

AUGUST - SEPTEMBER 2025

ISSUE 11

ESCAPE MAG

The Art of
BIEN

Guchi | Bright Chimezie | Kunmie | Erigga | Rukmani Softie | Emanuella | Eli Jae | Rachel Itaya |
DJ Axara | Zazarat | Hair By Ope | More Creatives

ESCAPEMAG

By Digital Escape Africa

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ESCAPE ARTIST 07

Guchi, Kunmie, Rukmani Softie, Bright
Chimezie, Erigga

DIGITAL AFRICA 30

Emanuella, Zazarat, Eli Jae

COVER FEATURE 57

Bien

ESCAPE ROOM 66

Rachael Itaya (Fashion),
Samuel Oluwafemi(Art)
Hair By Ope (Style)

CTRL+H 88

Does AI-Generated Art Qualify
as "Art"?

COMMUNITY WELLBEING 90

My Body, My Relationship

IJAYA COMIC 92

Breath of the Ancestors – The Origin Arc

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BEHIND THE SCENE

Winner

From the Editor

Welcome to Issue 11 of EscapeMag. Every issue feels like a milestone, but this one is special. We're growing steadily, and we're doing it with a team that becomes more dedicated with each step.

We've just launched our new website. It's faster, cleaner, and has a flip reader that lets you experience each issue in a new way. The site will also host our soon-to-launch Escape Marketplace, a space where creativity and commerce come together. You'll be able to buy the magazine directly from the site and choose the cover you want.

This issue is filled with stories that excite us. For the first time, our cover features Kenyan superstar Bien of Sauti Sol in his own unique way. We also had the vibrant energy of Guchi, fresh from her new EP, lighting up our studio. Rising star Kunmie sat down with us to discuss his breakout song Arike and his EP. Legends like Bright Chimezie and the South's rap king Erigga remind us of the deep roots of African music. Also, in a special interview, Emanuella opens up about the journey of growing up in the spotlight as a child star.

On the creative side, we were captivated by Zazarat, the artist whose finger art has become a signature expression of identity, and Eli Jae, a music artist carving out his sound with honesty and flair. We highlight sculptor Samuel Oluwafemi, hairstylist Hair by Ope, the ethereal Rukmani Softie who is signed to Cocoon, and DJ Axara, all of whom add fresh colors to African creativity.

As always, our writers explore the important conversations — from the complex intersections of love and obesity to the debates about AI art and its place in our culture.

Issue 11 is a reflection of where we are now and where we're headed. Thank you for being on this journey with us.

See you inside,

THE ESCAPEMAG TEAM

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No Skips, Just Gucci

I've always imagined that Guchi's decision to infuse purple into her brand was deliberate, so that when you see the colour, you're not thinking of Prince, you're thinking of her. And truthfully, it's worked. Every time purple flashes across my social feed, my first thought is Guchi. She wears it like a crown, embodying the royalty the shade has always symbolized.

Born Ugochi Onuoha, the Nigerian singer-songwriter mixes Afropop, dancehall, and R&B into a smooth, vibrant signature. Since her 2019 debut, she's built an impressive catalogue, from the viral Jennifer to heartfelt anthems that cross borders. Now, with her new EP, *No Skips, Just Feelings*, she's stepping onto the global stage, expanding her reach beyond Africa.

We sat down with Guchi to talk colour, confidence, and crafting music that feels as good as it sounds. Here's why purple might just be the new sound of royalty.

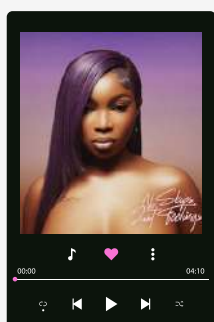


EscapeMag: So can you take us back to the little girl in an Abuja church? Do you remember the first time you made music, and how did it make you feel?

Guchi: I started from the choir when I was seven, and I think it was like a build-up for me. And my first studio session — trust me, I don't think you want to listen to that song. It wasn't so good. Listening to it now, I'm like, what? What was I singing?

EscapeMag: So your purple aesthetic has become so iconic. Was there a specific moment or story behind when you decided to choose the colour purple?

Guchi: So when I started music, I was just, you know, making random hairstyles, random colours. And I got comments like, oh, you look like this person, you look like that person. And I wanted a signature. I just decided one day that, you know what, I love the color purple. It represents so many things that I love, and I was just going to stick to it. So it's something I love personally — I love purple.





EscapeMag: So when Jennifer went viral and people were making videos, it must have been buzzing. What was happening behind the scenes at that exact time?

Guchi: Well, I was still pushing my songs. I didn't even know Jennifer was blown as of then. I went to a mall to shoot some content, and when I was shooting, I saw people passing and singing the song. That was when I knew Jennifer was blown. And the moment I realized the song was blown, I went to TikTok and saw that the video I posted had like a million views. And you know what? I had to just keep pushing and pushing. I started posting back-to-back, and it was getting millions and millions of views. I was just pushing actually then.

EscapeMag: Okay. So you've said your songs are 80% fiction and 20% personal. Can you tell us about one track when that 20% was real for you?



“

...If you listen to
Relate, that was me
pouring out my heart.
No skips, just feelings.

Guchi: Well, the one track that reflected what I was going through as of then is Relate. When I wrote that song, I was kind of down — really down — and I needed to get back to working, recording, and stuff. If you listen to Relate, that was me pouring out my heart. No skips, just feelings.

EscapeMag: What was the most vulnerable or challenging song to record, and why?

Guchi: The most challenging... I wouldn't say challenging. I just wanted to take my time to record it. It was Butterfly. You know when you're having fun recording and you're like, oh, I'm going to record the song again? That was Butterfly. It wasn't challenging, but it took the longest time because we started recording at night and I had to record it all over again the next morning.

EscapeMag: So was it because of something that happened — maybe a guy — or was it something emotional?


“

I don't make music for
just now — I make
music for three years
from now, 10 years
from now, 20 years
from now, so you can
still listen and feel it. I
just want to leave my
sound.





No, it was just me. You know, before I recorded the songs in my project, I knew exactly what I wanted. I wanted it to be more like a playlist. I knew I wanted a love song, a vulnerable love song. I knew I wanted a heartbreak song. I knew I wanted a hustle song. So when I was recording, it wasn't like something happened or I was in love — I just knew what I wanted.

A black and white portrait of a woman, Guchi, looking down with her eyes closed. She is wearing a dark, sequined, strapless top and a multi-strand pearl necklace. Her hair is styled in a short, wavy bob. The background is dark and out of focus.

EscapeMag: You've performed across Africa. Can you share an unforgettable moment on stage that reminded you why you do what you do?

Guchi: One unforgettable moment was me climbing the stage and someone dragged out my braids. Like, my hair literally pulled out because they were trying to touch me. That is a very, very unforgettable moment for me.



EscapeMag: When you imagine Guchi in 10 years from now, beyond the hits and the awards, what's the legacy you hope people will remember about you?

Guchi: One thing I hope people remember about me is my sound. I might not have everyone loving me, but the few that do, I know they love me for real. I've gotten so many DMs saying, "Guchi, my daughter loves you so much. My daughter listens to your music. I love you so much."

And one legacy I would like to leave is my sound. That's why when I make music, I don't make music for just now — I make music for three years from now, 10 years from now, 20 years from now, so you can still listen and feel it. I just want to leave my sound.

14

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Kunmie

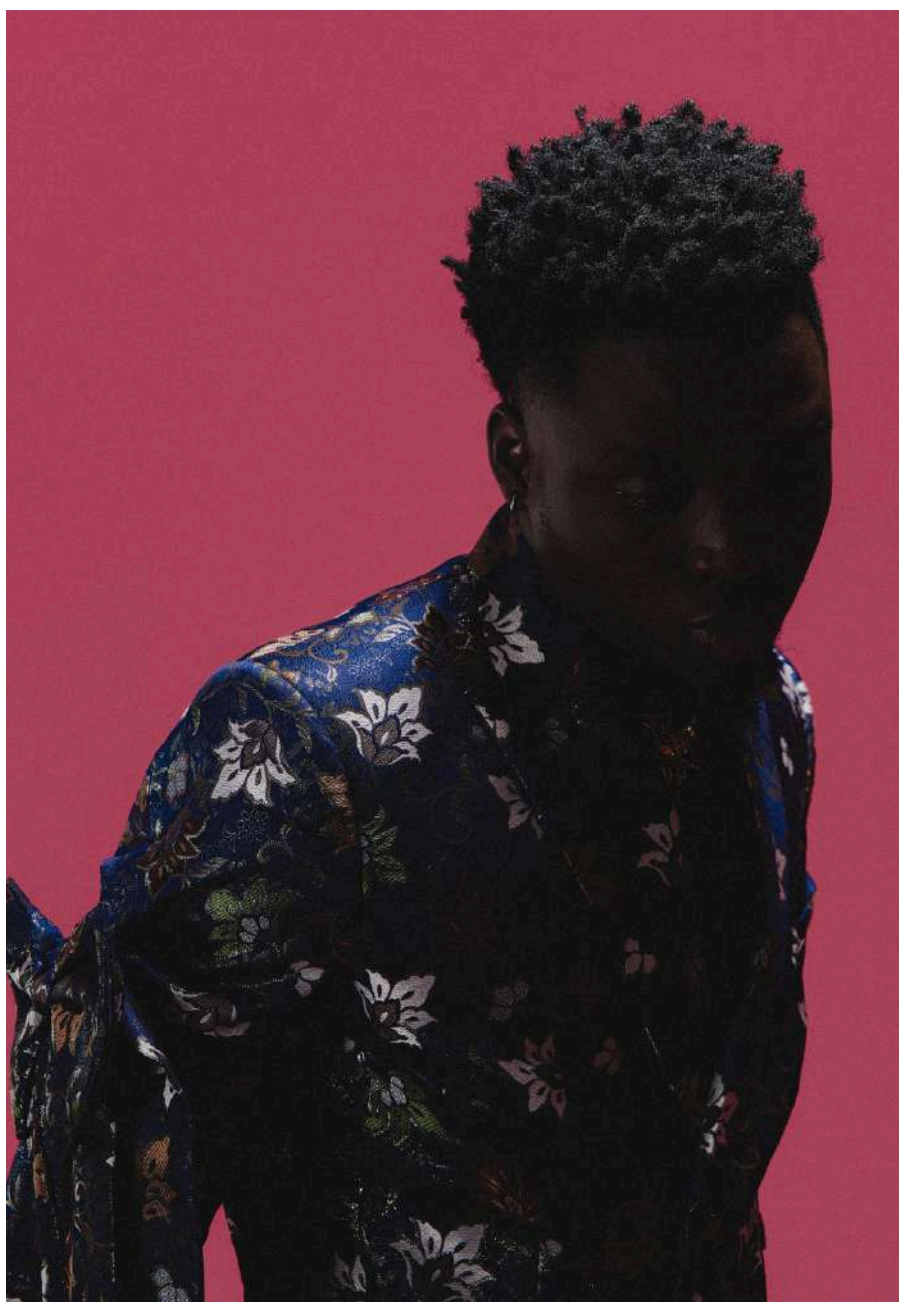
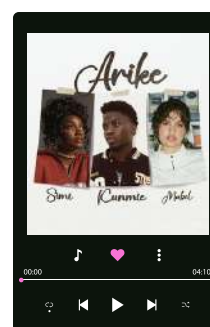
Your Next Favourite Artist

From Lagos traffic to nationwide playlists, Arike turned a quiet grind into a breakout moment. With a voice that lingers long after the last note, Kunmie is crafting stories you'll want to hear again and again.

Stuck in Lagos traffic, I kept flipping through radio stations, still one song refused to let go: Arike. By the time I reached my destination, I'd already Shazammed it and memorized the hook. Weeks later, Simi's version dropped, and the song exploded.

When I met Kunmie at the One RPM office, it was clear this wasn't luck, he'd been putting in the work, building his sound, and quietly crafting a moment like this. With his soulful voice, heartfelt storytelling, and undeniable charisma, Kunmie is poised to stay.

That's why this cover calls him what he is, your next favorite artist..



Photography by [Josh Oyeboji](#)
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[@jerryreginald1](#)



EscapeMag: When was the moment you knew music was what you were meant to do?

Kunmie: I've always known. I've always had that feeling that I was born to do something special in the music scene. But I'd say it finally clicked in 2019.

EscapeMag: What made it so prominent? Why that year?

Kunmie: It was the year I recorded my first song. From there, I just knew I was going to do this for the rest of my life.



Photography by [Josh Oyeboji](#)
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EscapeMag: Which one of your songs feels more personal to you?

Kunmie: All my songs. Every time I'm writing, I'm intentional with my pen, so everything feels like my story. But I'd say the one where I was most vulnerable was Majekajá.

EscapeMag: What made it so magical?

Kunmie: I remember writing the song, and the first line was exactly how I felt. It was the easiest song to write on the project — in 20–30 minutes, I was done.

EscapeMag: How do you want people to see you in the coming years?

Kunmie: In the coming years, I'd just say — a brand you can connect with. A brand where you can almost find your own story. The music will do the talking.

EscapeMag: People say you have a depressing tone to your music. Does that reflect your character?

Kunmie: People think I'm trying to act all sad or depressed, but it's generally just how I am. I'm not actually depressed — I'm just a very chilled guy.

EscapeMag: When did you know your project was complete?

Kunmie: I knew where I wanted it to go from the first song I started writing. I wrote them chronologically — first song first, second song second — so I had the structure in mind. But the moment I made One More Chance, I knew it was complete.

“

PEOPLE THINK I'M
TRYING TO ACT ALL
SAD OR DEPRESSED,
BUT IT'S GENERALLY
JUST HOW I AM. I'M
NOT ACTUALLY
DEPRESSED — I'M
JUST A VERY
CHILLED GUY.



PHOTO BY DIALLOBOI

I wrote the first song in 2023, and the last one in September 2024. If you listen to them, you'll understand why I named it Before We Became Strangers.

Fun fact — when I was done, I sent the songs to the babe, and she said, "You normally send me songs before we became strangers." I thought, okay, that's it.

I'm really proud of it. You don't get many projects that tell a story from beginning to end.





EscapeMag: What was the last song you made for the project, and how did you know to stop there?

Kunmie: To be honest, my colleague Bella Shmurda always says you can never truly satisfy an idea — you can always add more. If I wrote another song, it might fit, but it just had to be those four. There wasn't really a "spark" that made me say it's done — I played them for a lot of people to see if the story made sense, and everyone felt it was perfect as it was.

It wasn't just me — it was me and my team. We've been jamming the project since last year. You guys should look out for the next one — it's special.

EscapeMag: Can you tell us more about the next project?

Kunmie: The next one is very, very special. It's a continuous story, and hopefully, it drops before the end of the year. I can boldly say it'll probably be the most special project this year. I've been working on it for a long time, and I genuinely believe in those songs.

Every year, I write to my youngest self — the one I promised, "I told you it would work out." And honestly, it did. Everything worked out.

“

...YOU CAN NEVER TRULY SATISFY AN IDEA — YOU CAN ALWAYS ADD MORE.



