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Babalola, Daniel Olaniyan

THE AWO ART STYLE: A SYNTHESIS OF TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY ARTISTIC IDIOMS IN NIGERIA

The Ohio State University

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THE AWO ART STYLE: A SYNTHESIS OF
TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY
ARTISTIC IDIOMS IN NIGERIA

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

Daniel Olaniyan Babalola, B.A. (Hons.), A.T.C., M.A.

The Ohio State University
1981

Reading Committee:
Professor Howard Crane
Professor Arthur Efland
Professor Barbara Groseclose
Professor Okechukwu Odita

Approved By

Adviser
Department of History Art
To the memory of my mother
Bolajoko Babalola
Edu Oko; Omo Oba
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D. A. Akinpelu of the Nigerian National Museum, Onikan, Lagos, Nigeria.


J. B. Gege, Senior Assistant Secretary, Kwara State Government Liaison Office, Victoria Island, Lagos, Nigeria.
S. A. Toye (Rev.), Senior Cultural Officer, Oyo State Arts Council, Cultural Centre, Ibadan, Nigeria.

Oyinloye Olagoke, Oyo State Council for Arts and Culture, Cultural Centre, Ibadan, Nigeria.

J. R. O. Ojo, Head of the Department of Fine Art, University of Ife, Ile Ife, Nigeria.

S. B. Faturoti, Head of Fine Art Department, Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, Nigeria.

Demas Nwoko, New Culture Studios, Adeola Crescent, Oremeji P. M. B. 5162, Ibadan, Nigeria.

M.B. Omotinugbon, Chief Cultural Officer, Kwara State Council for Arts and Culture, Ilorin, Nigeria.

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VITA

December 14, 1939 ................ Born, Oko, Irepodun Local Government Area, Kwara State, Nigeria

1959-1964 ................ Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria

1963. ................ B.A. Hons., Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

1964. ................ Art Teacher's Certificate, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria

1964-1965 ................ Head of Art Dept., Advanced Teacher's College, Zaria, Nigeria

1966-1968 ................ Senior Education Officer, Ministry of Education, Northern Nigeria

1969 ................ Principal Govt. Secondary School, Potiskum, Nigeria

1974 ................ Principal, Govt. Teachers College, Jebba Kwara State, Nigeria

1975-1977 ................ Principal Education Officer, Ministry of Education Headquarters, Kwara State, Nigeria

1977 ................ Area Inspector of Education, Oyun Local Government Area, Kwara State, Nigeria

1978 ................ M.A., Ohio University, Athens, Ohio

1979 ................ Graduate Teaching Associate, Department of History of Art, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

1979-1981 ................ Kwara State Government of Nigeria Scholar and Doctoral Candidate, Department of History of Art, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio
PRESENTATIONS


"Egungun Elewe of the Igbomina." An unpublished manuscript presented at the 7th Annual Meeting, Mid-West Art History Society, March 27, 1980, Columbus, Ohio.

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: African Art and Archaeology. Professor E. Okechukwu Odita

Studies in: Islamic Art and Architecture. Professor Howard Crane

Studies in: American Art. Professor Barbara Groseclose

Studies in: Art Education. Professor Arthur Efland
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In the Federal Republic of Nigeria, a vast country with diverse population and culture, there are several artists and art styles. Among the art styles emanating from artists who are offsprings of various ethnic backgrounds, a type of art which can be called Awo is important. It is significant because it synthesizes the philosophy, motifs, and materials of traditional and contemporary societies. Awo is derived from the Yoruba language of Nigeria and literally means "secret." But it is only to the uninitiated that it is secret. Awo art refers to:

Works from a category of artists in contemporary Africa, who are custodians of original knowledge, who have independent styles of expression through a minimum or maximum of training who have cultural experience (past and present), and who have innate qualities that are capable of probing the future, as reflected in their works.¹

Thus, their works share inspiration and technique.

Out of a large number of Awo art works, only a small number are herein studied. For it is considered that through a selective sample, a thorough examination of key works may be undertaken. Throughout this study, an attempt has been made to organize the data chronologically. But where ideas overlapped, the most current has been chosen.

As such, this is an initial examination of Awo art in Nigeria and this writer anticipates further investigations that would be more
inclusive or ranging. Therefore, a special appeal is hereby made to Nigerian artists whose works are not herein examined to collaborate with the writer, as it is by doing so that future studies can be planned.

Several important issues came alive during the field research and are as follows: Why are several Nigerian Art Councils not headed by artists or art historians? Why are there no National or State art galleries? Why is it that some contemporary Nigerian artists consider the traditional art old-fashioned? Why do the Nigerian cities look drab and completely barren of art works? Why is the public, who are consumers of art, completely alienated from contemporary Nigerian art? Why is it that such a big and dynamic country as Nigeria is unable to forge an active body to ensure that posterity does not lose the monuments of today? Why is the administration of national art in Nigeria torn apart among several warring bodies? In the last instance, for example, there are some die-hards who believe in controlling art administration through the Ministry of Education. Others vehemently maintain that it is the sole prerogative of the Ministry of Information. And, in addition, art is lately being administered by the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture. In short, there is no effective and efficient national art policy. These issues are cogent and require immediate solution (although not in this dissertation), even though efforts towards solving them appear impossible because of the constrained and uncompromising attitudes of the public art officials.
Objective

The objective of this study is to examine the Awo art for its synthesis of Traditional and Modern artistic idioms in Nigeria. In this regard, Awo art is examined for its complexity of genre, motifs, and derivations. Where complexity was ascertained, the contributive factors for such a complexity receive a critical evaluation. This foregoing inclination presupposes a relevant view of the crux of various philosophies bearing on Awo art.

Another aspect of the objective is to ascertain whether Awo art emanating from Nigerian artists derives from its immediate environment or transcends it. It is valuable to understand the various spheres of impacts of Christianity, Islam, and traditional African religion on the creation and development of the Awo art.

Statement of the Problem

Formal Problem

This study grapples with the problem of how to classify and appreciate Nigerian Awo art. This immediately calls to mind the constructs of such an art which, although contemporary, has some of its motifs and symbolic roots in the traditional past. As a result, the following questions are resolved: Does the problem of choice of motifs available in the Awo art merely take after the concepts of the past or has it something new to offer? Another problem which requires urgent solution is how to view the sculpture or painting which emanate from modern Nigerian artists. Is it to be seen as replica of the traditional past with its true meaning lost, or a
specific synthesis of traditional and modern experiences? Moreover, is it a mixture of the collective and individual experiences and intercourses and a synthesis of their creative reactions to the culture conflict, varying lifestyles and acculturation? Furthermore, are Nigerian artists wooed through foreign art patronage to produce works which alienate its general public? Does the art reveal any originality and innovative use of media and techniques? Are there Nigerian aesthetic philosophies from which these aforementioned experiences, media, and techniques derive, and which contribute significantly to the Awo art style?

Classification Problem

A special problem arising from the study of the Awo art is the inability on the part of previous Western writers to identify this category of contemporary African art and to deal with it within an African context. Works which are contemporary are being confused with traditional works because some Western writers find such current art derivative. Does this problem not become magnified when certain scholars refer to works of Nigerian Awo art as derivative of the art of European artists such as Picasso, Modigliani or Epstein? Are the artists responsible for evolving the Awo art style unaware of the above claims and if so, is there any attempt to explain this style? If not, why not? Are the problems that the Awo art attempts to solve unique to Nigeria alone or is there any universal implication? If the Awo artists are prescribing solutions to cogent national problems or if they are making important statements that deserve a thorough examination,
then it becomes equally important not to treat them passively. It becomes absolutely crucial to examine the above problems with a view to prescribing solutions to them. There is not one book on Nigerian Awo art to enlighten the public or guide the art historian. The few books available are written on Africa, which this writer considers too large a continent to be covered in detail by a single work. Finally, such available books address sociological and historical concerns and do not deal with art styles.

**Limitations of the Study**

One limitation of this study is that it focuses on the Awo art style in the Nigerian context. Another limitation is that it includes the works of selected artists who are residents outside Nigeria. Thus, it encompasses typical works of Awo art style whether produced in Nigeria or overseas.

There is also the problem of interviewing the artists. The processes that led to the compilation of the various interviews in this study has been difficult. Efforts were made through letter writing, telephoning, and traveling by road and air. In many respects, the location of artists' dwellings were difficult to know, especially as many are not listed in the telephone directories. Others have changed residences and places of work and no one seems to know their present location. In other cases, it was necessary to go through various journals and bibliographies to locate the correct address. Where such addresses were not listed, it became very difficult to determine where to obtain the information.
A major constraint that militated against the compilation of interviews was the slow pace at which the mails travelled from the interviewer to the artists. A letter written in Lagos, the capital of Nigeria, may take a week to arrive in Ilorin, a distance of about 233 miles. Letters from Lagos to such places as Kaduna and Zaria, over five hundred miles north, sometimes do not get to their destinations. So, if an artist lived in Kaduna or Zaria, a quicker method of reaching him had to be found. To rely completely on scheduling appointments by mail before traveling to meet the artists was unsatisfactory.

After the scheduled interview, there were occasions when one felt the need to follow up with additional enquiries. The constraint here was the lack of a functioning telephone system in Nigeria. The telephone is still a luxury being enjoyed by business, governmental and some private establishments which are able to afford it.

The next alternative was travelling either by rail, road or air, each of which has its advantages as well as its disadvantages. Rail Travel. Even though travel by rail is considered one of the safest modes of transportation in Nigeria, it has some shortcomings. It takes longer to get confirmation after making reservations outside Lagos. Rail transportation to Northern Nigeria appears a slow but steady and sure way to travel there. One needs to travel first class to be comfortable. The second class is often too congested to provide comfort, although the fare is reasonable. It costs about forty dollars to travel from Ilorin to Zaria. However, since fares change, this will need constant verification.
Road Travel. It must be pointed out that most Nigerian highways linking the major towns and cities are very good. In the case of Lagos-Ibadan Express Way, one can drive without any reduction in speed or road hazard throughout. Lagos-Maiduguri, Port Harcourt to Sokoto, Lagos to Benin, Benin to Onitsha, Onitsha to Kaduna and Kano, Onitsha to Jimeta and Yola, Ibadan to Ife, Ondo and Benin are among the several very satisfactory roads. Thus, the roads from Lagos to Ilorin and Ilorin to all major Nigerian towns are smooth all through. Modern bridges are constructed across the river Niger at Jebba, Lokoja at Onitsha and river Benue at Makurdi and Numan.

From my personal experience, it is worthwhile to avoid the slow-moving private buses, and the very fast driven Peugeot 504 vans. However, apart from others like Ekene Dilichukwu buses, there is another category of buses known as "Lines" that are more reliable and much more comfortable. These are government owned transport services, better maintained and managed than the private buses. There were several of them earlier, like the Benue/Plateau Line, Bendel Line, and Kwara Line. To my knowledge, some of them have folded owing to their non-viability. Bendel Line and Kwara Line, however, continue to function efficiently. While Kwara Line plies Ilorin to Lagos to and fro daily, Bendel Line travels between Lagos and Benin daily.

Furthermore, there are taxi-cabs plying most Nigerian roads daily. While the highways may be good, occasionally the city roads are bad. Sometimes certain roads in Lagos, Ibadan, Benin, Aba, Onitsha and Enugu are flooded by seasonal rains. As a result, the taxi drivers are compelled to take longer routes and consequently charge more fare.
Air Transport. Air transportation is another means which is becoming increasingly popular in Nigeria. Although it is about twice as costly to travel by air as by train or road, it has the advantage of speed. Much time and energy can be saved for actual field research if one is able to travel by air. However, I would reserve air transportation to occasions when much has to be accomplished within a short time, where an appointment would have been missed if one traveled by train or by car.

Recipe for Nigerian Field Research

Some other considerations which may not directly touch on field research itself but which may indirectly affect it are worth considering.

First, since one is perpetually on the move, one needs a comfortable place to eat and sleep at the end of one’s journey. Assuming that one can always eat snacks or prepare sandwiches during the journey itself, one should try to locate cheap but clean eating houses whenever possible. It must be stressed that under no circumstances must one eat in the road side restaurants known locally as “Buka;” it is a place where most people eat. Although most "Buka" may be clean, some are just not up to the standards set by the Nigerian Health authorities.

Second, one should learn how to bargain for articles offered for sale. Even when the article is considered cheap, one should still try to bargain for a better price, as it is done in Nigeria. By so doing, one can often pick and choose items, thereby getting the best. Moreover, the market price would not be unduly inflated for the local consumers.
Third, one should always make sure of where one is going before setting out on the route. If it is by a private car, one should try to have an escort. If, however, one is confused or uncertain of the route, one should consider it normal to stop someone along the route, preferably in a town or city along the same route, to ask for directions.

Fourth, it is considerably more thrifty to stay in university dormitories or halls for a night rather than to rent rooms in a hotel. Nigerian hotels, though good, can be expensive by any standard.

Fifth, one should carry identifying papers and cards at all times. A letter of recommendation from one's academic unit is considered very useful in this regard. It is after one's identity is known and one's mission understood that every effort is made to help the person realize his or her goal.

There may be other things to consider, but the above appear major, without knowledge of which the field experience in Nigeria could be somewhat frustrating.

Apart from a lot of common sense which much of the above points entail, a background knowledge pertaining to the place and area of study is also highly recommended.

**Review of the Literature**

There are two main classifications of literature relevant to this study. The first category, which touches on other issues in addition to contemporary African art, is identified as general literature. The second category, that specifically discusses the problems of the contemporary African artists by offering suggestions
on the ways they ought to proceed, is considered as specific literature.

**General Literature**

Among the publications in this category, the following are pertinent and, therefore, deserve scrutiny. They are: William Fagg (1951), Dennis Duerden (1953), (1959), (1967), and Simon Ottenberg (1972).

William Fagg's "West African Art" (1951), deals with the difficulties of a European trying to understand African art. In his opinion, the main problem for a European in understanding African art is due to a "difference in historically conditioned western and 'tribal' categories of thoughts imposing similar but equally severe restrictions on the artist's freedom."  

He goes on to say that in Europe, Post-Periclean philosophy and art are bound up with the concept of the straight line and essentially based on geometry. He observes:

> The straight line is so completely absent in Negro Africa as to lead to a strong presumption that it was instinctively avoided as inartistic if not sacrilegious.

Fagg's discussion of the complete absence of the straight line in 'Negro Africa' appears to be an overstatement. In Nigerian art alone several examples exist with the concept of the straight line. For instance, the Akwanshi monoliths of the Cross River State of Nigeria were structured mainly in vertical shapes. It indicates that the people are aware of the straight line and its use. Furthermore, Fagg has completely overlooked Islamic art. In Africa, most of their design
motifs revolve around geometric shapes, some of which are inconceivable without straight lines. Northern Nigeria is a fertile ground for the display of African Islamic art involving the use of the straight line.

Dennis Duerden's "Is There a Nigerian Style of Painting?" (1953), deserves special attention. At the time this important question was raised, not only was the teaching of art in academic schools at its infancy in Nigeria, the cream of the professional artists the country has produced were not yet known. Dennis Duerden was a Federal Government appointed Education Officer, who taught art to a handful of Nigerians at the famous Keffi Government College, starting in the mid-forties. His knowledge of the history of art and his insights into the attitudes and backgrounds of the students that passed through his class, as well as his exposure to ethnic arts, prompted him to ask that question. In answer, he said:

> It is my opinion that there is to be found in the paintings illustrated here a distinctive Nigerian style which should be strongly encouraged and protected from the influence of European illustration. This is particularly the responsibility of the Festival judges and art teachers.6

Festival judges are those who select good works and award prizes during the Nigerian Festival of Arts. Unfortunately, some of them are not trained in art and subsequently may be arbitrary in their judgment.

Duerden discusses the boys' work as 'having a great feeling for shapes and gestures described by means of separate patches of paint. They have a sense of pattern,' (Duerden [1953] p. 52-59).
Their method of painting seems distinct from Western art. In discussing the boys' works, Dennis Duerden proved that there is a Nigerian style of painting. His assessment was based on a personal experience and conviction. The realization that his article is a scholarly and pioneering attempt to identify a Nigerian style of painting makes Duerden deserve recognition. His considerable number of years of teaching in Nigeria as well as his exposure to the various backgrounds of his students allowed him to have a special insight into the Nigerian cultures that his other Western colleagues could not understand. This in itself makes him not merely a lover of Contemporary African art but an advocate of contemporary Nigerian art from the country whose art he knows so well.

His "African Art and Its Critics" (1959), is perhaps even more scholarly in its observation of the course of traditional African art. He said:

If you are a determined European visitor to art galleries or reader of the art critics you will probably be able to name four modern African artists who have made their reputation: Ben Enwonwu and Felix Idubor of Nigeria; Kofi Amtuban of Ghana; and Sam Ntiro from Tanganyika (Tanzania): not very many for such a vast area. At the same time you may have seen hundreds of pieces of sculpture from Africa; and heard of thousands kept in collections in the British Museum, in Berlin, in Zurich, in Paris, and Philadelphia, to name just a few. You can also see a large number of dramatic photographs of this kind of African sculpture made by Eliot Elisofon and published recently by Thames and Hudson in a book called The Sculpture of Africa. Looking at books of this kind or at the museum collections you will find that the artists' names are either not known or considered irrelevant.7

Thus, Duerden seems to stress the need for identifying the work as well as the artist who makes it. This had not hitherto been done. Duerden
disagrees with Fagg in his observations of African art. He paraphrases Fagg's general thesis in these words:

The integration or rather the original unity of religion and art is nowhere more signally demonstrated than in tribal Africa before the decay of traditional life under the influences of Western materialism,

and

The problem of the survival of African art are in fact in the last resort philosophical ones.8

In Dennis Duerden's words:

The decay of African art, therefore, is attributed to the disappearance of an 'informing belief' and a state of society in which sculptors subscribed to these beliefs. Now it is exactly these assumptions which I am most anxious to criticize here.9

He agrees that there are currently not so many sculptors as there were before and that those who are left do not seem to be producing the same quantity in style. Yet he asserts:

But I question his [Fagg's] conclusions; first of all that we can discover a specific set of sculptural qualities which we can label either traditional or African, and secondly, that these so-called African qualities are necessarily associated with a particular kind of African Society which he calls 'tribal' or 'traditional.' The matter is of the greatest importance if one is to speculate on the future of African art.10

Before examining the remaining issues of the literature any further, it is necessary to make some observations. These observations will necessarily touch on McEwen (1968), and Marshall Mount (1973), who seemed to have drawn their inspirations from the writings of William Fagg. For McEwen said:
Deeply religious iron age agrarian civilizations were faced, suddenly, with the fascination and attraction of the fundamentally different European world.\textsuperscript{11} Again, Marshall Mount's observance of "Traditions already weakened by long contact with Western ways [which] have been broken down further by the goals of independence and nationalism" is meant to over emphasize his personal conviction of the nature of African traditions.\textsuperscript{12} These aforementioned writers, to be discussed later, appear to hold a view different from Dennis Duerden whose observation was published much earlier in June 1959.\textsuperscript{13}

Again, writing on "Thè London Exhibition of Contemporary African Art" (1967), Dennis Duerden observed from his Transcription Center, where he is Director, that although a radical change has taken place (during 1965-1967) in Western attitudes toward African art, the works he reproduced in his article were according to him not reviewed by one major critic in a national newspaper in the United Kingdom during the time they were exhibited. He said:

\begin{quote}
This exhibition was for four weeks at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London. Yet many very much inferior exhibitions were reviewed.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

Again he said:

\begin{quote}
Do not let us delude ourselves that anyone takes the artists and writers of Africa any more seriously than they were being taken two years ago.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

Moreover, he notes that sometimes the critics go to the other extreme and bend over backwards to be kind to African artists. This, he feels, can have an even more disastrous result. The artist from Africa is, therefore, always a victim of the political situation, whatever position he adopts in it.\textsuperscript{16}
Now we shall examine Simon Ottenberg's *Anthropology and African Aesthetics* (1971). Although essentially an anthropological study which identifies some problems with anthropologists and African aesthetics, Ottenberg's lecture seems to embrace the ideas of other scholars as well. The problems he carefully examines came to him through writing on traditional African masked drama among the Afikpo (now of Imo State) of Nigeria.

He draws our attention to his awareness of abundant literature on traditional African aesthetic forms but regrets that in spite of that literature, there is very little that has given the African conception of his art. Most of the work has been from an outsider's viewpoint, basically that of the Western investigator and scholar. He mentions that several westerners—travelers, art collectors, and museum people and scholars—have for many years been engaged in trying to explain African art to the world but have failed.

During his stay in Afikpo, Ottenberg watched several masked plays, but he admitted only having a good general description of the aesthetic elements of the plays as seen by an outsider. He had only some educated guesses as to how the Afikpo perceived the masks but not much more than that. He wonders why western artists do not think it vital to interview African artists who produced the mask that he so much admires. Then he argues at length that there is a great deal that can be understood by direct and indirect questioning, as well as through inferences made by sensitive field work, into the African's own aesthetics. He cites the deep knowledge of the performers of traditional arts who are living in modern settings as at the Institute
of African Studies in the University of Ife and Ibadan, and laments that more is known by them than what is written down. 17

Among other things, he attributes the lack of genuine understanding of the African point of view to a lack of research and scholarship in the arts among Africans. He notes that scholarship has largely been in the hands of Western persons until recently, but those Westerners have largely adopted a social approach, which has not been able to deal with aesthetics in indigenous societies. He wonders why the classification of art elements is necessary, for elements such as music, dance, and costume, are inseparable in African aesthetics. 18

After citing several elements that make it difficult for the Western scholar to arrive at a sensible understanding of the elements of African arts, he observes the advantages of African scholars who derive from the culture. Although he agrees that African scholars are more likely to be closer to the traditional aesthetic experience than Europeans or Americans, he cautions that being an African-born scholar does not fully resolve the difficulties, except when indigenous cultural knowledge is aided by research and scholarship. And it is his opinion that Western scholarship will, for some time to come, continue to be needed, as he believes there are very few African scholars doing research in African plastic arts today.

Among his suggestions is the need for detailed studies of the life-ways of creative African persons, their experiences, their views, a sense of their ideas, the relation of their art to others, their innovations and technical skills, and the changes in style that their work has gone through. Anthropology and African aesthetics is
a thought-provoking, well delivered lecture to a largely African audience. But the inferences and the main suggestions of his shrewd talk are that African and Western scholars should continue to complement each other's effort in the gigantic task of unfolding to the world the diversity in African art styles and aesthetics.

**Specific Literature**

In the specific literature relevant to this study, there is no article or book that specifically discusses the Awo as an art style, except Odita (1980). Some of the writers have attempted research in contemporary African art but have not gone into the specifics of classifying the Awo art style as such. Those whose publications have generated discussion are: Evelyn Brown (1966), Odita (1966), Paula Ben Amos (1967), Ulli Beier (1968), Frank McEwen (1968), Marshall Mount (1973), and Odita (1980).

A few of these writings refer to what is now being studied in general terms as "the New Art," but, in this context, they have failed to discuss what is "new" in an art historical context. A typical example of this failure is Evelyn Brown's *African Contemporary Art and Artists* (1966), which documents contemporary art and artists of most countries of Africa. Although this book is very valuable as an introduction and historical source book on contemporary African art and artists, it is lacking in art historical analysis of the few art works discussed. Perhaps Evelyn Brown's dilemma ought to be viewed with sympathy from two perspectives. On the one hand, she wanted to cover all the countries of Africa as well as its artists;
on the other hand, she intended to discuss the diversity of African art. Her inability to visit with and interview all the artists to arrive at the determinants for their various styles and her inability to assess first hand the problems the artists were attempting to solve might have complicated her problem. However, she has done a good job of documentation, perhaps the first one of its kind. With the realization of how big the African continent is, and the enormity of the problem she attempted, her dilemma ought to be better appreciated.

Even though Evelyn Brown's book has failed to identify or classify the Awo art style, it has provided a long list of contemporary Nigerian artists, some of whom will shortly be examined in this study. On the whole, her recognition that African contemporary art is alive and her effort in identifying contemporary artists will no doubt serve as an impetus to scholars studying contemporary African art. Her documentation of Nigerian art centers, like the Mbari Clubs at Ibadan, Enugu, and Oshogbo, as well as the universities and the colleges with art curricula will continue to be invaluable in research into Nigerian contemporary art. Her failure to identify, classify, or treat the Awo as an art style notwithstanding, her book will for a long time to come be useful in the study of art and artists in Africa.

E. O. Odita's "Some Observation on Contemporary African Art (1966), discusses the clash of ideas among African contemporary artists and examines these thoughts as related to three categories of artists:

1. Those artists who, though contemporary, are traditionally oriented.
2. Those artists who maintain that African artists should be exposed to some form of basic education so as to imbibe new techniques.

3. A third group not opposed to education of artists as long as the training does not impose foreign values on the African artist and adversely affect it. This group concurs that no artist creates anything from nothing and that the artist is often indebted to tradition for creating his art.\(^{20}\)

In much the same way as Brown, Odita has not specifically mentioned the Awo art. However, his third classification of art seems to suggest the Awo art style. He describes the works of such artists as striving to preserve some typically African elements while using modern technical skills in sculpture and painting. There is variety and inventiveness in the art of this third group.

Odita's observation appears timely for an understanding of African contemporary art. His remarks have not only sparked an enthusiastic call for closer study, they have suggested that African contemporary art should be studied for its art styles in historic context. Since Brown has provided the list of artists and Odita has observed three categories of art and artists, it becomes a challenge to consequent researchers to further an awareness of African contemporary art by building on their contributions.

Paula Ben Amos' article, entitled "Ben Osawe: A Modern Nigerian Sculptor" (1967), also provokes interest. She identifies one of the main problems facing Nigerian sculptors as how to define themselves artistically and socially. Then she lists three possible
directions she thinks an artist can follow so as to achieve identification:

1. To work within the traditional system adopting and modifying new techniques and forms so that they are compatible with traditional ones.

2. To opt completely for European forms, whether representational or abstract.

3. To attempt to create a synthesis of Western trends and traditional values and by this means produce a typically Nigerian modern art form.\(^{21}\)

She notes that while the first group of artists maintain a traditional role, the second and third face the problems in defining themselves as artists in the contemporary Nigerian scene. Tradition and modernity stand for opposing relations between the artists and their society and Ben is no exception. She examines Ben's life from when he was born in 1931 near Benin City, and how he watched his father carving for long hours. Ben's father wanted his son to take to a different vocation that prevented him from practicing with his father. At school, Ben's headmaster played an encouraging role in his early artistic development.

Sponsored by an English patron, Ben left for England in 1956 and he studied at Camberwell's School of Art in London. He experienced a new environment, new forms, and new tools which perplexed and challenged him. Nevertheless, he achieved success as a young sculptor in England. He participated in several group shows, such as the Exhibitions in the Picadilly Gallery in 1960, and in the International Association Gallery
in 1962, as well as Exhibition of Nigerian Art in the Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh, in 1963. He also took part in the Commonwealth Art Festival in 1965. Ben Amos says:

After ten years abroad, Ben returned to Benin City. The encounter with his home town was somewhat of a cultural shock. He left the city as an adolescent boy and returned as a mature artist.22

Although Ben was an adolescent when he went to England, he was twenty-five years old then. If Ben, indeed, could not comprehend his culture after only ten years abroad, then he must have disassociated himself from Benin culture long before he ever became an adolescent and went to Britain. Again Ben Amos says:

The Nigerian intellectual circles, who are in the best position to appreciate abstract art, make another demand on Ben. They want him to be a Nigerian artist, to synthesize traditional and modern forms in his work, and to express in that way the spirit of modern Nigeria. . . . As far as his own culture is concerned, Ben himself has had only a limited contact with the great art of Benin. . . . At the beginning of the twentieth century, Africa affected European artists and now the modern art which developed partially through that contact is having its own impact upon the new generation of artists in Nigeria.23

As far as materials and techniques are concerned, Nigerian artists may be deriving inspirations from outside but the motifs, philosophy, and essence of their art are indigenous.24

Frank McEwen's "Return to Origins: New Directions for African Arts," (1968), advocates that the African artist should return to his origin so as to avoid what he conceives as corrupting influences of Western techniques. Speaking of his Rhodesian workshop, he says:
Here ancient Africa spoke a vital contemporary tongue—no apeing of tradition, no pandering to the Western pattern.25

Still referring to his Workshop, which he calls a school, he observes:

A school of great originality but purely African in spirit has arisen.26

It is a tragedy to witness in Africa so vast a squandering of artistic essence. Today, Africa lacking tradition, is seething with desire for expression demanding outlet. There is a vast potential of creativity to be tapped and canalized and, like all art movements in history, it requires an umbrella of protection. . . . This essence, so rare in our technological world, suffers wholesale butchery on the altar of that worst of all tastes, that of the anonymous tourist.27

While blaming the tourist for encouraging the development of the mass-produced art, he actually applies the same procedure in his Workshop:

Thousands of works have found place in art collections in Africa, Europe, the Americas and even the East (including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London.)28

Besides mass-producing art in the Workshop, he claims that the artists did not follow any curriculum:

They work in separate cubicals in which they jealously protect their own aura, or they work in the bush under their own favourite trees. They have no curriculum and no obligatory hours of presence. They come and go when they can or wish to do—when their moods are right. It is more a successful workshop than a school. The artists may only remain if they are successful—successful in promise and eventually financially in the Workshop's own sales galleries.29

His critics, as McEwen himself observes, have the feeling that McEwen does influence the artists:

Some critics on the other hand, point to similarity between German expressionist paintings and those of the Workshop School. Certainly there is a likeness, but it derives from the intimate human phenomena and no-wise from any plagiarism.30
Although he claims not to influence the artists, his procedures and motivational techniques, to the contrary attest to the fact that he does. He obviously did influence the artists as proven by their works which are similar to German expressionist paintings.

McEwen's article is full of contradictions, for, on the one hand, he wants African artists not to be influenced by Western techniques, but his own procedures and museum environment certainly influenced his students. Whereas he condemns the commercialization of art, he appears to commercialize his students' art all over the world. Besides, by asking African artists to return to their origins without providing a curriculum, he leaves them adrift. In this writer's opinion, to ask African artists to go back to their origins would create a total eclipse of contemporary African art.

Ulli Beier's *Contemporary Art in Africa* (1968), also does not identify or treat Awo art as a style. Although he claims that the book is written on contemporary art in Africa, it is better called "Contemporary art in Oshogbo, Nigeria," as, a large part of the book was devoted to the art of Oshogbo Mbari Club. In his book, Ulli Beier lists some contemporary Nigerian artists and their works but does not discuss them stylistically. Nevertheless, Beier did a good work by starting art in a nonacademic setting, where artists can grow through workshops, lectures, and practice in an informal way. He succeeded in motivating several artists and youths of Oshogbo to attend his art workshops.

Ulli Beier's philosophy and belief are that schools in academic settings destroy artistic talents, i.e., if you have no formal
school education at all, you are better able to develop as a better artist. Therefore, Beier discouraged the young artists of Oshogbo from attending formal art schools in Nigeria. But trends in Nigerian art have since proven that Beier was not altogether right in his philosophy as practiced on the young people of Oshogbo. The failure to discuss the art styles, the materials, and the functions of the works produced, appear to be a major weakness of his book.

In the preface to his book, *African Art: The Years Since 1920* (1973), Marshall Ward Mount notes the awareness of the world of the current transformation of Africa at a speed unequaled in the history of civilization. He also observes:

> Traditions already weakened by long contact with Western ways have been broken down further by the goals of independence and nationalism.\(^{32}\)

Besides traditions which he feels have been deleted, he notes that some traditions have disappeared entirely:

> With the disappearance of traditions so fundamental to life, the cultural environment, as well as the political structures of new nations, are changing rapidly.\(^{33}\)

He says there are four distinctive categories of art that have been produced in Africa in recent decades:

1. Art done in traditional styles
2. Mission Inspired art
3. Art designed for sale to tourists
4. Art of new media and techniques and personal expression

He groups his study into nine chapters. In chapter one, he discusses the Akuaba figures of the Ashanti of Ghana, Chief Omoregbe's art from
Benin, and Areogun and Bamigboye's art from Nigeria. In chapter two on Mission Inspired art, he discusses the Congo crucifix and the works of the Patterson school with examples of works by Lazarus Kumalo, Sam Songo, and some anonymous works. He also discusses Lamidi Fakeye of Nigeria. Chapter three discusses Souvenir art created primarily for sale to Westerners. Chapter four discusses the emergence of a "New Art" without any illustrations. Chapter five talks about art schools in French speaking Africa such as: the Desfosses school in Lubumbashi in the Belgian Congo (now Zaire), and the Academie des Beaux Arts et Metiers d'Art with illustrations. Chapter six discusses art schools in English speaking East and Central Africa with examples of works by major artists such as Sam Ntiro, Gregory Maloba, Elimo Njau, George Kakooza, Theresa Musoke, Ahmed Shbrain, Ibrahim el Salahi, Skunder Boghossian, Gebre Kristos Desta, Thomas Mukarobgwa, Bernard Manyandure and Boira Mteki. Chapter seven discusses art schools in Ghana and Nigeria with examples of art works produced by Kofi Antubam and Vincent Kofi, both of Ghana, Yusuf Grillo, Simon Okeke, Bruce Onobrakpeya, Demas Nwoko and Uche Okeke as well as Festus Idahen of Nigeria. He also discusses the Oshogbo art with examples of art by Jimoh Buraimoh and others. Chapter eight discusses Independent African Art Schools with examples of works by Valente Malangatana, Ibrahim Njoya, Ibrahim N'Diaye, Gerard Sekoto, Afewerk Tekle, Oku Amfofo, Ben Enwonwu and Erhabor Emokpae. Mount concludes in chapter nine with a pioneering examination of the beginning and growth of a new art:

Given the proper support, there is no reason why the talent and ideas evidenced by many of Africa's young artists should not continue to develop freely using elements from their own and other arts to describe the exciting and unique experience of life in modern Africa.
Odita's "Contemporary African Art: Theory of Bintu, Kuntu, Skokian and Awo" (1980), introduces readers to the notions of Odita (1966), McEwen (1968), and Mount (1973), after which the new categories of contemporary African art as Bintu, Kuntu, Skokian and Awo are explained.

Odita identifies Bintu works as those available and extensively distributed in world markets. As they are purely commercial ventures geared towards merchandising, they are spontaneous in appeal and often deal with stereotyped or identical subject matter. Consequently, they are the products of mass production and pride of authorship is generally unimportant.

Kuntu art, on the other hand, adds art to its function. Based on African philosophy, Kuntu is the "harmony of meaning and rhythm, of sense and form," a theory derived from Jahn (1961, p. 174). A work of art is simply Kintu (thing) as it stands in the museum. But Kintu in association with objectivity, that is with purpose or function, must show Kuntu (a combination) that recognizes no division between the physical and the spiritual life.

Skokian art is produced by contemporary artists who are in a cultural dilemma. Such artists have received some sort of training of an academic or similar nature, subject to the disciplines of Western conventional sculpture and painting techniques. As such, they are academic artists whose experiences mostly alienate them from their own culture.

Awo art, however, refers to "works from a category of artists in contemporary Africa who are custodians of original knowledge, who
have independent styles of expression through a minimum or maximum of training, who have cultural experience (past and present) and who have innate qualities that are capable of probing the future, as reflected in their works." The Awo art, therefore, uses what appears valuable from the past but does not attempt a formal renewal of the past. The art work emerges as something new.

Awo, as explained, is derived from the Yoruba language of Nigeria and literally means "secret." But it is only to the uninitiated or novitiates that it is secret. Awo art is highly committed to constant development and research. Thus, the art always invariably seeks a new path. It is, therefore, something new and unlike Bintu (evolutionary), Kuntu (trans-historical), and Skokian (cross-cultural).

Odita has concluded with a note that offers the above theory "as a basis for continuing search, not final, in interpreting the changing aspects of contemporary African visual communication and in increasing the individual and collective understanding of the process of continuity and change in contemporary African art. The above theory does suggest a new direction in the study of contemporary African art."35

Justification for the Study

The immediate justification for this study is the understanding of contemporary Awo art in particular and the relevance of Awo art to contemporary Nigerian art in general. Since there is no study on Awo art, this approach becomes groundbreaking in the study of contemporary Nigerian art. It is imperative that a standardized
scholarly approach involving an understanding of the art within the culture be carried out. Another justification for this study is the need for clarity in the interpretation of contemporary Nigerian art, where, at the moment, several writers have considerable difficulty in categorizing the art. Most Nigerians themselves do not fully appreciate Nigerian contemporary visual art, partly due to the lack of published analytical statements relating to contemporary Nigerian art.

What is currently going on in Nigerian art has, in certain publications, been termed a "Renaissance." There are more painters, sculptors, and designers now than ever, producing different types of art ranging from realism to pure geometric abstraction. A variety of media are being explored, but the combination of local and imported materials being employed in artistic production sometimes present problems. An attempt will be made to examine these problems side by side with the Awo art in Nigeria.

**Definition of Terms**

To facilitate an understanding of the concepts delineated in this study, it is considered useful to know the words or terms below.

1. **Nigeria** stands for the country called Nigeria; the most populous indigenous African country. The name Nigeria is derived from an African word 'Nigr,' which means: land of the mighty river. Located approximately between latitudes 4° and 14° N, and longitudes 3° and 14° E, her territory extends about 650 miles (1,050 kilometers) from north to south, and 700 miles east to west. It is bordered on
the south by the Gulf of Guinea, on the west by the Republic of Benin, on the north by the Republic of the Niger, and on the east by the Republic of Chad and Cameroon.40

Nigeria is an amalgamation of many republics, kingdoms, and princely states of the former great empires of the western Sudan.41 It has an area of 356,700 square miles (923,800 square kilometers).

Modern Nigeria dates from 1914, when the two protectorates of southern and northern Nigeria were combined. The country became politically independent from Britain on October 1, 1960. Before this date, Nigeria was politically administered through the Northern, Western, and Eastern regions. A major administrative step was taken on March 27, 1967, when 12 states were created from the former regions. On February 3, 1976, six additional new states were created, thereby bringing the total states of Nigeria to 19.42

Because of her geographical position, Nigeria enjoys a tropical climate with two seasons. It is hot and wet during most months of the year in the south due to the effect of the southwest moisture-laden winds. In the north, the rainfall decreases according to the distance from the coast. As a result, the rain forest and the mangrove of the south gives way to grassland with scattered trees and semi-desert in the north. The north is exposed to the Northern dusty winds from November to February, bringing along with it the harmattan. Generally, owing to the blanketing effect of clouds during the rainy season, and of dust haze during the harmattan, the heat of the sun is not as fierce as might be expected.
There are over two hundred ethnic groups in the country, each with its own customs, traditions, and language. A Nigerian culture is slowly emerging out of a synthesis of various ethnic cultures. This is particularly noticeable in the large cities. The larger ethnic groups are: the Hausa, the Yoruba, the Igbo, the Fulani; other important but less numerous groups include the Edo, Ibibio, Tiv, Kanuri and Nupe.

Educational services are given prominent attention by the Federal Government. There are thirteen universities. In 1975, universal Free Primary Education was started throughout the Federal Republic of Nigeria. High school and university education is free but for board.

Nigeria's cultural heritage is rich and diversified due to cultural derivations dating back to some thousand years: Nok, Igbo-Ukwu, Ife, and Benin. Prominent among these cultures is that of Nok which flourished from about 9th century B.C., to about 2nd century A.D., and which extends over an area not less than one hundred miles long by twenty miles wide. It was essentially a terra-cotta culture. The great centers of bronze metal sculpture were Igbo-Ukwu, Ife and Benin. The bronze-working tradition of Igbo-Ukwu flourished from the 7th to the 11th centuries, A.D., while that of Ife has been dated between the 12th and 15th centuries A.D. The art of cire-perdue is said to have been introduced to Benin when Oba Oguola of Benin sent a request to the Oni (king) of Ife for a master bronze founder to instruct Benin sculptors in the art of making memorial heads for ancestral altars late in the 14th century, A.D. Specifically, the
Benin bronze culture date from the 15th to the 19th centuries, A.D.

2. **Awo art.** An art which derives from "a category of artists in contemporary Africa who are custodians of original knowledge, who have independent styles of expression through a minimum or maximum of training, who have cultural experience (past and present) and who have innate qualities that are capable of probing the future, as reflected in their works."47 **Awo art is a synthesis of whatever is useful in both the past and the present.**

3. **Nigerian Contemporary Art:** This term specifically refers to the art of painting, sculpture, graphics and design which are utilized in the present day society. It refers more importantly to the art produced in Nigeria at least since about 1920.

4. **Nigerian Traditional Art:** This refers to the art of the past, whether painting, sculpture, architecture, or decorative art. Its function is completely limited to the past society, i.e., before 1920.

5. **Professional Artists:** By professional artists is meant those artists who have gone through a system of education to qualify as artists. As professional artists, they may practice art on a gainful basis. They may have workshops and may practice art part-time or full-time.

6. **Society of Nigerian Artists:** A body of professional artists in Nigeria responsible for organizing national exhibitions of Nigerian art as well as art seminars and conferences. Membership is restricted to professional artists and this membership can be maintained by annual subscription and active participation.
7. *Buka:* is a term used by most Nigerians to describe a local roadside or very cheap restaurant visited by most citizens. The very high standard of the city or other restaurants is not to be expected in the form of building, furniture, food, and utensils. But the food could be no less nutritious.

Having arrived at this point of the introduction, I feel it would perhaps be timely to present in an outline form the succeeding chapters to serve as a prelude to their discussion in Chapter II.

In Chapter II, the Awo art works of a selected number of Nigerian artists are analyzed.

In Chapter III, the Awo art style is discussed.

Chapter IV concludes the study by examining the implications of this study and offers recommendations.

Appendixes I - III:

I - Data on Field Interview

II - Vital Data on Contemporary Nigerian Art

III - Official Policy Statements on Art and Culture:

Delivered Speeches.
CHAPTER II

ANALYSIS OF ART WORKS OF AWO

In this chapter, an attempt will be made to analyze the Awo art works of a carefully selected number of artists. The criteria for their selection has been based on factors discussed below; two works by each artist are then analyzed. The major consideration for controlling the number of works is that only a limited number of works could be efficiently handled in a systematic study.

For cataloguing purposes, the title, medium, dimension, date of execution and provenance of a work of art are important, and every attempt has been made to include the above items. But dates are flexible, especially where a work was known to have been executed over a long span of years. Nevertheless, even though dates are approximate in some cases, they are still useful. The works of each artist in this analytical study are therefore not necessarily studied chronologically. The reason for this is simple: this study does not claim to present a chronology of Awo art in Nigeria.

The Drummers Return
by Yusuf Adebayo Grillo
Plate I

This oil painting by Yusuf Adebayo Grillo measures 122 x 106.75 cm and was painted in 1967. It is one of a series of oil paintings on canvas of drummers which he executed from 1967 to 1971.
Figure 1. Distribution of the Awo Art Works.
Born in Lagos in 1934, Grillo had his early education there and in 1955 proceeded to the Nigerian College of Arts, Science, and Technology Zaria, for a four year Fine Arts course. He completed his Diploma Course in Fine Art in 1960 and took art education courses leading to an award of the Art Teachers' Certificate in 1961. He also later took Post Graduate Art Education courses in Britain. As an artist, he has exhibited or taken part in exhibitions in Africa, Europe, America, and Australia. As an educator and administrator, he has risen through the ranks to become Head of the Department of Art and Painting at Yaba College of Technology. He was, in 1978, Chairman of Lagos State Arts Council, while currently he is President of the Society of Nigerian Artists.

The major motif of the composition are the four drummers, dressed in what appears to be Yoruba traditional clothing. They present their backs to the viewer, as they walk away from the picture plane. In basic structure, the four drummers are a set of four upside down pyramids which are overlapped from side to side and varied in height from left to right. The dress of the left figure appears narrower than that of the second, while the appearance of the second is much wider than the third. The dress of the fourth figure on the right is as wide as the second figure. In terms of linear quality, they are boldly defined and, therefore, well linked. Lines bordering the figures on all the four sides appear irregular. But the outline bordering their feet is in an inverted form, to echo the outlines bordering their heads. In the left figure, the shape of the left arm seems repeated in the shape of the right figure's arm. Extended
arms of the two outer figures seem to complement the drapes in the
dress of the remaining two figures. As a result, the four figures
appear unified.

Five drum heads, which are immediately visible, are the major
decorative motif. The left figure carries two drums on his left
shoulder, the upper one of which is smaller than the lower. From the
left, another drum with strap is carried on the left shoulder, by the
second figure. The drum carried by the third drummer, if he carries
one, is hidden from view. On the extreme right, the fourth figure
also carries two drums, one on his right shoulder and the other on
his left hand. The one carried on his right shoulder is the biggest
of all the drums.

Compositional structure of the five drums is basically trian-
gular. Essentially, there are three triangles: one is formed by
connecting the two drums carried by the drummer on the extreme left
with the biggest drum carried on the right shoulder of the fourth
drummer. The third triangle is formed by connecting the second
drummer's drum from the left to the two drums carried by the fourth
figure on the right. Three triangles thus formed culminate in a
pyramidal structure with the biggest drum serving as its visual peak.
Attached to the rims of the drums are small triangular bells. These
are more visible on the bigger drums than the other drums.

Generally, the technique utilized by the artist entailed basing
his design on triangular and pyramidal structures. The main figures
of the drummers were structured together with related but varying
angles in the lines surrounding them. Likewise the major decorative
motif were also structured to link together but only to emphasize the biggest drum. Overlapping pyramidal shapes of the drummers, as earlier observed, are strengthened by the triangular organization of the drums. As such, there is a structural variety because the drummers have individual peaks while the drums have a common visual high point in the biggest drum.

Colors used in the painting are: green, blue, ochre, with a small touch of pink. Among the colors, green is predominant, as it is used more at varying opacity and intensities throughout the picture plane. Brushes and pallete knife were used in applying the paint. The background, unoccupied by the drummers, is segmented into a series of overlapping horizontal structures. Green, blue and ochre are applied in varied tones, intensities and opacities to create a cool but luminous surface. Some of the main figures are reflected in the foreground segmented colors. These shadowy effects, together with the foreground colors, which are completely artificial, create additional variety. A small touch of pink has been used on two drums, on a drum's strap and on a number of bells attached to the rims of the drums.

While the limited number of colors allowed the artist to concentrate on the technique of color application, he has successfully used the pallete knife and the brush. The use of the pallete knife, particularly, allowed the artist the opportunity to scrape off areas of unwanted colors to reveal undercoat colors or create in between ones. On the extreme right of the canvas, color has been allowed to run and drip freely from near the top to the bottom.
The simplification of the forms, the reduction of the forms to geometric structure and the limitation of his colors to mainly green, blue and ochre, appear to be Grillo's major strength in this picture. Another strong point of this painting is the way the major areas of rectangular bands of horizontal colors, which form the background, are subtly contrasted against the verticals represented by the four drummers.

Grillo's painting is not only interesting from the viewpoint of style, it also calls forth attention in terms of meaning. Culturally, the significance of the drummers is that they provide music for various occasions in Nigerian society. The drums they carry are the ensemble of the "talking drum." Essentially, a talking drum is a drum with several strings attached to its rim and when the strings are manipulated by the player's arm in a push-and-release technique, while beating the drum with a stick, varying sounds are produced (Plate II). The master drummer can even produce sounds comparable to human utterance, hence the name "talking drum." Although the biggest drum can be made to talk, it must be used in conjunction with other medium and smaller drums to provide the desired musical arrangements for various occasions.

Grillo's manner of color application demonstrates his knowledge of the use of materials. In the use of pyramids and triangles, he has indicated his awareness of their significance and constant occurrence in traditional African art. Moreover, his observation and depiction of the drummers' activities records contemporary history. By blending ideas derived from traditional and contemporary societies,
he has shown creativity. His simplicity of execution, knowledge of the society and control of materials, have finally brought to the forefront an aspect of African ceremony or ritual related to drumming. The Drummers Return signifies the end of a day's performance. Drums are taken away, carried from the scene of performance back to the places of storage, and tomorrow is another day.

Two Yoruba Women
By Yusuf Adebayo Grillo
Plate III

Another painting by Grillo is his Two Yoruba Women, which was executed in oil in 1960. Sight measurement is about 122 x 76.25 cm. During the National Independence Celebration in October, 1960, the painting was exhibited as part of a group of Nigerian Arts and Crafts sponsored by the Lagos Branch of the Nigerian Council for the Advancement of Art and Culture. What immediately stand out as the major motifs are the two women. Both are dressed in "buba" and "iro", the Yoruba women's short jumper and the wrap-around now worn in various styles in Nigeria. "Buba" is a loose outer garment worn to about the navel area, while "iro" is the wrap-around dress, which is wrapped around the body to below the knees. A "gele" covers the head, thereby completing the outfit for a Yoruba woman.

As earlier identified, the two well-dressed Yoruba women are the major structural motif, while the calabash carried by the woman on the right is the major decorative motif. In basic structure, the composition appears to be organized by relating triangles to the oval shapes
of the calabash and its variants. Two triangles are formed by the
taller woman, one with her head as the apex, the other with her legs
as the apex. Although part of her feet are not contained in the
picture, the manner of the tapering down would strongly indicate that
an apex is inevitable. The two triangles thus formed have a common
base in the woman's waist. Another triangle is formed by connecting
the end of the calabash right down to the taller woman's body to the
base of the picture and by joining the same point to the other woman's
body. A fourth triangle is formed by connecting the shorter woman's
head to her right and left sides. Altogether four major triangles
are thus formed. Two in the taller woman, one in between the two
women and the fourth in the shorter woman's figure.

In the picture, therefore, the two women are not seen realis-
tically. In addition to the triangle structure of their dress, their
heads and necks have not been seen from the point of view of naturalism.
The heads are small in relationship to the body. Another unique
feature is the elongated necks of both women. While the woman on the
right carries a calabash on her head, as well as a baby on her back,
the woman on the left bears nothing on her head but she too carries
a baby on her back. Although the babies are not directly visible,
their heads which show on one side, the loin cloth tied to the
mother's waists, as well as the great bulge at the waist, particularly
of the taller woman, seem to confirm that the babies are carried on
their backs.

Similarly, the background and all places surrounding the two
main figures are segmented into several shapes which relate to the
shape of the calabash and its lid. As a result, we have a series of arcs crossing one another, as in between the two women, and complementing each other, as around the right woman's head. The background forms have been linked with the taller woman's head-tie, which, in its extended fashion, repeats the shape of the top of the calabash. Owing to these arcs, which have been methodically organized from the lower part of the canvas to the top, the two women are linked. Likewise the calabash is on the one hand linked to both figures and on the other hand well integrated with the background.

Colors used in the painting are: yellow, blue, green, red and some white with yellow as the predominant color. Yellow has been used in the women's dresses and the background, most especially on the taller woman's "buba" and in between the two women. Yet the yellow areas are varied because, wherever they exist, the darker colors have been so mixed with it that a blend of both results. The usual glaring tonality of yellow has been greatly reduced all over the canvas. Different subtle areas of yellow of various intensities seem to link the entire surface together: blue and green have been used more on the taller woman's dress than on the other's, which is integrated with the background color on the left and yellow in their midst. Just as the various arcs are organized, so are the colors integrated.

Overlapping areas of yellow and blue have created green and the varied intensities were created by the amount of blue or yellow added. Selection and skillful application of the colors make certain areas of the picture opaque, while others are transparent, especially where the taller woman is linked to the shorter one through the dress
and the space between them. While some areas are necessarily smooth, as on the shorter woman's "iro," the taller woman's "buba" and a few adjacent areas create varied textured areas of interest with creases resulting from the overlapping of colors of the lighter and darker cloth. By not emphasizing the main figures or the calabash alone, these areas are interesting in themselves and contribute significantly to the total effect of the picture. Brushes and the brisk strokes they left behind in addition to the colors create perhaps an unintentional but greatly effective sense of high and low planes. Although the colors are fresh and the various forms clear, the two dimensional treatment of the figures and their components have created a stained-glass effect. In this instance, the manner of color integration without any muddy effect and the networks of varied overlapping colors make the picture a fine piece of craftsmanship and draughtsmanship.

The main significance of this picture is the way the artist has successfully treated a very simple subject in a stained-glass technique, whereby all the areas related to the main picture. Another highpoint is the success with which he has integrated the oval shape of the calabash with those of the main figures without camouflaging their structures and thereby diminishing their importance.

*Two Yoruba Women* commands respect not only for its dignified appearance and the successful manner in which it has been executed, but also for its cultural meaning. The babies the women carry signify that they are fertile, for fertility is one of the ultimum purposes of Yoruba, as of African womanhood in general. The elegant manner with which they stand brings to the viewer's attention the natural beauty of the Yoruba woman.
In this picture, therefore, Grillo has combined his knowledge of Yoruba women's aspirations with his knowledge of the use of materials. By conceiving the women structurally from triangles, he has derived his source from traditional African sculpture and its geometry. In his integration of the figures to the background in design and in color, he has shown himself as a fine colorist and strong draughtsman. The simplicity and composure with which he has seen the two women demonstrates his knowledge of Yoruba women. Finally, in the stained-glass effect, he has attempted with success to transform living subjects to an almost pure abstract design.

Birth, Puberty and Death
by Erhabor Emekpae
Plate IV

Birth, Puberty, and Death might suggest three separate works, but this carving by Erhabor Emokpae combines these three concepts in one. It is a very large sculpture measuring 177 cm. high. It was carved from a single log of Nigerian mahogany and was exhibited at the National Theatre Lagos, during the National Art Exhibition, from September 25 - October 1, 1980. Up to the time of the exhibition, it was in the artist's collection, but it is probably going to be acquired by the Federal Government for the proposed National Arts Gallery, where all major contemporary Nigerian art would be housed at Suleja, the New Federal Capital.52

Born in Benin City, Bendel State, in 1934, Erhabor Emokpae attended Technical Institute Yaba (now Yaba College of Technology) and won a prize in carving in the 1950 Festival of Arts in Lagos. After working in the former Eastern Nigeria, he became a designer with
Lintas Nigeria Limited and later one of its Directors, Asa Productions. He has held many one-man exhibitions of his paintings and sculptures and has executed several commissions including commemorative stamps, a 12' x 62' frieze for the Institute of International Affairs, Victoria Island, Lagos, the artistic embellishments of the United Bank for Africa Ltd. Headquarters, National Theatre Lagos, and street decorations for the 2nd World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture. A member of the Society of Nigerian Artists, he was former Honorary Secretary of the now defunct Nigerian Arts Council and member of the National Council for Arts and Culture.

The single-piece sculpture has three essential parts: first, the three circular shapes on top of the main body; second, the main shaft, which is the main body of the structure and which projects vertically into the lower area; third, the base, into which the long shaft has been projected. The structure of this third segment of the sculpture has its left part pointing upwards and the right side of it drooping towards the base.

From the three parts just identified, we have three varied shapes. The first portion of the sculpture is made up of three oval shapes which link together as its peak. Vertical shape is dominant in the second part which is the long cylindrical portion, with its curved bottom resting on the main base. And the third, another portion partly cylindrical and partly angular, grows from the same base. Almost half way up the sculpture it is cut off at a slanting angle, with its right part pointing towards the base. This piece pointing towards the base is partly detached from the main body.
While the vertical structure is composed of triangles which at its peak and bottom is surmounted by arcs, one of which is up and the other down, the wider and protruding segment is made up of triangular shapes. The protruding piece forms an essential part of this wider portion. Moreover, the last triangular part surmounted on the base reveals part of the body of the main trunk and reaches a sharp point on the left side before slanting and dropping sharply towards the common base.

In appearance, the color of this sculpture is dark brown, as most Nigerian hard woods are when dry. Although its color cannot be perceived from the black and white photograph, however, this writer was privileged to see the original and examined not only its dark color but its fine grains and varied textures. Subtractive technique was used in the carving, and there is a strong indication that it was carved from a single log. A greater portion of wood has been removed from the upper part than the lower part. Yet the three areas of the main trunk, the base and the drooping part as well as the tri-circular top, are well linked. As such, there is no portion that is severed entirely from the main body.

The artist's first job was to determine at what heights his varied shapes would start and end. Then he proceeded by creating the various segments, mindful of the unity and wholesomeness of the sculpture. He considered the kind of rhythm he aspired to create as well as the linear quality of its segments. A log of wood could necessarily be monotonous in itself, therefore, the artist had to think of how to relate the various segments to the overall appearance.
In this case, he has planned for areas of decisive angularity as well as subtle roundness and verticals.

Moreover, he observed the natural grains of the log of wood and planned his main shapes to coincide with them. In this way, he was able to achieve varied textures. His adze marks have contributed to the variety of textures. Mindful of the manner in which the adze could be manipulated, he has been able to carve away unwanted areas, following the grains of wood and leaving behind the mark of his tool. The sharp turns have been given coarser adze strokes than all the other areas. All round or curved areas have been more smoothed, while the flat areas also have been methodically chipped away without extra smoothing work. Consequently, the high and low areas move into each other freely but with sharp turns in the lower part of the sculpture.

The artist’s innovations are two-fold. First, he has successfully treated three independent shapes in one work. He has linked the three segments together, creating variety of interesting surface designs and textures in a log of wood. In achieving both, he appears to attain the status of a master.

This sculpture is significant for its immediate reference to the social belief of most Nigerians. Its focus on the three essential stages in life as birth, puberty, and death brings to focus the childhood phase, the youth phase, and the old age period. First, the childhood phase is represented by the three circles. Second, the vertical shaft represents puberty. Third, the angular part represents period of old age, decadence, and death. The time of birth is
a joyous occasion. The features of a child are not only rounded, they are subtle and flow freely into one another. The period of puberty is characterized by implicit energy and activity. The time of old age and death marks a sharp decline in the former energy. It is a time when wrinkles and loss of energy combine, leading to eventual decadence. The artist has experienced the first two stages and must have witnessed the third phase several times. Hence he was able to bring vividly alive the three life-phases in one sculpture.

The Acrobats
by Erhabor Emokpae
Plate V

Another sculpture by Erhabor Emokpae is The Acrobats, which must have been carved in the late 1970's. Although it was exhibited several times in Nigeria, its present owner cannot be determined. Since it was not available to be photographed during field research, the material for this dissertation was obtained from Nigeria Magazine: Festival Issue Numbers 115-116, 1975, page 36, that illustrated "Panorama of Nigerian Art," an article by Uche Okeke.

The major motif are the acrobats. They occupy the left half of the sculpture. In this case, a vertical line drawn from the top through the middle of the base would completely sever the two acrobats from the rest of the elements. One of the acrobats is below and the other is lifted upwards by the one below. The upper acrobat is composed of two circles, a rectangle and a triangle, which respectively serve as the head, neck, body and the leg. The rectangle has the right arm extended outwards to hold the next form. In appearance, the
acrobat is in profile, so there is only one arm, one leg, and one foot visible. About halfway below, on the left, the other acrobat with the round pieces as its head and neck has the remaining part of the body reduced to a simple triangular shape.

On the top right, we have another two-piece triangular form with a circular hole towards its upper part. The top part of this triangle is cut away. At the level where the acrobat's hand clutches the form, another triangular shape appears and seems to end between the upper acrobat's feet and the lower one's face. Its lower part extends right into the front of the lower acrobat in front of whom there is a heart-shaped form that props the upper and lower acrobats as well as the two-in-one upper triangular forms. Where it is connected to the base of the sculpture, here is a circular form with a pin-pointed center. This circular form, which repeats the shapes of the acrobat's head, is the major decorative motif. Its distribution has played a significant part in the balance of the sculpture.

The round forms in the upper acrobat makes a vertical line when connected to the lower acrobat's head. Similarly, the upper hole and the lower round shape appear almost directly above each other. In other words, a straight line is found to connect both of them together. While the two upper forms can be said to have essentially formed a big triangle, the lower forms make a unique heart-shape, with the lower left acrobat forming the end of its left "ventricle." What may appear as the right "ventricle" is complemented by a sickle shape, inside which the upper acrobat's foot projects and which seems to help to maintain its balance.
From the available photograph, it is difficult to determine color. However, as the sculpture was carved from ebony, its color must be velvet black or dark brown. Even so, some areas of the wood appear darker in tone than others. For instance, on the main trunk of the upper acrobat, some vertical stripes appear darker than the immediate surrounding area. Likewise, similar dark stripes appear on various areas of the upper and lower segments of the sculpture.

A subtractive technique was used in carving the sculpture. This entails the elimination of all unwanted areas from the log of wood. The artist first determined the positions of the acrobats, after which he related all other forms to them. As soon as all the positions were established, the artist proceeded to structure his forms basically around the triangle, the rectangle, and the circle. He has used circles for the acrobats' heads. Again, he uses the same circle for the upper acrobat's neck and the rectangle as well as the rounded triangle served as the body, the thigh, and foot. The lower acrobat has no neck, as the triangular shape is its body only.

Since the figure was carved from a single log of wood, what the artist had to contend with was how to balance the shapes of the two acrobats against the other parts of the composition without deviating from the use of the circle, rectangle and triangle. Balance of the whole structure became a crucial factor. In this, he has succeeded by cutting away as much area from the right half of the wood as from the left. In this case, the upper acrobat was emphasized by the relationship of the form incorporating the two triangles and
the circle. The apex of the top triangle had to be eliminated, as it would have shifted attention from the main figure.

Likewise, the lower half of the wood was balanced against the lower acrobat by the repetition of its basic shape in a counter-change manner. While the circle on top was meant on the one hand to complement the acrobat's head, it was, on the other hand, meant to reduce the excessive weight and bulky appearance that could have resulted in the right form. Similarly, the lower right half of the sculpture was reduced in weight by chipping away part of the wood, to create a shallow receptacle form around which the sickle-like shape was related. Finally, the circular form on the base was helpful in counter-balancing the hole on top, as well as helping to increase the weight of the base.

By these counter-change techniques of organization of forms and voids, Emokpae has been able to create a sculpture that is visually pleasant and strong. Not only that, he has demonstrated his knowledge of geometry and shown his awareness of the essential elements of design.

Cast Concrete Screen
by Demas Nwoko
Plate VI

The south facade to Demas Nwoko's New Culture Studio at Oremeji Crescent in Ibadan carries this untitled frieze that the artist has merely called Cast Concrete Screen. It is fixed opposite the window adorning the main lobby on the top floor of the two story building. The building in which the frieze is arranged was designed
and built by the artist himself, from the years 1962 to 1967. The sculpture was made of cast concrete, a mixture of cement and the local earth, hence the artist's decision to describe it merely as Cast Concrete Screen.

Born December, 1935, at Idumuje-Ugboko, Bendel State of Nigeria, Demas Nwoko trained at the old Nigerian College of Arts, Science, and Technology Zaria, from 1957 to 1961. He also took courses in Decor and Scenographic Art in France in 1961 and 1962. As a contemporary of Uche Okeke and Bruce Onobrakpeya, he was commissioned with them by the Nigerian Arts Council in 1960 to make murals for the Independence Exhibition Pavillion in Lagos. In 1961, he held his first exhibition with Uche Okeke at the Mbari Club in Ibadan. He joined the staff of the School of Drama (now Department of Theatre Arts), University of Ibadan, and has directed many productions including Palm Wine Drunkard, for which he also designed the costumes, Danda, which was offered by Nigeria at Dakar in 1966 and the Children of Paradise, one of Nigeria's entries in Festac '77. As a versatile artist, he designed and built the Dominican Monastery in Ibadan, the Cultural Center in Benin City, and his New Culture Studio in Ibadan. It was established in the early 70's to train students in the arts. His aims and objectives are stated in the prospectus as follows:

Student member will work in traditional materials and acquire mastery of techniques of wood, copper, iron, bronze, clay, and other readily available local materials. In the performing arts they will work with local materials in music, dance, drama, and speech styles. One of the major aims of the studio is to develop the use of these materials, and to bring fine arts back into all facets of modern African life, similar to the prominent role it played in the
African ethnic communities that produced the culture of Nole, Benin, Ife, and Igbo Ukwu. The institution is so organized that work in all areas will not only have practical application, but also social implications.54

He is founder and one of the editors of the New Culture Magazine.

Seven varied pieces of sculpture are the major motif of the frieze. They are organized from side to side and altogether measure about 183 cm x 305 cm. The major decorative motif is the individual segment of the frieze that represents one of the seven pieces of sculpture. Each of these pieces has been structurally designed in relationship to the other, yet with visual variety.

 Basically, in designing each piece, the artist derived his shapes from triangles and rectangles, some of which he rounded off by cutting away their apex to provide for continuity in each piece. For instance, in the first piece, on the left, starting from the top, the arrangement is a combination of a narrow rectangle, a short triangle, another triangle overturned to form an irregular oval or rhomboid, and a triangle with a fairly broad base. Similarly the second piece is constructed with triangles and rectangles, some of which are overturned to form other shapes. But this second piece is different from the first piece in the widths of each of its segments. The top is broader and each of the triangular and rectangular shapes are wider too. In the same way as the first two, the artist constructed each of the other pieces without repeating exactly the shapes he has used previously. Besides, he constructed the seven pieces with a discriminating taste for a puzzle, whereby, if he wanted, he could move the pieces to fit together as one individual unit.
Thus, where he created a bulging shape in the first piece, he formed a receding shape in the next piece. In other words, it is very much like a half-drop design in which the bulging areas, when connected together at various levels, form horizontal zig-zag lines. In such a manner, several triangular movements link the pieces together from top to bottom. Moreover, the play of light on the apparent triangular formations emphasizes the horizontal and vertical movements of the shapes. As the basic idea of each piece and the overall structure generated from rectangles, the varied triangles and rectangles earlier identified as minor elements create maximum variety.

