

TEMPLON

ii

PRUNE NOURRY

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## Are The Statues Of Missing Chibok Girls Still Breathing?



**LAGOS** – It is many things. In its unfiltered form, it evokes deep emotions as audiences discovered during the recent exhibition on the still missing Chibok Girls titled 'Statues Also Breathe'.

The exhibition, which was held on Saturday, November 19 at Art Twenty One in Lagos, Nigeria, was presented by sculptor Prune Nourry and the Department of Fine & Applied Arts of the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. The project was undertaken in collaboration with the families of the Chibok Girls who were kidnapped by Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria in 2014.

Rooted in the ancient Ife terracotta heads artistry, the collaborative art piece was aimed at raising awareness about the plight of the 98 Chibok Girls still in captivity.

For those who beheld 'the army of girls' sculptures on display, it evoked deep remembrance and awoke a questioning spirit on the fate of the 98 girls still in captivity.

During the audio-visual medium exhibition, one of the returned girls, Amina Alli revealed how seeing the heads made her feel. She said, "I know that this work will show the world that people are still worried about the missing Chibok Girls. Even the government has lost hope on what to do.

"Seeing the pieces, I remember one of my friends who we used to go to church together, fetch water together, and other things. My friends, there are five of us and the remaining four are still there in captivity. I am not happy because I want them to be brought back so that we would continue our friendship like before."

While speaking on her quality of life after the harrowing experience, she shared, "Looking at all these works and the support and friendship I am getting from people that I have never met before, it makes me so happy.

"Sometimes, when I think about what happened, I feel sad, it weighs me down because what I am supposed to have finished by this time, I am still doing it. At other times, my life now helps me feel better because with what happened to me, my life has changed. I am getting good education now."

But for Yakubu Nkeki, President of the Chibok Girls' Parents Association, the outlook is bleak. "It is almost eight years and seven months now, and these 98 girls are still in captivity, in the hands of Boko Haram. Recently, not more than 14 of them were rescued and they came home with many children. Some with four, some with three, two, and some of them have been married to these militants.

"It is tough for us to hold them with these children. They need consoling and even rehabilitation and support because the way these militants have initiated them into their own side, they need proper care.

"That is why I am appealing to the government to at least do proper rehabilitation for these poor girls so that they will become normal or near normal."

On the preservative nature of the exhibition, which is a documentation of sorts, Nkeki explained that the initiative is good because modeling the image of Chibok Girls means they will not be forgotten in the history of Nigeria and Africa at large.

“They invited me to Ile-Ife to witness the day they started the images, and the other 12 parents and I went there. Today, this exhibition has proven to me that something fantastic has been done about the Chibok community and girls.

“In a 100 years to come, I believe somewhere I will still find this image to know that people really are concerned with the poor people in Chibok, the voiceless. Now, we are the voices for everybody in the world to know that 98 of our girls, our daughters have been missing and are still missing in the captivity of Boko Haram. By God’s grace, we believe that the others will be released and they will come back.”

Currently billed to travel to parts of Africa, Europe, and America, Saturday INDEPENDENT gathered that Nourry, the artist, was able to conceptualise the art expression when after meeting the Chibok families to conceive the project, she was entrusted with portraits of their missing daughters. These pictures created the inspiration for eight heads sculpted in clay – creating portraits of the high school girls imaged in the style of the iconic ancestral Ife head of the region.

From these eight original sculptures then molded, 108 heads were cast in clay sourced from Ile-Ife, by potters from a female potter’s community in the Yoruba town of Ilorin and students of Obafemi- Awolowo University. On September 30, a one-day workshop was held at the university, and 108 students sculpted and transformed each head into unique sculptures using portraits of the missing girls.

At the exhibition of ‘Statues Also Breathe’, Saturday INDEPENDENT witnessed the ordeal of remembrance seen in the expressions of a delegation of mothers of the Chibok Girls and girls who managed to escape Boko Haram captivity. The women and girls were in attendance to honour and remember their friends and loved ones, ‘the army of girls’ depicted in the sculptures.