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Shoppers & Investors:

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Production Manager: Sam

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Rukmani Softie

R&B's New Voice

Rukmani is truly a softie. The moment she walked in, her gentle aura lit up the room — all smiles, calm energy, and quiet confidence. I had seen her live on Instagram before, and it was clear she's a gem; every move carries intention, as if she's saying, "I'm coming for the top spot."



On set, she gave us elegance and confidence in every pose, sealing our excitement to share her story. Known for her distinct, sharp vocals layered with Afrobeats sounds, Rukmani Softie's music is deeply poetic — a reflection of her journey as a young woman in Nigeria. Her EP, *Angel on the Run*, introduced her crossover sound, while her debut album *3XL* dives into love, lust, and loss with raw honesty.



EscapeMag: Your vocals have been described as piercing and soulful. When did you first realize that your voice could make people feel something?

Rukmani: The first time I realized I had that effect on people was in church, back in the children's department. Some years ago, I sang a song and everybody just went quiet. It felt really good.

EscapeMag: Your music feels like poetry with rhythm. What real-life experience first pushed you to start writing songs as a way of expressing yourself?

Rukmani: I'd say it was a connection with somebody. The experience I shared with someone special at a point in my life drew me into writing and storytelling. I value human connection deeply, and that connection inspired me to write.

EscapeMag: Your debut EP, *Angel on the Run*, feels like a diary in melody. What was the most personal song on it, and what story does it tell?



“

That would be Gateway Drug. It was about a connection I had with someone who made me feel so special, so womanly, so in tune with myself and with him. I remember going home and just having to write about him, and that's how Gateway Drug was born.



EscapeMag: Your album, *3XL*, explores love, lust, and loss. Was there a relationship or life moment that shaped how you see these emotions?

Rukmani: As a softie, I'm very in tune with my emotions. Not one single experience drove the project—it was a collection of feelings and encounters. I love the mushy side of life: intimacy, vulnerability, love. I even like lust. I like everything that makes you feel, everything that makes us human. I've also experienced loss, like everyone does. So all those emotions—love, lust, vulnerability, intimacy, loss—came together to give birth to *3XL*.

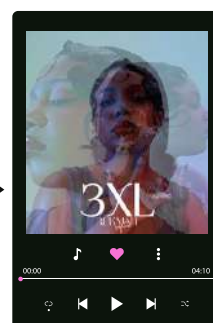




EscapeMag: You've also said your music reflects your life as a young woman in Nigeria. What's been the most challenging or defining experience so far that has shaped your artistry?

Rukmani: Learning to trust myself more. I think a lot of gifted people struggle to accept that their gift is real and worth sharing. For me, the biggest lesson has been learning to trust my own voice. And funny enough, once I started trusting myself, I began trusting others—my team, my fans—more. That's been one of my biggest experiences.

Listen



A close-up portrait of Sir Bright Chimezie, an elderly man with a weathered face and a slight smile. He is wearing a black, textured, cylindrical cap with a circular, ornate brooch on the front. The brooch features a central white gem surrounded by green and gold elements. He is also wearing a blue and gold patterned garment and a gold chain necklace. The background is a plain, light gray.

Sir Bright Chimezie

Dancing Through Decades of Ziggima Magic

Photography by [@popsshotit](#) & [Salami Omogbolahan](#)

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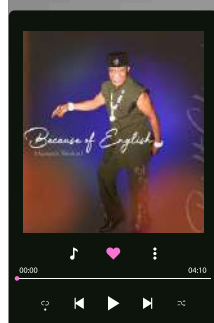
Interview by [Frankie Original](#)

BTS by [Winner](#)

Growing up in the '90s, even though I never fully understood his music or sought it out, Sir Bright Chimezie was a household name. In Nigeria, you didn't have to be a fan to know the name, his presence was that undeniable. It wasn't until I grew older that I grasped just how original and groundbreaking artists of his generation were. Meeting him in person, greeted by his warm smile, I knew I was in the presence of a living legend.



WATCH



Photography by [@popshotit](#)
 Styled by [Black Albino](#)

A pioneer of Ziggima sound—a vibrant fusion of highlife, traditional Igbo rhythms, and witty social commentary—Sir Bright has spent over four decades creating music that entertains, educates, and moves people to dance. Now, he shares his journey in his own words...

EscapeMag: You've been making music for over four decades. What do you remember about your early days of creating the Ziggima sound and performing with your first band?

Sir Bright: Wow. I remember I was much younger, about 24 years old, and almost all the members of the band were older than me. "Ziggima" is an Igbo phrase—O Ziga—meaning "the message you are supposed to know." Those were the early beginnings, and I feel so happy that we've sustained the beat till now.

EscapeMag: Your music blends humor and social commentary. Can you share a real-life experience that inspired one of your most popular songs?

Sir Bright: Number one, I use music as a medium to get messages across to the people. Most of my stories are illustrations. Oftentimes, it depends on how you want to reach your audience. For me, I use humor. Sometimes I create stories to make sure the message gets to the people.

EscapeMag: Davido sampling your *Because of English* sparked a huge moment. What was that first conversation with him like, and how did it feel hearing your classic bar again after 21 years?

Sir Bright: Wow. I think I was driving to the grocery store when his call came through. He didn't call directly; someone reached out to me and said Davido wanted to talk. I told him to give me about an hour because I was still driving. Honestly, before that hour was up, the call came again—"Davido wants to talk to you."

I didn't know he was putting me on live. His call came through—"Hey daddy, daddy", and I was so excited. "David, is that you?" We started talking about how my music influenced him, and it really touched me. Look at my age and look at his age, for me to have influenced him means a lot.

He then invited me to Lagos to host me. I was excited and said, "Bring it on." From there, everything just aligned.

EscapeMag: You've performed across Nigeria since the 80s. What's the most unforgettable or even funny thing that's happened to you on stage?





I remember when my first album / *Respect Africa* came out in 1984. We were doing a show in a club in Onitsha. When I opened up, the atmosphere was so charged that a fan came out and tried to carry me. He succeeded in lifting me, and then—boom—we both fell down. That's one unforgettable experience.

Photography by [Salami Omogbolahan](#)
Styling by [@3lvcksun](#)
Fit by [@mobiletailor.ng](#)



EscapeMag: Ziggima is more than music, it's a movement. How did you come up with your iconic dance steps, and do you remember the first crowd reaction?

Sir Bright: Music has always been an integral part of me. Each time I'm writing a song, it comes from my core, either from personal experience or from within. The music plays inside me, and when I share it with my group, the melody dictates the dance pattern I use to interpret it.

It's been there for ages. Every song that comes out, I react to it the way I feel it inside. So dancing has always been part of me.

EscapeMag: You recently signed a deal with Sony Music Publishing. What does this milestone mean to you at this stage in your career?

Sir Bright: Wow, it means a lot. We've been working to stamp our feet on the sands of time, creating and nurturing a particular brand for over 40 years. Being recognized by a global company like that is huge. It's a very big success for me.

EscapeMag: What can fans expect from you next? Any new music?

Sir Bright: Definitely. We were about to enter the studio before the Sony deal came through. People are going to hear fresh Zigma music, we're looking forward to it.

EscapeMag: Looking back, what's the proudest or most emotional moment in your career where you thought, "This is why I do what I do"?

Sir Bright: Like I've said before, music is my joy. Doing music is like eating food for me. I use it to correct societal ills in a funny way. I may not talk much in person, but once I hold the microphone, I can express myself and get my message across. Music has been my life all through.

EscapeMag: Can you do your iconic dance for us before you leave?

Sir Bright: Which one do you want, the leg one or the hand one? (Laughs)



Photography by [@popsshotit](#)
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Erigga

The Street Oracle Still Speaks

Meeting Erigga one-on-one, you immediately feel his no-nonsense energy. He's straight to the point—no small talk, no warm-up. After a quick handshake, his first words are, "What are we doing first?" That same directness has defined him since Don Jazzy's legendary Enigma Challenge, where he stamped his name as one of the few African rappers you can hear and instantly know—this is the real deal. Every bar, every line, unfiltered and true to hip-hop's core.

Born Erhiga Agarivbie in Warri, Delta State, Erigga has built a career off gritty storytelling, street wisdom, and a fearless commitment to authenticity. Over two decades in the game, he's become the unapologetic voice of the South, carrying Warri's spirit to the world.

What follows is a conversation as raw, grounded, and unapologetic as the man himself.

EscapeMag: You've been in the rap game for over two decades. Looking back, what was the turning point that made you realize music was your path?

Erigga: Yeah, when I stopped caring about what people say. When I started seeing music as a means of communication, seeing people relate to it and saying, "Yo, you changed my life with this song."

That's when I realized it was more than just me, more than money, awards, social status, or whatever metrics people use to judge greatness. It became about directly connecting with people—people who truly resonate with the sound and the energy. That was it for me.

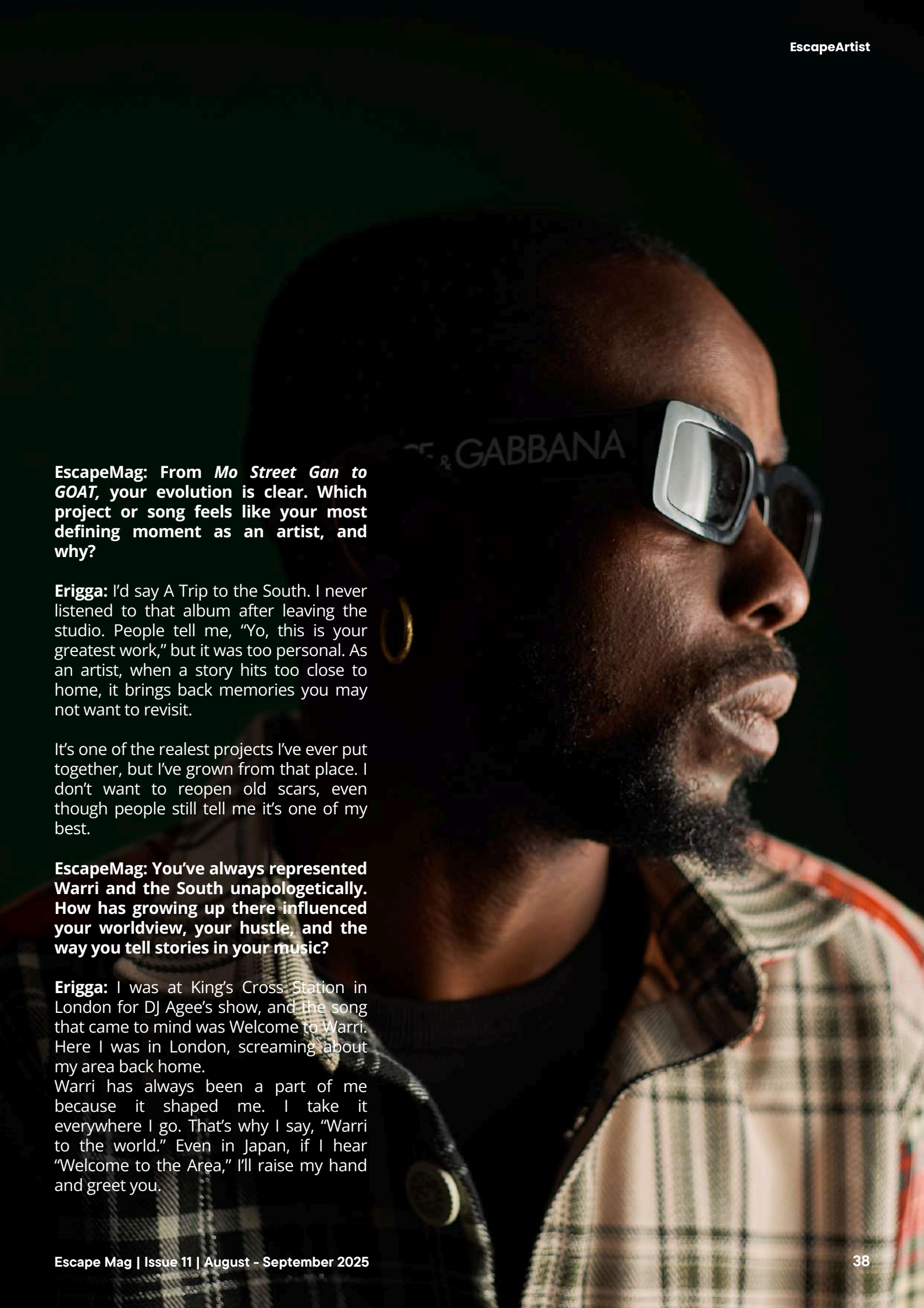
It wasn't triggered by some big external event, it was between me and myself. When I started getting direct feedback on the work I was putting out and saw it wasn't just "out there," I thought, Yo, this is serious. People's lives are being impacted.

EscapeMag: Your authenticity has been your strongest currency. Can you share a personal experience that shaped that no-filter, real-story vibe in your music?

Erigga: I came into this industry by just being myself. I've always been authentic. I remember being the first person to say tooou in music when Don Jazzy dropped \$2,000 for the "Enigma" challenge. I went raw and all in, something they weren't used to.

We Warri boys will tell you how it is; we don't sugarcoat it. That's the attitude I brought into the industry. They might try to polish it, but you can't change me because I am my music. I'm Erigga. My rap is my story—my life, my friends, my homies, my family. You can't fake that for decades; the mask will eventually fall off.





EscapeMag: From *Mo Street Gan to GOAT*, your evolution is clear. Which project or song feels like your most defining moment as an artist, and why?

Erigga: I'd say *A Trip to the South*. I never listened to that album after leaving the studio. People tell me, "Yo, this is your greatest work," but it was too personal. As an artist, when a story hits too close to home, it brings back memories you may not want to revisit.

It's one of the realest projects I've ever put together, but I've grown from that place. I don't want to reopen old scars, even though people still tell me it's one of my best.

EscapeMag: You've always represented Warri and the South unapologetically. How has growing up there influenced your worldview, your hustle, and the way you tell stories in your music?

Erigga: I was at King's Cross Station in London for DJ Agee's show, and the song that came to mind was *Welcome to Warri*. Here I was in London, screaming about my area back home. Warri has always been a part of me because it shaped me. I take it everywhere I go. That's why I say, "Warri to the world." Even in Japan, if I hear "Welcome to the Area," I'll raise my hand and greet you.

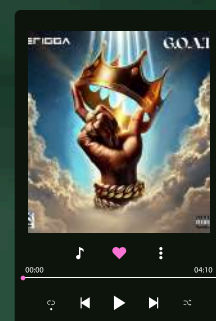
EscapeMag: Winning Best Rap Album at the Headies for Family Time must have been special.

Erigga: I feel like it was long overdue.

Honestly, it wasn't as special to me as it would have been in 2012 or 2013 when we were putting blood, sweat, and tears into the work and saw awards as a metric to prove we were good.

By now, I already know my worth. When it came this many years later, I had to ask myself, "What changed? Did I suddenly start rapping better? Did my storytelling improve overnight?" The award was really for the fans—the ones who waited, believed, and knew. I'm a fan too, so from that perspective it was amazing. But as a creator, I just felt like it was long overdue.