Noticeable in each main piece is that a vertical line drawn from top to bottom necessarily bisects the figure into almost two identical shapes. Variations, earlier mentioned, still appear in the linear quality of each segment. What appears to provoke much attention and interest is that much similarity, yet marked difference, occurs everywhere. The seven pieces, therefore, having variety in them, stand side by side, like seven pieces of sculpture with individual personalities and unique features of their own. But in their integration, they have been related superbly.

With the vertical and horizontal zig-zag movements so conceived, the seven pieces were organized together along the upper facade facing the window to the lobby. As the seven pieces have been arranged with voids in them and spaces between them, light is allowed to penetrate through these spaces and assorted holes, to illuminate the room with possible subtle light effects. As the louvred glass used on the window
is opaque, the penetration of light is controlled by the amount of
the opening of the louvred glass blades.

In color, the Screen is a pale brown attained by mixing
cement with the local earth and sand. Molds were used in casting
the individual pieces and these molds have been prepared, ready, as
well as the separator, before the actual pouring of mixed cement
occurred. The cement was allowed to set, following which, the seven
pieces were removed from their wooden casts and allowed to dry.
During the interval, rain water or sprinkling of water was constantly
administered to slow the process of shrinkage and further prevent
cracking. After the proper drying of all the seven pieces without
any evidence of cracking, they were then arranged side by side forming
this magnificent Screen. The lintel was then cast over it and the
pieces permanently held together.

Nwoko's accomplishment in this Cast Concrete Screen is mainly
the success with which he has integrated the seven pieces of sculpture
into a frieze, which is not an appendage to the facade of the building
but part of it. In other words, the seven pieces are made to function
together as a unified part of the building. Being an advocate of the
functional need of art in society, Nwoko definitely wanted to
reiterate the importance of art in architecture as an integral part
and not as an extra aspect of it.

As the artist has not given the sculpture any name more than
Cast Concrete Screen, he implies that first and foremost the work is
to function as an architectural object. But while satisfying that
need, it was intended to be artistic as well. There are probably very
few contemporary Nigerian architects interested in art being a functional part of architecture in the country. The significance of this frieze, therefore, is basically that with it, Nwoko has succeeded in making a vital innovation. With it, he seems to suggest to contemporary Nigerian architects the rich but unexplored possibilities of the successful use of art in architecture. Another major innovation is in the artist's use of local materials. With the exception of cement, wood, and nails, all the materials used in his frieze and building were found on the site. This is a solemn but cogent statement on a practical way to ward off inflation, with respect to ways to cut down the cost of buildings that are functional as well as artistically executed, and this proves Nwoko's resourcefulness.

_Mural at University of Ibadan_  
by Demas Nwoko  
Plate VI

This untitled mural was painted by Demas Nwoko on the wall of the cafeteria of Tedder Hall of the University of Ibadan in the early 1960's. It covers the frontal wall of the cafeteria and measures about 457.5cm x 1525cm. The picture covers the wall from the ceiling level to the window level. It is apparently painted in fresco, as Nwoko had just returned from France where he trained in that technique.

The composition is divided into five scenes which connect to present a continuous narrative. In the middle above and below are the two major panels. On their right are two vertical panels placed side by side and the fifth and last panel is another vertically placed one at the extreme left.
In the largest panel occupying the immediate foreground there are five figures and a larger one in their midst. Three are on the right while two are on the left. In front of the middle figure, representing an elderly woman, are some beads. These beads are being assembled by four of the five people who are standing near her. On the left, a figure standing with both feet apart stretches both hands outwards in an attitude of nonchalance. Three of the five youths have their hair plaited, which strongly indicates that they are girls. The other two do not plait their hair, which therefore implies that they are boys. The boys have broader shoulders than the girls, while the girls have wider hips than the boys. On the elderly woman's right, the first girl in front turns her head backwards to talk with another girl. The girl is holding in her hand what appears to be the same kind of beads. They are depicted in the nude. The elderly woman with her head bent forward appears completely absorbed in the collection of the beads.

On the upper register of the second panel is a row of seven people, male and female, with white loin cloth tied round their waists. They each hold a ring of what appears to be beads, similar to those of the boys and girls. While some of them, especially the two on the right hold their beads, maybe in an attempt to cast them down, two of the seven persons dressed in white loin cloth still hold their beads. However, the figure from the right is placing her own beads in a cone-shaped receptacle in front of them. Altogether, there are, in the upper register panel, four men and three women. The woman in the middle appears to be the chairperson, for there are
three persons on her right and three persons on her left. Perhaps she is laying down an example by first placing her beads in the receptacle in front of them. The woman on the extreme left gesticulates in a manner that seems to indicate a disclaimer. On the container, two rows of rings that appear like beads are placed close to the rim.

The first vertical panel on the right indicates two persons in a landscape. Both of them have white loin cloths tied to their waists. While the left one holds a stick, the right one stretches her hand upwards towards the tree branch. Both figures stand on either side of the tree. In the next vertical panel, a man and a woman stand close together. While the man holds a ring of beads in his two hands, behind him, the woman puts her hands on the beads around her waist in an attitude of removing it. Her breast is pointed and generally she appears sensuous. This couple appear to be the same as those represented in the extreme right panel. In the extreme left vertical panel is represented a man dressed in white loin cloth and with a long walking stick. He stands in front of the foliage and seems to walk towards the middle group of people with the elderly woman in their midst.

The technique followed by the artist was to paint most areas of the dark wall with ochres and greens before he continued to add the details of structures in the foliage and the physical features of the people. An eye witness account of the early stages of the painting states:

Contemporary Nigerian artists are represented in University College Ibadan by Demas Nwoko who has painted a large mural in Tedder Hall. This is on a
dark wall and when I saw it half completed, the simple shape in greens and ochres glowed brilliantly from the shadows. Unfortunately the picture has been rather overworked with fussy detail and that boldness has been lost.55

In this writer's opinion, even though some of the freshness had been lost, the details in this case have added to the completeness of the story.

In that year, 1962, there was a general complaint by the students of Tedder Hall, among other things, about poor food and lack of male and female freedom within the Hall. A demonstration was organized to press home their points. Other university students, who were also seeking freedom of that kind, joined the students of Tedder Hall. This revolt eventually led to the students' rustication and the closure of the university. University authorities were summoned to probe the incident and after their findings punished those found guilty.

Nwoko's painting is a satiric commentary on the whole episode in which he laid more emphasis on the students' male and female relationship. He used the casting down of the boys' and girls' beads to refer to the university regulation forbidding the aforesaid relationship after certain deadline times. By depicting the university elders (men and women) with similar beads like the students', which some of them did not wish to give up, the artist was pointing to similar relationships among elders. Generally, the artist's picture is demanding fairness in a situation which derives fun from human nature. He is, therefore, subjective in his treatment. In the common dining hall, it was believed that the students would not only
enjoy the scenes, but reflect on the story which depicts the true nature of men and women in whatever status they may be.

The Royal Welcome
by Sina Yussuff
Plate VIII

This oil painting by Sina Yussuff measures 122 x 183 cm. and was painted in 1975. It is one of the studies he made of various calibres of drummers in 1975 and 1976.

A painter and muralist with a good knowledge of graphic art as well, Sina Yussuff was born in 1945 in Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State of Nigeria, and obtained between 1968 and 1972 his professional training from the Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, after a successful basic education in Lagos. He received his Bachelor of Arts (Honors) degree and emerged the 1972 university prizeman in painting. His attachment to an advertising agency in Lagos, Ogilvy Benson and Mather (Nigeria) Limited, during his university education earned him enough experience in graphic illustrations to make him in 1973 the winner of a national art competition for the design of Nigeria's National Youth Service Corps emblem. He has since visited Soviet Museums and galleries in 1974, held two biennial one-man exhibitions in Lagos in 1974 and 1976, and participated in group international exhibitions in Romania (1976), in Lagos at the World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (Festac, 1977), and in New Delhi at the 4th India-Triennale of Contemporary World Art (1978). In 1977, he carried out six relief concrete murals to embellish the facade of the Oyo State Cultural Center, Ibadan and designed three frieze
medallions executed in bronzed fiber glass and copper panels embellish private buildings in Lagos, while the largest single collection of his paintings adorn the premises of the Headquarters Building of the Economic Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Also in 1978 the artist won a third prize in a National art competition for the artistic decoration of the New Murtala Mohammed Airport, Ikeja. Yussuff is currently a Principal Cultural Officer and Head of Visual Arts in the Federal Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture, Lagos.

In the painting, the four drummers are the major motif of the composition and the four drum heads are the major decorative motif. Each of the four men is dressed in traditional Yoruba dress known as "gbariye." Basically, the four drummers were designed from the point of view of triangles which have been slightly overlapped on one another from left to right. Their gbariye dress appear to be identical in structure and in design. Usually, a gbariye dress measures not less than fourteen to sixteen feet in width and five to more than six feet in height. It is, therefore, a voluminous dress. Each dress is gorgeously decorated with traditional royal emblems. The chest and stomach areas of the dresses are the most richly decorated parts. Each man’s dress is the big circular motif subdivided into various triangles. The chest shows the twining snake motif, while the neck areas are embroidered with similar material. The men on the extreme left and the middle appear the shorter pair of the four men; hence their drums hang loose more than the remaining pair. With the exception of this, the dresses appear very similar.
Each drummer had gathered his gbariye dress around the body. The folds resulting from the gathering of the enormous width of the dress is responsible for the various folds visible below the drum heads. These folds help to emphasize the drum heads. The men are seen in shadows; consequently details of their eyes, ears, mouths, and noses appear unimportant in the whole structure.

Each drum is decorated gorgeously with velvet straps, brass bells and leather, and made to face the viewer directly. The rims of the drum heads are also ornamented. Sticks for beating the drums are not shown on all the drums, except on the second and last ones. The leather straps for carrying the drums are inclined at various angles to emphasize the structure of the drummers. Likewise the brass bells help in emphasizing the drum heads. While the drum heads are the largest circles, other circles are clearly visible in the dress that echo them. While the circles on the dress are highly decorated with triangles, the drum heads are left bare. The leather straps are sparingly decorated while the chest area of the dresses appear heavily decorated. As such what may be considered in the drum heads as bare has been compensated for in the highly decorative rims.

Although geometric symbols are used in various parts of the painting, especially on the dresses and the drum straps, they have been freely used and not mechanically executed or organized. The lines are free and broad in some areas, such as on the drum heads, leather straps and the dress. Lines are narrow in the detailed designs of the dress and the leather straps. The linear quality of the painting is active and strong.
Brown, red, purple, green and blue are the main colors used. White has been used with some touches of blue, and red on the drum heads, while white has also been mixed with blue, green, purple and red for the upper segment of the picture. In other words, light green, blue and brown are concentrated around the drummers' heads but broken up into areas of related colors. The light colors with white predominating that have been used on the drum heads appear very important in the whole picture. Not only does the attention become focused on them as much as on the figures, their circular nature appear to propel the movement of the eyes around their rims one after the other.

Similarly, the light colored areas of the background enable the eye movement to be in a fairly regulated zig-zag pattern from the background to the drum heads. Thus, the colors of the background appear linked with those of the drum heads.

The play of light areas of colors against the dark areas creates variety in the work, which could otherwise have been monotonous. Most colors are so low in intensity that no specific area disturbs the sight. Generally, colors have been allowed to interact one with the other by the placement of highly related colors side by side with a lighter one for contrast. Another thing that makes the painting interesting to look at is the use of variety of textures. Some are dots and dashes as on the velvet strap and rims of the drum heads. Other textures include hatched lines that are used in the decoration of dresses. Textures appear almost all over the entire surface area of the dresses, except, perhaps, in the lower parts.
The simplicity of arrangement, the two dimensional technique of painting it, the color harmony, the repetition and variety of design motifs as well as the effective use of textures appear to be Sina Yussuff's main strengths in this painting. It is not evident that he has used other tools apart from the brushes. Nevertheless, he has been able to achieve varied effects and tonal qualities. The simplification of the picture, and the approach to painting it from the patterning point of view, has allowed the artist to integrate all areas of the canvas together.

Even though this painting provokes much interest owing to the simplicity of its arrangement and the varied design of the drummers' dresses and drums, what it implies within the culture deserves investigation.

The drummers, as the title of the painting implies, are royal musicians. They are the Alafin (King) of Oyo's special drummers. Their main duty is to welcome royal guests to the King's Court. As their duty is within the King's Palace, they also provide music for other occasions within the King's Palace. Their traditional role was more important than it is now, but their main duty of heralding the arrival of the King's guests has continued until today. The drummers are usually seated at the forecourt of the palace, to enable them to see any visitor that enters the palace. As soon as a stranger enters the palace from the forecourt, these musicians would have sighted him by their position and start beating their drums. If the King wanted to receive the guest, he would command that the visitor should be ushered in by his emissaries. The significance of the
Royal Welcome is that it attempts to record an aspect of contemporary history as it affects the King's court in Nigeria today. The musicians are full time royal employees, and, as such, their meals and clothing are provided by the King.

Peace and Protest  
by Sina Yussuff  
Plate IX

While visiting New Delhi, India, when he took a Nigerian exhibition there in 1978, Sina Yussuff had some unique experiences, one of which prompted him to paint this picture on his return to Nigeria.

Peace and Protest, 1978, is an oil painting measuring 91.5 x 122 cm. The major motifs are the two areas organized into two contrasting shapes. Easels and boards represent the main decorative motifs. On the left, the arrangement of boards of various sizes, is methodical, while those on the right are haphazardly arranged. The left group occupies about half the surface of the canvas, while the remaining half is occupied by the randomly arranged easels and boards. Boards on the left are made up of rectangles and squares propped against the vertical easels in the right segment of the canvas. In the arrangement of the boards and easels, balance is maintained by the distribution of weight in the middle portion of the canvas. Variety is present in the randomness of the arrangement of the easels and boards in the right half of the picture. Otherwise, the whole arrangement of canvas might have been called regular and, perhaps, monotonous. Balance is also maintained in the two major halves of the canvas by
variety of lines and masses. Proportions of the boards and easels vary and, when viewed in the total organization, two different rhythms are suggested within the picture. While the rhythm of lines on the left is calm and simple, the rhythm of lines on the right half of the canvas is staccato, jerky, unorganized or confused. Yet, the unity of the two areas of the canvas is brought about by linking the boards of the first half with that of the other half. The arrangement of the two areas has created a simple but effective difference.

Other variety is achieved through the careful segmentation of the background areas. There, other boards appear to emerge from behind the busy pile, to lend weight to the others already there. The brawl-like appearance of one area against the apparent serenity of the other creates tension in the painting.

Color is not significant, as it is painted in a near monochrome, with the exception of minor areas, especially the foreground. Colors have been applied with almost the same technique as in Yussuff's other paintings. They have been applied carefully and thickly to create nontransparent surfaces. The painting appears bare of any decoration in the form of textures. The whole surface of the canvas is smooth and the light and dark effect is subtle.

Yussuff's technique in this picture is built around the identification of opposites: calm against turbulence, order against chaos, and serenity against anarchy. He has succeeded in this by the simplification of vertical and horizontal lines on the left, and the oblique lines with verticals on the right. The success of linking both areas together is dependent on his ability to pull together both
areas by color and line. He has been able to achieve this by integration of oblique lines and light and dark tones. It is this achievement that marks the vigor of his painting.

What does the picture of drawing boards and easels mean and what significance could there be outside the painter's studio? In this instance, the artist may be making a philosophical statement. The artist, himself, has got this to say about the painting:

Well, the third painting [Peace and Protest] is an influence on me after my visit to New Delhi. Because my visit to New Delhi was to take a Nigerian participation exhibition there in 1978. And Nigeria participated, among 40 other countries all over the world, including Japan and all others, and then as a result of all these, I was exposed more to the various artistic trends all over the world. As a result of that, the painting that was said to have won one of the awards of the Indian Triennale was something I would not under----by my upbringing and by my assessment of what is art and what is not art, I would not have tipped an award winning entry. You find out that one of the paintings that won the award was like that [Peace and Protest]. The canvas was divided strictly into two. And when you talk of composition, etc., which we are always conscious of, the painting was highly lacking, but maybe the judges have their own reasons for choosing that. . . . The area there, the peaceful area, yes, that is the peace, where you just pack things like painting boards. You know, all these are reflections from my painting studio. You would have seen that the protest there is depicted by humanized painting easels, carrying painting boards, unused yet, at various angles. That gives a sort of confusion—confusion of lines, confusion of forms—yet held together by unity of color. . . .and half way the canvas to the left--you see serenity, and tranquility around. So I call it 'Peace and Protest.' But in both of them you can see a sort of unity.56

In his attempt to criticize objectively another trend in art, Yussuff has achieved a new technique for his design. Peace and Protest records two sides of the same coin and seems to broaden his knowledge of the possibilities in creative art of the world.
Pregnant Mother
by Ben Osawe
Plate X

One of Ben Osawe's most successful sculptures is the
Pregnant Mother, which is 215 cm. high, carved in 1980. It was ex­
hibited at the National Art Exhibition, September-October, 1980, in
Lagos.

The artist is a Nigerian. Born in 1931 at Agbor, sixty-four
miles east of Benin City, Ben's parents came from Benin City. His
father was a carver who learned his art while serving as an amada,
an attendant of the Oba of Benin. Upon release from service, Ben's
father moved to Onitsha where he continued to carve panels for sale.
There Ben spent several hours observing his father at work. However,
his father forbade him to carve, for he wanted his son to have a more
socially acceptable vocation. Ben was forced to carve secretly and
the first time he was able to work in the open was in the elementary
school, where his amateur-painter-headmaster encouraged him. He
started to work in various media, and in 1946 his family moved
again to Benin, where, in 1947, his father died. After his father's
death, he was forced to apply his skill to the production of rubber
stamps and ebony figurines. In 1956, he left for England supported
by an English patron, Major Grimley. He studied first at the London
School of Graphic Arts for one year before going to the Camberwell
School of Art in London for five years. While in England, Ben
achieved modest success as a young sculptor. Not only did he
participate in several group shows in art galleries, he took part in
successful group shows at the Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh,
(Exhibition of Nigerian art) in 1963, and the Commonwealth Art Festival in 1965. He returned to Nigeria in 1965. Since then, he has executed many commissions for public buildings at Jos (Central Bank), Benin City (High Court, University of Benin, and Benoni Hospital). He left Lagos in 1975 to settle in Benin City.

This writer was privileged to view the exhibition [of Contemporary Nigerian Art] and made a sketch of the Pregnant Woman. It is a sculpture constructed from the point of view of triangles and rectangles related to one another at varied angles and carved from a log of hard wood. The head is elongated and conical shaped but small. It is bent forward at an angle of about eighty degrees to the breast. The breasts are full, rounded at the top and bottom, and hang firmly against the chest. Both hands which have been carved as simple rectangles are clasped together to prop the bulging torso. Although the full legs are not shown in the photograph, my sketch shows it as a long triangle, with its upper part serving as the broad and wide thigh. It is, therefore, a figure with various segments related to each other as follows: above the forehead is a triangle; the shape of the hands propping the stomach is made up of two rounded triangular shapes coming to a common peak in the navel, and the rest, which is the thigh and legs, are basic triangles. Thus the artist has based the various parts of the body on either the rectangle or the triangle. The stomach, the breasts, and the thighs are rounded to suggest their appearance at that stage of a woman's pregnancy.

The work is dark brown with various textures where the grains of wood have shown on the smooth surface. A subtractive technique
was used in carving the sculpture. First the wood was broadly hewed into the basic shape with relevant portions removed to create rudimentary features of the head, shoulders, torso, and legs. Second, the artist proceeded to redefine the nature of the head to the shoulders both in size and inclination. Similarly, he determined the shape of the breasts and whether they were going to be separated or not. He realized that his main emphasis was to show a full stomach, hence, he not only made it full by carving away little wood, he did not separate the two hands from the body. By conceiving the hands and the torso as complementary for the achievement of his design, he reduced their structures to the basics. The navel, being the organ of life, became the highest ridge. This also helps to emphasize the raised stomach as well as the full breasts. The thighs were similarly treated as full by broadening the upper part and by smoothing the surface. The base appears heavy enough to bear the weight of the torso and the thighs. More areas are smooth than rough. The artist has used his chisel particularly in the hand areas to indicate their strength in supporting the stomach.

It is a figure composed mainly of masses and volumes and carved with the feeling for rounded contours and sharp turns. The lines created where sharp turns and rounded forms meet are clearly and cleanly carved to emphasize the delicacy of the rounded areas. Although the stomach could have appeared too heavy, the artist has resolved this problem by eliminating excess wood below the navel up to the hands and above it up to below the breasts.
The figure is not only pleasant but strong. The artist's successes are in the relationship of the various parts of the body and the overall balance. There is also a simplicity to the various parts of the pregnant woman. While the general physical appearance of a pregnant woman is not all that pleasant to view by some people, the artist has suggested through this work that the appearance of a pregnant woman could be attractive.

Culturally, pregnancy, if legitimate, is regarded as a blessing. Not only is it regarded as desirable, it is nurtured and the woman is cared for throughout delivery. Since it is only through the pregnant woman that the continuity of the culture can be ensured, birth is a thing of beauty and, therefore, a joy. In this sculpture, the artist recognizes the role and importance of women in the society. They are productive and they ensure the continuity of families, clans, societies, and a nation.

**Standing Figure**
by Ben Osawe
Plate XI

A monumental welded, metal sculpture entitled *Standing Figure*, was executed by Ben Osawe in the late 1970's. It is much above life size, possibly c.366 cm. high, although I was not able to ascertain the exact height.

The major decorative motifs are the smaller triangles that have been welded to the main structures. There are six of such triangles. Four have been joined to the top of the left part of the figure and two have been joined to the right of it. In the main figure, working
from the left, mask motifs in triangular, circular and oval shapes have been welded on to the body with narrow strips of round metal.

On the first piece, welded to the second, the triangular mask occupies the left side of it, while the oval shaped mask is on the right. A broken line that separates the masks is divided, slightly outside them, into two spiral-shaped loops. Immediately outside the loops, the broken line finally ends in a circle bisected horizontally and vertically into two parts. A cylindrical welded metal vertically placed helps to prop up the left part of the figure. This prop is bisected into two equal parts with a thin rod of metal welded to its surface. At the lower end of it, on either side of the line are two oval shapes. Their centers are slightly punched to indicate two small dents in them.

On the right half of the main structure, a large but narrow triangle is created with the same kind of metal as that of the left half of it. At the upper part of it, two circles are created. The left circle is bisected into two equal parts while the right is divided into four unequal parts. These two circles are outside the triangle and thus unconnected with it. Instead of the base of the triangle being connected with a straight line, it is joined to an arc shape. Five other concentric arcs occupy the inner part of the triangle. At the peak of the triangle, three circles of varied sizes are welded with the smallest last. From about the middle part of the triangle and to either side of it are welded three pairs of broken, thin metal rods. Two other cylindrical pieces of metal are welded to the base.
The heaviest parts of the figure are thus linked together at its upper register by the triangular welded metal pieces as well as towards its base by the slight overlapping. The shape formed by the link of the two major shapes is a negative rhomboid with two of the triangles projecting slightly to the center of it. Projecting outside the main figure are two cylinders that have been welded to the triangles projecting inside. While the one on the left is rounded off at the top, the one on the right is partly divided into several pieces that are not, however, separated from the fairly squashed cylinder. By this organization, we have several triangles welded to the cylinder. The overall arrangements suggest several pyramids.

The two major cylindrical parts would seem to end in a large triangle with its up-turned peak cut off, while the upper base is surmounted with several triangles. These triangles seem to have independent structures of their own that serve as individual shapes of triangles that are joined together at their bases and peaks. Thus, they link the major two parts of the composition together, as well as link one another together. Again, the triangular ovals, arcs, and circles welded on the figure's surfaces help to create areas of secondary integration.

What the artist did was, first, to create the two major segments of the composition, and second, to create the small pieces. Then he welded them together into the curved shapes. He welded the smaller related triangles together before welding them to the main structure. Thus he created shapes, the ends of which project inward to enhance the main structures.
Since the pointed ends of the triangles necessarily would have led off the eyes from the main figure, the artist decided to weld them together by overlapping them. Thus, we have them on the one hand pointing upwards and, on the other, leading inwards to the figure in the negative space. The cylinders that were used below serve as props that connect with the main figure. The artist was mindful of not repeating them; otherwise the overall variety he had all along been able to achieve would have been negated. But for these props and their verticality, the main figure would have appeared unbalanced. Those vertical cylinders, therefore, created the much-needed verticality that was crucial to the balance and strength of the whole structure.

Osawe's achievement in this composition is the monumentality of the structure. For even though metal welding is not uncommon in Nigeria, the scale in which he works is not common among contemporary artists. In spite of the monumentality, the remarkable ease with which he attained a balance of the various parts is commendable. He has not only put a lot of effort into the assemblage of the whole before welding a permanent shape, he did a lot of thinking about its outcome. The apparent intricacy of the upper segment of the composition in relation to the simplicity of the lower area create areas of tension and calm. The harmony that has resulted is demonstrative of the artist's ability to create balance from shapes placed in unbalanced positions. He was able to break the law of gravity with impunity in the construction of the upper register of the composition. He has carefully designed in relief motifs already repeated in the upper register. In
this way, the surfaces suggest the shapes already present above them. The negative and positive spaces relate well to create a variety in the composition.

Although simply called Standing Figure, Ben Osawe’s representation derives from one of the most common motifs in African sculpture: the rectangle, triangle, the circle and their variants. His achievement is demonstrated in his ability to synthesize shapes which derive from old traditions. He must have studied the abstract-shaped poles of shrines and perhaps the palace of the Oba of Benin. His additionally acquired knowledge of metal sculpture brought back from Britain certainly became profitable in the welding of the various segments. Except where he had intentionally indicated it, it is hardly possible to distinguish the various joints. Creativeness apart, technical excellence makes the Standing Figure a successful piece.

Facing the Unknown
by Obiora Udechukwu
Plate XII

Facing the Unknown is the title of a woodcut by Obiora Udechukwu. Its measurement is not exactly known but it is approximately 38.1 x 30.5 cm. It is in the artist’s personal collection.

The artist comes from Agulu in Anambra State of Nigeria. Born June 4, 1946, at Onitsha, he had his early education at Central School and Dennis Memorial Grammar School, Obiora, Anambra State. In 1965, he worked very briefly as a commercial artist at Enugu and thereafter studied art at Zaria and Nsukka, where, after a three year
hiatus, he graduated in 1972, winning the Department of Fine Art Prize and the T. A. Fasuyi Prize for painting. From 1967 to 1970, he worked with the Cultural Workshop directed by Gabriel Okara at Alaenyi-Ogwa, where he was actively involved in the founding of the Odunke Community of Artists and in writing and producing its first play, "Veneration to Udo." Between 1960 and 1965, he won several certificates and medals, the trophy for Commercial Art (1964) at the Eastern Nigerian Festival of the Arts, and the trophy for painting (1965). In July, 1972, he held a joint exhibition with Bons Nwabiani at Enugu; in 1973, he participated in a three-man exhibition at the Exhibition Center, Old Niger House, Lagos, under the auspices of the Nigerian Arts Council. In 1975, he held an exhibition of drawings inspired by the poetry of Christopher Okigbo at Enugu and Gong Gallery, Lagos. In 1972 and 1976, he traveled extensively in Europe and the United States, visiting museums and art galleries. He completed one post-graduate MFA course at the University of Nigeria-Nsukka, in 1977, where he is also a lecturer. He has exhibited in group shows and had one-man exhibitions in Nigeria and Western Germany.58

In the composition previously identified, the man and woman, who appear to be husband and wife, are the major motif. What appears to be the major decorative motif is the man's hat. The man, dressed in a wrapper, rests his left hand on his wife's left shoulder. He wears a hat with a circular rim and buckled belt around the outside of it. His wrapper, with stripes of varied widths, is gathered in two folds on his right shoulder. The wrinkles on his forehead accentuate the furrows created beneath his two eyes. His eyes are fixed
on a distant object or scene. The hollow areas around his collarbone exaggerate his long, thin neck. In contrast to the husband, the wife wears nothing on her head. However, she has her hair plaited in spiral shapes, eight of which are clearly visible. She wraps her dress across her chest up to her armpits. Similarly, she has deep furrows that repeat those beneath her two eyes and across her eyelashes. Her eyes are fixed on a distant object and her lips are thin and firmly pressed together. She is nearly as tall as her husband and the space between them is broken up into two areas of light and dark tones of ink. The area opposite the husband's cap is structured into several concentric circles that seem to repeat the circular rim of the hat.

Color is inconsequential to this black and white woodcut, but areas of light and dark tones are created throughout the entire picture. The use of light and dark tones are especially effective in the husband's dress, his wife's hair and the area of concentric shapes forming the background behind her.

Varied textures are created all over the picture. Fine textures are noticeable on the husband's face and left chest, while his wife's chest and arms and part of her face have fine textures also. Heavy textures are particularly well used on the dresses and the background.

In basic structure, the picture was designed by relating two triangles. The first triangle is formed by connecting the husband's hat to his shoulders, and the second by connecting his wife's head to both her shoulders. Then the circle evidenced in the husband's hat was related to the two overlapping triangles. Having laid down the basic shapes, the artist proceeded to create light and dark tonal
qualities that repeat the main shapes and unify the entire picture. The big area behind the wife, opposite her husband's hat was developed into areas of light and dark tones that accentuate the rim of the hat. As a result, two strong triangular areas are linked to two adjacent areas with circles. The placement of contrasting shapes and contrasting tones help the picture to maintain its balance. The amount of area carved away in total volume appears to be just about the same as the area uncut.

The eyes of both husband and wife are strongly emphasized by the furrows above and beneath them. The placement of the pupil in both sets of eyes suggests that they are looking at a distant object. The firm lips appear to indicate seriousness or determination on the part of the couple. To my mind, these unique devices by the artist has helped to lay more emphasis on the face than the carefully textured areas. As a result, the viewer is able to feel that the couple's eyes are cross-fixed in determination on a distant object. Remove the fixed gaze of the couple and there appears to be no special areas of attraction in the picture.

The husband and wife, as the title suggests, are 'Facing the Unknown.' Determination is suggested by the cross-fixed gaze in their eyes. But what appears to be a serious occasion, with its slightly formidable air, has been turned into a pleasant harmony of related triangles and circles and of light and dark areas. The interest maintained by viewing this picture could be no less than viewing a painting with varied colors. The mark of a master seems evident in the plan, by relating shapes, lines and textures to one another in the
total space of the picture. Most important, the arrangement of triangles, circles and the effective stress on shapes that relate to them helps in creating a balanced picture.

**Staff Sergeant**
by Obiora Udechukwu
Plate XIII

Another picture by Obiora Udechukwu is his drawing of the **Staff Sergeant**. It was executed in the late 1970's and measures about 38.1 x 30.5 cm. It is in the collection of the artist.

The picture is composed of circles and curvilinear shapes in the upper register. Starting from its upper register, within a larger implied circle, there are three smaller circles. One is placed on the right, the other is on the top left while the third is on the lower left part of the implied circle. The right part of another large implied circle encloses the earlier described shape and to it is applied a wash of ink. There is a segment of another circle with several fine lines in it, especially in the right and upper parts. The semi-circular part precisely repeats the earlier described implied circle on a smaller scale.

From that stage, a broad vertical line connects the shapes on the left to the lower parts of the picture. Likewise another broad line connects the two implied circles to the central part of the picture. Outside this line, two other, shorter lines of identical width project from the outer implied circle to about the same level as the circle on the left of the picture. Another broken-up line, narrower in width, projects to the body of the picture from the same
level as the others. From the left of the three broken segments, a curvilinear line starts and moves down in an 's' shape. This line is meant to indicate the left shoulder. Below the line and on the left arm are three consecutive rows of "V" shaped stripes.

When the picture is turned sideways with the broken-up lines horizontal to the base, it implies a completely different figure. It seems to look like a vehicle. The circles look like the vehicle's tires. The broken-up lines seem to imply the load within the vehicle.

The stripes earlier identified on the left shoulder are very important as they signify the rank of the staff as a sergeant. Without these stripes, the identity and rank of the figure would be unknown. The mystery surrounding the identity of the composition is thus broken by the presence of those three stripes. The artist was able to show the identity of his subject not by the curvilinear shapes of the upper parts, but by the simplicity of the lower ones, especially the stripes.

Who is a staff sergeant in the Nigerian police? He is the first rank of commissioned police. Before he can attain that status, he must have demonstrated courage, dedication, and exemplary bravery in the performance of his duty. His three stripes worn on the left shoulder are, therefore, a sign of achievement and a thing of pride. Remove those three stripes and his uniform looks no different from that of recruited officer.
One of the paintings by Egonu is the *Exodus* which depicts the flight of the Igbo people from Northern Nigeria after the massacres of 1966. It is the twelfth in a series of paintings that the artist carried out on that theme, and it measures 129.6 x 106.75 cm. Painted in 1969, *Exodus* was exhibited at the BBC Art Competition of 1970 and won the first prize.

Born in Onitsha in 1932, Uzo Egonu comes from Ossomari in Anambra State of Nigeria. He has been living in England since 1945. He had his art training in that country and paid many study visits to France, Italy and Germany. He has exhibited extensively in Europe, the United States, and Africa.  

Egonu's canvas is based on a triangle and implied circles with a common center. The line separating the triangular part from the implied circular part is oblique. The major motifs are the stylized human beings that are shown on the either side of the line bisecting the circle. Nine people with loads on their heads are organized into various positions, filling the area within the right segment of the circle. Their arms, legs, and the loads they carry create an interesting pattern on the space within the area. The portion is broken into various segments and the spaces not filled with people have been designed into shapes that relate to the movement of the people. Emphasis is therefore laid on the basic shape of the implied circle and the people.

On the left half of the implied circle are two main figures. In the lower portion, one figure rides a bicycle, while above, another
man rides a horse. Both figures appear very active in their endeavors. The bicycle rider bends his whole weight forward in an attempt to gather speed. Likewise the horse rider with his knapsack on his back leans forward on a horse that has its front leg raised in a gallop. There is intense activity and hence a lot of energy exerted on either side of the line of demarcation. The area occupied by both the bicycle and the horse rider are patterned into shapes that relate to the bicycle wheels. Behind both figures, strong, triangular "beams" of the triangular part are visible and link with the figures of the riders.

Colors used are orange, brown, blue and grey. Orange and brown seem to predominate in the two main parts of the picture. However, white has been used on the circular area of the canvas as on the triangular part. Outside the circle on the right, the surrounding area is decorated in zig-zag patterns painted in brown, orange and grey. However, the orange and grey used have been reduced in their intensities, so that the color of the people within the implied circle may be related clearly. Similarly the orange and white areas in the two parts of the picture are brighter than the extreme enclosures. The sense of patterning comes vividly alive through the use of the orange, brown and blue. The brown has been well distributed in all the four corners of the pictures as well as within the two main areas occupied by the figures.

The artist's compositional skill is evident in the structure, which is suggested by the nature of the subject. The choice of patterns clarifies the shapes and helps the viewer's eye to meander over the entire surface. Finally, the selection and distribution of the color is crucial in confirming the mood of the artist and the nature of the
subject. Although the occasion is somber, the artist was able to turn it into a cheerful occasion by the choice of warm colors.

The artist's theme is based on the Igbo exodus from Northern Nigeria during the Nigerian Civil War. When interviewed about his work, the artist was quoted as saying:

Speaking for myself, I work on inspiration. You see, just as in fine arts and music, people are inspired in the same way I am inspired. But developing interest is also important because interest will bring out the real interpretation of your work. For example, when you want to paint a room with a rainbow, the most important consideration is that you have been inspired. This is followed by your interest which will bring out the interpretation of the work in the room after painting.

It may be assumed that since the artist was not in Nigeria at the time of the exodus, he must have based his ideas on hearsay or the news reports.

Egonu's achievement is not merely in his recording of a contemporary event, but in his method of doing it. He has conceived the riders as well as people fleeing with loads on their heads primarily as abstract patterns. He has organized his colors around the main motifs to emphasize the people fleeing or being pursued. Although he has deliberately broken the composition into two parts, the curved patterns of the left of the implied circle link with the right part that contains the pedestrians.

Although the painting is interesting to view from the color and patterning standpoint, it has meaning in a cultural context. In 1966, following the army take-over, the populace heaved a sigh of relief. But in July, 1966, a military coup occurred in which another general
came to power. There were various incidents of violence, particularly in the North where Nigerians of Eastern origin lost their lives and property. That was the time of the Exodus of the Igbo back to the East.

The artist has been able to capture the essence of both the historical and political aspects of the event in his painting. He has added his own personal sense of design and patterning to construct a pleasant picture from an unpleasant subject.

*Sacrifice to the Malignant Spirit*
by Uzo Egonu
Plate XV

Another work by Egonu is an etching which he called *Sacrifice to the Malignant Spirit*. It is 60 x 78 cm. and was in the collection of the artist.

The major motif is the person in the left part of the picture whose two hands are stretched forward. While his complete body is not indicated, his head and his right and left arms as well as his shoulders are indicated. In his right hand he holds a plate with assorted food: fruits, meat and wine. He holds a stick in his left hand. Apart from this figure, the remaining parts of the composition are grouped into four segments. These segments in turn flow into one another freely.

From the left, up to about one fifth of the entire length of the picture, from top to bottom, a curvilinear tree with most of its branches on the left curves towards the middle part of the picture in its upper regions. Next to the tree there are several wavy lines
from the front of the tree and from its base to the left of the 
person's shoulder. Above that, there is a curvilinear shape that 
repeats the shape of the front part of the tree. Around the person's 
left hand are at least four consecutive curvilinear shapes. The 
first one is fairly regular like the shape of the new moon, followed 
by another one that twists like a snake. Next, the last two have the 
upper shape more curvilinear than the immediate lower shape to it.

Along the lower regions of the composition, there are several 
circular motifs which extend from below the person forward to the end 
of the composition. The shapes of the motifs are varied by an in­
sertion of other related shapes inside and outside the circles. These 
shapes generally repeat the shape of the plate with the offering in 
it. Surrounding the plate and extending in front of it is a flat 
irregular motif which extends to join the earlier-mentioned curvilinear 
shapes.

Color has been restricted to ochre, blue and green that results 
from the mixture of both ochre and blue. Ochre is, however, the pre­
dominant color. The left part of the composition is flat and solid. 
It forms the major color of the curved tree branch with the textures 
made of dark green. The immediate foreground of the composition is 
an extension of similar color and textures. Behind the person presenting 
the sacrifice are wavy lines that are ochre and light blue against a 
dark blue-green background. The color, extending to an area of pre­
dominant blue colored, is at the back of the person sacrificing. Four 
areas within the blue-green area are transparent and, therefore, appear 
as light blue-green patches of color.
Along the lower part of the composition the several circular motifs earlier described are arranged in two rows. These front rows have outer areas of solid dark green colors and the inner part with ochre is divided vertically and horizontally into four parts. The next row of circular motifs have rhomboid shapes placed inside each of them. The rhomboid shapes are printed in dark green while the remaining part of the circles are left in ochre.

Several curvilinear shapes above and in front of the person are printed in various shades of color produced by an effective combination of ochre and blue. Areas of white paper have been allowed to shine through in a large part surrounding the person's left arm, the plate and at the opposite end of the plate on the far right. There, white areas are allowed to shine through solid blue colored areas. Close by is an area of ochre textured with mosaic-like pieces. An area of ochre surrounded by dark colored areas extends forwards to the end of the curvilinear shapes. It is textured in front of the plate of sacrifice. But toward the end of the picture, it becomes heavily textured in green.

Generally, the central part of the picture has the highest contrast. Broken up areas of color have been placed next to solid colors. Fine textured surfaces appear side by side with smooth areas of neutral pigment. Colors with objects that are easily identified exist with objects that appear beneath the deep, dark malignant areas.

In preparing his etching plates, the artist was mindful of relating his shapes to the person with the sacrifice. He created areas of high planes as well as deep concaves. Realizing the effect textures
can play, he concentrated on using them effectively in all the areas except the dark parts. Although the composition is on a flat surface, the artist has been able to create surfaces that seem to recede by their dark colors. The whole surface is well integrated by the areas flowing into one another in the curvilinear shapes, in the colors and textures. The success of the composition is achieved by the effective concentration of attention on the central and lower parts of the picture. The viewer is easily drawn to the center of the picture to wander through the other parts of the composition.

_Sacrifice to the Malignant Spirit_ derives from the artist's wish for an Igbo religious revival. As he was still living in London at the time this work was executed, this meant that he used a subjective approach as he had to imagine the event he wanted to depict.

Sacrifice is very important in Igbo religious life just as it is in Egonu's personal living. The sacrifice of food and animals to various gods was very common during Egonu's youth in the country. _Sacrifice to the Malignant Spirit_ implies that there was soon to be an impending disaster unless sacrifice was offered.

_Mother and Child_
_by Chike Ochi_
_Plate XVI_

_Mother and Child_ is the title of a wood sculpture which Chike Ochi executed in 1980 and exhibited at the National Art Exhibition in Lagos. It is 128 cm. high.

The artist was born at Ogugu in Awgu Local Government Area of Anambra State. He attended the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and graduated B.A. Fine Arts in 1971.
Later he studied in Canada for his Master's degree in sculpture.

The figure just identified is carved from a log of wood with anthropomorphic shapes suggestively indicating the head, shoulders, and body, but without any realistic indication of the parts. From the top, there is a knob, which represents the head. Next to the knob is the long narrow shaft that represents the neck. It is flattened out in front and has almost equal width and breadth. Below the portion that appears as the long neck is the rounded shoulder. There is no arm attached to the shoulder or projecting from the body. Instead there is a round hole where the arm should have joined to the body. In front of the shape is another anthropomorphic shape that has its upper part tapering off where it joins the other shape with the long neck. No leg or arms are clearly identified, but the tapering left part of it linking with what appears to be the chest, is the arm. Where the two shapes connect, there is a hollow area which has been cut out by the artist.

The figure appears to have a lower segment on which the two identified anthropomorphic shapes are connected. Like the upper shape it is conceived as a round form that grows from the main log.

Originally, in color, the wood is dark brown and except for the wood grains, no textures have been made purposely by the chisel or adze marks. However, the darker grain of wood enables the viewer to see the original direction of the growth of the log.

What appears to provoke much interest in the sculpture is the success with which the artist has been able to carve his image of
mother and child from a log that originally had similar attributes of growth and sense of becoming. In the choice of wood, the artist has noticed the nockles and areas where smaller branches joined the trunk of the tree. Instead of cutting them away, he has carved his figure in such a way that he was able to emphasize them. By so doing, the areas where the branches originally joined the trunk became areas where the newly created child joins to its mother.

The hollow areas became suggestive of the solidity of the mother figure, the shape of which the child can lean and depend on. By carving along the grains of wood, the artist was able to adapt the natural form of the wood to suggest the growth of life.

The areas of turns are clearly and cleanly cut and the areas that suggest the knobs of growth have been strongly cut to imply the gradual development of a human being. The whole figure attains its balance from the reasonable distribution of knobs or round parts of the sculpture. Within the overall simplified figure appears areas of varied planes that move into one another. The minor hollow areas compensate the round areas that project from the surface.

Mother and Child appear to be one of the commonest themes in traditional African sculpture but Chike Ochi has conceived of it in his own unique way. The uniqueness is marked not in the twists and turns alone, but in the manner of adopting the natural form of the log to evolve his ideas.

There is no doubt that he has derived inspiration from the living things around him and that he has been able to draw deeper inspiration from traditional culture which recognizes the image of
the mother and child and the culture which uphold their ultimate importance. Chike Ochi's short stay and study abroad, no doubt, enriched his ideas and sharpened his intellect. From what he learned, he crystalized his image of the mother and child but the natural growth of the tree is the one that holds the entire concept together.

**Togetherness**
by Chike Ochi
Plates XVII-XIX

Togetherness is the title of a 15 cm. unfired clay sculpture made by Chike Ochi in 1976. It is in the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Alvan Ikoku College of Education, Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria.

The major motif are the three figures that have been connected together by a series of curvilinear lines, while the major decorative motif are the negative and positive spaces that have been distributed to link the figures together.

Considered from the three-quarter view, three round shapes which could be identified as heads immediately stand out. The first is on top, the second is in the middle while the third stands out on the right. Curvilinear lines link the three heads together (Plate XVII).

The middle part is made up of two major areas. The top with the head standing out of it, is linked to the lower area in a curved manner whereby a negative space is created above the other head. Although the other head stands out of the main curvilinear twisting bodies, it is connected in such a manner that a positive space is created. The head continues to link with the body which twists to
connect with the third head. On the extreme right, the forms flow into one another from the top head to the head on the right. A line drawn from top to bottom of the sculpture on the right is curvilinear in shape almost like that of the extreme left. From the sideview, three heads are still visible. One is on top, the second is on the lower left, while the third is in the middle right. The first head is free standing, while both the second and third heads are linked to the extended portions of the forms.

Three major outlines appear in the sculpture. On the left, the curved line leads from the head to the torso part of it. Through a concave loop, it turns down in a convex shape to form another loop. It connects to the second head before finally turning along the base to the second figure. On the right, from the top to the middle right head, the movement of the line is rapid. Although still curvilinear in appearance, the deep concave shapes have been literally tightened up into shallow ones. Around the lower left head, an area of negative space is visible while positive spaces are visible between the top figure and the middle right. Part of the positive space creates a furrow that leads sharply downward from the middle section of the sculpture to the base. The solid portions of it flow freely into one another without any separations in their inter-link.
On the reverse view, two figures can be identified (Plate XIX). One appears reclined with outstretched hands, the other holds his hands and tries to balance like an acrobat. Three heads are, however, visible; one on top, the second in the lower left figure, while the third is close to the base on the extreme right. Two major areas of positive and negative spaces are created by the link of the figures. Close to the reclining figure, there is a negative space, and there is another negative space below the body of the top figure. Thus, the two negative spaces are far apart whereas the positive spaces are connected, one to the other right in the middle of the composition. What appears to be another negative space, between the reclining figure and the third head, cannot be clearly defined as either a negative or positive space.

In material, the sculpture was made from clay. A considerable part of it was created through the additive technique, like the heads and the twisting bodies. The rest was made subtractively, clay being removed to create the voids or negative spaces and to partially create the positive spaces. The general shape of the composition from the three-quarter view is an irregular quadrilateral shape from which negative and positive spaces stand out.

From the sideview (Plate XVIII), the composition is mainly triangular with the right side shorter than the left, while the base line is similar. In it more areas of positive space are visible. Still, the reverse side shows that the composition is based on a triangle. More areas are removed from the left and right as well as the middle. More negative and positive spaces appear integrated with
one another than in the two previous views. But the composition appears widest along its base when compared to the others. As a result of this, the outer right form appears to extend outward a little too far.

On the whole, the sculpture is successful due to the unbroken nature of the forms as seen from any angle one turns it. (see Plates XVIII-XIX). The use of negative and positive space was very useful in reducing the unwanted areas of clay which do not contribute to the overall visual harmony of the composition. Moreover, it assists the free movement of the eyes from one area to the other, ensuring continuity.

What is the cultural significance of this work which the artist terms Togetherness? As it was made in 1976, a period of national awareness of the need for the unity of the Nigerian States, this sculpture appears timely. The link of the three major areas within which other areas appears to point to the essential need for the linking of the Northern, Eastern, and Western parts of the country.

Unity
by Isiaka Osunde
Plate XX

Unity is the title of a gigantic sculpture carved in Iroko hard wood and first publicly shown at the All Nigerian Festival of Arts in Lagos in 1970.

The artist was born of Bendel State parents and raised in Lagos. He attended Yaba Technical Institute, later called Yaba College of Technology. He also attended the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and
Technology Zaria, where he majored in sculpture. Later, he studied at art institutions in Russia where he gained considerable technical experience before returning to the country in the middle sixties. At the moment, he is on the staff of the Department of Art and Printing of the Yaba College of Technology where he lectures in sculpture.

His composition, carved out of Iroko wood, depicts three figures that are recognizable but have no independent identities of their own. From the front view, and starting from the top, three heads could be identified. The heads are rounded but without any indication of the facial features. From this perspective, the profile of the right figure indicates his shoulder with the hand of the middle figure round his shoulder. Likewise, the left figure bends both his hands on the chest. The torso is indicated on the left figure below the two hands, while the right figure's left arm is extended to hold the left figure's waist. A groove created by the relief of the hand leads to the upper parts where the three heads cluster. From below the torso, two legs can be identified in the left figure, which suggests its frontality. On the other hand, the right figure has only a single leg visible. Owing to the indication of the shoulders, buttocks, and a leg, it is apparent that the figure is conceived from the profile viewpoint.

From this perspective and from the upper register to the base, there is no major area of negative open space. While it is true that varied contours have been created to indicate movements from changing scenes and surfaces, they all appear to be fused together.
The artist has been able to suggest that three figures are standing together in the upper register through the three heads. But as one moves toward the torso area, only two figures that seem joined together can be identified. Further down towards the waist area, the two figures are better linked together. The flattened, wide hand of the right figure clearly maintains a firm grip on the left figure. The hand seems to have been divided into two by a high crest of wood from the right figure's shoulder. The high crest eventually ends up as the thigh and leg, the only leg of the right figure visible. On the other hand, the left figure held at the waist as suggested by the flattened, wide hand, has both its thighs and feet visible. A concave groove from below the hand indicates the parting of the two legs. This also implies that both feet are not completely separated, except at the very end of the base. Generally, therefore, there are three heads indicating three persons, but only three legs are visible.

A sideview reveals an interesting composition with two figures, one slightly overlapped on the other from the upper register down to the base. The two figures have got round heads that are tilted forward without any strong indication of shoulders. On the right, a hand that derives directly as a flow of line of the head, holds the next figure. Although a part of the right figure's torso can be identified, it has started its fusion from the head downward. In contour, the line of the second figure on the left undulates from the heads to the thigh area in the three major concave and convex
shapes. A major triangle that has its base in the right figure's upper thigh, points toward the hand holding the second figure. A deep groove indicating the area of connection is carved to follow the thigh toward the feet area. There it ends in a shallow but wider groove that turns upward with a powerful flow. From there, right to the hand, a flat plane is indicated adjacent to the deep groove.

Structurally, the figure is composed of round and flat surfaces as well as concave and convex shapes. The round heads are again suggested in the circular groove toward the base. The undulating turns of the left profile are repeated in the flow of line from the heads, hand, and thigh of the right figure. The inward-leading triangular plane that points to the hand is noteworthy as it links with the major area of connection of the two figures.

From the right, left and middle of the figure as shown from this view, there is movement of line which undulates from one major part of the composition to the other.

What does Osunde's Unity mean in cultural context? It refers to the unity of persons in cooperative venture in Nigeria. It seems to imply that the cooperation, understanding, and harmonious relationship of the Nigerian people demonstrates strength.

Festival
by Isiaka Osunde
Plate XXI

Another sculpture by Isiaka Osunde is a panel he has termed Festival, completed as a commission to adorn the departure lounge of the New Murtala Muhammed Airport, at Ikeja, Lagos. It is carved in wood and measures about 274.5 x 762.5 cm.
The Netherlands Architectural Company, the Dutch designers of the airport, commissioned several Nigerian artists to carry out commissions for the airport as architectural pieces. Among the artists, Osunde was one.

This sculpture, which is more relief in nature than three-dimensional, contains several figures. From the left to the right about ten vertical panels, which appear well integrated, can be seen. The figures are mainly anthropomorphic and vegetal in character. Starting from the left, an anthropomorphic shape develops from the middle part of the second piece before developing upward and downward. Downward, it grows into two additional branches, but upward it turns into three. The middle branch is slightly shorter than the two outer ones. The second shape from which the first develops, resembles a figure of a man in profile with his two hands outstretched. His right leg is stretched as though he is standing in contraposto. The third anthropomorphic shape also links with the fourth one that appears with a torso, two outstretched arms, and legs, but without a shape that can be identified as the head. Whereas the third shape resembles a figure carrying another object on its right shoulder since there is only a head.

Still proceeding from the left to the right, the fifth shape is more plant-like in appearance than anthropomorphic. There are two stems that grow from the base and connects almost toward the top. The right divides into three branches before connecting with the left one and the sixth shape on the right. Above it another part of an anthropomorphic shape can be identified amidst the branches.
The sixth shape is more anthropomorphic than vegetal. It is like a figure of a jubilant person with both hands outstretched, while the body twists in three-quarter view, the legs are seen locked together. It has the appearance of a figure that is feminine with a narrow waist and wide hips. The seventh and eighth shapes resemble two interlocked vegetal motifs with several branches connecting together upward and toward the base. Twisting branches extend to the base as well as upward behind the ninth and the tenth shapes. The ninth and tenth which are the last, are again more anthropomorphic like the earlier discussed shapes. In their upper reaches, what appear like four hands are stretched aloft. Similarly, what appears to be four legs are clearly indicated. The bodies are long and twist in a horizontal eastward direction. This is in contrast to the first three figures on the left which appear to move in a westerly direction.

As the anthropomorphic and vegetal motifs appear closely fitted together with limited spaces between them, there appear to be several figures standing and moving together. Although there are subtle twists, the general movement is in the upward and downward direction. In this manner, emphasis is laid on the verticality of the various figures.

Even though movement is in the eastward and westward directions, the two areas are well integrated by the joint vegetal and anthropomorphic shape of the middle. The upward and downward thrusts and the eastward and westward movements create tension which demonstrates one of its unique features and strength. Besides, the conception of the various spaces in between the shapes create other interesting patterns which relate well with the figures.
Osunde's achievement in this sculpture is his organizing and executive skills of an otherwise rowdy and complicated scene. In the upward and downward thrusts, strong verticality is well demonstrated. Likewise the right and left movements of the shapes that are well integrated in the middle create subtle tension. In the clear treatment of the various planes that make up the twists in the sculpture, the artist has demonstrated his technical proficiency. The upward and downward movements of the figures demonstrate the artist's awareness of the commonest movement depicted in traditional African sculpture of the dancer. The eastward and westward movement is his own personal derivative from a long term acquired knowledge of the Nigerian tradition.

This sculpture demonstrates a knowledge of tradition, shows the artist's technical capability, and is deeply meaningful. Festival is common during the year to celebrate new harvests of crops, a period of hunting, a period of harvest of new yams, and ceremonies that deal with remembrance such as the second ceremony of burial.

**Abiku Spirit**
by Bruce Onobrakpeya
Plate XXIII

*Abiku Spirit* was created through the Deep Etching technique by Bruce Onobrakpeya in 1971. It was the first of the eight prints he made and it is now in the collection of Ron Butcher.61

The artist was born in 1932 at Agbarha Otor near Ughelli in Bendel State. He received his elementary and secondary education at Sapele and Benin City. From 1953 to 1956, he was art teacher, first at Western Boys' High School, Benin City, and later in Ondo Boys' High
School. He studied at the Nigerian College of Arts and Science and Technology Zaria, and completed his studies in 1961 specializing in painting and art history. His first one-man exhibition of water colors, lino cuts, and fabric prints was held in Ughelli in 1959. He was commissioned, together with Uche Okeke and Demas Nwokolo by the Nigerian Arts Council in 1960, to paint murals for the Arts and Crafts stands of the Independence Exhibition. He took part that same year in the group exhibition of Contemporary Nigerian Art, and Nigerian Art in Germany. His experiments resulted in 1966 in a low relief painting technique called lino bronze relief, and his specialization in deep etching. He has held many exhibitions in Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Britain and the United States. His numerous commissions include a 96' x 6 3/4' mural for the Idi Araba, temporary site of the University of Lagos, completed March, 1963; a frieze of metal and rod measuring 17 3/4' x 7' for the Health Center, Apapa, which he completed in October, 1964; fourteen paintings each 10' x 4' of the fourteen Stations of the Cross for St. Paul's Church, Ebute Metta, Lagos, which were completed in October, 1969. A foundation member of the Society of Nigerian Artists, Onobrakpeya taught at St. Gregory's College, Lagos, from 1963 to 1979. A book illustrator, painter, and print maker, he is probably the most internationally acclaimed Nigerian master print maker.

His deep etching print called *Abiku Spirit* is based on a Yoruba concept of the wandering spirits wishing to be born but only to die young and then return to be born again by the same mother. Originally, *Abiku* is a Yoruba word which literally interpreted means: abi, "he is born," oku, "he dies." Put together, it means abi(oku) or abiku, which
may have two connotations. One, either he is born and dies later, or he is born dead. Thus, the word abiku has come to be associated with children either born dead or children who die young.

Owing to the concept with the abiku's several unique attributes, the artist was able to conceive his free forms in the way he pleased. In this way, an unusual figure, mask-like, with outstretched arms, holding a pair of what appear to be scales, dominate the entire picture. Observed from below, it has a bulging part highly decorated with converging lines which are braided by two heavy bands of the cross. Several triangular motifs are formed in it. Immediately following the converging triangular decorated part which tapers toward the middle portion of the picture, two appendages, one on either side of it appear. Each of them is decorated with a heavily textured circular motif and a twining shape with three loops.

Next to the tapering portion earlier described, right in the middle half way up the picture, is a wide open mouth with the teeth visible. Eight teeth are visible below, while nine are above. Above the mouth is the chest and from it on either side, the hands are horizontally stretched outward. It immediately occurs to the viewer that the mouth should belong to another place and not where the artist has placed it. But as earlier said, the artist realizes the unique attributes of abiku and, therefore, felt free to organize his forms the way he liked.

The head area, which is made of three segments, has the lower part of it like a decorated wood carving. It is divided into three
vertical strips with the outer left and right pieces having two
darkened rhomboid motifs serving as the eyes. There is, however, no
indication of the nose or mouth. Above the eye area, the head be­
comes rounded before separating into two forms, on which two snake­
like motifs twist. Finally, we have what looks like a big hat on
the head.

Anthropomorphic and zoomorphic motifs appear on either side
of the abiku spirit from the upper register to the lower parts. They
are organized all along the edge of the picture held together as a
continuous chain. These objects represent the sacrifice to the
abiku spirit.

Because of the nature of the subject with its unique attrib­
utes, the artist was able to organize his free from to emphasize
the mouth of the abiku spirit. In the composition, unity is main­
tained by the directions of the main trunk, the arms and the major
appendages all converging on the big open mouth. The main figure
is heavily decorated with series of triangular formation from the
lower parts up to the lower lip. Similarly, the appendages close to
the mouth are heavily textured. Unity is achieved not by the pro­
portion of the various segments alone, but by the unity of lines.
Thus, there is absolute harmony and unity in the overall arrange­
ment. The placement of the mouth might bother the viewer, but appears to
be intended as a major emphasis by the artist.

Converging lines play a prominent part in attracting the
eyes to the mouth area, and were clever devices utilized by the artist.
What could have appeared as empty spaces therefore, were well inte­
grated.
Color is restricted to blue and it is by sheer dexterity that the monochromatic color has been so successfully used. Light and dark areas of blue placed side by side with opaque and translucent areas create variety of tones. Varied shapes of color have left more smooth areas than rough. However, few rough areas are intentionally organized all along the edges of the picture, so as to retain attention on the picture plane.

The technique used by the artist has been called deep etching, but in practice, it entails doing engraving on epoxy. He used araldite which he spread on his plate. In the process, he allowed variety of lines of varying thicknesses to be formed. In other areas he allowed them to drip freely. When dried, he printed them. Those drips formed lines with textural quality. He carved into some areas, details which might not have been possible to achieve by free dripping to arrive at his final design.

The two dimensional picture is well contained, thereby bringing into focus the main character and its appendages. The abstract treatment of the motifs, the avoidance of the use of perspective and consequent modelling of forms have made the picture very simple but effective. The exaggerated mouth with teeth is intended to indicate the gargantuan appetite of the Abiku Spirit.

The concept of Abiku and the belief associated with them, indicates that the status and care they receive from any family they choose to be born into, has no effect on them. The Abiku Spirit can not be prevented from performing its tricks, coming and going, when
It pleases. It is believed that Abiku would neither be coaxed nor coerced. In spite of this, attempts are made through sacrifice and use of charms, to prevent it from returning to the spirit world.

Even though Abiku Spirit is not a new subject among Nigerian creative writers and artists, Onobrakpeya has attempted to see it in a special way and has succeeded in bringing out the main attributes of Abiku which makes it awful to deal with, but interesting to view.

Quarrel Between Ahwaire, the Tortoise, and Erhako, the Dog
by Bruce Onobrakpeya
Plate XXIV

This print entitled Quarrel Between Ahwaire, the Tortoise, and Erhako, the Dog was executed in the early 1960's and is now in the artist's collection in Lagos.

The Tortoise and the Dog stand out as the major motif. Although, the stylized upward spiraling formation which represents the dog makes it more emphasized than the tortoise in this instance. A dog is placed within the dog, while in the lower regions of the composition, is Ahwaire, the Tortoise.

Starting from the top of the picture, three knobs stand out. These knobs respectively represent the dog's nose, eye and tooth and together a stylized dog barking, with its mouth wide open and a tooth visible. The upper area within the three points, represents the dog's head and is clearly divided into solid areas of black and white. A few of the shapes below the eye and the tooth are designed into simple lines and patterned areas. About half way down the stylized dog on the left side of it is the profile of a dog. It faces left. Its body
is heavily patterned. It does not open its mouth or bark like the stylized dog. On its right, the stylized dog is designed in simple lines which form series of up-turned V shapes, from the level of the dog's head to the tortoise's head. Simple lines separate the tortoise from the dog. With its stylized feet, the tortoise is playing a musical instrument known as the sansa. Its body is heavily patterned all over. On the tortoise's left and right are areas of solid black while above and below are areas designed with simple lines.

Four areas stand out in the print. The first area is the triangular formation of the nose, eye and tooth of the stylized dog, and the patterning of the space into solid white and black areas. The second is on the stylized dog's neck, where a solid white rhomboid shape seems to link with the mouth area. The third place is the face of the musical instrument being played by the tortoise.

Similarly, there are two areas of intense activity in the picture. The first is in the dog's head in the upper part of the picture. The other area is in the musical instrument segment occupied by the tortoise. The two areas are well integrated by the broad lines and areas of solid black. Heavy patterns of the smaller dog within the stylized dog are also helpful in linking with the heavily textured tortoise. Thus, we have the heavily textured areas of the dog and the tortoise emphasized in the composition.

The artist first designed his picture on paper before tracing it onto his lino block. Later, he carefully cut all the white areas before printing. The work in some areas, especially in the stylized dog's head, suggests the effect of stained-glass. Although a lino
print executed in black and white, this picture is successful in the
dexterity and simplicity of the composition.

Culturally, there are several stories in which the tortoise and
its tricks are told. The dog, in all such stories, is almost always
the victim of the tortoise's tricks. In this instance, the dog and
the tortoise appear facing opposite directions which implies the sharp
difference of their characters. The dog is especially shown here as
angrily barking away with all its energy while the tortoise is en­
joying its music. What caused their quarrel, we may never know, but
this picture clearly demonstrates the incompatibility of Ahwaire, the
tortoise, and Erhako, the dog. The dog's annoyance is very successfully
indicated. Although naturally, it is good natured and calm inside,
the tortoise has provoked it to display its anger and the rugged
strength of its tooth.

Youth
by Felix Eboigbe
Plates XXV-XXVII

This sculpture created by Felix Eboigbe, was completed in 1979.
It was carved in American walnut, hard wood, and it is 198.25 cm. high.
It is in the artist's private collection at the Department of Art
Education, Indiana University, Bloomington.

The artist is a Nigerian, born about 1946, and raised by parents
of Bendel State origin. His early interest in sculpture led him to
persuade his father, who was not pleased as he wanted his son to be a
medical doctor instead of an artist. As a young boy, he was apprenticed
to Ben Aye and he completed his training after three years instead of the
usual five years as a carver. Upon graduation, Felix set up his own
studio in Lagos where he devoted his energy to carving figures, both abstract and realistic.

He was brought to the United States in 1964 by the United States Information Service and the Ford Foundation. At first, he combined teaching, lecturing, sculpting, and attending classes, but after his first degree, he devoted his attention completely to teaching. He has taught several United States students and has influenced several people. At 34, Eboigbe has been one of the most successful Nigerian artists in the United States. Several of his large works are in museums and private collections in many states.

In Youth, the major motif is the figure of a young man with a twisted body. From the sideview, he has his left foot forward, with his chest in three-quarter view. He stands in contraposto, placing his left arm over the head. By touching his forehead with the bent arm, a great arch shape is created. His right arm is turned around to touch his left thigh. The chest and the slim, but protruding, stomach are pushed forward. The thighs have a fleshy volume while the legs are slim. There is ample space between the two thin legs. The proportion of the various parts of the body are according to the human proportion, except that the sharp contours of the shoulders and the knee have been reduced considerably. Although human proportions are recognizable, the treatment is not completely realistic.

When turned away from the viewer slightly, the features described above are seen less prominently. At this angle, the face is turned more towards the left, the protrusion of the stomach is less and the shape created between the right arm and the body is less. The thighs
are full and the legs are thin with space between them. The chunky base is meant to aid in the balance of the lower part of the sculpture with the upper part of it.

As the face is turned more towards the viewer, less of the space created by the left arm with the head is reduced (Plate XXVIII). The face, the right shoulder, and the middle of the buttocks are lined together. From this angle, the right leg overlaps on the left leg without any space between them. The two legs, therefore, taper together before ending in the base. The areas of movements are more subtle as seen from this angle and the complete figure is seen as a slim tall youth. The flow of the left arm links with the right arm through the right shoulder, from where the arm turns away gracefully over the right buttocks to the left leg.

