

Save Our Art! Save Our Heritage!

Campaign Launch & Exhibition

Benefitting Nigeria's UNESCO World Heritage Site; The Osun Osogbo Grove

Save our Art! Save our Heritage!, is a campaign to safeguard one of Nigeria's most important artistic treasures; Nigeria's UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Osun Osogbo Grove.

The Susanne Wenger Adunni Olorisha Trust, kicked-off this important campaign with an event launch and art exhibition held Tuesday, November 24th at the Wheatbaker Hotel. The event was extremely well attended by leading members of the business and art communities as well as concerned citizens and artists. Attendees appreciated the specially curated exhibition, purchased artworks to support the campaign, and joined in the conversation about the importance of heritage art with special guest speakers, and highly regarded artists, Professor Bruce Onabrakpeya, Victor Ekpuk & Peju Alatisé.

Nestled in a beautiful forest on the edge of the city of Osogbo are the Osun Groves. The Osun Osogbo Grove boasts an amazing 75 hectare art park brimming with hundreds of monumental sculptures. Recognizing the significance of this art, and the heritage it reflects, UNESCO declared this location a World Heritage Site in 2005.

The Osun Osogbo Grove is one of the most impressive places in the country --- and one of only two UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Nigeria -- where tourists and art lovers can visit the monumental sculptures created by the renowned artist, Susanne Wenger, in collaboration with important local Osogbo artists: Adebisi Akanji, Rabiú Abesu, Kasali Akangbe-Ogun and others. These unique sculptures exemplify the artists' commitment to creating art that reflects the intrinsic culture and traditions of Nigeria.

Many of the sculptures, created between 1960-1980, are in urgent need of repair and restoration. Restoration and preservation efforts must begin immediately or Nigeria risks losing not only the sculptures themselves, but also the important UNESCO World Heritage Site designation.

"We, the present generation of Nigerians, have a duty to preserve the spectacular artistic works in the Grove and hand them over in perfect form, to coming generations.", stated Femi Akinsanya, Chairman, the Save Our Art! Campaign, "The works serve as a testament to continuation of the tradition of great creativity of Nigerian artists in our own time!"

Time is of the essence. Only two of the original artists working in cement are still active. Despite their age, they are eager and uniquely qualified to do the restoration work and to

train the next generation of artists and artisans. With improved materials and techniques, the restored sculptures will last for decades.

Why is it necessary that we put forth the effort to restore these crumbling monuments? "Memory is that which gives us our sense of self and identity. The preservation of our people's culture, history and art is a preservation of our people's memory. The Osun Osogbo Grove, and the art in it, is an important memory of a people. Preserving this memory is to bequeath an important legacy for the generations after us, so they not live in a sad condition of identity amnesia.", shared the esteemed artist, Victor Ekpuk.

The Susanne Wenger Adunni Olorisha Trust (AOT) has completed seven major restorations to date. Based on that solid track record, the Trust projects that within five years the artists can restore all the remaining works of art in the UNESCO site and, quite importantly, train the next generation of restoration artists.

In order to develop further awareness of this important period of art heritage in Osogbo, the AOT will also restore Susanne Wenger's remarkable Brazilian style house which contains her personal art collection. The house will become a 'living' Learning Center that will promote Osogbo art, the legacy of Susanne Wenger & Ulli Beier, and establish an art residency program.

The benefits of this restoration project, to the community and country, are many:

- Conservation of art and heritage in Nigeria's UNESCO World Heritage Site;
- Youth training and employment of the next generation of Osogbo artists and artisans;
- Employment and economic development through enhanced tourism;
- Establish a foundation for increased promotion of art, providing education and awareness of this unique art legacy within Nigeria and internationally;
- Protect the environment in this unique unspoiled forest.

"These works must be used to rally and inspire generations of Nigerians, to remind us that we are a people with worthy cultural and historical achievements, from which we can draw a sense of identity and pride.", concluded Mr. Akinsanya.

To contribute to the campaign, or to learn more about the Susanne Wenger Adunni Olorisha Trust, please visit: www.susannewenger-aot.org

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