



CORA ACTIVITY REPORTS 2020-2022

2020

2020 was the year the world went fully into lockdown due to the full manifestation of the Covid19 pandemic, thus the traditional flag-off event of the CORA, the *Art Stampede*, which was always staged within the thematic context of the annual *iREP Documentary Film Festival* had to be postponed as the festival itself was cancelled two days to its take-off on March 20.

Like every other Culture Producing organisations, the CORA went into forced 'vacation' but it spent the time strategizing on how to embrace the stress poised by the Covid-era challenges. It resolved to rise about the pall of darkness and fully embrace the then emerging coping strategy of migrating its activities to virtual platforms.

In May, the CORA was appointed as part of a consultative forum convened by the Federal Government of Nigeria through its agency, the National Council for arts & Culture, to designing a support system for the continuing operations and survival and of the creative industry, during and post covid lockdown. The CORA participated actively in several virtual conferences that collated distress notes from various performing companies, galleries, restaurants, hospitality centres and others in the culture

and tourism ecosystem, and eventually designed palliative measures towards rescuing many of the culture-producing organisations. The reports were submitted to the coordinating agency in the first week of June, but the implementation was yet to be implemented by the government that set up the scheme.

In August, the CORA staged its annual *CORA Book Party*, which celebrates the 11 longlisted writers in the annual Nigeria Prize for Literature, NPL. Staged virtually, the intense literary session featured all past winners of the NPL located in different parts of the world. The session featuring 16 writers in all discussed the state of literature across the four genres of the prize – Children’s Literature, Poetry, Prose and Drama. The authors also spoke on their individual careers, recent writing exploits, and the works that got them the award, while seeking to position Literature and the Arts as liberators of the human communities.

In September, the CORA resumed its regular programming content with the staging of *BookTrek* – a live book reading session featuring the book that most engages the most trending issue in the national polity. The book of focus was *BATTLELINES*, a memoir by the veteran journalist turned politician, Chief Segun

Osoba, who is considered one of the most influential media professional of his generation, having reported on the Nigeria civil

War as well as the various highpoints of the Nigerian political dispensations. Osoba was also the Governor of Ogun State at a most critical period in Nigeria's transition to Civil rule, when adventurous military officials repeatedly sacked the democratically elected governments. The agenda was to probe into the political history of the country, to uncover some of the hidden facts about the struggle for democracy, ostensibly to bring the political trajectories of the nation to attention of the younger population who are mostly denied of such knowledge. Also, it was to, ostensibly, look into activities and operations of the media industry, especially to see why the Media has not been able to perform optimally its role as the 4th Estate of the Realm.

November was the time for the CORA's prime project, the *Lagos Book & Art Festival*, LABAF, which, having started in 1999 at the cusp of Nigeria's transition to democratic governance after over three decades of military interregnum, is the longest-running private sector-driven culture project in the country. As usual the theme took on a national focus, prognosing into the state of the world and our collective humanity. The theme was *STATE OF FLUX*, and it was designed to examine the general state of uncertainties that defined the era of the Covid19 pandemic lockdown. Though the Festival programme was held virtually, all its panels featured variegated strands of the theme, using literature, theatrical and visual arts contents to engage the theme. One of the panels was on *Writing & Social Engineering*, which looked at how the written and performative texts, and visual representation could help to change the course and cause of society by serving as platform for education, enlightenment and empowerment of the people. Another panel was on the theme, "*An Orchestra for Survival of Collective Humanity: Ending violence, Poverty & Brutality*," which had as participants scholars and literary activists

from seven countries discussing how the incidents of State-wrought violence in policies and actions could be drastically tamed through the instrumentalities of the Arts.