PLAY





EscapeMag: You've worked with MI, Vector, Zlatan... what's a collaboration story that fans would be surprised to hear?

Erigga: For the one with Zlatan—Two Criminals—I was on Instagram Live and he just joined. Next thing, we linked up backstage before a performance, recorded the track right there, and then went straight on stage. That's how quick it was. With Zlatan, it's always love. He's family.

EscapeMag: Any moments with MI?

Erigga: MI was cool because I'd always wanted that collab. We had a lot of conversations, and funnily enough, MI had performed at my events before. The track we did ended up on The Erigma II album.

EscapeMag: What do you hope for the future of rappers in Nigeria?

Erigga: Get your money right. Secure your bag, put yourself out there, and put in the work. I don't like when people say there's ageism in hip-hop. Most of the best rappers are over 30 because by then you're sharper, smarter, and you know what you're doing.

It's not just about vibes. I want to finish an album and say, "Yo, this guy dropped some serious game," not just vibes. Stay authentic. Tell your story—when you do, you'll never run out of material because life always gives you something to say.

Don't feel pressured to switch genres just because people say rap isn't popping. Don't water it down or try to turn it into Afrobeats if that's not your lane. Stay true to your core and do your thing.



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Written by Okiki Laoye

Photography by TEJ

Emanuella

From Child Star to Cultural Icon

The first time EscapeMag met Emanuella was at the African Creators Summit, where we had a brief but unforgettable chat with her. For me, I was taken aback to the very first time I stumbled on one of her videos, I remember asking myself, "Who's this small comedian?" Not long after, she was everywhere; on our timelines, in conversations, and in hearts across the globe. Seeing her at the summit was a sharp reminder of how fast time moves when talent is undeniable.



Emanuella Samuel, the pint-sized powerhouse from Port Harcourt that year, is more than just a viral sensation. As one of Nigeria's youngest comedic stars, she rose to fame through Mark Angel Comedy, charming millions with her wit, timing, and fearless personality. Over the years, she's evolved from a child making people laugh into a global face of Nigerian comedy, winning awards, traveling internationally, and inspiring kids around the world.

In this follow up conversation, we catch up with Emanuella to talk about her journey so far, the lessons she's learned in the spotlight, and what's next for the young queen of comedy.

EscapeMag: Emanuella, you started your career at just four years old. What do you remember most vividly about these early days in comedy?

Emanuella: Thank you for this question. Well, I remember people clapping and laughing. Everything felt like playtime to me, but with cameras. Sometimes I didn't even know I was being funny. I just followed instructions and had fun.

EscapeMag: You have literally grown up in front of millions of people. How has being in the spotlight from such a young age shaped who you are today?

Emanuella: It taught me a lot. It taught me how to be confident and well-behaved. I know so many people are watching, so I always try my best to be kind and respectful. It has also taught me how to work hard and never give up, even when things are hard.

EscapeMag: How do you manage the balance between school, work, and just being a young person? Do you ever find it challenging to juggle everything?



It's not easy. It's really not easy. I get this question a lot, but it's not easy. Seriously, most times I just want to relax and play. With the help of my management and my family, I always make sure I go to school and work. They help me balance school and work.

EscapeMag: What role has your family and creative team played in helping you stay grounded through the years?

Emanuella: They have really played a crucial role in my life. I want to say a very big thank you to all of them for being part of my life. My management and my family always remind me that I'm a child. Every single day, every day. Anytime I do something wrong, the first person that will call me is my manager. My manager protects me. He always makes sure I'm doing my best, I'm hard-working. He also makes sure I'm learning, not just working. That's why I love them.

EscapeMag: Comedy has clearly been a big part of your life. What other passions or interests have you discovered as you've grown older?

Emanuella: I've discovered that I love dancing and singing. I've written down some lyrics, but trust me, they're nonsense. I'm open to learning new things. I love learning every day.

EscapeMag: How would you say the child star has evolved into Emanuella, the young lady we see today?

“

...with the help of my management and family members, everything is easy. They always remind me to do my best. I don't have to be perfect. I just have to do what I love doing and be good at it.





“

Well, I've grown in the way I speak and act. It has really helped me. I understand more things now and I'm learning to take more responsibility. I mean, I'm still learning.



EscapeMag: How do you handle pressure from fans, expectations or even from yourself as you go and explore new directions?

Emanuella: It has not been easy. Most times, I feel exhausted. But with the help of my management and family members, everything is easy. They always remind me to do my best. I don't have to be perfect. I just have to do what I love doing and be good at it.

EscapeMag: What are you most excited about in this next phase of your career? Any dreams or new directions you're exploring?

Emanuella: Maybe acting in movies and maybe learning how to direct one someday. I'm really excited to travel more and meet people that love what I do.

EscapeMag: Many young people look up to you today. How do you see your role as a role model and what message do you hope they take from you?

Emanuella: I want to say a very big thank you, first of all. And I want to let every child out there know that it's okay to dream big, no matter how small you are. Just be yourself. Be kind. Have trust in God. See, if I can do it, they can too.





Zazarat

The Language of Hands

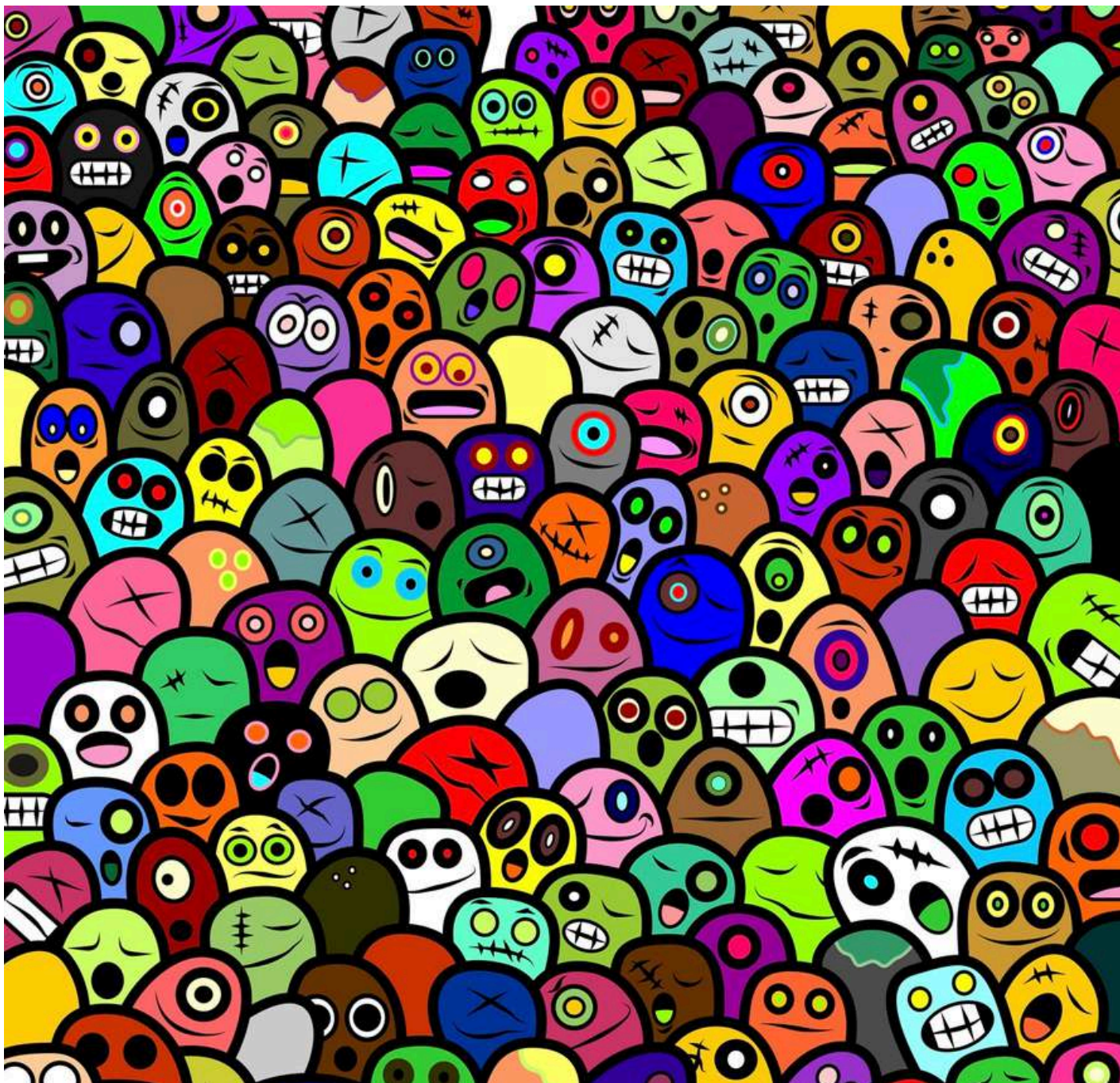


BY OKIKI LAOYE

Calabar-born artist Zazarat transforms hand gestures into Finger Monsterrs, a vivid, character-driven language of expression."

There's something both innocent and subversive about Zazarat's world. Her creations - quirky, wide-eyed "Finger Monsterrs", are equal parts childhood doodle and contemporary pop-art rebellion. They smirk, they sigh, they side-eye. They stretch their tiny cartoon hands toward you as if to say: we have something to tell you.

But the story of how these characters came to life isn't some grand artistic epiphany. It began with a passing comment.



"One day, a friend looked at one of my scribbles and said, 'That looks like fingers,'" Zazarat recalls. "It was such a simple comment, but it completely shifted my perspective. I started seeing how much our hands can say without words, the way a single gesture can carry emotion."

From there, the idea bloomed. Zazarat began refining the shapes, adding personalities, giving them attitude and color until they transformed into what she now calls Finger Monsters: tiny, animated slices of human expression. "A 'finger' a story," she calls it.

From Scribbles to Stories

The process is as instinctive as it is deliberate. "Honestly, the only thing I do is add expressions and emotions to an empty canvas, and somehow I end up with Finger Monsters," she says.

It starts with imagining how a hand might feel in a certain moment; joy, exhaustion, mischief, and then shaping that emotion into a gesture. Once the posture is set, colors and subtle facial cues do the rest.

It's a style that invites you to lean in closer. The characters are playful, but there's depth in the way they hold themselves. You can almost hear them talking.

The Exhibition That Changed Everything

Like many artists, Zazarat's early days were a mix of uncertainty and quiet hustle, until her first exhibition. "It went so well," she remembers. "I sold eight designs that day. But more than that, it was the first time my father truly saw that this wasn't just a hobby for me." That validation, both personal and professional, sparked a shift. The art wasn't just hers anymore; it belonged to an audience who wanted it.

What's Next for the Monsterrs

For Zazarat, the future is wide open. She's already collaborating with a fellow artist on a yet-to-be-revealed project and has a solo exhibition concept ready to bring to life when the moment feels right. "Finger Monsterrs can only go up from here," she says with quiet certainty. "There are so many ways to expand—new characters, new mediums, new collaborations. I'm excited to see where it goes."

The Reality of Creating in Nigeria

But between the dream and the doing lies the grind. The rising cost of materials, the weak naira, and the unpredictability of sales all loom in the background.

"Sometimes I can go a long while without selling anything at all. It can be demoralizing," she admits. "But I've learned you have to keep going. It won't always be easy, but the right people will see it when it's time."

Her resilience is as much a part of her art as the playful gestures themselves. Each "Finger Monsterr" feels like a small act of defiance—a refusal to let silence, scarcity, or doubt win.

And maybe that's the magic of Zazarat's work: in a noisy, chaotic world, she reminds us that even the smallest gesture can speak volumes.



Eli Jae

The Soundtrack of Now

Photography by [Salami Omogbo](#)

Video by [Josh Oyeboji](#)

Styling by [@stefanthe stylist](#)

Written by Okiki Laoye

Production Manager: Sam

Interview by [Frankie Original](#)

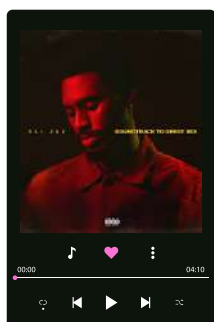
BTS by [Winner](#)



By the time you hit play on *Soundtrack to Great Sex*, it's clear Eli Jae isn't here to tiptoe around intimacy. His debut album, a nine-track plunge into connection, vulnerability, and unapologetic pleasure, plays like the score to an unforgettable night—layered, cinematic, and defiantly honest. Catch your mental breath.

The idea sparked, as many good ones do, out of frustration. "I realized it's been hard to find music that talks about intimacy and romance in that smooth, easy-going way," he recalls. "If I wanted to set the mood, I'd have to go back to the 2000s or '90s. At some point, I stopped complaining and thought—if I can't find it, I'll make it."

That decision shifted his focus from nostalgia to creation. What began as a personal soundtrack for his own moments became something larger: a collection built to resonate with anyone seeking honesty and sensuality in music.



**More Than a Playlist**

From the electric opening of *Ready* to the haunting a cappella reprise of *Your Body*, *Soundtrack to Great Sex* isn't just a set of songs—it's a narrative. "Storytelling is huge for me," Eli says. "I wanted listeners to feel like they'd stepped into my world and lived through the full arc of what I'm talking about."

Sequencing was deliberate, each track flowing into the next like chapters in a film. "When I listen back, it feels exactly how I imagined. I hope people experience that same journey."



The Now, as a Gift

Eli calls the album “the now”, a marker of where he stands creatively and personally. “It showed me how much I’ve grown, and how much I’m willing to take risks while staying true to myself,” he says. “I don’t need to follow someone else’s narrative. My truth, exactly as it is, is enough.”

It’s that commitment to authenticity that keeps the project from feeling like an industry calculation. There’s no sense of Eli shaping himself to fit a market, he’s letting the music be an unfiltered extension of who he is.

Cinema for the Ears

R&B and Afrofusion form the foundation of his sound, but Eli wanted something more immersive—music you can see. “Sometimes we’d start with a simple beat, then lay down vocals, then go back and rework the beat to match the story,” he says. “The music had to give you a visual feel, like you’re watching a scene unfold.”

That cinematic ambition is why *Soundtrack to Great Sex* feels both intimate and expansive, equally suited for a candlelit room or a pair of headphones at 3 a.m.



Truth Without Filters

With themes of pleasure, vulnerability, and connection running through the record, there's no mistaking the personal investment behind the lyrics. "I don't know how to express myself any other way," Eli says. "Even in conversations, I go deep. I like to reveal things in the purest way possible—and that translates into the music."

For him, it's not about oversharing, but about making sure what he does share is real. "When people hear my songs, I want them to know it's coming from the heart, not engineered to fit some formula."

If It Were a Film...

Ask Eli to picture the album as a late-night movie, and he doesn't hesitate. "It'd be the Red Room scene from Fifty Shades of Grey, the part where he gives her an NDA to sign, tells her it's his playroom, and she asks if there's a PS5 in there," he laughs. The perfect soundtrack? His own Taste Amazing.

It's a fitting image for an artist that's not afraid to mix playfulness with heat, tenderness with boldness. With *Soundtrack to Great Sex*, Eli Jae is subtly curating a mood, a space, and a story for anyone ready to step inside.

