



## The Future is Now

### A podcast series | ArtsLink Assembly 2021: Future Fellows

#### Podcast by Ambrose Idemudia Joshua

Transcript abridged and edited by Anya Szykitka

Simon Dove:

Hello, and welcome to *The Future is Now*, a podcast series from CEC ArtsLink. My name is Simon Dove. I'm the Executive Director of CEC ArtsLink. For this podcast series, we asked 10 independent artists and curators from different parts of the world, whom we call the Future Fellows, to talk about the current context of their work and to share their vision for how they see the future of arts practice. In this episode, we hear from Ambrose Idemudia Joshua, based in Lagos, Nigeria.

Ambrose Idemudia Joshua:

My name is Ambrose Idemudia Joshua, properly known as Ambrose tJark. I'm a founding member of Westsyde Lifestyle. I'm representing the team, actually, so I'm based in Lagos. I'm an artist, a dancer, a fashion designer, and a stylist, a community organizer as well. And we're working on a project with *The Future is Now*.

The place where the young boy or girl in the street can always come to exchange with their fellow peers, or with someone she has met, or they can come there for mentorship, come for trainings. They can come there for safety in general. Basically, that's what our project is about. We're calling it D'KRIB Artist, after the passing of our queen, Love Divine Ike. At that period, it kind of gave us I would say a repurpose as to why we are actually doing this. There's actually no time to waste. This is the time for us to do what we need to do, which is to give back to the community. We need a place, a space, which is what we call D'KRIB. This is the project we're working on currently.

It is a challenge because we usually don't have facilities like this in Lagos. We don't have dance studios. We don't have community centers where creatives can come together and just express safely. We don't have it, so we are hoping to be one of the first people that will actually do something this tangible in our immediate community.

It's urgent for us to have this space right now. We tend to dictate the rules ourselves because it is our space. We can define the rules, the timing, how to go about it, a space where people can actually come together, put their heads together, to express. Where there's people, there's power.

Because our first focus is our immediate community locally, then we transcend into collaborating with other community centers locally, internationally, and globally. That is the plan. But our first objective is the local community.

This is one sweet way to actually secure the future of where we'll be living, of what we're doing, or why we're being called to be artists. Because first off, you can secure the future. Securing the future is what? Training the future ones, educating them, making sure they are going through the right path. Me growing up as a kid or young artist, I didn't have this opportunity. I didn't have it this easy. So imagine, because I didn't have these things, I'm trying to amend these mistakes. Should I say mistakes? It's not mistakes, but we are really, really making sure we secure our purpose, which is by training the younger ones and showing them the right paths, and make them stick to the essence of why they want to be artists. Because these days you can easily find artists miss their way when they get carried away by the whole façade of fame, money, and all that. Whereas we are living out the essence of the culture, of your arts, or your calling, or your talents. We need to set the foundation strong by training and educating them.

If we're properly recognized, then crisis like this, like the pandemic, you know you're calling out a pandemic showdown, then definitely you're going to make adequate provisions for artists, you understand? Why? Because we're not recognized. We're not seen as important as other people, like the technologists, fellow politicians, they, in a way, make provisions for them in times of crisis. But they don't make provisions for artists. So if we are the artists, we rely on ourselves to create opportunities for us to actually survive.

We as artists, we contribute immensely to the economy, even the GDP. Right now, I would say we contribute ten times more than what the agricultural sector contributes to the GDP of the economy. But the artist's role is never so important, never recognized, so we believe that if we are recognized and respected and seen, in a pandemic crisis like we have now, next time it will be easier for artists because they would have made necessary provisions, necessary platforms, necessary opportunities for artists, just like they do for other sectors.

People are beginning to really appreciate the street dancers like the Afro Urban culture and lifestyle, this Afro street style. Before now, we as Africans, we as Nigerians, we tend to appreciate the foreign culture more. We tend to give a damn about what someone outside the community is saying, whereas you're supposed to actually look inward, look within your own cultural place, but we don't really appreciate it. You don't just appreciate your thing, simply. Let me put it that way. But it's not like that anymore. I'm beginning to see the layman also really interested and aware of his . . . our culture. So I'm glad about the gradual change. I feel like it's a life lasting project, really. It is a journey, a continual journey.

