

ON THE COVER

Integration by Dotun Adegbite

Portions of the following are based on an interview with the artist on December 19, 2024.

This month's cover art is a collage combining acrylic paint with bits of textile and twine on canvas. The piece, with its stylized figures and West African-influenced patterns of flat color, is titled *Integration*. However, what the artist had in mind with this title is perhaps not immediately obvious. Integration often means a coming together of different people, yet the picture is really about a journey that ends in a carnival. The journey is from Nigeria to Britain, and it is both psychological and physical in nature. Its endpoint is in a carnival that celebrates a culture carried from Africa, a culture growing roots and joining, not submitting to, the new environment. For our cover artist, integration occurs when this joining succeeds, gains acceptance in the adopted country, and remains dynamic and vital.

Dotun Adegbite is a British painter, sculptor, and graphic designer, born and educated in Nigeria. He emigrated to the United Kingdom with his family in 1996 after a 14-year career in advertising, which built to the position of creative director at a leading agency. It was a move many Nigerians have undertaken, seeking a better life away from "the security situation" and corruption in their home country. For Adegbite, relocation meant a career change to the field of welfare rights consulting, advising youth on their rights and opportunities for financial support. As an artist, he has had two solo exhibitions of his work and participated in auctions and group exhibitions in London.

There is an irony involved in the life-altering journey of the Nigerian diaspora. For centuries, Britain, the old imperial power, extracted slaves from the West African coast, transporting them to the Caribbean where they were worked to death on sugar cane plantations. After emancipation in 1834, colonization shifted to the extraction of the region's material resources, especially palm oil. The country that became Nigeria was constructed out of British holdings. Following independence in 1960, the population endured decades of autocracy as the exploitation of petroleum powered the economy and enriched a few at the expense of the many. Millions left for the United States, Canada, and, yes, the old colonial "motherland," Britain. The descendants of people whose resources, and even lives, were once appropriated have arrived in the island kingdom. They are

weaving themselves into the fabric of everyday life, creating a new social tapestry, transforming the country that instigated and benefitted from the appropriation.

Adegbite recalls being scolded by a classroom teacher for drawing under his desk during school days in Nigeria. However, he also received praise because of his proficiency in depicting North American cars, a topic of wide interest. His artistic inclinations were encouraged, although mostly in the direction of graphic design and advertising, which were regarded as viable career paths. As a child Adegbite endured the breakup of his parents' marriage and the early death of his father. He was drawn to vibrant colors as a way of counteracting the mood of this time. Art remained his first love, and he went on to major in graphic design at Yaba College of Technology in Lagos. Kolade Oshinowo, head of the Fine Arts department, was a teacher who encouraged Adegbite's development. Oshinowo was known for his figurative representation of people and their connection to the surroundings, a focus Adegbite shares. Another influence and mentor was Yusuf Grillo, who made use of both Western technique and local Yoruba sculpture motifs in his paintings, mosaics, and stained-glass works. Like these Nigerian artists, Adegbite applies Western methods and materials, including acrylic paints and canvas, combined with collage and textile inserts. The content, however, is African imagery, expressing what he calls the "flamboyance" of Nigerian culture. He likes to include illusions in his imagery and encourages viewers to penetrate past the first glance and to look deeply at his pictures and beyond what is obvious.

Returning to *Integration*, those dark loops near the top are pieces of twine fixed to the canvas. Adegbite added them to symbolize the binding of people to each other and to their new place. The binding is part of the integration process for immigrants because there are forces that can pull them apart from each other, away from their original culture and away from the society they have chosen. He hopes that readers of *American Psychologist* appreciate the challenges faced by immigrants as they rebuild their lives in unfamiliar contexts, enriching their new homes along the way.

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Art Editor