

Marissa Fox: Great. Hi, everyone. Welcome!

Marissa Fox: Welcome to "Behind the Lens," a presentation of the Museum of Contemporary Photography at Columbia College Chicago.

Marissa Fox: I'm Marissa Fox. I'm the manager of marketing and community engagement at the museum and today it is my pleasure to welcome Akinbode Akinbiyi.

Marissa Fox: Akinbode is a Berlin based street photographer who is known worldwide for his images depicting life in global cities.

Marissa Fox: In 2019, he was commissioned by the Chicago Architectural Biennial and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago for a month-long residency in Homan Square and the Chicago neighborhood of North Lawndale.

Marissa Fox: During this time, he hosted photography workshops with students, activists, and community members.

Marissa Fox: The images he created during this residency, including "Easy Like Sunday Morning- North Lawndale," were recently acquired by the MOCP.

Marissa Fox: His work has been included in exhibitions around the world, including Documenta 14, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the Goethe-Institut Johannesburg, South Africa, and many, many others.

Marissa Fox: I'm so thrilled that he is here with us today. He will first share presentation a on some images which will be followed by a Q&A session.

Marissa Fox: If you have questions, please enter them in the Q& A chat box and I will monitor those, and he'll answer them following the presentation. So, I'll now turn the floor over to Akinbode. I thank you so much for joining us today for MoCP "Behind the Lens."

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Thank you very much Marissa. I hope everybody can see me clearly. I greet everybody as well.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And I just have to apologize, I'm having a bit of difficulty, but I hope I can share the screen with you all to start my presentation. So, wherever you are, all the very best. I hope you're all safe and sound. And I'll start very soon. Just give me one second to share the screen.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Okay, yes, working now. So now, where do I start to share?

Marissa Fox: You can just press the share screen and then you can select the screen that you want to share.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Okay, so now hold on a sec. But it still says host disabled attendee screen sharing.

Marissa Fox: Let me check on that.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Oh, thank you.

Marissa Fox: Yeah, you're sharing your screen now. So, it shouldn't be an issue. You're a co-host.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Looking good. Looking very good. Now where is customized file?

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Mr. File where are you?

Akinbode Akinbiyi: This should be it. Yeah, okay. Off we go.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Can everybody see this? I hope so.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Yeah. But this- okay.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, ladies and gentlemen to start off, I hope everybody can see.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: I'm not hearing anybody to say yes or no.

Marissa Fox: Yeah, they have their sound disabled. You can put in the chat. I think that everyone can hear you. Can put in the chat if-

Marissa Fox: Yeah, they can. They can hear you, yeah.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, like Marissa said, I'm very much a street photographer. But not in the- how can we put it? Not in the normal sense of the of the word street photographer. I'm more of a wanderer. A very conscious wanderer. Trying to understand my wanderings and at the same time trying to look at- perceive, see, listen in, to my environment.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, I live here in Berlin, Germany. But I visit many different cities all over the world, mostly in Europe. Yeah of course in Africa and of late some of the states. I've been to Chicago, to Philadelphia, some years ago I was in San Francisco.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So now in my wanderings I try to see in a very kind of in-depth manner. Which means going beyond the superficial. Trying to go in depth into what is around me. Around and about and above and below.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, this was something I saw last year here in Berlin where a toilet had been thrown away onto the streets. On to the pavement or what the states called the "sidewalk," and somebody else had written "Fuck Duchamp." So, I hope most of my listeners will know who Duchamp was. A very sort of insightful artist at the beginning of the 20th century. I think in the 20's/30's already. And he started this whole deal with readymades. So rather than you know make art, he brought in other things. Also, I believe he bought in a pissoir into the museum space and presented it as an art piece.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, what I'm trying to do here, is to more or less recycle this readymade art idea, but through what I had seen on the sidewalk on the streets.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, this is part of my way of wandering and try to see in depth. So, let me- now I hope I can continue with this... you know it doesn't go on. You see, this is the problem. Oh man, I'm sorry about this, one second. I have to go back to my... I don't like this at all.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Should be able to open the file. Yeah, all this. I can't, I don't know why.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Okay, I'll go to the second image.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: This is at the beach in Lagos a few years ago.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And it's part of a body of work called "Sea Never Dry." It's about the sea, water, and the way we human beings interact with water. In many different ways depending on one's society and one's geographical space.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: In Lagos, which is around today around 20 million inhabitants. We have no actual public space. Open big space, like a park, like Central Park in New York, or Hyde Park in London. Or even now, this particular beach has also been...