When the stomach is turned frontal to face the viewer, part of the chest is turned away out of view. Only the back part of the head is seen with the left arm turned over the crown of the head to touch forehead which is also hidden from view. The two legs are twisted together with the left leg overlapping on the right from the knees to the end of the feet. The twisting and turning appear to have been completely lined up into a vertical shape from this view. And it is probably from this angle that it would be easily deduced that the sculpture has been carved from a log of wood.

Eboigbe's technique is derived from a long practice of not sketching any of his work before carving them. His tools are an ebony mallet, an axe and chisels. Owing to this practice of carving without sketching, many of his pieces are abstract in the beginning. Regarding
the Youth, what he thought he saw in the wood before he started the carving was what he carved. He stated, "Once I see the thing in the wood, I have to get it out." It is an emotional response to free the image seen in the wood by chipping away the excess.

What the artist did in the carving of the Youth was first of all to use his axe to shape the wood by carving away the major unwanted areas. Then, he continued with his chisels and mallet to further remove those areas that would be spaces either complete negative or positive spaces. Finally, he used the same chisels to finish off the work to perfection.

His achievements in carving Youth are two. First, he was able, without sketching first, to create a sculpture with parts that relate to one another harmoniously. Second, he was able to carve the wood with limited tools: a mallet, an axe, and chisels. American power tools were available if he needed them, but he chose not to use them for his sculptures even while residing in the United States.

Youth is not a new subject for artists. Myrai's "Discus Thrower" was conceived as a youth. Similarly, Michelangelo's "David" was conceived as a youth. In Eboigbe's case, he has approached the subject by looking at a youth whose features do not disclose a particular race, but whose body parts represent the harmonious relationship of a perfect human being. In the male figure, therefore, the flow of contours and the interrelationship of the various parts, makes this sculpture a very beautiful and successful work.
Adudu is simply the name by which this sculpture, carved by Felix Eboigbe, could be called. Adudu is a Bini term that means "shadow." The shadow image of any object is, therefore, its adudu, or what the Europeans and Americans call abstract.

In Benin culture, the adudu was obtained in the following manner:

They have a glass of water. Splash it down and that water would spackle on the floor and as a man leaves his shadow, a little boy will sketch it behind him. But he will not know that anybody is sketching it. Then the owena, i.e., the artist, would be called to create the person that has just visited, just the way he looked like.

This adudu or abstract sculpture was carved by Felix Eboigbe in 1980 measures 183 cm. in height. It was carved in American walnut and it is in the collection of the artist at Bloomington, Indiana.

Carved from a log of wood, the sculpture as viewed from the front indicates four main segments of interlinking surfaces that flow gently into one another from the lower part to the upper areas. The groovy areas are steeper all along the left part of the sculpture from the base to the peak. In its upper part, it is rounded off to a point with its inner portions carved away.

From the back, the sharp angle created in the upper regions of sculpture is better seen. A ridge of one side of the groove is made to circumscribe the entire length of the sculpture, from top to bottom. The width of the ridge is broader than the view presented in the front elevation of it. The portions cut away are less and in this way, the
up and down movements from the cut away areas to the uncut away parts is gentle. There is a slight twist to the right of the sculpture. The left part of it looks almost vertical when connected together, while the right side bulges outward.

Another view of the sculpture is completely different from the two previous views yet related to them. In the upper part, most of which appear broad, only a small section is cut away in the front. It is however curved in a convex shape before connecting with the main body. From where the top convex shape joins the body, the composition is divided into two main ridges. Starting off at the lower left of the convex shape, they open up for a little distance, before connecting again about mid-way down the length of sculpture. The one that started as the upper left ridge now turns with a loop downwards to form the right ridge. In this way, the upper right ridge ends being the lower left one.

The grooves that were seen from the first angle, now seem to be conceived in a totally different fashion. Not only are they narrow, they are deeper except at the big bend of the front ridge. The two previous views do not resemble any particularly known object, but the last view is similar to the adudu of a short person. It seems as though its upper convex shape is the head that connects with the torso. The parting of the ridges only to connect and separate again portrays the legs, from the big loop downwards.

Eboigbe's method of carving employed in this sculpture was to view the abstract shape from three independent angles. By quickly cutting away the unwanted areas, thereby creating the ridges, he was
able to relate one area to the other. He first of all used his axe

to cut into deep areas and to carve away the top. From the time the
major characteristics of the sculpture are fixed, he proceeded to
carve one area in relation to the adjacent ones, thereby creating inter-
flow of lines and grooves. Constantly he had to review the verticality
of the sculpture against the various parts he has cut away.

Although the simplicity of the overall sculpture is its major
strength, it is not as simple as it looks. The artist has been careful
in his selection and carving along the grains of wood. He has combined
fairly smoothed surfaces with rough ones created by the patterning of
his chisel marks. He has particularly concentrated coarser textures
on the deeper grooves and finer ones on the outer parts of the convex
shapes. Whichever angle of it one turns, varied shapes combine with
varied textures to give a pleasant combination of an overall thought-
fully executed sculpture.

Culturally what is the significance of Eboigbe's sculpture? In
Benin, even before contact with the Portuguese, there had been a tra-
dition of creation of figures by using the adudu technique. Not only
were important events recorded, significant personalities were sculpted
in wood or bronze by the owena, [the artist]. Eboigbe, who came to
the United States some years ago, vividly recollects instances when
he talked with late Idah, a famous Benin artist, about the employment
of adudu in Benin sculptural tradition. There is, therefore, little
wonder that Eboigbe does not need to sketch before he starts his sculp-
tures. The fact that he can recollect and still draw inspiration for
most of his sculptures from that culture, emphasizes the early exposure
he had to it. More specifically, his knowledge of abstract or semi-abstract sculpture is not altogether new to him.

It can be observed from the analysis of the twenty-two works that nine artistic characteristics are most apparent. 1) Most of the works show evidence of the knowledge of traditional African culture especially from the titles; 2) they reveal artists' inventiveness in terms of (a) color application in painting and (b) derived motifs in sculpture; 3) they exhibit overlapping in shallow recession both in painting and sculpture; 4) they reveal knowledge of formal academic training; 5) they show an understanding of the nature of materials used such as color and canvas as well as clay, linoleum, wood and metal; 6) most of the paintings exhibit emphatic north to south, or vice versa, movement otherwise known as vertical perspective; 7) they display the use of negative and positive spaces; 8) they show evidence of the sense of growth or becoming, implying that the works have the potentials for further development, thereby pointing to the future; and 9) they have deep meaning in terms of traditional and contemporary history. It will appear from these nine artistic characteristics that any work of contemporary African art with such qualities will be an ideal Awo art since Awo means "secret" and refers to works from artists in contemporary Africa who have been formally educated and who have assimilated their past and present cultures, and are able to utilize their knowledge and their inborn qualities to comment on the past, present and to peep into the future through their works. Therefore, their works are "secret."
CHAPTER III
DISCUSSION OF THE AWO ART STYLE

In Chapter II, an attempt has been made to critically analyze twenty-two works of art produced by Contemporary Nigerian artists for the past twenty years, starting from 1960. Based on the findings in Chapter II, these artists' works stand and show together as homogeneous as follows, in terms of artistic and aesthetic characteristics:

1. knowledge of traditional African culture especially from the titles;
2. emphatic north to south movement, or vice-versa, otherwise known as vertical perspective;
3. the use of negative and positive spaces;
4. deep meaning in terms of traditional and contemporary history;
5. overlapping in shallow recession;
6. artists' inventiveness in terms of (a) color application and (b) derived motifs in painting, graphics and sculpture;
7. knowledge of formal academic training;
8. an understanding of the nature of materials used such as color and canvas as well as clay, linoleum, wood and metal; and
9. evidence of a sense of growth or becoming, implying that the works have the potential for further development, thereby pointing to the future.

It would appear from the above that artistic characteristics 1 through 4 show the style of traditional African art and characteristics 5 through 9 reveal African modernist style. Because these characteristics, 1 through 9, seem to show a combination of the traditional African art style and the contemporary African modernist style, it would be profitable to examine first typical works of traditional African art and contemporary African modernist art (one of each) to substantiate this claim; and second, to correlate the resulting nine artistic characteristics with three of the most outstanding works of this dissertation to establish their consistency. Thus, the order of the investigation of this chapter will be on three levels as follows: I - the typical traditional African art: Fang Reliquary Figure from Gabon, nineteenth century; II - the contemporary African Modernist art: Figures by Mvusi Selby, 1960's; and III - the correlation of the nine Awo artistic characteristics with three works from Chapter II: Grillo's Drummers Return, 1960, Plate I; Emokpae's Acrobat, 1970's, Plate V; and Onobrakpeya's Abiku Spirit, 1971, Plate XXIII; representing painting, sculpture, and graphic art respectively. Also, in the investigative order of levels 1 and 2, theme, style, and technique will be used to analyze the works, i.e., the traditional and the modernist forms of art.
Typical Traditional African Art Style:  
Fang Reliquary Figure  
Plate XXXI

This reliquary figure comes from the Ogowe River Basin of Gabon and was carved by a Fang sculptor in the nineteenth century. It measures 68 cm. in height. It is a typical African sculpture carved in wood and is currently in the Tishman Collection.

Theme: The motif of this sculpture is an ancestral figure. In Gabon tradition, the ancestor is revered after his or her death. The bones of important ancestors are collected from the cemetery, kept in a casket, and the reliquary figure, in wood or metal, is placed on top of the casket. During any important religious or social deliberation by the family or village, the people gather around the casket facing it frontally, so that a direct communication can be achieved between the ancestral spirit embodied in the figure and the family or village members. The figure serves as a rallying center for religious sentiments and assists the people in reflecting on such virtues as truth, uprightness, loyalty, and respect for elders. In traditional African art, ancestral figures such as this are found as individual units even in Duen Fubora, Plate XXXII, a Kalabari ancestral shrine, where several figures are composed in an assemblage style, yet all elements of form conform to the stylistic requirement of a traditional African sculpture—frontality.

Style: In the carving of this figure, selective naturalism is used as a style. First, the various parts of a natural human figure are selected, mentalized and re-ordered to satisfy the required
abstract image of the ancestral spirit. This image is assumed to house collective ancestral spirits when energized by libation and offering and so enables the desired religious communication between the living and the dead, especially when the people stay in direct view with the energized figure. The head of this figure is considered very important since, as in nature, it is supposed to contain the five senses, i.e., hearing, tasting, seeing, smelling, and feeling. For this reason, the head is represented as the biggest part of the body, often in the ratio of 1:3 or 1:4 as seen in Plate XXXI.

Again, the shoulders are almost as wide as the head with the two hands placed on the chest in a blessing stance. The torso is narrow and elongated and comes to a high ridge at the navel, a center point and an organ of life for the unborn child. The legs are bent and seem to support the weight of the figure, appearing to defy gravitational force. This pose occurs also in most traditional African sculpture as it represents a pose of an African dancer, emphatic north to south time-bound movement, or vice-versa. Although the forms of the figure are rounded, or rotund, which suggests the viewing of the image in three dimensions, or in the round, the religious viewing position of the figure as required by tradition has controlled the frontal disposition of the figure's forms. Symmetry and axial balance are obtained because of this traditional requirement.

Technique: The method of carving the sculpture may be broken down into three major components: wood, tool, and the carving of the figure.
Wood: The selection of hard wood for traditional African sculpture is decisive. It is meant to enable the completed work to endure, since soft wood is often quickly eaten away by termites. Various hard woods are used in carving traditional African sculpture. A Nigerian sculptor had the occasion once to explain the types of hard wood he considered most suitable for carving contemporary works:

In the carving section we try to make use of some wood. Black ebony wood, we purchase it from Bendel State. It is not common in our state. But we have some typical Kwara wood like Iroko,... mahogany,... ogano; ole-ogano is not all that good for carving. ...I think Awun would also be very good. But I have forgotten that name completely. You have just even reminded me now. We want to try some black ebony wood. It is not easy to carve because it is a hard wood.66

This artist's statement shows that various types of hard wood suitable for carving are available in Nigeria.

Carving of the wood: The wood is divided into the segments of the head, torso, and legs. Then the basic shapes are carved by using an adze, after which these segments are further shaped by carving away the unwanted areas in a subtractive technique. Further, the figure is carved in detail with a knife. Then the completed figure is sanded fairly smoothly. Lamidi Fakeye, who is a traditionalist Nigerian sculptor, has termed this procedure Ona-lile,67 ona = carving/lile = organization, which means the method of shaping the major parts of a sculpture. Also Frank Willet, 1978, said of Fakeye that:

He takes the block of wood, and after an appraisal lasting only a few seconds, he begins to carve with rapid blows of a wide [6.4 cm.] adze. The outline of the top of the head appears; then he turns the wood to one side and a few rapid strokes define the general
posture of the figure. We have not so far quantified the time this takes, but it is quite clear that from the very beginning he sees the completed sculpture inside the block of wood. Apart from Fakeye, Eboigbe is another sculptor who carves in the same rapid manner without any preliminary sketch.

This technique of carving the figure in a rapid manner combines the understanding of the nature of the material and the knowledge of the ancestral attributes. Finally, the artist's technique includes the use of enclosed form often obtained through the combination of negative and positive spaces, which may be referred to as his own personal attempts to resolve a traditional formal convention. Thus, traditional African art is conceptual and functional in nature. In other words, the art is based on an idea or concept of the object being represented. It is from the point of view of style largely abstract and non-realistic. Therefore, the characteristics of a typical traditional art favors (1) frontal pose; (2) 1:3 or 1:4 proportion; (3) rigid pose; (4) cylindrical form; (5) north to south movement, or vice-versa, otherwise known as vertical perspective; (6) deep meaning in terms of traditional history, and (7) negative and positive spaces.

Of the seven stylistic qualities of a typical traditional African art, four—knowledge of traditional African culture, vertical perspective, negative and positive spaces, deep meaning in terms of traditional and contemporary history—correspond with the cross-cutting artistic characteristics of the twenty-two works analyzed in Chapter II. This means that 44% of the cross-cutting
artistic characteristics have derivations from traditional African art style, thus leaving, as it were, 56% of the characteristics to be accounted for. Where then can this missing percentage be found? Perhaps in the contemporary African Modernist art and artists' innovations. Let us investigate.

II

Contemporary African Modernist Art:
Figures by Mvusi Selby
Plate XXXIII

This painting is by Mvusi Selby, an African artist from South Africa. Executed in the 1960's, it is oil on canvas. It is about 122 x 105 cm. The collection is unknown.

Theme: Human figures are the motifs of this painting. There are five represented: two are seated while three are standing. The largest figure is in front seated with his head bent low, as if he is lost in thought. His hands are folded between his parted knees. Why most of the figures might be standing and what they might be contemplating may never be known from either the picture or the title.

Style: The five figures are rendered in a vertical and rectangular format with a knowledge of linear perspective. While overlapping, the seated figure is nearest to the viewer as other figures recede. Apart from this recession, the proportions of the figures are life-size. Atmospheric perspective is realized by the skillful manipulation of color to create airy space. Balance is achieved with a careful distribution of the figures and, through this, harmony results. Also, there is evidence of distortion in the figures, which shows the
artist's initiative or invention. Thus, the use of linear and atmospheric perspective, as well as proportion derived from life study, the use of models, knowledge of composing the figures and maintaining balance and harmony of colors, satisfy the educational standards obtainable through formal art education.

Technique: Materials used in painting this picture are oil and canvas. The application of the colors by the artist helps to suggest depth; the colors nearest to the viewer are more intense and the figures nearest to the viewer are therefore conspicuous. By using light and dark colors to model the figures, the artist used the technique of chiaroscuro, i.e., the distribution of light and shade to make the figures look solid. The background area was divided into two, with the left side lighter than the right. The method of achieving this effect is by adding white to the blue-grey colors to produce varied tonal qualities. Textures are minimally used in the painting. So, the simplicity of its execution is effective. Thus, the African modernist art may be viewed as art for art's sake with definite attempts at objectifying nature. The characteristics of a contemporary African modernist art would therefore include: (1) models in nature; (2) chiaroscuro; (3) perspective; (4) vertical and rectangular arrangement of figures; (5) balance of forms; (6) overlapping of forms and (7) artist's inventiveness.

Out of the seven stylistic qualities of a contemporary African modernist art, three—perspective, color modulation, use of model—can be identified in the cross-cutting artistic characteristics of
the twenty-two works analyzed in Chapter II. This means that the artists who executed the twenty-two works have selected some elements of style from contemporary African modernist art. Thus 33% stands for these elements of style.

From the above analysis of the traditional African art and the contemporary African modernist art, it is clear that 77% of the cross-cutting characteristics have been accounted for. Therefore, about 23% of the cross-cutting characteristics can be safely assigned to artist's innovation which show the stylistic elements of: (1) evidence of the sense of growth or becoming; (2) understanding the nature of materials.

In the end, we have found in the above analysis that African traditional art style, African modernist art style and the artists' innovations are involved. When such condition is obtained, the combination must express Awo art. This is the case because Awo art synthesizes a successful display of traditional and contemporary African art styles including the artist's innovation.

III

Correlation of the Nine Artistic Characteristics with Three Works of Chapter II

It has been established that at least nine cross-cutting artistic characteristics are essential for any ideal Awo art. In correlating the nine characteristics with Grillo's Drummers Return, 1960, Plate I, Emokpae's Acrobat's, 1970's, Plate V, and Onobrakpeya's Abiku Spirit, 1971, Plate XXIII, the following are apparent:
Grillo's Drummers Return, 1960
Plate I

The choice of title of Grillo's painting was based on first-hand knowledge of traditional African culture relating to drummers. He personally confirmed this in specific terms:

"...yes, at a period I was very much interested in the drummers, but I wasn't interested in drummers in the act of drumming necessarily. Of course, I did a few pictures of drummers...but I found that there is so much interest, so much intrigue in looking at drummers when they are not drumming...There was a period when I was watching drummers when they are just getting themselves ready to drum. Tying the drum, testing it to see that the tone is right, and you know, they do various things."  

So, the Drummers Return refers to the end of the day when the drummers come home after the day's performance. Drummers are entertainers in Nigerian society. They are historians, philosophers, and a group that understands their vocation. Since they are capable of interpreting the ancestral spirit's message to the living, their role, therefore, has deep meaning in Nigerian life.

In his method of composing the figures, Grillo used the idea of emphatic north to south movement, otherwise known as vertical perspective, because he arranged the figures and the drums with a flair for vertical movement. Again, in the manner of relating his figures to the background, verticality is emphasized. The eye movement is in an upward and downward direction because of this factor.

The use of negative and positive spaces is applied subtly in the segmentation of the background in which Grillo has allowed some areas to be transparent while others are opaque. Moreover, there are also some spaces between the feet of the figures. These spaces contrast with the background segmentally.
Grillo's figures are overlapped in shallow recession. This implies that although the figures recede, the amount of recession is minimal. There is an airy space but this atmospheric effect is not emphasized in the painting.

Color application in the *Drummers Return* shows Grillo's inventiveness. The success with which the color was applied in the work has been described by an observer:

> The *Drummers Return*, a canvas that almost drips with rain... I recognized Grillo as the painter of the restricted tonal range of limited but beautiful color. These characteristics may be obvious but are not unworthy for that; more important, they were always accompanied by thoughtful design.72

The above observation suggests that Grillo plans his compositions with the same skill as his color application.

Grillo's knowledge of formal academic training is displayed in the organization of the composition. This rectangular format of the painting is well related, horizontally, to the background. The manner of color application in which the forms are unmodulated and the limited tonal range show that Grillo understands the true qualities of the materials he used. In the end, figures are painted flat but the varying intensities of color create variety.

The *Drummers Return* shows also an evidence of a sense of growth, or becoming, which implies that the work has the potential for further development. Moreover, the way the drummers walk away from the viewer as well as from the scene of performance leaves one to wonder what their next event might be and seems to point toward the future.
Emokpae's Acrobats, 1970's
Plate V

The selection of the title, Acrobats, for Emokpae's sculpture demonstrates his knowledge of traditional African culture with definite reference to the acrobat. Gymnasts act as entertainers during festivals in the Nigerian society. They perform during major State or National Festivals of the Arts.

In the rendering of his composition, although disposed in the round, the emphasis is on verticality. His idea here is derived from his knowledge of the style of traditional African sculpture. Even though it may be conceived in the round, it is meant to be viewed frontally so that a direct linkage is established between the viewer and the figure.

In his sculpture Acrobats, Emokpae also carved away some areas. For example, in the lower area, he created some passages of negative space by carving away portions which enabled him not only to reduce excessive weight, but also to create visual excitement. In the upper part of this sculpture, Emokpae carved out a circular portion from the right section of the sculpture. Therefore, he creates what had been earlier described as a counter-change effect. Areas of complete void, therefore, balance areas of partial relief.

The Acrobats, a subject derived from Nigerian culture, especially of Benin whence Emokpae comes, has deep meaning in terms of traditional African festivals. As gymnasts are still entertainers in Nigeria, the concept of Acrobats is meaningful in contemporary life.
Moreover, in the work, overlapping of forms are created in shallow recession by the arrangement of shapes which link the lower gymnast with the upper one. The same coincidence is also evident in the central portion of the sculpture where the upper acrobat's leg and all the shapes converge.

The presentation of the triangular and circular format of the sculpture shows the artist's inventiveness. In other words, the planning of the overall design and, later, its carving, shows that a reconciliation of the triangular and circular forms take place.

Emokpae is known to have attended a formal art school; his training is evident in this harmonious composition. Another understanding on the part of Emokpae is the nature of the hard wood he uses. He carved along the grain of the wood to enhance the appearance of the sculpture. Thus, a perception of Emokpae's sculpture gives one a feeling of it as having the potential for further work or development. Therefore, this last feature suggests that the artist may carry out further research to extend the aesthetic and artistic boundaries of the work.

Onobrakpeya's Abiku Spirit, 1971
Plate XXIII

Abiku Spirit, a deep etching by Bruce Onobrakpeya, derives from the Yoruba concept of a child-wandering spirit that wishes to be born only to die young. Thus, Onobrakpeya's decision to create a print of this title shows that he has a knowledge of traditional African culture related to the Abiku concept in Nigeria.

In the deep etching itself, the organization of the major and minor elements shows an emphatic north to south movement, or vice-versa.
One either starts to observe the figure from below to upwards or from upwards to downwards. The composition also combines negative and positive spaces both in the figure and the appendages, although there appears to be more positive spaces than negative ones. Apart from the main figure of Abiku Spirit, several minor figures are seen in the composition which indicates the overlapping in shallow recession of the Abiku Spirit, or some other elements.

Abiku Spirit, or at least its concept, from the viewpoint of traditional and contemporary history, has tormented many families. Several children, who ought to be alive today, are, as a result of Abiku Spirit's tricks, dead. By the coming and going of Abiku Spirit, it often causes misery to many people.

Since Abiku Spirit is a concept, not physical, it is difficult to represent all its attributes visually. By placing the mouth in a central position and by making several areas of the deep etching lead toward it, Onobrakpeya shows a trace of formal education in terms of suggestive linear perspective. Thus, he certainly learned how to achieve emphasis in a composition. This he did since the Abiku Spirit's attributes allowed him the freedom of choice of motifs. Therefore, the emphasis on the Spirit's mouth, in addition to all the attachments around it, shows how inventive Onobrakpeya is.

The deep etching technique was a method Onobrakpeya acquired by chance and developed over the years. He explains:

On a Sunday, just out of chance, I was visiting Emokpae who was at the time carving a tall figure he labeled Olokun. He was gluing money to the side of the wood to convince people that this is really the goddess of money. So he was using araldyte and
he spoke very highly about araldyte. That it gums iron to iron and iron to wood, and so on. So, I saw it and an idea occurred to me, that I could use that araldyte to glue the holes of the plate I had made at home. So, on my way back, I bought a small tube of it and then sealed the holes which I made on the plates. Then in doing it, some drips fell on the plate where I did not really want. But they all dried up and then when I printed them, those drips formed such lines that give me some textural quality which I found very interesting. From thence on, I started developing my type of deep etching, which is really engraving on epoxy. . . .I am still doing it today. And in fact, when they talk of me as a print maker, they usually refer to that particular technique. I call it deep etching but really it is an engraving on epoxy.73

At this juncture, it needs to be stated that Grillo, Emokpae, and Onobrakpeya are active artists who continue to experiment constantly with new ideas. Based on the findings in the analysis of traditional African art, contemporary African modernist art and the correlation of Grillo, Emokpae and Onobrakpeya's works, the style of Awo art has now been finally established.
Conclusions

From chapters one to three, it has been possible to know what Awo art is: it combines traditional African art elements, contemporary African modernist motifs and the individual artist's innovations. Twenty-two works from eleven Nigerian artists were studied in the investigation.

Some of the artists whose works were studied trained partly in Nigeria and partly in other parts of the world, particularly in Europe, the United States and Canada, as well as in the Soviet Union. Others were educated mainly in Nigerian universities or colleges with art departments, as, for instance, the Yaba College of Technology. However, Nigerian Awo artists derive their inspiration and sources for their work mainly from their indigenous culture. Wherever they were educated, they acquired additional technical competence owing to their exposure to various artistic trends. At the same time, they experimented with local materials which sometimes appeared very significant in their works.

The conclusions which can be drawn from this study are many and varied. However, the core of the conclusions is that there are a group of artists in Nigeria who are producing art works which reveal
Inventiveness and have deep meaning within the Nigerian tradition. Frequently the works have mystical qualities. They point towards the unknown and are capable of being interpreted in multiple ways. The philosophy and messages of Awo are often penetrating and universal in concept.

Islam, Christianity or traditional Nigerian religions have not hampered the new idiom. For instance, both Yusuf Grillo and Sina Yussuff are ardent Moslems. Quite a number of artists are Christians, such as Ben Osawe, Felix Eboigbe, and Bruce Onobrakpeya, while others do not affiliate with any known religion. A few have shown keen interest in traditional African religion, while not necessarily being adherents. Onobrakpeya, in particular, although a Christian, has studied Urhobo Shrines. So, whether associated with one religion or the other, an artist may freely undertake the interpretation of a religious tradition.

The Nigerian elite, largely composed of a carefully selected part of the society, including writers, is sometimes oblivious of the Awo art and its meaning. Because the typical elite is not convinced that this brand of new art is worthwhile and has any philosophy at all, he may refer to Awo artists as "daubers and scribblers." Nationally the artists are not completely appreciated, and worse still, internationally they are accused of "sheltering under the haven of their cultural ethnocentrism." Thus, Awo artists sometimes appear to cling to the works they produce until such a day when someone would understand what they are trying to say and patronize them. The outcome has neither been encouraging for the artists or for Nigeria, as some
of the artists refuse to sell their works. Consequently, Awo art is frequently hard to come by.

Although the artistic renaissance of the late fifties, culminating in the October 1st National Exhibition of 1960, resulted in a proliferation of new and independent artists, such as the Awo artists, they were neither adequately appreciated then nor patronized. Law (1967), appears to corroborate this view with his "Contemporary works of art need a home in Nigeria." The Nigerian elite which, at that time assumed the role formerly played by colonial patrons, lamented the exorbitant price of the art. Cyprian Ekwensi's article entitled, "High Price of Nigerian Art," published in Nigeria Magazine, March, 1966, is a typical example.

For that price [three hundred guineas] a large percentage of jobless Nigerians would happily give their services for twelve calendar months. How many Nigerians were appreciative enough to write a cheque for that figure and have the painting delivered? And again, was it becoming the vogue to sell paintings by the square foot? The answers to these questions and to many others which plague the mind about Nigerian art and Nigerian artists can best be answered by the artists themselves. The more different their backgrounds, the more contrasting their points of view. All three artists are agreed on the need to reorganize Nigerian art on a National basis, on the importance of artistic appreciation among the ordinary people based on a re-education of the people and a new functional approach to art.?

Nonetheless, the attitude of the sixties appears to have changed dramatically. It is gratifying to note that some contemporary artists, especially Awo artists, have started to find indigenous Nigerian patrons. Yusuf Grillo, one of the Awo artists studied in this dissertation, confirmed this.
Yes, patronage has definitely improved. Apart from individuals attending exhibitions and buying works of art, architects almost as a rule now, try as much as possible to include something in the buildings they design, especially if they are public buildings. . . . Personally, I have done quite a lot of art in architecture. Actually, it has taken precedence over painting.78

An increase in patronage might raise the hope of the Nigerian Awo artists in particular and other artists in general. On the one hand, this perhaps indicates that the long alienation, resulting from lack of information and lack of understanding of their art, is coming to an end. On the other hand, it re-emphasizes the worthwhile nature of Awo art in its derivation from the traditional and contemporary idioms. This automatically contradicts the notion that Nigerian artists must derive their synthesis from modern European art rather than from indigenous culture.

It is only when artists, especially the Awo group, continue to examine problems that are universal in nature and come up with creative solutions that have universal implications that there will be a true renaissance in contemporary Nigerian art. As the "secret" language of the Awo artists becomes better understood, the vocabulary of the artists should improve. And this implies that the standard of Awo art should continue to rise.

Implications

The success of the Awo artists in their attempt to synthesize traditional and contemporary artistic idioms has historical and educational implications. It became increasingly clear through this study that the misconception of the direction of contemporary African art is
derived from faulty evidence. Again, it is ascertained that the core of a culture must necessarily exist in that culture rather than outside it. Whatever outside influences might be imposed should be of secondary importance in the art produced.

One thing that is universal in human artistic development is continuity and change. Africa and Nigeria are a part of the world and must continue to be. Whatever art is produced in the country should be part of the art of the world in general. Therefore, the history of art should elicit accurate data with which to analyze, instead of building theories around mere philosophical assumptions. Awo artists are human and as such they may reject or accept any foreign notion.

Recommendations

At this point, from my study of Awo art style of Nigerian artists and from my insight into the problems of understanding contemporary African art, I would like to make the following recommendations:

1. That consequent study of the Awo art style should concentrate on specific artists and their works.

2. That History of Art Departments in higher institutions, whether in Nigeria, Europe, or America should consider eliciting ideas from these artists. Whenever possible, outstanding Awo artists should be encouraged and invited to lecture at the institutions.

3. That field work is helpful to the student researching and, as such, Departments of History of Art should assist any student on field research.
4. That various contemporary artists, Awo artists in particular in Nigeria, should document their works; the documentation should include making slides.

5. That the welfare of artists depends on the solidarity and collaboration of artists. They may affiliate with an artistic union and together demand certain rights.

6. That as the field research continues, collaborative efforts of scholars should be undertaken.

In this regard, with the Africans, Europeans, and Americans fully cooperating with one another, the essence of the Nigerian contemporary art in its full diversity can be slowly but surely unfolded to the world.
Figure 2. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (Political).
Figure 3. Kwara State of Nigeria
Figure 3. Kwara State of Nigeria
NOTES


2 Ulli Beier who has written a lot on Nigerian contemporary art is a typical example. See Ulli Beier, "Experimental Art School," Nigeria Magazine No. 86, September 1965, p. 200.


4 For further discussion, see App. II, p. 465.


8 Ibid., p. 14, col. 2, par. 2.

9 Ibid.


Another writer discussed by Dennis Duerden is Leon Underwood, whose ideas still find inroads into the general writings of African art historians. Dennis Duerden proves Underwood wrong in the latter's statements about a decline in Bamigboye of Odo Owa's art. Bamigboye was employed by J. D. Clarke to teach at Omu School at about 1939. J. D. Clarke said:

> There was a better carver in a neighboring village, but for two years he refused all inducements that we offered to persuade him to come as instructor. . . . In the end, the Emir of Ilorin was asked to obtain the services of the particular carver for the school. He instructed the chief to send him along, and Bamigboye, one of the best of the remaining Yoruba carvers, has worked for the school ever since. He has never shown any disinclination to teach the boys all he knows. 

(Clarke, 1937, p. 108).

In this writer's opinion, if ever there is any authority to have known Bamigboye very well, it could have been no one else but J. D. Clarke. For he knew the standard of Bamigboye's art by his association with him. Ulli Beier, another authority on African art, in his *Contemporary Art in Africa*, 1968, says there is a decline in Bamigboye's art. It is believed that neither did Ulli Beier care to meet with Bamigboye, nor bothered to investigate his background before convincing himself about the decline in the art.
Dennis Duerden is, therefore, convinced through practical association with Bamigboye:

Mr. Underwood's book was published in 1948. He shows an Epa mask carved by Bamigboye thirty years earlier as an example of the work he was doing under the old 'tribal' conditions. Well, I myself bought an Epa mask which Bamigboye made in 1950, which not only, in my opinion but in the opinion of artists and curators, shows a discernible change in style, but no loss of quality. In fact, the later mask has taken on an economic and sweeping breadth of execution compared with the more involved 'chunky' style of Bamigboye's youth (Duerden, 1959, p. 15).

From the above statement by one who has imbibed a lot from the Nigerian culture, it becomes increasingly significant that one should recommend on the spot experience for researchers in contemporary African art. Again, it has become more crucial than ever for the systematic dates of works discussed to be included whenever possible.


15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.


18 Ibid., p. 5.


22 Ben Osawe was 25 years old when he went to Britain. He spent 10 years there, returning to Nigeria in 1965. Uzo Egonu has been living in London since about 1963. See African Arts, Winter 1973, p. 11. He has, to the contrary, been a Nigerian artist in spite of his living in England.


24 For a Nigerian contemporary artist's view on this issue, see Bruce Onobrakpeya, App. II, pp. 315-316.


26 Ibid., p. 20.

27 Ibid., p. 22, par. 2.

28 Ibid., p. 25, col. 3, par. 1.

29 Ibid., p. 88, col. 2, par. 1.

30 Ibid., p. 88, col. 3, par. 3.


33 Ibid., p. XV, par. 3.

34 Ibid., p. 193, par. 4.

Several attempts have been made to conduct an accurate population census of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. In 1979, calculations ranged from a Nigerian Government estimate of 83.4 million to a United Nations estimate of 74,575,000 to an unofficial estimate of 100,075,000. For sometime, the accurate Nigerian census may never be known. This is due to the fact that the registration of births and deaths, as well as individual citizens, will take some time to be accurately maintained.

A lot has been written on both the traditional art and archaeology of Nigeria. There are a few publications on Contemporary Nigerian art.

Some publications ensure to mention the Nok Culture: 900 B.C. to 200 A.D.; Igbo-Ukwu: 750 A.D. to 950 A.D.; and the art of Ife with its realistic bronzes dated from 1200 A.D. to 1500 A.D. Similarly, the art of Benin as old as 14th century A.D., was earlier known to the Western world before all the aforementioned art forms. In 1897, after a British Expedition sacked Benin, they looted the bronze works and other objects in the Oba's palace and in the city. Although these works were later sold to various museums and galleries in Europe and America, a proper historical sequence had been disrupted. The manner of removing the works from the walls and altars was unmethodical and systematic. However, this enabled Western scholars to study the art
of Benin in detail, but made it impossible for them to understand the prescribed function of the works.

With regards to publication at Independence in 1960, various articles as well as a few books on various aspects of Nigeria, especially its history, art, and emerging culture, were published. In this regard, reference may be made to the following books, some of which were published after Independence.

For an excellent introductory reading to the country and its people:


H. U. Beier, Art in Nigeria 1960, (Cambridge University Press), published in collaboration with the Western Region, Nigeria Ministry of Home Affairs, Information Division, Ibadan. (This book treats the various artistic endeavors in Nigeria in its year of Independence.)


Beier, Contemporary Art in Africa, (Pall Mall Press, 1968). This book treats Africa as Ulli Beier knows it. Although it goes beyond Nigeria, most of the book can be closely associated with Nigeria, especially Mbari Club, Oshogbo rather than the whole of Africa.

A. D. H. Bivar, Nigerian Panoply, Arms and Armour of Northern Region (Lagos), Department of Antiquities, 1964.


art, describing the treasures seized and carried away to Europe after the capture of Benin by the British in 1897.


Nigeria plays a dynamic role in championing the cause of Africa in international forums, e.g., in 1975, Nigeria assisted Angola to attain its political independence from Spain after more than 400 years of colonial rule. Similarly, in 1977, all important African artists, writers, and scholars converged in Lagos for the historic All Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC). For a whole month, the rich and dynamic culture of Africa past and present was brought vividly alive. In this instance, refer to:


The mighty river is the Niger, which has its source in the Futa Jallon Highlands of Sierra Leon. It flows through several countries of West Africa such as Guinea, Mali, and Niger before flowing through Nigeria to empty its waters in the Atlantic Ocean.
Nowadays, the Niger supplies not only water for generating electricity, e.g., the Kainji Dam, but water for irrigation all along its banks.

40 Nigeria's immediate neighbors are French speaking, having been colonized by France. However, the Cameroons adopt both the English and French languages as its lingua franca.

41 Some of the great empires of Western Sudan were encompassed within the present day Nigeria. In this regard, the following empires and kingdoms deserve mention:

Bornu-Kanem Empire
Oyo Empire
Benin Empire
Sokoto Caliphate
The Kingdom of the Jukun

refer to:

B. A. Agiri, Early Oyo History Reconsidered, Waltham, Mass., 1975.


42 The states of Nigeria were created to ensure even and rapid development and to alleviate the fear of domination of one ethnic
group over the others. The states are not based on ethnic or linguistic groupings.

The Nigerian Cultural Heritage is keenly alive today and this is due largely to the active participation of the public. With the indivisibility of the Nation already assured, and with a concerted effort for education at all levels, it is hoped this culture will remain dynamic. Refer to: Noel Grove, "Nigeria Struggles With Boom Times," National Geographic Vol. 155, No. 3, March 1979, pp. 413-444.

There are thirteen universities. But recently eight additional universities were approved by the Federal Government so that each of the 19 states can own at least a university. There are, for example, two universities in Oyo State, one in Ibadan, the other in Ife. The Nigerian Universities are:

The University of Ibadan - 1948
The University of Nigeria Nsukka - 1960
The University of Ife - 1961
The Ahmadu Bello University Zaria - 1962
The University of Lagos - 1962
The University of Benin Founded 1970 as Benin Institute of Technology
The University of Calabar - 1975
The University of Ilorin - 1975
The University of Jos - 1975
The University of Maiduguri - 1975
The University of Sokoto - 1975
The Ado Bayero University Kano - 1977
The University of Port Harcourt - 1977
Although due to the perishable nature of wood, it is difficult to ascertain that wood was never used in the Nok Culture areas.

According to Benin historian, Egharevba, in the late 14th century, Oguola, the Oba of Benin sent a request to the Oni (king) of Ife for a master bronze founder to instruct Bini sculptors in the art of making memorial heads for the ancestral altars.


In chapter two, at the beginning of analysis of each work, the title, medium, dimension, date of execution, and provenance of the work are mentioned.

Material for this study was, however, obtained from the publication entitled, "Exhibition at the Commonwealth Institute," which was written by Donald Bowen and published in the Winter edition of African Arts 1973, page 44. The original work was not available to be photographed during field research.


As the original of this work was unavailable to be photographed during field research, material for this study was therefore
obtained from a publication in the Nigeria Magazine of March 1961, p. 44, in an article with the headline, "Contemporary Nigerian Art," by Ulli Beier.

52 The Federal Government of Nigeria plans to build a National Gallery of art at Suleja, the new National Capital, during the plan period starting from January, 1981. Refer to Appendix I, p. 366.


55 Michael Lancaster, "Mural at the University of Ibadan," Nigeria Magazine No. 74, September 1962, p. 94.


58 Refer to Nigerian National Art Exhibition Catalogues of January/February 1977, p. 69; September 30-October 7, 1978, p. 28; and September 25-October 1, 1980, p. 36.


60 Adeyemo Adekeye, "Uzo Egonu of Nigeria," African Arts, Autumn 1973, p. 34, explains more about the artist.
Wendy Lawrence, Bruce Onobrakpeya: Nigeria's Master Printmaker, 1979, p. 18.

For details on how adudu sculpture is obtained, refer to Appendix I, p. 384.

African modernist style is practiced by artists who have been educated in African art schools. The characteristics of the art utilize (1) models in nature; (2) chiaroscuro; (3) perspective; (4) vertical and rectangular arrangement of figures; (5) balance of forms; (6) overlapping of forms; and (7) artist's inventiveness.

For a discussion of the ancestral spirit and the life and art of the Fang, refer to: Rober Thompson, African Art in Motion, University of California Press, Los Angeles, Berkeley, 1974.


For more discussion on various types of wood suitable for carving, refer to Appendix I, p. 302.


For the artist's explanation of his method of carving without any preliminary sketch refer to Appendix 1, p. 383.
Further discussion on how Grillo observed Nigerian drummers and what especially interests him, refer to Appendix I, p. 258.

The role of the drummer and how meaningful it is in Nigerian society can be found in Ayo Bankole, Judith Bush, Samaan H. Sadek, "The Yoruba Master Drummer," African Arts, Winter 1975, Vol. VIII, Number 2, pp. 48-56; 77-78.


A detailed explanation on how Onobrakpeya acquired the deep etching technique is available in Appendix I, pp. 332-334.

Onobrakpeya told the writer that he studied Urhobo Shrines for some of his deep etching. With reference to this discussion, turn to Appendix I, p. 345.


Grillo, one of the Awo artists studied, gives his view about patronage. For more information on Grillo's view about patronage of Nigerian art, refer to Appendix I, p. 249.

I. The Drummers Return by Grillo. Oil on Canvas c. 122 x 106.75 cm.
A Yoruba Drummer Using the Talking Drum.
III. Two Yoruba Women by Grillo. Oil on Canvas c. 122 x 76.25 cm.
IV. Birth, Puberty and Death by Erhabor Emokpae. Wood, 177 cm.
V. The Acrobats by Erhabor Emokpae. Wood.
V. Cast Concrete Screen by Demas Nwoko. c. 183 x 305 cm.
VII. Mural at The University of Ibadan by Demas Nwoko. Fresco, c. 457 x 1525 cm.
VIII. The Royal Welcome by Sina Yussuff. Oil on Canvas, 122 x 183 cm.
IX. Peace and Protest by Sina Yussuff. Oil on Canvas, 91.5 x 122 cm.
X. Pregnant Mother by Ben Osawe. Wood, 215 cm. high.
XI. Standing Figure by Ben Osaue. Welded Metal, c. 366 cm.
XII. Facing the Unknown by Obiora Udechukwu. Lino Print, c. 38.1 x 30.5 cm.
XIII. Staff Sergeant by Obiora Udechukwu. Drawing 38.1 x 30.5 cm.
XIV. Exodus by Uzo Egonu. Oil on Canvas, 129.6 x 106.75 cm.
XV. *Sacrifice to the Malignant Spirit* by Uzo Egonu. Etching, c. 61 x 76.25 cm.
XVI. Mother and Child by Chike Ochi. Wood, 128 cm.
XVIII. Togetherness by Chike Ochi. Raw Clay, 15 cm., Side View.
XIX. Togetherness by Chike Ochi. Raw Clay, 15 cm., Reverse View.
XX. Unity by Osunde. Iroko Wood, Front View.
XXI. Unity by Osunde. Iroko Wood, Side View.
XXII. Festival by Osunde. Wood, c. 274.5 x 762.5 cm.
XXIII. Abiku Spirit by Bruce Onobrakpeya. Deep Etching.
XXIV. Ahwaire the Tortoise and Erhako the Dog by Bruce Onobrakpeya.
Lino Print.
XXXI. Fang Reliquary Figure. Wood, 68 cm. high.
XXXII. Duen Fubora: Kalabari Ancestral Shrine.
XXXIII. Figures by Mvusi Selby. Oil on Canvas, 122 x 105 cm.
XXXIV. Paramount Chief and Attendant by Kofi Antubam. Oil on Canvas.


Published in 1968. Magazine not indicated, but material
is in Appendix II, p. 503.

Anonymous. "Nigeria at the Commonwealth Festival." Nigeria Magazine,
No. 87, December 1965, pp. 297-303.

Anonymous. "The One-Man Show of a Young Artist." The Service, Vol. I,
No. 55, October 7, 1961. Page number unavailable at the time
of research, but material is in Appendix II, p. 474.

Babalola, D. O. "Awo Art: The Practice." An unpublished manuscript
presented at the 22nd Annual Meeting, African Studies Associa-
tion, October 31-November 3, 1979.


Express, 5 October 1961. Page number unavailable at the time
of research but material is in Appendix II, p. 465.

Beier, Ulli. Contemporary Art in Africa. New York: Frederick A.
Praeger, 1968.

Beier, Ulli. "Contemporary Nigerian Art." Nigeria Magazine, No. 68,


Brown, Evelyn S. African Contemporary Art and Artists. New York:

Clarke, J. D. Omu: An African Experiment in Education. Longmans,


_____.

"African Art and Its Critics." Ibadan. A journal published at the University College Ibadan (now: The University of Ibadan)6 (June 1959):14-17.

_____.

"Is There a Nigerian Style of Painting?" Nigeria Magazine No. 41, 1953, pp. 51-59.


Holiday, John. "Surprises When Africa is Taught to Make Art." *South Wales Echo*, 17 September 1965. Page number unavailable at the time of research, but material is in Appendix II, p. 475.


Onita, Coker. "Chief Who Retired to Art." Art/Life Column: 
Nigeria Daily Times, 29 December 1979. Page number unavailable at the time of research, but material is in Appendix II, p. 519.


APPENDIXES I - III
APPENDIXES I - III

The material for this Section is organized into three categories, namely:

Appendix I - Data on Field Interview
Appendix II - Vital data on contemporary Nigerian art
Appendix III - Official Policy Statements on Art and Culture: delivered speeches.

Collected during my Nigerian field research, every piece of information appearing here is considered useful to the study. This gathering of information was systematic.

First, questionnaires were distributed to identified artists wherever they were found in the country. Out of the one hundred copies of the questionnaire distributed, forty-one were completed and returned. This represents forty-one percent of the questionnaires. (See page 195 in Appendix I).

As it has been enumerated earlier, the process that led to the compilation of the data was difficult.

Letter writing, telephoning, and traveling were the three main strategies used in the process of data collection. But owing to several constraints the former two became so ineffective that travels were eventually relied on more than the others. In most cases, journeys undertaken proved very successful. Even so, the traveler, for various reasons, had to discriminate the type of transportation
for particular journeys. As earlier said, rail and air transport, each had its own merits and demerits, and consequently had to be considered for specific occasional journeys. While rail transport is considered slow but sure, air transport is found to be quick, but costly. A means of ensuring that maximum benefit was derived from each journey made, had to be devised well in advance.

Apart from the questionnaire filled out by each artist, the pictures of his works, whenever available, were photographed first in color, then later in black and white. In this process, it was discovered that some artists' work were collected by different patrons over the years and were therefore not available for any photographic work. Besides, a Nigerian university library with a considerable number of such works refused to grant permission to photograph any work in its holding. Several works which ought to have been photographed directly were unavailable. Nevertheless, catalogues to exhibitions, which carried these works, became very useful in this regard, and contributed to the quantity of the data collected.

In addition to the photographs of the artists' works in black and white and in color, an oral random interview was conducted whenever the artists consented. While most artists cooperated in this endeavor, a few, for personal reasons, requested not to have our discussion tape recorded. The oral random interview took care of the social, psychological issues related to the artist. Moreover, it validated the questionnaire or improved upon the responses which required further elaboration. It touched on new areas which are considered personal to the artist and therefore outside the scope of a general questionnaire.
Again, a collection of the artists' literary materials were made whenever the artist concurred. It must be clearly stated that a number of artists were skeptical of the motive behind such a collection of data and either declined outright, or thought of seemingly genuine excuses for not having any material to be photographed.

Another endeavor was to collect library materials from:

a. Ministry of Information
b. Information centers
c. Art galleries and museums
d. British Council Libraries
e. United States Embassies and consulates

Much as one would have expected to gather more than adequate library materials or xeroxed copies from such diverse places herein enumerated, the priorities in the efforts of the various aforementioned places have changed over the years. However, the Federal Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture, which is now more concerned with visual arts, has provided some valuable materials. These were in the form of booklets and catalogues for exhibitions.

The Federal Ministry of Education which is still concerned with the administration of art education, provided some useful short notes on various aspects of Nigerian art. However, most of the information dealt with traditional art in Nigeria. The short notes which are concise and informative, were produced and printed in the Art and Cultural Education Division of the Federal Ministry of Education Lagos.

The Research Division of the Oyo State Council for Arts and Culture tried to provide all the information available to it. Although
the aspect of contemporary visual art being sought for appeared to be undocumented in slides as would have been expected. A lot of works in various parts of the state were photographed by this writer, for future study. It is, however, considered essential that the Council should have current works from the University of Ife in particular as well as other institutions in the state documented in slides.

Whether the works are produced in cities or in the university campuses, they mirror the society in which they are produced. Although the National Museum Lagos had not a single literal material on contemporary Nigerian art, they had adequate material on traditional Nigerian Art. Epo Eyo's, *Two Thousand Years of Nigerian Art*, as well as a number of booklets on various Nigerian cultures were available for sale. Besides, this writer received maximum cooperation by being permitted to photograph some valuable traditional works in the museum.

The National Museum Kaduna, also cooperated by making available whatever it could to facilitate this study. Nevertheless, it must be mentioned that several of their works collected from various parts of the country are yet to be documented in slides. The only copies of slides on display were on Epo Eyo's, *Two Thousand Years of Nigerian Art*.

Permission was given to photograph for research purposes by both Lagos and Kaduna Nigerian Museums, for which this writer is very grateful.

Another establishment visited for data collection was the Kwara State Council for Arts and Culture. Its six major departments were visited and wherever found suitable, works were photographed.
Likewise the various heads of departments were interviewed.

Considered one of the leading Councils for Arts and Culture in Nigeria, the Kwara State Council for Arts and Culture has made some significant strides but continue to have some notable difficulties. Although it has laudable ideas and plans, which are yet to be executed, its major dilemma is lack of funds to carry out its projects.

The "Image" and "The Confluence," magazines which mirror some of the activities of the Council, have not been published beyond the first issue. Again, the works in its museum and the craft shop have never been documented in slides. While it is still possible to do so with the works in the museum, it is impossible with the works in the craft shop as buyers and collectors often patronize it.

Contemporary art, although recognized, had not been duly attended to for financial reasons. In spite of this, the data obtained from the Kwara State Council for Arts and Culture was considerable and was possible only through the cooperation of all its officials.

Each of the appendixes now appear with a headed guideline as follows:

**Appendix I.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<td>Yusuf Adebayo Grillo</td>
<td>August 8, 1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. Dele Omotinugbon</td>
<td>August 15, 1980</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oduoye</td>
<td>August 19, 1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. Oyinboye</td>
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<td>Bruce Onobrakpeya</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fela Odaranile</td>
<td>September 13, 1980</td>
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</table>
Ola: My name is Daniel Olaniyan Babalola. I am from the Department of History of Art at the Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio. I am here to interview you, sir, on your personal contribution to the development of contemporary art in Nigeria. And as the President of the Society of Nigerian artists, as well as the Head of the Department of Art at the Yaba College of Technology and together with your contributions to the development of Nigerian art nationally and internationally, you would be able to enlighten me on your personal impressions of how art is going in Nigeria and I hope I will be able to learn from it.

Grillo: I wonder whether it wouldn't be better to ask questions to which I will give answers; but maybe, by way of a start, I can say that art (the practice and the patronage of art), and the development of art has continued to grow from strength to strength. Barely fifty years ago, it was a different story. People didn't want to offer art...
FIELD RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire attempts to inquire into your activities as an artist in Contemporary Nigeria. To facilitate an easy process, four boxes have been provided, each denoting a response. Only one box should be marked in response to each question. The following codes correspond to the boxes in this order: C=Correct, VC=Very Correct, I=Incorrect and VI=Very Incorrect.

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<td>15. I studied drawing, painting and sculpture</td>
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<td>16. I studied painting, sculpture, history of art</td>
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</table>
17. I studied design, painting, sculpture, hist. of art

18. I studied textiles

19. I studied other (please name)

20. I decided to be an artist so that I can be as famous as an international artist

21. I can make a lot of money quickly

22. I can make money and be famous as well

23. Because of the love I have for art

24. I was encouraged by my teacher

25. I was encouraged by my principal

26. I was encouraged by my father

27. I was encouraged by my friend

TALENT

28. I know I have talent because I find it easy to do art

29. I always enjoy drawing

30. I always enjoy painting

31. My art works were better than those of my colleagues

32. My first early efforts were rewarded when I won a prize

33. When I was given a scholarship to study art

34. When I was invited to teach art in my former school

Those who bought and encourage my art are:

35. Companies or commercial establishments

36. Educated Nigerian elite
37. Expatriates

38. Visitors or tourists

39. A combination of Nigerians, expatriates, tourists, visitors

40. I have commissions at least twice a year

41. I have commissions up to ten within a year

42. I have not received any commission for some years

43. I rarely have any commissions

44. Nobody has ever tried to commission me

45. My commissions usually come from the Banks

46. My commissions normally come from individuals

47. My commissions come from expatriates

48. My commissions come from visitors or tourists

49. My commissions come from a mixture of the above

AUDIENCE

50. Interested people often view my work

51. Interested people occasionally view my work

52. Interested people very seldom view my work

53. My studio is closed to all visitors and intruders

54. My studio is open to any interested person

55. The visitors ask questions at great length

56. These people do not seem very interested
57. Visitors come every day
58. Visitors come almost every day
59. Visitors come every week
60. Visitors come every other day
61. Visitors rarely come
62. I exhibit my art works about once a year
63. I exhibit my art works about twice a year
64. I exhibit my art works as often as I feel the need
65. I exhibit my art works only once in every three years

**FEED BACK ON EXHIBITIONS**

66. I usually get feed back on my exhibit in letter form
67. I usually get feed back on my exhibit in publication
68. I usually get feed back on my exhibit in radio, television commentary

**SPONSORS**

69. I have sponsors. I have at least 2
70. I have sponsors. I have at least 3
71. I have sponsors. A society sponsoring my shows
72. I do not have regular sponsors
73. I am usually sponsored by banks
74. Rich traders
75. Educated Nigerian elite
**PUBLICITY**

76. I publicise my work by posters

77. I publicise my work by letters, radio & television

78. I publicise my work by a combination of the above

79. I am not sure I need any publicity

80. I leave the publicity to my sponsors

81. I have no time for publicity

**CRITICISM**

82. I have had numerous critics

83. I have had some critics

84. I have never had a critic

85. These criticisms are published in the newspapers

86. These criticisms are given on radio

87. These criticisms are given on television

88. These criticisms are given in all available media

**THEME**

89. The themes for my work are derived from personal experience

90. The themes for my work are derived from the city life

91. The themes for my work are derived from the rural area

92. The themes for my work are derived from political events
93. The themes for my work are derived from imagination

MEDIA

94. I use oil colors
95. I use acrylic
96. I use pastel and chalk
97. I use a combination of the above

PUBLICATIONS

98. I have published on my work
99. I have not published anything on my work
100. Somebody has published on my work
101. Somebody has published for me
102. Nobody has published on my work
103. I am ignorant of any publication on my work
104. I think it is too early to publish on my work

FAMILY

105. I live in my own house with my family
106. I do not own a house, I rent an apartment
107. My family is comprised of 3
108. My family is comprised of 4
109. My family is comprised of 5
110. My family is comprised of 6
111. My family is comprised of 8
I have other sources of income e.g. from:

112. (a) ___________________________
113. (b) ___________________________
114. (c) ___________________________

I have commissions from:

115. (a) ___________________________
116. (b) ___________________________

**PATRONAGE**

The frequent buyers of my works are:

117. Tourists
118. Visitors
119. Expatriates, Europeans and Americans
120. Banks
121. Galleries
122. Nigerians

**SELF IMAGE**

123. I perceive myself as a successful artist
124. I perceive myself as an up-coming artist
125. I have no idea of what I have achieved
126. People in the environment think highly of me
127. I am usually treated with respect, like other invitees
128. I am usually invited to every important function
129. I have never been underrated
130. I have been underrated once or twice
131. I have friends in the high society
132. I have friends in the academic community (univ.)

SOCITIES AND CLUBS

133. I am a member of the Society of Nigerian artists
134. I am a member of _______ social club
135. I am a member of _______ tennis club
136. I am a member of _________

(please fill in the gaps)

AGE

I am from 20-25 years old
I am from 25-30 years old
I am from 30-35 years old
I am from 35-40 years old
I am from 40-45 years old
I am from 45-50 years old
I am above 50 years old

Thank you for your assistance.
### STATISTICAL ANALYSIS SYSTEM

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| 3 15                          | 39                            | 100.000       |

| Q75 FREQUENCY CUM FREQ PERCENT CUM PERCENT |
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| 1 24                          | 24                            | 100.000       |
| 3 13                          | 37                            | 100.000       |

| Q76 FREQUENCY CUM FREQ PERCENT CUM PERCENT |
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| 1 6                           | 6                             | 100.000       |
| 3 14                          | 20                            | 100.000       |

| Q77 FREQUENCY CUM FREQ PERCENT CUM PERCENT |
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| 1 19                          | 19                            | 100.000       |
| 3 12                          | 31                            | 100.000       |

| Q78 FREQUENCY CUM FREQ PERCENT CUM PERCENT |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1 5                           | 5                             | 50.000        |
| 3 21                          | 36                            | 100.000       |

| Q79 FREQUENCY CUM FREQ PERCENT CUM PERCENT |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1 18                          | 18                            | 100.000       |
| 3 16                          | 34                            | 100.000       |

<p>| Q80 FREQUENCY CUM FREQ PERCENT CUM PERCENT |
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as a career because prospects in it was very dim, but since then very great strides have been taken. It is no more a profession which people shy away from; actually the opposite is true now. Patronage has continued to grow. At the beginning, patronage was limited only to the experts, but now it's very gratifying to note that quite a number of Nigerians are beginning to appreciate and patronize art. The government is doing its best. We know it could be better and generally I think the outlook is very encouraging. I think that that as a start would be o.k. and I can answer specific questions which you may want to ask me.

Ola: Right now you mentioned something about patronage, and I am quite happy that you mentioned that because it’s being said that artists in this country are not receiving patronage or adequate patronage, but from the literature on your life and work, we know that you have had a lot of commissions both in this country and abroad. Would you please like to highlight some of them?

Grillo: Yes, patronage has definitely improved. Apart from individuals attending exhibitions and buying works of artists, architects almost as a rule now try as much as possible to include something in the buildings they design, especially if they are public buildings. Even in private buildings architects do their best within the resources available to include something for the artist. Personally I have done quite a lot in art in architecture. Actually it has more or less taken the precedence over painting. Painting is my main field, but since I started practice, because of the commissions that have been coming, I have grown to know some materials which I didn't learn about in school: like mosaic, like stained-glass, and so many other art
in architecture materials, permanent materials, which will stay on buildings for as long as the buildings last, or even longer than the buildings last.

I have done quite a number of mosaics on public buildings. The very first was the one on the Independence Building, which was done around 1960-61 and since then, there have been many others. There was a mosaic, (no, two mosaics) outside the country, both for the World Health Organization. There is one in Geneva and the other in Brazzaville. There are numerous reliefs, stravito-painted murals in the country, and of late, I have gone into what one might, for convenience, describe as stained-glass. It isn't stained-glass in the traditional sense, that you use glass and tin-lead, etc; but I have been using plexi-glass which is bonded with cement (glass cement) to produce pictures. And I have done this in at least four places: Saint John's Church Aroloya, in Lagos, All Saints Church in Yaba, Presbyterian Church in Yaba, Nurses' Hostell at Awolowo Road. A few for private homes. I am at the moment doing one for a Church in Ogere in Ijebu (Ogun State, Nigeria). I have just been working on the frame and I hope to do another very big one for the Nigerian Defence Academy Chapel in Kaduna. All these are stained-glass commissions. So, I have been very busy as far as art in architecture goes and as I said earlier, it's more or less taken precedence over painting, even though I still find time to do some painting.

Ola: Would you, please sir, enlighten me about some of the major paintings, mural paintings, you have carried out?

Grillo: Mural Paintings!; if we're referring to mural paintings, they are very few. There are two in the University of Ibadan at the
Sultan Bello Hall and the Queen Elizabeth Hall and there's one in the Shell Club (which became National Club). Those are the few. . .oh, yes, there's the third one in Afikpo; there's a chapel in the Afikpo Presbyterian Church in the Eastern part of the country. Those are the only painted murals I have done. But I have done many more mosaic murals, relief murals, and murals in other media. There is a relief mural for instance, in the Federal Palace Suite Hotel. The New Wing of the Federal Palace Hotel. It's outside and it goes round the building. It's done in relief on which text-santex (which is a permanent coloring material) has been applied. It is a material which lasts as long or longer than the building itself. Painted murals, except when they are inside, are not advisable because exposure to light and wear and tear which walls are subjected to, will make a painted mural not last. And you find that most painted murals all over the world, have either had to be taken away from the wall and kept in a museum or preserved and protected in a very special way. Otherwise, they don't last long. But the other media which last for much longer are more popular for murals.

Ola: Thank you about this. As one who has contributed to the development of contemporary art, as I have said earlier, you noted that contemporary art in Nigeria is, perhaps, not moving as other areas of art like traditional art. Perhaps you would like to say, in particular, what statements, what personal statements, you are making in these several works you have carried out.

Grillo: I don't think I understand the question very well.

Ola: Contemporary art is not moving (at the same pace as, perhaps, the traditional.)
Ola: Maybe that is a personal opinion, anyway, so I stand to be corrected please.

Grillo: It will depend, of course, on what direction one is looking. Traditional art has not been as buoyant as it used to be. That is a fact. In the traditional society, before the advent of the British and western civilization, and all what not, traditional art, of course, had a very important and active role. It was part of the society. The artist was part of the society and his sustenance was primarily religious and secondarily court. In other words, the traditional artist was doing most of his things for religion, either carving masks or carving *ibeji* "idols" or things which are spiritual in content. That was the main bulk of traditional art as can be seen in the films if one goes into the museum.

If one leaves the religions, then it is the court. The things which the Oba or the chief or the Obi commissions as is evidenced in the traditional art of the Benin, Ife, etc. Those were the two main areas. Of course, the artist also did things for the individuals, the ordinary person like carving stools, or decorating utensils and things like that. But that was not as prominent as the first two. A visit to the museum will convince one of this, or if one takes a book on the traditional art of the country he'll find that perhaps seventy percent of the items you will see would be religious-based items and maybe 30, maybe 40% in some cases, like Benin, would be court art. But since the western influence came, most of the basis for traditional religion, except in some places where this impact has not been felt. Most of the basis have been destroyed.
Most people are now Christians or Muslims and very few people still believe in the Ibeji "idols", for instance. They would rather go to the maternity hospital than carve "idols" for the safety of their babies, etc. So, from that point of view, one can safely say that traditional art is not as buoyant as it used to be. But traditional art is still being practiced on a completely different level. People who do it now are doing it more or less like craftsmen anywhere. In other words, if they carve Ibeji twins now, they are not carving it because they believe it's going to protect the babies: they're carving it because some people want it to buy or to use as decoration. They're carving doors, door panels, just like that one we are looking at, wall plaques for decoration, because people want to buy them. So the motif is different in most places.

Ola: Are you suggesting that they have commercialized this kind of art?

Grillo: Very much so! Except, as I have said, in very remote places where tradition is still, to some extent, intact. But in most other places it has been commercialized. A few traditional artists who have visions have been able to break through the craftsman's-sphere and have become artists. In other words, they are not just good craftsmen, which all traditional artists are, but they are artists. In other words, they have something to say. They have a vision. They have a message and they are not just repeating the same and mass producing the same thing like the Benin carvers do. You know it's an elephant and they can turn out fifty elephants a day—or a head, they can turn out a hundreded in one week. So that, one or two of them have been able to burst through this shell of
craftsmanship to become an artist with a personal statement to make. So that is what I can say now about traditional art. The government, of course, and the Art Councils are doing their best to encourage the traditional artists. Everybody is concerned about the preservation of the traditional arts. In the museum, now, you have the Crafts Village near the museum.

Ola: I was there yesterday.

Grillo: And they bring traditional artists, bead workers, etc., to give them an avenue of continuing to practice and getting patronage. But we will all agree that that was not the primary. The bead worker who is now at the Craft Village of the museum, producing beaded hats, etc., for the connoisseurs to collect, was only working for the chief in the olden days. Actually he would have been barred from working for any other person. He would be the personal bead worker to the chief, or to the Oba, etc. But, those type of situations have changed and this is why. But whatever could be done to keep it going, even if it's the craftsmanship, whatever could be done to keep it going, I think is a very well contained... and I am happy that the government and councils and museums and other bodies are promoting the (craftsmen) traditional craftsmen. Now contemporary art, on the other hand, started only recently. I think the very first line in the history of contemporary art can be put at as recently as--not less than 40 years. (40-50 years with Aina Onabolu). When Aina Onabolu came back from Britain to start teaching art in schools for the first time. Before that time there was nothing worthy of mention. Of course, there were people who intuitively had interest and were doing things but in the real sense of the word, the first line of the
history of contemporary art would start with Aina Onabolu who died only recently. Only less than... 

Ola: Who died in the 1960's.