“

I don't need to follow someone else's narrative. My truth, exactly as it is, is enough.



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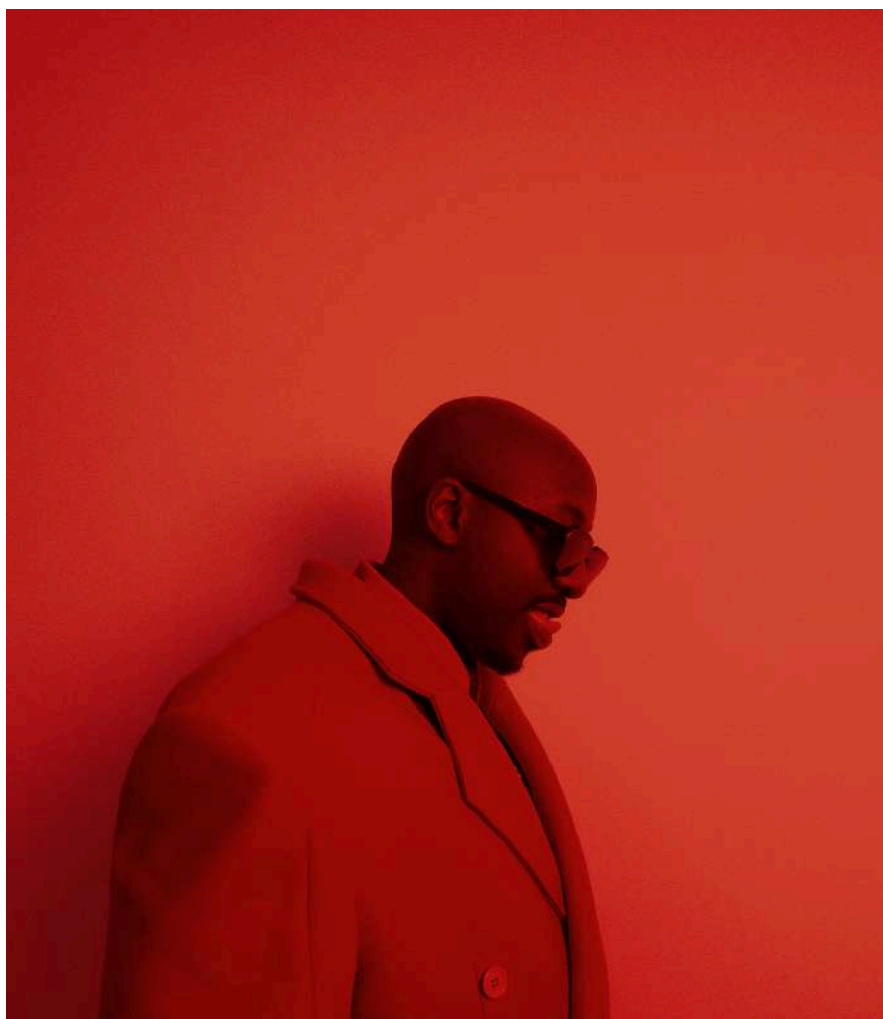
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The Art of Bien

When we had the chance to feature Bien as our first international EscapeMag cover star, it was an instant yes. Initially planned to be shot in Nigeria for our August drop, the feature shifted to a remote one, yet the final interview video made it clear—the warmth, wit, and honesty he brought were exactly why our audience would connect with him.

BY OKIKI LAOYE | PHOTO EDIT BY
PHALOREY | PROJECT MANAGEMENT
BY HONOUR AGHEDO (ONERPM)

Kenyan singer-songwriter Bien, formerly of the acclaimed group Sauti Sol, has redefined East African music with rich vocals, poetic lyrics, and a fearless blend of Afropop, R&B, and soul. Now stepping fully into his solo journey, this superstar who once stole Africa's heart is proving there's still so much more of his story—and his sound—left to share. Now, in his own words, Bien takes us into his world.



EscapeMag: You once said, “I had to have the humility to start again after Sauti Sol, so I took a definite break.” What did that journey feel like emotionally and creatively?

Bien: I think I'm still on that journey, so I can't really speak on how it felt just yet, but so far so good, and with every step I'm taking, I'm learning more about myself, I'm getting better, I can feel like my show is growing, my team is growing as well, and there's been so many beautiful moments to celebrate since I started my solo journey up until this point, and I'm looking forward to even better things.

EscapeMag: *Alusa, Why Are You Topless?* has East African traits at its core. How does your music challenge the global focus on West or South African sounds, and why is that distinction important to you?

Bien: My music is not here to challenge the world, my music is here to tell the story of my people, and as long as I've done that, then I think it's up to the world to catch up. The ones who get it, get it, the ones who don't, don't. But I think we don't make music to challenge other markets.

We incorporate some of the influences from different parts, but that's just to make a better stew. But the music is for the storytelling of the people.

“

I learned that therapy means you care about the relationship. So, I care about that relationship. I care about that part of my life, which is such a pillar of my life.





EscapeMag: You've mentioned writing songs every single day since you were a kid. Can you walk us through your creative process, how you capture inspiration from everyday moments into finished music?

Bien: My everyday process is just *Shagala-Bagala*. Scattered, because every moment is different. Sometimes I get inspired when I'm driving, sometimes I get inspired when I'm talking to my friends. Sometimes I'm on TikTok, I see something that inspires me there. I just draw inspiration from different points.

I always have crazy melodies happening in my head, so I make sure to record as many voices as possible. But, I don't know, sometimes I'm writing excellent songs, sometimes I'm writing shitty songs. But, you know what they say, it's like a tap. You have to open it, and with time, the good songs come. But I find that when I write about people, and stories of everyday people, those songs really connect.

EscapeMag: In Sauti Sol's 20-year journey, you mentioned going to therapy "like a married couple" to sustain brotherhood. What lessons from that process inform how you navigate relationships in music and business today?



Bien: It's just that in every story you hear, there's always a perspective of someone who's on the other side. Who has equally great passion for themselves and the crowd. I just learned how to respect other people's opinions. I learned how to respect other people's values. And especially, the most important is, I learned that therapy means you care about the relationship. So, I care about that relationship. I care about that part of my life, which is such a pillar of my life. It's in a good state, all the time.





EscapeMag: Collaborations with Fally Ipupa, Ayra Starr, Adekunle Gold and even Diamond Platnumz on Katam, what's your strategy behind these cross-border partnerships? What did they unlock for your sound and reach?

Bien: I don't really think it's a strategy. It looks like strategy, but in essence, it's just fellowship. I think it's very important that artists make songs together and collaborate as much as possible. You know, music is the first, I'd say, cash cow that is exported to other countries, and it shows you the beauty of Africa. If we take that trade now, if we take that practice into other forms of trade, Africa still isn't trading as much as we should. A flight from here to Nigeria is so expensive, yet we're on the same continent.

I think music has shown us that those relationships, those things make life easier for everybody and make everybody profit. So I'm asking the rest of the continent to follow suit and work together. Let's build together, let's build railways, let's build relationships with one another that are for profit.



EscapeMag: You're signed to Sol Generation Records, a label you co-founded. What did it mean to negotiate your own deal and lead Sol Generation, while reinventing yourself?

Bien: You know, it was me starting again. Because I developed so many artists in Sol Generation, I knew how to develop myself. I didn't have a discussion with Sol Generation on signing me. I know people are expecting to hear some big legal and business.

But the label took a chance on me to take them to the world, and that's still my work. It's something that I've built with passion over the years. It's taking money from your front pocket and putting it in your back pocket.

It's still a journey, though. We're still finding ourselves in the label.

We've done a lot more development in Soul Generation. And in that development, I've learned more about myself as well. And my future as a teacher. That's all I can say.

EscapeMag: Beyond music, you have a disciplined gym routine and careful diet, but you also indulge in Oreo and fries sometimes. How do you maintain balance between discipline and joy?

Bien: (Laughs) Guys, I don't. I'm allergic to Oreos. I'm allergic to fries. I eat a healthy diet. I'm a raw food vegan.

I don't know, guys. I'm struggling. Especially now because I'm in my later stages of 30s. Not that I'm in my late 30s, man. My six-pack is just fading. I'm trying my best to get abs. I'm trying to eat clean. But I don't know. Food is my friend. I find comfort in eating some things. I love fries. And it just soothes my soul. It takes me back to when I was a child.

But I punish myself by going to the gym every morning. Today, I danced for two hours and I did gym for an hour. And then I went to the forest and walked five kilometers. I'm here now. I'm punishing myself for last night's sins.

EscapeMag: You say East African music needs more confidence and visibility. What's your message to the next generation of East African artists trying to break into the global space?

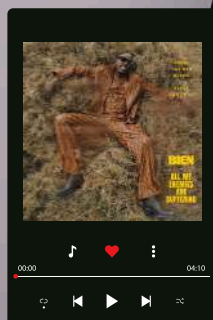
Bien: Be bold, be fearless, and put yourself in uncomfortable situations. I don't mean like that, but you know what I'm saying. Put yourself in uncomfortable situations means going to play for audiences who don't know you.

Don't get comfortable being seen by the same people every day. Don't get comfortable being in a big fish in a small pond. The world is there for us to conquer. I think the world is there for us to conquer. And your gift is to give you dominion over the world, not just your locality.



EscapeMag: As our first international cover feature, what does this global stage mean to you and to the story that EscapeMag is telling about African creators?

Bien: I'm the first international global feature. Hey, hallelujah! It's a big deal, guys. Thank you for taking a chance and starting with me as I start my solo career as well. And yeah, I wish you guys the best. You guys grow and grow and grow and always tell the African story the right way. Thank you.



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Written by Okiki Laoye

Production Manager: Sam

Interview by Frankie Original

BTS by Winner

Rachael Itaya

Fashioned for Boldness

Meeting Rachael Itaya is like stepping into a world where fashion, art, and precision collide. A multi-hyphenate creative—designer, stylist, makeup artist, and educator—she's built a career defined by bold vision and meticulous detail. From couture gowns to bikini lines, red-carpet styling to music video direction, her work has graced celebrities, movie sets, and global clients alike. As the powerhouse behind Elegant by Rachy and LuxuryBodyNG, Rachael's influence extends far beyond design—she's trained hundreds, styled thousands, and continues to shape the Nigerian fashion landscape one look at a time.

Now, in her own words, she shares her journey...



Escapemag: So you built two successful brands and worked with some of Nigeria's biggest names. What was the first fashion or make-up job you ever did and how did it make you feel?

Rachael: The first fashion job I ever did was when I wore a particular piece to a make-up job with Big Brother Reunion. I think a particular housemate saw the two-piece I wore and she said, oh I like this two-piece, can I get one? I think that was my first fashion job I ever did. To this day it still feels really amazing and I'm glad it did happen.

Escapemag: Winning star student at AISY Fashion Academy must have been a huge confidence boost for you. What lessons from that time still guide you in your work today?

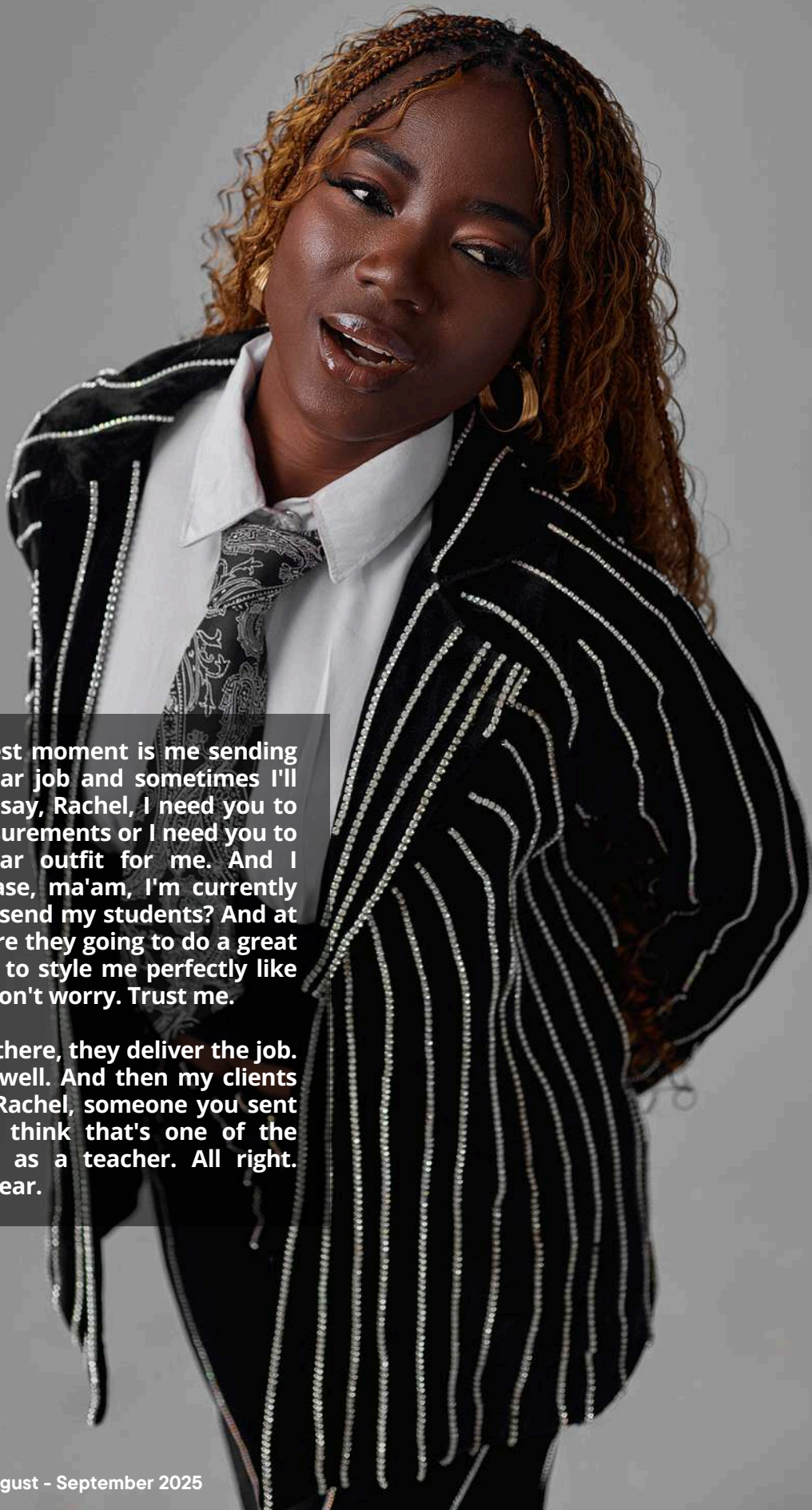
Rachael: One thing I always tell people is consistency and prayers. During my time in AISY Fashion School, it was really challenging, I won't lie. But it was the consistency for me and the hard work and most especially prayers. So consistency really does pay.

Escapemag: So Elegance by Rachy and Luxury Body Nigeria are both thriving. What's the biggest challenge of running two creative brands and how do you keep them distinct?