Akinbode Akinbiyi: It's been taken away and it's been used as a building site for- they're building a new city on the sea called Eko Atlantic City. So, the beach has been closed off and that's where they started building materials.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So now this was some years ago and inhabitants from the city or further inland come to the beach to look at the sea. Very few actually go inside the water, many can't swim.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And also, the sea current is very, very strong. It takes even the strongest swimmers sometimes out of their comfort zone.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, there's this kind of open public space which is a kind of conversation between us. So, people who come to the seaside, to the beach, and the sea itself. Which is constantly coming in and going out, coming in and going out.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: This was, I believe, during a Muslim festival. Nigeria is a Christian, Muslim, but also, we have our own traditional religions as well as a country.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And this was during a Muslim festival, national festival. So, people had time to come to the beach during the daytime and spend time there. But as you can see, many are just looking on and enjoying the sea breeze. Very salty and trying just to enjoy themselves.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Sorry about this. I just don't know why I haven't been able to... but we can still go through and it's working, which is good.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: The third image is a performance.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Probably quite a few of you can recognize the mask on the performer. It's Michael Jackson. This was around the 90's. At the time, some of his musics were very popular and people in- this is again near Lagos in Nigeria, were performing so, re-performing Michael Jackson's, in those days, videos and his musical pieces. His dramatic pieces and was very, very popular then. And you had people putting on these masks and dancing like him. Singing, sometimes they would have his music on a recording machine. And it was quite a very popular thing at that time. I often wonder today how those who are very drawn towards him or fans of his, how they now consider him. Considering all that has been said since then. Said and the film that was made about him since then.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, you see, now again, this is interestingly a bit of what one would say white face on a black body.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: But the whole performance. And you can see bits of the people in the background and these two people here- this man here, this man here. They're actually performers, twins, who are performing and trying to encourage the crowd to get into the into the groove of it I would say.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, we come to the fourth image.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, I deliberately chose my images to be very sort of... all over the place in a way to confuse you all. At the same time, to give you an idea of how wide ranging my wanderings are.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And what I'm trying all the time to work on, to see, and to say. So, this particular image is from a high rise. I was staying in a flat on the 12th floor, an art deco building built around the '20s, '30s in Johannesburg. Johannesburg is the largest city in South Africa. It's a gold mine- at least was a gold mining city and a lot of its wealth comes from the gold mines.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And you see here from the 12th floor, a kind of street Canyon, almost like a valley. And actually, those are minibuses, most of them returning back to the townships, especially later in the evening.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Because in the downtown area where I was staying black people now live there quite a lot. But when Johannesburg was conceived and later on during the apartheid years, White South Africans, separated themselves from Black South Africans and other Africans of elsewhere. And they put the Black Africans in townships or, you know, far from the inner city.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: But as Apartheid became untenable, especially in the '80, whites started moving out of the inner city more towards that what they felt was a safer northern suburbs of Johannesburg.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And then blacks moved into the inner city with is now predominantly black, actually.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: But in the evening, many of them don't live in the inner city, they still live in the townships. So, they return back to the townships in these minibuses and there's also a pop-up bus service and also train services.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, you see this image from quite high-up, in what I would call the valley. Or canyon, so to speak.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, one thing which I'm really concerned with is trying to understand my surroundings. I said this already, but primarily also what is a photograph. What is it I am trying to make?

Akinbode Akinbiyi: To take? And to... yeah to get across, so to speak. What is- yeah. What is a photograph? Obviously, for many people, it's a piece of paper.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: My images are analog images. So, they are silver gelatin based and they convey a dimension, which if you look on the piece of paper, you get into depth. So, you see many other layers, so to speak. And most non-West Africans, especially those who have not been to Africa, will not really understand this image because it says, "Urgent Photo Here," but where is "here"? It's just arrows pointing. One pointing downwards, one pointing in more towards the left.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: This particular image was made some years ago, in the area of Lagers where a lot of embassies are. So sometimes if you want a Visa and you don't have a passport photograph, you come to this particular spot.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And there's a photographer around and they make a digital image of you and prints it out quickly. That's why, "Urgent," because to get the photograph is urgent and the photographer's here but you can't see. So now, there's so many different layers the people walking, there's a car going the other direction, there's the building behind.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, this thing is urgent, is it the photograph itself which is urgent? Is it my photograph? Or the people walking by? Or the car? Are they here? Where is here? Where is there? So, these are the kind of questions- I hope I'm not sounding too moralistic or pedantic.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: I'm so sorry about this awkward way of showing with images, but I hope you're enjoying them.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, I am presently having a major retrospective show here in Berlin. And it's called, "Six Songs Swirling Gracefully in the Tout Air."

Akinbode Akinbiyi: This is one of the key images in this show. It's in the first room. That's where the first song is being sung. And in that first room, the title of the images is "Photography, Tobacco, Sweets, Condoms and other Configurations." So, what I'm trying to do, to say, to show, in that first room is actually what are photographs? At the same time, addressing the question of tobacco, which I don't smoke. I'm actually, I'm a bit of an anti-tobacco, especially the way it's produced as cigarettes. And then condoms, because here, especially in Germany, they have condomates, where you can put in money and get a condom out.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And they also have sweet machines. And often these condomates and the sweet machines and the tobacco machines quite near- next to each other. I was thinking- in my wanderings in the States, I never actually saw tobacco machines. Although I think there are some- I'm not sure because I think in the States, they're a bit more strict about smoking now.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And then of course the other configurations can be any and everything. This particular image has as the central point here, is Okwui Enwezor, who has since passed and who was an internationally, very well recognized curator. He came from Nigeria but lived most of his adult life in the States and achieved a lot in a very short time. He passed on in his early

50's and this was- he was giving an opening, a big exhibition called "Short Century," in the same building where today I am sharing my images.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And so, he was giving the opening speech and behind him is a photograph of Princess Alexandra and Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, who's next to Princess Alexandra, at the evening celebrations, or the celebrations of our independence in Nigeria in October 1960. The first of October 1960. So, the "Short Century," was very much about- is specific to Africa, of our times of being colonized and then our independence and thereafter, in photographs. So, this particular photograph within the photograph, is again referencing my concern about what is a photograph.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, you see all these different layers coming together. And also, I wanted to show this particular image because over the years because I and others got quite close to Okwui Enwezor. And we went to see him about two months. Yeah, about six weeks before he passed on. He was at that time, the director of the- what's it called again The Haus... The Haus of Arts, The Haus der Kunst in Munich. But he was already very ill, so he was in the intensive station in a hospital in Munich. He had cancer.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, we had to put on what we would now call PPE. So really protective clothing, because we couldn't infect him because he was in the intensive station in the hospital.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: But he was still so happy to see us. And so, you know, ebullient. He engaged us and spoke with us for two hours. In fact, he did most of the talking, was really very happy.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Unfortunately, though six weeks later he passed on. So, in the first room definitely is a kind of an homage to him, but the whole exhibition as well.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So again, in my wanderings I'm always trying to be here in the present, in the here and now. I'm looking back, but also looking forward.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Marissa, is it going okay?