Grillo: Yes, less than 20 years ago. Actually, I think about fourteen years ago or there about. He died after I came back from Zaria (ABU). I came out in 1961, so I think he died around 1964. So that will show you how recent the history of contemporary art in the country has been. But it has moved very fast after a period of inertia. The period of inertia was during the period of Onabolu. Nobody appreciated what he was doing. He was going from school to school teaching and getting almost nothing and trekking from place to place. He lived more or less a pauper. Well, relatively, he didn't have much and he died more or less just like a school teacher. His works, of course, now are being appreciated. Then followed, of course, people like Akinola Lasekan, Ben Enwonwu. But they were all isolated items in a vast area and the impact was not felt. But, from about 1960 or 1959 when art teaching and art training in the country really started both at Yaba and Zaria to start with, then things began to change. Because people then were being trained in the country for the first time to be artists. There were being produced in much greater number than had hitherto been. Because before then, you could count all the artists in the country on your right hand finger: Anabolu, Ben Enwonwu, Akinola Lasekan, Okaybulu, less than five. But then when this course started young men were being admitted for art. Those who could make it at that time went in and when they came out, they didn't know what they (government) were going to do but then because of their presence, things were faced; issues were faced and resolved. The government began to recognize that they have got to create posts...
in the civil service, in schools, etc., to absorb graduates in art, etc., and from then things began to gather momentum. And as I said, now their output in the country every year, of artists, will definitely be approaching a thousand. Yes, because apart from the universities we have Zaria, Nsukka, Ife, Benin—in all these places they offer art degrees. Then there are colleges of technologies: The Yaba, Ibadan, Auchi, Owerri, Ondo, Kano, Kaduna, Port Harcourt. Nearly all the colleges of technology offer art.

So you find that the sum total of the output in all these places every year now approaches a thousand. Either going out as teachers at the N.C.E. level, or as artists from the polytechnics with a diploma in art or with degrees in art. And the impact of these people are being felt in the nooks and corners of the country, everywhere. Because they are dispersed, they have to go to work somewhere. So in the advertising areas, in the television, in the Press, everywhere the presence of the artist is felt and it's a big difference in the picture, which they had before.

Ola: Thank you. The areas of the works of artists, of contemporary artists, may be classified into certain categories and I know in particular by looking at your work that your's, in particular, stands in a special category. And I know that you must have certain personal statements you are making that you would be best positioned to enlighten any scholar.

Grillo: Well, I think the work of any artist has to be unique because no two individuals are the same. Everybody is a peculiar person and the statement he is making cannot but be different from what somebody else is making. The only difference would be where you
find an artist who is still trying to find his feet. Who is still
groping, who is being torn between influences. He sees the work of
Ben Enwonwn and he thinks "ah, yes, I like this and I think of this."
He sees a traditional piece of art he says, "oh, yes." He sees a
Picasso tomorrow, etc. You know, especially for young graduates
coming out into the field to practice, this dilemma is there that
he wants to make a mark. He's probably not researched and searched
for himself enough to be able to say "yes, this is my direction."
So he subjects himself; he submits himself to perhaps this influence
today, another time that influence may surface and at another. So
you may find that a stage in the artist's life there may be peace
undecided style or idiom, because he's been torn apart. He is still
trying to find himself. But, I think if and when an artist finds
himself, his statement will clearly be peculiar to him that you will
see this in his art. So in saying that my work is recognizably
mine, is just because of the same thing. I am saying the things
which I and me alone want to say. Now to comment on my own work--I
am not sure it is conscious, but I hate being put under a class,
like saying: "this is a cubist or this is an abstractionist, or
this or that. Any of the. . ."
Ola: No, you have been a prolific artist. The way you work, you
know you painted the picture of the drummers; you know those drummers,
one carrying on the back facing like this. In greens, etc. That is
special! You painted another one in which you had somebody riding
a bicycle, having a saw facing like this.
Grillo: That's "The Flight".
Ola: Ah, so these kind of things; there are several others. They
are slightly different from each other. They have got, you know,
things. And this is exactly what I mean. You have a strong statement you are making with those drummers because the way you see them is different from how others would have seen them.

Grillo: Yah, that's right. This is so. Primarily I draw my interest from or my inspiration mainly from people. From watching people and getting in my own way to understand what their moods are, what they are doing. You talked about the drummers. Yes, at a period I was very much interested in the drummers, but I wasn't interested in the drummers in the act of drumming necessarily. Of course, I did a few pictures of drummers in there, but I found that there is so much interest, so much intrigue in looking at drummers when they are not drumming; when they are preparing to drum, for instance. There was a period when I was watching drummers when they are just getting themselves ready to drum. Tying the drum, testing it to see that the tone is right, and you know they do various things. Some put the drum over a small fire to make it tight. They do all sorts of things which are so interesting and so intriguing and I made a number of sketches on those.

I also, at a time, was interested in the drummers. The one I first did was when they are preparing to drum. And I think that led to "o.k. after preparing the drum what do they do after?" And then I painted a series of what they do after the drumming. When they are going back home, when they are tired, and when the elder drummers give the drums to the younger ones and you find that the younger drummer carries about three or four drums; whereas the elder drummers are going without anything. Things like that. That was another stage of watching the drummers. And so there was quite a long series of
paintings which I did on the drummers.

The one you talked about, the man on the cycle was inspired by Flight. Actually it started during the civil war and at that time one had been told stories, saw pictures, and viewed people fleeing from one village to the other because the soldiers were near. And that led to, or in some ways, reminded one of the flight of the Holy Family from Jerusalem to Egypt. And, of course, they went in their own way then. But here, people were carrying their family and everybody on bicycles and moving from one village to the other. So that inspires the flight which you referred to and there was the man with the woman and a child sitting at the back of the bicycle and some load and the saw. Well the saw is something which came by the link between the Holy Family (because Joseph was a carpenter) and the mark of the trade was the saw, but you can find carpenters all over the place. But there was in my mind, subconsciously, a link and something reminding one of one or the other; the Holy Family and the people who fly from one village to live in the other.

As far as the style is concerned, I don't paint naturalistically. I, for a long time, soon after I left college, I realized that the exercise one had done in college of painting portraits, etc., were o.k. and one can always do that. But to make statements, one needed a vehicle for conveying the statements. And before a statement can be really felt, especially a visual statement, it has to carry a punch. And the only way one can make statements with punch in them visually, is by emphasizing something and this emphasis will definitely lead to distortion. You want to emphasize for instance that somebody is strong and you exaggerate the muscles. You know
that if you were doing a life drawing, a realistic drawing, the muscles would just be normal. But because you want to say that this person is strong, you would put a little more on the muscles and you want to exaggerate them. You want to show that somebody is tall and you put him near a short person and you emphasize and exaggerate his own height. Ah, these are things which help the artist to drive home a message, which the realistic interpretation would have watered down or killed.

And because of this I have grown particularly looking at the things I surround myself with--traditional pieces of art. I collect them like...whenever I can find them and find the money for them. I collect them almost compulsively and I study them, I analyze them. They influence my work and you may, looking at some of my works, find that there is a weakness if one can call it weakness for planes trying to define planes.

Ola: I wouldn't call that a weakness.

Grillo: And this is because if you take any traditional piece of art, you will find that they always deal in planes. The clear cut definition of planes defining one plane from another, etc., and this has worked itself into my work. I think I can recognize them and I can know that it's because of my interest and love for traditional works of art that this has come in. And I think it has been very useful in helping me to convey the message.

Ola: Sir, if you would not mind, I have other questions I would like to ask you. The second one, the one to follow right now, is about your paintings of "Eyo". You painted a series of "Eyo", perhaps you have gotten something to say about that.
Grillo: Yes, well again as I said, my main source of inspiration is people and what people do. And of course, "Eyo" to me are people—celebrating the festive masquerade. Again it is the interest in the festival, watching the festival, being interested in the flowing robes and the shape from the heart downwards forming a pyramid type of picture. And the way they carry the staff, the rhythm of the staff and the flowing gowns together—I think have inspired the "Eyo", which as you said, I painted a series of. I am still interested in the "Eyo". There was a festival recently and I made quite a number of sketches again. When the time permits, I want to paint another series of the "Eyo."

Ola: I would like to know about your own choice of colors. I have spoken that you use greens and you use some other colors in addition. Do you have any special choice for special pictures and do you have reasons?

Grillo: I think again I would say weakness. I have a weakness for the cool colors.

Ola: Well, that's not a weakness, everybody has a liking.

Grillo: It is almost a passion that almost any picture I paint finally find themselves resolving into the cool colors: blues and greens and mauves. And this has gone on for ages to such an extent that at a stage, I was intentionally making myself to paint in the opposite—the reds. I would start a picture with red. This is something I did consciously because I found that I was almost imprisoned in the blues, greens and mauves. And I thought "oh look" I have got to, inspite of myself, break out and discover what other colors may be able to do for me.
I did one or two pictures which are not here. I hardly have any of my pictures because they disappear no sooner than I am able to paint them and I paint very few pictures. My dominant—mainly murals. But I did one or two paintings, intentionally (doing), using the reds, just to be able to break... But I can say that I haven't enjoyed them as much as I enjoyed using blues and greens. And I find myself always returning to the blues, greens and mauves for almost any subject. Perhaps it is tied up with the subject I choose also. Maybe if there is an influence in the opposite direction maybe that will dictate a completely different pallete. The type of subject I choose and the moods I choose to paint seem to agree with the pallete I use and the type of color, etc., etc.

Ola: Exactly they seem to work together in a sort of very convincing way that one wonders how you do them. Ah, that set of drummers series as I have said, there are only very few which have been published. But they didn't say exactly what you were saying and they didn't say exactly why you do certain things. They just say this is your work. It leaves one in a blank. And I will appreciate your explanation in this area. You have produced quite a number of works in the country. You have highlighted some of them. Some others might have been bought by some other people resident outside Nigeria. Could you please, sir, enlighten me about some of them.

Grillo: Actually most of my works have been collected by expatriates Many of them are no more here. Because at the time, I was painting more than doing murals. These were the first few years of my coming into practice: 1963, 1964. I think my first exhibition was in 1963. After that, 1964, etc., etc., I was doing quite a lot of paintings
then. The only few people who purchased paintings then were the expatriates. But that has since changed. And most of the paintings I did then were purchased by some of the people who purchased most of my paintings. The former British High Commissioner, Lord Head. He was here around the early '60's. Professor Gower, who was Professor of Law, Lagos University. Actually he came to establish the university—the Lagos University, at its inception and he bought a large number of my paintings. Mr. and Mrs. Corse of Islington, Britain. Quite a number of other expatriates. But the ones I have mentioned are the ones who have large numbers. There is Robert Atkinson, the architect, Peter Whitehouse, the architect. They have large numbers of my works. There are others who have one or two, etc., but most of my works (paintings) to date, have been collected by expatriates. There is also the Nigerian National Society for Arts and Humanities, which society was trying to establish a modern art gallery sometime ago. And they were building up a collection which is now in the University of Lagos. And some of my work are in that collection also.

Ola: This is interesting. I was just going to ask you about the fact that most of your works are outside the country. Have you, sir, got any personal documentation of them in slides.

Grillo: Ah! This is one thing I am so poor at. I tend to lose interest in a painting when it's finished. I have a few slides. But I didn't start forcing myself to document things in slides until much much later than this period I was talking about. My interest in taking slides actually started in an indirect way. Some people came from the United States.
There was a Professor Hyde (Hide) who came to me directly. She is a researcher. And she went to a lot of pains in tracking down the places where she could find my works and took slides of them and she was so kind to send me a copy of each. So that was the initial set of slides of my own works, which I had. And since then, particularly since I was being invited outside the country to talk about Nigerian Art, I found that it's very wise to keep a set of slides to illustrate my talks, etc., etc. But most of my early works I do not have them—I do not have the slides. There are a few publications where some of them appeared at one time or the other.

Ola: Yah!—but they are quite few. Quite few indeed! And one is left blank as I have said. And we would be in a better position to document whatever contributions you have made, when we can review from the beginning, the works you have done. When we see them in the series we will then be able to actually understand what you are trying to say right from the beginning to the very end than when we just have only one or two which are in Nigeria.

For instance, in the United States we have people like Rauschenberg. Rauschenberg has done series just like yourself. And in the series he has done over the years, they made a sort of collection of all of them and published something on them. And then one is able to understand what he has been saying all along. When he changed, people knew why he changed and when he was doing certain things people are able to understand because they can relate it back to what he did previously. And this would have been quite interesting and at least helpful.
Grillo: I know but I think it is the same old story. It is exactly what happened to traditional pieces of art. Many of us, (talking of Nigerians) at the time when these things were being done, did not know the value of it. So, even now people are prepared to sell traditional pieces of art to the tourist rather than take it to the museum where Nigerians could be able to see it. You find that the artist or the craftsman, etc., when he is doing these things, especially to people, do so because he wants to be known. They would rather part with their work on the chance that whoever takes their work is taking it somewhere to publicize them because wherever it is, the artist is being publicized. So, especially at the time when we came into the field, the situation was still very dim. We were more or less like the pioneers—in the present set of the word—I am not talking of the Onabolus, etc. But talking of the present set, we were more or less the first set to come out. And our interest then was to work, exhibit, get our works collected by people who appreciate them. Do more work, improve, etc., etc. Primarily then, we were more interested in building ourselves than in concerning ourselves with our own history. But talking of people who want to write—I think about myself—there is still quite a good number of works—maybe, not paintings. There are still a good number of my works in other media around. And God sparing...

Ola: Could you please give where some of them are and what they are about?

Grillo: As I said, there is quite a number in the collection at the University of Lagos. Robert Atkinson even though he is an expatriate, he is in the country. Peter Whitehouse, he is in the country.
Mrs. Majekodunmi, she also has quite a number. Quite a few other people, quite a few other collectors.

Ola: Would you be able to give me the addresses if they are in the country; would you know some of their addresses?

Grillo: Yes, but I think I know only some of their addresses.

Ola: Would you please give me.

Grillo: Mr. Whitehouse at No. 36 Proben Road, Ikoyi; Robert Atkinson is at 45 Campbell Street, Lagos. I don't remember the address of Mrs. Majekodunmi. And of course the University of Lagos library is behind us here (the College of Technology, Yaba) and quite of few of my works are there.

And in any case of course, to someone who wants to write history it is very important to get the things done at a particular time. Otherwise, what I was saying is, from my own point of view—since God, sparing one's life, one is still able to do some work, that the history is still a growing history. There are still quite a few—for instance, the annual national exhibition which we always have—The Society of Nigerian Artists—at the Anniversary of Independence, will soon come. And I intend to send at least three new paintings. That's the paintings which have not been exhibited earlier. I am working on them.

Ola: Then perhaps I am tiring you off very rapidly as I can see, but I hope you wouldn't mind. Now perhaps you would like to give some advice to Contemporary Nigerian artists because I know several are striving along the road you have trodden. People consider you as a successful artist, perhaps you would have some advice for Nigerian contemporary artists.
Grillo: Yes, as a teacher I think this is what I do, day in—day out, because trying to shape the future of art aspirants—students one cannot but keep advice in mind. The main advice, I think I give young men and women who want to become artists, is that they have got to accept right from the start that it is not an easy subject. To be able to... Well, there is this misconception which is a general misconception right from school, etc., that it's only the people who can't do this or who can't do that, who go into art. But I think many people have now learnt that this is not so. And that where you find the artist (you have artists all around) who have been in classes with people who are now doctors and who had been better than they were in their own class. But who have chosen art because they want to do art.

People have now learnt that it is easier to cram a formula, it's easier to cram a history, or learn this or that, than to create. And that unless you have really gotten something in you, you cannot create. And that it is not as easy as people think. So the first thing which young artists must learn is that this is not an easy matter. Again they must not keep looking at----. I won't disagree with you that I am successful. Relatively, I am. I get work to do, do the work well. I get satisfaction from it. I think success is no more than this. They mustn't—the young men must not look at people like Ben Enwonwu and Emokpae, etc., and say "Oh, these are people who have made it. They ride good cars, they live in good places, etc., etc." And they can get the false notion that by just doing anything, success will come. They may be so impatient, they may be so attracted by material success, that they will neglect the basis for it and the basis for it is their own work. Trying to make sure that they are
sincere to themselves. Without sincerity to themselves, they cannot get anywhere—they cannot say something which is "patently yours."

Unless you are sincere, you cannot copy somebody and say you are sincere. Because you cannot draw this to be like this—so you just do anything and put it forward. That is not sincerity. Sincerity is working and working, failing to achieve what you want, scraping it, starting again, making more studies, researching, until you are able to get the message you want to put across right. It is only then that you can say this painting can go away. The painting is never finished. But at a stage you can feel that Oh, at this stage I think I can let this rest. I think all these are very important. And I have found, being a teacher, I have found that the student who is least interested in material success and who is more interested in his work is the one who makes material success and artistic success.

Just because at the time when their other mates are rushing around—"oh, I want an exhibition!", and they're packing the things they did in school and doing some horrid things and saying "oh, I am ready for an exhibition." You know they may pester the life of a gallery or the Arts Council or something so much that they say o.k., we'll give you an exhibition. They have the exhibition and it's rubbish and from that stage on they are defeated. They won't ever have the courage of having another exhibition. The exhibition may be so poor that nobody talks about it. He doesn't probably sell one picture. And he is demoralized and that's the end. He may never paint after that.

Whereas the one who is patient, who keeps working and solving his own problems, getting his message, may be just struggling until
somebody says: "oh, yes, I think you have done quite a few things. This is good. This is very nice, etc. I think you should have a valid exhibition." And he may even say "no, I don't think it's good enough. I want to do a few more." It's that type of person who gets the two. Because he is not interested in the material side of it. And he finds that when he achieves the artistic success, when he's able to discover himself, so to say, and he is able to put messages across—that's when the material success comes. That's when people want him to do things. Architects come to him for designs, etc., etc. So that's the advice I would have for the young aspirant.

Ola: Thank you. And finally, perhaps you will like to let me know your opinion about what I am going to say now. The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, 43210, has got a dynamic African Art Section. That African Art Section teaches what we call African Art and Archaeology. And that section is interested in not only finding out about African past and present, but going into the contributions of artists in Africa and then seeing how they are synthesizing ideas which we believe would help Africa to spring back again into the forefront of civilization as they were before. We know artists have got strong contributions to make and we know that except we of this present generation try to document what is being said and done. The artists themselves alone cannot do it, because they are busy doing something. We have to try by all means to say exactly what they are trying to say, not what we think they are trying to say alone. We understand a work by looking at the work.

We can analyze a work by looking at it or by looking at series of works. But I think what you have said so far has enlightened me
in several areas and I would be highly interested, sir, if you would not mind granting future interviews. If it should be necessary for me to come over, I would like to intimate you in writing.

Grillo: O.k.

Ola: I would like to ask something about your being invited to the Ohio State University. I have not proposed this, but when I go back, I would like to propose that when the Department of History of Art is inviting guest speakers, they should consider enlisting your name and inviting you over to come and help us anytime you are free. I know that it is from this kind of contribution that students who are right there in America would understand what is being done in Africa.

I am sorry to say that the standard of development as I see it, is different from the conception of the Americans or even students in America. When artists are interviewed and when they publicize what the artists are doing, we do not know exactly because they do not emphasize what the artists are saying. They just say the work is this, the work is that, but they don't say exactly what is being said. And so they leave one in a blank.

Has the African got any original contribution to make to knowledge? To the development of art? Or are we just glorifying ourselves in the past? We know something is being done. We know that conscientious effort is being made but we do not know exactly the right approach of reporting them. Hence, my endeavor to come out to you and I am very, very thankful for the way you have received me. I am very grateful for your forthrightness, for all your explanations, and I think they will go a long way enlightening my colleagues when I go back.
Because we are studying your work, we have tried to analyze your work. We have tried to understand what contributions you are making and this is why I, in particular as a Nigerian, would like to associate myself with what you are doing and see it in the true light as you would like it to be seen. Not as an outsider would see it and not really understand.

So, I am really very thankful and I would like to thank you on behalf of my Department at the Ohio State University.

Grillo: Thank you very much. If I am invited and the time is right and I am not booked up with any other thing, of course it should be my pleasure to accept.

On the topic of synthesizing. It is a very important subject and it's a subject which has been discussed at very heated debates. There was an O.A.U. Seminar on it which I attended. And I think it is a subject which will, for a long time, either be misinterpreted or be misunderstood until people really get to accept the fact that before you can draw from anything—and in this case we want to draw from our past. We want to draw from the rich cultural artistic heritage of our country. We don't want to be an oxstart (starting from nowhere), which is a very, very noble thing. But people have to realize that this would be impossible until the contemporary artist brings himself to terms with traditional art. It is not something one can do with inordinate acquaintances to tradition. You can see an Ife head today and you are copying it tomorrow. It won't come that way. One has to go deep into the study of traditional art, get to know it, get to understand it, and get to assimilate it. And it is not until it is assimilated that it can come out. Because we
are not talking of copying. Once it is copied, it is nothing.

Anybody can copy. An American can copy Ife art, can copy Igbo Ukwu, can copy Nok, can copy anything. A Japanese can copy it. But that's not what we are talking. We are talking of finding ourselves in this thing. And before we can find ourselves, there we have to understand it. We have to go deep into it. It is only then that it can come in a wholesome way—and become evident in the things we do now.

This happens to be a pet subject which I have had very many heated debates both on television and at panels, etc., etc. But I think it is a very, very important subject, and this is why in the school we not only make sure that traditional art is taught, we get them to know it. At times we get them to copy—just for craft—teaching them the craftsmanship of it. So that they can get to know these things and get to assimilate it. So, that's all, I think, I can say about this question of synthesis between the traditional and the contemporary.

Ola: That's really good. Thank you very much for your reception and thank you very much for all the time you have devoted to this interview.

Grillo: You are welcome. O.K.
M. B. Omotinugbon (1980)

Ola: My name is Ola Babalola and I am from the Ohio State University. I am carrying out research on Nigerian Traditional and Contemporary Art.

Sir, as the chief cultural officer of the Kwara State Council for Arts and Culture, and as one who has had a lot of dealings with the development of art in Kwara State, perhaps you will be willing to enlighten me on your activities as the Arts Council for the State.

Dele: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Babalola. The Arts Council was set up by an edict in the year 1973. And its main purpose is to promote, to preserve, develop, or revive the arts and culture of the State. And normally, the Council is governed by a Board. It is appointed every three years. The Board's responsible for the kind of governmental administration of the Council. And the Council, itself, has various types of staff. Most of them as professionals acting for one type or the other.

The Council has been divided into six major departments. Each department tries to cater to the aspirations of the Council. For example, we have the Department of Fine and Applied Art. This department is responsible for producing various types of our art including the type of carving, weaving, pottery, etc. Besides producing some of these arts and crafts within the Council itself, the Department has a duty to engage with practicing artists outside the Council. And that's a way of encouraging the external artists to continue their skill. As a matter of fact, we maintain a craft shop where some of the things we produce here are sold. And at the same time, we buy
from outside artists to help them promote their own sales. Similarly we have a Department of Performing Arts. This department is again responsible for all forms of drama, local music, or cultural music, like choral songs. And, of course, the department is responsible again for mainly external performing artists that we have, like traditional dancers of various types.

We should realize that Kwara State is very unique among other states of Nigeria. Kwara State, as a matter of fact, has almost every other kind of cultural heritage that we meet in most other states of Nigeria. So, we have a lot to promote, to preserve, and to develop.

I just want to go briefly into telling you about departments that we have. We also have the Department of Textile and Costume. This is a virtually new department. It deals with the Department of Fine and Applied Art in the past. As of recent, we find it necessary to break the department into two. The department is headed by somebody who has a university education in textile design. And as a result, the main job is to actually develop some form of materials which are of modern trend. At present, they are engaged in some batik work which has been in vogue now among the young people in the state.

Ola: That's good.

Dele: Not only that, this department has a duty to liaise with the weavers within the Kwara State.

Ola: You mean the traditional weavers?

Dele: Traditional weavers, yes.

Ola: That's good.

Dele: We realize that Kwara State is blessed with traditional weavers. As a matter of fact, Kwara State is most popular for traditional
weaving. You realize the popular ones like the Okene type of weaving, and the Ilorin "Aso Oke". Then we liaise with these people through the textile and costume department.

Ola: It can be quickly asked before we go on - Do you invite any of these people to come over to the Council to demonstrate their competence?

Dele: That was the idea, really. We wanted to. Unfortunately we have not been really able to develop the things; we actually wanted to set up their own type of loom in our premises. Really we would as soon as it is possible, to employ directly some of the traditional weavers to be doing the work directly on our premises here. That could be a kind of tourist attraction we believe. And not only that, we want these materials to be under our own supervision so that if possible, we can help in modernizing, in a way, some of their designs. Or really encouraging them to have more varieties of what they have. As it is now, we can not go direct to them in the town to submit these suggestions to them or to press anything further. Because you know, they work throughout. Some of them are really very conservative and will not readily accept any form of changes.

Ola: And moreover, they will think, perhaps, you want to usurp their economic gain.

Dele: Sure! Definitely! Just that's why we feel really that the best thing to do is to develop situations similar to theirs within our own premises. And employ some of them to work for us on salary basis. Then they will be directly under our control. As a matter of fact, this is almost the same case for the Fine and Applied Art Department.
In the place of the Fine and Applied Art Department, we are lucky, that, for example, the traditional carvers. We have employed two traditional carvers who are working directly under us here. But this is possible because. Maybe you are aware of the senior traditional carvers we have in Kwara State. Like Bamidele Osi, Bamigboye of Iloffa, etc. Well, we are always in contact with these people. From them, they train apprentices. And after their apprenticeship, some of them are anxious to get employment under the Council. As of now, we have been able to maintain two of these people.

Ola: That's good.

Dele: So, it's the same thing we want to do with virtually every other department within the state.

Then, I have talked about the Textile Department and the other Department is the Department of Research Documentation. Well, this department, like I said, is responsible for researching into our various cultural activities all over the state. There are all various types of traditional dances, traditional festivals, that are coming up throughout the year. And in most cases, we are invited to do a coverage of the very important ones. And we go there for the purpose of conducting some kind of research into the cultural activity about the arrangement and their festivities. And we also take cognizance of those dealing with the performance for our own purposes. Because when we have a kind of inter-state festival, we look, I mean, we shop round for the successful ones. And it affords us the opportunity when these people are really having their festival to go round, to watch, you know, to record, to record on tape. And
not only that, sometimes we do record, too, on video tape. In future we hope we will be able to include direct filming.

This department, after having researched in the field, come back home to compile, to write, and publish some pamphlets. Even submit some of these materials we collect for mass release.

Ola: Would you like to say the kind of publications you have? Would you like to mention them?

Dele: Yes, but as of the moment, one of the publications we have is the "Image" Magazine. And then again, we have started a sort of more academic magazine called the "Confluence". The name "Confluence" comes from the joining of the Rivers Niger and Benue. So that's where we derive the name "Confluence" for that particular magazine. But it's more academic in the sense that it's not only dealing with what we collect within the Council complex, but it also receives quite a lot of materials from higher institutions like the universities and from scholars all over the country.

So we... and of course we set up the people responsible for collecting the materials--the editors. We set up an editorial board which cut across all.

Well, we have some other small pamphlets like the pamphlets we printed on "Shao." And some of these very regular and important festivals. After we have conducted our research, we then make few pamphlets for distribution. That's besides our weekly publications. We make regular weekly publications of the activities from the research conducting unit in the Department.

Then we have another Department called Department of Museology. Again, it's a new department. Since we have to preserve most of our
cultural heritage, we thought that the best we can do is to have our own local museum in the state. We are aware that the National Museum in Lagos is preserving virtually the most important artifacts and antiquities in the country. We try to know what we have within the state. We are mindful of the kind of things that have been going on. A lot of smugglers have been going round, stealing quite a lot of artifacts. So we have set up the Museum here to really cater for all these things.

Ola: You mean a National Museum.

Dele: No, not the National Museum.

Ola: Oh, the Council's own museum.

Dele: The Council's own museum. But with the cooperation of the National Museum. We are well, in close contact with the National Museum on this particular issue. As a matter of fact, before the end of this year, we hope to - we are trying to - organize an exhibition of our antiquities within the state. Most of them will be recalled from the National Museum. We have liaised with the National Museum and they are very ready to cooperate.

Ola: Oh, that's beautiful.

Dele: To take back most of our antiquities that are in museums for our exhibition here.

Ola: I think that's very, very worthwhile.

Dele: Yes. Actually we are lucky that at the moment we have a curator who is directly from the National Museum whom we have employed directly from Lagos to work in the state for the purpose of setting up this particular state museum.

Ola: Oh, that's good. That's really good. I am impressed.
Dele: So, the other department is also just in the making. And that’s the Audio Visual Department. All said and done, but for the purpose of recording, you know to preserve most of these traditional heritage, we are setting up—or we have a mini kind of Audio Visual Department. At the moment, we have the video tape recording system. Like I have told you, we are trying to buy equipment for filming, because we want to go into direct filming. So, this is the way we are really trying to go into the business. To carry all our duty, trying to promote and to preserve and develop the cultural heritage of Kwara State.

Ola: Thank you very much, Mr. Omotinugbon. I would like to ask you some more questions if you don't mind.

Dele: That's O.k.

Ola: The other questions that immediately come up in my mind—the first one of them is: you have mentioned that you are trying to preserve art—traditional art in the state. Is your Council interested in the development of contemporary art in the state?

Dele: Well, we are very interested. Actually, each head of department, for example, the head of Department of the Fine and Applied Arts, is one of the people who have been trained in the university of modern art. It's the same thing with the head of the Department of Textiles and Costume. These people, besides, try to help in promoting the traditional art. They also produce on their own, some contemporary art work. And not only that, we also try to promote contemporary art through exhibitions. In fact, any contemporary artist who wants to stage an exhibition of work, either one-man or a group exhibition, the Council is always ready to sponsor
such exhibition. And as a matter of fact, the union of artists in the state has for sometime staged very statewide exhibitions of contemporary art. And it was sponsored by this Council.

Ola: I see.

Dele: So we are out to promote all kinds of art. Not limited to the traditional ones; we are also very interested in contemporary art. And for your information, we organized an exhibition of children's art of recent, to commemorate the International Museum Day.

Ola: I see.

Dele: So we carried out an exhibition of art work from most schools around.

Ola: Oh, that's good.

Dele: So we are equally interested in promoting the contemporary art within the state.

Ola: Oh, that's good. Well, I think my second question would seem to link with the first one. And that is: if you are highly interested in the development of contemporary art in the state, is your Council making any effort to collect what we might regard as fairly acceptable works—contemporary works in the state just as you are collecting traditional works which you exhibit in your museum?

Dele: Yah, certainly so. I must say, of course, that we have not been doing much in that line of recent because of financial reasons. As a matter of fact, we have not been too lucky to have been really well financed by the government and as a result, it has not been really easy for us to finance buying most of the art works from the contemporary artists as we want to. It's the same thing with the traditional art works. Most of the traditional art work are not
easily obtainable. We cannot just get plenty of them anyway. We have to buy them. One of the projects we have wanted to carry out this year was to collect samples of all the various types of musical instruments all over the state, particularly for keeping in our museum. Because most of these instruments, like the type of music, the drum, the gongs, and so many things, traditional things, which are being used are dying off, are getting lost, are being destroyed, all over. And we feel that one day we may end up not seeing any of our traditional musical instruments around. So it has been our intention to really collect as many of these things as possible from the various ethnic groups in the state for safe-keeping or for preservation in our museum. But it has not been easy for us because there is no money for us to go into the project. So really everything depends on how much funds the Council really has. Well, and of course, a lot of contemporary artists bring their work for sale and—where we are able to buy some, we do buy and where we cannot—maybe we help to promote the sale by putting them in our own craft shop. When it is sold, we refund the money back to the owner.

Ola: The next question that I would like to ask is regarding the encouragement you give to artists within the state apart from the ones you have mentioned. I know that you have teachers in Secondary Schools, in teachers' colleges, and maybe in the Kwara State College of Education. Perhaps you will like to comment on the kind of encouragement you give to these artists. Do they liaise with the Council in any way?

Dele: Well, somehow we are close to those people. Somehow!, because where possible, we form various types of committees. So at present,
we have what we call the friends of the Museum. And all these friends of the museum are from the University and the College of Education. Even the Ministry (of Education) itself. So with this Friend of the Museum as a kind of Committee with discussions we are trying to solve the problem of really developing our museum here. So definitely in this state we have a lot of cooperation. And people are really happy to come to us.

Not only that, for the Textile and Costume Departments we are also setting up a committee of designers—of contemporary designers to really work with our Department of Textile and Costume. That is to say, that if anybody has any striking design.

Ola: And any new idea?
Dele: Yes, new idea; we are ready to buy it.
Ola: I see.
Dele: Yah, we want to promote. We want to encourage all kinds of designers to work with our Department here. And give us any kind of new ideas they have. So definitely, we're doing everything possible to encourage and to work with every artist that is around us. Not only in the field of plastic arts; we also do the same thing for the literal arts (performing arts). We are interested in the poets in the higher Institutions. And also in the field of drama, we make use of the drama groups in all the colleges around us. And of course, they depend on us largely for the supply of many things like costume and musical instruments, and state materials. So, definitely, we are in close association with the contemporary artists and the higher institutions.

Ola: O.k. Thank you very much for answering these questions. I still have more, if you don't mind. Because I know I have taken your
time, but I hope I should ask these questions with a view to going back and listening to them and then later on if I have more questions, I would want to come back and ask them again. Because I believe that Kwara State is a dynamic state. It is an area where we have a melting pot of cultures as you have said. And I know that what you do here has been really an eye opener for some other states.

You mentioned something about the exhibition of children's art. Was that one only once or is it meant to be a continuous process? Dele: Well, certainly it's going to be a continuous process. Although the last one we have done was specifically to mark the International Museum Day.

Ola: I see.

Dele: That was our own activities for the International Museum Day. But, in fact, since then, we have been receiving a lot of pressures from other schools—secondary schools all over the state wanting to bring their own works for exhibition. Because we limited our last exhibitions just to schools within our immediate reach. But we want to carry out a bigger exhibition in the very near future.

Ola: I see. Perhaps here I might comment. This kind of students' art which you have exhibited will be of high interest to the African Art Section of the Ohio State University. In fact, when I was about to come out, my professor intimated to me that we have to know from the rudiments how art is developing in all the States of the Federation of Nigeria. And as a Nigerian, I know that if we encourage the children from the beginning, and we watch their progress, we can, from that, be sure that art is going to have a sound footing. Not only in the state, but elsewhere. So, if this exhibition is
still intact, perhaps if you don't mind, sir, you could let me see them. And then by cooperation with you, we could have this exhibition—some of them taken over there, exhibited for you which would propagate the state which would uplift the name of the State. We would write a catalogue for the children's works. We would also demand from each child whose work is taken along to the Ohio State University to have his name, address, the name of his teacher, and what he is trying to do. In other words, the literature concerning the work he has done. It may not be a painting. It may be any kind of work. It might be drawing, it might be painting, it might be textiles, it might be a print. But something which is flat which would be easily carried. And then if I could have the list, the documentation of each work, we would make sure that each work is returned intact as you have given it. But what we want to do is to see that we help to propagate what is going on in Africa. Because not much is known about the development of art in Nigeria let alone the whole of Africa.

Dele: Well, I think that is a very interesting kind of idea and by all means, the Council here will be ready to cooperate. We have more or less folded up the last exhibition by returning some of the works. What you will still see in our gallery is just very few ones that are still not collected by the owners. But in any case, as I have told you, we will be arranging a much bigger exhibition within the shortest possible time. And when this is done, I would jolly well want to cooperate in this line. So please...you have said, I wouldn't mind meeting you again because now we are going for a meeting.

Ola: Thank you very much.
Dele: Thank you.

INTERVIEW WITH M. B. OMOTINUGBON, CHIEF CULTURAL OFFICER, KWARA STATE COUNCIL FOR ARTS AND CULTURE, ILORIN, NIGERIA. AUGUST 15, 1980.

Odu-Oye (1980)

Ola: Yesterday I was with the Chief Cultural Officer of the Kwara State Council for Arts and Culture. He was kind enough to grant me interviews with him. And then he told me about the various sections of the Arts of this Council for Arts and Culture. Now I have the privilege of meeting with one of the directors of the various sections.

Sir, would you like to introduce yourself to me and then perhaps later on tell me what you are doing in your section.

Oye: Thank you. Oduoye is my name. The Head of Department of Textile and Costume. We have a lot of things to do as Textile Department. Textile: we sectionalize it. Textile apart and costume another section. In the costume, we have various costumes for occasions. And organizations, schools, and other people too come to loan costume for festivals. We provide props for the performing artists in the Department. Apart from that, we maintain the relationship between the people in the town with our kind of work.

Ola: I see. Would you like to elaborate on the kind of relationship.

Oye: Yah. Many people do come to seek our aids on occasion. And we try to advise them on the type of costume they would use that would be suitable for the occasion. Like the students; sometimes they may like to organize some cultural display. And the type of idea, or the idea of the type of costume they have, sometimes is different from ours. And we try to advise them by telling them the way it is done because we
have made a lot of research into our costumes. And we try as much as possible to do it as our people used to do it. And I think people are getting it quite alright.

Ola: By that do you mean traditionally?

Oye: Traditionally.

Ola: I see. And don't you have a sort of new ideas which you incorporate in this?

Oye: Yes. We do that. By studying the environment. Sometimes, our old costumes is no more suitable for the kind of economy we have now. And we try to design some costume that would suit the economy we have. That is, our business------going up and down. We are no more farmers only as such we work in the offices so we need something light. And to introduce our people to our kind of dress, we need to re-design it. And I think that we have been doing this. By sewing our locally woven materials to assorted dresses. You know. We get this design from the previous design of our people.

Ola: I see. That's good. Is there any effort being made then by your section to document the motifs which are available in the environment?

Oye: Yes, we are trying to do that. Only that we have some constraints. We have planned to have a sort of research for costumes in Kwara State. Our idea is to have a deeper knowledge into many costumes. Only very few is very prominent. Like the locally designed fabrics around the big towns. But in the rural areas, there we could get a typical African design. And we are trying to go round to fish out some of this very fantastic design from these places. So, the thing is first, to design a plan to form some
questionnaire, which I think with the students coming around now will try to help us. To ask people questions. And from the data we collect, I think we can get something out of it.

Ola: Is there any way by which you are trying to disseminate your knowledge to the local artists? I mean the textile artists. Like the weavers and others?

Oye: Yes, we have been trying to have some connections with them. They are rigid. They are conservative in their own way of doing things. They will tell you this is the way I am taught and I don't know the other way. So, we are trying to help them to follow the trend of events by improving their lot. By trying to introduce some type of design, you know, deviating a little bit from what they used to do. People are bored with the same system, the same pattern, from year to year. And I think they have been trying to understand this. Especially the "Aso Oke" weavers. The men-loom weavers. They have been trying to follow the trend. They will tell you this one is "Saraki," this one is "African Game," this is "Obasanjo." Just the trend of events. They have been trying to, you know. . . .

Ola: Give them contemporary names.

Oye: Ah, yes. Give them contemporary names. And in fact, by trying to change from one stripe to the other, they try to vary the style and the design. And this is where we come to. We advise them, "why can't you do it this way, or try it and let us see." And they have been cooperating. And I think the Council has planned to employ some two or three weavers. Then we could be able to teach them what to do. And, in fact, they will do it. Getting our result we can make a publication or invite the artists—the weavers. They have
an association to come and watch, the new development in their trade.

Ola: I see. The Council plans to employ these people and bring them directly to the council premises.

Oye: Yah. So that we can easily experiment with them. And with the dyeing too, we could see. This is synthetic dye (showing me).

Ola: This is imported?

Oye: Imported.

Ola: From Where?

Oye: I don't know. We just buy it in the market. But I think it is imported with all the chemicals. What we are trying to do is to improve upon our own local dye. This one is quite economical but the effect is not as good as the typical "Aro."

Ola: Exactly! Exactly!

Oye: What we are trying to do now is to improve upon the "Aro."

Ola: That's very good.

Oye: Because that of "Aro," is a little bit tedious and it washes away; you know, it bleeds. Because, maybe, they have no standard way of measuring chemicals.

Ola: I see.

Oye: Just to get the result!

Ola: Yah, maybe by experiment, your section would be able to devise a way by which the colors would be fast.

Oye: Fast; we are trying to employee one and from that, if we can experiment and we could get a very good result, we'll pass it to Oshodi Industrial Center. Then...

Ola: I see, oh, that's very good. That's collaboration of effort which could yield good dividends. Oh, that's good. Now you have
been dyeing some cloth since after eight o'clock. I saw you first of all make the dye. You measured the dye in a spoon. Then you poured some hot water, mixed it, and then you begin to test the solution whether it is thick or thin after which you begin to dip the cloth.

Now how many times do you dip each cloth before you take it out?

*Oye:* You mean...  

*Ola:* How many times do you dip it in before you take it out, or how long do you leave it inside the dye?

*Oye:* Yah. We have different types of dyes. Some, we just dip. Ten minutes you are o.k. But some must stay to around an hour.

*Ola:* I see.

*Oye:* But this very one... All we are doing is cold water bath. This one stays longer in order to get fixed because of the wax we use we can't use hot water. But if it is hot, we just dip it. Few minutes, it is fixed. We have another type of dye. That is "dylon." We don't need to measure here and there. Just what we need is table salt. A tablespoon of table salt, mixed with cold water and the dye. That's all. We don't use it here. It is not economical. All the work we are doing would later be taken to the craft shop...for sale. So we should try any way to be economical.

*Ola:* Would you like to explain how many stages you take to dye this cloth? (colored cloth)

*Oye:* I think two stages. First of all if it is batik, you wax and fasten it. If it is tie and dye, you tie either with rope or string. Second stage, dye. But the stages sometimes could be more than two. It could be three depending upon the color.

*Ola:* I see.
Oye: If one wants multi-colored dye. Each color takes some patience. Yellow: you dye yellow first. You shift your design to go on the second dye. Then next and so forth. Actually, it depends on how many colors we want. But basically, two in preparing the fabric for the dyeing.

Ola: Perhaps I need to interview the people doing the dyeing. Could you come forward. Do you speak English?

"Nhum!"

Ola: o.k. To ba so Oyinbo. Wa so yoruba ke. Yoruba na ni mi,Mo gbo Yoruba ke. Bawo le se nse kini yi. Ko s'alaye re ni kikun fun mi.

Worker: Bi gbogbo re bi eti nbere lowo awon oga wa Mr Oduoye, lati ekan. Awon oro ti mo le so patapata na ni won ti so lede Gesi fun nyin. Afi to ba wa ni nkan miran ti eba fe...

Ola: Ani iwo gan to nsise yen, bawo loti ri lowo re Bawo lo se nse. Ko se alaye re fun mi Mo tigbo tenu oga "quite all right." Sugbon iwo to nse. Odun mo e ni o, ko dun mo e ni o. Nhun un, boya o kan nroju 'se ni. Iru nkan ba yen. Tabi boya oti e ye e boya ko ye e tori won nso pe' ko won okan bayi, ko tun won ekeji bayi. O kan nwon, o n "follow instruction." Nkan ti won nso fun o, o nse. Sugbon mi o mo boya. Nkan ti mo fe mo, ma mo nipa oro to ba so fun mi.

Worker: Loto na, mo mo nipa ise "tie and dye" ati "batik" ti won nse.

Ola: Nhan! gbogbo ahun to ba mo ni mo fe ko so fun mi.

Worker: Awon iru omi ti won ni ki nda si kini "hydro-sulphite," ati soda, mo ko po sinu sibi kekere te nwo yi. Mo wa da sinu "bath" nla te nwoyi. So, kini dudu yen ti won npe ni "dylon." Mo bu sibi kan. Ṍọ duro lori b'aso ba se tobi si Eripe mo bu sibi kokan lekan.
Ola:  Sibi kan dylon.

Worker:  Sibi keji Andro-Sulphite, and sibi kan fun soda. Then mo wa da si. Mo wa"mix"re. Mo wa da sinu "bath" nla yen. Ogbona ju, won ni ki ntun bu omi tutu si. Bena ni mo se ma nse. Nigbati a wa da si, a a ra aso yen bo inu re. Awa mu awo dudu ti a ri yi jade. Gbogbo nkan ti won de nso fun mi mo gbodo se. Ki ise pe mi o mo nkankan towa nkan ta nwo nibe yen nipa batik, tabi "tie and dye."

Ola:  Ose pupo. Thank you.

Ola:  O.k. Se wa so oruko re, ati ise ti e nse.

Mrs. Salako:  Se pe ki nma so bayi Oruko mi ni Mrs. Salako. Bi a se ma nse "tie and dye." A koko ako ma gbe omi gbona kana. To ba ho, a mu kini caustic soda, pelu adro-sulphite a bo 'mi si. Omi gbibona ni o.

Ola:  Iru iwon wo le ma bu, ke to. . .

Mrs. Salako:  O "depend" bi a ba se fe ki o "dark" si. Ba se ma won sibi "hydro-sulphite" pelu.

Ola:  To ba se bi opa meji?

Mrs. Salako:  To ba se bi opa meji. . .l'enia ba fe ko "dark" enia awon sibi kokan. T'enia o ba fe ko "dark" pupo, enia awon idaji, "hydro- sulphite" idaji, "caustic" soda na idaji. So, enia a wa bu omi gbibona si awon yen. A da. Bi enia ba se wa fe ki omi yen ko po si l'enia sema bu omi si. Sugbon to ba se oni "candle" ni, ki lo omi gbibona pupo. Omi tutu a po ju, omi gbibona lo.

A tun di, a wa"dye"eketa. So igbati oba"dye"eketa a sese wa tu gbogbo e. "Three color"a wa"show." Sugbon to ba n/dye e ko ni fo "immediately," a kan ma san nu, a ma 'hang' e. To ba "hang" e to ba ro tan, a sese wa fo se fo n'u.

Ola: Lehin to ba"dye"color kokan a ma san?

Mrs. Salako: A ma san, a de ma"hang"e. Sugbon ki ise"immediately" to ba"dye"e tan lo ma san. A je koro ko to dipe o san.

Ola: O ti tan?

Mrs. Salako: Beni.

Ola: Thank you very much.

**Interpretation**

Ola: O.k. If you cannot speak English, speak Yoruba. I am, myself, from Yoruba and I can understand you. Explain fully how you dye the cloth.

Worker: It is exactly as my boss, Mr. Oduoye, has briefed you. He has told you everything in English. Except you need some other information.

Ola: I need to hear from yourself how you carry out the process of dyeing the cloth. I understood what your boss has told me, but you as the executor of his directions have your own perspective. Perhaps you don't like the work, especially since it makes your hands dirty. Or, perhaps you find the processes difficult to understand, as I heard him direct you. You did a good job, proceeding from one step to the other, but I will still be able to make up my mind whether you understand this process or not from what you will now tell me.
Worker: Very well. I know how to carry out tie and dye as well as batik.

Ola: O.k. Tell me everything you know.

Worker: I will measure some water, hydro-sulphite and soda. I will first mix both in this small spoon (showing me). Next I will pour it into this big bath; then, I will measure a spoonful of dylon dye. It however, depends on the size of the cloth.

Ola: O.k., a spoonful of dylon.

Worker: The next is a spoonful of hydro-sulphite, and a spoonful of soda. All will be mixed together and poured into the big bath. When it was very hot I was advised to add some cold water. That's how it should be. After that, the cloth will be dipped in it. Eventually it comes out in that color you have seen. I have to carry out everything as I was told. I have nevertheless mastered the process of batik and tie and dye.

Ola: Thank you very much.

Ola: What is your name and can you briefly explain your work.

Mrs. Salako: Now my name is Mrs. Salako. This is how tie and dye is carried out. First, hot water should be prepared. Caustic soda and hydro-sulphite will be mixed with the hot water.

Ola: What are the measurements?

Mrs. Salako: It depends on how dark the cloth is to be dyed, that hydro-sulphite other proportions should be.

Ola: If it is two yards of cloth?

Mrs. Salako: If it is two yards and one wants its color to be deep (dark) one should measure a spoon each of caustic soda, hydro-sulphite
and dye and mix it with hot water. For moderate color, half a spoonful of each of caustic soda, hydro-sulphite and dye should be similarly regulated. If it is waxed cloth, only luke warm water should be used.

To produce three colors, first: tie the cloth for all areas you want to preserve as white, before dyeing it in the first color. Next tie any area of that first color you need to preserve, before dyeing it in the second color. The process would be repeated for another color. One should not wash it during the intervals of dyeing in the various colors. One should only rinse and hang for the excess water to drain off. Finally, it will be washed with soapy water.

Ola: Is it finished?

Mrs. Salako: Yes.

Ola: Thank you very much.

INTERVIEW WITH ODUOYE AND HIS DEPARTMENTAL STAFF, KWARA STATE COUNCIL FOR ARTS AND CULTURE, ILORIN, NIGERIA. AUGUST 9, 1980.

Oyinloye (1980)

Ola: O.k. Mr. Oyinloye, you are the Senior Cultural Officer of the Kwara State Arts Council. Perhaps you'll like to enlighten me about your activities as a senior member of the Arts Council.

Oyinloye: Thank you very much. It gives me great pleasure because I like to discuss matters of interest with people whom I think can make contributions to the progress of the work.

The Department of Fine and Applied Arts and any other department in the Council came into existence about one and a half years ago. Exactly what really happened was that we really felt then
that professionals should be made to head different departments. These professionals would be able to practice their profession. Before, we simply felt that they would simply work.

In my department, I have many sections. I think I will first of all mention them and probably after then say what major assignments each has. We have the graphic section. We also have weaving section, carving section, beading section, and ceramic/sculpture section in this department.

I think I'll start from graphic section. This is not new to me. But for the activities of this important section within the department, I think I have to highlight some of the possible achievements and possible failures. And what we feel it must be up to in the future. The idea is quite bright in it. Although we have many handicaps, among them finance, which is the "song" we have been singing for quite a long time. And we hope this will be solved very soon. In the graphic art section I have about five members of staff there as members of staff. And the professional heading that particular section, I mean, Mr. Ariyo. He graduated from the Yaba College of Technology. And I think he has been doing very fine in the work. So he has made many posters for the Council. He joined us about a year ago. And with the experience he has, and being a grade Two teacher, too, I think he is an interesting fellow to work with.

Ola: Oh, he was a teacher?

Oyinloye: He was a teacher before. So, I find it very easy to work with him. In the design of posters—like drama productions: And I remember about six months ago, we had a sort of drama competition
among secondary schools. We had some posters made. It is a pity we have just taken it down - anyhow I will be giving you a copy afterwards. We have many designs and I will be able to give you probably a copy or two or three which this man has made. Relevant to our culture. I mean Kwara State in particular, not necessarily getting a copy of the designs of the northerners or the westerners or the southerners. Because we are in between, it shows that our culture is a diverse one. Because Kwara's in between north and south. Part of us are southerners, part westerners, part northerners. As such, we want to fuse all these ideas together also in our design to reflect these in our design. Just as I have said, the school program Committee Design was made by this section. And it was quite very satisfactory.

No matter what design, they want to make in this Council, it is the section who deals with it. For example, we have chosen to have this year's almanac for the Council. And they started the work; also greeting cards. I think I saw some of it in pictures again. Well, there are many other things. We also have sign writers in this section. And if we want to write anything pertaining to Arts and Culture, the inscriptions there. It is this section that carries it out. We have a boy who is well trained, loyal and competent. He does nothing but sign writing.

We also have some other activities like cultural activities inviting people to come and display in this state. At times we want to go outside the state, for instance, Lagos, Jos, Argungn, and the rest of them, where we can perform. It is this particular section that will make the contact, design the paper commenting, and then
probably arrange the pictures in the exhibition place. I think it is a worthwhile exercise, having this section within the department.

We have nothing more than ordinary design. And it has been very satisfactory.

Another — I think we better go straight to weaving section. Like I said yesterday, this section is being headed by Mr. Bamidele. He is a blind man. And he was trained at the Ogbomosho Blind School. He is a professional in the job and he does many things. This weaving, if I may explain further, is fibre weaving. Now, because when I say weaving it is not textiles this time.

Ola: What type of fibre?
Oyinloye: Now it may be cane, grass, raffia. Just anything fibre besides textile. So we have thought that this man alone cannot do this job. Because immediately we employed him, we started to have many orders. If you ask, we find them as ten stools, twenty foot mats, forth-eight hand bags. And this man alone cannot make them. I traveled back, immediately to Ogbomosho. Probably we could appoint other two blind people who could join this man. Unfortunately, they were all under training. Unfortunately too, the one from Kwara State is not the promising type yet and so he is not ripe, therefore, for this Council. It is a pity, too, he lost the two eyes, lost all fingers and as such we think by bringing such type to the Council may create a sort of ...(precedence).

Ola: Because he has no hands to use. Oh, dear, what happened?
Oyinloye: Probably accident. I don't know. It's a pity, I don't go into this. He is still there. And his relatives come about a month ago asking for whatever we can do for him. He is from Kwara
State any way. So we are still thinking of helping him out. If we can't employ him on regular basis like this, probably if we could settle him at home and provide materials for him; whatever yields he has from there, that will pay him off. Well, we have not decided fully about that case.

Now, like I was saying, we then made contact that this man cannot fulfill the bulk work we have here. We decided we should employ more hands there. And as such we felt that instead of employing new hands, new staff, who believe in helping the established staff—we feel those who have been doing the work for some years, without much hope of promotion. They think they are professional of one kind or the other. We then thought it wise that we better made use of these people and help them out. So, we trained two. One former cleaner, the other one former messenger. And they are now full professional men. And they are really very happy. Also they learnt the job for six months and they felt very enthusiastic about it.

Ola: What kind of work?

Oyinloye: It's still fibre art. They weave foot mats. A lot of foot mats. And as I have said yesterday, we had many orders which we cannot fulfill yet. The Niger Basin Authority asking us to make 120 foot mats. We can't fulfill it. Some other Ministries, too. So we hope that as this aspect of the matter is improved, we shall employ still more hands there, and train more men. So that these people can meet the demand of our patrons.

Now and then we have to stop everything because we haven't got raw materials. Now we have other workers in that section. These are rope makers. They simply weave ropes and supply the ropes to the
men who are making the foot mats. So that we make a sort of division of labor. While some are weaving, some may be making the foot mats. And in fact, what we intend to do now is color the foot mats afterwards. After it has been made, scissored, then we'll try to make patterns in them to make them more beautiful. Before we used to sell the foot mat for M4; M4.50k, now it is M6.60 and yet people still rush to the Council. It is more superior to the one they sell locally. So it's a very lucrative venture, if it can really get the means to continue. Mr. Bamidele, the blind man, is trained in many aspect of this crafts work. He also can make trays, using the formica wood. He has made a dozen but they are all sold.

Ola: They are all sold?

Oyinloye: Yes, they are all sold! In fact, I should make—even though I want this color—that day it will be sold. Probably when we have money, we would continue with this. When other people say so should continue making the foot mats. And then we try to get four or a few other men employed to learn the trade.

Now, if we also can make tables, cultural tables. Because I have never seen him make one, but he promised to make one very soon using things to make a very beautiful symmetrical table. Which could be placed in the sitting room and then probably put papers on—I mean things on it. It is very colorful, depending on which color we use for the tables. And he has not done one like I have said. But I think he knows it because he has never disappointed us in all the ones he has been making. We can also make mattress. We are yet to make the things for the mattress. Well, this mattress is going to be in the form of those ones they sew locally. It is going to be
more superior because it is taking more pains than those people making it outside. And he uses stands and everything with calculation. Not just making it for fun, but in fact, following some guidelines in making it. We have not adequately learned how it will fare. But immediately we have the money, we shall get things and let him make one. If we see that one is appreciated—if people want it, then we can also establish it on the arts program.

I think I better go to another section now, which is carving Section. We have two people on the list there. And these people are trained locally. They are Bamidele's staff. Bamidele is a reputable carver in the state. And as a local carver—traditional carver, so to say. And he has trained many, many people. We expect these people to carve figures, balls and some other things. Like I said yesterday, we want to put two or three Nigerians together so that we have some people who are purely traditional. We don't discriminate between modern and traditional. We have some people who want to be very modern: They don't want anything traditional. They want something very new and modern. They feel we'll be able to carve for them, too. And we have people who would say "Ah, if you want something traditional, go to this fellow, if you want something modern, go and buy 'Baby' or anything from overseas." But there are people who would want both combined. And so, we want to try both the traditional type and the modern type together. And in that wise, last year we made many things. Like the tortoise box, biro hooks, and just anything. We create a sort of fun. Interesting fun. And we try to insert a radio or clock inside it. Which could be decorative as well as functional. In the sense that the clock is
there, and the radio is also there in the same form. If it is
animal form—well we use cats, we use lions—all these types of
animals with eyes and face not necessary long mouth. We use monkey
and we use tortoise too. So, all these are things. I mean we
try to combine both old and new ones to meet the middle width. We
have ceased from doing that. This is why you cannot see any of
the carvings like that. Because of finance. Well, I have it for
record, and it is one of those things that I am working seriously
towards. That immediately we are given money, I need to make some.
And it will sell very well because people will just come get it
and send it to friends. For instance, people going overseas. These
and for send off parties. They will always come to us for this kind
of thing. In fact, many people prefer such gifts rather than ordinary
carvings. And like I said, some religious people will say I don't
want carving in my room. But now that we are trying to combine both
new and old method together, they wouldn't mind having it. For ex-
ample, if we carve a clock and we put animal figure there. We put
clock and radio. They like it because it is functional. And they
wouldn't mind putting that in the house.

Like the carving you see on my table: the women carrying
goards, coming from the river. Well, I am sure orthodox Christian or
Muslim wouldn't want to have that in their houses according to the
taste... .

Ola: Why do you think so?

Oyinloye: To be very precise, I think Muslims wouldn't want to
see images. They think we are worshipping images. And they don't
want any figure or images in their houses. They wouldn't buy it.
Although, Christians wouldn't mind.

Ola: Wouldn't they see this one as representing an activity which is occurring day in day out in the society?

Oyinloye: Yes, even if they see it like that, and they still feel that, well, this is a figure. And anything figurative with eyes, with nose, which cannot talk, which cannot do any other function other than physical function is made to serve as idol. And for the fact that idols from time were carved like that. And whenever they see anything like that they feel suspicious of it. And they feel they are idols to be worshipped. In any case, Christians are not much in that scene. They care less about it.

We are trying hard also, to make sure to open the eyes of these people as such, and of course, on the list of my staff here, I have many Moslems. They are about half the Christians now. The Moslems in this department. Some of them carvers, designers, weavers, and the rest of it. So we believe that these people will be able to speak better for some Moslems who misrepresent those sort of carvings.

In the carving section we try to make use of some wood. Black ebony wood. We purchase it from Bendel State. It is not common in our State. But we have some typical Kwara wood. Like Iroko, like mahogany, like ogano, ole ogano is not all that good for carving.

Ola: What of Awun?

Oyinloye: I have never used it. It's not common so we have not been using it. I think Awun would also be very good. But I have forgotten that name completely. You have just even reminded me now. We shall try that wood later.

We want to try some black ebony wood. It is not easy to carve because they are hard wood. Really very hard and heavy. But we have
some people who would really say "I want black wood carving." And instead of saying, let's go to purchase carving, we believe in carving. We can then carve it to make it our own carving. So far so good about that section. If there's no question, I think I better go to another section which is sculpture/ceramics.

Ola: Well, before you go on, perhaps I should like to ask what do you do to incorporate the people in the city of Ilorin with this kind of program.

Oyinloye: We have many activities in the Council. And what I always do as the Department head of Fine and Applied Arts is that any time we have an activity, I make sure we have an exhibition the next time. Whether connected with or not. I remember when the Emir of Ilorin was celebrating his 20th Anniversary in the palace. I tried a small corner for an exhibition and in the exhibition I carried all things which I exhibited there. Many carvings, ceramic works, sculpture and the rest of it. Everything were carried there and by stroke of luck, we had many sales. So by trying to make them see, because I believe that whatever you see always there is going to be something you will like later. But if they have never seen something and people say what about this? They wouldn't like it. But if you see it today you see it tomorrow, then you begin to see the function. It will likely begin to occur to you and later you'll like it. So these are the things we always do. We have exhibitions also in the Council, in schools; all about. But I make sure that even if there's going to be cultural dance, I make sure I have a small exhibition--a comic of that exhibition. And well, I believe this is very necessary even if we don't sell much in that exhibition, we always have people
who will say yes, "you exhibited somewhere, sometimes last week. We saw a very good carving. I want to present it to a friend going overseas, or a friend celebrating this or that." This is the word of acceptance.

Ola: Another thing which I would like to ask is about your documentation of these things in slides. What is your plan to try to preserve whatever you might have made and sold out for the Council? Do you have any plans to make slides?

Oyinloye: Yes, I have plans and proposals too which have been made to the Authorities, through the chief and we have to have many cameras. And probably each given to the responsible artists. Like me, although I have my own personal one, but if an official one is given to me, I will be able to use it socially. And anywhere I go, I will take slides. As an artist, any form interesting to me even when I am not doing official job. I could just play out one day and see an interesting thing. I could deduce something from that if I like. But I need a camera to record it and then try to see to the appreciation if there's any.

And I think this is being treated by the authority. Though we have not been given the camera, all together, but the promise is there and the authority realizes the importance. If we can have these, we can always take our pictures in slides. And depending on the financial strength of the Council, I know it's not costly to get slides. But we shall try that method.

If we can document our activities, it will be very useful for the future. Because any of us can leave at any time. And if the record is there, we can pick it, make use of it. The black and white
is not all that good because they are not in color. And as such, they could be carelessly handled. Sometimes the very texture—color which is supposed to show in the picture will not be there. And the whole scene will not be seen as it was not taken in color. So I think I agree with you that we should try to intensify our effort to improve this aspect of our documentation. Already the Council has a section in the Department of Research and Publicity. A small library is existing. Though we have not been able to equip it well. Slide-wise we shall try as much as possible to do that.

Now I think we'll go to the other section, sculpture/ceramics. We combine the two sections together, not necessarily because they are the same. Because we use clay for ceramics and we also use clay for sculpture. Clay, cement and all the rest of it. But now, we have not got a professional to man that aspect of it. Sculpture section. We had a youth corper last year. "Youth corper comes, youth corper goes." So he has left us now. And there is nobody to man the place. And it's not a section to be manned by just a school learner or a secondary school learner. No you have to do it professionally—a graduate.

We have not got somebody, so I have to manage the two. I did it in my degree course. I did it up to part two. And I am managing it. So I specialize in ceramics.

The ceramics section also has not taken full speed. Hence, you cannot see many of the works around. We have to make a kiln. We are trying to build a technical kiln. We shall get to that section. If you'll like to take photographs of small ceramic pieces.

We want to build a kiln this time and it is in the estimates type of Abuja kiln, local. It's what we are proposing, so that
probably we can try as much as possible to commercialize ceramics in this Council. Government wouldn't want any section that may be consuming and not producing. Since our own section is a productive section, the department as a whole is a productive one, and if we are asked to stay on our own—without exaggeration, we can try to commercialize that place and sell many of our wares out. I want to train four potters. And then Abass will be in charge of firing. I have made a proposal and I have the drawing ready. The clay has been tested. And the big goard you see, this particular ware, was made at the Ahmadu Bello University. But I carried the clay from Kwara State. After I have tested it, then I made this out of it. Just to see whether it is very good or the same as the other we have been used to.

So also the glaze, they are the local stones grinded at ABU, used as glaze.

Ola: Oh, really?

Oyinloye: I have never imported anything and it's being used in some local way.

Ola: Oh, this is impressive!

Oyinloye: There is nothing imported. And so if there is money to establish it... then...

Ola: From which particular town did you get that glaze? I mean the stones which you used for the glaze. Could you mention the name.

Oyinloye: Agbonda.

Ola: Oh!

Oyinloye: Yes, they are... All these local stones, you see, depending on the color you want. It's that color I want. That's why
I have made it like this. So, now, that we have tested the raw materials and found them suitable...we can now begin.

Ola: I should have asked you. I thought that must be an imported glaze.

Oyinloye: Not at all.

Ola: Why can't our local potters be informed of the possibility of this kind of thing?

Oyinloye: We are not ripe enough to do that in this State yet. I have tried my possible best about two years ago. Going to the potters. Majority of them are women. Old women for that matter. It is not easy for anybody they wouldn't want anybody to go into their business. They are illiterate and are very suspicious of anybody not from the environment. You have to be born there. And your father or mother is a potter in that village before they can allow you in and bring anything to you. What we intend to do is to hold seminars and invite all potters in the State. First of all invite them to bring all the pots they have, exhibit them, invite them to see the pots. This may help us to penetrate their old method of organizing pottery. Because they are women. If they have a union here, it has nothing to do with a union there.

Ola: They don't have cooperation?

Oyinloye: No, they don't have cooperation. They don't want their pattern to be used anyhow. So it is not easy to go through them. So through this exhibition we might be able to solve this problem. We want to first of all establish that of the Council.

Ola: I am now in the house of Mr. Bruce Onobrakpeya, and in fact, speaking in his studio in Papa Ajao, Mushin, Lagos, Nigeria. It has been rewarding coming over here from the Ohio State University to interview Mr. Onobrakpeya; to see what he has to say about his work and then to go around to take pictures. It has been very stimulating, as I have said, and I would just want Mr. Onobrakpeya, himself, to introduce himself and then, of course, the speech would continue. It's going to be a long one and I hope at the end of it, a lot would be learnt. Now, Bruce.

