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Mission Impossible



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INSTALLATION

Olu Amoda

produced during the 'aftershave international artist workshop' held at Monta, Jos, entitled *mission impossible* was inspired by the reports in the Nigeria media of resurgent cases of construction disasters. This has pointed to a longstanding problem within the Nigerian building industry where little or no attention is paid to construction standards and the building code.

Despite the signs and other warnings, the lack of standard practice in this industry persists. One pathetic case records that the very builders were perfectly interred under the collapsing rubles of a particular site.

At this moment all our big cities are opening up as a result of the new wave of private civil constructions. The bandwagon effect has been that quacks masquerading as civil engineers emerge and multiply leaving behind monuments that can be likened to active volcanic mountains ready to erupt (collapse).

Sadder than even this deplorable scenario is the total absence of rapid rescue operation coming to help in the face of the unexpected. People at a Lagos suburb were recently shown on the television watching in frustration the live burial of many breadwinners. Today if our own president were to be involved in an auto crash it will take more than medical intervention to save his life. With the absence of reliable rescue teams the chances of his recovery and others similarly served are slim inspite of the platoons of armed law enforcement agents put in place to ward off attempts on his life from every other direction. *Who dey fool who?* (who is fooling who?)

The Ejigbo plane crash that claimed the lives of scores of senior officers of the armed forces is still fresh on our minds. Another Lagos building claimed 25 lives, yet another in Abuja makes one ache. Because I am writing from the seclusion offered by this workshop, I am unable to furnish all the accurate data of incidences and lives lost to prove that many buildings in our cities, without the urgent and necessary intervention, are nothing but active volcanic mountain sites, potentially. But so, *the seventy million viewers of NTA (Nigerian Television Authority) that cannot be wrong can attest to the fact.*

We are extremely lucky not to be anywhere close to the earthquake belt of the world. I am sure that Mr. J. B. who constructed the collapsed bridge in Lagos would have had to reconstruct had that happened elsewhere otherwise people would pass a motion of deconstruction on most of the bridges credited to him. Put Lagos in Istanbul and the rest will be history.



The Mission Impossible installation (candle light) at night

The need for an alert rescue department cannot be over-emphasised. It is also dangerous to the built environment for civil servants to merely sit back in their offices and approve building plans. It is desirable for them to pay surprise visits to construction sites instead of leaving things entirely to site engineers, many of whom can be influenced to cut corners.

The mission impossible would at once become possible the moment we began to adhere strictly to the building code and prepare our fire-fighters and paramilitary organs for undertaking the much needed rescue missions.

Monta, Jos
November 1999.