the CUSO of Canada to that conference as the only Nigerian artist who exhibited her art works and held workshops at that conference.

1992 - Nike was the only African who represented the continents of Africa in an exhibition organized by BMW Company, Munich Germany during their anniversary celebration. Nike was accompanied by her cultural troupe to the show.

1994 - 50th anniversary of the UN, Nike was one of the 50 world artists selected to exhibit their works in a film; a documentary in-put for the anniversary that was exhibited in South African.

November 1994 - Nike exhibited her art works at the Royal York Hotel, Toronto Canada during the 37th annual conference of the African Studies Association of USA and Canada.

1995 - Nike was one of the ten (10) African artists who had exhibition at the African Heritage in Nairobi, Kenya.

1996 - Nike held an exhibition at the University Of Tampa Florida, USA. The exhibition was followed by series of lectures and workshops she conducted at the department of fine art of the University.

1997 - Nike held an exhibition at the prestigious "Schobgarten Galleria" in SCHOBGARTEN, Germany.

1998 - Nike held an exhibition at the University of Wisconsin, USA. This exhibition was followed by series of lectures she delivered at the department of African studies of the University.

1998 - Nike went with her cultural troupe to Antwerp, Belgium to perform at the Wereld Cultural Centre in Antwerp.

1999 - Nike held an exhibition at Northern Michigan University, USA. The exhibition was followed by series of lectures and workshops she conducted at the department of humanity of the University.

2000 - Nike was invited by the Federal Government of Nigeria to supply all the textile materials, which she designed for the Nigerian pavilion at the Expo 2000 in Hanover, German. Her art works were also on display during that Expo 2000 in Hanover, Germany.

June 2000 - Nike was invited to Italy by the CISV of Italy and Caritas of Italy to organise art exhibitions and art workshops in Turin to address the problem of female prostitution in that country. She mounted these art exhibitions and art workshops, which was largely attended.

October 2000 - Nike was invited with her cultural troupe by the Nigerian Ambassador to Netherlands to perform at the Hurge in celebration of the Nigerian 40th independence anniversary.

2001 - Nike went with her cultural group to Antwerp, Belgium to perform at the Wereld Cultural Centre in Antwerp.

2001 - Nike held an exhibition at the Pan African Film Festival (PAFF) in Hollywood, Los Angeles, California. USA.

2002 - Nike was again invited to Hollywood for an art exhibition during Pan African Film and Art Festival (PAFF).

2002 - Nike was in Denison University, Granville Ohio. USA for an art workshop and lecture.

2002 - Nike was in Bowling Green State University, Toledo Ohio, USA to hold art workshops and lectures.

June 2002 - Nike was invited as a special guest artist in resident during the commonwealth festival of art in Manchester, UK.

July 2002 - Nike had exhibitions of her works in Augsburg, Germany during the La Piassa art festival.

August 2002 - Nike was in Calgary, Canada for exhibitions during the "Afrikadey" annual festival.

November 2002 - Nike was at the Dartmouth University, Hanover, New Hampshire, USA as artist in resident, holding exhibitions, art workshops and lectures at the department of humanity of the University.

December 2002 - Nike attends the annual meeting of the African Studies Association of USA and Canada which holds in Washington DC. As a long time member of this association, her art works were also on view during the conference.

February 2003 - Nike was a special guest artist in resident at the Pan African Film and Art Festival in Los Angeles USA where she awarded certificate of honour by the County of Los Angeles, California, USA.

September 2003 - Nike was invited by Belgium government with her cultural troupe to perform amongst other cultural troupes from other 40 African countries at Antwerp cultural centre.

February 2004 - Nike was artist in resident at the University of California, Berkeley, USA.

July 2004 - Nike artist in resident at the International Folk Art Festival at Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA. The festival was sponsored by the Museum of New Mexico Art Foundation.

October 2004 - Nike was appointed a member of the UNESCO Committee of the Nigerian Intangible Cultural Heritage Project.

May 2005 - Nike was a guest artist in resident at the African Art Festival in Wurzburg, Germany.

June 2005 - Nike was in Graz, Austria with her cultural troupe to perform and show case Nigerian art at Maria Moser Centre.

May 2006 - Nike was appointed a board member of the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria Tourism Board at Abuja, Nigeria.

January 2007 - the government of United States of America selected Nike and sponsored her trip to Cape Town, South Africa to participate as a facilitator/panelist at the world conference of "Vital Voices Pan-African Leadership Summit & Initiative for Women and Girls". At that conference, Nike presented a paper "Art, Activism and Women Empowerment" in Nigeria which caught the hearts of her audience at the conference. This paper was posted at her web site for six months from January to July 2007.

March 2007 - Nike was invited by the University of South Florida, Tampa to conduct workshops and lectures at the department of women studies and art history, on batik and traditional African textile (Adire).

April 2007 - Nike was invited by Harvard University, Cambridge to conduct workshops and lectures on batik and technique of adire textile processing and African dyeing techniques.

2008 - Nike was invited by University of Alberta, Edmonton Canada to conduct workshops and lectures on African batik and the technique of Adire textile processing and African dyeing methods.

August 2009 - Nike was once again invited by the promoters of "Afrikadey" annual festival of Calgary, Canada to exhibit her works and conduct workshops on Adire processing during the six days festival.