

Welcome to Bedlam

Exhibition by Christopher Nelson Obuh

at Federal Government Printing Press, February 2024

The exhibition presents *No Food for Lazy Man*, a body of work including photography, text and a video installation, exploring labour in Lagos city with particular focus on the automobile spare parts market called Ladipo. This trade dates back to the eighties, when a large number of Nigerians moved to America and Europe and began to send used spare parts and vehicles back home to be sold. That created the possibility to support their families back home, but also established a flourishing business for everyone involved.

This is where Christopher's interest comes in as his art practice refers to documenting daily lives in Lagos, peoples businesses, their hopes and struggles, their resistance. His main concern is to draw attention to the workers, as often their tremendous impact on the local economy is overlooked. The subjects of this exhibition are traders hustling for their daily bread, many of them labourers with no skills who depend on their strength to earn a living. Others are apprentices, in the hope of one day owning a shop themselves. There are food vendors, mostly women, and also women mechanics who prove themselves in a male dominated field. Over time this business has grown enormously, developed into a billion-dollar economy which has spread into other parts of the continent. What makes Christopher's approach unique, is his personal commitment, focussing on the workers incredible creativity, largely responsible for the success of this informal economy. As he prefers to work collaboratively, Christopher started out by getting in touch with those he intended to present, primarily to gain their trust, but also to better understand their motivations. By doing so he achieves authentic image material which enables the viewer to explore Ladipo from an internal perspective. It's often described as a place of confusion and disorder, but when you take a closer look, you understand the particular way of organising like Africans do. They have established their own apprenticeship system which operates like an independent educational programme. Even Christopher's working method is considered to be documentary, which implies a certain veracity, we must know that all photography is subjective. It is always the photographer who determines what is to be shown, and what not. The photographic image is the result of a selection process, emanated from personal experience, so what we get is the photographers interpretation. The relationship Christopher has built up with the person portrayed is what we see in the first place. And as he has decided *No Food for Lazy Man* should have a positive impact on everyone involved, we see strong professionals who go unconstrained about their business. The aim for this exhibition is to share knowledge under a distinct approach, to discuss African ideas and systems beyond borders.

But Christopher does not only create photographic images, additionally he does performance, he writes and is also working with video. As part of *Welcome to Bedlam* a video installation including a dual screen completes the narration. On one side we see people actually working, on the other we see them moving in reverse, a reference to the country's situation, as government policies continue to frustrate the struggling masses. The need to make a change drives Christopher Nelson Obuh to go out and do the work.

Eva Maria Ocherbauer | FotoFactory.Lagos

Berlin, January 2024