

02 *of* 100**Ayobola
Kekere-Ekun**

Here to be Unmissable

The quiet power of becoming unmissable: Ayobola Kekere-Ekun's journey.

Some journeys are loud. Others are built in silence, one careful step, one bold decision and one unwavering belief at a time.

For Ayobola Kekere-Ekun, that journey began long before the world knew her name. She began as a young girl in Lagos, Nigeria, with an imagination that saw possibilities where others saw ordinary sheets of paper.

While many searched for the quickest path to recognition, Ayobola chose one of the most meticulous art forms imaginable; paper quilling. Every strip of paper is cut, rolled, shaped and placed by hand. Hours become days. Days become months. Every artwork is a lesson in patience, discipline and faith that something extraordinary can emerge from countless unseen moments.

In many ways, her art became a reflection of her own life. As an artist, lecturer and researcher, Ayobola has dedicated herself to telling the stories of African women; stories of resilience, identity, power and belonging. Through every intricate quill, she reminds us that women are not defined by the roles society assigns them, but by the strength they carry within.

That quiet commitment to her craft would lead to one of the defining moments of her career. In 2021, Ayobola was named the winner of the Absa L'Atelier Award, one of the continent's most respected platforms for emerging visual artists. More than an accolade, the award became a powerful affirmation that African stories, told authentically and unapologetically, deserve to be seen on the world stage.

This year, as Absa L'Atelier celebrated 40 years of championing African creativity, Ayobola returned not as an emerging artist searching for her place, but as a celebrated voice unveiling her latest exhibition in Cape Town.

It was more than an exhibition opening. It was the closing of one chapter and the beginning of another. A moment to reflect on the little girl who dared to dream, the young woman who chose perseverance over shortcuts, and the artist whose work now inspires audiences across Africa and beyond.

Her story reminds us that the most meaningful success is rarely instant. It is patiently crafted through years of dedication, self-belief and the courage to stay true to your purpose even when no one is watching.

This Women's Month, Absa celebrates Ayobola Kekere-Ekun not only for the beauty of her work, but for the woman behind it. A woman who has shown that when talent is nurtured, authenticity is embraced and opportunity is given, ordinary beginnings can become extraordinary legacies.

Your
story
matters