Marissa Fox: Yeah, looks great and everyone is saying they're really enjoying the images in the chat.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, the next image I return again to Johannesburg, this time to Soweto, the township south west of Johannesburg. That's why Soweto, south west, sowe, to is township. South west township.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: It actually has more people living there now than Johannesburg itself.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And you have areas of Soweto where they have, I mean, very rich. I mean millionaires and shopping malls and things like that, but also have other areas, unfortunately, a lot of poverty and impoverishment.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, this was again, I was there one day and a group of tourists, because now they have this- something which I am very much against what they call "Township Tourism."

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Like almost like Slum tourism, which also happens as well. So, tourists who come from elsewhere, come to a particular country, in this case, South Africa. Then go on a big bus to the Township, to see the Township, and they have a museum there which is it talks about the apartheid years.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And so, there's an image here. I hope you can all see it quite well.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Here in the middle ground, it's of the Soweto uprising of school children in 1976. And in this particular photograph taken by a photographer underground at that time, a black South African photographer.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Is one of the first of the school children to be actually killed by the- because the police there to suppress the demonstration started using live ammunition. The demonstration was against the implementation of Afrikaans as the language of teaching in all schools. So, this culture rose up and said, no, this is just too much. And this led to years and years of demonstrations and protests and actually physical fighting. Until eventually apartheid was overturned, and democracy returned or came back to South Africa. It was never really there before.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, you see, again now I'm standing behind the tourists. In some ways, I'm also like a tourist, but I was actually in my wanderings came upon the situation.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: I returned to Berlin. And a photograph of a poster. And I took a fragment of the poster with the words "Can't be Silent."

Akinbode Akinbiyi: In the middle ground you see some black South Africans actually, playing music on the microphone in the foreground.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: A white person on the guitar. And this was a film made by white musicians together with musicians who were living in refugee homes in Germany and couldn't get work. So, they went to the refugee homes found out who were musicians and together they made a film and music. And the film was quite successful. It's called "Can't be Silent."

Akinbode Akinbiyi: It has a particular resonance in light of what has been happening of late where, again, especially Black people have a reason, said we can't be silent, and we can't take all this suppression and indignation. But this was a film together with white people made then.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: What was interesting for me was, again, this is what I call serendipity. I was being filmed in the exhibition space, about three months ago and the camera man for a television interview. And the cameraman doing this was the cameraman of this film, very interestingly.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: He was quite surprised to see this fragment of film he had, the way he was a cameraman many years before.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And then his daughter rang him during the interview, and his daughter at school, was looking at that film that particular day. So again, all these kinds of things came together.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, this is part of what I'm very sensitive to how threads- which you often can't see, come together in their weaving and manifest themselves. And if I'm fortunate enough, I can try to take or make an image. I deliberately say take or make as opposed to shoot, which is the word or the term I don't like because it has a very militaristic and for me very negative, negatively possessed.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Here we have an image I made in Chicago last year.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: In that room or actually, it is kind of a very small office space of a wonderful historian in the library in Chicago, the former Central Library in Chicago.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And he has been collecting these- they're not posters, yeah, they are posters as well, but also... what has been stuck onto bottles and you know, creams and so on over the years. So, this was a particular company making these kind of creams and other cosmetics. Apparently, it was a Jewish entrepreneur, but making these creams and other cosmetics for African Americans.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And actually, the person who did this designing of this particular poster of Lucky Brown was an African Americans as well. And you can see how times have changed, so to speak, that in the in this particular thing you see the straightened hair. Also, the man or just the woman of color.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: But what fascinated me was the play with many different words. "Lucky Brown," "Bright Skin," but especially "Vanishing Cream."

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Because implied is that if you put on this cream you would vanish. Or of course, your skin will get lighter. But it's interesting that at one time, and unfortunately still especially in a now in Africa, some people, Black people, like to lighten the skin because they think or feel it makes them more beautiful. Or they're more attractive to others, you know, male or female, because men also do as well.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And what's fascinating is the concept of vanishing, of disappearing. Just like, literally, you know, no longer being there.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Back again in Berlin. So, in my exhibition "Six Songs," one particular room is called "African Quarter."

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And the African Quarter is a quarter here in Berlin, what the Americans would call a neighborhood.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Where about 120/30 years ago, at the end of the 19th century, a circus magnet, I believe from Hamburg, wanted to open up in Berlin a zoo that's beyond the city boundaries then- but it was much smaller then but already expanding. So, he wanted to open up a zoo, where he would show exotic animals, of course, from Africa but also from South America. But also, human beings.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Human beings would come from the colonies, from the German colonies then, and the colonies in Africa. And they wanted them from the South Seas.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And but also that try to bring in of course other exotic people's like Native Americans and so on. Fortunately, very fortunately the plan didn't come into being because Berlin was expanding so much because of industrialization. The then city and local government took over the land and started building houses- residential houses, not just the city, but also private people as well.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, here in Germany, they give the streets- when they open up a new area, first numbers and they start giving them names, street names.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, they named this particular area after the African colonies initially, Cameroon Street, Togo Street, Guineas Street, Congo Street.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, in Cameroon and Togo, those were German colonies. In Congo, the Germans had aspirations. Guinea, as well. Some other streets, also from particular geographical areas and so on.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So that was one particular area where I've been photographing over the years, I keep on going there. I mean, this was an area, not for Africans but for Germans. Mostly, especially working class, but also, it's lower-middle class and they're still there today. But this particular image is not the African Quarter, although I put it together with the other images because this particular pathway is called "Martin Luther King Path."