Bruce: Mr. Ola Babalola, I must say that it is a great deal of pleasure and surprise that you are able to come to my studio. People don't go all this far. In a small way, whatever little bit of information you want and you think I can give it out, I am ready to give it. I must say that all along we have been looking for people like you to actually document the art of this country, and particularly the contemporary aspect of it. That is the only way that people outside can know what we are doing. That is the only way also to change the feeling that the Old African art is the only art and that the contemporary art is not making any impact. I think that the contemporary art is making impact. It is for people like you who are born here, studied here, and who have travelled out and seen, to really educate the public on contemporary art. Thank you and welcome again for coming to Papa Ajao.

Ola: Thank you very much. Well, first of all, what I would like to know is, you have such a very mighty studio. I think it's even almost as big as the whole painting section of the Department of Fine
Art in Zaria. Perhaps if I would not be accused of being too proby, you will let me know how this idea came up in your mind?

Bruce: Thank you. All along ever since leaving Zaria in 1962, I have had a dream to put up a studio where I will be able to experiment. And gradually, I have put money aside, particularly those I realized from the sales of my art work. And just around 1972, a colleague's husband, Mr. Bob Alonge, helped to acquire the plot and that started me off and gradually, I developed the plot and now this is almost the final stage of the development. But I must say that it's been going on ever since 1972 when I acquired the property.

Ola: That's eight years of continuous work. That's good.

Bruce: Yes, thank you.

Ola: Now to really come to your work, itself, which I know is quite a lot and which you will take adequate time to cover if you don't mind. You could speak for any length of time you want. I have got adequate tapes here. I have got more in my bag. I would want you to explain--give me a sort of your personal background. I mean as you would say it not as written down. But your personal background before you were in Zaria. Before you were in the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology, Zaria.

Bruce: My father used to be a farmer. When I was born, he moved from our village in Agbarha Otor to a place some ten kilometers from Benin, along Benin-Lagos road. There he acquired a piece of land and he was practicing farming. But during his leisure time, he was himself engaged in some craft work. And he really did enough to command the respect of the people around him. When I went to Benin and then later went to Ughelli, which is very near my village,
I went to school there. But I returned—and then went to Sapele, too, to school. Then I returned to Benin City for my secondary education. Benin/Urhobo, which is my "tribe" is one of the Edo speaking languages.

Ola: Your ethnic group?

Bruce: Yes, it's one of the Edo speaking languages. The Benin culture is almost the same—in some respects similar to the Urhobo culture. So, I, being in Benin, schooling in Benin, gave me the opportunity to see a lot about the high art, the court costumes, and the traditions of the Benins. And in particular, I was able to see the bronzes. And you can see some things here.

Ola: Exactly, I am going to ask you more about that.

Bruce: Yes, what I gathered during those formative years—what impressions I had are still some of my leading aspirations in my work today. I attended a school called "Western Boys' High School." It's now called Arwelle High School—and studied art briefly—for about a year or two. But by the time I finished, the school proprietor was able to know that I have gotten something of art in me. And I was easily recommended for the vacant post of the art instructor. That was with my school certificate. I was employed so, I accepted the job. It was when I got that position that I really became determined to study very hard and make something of art. And I stayed some two years there, and then later went to Ondo Boys High School and stayed some seven months and then I went to Zaria to study fine art.

Ola: Well, maybe as we pause a little—I know your history would be continuous—because you will continue to enlighten me more about
it. But perhaps we can proceed from there and ask a little question about your experiences in Zaria, Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology.

Bruce: Zaria—of 1957. The then College of Technology. You remember that it was the year we left Zaria that they changed to Ahmadu Bello University (1962).

Ola: That's right.

Bruce: So, Zaria of 1957, October actually, collected some people who are now featuring very, very prominently in Nigerian Contemporary art and education. Now in the fine arts alone you have Prof. Baikie who is now the Vice Chancellor of Benin University. And then you have Prof. Uche Okeke in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. You have Jimoh Akolo, the painter in Ahmadu Bello University and then you have Demas Nwoko, formerly of the University of Ibadan. And of course--myself and then a host of others. Now people—although Olashebikan was not our classmate, Olashebikan was there. The late Simon Okeke was there, Grillo was there, and Agbabiaka. So all these people were working together in the same studio about the same size. And the inspiration we had from one another was tremendous. I wouldn't mention again that Odita was there, Osadebe was there. And these you probably would have known. So what I say was most important to us was that apart from the things we learnt in the class, we retired to our cubicles and discussed what African art was. Nigerian art in particular. And so while we did the academic things in class, we went back and produced things which we thought were African art.
Some of our lecturers saw this but they thought we were running while we should still walk. And they didn't like it very much. But I would say that the sort of discussions we had at Zaria raised us and we started exhibiting and we did not leave off. We just continued up till today. I would say that whatever I am able to make today, the inspiration was sewn while at Zaria. I look at Zaria then at that time as very pure—very good in everything. The student population was not too much. Accommodation was very good. Food was good. The landscape was not spoilt. The natives there in Zaria were very, very cooperative—I remember I would always take bicycle, go outside alone in the bush to sketch the special palms you find there. Go after the Fulani cows and sketch the animals and their herdsmen and a lot of other things! Even go to Tudun-Wada to sketch. The people—they didn't grudge us; they did not say we were insulting them. They cooperated as much as possible. And I think, I owed everything I have today to that very solid background, which we had.

I will say, too, that our teachers were very, very good. They were very cooperative. They taught us everything they had to teach us. But as I said, we went a little behind them to discuss what we thought was African art. So I can talk a whole day about Zaria then but, you see, I don't know if the tradition is still on. But I must say that Zaria has been the cradle which raised up many of the contemporary Nigerian artists.

Ola: You mentioned some of your colleagues, who were your mates then, either with whom you worked or who were contemporaries with
you there. Are there still some of them who are your personal friends today?

Bruce: Yes there are. In fact, Uche Okeke is a personal friend; Demas Nwoko is a personal friend; Grillo is a personal friend and a host of others. Solomon Wangboje, too! What is very important is that we have sort of formed a family—like the Society of Nigerian Artists. And we meet now and again in one forum or the other, either in an exhibition or in art seminars or in our bi-annual conferences or, etc. And so each time we meet, we always—that same sort of Zaria atmosphere comes back again.

Ola: I see. Well, these artists whom you have mentioned, I have interviewed quite a number of them. I have met with Mr. Grillo at the Yaba College of Technology. He's the Head of Art Department there. I have met with Mr. Demas Nwoko at his New Culture Studio in Ibadan. And I was in the University of Benin. Unfortunately, I didn't meet with Prof. Wangboje. But from what you have said, I think there's something which I would continue to go and look at. I would go back and look at it again and again. But I want to ask another question if you don't mind. And that is: Now that you have been friends for such a long time and you are still friends, and you meet at art forums, exhibitions.

Bruce: We visit one another's houses.

Ola: And you visit one another's houses, is there any conscientious opinion and concern for the development of contemporary Nigerian art?

Bruce: Sure!

Ola: Would you elaborate.
Bruce: Yes, sure! Number one: many of us went into education, teaching, because we felt that the best way of developing the contemporary art was to start early with the young people, so that a thing like taste can be acquired. It's not just something that one can jump into. It has to be developed over many years. So we were all in education. Most of us are in education. We also believe that apart from training the young ones, the parents who sponsor the young ones, also should be taught. So, we hold exhibitions and seminars and lectures, which enrich the parents. And, we also think something which will encourage the generality of the public to respect the artist is being able to generate finance from what you are doing. So we sell works and people who have made it in business buy these works and they show off with it in their houses. And the other people who see, aspire to be like them. We travel abroad to hold exhibitions, participate in seminars and give lectures about Nigerian art. And then we ourselves, too, we travel abroad too, to participate in workshops in order to improve whatever we have with us. Whatever we have in us. Now and again, we talk to the Government Agencies. Like, last month the members of the executive of the Society of Nigerian Artists went to talk to the Minister in charge of Youth, Sports and Culture, Dr. Amadike, who also was at Zaris. He was our own contemporary.

Ola: Oh!

Bruce: That's right. We went to talk to him about our concern over a number of subjects. Principally, the development of contemporary art in the country. And the role that the artist should play in
the New Capital at Abuja. So we are doing many things which are helping to generate good feelings about contemporary art. Many. Yes, as our discussions touch it, I would elaborate on some of them. But also I would mention that one very important thing that we are doing is that we are trying to create a feeling of synthesis. That is to say we are looking into our past art and picking some old motifs and old idioms and old philosophy and blending it up with the new philosophy, or new feelings or new ideas which come from outside. So that we take our past with us, and at the same time, we take the good things that are coming from outside to have *arabesque* of a truly contemporary Nigerian art.

**Ola:** When you speak about "from the outside", are you speaking of from outside Nigeria?

**Bruce:** Yes, from outside Nigeria.

**Ola:** And you blend it with those things that we have here. I see.

**Bruce:** Yes, those things that we have here. Now, if I may explain that. You see, some protagonists of contemporary Nigerian art lament the fact that the old African Art is dead and that the modern artists are only copying the old ones and at best, they are using the idioms and philosophy from outside, which we don't understand. That is their lamentation. But we say, we contend, art like any other aspect of the people's culture is never static. It's always on the move. And that if a people should rely so much on their old art and are not getting the ideas from outside, the old ideas or old philosophies will be done to death at one time or the other. So what we feel is that bringing in ideas from outside is like actually marrying outside one's
Immediate family. If you marry from outside, then you bring new blood into the family and then the resulted offspring will be very, very strong. So, that's what we are doing. We get our old art, the old values, the forms and the philosophy; we look into them and see the ones that we can adopt in our contemporary team and adopt them. And then use ideas, from outside. When I talk of ideas, I want you to look at it not only from just artistic philosophy, but in also materials, material concepts, and philosophy, etc. Like this bronze-lino relief which I have developed and then the plasto cast which I have developed. And the printing method which I just called generally as deep etching method, which is, in fact, the use of an epoxy, araldyte from outside. These are materials which I don't find in the country. They all come from outside and then we are able to use them to interpret the life here as we are living in them. So that is a sort of synthesis which I talked about.

Ola: But there are some aspects of this taking of ideas from elsewhere and you know, using it within the culture here to interpret the culture and enrich the new culture. . . . that outsiders don't really understand. And they feel that you are imitating. . . . either--some say, Picasso (not you in particular). But contemporary Nigerian artists. Or maybe American artists in addition to that. You have mentioned briefly--your idea--or what you feel about this kind of erroneous comment. But I would like you to elaborate more.

Bruce: Yes, yes, these were some of the points which I had occasion to speak on during my last trip to the United States. That the question is now--"who is imitating who?" Is it the Africans who are imitating Picasso or Picasso who is imitating Africa? Now you, as a
history student, know the trend in contemporary European art.
Pablo Picasso thought that classical or neo-classical ideas have been done
to death. He and his group—Braque and people like Gauguin have to
turn to Africa to the Horea and to the Tahiti Papua to get new ideas.
You know Cubism—you know the famous paintings—the women of Avignon,
which is the beginning of the use of African symbols which originate
from the mask, etc. Picasso saw the value, saw the importance—saw
the real essence of what Africa was doing and he just turned the
surface and he became very, very famous. But our artists—African
artists, have been doing that for centuries back. We gain an insub-
stance—we have—the realism which actually got heightened by the
classical feeling, etc. We don't pay too much attention to it.
Although in works like the Ife art, etc., you can see some realistic
portraits which are comparable to those of the Greeks. But really
the African art reach for the soul—not just for the body. And that
was what Picasso saw and adapted. Now we readily saw what Picasso
was doing and rather than copy him, we now take inspirations straight
away from our own source—that is from the traditional African art.
And use the substance. And so we are not copying Picasso, we are
copying from ourselves—we are copying Africa and there's nothing
wrong in that. There's nothing wrong in a child getting the inspira-
tion from the father. So that's what we are doing. I think that those
who say that we are copying European art are very much misinformed
and they will learn eventually that our works stem from Africa, and
they are a continuation of the African art—which is done in the
contemporary sense. I mean when you talk about contemporary art, you
want to talk about all the scientific inventions which have been
placed at the disposal of the artist. And we are 20th Century
people. We cannot run away from that fact. And we have to make use
of the things that have been made available. And that is it.

Ola: Some people say (though when I use the word "some" I mean
both in Nigeria and outside Nigeria). Some people say it is because
Nigerian artists find it almost impossible to exist in Nigeria and
fend for themselves. That's why most of them go teaching in schools.
Would you like to say something about this. I know you were teach­
ing and at the same time you were maintaining your personal studio.
But perhaps you have something to say about this.

Bruce: Artists, even in Europe and America, at one time or the other,
have done one work or the other. If it's not full time, it's part
time. So Nigerian artists teach, some do other work, first of all
to find money to buy art materials and to exist. And then later,
they then break away from whatever they are doing to concentrate on
art work. You know fully well—you probably know that Ben Osawe,
who is in Benin, he's never taken up—he was doing part time teaching
in Yaba College of Technology. He is just packing off, he is a full
time practioner of art. Yes, he is in Benin. And then you talk
about Idubor you went to see. Idubor is full time. Erhabor Emokpae
packed off his job in Lintas and is full time—is full time artist
now.

Ola: In Lagos?

Bruce: Yes, he is in Lagos. But for the consideration of training new
people and helping to develop taste in art among the young people, I,
too, would have packed up teaching. For you know fully well that
since last year I have been on what they call Sabatical leave and I
am on leave without pay. And my support has been coming from my art. So you see, like elsewhere, we start off doing one thing or the other and eventually we go into becoming full time practitioners. Yah!

Ola: Thank you for this enlightenment. Now I want to bring to your attention three authors on contemporary Nigerian art. And I am sure you know at least one of them personally. The people I am going to mention are: McEwen... McEwen was the Director of the Museum in Salisbury, Rhodesia as far back as the early 1960's. Then he wrote a very, very important article in *African Arts* in which he said that African artists should return to the origins. Return to Origins is the title of the article. African artists - Return to the Origins. And in that article he said quite a lot about his conviction, why African artists should return to the origins. I would come back and elaborate on this a little more before I ask my questions. Another one is Marshall Ward Mount, a teacher or professor in the University of Ife, for a number of years. And he published a book called *African Art: The Years Since 1920*. The third one who is worthy of mention is of course, Ulli Beier. Ulli Beier wrote a lot about African contemporary art and artists. He produced a book, *Contemporary Art in Africa*, and of course, he discussed your work. Likewise Marshall Ward Mount briefly discussed your work. He has a chapter there in which he lumped some Nigerian artists of Zaria School together. Now these three people are very, very important commentators on Nigerian contemporary art. In particular I want to first of all start with McEwen, who is saying that Africans should return to the origin. In his assertion that African artists should return to their origin, he said that the
society has completely broken down. African society has completely broken down. That since European contact, the whole set up has been more or less tending toward European culture. As such, he felt that Africans are losing their souls. In other words, their artistic souls. So, they should return to origin; they should try to do away from this European contact, he called it and then shut themselves up completely and look back to the past and nothing but the past, so as to save African contemporary art. He mentioned what he was doing in his Salisbury studio, the Museum studio where he was training some people.

Now have you any personal reaction--I am not sure you have seen this article, but maybe if you have, would you like to make any personal comment on this McEwen.

Bruce: McEwen? I have never seen this article--McEwen.

Ola: It is in *African Arts* of July, 1966.

Bruce: I have never seen this article, but McEwen's assertion is typical of new colonial feeling about Africa. There are many books today lamenting the fate of Africa, that Africans are no more Africans. That they are losing their Africanness very, very fast. There are few of them--some are captioned "the last of the Africans" others are captioned "Vanishing Africa." Well, my first comment is that Europeans want Africa to be static like a photograph, so that they can continue to enjoy it when they have done enough business in Europe, they go to Africa and with their camera they can move around and see women who are almost nude. They want to see rituals (it doesn't matter what it is). They still have the impression--they
still have behind their minds the sort of fabled or legendary African kings with a hundred wives, with houses on top of woods. They want to see Africans of the Tarzan posture, holding a rope and swinging from one tree to another. They are completely blind of the fact that no culture is static. No culture is static at all and that the very survival of man changes. Now I take you back to Roman History and the influence of Rome on Britain when Julius Ceaser visited Britain—in fact the word Julius Ceaser used for the Britons were that they were barbarians, and that they were doing such crude things that were being done by the druids. In fact in some of the historical documents there, things that the Britons did—some of the women could marry as many as ten wives or more wives, etc. Then gradually the Roman influence changed the language, and later the Romans helped to build roads, etc. and...

Ola: Could I ask for a clarification? Did you mean a woman marrying ten husbands or a man marrying ten wives?

Bruce: No, no. A woman.

Ola: Marrying ten husbands?

Bruce: Yes, yes. She's the boss. And they will marry all these once. Yes, you see . . . things like that. Now, I would very much say, why did things change over there? They should be what they were.

Ola: They should return to their origins!

Bruce: They should return to their origins so that we can say at least when we go there, we can just look at them and say, "oh, oh, so these are types of people. They are very interesting. You know they are there." But they have changed with the times. O.k. look
what I said about Britain is true, too, of other sections of Europe. They have grown; one culture meeting the other. There was a time when the moslem faith went as far as Spain and actually dominated and they built a mosque and that sort of thing. The influence coming from the East, and throwing aside some of the influences in Europe until later it was made possible for the moslem now to be asked to go away and the European tradition held sway again. So you see, there is this interaction of culture. Now if we go back again, the first seat of civilization is around the Nile Valley. Now the Nile Valley moved to the island of Crete in the Mediterranean, influencing them and from Crete now civilization went to Rome and then from Rome it went over to the other Romance languages, France, etc., etc., and Britain. You know, and then people from the west, central Europe, etc., then carried the wave to Australia and to America. Things are not static. Things are not static at all. There's always interaction—cultural interaction. Whether we like it or not, things are always changing. In fact, that's how people survive. That's the biggest element of survival. So, you find that what we are doing in Africa today is a matter of survival. We are living in a time when in 6 hours you can cover more than 6,000 miles. We will be killing ourselves if we deny ourselves the opportunity to travel as fast as that in order just to become Africans. Because that's what they are trying to say—returning to the origins and staying Africans—in order that our art may become interesting.

Now I tell you this. My father worshipped his ancestors. He is still worshipping his ancestors today. Now he did not go to
school at all. He believed in the Almighty God but he believed in
approaching the Almighty God through the ancestors and the various
household gods or "tribal" gods. I went to school. By the virtue
of the fact that I went to a protestant school, I became a
protestant—an Anglican. My friends who went to Catholic schools
became Catholics. And we now come to know the new religion and em­
brace it. And we now believe in Christianity. My father uses his
art to worship his God, the way he knew it. Now I am using my art
to worship my God the way I know it. My art is in the churches, it is
in books for moral and religious instruction. It will be out of
place completely to say that we should return to the origins. That
is make my art now serve the same purpose as that of my father or my
grandfather.

Ola: That's the way you understand it?

Bruce: Yes. It will be out of place too, to get myself to be com­
pletely blind to the problems of our time. Because we use our art
to solve the problem of our time. It will be out of place for us
to propagate things like "tribal" dresses, when we know that they are
not in all cases most suitable for us. Like the case of a young man
who went to the laboratory with a flowing gown and the flowing gown
was knocking down test tubes and so on. So, for convenience sake,
you need a very smart trouser and a very smart shirt, etc., to go to
the laboratory in order to do your research work. So (I think)
McEwen is like this other African who wants us to remain static so
that they can enjoy some of the things which they consider very
exotic and very African, etc. But they, in Europe or wherever else
they are, had to change with their times. We have to change with our times. Perhaps what I think he should say is, which I will like, that we should take with us some of the good things which we have, we should never throw away some of the gems of our culture. We should not throw them away. We should incorporate them into our present life. We should refer to them as the frames of reference. We should have them as a starting point. That is what he should tell us. Not to throw away, forget, or use the present thing that are coming out, that we know and presently that we consider good. What we have to do is to blend them.

Ola: Look at the past, take what is good in it and use it for the contemporary society for the good of the people. Oh, that's good. Thank you for the long comment and I hope I have learnt from it.

Bruce: I am sorry I am not a good speaker, but you, as an historian, you will be able to pick out. My discussion is winding and I keep on going backwards and forwards.

Ola: I understand what you are saying and I hope it is because, you have, I mean artists do have emotions. And when some words or some accusations which you don't necessarily agree with come up, you are likely to have some emotions. And I am not really un-understanding about this at all. I fully appreciate your comment on McEwen.

Now perhaps we can try to go to Marshall Mount. Marshall Mount worked in Ife. He has been in Nigeria for some time. He wrote his book African Art: The Years Since 1920. I am not sure you have seen it.
Bruce: I have seen it.

Ola: Have you read any section? Particularly the one that deals with Christian art and the one that deals with Zaria School? Maybe other sections? Are there any areas that particularly catch your fancy which you will like to comment on?

Bruce: I met Marshall Ward Mount twice. He actually interviewed me and took some photographs of one of my exhibitions. The second time he came was around 1965. Then he took more than about 8 years before that book was published. My first comment about that book is that the materials he published were already out of date by the time he published them. When I met him and explained, he said yes, that he had difficulties with publishing the book in the first place and that was responsible for the delay. I asked him whether he would seize this opportunity of his lecturing in University of Benin to upgrade the book. He said "yes, that he was going to review it." But you see, the Nigerian contemporary art he knew at that time was very small, only a very few people. But now he has more work to do.

Ola: Or we have more work to do?

Bruce: Well, if he has to review the book, yes, he has more work to do. He has to cover a wider area now and he has to really look into some areas which may not have already been covered. Because a lot of people are now working in contemporary art field. As I said, my first reaction and those of other friends, is that the book by the time it came out, was already outdated. Events have really over taken it.

Ola: Thank you very much. And last and not the least, perhaps you can say what you know about Ulli Beier, and your feeling about
Bruce: Ulli did one good thing. That of opening up art in a non-academic setting. He did one good thing in opening, that is to say, artists can grow out of workshops, lectures, etc., (in an informal way). He did that, which was very good. And I would say that although I was doing a bit of print making before I left Zaria, it was through the workshops (series of workshops) which he organized that I got to meet the Dutch artist, Ru Van Russem, who introduced me to the traditional print making technique like dry point, engraving and Intaglio etching. So, that's all about the good which his sort of teaching did. The other thing I want to say about Ulli is that he propounded a philosophy which he tried out in Oshogbo. He used the Oshogbo group as a sort of guinea pig for trying out this philosophy. He believed that the traditional school, that is the school in the academic setting like we know it, destroys artistic talents. And that in a situation where you don't have to go to school at all, you are better able to come out as a better artist. So that was his philosophy. So he discouraged the young people from Oshogbo, as much as possible, from going to formal art schools. He discouraged them. He thought that once they go there that the teachers were going to veer them away from the good things they hadn't. So that was his philosophy. And as I have said, he used the Oshogbo group as an experimental group and to a large extent, he succeeded in persuading the entire world that art from Oshogbo was the best in the country and he threw all his weight in writing, in
trying to convince people that it was the best. So the writing in his book actually helped to portray, to show the world, how good these Oshogbo artists are. I think he lumped a lot of us together in one chapter.

Ola: Ah! That's right.

Bruce: In one chapter and then when he was confronted later, he did say that as a human being, he should be excused if he liked a thing and wrote about that thing. That he could not possibly write on everyone in the country and in any case, he didn't believe in everyone, that he cannot write on everyone. He can only write on what he believed in--in the people he believed in, the people he thought had some future, and the people he thought were doing the thing he was saying. So that was it, he wrote a few things. And so, among the other artists who went to the formal schools. There are some of them whom he liked very much and whom he thought, although they were in art schools, were producing things that were not affected by their being in art school. Here I would not like to mention names, but he helped those people very well apart from his writing about the young people from Oshogbo. But events have proved that he was not altogether right in his philosophy. That philosophy created some people who are still practicing today who are still very good and being admired. But when he left Nigeria, the sort of upsurge of art which was emanating from Oshogbo dwindled.

Ola: I see.

Bruce: To the extent that a lot of people (artists) who were really on top, at the peak when Ulli was here, some of the artists who were
at the top really shrunk in importance and by far they are living
on their old names now.

Ola: You mean they don't practice again?

Bruce: They don't practice again because there is no basis for their
further development. Really, what Beier was doing was suggesting
to them, to these artists, what to do and once he left, there was
no basis for them to—the fundamentals of art were not strong in
them to be able to generate ideas, experiments, etc. So, many of
them became sheep without a shepherd. And they couldn't go anymore
but one of them who was destined to rise above everyone of them
came to me and he told me about Beier's philosophy and that he had
an offer to go to Ahmadu Bello University to do one year. (This is
a chance that is usually given to practicing artists who have showed,
who are not the academic type, who didn't attend the schools—the
formal schools but are working hard enough to merit admission). He
was given one year. And he came to me and he said he was afraid to
take it because according to Beier, these schools destroy. In any
case, if he took it, he was disproving Beier's philosophy which he
didn't like. So he told him not to take it. But I told Jimoh
Buraimoh, who was a young man then, that going to an art school does
not destroy anything. But rather it gives you a basis for your own
personal development. And so he went. He went to Ahmadu Bello
University for one year. He did life drawing, did some sculpture,
attended lectures—lectures about life, lectures about this lecture,
about that and he is the one single giant that is rearing his head
above everybody now as far as the people from Oshogbo are concerned.
He has since gone to Germany to understudy some artist under the German patronage and then he has since gone to England. I told him "open up your eyes and learn." And so, he's doing a lot. He learns from contemporary artists who have been to the traditional schools. He has been here to acquire the techniques of my deep etching. He stayed here and worked here for about a fortnight. You know, so that's the type of person like that. He continues to have inspiration.

Now I will say that if Beier has to start again, he should note that the best thing that you can do for a child is not to store up yams in a barn and teach him to go there and take the yam and cook it, boil it, and eat it. The best thing you can do for a child is not that. The best thing you can do for a child is to teach him to dig the ground and put a piece of yam there and let that yam grow and let that yam go through the various stages of development and then teach the child to harvest the yam and eat it. Then he can plant another yam and harvest it and eat. Rather than keep the yam there because if the yam is not put there by somebody, then he cannot get it to eat. So if Beier has to begin again, that's exactly what he will need to do.

Ola: I think that is proverbial and I seem to get it.

Bruce: Yes, yes, that's it.

Ola: We have gone at length about these three contemporary writers who seem to write a lot about Nigerian art or African contemporary art. In Nigeria, it appears some people are attempting to write but they are not many. Do you happen to note anybody in Nigeria who has written about your work?
Bruce: Yes, the newspapers do write, but most often they are just—they are not even commentary. They are reporting. A few people now and again do comment on contemporary art work to the extent that they try to teach the public how to look at the art works. But they are few and far apart. I have always said that—I have always appealed to our men who are in the university that they should also train critics for us. They should train people—art historians, who will direct the people, lead the people, teach the people how to appreciate and tell the people what to look for in an art work. But even at that, we find that sometimes the newspapers don't have anyone even doing any form of reporting. The Daily Times in the past five years employed a very versatile young lady, Miss Sereba Agiobu Kemmer, who was working very, very hard, and commenting on contemporary African art. But all of a sudden, we don't read her again. Nobody knows what has happened to her. So right now, the newspapers are dead. They are not even reporting, not to talk about commentary.

We have people like Prof. Uche Okeke, Prof. Wangboje, Prof. Lawal of Ife University, writing in these learned magazines, like Nigeria Magazine, Art International, etc. Who else is writing?

Ola: J. R. O. Ojo is writing sometimes, Ojo of the University of Ife. Rowland Abiodun sometimes, also of Ife. But not on contemporary. No, not contemporary.

Bruce: But I have not come across them . . . Oh! Oh! Yah, not on contemporary. So I really want to see more writing and more commentary. More directing of the public to appreciating contemporary art. There's not much of it happening now.
Ola: I see, well in that case—I know we are going to go through your work and it's going to take us a long time because I want you to explain the process to me. I want you to perhaps highlight your very major areas—the landmarks in your area. I know it's going to be very, very long to go across the whole work but perhaps you can give me the major examples from where you started and then the development and then the next kind of printing you do in one stage. Maybe, if you start with the print before you go to the other one which you call... what do you call the other one? The second type which involves another media entirely?

Bruce: It's this, the plastocast or is it this kind...yes. Well, you know at Zaria, I did painting. I did a few lino cuts. Some of them are still hanging on the gallery downstairs. I left the college with the feeling that I was going to do painting all the time. But I have just told you of how I met Ru Van Russem who introduced me to the traditional etching medium and I grew interested. The last workshop I was with—I think it's two. The second workshop was in 1964. But I was saving up gradually and I saved up about $150 and bought that press—imported one from Holland. It's just the hand...the ordinary traditional roller type of press. I was doing things like silkscreen and lino cut. And in the meantime, around 1966, instead of cutting and throwing away my lino blocks, I put them together in the form of collage and developed what is now being referred to as the bronze lino relief. It has a low relief quality and when bronzed up and patinated, it looks like an old art work. So that to me was a first major breakthrough. To be able to
use materials which are normally discarded to put them together to have something.

Then the next thing was around 1968, 1967, I imported a press. And then in 1968 I got some materials and started to make Itaglio-etching.

Ola: Itaglio?

Bruce: Formal Itaglio etching. The traditional etching. But an accident occurred. Instead of my buying the normal nitric acid, I bought hydrochloric acid to bite my zinc plate with. And it bit it so badly that I was frustrated. You see, it's been three years since I did the last etching under Ru Van Russem. I had forgotten the technique, etc., so I used the wrong acid and it bit it so badly. On one Sunday, just out of chance, I was visiting Emokpae who was at the time, carving a tall figure he labeled "Olokun." Olokun, of course, is the goddess of money from the sea. He was glueing money to the side of the wood to convince people that this is really the God of money. So, he was using araldyte and he spoke very highly about araldyte. That araldite gums iron to iron and iron to wood, etc. So I saw it. An idea occurred to me that I could use that araldyte to glue the holes of the plate I had made at home. So, on my way back home, I bought a small tube of it and then sealed the holes which I made on the plate. Then in doing it, some drips fell on the place I did not really want but they all dried up and then when I print them, those drips from such lines that give me some sort of textural quality which I found very, very interesting. From then on, I started developing my type of deep etching, which is really engraving on epoxy.
So that was a number two development. I am still doing it today. And in fact, when they talk of me as a print maker, they usually refer to that particular technique. I call it deep etching but really it's an engraving on epoxy.

Then the next thing that I did was to make another form of print, which is casting the deep etching plate—the deep etching plate because it is relief and because it is patinated by the use, it becomes what I may now describe as a collector's item. People wanted the plate very, very much. So, I developed a technique of reproducing the plate; that is casting the plate in plaster of Paris and using the same araldyte to reproduce it, to make the positive. So I (now) then make copies of the plate. So I call that the plasto-cast technique.

Then the fourth technique which I developed was using the lino block to print on rice paper. Of course, it's a way like the traditional block print, but I am able to build up textures with other plates in relative areas and then using the master block to print on top of it. Some of those you find on the stair case--downwards. Yes. So it is block printing on rice paper. It's a special technique of its own. I have never seen anyone use the material like that. So that's the fourth technique.

Ola: So all those big ones are single blocks of lino?

Bruce: Well, I glue them together where they are. We get small bits of lino. So we glue them together and make them to form big ones.

So the fifth technique which I have developed is... Rather than make cast from a plate which has been used for deep
etching, I now prepare a plate directly for the purpose of reproducing a plasto-cast painting. So the method is: 1. you either get a plaster of Paris prepared and then cut directly into the plaster of Paris, producing the negative and then you take the positive from it. Or you make a drawing into hardboard and then, as if you are preparing a plate for deep etching, spread the epoxy on it, let it dry and then you engrave on it and then cast from that hardboard. Another positive. So, you can get more than one— one, two, three, four, five of the original. And you paint it up. You paint it up. You put oil colors or polymar colors on top of it to enrich the relief and to enrich the natural color of the epoxy. So that is No. 5 development.

And of course, I still paint. And of course, I have used these methods now to achieve a higher dimension in painting. Yes, you see some of those ones downstairs.

Ola: Yah! Yah!

Bruce: So, those are the main techniques I employ at the present time. It just leaving one technique, leading to the other, etc. I wouldn't say that the latest one I use is putting a metal foil on the epoxy plate and embossing it and patinating it.

Ola: What do you mean by embossing it?

Bruce: You put the metal foil on the plate and then run it through the press so that the press can now depress the metal plate to pick the lines and the textures which you have on the bigger chief plate. So once it is done that way, you now put ink on top of it to develop the line, to make the line dark so that they can contrast, with the
shining surface. And then put other colors in it to make it have a feeling of age--color. Yes, so that is the latest development and it's extremely popular.

Ola: Ah, it has taken you so much time, I know, to develop all these techniques and you have practiced each one of them and you have achieved notable works from each of these techniques. Are there any Nigerian artists who have seen these styles and have been able to learn from you directly?

Bruce: Yes, David Daile; he was my student in St. Gregory's College and later went to Ahmadu Bello University and then while he was working in Ahmadu Bello, he was always coming home on holidays to assist me in whatever project I was doing. He picked up the deep etching technique and the bronze lino relief technique. And those are his main techniques today. He studied graphics of course.

Ola: I see, do you know where is he now?

Bruce: Yes, he lives at No. 22 Oyebola Street, in Surulere, off Adeniran Ogunsanya. Yes. Then, Thomas Quaye; he is still a student in Yaba College of Technology. He was with me for about 2 years as my assistant and he now uses the deep etching technique and then the bronze lino relief and the plasto-cast technique. And then, I have just told you about Jimoh Buraimoh.

Ola: That's right.

Bruce: He too uses the technique of my deep etching. And then there's another young man from Ife who uses the technique, too. And of course I have taught the technique, demonstrated the technique in many workshops in America. But I think the man who may also be
using the technique now is Dick Wolford. He is in Washington, D.C.

He was in Nigeria here. He was a friend to the artist and helped to—
his wife initiated the Thursday Show which is now in Victoria Island.
I told you about it.

Ola: Yes you did.

Bruce: And if you want to find out more about— (let me have it) the
origin of that show, you should go to page 1, here (Stephen Maddox).

"The Thursday Show now running into its second
decade was started in Ikoyi by Mr. and Mrs. Wolford, of
the USAID. When they left Nigeria, it was passed
briefly through three successive hands. The chiefs of
Ford Foundation, The Fitches of WAEC and the Edwards,
again of the USAID. The next two patrons were the Cox
and the Blacks. Both were employees of Gulf Oil. The
Blacks changed the Ikoyi Venue when they moved to
Victoria Island, where in turn they handed over to
the Maddocks.

The artists and their friends use this opportunity
offered by the publication of this booklet, print-notes
and comments to thank Mr. and Mrs. Maddocks in deep
appreciation of their services, now that they are
leaving us for good. And the Thursday Show is about
to pass to yet another hand.

So Dick Wolford, one of the people who started this Thursday Show, is
practicing this very technique now. And in fact, he was in Nigeria
during my experimental stages too. And showed up in my workshop
which I held as a guest instructor in Hayes Shack Mountain School
of Art. He was there. He's built himself a studio in the northwest
of Washington, D.C. and is already practicing.

Ola: This is really interesting! Would you like to take some
more Nigerian contemporary artists? You know, maybe on fairly full
time learning basis with you in the near future. What I have in mind
is: I know artists who are in Lagos have been able to learn a lot
from your immense knowledge and research. But not many others, or
let me say none from others, like the hinterland of the country. Like Kwara, Niger, Bauchi, even Zaria, itself. Up northwards like that. None seem to have maybe come down here to learn anything from you.

Bruce: I wouldn't say that—many students do visit here. Schools do come. The students of Adeyemi College have come here. And Mr. Ajidahun himself, who is the head of the art section of Adeyemi College of Education has come here to do some work. And then, this year, I opened up—I was a guest of honor in the exhibition organized by Udechukwu. He is a lecturer in the University of Nigeria. He expressed the desire to come here to do some work in deep etching. He does some prints already. And then a student who has just done his youth corpse (National Service) one, Adenike also from University of Nigeria, also expressed the desire to come here to do some print work. And kodjo Fotsu, sent a student too, Deborah Ajua Jackson, from the U.S. here to do some studies too. This was a year ago.

So you see, many people come here. Many people still have the desire to come, to pick up a few techniques. Not only just picking up techniques, but to see how an artist works and to see the right atmosphere which is conducive to make an artist operate. So, things like that.

Ola: How do you see the development of Nigerian contemporary art. How do you see it evolving?

Bruce: It's evolving. It's evolving although some aspect of it is quite slow. By now we would have thought that there would have been a gallery or a museum for contemporary art. It's very, very important.
But we haven't got it yet. Because like I said, you need something to refer to, to give your bearing. Now the people who are coming up now will not confront any longer the problems we have solved, rather they will build on top of them.

Ola: Exactly! Exactly!

Bruce: And the only place where they could see such examples would be in the museum. There are different small collections in places but that's not good enough. So, what I really want to see is for the Federal Government and the State Government to be directly involved in building infra-structures which will house contemporary African art. It needn't be a very ambitious place. It needn't be very ambitious. But it could start very humbly. Eventually it will grow.

The other thing I want to see happen is the use of contemporary art to help tourism. I see a great opportunity for tourists in this country. As an avenue for making money. We needn't get our money only from oil. There are other countries without oil and yet they make substantial sums of money, every year. Our contemporary art can really help to attract people if only this art work can be collected and presentable in places where people can see them with little or no difficulty.

Another thing that the contemporary art is doing, but I really want to see more of it, is the use of art in asserting Nigerian identity.

Ola: What do you mean by that?

Bruce: Art can be used to assert ourselves. And you asked the question
what I mean by "asserting oneself" or art helping in identity. Now, we have participated in a number of Trienales. This is a two year print exhibition of all countries. The very fact that Nigeria participates in such exhibition gives Nigeria an identity and places Nigeria on the map. And in such exhibitions, the Nigerian work can only reflect feelings about Nigeria. It can only show the outside people what Nigeria is doing about art. And it is also—would reflect some values that Nigeria is trying to put forward. So, in that way art is helping to advertise Nigeria to the outside world. To teach the outside world some philosophy about Nigeria. To help tell other worlds that Nigeria has a contemporary culture and Nigeria has a history. And Nigeria has people who are working now. These, all put together, are things about asserting our own Nigerian identity which the art, I think, can help to do a great deal.

Ola: I would come back to whatever you have to say more about this later. But maybe meanwhile, I would like you to comment on what you personally feel that you are saying. What personal statements you are making with your work. I know that you have a lot to say on that and I know that you are saying quite a lot in your various work. But perhaps you can highlight specific work and say exactly what you are saying by that work. If I take, for instance, maybe, this painting here. The one at the back here. It has a title, it has a theme. The motifs you use, perhaps you can elaborate on specific works you have done like that maybe you just say the major ones you can immediately remember. Or maybe you can even use the illustrations in the one booklet I am holding, and just explain a little about
some of them. As art historians we can begin to deduce what kind of statements you are making.

Bruce: Yes, like it has often been said about my art work. I am interested in the myths and legends of our people. Either as shown in the oral literature, which of course, in a way, also helps the history. It also says something about the past of the people. Because we did not have any. I think in the States I counted this word tribe and all this. They think it should not be used. I would ask you why?

Ola: That word was, first of all, well, we are trying to clarify the word "tribe" and vis a vis with ethnic. That word "tribe" has a wrong connotation. In American culture, Krober was the one who used that word "tribe" on American Indians. In fact, the origin of that word is Roman. And it referred to Roman soldiers of about seven or so, in other words, a small unit. And then, when it is applied to a culture, especially on the American Indian Culture, it referred to isolated groups of people who had no dealings with one another and who are very few. Not in Africa, especially in Nigeria, we have different ethnic groups who speak different languages but who associate with one another. Through trade, through inter-marriage, through other means of communication. So ours is a sort of living culture. Ours is in mutual association with one another. In fact, if we take it from history we know the Benin had a lot of dealings with the Ife; the Ife had a lot of dealings with other people like those across the Republic of Benin of these days, and we know that the Yoruba north had a lot of dealing with the Nupe. Then the Nupe
had a lot of dealings with the Hausa. So, everything is mixed together like that. Whereas, as it is still applied to American culture—they are completely torn apart. No unit is having any strong association with the other. So, they are isolated in bits like that. As a result, when applied to Africa, it's completely out of context. It doesn't work because our own culture has been identified as still continuing. R. S. Bascom and M. J. Herskovits wrote a book called Continuity and Change in African Cultures." In it they explained this kind of thing and they identified this kind of mistake that as applied on American Indian culture is not tenable in Africa. So in American scholastic circles today, they have dropped the word "tribe" as applied to Africa.

Bruce: Thank you for the explanation. I was talking about my use of myths and legends. First of all, trying to give the oral literature. Some sort of body, a fantasy, which is involved in the sayings and in the stories to give them body. So that people can see and enjoy what they have heard in the pictures. As I was saying, many of our past records are only handed from father to son through the words of the mouth. The spoken or oral literature is very important in also finding out about the past of our people. So, that is one of my first interests.

And here in this black and white book The Magic Land of the Shadows. It's a story which is built around the folk tale of someone who went to the spirit land.

Ola: It's on page 9.

Bruce: Page 9, yes. It is a sort of fantastic figure as you saw there. I have done a lot of works which told tales of tortoise, tales of
hunters, tales of people who ventured beyond the boundary of our ordinary world to the land beyond. The land of the spirit, etc.

Then these stories although appear sometimes to be childish, directed to children to teach morals, etc., they are also commenting on life as it is at present. Because one of the essential manners of speech in some African languages is that you use figures of speech and you also replace people with animals. Like the tortoise refers to craftiness. Also the behaviors of tortoise actually refer to the behavior of people. But you see, you will be offending a lot of people if you put them into tales. So you refer to the tortoise. And, usually in my own (tribe) ethnic group, people don't talk—if they are talking about themselves, particularly in connection with something that may be bad, they refer to their enemy or they refer to trees in the bush, rather than mention themselves. Like, they would say, if my enemy were to fall into trouble, this and that would have happened. So, they use the third person, rather than refer to themselves. So really, some of the commentary in the folktales which I illustrated, are making reference to the day to day happenings of our life. Thirdly, you would have seen some publication particularly in the African Arts about my being obsessed with small things. I only know that the modern man is so busy that he has no time to stand and admire very little things—little things which are very artistic. I think that it is the duty of the artist to point that these little things, that these things that are happening, put them together in a big way for the man—the modern man to see and admire. We all know what is always said that "an artist doesn't
really grow out." That is to say that some of his joys of childhood and boyhood are still there. But some people grow out of that and they don't see joy in some of those small little things anymore. But it is still the role of the artist to point out these things in such a way that the modern man can still enjoy them. I want to give some examples.

When we were at Zaria, as we moved from the city to campus, you would see some trees that are stunted and twisted. Zaria is in the Savannah, and they have seen many harmattan, and they've been wounded. They have had a tortured growth. The ordinary man would drive past that place a hundred times, he will not make anything of it. But I have studied those trees, I have drawn them. I have developed them in prints and paintings, in such a way as to show, to compare the tortured feelings with people, human beings who are equally starved or deprived. It's not only in the trees. Equivalent situations can be found in human beings.

Sometimes I painted pictures of plants with subtellent leaves but with thorns attached to them.

**Ola:** I see, what meaning has those thorns?

**Bruce:** Well, the gazelle, that is the animal with the herbivorous instincts don't eat them. I think it goes with the saying that "if you are just all sugar, then the world will lick you up." So also you've got to have some thorns around you, to repel people who will lick you up if you have something sugary. That is to say, the lesson from that is that one cannot be sweet all the time. You also have to have some naughty points about you which will help you in
your self-preservation. So, these are the either moral lessons or lessons related to beauty or aesthetics which are drawn from nature. It may be landscape. It may be in the form of stone. It may be in the form of the elands, the sky and even human behavior.

I have to draw this out. Now here in page eleven, there is this Ekrire Krebe (I am coming...). Here is a young man with two sets of eye glasses on, a different shoe on each foot, a tire in one hand, something like a rope and a staff on the other, wearing bicycle spare parts and a lot of other things surrounding the body. This is making some commentary on the young men and their mode of dress at that particular time. There is one small animal which the Urhobo call Ekrire Krebe. This animal lives in a cocoon and it uses the branches of trees to create a house around itself and uses the siliva to weave it all together. So, when it's moving, it brings out the head and the four feet and crawls along like that--carrying with it the entire house. So these young men are presented in this picture--it's like that particular insect, the Ekrire Krebe, moving and carrying the house with it at the same time. But it sort of also shows the onlookers that there's a lot of fun to be enjoyed by just merely looking at these young men or young people at that particular time. And it's drawing... the attention to the fact that... .

Ola: Which year was that?

Bruce: In, Ekrire Krebe would have been done around the early '70's. I mean the early '70's. This was the time when the Hippies were actually in the bowl.

Ola: In the U.S.?
Bruce: This picture was not done in the U.S., but the interest of the Hippies actually spread to Nigeria. But not only the Hippies, there's people who were clans like that. They were not mad, they moved about like that and you could see that. They are like that particular insect. So that is commentary on life as it is being lived.

Ola: That was done here in Lagos?

Bruce: That was done here in Lagos. Then here on page twelve, you have this is plane, straight forward. Studies of Nigeria Musical Instruments. Then on page 13, I call it "Ekuoregbe" that is, putting things together for the common good. It shows the different ethnic groups in their different costumes together, almost like posing for a photograph. It sort of says some complimentary words about unity in diversity. Yes, and diverse cultures all coming together as one are very strong. Then here is a picture which I call "Izobo". Izobo is "sacrifice" in Urhobo (word). It shows a sort of shrine with a snake coming up and with several heads. And here is a small one. Now it focuses on world problems.

Ola: World problems? I see.

Bruce: Problems in general. The more sacrifices you make, sometimes the more sacrifices you still have to make and as soon as one problem is solved, another one rears up. That is the searchable nature of human problems. This time you are fighting drought, the other time you are fighting flood. This time you are fighting and killing people; the other time you are fighting and rehabilitating people. You know, the human problems. The moment one problem seems over
another one grows up. You know, things like that.

Ola: And that's the essence of life anyway.

Bruce: Yes, that's it, yah, that's it. And this again about nature
is the ant hill and the tree that grows beside it. And sometimes,
as I was telling you, the form of the tree itself becomes very power-
ful. Almost as powerful as some of our sculptures. You know, so I
draw attention to things like that. This is the ant hill and some
other shrubs growing and having flowers. So, that is again nature.

Ola: I see.

Bruce: Yeh, this is the philosophy. Then this other one.

Ola: On page 60.

Bruce: Yes, page 60. It's a typical Urhobo farmer threshing the
palm oil. Some of them are fishing, as you can see, with this net.
And others are busy washing their clothes. A typical setting of an
Urhobo farm at the water side. Now this is other one here rain and
cry "Atutorogba."

Ola: What is the interpretation of that?

Bruce: Well, it focuses on the expression of grief during tragedy.
The way the Urhobo person shows it. Here's some one just dead. The
wives of the man are wailing, you know. See the hands, the way the
hands have been placed. And then you can see that man is being con-
veyed in a bicycle ambulance. The incident actually took place when
I visited my mother's village around 1973. Yes, and here is an owl
on top of the umbrella. It was drizzling—light drizzle. You know
the owl is always connected with deaths. Nobody died of a natural
cause. It's usually a witch and wizard. So the owl is the symbol.
Now, this is my own interpretation of the Yoruba Abiku spirit.

Ola: Oh, the one on page 18. I see.

Bruce: Yes, and then here, you know a lot about Abiku spirit.

Ola: Yes, I know, yah.

Bruce: And the Igbo call it Ogbanje. Here is the Presbyterian Church with the scaffold as it was set up around 1970. I did the drawing, but I did not really.

Ola: Which Presbyterian church?

Bruce: There's one in Yaba. Grillo has a mural on it.

Ola: Oh, is it that one pointing very near the road? And that is shown on your page 19.

Bruce: Yes, you see the scaffold. Yes, so contemporary construction. Then this shows a shrine. But I am interested in the "surrealist" form of the skulls tied up in a sort of frieze on top of the mud sculpture below. Yes.

Ola: I see. Did you draw this from Mbari or from any other?

Bruce: No, I went to study a shrine in Sapele river raid area. They call it shrine "Okulum". This is the study. Then this other one on the next page to it, page 17.


Bruce: Page 21, oh yes! Nomorere: the figure at the top is just the symbol of a deceased person. Now the person who is the head is the one in the middle with a sword. The Binis' belief that a man who eventually comes to be buried by his own son or daughter should count himself, the man or woman should count himself as being blessed. Because it is one of the greatest gift one can get from God for
living on this earth. That is you are able to have children who outlive you, then they give you the funeral burial. So usually when the burial takes place in Benin, the man is donned with a sword of a conqueror as they dance with him all over the town (in the town). And they hold his hand, as they hold the king's hand. Yes, so this is again trying to interpret our culture.

Ola: I see.

Bruce: Then, this is "Ivwie." Ivwie is an Urhobo word for "oppression." A sort of situation where you feel some sort of oppression and yet you cannot seek redress. The example I gave was a man from a big family, with a lot of strong men who can defend— you know, in those olden days—the defense of a family, of a particular family—depending upon how many people there are. You have many people but just one day as you are moving out, or you are working, you run into a gangster. And they beat you up thoroughly. Or seize your things. That situation is regarded as "Ivwie." Although you have people who could have fought back and conquer those people or scare them away, but at that material time, you were not able to mobilize them. So that is "Ivwie." That is suffering in a situation where you shouldn't have really suffered.

Ola: I see—"Ivwie."

Bruce: So, it's like the skull of a human being battered and beaten out of shape. With the mouth represented by this form here. And a bridge across it. Like somebody in a bad dream. You are shouting and you cannot shout, you are running and you cannot run. You know that is symbolic. It's purely abstract formation.
Then these cows (p. 23) I studied while I was at Zaria and these forms of the Fulani people I also studied while I was at Zaria and I am still working with the studies I made during my Zaria years, reminiscences of the time I had at Zaria. These cows I call "Bokolo." They are the short-horn cows. Now these pictures here, "otagbinuiwe" is more of a political comment. But again I roped it around a folktale of a man who was dissatisfied with his lot and went to the land of the spirit to ask God, his creator, to re-shapen his fortune. So, he went and he did not see his creator but he saw a group of people in an assembly. This is the assembly. He could not communicate with them, but he came back to the world and you see they were in an assembly— and over here at the top is a phantom and below the phantom are the carcasses of people who recently died. He came to the world and was much more confused. So he went to an oracle to find out the symbol of his adventure. And he was told that the people in the assembly were deliberating over their future and that they were asking the question "Otagbinuiwe", "will it be good or will it be bad?" The oracle said that the symbol was that if they learn from their past mistakes and kept away from selfishness, greediness, sectionalism, then their future will be good. Otherwise, if they became selfish, then the sword of destruction will come down from the phantom and do its work in the midst and destroy them. You know the meaning that could be drawn from that is related to the Constitution Assembly which was meeting for the first time. The Assembly to write the constitution, which was meeting for the first time after about thirteen years or twelve years of military rule,
writing a new constitution. So the political meaning is that the assembly represents the wise men who were writing the constitution and the phantom represents the immutable law of nature which states that every action has a reaction. It is what you plan, you sew. And if you learn from the past mistakes then you will rule a right, etc., etc. Otherwise, we are not out of waters yet. The sort of destruction or war which was in Nigeria before might still come up again. So that was that.


Bruce: This other one is, this one here is a motif which I took from the Nigerian stamp of unity which I developed in 1970 or 1971 when the civil war was over. After the civil war we were invited to do a stamp that would reflect unity in diversity. Nigerian unity in diversity. So, I made this. These were at that time we had five states. These were the five states mysteriously joined together and all holding Nigeria. Something like a globe symbolizing Nigeria. Meaning that Nigeria is all bound together in one. What affects one affects the others.

Ola: I see. I can see one, two, three—where are the other four and five?

Bruce: The others are behind. You cannot see it. And then these small vignettes, later build up together, were other ideas I have for this unity in diversity picture. Now this one represents the tree of evils which should be cut down if Nigeria has to become a viable nation.

Ola: I see, hence the two people cutting it here.
Bruce: And then, this one here shows the number of states then—three here, three here, and three here. Three, three, three, three. I think twelve states or so. Then this is thanking God that we have emerged from a civil war. This was rejoicing that we have emerged from civil war. This was showing--this is a caterpillar being carried by the ants--showing that if we are all united, we can do big works. Then, this one here is saying that we have the resources--all we need is someone to be a good leader--a good leadership. Then this other one here is mountaineers climbing up saying that with ropes around one another. Whatever affects one of them will affect all of them. So that our fate and everything is bound together. You know, so that is ...that's about that!

Ola: I see, very revealing.

Bruce: Now this is a picture about the Cherubim and Seraphim. I went to the bar beach before their things were demolished.

Ola: Page 26. Ah ha!

Bruce: Before there they would pray, they would fall into trance. They will do all sorts of things. And but what interested me was their costumes. They were always very bright and they were very colorful and sincere about what they were doing. So for this one, which is the series you find there, I did four of them. Yes, give me the red book and then I will read to you my commentary about the four panels which I call "mami wata." The four panels are:

Eg. "mami wata's compound" my imaginary compound.

Mami wata Voyibo I. "mami wata and the white man I."

Mami wata Voyibo II. "Mami wata and the white man II."
Aroi mami wata  "That is a shrine where the mami wata should be appeased or worshipped."

Ola: I see!

Bruce: Now, I read. The arrival of colonial rule in Nigeria created some myths which have now formed part of our oral literature. Many of the technological wonders which the white man performed could only be explained in the context of the supernatural powers of the gods and spirits in which the people already believed. The legend of mami wata voyibo (mami wata and the white man) center around the construction of the Jebba Bridge. The story says that the mami wata or the water spirit residing at that spot refused to be disturbed. So did not allow the work of construction to go on. The white man or the engineer, himself, spiritually equipped went under the water and at first tried to persuade the spirit. But when that failed, he resorted to other means. He entered a bottle and mysteriously came out of it. Then he challenged the mami wata to perform the same feat. Yes, she went in very easily but before she could come out, he placed a lid on the bottle barring the spirit from coming out. So, he won. After that encounter, there was peace in that section of the Niger River and the famous Jebba Bridge was finally built.

Even today, the huge computerized constructions going on around us still appear mysterious and success in erecting them is still credited to supernatural powers of the engineers. For example the story is now going round that the spirits of the dark brown waters of Odo Iya Alaro beyond Maryland had to be specially appeased before a second attempt to put a bridge there was successful. This little sketch forms the background for a series of four prints based on mami wata.
The first *Egori mami wata* shows the imaginative habitat of the water spirit. The second *mami wata voyibo* I shows the white man in the bottle. And the third print, *mami wata voyibo* II shows the spirit in the bottle. Finally the last print *Aroi mami wata* shows the impossible shrine created for the water spirit.

**Ola:** Nhun! That is interesting! And incidentally, that Jebba Bridge is in Kwara State from where I come.

**Bruce:** But you see, the white people like that story very much because it boosts their ego and they think they are clever. But they figure the other side of the story—which is their craftiness. You know, they have achieved everything they have achieved, but that double-dealing! You know, they would come they'll say give me this piece of land. Before you know it, they have acquired the whole area. You know that kind of crafty dealing and all that. It's again an underlining factor in the story, which they never always easily understand.

**Ola:** I see, I see.

**Bruce:** So I think that's about all. This is the same. The block of the *Uzobo*. That's on page 28, which is the last one. So that seems to cover quite a wide area.

**Ola:** Yah, it does! It does. And it has been very revealing. Actually it has been. I don't think I could easily have understood everything as you have mentioned them above. I can only just guess—but, Thank you very much. We can stop and have a break.

**Bruce:** Yah, yah. I am sure we can for we have been talking for more than one hour.
INTERVIEW WITH BRUCE ONOBRAKPEYA AT HIS RESIDENCE/STUDIO: 39 OLOJE STREET, PAPA AJAO-MUSHIN, LAGOS IN NIGERIA. SEPTEMBER 10, 1980, 5:00 P.M.

Fela Odaranile (1980)

Ola: I am with the Thursday Show, sometimes called the Oshogbo artists. But in Lagos here, they embrace more than the Oshogbo artists. So most people like it to be called: Thursday Show. Now, over to you. Would you like to introduce yourself?

Fela: Fela Odaranile is my name, one of the Oshogbo artists. I am based at Ile Ife and I work on oil painting and drawing from the bark and batiks.

Ola: Do you know any other artists base in Ife who work in your style?

Fela: Yah, Rufus Ogundele and Tijani Mayakini, and Bayo Ogundele and some other people.

Ola: Have you made any sale since you're here?

Fela: Well, not every day that we always make money. Sometimes we come we don't have anything and sometimes we come we have something.

Ola: I see, but have you sold any of your work?

Fela: I sold one of the works.

Ola: What is the title?

Fela: Iya Alaro.

Ola: Iya Alaro. Can you describe it? The kind of colors and the shapes, etc.

Fela: It's brown color and black and yellow color combined together.
And I take the black from the back. After getting the colors from the front, I take a sharp pencil to get the black from the back.

_Ola:_ What's your idea about Nigerian contemporary art?

_Fela:_ My idea is that Nigerian contemporary art is good!

_Ola:_ Who are the other artists you like apart from yourself?

_Fela:_ Well, I like Bruce Onobrakpeya and Seven Seven and Jimoh Buraimoh and Rufus Ogundele, Tijani Maiyakiri and some other artists as well.

_Ola:_ What is your idea about Thomas Quaye's work?

_Fela:_ Well, I like his work very much.

_Ola:_ I see. O.k. Thank you very much.

**Thomas Quaye (1980)**

_Ola:_ I am with Mr. Thomas T. Quaye. Yes, would you like to introduce yourself and say something about your work and then about contemporary Nigerian art.

_Quaye:_ Yah, I am Mr. Thomas T. Quaye. At present studying at Yaba College of Technology. Doing painting under. . . . I was an ex-student of St. Gregory's College.

_Ola:_ Oh, really?

_Quaye:_ Yah, where I met Mr. Bruce Onobrakpeya, as my tutor for five years. And after that, I studied under him for two years as his assistant in his studio. And I think I started deep etching, lino cut and in fact, print making from him. I started right from him—under him. And the theme in fact the way he started was, after working for him. He said I should take up. . . . I said I was interested in his idea, the technique itself because it's new. And it has about
three different parts to it. That's what really made me do it. You
can call it a painting, you can call it a kind of relief sculpture,
and graphics too. I took it up and at first I had some difficulties
in getting used to the materials, the techniques used and things like
that. So I asked him to let me know how to go through that. So all
he said was that I should just pick up a topic like "life in Lagos."
So that's how I started, in fact, with life in Lagos. And I realize
that to take up life in Lagos I would not finish it until, maybe, I
leave this earth. Because the more I live here, the more I see new
things everyday to work on. So I started working on the technique.
And I have had two one-man exhibitions. Now I had them last year
and I have to have more.

Ola: Can you let me know about your comments on the contemporary
society; what are you saying through your work?

Quaye: Yah, through my work, I think I am only giving the people,
the masses, you know, which I see as of now. That is the present.
And more about the past—in the way of culture and tradition. Then
looking forward to the future, too. The contemporary Nigerian artist,
I would say, we have very few of them, but a lot more are coming
into art now. I mean they are coming to appreciate and put a lot
into art. But the forerunners should do a lot to make the ones
coming to realize what benefit art is and how good one can put all
their minds into it.

Ola: Would you like to comment very briefly about your work which
I saw in the Thursday Show. One you called "Olokun." I remember I
saw about three or four shades of color on that print. One in red-
browns, and then the other ones in blues and cool colors like that. Would you like to say something on that? 

Quaye: The work "Olokun" has been there for a very long time. And for quite some time, I have been trying to create it the way to make people understand it. So, I heard when I was small, that the Olokun is supposed to be a goddess of water and wealth. And it gives, like let's say, the barren, when they pray and make some offerings to the sea, to the goddess of water, they will get whatever they want. So I decided to create a woman—a huge woman right at the center of the print and with a little kid beside. To me, I feel mostly, what I have seen so far about the Nigerian women or African women, I see them large. When you're a very slim woman, or when I see a very slim woman, I say oh, maybe this is still a lady. But majority of us, when we see a big woman we call her—that's a mother.

Ola: I see, I see, "momo."

Quaye: "momo", exactly! That's why I use that very woman. Because of the kind of figure we have here in Africa. We don't [kind of] take to the western world where they try to slim down and things like that. Or where they don't breast feed for a long time. And right there at the lower part of the print, I have what I call the earth. The woman looking unto the world. You have—I tried to create some traditional architecture by way of putting the horse and things like that. And then you have the Ibeji figure on one side, which is very common with the Yoruba. And with us—not even the Yorubas. The Africans in fact. Because the same thing we do here, we do it in Togo, we do it in Ghana, we do it in Benin—the Republic of
Benin. Then you have the fish which are supposed to be the spirit guarding the soldiers of the water guarding the woman.

Ola: Thank you. You had another work there which you called "Ogbanje." Would you like to say something about that.

Quaye: "Ogbanje" is an Igbo name called "Abiku" in Yoruba. That's "born to die" and that's I think since I was small, I have been hearing things like that. And my playmates--some of them have names like "Durojaiye" an abiku name which means "stay to eat the fruit of life." And there again, I decided to create the ogbanje spirit in a circle, in a class of its own. With the loots of the world that he comes to carry whenever he comes in and out of the same woman, thereby giving the woman a lot of sorrow. And putting the people into a kind of depressed situation throughout her life. And at the top corner I have about seven figures. These are actually carvings to indicate the times this same spirit has come into the woman and out. Then, there you have the woman in a very sorrowful manner right at this corner with maybe a kind of blue color. And the breast dangles down after a lot of these people have come in to suck the breast and then leave her flat chested and the body wrinkled.

Ola: Thank you very much. The last question I have for you is about the one you call "Masquerade."

Quaye: "Masquerade."

Ola: Masquerade; it's a swelling. . . .

Quaye: Is it a Dancing Masquerade?

Ola: Yes, a Dancing Masquerade.

Quaye: Yah, I think that is one of my new works. Those are my new works!
I did that last year before I traveled for my exhibition in the States (U.S.). So, I think the dancing masquerade to me, has three parts. In fact, I have been involved in masquerading when I was small. You know, to some people my playmates in my area and I have seen a lot of witness. A lot of masqueraders dancing in the street, courtyard, and things like that. So I decided to create this masquerade in about three forms. You have the costume--it's of the Egungun masquerade, but the mask--the facial mask is from the East Central State. And then right at the top I have a kind of salt-like fish headgear unto it. That is from the Rivers. And all these areas indicate where I came from.

Ola: I see. Do you come from the Eastern States?

Quaye: My great grandmother from my father's side is from the East. So whatever I do I try to incorporate my mother's side and partly my father's side. Oh, mostly my mother's side because since... Although I have a foreign name--like Quaye, but I am a Nigerian. And more or less from the Yoruba side.

Ola: I see, I see. Thank you very much Mr. Quaye. It has been a pleasure speaking with you. I look forward to meeting with you again. Thank you.


Sina Yussuff (1980)

Ola: I am now in the National Theatre, Lagos, Nigeria, and I am now with Mr. Sina Yussuff, the Principal Cultural Officer in charge of visual arts here.
Sir, would you like to tell me something about yourself. I know you have been a prolific artist—a painter for that matter. Would you like to enlighten me about your activities as far as contemporary Nigerian art is concerned.

Sina: Thank you very much, Mr. Babalola. If you are already aware of my sort of capacity, we may not need to recapitulate on that. But there are certain things on the National level which I think have been attached to my name and major in that is the designing of the National Youth Service Corpse Emblem in 1973, for which I received a National recognition from the then Head of State. Since then, it has been working for the Nation. Cultural administration is my main occupation with bias for the visual arts. The main duty of the Department of Culture here is to foster Nigerian Arts and Culture locally and internationally. Since 1972, the department was established under the then Ministry of Information. Now the Department has moved closer to greater recognition by government by now being tucked under the existing Ministry of Social Development, Youth Sports and Culture and we still hope that we are developing in terms of cultural promotion, cultural administration, and we might consequently have a Ministry of Culture that will stand on its own and then cater to all the aspects of our culture, with the aim of internationalizing the same.

Now, coming back specifically to my own contributions in this. It was initially my duty to administer Nigerian Art in all its ramifications. The various aspects ranging from painting, sculpture, textile designing which Nigeria and African countries are very noted for. Ceramic, then the last aspect which is graphics design. All
these aspects are the intellectually named areas. We still have, in this country, other artists from Oshogbo, who were said to be experimentalist by intellectuals. Intellectuals have also given them the names of "naive artists" and all what nots. But whatever the situation is, the Department of Culture in this country recognizes the existence of all the various trends of Nigerian art whether Intellectual, Experimental, Neo-modern, emerging from Traditional art, who used to be patronized by religion, but who have now lost their patronage in religion for festivities. So, we recognize all these people and then we try as much as possible to project them especially internationally, under one umbrella or the other. Such umbrellas include: International Exhibitions and participation in international exhibitions. Or cultural Exchange Programs under Cultural Agreements with other countries. You know, Nigeria has a lot of agreement with other countries.

Ola: Could you please give examples.