Rachael: Dispatch riders. Dispatch riders will not end my business. I think aside dispatch riders and then working with girls that you've not met before and then they decide to come and work with you has been really, really challenging.

I think it's just dispatch riders and then working with new faces. But with God's grace, I've been able to manage the two brands. I've been able to manage Elegance by Rachy and Luxury Body Nigeria..

Escapemag: So you've trained over 200 students. What has been your proudest moment as a mentor to them?



Rachael: My proudest moment is me sending them for a particular job and sometimes I'll tell my clients who say, Rachel, I need you to come take my measurements or I need you to make this particular outfit for me. And I would say, oh, please, ma'am, I'm currently not available. Can I send my students? And at first they'll argue, are they going to do a great job? Are they going to style me perfectly like you did? I said, no, don't worry. Trust me.

And when they get there, they deliver the job. They do amazingly well. And then my clients will reach out, oh, Rachel, someone you sent did so well. And I think that's one of the proudest moments as a teacher. All right. That's very nice to hear.



Escapemag: So as someone shaping the looks of artists and celebrities. What do you think is the next big thing for Nigerian fashion on the global stage?

Rachael: I think the next big thing for Nigerian fashion is actually my brand, it's because I am currently working with some prominent people that are outside Nigeria. So I can help push my brand, push Ibihaio to other states, other countries outside Nigeria. So currently now, the next big fashion thing that happens in Nigeria is going to be my brand.



by Sam



Hybridbwoy & Bizzonthetrack

The Sound of Synergy



For Hybridbwoy and Bizzonthetrack, better known together as HxB, that spark ignited in 2019 during what was meant to be just another casual studio session. Instead, it was the beginning of a partnership that would birth a sound neither of them could have created alone.

"The chemistry was instant," Hybridbwoy recalls. "Our ideas bouncers d off each other naturally, and I knew right there we had something bigger than just a one-off track." Bizzonthetrack nods in agreement, adding, "That first night we left the studio feeling like we had unlocked a sound that neither of us could've found alone. That's when HxB was born."

And that sound? It's a heady blend of Afrobeat and alternative vibes, vibrant yet soulful, global yet unmistakably rooted in Africa. In the studio, the two balance each other: Hybridbwoy crafting rhythm and sound layers that make the music knock, while Bizzonthetrack drops the melody, vocal textures, and storytelling that carry emotional weight. Together, they create something full and alive, a sound that is as much Lagos as it is universal.



Their debut album, *Melodramatic*, shows this synergy. Described as “soulful and Lagos-infused,” the project is like a reflection of life in motion. “*Melodramatic* came from navigating love, growth, and the madness of city life,” says Hybridbwoy. “The highs and lows of Lagos really shaped the mood.” For Bizzonthetrack, it was about pouring their lived experiences straight into the music: “Late nights, heartbreaks, the hustle, and moments of joy. That’s why the album feels raw yet soulful.”

Every track feels like a different chapter of their story, but if they had to pick one that best represents HxB, the choices speak volumes. For Hybridbwoy, it’s *Oju Ri*—a song that captures emotion, storytelling, and vulnerability in one breath. For Bizzonthetrack, it’s *No Brakes*—an Afrobeat-driven yet experimental track that proves their commitment to pushing boundaries while keeping the vibes intact.

In a music scene filled with fleeting collaborations, HxB stands out as something deeper. It’s not just two artists hopping on tracks together; it’s a merging of visions, a shared language built on rhythm and melody. Their sound resonates because it is born from actual realities, chaos and beauty, heartbreak and hustle, all woven into music that feels both intimate and expansive.

And if *Melodramatic* is only their first chapter, then HxB is just getting started. What began as a spontaneous session has now evolved into one of the most exciting creative partnerships on the rise. A dynamic duo in every sense, Hybridbwoy and Bizzonthetrack are proving that when synergy and determination collide, the result isn’t just music—it’s movement.



DJ Axara

Spinning a New Sound Revolution

by Okiki Laoye



Female DJs are taking over. Gone are the days when we used to gawk and point fingers anytime we saw a woman behind the decks. These days, it almost feels normal to expect one at any function. But with presets and new tech flooding the scene, it's getting harder to tell who's who.

One thing I know for sure is this—DJ Axara is the real deal. Watching her mix, seeing the purpose behind every set and move in her career, you just know it's only a matter of time before the world calls her name.

BY OKIKI LAOYE

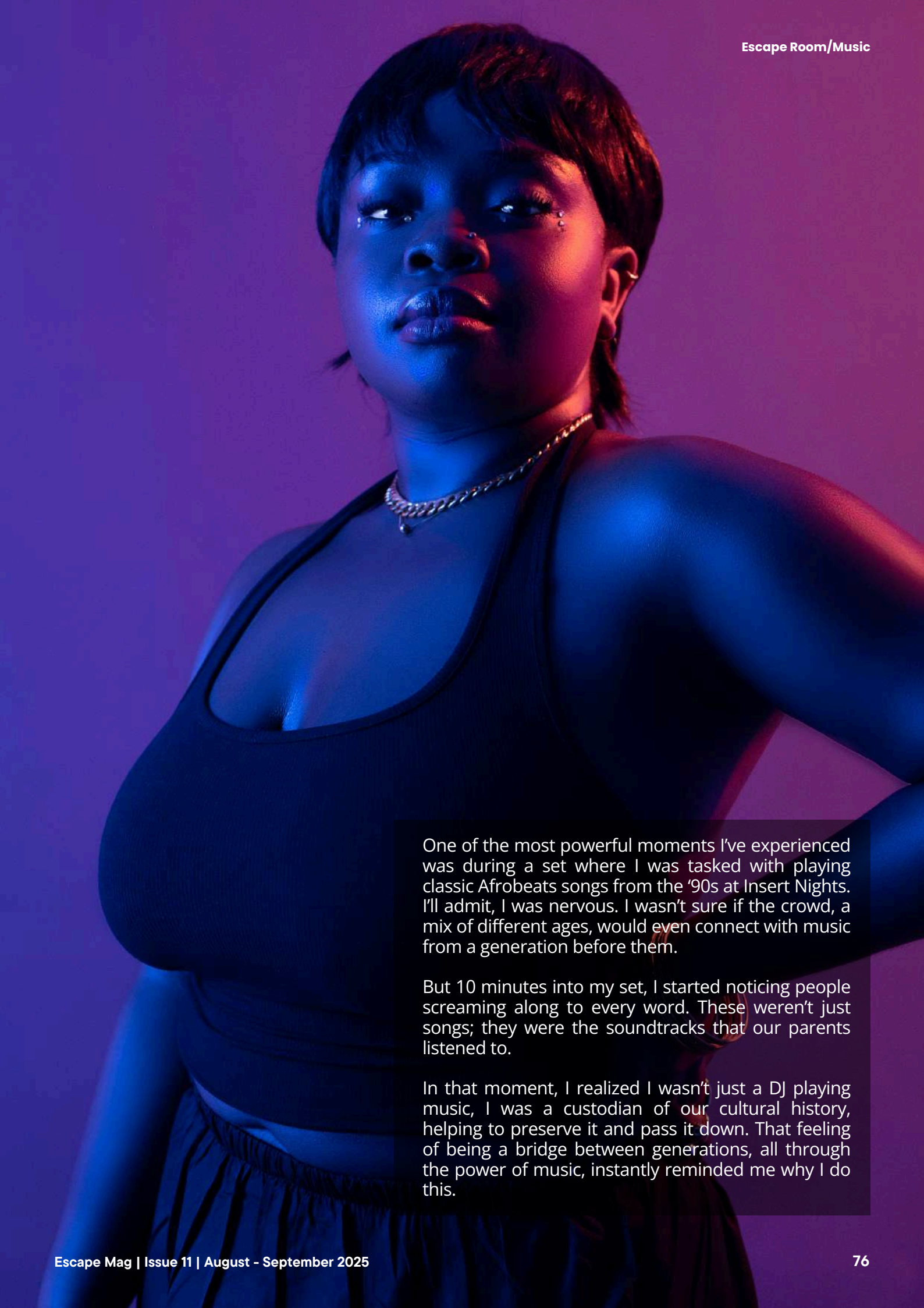
DJ Axara is a Nigerian DJ and culture shaper whose sets mix Afrobeats, Amapiano, hip-hop, and global sounds into one seamless vibe. Known for her fearless stage presence and technical skill, she represents a new wave of African DJs redefining nightlife, festivals, and global music culture.

EscapeMag: What does it mean to you to be a female DJ navigating Nigeria's male-dominated music scene?

DJ Axara: Being a female DJ in Nigeria's male-dominated music scene means constantly proving my skills and passion. It's about breaking stereotypes and focusing on the music, not my gender. I see it as an opportunity to be a role model for other aspiring female artists, showing them that with dedication, you can succeed and help create a more inclusive industry for everyone.

Also, in the next 5 years, it might not be such a male-dominated scene anymore with the powerful wave of talented and ambitious female DJs popping right now.

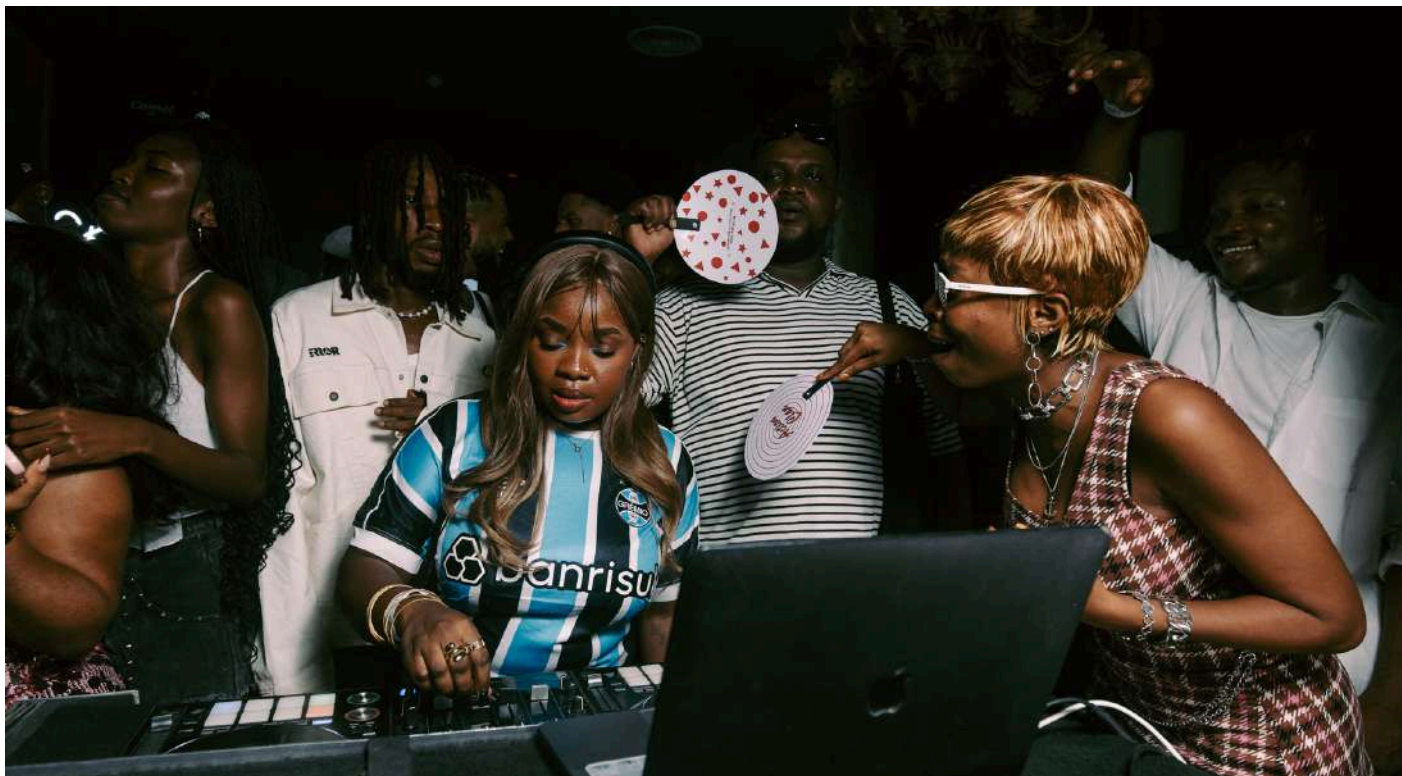
EscapeMag: What's the most powerful moment you've experienced while performing, one that reminded you why you do this?



One of the most powerful moments I've experienced was during a set where I was tasked with playing classic Afrobeats songs from the '90s at Insert Nights. I'll admit, I was nervous. I wasn't sure if the crowd, a mix of different ages, would even connect with music from a generation before them.

But 10 minutes into my set, I started noticing people screaming along to every word. These weren't just songs; they were the soundtracks that our parents listened to.

In that moment, I realized I wasn't just a DJ playing music, I was a custodian of our cultural history, helping to preserve it and pass it down. That feeling of being a bridge between generations, all through the power of music, instantly reminded me why I do this.



EscapeMag: We're seeing more women enter the DJ space across Africa. What do you think is driving this rise, and what still needs to change?

DJ Axara: I think the rise is largely driven by two things: accessibility and visibility. Digital platforms and the global success of genres like Afrobeats and Amapiano have made it easier for women to learn the craft and build an audience. Seeing successful women like Uncle Waffles and Dope Caesar at the forefront has also contributed to it.

For now, I think many of the issues that need to change are systemic problems that affect every DJ. Things like low offers, late payments, etc. are frustrating for everyone. These are the core issues that need to be addressed to make the entire DJ scene better, regardless of who is behind the decks.

EscapeMag: Your sets span House, Afrobeats, R&B, and Hip Hop. How do you approach mixing these genres for diverse crowds?

DJ Axara: I think it helps that I'm genuinely a fan of all genres of music. For general crowds, it's almost like having a continuous conversation with the audience. I'm always watching the crowd and adjusting my set to their reaction. For genre-specific events, it's basically taking the audience through that sound and showcasing the variety and uniqueness of the genre. Either way, the goal is to keep them on the dance floor and surprise them with new sounds they love no matter the genre.

EscapeMag: With Dance Dance Dance, you've entered the role of curator. What inspired the event, and what do you hope people experience when they come?

DJ Axara: Dance Dance Dance was born from a simple idea: to create a space where people can just let go and dance. I wanted to design an event that wasn't tied to one genre.