Akinbode Akinbiyi: It's another part of Berlin, Buckow, but it's in the east. Former East Berlin and it was very interesting that in the West of Berlin, they had this African Quarter, they've kept the street names.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Later when Hitler came to power in 1933, the fascist added- before then, but also, after they added some of the family names of three German colonialists.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: One or two of them were very, very brutal and the names of- since the Second World War, have been very contested and hopefully they'll be removed sometime soon. They want to change the names on these particular three streets.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: In the east of Berlin, they- because of their social socialist ideology, especially, but they're very aware of what was happening elsewhere in the world. Especially the Civil Rights Movement in the States. So, they have this Martin Luther King Way, as a way of honoring the legacy of Martin Luther King.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And also, they have another street called Paul Robeson Street honoring the legacy of Paul Robeson who was a great singer and I'm certain civil rights activist, even before Martin Luther King in the 40's/50's.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, what I like in particular about this image, "Martin Luther King Way," is what is a young, very young, white boy stepping forward or running on forward. And again, this kind of serendipity because I heard him coming from behind. So, I waited until he came into the image, and continued on his way. And in the background, you have the high rises. These were built in the former East Berlin after the war.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Because, I mean, the war was so terrible on Berlin, many buildings were destroyed. So, there was a big building boom, rebuilding after the Second World War.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Here we have another image. Now this particular image, is in the African Quarter.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Of the neighborhood African Quarter, it's called the African Quarter in Berlin here. This was taken about on almost 16/18 years ago. And maybe a few of you will recognize in the background, on the Billboard, is Carl Lewis, one of the first black male models here in Germany.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, the Germans, this is now- what's the word? It's something we're all being sensitized about, what's been happening recently in the States.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: But I mean racism is widespread- very, very strong in Europe as well. It expresses itself in different forms, but one particular form was that they were- hardly in fact... I've been in Germany now 50 years, and when I first came there was no advertisements or billboards with black people on them. Started coming around the 80's. People like Naomi Campbell and also bit later Carl Lewis. I think he was at that time, it started with Nike, if I remember rightly.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: This particular image is again serendipity. Many people are fascinated, because the young man in the foreground is doing in another kind of way the same kind of hand movement as Carl Lewis in the background. But this happened, I didn't say anything, it just happened. And then I was fortunate enough to be standing there. This is what I mean about the weaving of the threads how things come together. The next millisecond, nanosecond it's all over, it's gone again. But this is not like Cartier-Bresson's idea of the- what's the word... decisive moment. I'm not into that at all. It's rather this coming together of the threads, they manifest themselves, sometimes for minutes, for a few seconds and then the weaving continues all the time.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: We now return to Lagos. This is the Catholic cathedral in Lagos.

Marissa Fox: I think there's an issue with the photo. If you want to reload it, because it's still on the last photo.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Sorry. I'll be back.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: How about now?

Marissa Fox: I don't see it.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, my screen. Sorry about this. Oh, man.

Marissa Fox: You can stop the share screen and then reload the share screen with the new image. Maybe that will help?

Marissa Fox: Or if you do it there. Yeah.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Okay, I'll stop it.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And then go back to share screen again.

Marissa Fox: Yeah, and then select the image.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Is it there now?

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Yeah. Okay, very good. Sorry about that.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, this image, I'm back in Lagos. This is the Catholic cathedral built by returnees from Brazil- not this particular building, not then, this was built a bit later. But it was, the first building was taken down. And this was built also by returnees from Brazil about 100 years ago. And these returnees from Brazil were former slaves who got their freedom. One of the last countries to give freedom to their slaves, 1888.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And as soon as they got their freedom, some slaves in Brazil, especially those in the Northeast, they chartered ships then and came back to West Africa to return home.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And they came back with especially, you know, they had not been working in plantations like many of the slaves in the States, but had been working in the cities as craftspeople, carpenters, brick layers, builders, and working on building sites and so on. So, they came back with these abilities and put them into good use as a form of living in West Africa. Especially at the port cities. Which Lagos was one of the major return ports.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, this particular cathedral was, I think, around about 80-100 years ago built and I often walked past and to this day, I was very fortunate to see almost like a ship moving through the urban spaces. So, you have in foreground, the cars and this here is a kind of- what do you call them in English?

Akinbode Akinbiyi: It's a kind of three wheeled taxi.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And then you see all the, what I call the scattering of the wiring from above, and the palm tree. But the cathedral seems to be sailing through. So again, for me this particular moment, seeing it and being prepared and willing, also. I really wanted to take, make, this image. I have often shot- now I'm using the word shooting. I have often made images of the cathedral, but this one for me is one of the most successful.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, Christianity was brought to us by missionaries, especially from Britain. So, at least in Nigeria other missionaries went to

other parts of Africa, from France, from Germany as well, from all the colonizing countries.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: But we have our own forms. And also, especially our own religions and it comes together, like in this particular image. This is the crowning of the King of Lagos. This is him here, in the underneath the umbrella with his staff of authority and our own ways of sort of culture and languages, of course, and also our religions are still very much there. Very strong, but unfortunately this sort of overlay of Christianity and also Islam and other modern forms of thinking of being, which somehow have suppressed us and no longer allow us to be how we- our own path of development. But it is still trying to come out. So, I'm very much interested in this kind of things. And I happened to be in Lagos at this particular time when this king was being coronated, and so, coming into power.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And it was quite a powerful experience. You can see the crowd, people here in the background and it's very crowded.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Lagos has a very humid temperature, can be very hot and muggy. No problem, just mixing in and trying to again- take, make the image and this was a particular moment where the king with his entourage. Notice, mostly men. There is also a queen, not necessarily his wife, but a leading lady of Lagos as well.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: This is one thing which the colonizers really destroyed, the women had almost an equal power to the men.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: But when the colonizers came, they favored the men to the detriment of the women. So nowadays, women have to almost literally re-fight back for their positions which they used to have before. Interestingly though some of the major markets in West Africa are run by women not men.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, another room of for the "Six Songs." The six songs refer to actually to each room. And so, the six rooms, six songs. So, this is a particular image which was also showed at the beginning of another image from the "Sea Never Dries," series.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: This was some years ago on the beach, which has now unfortunately, been closed off. Two Europeans, an elderly couple sitting and just, you know, just chilling and watching what is going by.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Again, the kind of- the moment of being there and being fortunate enough to see these things coming together and also moving apart as well.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: What so many people can't quite fully understand- because from about the 80's onwards, Lagos got a very bad reputation, has been very dangerous, lawless, a lot of crime, and criminality and so on.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: But yet you still have people- this older couple felt quite comfortable to come to the beach. Had no guards around them, had no weapons or anything, just sitting down and just watching. And then later on, getting a bit dark they get up and go home. So, I mean like everywhere in the world, something in conflict here at the time. Some people still realize, okay I don't want to do this, get involved in this criminality. I don't want to become a victim. Or actually, become a part of the people who are doing the crime just live a more quiet, peaceful life. And so, I particularly like this image.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Come back again into the nitty gritty of what I call downtown Lagos. Lagos actually is a lagoon city, it's a city built around lagoons.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, we have Lagos Island, and then the mainland and Lagos Island is actually a series of islands now. The islands have almost become one because they filled up the lagoons or the waterways, the crossways.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: But this used to be- still is actually the center of Lagos Island and I'm standing on the rubble of a building, which was pulled down illegally. A former building built by returnees from Brazil, which is quite an iconic building looking towards the Central Business District, the CBD.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Which is almost on the shoreline of the Atlantic coast.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Around the 70's and 80's, it no longer became- people moved to another part of Lagos, but now they're returning also back to the Central Business District and so it's quite a like all cities, neighborhoods, come and go, change, are gentrified. Become you know, sort of middle-class areas or slummish areas and then are re-gentrified. It's all kinds of things are happening all the time. So, this is one particular reason why I especially like wandering cities.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Seeing, experiencing, and sometimes trying to take/make images of this constant changing, evolving, constantly redefining themselves.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: This is quite a jumper.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, the next image- please don't be shocked.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: But this has to do in the first room which I mentioned about "Photography, Tobacco, Sweets, Condoms, and other Configurations."