Sina: For example, we have with U.S.S.R. and an exhibition was taken to Moscow by me in 1974. No, it wasn't really an exhibition. I paid an official visit to Moscow in the company of another Nigerian elderly artist, Mr. Jimoh Akolo from the Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria. And we just paid a ten day goodwill visit to the country to meet with the Soviet artists and exchange views on our profession. That was under the auspices of the cultural agreement between our country and the U.S.S.R. Since then, I had been under the same umbrella to Rumania taking our exhibition in 1976, to Rumania--an exhibition of Nigerian Traditional and Contemporary arts and crafts
to Rumania. In 1970 it's under a different umbrella of participation in international exhibitions. Nigeria participated in the 4th Indian Triennale on the biggest scale ever—forwarding some 24 large paintings to the exhibition and some 20 sculptures which pulled a lot of crowds at the Indian capital of New Delhi. As a result of that, we since then moved into various areas and then we project Nigerian art internationally under various headings. We always take part in other international things like World Cross Council. We have our Society of Nigerian Artists around in the country who were doing their own bit but they are now a member or an executive member, too—of the International Association of Art. And we have our own President, the President of the Society of Nigerian Artists as—

Ola: Do you know where the Headquarters of that is? The I.A.A.?  
Sina: The I.A.A., I think it is in the U.S.  
Ola: I was just going to ask you whether you are aware, I know you would be aware, that New York is the Center of the Art World. And I was going to ask whether Nigeria has had any international exhibitions with any agency in the U.S.  
Sina: No, I don't know now whether. . . . Yes, there was one recently by Bruce Onobrakpeya in Canada.  
Ola: That's personal, I am talking of National.  
Sina: I have not yet got the opportunity to really. . . . because don't think Nigeria has a cultural agreement with the U.S. We don't have a strong cultural agreement with the U.S. We have other relations in trade and technical education and all what nots. But not in culture to the extent that we should have been able by now to project
Nigerian art in that country. But recently, if we have to go by the slogan that to really promote—you know, is to preserve. If you go by that slogan or vice versa, "to preserve is to promote" I want to recall that recently, if it is not even currently going on. "Two Thousand Years of Nigerian Art" exhibition which dominates Nigerian antiquities of the old civilizations of Ife, Benin, and Nok, have been receiving some wide publicity in the U.S. It is currently holding, I think, in the U.S. That is not organized by the Department of Culture, but we deal with contemporary culture. But the exhibition I am talking about is mainly dealing with antiquities. So I think that one is holding now and it could be a step towards having a contemporary one to compare later in life.

_Ola:_ You mentioned something about experimental artists in Nigeria. Could you give me the most versatile ones among them.

_Sina:_ Well, we have had names on the international scenes, especially the Germans who were resident in the country. Around the '60's, middle '60's. Specifically in 1966, there abouts. Ulli Beier was one of the Germans responsible. By just giving materials, painting materials, to anybody in the village who could paint or do anything and then...

_Ola:_ That resulted in the Oshogbo group.

_Sina:_ Then that resulted in the Oshogbo group. And this might be responsible for their being termed as naive artists who don't know what they are doing except that they have been given brushes to paint by the intellectual. That might be responsible.

_Ola:_ I see, I misunderstood what you meant by experimental artists. I was thinking of Nigerian contemporary artists who are experimenting
with either ideas or media or something like that.

Sina: No, no, no, sorry! Not experimental artists. We would say experimental artists— it might be confusing. But the Germans experimented with them—you know, and that's why we call them experimental artists. The term might be confusing really, but if that is, the observer or the hearer should be able to draw a line.

Ola: Do you have slides of your own works?

Sina: Yes, I have a lot of them. But I don't think they are here. But I can show you my works. I have some of them around. This is one you are seeing here, which is a painting in itself.

Ola: It is not on exhibition now? But it was before.

Sina: It was on exhibition last year and it is a title that could not be meant for sale. It is a sort of sketch painting.

Ola: Yah, from what I look at in this particular painting, it has a lot of qualities of experimentation there. I don't know what your view is.

Sina: Well, not experimentation as such. This is my style you know. Like every artist who had intellectual training in this country (a long pause) such trainings are given to us mostly by expatriates and then automatically when you study under a master you would be influenced advertently or inadvertently by that master. And to the best of my knowledge, all the students in this country coming out of the institutions were always trained, you know, along the representational art. How to work your perspective, how to do that, how to make tonal perspective, etc. Now when an artist comes out of the institution, it is left to him. Because the institutions would
expose you to a lot of trends, artistic trends in Europe in terms of art history you know, will expose all the students to these sort of various trends.

It is then left to the artist to work out for himself which trend he wants to follow. Or to use his knowledge of all these various trends in Europe or elsewhere to build one related to his own culture for himself. So what I have done with my works here, my early works—were mainly representation but gradually, I moved up having a flair for vertical lines. And in most cases, you find out that the vertical lines are very prominent in the paintings and that is really very prominent in this one you are seeing.

Ola: What do you call the title of the one where there are four human beings?

Sina: "The Abortive Coup"!

Ola: "The Abortive Coup"? Oh, I see. That's why there are stripes on those men.

Sina: Yes, The Abortive Coup, and then the people are put to the stake and the firing squad. You see, but the need for representing four people does not make... 

Ola: No, no, it's not the only thing. The mood and other things like the color.

Sina: So, that's what that one represents, and you can see that.

Ola: That's very effective.

Sina: That is it but it is meant to go into a large painting, which is going to be about the size of this room for the national gallery.
And those four people shown here as being victims of—being the coup plotters—might range to any number. But they were very many when we had the abortive coup in this country in 1976 against Murtata Mohammed Regime. And the painting is really to reflect an aspect of the military regime. You know, the fact that you could not be sure of the next day, whether there was going to be coup or not. So the painting I hope when it is finished, it will really remind people of an aspect of their past.

It is going to be a mural painting?

It is not going to be a mural painting. It's going to be a canvas painting but it's going to be as big as that. You know, as much as I can make it very effective for posterity to see, because I even think that each of the people should be made to life size, you know, and one would really see the effectiveness of a dying body.

And it's going to be in the National Theatre?

It's going to be in the National Gallery. The National Gallery itself is currently in the National Theatre temporarily because the original structure is yet to be build in Suleja within the next plan period. And the next plan period is starting in another two month's time—next January, 1981.

I see, I see, oh, I see. Ah! That's fantastic.

And as a result of that, we are holding the Gallery here temporarily to really use that forum to identify our problems in establishing a national gallery in this country and to try our hands on all the things that are necessary to establish a national
gallery. We hope that at the temporary site of the National Gallery—
we should be able to train prospective staff for the Gallery, proper,
when it is established. Either locally or by sending them abroad
within the interval of five years when the plan period would last,
before the election of another one.

Ola: What have you to say on this second one? What is the
background?

Sina: Well, this is a reflection of my visit to New Delhi in 1978
(India). I have found out that mostly their transportation is on
this wooden cart driven by bullocks that are very heavy,—heavier
than the carts themselves—the carts look very fragile behind them.
But the cattle are always very hungry looking, you know, very
hungry looking yet very broad things on the road. Viewing from my
hotel, I imagined as an artist, that suppose any of these cattle fell
down out of hunger—what would happen to the people who were seated
in the cart behind. So there was no crash of such nature, of
course, till I left the place, but I kept on imagining that—and so
this led to this painting when I came back entitled "Breakdown at
New Delhi" or "Breakdown in New Delhi" of course; yes!

Ola: The colors are very effective, too. Do the colors reflect
the colors you saw when you were there?

Sina: Yes, because they remind me—, the colors I saw in New Delhi
reminded me of the colors we have in our Northern part of the country
here. And the attitude of the people there is a reflection, too. It
has a sort of relationship or affinity with the people in our northern
part of the country.
Ola: Being muslims perhaps?

Sina: No, not being muslims. Their orientation is--oriental. It's if I have to make it. It is Eastern in nature. And then you find out that the muslims here in the northern part of the country--Islam having come from the East--they cultivate the cultures of Islam. And so automatically if we have Islam in Nigeria and we have Islam in India, automatically there should be some affinity of cultures.

Ola: Thank you very much. Would you like to say something about the third painting?

Sina: Well, the third painting is again an influence on me after my visit to New Delhi. Because my visit to New Delhi was to take a Nigerian participation exhibition there in 1978, and Nigeria participated among 40 other countries all over the world including Japan and all what nots and then as a result of all these, I was exposed more to the various artistic trends all over the world. As a result of that, the painting that was said to have won one of the awards of the Triennale of the Indian Triennale--was something I would not under--by my upbringing and by my assessment of what is art and what is not art, I would not have tipped an award winning entry.

Ola: I see. Do you remember the artist?

Sina: I don't remember but they are about four or six of them! I have a catalogue of the Triennale here, but it is the only one which is kept in the Department's library. Yes. You find out that one of the paintings that won the award was like that. The canvas was
divided strictly into two. And when you talk of composition and all
what not, which we're always conscious of, the painting was highly
lacking, but maybe the judges have their own reasons for choosing
that.

Ola: But to me, this is very effective too and I wouldn't even
know—I don't even care about the title as much as just looking at
the painting. But, you know, as the painter, I have to ask you what
is it all about?

Sina: Yes, well, this one is called "Peace and Protest." The area
there, the peaceful area, yes, that is the peace, where you just pack
things like painting boards. You know, all these are reflections from
my painting studio. You would have seen that the protest there is
depicted by humanized painting easels, carrying painting boards un-
used yet, at various angles. That gives a sort of confusion—yet
held together by unity of color. So you can see some confusion in
that aspect and half way the canvas to the left, you see serenity and
tranquility around. So I call it "Peace and Protest", but in both of
them you can see a sort of unity.

Ola: Thank you for this. I don't know how much time you have but
I am going to be very quick indeed. Now I would like you to enlighten
me on some other major paintings you have done which are not here.
There are three major ones and the three seem to be very, very
stimulating to look at. And have you got any other major paintings
which are along these lines, which you haven't got here and what are
the titles?

Sina: Yes, I have them. I have one which is 6 feet by 4 feet. I
work in very large canvases. These are the minimum you have seen. Three feet by four seems to be my minimum. When I have an idea, I want to blow it up to the biggest canvas I can lay my hand upon. Thereby setting for myself some other challenges. Because when you have an idea you blow it too big, it poses other problems. You may find out that the composition is not as interesting when it is big, then you are forced, you are compelled to put in more and more other things that were not in the original sketch, to make it interesting. And this is one of the reasons why my finished paintings hardly reflect the sketch.

Ola: Which is what it should be anyway, because any work is an original work, as it's coming on.

Sina: Yes, it doesn't, so as result of that, I don't sketch; I hardly sketch again. I just paint—when I have an idea, it flashes in my head; I might keep it there.

Ola: Which are the other major works you have?

Sina: This one I was trying to talk about is 6' x 4' called "Royal Welcome"—based on the set up in Alafin of Ayo's palace when I visited there sometime in 1974 in the preparation for FESTAC. I found in the fore-court of the palace a set of drummers gorgeously dressed in traditional attire using the talking drum. And the talking drum was also gorgeously decorated with velvet, bands and all what nots and gongs and rattles. They were really very gorgeous. And they sat down in sets of fours or fives beating the drum and then using that always to welcome strangers to the palace. As soon as the stranger enters into the palace in the fore-court, these musicians would have
sighted you by their position. They would have sighted you as you enter into the court and they would start beating the drum which will be talking like this in traditional tongue, "Kabo se dada lo de?" (music) "Dandan-dan-dandan-dandan?" (trans.) "Welcome, Welcome, hope you come well?"

So you have some attendants in the court who would have come out of there—usually small boys, who would have come out to meet these guests. And then they want to show you round all the shrines of Ogun, Shango and Obatala and all what nots in the fore-court before you enter into the palace. While you are doing that, the Alafin of Oyo would have heard the sound of the drum in the inner palace and would have been conscious that some strangers were in the fore-court.

Automatically nowadays, we have enlightened, educated Obas. They would have looked at his diary and seen who had an appointment with him at that particular time. If that person is just a random visitor who might not necessarily have to see him, he doesn't bother. But, if he has appointment with a dignitary who wants to see him and he hears that drum, he sends his emissary from the inner palace to meet the guest and then usher him in in the traditional manner.

But what I found in the drummers whom I painted was contentment, rather than the decorativeness of their full vocation. It was the contentment, because by history I was told that this is the occupation of their forefathers and they hand this occupation down from father to son from generation to generation, for the Alafin of Oyo. And they don't do any other thing. Their three square meals come from the palace. Their clothing come from the palace and they
don't bother their heads about worldly gain.

Ola: This is interesting!

Sina: So when I was painting them, I was not painting the talking drummers, but I was painting contentment and satisfaction in human life.

Ola: I see, thank you. Could you let me know of any other briefly?

Sina: Another one in that category which is now in the existing State House, is a painting of the same size which is called "Bori." I call it "Tribute to Bori." Bori consists of 99 gods worshipped in the North by some Bori worshippers. That is one of the main deities worshipped in the Northern part of this country.

Ola: In which place do they worship it?

Sina: All over the north,—possibly before the coming of Islam. But people still worship it now, they did a lot of things in the course of worshipping it. They even perform magic, you know, using very sharp knife to cut themselves all over the body and they don't--this does not come out effective on their flesh. So they try all sorts of things. But what stimulated me was the serenity of their white attire when they are worshipping. They carry white calabashes on their head. Calabashes are all out white, banded with white stripe in the middle and then hanging down there are white cowries, which the women--mostly women--who do the dances hold by the two hands. You have head-rest, also in white, which Yoruba's call "osuka." You have it very wide on their head and is always white too. They put the big calabash on top and they hold the strings tied to the calabash with the two hands to balance when they are dancing.
Their attire is always— they have topless attire, you know. And then their beads are always white with combination of "iyun", which is red and blue and all what nots. You know, so if you are going to see any color about them, it is only in the beads, which they wear on their necks. All other things, even their waist bands, are made from white cowry. So I painted them with the white calabashes on— you can imagine the circular calabashes on top. About four or eight of them. Then with the women in the same uniform, dancing in a sort of circular manner. So it is in the same style of my deliberate fragmentation of form to effect some units.

Ola: This interview with you has been very stimulating indeed, and I felt like having three/four days to discuss fully with you about these things. Now, I have a question related to this. Have you heard of anybody who has written on these items that you are just discussing with me?

Sina: I have held exhibitions since my graduation in 1972. I have held, I think, three exhibitions now. One in 1974, another one in 1976, and another one in 1979. It is my policy to hold exhibition not earlier than two years interval. And the last one I had was after the third year of course from the previous one, 1976 and 1979. And on each occasion the press had the opportunity of really writing about me.

Ola: But not an art historian.

Sina: Not an art historian. That in this country is another aspect we are yet to develop fully in "Art Criticism." We are yet to develop, the sort of criticism that is made nowadays is made by the unenlightened press.
Ola: By the journalists.

Sina: By the journalists who hardly know the principles in art but they describe art work as they see it. And then some of them in their assessments have contributed in no small way to killing an artist. Some have inadvertently or so, really brought up some artists into the limelight. This aspect is an aspect not fully developed and we are yet to have real art critics in this country. We don't have that now. We have artists in numbers, but we don't have art critics.

Ola: Well, one last question for you. I know you have been itching for the time. I noticed that you have a lot of works which you have exhibited just as you have told me. And you have not actually had anybody who has really written to project what you are saying through your work. This is a challenge to us who are emerging art historians. This is one of my endeavors to try to break into in Nigeria.

Sina: I see.

Ola: Now I'll need your help in this area very much because even today I have got my camera here and the lighting within the National Theatre will not allow me to have good shots of your paintings. So I would like to request you to help me take the photographs in slides which I will pay for, and that will enable me—I would take my own if you allow me today, and then I would like to request someday that you help me take the major ones so that when I begin to write up, I will be able to do justice to what I am writing about of your work. It will not only be just saying but it would be illustrated. And, of
course I will let you have a copy of the relevant areas which touch on your work.

Sina: Again, as much as I would want to assist you in this direction, we have a sort of handicap. I have slides of nearly all my works, which could be very useful to you but they are all single slides.

Ola: Could I copy them?

Sina: Unless copies of these could be made, but I could not afford to release them to you because they are the single things and God knows we make use of these things everyday. Many people come here just as you have come and then we would have the course to have a projector. If we had known that you were coming today, we might have arranged a projector to be mounted here and they would have shot all these things for you. It's a pity that the arrangement is not too proper. We hope for a better meeting sometime. But to assist you, I think that what we have around that could easily come to hand is black and white photographs. We have a lot of them.

Ola: Fine!

Sina: I might have to collect them together and forward to you if you leave your address.

Ola: O.k., o.k.

Sina: But I don't know how soon you want them because from the looks of things and as you can also see, the situation is very tight with us now. We are trying to establish a National Gallery and now I am at the center of everything. We want to make sure that we open the Gallery officially before the end of the year.

Ola: No, I think what I would do to make sure that things do not weigh heavily on you is to leave my home address in Nigeria. You can
just help me by sending it there say within any time from now or
when you can get it. And then they will be able to send it to me,
you know, because it is costly to send things overseas.

Sina: O.k., I see. That might be another thing. Well, again things
get lost a lot when you send them. You can never be too sure about
our postal system.

Ola: In Nigeria?

Sina: Yes, especially when it is heavy things like this. Like
photographs, two, three or four.

Ola: Do you think it is safe to send it directly to me in the U.S.?

Sina: That might be safer. If you leave both addresses, I would
then decide when I want to send it. If it is just to put it by
airmail here and then send it straight to the U.S.

Ola: I wouldn't mind paying the money if I know how much it will
cost right away.

Sina: I don't think it will cost much. It's not going to cost much.

Ola: Could I leave some money.

Sina: No, it doesn't go into that. All that it will cost is the
postage.

Ola: Sometimes it could cost N9 (nine naira) for postage in
Nigeria.

Sina: It depends on what it is. Photographs about 6 or 8, should
not be very costly.

Ola: O.k., o.k. Thank you very much. I think you have been very,
very helpful.

Sina: It is a pleasure meeting you and this is one of our duties
we have to perform to really project Nigerian art internationally.
Ola: Thank you.

INTERVIEW WITH SINA YUSSUFF, PRINCIPAL CULTURAL OFFICER AT THE NIGERIAN NATIONAL THEATRE, IGANMU, LASOS, NIGERIA. SEPTEMBER 30, 1980.

Josy Ajiboye (1980)

Ola: I am now with Mr. Josy Ajiboye, the Nigerian cartoonist, and one of the effective Nigerian artists. Now would you have anything to say on Nigerian contemporary art and yourself.

Josy: Well, I don't talk very much about myself. But as far as Nigerian contemporary artists are concerned now, they are doing quite a good job. What I really would want them to do is to help all those people who are becoming artists and who are coming behind them. It is very difficult for the young ones to get up. What I mean by the young ones is not necessarily those people who are young or who are in the college or universities. But people who are just starting. It is necessary to put them through and help them—show them the way. So that is what I think those people who are really "ruling" now as contemporary artists should do that would bring honor to them.

Ola: Would you like to give your full name and address and where you could be contacted, your official hours and things like that.

Josy: My name is Josy Ajiboye.

Ola: Is that your real name? I think that's your pen name. Oh, I see.

Josy: My work is with the Daily Times. We were once at Kakawa Street, but now moved to Agedengbe.
Ola: What is the post box or is there any post box?
Josy: I have a card here. O.k.
Ola: The card or would you like to leave one with me?
Josy: Yah!
Ola: That's alright. That's good. Thank you. And this is 3/7 Kakawa Street, Lagos. Once more, thank you very much. It's been a pleasure talking with you.

A SHORT INTERVIEW WITH THE FAMOUS NIGERIAN CARTOONIST, JOSY AJIBOYE AT THE NIGERIAN NATIONAL THEATRE, IGANMU, LAGOS. SEPTEMBER 30, 1980, 12:00 noon-12:07 P.M.

Felix Eboigbe (1980)

Ola: Hi! Mr. Eboigbe.
Felix: Yes, sir.
Ola: How are you?
Felix: Alright.
Ola: How are you?
Felix: Fine, oh, yes. I just spoke to Mr. . . . Dr. . . . whatever.
Ola: Odita?
Felix: Yah, Odita.
Ola: Oh, in Columbus?
Felix: Yah.
Ola: I see. Have you anything very interesting to discuss?
Felix: Oh, that's em. . . . No, I am sorry I pack in this place. Can you get yourself inside?
Ola: Sure, I will. Thanks
Felix: . . . ah . . .
Ola: It's much warmer than I thought today! It was colder in the morning.

Felix: I think we're all lucky. We are all lucky today because it was snowing yesterday.

Ola: May I ask a question first of all before we go? Are you going to be in tomorrow?

Felix: Tomorrow?

Ola: Yah.

Felix: Yah, I will be in, let's see now. Yah, I will be in in the afternoon.

Ola: You know the reason is because we are going to your studio and I need to take photographs of your work if you permit me.

Felix: This afternoon?

Ola: Well, if I may, you know.

Felix: O.k. First of all, let's go eat first. I am hungry.

Ola: ha! ha! o.k.

Felix: Then I can get... My people say you don't take empty stomach and talk to someone. Because anything you say is anger mixed with sweet. You don't know which one to handle. So let's go eat first. Have you eaten?

Ola: No, not lunch.

Felix: O.k., you can put your tape over there. If you are free. It's your brother's car. I don't owe anybody for it.

Ola: Let me hold it.

Felix: O.k. We go and eat and then we go to my studio.

Ola: How are you finding this place?
Felix: Oh, your brother has been here too long and it is a part of me.

Ola: How many years have you been here now?

Felix: Ten years.

Ola: Ten years! You don't mean it.

Felix: No, I haven't been home since ten years. Even though Nigeria still writes about me in Nigeria, but I have been here. I left Nigeria nearly when the war just ended.

Ola: Nhun!

Felix: Right, that's 1970.

Ola: When are you planning to go back?

Felix: Any time. ha! ha! ha! ha! Any time. Your brother is planning to go back anytime. That's what I told the Embassy.

Ola: With your booty?

Felix: Hah! ha! ha! With my booty, yah! I told the Embassy...

Mr. Jolaoso, His Honorable. He said, "Felix, we want people like you with talent." I said "when I was home you didn't buy a work from me. So what do you want me to come home for. Hah! ha! ha! ha!"

Ola: Nhun! Nhun! That's always the problem.

Felix: I say what do you hide? He said but we use to know you in Ikoyi. You. you...I say yah, you drive by my studio. You don't even know that your brother is wanted by that time. Except you see the white people coming in. You say this man must have something selling to these white people.

Ola: Nhun! Nhun!

Felix: Ah. Let's go grab something for our tummy. I see where I can put my car now. Ah, to heck with it, I'll stick it right here.
Ola: Do you think it fits right here? It's in the way.
Felix: I don't care! Will you get a room to get out there? Will you?
Ola: No. It's a bit close.
Felix: Let me go back a little bit and get myself room. They have a lot of space to run around there. Is that alright?
Ola: Yah, I think so.
Felix: Great! You want to put your tape in the trunk of the car?
Ola: No, I always like to carry it with me.
Felix: Ah! Even eating?
Ola: Sure!
Felix: Because we can put it in the trunk right now.
Ola: No, as we discuss ideas, I don't want to lose them.
Felix: You want to accumulate experience more and more?
Ola: Oh, sure! Not only just gaining experience but having insights into how other people do their thing.
Felix: Oh.
Ola: You know I was in Athens, Ohio, in 1978 studying and it was from there I saw your first picture with some of your wood carvings and an article about you.
Felix: I see! I see!
Ola: And since then I thought, well maybe we might not meet before I leave this country. Incidentally I went to Nigeria studying contemporary Nigerian artists.
Felix: Ahah!
Ola: And I traveled the length and breadth of Nigeria in search for everyone.
Felix: That's very nice.

Ola: And so when I came back... That's what took me to Benin. I was at Idubor Gallery. I searched for Osawe.

Felix: Ben Osawe?

Ola: Ben Osawe. I couldn't get him anyway. I, you know, got quite a number.

Felix: You met Ben Enwonwu too?

Ola: Oh, no, no, no. I didn't meet with Ben Enwonwu. Anyway I didn't intend meeting with Ben Enwonwu because I already had more than enough. Well, I didn't meet with Ben Enwonwu but I didn't need to. I wanted to meet with artists who are in the category which interests me.

Felix: That's super! That's super! But you should talk to Ben Enwonwu too. He is still our first earlier figure according to the newspaper. You know what I mean. He is the... At least, he is the...

Ola: Exactly.

Felix: At least, he is the...

Ola: The forerunner.

Felix: You have to respect that our elderly man.

Ola: Yah, I do. It's not from that point of view I have said I didn't intend seeing him as such. I am studying a category of artists. If I claim to be able to study all Nigerian artists you would know I am lying.

Felix: Yah!

Ola: I can't study everybody.
Felix: Right. Oh, oh! You had a good time at home.

Ola: Oh, sure I did. I did. And you know, as I said I went round interviewing artists everywhere I could get them. So I always carried my tape recorder with me. And if I bumped on an artist, instead of saying, oh, I wish . . . , I would just say, "hallo" this is my name. I would introduce myself and ask him a few questions.

Felix: Nhn!

Ola: And we talked informally. You know, just as we are talking now. I don't believe too much in rigidity. Otherwise, there will be no freedom of airing. . . of saying exactly what one needs to say. So I was going to ask you. . .

Felix: Just a minute. Just a minute.

Ola: Now I am at the Memorial Union at Bloomington, otherwise at Indiana University, Bloomington. And Mr. Felix Eboigbe is now here. I am going to try to conclude this aspect of recording by asking a few questions.

Now, Mr. Eboigbe, would you like to comment on the materials you use for your work?

Felix: Of course, I use wood. I do wood sculpture. And also, I work with a block of wood. I do not sketch before starting any of my work. So, I look at the wood for about twenty, maybe thirty minutes. Even may be longer than that. And take off what I don't like and keep the rest there. And why people say that my work is unique or whatever, happens that I do not imitate anybody. I do my own way. By looking at a log I can tell what is inside that wood.

Ola: Thank you very much. Now, some of your works look realistic, while some others look abstract. Have you anything to say on the abstract ones?
Felix: Definitely. Definitely. Why I am saying definitely is that before I even came to the United States I have been doing my abstract work and also doing the realistic work. The realistic will remind me of my *tribal* (ethnic) way, but also the abstract is the same thing. Because in Benin, in our culture in Benin we use to say that *Adudu*. What we call *Adudu* is a shadow and this carving is made out of shadow.

Ola: How do you spell that *Adudu*?

Felix: Don't ask me for that now.

Ola: O.k.

Felix: It should be *Adu a du*, something like that. So any time we have a guest in Benin, before the guest leave, that's how the abstract started from Benin. Way, way back, even before the Portuguese came.

Ola: I see! I see!

Felix: It is the tickle. They have a glass of water. Splash it down and that water will sparkle on the floor like the way the man leave his shadow; a little boy will be asked to sketch it behind him. But the man will not know that he is sketching it. You know, he will sketch it immediately he leaves. Then they will give it to "owena". What we call the artist.

Ola: Nhun!

Felix: Say, we would like you to create this person who just visited us. Just the way he looked like. That was years, years, years! And they will do it in abstract form. What the western people now call abstract. Because that started from *Adudu*. That's how this abstract started. It is just by taking 1/2 glass of water, sparkle it on the floor. You will see it. Different abstract will even show.
Ola: I see, it is very interesting. This will prompt me to ask another quick question. Some of the people who have interviewed you before whose literature I have read in newspapers, do say that you look at the wood and the inspiration just comes and you do it!

Felix: Definitely!

Ola: You know, what they are implying directly is that you do not have to look back to your culture—Benin Culture—to derive something. And now what you are telling me is that you have already known about this "Adudu" before which is Benin Culture.

Felix: Way, way before.

Ola: Would you like to emphasize this?

Felix: Way, way before. Even this that I was saying just a few minutes ago that when people come to my gallery in Lagos they used to see different variety of sculpture that I do abstract and also do the realistic. And I used to ask them "what do you mean by abstract and realistic?" I did not know the difference by that time. And they used to say "Felix, you don't understand?" This is abstract and this is realistic. I would say "No. Both of them are the same way, that I see it." What happens there now is that our "Adudu" is what they call abstract. And we can't change it. The Benin have been doing it for long, long, long, long. . . . Even when the Portuguese came 1478 or 1480 or whatever the year was. But we have got used to that Adudu. Even some of Benin project are not really refined, some of them are abstract.

Ola: Some of them are not realistic at all.

Felix: Definitely. It's because of that Adudu that is the system that
every carver that I talked to that I know years ago, used to say.

Even Idah used to say the same thing to me.

Ola: I see. Thank you very much.

Felix: You are welcome.

Ola: Now, these works which you have, could you maybe just briefly in passing, just mention something about each of them. Now, I am going to start on this one and I want you to tell me the size of it if you can remember.

Felix: Oh, that one is about 10 feet, 6 inches.

Ola: And the name if you can remember.

Felix: The name of that one. Yah, the one I call this one—I call it a "Smart Woman".

Ola: Smart woman! I see, you still give it a title.

Felix: A title. It's because of the hollow head I have. It's the same piece.

Ola: It's the same piece, o.k. Now, this mask, I know derives from the culture but what name do you give it, and how tall is it?

Felix: That mask is exactly three feet tall.

Ola: Three feet tall. Nhun!

Felix: And I call it Ogun.

Ola: Ogun? Why do you call it Ogun?

Felix: I call it Ogun because of the Ividi Ipiho. What we call the Ipiho. You see that ipiho. Turn it around. I'll show it to you.

This is what we call ipiho.

Ola: Oh, that's cowrie shells.

Felix: That's cowrie. That cowrie. Ogun is the only one who uses that ipiho for his hat.
Ola: I see, I see. And this is another...?

Felix: That is a successful head. An abstract. That's how they call it.

Ola: They call it...?

Felix: "Orire." What you call Orire and that one is about 9 feet tall.

Ola: Nine feet tall. I can see from your figure. I even think it is taller.

Felix: It is nine feet.

Ola: Now what about this?

Felix: That one is just ordinary—an elderly man.

Ola: An elderly man and is this from the culture?

Felix: That is from Benin culture and is five feet six inches tall.

Ola: Five feet six. Nhun! very impressive!

Felix: Thank you.

Ola: And we come to another abstract one. What of that one?

Felix: Oh, I call this one in English name. I put it or call it "Madonna."

Ola: Nhun, "Madonna." Where is the child if it is a madonna?

Felix: O.k. You see, she is already holding the child in her hand and roll it up with her clothes. You can see the clothes here full all over here. So the arm hides the child, keep him warm up. So that is why here there is a lot of swelling than there.

Ola: I see, I see.

Felix: Right, yah. And that one is about seven feet.

Ola: Now, what about this head. It looks very similar to the one you are carving now.
Felix: Right, right, that is Benin Princess (girl).

Ola: I see.

Felix: About three feet or two feet something. Two feet six inches.

Ola: You have had a lot of exhibitions I know. And in several of the exhibitions you seem to wear Nigerian dress to go with it. Is there any statement you are making with that?

Felix: Not really a statement. Why I wear Nigerian clothes is that I always feel comfortable by wearing that my dress. I feel much relaxed. I feel myself in me. It makes me feel relaxed than putting on a coat and jacket. It doesn't feel relaxed in my body up to my. Is like my people saying: "eating with your finger is still the best than taking a fork and knife."

Ola: Nhun, nhun, I see. If we may continue with the work. Now you have shown the one on the right. What of the lady?

Felix: That one is Fulani woman nursing a baby and carrying a bowl of milk on her head.

Ola: Fulani woman, oh! And that's the one in the studio.

Felix: That is it, right! And that one is 9 feet 6 inches tall.

Ola: That's the one you said you exhibited--where?


Ola: Did you put any price tag on it?

Felix: Oh, the price on that one--my own price is different from my agent's price. So my agent put his own price of $75,000 on it. But I know I will not get more than $35,000 or $36,000 out of $75,000 when he sells it.

Ola: Oh, oh!
Felix: Because he sells it by pictures. He has practically all those art works you see. He has the pictures in his living room.

Ola: I see, what of this squatting one?

Felix: That one. I am the one who create that and I always love it because I call it a "Prodigal son." An abstract of a prodigal son.

Ola: Thinking seriously!

Felix: He wrecked everything down. Right. He wrecked all the whole things he had and took all the whole thing his father had, finished everything up and said, oh my goodness, this is how life is about.

Ola: I see, thank you.

Felix: You are welcome.

Ola: Now this one?

Felix: Oh, that one I call it "Tricky Girl."

Ola: "Tricky Girl"?

Felix: Right. Really the title in the handouts that I really give it is a "Tricky Woman."

Ola: I see.

Felix: Because you see she brought one breast out and hid the other breast. Very, very tricky woman!

Ola: Oh, I see. O.k.

Felix: It's an abstract. It's about 6 feet tall, but already sold to an art collector in New York.

Ola: Nhun! Now, this is a . . . ?

Felix: A "Thinker."

Ola: A "Thinker." The one that. . . . Is it not very similar to the one I saw yesterday in the studio? The one that you called a bird?
Felix: The bird one is different from that one.

Ola: Is different?!

Felix: Yah! Yah!

Ola: I see. It has the same inspiration with the feeling, you know, coming down to a tapering point in the middle.

Felix: Right, right. And they are nearly the same size, 6 feet 6 inches.

Ola: Now, what about this?

Felix: A mother and a child. An African woman carrying the baby on her back.

Ola: Now, out of your work which I have seen, there are many more and I think, you know, we don't necessarily have to go through every one.

Felix: Oh, oh, you have short time now for us to go to the bus station.

Ola: Yah. Which one would you like to speak on at length without being tired on. That you have a lot of story to tell about.

Felix: Goodness! There are about two of them.

Ola: Two of them.

Felix: Right.

Ola: O.k., could you make it brief.

Felix: Oh, my goodness.

Ola: Go on, the tape is there.

Felix: Yah, but we don't have the time. You see, when I start...

Ola: Go along when you are ready, we can go along the way.

Felix: O.k. The one that moves me is the warrior woman. The Idah Yesijie. That when she was expecting her baby, she lost her husband, and she lost her dad and she lost her mother and her sister. So the
whole family was gone before she had that baby and when she had the baby, it was a baby boy and Idah said to herself, "O.k., this baby boy is my husband, is my dad, is my friend, is my mother, is my sister, is my everything I have in my world. Is everything I have in my life." This Idah is all my eye, I can say. So I will cut the story short because we don't have the time.

Ola: You can go on.

Felix: Unfortunately, we have a civil war in our 'tribal' way. So they got up. He got up. The stubborn boy said, "Mummy, I want to go and fight."

Ola: We can go, I would carry it, and you can speak as we go, as long as you hold that.

Felix: Oh, don't worry, I can cut the story short.

Ola: Oh, no, don't. Don't worry.

Felix: He said. It would take us more than days. So that's why I say I am going to cut the story short.

Ola: O.k.

Felix: Then he dressed up and said, "Mummy, I am going to fight."

She said, "Why are you going to fight. You are all everything I have in my life. Please don't go and fight. Don't go and fight." The stubborn guy sneaked out from the house and went over to the war front. So the news came to the mother and said "Your son is dead!"

Ola: Oh, dear!

Felix: The mother said, "What am I doing in life? If I can't see my son and he is not alive, why don't myself go to the war and fight."

Ola: Nhun!
Felix: So the mother talked to the neighbors and they advised the mother you dare not go and fight. You should stay until the real full news come to you. The mother said no she can't wait, she can't sleep, she can't eat, she can't do nothing.

Ola: Nhun! 

Felix: So, stubborn woman too dressed up as a warrior and went to the war front and started fighting, fighting until she saw the dead body of her son and picked up the son and brought the son home. And buried the son in her living room.

Ola: Is it?

Felix: So, and her name in our tribal pronunciation we call it "Okoro vi-vokho" except I will say except because I have to put English there — except Idah, Iyesijie, which means "Okoro vi-vokho to pida no bi yesi je."

Ola: I see.

Felix: So that is the. . . . I cut the story short because I know it will take us all evening and all night to talk about Idah.

Ola: I see.

Felix: So, she buried the son in her living room and called all the women in the village, in the whole town, and said come and celebrate and give them the "tribal" . .

Ola: We use ethnic. . . anyway.

Felix: Ethnic references to give them a party. Of course, in olden days, the party they used to give was with drinks. The tribal drink—I mean the ethnic drink. And also the women will be enjoying salt.
Ola: I see.

Felix: You don't. By that time, you don't give women money or drink. You only give women salt because that's what she cooks with. And that is a part of herself and women always love it in our cultural way.

Ola: I see.

Felix: So, that woman I created, Idah Iyesijie, I call it "Okoro yi-vokho."

Ola: Nhun!

Felix: That is...that very woman warrior that I create. And I love it so much and I will try to keep it. Sometimes I put for sale, sometimes I say not for sale.

Ola: Do you have it in the studio there?

Felix: Oh sure, it was there.

Ola: Nhun!

Felix: Yah! Carved in ebony wood. Sometimes I put for sale, as I said, sometimes not for sale at all. But I know one of these days...

Ola: Have you been interviewed on it before?

Felix: Oh definitely.

Ola: Oh, o.k.

Felix: Really, but not too much. Briefly!

Ola: Nhun. I see.

Felix: Yah! I will say...

Ola: Is it abstract or semi-abstract?

Felix: It is semi-abstract and semi-realistic.

Ola: I see. I can't remember seeing it yesterday. Did I? Did we take it out yesterday?
Felix: No, it was in the back room. No we didn't take it out at all.

Ola: Oh, it's too big?

Felix: It was heavy. Not really too big. It was heavy. So the price I put, sometimes I even put $60,000 or $50,000 or $70,000 on it. Sometimes I put $100,000 on it.

Ola: I see.

Felix: My agent even told me in New York that that very piece has to be sold to a museum or a big art collector.

Ola: That kind should have gone to Nigeria.

Felix: It should, really!

Ola: Because it is historical.

Felix: That is it; that is it.

Ola: And if this kind of thing should come to the attention of the ambassador, there is no reason why they can't talk to government to buy this kind of thing for the National Contemporary Gallery.

Felix: Right, I have been trying. I, myself, I have been trying to hold on to it for all these years. But you know, sometimes we all are human. One of these days there may be attempt by someone who has the money to.

Ola: Yah, and if Nigeria would buy it, I can't imagine Nigeria buying it for even $30,000.

Felix: Even though they buy it for $30,000 or even $60,000 they are still making a good deal because Nigeria, it will be so silly for them. It's like they go out to New York, go buy a mask that was sold to one gallery for $2,500. Nigeria went over and bought it for point something million dollars. Get it back! Your bus is already here.
Ola: When there was nothing they could do. They couldn't take the
guy who has it to court here.

Felix: No, no way. They can't get the guy who has it.

Ola: Thank you very much.

INTERVIEW WITH FELIX EGOIGBE AT THE DEPARTMENT OF ART EDUCATION,
November 14, 1980

Mr. Daniel Olaniyan Babalola
164½ East 11th Avenue
Columbus, Ohio 43201

Dear Mr. Babalola:

It is my pleasure to inform you that your research project, "The Awo Art Style: A Synthesis of Traditional and Contemporary Artistic Idioms in Nigeria," has been approved for funding at $600.00 as part of our Graduate Student Alumni Research Award program.

Please call and arrange to see our fiscal officer, Miss Susan Erskine, Room 250L University Hall, 230 North Oval Mall (telephone 422-1679). She will provide you with information relating to the expenditure of funds and will finalize your budget with you.

Again, my congratulations to you for a fine project.

Yours sincerely,

Timothy R. Donoghue
Associate Dean for Research

TRD/vg

cc: J. B. LaPidus
H. G. Crane
O. E. Odita
S. L. Erskine
APPENDIX II

VITAL DATA ON CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN ART
Appendix II - Guideline

a. Published Articles by Artists

1964 - Anonymous artist "Exhibition."
1975 - Uche Okeke. "Panorama on Nigerian Art."

b. Unpublished articles by Artists


c. Published Articles by non-artists

1961 - "Contemporary Nigerian Art."
1961 - Anonymous. "The One Man Show of a Young Artist."
1965 - John Holiday. "Surprises When Africa is Taught to Make Art."
1965 - Anonymous. "Nigeria at the Commonwealth Festival."
1965 - I.N.C. Aniebo. "Daubers and Scribblers."
1966 - Editor, Nigeria Magazine. "Exhibitions of Paintings."
1966 - Anonymous. "A Large Number of Benin Artists."
1966 - Ayo Ajayi. "New Name in Art World."
1968 - Anonymous. "Fajuyi to Open Arts Exhibition."
Anonymous artist (1964)

An exhibition to mark the inauguration of the Society of Nigerian Artists (SNA) was held at the Exhibition Centre, Marina, Lagos, from 16th to 22nd January, 1964, under the chairmanship of Mrs. N. Majekodunmi. Featuring eighty-three exhibits in various media, the exhibition which was opened by Mr. Ben Enwonwu, R.B.A., Nigeria's leading modern artist and Federal Adviser on Art to the Nigerian Government, drew attention to two things. First, the Exhibition Centre, the only indigenous hall in Lagos for showing contemporary art, has outlived its usefulness; second the standard of work varied greatly.

The Exhibition Centre, Marina, was constructed in 1943, just before Ben Enwonwu's first one-man exhibition. The increasing number of young artists and the growing interest Nigerians are showing towards art have proved the hall no longer adequate. The
building is small and not suited for art exhibitions. What is called for is a Museum of Modern Nigerian Art where our young artists can hold exhibitions to the best advantage.

This exhibition, which marked the inauguration of the Society, had works of a very high standard shown alongside those that are mediocre or even just plain bad. This, in itself, calls attention to the important role that the new society can play for the advancement of art. In his opening speech, Ben Enwonwu reminded the twenty-four foundation members of the Society (they range from artists whose background and training are traditional and who still carry on their work in the traditional idiom to those who have attended art schools and have accepted Western Techniques and styles believing 'that an artist should be able to speak the language of his time') that they will be required to stress the importance of the academic nature of art, and of the studies necessary for an African today who wishes to become an artist in the true sense. Through its debates and researches, the Society will evolve new aesthetic principles based upon knowledge. It will afford reasons to academic debates on what is true art and what is its counterfeit.

The Society's accepted principles will help to determine what constitutes the difference between a great work of art and a lesser one, the difference between an artist and a craftsman. The Society of Nigerian Artists will go further in formulating new aesthetics of African art.

How well the Society can live up to this task remains to be seen!

ANONYMOUS ARTIST: "EXHIBITIONS." NIGERIA MAGAZINE NO. 80, MARCH, 1964, p. 69.
What is today known as Nigeria's Modern Art has its humble beginning in the 16th Century in the City of Benin. There, traditional craftsmen and artists employed some of the Christian European concepts and symbolism brought in by their Portuguese visitors. The Portuguese, for their part, held in high esteem the Oba and his court, the artist inclusive. Over the centuries, Nigerian art has, therefore, slowly evolved from traditional through transitional to modern. In fact, all the three major groups are today contemporaneous. By far the largest active group are the transitional artist and these range from neo-traditionalists to pseudo-moderns, products of Nigeria's new urban culture. Their world view is not as circumscribed as that of the ethnic artists, their knowledge is much too small for the modern.

The recent National Arts Festival exhibition more than adequately proved the maturity and indeed the validity of Nigeria's modern art. This is as it should be, for the Independence Exhibition of 1960 served to bring to light young promising artists from Zaria. It further exposed the work of such well known Nigerian artists as Aina Onabolu, Akinola Lasekan, and Ben Enwonwu.

Nigerian artists after 1960 experienced awareness of their individual and collective importance. Consequently, there was an outburst of creativity, a virtual renaissance. Nigerian artists are more than ever poised for a meaningful cultural revolution--a socio-cultural revolution--African in form and content, a contemporary expression of the African soul within the context of a large world revolution.
One obvious omission in the recent Festival exhibition is that of Aina Onabolu. Onabolu is without doubt the father of modern Nigerian Art and a master of considerable influence. Because of his position of importance in the local art scene of colonial Lagos between the two World Wars, his place in Nigerian art history is well assured. His drawings and paintings show great sensitivity and the discipline which he acquired in art academies in London and Paris. Some of his works remain to this day the finest naturalistic portrait paintings of contemporary Nigeria.

Both Akinola Lasekan and Eke Okaybulu were well represented. Akinola Lasekan's death brought to an abrupt end the work of this pioneer political cartoonist of the post Second World War years. His cartoons in the West African Pilot were as important if not more effective than the speeches and writings of such eminent Nigerian nationalists as Herbert Macaulay and Nnamdi Azikiwe. Lasekan's paintings displayed to effect his draughting ability and his debt to Aina Onabolu. One distinguishing feature of his contribution though, is his painting of common people and events of everyday life, for example, Market Scene, Hausa Boy and Nigerian Constable.

Lasekan is mostly home grown and earthy. Although he traveled to Britain briefly in the early forties, he did not and could not because of his political orientation and the socio-political ferment in Nigeria accept the elitist attitude of Aina Onabolu. Aina Onabolu, for example, was most at home with colonial governors and civil servants. This accounts for his relative anonymity and the general lack of appreciation of his contribution today—a rather unfortunate situation.
Eke Okaybulu's Abang exposes to effect his innate sense of form and empathy for his dancer. This rather serious but sensuous water color painting is easily the finest piece I have seen painted by this highly sensitive and introverted mind. The star dancer looms larger than life. She is indeed the goddess of the dance. It is unfortunate however, that of all his works advertised as collected by the Public Relations Department only the Abang has survived or has been retained in this country. Okaybulu's genius is lamentably mostly lost to us but for the recent interest in his life work as contained in an Asele Archives monograph titled "Eke Okaybulu 1916-1958." Okaybulu was a prolific illustrator of school texts. These have preserved for us in print his pencil and pen and ink drawings. Eke Okaybulu gained immensely from his knowledge of the so-called Murray School at Umuahia where such artists as C. C. Ibeto, Uthman Ibrahim, Ben Enwonwu and D. L. K. Nnachi trained in the early thirties. He profited from the rustic simplicity of the Murray School and from the urban or class conscious art of Onabolu.

It was not possible to sample some representative work from K. C. Murray'a past pupils at Ibadan and Umuahia. Ben Enwonwu's water colors on display were of recent origin. His Negritude Theme, Black is Beauty, sub-titled Africa Dances, explores the rhythmic movement of the African dance, a theme that has engaged the master for some two decades. Ben Enwonwu has not been well represented in this exhibition, his sculptural work and indeed more exciting painting have not been presented. He is perhaps the best known African artist of the forties and fifties and has exerted considerable influence in Nigeria.
I have before now listed four artists of the Murray School, there are others such as A. P. Umana, J. O. Ugoji, D. L. K. Nnachi who also profited from his direct guidance and encouragement. Murray encouraged in his pupils the study of traditional customs and usages and because of the influence of Igbo art and culture, the human being, his every day life experience formed the central theme of their genre paintings. Murray's pupils found acceptance of their efforts in the schools where their works were displayed mostly as visual aids for teaching. It is unfortunate therefore, that this important omission has been committed by the exhibition organizers and we are the poorer for it.

Although the Murray School was the earliest and most impressive for its pioneering achievements in the area of formal art training in this country, there was, for instance, Mrs. Williams' experiment at Uzuakoli also in the thirties. Udo Ema a pioneer writer of school texts on art techniques and a designer, came out of the Uzuakoli experiment. He has, himself exerted worthwhile influence on art teachers and artists since the forties. He is the father of the promising artist and designer, Inyang Udo Ema.

Perhaps it is pertinent here to put into perspective what I have in some earlier essays called "The Mbaise School" and whose moving spirit and master was and still is S. A. O. Chukwuegu. The master himself was not represented at Lagos recently although he is alive and still active. He showed early interest in the work of C. C. Ibeto and learnt of Murray's activities at Umuahia. Chukwuegu took part in the 1948 art show organized at the Exhibition Centre,
Marina, Lagos. There, for the first time his Amadioha, a fresh and rather personal interpretation of Igbo Folklore was well acclaimed. In the recent festival exhibition, the Mbaise School was ably represented by Silva Chukwuegu, the master's son. Silva's monumental piece, another Amadioha is an exciting exposition of a familiar theme, a totem, as it were, to the spirit of thunder and its lesser aids--spirit, human and animal beings carved in wood in the traditional fashion although the idea is essentially personal and mostly grotesque. Silva has the potential for further improvement although his technique is yet to match his fertile imagination and his pre-occupation with the gods and goddesses of Mbaise.

Felix Idubor and Lamidi Fakeye were some of the foremost transitional or new folk artists of the fifties and the post-independence decade. Their importance lay in their ability to further the traditional art of their ethnic societies with modern techniques of production. Lamidi Fakeye is much closer to his native Yoruba wood carvers' art than Idubor to the traditional art of Benin City before the Portuguese. This understanding is important in appreciating the contribution of both artists or indeed others of similar background and experience.

Today, transitional artists constitute the largest and the most diverse body of practitioners of Fine and Applied Arts in Nigeria. And the Festival exhibition is full with rich examples of works of this group of artists--Bisi Fakeye, Amos Odion, Ben Aye, and Geoffrey Nwaogu.

The factor of change becomes at once very obvious in the border areas where, for example, a traditional artist turns
transitional as a result of his migration to an urban town or where such transitional artist with some school education improves or deepens his knowledge and experience of art and life and paints and sculpts in a very individual style or with sophisticated techniques. Shanumi's *The Great Hunter* is very impressive in its rather elegant and naturalistic style.

It was at Zaria in the late fifties that a student art society seriously examined the role of the artist in Nigeria's contemporary society. Only recently I reexamined the documents of the NCAST Art Society, as it was then known, and was confirmed in my views that it was the first time in this country that a group of creative artists formulated a guiding principle for themselves—a manifesto as it were, which accepted change as an important element in the art and life of the people. A concept, which as recent as 1972 formed the bedrock of the National Art Education Committee's stated philosophy of Creative and Cultural Art Education. "... such education according to the advisory body is geared towards developing the individual into a complete and creative person, resuscitating what is best in our traditional culture and harmonizing it with what is best elsewhere in the world." Members of the Zaria Students' Art Society through their efforts exposes their preoccupation with the search for identity.

Works by Y. C. Grillo and Demas Nwoko were not exhibited. These two were members of the Zaria Art Society who emerged from the Independence Exhibition of 1960 and are now some of the important African artists of our times.

Bruce Onobrakpeya, one of the Zaria student group, presented a few of his famous deep etchings. I see in this presentation the
artist's fresh use of colors in his more recent works: Rain and Cry at Otorogba and Boat Regatta. His rather restrained color scheme of yester-years has given way to the painter in him and his poetic sensibility has been greatly heightened.

Only one of Simon Okeke's unique water color paintings, The Struggle" was displayed. Simon's works are deeply rooted in Igbo culture, his forms are very carefully or meticulously modeled. It is lamentable that such young and creative artist has ceased to be and under such circumstance as leaves one guessing.

I have continued to explore Igbo folklore ideas as is shown in my large painting "Oyoyo" and my recent linoleum print, "March of Masqueraders." Igbo "Ulli" drawing which informed my experiments since the early sixties continues to do so. Perhaps my drawings have attained more fluency.

Jimoh Akolo's paintings retain their original formal quality and almost self-conscious approach to color design. A fine draughtsman, Jimoh in his cool calculating way, achieves a highly intellectualized effect in his paintings which derive much of their strength from the observation of life in Northern Nigeria.

Isiaka Osunde, who spent some time in the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology and later trained in the U.S.S.R, is a naturalistic sculptor. He is a fine portraitist and this is well illustrated during the recent exhibition. Osunde is a fine craftsman and artist whose works are very sensitively modeled and carefully finished.

Ben Osawe's Standing Figure in metal is a monumental piece and a fine example of welded metal sculpture. His training in London
helped to put him out of sight of the generality of the Nigerian people. His works have force and are very well thought out and executed. Without much equivocation, Osawe, to my mind, is one of the finest modern sculptors working in Nigeria today. Perhaps there will be a better opportunity in future for a fuller appreciation of his wide ranging efforts.

Erhabor Emokpae is a well known Nigerian artist. His large wooden sculptures show certain modern tendencies—the glorification of form as commonly practiced in the highly industrialized societies. But Emokpae is a designer of considerable experience and is well aware of his role as a creative citizen. His personal vision is validly part and parcel of Nigeria's contemporary experience.

Francis Osague's wood sculpture "Agbohidi" is most effective. His use of the natural quality of wood is in line with the best tradition of the wood carver's art in Nigeria's ethnic societies. The artist here, as it were, transforms mere wood into an object of occult powers. Osague is not a newcomer, he participated in the 1960 Independence Exhibition.

Twins Seven Seven and Jimoh Buraimoh, the leading exponents of the Oshogbo School, in their work explore and exploit the world of Yoruba folklore much in the same way as Amos Tutuola did in the area of the written word before them. Their works exude that earthiness of folk ways and that sense for the decorative that marks out Yoruba folk art from perhaps the studied and highly refined work of Yussuf Grillo. Twins Seven Seven's painting, The Dreams of Reincarnation Child and Jimoh Buraimoh's The Peacock, very well represent
these two very lively and creative artists. It is perhaps important
to note that the Oshogbo experiment is part of Nigeria's contemporary
art heritage and indeed very much so.

One heartening aspect of the festival exhibition is the
appearance of new and effective artists on the scene. I have in mind
such painters as Obiora Udechukwu, Kolade Oshinowo, and Sina Yussuff,
of all these, Obiora Udechukwu is, to my mind, already on the sure
path of maturity. He has found his root in the traditions of his
ethnic society and has essayed to employ the Igbo Uli motif symbols
in his own way. Chris Okigbo's poetry is his important source of in-
spiration. His is perhaps part of the package of the Nsukka School
to which he belongs. Obiora's paintings and drawings show lyrical
qualities and a certain organizational quality that belongs to the
best of Igbo mural painting tradition. There are a few minors of the
Nsukka School whose works stood out at the exhibition as exemplified
by Ego Uche Okeke.

Kolade Oshinowo and Sina Yussuff have the fine sense of color,
although they have as yet to bring to focus their vision of art and
life. Their paintings are well structured and their color sense
quite lively. They very well realize the sweltering heat of a Northern
sallah or durbar atmosphere. This is in character with the spirit of
Zaria from where they recently graduated. Perhaps in time their
rather romantic view of the horse-man will yield way to something of
the robust and stylized Yoruba horseman of Fakeye or Bamgboye of old.

These three along with others of the younger generation, are
the inheritors of an ever widening vista of Nigeria's contemporary
art scene. It is for them to pick up the loose threads of Nigeria's mid-20th century art thoughts in order to continue to give meaningful direction to the society at large.

It is not possible in a review such as this to catalogue all names. There are far too many artists involved in this free and largest representative art exhibition ever held in Nigeria. New schools of art are emerging, new studios and galleries are being set up by individual artists, artists' groups and local art enthusiasts. Artists now find wider acceptance and patronage for their work in Nigeria. These are very welcome developments.


Demas Nwoko (1977)

At the Colloquium during the second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture in Lagos, the recommendation on the arts reads:

In view of the fact that art is a factor of cultural identity and technological progress in a civilization, and in view of the fact that a work of art is African not only by subjective content, but essentially so by its form and style that carries an unmistakable stamp of Black and African aesthetics, the colloquium recommends that artists acquire knowledge of this aesthetics and create along this same style while avoiding more copy and repetition of the past. On such a foundation, they will be free to get innovative inspirations from other aesthetic sources in the world and make effective use of all means of modern technology available to them.

Viewed in this light, the work of most contemporary African artists have been a failure. It is obvious that they have not conformed with the essence contained in the recommendation as read,
given the type of formation they got during their period of training.

I have stated many times before that the contemporary African artist has been unfortunate in the sense that he has a foreign formation. He lost the opportunity to be apprenticed in the traditional sense to master artists where he would have learnt, not only the craft, but the aesthetics of the forms in conformity with the necessary African aesthetic sensibility.

It is true that the validity of the works of African contemporary artists will be greatly reduced if they practiced an art which carries a foreign aesthetic idiom. At worst their works would have an exotic value to this part of the world.

Let us examine how the contemporary African artist has fared in this society. One would have thought that since art patronage usually rested with the elite—by elite here, I mean the educated and affluent who form a leading class in any given society—that since the artist had a similar formation in the same schools with these modern African elites, there would be an affinity and an understanding of aesthetics essence that would have made his art acceptable to them. But it is true that the contemporary African elite has not become an effective sponsor of contemporary African art. Two reasons could be responsible, either that the aesthetics of the works of the contemporary African artist still has not found a place in the sensibility of the contemporary African elite, or that the type of education both had been exposed to had not been thorough enough to have armed them with an understanding of the aesthetics of art.
If we take the first situation where I have stated that the contemporary African elite has not absorbed the aesthetic sensibility of the west in whose form of education he had been raised, we are saying that while he acquired some scientific and technological knowledge and language at school, he did not acquire their relevant aesthetic civilization along with his education. This could be due to the persistent presence in him of the native African aesthetics. In which case we would expect he would still appreciate an art in a typically African artistic idiom. And since the contemporary African artist has not been working in this idiom, he finds neither the market, nor the sympathy from the contemporary African who still waits for an artistic expression that is truly African.

On the other hand, if it is that the contemporary African audience has little or a garbled knowledge of western aesthetics that is only comparable to the little and garbled knowledge of the African contemporary artists, then we will be facing a situation where we would say that the contemporary African art is a derivation of a civilization which has not been effectively comprehended by its apparent peddlers. If this should be the case, it could be said to be an advantage, since they have not been fully assimilated into a foreign culture and are thus retrievable and could be reformed to the right process of production of valid contemporary art in Africa through a process of rekindling the latent aesthetic sensibility that is buried in the contemporary African generally. If we succeed in rekindling this awareness and arrive at a situation where the contemporary artist starts to produce works that would pass as
African, we would expect that patronage of the arts could return to its pre-colonization level—a level which has been proved to have been quite high. Evidence of this is seen in the amount of work of art that had been produced in Africa. This exceptionally good level of patronage of the artist inspired him to produce several works thus generating a great proliferation of the arts.

During discussions at the Colloquium at Festac, reference was made in the paper of Fecadu Gadamu, an Ethiopian, to a situation where traditional artists at a time in Ethiopia were members of a caste that were almost taboo to society, retaining the lowest rank among the people. But there was evidence of high numerical membership of this profession, people taking to the profession voluntarily and producing the large amount of works of art that is the Ethiopian art legacy today.

I would like to discuss further the implications of a guideline to creativity directed towards the contemporary African artist. By the manner of the practice of art all over the world today, it could be resentful to contemporary artists to be asked to conform to any given style or given aesthetics; the tendency to be unbridledly free is present to the extent that the world has been subjected to and called upon to appreciate works that are definitely of very low aesthetic level. It is desirable, therefore that an aesthetic guideline should be established, and taught in schools of fine arts all over the continent. I do not expect such a guideline to limit detrimentally the creative freedom of any artists. It would be an exercise that would open the contemporary artist to a good knowledge of African aesthetic values which he had hitherto not been exposed to.
What is being done for other subjects and disciplines in our institutions could be done for the arts since the arts are almost exclusively taught in formal educational institutions. It is a fact that instructors in most art institutions are still foreigners or foreign orientated. When they are Africans, they have had an extensive exposure to western values through extensive and protracted... They were subjected to western poetry at their kindergarten level, to only western literature during their primary and secondary school levels, worsened by their involvement in the teachings of foreign religions. To confound the situation, they had attended a completely western style arts school though situated in their own country with a staffing population that is overwhelmingly foreign and with all stylistic procedures in conformity with similar schools in America and Europe. Often, these budding African artists had not stopped at their college education at the art school in their country but had gone on to pursue higher qualifications in a university overseas. For an artist that has found himself in such a position, it will be difficult to expect him to have imbibed enough of the idioms of African aesthetics, how much more talk of developing a natural sensibility to it to the extent that he could produce works that would in any way satisfy such an urge in the average true African found in the masses of the people. As I said earlier, there is no evidence to show that whatever he has produced has even gone down well with the educated elite in the African contemporary society because when this group of people bought art works, they have acquired the worst examples at the lowest level of craftsmanship and
composition which shows that they do not even have the basic sensibility to good art.

Worse, given a situation where even these 'educated' elites who would make pretensions to art appreciation are very few, forming a very minor percentage of the population, it becomes even more pertinent that the contemporary African artist work for the greater masses of the people and not for this minority.

While chances of communal commissions have diminished with the increased membership of foreign religions, and the playing down of traditional African religions manifestations, the plastic artist has to depend on an elite class more than ever before. In history, it was the kings and his ruling hierarchy, the chiefs or the wealthy merchants and medicine men who traveled wide. The average member of the society contributed to a communal commission of shrine figures and masks for their theatrical entertainments, pseudo-religious conditions or mere social festivals. To the average African therefore, items of plastic arts are meant for communal ownership and hardly for individual acquisition and it has been traditionally so. These ruling elites were the custodians of such treasures and the people would be quite content to view these items of works of art either at the public shrines, in the king's palace, or in the exclusive enclosure of the house of the wealthy citizens. These categories of people were usually accepted and looked up to for leadership which they recognized and gave also.

If we have no more public shrines to which the average man is called upon to contribute at the commission of an art work, the
average man has arrogated his right to the government to carry out such commissions which will produce works of art to be placed in public places for the viewing of the citizens. When such a work has been commissioned, its exposure transcends the limits of social class and status. If the work is to be exposed to all levels and status in the society, it is only moral that such a work should conform to the aesthetic sensibility of the greater majority of the people.

In the performing arts there is no case for exclusiveness since a cross section of the society would very likely attend the shows, be it dance, drama or music. The recommendations as quoted at the beginning of this intervention should even hold a lot more stringency on the performing artists which includes the dramatists and musicians. Popular music has done well as it has been able to evolve and develop, retaining a basic character that is not strange to the sensibility of the average African because of its high content of African idioms while it has borrowed a lot from foreign sources in addition to the use of instruments that have become foreign even though it could be said that their origin was African instruments like the guitar, the trumpet, the xylophone, wooden clappers, and the flutes, are all instruments that are native to Africa, exported, redesigned and refined in exile. Their re-importation was very easy because the sounds they produced were not strange to their contemporary users. In this vein, it would be seen that the piano has not become a popular instrument with the African popular musician, though it has some ample sound qualities that are
similar to that of the xylophone, but the sounds are not the same and so there has not been any effort to introduce the piano seriously. The guitar has the advantage of a capacity for being tuned to any sound modulation that the player chooses and it has been thus possible to tune the musician's guitar to sounds of original African instruments.

The great problem area in contemporary African music has been with the composers of what could be called the fine art music. They have been so tied up with the foreign idiom that they have not been able to use available local instruments to produce new idioms of music as a fine art creation.

We could examine some two points that we might establish as the essence of African aesthetics which could be applied in the arts to help make African contemporary art conform with the essence of the African aesthetic idioms.

AFRICAN AESTHETIC IDIOMS

The Plastic arts: (1) The abstract idiom.

The abstract and abstraction as an idiomatic style is rooted in the tradition of African art. The evidence abound and in them, we will easily notice that the art of abstraction attained a very high level of purity.

One recalls the art events of the century when European artists received the influence of the African art style and they quickly evolved an abstract approach to painting and sculpture. Worthy of note are the paintings of artists that finally drove this abstract approach to its logical end of painting white on white and white and
and black on black. This liberation of the artistic mind in Europe as instigated by their knowledge of African art led to the abandoned and uncontrolled freedom that has brought the plastic art in Europe to a fairly light state. To them the experience is new but to us in Africa, there is nothing that has been done or that is being done in the western contemporary art scene that has not been done in traditional African art. There is the most beautiful example of paintings of black on black or white on white that I know of in the African Artistic Experience. The walls that are usually painted white, black and dark green on which the women made patterns with the same white paint over their white surfaces. This patterning is hardly noticeable but a closer look at the walls reveal to you the artistically broken surface. So it is seen that when the African wanted to paint a wall white he did not just stop at painting it flat white, he tried to create further forms on the white, not using any other color but the same white. The same treatment was given to the black and dark green areas too. This form of artistic realization is obviously a product of a most delicate and the finest aesthetic sensibilities.

This is recognition that the human eye, once it looks on anything and, if the owner of that pair of eyes is in a state of mind to derive aesthetic pleasure, would normally examine the object further in great detail. To be successful, these objects should possess infinite possibilities for a deeper visual and aesthetic satisfaction to the spectator. This aesthetic satisfaction is in tune with the form quantity in Nature itself in which all forms are infinitely rich. The more you examine anything in nature, the more
you discover more than the casual eye can see. The use of modern technological aids to examine natural objects have revealed this infinite richness and the bigger the microscopes, the more forms have continued to unfold. The African artistic approach is aware of this and would do its best to infuse into any form it has created, that type of infinite depth in the world of forms.

When a spectator is drawn unsuspectingly into a very close examination of an object with such wealth of forms, the pleasure it gives is usually infinitely satisfying and that may spell out the interest that one notices in the spectator of an African abstract which is not the same thing with a spectator of European abstraction. One thing is common to both and that is that the forms are usually geometric. Geometric forms like are used in mathematics which is an abstract subject, seem to be the base of the forms of all pure abstract productions. While the European abstract artist resorts to fairly modern mathematics to justify his artistic production, the African artist inherited these geometric forms as a traditional idiom. It was just a valid art form to him.

The purity of the African abstract is greatly enhanced by the composition style of the African abstract artist. His choice of form and the arrangement of these forms, shapes, and colors, carried a lot of poetic undertones. In my experience, it has been possible for an African abstract piece to excite words of lyrical poetry. The forms are arranged in movements that are usually rhythmic using repetition of both form and color in a pattern sequence that excites joy. Usually, the African abstract is easy to the extent that it might pass as mere
pattern if one did not look twice. Even in tradition, where they may appear on walls as figurative art, their presence have been very compulsive. They created environmental aesthetics that are truly satisfying. More so as the best application of the abstract idiom has been as decoration and embellishment of useful objects and in architecture, on walls, roofs, doors and on floors.