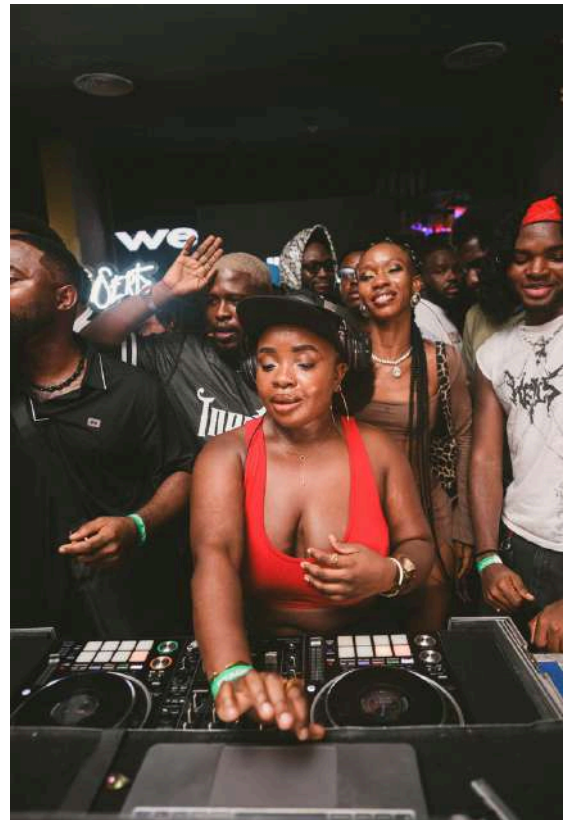
This event, as you can already tell, is a reflection of my DJing style, which is all about versatility and keeping the energy high. It's a place to prove that a great party doesn't need to be limited to one type of music. My hope is that it influences people's playlists and inspires them to explore and appreciate new sounds.

EscapeMag: You're also deeply involved in creative communities through CIIFA and the Music Business Academy for Africa. How does that work influence your identity as a DJ and creative?

DJ Axara: My work as a Community Manager at the Music Business Academy for Africa has been a huge influence on me, both as a DJ and a creative. It has really grounded me in the business side of the industry.

Working with these communities has also shown me the importance of building a strong, sustainable creative ecosystem in Africa as a whole. It's no longer just about my personal journey; it's about empowering the next generation of artists and music business professionals.

This has made me a more conscious creative, and I now approach my work with a bigger purpose. I'm not just a DJ...I'm also a part of a movement to grow and shape the future of African music.



EscapeMag: When people look back on your work years from now, what do you hope they say about the impact you made in music and culture?

DJ Axara: I want to be remembered as that creative who wasn't afraid to push boundaries and blend genres, someone who helped introduce new sounds to a wider audience.

More than anything, I hope they say that I was a part of a movement that helped shape and elevate African music on the global stage. I want to be known for connecting different sounds, cultures, and people through the power of music. I hope my work inspires the next generation of DJs to be bold, innovative, and to always stay true to their craft.

by Okiki Laoye

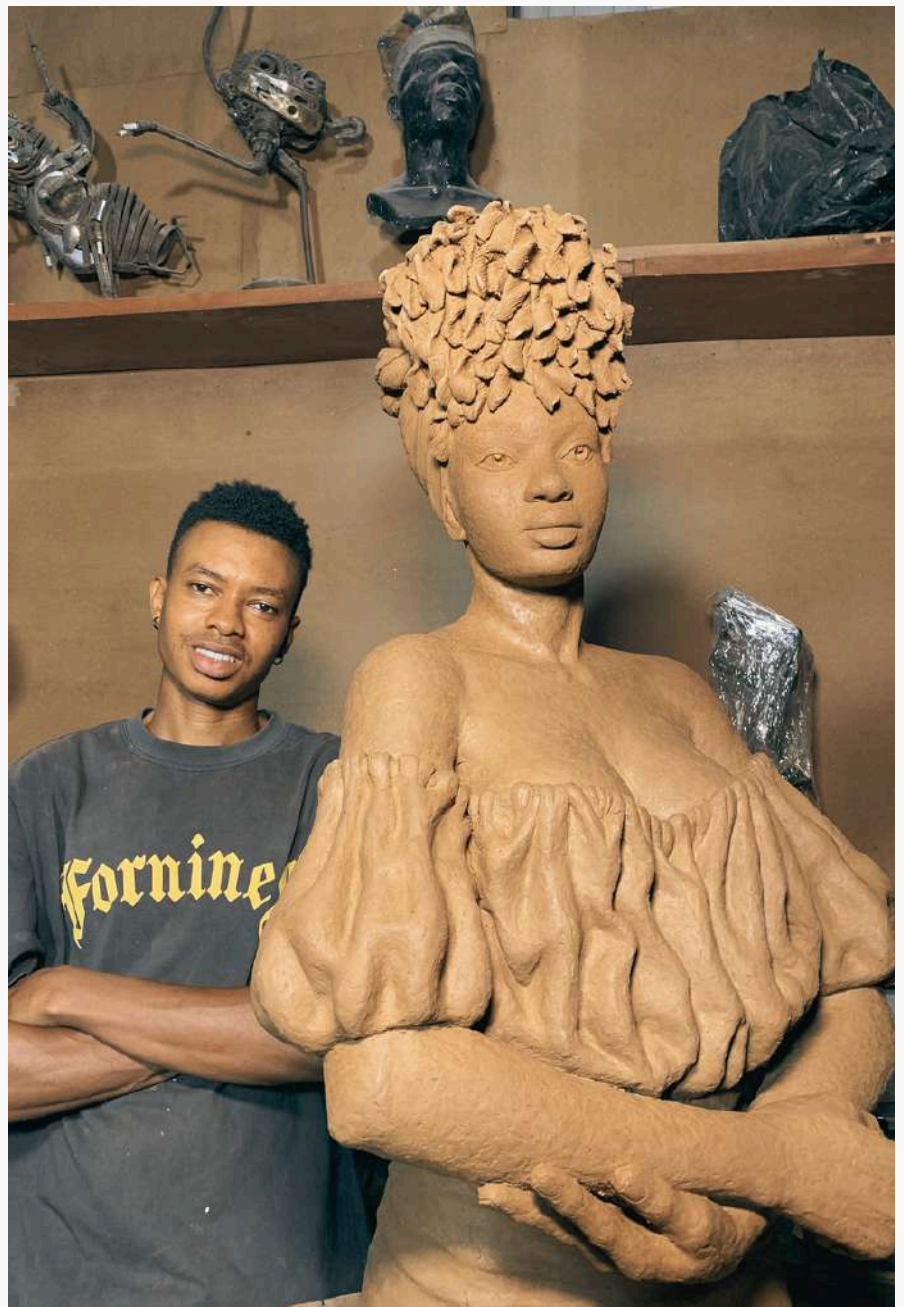
Samuel Oluwafemi

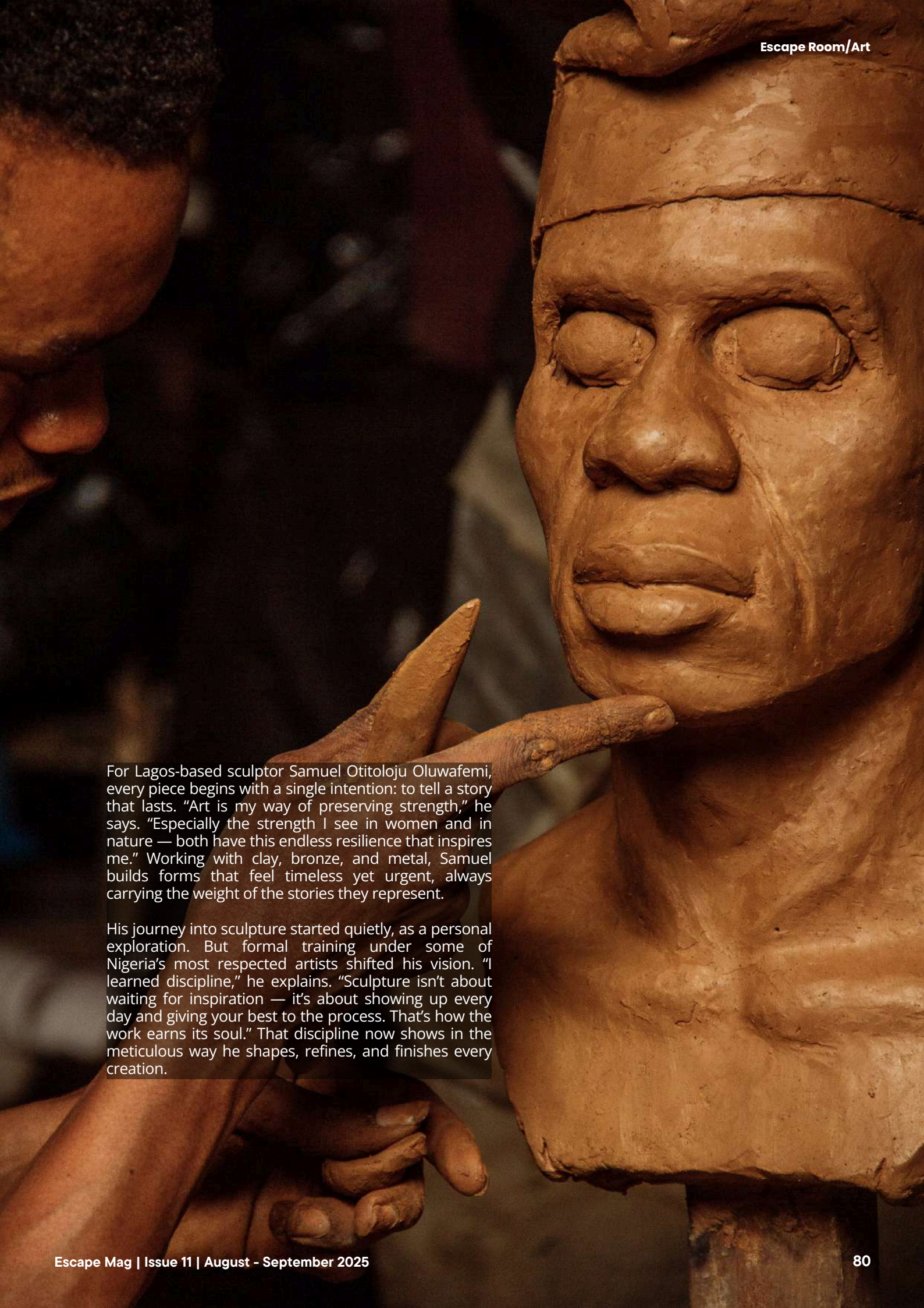
Solid as Art

Checking out Samuel's work on X made me realize something — in Nigeria's creative scene, sculptors don't get nearly as much love as their digital counterparts. Yet there's a raw, unfiltered brilliance in bending metal, shaping clay, and breathing life into something you can touch. It's more than art; it's a physical conversation between the artist and the material.

Samuel Otitolaju Oluwafemi is a Kogi-born sculptor whose works merge human form, layered storytelling, and cultural symbolism. From his Lagos studio, he crafts powerful figures — often women — that embody resilience, heritage, and the deep connection between humanity and nature. Trained at the Universal Studios of Art and Yaba College of Technology, Samuel's practice embodies the skill, passion, and the timeless beauty of three-dimensional art.

BY OKIKI LAOYE





For Lagos-based sculptor Samuel Otitolaju Oluwafemi, every piece begins with a single intention: to tell a story that lasts. “Art is my way of preserving strength,” he says. “Especially the strength I see in women and in nature — both have this endless resilience that inspires me.” Working with clay, bronze, and metal, Samuel builds forms that feel timeless yet urgent, always carrying the weight of the stories they represent.

His journey into sculpture started quietly, as a personal exploration. But formal training under some of Nigeria’s most respected artists shifted his vision. “I learned discipline,” he explains. “Sculpture isn’t about waiting for inspiration — it’s about showing up every day and giving your best to the process. That’s how the work earns its soul.” That discipline now shows in the meticulous way he shapes, refines, and finishes every creation.

“

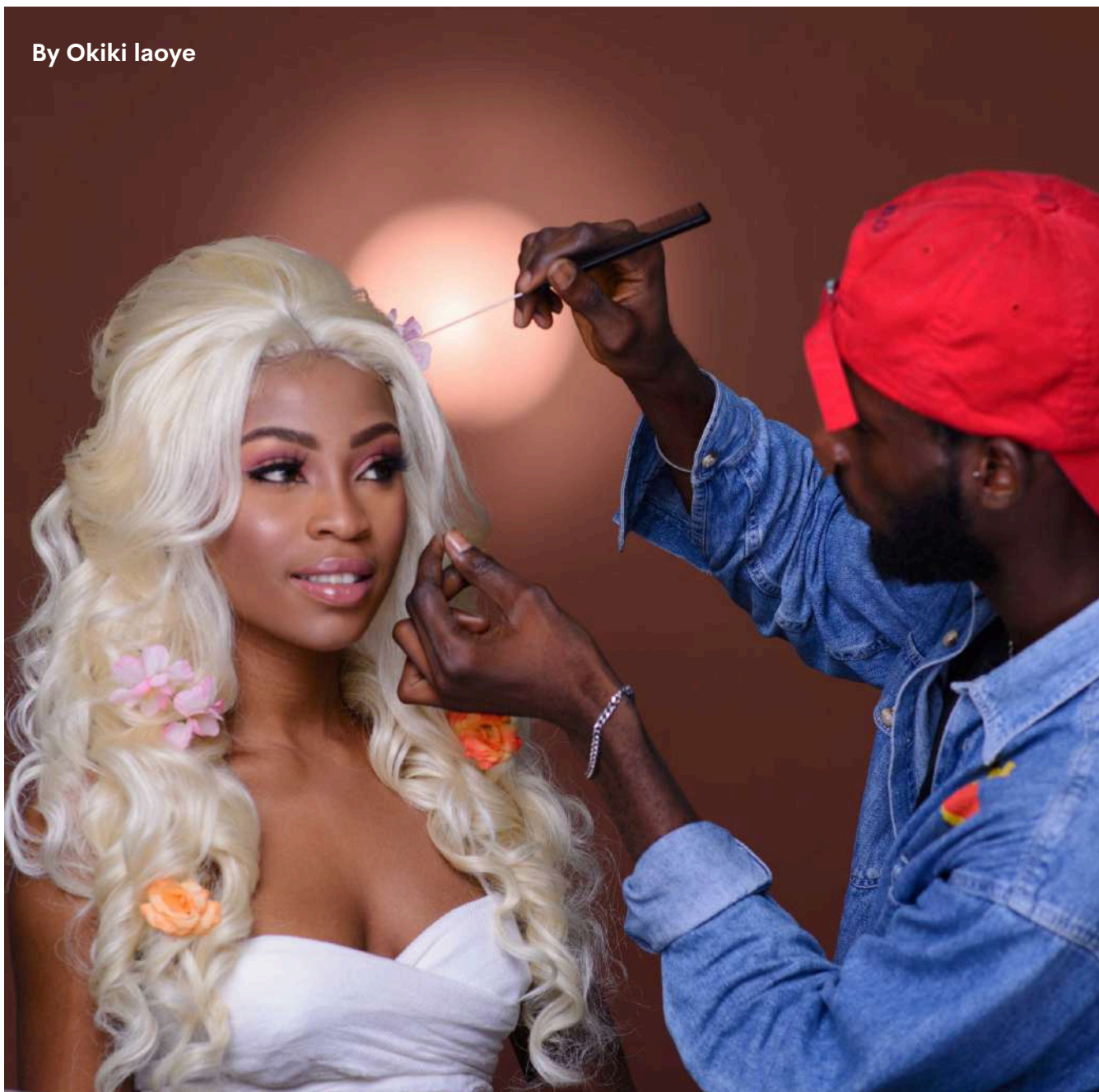
...I enjoy making metal works and it's a part of me I wouldn't let go even though I also enjoy creating figure modelings in clay, clay on the other hand is like therapy to me, feels like breathing, it remembers every pinch and every fingerprints I make on it.