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, one thing which has fascinated me actually most of my life is the way in cities, especially, the eroticization of public space and private space.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, there's a lot of- in fact, there's a lot of money to be made in marketing in all kinds of different ways, erotic. Was almost mixed-up with exotic- but also sexuality.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So now for years I've been meaning to go to this big erotic affair in Berlin, every year, once a year. And I'd be meaning to go for the last 20 years- never made it. I went last year for the first time.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And these... I mean, I hope you can all see this from the image, these are actually mannequins so plastic, almost avatars or look alike human beings. But in the background, this statement of "Real Sex." So now the question is what is real? What is unreal? Or what is... yeah, what is visible? Like with the visible invisible creator. What is invisible? So, all the time, in photographs I'm trying to...

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Yeah, I'm trying to cinematize these problems. Also trying to see them and look at them and trying to understand them.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, this particular image was really fascinating for me and something I've been working on. But some other images coming up, but all over the world. So, this desire of us to- especially in our private lives to express ourselves but not fully knowing what it's all about. Another thing which fascinates me is that this virtual world is becoming so strong that very soon, we will not be able to tell the difference between a real human being and the copy of the human being. Or I forget the word- there's is a particular word for it. It's not avatar....

Akinbode Akinbiyi: But anyway, so you know, an artificial human being. And so, they'll be moving together, apparently, even in Japan, some other countries, especially some men have apparently left their wives for these kinds of virtual dolls.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Another form of this virtual world but in this case actually dress mannequins. Or mannequins which are actually being sold on the streets of Lagos for people who want to have a textile shop. And what I found interesting, I didn't see it immediately in this particular image, is the way the man on the extreme left- his hand, corresponds to the lady next to him with her hand.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, this later I saw in the contact sheets, I found so fascinating. Also, of course, you know, the lack of a particular head or this kind of thing. So, it's all these things all the time. Interestingly, at this particular- this is a very crowded market in the center of Lagos Island a local market and next door was also another shop full of mannequins. And I asked the lady who was there.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: *Audio cuts out* She started back at me, "No."

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Then I left quietly, I went to the next shop and the man allowed me to take/make this image. Marissa it just said that the internet is unstable. Can you still see the image?

Marissa Fox: Yeah, I can see the image. Your sound was breaking up for a second. But I think it's ok now.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Okay. So, as you've probably already got it, signage, billboards, graffiti, the writing on the walls fascinated me. This is a particular billboard. Some years ago, and this is about you know, giving money for development in the so-called "Underdeveloped World." But somebody had written then, you know, "fuck your money," which I found very appropriate. Especially, with a smile and also in the image is also holding up his photograph.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, this is the kind of way I try to read these signs- these images, these billboards, these graffiti on the walls, signage.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: I like to refer to the Bible, I'm not a particular Biblical person, but there's this thing about the writing on the wall as a kind of warning, meaning, to a particular city or to our time and if you can- you can actually read these signs and possibly get an inkling of what is to come.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: I hope I'm making sense.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So here we have, sorry-

Akinbode Akinbiyi: We have another scene from Lagos. This is quite near actually the Catholic cathedral. In the middle ground is a one-story former nice, but dilapidated, falling apart, but built by Brazilian returnees. Then in the foreground, or it's more in the middle to foreground, a completely sort of deconstructed three-wheel taxi. But for me, the two young boys in the school uniform walking past- some people remark, they're very clean and the uniform is actually a replica from the colonial times. The British brought this uniform and this kind of schooling to us. And we've continued with it.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, this is kind of reference to my own upbringing. Where I too had to wear uniform at times, going to such schools. But in my time, this is many decades ago, Lagos was actually in a better state. I mean not so many dilapidated houses and so on. Things that are improving though, I mean, but it can be time consuming and also for some very difficult times.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, I return to one of my major things. What is a photograph?