On wearing apparel, patterns on cloth are not treated as patterns on modern European textile where a motif is picked and simply repeated, often uniformly over the sheet of cloth. Traditionally, patterns for textile wearing apparel were treated in search of a manner as to give the impression that any piece of given material was one whole artistic expression. The artist drew his patterns not just for the ease of repetition, but did lay out his forms carefully considering the purpose and how that material will be worn to give full play to his artistic creation.

It will be difficult then in a culture like ours to produce an abstract, as a painting, meant for hanging on a wall and expect an African to admire it as a piece for aesthetic appreciation. The abstract artist should apply his art to which it rightly belongs and that is to walls, wearing apparel, to furniture, to utensils and on figurative objects which it embellishes as plastic poetry to bestow maximum aesthetic form to his création (in Italics).

One has to read these abstract forms as one would read a writing or calligraphy to derive maximum and very gratifying aesthetic experience from them.
FIGURATIVE ART

The figurative art is rooted as an expressionistic art, eloquent in its communication. This eloquence of language and communication seems possible because of the subjection of realism to an urgency of idea communication and aesthetic communication.

The African figurative artist sets out in the first place to convey definite messages. His works are usually directed towards definite purposeful usage and usually commissioned specially. Envisaged use and given subjects play a very important role in the formation of the forms they carry. Here I will be quick to add that this formulation is entirely under the control of the artist. The subject as given by a client does not include form concept. It was left to the artist to create a form that will express the subjects as demanded by the clients.

If we accept the fact that the objective of the exercise was to communicate to its audience the message as carried by the subject, then the artist has to achieve this through composition of form and color elements which conform to the aesthetic sensibility of its users.

The figurative artist has to speak not only a phrase but seems to be required to speak an anecdote or even a whole story, the lucidity of which is expected to endure as long as the work lasts. To achieve a success that is acceptable therefore, the artist must be able to imbue the figure with the power of continuous communication to his audience. A type of communication that remains valid for that culture through time. This has been the profound accomplishment of traditional African artists as witnessed by the figurative forms found on the
shrines' objects that have been able to keep their magic grip on their audience for all time, running through ages and across cultural barriers. Given a dynamic culture as the Africans have, it could have been easy for works of art to fall out of favor with succeeding generations especially when their spoken language forms had changed and their life style altered. But despite these changes, the plastic art elements in African culture have kept their hold on the majority of the people even today. The masquerades for example, still carry the same awe which they inspired in their originating audience, a reverence which is very much attuned to the objectives of their creation, which in many cases, were religious, ethical and moral.

Let us examine how the African artist was able to imbue a figure, a human or animal figure, with the attribute that gives it life and an abundant ability to speak eloquently. In my observation of man and animal, living things in nature which are usually the prime sources of inspiration for artists, I have discovered that what makes for an effective expression in the animal or man, is the continuous rearrangement of the muscle of the body. We pick any expression that we want to formulate and we accordingly twist or distort that part of the body which when read in relationship to other parts of the body communicates the expression envisaged. Man is a living being, an animal that displaces itself freely; an attribute he uses freely to demonstrate his emotional reaction to his environment. Such manifestation is usually an action that speaks, such as distorting his hand, his legs, his face, his eyes, to the extent that if a photograph was taken of this man at this point, I think he might reject
it as not being a true picture of himself. He could hardly imagine his handsome self so distorted.

This process of distortion by rearrangement of parts of the body which is instinctively achieved to express ourselves, is what the African artist uses to give life to his figurative forms. A means that is seen as distortion in African art. If you produce a completely neutrally placid image or picture, it will look like a death mask, a state at which the human body has ceased to live and react and, therefore, has ceased to communicate. Hence if one produced a realistic copy of a human form, its result will probably be dead-like since the work is incapable of movement in itself. Any life in any work of art therefore, has to be predetermined and worked into the piece. This should not be confused with deformity. Deformity in itself is ugly because of its permanent nature in relationship to other normal parts of the body. The assignment which the African artist has given to himself to create eloquent expressionistic form in static objects like wood and stone, runs this danger of being looked upon as an act of deformation of shapes. This often happens with works of unaccomplished African artists, who fail to produce good works in this style and end up with deformed objects.

Deformity in itself is not acceptable but distortion as an activity in liveliness, is perfectly acceptable as valid aesthetic expression. The challenge here becomes that of creating distortion and obtaining expression without creating deformity. This has been possible in African art due to the ability of the African traditional artist to balance his forms and proportions to the extent that he
makes his figurative form exude an air of confidence and therefore, establish his existence as valid.

Having achieved this, the African artists have then created a stylistic idiom that established an existence without necessarily copying nature’s forms. He used nature’s forms in his composition, which is natural because man’s experience is of the world around him, and his creation would reflect this. What the African artist has done, is to extend the dimension of nature’s creativity instead of presenting nature. He then created his own from realities. This unfettered approach to artistic creativity established the most favorable conditions for the unprecedented prolific production of the arts in this part of the world. It also created a situation where nature has been allowed to retain its valid existence from which man was free at all times to derive maximum aesthetic pleasure. Such environmental aesthetic pleasure is desirable for all humanity and all effort has always been made to preserve it intact. The validity of environmental aesthetics was heightened in Africa because man, in seeking to express his own creativity, has not challenged nature in any way. Instead, man has gone into himself to create his own world of forms completely independent of natural forms.

In this part of the world therefore, the world has been made richer by having two sources of artistic aesthetic pleasure—one from nature and one man-made. It is this separation that is very important in the process of artistic creation. A situation where it is established beyond any doubt that the artistic creation of man is valid in itself as an activity, a valid part of life that should be
experienced by every human being just as nature's resources are open to all humanity. The artistic forms of the African artist should then be seen as being that command independent existence that is only equaled by the independent existence of the elements of nature's creation in the world. That is to say that a piece of sculpture that has a human form should be attributed a right to exist on its own without being compared with the living human being or the animal as created by nature. So the leopard as created by the ancient Benin artist has little to do with a living natural leopard in the forest anatomically. But on its own, it exudes life, comparable only with its regal presence as a Royal Leopard and not leopard, the animal in the bush, but possessing a common attribute of a human office in a human situation.

It is my belief that the day the African contemporary artist adopts this stylistic approach, he should be able to speak in the same eloquent manner to our contemporary audience as the traditional artist was able to speak to his own contemporary world in the past.

To complete his creation of a figure, the African artist usually embellished his form composition with his unique arrangement of abstract patterns. Form composition could speak a dramatic language that would conjure up on the spectator the truths of a living process and therefore tell the situation story. While this in itself could be very intensive and therefore, not necessarily beautiful or immediately pleasing as such, it would conjure up an emotional reaction which is one attribute which the spectator expects of the arts. To avoid running foul of an audience that is weak-hearted, the African
artist has been able to give a more charming type of aesthetic pleasure to his audience by finally adding what amounts to familiar words onto these works, accomplished through abstract patterning or forms superimposed on the figures.

These detailed treatments on the figures became in themselves a compulsive measure for further retention of attention from the audience. In this way, a possible ugliness that could be engendered by expressiveness as is seen in nature, could be toned down with a poetic finish that is written in the caligraphy of abstract shapes and forms as created by the African artist.

To conclude, I would like to make my oft repeated statement—that we cannot create a valid African art by building on the foundation of a foreign art to which we add some elements of African idioms and using an African subject. African art will be created instantly if the form is originally of African traditional idiom and experience to which could be added the innovation of any foreign form. Already African forms are overwhelmingly present in Western art and it becomes even more difficult for contemporary African artists to create and form an art work that will be spectacularly different from that of the contemporary European artist. The ultimate solution will be the greater presence of the traditional African elements in the works of contemporary European artists. It has been seen that however much the African art elements have been present, even in the earlier works of European artists like Picasso and others who painted masks, it could be seen that theirs were very superficial copies of the shape of the mask. The works were essentially very foreign because European
aesthetics did not in any way carry the same aesthetic expression as the African traditional art that must have inspired them. It shows that there are essential qualities in the African arts that have not been grasped by these Europeans. It is possible that they are capable of understanding the idioms but since they did not have the experience of the culture that created them, it was difficult for them to grasp the greater essence and the true aesthetics of these works. It was easier to copy the outward form and then use that to liberate their minds. After the initial extensive copying of the shape of African art, the movement was left with just the essence of change and the freedom to create freely of the African artist. What became the final and permanent benefit for European art from its association with African art, is the African artist himself who was born and raised in the culture that can produce a contemporary art that would carry the aesthetic sensibility that is unique to African art.


Tayo Adenaike (1980)

"Childhood Fears: An Exhibition of Paintings."

"Even since my thoughts awakened, I have lived with numerous anxieties, most of which found their roots in myths and legends.

A chronology of the tortuous and tormenting experiments of my childhood might make an interesting reading material, but for want of space and time, a few should suffice."
Once, I was told not to draw lines on brown earth, or I stood the chance of having my "mother's breasts crawling on the ground for eternity. . .should any housefly perch on the lines." I never could go near old people because "they have the powers to make one laugh, even when the need doesn't arise." On lonely roads, I have had to kick sandgrains for fear that any approaching figure might be a witch or wizard. I was made to believe "witches and wizards walk with their heads down and legs up," and that by my action, I could go past them unnoticed. Usually the stories ended up with my being advised to desist from whatever might expose me to the invincible forces.

Strange as these may sound, to deny the impacts they had on me, would mean denying the very essence of what has today molded my being,—ability to decipher the good from the bad, and more importantly the sources of inspirations for the works on show.

Watercolor as a painter's medium, has found little favor with most Nigerian artists. My introduction to the medium by a combined effort of Obiora Udechukwu and Uche Okeke in January last year, was a welcome idea, since it coincided with my personal philosophy of wanting to learn in order to tread where most have not."

Secondly, I felt watercolor might as well be a medium which when effectively handled, might form another outlet in creating new areas of interests, in which might appear as a static stage in the comprehension of the complexities of (both visual and plastic) African arts which many now profess in.

Reactions to my first experimental results which lasted till
July, 1979, culminated in my December joint exhibition at Enugu.

"Childhood Fears," which is the second in the series of projected watercolor experiments, is therefore, thematically limited when compared to the genre that persisted in the first experiments. It is only hoped that some mastery is gradually being achieved in terms of medium control techniques.

Finally, everything may undergo abrupt or gradual changes in our unstable world except our hearts, which I believe is continually loving or hating and striving to probe into the unknown. Painting like the other arts, to me has a part to play in making the unknown visible and known. There is little doubt that people feel this way today like our ancestors did many years ago. When I remember the trials that surrounded my childhood, one thing gives me solace—the weird stories that were told in order to curb my mischievous deeds. The numerous stories today serve as vestiges of the love people had for me.

The works on show are memory—images of my thoughts on some of the stories: they constitute my childhood fears.

(Sgd) AUGUSTINE OMOTAYO ADENAIKE
Enugu, April, 1980

"CHILDHOOD FEARS: AN EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS." COURTESY MAAN LTD., PRINTED BY SNAAP PRESS, 46 UDOJI ST., ENUGU. (CATALOGUE.)

T. A. Fasuyi (1972)

In Nigerian constitution, culture, like education, is a concurrent subject with every state having powers over its cultural policy and administration. Each state can initiate cultural programmes; it can build and maintain cultural centres; and it can
determine the type of cultural education thought suitable for the state citizens. While the States are autonomous in their cultural pursuits, the Federal Government initiates national cultural programmes with a view to promoting national cultural unity. International cultural exchanges and programmes are however, the exclusive duties of the Federal Government.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

At the national level, there is no separate Ministry of Culture as is found in many European and African countries where art and cultural programmes are planned and affected under a single Ministry. The cultural policy of Nigeria is therefore not embodied in single document. Every Ministry formulates its own policies; and performs its assigned duties invariably in isolation. Federal Government art and cultural duties are shared among different Ministries as follows:

Federal Ministry of Information:

a - Cultural promotion,
b - Cultural information and publications,
c - International cultural exchange,
d - Mass media, and
e - Festival of art.

Federal Ministry of Education:

a - Art and cultural education,
b - Art exhibition and artists societies,
c - Museums and Monuments,
d - National archives, and
e - UNESCO sponsored cultural activities.
Federal Ministry of External Affairs:
   a - International cultural exchange
   b - Industrial and cultural exhibitions

Federal Ministry of Trade and Industry:
   a - International Trade Fair and cultural display
   b - Promotion of arts and crafts industries

FEDERAL MINISTRY OF INFORMATION

Government Cultural Programmes: The Cultural Division of the Ministry plans and handles major government cultural programmes. These include the annual cultural programmes of the independence celebration, local and international festival of arts, international cultural exchanges, etc. The division also maintains an Exhibition Centre for art exhibitions of local and foreign artists. Until 1968, the division was headed by the Editor of the Nigeria Magazine, who was assisted by a few officials in carrying out his cultural programmes. In that year, a new post of the Federal Cultural Adviser was created to give the division the necessary professional guidance. The former Federal Art Adviser, a renowned and experienced Nigerian artist, was appointed into the post. As the division has not got sufficient professionally trained cultural officers to cope with its activities, it has often set up Ad hoc committees to plan and effect its programmes or requested the Nigerian Arts Council to help.

International Cultural Exchanges: From time to time, Nigeria signs cultural agreements with her friends in the world of nations. Such cultural agreements are prepared and effected by the Federal Ministry of Information after due consultations with other appropriate
ministries. Before signing such agreements, ad hoc inter-ministerial meetings are called by the Federal Ministry of Information to discuss the items of such cultural exchanges. The Ministries usually called for such meetings include the Federal Ministries of External Affairs, Education, Trade and Industries. Copies of the agreements officially kept by the Ministry of Information are sent to other Ministries to guide their participation.

Cultural Information: The Information Division of the Ministry of Information regularly publishes books, pamphlets, journals, etc., to inform the public on government activities, programmes, and policies. Some of the publications also contain information and photographs of official, social, and cultural programmes. The section also produces pamphlets on aspects of Nigerian culture as introduction to Nigeria's participation in international festivals. The pamphlets include 'Our Cultural Heritage,' 'Nigerian Music,' and 'Nigerian Drama.'

The photographic section of the Division holds regular exhibitions of film and photographs of important events in the country. Its film Unit has also produced some documentary and feature films.

The administrative head of the Information Division is a civil servant; but he has under him professionally trained people for their different jobs.

Mass Media: All the government mass communications including broadcasting, television, film and photography, library and the press, come under the direction or supervision of the Federal Ministry of Information. Some of the services are allocated to departments within the Ministry, while others are assigned to different independent bodies,
established and financed by the government through the Ministry. Broadcasting and Television are under the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation; library services are under the Nigerian Library Board while the Nigerian Press Corporation is in charge of government publications. The Department of Film and Photography is directly under the Information Division of the Ministry.

THE FEDERAL MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

The Federal Ministry of Education is charged with the responsibilities for:

a - Art and Cultural Education
b - Art Exhibition and Artists' Societies
c - Museums and Monuments
d - National Archives
e - UNESCO Cultural Programmes

Within the professional division of the Ministry, there is a section for the Art and Cultural Programmes of the Ministry. This art section is headed by the Federal Art Adviser and he is assisted by other officials in carrying out the duties of the section.

Art Education: The Federal Ministry of Education plays a leading role on the promotion of art and the cultural subjects in schools and colleges. It helps the states in reviewing their syllabuses and in planning the curriculum structure; and on states request, the Ministry also helps in inspecting state art schools. It circulates art visual aids, including UNESCO art slides, to schools and colleges. The head of the Art Section also serves on examination and moderation panels thus ensuring a measure of standarization in the art examinations.
Art Scholarship: The Federal Government awards few scholarships to art students annually although the subject is rated low on its priority list—the priority being on Science and Technical subjects. This unfortunate trend in most developing countries is justified only by the dire need for more technical personnel in their general economic development. However, it is now being realized that art and cultural education would be needed to produce the necessary spiritual and aesthetic overtones to scientific and technical education.

But in the training of teachers, the attitude of the Federal Government is more positive. In 1968, the Federal Government started a scholarship scheme called the "Crash Programme for the Training of Teachers." The scholarships are awarded on quota basis of 60% for Science, 30% for Liberal Arts and 10% for Cultural and Creative subjects. Over one hundred Art, Music and Drama students had been awarded the "Crash Scholarships" during the past two years. It is expected that, at the completion of their courses, the number of specialist art teachers in the schools and colleges in the country will be greatly increased.

National Schools Art Exhibition: The Art Section organizes an All Nigeria Schools Art Exhibition and Competition, the aims of which are:

a - to promote cultural contact and understanding among children in all the States of the Federation with a view to developing a common national artistic heritage;

b - to enable children to see how their counterparts in
other States solve their aesthetic problems—
their methods and techniques, their materials
and improvisation;
c - to give art teachers the opportunity of seeing
the standard of works in other schools so as to
improve and guide the teaching of art in
schools.

The exchange exhibitions are arranged under the auspices of
the States Ministries of Education, who help in the collection and
selection of works for the exhibitions. The pilot scheme of the
exhibition was started to coincide with the 10th Anniversary of the
Nigeria's Independence. After its maiden show in Lagos, the exhibi-
tion rotates round the State capitals under the auspices of the State
Ministries of Education. Prizes in the form of art materials are
awarded to students with outstanding works.

Introduction to National Schools Art Exhibition, Lagos, 1970.
International Children Art Exhibition: In addition to the national
schools art exhibition, the Art Section of the Federal Ministry of
Education organized Nigeria's participation in international children
art exhibition. It keeps a library of children's art works from
where selections are made and forwarded to international exhibitions
and competition. It is very encouraging that during the past few years
Nigerian children have been consistently winning outstanding prizes
in international art exhibitions. In 1970 alone, seventeen Nigerian
children won prizes at international art exhibition in Venezuela,
Tanzania, Japan, and India. Their performances in such international
exhibitions are a pride and encouragement to the different Ministries and schools.

**UNESCO Cultural Activities:** The Art Section of the Ministry works with the UNESCO National Commission in planning and organizing Nigeria's participation in UNESCO Cultural programmes. It also helps in effecting UNESCO sponsored special programmes, like the recent Education Year Celebrations, in which the Art Section, in collaboration with State Ministries of Education, mounted Art Exhibitions and put up cultural displays. The Section collects cultural materials for UNESCO publications and helps in the circulation of UNESCO cultural papers, journals, visual aids, etc.

**Artists Societies:** Matters concerning Art and Artists' Organizations are also dealt with in the Federal Ministry of Education. Some of the organizations apply either for government recognition or for subvention, or both. Some of them have been recognized and given government subvention. The Society for Art and Humanities whose main objective was the collection of art works for the proposed Museum of Modern Art received over $30,000 subvention in four years from the Ministry. The International Institute of African Languages and Culture also receives an annual subvention of $500 from the Ministry. Other societies that have been recognized or aided by the Ministry include:

1 - The Society of Nigerian Artists
2 - The Society for Education through Art
3 - The Nigerian Museum Society
4 - The Society of Art Teachers

**National Museum:** Government financial grants to the National Museums are channeled through the Federal Ministry of Education which is also
responsible for the administrative machinery of the Museums. The Federal Commissioner or Minister of Education is responsible for the appointment of members to the National Antiquities Commission. Members of the commission are distinguished men of culture and notable scholars in the field of arts and humanities. The commission is responsible for the establishment and maintenance of Museums. Other duties include the discovering, preserving, and studying of traditional art and culture of the country. The Commission also has powers to declare monuments and scheduled antiquities and has control on archaeological excavations and the exports of antiquities.

The Director of the Antiquities is the professional and administrative head of the Museums all over the country. Other high ranking officials include the Deputy Director and the Curators of the different Museums. There are other officers engaged in the Archaeological, Econographical and Architectural research in all parts of the country with less administrative responsibility in the Museum.

FEDERAL MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

The Federal Ministry of External Affairs has a Department of Information which also covers cultural matters, including publicity and information in Nigerian Embassies abroad. Information officers attached to the Embassies perform the duties usually covered by cultural attaches.

The Ministry has a vote for cultural and industrial exhibitions. It also participates in the drafting and effecting of international cultural agreements.
As a link between Nigeria and the outside world, the Ministry determines Nigeria's foreign cultural policy; and recommends after necessary political consideration and consultations the countries with which Nigeria should be culturally associated.

**FEDERAL MINISTRY OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY**

The main connection of this Ministry with cultural affairs, is its promotion of indigenous arts and crafts industries. The Federal Ministry of Trade and Industries in cooperation with the State Ministries of Trade, encourages the production of local materials including art and crafts. The Ministry also gives subvention and encouragement to the formation and maintenance of corporative societies including those in art and crafts. Nigerian art and crafts products are regularly collected and exhibited in local and international trade fairs. Occasionally, other cultural displays are arranged as part of such trade fairs. It is the Ministry of Trade and Industries that initiates such cultural programmes whose expenses are borne by the Federal Ministry of Information.

**CULTURAL POLICY AT STATE LEVEL**

**Administrative Machinery:** After the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern territories in 1914, Nigeria was ruled centrally by a colonial federal government based in Lagos. There was a number of provincial administrative centers through which the Lagos government ruled the country.

Following a constitutional review, the country was in 1952, divided into three regions. Lagos, the federal capital, remained a
separate territory administered by the Federal Government through the local council. Each regional government was autonomous and had powers on many constitutional matters including Education and Culture. In the regions, art and cultural matters were dealt with under different Ministries. In the Eastern region, the Ministry of Internal Affairs; and in the West, it was the Ministry of Home Affairs; while in the North, it was the Ministry of Local Government and Tourism. The Western region was later subdivided into two regions increasing the number of regions to four. The Ministry of Community Development was charged with the responsibility for the festival in the mid-west.

In 1967, the country was re-divided into twelve state units including the State of Lagos. The State Governments, through their appropriate Ministries, therefore, became responsible for cultural policy; and they do not execute cultural programmes under one Ministry. Provincial and local councils have a major role to play in the planning and executing of local cultural programmes most of which they also finance. The State Government’s cultural duties include:

a - Cultural promotion and festival of arts
b - Art and cultural education
c - Cultural and community centers
d - Mass media and cultural information

State Festival of Arts: The different State Ministries now responsible for the culture organize annual festivals of art.

Each provincial authority is requested to organize local festivals and select the best group to participate in the state
festival usually held in the State capital. The provincial authorities are responsible for the practical and financial administration of the local festival and their participation in the state festivals.

Art and Cultural Education - Primary and Secondary Schools:
Regardless of all political or administrative changes and development, formal art education has always come under the Ministry of Education both at the national and regional levels. As already mentioned, Education is a concurrent subject in the Nigerian constitution with both the Federal and State Governments having powers on educational policy, planning and administration of education. Primary and secondary schools and colleges are under their state governments, although the Federal Government maintains some inter-state secondary schools known as the Federal Government Colleges. The State Ministries of Education are now responsible for the policy-making, administration and inspection of their individual state system of education.

Some State Ministries establish local school boards who share powers with them, and others control education centrally from the State Ministries of Education. Some State Ministries of Education have Art Departments for the overall planning and inspection of the cultural subjects. Some States also have local inspectors attached to the different local councils through whom the State inspectors work. Although Art, Music and Drama are listed in the overall State educational planning, many primary and secondary schools do not teach the subjects mainly for lack of teachers and suitable materials. During the last decade however, more teachers have been trained as a
result of which more schools have introduced the cultural subjects into their curricula.

Some states appoint specialists in the cultural subjects to tour round schools in their states giving demonstrations and organizing exhibitions with a view to improving the standard of the subjects in schools. Some states also include the arts in their Adult Education Scheme; Lagos State, for example, has a School of Art and Crafts as one of its centers for Adult Education evening classes. Many state governments annually give scholarships for the training of teachers including those specializing in art and other cultural subjects.

Museums and Cultural Centers: One or two states including the Western state, give subventions for the up-keep and maintenance of museums. For example, during the past ten years, the Western Region, now the Western State, allocated $16,690 as subventions for museums. There are very few state museums as most museums located in states are maintained by the Federal Government. There are also very few state cultural centers; but some local councils maintain community and youth centers, which provide facilities for local social and cultural activities. As such activities are interwoven in towns and villages, it has always been difficult to indicate separately the amount spent on cultural activities.

Mass Media: The former regional governments also maintained separate broadcasting and television services based in their capitals. The regional broadcasting and television corporations initiated local cultural programmes many of them in Nigerian languages. Such programmes are transmitted to their regional audience. But programmes considered to be of national importance or significance are usually relayed
through the National Broadcasting and Television Services. It is also difficult to know exactly how much each station spends on cultural programmes. With the creation of twelve states, it may become necessary to review the status and operation of regional broadcasting and television services.

ART AGENCIES AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS

Art agencies and cultural organizations have contributed in a very great measure to the general cultural awareness and development in this country. These organizations constitute the hiring force behind all cultural activities in this country; and their contributions have somehow compensated for the seeming official indifference to cultural programmes. The organizations can be broadly divided in three groups:

1. The first group includes Art and Cultural agencies purporting to promote the arts.
2. The second group consists of professional artists' societies.
3. The third are the institutional or tribal cultural groups activating all over the country.

Art Agencies: Art agencies or organizations spring up from time to time at the initiative of culturally minded individuals who, though not necessarily artists, are interested in the arts. They include Nigerians and non-Nigerians in different walks of life. They meet and agree to pay some subscription towards the achievement of their objectives. If they are influential enough, or if their activities
were supported by the Government, they may get Government recognition or subvention. Notable among such organizations are: The Nigerian Arts Council, the Society for Arts and Humanities, and the Nigeria Museums Society.

THE NIGERIAN ARTS COUNCIL

"The Council shall work towards the promotion, revival, development and encouragement of literary, visual and performing arts of Nigeria by:

a - assisting and encouraging deserving Nigerian artists and craftsmen;
b - initiating and participating in the revival, organization and conduct of cultural festivals, exhibitions, concerts, and displays;
c - promoting and publicizing Nigerian arts in and outside Nigeria;
d - advising in the acquisition and preservation of art and cultural monuments;
e - fostering appreciation and pride in local tradition and culture by encouraging the compilation of publications on local history and monuments, the giving of lectures on local history and by education in the value of their artistic heritage;
f - encouraging the performance and exhibition of the forms of non-Nigerian cultural activities in Nigeria with a view to the development of
indigenous arts by the impact of international culture."

The Council quickly got Government and public recognition. As a result of this, an annual subvention of $50,000 was approved by the Federal Government in 1961 after a debate in the parliament. The Council thus became the first cultural organization in Nigeria to receive Government financial and official support.

Soon after its founding, some distinguished artists and men of culture were co-opted into the Council.

The first important undertaking of the Council was in connection with the cultural programme of Nigeria's independence celebration in 1960. The Council mounted an exhibition of ancient and contemporary Nigerian Art works; and organized some cultural dances and manifestations.

**Constitution of the Nigeria Arts Council:** In 1961, the Lagos branch of the Council established the Gallery LABAC for the exhibition and sale of Nigerian art and crafts. Gradually, the Council became the main agent for Government cultural activities. In 1964, it became necessary for the Council to be reconstituted to include the representatives of all the Regional Governments.

In cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Information, the Council organized Nigeria's participation in the 1965 British Commonwealth Festival of Art and the First Negro Festival of Art in Dakar. The Council was also responsible for the preparation of Nigeria's participation in cultural programmes at other international events including Olympic Games of 1968.
The Council became less active during the civil crisis; and it could not function properly as all cultural and social programmes were restricted by the Military Government.

In 1968, the Council was reorganized and its constitution reviewed to reflect the political changes and cultural development in the country. The membership of the Council was enlarged to accommodate representatives of the newly created twelve states of the Federation. In addition, all Federal Government officials concerned with art and cultural duties were co-opted into the Council. There are also representatives from all the five universities in the country.

Under current constitution, the Executive Committee of the Council is made up of elected officers as follows:

1 - The President  
2 - Three Vice Presidents  
3 - The Secretary  
4 - The Treasurer  
5 - The Financial Secretary  
6 - Publicity Secretary  
7 - Four co-opted members

The Executive Council meets once or twice a year to consider the reports and recommendations of the different committees which are also elected annually.

The permanent Committees of the Council are:

1 - The Art and Gallery Committee  
2 - The Dance/Drama Committee  
3 - The Music Committee  
4 - The Festival Committee  
5 - The Research Committee
Members of the committees are professionally qualified and experienced Nigerian artists or artistes who are considered capable of helping the Council in carrying out its programmes. There are five or six members of each committee which meet from time to time to discuss matters concerning their assigned duties and make recommendations to the Executive Committee of the Council for necessary action.

The Council maintains a secretariat and a Gallery both of which are at present situated in the same premises in Lagos. Permanent officials of the Council include two organizing secretaries and a gallery curator. The day-to-day running of the Council is left in the hands of the Honorary Secretary helped by an ad hoc committee known as the "General Purpose Committee."

The newly constituted Council has been gaining more recognition from both Government and private sectors of the country as the 'apex' for art and cultural affairs. In cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Information, the Council now organizes the annual national festival and prepares Nigeria's participation in international festivals as already mentioned.

T. A. FASUYI: "GOVERNMENT MACHINERY FOR ARTS AND CULTURE." AN UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPT PRESENTED AT THE ART SEMINAR/WORKSHOP - MARCH 23-26, 1972, AT AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA.

A. Ajepe (1978)

Ladies and Gentlemen, when the theme of this 23rd World Congress was first indicated in Sevre in 1975, I did not conceive it as one that would provoke in me what I would describe as a traffic jam of positive thinking and a critical appraisal of a world which I can
now see as a house which is divided against itself. A world of conflicts. A world of confusion. This is so because man, in his foolish wisdom, has torn himself away from nature and natural order of things. He daily dreams of how to conquer nature. He, in the destructive process, sets elements of peace, one against the other, to create conflicts and confusion. The result is that he replaces truth with falsehood, he creates an illusion of great feats to which he gives sensational publicity. This submission is a slight digression from my original plan of going straight to present a paper along the nauseating convention of discussing abstract theories, quoting and unquoting the thoughts of others. But this I may not do for a change to prevent you from sleeping away three quarters of the one hour allocated to me.

I have always liked to believe that artists are men of action, whose works should speak their minds. By this I mean to suggest that future congresses should be less of controversial dissertations which may nearly always not convey the accurate interpretations of other people's minds. I have always observed that these papers refer to man's cultural base, while we ourselves, the presenters, are swept off our feet and trapped in the fast current or whirlwind of science and technology, which have almost completely concealed the indigenous cultural base from our sight. What we now build in the name of culture are so fragile and uncertain.

Today we talk about art as a universal language which should interact and foster peace and unity. Tomorrow we talk about the culture of the people of other lands as being primitive.
Today we lament having lost the solid base of our art and culture to migration, science and technology.

Tomorrow we begin to advocate at conferences that art and culture should promote cultural identify, with its indigenous charm, and grace.

We, the artists and the custodians and promoters of culture, have got to remember that we need to be consistent, honest, and positive about what we preach; otherwise, there would come a time, when we might lose grip of the cultural cycle which should weld the present to the past and the past and the future to the present. It is the last hope against the false and disastrous claims of science and technology. I wonder if it would not be worth some consideration, the idea of bringing nature back to influence our culture or drop nature and succumb to science and technology as we are already doing and stop discussing with regret, our cultures which are fast losing their indigenous bases to science and technology.

The children's opera at the opening of this congress, more than entertaining, sounds a timely note of warning. We need to examine our attitudes and actions against the ideals we profess in the name of art and culture. Nothing could be truer than what was quoted in the Australian paper, "The Advertiser" yesterday. The prophetic statements were made by Professor Frank George, a leading British computer scientist, who, when he was launching a book, "Science Fact" (edited by him) in Adelaide the previous day said,

(i) Science and technology have created a lifestyle which humanity cannot handle.
(ii) He also directs the book to his colleagues, whom he described as 'people who lead narrow, parochial, highly specialist, unworldly, inward thinking lives. In the tiny academic worlds they live in, they can't see what is happening.

(iii) He lamented, 'Everytime I walk past my computer department, I wish it didn't exist.'

(iv) He advocated positive action by saying, 'Now is the time to decide what sort of society we want in the future.'

(v) Like an objective thinker, he said, 'It may be possible to make our lives more interesting through the arts which he had seen in history to flourish in times of stress.

(vi) Like a dreamer, he expressed the feeling that, 'Humanity might decide to go back to the trees, the fields and the animals. This to me, is the beginning or the end of a cultural cycle, which is inevitable.'

Those who decided on the theme, "Arts in Cultural Diversity" must have consciously eliminated a word like "indigenous" in a subtle attempt to cover up our lapses and seeming defeat in the face of science and technology.

This brings me to the theme of my paper which in serious terms is a sketch, entitled, "Art Education in Nigeria--A Reflection of Her Rich Cultural Diversity." For a couple of days now, I have been wondering whether this statement could be true or false in view of the traffic jam of new concepts and conflicting observations that have taken possession of me since the congress began.

Here the paper goes in the firm belief that since art education is a continuing process, future planning in Nigeria would henceforth be guided by the new concepts which are in the germinating process.
Three years ago, Ladies and Gentlemen, the World Council of this august body at one of its sessions in France, expressed a number of sentiments at the instance of three of us from West Africa (two from Nigeria and one from Ghana). The three of us received these sentiments with mixed feelings. We were happy because the Council, and indeed the world, openly acknowledged the remarkable contribution Africa has made to the World of Art. We were happy because the Council, and indeed the world, expressed its eagerness to see Africa become a Region of this body because of these significant contributions. We were happy and we blushed with pride, when the Council and indeed the world, signified its eagerness to hold in the very near future, the World Congress in any of the African Countries, with emphasis on Nigeria. But we were sad when we realized that National Chapter of the World body were conspicuously absent in most African Countries. We went back home, accepting this deficiency as a challenge, and we resolved to harness our resources to encourage the establishment of National Chapters where there were none, and consolidate where any had been established.

It is against this background and the theme of this Congress, that I am presenting my paper which may not carry the characteristic features of a dissertation. No bibliographies, no propounding of theories, no philosophical quotations. All these ingredients, I believe, many other papers would provide. This paper is precisely a progress narrative of art education in Nigeria, traced against the ecological, historical, physical and metaphysical influences and beliefs. It is a report on an off-shoot of a rich indigenous
cultural diversity, the past of which we view with pride, its present
with inspiration and its future with confidence and hope.

To support this paper and give credence to its contents are:

(i) A film, entitled 'Art and Archaeology,' which
literally will give it a concrete base.

(ii) Some slides to reinforce the base and to
illustrate the products of her art education.

(iii) An exhibition of Nigerian children's art which,
for the period of the Congress, would serve as
a prop to the paper.

Nigeria, the most populated country in Africa, South of the
Sahara, is endowed with a rich indigenous cultural diversity. This
is a modest statement, quite devoid of exaggeration. The magnitude
of her rich culture is most probably proportional to her geographical
size, and its diversity, to the heterogeneous components of her
population.

It may be pertinent at this juncture, to mention that what is
today known as Nigeria was gradually built up, first by systematic
force of arms, closely followed by the amalgamation of the conquered
areas, by the British Army led by Lord Lugard, who in 1914, completed
the amalgamation exercise by merging the North with the South for
convenient administration: he consequently became the first Governor-
General.

Before then, Nigeria was a geographical area of some indepen-
dent powerful empires and kingdoms, independently controlled by the
Fulanis, the Kanuris, the Hausas, the Yorubas, the Bini. These
kingdoms and empires and many other ethnic groups have hitherto been
neighbors with many long years of association, with some measurement
of cultural interaction and economic intercourse. This could be adduced as the most valid reason for an easy political integration which followed the amalgamation.

For an art or indeed, a culture, to exist and flourish, there must be the necessary infrastructures for its base. Invariably, such physical infrastructures are natural and most of Nigeria's rich works of art could be traced to the following natural sources.

**Vegetation** - With Nigeria's nearness to the tropics and the sea, the country enjoys enough rains and sufficient sunshine which support some belts of vegetation, ranging from the thick mangroves through the rain forest in the Southern part, and through the deciduous forest in the middle to the grassland and semi-desert shrubs in the far North. These belts have different types of wood whose assorted qualities stimulate different crafts or industrial products. The hard ebony, Iroko, and Mahogany for carvings, furniture, tools and props in palaces and shrines, etc. We also get the soft and light wood suitable for masks, drum frames and native utensils.

The various popular masks like Gelede masks from the River State, Ekpo and Eko skin covered drums and masks, all from the Cross River State, the popular relief wooden and door panels from Benin and part of Yorubaland, the wooden figures and compositions from Yorubaland, the tie and dye from Abeokuta, the carved calabashes from Oyo, cane works from Bendel State, and the much prized locally woven Akwete cloth from Imo State and 'Aso oke' cloths from Oyo State; all these combine to give credence to the rich artistic and cultural wealth of Nigeria, traceable to Nigeria's wealth of different types of wood and vegetation.
It is already acknowledged in history that Cubism is an offshoot of African sculpture, which would probably have not existed but for her rich vegetation.

**Clay** - Nigeria is blessed with an abundant deposit of clay. Its presence is more noticeable around the river banks along the vegetation belts, from the South to the North. To this raw material could be traced the prolific terra-cotta pieces of the estimated 2000 year Nok Culture, the classical terra-cotta pieces of Ife and now of Owo, noted for their high technical excellence, the very many native pottery craft establishments—the institutional and industrial ones at Abuja, Umuahia, Lagos, etc., are firmly established due to the country’s abundant sources of clay supply.

**Rocks** - There are notable locations of rocks all over the country, to which could be associated the unusual beautiful collection on one spot, of the over 600 stone figurines of Esie in Kwara State, the fantastic Ikom monoliths, the historic Oranmiyan Staff of Ife and many other stone sculptures of remarkable significance. It is of significant interest to note that wealthy people build houses of stone walls, especially in areas where stones and rocks are in large quantity.

**Animals** - Cattle rearing is an age long popular occupation of the North, mostly along the grassland region. The skins from the cows, goats, and sheep are either exported or dressed and dyed for leather works, such as bags, puffs, footwear, which are richly embroidered.

**Minerals** - Nigeria is endowed with some minerals like brass, tin, copper, iron, etc., from which are produced articles such as the
remarkable brass plaques, trays, bowls, ornaments with relief decorations from Bida in the Niger State, and the superb iron articles from Awka in Anambra State.

It will be observed that all the above described activities and related infrastructures could be traced to one thing, and that one thing is the fertile LAND, which is the main source of the raw materials and the dynamic base of our economic and cultural existence.

Associated with agriculture, which could be described as the enduring core of Nigeria's economy, are other diverse social activities and traditional symbols, by which non-Christian and non-Muslim Nigerians have always been identified. These are rituals and festivals which are celebrated to demonstrate happiness during marriage, planting season, chieftaincy, good harvest, puberty, death of the traditional chiefs, warriors, religious leaders, and priests; special religious rites and sacrifices also greet the birth of twins, children born under unusual circumstances, like the one born with the legs out first, the one born with the placenta, the one with umbilical cord round his neck, etc. Certain rites are also performed to appease some gods identified with certain occupations, to prevent the hazards of the trade. For instance, the hunters who use the guns for their game, or the blacksmiths who make tools, weapons, and implements of iron, would make sacrifice to the god of iron. There are certain traditional religions whose adherents pick physical symbols like rocks, rivers, trees, etc., with unique shapes and sizes through which they worship and make sacrifice to the unseen spirit-god. There are spectacular occasions when the people believe that the gods are angry,
like when there is noticeable infertility, draught, famine, war, epidemics, unusually frequent deaths of children or youths; they make sacrifices to the god-spirit through any of the adopted symbols. It is also a matter of interest to note that some of these various social and religious activities at times dictate the mode of dress, dance, drum beat, the hair style, the type and quality of food of the fanatics. Many are subjected to certain restrictive norms. For instance, it is considered a bad omen, and therefore forbidden in some places, to give a dead pregnant woman a normal or fitting burial. Such corpse is buried far outside the town. Again, to avoid the wrath of the gods, members of a sect would never drink from water stored up for more than one day. There are lots and lots of such restrictive habits, forced on the fanatics by the superstitious tenets of their religion, or traditional family beliefs, etc.

Before the advent of Christianity, the traditional carver in our society was a highly placed and revered person, seen in the indigenous religious circle as a spiritualist. The only one capable of creating the image of the spirit-god mostly in wood; only one who could create the link between man and the unseen spirit. He enjoyed the limitless patronage of the kings and the native traditional religious priests. He had his own school, where his children were mostly the student apprentices. It was not an art school, because his works were not seen as works of art, but as images through which the spirit-god could be worshipped, and the god-spirit invoked.

But education and technology are two modern forces which have since modified considerably the people's culture, which described in
few words, 'the sum total of everything that contributes to the for-
mation of practical, physical, and mental dimensions of a people's
way of life.' For almost a century and a half, Nigeria has been ex-
posed to the organized system of western education. Western educa-
tion came with Christian religion which first stepped the shores of
Nigeria in 1842. Christianity was for many years used to smother
different areas of our culture under the guise of substituting
Christianity for paganism. In the process, carvings, which today
would be worth millions of dollars, were either cleverly taken
away from the converts, or they were forced to destroy them.

The forceful wind of cultural change started to blow around
1948, when the Colonial Government established the post of an Art
Supervisor in the Public Relations Office, now known as the Ministry
of Information, the duty of which was to give publicity to its
activities. The first Nigerian contemporary visual artist, who was
brought into the public service and focus, was Professor Ben Enwonwu,
a sculptor. He was attached to the Public Relations Office as an
art supervisor. In 1955, the Colonial Administration made him an
art adviser and in 1957, his seat was moved from Information to
Education.

He was in that year commissioned by the Colonial administra-
tion to produce the full sculpture portrait of Her Majesty, Queen
Elizabeth II of England, to adorn the frontage of the edifice, which
was to become the country's Federal Parliament on the attainment of
independence two years later. During that period, there were about
five other academic artists who studied in overseas countries and
returned either to practice or work as illustrators in some public relations offices, or do part-time teaching in some Lagos Secondary Schools. The subject art in the school curriculum then was very new and strange and its aims and career possibilities, most unknown, because these artists operated as mere instructors than as teachers. Converted fanatical Christian parents who had been brainwashed and indoctrinated by the missionaries saw and frowned against any type of image-making, as offending their accepted religious principles. The result was that the pupils were not encouraged to take this subject seriously. It was extremely difficult, and almost impossible for this handful of pioneering art teachers to penetrate. Their subject was merely used to fill a gap. It was used to while away the time and to keep vivacious and restless children busy. At the primary school the teachers were as ignorant as the pupils, who were made to copy poor drawings made on the blackboard by the teacher. It could be asserted that many school administrators themselves needed some orientation to understand the need for and emphasis on the subject.

In 1955, the first Art School was established as a department in one of the then three Nigerian Colleges of Arts, Science and Technology, which later formed the nuclei of the universities of Zaria, Nsukka, and Ife. It is gratifying to note today that, in addition to these three universities, each of which has a well established department of Art, the country has started to nurture another art school in the University of Benin. In the late '50's, a humble graphics art department, aimed at producing studio graphics
assistants for industrial-growing Lagos, was started. That humble beginning has now grown into a full fledged department of Fine Art and Printing, headed by Mr. Y. A. Grillo, the African representative on the World Council. Three other polytechnics have now added art to their programmes to meet, not only the social, but also the economic and higher institutional needs of the country. The Colleges of Education and Advanced Teachers' Colleges which are now over twenty-five, have not, many of them, failed to join in the crusade to preach the role of art education in an enduring broad-based education. Nigeria is a developing country in a hurry for progress. She, in her policy planning and operations, therefore, makes revolutionary moves to evolve a system of education that would cater for all the needs of the child and equip him with all that is required to make him a first rate citizen. There is an acute shortage of art educators at the Primary School Teachers' level. It is believed that a dynamic gap-filling at the Advanced Teachers' College level will remove the serious deficiency at the Primary and the Primary Teachers' levels.

The Nigerian Government's education policy is a liberal one. It is a broad-based system. As an outward visible manifestation of its policy, scholarships are extended to art students in all post secondary institutions and Teacher Training Colleges. I said earlier on that the first known Nigerian academic sculptor was made an art adviser and his office moved to the Federal Ministry of Education in 1957. The post became significantly meaningful in 1968, when the office was reorganized, not only to translate art education in relation to
general education policy or advise on art education matters, but has been expanded to:

a - Plan national and international children's art contests and exhibitions in the country and organize the country's participation in international ones.

b - Organize national children's art and cultural festivals.

c - Coordinate the teaching of art, music and drama in her unity schools.

d - Represent the Federal Ministry of Education at Interministerial meetings on culture.

e - Cooperate with other cultural bodies to contribute the children's share of any cultural programmes of general nature.

f - Help the Nigerian National Commission to UNESCO in matters relating to cultural matters, and liaise between the Commission and UNESCO non-governmental organizations on culture.

g - Organize national workshops, seminars, and refresher courses for teachers of Art, Music, and Drama.

The Section has now added the duty of helping the Ministry with designs, illustrations and printing of simple materials, such as reports of workshops, news bulletins, information booklets, etc.

It is worth mentioning that many States have taken a queue from the Federal Ministry of Education by establishing similar units
in their State's Ministries of Education to liaise with the center for easy execution of National and international children's art and other cultural programmes.

Before I go to another aspect of progress, I would like to make special remarks on a programme which is eight years old and of particular interest. It is the National Schools' art contest and exhibitions. It is a contest meant to promote the standard and values of visual art at pre-university levels. By this contest, we are able to foster cultural interaction and expand the scope of infrastructure in a particular area. The programme started with secondary schools eight years ago, but in the last three years, it was projected to include primary, pre-primary schools and primary school teachers' colleges. In 1977, there was a further projection which brought in special schools and homes for the handicapped and colleges of education. Prizes in forms of art materials are provided. Certificates are awarded and trophies are presented to overall institutional winners. Cash prizes are however provided for the blind winners who send in crafts for participation.

Special presentation ceremony is occasionally arranged for top prize winners who assemble before a large assembly of notable personalities to take their prizes. An exhibition of selected pieces from all the levels is mounted to lend color to the ceremony. This exhibition is later arranged to tour the States. After the tour, color slides of the works are made and distributed to the States, institutions, and organizations for art appreciation lessons and research programmes.
On their inspectorate teams, the Federal and States' Ministries of Education have among other subject inspectors, art inspectors who visit schools to inspect and advise on art education.

For desirable integration of the academic present with the indigenous traditional past of art and crafts, many institutions now recruit the services of traditional craftsmen as demonstrators or auxiliary teachers. Nigeria, like many other countries, still use examinations to measure abilities for employment. To what extent this principle or policy should apply, is a matter which is already engaging the attention of policy makers. You and I may believe very strongly that such a measure, if at all, should cut down on its emphasis with regard to the creative arts, but we may not rule out the issue of certificates or paper attestation in any case. As of now, art education in Nigeria is double-oriented. Broad, basic, compulsory art is taught where it is taught in primary schools and junior secondary schools. It becomes optional and examination-centered in the senior secondary schools, teachers' colleges and other post-secondary institutions. It is noted with joy that, as against the first set of four graduate art teachers produced in Nigeria in 1960, we now have about 500 art graduates in our different institutions, studios and administration. In 1965, the number of candidates who took the annual school certificate or general certificate of Education, Art examination was just near 2000. Today, the number has risen to more than eight thousand.

Since a thorough understanding of the art of a people may not be complete without a base, branches of the Federal Department of
Antiquities are either already established in some, or in the process of being established, in all the nineteen states of the Federation. With these, it is believed that the rich and varied cultural past would be brought closer to the pupils in particular, and the public in general.

For effective diffusion and interaction of our culture, which we have identified and now acknowledge as a dynamic force of achieving the desirable national unity and cultural identity, the States arrange annually or biennially, and the Federal Authority organizes at reasonable intervals, art and cultural festivals, where we put on shows on something of many aspects of our life. There are displays of our carvings, paintings, crafts, regatta, costumes, hairdos, ceremonial dances, indigenous instrumental music, drama, etc. During such occasions, both adults and youth come together to participate. On such occasions, one can easily see elements of the cultural past and the influence of the present, especially education and technology.

The main professional artists' body in Nigeria is the Society of Nigerian Artists, which was established in the early '60's. It caters for visual artists in different employment. It is the society that represents in Nigeria the interest of UNESCO's (NGO) I.A.A., (International Association of Artists).

Apart from this society, of which many art educators are members in their own right, (being members of the SNA) the Nigerian chapter of the International Society for Education Through Art was founded in May, 1966, with only four members, two of whom are here
today. For almost ten years, desperate efforts were made by individuals to make the society grow, by ploughing in their limited personal material and financial resources. Simple programmes were planned for, and executed in Lagos schools. The Society's activities were restricted to Lagos by lack of funds. There was not much impact to convince colleagues who sat on the fence that all hands should be on deck to help the Society grow to become the enviable rallying point of art educators and their allies.

In spite of its apparent ineffectiveness, the Society, with the help of one of its members, Mr. T. A. Fassuyi, my predecessor in office and who, incidentally, succeeded Mr. Ben Enwonwu (the first art adviser), the Society was accorded recognition by the Federal Ministry of Education as a Learned Society in 1968.

Then came the Nigerian Civil War and the aftermath of the civil war, which made national expansion and execution of serious programmes impossible, until 1976, when the two Nigerians at the World Congress in France returned home. With the burning inspiration to meet the challenges thrown at the World Council meeting, we set all machinery in motion for the launching of the national chapter of the International Society. All determined efforts were duly rewarded. Colleagues from the length and breadth of the country were present to enlist their memberships. Messages of encouragement, inspiration and congratulations came from Nigerian Government functionaries, the World President of INSEA and many professional bodies in the country. The National Society's News Bulletin (NSEA) was launched as its publicity organ, to carry local and external news of art education
activities, new principles, techniques and materials. State branches of the Society were formed, with local activities, news of which are relayed to the editorial board of the bulletin for publications.

The most recent highlight of the Society's activities was its 2nd three-day biennial conference at Ife University in February, 1978. It was sponsored by the Institute of Education of the Ife University, the Federal Ministry of Education and the National Council for Art and Culture. Impressive papers were presented and discussed. It was a colorful occasion which brought together a large number of art educators and educationists from different parts of the country. Places of historical interest—the Ife Museum and shrines were visited. The conference was a wonderful forum for members to exchange views, and to discuss their problems and aspirations. It was a most pleasant experience in the life of the Nigerian Chapter, which I am happy and confident to report, has come to stay.

23rd INSEA CONGRESS 1978, ADELAIDE, AUSTRALIA. PAPER BY MR. A. AJEPE, HEAD OF ART EDUCATION SECTION OF THE FEDERAL MINISTRY OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA.

William Fagg (1951)

The difficulty for a European in understanding African art is due to a difference in historically conditioned western and 'tribal' categories of thoughts imposing different but equally severe restrictions on the artist's freedom. In Europe, post-Periclean philosophy and art are bound up with the concept of the straight line and essentially based on geometry. "The straight line is so completely absent in Negro Africa as to lead to a strong presumption that
it was instinctively avoided as inartistic if not sacrilegious."

Occasional instances of realistic treatment may be ascribed to the strictly functional character of some African sculpture, e.g., in carvings intended to resemble closely a dead person in order to deceive evil spirits. "Whereas European art may be said to have a deductive tendency—expressing general concepts (such as love or grief) in terms of generalized concepts such as dignity or "violence."

The representation of a deceased ancestor may aim at bringing out certain qualities by means of a distortion rather than at being a faithful likeness. The transcendentalism of African art, which constitutes its great attraction necessarily makes enigmatical to people steeped in a fundamentally different culture. Europeans should realize that their interpretations of primitive art are conditioned by their own collective representations.

WILLIAM FAGG. "WEST AFRICAN ART." TIMES REVIEW, LONDON, BRITAIN, COL. 2, 6-7, JUNE, 1951.

Ulli Beier (1961)

"Bruce Onobrakpeya is a young artist who was trained at Zaria Technical College (of course this should have read: The Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology, Zaria). At the Exhibition Center in Lagos, he shows oil paintings and lino cut this week. This 5th October, 1961. The lino cuts are technically excellent and they show a considerable sense of design. The themes are folkloristic, but the subject matter is always subordinated to the composition and they are extremely decorative and pleasing. Mr. Onobrakpeya should make an excellent illustrator. The paintings are not without
interest either. But the composition is much less disciplined and the color is not always happy. The subject matter is usually derived from African folklore. They are interesting themes, but one should like to see more organization in the composition and a somewhat more subtle development of color. Mr. Onobrakpeya has the makings of a true artist. One feels that his paintings will be greatly improved if he applied some of the lessons he has already learned in print-making. The slight tendency towards abstraction and the sophistication of forms which he has so successfully employed in the lino cuts would, I believe, greatly improve his paintings.

His most successful painting was, in fact, the composition called "Negrotude" in which the abstract theme forced the artist to develop a literary treatment. This painting was, by the way, bought by the German Ambassador. Mr. Onobrakpeya sold quite a number of his works on the opening night. And he can be pleased with the excellent impression he has made on the Lagos public. He is an artist to watch out for. There is no question that here is an artist with a future."


Ulli Beier (1961)

The exhibition of contemporary Nigerian Art organized by the Lagos Branch of the Nigerian Council for the Advancement of Art and Culture at the Nigeria Exhibition, must have brought many surprises even to those who thought that they knew a lot about artistic activities in Nigeria. Even a few years ago, it would have been
difficult to name more than a handful of contemporary Nigerian artists. This exhibition introduced a great many young people who are seriously and busily engaged in trying to find new and typically Nigerian forms of expression.

The exhibition was meant to be representative rather than selective and so it was inevitable that there was a great deal of mediocre work. It is impossible—and even pointless—in a short article like this to discuss all the painters and my own selection is naturally going to be subjective. Nevertheless, it will show, I hope, the great variety and the considerable talent displayed at the exhibition.

When we speak of "contemporary" Nigerian artists, we group together under that term, artists of widely different backgrounds and ideas. On the one hand there is a carver like Lamidi Fakeye who was trained and brought up as a traditional Yoruba woodcarver—on the other hand there is a sophisticated sculptor like Ben Enwonwu, Slade trained, who brings to his profession all the routine and all the ideas acquired by moving for years in the artistic circles of Europe.

Lamidi Fakeye is a remarkable man. Trained as a traditional carver in Illa, he has not been content to work merely in the traditional setting, but has adapted his art to modern needs and conditions. His most famous works are probably the carvings in the Western House of Assembly, in which traditional Yoruba forms have been successfully wedded with modern architecture. A similar type of artist is Idah from Benin who was trained as a boy in the palace of King Eweka. Some of his wood panels are close to the traditional style, but Idah
has done a great deal of experimenting in new mediums and with new forms. He was the first to start ebony carving—which has since been turned by others into a deplorable tourist trade. He is also the author of remarkable cement sculpture that can be seen in Benin. His importance in Nigerian art is equally great as a teacher: many young Nigerian artists passed through his hands at one time or another.

Fakeye and Idah represent that group of artists who tried to keep traditional art alive in a changing Nigeria by adapting and developing it. There is another group of artists who felt, however, that traditional art had nothing to offer them, that the only way in which a Nigerian could withstand the impact of Western culture and art was to try and master the foreign technique and style. There was a tendency towards a meticulous—and mostly rather boring—realism. Chief Onabolu rediscovered perspective for Nigeria. Mr. Lasebikan was one of the first Nigerians to make accurate anatomical portraits. A long way from traditional Yoruba art where a "likeness" was considered undesirable! This tendency to achieve a photographic realism has dominated Nigerian art for a long time. It has not produced much of artistic interest, but it may represent a traditional phase which Nigerian art had to go through. Even among the younger generations the school of realism has its adherents. Chief Akeredolu and Isiaka Osunde are highly competent portraitists. The foreign technique is handled with ease and grace by them and their faces have become alive. Chief Akeredolu is also well known for his thorn carvings, which are miniature works depicting Nigerian life. They are charming and unambitious toys.
The first two artists to attain something of an international reputation were Ben Enwonwu and Felix Idubor. Ben Enwonwu was, for a long time, the only Nigerian artist known outside Nigeria. In spite of his modern European training, and although he lived much of his life abroad, he has always striven to preserve some typically Nigerian elements in his art. It is the Nigerian quality of his work that helped him to great success in England and America. In a sense, he was the first Nigerian to be considered a "contemporary" artist by the European public. He was represented in both bronzes and paintings, but his work is so well known that we need not discuss it in detail here. Felix Idubor has had less European training than Enwonwu but is equally trying to bridge two cultures in his work. He has less experience of the sophisticated European art world and his carving is closer to African tradition. Recently his reputation has also spread abroad. His major works so far are the door panels of the new National Hall in Lagos. Idubor's competent decorative work is eminently suitable to give a Nigerian touch to modern architecture.

So far we are on quite familiar ground. Most people interested in Nigeria are quite well acquainted with these artists and movements. But the exciting thing about this exhibition was that it brought to light so much new talent, so many young artists with new ideas.

Outstanding among the sculptors were Festus Idehen and Osifo Osagie. Both are from Benin, both have a certain amount of traditional training, both live in Lagos and have been working with Paul Mount in the Yaba Technical College. Through this institution they have been
brought into contact with European techniques, with modern ideas and with European aesthetic concepts. The teaching did not attempt in this case, as so often happens, to impose blindly another convention and another tradition to replace the African one. Rather, the new ideas were used as a stimulus, as a widening of the horizon. The result has been remarkable. Both Osagie and Idehen have preserved a unique African character in their work. But they are no longer merely perpetrating a tradition. They are working as individuals constantly absorbing and adapting new ideas. Some of the African style elements in their carvings are not survivals of their earlier training, but represent a conscious and sophisticated use of traditional forms. In his "Ibo Princess," for example, Osifo Osagie has deliberately experimented with forms and proportions of Ibo carving—a tradition very different from that of his native Benin. Both Osagie and Idehen have looked a great deal at African carvings—from many different tribes. They looked at it consciously like a European observer. The result is a great richness in forms and ideas and a diversity of styles. This diversity of styles is understandable in artists who are still relatively young and still in the experimenting stage. And although neither of these artists seems to have found himself completely, yet there is already an unmistakable individual touch to their work. Idehen's vigorous chisel strokes, his bold, compact forms, his obvious delight in his craft, his mastery over the material, the expression of rugged strength in his better work—all these are uniquely and typically Idehen. His most remarkable work in this exhibition is the powerful cement sculpture that has the impenetrable and mysterious strength of an ancient god.
Osifo Osagie on the other hand, is much more gentle in his approach. His surface treatment is delicate, his expression sensitive. His plaque of a Benin Chief keeps very close to traditional forms, yet it seems to have a gentle withdrawn sensitivity that is lacking in the more prosaic traditional work of Benin. Osagie's most beautiful work is his "Goddess of Fecundity," a work of great depth and poetic feeling.

The greatest surprise of the exhibition was a group of young painters who are still students at Zaria Technical College. The interesting and encouraging fact about these young men, Jimoh Akolo, Grillo, Onobrakpeya, Uche Okeke, Simon Okeke, Demas Nwoko--is that their entire attitude to art is essentially modern. They are not interested in the conflict between traditional forms and western techniques. They do not try to solve the problem formally--they try to solve the conflict in themselves. Their work is very individual. They are mostly meditative pictures. The artists are grappling with ideas, with psychological and cultural problems. Their pictures are heavy with content and charged with emotion. Some show a definite tendency towards expressionism.

The coolest formalist among them is Jimoh Akolo. Akolo comes from Kabba province and his painting has something of the cool, detached dignity of the North. He seems preoccupied with composition and his paintings usually achieve a perfect balance, and radiate a soothing calm.

Grillo is technically one of the most impressive artists. His pictures are well constructed and he seems particularly gifted for
mural design. In content, however, his pictures are less weighty than those of say Uche Okeke and Nwoko, and we shall be able to judge his work only in a few years time when he has attained greater maturity.

Onobrakpeya's talent is best shown in his work as an illustrator. He is very imaginative and has a fine sense for the decorative. He masters various complex printing techniques and has done some interesting experimental work.

Simon Okeke is a fascinating artist. He creates balanced compositions with a meticulous renaissance technique. Weird, mysterious, human forms are distorted according to some hidden law we cannot fathom. These pictures that show a rather horrible side of life are extremely disturbing, yet somehow convincing. The artist is apparently disturbed himself by these visions—that is why he sometimes tries to depict the sweet and pretty side of life. These sweet pictures are artistically unsatisfactory and unconvincing. With them, the artist tries to compensate his fearful visions, but he does not get nearer the truth by splitting up life into its "good" and its fright aspects. One feels confident however, that Simon Okeke will become one of Nigeria's important artists in the future when he has gained a more balanced and rounded vision of life.

To my eyes, the most important works in this exhibition were by Uche Okeke and Demas Nwoko. Both have certain points in common. They have the advantage of being Ibos. I say "advantage" because Ibo art is not only one of the most vigorous traditions in Nigeria, and one that has not yet died out, but also because there is some quality
in traditional Ibo art that strikes one as "modern"; and an almost
direct transition from traditional Ibo forms into contemporary indi-
vidualistic art seems possible. Yoruba and Bini art do not seem
readily to offer this possibility of adaptation. Whatever the
reason for this may be, Okeke and Nwoko are essentially modern artists,
but also distinctly African. There are obvious formal resemblances
between their work and traditional Ibo carvings. But they do not
consciously and deliberately borrow forms as, say, Idehen or Osagie.
Because they are mature people, they can give free play to their
African personalities.

Both are artists who have a lot to say. Formal and technical
problems to them solve themselves. They want to put across ideas and
it is clear from their work that they do not throw a design quickly
on canvas. Ideas ripen in their minds for months before they actually
go to work. Their work is charged with energy and emotion.

The clever drawings of Uche Okeke have been seen before in
Nigeria, but in this exhibition he surprised us as a painter of great
force.

Demas Nwoko's Ogboni Chief from Abeokuta is superbly serene
and at the same time charged with spiritual power. He has succeeded
in recreating the intensity and vitality, the sincerity and integrity
that we admire in the traditional cultures of Nigeria. His large
picture "In 1959" was perhaps the crowning piece of the exhibition.
Three white officers sit blase and bored in front of a line of grimly
determined African soldiers. The picture is so charged that one feels
there must be a violent outburst any moment. Nwoko's expressionist
tendencies are here most fully developed.
Emokpae is in a class by himself. He is primarily a designer and his paintings are decorative rather than heavy with meaning. But he is certainly extremely original and has a tremendous sense of design and texture. Traditional motifs and patterns that are used by him are cleverly transposed and attain a certain elegance.

This exhibition has shown us that we are witnessing the beginning of a new phase in Nigerian art. A few years ago we had nothing but more or less successful attempts to adapt traditional styles, on the one hand, and the realistic school, on the other. The latter sometimes tried to assert that it is Nigerian by choosing folkloristic themes: women carrying water pots; sunsets; market scenes; palm trees; masqueraders—the lot. The younger generation have grown out of what Michael Crowder has baptised the "palm trees and canoe school."

Their art is more genuinely and more authentically "Nigerian" while it is at the same time, far more modern in approach. It is the finest monument to Nigerian Independence we could have wished for.


Anonymous (1961)

"Currently holding at the Exhibition Center, Lagos, is a one-man exhibition of art and paintings by a 29 year old Nigerian, Mr. B. Onobrakpeya. The exhibition is jointly sponsored by the Nigerian Council for the Advancement of Art and Culture and the Nigeria Magazine, which saw in the 29 year old Nigerian from Ughelli, Western
Region, a budding artist who may in the nearest future be ranked among the world's renowned artists.

Admission to the ten day show which began on September 28, and scheduled to end next week, is free. Displays at the show are divided into two—Paintings and Prints. Division and design made and reproduced through simple learned method section. Mr. Onobrakpeya was one of the three Nigerian artists commissioned by the Nigerian arts council to decorate the art and crafts pavilion at the 1960 Nigerian Independence Exhibition. His current exhibition is the second one man show he is staging. The first was at Ughelli in 1959. He has also taken part in other group exhibitions, such as the exhibition of contemporary African painters held in Ibadan last year, October, and the exhibition of African art in West Germany. On October 23, this year, his paintings will be one of those collections all over the world, to be exhibited in Boston, U.S.A., at a UNESCO exhibition, introducing contemporary African art. Mr. Onobrakpeya has been commissioned to illustrate a book entitled "African Night Entertainment" written by a Nigerian novelist, Mr. Cyprian Ekwensi. He has also had an offer from the management of the Bristol Hotel to do some paintings for them. In his artistic paintings, Mr. Onobrakpeya has always aimed at interpreting Nigerian culture both folktales and legends and reflecting the day to day life of the Nigerian people. This artist's love of his profession started while he was a pupil at the Western Boys' High School, Benin City, where, after completing his secondary education, he became an art master. In October, 1957, he went to the Zaria Branch of the Nigerian College of Arts, Science
and Technology for a four year course in Fine Arts. In June, this
year, (1961) he was awarded the College's Diploma in Fine Art."

