

INTRODUCTION

Time is implicated in everything that we do and it is no more visible as in the time that I have had the opportunity to work with artist Kelani Abass. I first came across his work about seven years ago during his first solo exhibition *Paradigm Shift*, (2009) at Mydrim Gallery – two years after he graduated from the Yaba college of Technology fine art department. At the time he can rightly be classified as a painter's painter whose love for and skill in the medium singled him out early in his career. But if we thought he was going to be comfortable to only refine his work so as to position himself among the long line of Yabatech (as the school is fondly called) painters – known for their naturalistic style - we were to be disabused of that idea very quickly. His second solo exhibition *Man and Machine* 2011 at Omenka Gallery in which we see a softening of his palette as well as an elimination of the use of a cacophony of primary colours can be considered the visible beginning of a journey that would challenge his educational background and open up his contextual and artistic boundaries. In 2013 *Asiko* demonstrated the way in which spatial and temporal possibilities in the production and the presentation of his work articulated the personal and collective histories that underpinned Abass's interest.

If I Could Save Time... grapples with the ontological signification of time taking the invention of the printing press five hundred years ago as a point of departure and bringing it into the 21st century by highlighting the technological advancements that exist today. In trying to collapse time by amalgamating the past with the present Abass attempts to make a statement of the future, that acknowledges the interdependence of different moments. One in which Time is process and reality, is abstract yet tangible, is conceptual yet solid, of history yet of the moment, existing in the past as well as the present.

As time unfolds, repeating itself in a continuous swirl Abass uses technology- the printing press as metaphor to negotiate and even to bypass obsolescence, bringing it into existence in new ways. To do that he has appropriated dated technology and materials such as printing cases and the stamping tool to create new meanings and narratives. In this two large scale (*Stamping History*, *Making Time 1 and 2*, 2015-16) pictorial installations the impact of time is embodied through the artist's own performative process of imprinting the stamp on paper by layering and sequencing over and over again bringing into the present archival images of the past.

If I could Save Time... would not be complete without the insightful text by artist and curator Temitayo Ogunbiyi that expatiates on the ideas embedded in the works or the conversation between the two artists Odun Orimolade and Kelani Abass that focuses on the act of making art and marking time. But my profound appreciation goes to Kelani Abass with whom our numerous interactions and discussions have provided a unique insight into as well as an understanding of his practice.

Bisi Silva
Curator
Director, CCA, Lagos