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And this is a kind of sort of almost like an installation of a photo booth in the states, a "fotoautomat." I've never actually seen photographs coming out of this particular fotoautomat" in Berlin. Here you see all the graffiti written on it and somebody moving past, but what I do like it though is this kind of constant re-interpretation of a particular theme. Especially the photo booth, which was the kind of precursor of the selfie. Where now people have the photo booth in their hands in their mobile phones, so their now constantly making portraits, or downloading portraits of themselves, selfies.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: But the photo booths are quite popular here in Berlin and most of them- they're called actually fotos- not spelled Ph but F.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And they've come from the States or from Canada and they've installed about 19 to 20 of them. And are quite popular, quite cheap as well. Most of them black and white, analog, one or two digital, one or two colored as well.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: I do believe they have them in the States, but I didn't see any in Chicago- I did. I did. But I saw them in the underground, in one of the subway stations in Chicago.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, what really upsets me, and I think now people understand much better- is this constant dehumanizing and sort of dumbing down black people.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, these are- this is a recent image taken last year in Austria.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Advertising, or a billboard trying to you know, say that- I think it's for one of the children organizations, you know, trying to improve things for children.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: But then the way it's been done is so... I mean... actually, I find it very racist. I mean, I just sometimes can't get into my head that the people who actually designed this kind of thing, can't see what they're doing.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And the woman, she's an actress apparently, she's holding this particular kind of globe and within it the smiling face of a young black boy.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And it's so... I mean... Okay, I'm standing in front of this taking/making this image, other white people- because it's in Austria, walking past me and if you understand that I'm actually quite annoyed by this kind of thing. Others walk past and say, yeah, you know, that's how it is. Or they don't even know- they actually don't notice what I'm doing, this kind of thing.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: But so very bad. And these are the kinds of things which must stop. Some countries don't do this anymore, fortunately, I don't... I hope not in Britain anymore.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Don't know about France, but in Germany you still get it. In Australia it's very bad. And this is the thing which makes people start talking about institutionalized racism and embedded racism. People don't want to talk about. But here it is- here's a clear example of it.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: An image from São Paulo.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Very much into this kind of buzz of the streets. But as I said again please, I'm not a street photographer as such, I'm more of a wanderer.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Trying to actually understand the street and my surroundings. But not just the street, even for example in this particular space. The hotel in the background, the traffic lights, signage, lady in the foreground, it all comes together, but also this lamp post as well. So, this particular image I put here because the next one gives you more of a reference.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Yeah.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, we're still in Sao Paulo, but now many things come together.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: The man on the phone. No big deal. But here you have the sweet machine again. So, my sweets theme. And then you have the photos, the internet. So many things happening all together in one particular image. I'm fortunate, happy to get to take/make this particular image.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, it says something about our times and also what fascinates me is how we've taken to being so *Audio cuts out*

Akinbode Akinbiyi: They become so ubiquitous that we don't even think about it anymore. But I grew up where nobody had a mobile phone.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And phones were actually fixed. So, I mean within the house or if the phone rang, you went to the phone the phone didn't move with you. Fascinating, fascinating. So, these are the kind of things where times change, we change, but we don't fully- at least I feel, often we don't fully realize what's happening.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So yeah, so now this is back in Berlin and on the left, the sweet machine.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And on the right for those in the know, this looks like a tobacco machine. Where you put in the money and get a packet of cigarettes out, but it's not it's a condomate.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, this particular image is in the show. I'm trying to show/say that... what's happening? That these machines are for children, no?

Akinbode Akinbiyi: The condomats are they for children too? Their next to each other. So, are they for children too? And is this what makes us consumers, you know?

Akinbode Akinbiyi: That one, second, I'm putting in money to get some- this is mostly for chewing gum, kind of bubble gum or- I never ever tried it, but some kind of unpleasant chewing gum and next to these condomats.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So again, but it's not only that, it's also the vegetation in the background.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And also, the kind of, you see the stickers on the machines on both. And also, the graffiti sometimes, now this particular machine has been damaged a bit.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, some people sometimes try to break into them, which fascinates me.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Marissa, I hope I haven't been talking for too long. I'm almost finished.

Marissa Fox: Yeah, we have a couple of questions. But whenever you're ready, you can wrap up.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Mm hmm.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So here I return to Johannesburg I believe for the last image.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And a moment again of serendipity. I was very trying to see the shadow play, the stop sign, and then also this particular thing. Because again, presently, this was two years ago in Johannesburg.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: People they feel very insecure in Johannesburg, a lot of crime.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Random crime and sometimes very bad deliberate, horrible... So, breaking into houses and, you know, raping, killing, and also you know, taking away your property and-

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, I'm wondering, that particular neighborhood is more or less mixed, middle class, I would say, and then a jogger comes passed. A young man jogging.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, the things coming together. So again, I'm trying to say that it's not for everybody that it's so dangerous. I'm wandering around with the camera and all my equipment, but I don't feel endangered. So, do the jogger.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And even at night, I would still do this. I didn't see anybody jogging around at night though because people get even more, a bit afraid. So, then the next image is a kind of comment on this particular image. I hope nobody would be upset by it because it's in some ways, very sexist. So, this was about two years ago at the billboard, advertising, for the erotic fair here in Berlin.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And so, you see these four ladies and they're in a very kind of intimate photographic pose. But somebody had you know, the audacity or you know, what do you call it, this signage here and then the #MeToo sign. Which at that time, two years ago, was something, which was on many people's minds.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: But for years, these particular billboards advertising the erotic fair have often been destroyed, pulled out. Especially by activists, women who are very much against the whole idea of this pornographic, erotic thing.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And this particular image I found very sort of prescient. Well, you know, with the whole signage here, but also the graffiti and the- I've taken just a fragment again.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, all the while it's wandering, looking, taking in and trying to understand. Oh, I like the word to overstand. Them to get into it, you know, a really deeper understanding of what is happening. As in this image, which is a photo booth, but this is actually more of a so called, more professional where you could actually use these particular photo booths to get your passport image made. And I believe the government of today, they even accept them for the barometric passport images.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: This one is in Berlin, here in a particular subway, which sometimes gets quite- you can see the curtain has been torn.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Graffiti inside, all kinds of stuff, and so often I check it out and see what's happening. And there's this particular moment where I felt that there was a kind of correspondence between this space, in the curtain, and the face here.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: But I mean I don't impose my ideas on my audience. I just hope that the audience get it in the sense that they too look at the images and try to understand. Come to their own conclusions, develop their own ideas, their own narratives, as well.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So just two more images that then I'll be finished.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Yeah.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, this, again, is one of my main themes. This is what they call a garden dwarf, I believe, is what they call them in English. Marrison, you know the name?

