

GÈLÈDÉ TUPPERWARE PARTY

ADEJOKE TUGBIYELE



Medium: Tupperware bowls, plastic forks, spoons and knives
Size: Varies



Gèlèdè is a Yorùbá masquerade dedicated to the praise, adulation and propitiation of “*Ìyá Nlá*” (the great mother), also called “*Ìyá wa*” (our mother) and “*Yéwájóbi*” (Mother of us all), the first mother who was endowed by Olodumare the creator, with formidable powers, including witchcraft, fertility, and power over life and death¹.

Gèlèdè is thus in the first place, recognition of the latent power of all women to wield the powers conferred on *Ìyá Nlá*, that can only be actualized if one becomes a devotee of *Ìyá Nlá*. Secondly, its reference to “our mothers”

alludes to the command of women over the mysteries of creation, fertility and fecundity. The masquerades use *èfè* (jest and satire) as social commentary to tease the powerful and critique abuses of power as well as social, political and economic excesses. Yorùbá masquerades are also referred to as “*ará òrun*” (heavenly beings) who are a physical manifestation of the spirits of the ancestors that connect the living to the dead and the unborn.

Gèlèdè masquerades use a great deal of improvisation, irony, and symbolism in vibrant displays that weave together the spiritual and temporal, the musical and the poetic and the dance form².

The Second World War required that women leave their homes to work, mainly to make up for lost income of husbands who left for war. Upon the war’s end women were told, as is now commonly known, to “go back to the



kitchen.” It was around this same time, 1940’s and 50’s, that the use of Tupperware, the plastic home product line, became widespread. Inventor Earl S. Tupper’s famous Tupperware parties were held in homes across the United States as well as Europe. As their popularity grew, the product slowly came to symbolize the liberation of women from the kitchen or home.

While women in the west enjoy new freedoms, people in oil producing nations - from which plastic originates - often do not get to reap the benefits of inventions like Tupperware.

In some cases the lack of other competitive industries, help to sustain underdevelopment and poverty.

Women and children are disproportionately affected due to a lack of education and limited chances for upward mobility. While the use of plastic is on the decline, it is mostly due to our shift towards sustainability - the so- called green revolution. We less often want to admit that our actions help to limit the freedom of others in parts of Africa or the Middle East. This subject also resonates with me on a personal

level. My mother is one of many African women living in the United States who consume Tupperware to make life easier. She refrigerates meats and vegetables for extended periods of time so that her role as wife/mother is not compromised by her nine-to-five job. Plastics make it easier for her to cater large Nigerian parties such as birthdays and weddings. In fact, she has an entire kitchen cupboard dedicated to Tupperware of all colors, shapes and sizes. I still have memories of trying to find the best arrangement to prevent them from toppling



over. More importantly, this aspect of my mother's move to the West highlights either (a) the insignificance of cultural boundaries with regards to the global economy or (b) the emergence of a new cultural hybrid. It may also speak to the powers of women to create and preserve while juggling multiple responsibilities.

BIOGRAPHY

Adejoke Tugbiyele is a Brooklyn-born artist of Nigerian (Yoruba) parents. She was raised in Lagos, Nigeria during seven of her formative years. In 2002, Tugbiyele received a Bachelor of Science in Architecture at the New Jersey School of Architecture at the New Jersey Institute of Technology. She ceased PhD study in Urban Systems at the same institution in order to pursue a Master of Fine Arts in Sculpture at Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), Reinhart School of Sculpture. Her work has been exhibited at The Museum of Arts and Design, Centre for Contemporary Art (CCALagos), and the United Nations Public Gallery. Recent awards include a Maryland Institute College of Art, Merit Award in 2011, and first place in the Newark Arts Council, Art & the City, Sculptural Fine Art Competition in 2006.

¹ Babatunde Lawal "New Light on Gelede" *African Arts*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Jan., 1978), pp. 65-70+94, p. 66.

² Bode Omojola "Rhythms of the Gods: Music and Spirituality in Yoruba Culture" *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol.3, no.5, March 2010, pp. 30-50; Babatunde Lawal "New Light on Gelede" *African Arts*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Jan., 1978), pp. 65-70+94.