**Ata Ire: Abayomi Shogbade’s Striking Tribute to Yoruba Culture and Nature**

**By Olamiju Fajemisin**

Abayomi Shogbade, a visual artist and art photographer, stunned audiences with his latest collection of works, titled Ata Ire. A Yoruba phrase that approximately translates as pepper of goodwill in English. The magnificence of this work cannot be overemphasized. Abayomi, who just landed and completed a successful solo exhibition gig with Volcano theatre, a UK-based art gallery, was able to demonstrate the delicate beauty of how nature and culture interweave and integrate into themselves through his latest demonstration.
Ata is thought to not only nourish but also fortify the soul, as evidenced by the classic Yoruba saying "emi ti o je ata, emi yepere ni," which translates to "a soul that does not consume pepper is a weak one."

Abayomi designed a brilliant visualization that tastefully and excellently represents this adage, using ebony people with ata-adorned hair or ata in their mouths. Judging According to the yoruba adage that serves as the foundation for this work, yoruba people become one with the plant/nature after eating ata, as depicted in these images that show ata in the mouths of the models and other images that show ata on the hairs of the models, implying that ata is growing on the hair, while the model itself acts as the source and the branch that holds ata.The models' hair is patterned in a traditional Yoruba hairdo that incorporates threading, making the process more immersive. There are so many details in this work that cannot be overlooked. From the background setting to the hairstyle, ata, and models employed, every shot from a different angle, position, and facial expression all contributed to a beautiful artistic direction that Abayomi has bestowed upon the art world.

The Yoruba people believe in the power of ata, and from a young age, they give their children a type of ata known as ata ire, which differs from the one depicted in this illustration. In English, ata ire is alligator pepper; one seed is typically given to a youngster to consume with the belief that it will build the child's soul, and the parents pray over the child's life. This is where the Yoruba proverb, "Emi ti o je ata, emi yepere ni," comes from. And, as is commonly known in Nigeria, where the bulk of Yorubas live, they enjoy hot and spicy food.

One takeaway from this work is that nature is vital; plants are a tremendous source of medicine and fortification that should not be overlooked. Yoruba people understand this, which is why they are experts at preparing plants and spiritual fortifications.
Abayomi Shogbade's work is really wonderful, and witnessing how he brings a popular and strong Yoruba adage to life is breathtaking. I would want to see a lot more of his work.