Marissa Fox: A garden gnome.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Garden gnome. Thank you very much. So, they sell these things here in Germany, but not with the blackface and across the border in Poland and they apparently have some with blackface

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, I saw this last year and I was really shocked because I've never ever- I have not known about it.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: I've seen them around it for years and years and years because small gardens, urban gardening is a bit different name here- but Germany is very popular and some people they have the actual...

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Their own little plot of land and they installed garden gnomes in this kitchen portal that not everybody, some people. But most of all, most of the garden gnomes have white faces.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: But these particular ones are becoming quite popular, especially across the border in Poland and I saw this one in the courtyard here in Berlin.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And please again, this whole question is why are they doing this? What's the meaning? What's the message?

Akinbode Akinbiyi: I haven't fully found out, I've done my research, but I haven't actually found out where they're being made, or why they actually- what they're trying to get across.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And then- but again in making/taking this image I included all the other things as well. So, the ladder, which for me is a reference to the ladder upwards. Or in the Bible, again, the heavenly ladder, so to more understanding, more learning. So, in all my wanderings, what I'm trying all the time- to understand more, to see more, understand more. Of course, I realized that there is no end to understanding. I mean, the journey is a constant, always on a moving forward journey.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much. Welcome to the very last image. I hope I have not bored you.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And yeah, and I hope you all have a little bit of understanding now where I'm coming from, where I'm trying to go to.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, this is the last one. This is quite interesting. I said, where I'm trying to go to because here in Germany, we have these things what they call, take away- take away coffee, take away snacks, and so on. And they call it to-go. Like here, to-go. But this is actually a photographic studio in Bamako, Mali, a country- a landlocked country in West Africa. The

capital actually, Bamako. And I happened to be at this particular moment and this donkey john cart going by, and the studio. But in the studio, the photographer came from the country called Togo, not to-go, but many people here in Germany, read it as to-go which is all so funny.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: You see all the signage again. And also, my question of what is a photograph? Is the photograph about the donkey?

Akinbode Akinbiyi: The photographer? About his clients? About the people on the cart looking back? Which that for me is a wonderful moment because in looking back as if you're trying to see what is coming from behind, looking back into the past. *Audio cuts out* ... in the front here at least towards our left.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, I thank you all very much. I hope I have not bored you and I hope you have some interesting questions to ask. And please I apologize for my awkward way of showing the images. Thank you very much.

Marissa Fox: Thank you so much. That was wonderful.

Marissa Fox: Really, that was a really incredible presentation and thanks for correcting me with a street photographer, you're more of a wandering photographer and some of the questions actually deal with some of that. That you discussed previously. So, I can read you the first question that was asked actually even before you began your presentation by Rick in Florida.

Marissa Fox: And he wrote in recent years, there have been restrictions placed on what and who can be photographed in public places. So, Berlin, Germany, he believes is a location that may be difficult for street photographers.

Marissa Fox: His question is, "How has this affected your work? What difficulties have you faced personally and how has it changed your approach?"

Akinbode Akinbiyi: I am aware of these new regulations, so to speak, or more stricter regulations.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: I believe you can take/make an image in the public space of groups of people or people on the streets. But if you come in close, you have to get their permission.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: I still do my way of photography. If somebody obviously doesn't want me to take their photograph, I don't take the photograph. Unless, of course, I really wanted to make a portrait of them, then I will ask them.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And actually, the majority are willing to have their portrait taken, but some don't. I always respect that.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: There are moments like demonstrations, street parades, street parties- before corona. Other things where there is a kind of free license to photograph. So, I mean, it's a very difficult situation. And then in the subway, in sort of semi-private spaces like shopping malls.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: You know, it's a give and take. Most people don't actually mind, in my own experience, but some do. Especially some ladies, it's very strange. They start shouting at me at times.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Recently again here, but on the street... I just... I mean... I don't engage with them either.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And recently, this is just- this was actually when Corona already started. I went to a lake side some other friends- African friends and some German friends. And most of us had cameras, are walking around, the police came- not because of us, but because of social distancing. This was at the beginning of the lockdown. They were pushing people apart and some people complained about us walking around with the cameras. We weren't necessarily taking photographs of them. So, there is a kind of suspicion and it gave me a renewed... yeah suspicion about what is a photograph? What's it doing? Especially now with all these different social media platforms.

Marissa Fox: Yeah.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: I'm aware of this- there's one thing which has happened of late. Some people apparently, have been taking photographs of women from below so that they can see into their pants and so on. And they're posting them on social media. I didn't even know about this. And there's even petitions, trying to stop this and so I'm always careful. One thing I'm very, very careful about is photographing children.

Marissa Fox: Yeah.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Because then again, child abuse. So, I'm very, very careful.

Marissa Fox: That's very fascinating. So, the next question is from Catherine Dale. She writes "My question is, do you have an idea in your head about what subject you were looking for on a particular day? And have you been able to take images of the current circumstances of the last few months?" So, the coronavirus.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: I try to be as open as possible. I try not to have ideas in my head or within me when I set out, but I do realize certain things draw me. Like the writings on the wall, the graffiti, and so on.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And, you know, I'm very interested in crossroads. Traffic points where a lot of buzz is happening. I sometimes stay there for an hour to see what is happening and sometimes take a kind of image.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: In this present lockdown, COVID, now a little bit post-COVID time. I still have been going out on my wanderings, also because of social distancing. It's for me, a very interesting time because the pace of the cities...

Akinbode Akinbiyi: I mean, here in Berlin has slowed down. And it's this slowing down, which I really like. Because I really, I wander very slowly. I take time, I look. So now I can see better, even more. And one particular day of the week I really like wandering and working is Sunday. Many days prior to this particular- now it's getting a bit more busy again. But at the beginning of the lockdown, it was almost like every day was a Sunday. So, I enjoyed that time.