Samuel's recent work focuses on themes of migration, identity, and belonging. "Clay lets me mold my thoughts as they come — it's fluid," he says. "Metal, on the other hand, demands strength. It challenges me to turn that strength into something you can touch." The interplay between these two materials gives his work a distinctive edge: soft yet unbreakable, rooted yet full of movement.

Even as the art world shifts with trends, Samuel stays committed to purpose over noise. "I'm not chasing what's popular," he says firmly. "I want my work to connect deeply, even if it takes time. African art isn't just part of the conversation — it can lead it." For him, every sculpture is a vessel carrying a piece of history, a reminder that resilience is as beautiful as it is necessary.

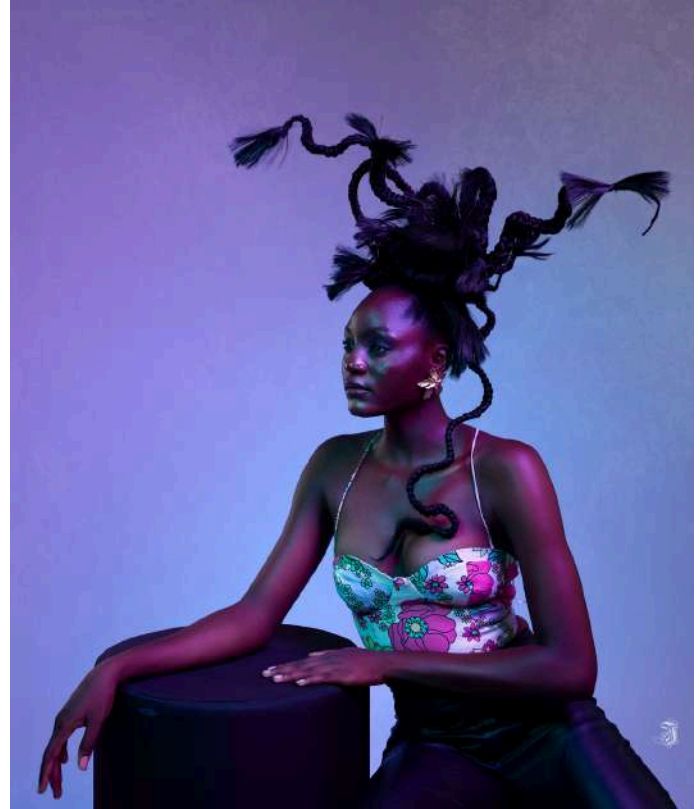
By Okiki laoye



Hair By Ope

Statement Styles

With over a decade of experience perfecting women's hairstyles, Oyebanji Opeyemi has built a reputation as a true artist with hair as his canvas. In a field often dominated by women, he stands out not just for his skill, but for the creativity and precision that have made him a trusted name among clients and collaborators alike. I've seen the magic he creates firsthand on countless projects, and I'm always proud to introduce him to other creatives. We caught up with him for a quick interview on how he found his way into the craft.



EscapeMag: What inspired you to become a hairstylist, and how did your journey begin over a decade ago?

Ope: Seeing a male hairstylist for the first time inspired me to become a hairstylist, because I never had an interest in hairstyling, it made me believe I can do it.

So the journey begins with my neighbor, she makes weaving and braids for her daughter, so I told her I'd love to learn how to weave, I showed full interest and she started putting me through with her mannequin. She eventually gave me the mannequin for continuous practice.

EscapeMag: What would you say sets your approach to female hairstyling apart in such a competitive industry?

Ope: What sets my approach to female hairstyling is the techniques and art in weaving, the different designs that can be created. I never thought of the beauty industry when I started, I just want to be good and better at what I do with no competitive mindset.



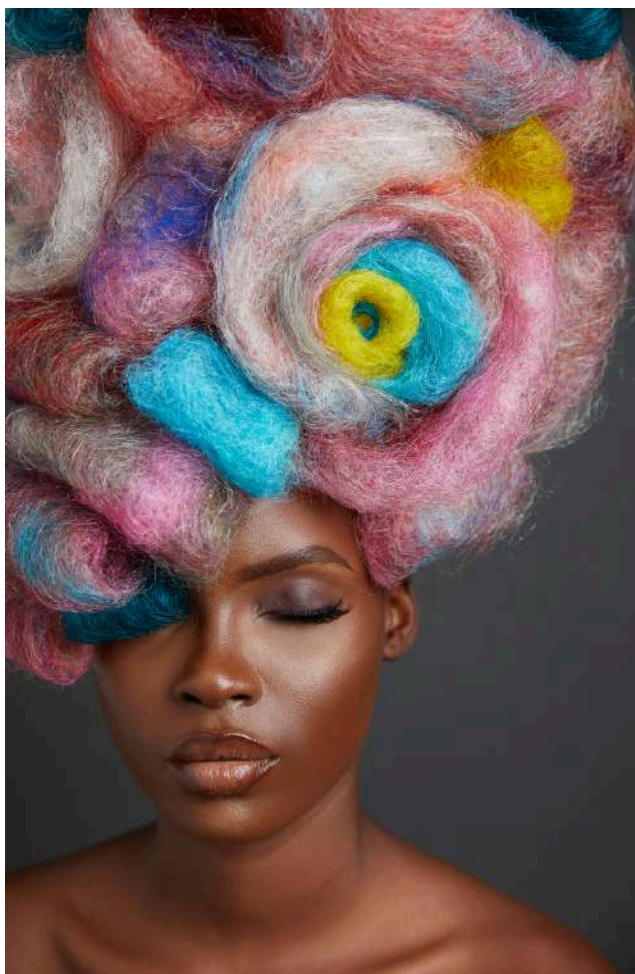


EscapeMag: In your 10+ years of experience, how have beauty standards and client expectations evolved?

Ope: Over my 10+ years experience, the beauty standards has evolved in such an amazing way. From washing and setting to straw curls, from traditional sew-ins to wigs or micro-links, now it's frontal installations with customized hairlines looking natural. Client's expectations have evolved more than just the service itself, clients now seek a welcoming atmosphere, attentive service and a sense of being valued as individuals. And convenient online booking system allow clients to schedule appointments at their convenience.

EscapeMag: What's one unforgettable moment or transformation that reminded you why you do what you do?





One unforgettable moment that reminded me why I do what I do was when I made the decision to leave a Chinese tile factory job so I could fully focus on hairstyling. It was a tough period — I had to spend months upgrading my skills before any standard salon would hire me.

During that time, I was so broke I couldn't even afford a place to live. But that struggle became my turning point. It reminded me that passion is worth the risk, and today, every satisfied client is proof that I made the right choice.

EscapeMag: What's the bigger vision for your brand as a hairstylist, where do you see it going in the next few years, and what impact do you hope to make in the beauty industry?

Ope: The bigger vision is to own salons where I can train both male and females on creative hair designs and travel overseas/abroad to train great hairstylists.

DOES AI-GENERATED ART QUALIFY AS 'ART'?

What does art mean when machines can create it too?

BY ISRAEL OLORUNNISOLA

In the middle of a mid-day doomscroll between work hours, I came across AI-generated illustrations. I was impressed. Until I realised... "Nah AI!" I hissed. Lately, I've noticed that with each new demonstration of what AI models can create, from visual art to voice-overs, the wow factor is being replaced by a darker shock that feels pessimistic, even hopeless. Omo.

What has always made humans human is our ability to feel, to interpret those emotions, and to transmit them through art. That sacred process is now being delegated. When we hand over our free will, our reasoning, and our creative instincts to machines, art is reduced to mere prompts and outputs.

Are we having art without human originality and inspiration? Are we yielding our ability to create, our most sacred gift, to a freaking robot? The critics are wondering.

The Grey Zone

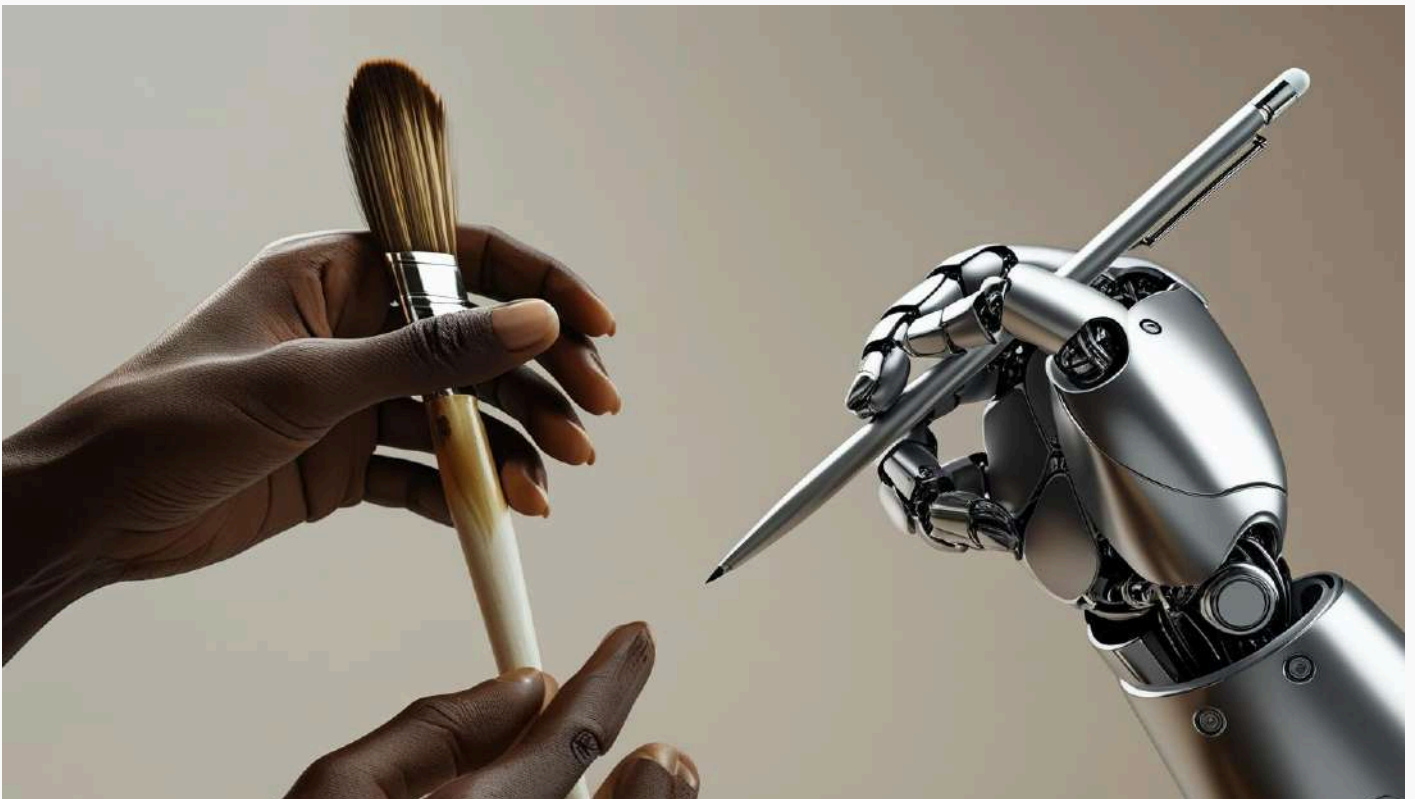
AI is a subjective, divisive subject. Each person draws their own conclusions. For science, technology, agriculture, and engineering, the verdict is clear: AI is overwhelmingly positive. But art... it's grey, just as much as it is black and white.

The foundations of every piece of art are built on raw emotions and soulful imperfection. So where exactly do we draw a line?

Yes, AI can compose music, write poetry, design clothes, and even edit films. But when the human role in the most primal stages is skipped, is it still ART?

The Last Human Invention?

AI is not going away. At least not any time soon. To deny AI's potential would be like dismissing social media in the early 2010s. Some even call it The Last Human Invention." They may not be wrong.



We've built, endorsed, and distributed a technology that doesn't simply make life "easier" and "faster" like every other machine does, but thinks, not like us, but better than us.

Super intelligence, Mark Zuckerberg calls it. Super intelligence creating super art. At what cost?

If AI and art are to coexist, should AI-generated art aim to surpass human creativity or merely imitate it? And can it ever truly be just like us?

Who, What, Where Is the Art?

So, in 2025, as AI-generated art floods our feeds, we must ask: who, what, where is the art substance?

- Is art the first thought before it's typed into a chatbot?
- Is art the medium of creation, regardless of whether its original idea was from a robot, which actually is just an infinite well of homogeneous data, the general average?
- Is art the prompt itself, the vague or detailed instruction guiding the machine?
- Is art the final expression, independent of the source or medium of creation?

Perhaps it can be all of these at once. Across various niches, art struggles to be defined. Not by the people who make it, not by the tools they use, not even by its societal interpretations!

We could call it a day here: "Each to their own." "To your tents, O artists," but history insists on offering an objective angle.

The Choice

History reminds us: art has always been tied to the tools of the time.

Animal blood for paint.

Animal skin for drums.

Bones and branches for wind instruments.

Shadows and makeshift puppeteers for film.

Today, some artists paint with oil, charcoal, watercolour, light pens, and digital canvas, while others just prompt it until they get their desired results. Maybe art needs no redefinition, only freedom to choose process, expression, and appreciation.

The Real Danger

But here's the real danger: the decline isn't in art, it's in artists. Critical thinking and communication skills are thinning at alarming rates.

An MIT study recently confirmed the "cognitive cost" of relying too heavily on AI to perform tasks that humans previously accomplished more manually. Prolonged exposure can lead to measurable cognitive decline.

For the artist: please read books, consume diverse human art as much as possible. Exercise your brain, practice public speaking and limit your dependence on AI. Think for yourself, spit out original ideas, and trust your guts.

And even if AI must come in at any junction, let it be after you have reached the end of your creative rope that pulls from your deep artistic mind. Because every time you outsource creativity, you weaken both self-trust and cognitive resilience.

The Inevitable

Having covered culture for years, I've noticed a pattern: what's abandoned eventually gains resurgence. The pendulum swings.

Artists and agencies eager not to "miss the momentum" of AI should prepare for the coming fatigue. At some point, audiences will crave the real, messy, human first and only art again. And when that happens, human artistry will become scarce, cherished, and commercially prized.

What is scarce is what is valuable. And soon, nothing will be rarer than ideas thought by human minds, created by human hands.



