



YEMISI SHYLLON
MUSEUM OF ART
PAN-ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY

Artwork Information Sheet 44

AZEEZ AFEEZ'S ORI APERE



Ori Apere, Underglazed on Clay , 27cm x 21cm x 9.5 cm Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art, Pan-Atlantic University.

INTRODUCTION

Adeoti Azeez Afeez (b. 1998) stands among the emerging voices redefining contemporary Nigerian ceramic art. His work is rooted in the historicity of Yoruba craftsmanship while embracing new perspectives that respond to the demands of present-day artistic expression. Originally from Oyo State and currently based in Lagos, Adeoti approaches clay not only as material but also as a cultural vessel. His practice reflects his belief that the stories, values, and spiritual ideas embedded in Yoruba identity continue to offer relevant frameworks for understanding the world. This Artwork Information Sheet focuses on his terracotta piece Ori Apere, part of the Inner Self Series, examining its formal qualities, cultural grounding, and the artistic philosophy shaping Adeoti's broader body of work.

THE ARTIST

Born in 1998, Adeoti Azeez Afeez has steadily built a reputation as a ceramic artist whose work balances innovation and tradition. He graduated with distinction from Yaba College of Technology, Lagos, where he was recognized as the top student in the School of Art, Design, and Printing Technology. This recognition did not only reflect technical mastery but also an early sense of direction, an awareness that clay offered him a medium through which to express complex ideas about identity and heritage.

Adeoti's professional development has been shaped through exhibitions, workshops, and international residencies. His work has appeared in notable shows such as the Future Fair in New York with AMG Projects (2024), the Sur(face) exhibition at Chilli Art Projects (2023), and Beyond Limit (2023). These spaces allowed his pieces to enter global conversations around contemporary African art and broadened the contextual reach of his practice. A defining moment in his artistic journey occurred during his participation in the Statues Also Breathe workshop led by the internationally acclaimed artist Prune Nourry. This encounter exposed him to deeper reflections on how art intersects with cultural memory, human experience, and social critique. It strengthened his understanding of sculpture as a space for dialogue, where form and meaning work together to question, remember, and reimagine.

Adeoti further expanded his technical and conceptual horizons during a residency at Jingdezhen Ceramics University in China, a globally respected institution within the ceramics field. There, he engaged with new methods, explored experimental firing techniques, and interacted with diverse ceramic cultures. This experience refined his craftsmanship and broadened his understanding of clay as a global medium with local possibilities. Today, Adeoti continues to develop a body of work that honours Yoruba artistic traditions while engaging with contemporary conversations on culture, heritage, and collective identity.

STYLE OF ART

Adeoti describes clay as a "living medium," one that carries memory and responds to touch. His style is shaped by close observation of cultural erosion in modern Nigeria, where rapid technological and social change often challenges traditional identities. This concern forms a central motivation in his practice: to preserve, reinterpret, and celebrate cultural knowledge through ceramics. His works explore unity, heritage, and the continuity of Yoruba cosmology. Each piece is deliberate in its form and symbolic in its details, often engaging themes that connect personal identity to collective experience. His ceramics function not only as artworks but as reminders, silent but potent of the values and stories that define a people.

Through line, colour, texture, and form, Adeoti creates objects that resonate beyond their physical presence. His work becomes a bridge between ancestral knowledge and contemporary realities, affirming the importance of cultural memory in shaping present and future generations.



Azeez Afeez. Ori Apere, Underglazed on Clay

ANALYSIS OF THE WORK

Ori Apere, translated loosely as “the revealed inner head,” presents a cubic interpretation of the human profile rendered in terracotta clay. The sculpture rests on a balance between simplicity of form and complexity of surface treatment. At first glance, the piece reveals a geometric silhouette, its cubic shape reducing the human figure to a minimal but striking profile. Yet on closer inspection, the surface is rich with detailed sgraffito engravings, creating a tactile map of lines, shapes, and symbols.

These engraved elements run along the sides of the sculpture, each line carefully scratched into the clay before firing. Some of the geometric shapes are highlighted with gentle green underglaze, creating a subtle contrast against the warm, earthy brown of terracotta. This interplay between colour and material echoes the relationship between the physical and spiritual dimensions of the Yoruba concept of Ori, which forms the conceptual core of the work.

In Yoruba cosmology, Ori refers to a person’s inner consciousness, essence, and destiny. It is both a spiritual guardian and an internal compass, believed to guide an individual’s life choices and shape their character. Ori is not simply the physical head but the metaphysical self, the aspect of a person that interacts with divine forces. It represents clarity, purpose, and alignment with one’s destiny.

Adeoti’s sculptural reimagining of Ori reflects this layered understanding. The cubic form suggests stability, foundation, and groundedness, qualities associated with an individual who is aligned with their inner essence. The engraved lines function metaphorically, marking the experiences, decisions, and influences that shape a person’s spiritual journey. The smooth surfaces contrast with the textured engravings, echoing the way life presents both calmness and turmoil. Together, the elements form a sculptural dialogue between the seen and unseen, the external and internal, the physical vessel and the spiritual core.

By working in terracotta, one of the oldest materials used in Yoruba art, Adeoti connects Ori Apere to a lineage of traditional pottery and sculptural practices. Terracotta’s organic texture and warm hues evoke earth, origin, and ancestry, reinforcing the philosophical grounding of the piece. The minimalistic form paired with symbolic surface

markings allows the work to carry both aesthetic beauty and cultural depth, making Ori Apere a contemporary reflection on a timeless spiritual concept.

CONCLUSION

Ori Apere stands as a thoughtful expression of Yoruba philosophy and contemporary ceramic practice. Through this work, Adeoti Azeez Afeez continues his commitment to bridging tradition and innovation, offering viewers a moment of reflection on the inner self, destiny, and identity. His approach to clay transforms material into meaning, making Ori Apere not only a sculptural object but also a cultural statement, one that honours the past while engaging the present with clarity and depth.