Marissa Fox: Well, the piece that we acquired for museum was "Easy like Sunday Morning," does that tie into that as well?

Akinbode Akinbiyi: A little bit. A little bit. I particularly like the song and also there's a kind of... within the cities, especially a kind of... Especially, I noticed this even in Chicago too. There's kind of a relaxed atmosphere.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Especially for the women, they have time for their families, for their kids, for their husband for the house, what they have to

do at home. But for the men as well. Away from work and then sometimes they like- in the States go to the ballpark or watch a game or something. But also hang with each other. So, it's a different vibe, but each day of the week has its own special vibe. So, I try to be attuned to all these different vibes all the time.

Marissa Fox: Great. So, the next question is a three parter. It says, "What led you to move to Germany over 50 years ago?" And the other follow up questions are "Other than Berlin, what other cities have you lived in in Germany?" and "How would you describe your life in Germany?"

Akinbode Akinbiyi: I came to Germany to study. Actually, I wanted to do a doctorate, and never did it because I got into photography. I'm halfway on the road and then I got married, had two lovely daughters. Actually, three because my former wife came with a daughter, so I just stayed in Germany. I don't have any particular difficulty staying in Germany, then until now because I was born in Britain. But I grew up in Nigeria, so it's not really much of a difficulty for me.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And I came to up to Germany, and I was studying in Heidelberg. It's a small town actually, so I started there. And then in the 80's I moved to Munich when my marriage broke-up. So, I lived in Munich for about eight years. And ever since then, for about 30 years now. Just over 30 years I've been living in Berlin.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: I was telling somebody today actually, Berlin is the only city in Germany, where I really feel comfortable. It's the most cosmopolitan, if I can say that and it's actually the city where a lot of Germans come too. From other parts of the provinces of Germany, and they suddenly change. They become more- actually it's not Berlin, but they realized that their home... So, the way they behaved in their provinces, doesn't fully work here. So, they change suddenly, I like this a lot.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, this is why especially, I like cities where you have a kind of buzz and intermingling which you don't get often in the provinces, or in the countryside. Yeah.

Marissa Fox: That's certainly true, true in Chicago as well.

Marissa Fox: So, our last question is- I think there's two parts to this. "Could you please discuss what you mean when you say I am not a street photographer, but I'm a wanderer?"

Marissa Fox: And could you also discuss the possibilities/constraints for wandering and image making in public space. And he also clarifies public spaces in different urban public spaces that span the globe.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, in the past, some people wrote about me or my work and brought up Baudelaire. And Baudelaire the French poet, writer, speaks about the flaneur and I intuitively dislike this particular concept because it's more of the stroller.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Someone who has leisure time and takes his time in looking into what is happening in the city. So chilling, watching people looking into shop windows, at the railway station, or the airports. I to, do this. So, I do realize I have something of that in me, this strolling.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: But it's more a conscious wandering. I want to really stress this. I much prefer the idea of being a hunter. So, going out, hunting. Or hunting, again hunting sometimes can be quite a bit aggressive, but looking for images or for the manifestations of the threads which suddenly come into being. Okay, that's what I'm really about. So, it's very conscious way of thinking. It's some European concept in some ways of the wanderer.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Who sets out every day, wandering. He has his backpack, his walking stick... yeah, he just wanders out into- not just into the landscape or from city to city. From one location to the next. And I love doing this, I wanted to say something- that I'm a sucker for the next corner.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, whenever I'm out on the road, after about six, eight hours I can do this quite easily. I say to myself, I must go home, I must stop. But there's another corner in the distance. I must see what's beyond that. So, the next corner keeps on calling me. Okay, first of all that. Secondly, public space varies from city to city- to geographical space. Some places are much easier to photograph than others. So, I try to go with the flow.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Which is very- still is very difficult.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: This kind of photography is- in Lagos, Nigeria, people are very aggressive, can be very aggressive.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And especially when I was younger, I could hardly sometimes take photographs. As soon as I bring out the camera some people say

they're going to smash the camera. What am I doing? I'm making money out of them, using the images with sellers. So, I tried to explain that to them.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: But over the years I've been much more accepted. Especially, as I've gotten older, got gray hair, people accept me much more now, a lot of respect. Also, my camera which is not digital but analog it's not so invasive. And then since I've been doing it for about 30/40 years now. I learn what the Americans call "streetwise." So, I'm not aggressive. And I'm also- I'm not a fly on the wall, but people, most people, especially in the so-called developing world, they realize what I'm about.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: I'm wandering, making/taking images and in São Paulo in Senegal, people really respect this. No problem, do it.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Obviously not everywhere. I mean, some things you can't like... you know, criminality, drug dealing. Yeah, people... other things yeah, I'm careful about that. And also, I have a lot of difficulty photographing the homeless people, but it was so bad in São Paulo. I got into it again because it was terrible.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: People were sometimes literally naked on the street and people were just walking by others, as if they didn't even exist. I said, this can't be like this. And I started photographing this again.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Doing it here, too, but other parts of the world. So, it's a learning process and each of us- it's so individual. I can't give any rules or regulations to others, but I believe in respect.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: And I'm not in your face.

Marissa Fox: Yeah.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: So, I don't try to be invasive in that kind of way.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: I hope that's a good enough answer.

Marissa Fox: No, I think that's an excellent answer. And I think that's a great place to end on.

Marissa Fox: So that's all of our questions. But thank you so much for joining us today and for giving us this really interesting walk through your work and your career, it's been really interesting and enlightening. And I know a lot of the people in the chat have been very excited by it as well. So, I really appreciate it and thank you again.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Thank you very much. Marissa, I'm very grateful for your- How do you call it? Taking care of me and of us. Thank you to everybody who listened in and for the questions. Very, very sensible questions. Thank you very much.

Marissa Fox: And thank you.

Akinbode Akinbiyi: Again, thank you very much, bye-bye then.