Focus is on the females, the young females especially, because in Africa, there is now so much attention on the female. First of all, the space is nowadays people trying to even break the whole idea of masculinity, and making the younger ones understand that you're a male or a female, you're equal. We're breaking down that toxic masculinity. This is one of the goals of Love Divine. So we as a team, we know our plans. We know what she really wanted to achieve with her gift and her journey. This also really bettered the idea of the Love Divine Foundation, and also why we should have D'KRIB, which is the space, so we can adequately bring together

the young, talented females. Our other major focus on the young kids, especially also for the young females, because the world now can see that really the future is female, so we need to give them that proper attention.

Actually, so far it's been this successful because we have other communities come out to support. I told you we'll be doing community functions. We won't be doing it alone. We have neighboring communities come together to support Westsyde Lifestyle, from Uhuru, from Akoka, even from the island. Literally everywhere in Lagos, people come together to support Westsyde Lifestyle on these projects. It's been amazing. So far it's been sweet and smooth because of this support. That is one sign and proof that shows that, yes, we're on the right path. We're doing something great. And the younger ones seeing that, oh, creatives are actually coming together to support each other. When you come, it is evident, you see it. You know people in Westsyde Lifestyle. When you look to your left, you look to your right, you're actually seeing people organizing and putting things in order. We don't do these things alone. We don't. Westsyde Lifestyle is for the people, the community. It is not just about us. It is for everybody. And so far, so good. It's been smooth, and the support and love has been tremendous. It's crazy.

What's inspiring us to keep going is first of all . . . Me personally, as Westsyde Lifestyle, we already have this purpose firing within us. The fire purpose, it is a must that we do this, we must do this for ourselves. We believe this is why we've been called, and also because of Love Divine. We have no choice. We have to do this because this is what she would have wanted, and as a collective also, as Westsyde Lifestyle. And also looking at my everyday reality, the things I see every day, there are still a lot of things that needs to be changed, needs to be countered, needs to be talked about. We still have a lot of less privileged, talented kids wasting on the streets. So seeing this, our reality alone is a drive that we must keep going. And so far, so good. It might be grand or it might be small, but we've been getting results.

I am very, very optimistic. So far, what we have as artists, our tool, our voice, our expression so far has been working. We've been able to successfully tackle some really, really sensitive economic issues. If you see this city, raising global issues, we were able to tackle it because of artists. Artists came out and really talk about it, in our different artistic expressions, like when we tried to make [inaudible] listen to us. Black Live Matters, the same thing. The End SARS protest in Lagos, same thing. Artists came together to make sure our voices were heard. We became threat with the government. In a long while, I've not really seen creatives come together in that manner. The government were surprised, shocked. They saw that trend. That is why they took that drastic action against us where they killed . . . may their souls rest in peace . . . killed a lot of souls on the 20th of October 2020. This is a date we can never forget. Never forget. They had to take that measure to instill fear into us so they can go about their propaganda.

And after that, a similar protest has come up again where creatives came together, put their voices together to make sure that we're heard, and there were results. The government pulled back. These are signs that the future is great. I'm very optimistic. Very, very optimistic.

Simon Dove:

You have been listening to *The Future is Now*, a podcast series from CEC ArtsLink with support from HowlRound. All interviews and post-production is by me, Simon Dove, Executive Director of CEC ArtsLink. The specially composed music is by the extraordinary bass player and composer Shri. This podcast is part of the ArtsLink Assembly 2021: Future Fellows, supported by the Trust for Mutual Understanding, Kirby Family Foundation, John and Jody Arnhold Foundation, and of course, generous individual donors. These podcasts are available to listen to, or download the transcripts at our website, [www.cecartslink.org](http://www.cecartslink.org), or at [howlround.com](http://howlround.com).