<https://web.facebook.com/LagosBookArtFestival/videos/702484330666436>

<https://web.facebook.com/groups/34689401550/user/100065094306937>

2021



The CORA programme cycle started ahead of its yearly dateline, which is usually March. February is the birth month of the matron of the organisation, Dame Taiwo Ajai-Lycett OON, a veteran actress, who is regarded as the Matriarch of the Nigerian Screen and Stage. Also, a vocal social and cultural activist and public intellectual, she was 80 on February 3. Thus,

CORA decided to exploit her activist personae and influence as a female gender advocate to treat themes related to the condition

of the Woman and the Girl child in the Nigerian society. This was germane at a time that the Nigerian Parliament has continuously denied the Nigerian women their rightful place in society by refusing to pass the Woman Bill (presented five times already), which is designed to guarantee greater participatory role for the female gender in the national polity.

Thus, on February 3, 2021, a congregation of nine (9) women was convoked to discuss several dimensions to the state of women in the polity. The panel consisted of women from different educational, age, faith and professional disciplines. Riding on Dame Ajai-Lycett's eminent influence in the society, the panelists examined all the issues affecting the women in the Nigerian society. The recorded proceedings became the toast of the media, especially the social media for months after the event was staged.

March, the CORA started its traditional first discursive programme with the *Art Stampede*, which was staged as the last event of the 2021 *iREP Documentary Film Festival*. Coming in the aftermath of the youth uprising that defined the Nigerian polity, popularly called #EndSARSin last quarter of 2020, which ended tragically with the killing of some youths by soldiers in parts of Lagos, the iREP festival explored ideas about how the youths could engage the democratised tools of communications, especially their phones and tablets in telling stories/covering issues that affect their daily living and experiences. In tandem with the iREP Festival's theme, the *Art Stampede* explored the topic, ***Power in the Hands of Citizens: Protests and Documentations***, and the CORA captured the spirit of the conversation thus: "*The fragility of Nigeria's democracy and the thin boundary between decency and thuggery were exposed during the ENDSARS movement. It is necessary therefore to sensitise the youth and young population*

the writers with the agenda of bringing the texts to the attention of the general public, so they can engage the contents of those works. Incidentally the book that won the Prize was a prose fiction, *The Son of the House*, by Cheluchi Onyemelukwe-Onuobia, which through the *leitmotif* of the kidnapping and human erasures that were rampant in the Nigerian society of the period, powerfully narrate a story of bravery, of overcoming personal injustice, and having the strength to face difficult truths about oneself. The 10 other books also treat subjects that engage various themes of human resilience and survival.

<https://www.newtelegraphng.com/celebrating-longlist-of-11-writers-at-nlmg-cora-book-party/>

September, the CORA staged two BookTreks on texts considered relevant to the national economy. The first was the book, *The Riddle Of The Oil Thief* by HRM King Bubaraye Dakolo, a royalty and human and economic rights advocate. Described as the untold story of several decades of oil and gas exploitation in the Niger Delta of Nigeria, the book x-rays the root causes of insecurity in the country, and presents the recipe for the restoration of peace in Nigeria and the entire West African Sub-region.

In November, the 24th edition of the prime carnivalesque culture picnic *Lagos Book & Art Festival, LABAF*, held, and because it was at the cusp of the transition to national elections, the festival focussed entirely on political themes, which was curated through its many panel discussions, conversations, visual art projects, theatrical performances and others.

The major highlight of the festival is the attempt to reach out to the global world in its programming content. Hence the CORA

collaborated with the Pan African Writers Association, PAWA, to explore how Literature in indigenous languages could be given a lift.

Tagged *PAWA-CORA Convention*, it was themed '*Development of Literature in African Indigenous Languages*,' and held with PAWA Sec-Gen, Dr Wale Okediran, delivering the lead talk., and the renowned writer-translator Kola Tubosun moderating the panel session featuring expert translators and practitioners from Cameroon, Kenya, Ghana, South Africa, and Egypt. Following that was the festival's colloquium on the festival theme, '*A Fork in the Road*' keynoted by the activist, Ayisha Osori, head of the Open Society Office, Osiwa United Kingdom. More readings and conversations held in the course of the rest of the festival, which ended Sunday, November 21.

