

## ***Sangodare Gbadegesin Ajala: Artist of the New Sacred Art Movement***



Shangodare Gbadegesin Ajala is one of Nigeria's finest artists and a true representative of traditional Yoruba culture. Sangodare lives in Osogbo, Nigeria, and in addition to his work as an artist, he is a practicing traditional Yoruba Sango Priest and Herbalist. Sangodare leads the art movement in Nigeria, founded by the late Susanne Wenger, called "The New Sacred Art Movement".

Sangodare was raised by Susanne Wenger, the founder of this Art Movement. He was born in 1948, the last son of the highest Sango Priest in Yorubaland. At the age of five, upon the death of his father, he was brought to Susanne Wenger, an Austrian artist and Priestess living in Osogbo, to be raised and educated as a Yoruba traditionalist. Susanne Wenger (1915-2009) was a renowned Austrian artist, who lived in Nigeria for nearly 60 years. During her lifetime she and the artists she mentored called "The New Sacred Art Movement", created hundreds of monumental sculptures and shrines depicting traditional deities in the Sacred Groves. The Sacred Groves, a 75 hectare forest and traditional place of worship for the Yoruba, was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2005.

Sangodare's art is an expression of his deep understanding of Yoruba tradition and ritual. His art communicates the rich complexity of his heritage and his own spirituality. The inspirations for his extraordinary batiks are Yoruba mythology and ritual as experienced through his own practice. His art provides a bridge between traditional Yoruba wisdom and the changed world of which he also has become a part. In Susanne Wenger's words, Sango's art "transcribes the orisa (i.e the Yoruba divinity) experience into artistic language, a language that can be more widely understood than the closed language of the Yoruba ritual". Parallels can be drawn to medieval art of Europe, when art then too was an *expression of the sacred*.

Batik is not an ancient craft in West Africa. Various tie-dye techniques and indigo dying have been practised for centuries, but the use of batik is comparatively new. Susanne Wenger learned the technique of "adire" in Nigeria and then experimented with wax batik methods, using multiple colours. Sangodare worked along with her but in his own style.

Sangodare has exhibited his batiks all over the world both with Susanne Wenger and in solo exhibitions. Exhibitions have been held in Nigeria, Austria, Germany, the UK, France, Germany, North America, Brazil and Cuba. Sangodare won the prestigious Golden Jubilee Award in 2010 in Nigeria presented by Nigeria Breweries/African Artists Foundation.