Untitled Skull, 1982 by Jean-Michel Basquiat

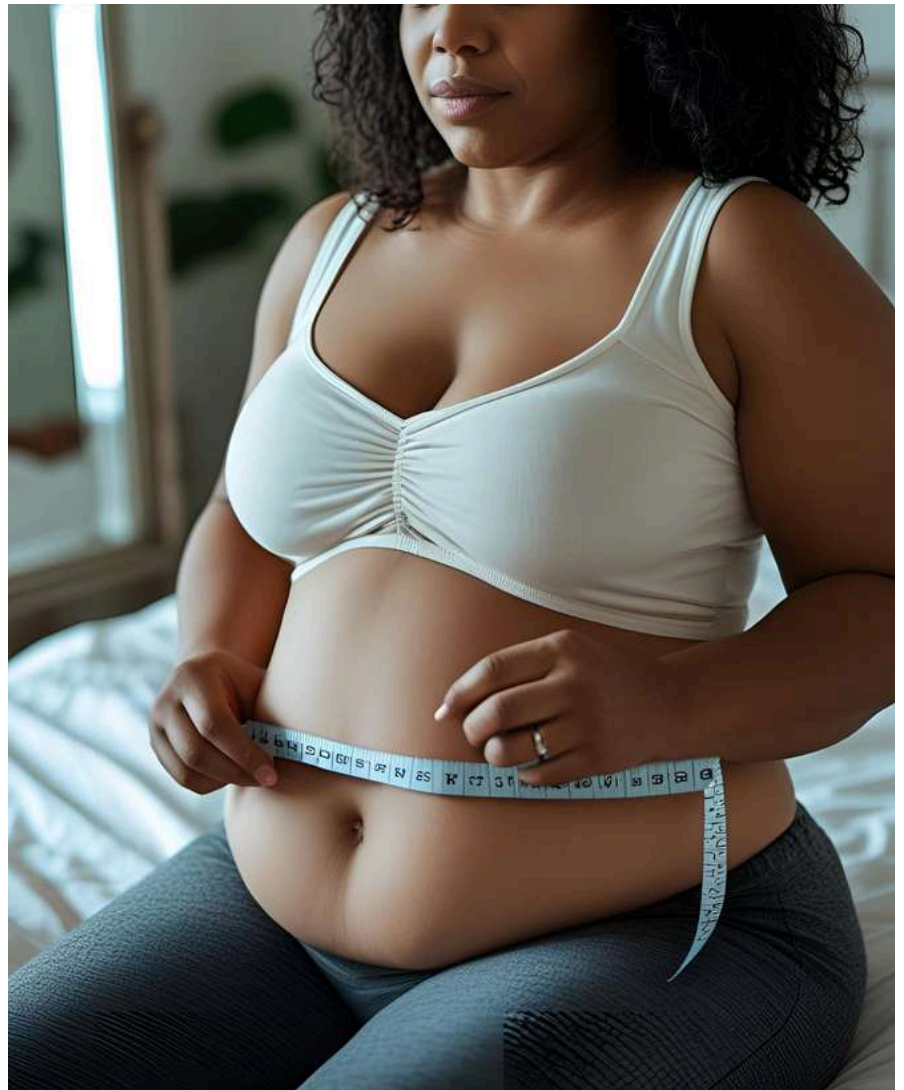
MY BODY, MY RELATIONSHIP

Why your partner's preference should never outweigh your health

BY DR NKEM ANDREA OBI

MEDICAL DOCTOR, NUTRITIONIST
CONSULTANT
FOUNDER OF M&D HEALTH

In my years of consulting, I've met many women with elevated cholesterol levels and a BMI (Body Mass Index) in the range of Grade 2 obesity. Now, it's important to note that having a BMI in this category doesn't automatically mean you'll have high cholesterol but in many cases, the two show up together.



Here's the part that concerns me: when I counsel patients on diet modification and exercise, the conversation often ends with a statement like, "My boyfriend doesn't want me to lose weight," or "My husband likes me just the way I am."

This isn't just a personal preference issue it's a health issue.

The Medical Side of the Story-Elevated cholesterol is one of the leading risk factors for heart disease, yet many people aren't aware of it. The type that's most concerning is LDL cholesterol the so-called "bad" cholesterol. It can come from certain foods we eat, especially those high in saturated fats, trans fats, and refined carbohydrates.

Over time, these cholesterol particles can build up inside blood vessels, forming plaques that narrow the arteries. This process, called atherosclerosis, can reduce blood flow to the heart and brain, increasing the risk of heart attack and stroke.

High cholesterol can also go hand-in-hand with elevated blood sugar levels, especially in people with metabolic syndrome. Left unchecked, this combination can lead to type 2 diabetes, liver problems, and more.

Your Health Is Yours: Here's the truth-loving your body and protecting your health are not mutually exclusive. Confidence is important, but confidence without good health is short-lived.

Your health should never be dictated by a partner's preference. If someone truly cares about you, they will want you to be healthy, active, and here for the long run.

Longevity Is a Team Effort

For a long, healthy life, one principle holds true: healthy eating + regular exercise = a winning collaboration.

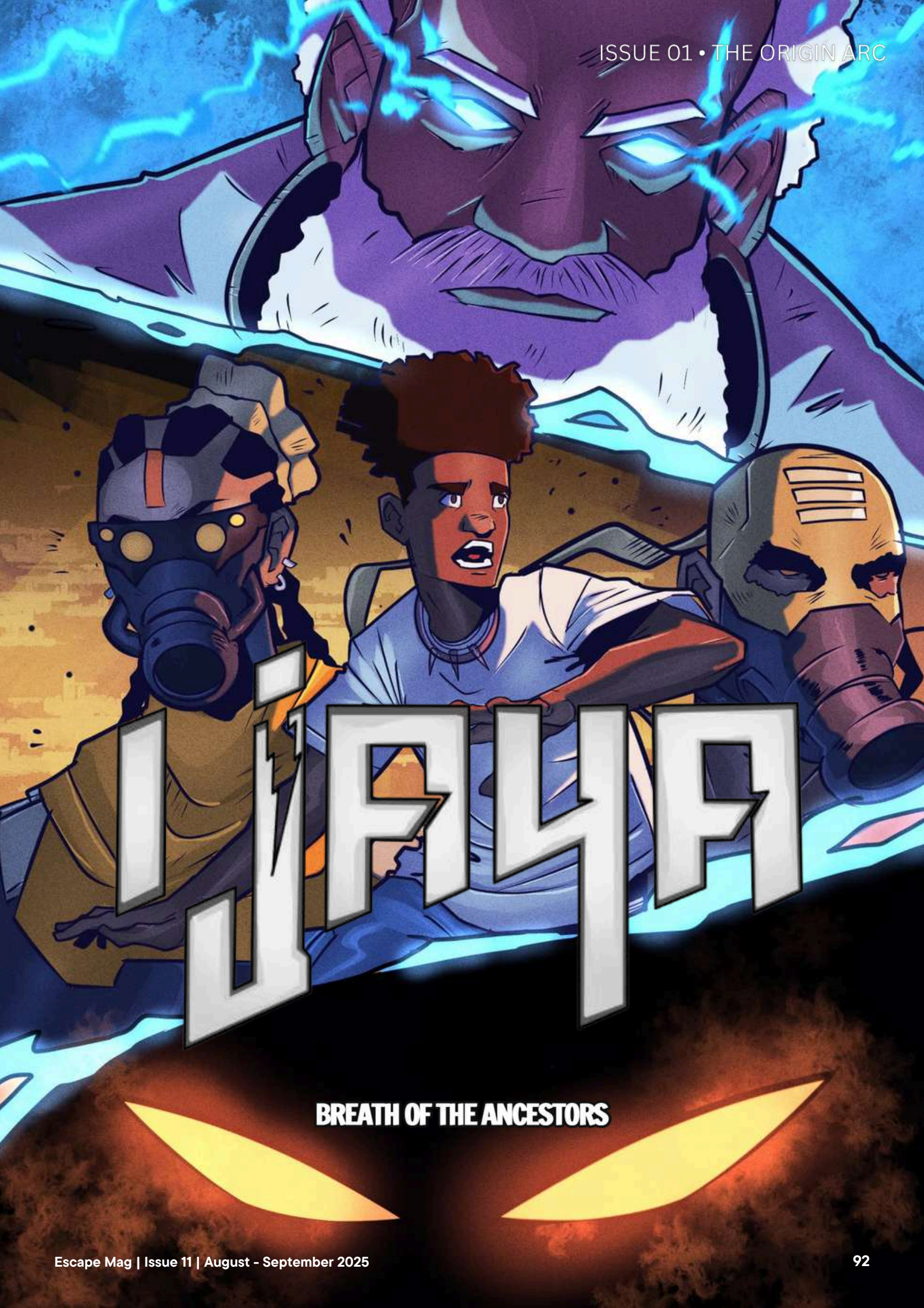
- Healthy eating means including more vegetables, fruits, lean proteins, whole grains, and healthy fats while reducing processed and fried foods.

- Exercise doesn't have to mean the gym every day it can be walking, dancing, swimming, or any movement you enjoy.

- Routine health checks help you catch changes in cholesterol, blood sugar, and blood pressure early.

Start today. You don't have to wait for a health scare to make a change. Your body, your health, your choice.





BREATH OF THE ANCESTORS

IJAYA

Story by

OKIKI Laoye
DEJI Jaye

Creative Director

DEJI Jaye

Line Art

EMMANUEL Fruebi
(Hyve)

Colours

MUYIWA Fatuyi
Adene

Speech Text/SFX

UZOMA Obinna
(Zeek)

[Read Previous Chapter](#)



CENTURIES AFTER THE FALL OF OLD NIGERIA, THE SACRED MOUNTAINS OF ILE-IFE REMAINED UNTOUCHED BY TIME. IN THESE MOUNTAINS LIVED ISHANA, THE 65-YEAR-OLD CHIEF EIFA PRIEST—GUARDIAN OF ANCIENT WISDOM AND OVERSEER OF THE GRAND EIFA SHRINE.*

SINCE THE FALL OF ÈXÙ, EIFA PRIESTS HAD BECOME THE LAST TRUE BRIDGE BETWEEN MAN AND THE DIVINE. AND ON THIS NIGHT, UNDER THE WATCHFUL GAZE OF THE MOON... ISHANA STIRRED.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND...

THE DREAM HAD FELT REAL. TOO REAL TO IGNORE.

THE HOUR CLOAKED IN AN UNNATURAL STILLNESS...
3:00 A.M.

IT WASN'T JUST A DREAM.

SEEKING SOLACE IN THE COOL NIGHT AIR...

COLD NIGHT.

BUT BENEATH THE STILLNESS...
SOMETHING STIRRED.



IT DESCENDED LIKE A SHADOW TORN FROM THE STARS...

FWOOOOOSH

FWOOOOOSH

WHAT
ABOMINATION
IS THAT?

?!



THERE'S NO TIME TO RUN—ONLY TO FIGHT.

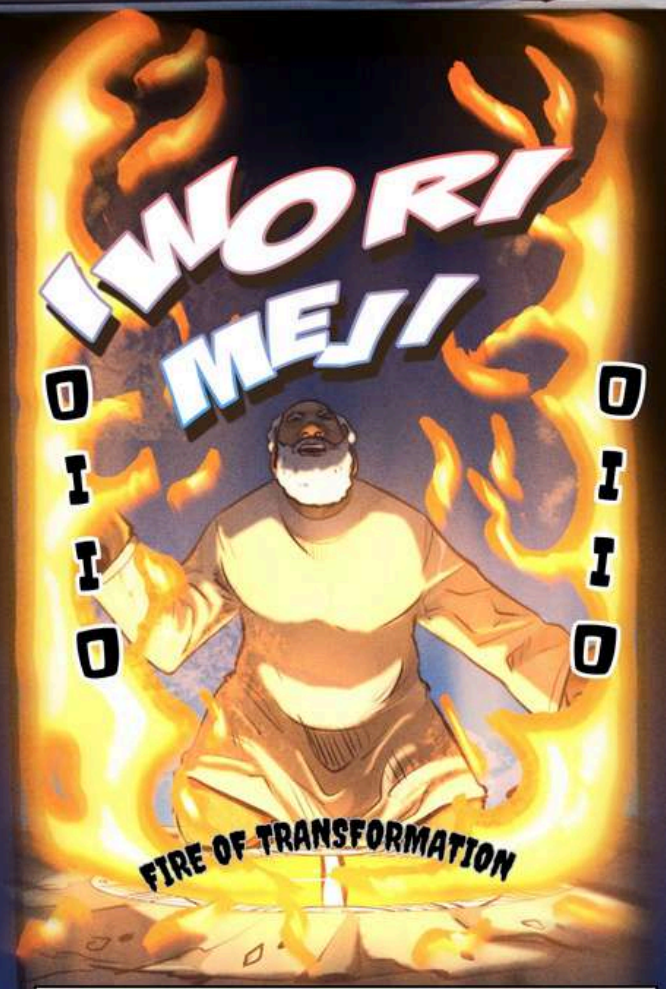
ORÚNMÌLÀ,
GUIDE MY HAND...



REACTING INSTINCTIVELY, HE REACHED FOR
THE SIGILS—HIS ANCHOR BETWEEN REALMS.

OPE LERU
KÍ EMÍ INÚ MÌ
LÈ BÀ...

GRATITUDE BEARS THE BURDEN, MAY THE
SPIRIT WITHIN ME NOT FALTER...



A CIRCLE OF FLAME ROSE IN DEFIANCE, DRAWN
BY SACRED GEOMETRY AND AN UNSHAKEN SPIRIT.

A YEAR HAD PASSED SINCE ISHANA'S ENCOUNTER IN THE MOUNTAINS. NOW, IN THE OMOLUABI ORPHANAGE ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF AKAMARA, A BOY NAMED AARE SAT QUIETLY ON HIS SICKBED. THE CITY OUTSIDE BUZZED WITH ITS USUAL RHYTHM, BUT HIS WORLD FELT UNNATURALLY STILL.

I COULD SWEAR I SAW A BALL OF FIRE... IT CAME OUT OF NOWHERE. THAT'S THE LAST THING I REMEMBER BEFORE BLACKING OUT.

WHAT COULD HAVE HIT ME THE OTHER TIME?

THE MEMORY WAS HAZY—LIKE SMOKE SLIPPING THROUGH HIS FINGERS.

NO WARNING. NO VOICE. JUST HEAT—AND IMPACT.

THEN THE DREAM FOLLOWED—MORE VIVID THAN ANY NIGHTMARE.

...COULD THAT HAVE BEEN REAL?

A MONSTROUS FIGURE... EYES LIKE MOLTEN METAL... AND FLAMES—COMING FROM ME.

WHAT WAS THAT?!

A LOUD CRASH SNAPPED HIM BACK TO REALITY.

CRASH!!!

AARE SAT UP, STARTLED.
THE ROOM FELT HEAVIER...
THE AIR SMELLED WRONG.

WHAT WAS
THAT SOUND...

AND THIS
SMELL?

THIN GAS SEEPED IN FROM THE VENT—GREEN
AND SLOW, LIKE SOMETHING ALIVE.

HE MOVED TOWARD THE
WINDOW. THE SOUND HAD
COME FROM OUTSIDE,
NOT INSIDE.

PLEASE
LET IT BE
NOTHING...

MASKED INTRUDERS... SIX OF THEM. ONE WAS
FEEDING GREEN GAS INTO THE BUILDING'S VENTS.

WHO ARE
THEY?

WHY DO THEY
LOOK LIKE...

SOLDIERS?

TO BE CONTINUED...



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