2022

The prime art and culture advocacy group Committee for Relevant Art (CORA) flagged off its 2022 programming season on March 1, dedicating the year to celebrating the exemplary life and illustrious career of the grand patriarch of Nigeria's visual arts, Dr Bruce Onobrakpeya, as he entered the nonagenarian age in August. A multi-pronged artist, teacher and mentor to generations of artists, Onobrakpeya was clocking age 90 on August 30, and CORA said it was rolling out the drum to celebrate the accomplishments of the painter, sculptor, plastocastist and artist-philosopher, whose 60-year 'Retrospective; exhibition was then holding at the San Diego State University, United States of America. A statement from the Programme directorate of the CORA said: "Just as we dedicated

the 2021 Programming season to celebrating the life and career of the theatre matriarch, Taiwo Ajai-Lycett, we are dedicating this year fully to honouring Onobrakpeya.” Throughout the rest of the year, the CORA staged a series of conversational events, under its signature periodic gatherings, *Arthouse Forum.*, to explore various angles to the globally celebrated life and career of the patriarchal artist.

In same stead the CORA also celebrated the landmark birthdays of other eminent artists, who had through their career and exemplary life contributed to the growth of the culture ecosystem in the country. These included the veteran journalist and photo-artist, **Tam Fiofori @80** in June, the multi-skilled performer – actor, musician, storyteller, visual artist, **Jimi Solanke @80** and the veteran actor, **Olu Jacobs @ 80** both in July.

Stated the Programme directorate of the organisation: “The CORA is conscious that its Honours programme, remains a pedestal of recognition for those who should, and could be formally described as ICONS of the Culture Sector.” And in what manifests as a major shift in programming orientation and mission, the organisation also resolved to celebrate the accomplishments of younger artists - “younger masters of the creative fields who come into the 50s and 40s birthday fold in the year.”

“The CORA as a future-focused organisation, whose foundation is rooted in youth empowerment, has resolved to reawaken its commitment to the recognition and celebration of the Nigerian youths, who have consistently proved that they are well equipped mentally and otherwise in all fields of endeavour – from the Creative Art to Science and Technology – to take on the world in terms of accomplishments. To this end, the CORA

Creative Youth Club, CYCC, is being energised to stage regular programmes to recognise the contribution of the youths to the process of Nation Building,” stated the CORA. This was obviously its tactical response to criticisms that its celebratory programme usually focussed on the elderly members of the creative community.

These celebrations were held in the period between March and August, when the prime culture advocacy group staged the 13th edition of its annual *CORA Book Party* on Sunday, August 7, 2022 at the Shell Hall of MUSON Centre, Onikan, Lagos. Held both in-person and virtually, the event attracted over 1000 guests.

It featured the writers, poets, who had been longlisted for the 2022 Nigeria Prize for Literature inaugurated in 2004 and sponsored by the Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas Limited with a cash prize of first \$20,000; later, \$50,000 and now; \$100,000, which is the biggest of its kind in Africa.

In October, the CORA resumed its *BookTrek* series with 4 books published in the course of the year. The *BookTrek* is to help expose the general public to published texts that touch on the state of the polity. It has, over the past decade, helped to shape the direction of public discourse on several occasions.



In November, from Nov 15-21, the 23rd *Lagos Book & Art Festival* held on the theme, *A Fork in the Road*, which through reviews of relevant published texts,

performances and visual arts dissected the state of affairs in Nigerian polity, and made prognosis into the future of the nation, especially as it headed into the preparatory stage of yet another political transition in 2023. It was the 130th Art Stampede, and was appropriately themed, *Can Citizens Mobilise Enough To Rescue Nigeria's Democracy?*

A highpoint of the edition was the performance of *Mokóó-Morò*, a high politically-charged piece on the need for citizens to speak up on issues that affect their communities. It was followed by a conversation between a Dutch journalist, and the artist, Jelili Atiku, on the importance of the art to communal engagements.

Signed

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