ANONYMOUS. "THE ONE MAN SHOW OF A YOUNG ARTIST." THE SERVICE,

John Holiday (1965)

"The contemporary African Art exhibition which opened today
at the National Museum of Wales, is in many ways a surprising one.
For there is little of a primitive, not much of the barbaric, and
the sophistication of Europeanisation of the artist is quite pro-
nounced. And, of course, these one hundred works show as part of
this Commonwealth Arts Festival, do not represent the whole of
Africa, nor even a particularly large part of it. Hotfully debated.
Indeed, the artist have mostly studied at two major training insti-
tutions, in painting and in the graphic arts. At Kampala in Uganda
and at Zaria in Nigeria. There is also a third group represented from
Oshogbo in Nigeria, who have not received any recognized institutional
training. In a country where great art has previously existed with-
out schools, it is perhaps not surprising that the roles played by
these schools have been hotly debated. One starting comment in the
introduction to the catalogue deserves to be picked out in the letters
of gold outside every gallery in this land. Sweat and blood! There
is no lack of bias for works of any art in Africa and it is difficult
to persuade the artist to send their work overseas because they can
sell most of what they produce. Africa must be the only country in
the world where (Africa being A country? This man must have forgotten
his geography!) such a situation exists. The most eye-catching
works for me were the three by Ignatius Serulyo of Uganda. Plantation Pruners, so pastorially peaceful compared with his blood drenched Kijugati works and his near horror of something in prisons, one of the most directly frightening pictures I have ever seen. There's a fine metal relief by the former blacksmith: Ashiru entitled "Collecting Palm Wine." Jimoh Akolo is represented by several large canvases, all effective. The simple drama of his lion hunt being particularly satisfying. My favorite to which I return again and again because of its purkish humour was the man in hooved by E. B. Sanka. He is unsophisticated fun at its best. The exhibition continues until Saturday October 2, in the adjoining gallery. The museum has mounted a small exhibition of portraits of some Welsh artists and writers."

JOHN HOLIDAY: SURPRISES WHEN AFRICA IS TAUGHT TO MAKE ART. SOUTH WEST ECHO. SEPTEMBER 17, 1965.

Anonymous (1966)

Another talented Nigerian artist is also holding an exhibition of his works. He is Bruce Onobrakpeya, who was born at Agbarha Oto, Mid west Province of Nigeria, on August 30, 1932. He studied art and art education at the Nigerian College of Technology, Zaria. He had his first one man exhibition of paintings and prints at Ughelli, his second at Lagos, his third at Mbari, Ibadan, and Lagos Museum. He has taken part in group exhibition at Lagos, Western Germany, New York, and Ibadan. He has illustrated many famous books. He took part in the first Commonwealth Art Festival in London and Cardiff, where two of his prints were bought by Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh.
Bruce has executed most interesting prints which visitors to his exhibition will find delightful. The prints and paintings will be on sale. Above is a reproduction of his oil painting, "Oniboli."


Anonymous (1966)

Whatever time you can make it, pay a visit to the exhibition of paintings and prints by Bruce which opened last Wednesday at the Exhibition Center, Marina, Lagos. Bruce is the foremost book illustrator and one of Nigeria's best known painters and lino printers. These and the 32 odd items of paintings, lino prints, wood cuts, silkscreens, and bronze reliefs are very good reasons why you should visit this latest exhibition at the oasis of art along the Marina. You can take an hour of your normal shopping time, or you can devote one lunch time, or you can even make the center your first call on your evening drive. But visit this exhibition, you must. If you are in a hurry, you can go straight to the oil on the board bearing number seven. And like the title of which is "Palm Wine Women." You will have to see this painting first because you may want to spend a lot of time at it. You may find that the green of the foliage and the bright blue of the women's wrappers and the abundance of yellow on the foreground will remind you of a very hot afternoon.

I found quite a lot of Bruce's work which reminds me in a very subtle way of the glare of tropical sunshine. See the very striking oil painting marked No. 6. This is inscribed: "Scare-crow." Although
you may like it, I find it does not scare. Rather, it is very in-
viting. You may want to compare this scare-crow with another one, number 31. This second one is a silkscreen item of red and blue and touches of white cleverly used to remove the ghastly effects that blue usually has on red. Here again I could not help feeling bright afternoon sunshine in the scare-crow number 6, contrasting with the Tropical Evening sunset in Scare-crow item 34. From the shadeless weed fields and the scare-crow that guard them, you may want to move towards town and into the shade. On your way however, you will come across an oil on canvas numbered 49, and called "Zaria Indigo." When you have seen this, you may then go round the lino cuts and see the prints made from them. The lino cuts have themselves been plated with a bronze material which give a slightly pretentious air to them.


I. N. C. Aniebo (1965)

Sir,

Thank you so much for your kind invitation to your last ex-
hibition of paintings and sculptures by an artist for whom I have the highest regard—fraternal brothers and all that—but I regret I have decided not to attend any more exhibitions. Now I am not trying to be snobbish or anything like that, but you see, each time I go to an art exhibition, I come out more angry than I went in. Why? Why, because these painters seem to be the only successful panders of culture in Nigeria at the moment and I think this very unfair,
particularly to the other hard worked and unsung brothers— the Scribblers.

Take for instance the exhibition of paintings that I attended the other day. After you pointed out the artist to me, I gave him a second look. Short, bearded, with a permanent scowl on his dark flesh-ridden face, and dressed in a garb that seemed to come from Shade's boutique, he looked the part all right. But there was something, somewhere that did not fit. Was it his occasional laughter; lightening without thunder? Or his intermittent but overdone silence; back into the dark warm womb? Or his dreamy faraway look as if communing with creative spirits invisible to ordinary mortals? Or... He spoke well though—when he condescended to—mostly in an intellectual, painters' jargon vein.

Then it hit me. The something somewhere. He felt superior, different and one with the gods, unlike we destructive little mammals. And why not? A single stroke of his brush, inspired or insipid, guided by imagination, frustration or disgust, is immediately acclaimed, swooned over, read meanings into, interpreted and... paid for. And he becomes the creator, even though nobody, least of all himself, understood what he created. But then he could explain it— as I said, he speaks well: '... I have used here the cubist technique, with a dash of realism. This elongated arm was meant to appear like an object seen through a chamfered glass and to give it this effect I used an impasto finish... . .' It all came out during our conversation. He had worked in a desultory fashion for a year (he had another job) and both by design
and more by sheer accident, amassed forty odd canvasses and boards full of smears, whorls, meaningless crosses, big gashes of red and at the bottom right hand corner, a signature. Then he emerged from his hide-out or in more acceptable terms, his studio, looking harassed and worn out for this his first exhibition. Already he had lined up a big shot to make the opening speech and had put the price tags on the paintings: A Girl--180 guineas; Fruits--140 guineas; and Dream--90 guineas.

A white member of the international and culturally subdued crowd interrupted us to introduce himself and sing the praises of this creator. I moved away and watched the other members staring at the paintings and trying hard to wrench a meaning from their dried paint. Often they did not succeed--one could see failure clearly written on their faces--but they dared not ask for enlightenment. Nobody likes to be called uncultured? So they wandered around, lists of the paintings in hand, faces set in the cocktail boredom look, eyes darting here and there to see who was or was not there, who bought or did not buy and what.

From time to time, the whir of the television camera cut across the hum of fashionable conversation, its harsh lights invariably picking out the VIPs and the dauber, sorry painter, in affected poses.

Then I began to wonder why these painters should have it all made; and this is not exaggeration because even foreign painters who, being mediocre, will not do well in their own countries come out here and under the guise of learning something from Africa compose unpalatable paintings--with a mask here and a black face there--which are sure to sell so long as that magic word--Africa--is used.
But the most annoying thing, sir, is that a painter can be a mediocre and yet be very successful. Where is the yardstick with which to measure excellence? With writers however, mediocrity is taboo because anybody who has been to school has an idea of what is and is not good writing.

Then talk of the fees! The creator must have garnered something like 800 guineas that day. So he can afford to go into hiding for another year, or give up his job or experiment to his heart's content with new techniques and finally emerge for another exhibition having already fixed the prices of his paintings himself. And not to talk of the publicity he gets, gratis.

I am yet to hear of any Nigerian scribbler fixing a price for his manuscript and getting it. Our editors knowing how few their magazines are, and therefore the very limited places a writer can take his manuscript to, have decided to pay the lowest possible prices for manuscripts. The Sunday papers pay only three guineas for short stories of 1,000—3,000 words and, with the exception of Spear Magazine which pays five guineas, magazines pay the same; yet some of our editors will not hesitate to buy a short story of the same length from an unknown foreign author for as much as forty guineas, if not more. I wonder if this means that foreign authors are better than Nigerian authors. To him that has, more will be given; but him that has not even.

So sir, this is why I have to decline your invitation. I am sure you will understand. The only other exhibition I will attend, will be my own. After all the former Kenyan Ambassador to London
who recently resigned his appointment has proved that the concentra-
tion required by a work of 3,000 words if applied to painting will
be worth a hundred times more. I would say two hundred times more in
Nigeria.

God! the unfairness of it all.

Yours Sincerely,

I. N. C. Aniebo

I. N. C. ANIEBO. "DAUBERS AND SCRIBBLERS." A LETTER FROM I. N. C.
ANIEBO TO NIGERIA MAGAZINE, NIGERIA MAGAZINE NO. 86, SEPTEMBER, 1965.

Anonymous (1965)

Pages 302-303:

"In the visual arts, Nigeria was also well represented at the
Festival. The exhibition of contemporary Nigerian Arts and Crafts at
the Royal Festival Hall in London was not particularly well chosen.
With too many heterogeneous objects, too much tourist art (contempor­
ary imitations of classical Benin bronzes) and too many mediocre
paintings by good Nigerian artists, the show did not add up too much,
and was easily swamped by the Rhodesian contribution in the same hall,
that featured the excellent painters and sculptors that have emerged
from Frank McEwen's Art School. Fortunately, there were many other
exhibitions where Nigerian art was featured. The Picadilly Gallery--
one of London's leading private galleries showed works by Yusuf
Grillo and Jimoh Akolo, two fine artists who are very competent painters
and whose sensitive canvasses attracted a great deal of attention and
praise in the British Press. In a huge exhibition at the Royal
Academy in London ('Art Treasures of the Commonwealth') three Nigerian pieces stood out among thousands of exhibits from India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Australia, Canada, Malta, Rhodesia, etc., a large aluminum sculpture by Asiru, a batik by Sussanne Wenger, and a brass figure by Yemi Bisiri. Here also the public could see some very fine traditional Nigerian carvings from the collections of the British Museum.

Rufus Ogundele, Jacob Afolabi and Muraina Oyelami, three young artists from Oshogbo also attracted much attention for the backdrops to Oba Kobo which they had produced in the Oshogbo Art School. Said the critic of The London Times: 'More attractive, indeed, than the paintings on show in Festival Hall.'

Other Nigerian artists figured prominently in Cardiff, in an exhibition of contemporary African art organized by Denis Duerden. Here Muraina Oyelami and Twins Seven Seven were representing the Oshogbo group. Bruce Onobrakpeya and Simon Okeke attracted the attention of the Duke of Edinburgh, who bought prints from both. . . ."


Editor Nigeria Magazine (1966)

The Editor of Nigeria Magazine, invites you to the opening of an exhibition of paintings and prints by Bruce Onobrakpeya at the Exhibition Center, Marina, Lagos, on Wednesday, April 13, 1966, at 6 p.m.

The Exhibition will be open daily from 9:00 a.m., to 6:00 p.m., until April 28th, 1966. In this exhibition, Bruce Onobrakpeya, the most sought after book illustrator, justifies the wide acclaim he
received a couple of years ago, as one of Nigeria's greatest painters and lino printers.

His works are characterized by new confidence, technical excellence and unusually pleasant color harmony. Bruce mixes a limited number of prints of each design and converts the blocks into pleasantly bronzed relief, which are very unique and a few of which can be seen during the exhibition. There's, however, an unfortunate aspect of these reliefs, which is the reliance on color of the tainting pigment. If the pigment were not permanent, then that might, in time, affect their appearance. But while the quality of his works takes a big stride forward, his prices have remained very reasonable and collectors have found that his exhibitions should be seen on the first day for this exciting new experiment carry red sold tags on the second.

"ARTISTS NOVELTY"

Bruce Onobrakpeya has offered one man exhibitions of his work on several occasions. But his current exhibition at the Exhibition Center is remarkable for his inspired adaptation of some of his lino-cut illustrations into wall panels and friezes of considerable attraction. Bruce has taken zest of these illustrations used to illustrate the work of Cyprian Ekwensi and writers, bronzed and mounted them in a variety of compositions which dominate the 52 exhibits on show. Perhaps the finest of these bronze-lino cuts, a drum, is not for sale and has been lent to the exhibition by Mr. and Mrs. J. D. Clarke. But several of the other arrangements are reminiscent of the illustrated friezes of the ancient Egyptian tombs.
In the current world of abstract presentation, which prevails among Nigerian artists, this touch of novelty has a refreshing appeal. There is a plentiful supply of reproductions of Onobrakpeya's lino work, cut with great skill and balance and characterized by old experimentation with color combinations so that two prints from the same plate might give completely different impressions. Variations in the same manner have been used for the three examples of silk-screen work which he shows. As a book illustrator, Bruce Onobrakpeya is probably the best known in the field and the exhibition which remains open until April 28, clearly shows that his talents in this direction, are considerably advanced.

Anonymous (1966)

NIGERIA TODAY, VOL. 9, NOS. 7 & 8, PAGE 6, COLUMN 2, 1966.

In Nigeria, quite a large number of these modern artists are of Benin origin. In a sense, they are a product of the artistic tradition of Benin. But besides being exposed to traditional art in its various manifestations in their youth, they have received a formal education and have acquired western techniques and aesthetic concepts. This widening of their horizon has not resulted in the total rejection of the old tradition but has produced a dynamic and exciting art born of the synthesis of European techniques with traditional forms. One such synthesizer is Bruce Onobrakpeya, one of Nigeria's promising young artists whose works were exhibited at the recent World Festival of Negro art at Dakar. Mr. Onobrakpeya is an unabashed admirer of traditional art, who displays great imagination in his blending of the old with the new. Onobrakpeya, whose father
was a carver, grew up in Benin City, and showed an interest in art quite early.

"As a child, I was greatly fascinated by the carved images in the household shrines. The bull paintings on the walls and the bronze works. And without knowing what I was doing, I started carving thorn and engraving rubber stamps."

The young artist, who developed his artistic talent through primary and secondary schools and later attended the Nigerian College of Arts, Zaria, received inspiration for his works from the life and culture of the people. "A day to day life of the people and their folklore stir my imagination to an extent that I am moved to portray them in my works," he said. Another Benin artist who has achieved international reputation, is Felix Idubor. He is well known for the door panels he carved for the National Hall in Lagos.

Ayo Ajayi (1966)

AYO AJAYI, "NEW NAME IN ART WORLD." SUNDAY TIMES, APRIL 17, 1966.

Bronze lino is a new name in the art world. Here it means linoleum cut into relief and converted into bronze, by giving it a bronze coating. Although, this new-born medium of creative expression is a fresh inroad into the Nigerian cultural scene. The author of the idea, is as old as bronze in the modern Nigerian art scene. He is the same 30 year old Bruce Onobrakpeya of St. Gregory's College, Lagos, who has had four one man exhibitions in Lagos alone—several others in the provinces. Bruce is better known for his illustrations of Cyprian Ekwensi's books which he did in 1960. Another of his famous works is the four-part mural at Idi Araba, Lagos University Court. Apart from these, he has been long associated with the
Mbari Club, an art promoting wing of the Ibadan University extra-mural Department. His unfailing effort to work like Picasso and hike out a new path in art is a result of his recent discovery of the new expression—media-bronze-lino.

Anonymous (1967)

"Thousands of passengers and visitors to the new ultra-modern Passenger Terminal of San Diego's International Airport in the U.S.A., can see on display a traditional Nigerian work of art. It is one of the symbolic presents from many countries of the world on the occasion of the opening of the terminal last month. The Nigerian work of art is the Oba of Benin with attendants by Ben Aye, in ebony. And it is the gift of the Government of the Federation of Nigeria. The sculpture, the cover page picture of this edition of Nigerian Magazine, was finished in 1961 and previously exhibited at the Independence Building, Lagos, during Nigerian Independence Celebration Anniversary of 1962. It was also exhibited at the Wind Symphony Orchestra at Pennsylvania, U.S.A., Exhibition in 1963. This gift of work of art was bought from a Lagos Art Gallery. There are today a few art galleries in the Federal Capital as well as other cities and towns in Nigeria. This is a development which augurs well for the advancement of Nigerian art and culture. These galleries are bringing to the limelight, young Nigerians who are helping to show the world Nigeria's rich heritage in the field of art and culture. Many outstanding works of art are finding new homes at these art galleries, providing a veritable market for the works of Nigerian artists, painters, and sculptors. And helping to provide a new tourist attraction all over the country.
In Lagos alone, there are more than half a dozen art galleries who are the brains behind these ventures. This Nigerian Magazine survey covers Idubor Gallery of Art, The Bronze Gallery, Mbari Mbayo Gallery, The Idehen Gallery and the Onobrakpeya Studio.

Felix Idubor is perhaps one of the best known Nigerian sculptors. It is not surprising that he is one of the first pioneers of art galleries in Nigeria. His dream of a home for his many works of art came true in 1966. And it is a house of beauty, for some of Nigeria's best works of art. Idubor Gallery of Art at Kakawa Street, Lagos, is an imposing house with an architecture which dates back a few years. This is one of the very few houses of Brazilian architecture still left to grace old Lagos. Inside, Felix Idubor houses his valuable additions to Nigerian treasures. The house itself has been remodeled but still fascinates for the more than one hundred years old original Brazilian design. It has symmetry, elegant front windows and doors, altering classic influences. Since Felix Idubor moved into his Kakawa Gallery, he has not relaxed in his efforts to make this cool house. More works of art have been transferred from his studio at Onikan, Lagos.

Bronze cartoons have been added from Idubor's foundery at Benin to the enrichment of the culture inside. But this Gallery does not house the works of Felix Idubor alone, but it also has on display collections of budding Nigerian artists who have no other place to send their works. And Felix Idubor has this to say about his aims and objectives. "I have taken the plunge to run an art gallery befitting the city of Lagos in order to arouse in the authorities the
need for building a National Art Gallery, to retrieve our love of artistic consciousness and to show art as an integral part of man."

He produced the case covering the souvenir album of the Royal Tour photographs presented to Queen Elizabeth II by the High Commissioner for Nigeria in the United Kingdom in 1957, and designed and executed the works shown on the doors leading to the Cooperative farm in Ibadan. He was commissioned by Maxwell Fry, the famous British architect well known for their building of Pandigar, the New Indian Capital city of Punjab; to design and carve the entrance doors of the bank headquarters. He also carved the main entrance doors of the new extension to the Iga Iduganran, the palace of the Hereditary Obas of Lagos. These consist of three panels with the Obas depicted enthroned, side by side, with other characters. Felix also carved some of the wood paneling on the impressive range of doors which form the foyer of the National Hall and the panel for the throne.

He has recently completed a work commissioned by the Central Bank of Nigeria, Benin City. He also carved the Bank's entrance doors and designed and executed the iron springs depicting Benin Oba's state wars displayed at the Bank's gate. Felix is also the proprietor of the Nigerian Art and Craft Center. His Idubor Gallery of Art is at 29 Kakawa Street, Lagos, Nigeria.

The Bronze at 39 Campbell Street, Lagos, is the successor of the Gallery Labac, which opened in December, 1961, for use as an outlet for the production of all artists. Today, it has, among other things, fifteen artists, regularly contributing their works to the gallery. The gallery which seems to be a misnomer viewed from what it houses, is owned and managed by Miss Afi Ekong and contains bronzes,
ethnographical objects, old and contemporary batiks, carvings, paintings, prints, and sculptures. Works of famous artists like Bruce Onobrakpeya, Simon Okeke, Susan Wenger, Festus Idehen, Ayo Bello, Ben Aye, Fakeye brothers, George Bamidele, Chief Bamigboye, Ben Osawe, Ayo Ajayi, and Okiki, are prominently featured there with heavy emphasis on bronzes and wood carvings, especially Benin and Yoruba images. Included in the collection are five rare pieces dating to as far back as the 18th century. Afi Ekong is almost a household word in Nigeria and she needs little or no introduction. Born in Calabar in 1930, she was educated at Christ Church School and Epton School, Calabor, and at Wusasa, Zaria. She received her professional training as a painter and fashion designer at Oxford College of Arts and Technology from 1951-3; St. Martin's School of Fine Arts, London, from 1955-7; and spent a year studying history of costume at the Central School of Art, Holburn, London. She held one man exhibitions in Lagos in 1958, 1960, and 1962, and in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1961, and took part in joint exhibitions in Lagos, New York, Germany and London.

For her contribution to the advancement of African Women, she was decorated by President Taubman of Liberia, with a Star of Dame Official of the Human Order of African Redemption. A member of the Nigerian Institute of Management and of many women’s organizations, Afi Ekong was honorary secretary of the Federal Society of Arts and Humanities then. She has a life interest in the promotion and development of Nigerian Art and Culture.
The Idehen Art Studio

Hidden in a quiet, yet unpretentious Obalende suburb at the corner of Mosalashi and Keffi Streets, is the Idehen Art Studio. Festus Idehen, whose fame has spread abroad, is a carver. There Festus is making a quiet but growing contribution to a new world of art galleries in Nigeria.

Born in Benin City in 1927, he was educated at CMS School, Benin, and St. Saviour's Academy, Onitsha. On leaving school, he worked with the U.A.C. Warri, for about three years and then taught in Benin until he moved to Lagos in 1956. Descended from a family of wood carvers, he was apprenticed at the age of 9 to his grandfather, who was the official wood carver to a succession of Benin Obas.

On his arrival in Lagos, he resumed his art studies at the Yaba College of Technology. Mr. Idehen, who has held three one-man exhibitions in Lagos, 1957; West Germany, 1959; and Ghana, 1966, studied bronze casting in Munich, West Germany, in 1964, under a Western Germany Government Sponsorship. He has had commissions for sculptures from the Chase Manhattan Bank in Lagos, the Eastern Nigerian Development Corporation for its Presidential Hotels at Emigu and Port Harcourt; the Government of Liberia and the Ghana Fishing Company. At present, he is working on sculptures for the Lagos City Council. Mr. Idehen sculpts in wood, marble, cement and fiber glass resin. His hobby is picture going.

Onobrakpeya Studio

Bruce P. O. Onobrakpeya lives and works in the top floor of a three-story building in Iseyin Street, near Palmgrove Ikorodu Road, a
place not easily reached by visitors. A studio could do with a little more space. It is jammed tight with art materials and one wonders how any work can be produced there. Conspicuous among these materials is the newly installed 70 cm roller etching press standing on a strong wooden table. Both on the walls of the studio and in his local exhibition center are finished and unfinished paintings, prints and lino-bronze reliefs, altogether presenting an atmosphere such as can be found in museums.

Mr. Bruce Onobrakpeya was born of Urhobo parents at Agbarha Oto near Ughelli in the Midwest in 1932. He received his primary and secondary education at Sapele and Benin City. From 1953-6 he was an art teacher in the Western Boys' High School, Benin City, from where he moved to the Ondo Boys' High School the following year. To improve his artistic talents, he entered the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology, Zaria, now Ahmadu Bello University, in 1957, to study Fine Art. He obtained a Diploma in Fine Art, specializing in painting and the history of Art in 1959. He made his debut into fame in 1959, when he held his first one man exhibition of water color paintings, lino cuts and fabric prints in Ughelli, Midwest Nigeria.

The Nigerian Arts Council in 1960, commissioned him, together with Uche Okeke and Demas Nwoko, to paint murals for the Arts and Crafts Stands of the Nigerian Independence Exhibition. In the same year, he took part in group exhibitions of Contemporary Nigerian Art in the Independence Exhibition, Contemporary African Paintings at Ibadan and Nigerian Art in Germany arranged by the Arts Council of

A group exhibition of art from Africa at the Helps Stokes Fund arranged by the Harmoun Foundation, took him to New York in 1962, in which year also he did fourteen illustrations for Chinua Achebe's "No Longer at Eaze" and got his Post Graduate Art Teacher's Certificate. He closed the year by attending as an observer, the first international congress of Africanists in the University of Ghana, Legon, Accra. He was appointed art teacher at St. Gregory's College, Lagos, in 1963. The same year he completed a 96' x 6 3/4' mural for the University of Lagos and sixteen illustrations for Babalola's "Iwe Ede Yoruba." Two of his prints were bought by the Duke of Edinburgh at the Commonwealth Exhibition of Paintings, Sculptures, Prints and Crafts held in London and Cardiff in 1965. Not satisfied with teaching art, his experiments in new techniques, resulted in 1966, in a new development called lino-bronze relief of the success and future of which Mr. Onobrakpeya is very much optimistic. His old works can be found in the University of Lagos and others can be seen in the bronze gallery at Campbell Street and Idubor Gallery of Art, Kakawa Street, as well as Mbari Mbayo Gallery at Ikorodu Road. The Mbari Mbayo Art Gallery at 23 Ikorodu Road, Yaba, was opened in October, 1964, by His Highness Oba Laoye, the Timi of Ede and owes its
origin to Mr. Ulli Beier and Mr. Omotayo Aiyegbusi.

Tayo Aiyegbusi runs the gallery. The gallery is open to all African artists of outstanding qualities and a plan is afoot to exhibit works of non-African artists in order to keep abreast of art in the world. Items exhibited includes sculptures, paintings, and prints. Some outstanding crafts which reflect the cultural background of the country on Mbari publications. The gallery is open from 8 a.m.-6 p.m. daily except Sunday. The aim of the gallery is to bring to the limelight, the aesthetic ability, technical competence, and professional integrity of Nigerian artists as well as artists from other parts of Africa, whose works are qualified to be exhibited in the gallery. Mbari's activities, of course, are not limited to exhibitions only. It organizes many other activities like discussions, conferences, and classes in art and reproduction of drawings and paintings.

Mr. Tayo Aiyegbusi left school with a senior Cambridge School Certificate in 1945. He entered the Federal Survey Department the following year where he was trained in map production and employed as a draughtsman for six years. His overseas trip came in 1952 when the Institute of Internal Education invited him to participate in a world wide art program in the United States of America. On that visit, he learnt also cerography reproduction, which enabled him to set up the first color printing business in Nigeria.

His second overseas visit took him to the St. Martin's School of Art, London, and the London School of Printing in 1954, where he studied Graphic Design and Method of Printing, obtaining a National
Diploma in Design in 1957. Back in Nigeria, he worked in the Western Nigeria Ministry of Information, Department of Graphic Arts till 1961, in which year he was elected a member of the British Society of Industrial Artists. Also in 1961, Tayo Aiyegbusi established his Design Productions West Africa, from his meagre savings, when he was a civil servant. He has done many book illustrations as well as cover designs for books of Nigerian authors.

ANONYMOUS. "LAGOS ART GALLERIES." NIGERIA MAGAZINE, MARCH 1967.

Dennis Duerden (1967)

Writing from his Transcription Center, where is is Director, Dennis Duerden observed that although a radical change has taken place in western attitude to art from Africa, (during 1965-67), i.e., the breaking down of cultural ethnocentricism, the works he reproduced in his article were not reviewed by one major critic in a national newspaper in the United Kingdom during the time they were exhibited. This exhibition was for four weeks at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London. Yet many very much inferior exhibitions were reviewed. Again he said "and do not let us delude ourselves that anyone takes the artists and writers of Africa any more seriously than they were being taken two years ago." (i.e., 1965-67).

Moreover, he noted that sometimes the critics go to the other extreme and bend over backwards to be kind to African artists. This, he feels, can have an even more disastrous result, as the ones which are over-generously praised obscure the ones which really deserve praise from those critics who would know their value. The artist from Africa is, therefore, always a victim of the political situation, whatever position he adopts in it.
Again, he observes, "Writers and artists from Africa have sheltered in their haven of cultural ethnocentricism and have not cared to compete in a race in which they are already far behind. I am sure a young African who contemplates a business career in the modern world must feel weak at the knees in the same way, although of course, he doesn't admit it! Inevitably, this must seem like the most appalling heresy to those whom I have described elsewhere as the hot house nursery men of African art."


Paula Ben Amos (1967)

One of the main problems facing Nigerian sculptors is to define themselves artistically and socially. There are at least three possible directions an artist can follow: first, to work within the traditional system, adopting and modifying new techniques and forms so that they are compatible with the traditional ones; second, to opt completely for European forms whether representational or abstract; third, to attempt to create a synthesis of Western trends and traditional values and by this means, to produce a typically Nigerian modern art form. The basic problem of the second approach is how to make modern forms that may or may not be African, while that of the third approach is how to make African forms that are completely modern.

While the first group of artists maintains to a large extent, its traditional role, the second and third face problems in defining themselves as artists in the contemporary Nigerian scene. In effect,
tradition and modernity in Nigeria stand for opposing relations between the artists and their society. According to traditional values, the wood carvers and brass casters should strive to satisfy their patrons, even if the taste of the latter is changing. In terms of modern attitudes, the artist should have a complete disregard for his public and concern himself only with his own imagination. Hopefully, his patrons will eventually give up their conventional taste for his whimsical innovations. The problem of Nigerian artists, then, is not only one of dealing with modern forms but also of establishing their role in the society as individualistic artists. Ben Osawe is no exception. Indeed, his case is an excellent example of this dilemma, particularly since he has just returned from England where he spent ten important years of his life.

Originally, Ben is from the Mid-west. He was born in 1931 in Agbor, forty-four miles east of Benin City. His father was a carver who learnt his craft while he served as an amada, an attendant of the Oba. Upon release from service, Ben's father moved to Onitsha where he continued to carve for some time, making panels for sale to Europeans. Like other Bini boys, Ben used to spend long hours watching his father at work. However, his father forbade him to carve for he wanted his son to have a more respected profession, such as law. Ben was forced to carve secretly and the first time he was able to work in the open, was in elementary school. The headmaster, an amateur painter himself, encouraged Ben to carve and to paint. Once started, Ben began to work in various media, doing mainly what he thought to be exemplary European art: portraits and landscapes,
decorative roses and other flowery arrangements. In 1946, he moved to Benin, and after the death of his father in 1947, he was forced to apply his skill to more practical ends—the production of rubber stamps and ebony figurines. Up to this point, Ben fitted very well into the pattern of many carvers in Benin today. But he was more fortunate than most, for in 1956, he left for England, supported by an English patron, Major B. F. H. Grimley, D.S.O., who perceived his great talent in spite of the work he was doing at that time. In England Ben studied at the Camberwell's School of Art in London. The first months were difficult, the new environment, tools and forms were perplexing and challenging at the same time. In his first encounter with abstract art, Ben resented it, thinking it to be phony and pretentious. Two years passed before he could fully appreciate it. But as soon as he could command these novel visual forms, Ben began to develop as an artist.

While in England, Ben achieved a modest success as a young sculptor. He participated in several group shows, among them exhibitions in the Picadilly Gallery, London, in 1960, in the Artists International Association Gallery, London, in 1962, in the Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh (Exhibition of Nigerian Art) in 1963 and in the Commonwealth Art Festival in 1965. Although none of these were one man shows, reviewers discussed Ben's work extensively and enthusiastically.

After ten years abroad, Ben returned to Benin City. The encounter with his hometown was somewhat of a cultural shock. He left the City as an adolescent boy and returned as a mature artist. After
an initial period in which he reached an artistic standstill, Ben began to sculpt and to experiment with a different medium. While in England, he had worked primarily in bronze and plaster, but the natural environment around Benin provided him with ample supplies of wood, particularly ebony. Within six months he had created more than fifteen pieces of different sizes, a sufficient number for a one man show which was held in the Exhibition Center, Lagos, and the Mbari House in Ibadan.

In Nigeria Ben is faced with the problem of establishing himself socially and artistically. He identifies himself with the role of the artist as he experienced it in England. Thus, he insists on an individualistic attitude to his art and wants to isolate himself from economic motivations while working on new pieces. The abstract forms he produces create a further problem. People invariably ask him for clues to establish the connection between the sculptures he makes and the natural forms they know. However, this kind of question actually misses the point of Ben's work as he sees it. While the similarities between the natural shape and the artistic object had an autonomous aesthetic value for the traditional carvers in Benin City, formal novelty is the basis for the work of the modern artist. The sculptures Ben makes existed previously only in his imagination. True, like every other artist, Ben does not work in a visual vacuum. His sculpture is composed of geometric shapes and natural forms. For example, at the time we met him, he was fascinated by the shapes of birds. A photographic album of birds was in his room and he looked at it often. However, it would be wrong to assume that Ben tried to
carve figures that would approximate the forms of the birds in this
album. He only utilizes the shape of birds as well as those of
triangles, quadrangles and circles to create a new formal entity in
which surfaces, textures and shapes relate to each other in terms of
balance and contrast. For Ben, the work on a new sculpture amounts
to an intuitive combination of the expression of emotion and the
exercise of intellect through which he arrives at an aesthetic
solution to the creation of new forms.

The Nigerian intellectual circles, who are in the best position
to appreciate abstract art, make another demand on Ben. They want
him to be a Nigerian artist, to synthesize traditional and modern
forms in his work and to express in that way the spirit of modern
Nigeria. However, according to Ben, the whole concept of a Nigerian
artist is false from an aesthetic point of view. It provides just
a geographical, national and cultural designation for the artistic
activity, but by no means does it supply any aesthetic framework for
art. He will be the first to admit that he sculpts the way he does
because of his Bini background, but he will immediately add other
factors, like his individual psychological make-up, his professional
training, and various accidental influences, all combined and none
excluded. Consequently, if Ben reaches any synthesis at all between
modern artistic trends and traditional aesthetic values, he achieves
it intuitively, without any self-consciousness. Ben feels very
strongly that the more minute an artist tries consciously to be
Nigerian or to make deliberate concessions to his own traditional
culture or the new middle-class clientele, he endangers his existence
as an artist.
As far as his own culture is concerned, Ben himself has had only a limited contact with the great art of Benin. Nowadays, the main works for which Benin is famous are found in international museums and not in the local ancestors' shrines where they belong. Thus, Ben learned about the artistic heritage of his own culture through art books and visits to European museums. Through the same media he learned about modern art in general, as well as the traditional art of other Nigerian tribes. Therefore, when it is possible to trace 'Africanism' in his work, it is not necessarily a result of contact with Bini or any Nigerian art tradition. In fact, some of his sculptures have greater similarities to Congolese masks than with any local work. In other cases, the African influence on Ben is indirect via modern European artists who have been influenced by Negro art works. The impact of the African elements in modern European art upon Ben and other young artists in Nigeria suggests that the relationships between the African and European art traditions have made a full circle. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Africa affected European artists and now the modern art which developed partially through that contact is having its own impact upon the new generation of artists in Nigeria."


Anonymous (1968)

"The Military Governor of Western Group of Provinces, Lt. Col. F. A. Fajuyi, would open the exhibition of paintings at Mbari today.

Precedent: Artists whose work will be exhibited will include Armound
Aniamposu of Dahomey, Alexander Skouder of Ethiopia, Valente Malangantana of Mozambique, Bruce Onobrakpeya and Miss C. Omagbai of Nigeria. The exhibition would last for a week. Sources close to Mbari have said that it is hoped that the kind acceptance of the invitation to open this exhibition by the Military Governor will establish a precedent for future collaboration between the Government and cultural organizations in the country."


Anonymous (1968)

"Another opportunity for the connoisseur of art came at the Goethe Institute when 36 year old Bruce Onobrakpeya exhibited magnificent ranges of color paintings, murals, and his new art trend of the bronze-lino reliefs. The subtlety of the paintings, some of them on cardboards and canvasses, and the lino-cuts glazed in bronze color clearly illustrates the versatility and mastery of details in his paintings. The Benin woman and other vignettes at one hundred and twenty guineas, the beauty in the wild etching and lino-cuts at ninety guineas. And the oil paintings of palm wine women at sixty guineas, are few pieces to mention, with artistic uniqueness that made a collector's piece, not minding the price.

Born in Agbarha Oto near Ughelli, Mid-west State, Bruce attended schools in Benin and Ondo before studying art at the Nigerian College of Technology, Zaria, now Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Unlike crops of his contemporaries, he brushed up his strokes at the summer school organized by the famous Mbari Mbayo Club at
Oshogbo, where he developed his bronze lino reliefs. Before his present appointment as art master at the St. Gregory's College, Lagos, he had exhibited his works in Britain and Europe.

As a good illustrator, he receives commissions frequently to illustrate on books and some of his mural paintings can be seen in public centers in Nigeria.

ANONYMOUS. "BRUCE'S LINO CUTS. NEW TREND IN NIGERIAN ART." 1968.

Ajibade Thomas (1968)

"That the Nigerian artist has established himself in the last five years, there can be no doubt about. He has even gone some steps further. He has evolved a new pattern in art that is truly Nigerian, nay, African, and thus, has created a place for himself in international art. A testimony to this thinking is the contemporary Nigerian artists' exhibition currently being staged in Lagos, where twelve of best works of ten leading Nigerian artists are being shown. A crop of well known Nigerian artists, including Y. A. Grillo, T. A. Fasuyi, Erhabor Emokpae, Ayo Ajayi, Bruce Onobrakpaya, Mrs. Ugboadaga-Ngu are taking part in the exhibition. The Nigerian artist has also placed a new trial in the art in Fasuyi's, the tortoise. That is a sculpture made out of calabash. Tortoise has a long elegant neck and rather too large curve bit for the shell, old sage with one strange bead around its neck. The bald head and the air of a strict disciplinarian the old man wears show how delightful oil can be beautifully used.

With a drinking calabash on one hand and a keg of palm wine in the other, Ayo Ajayi portrays the God of Wine of the old Yoruba fable.
Termed "Joy of Drinking" Ajayi God of Wine has its eyes bulging, probably an effect of too much on, and looks complacent as he poses lying on the ground.

Bruce Onobrakpeya, who uses lino bronze, does a good work on three spirits, a painting in bronze relief, from linoleum cut then pasted on board. Onobrakpeya's spirits are rather tough and I actually mistook for bronze-cast figures. All these and others now being exhibited are among the collection of works by Nigerian artists for their impending tour of Europe in summer.

As Labor and Information Commissioner, Tony Enahoro said the tour will strengthen cultural links between Nigeria and European countries which will be visited and provide better forum for cultural understanding.


Sabu Law (1969)

"Of all people in Africa rich in cultural heritage, the Nigerian who sells works of art seems less fanatically concerned lest the rich contemporary paintings, sculptures and carvings he exposes for sale should be acquired by aliens who resell to Nigeria at a price hundredfold in future. The absurdity of his ignorance has never been more vividly displayed than by the various wayside stalls found in Lagos at Ikoyi Hotel, Ikeja Airport, and Federal Palace Hotel today. He sells for cash, never for value.

This malpractice call it ignorant unpatriotism is inconsistent with, and unexpected from, a people of a great country whose artists
have demonstrated abroad what the future holds in store for Nigerian art.

Today, in modern museums of Europe, Nigeria has many un guintely exportable pieces of bronze, paintings and sculptures any ex-colonial African country has produced. Art collectors, connoisseurs and Museum Directors have criticized this move which has elicited scorn from Europeans against those who are bent upon depriving this country of her place as star country in culture.

Mr. Ekpo Eyo, the Director of Nigerian Museum of Antiquities, Lagos, has rightly said: "Year in, year out, Nigeria loses her antiquities to foreign museums and markets. In this way, the country not only loses the concrete evidence of her past civilization, but also hard cash. An extremely modest estimate is that this country loses up to N50,000 annually by way of illegal exportation of antiquities. This course is scandalous in view of the economic situation in this country."

Unhappily, the young Nigerian artist because of poverty is ready to sell everything he produces to foreigners in exchange for ready money. Hence major works of contemporary art purchased during exhibitions which should be preserved in modern galleries as art soon find their way to various art markets scattered in Europe where they are sold at prices never proportional to their aesthetic value.

Happily, major contemporary works of art which are more affected by this malpractice than antiquities are few. They will increase in the future. The reason for this is not hard to find.

Within the last three years, a number of exhibitions variously sponsored by Europeans and Africans alike were held in Lagos and
important art centers like Ibadan, Benin, Kaduna, and Ife.

In Lagos alone, over twenty-five exhibitions were held at Idubor Art Gallery, J. K. Randle Hall, Goethe Institute, Federal Palace and Ikoyi Hotels. Other exhibitions held at the same period and sponsored by Mbari of Ibadan took place at Ibadan, Ife and Oshogbo.

In one exhibition sponsored by the Cultural Division, Ministry of Information and held at the Ground Floor, 25 Storey, Independence Building, by the Eve de Negri, over $1,000 was realized from sale; most of the buyers were foreigners. Added to this fairly large sum, over $2,000 was realized from cheap sales of other major works of art displayed in many public and privately owned galleries. This drain on our future reserve of art treasures has not been regulated as is the case with antiquities.

To counteract the sale of antiquities, the Department of Antiquities has caused export laws to be enacted and consequently the Director has to examine every piece of antiquity that leaves this country officially to see that it is authentically not unique and historically not important. Hundreds of these objects turn up every month for export permit. In the bid to check smugglers the Criminal Investigation Department and Customs Officers are lectured on detection and prevention of export of antiquities. The same does not apply in the case of contemporary works of art. The check against mass selling of contemporaries is permissive.

1Idubor Art Gallery, Lagos
Bronze Gallery, Lagos
Gallery Labac, Lagos
Mbari Mbayo, Ibadan, etc.
Lagos alone has five top galleries. Ibadan has one.
Far away in Europe, artists and governments have long realized the importance of legislating against the sale of major works of art whose creators are dying out, hence the speed and stringent precautions undertaken in these parts of the world to ensure that cultural glory is sustained.

Here in Nigeria, however, not all artists are prone to sell for what it pays. Artists like Erhabor Emokpae, Bruce Onobrakpeya, Felix Idubor, Y. A. Grillo and Etso Ngu reserve their major works of art for sale to art lovers who are committed to preserve them in Nigeria.

This is one reason distinguished Nigerians like Chief A. Y. Eke, Mrs. Aduke Moore and Nora Majekodunmi founded the Federal Society of Arts and Humanities whose art collections presently adorn the foyer of the Library at the University College, Lagos. Here, Nigerian treasured sculptures like "Mother Africa" sculptured by Osunde and other major paintings by Bruce Onobrakpeya, Erhabor Emokpae, to mention a few are displayed. Such is the spade work so far done in preserving contemporary works of art in Nigeria.

History shows that new forms of art like music to the deaf have always been found absurd at first and then condemned out of hand by the public at large. The man-in-the-street who attends an exhibition often asks what is the purpose of this thing they call abstraction and why has the painter eliminated the subject too as to liberate his lyricism from the chains of reality? Why must we preserve such works of art, call it major or minor which do not conceive of the picture as an intermediate point between nature and the viewer?
Isn't the artist alone the oracle capable to interpret what his forms, splashes of color on the canvas, and lines represent? The layman attends the formal opening of an exhibition to drink free beer, he does not understand art. A day comes, however, when the people's eyes are opened, their ignorance disappears and a few of the works he did not comprehend a decade ago at least inspire a well-nigh religious awe.

It is when that day arrives and that might be too late, that people become aware of the importance of preserving works of art. It is then when Nigerians will say "the impious acts of philistines have torn out one of the finest pages of the history of this generation." That day is now when major contemporary Nigerian works of art must have a permanent home in Nigeria?

SABU LAW. "CONTEMPORARY WORKS OF ART NEED A HOME IN NIGERIA."

NIGERIA MAGAZINE NO. 100. APRIL, 1969. PP. 348-355.

Anonymous (1970)

ART

Top Nigerian Artist Showing Art in North

One of Nigeria’s best known and most versatile artist, Bruce Onobrakpeya, has arrived in Kadura to prepare for a one man exhibition of his art in Kadura, Zaria, and Kano. The exhibition sponsored by the U.S. Information Service in the Northern States will feature paintings, etchings and bronze reliefs. The Kadura exhibition began yesterday at the U. S. IS. Library, 5 Ahmadu Bello Way, from 10 a.m., to 6 p.m., and will be on until Friday, the 25th. In Zaria, the Department of Fine Art, Ahmadu Bello University will show
the works on Saturday, 25th, to Monday, the 27th. The third exhibition will take place in Kano from Tuesday, 28th, to Saturday, May 2nd, at the U.S.I.S. Library along Post Office Road from 11 a.m., to 7 p.m.

Born in 1932, in Agbarha Oto, in Mid-west, Mr. Onobrakpeya attended elementary and secondary schools in Sapele and Benin. After teaching art for several years in Benin and Ondo, he entered the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology at Zaria, now Ahmadu Bello University and received a Diploma in Fine Art from there in 1961. Mr. Onobrakpeya was commissioned to paint murals for the Nigerian Independence Exhibition, 1960. In addition to painting, he has numerous book illustrations on Nigerian folklore. And has done murals in churches in Lagos, Ibadan and Benin. He has held several one man exhibitions in Nigeria and participated in exhibitions in the United Kingdom, Canada, India, Brazil, West Germany, The Soviet Union, Poland and the United States.

In the U.S., Mr. Onobrakpeya's folklore prints and water colors have been shown through the Harmann Foundation and the Pelps Stokes Fund. A founding member of the Society of the Nigerian Artists, Mr. Onobrakpeya currently teaches at St. Gregory's College, Lagos.


Anonymous (1970)

Nigerian artist, Bruce Onobrakpeya, was honored last week at the opening of his first one man exhibition in the United States which is being held at the Howard University Gallery of Art in
Washington. The two week exhibition featuring nineteen of Mr. Onobrakpeya's paintings is sponsored jointly by the University’s Fine Arts Department and the African Cultural Services, an organization dedicated to the promotion of all aspects of African culture among the Americans. Noting that his works have been already warmly received in the United States, Mr. Onobrakpeya pointed out that he has sold well over 300 paintings to Americans. Among those included in the Howard Exhibition are paintings owned by Beverly Carter, U. S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Lloyd McNeil, well known Afro-American artist and writer, Carol Greene, former head of the Department of Afro-American History at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington.

Present at the opening of July 16, were educators from ten African countries, who are in Washington with Mr. Onobrakpeya to begin a 45 day cultural tour of the United States.


Anonymous (1971)

Nigerian artist, Bruce Onobrakpeya, is one of three artists represented in an exhibition holding for two weeks at the Commonwealth Art Gallery in London. The picture-write shows one of his forty exhibits entitled, "Stations of the Cross." His contribution to the exhibition includes deep etchings, lino reliefs, and silkscreen work. His pieces range from imaginative treatment of Christian religious subjects to contemporary abstract art. Both his theme and titles he chooses reflect the heritage of African art. The artist,
Bruce, is seen in the middle in the picture above, talking about his work to visitors to the exhibition.  

ANONYMOUS. "NIGERIAN ARTIST AT LONDON EXHIBITION." MORNING POST MONDAY, MARCH 22, 1971, P. 9.

Adeyemo Adekeye (1973)  

For the Nigerian artist, Uzo Egonu, his Ibo heritage has provided the inspiration for much of his work. When I interviewed him in his large London studio as he was preparing for a one-man exhibition at the Commonwealth Institute in London last May, he described his most recent paintings and etchings as a wish for an "Ibo religious revival." This wish can be perceived in some of their titles: "Guardian Spirit of Food and Cookery Utensils," "Sacrifice to the New Goddess Before Sowing New Crops," and "Yam Festival." In response to a query regarding his personal method of working, he said, "Speaking for myself, I work on inspiration. You see, just as in fine arts and music, people are inspired in the same way I am inspired. But developing interest is also important because interest will bring out the real interpretation of your work. For example, when you want to paint a room with a rainbow, the most important consideration is that you have been inspired. This is followed by your interest which will bring out the interpretation of the work in the room after painting." While Egonu does not deliberately limit his subject matter, he does admit a particular sympathy towards "figurative and still life paintings. But of course, I am not provincial in my choice of subjects . . . . I find interest in practically everything. . . ."
The artist achieves his international reputation through a combination of talent, energy, and perseverance. After completing his studies at the Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts in London, he traveled alone to various European countries to study in their galleries and museums. During this period, he worked hard, selling drawings and watercolors and delivering talks on African art to maintain himself in each country and to pay for the trip to the next. His work attracted attention in Lagos, Port Harcourt and Enugu, Nigeria in 1964. In that same year, he staged a one-man show at the Woodstock Gallery in London, and his paintings, drawings, and etchings have since been prominent in many exhibitions in Europe as well as in Africa. Yet, to Egonu, success has not yet been attained:

"My childhood ambition to succeed I still cherish, because success will lead to recognition. I cannot assume that I have succeeded as I feel there is still quite a lot in the field of art and the more deeper in my search, the better. If I claim that I have succeeded, it means that I have solved all problems in art, which is not so at all. My other ambition is to be in Africa one day where I will be very much involved with others making vital contributions to solving problems of contemporary African art."

The artist is grateful to his father, a former colonial civil servant who recognized his son's talent and arranged for the ten year-old to be tutored for a year in drawing and watercolor. When he won the first prize in art in a nationwide school competition at age thirteen, it was to be the first of many awards; one of the more recent was the second prize in the 1972 African Arts competition.
Some of Egonu's most important works were commissioned. In 1960, he was approached by the Nigerian High Commission to paint "Independence Day," and that same year, he was commissioned by Whitbread & Co., London, to paint a scene of a Nigerian market. The artist has also designed textiles, brochures, and book covers and has illustrated a book of Nigerian folktales.

As for his future plans as an artist, "My intention...is to contribute to and also rediscover African culture." Similarly, the recognition of African artists by their own people is of much concern to him. It is still not uncommon for some African governments and organizations to commission works from non-Africans or expatriates, even when a capable local artist is available. To those talented and diligent Africans who desire to embark upon a career in art, Egonu nevertheless offers words of encouragement.

Africa is experiencing a cultural revolution which hopefully will give a sense of identity to its future generations and enrich non-African cultures as well. Uzo Egonu is one artist who is dedicated to this purpose.

ADEYEMO ADEKEYE. "UZO EGNONU OF NIGERIA." AFRICAN ARTS AUTUMN 1973, PP. 34-37.

Babalunde Lawal (1976)

The art of Bruce Onobrakpeya is a poetic projection. It is an attempt to express in visual terms the inner substance of things and the non-visible aspects of reality. Thus the expressive content of his art straddles the border of fact and fiction, tangible and reality and dreams. Time is immobilized in a web of sinuous lines and
saturated with a sensuous blend of hot and cool fluorescent and
nightmarish colors. Transversable space is at once suggested and
denied. We are here experiencing a phantom. Through this artistic
medium, Onobrakpeya affords us a glimpse of the inner realities of
human existence and its overwhelming paradox. For not withstanding
its tangible milieu, life is no more than a phantom of floating con­
tradiction of matter and spirit, the conscious of the unconscious,
truth and falsehood. The origin of man and, indeed, the whole universe,
is shrouded in mystery. We are the product of a primordial magic.
Because it hints at this mysterious aspect of existence, the art of
Onobrakpeya intrigues us visually, aesthetically and emotionally.
One is captivated not only by the wealth and depth of his formal
resources and how he has skillfully and sensitively dovetailed form
with content, but also by the unique way he has been able to adapt
the modern techniques of print making to communicate in an original
and unmistakably African idiom.

Even though his imagery is deeply rooted in Urhobo world
view and mythology, his message has a universal appeal. In his
"Ivwie," for instance, we have a visual inkling of the oppression in
Urhobo life. In the words of the artist, "very often, there is an
emergency and one suffers because one cannot receive help, which,
under normal circumstances, would have easily been obtained. For
instance, a man from a large and well protected family is molested
and beaten up by gangsters in a situation where he cannot receive
help from his relatives. The Urhobos call this 'Ivwie.'"

In this etching, the dominant form is an abstraction of the
human head, twisted and battered out of shape, the aftermath of
human helplessness in the fact of overwhelming oppression. Thus, "Ivie" could as well refer to the Sharpville shooting in South Africa or even the massacre of the Jews in Nazi-Germany.

Born in 1932 in Agbarha Oto, near Ughelli in the Bendel State of Nigeria, Bruce Onobrakpeya obtained in 1959, a diploma in Fine Arts from the Nigerian College of Technology, Zaria, now Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. He has had more than ten one-man shows and has participated in over twelve group exhibitions in Nigeria, Dakar, Kenya, Britain, Moscow, Warsaw and the United States of America. During the Commonwealth Arts Festival in Cardiff in 1965, he hit the headlines when one of his prints was bought by the Duke of Edinburgh. Since then, his works have been much sought after both at home and abroad.

In 1967, on the invitation of the Italian Government, he visited Bologna where he exhibited his original illustrations for the National Catechism of the Catholic Church in Nigeria. In the same year, he painted Fourteen Stations of the Cross, each measuring 4 feet by 10 feet, for the St. Paul's Church, Ebute Meta, Lagos. He has illustrated many books and has designed postage stamps for the Post and Telecommunications Department of Nigeria.

Constantly searching for new ways of expression, Bruce Onobrakpeya developed a bronze lino technique in 1968 by investing low relief linoleum with a bronze coating. The result is a visual delight. In 1972, he evolved another technique, which he called "plastocast," by casting plates for deep etching in plaster.

Since 1963, he has been teaching art at St. Gregory's College,
Lagos. One significant aspect of Onobrakpeya's works is the way in which he has been able to draw freely on the artistic traditions of the various ethnic groups in Nigeria, fusing them into a delightful panorama. In his "Ufeto," for instance, Hausa, Fulani, Ibo, Ibibio, Yoruba and Urhobo motifs combine to reflect the cultural diversity of Nigeria.

It is an artistic statement of unity in diversity, meaning the comb, in Urhobo language. Although the overall design has been inspired by the Yoruba adire textile, Ufeto focuses on the question of the relationship between the comb and the hair. The central figure, an anthropomorphic comb, that is identifiable with mother Nigeria, unites all the ethnic elements in the composition, just as the ordinary comb organizes and shapes the hair. The capitation of the teeth of the comb and their rendering as masses recall the role of the latter as functionaries of the traditional god and hence, agents of social control, a function that has since been taken over by the new institutions such as the press, the police and the judiciary among others.

His etching of 'Ominira' Political Independence, not only integrates motifs from different parts of Nigeria but also identifies Onobrakpeya as a nationalist. Here we see him searching frantically for a Nigerian personality in art. Like 'Ufeto,' 'Ominira' explores the theme of the United Nations symbolized by three figures sustaining a globe, which reminds us of the traditional Nigerian saying "the soup pot is most secure on three hearth stones." But then, the artist warns that no nation can endure without unity, faith and morality.
Unity is allegorized in the top right of the picture, by small soldier-ants, uniting to sustain their queen mounting climbers all linked by the same rope.

And masqueraders from different ethnic groups coming together to celebrate Nigeria's attainment of political Independence. Faith is represented by the supplicating figure directly above the masqueraders while morality is some symbolized by two men, extreme left center, cutting down the thorny tree of vice.

In a recent interview with Jean Kennedy (African Arts, Vol.V, No. 2 of 1972), Onobrakpeya describes his efforts as:

"An attempt to create a synthesis. I try to speak to the present generation about the future and in the process, choose what I wish from Nigeria legends, myths and religious philosophies."

The uniqueness of this synthesis consists in the expressiveness of the whole, rather than the individualities of the parts. Being particularly interested in the marriage of form with the content, Onobrakpeya is at his best when inspired by traditional myths and legends. His etchings based on the ghost stories of Amos Tutuola and the fables of the late D. O. Fagunwa are so approximate to their themes that the viewer almost experiences them. Form and content become one in a pool of colors. The viewer is left to ponder over the mystery of existence. No doubt the art of Onobrakpeya represents the triumph of the human intellect over the machine. Art is lifted beyond the reach of the camera, for Bruce Onobrakpeya is creating rather than imitating.

BABATUNDE LAWAL. "THE MYTHICAL REALISM OF BRUCE ONOBRAKPEYA."

NIGERIA MAGAZINE NO. 120. 1976, PP. 50-59.
Chief Akeredolu traveled all the way from Owo, Ondo State, to the Kakawa office of the Daily Times the other day, cap in hand, for the authorities who had "threatened" the existence of the Federal Government's old Secretariat.

Bespectacled, tall, slim and in flowing agbada dress, the chief said he was "much disturbed", about a publication in one of the national dailies about the imminent "demise" of the old Secretariat. "I don't want it to be destroyed," he snapped.

His utterances soon went beyond the old Secretariat issue as he began to speak of his contribution to the works of art. This reporter got fascinated and settled down for a full scale interview.

Chief Akeredolu had sent a telegram to the Director of Antiquities, Dr. Ekpo Eyo, saying "Grateful endeavor save remaining ancient buildings in Lagos for posterity." He later wrote a protest letter to back up his demand.

"You see, I am keenly interested in antiquities. To my surprise, the few we have in Nigeria are being demolished to make room for the so-called modern buildings." he said.

He said that "since most of the ancient buildings were received from our 'ancestors', it was necessary to keep them for generations yet unborn."

Born at Owo, Ondo State more than 60 years ago, Chief Akeredolu is, by nature, an artist and sculptor. In 1948, he, with Lashekan, a painter, exhibited their works in various cities in Nigeria. "Both of us constitute one of the pioneers of art in the Festival of Arts staged in 1950," he said.
During the British Festival of Arts in early 1950's, he went on, "I sent some of my works which were admired by the Royal family including the mother of the Queen."

In 1953, Chief Akeredolu said some of his carvings were bought by the Royal African Society in London and presented to the Duchess of Kent during the Queen's Coronation.

In 1956, the Nigerian Federal Government commissioned him to furnish with his carvings the railway coach in which the Queen of England traveled in Nigeria.

The Chief related how he acquired his expertise. He said in 1951, having displayed some artistic talent, the Nigerian Government gave him a scholarship to study at the Institute of Archaeology, University of London, for three years.

"Then a year after," he continued, "I was given a fellowship to travel to Europe to see museums and places of antiquities. I visited France, Sweden, Denmark and Italy." The Chief also attended two short courses in Paris.

Chief Akeredolu later came back to Nigeria and joined the Antiquity Service. "I was then employed as technical assistant (Antiquities) and was later made technical officer and later promoted to Higher Technical Officer, the post where I retired in 1970," he said.

But Chief Akeredolu did not seize the opportunity of his retirement to "retire" his interest in the works of art. Instead, he began collecting old works of art in Owo and suburbs. "These were put in my house for a long time before the Nigerian Federal Government
got interested and later organized a temporary museum at Owo. "This is located at the King's Palace," he said.

Apart from collecting works of art, he said, "I cast brass and at present, I am developing an art jewelry. Bringing out a specially designed ring," he said, "the product was a combination of gold, silver, with amethyst stone mounted on it." The wrist watch he wore was encased inside a carefully blended silvery material with coral beads.

Chief Akeredolu's appearance presented a simple picture, except that he wears a few rings on his fingers and one necklace with a pendant which, according to him, he bagged during the Nigerian Festival of Art in 1950, at which he came in first.

Asked why he was not much in the news like other artists, he said he got a lot of publicity in the 50's. "NIGERIAN TEACHER"—a publication in the 50's carried a lot of his works and a short history about his life. "I had many in overseas newspapers like The Corona of London," he said.

Chief Akeredolu presently does a lot of wood carving especially church doors. He mentioned more than a dozen churches in Nigeria which had patronized him. These include St. Peter's Church (Faji), in Lagos, St. Andrew's Church, Owo, and St. Paul's Church, Shomolu, and the Christ Church Cathedral in Lagos, where he also carved the pelican which surmounted the cover of the font. "It's used for holding water for baptism," he said.

Are artists a wealthy lot? "Yes," Chief Akeredolu answered promptly. Talking forcefully, he said, "artists are wealthy spiritually, not materially; we are above any ordinary man," he concluded.
A major exhibition, "Two Decades of Oshogbo Art" has opened at the Geothe Institute, Victoria Island, Lagos. It was put together to show how the artists of this school, who began their career in the early sixties, have developed during the years.

Oshogbo art is represented in most major collections all over the world. Its emergence was a revolution to the contemporary Nigerian art scene which until then, was seen as an appendage of European type art styles.

However, the most significant characteristic of this group of artists was that they belonged neither to the traditional nor Western type of art school. They possessed no training from either. Therefore, this break with all conventional modes afforded total freedom to their artistic impulses and imagination.

The result was an astounding out-pouring of images, color, and high design of such innocence, purity and highly symbolic abstraction of sophistication. Others brought forth such complexities while still some could be seen for the simplicity of expression.

This new group had thrown a freshness and qualities, hitherto unknown to the contemporary art for which it could only be appreciated. Although, it must be said that no art form however, can be to everybody's liking, of which Oshogbo are is no exception. It may have generated much controversy.
But, needless to say, controversy or not, and regardless of its short span Oshogbo has been established as an art style in its own right and for posterity. What, however, cannot be ignored, is that like all art movements, it is made up of individuals who have passed through different stages of development, experimenting and discovery of new techniques and styles of expression.

Like all art schools, it has set a convention from which another generation derive inspiration, as well as a generation of imitators, who commercialize on stereotypes.

A critical look would reveal that while works of certain artists have been on decline, many have improved greatly while many had a chequered career.


Richard Ikiebe (1980)

A five day national arts exhibition which was also part of the week-long celebration of our country's 20th Anniversary has ended in Lagos.

During the opening ceremony which was performed by President Shehu Shagari, the Attorney General of the Federation and Minister for Justice, Chief Richard Akinjide, was so impressed that someone overheard him comparing some of the art works with that of the great Picasso.

It is not publicly known that Chief Akinjide is an art collector, but the statement showed that he was interested and impressed enough by what he saw.
The mention of Picasso is essentially not what made the occasion important, other than that it became obvious that there was no other immediate standard of comparison for Chief Akinjide.

The long and short story on the whole, is that the exhibition was unique. In many ways it reaffirmed the age long belief that Nigeria is rich in great artistic talents. It also pointed to the fact that because of the vastness of the country, there are other great talents who still need to be discovered and nurtured into greatness.

One of such outstanding new discoveries whose works towers above the others at the exhibition is young Muri Adejimi of the University of Lagos Cultural Studies. His three paintings in oil evoked comments of admiration and delight from virtually all that saw them. Adejimi's mastery use of bright colors was such that you could pick the kola nuts from the calabash in the pseudo-abstract creation he titles, "Marriage."

"Aiye" and "The Egg", his other works were equally good imaginative and impressive. Among the "younger" generation's work that easily make impressions is also "Floating Calabash" by Olu-Spencer, who incidentally, is also trained by Abayomi Berber under whom Muri Adejimi is currently studying.

Abayomi Berber himself has Ali Maigoro, a handsome portrait in fiber glass at the exhibition.

Renowned Ben Enwonwu and Ben Osawe also graced the occasion. Enwonwu's pieces were all paintings while Osawe had some of his abstract creations in wood and portraits in bronze. "Fertility" by Osawe never really seems to fascinate one.
E. C. Madukaego's work in wood remains as intricate as ever, and in some cases, as in that of "man and woman in love", erotic. Other well known sculptors included Erhabor Emokpae whose "Olokun" done in Iroko and coins, looms high above all else in the hall.

For any people bound together by geographical make-up and social interaction, there is bound to be an artistic identity. What is yet to be determined is how much that art is influenced by external influence and the so-called "appreciation" by western collectors and writers.

The exhibition also included a few selections from works of school children, who even in their small ways, have their contributions to make towards evolving a national identity for our arts.

APPENDIX III.

OFFICIAL POLICY STATEMENTS ON ART
AND CULTURE: DELIVERED SPEECHES

GUIDELINE

I. B. M. Haruna (1977)
George Innih (1978)
Olujimi Jolaoso (1978)
I. B. M. Haruna—January/February, 1977

Contemporary visual arts has thrived luxuriantly in Nigeria since the pioneering efforts of late Chief Aina Onabolu some 50 years ago. Today, Nigeria can boast of over a hundred practicing professional painters, sculptors, print makers, textile designers and ceramists. There are six art schools training artists in various areas of specialization and there is also a very favorable climate for self taught artists to develop.

Many Nigerian artists have gained national and international recognition. Opportunities abound in Nigeria and every encouragement and assistance is given by the Federal Ministry of Information, National and State Councils for Arts and Culture and many other bodies towards further development of the Arts and the projection of the artists. Exhibitions are organized in the country and also taken abroad with the cooperation and assistance given to the Society of Nigerian artists. Art works are also often commissioned for public buildings and parks.

This exhibition shows the work of the Father of Contemporary visual art—late Chief Aina Onabolu, Akinola Lasekan and some other deceased Nigerian artists. It also shows the present scene in contemporary art and provides a peep hole into the future through the exhibition of Art Schools' work. Happy Viewing.

(Sgd)

Contemporary Visual Arts
Logos State Cultural Center
Eleke Crescent,
Victoria Island
Lagos, Nigeria

Major General I. B. M. Haruna
Chairman, National Participation Committee
Nigerian National Exhibition
It is my pleasure to address you today. For over four years now, Arts Council affairs have been managed by successive Caretaker Committees while its day to day activities have been supervised by an Executive Secretary.

It is pertinent to acknowledge the achievements so far made in the promotion, development and dissemination of Art and Culture through a welter of activities, namely: organizations of festivals, drama production, research into the history of selected towns, exhibition of art works and the maintenance of an art gallery. Kwara State did remarkably well during Festac '77 at both Lagos Regatta and the Kaduna Durbar.

Your Council is therefore, established to better this impressive beginning and building a strong super-structure on the existing solid foundation.
By your varied disciplines, knowledge, skills, experience, vision, commitment and dedication, you are well equipped to give the council a new lease of life, a new direction, a much bigger stature, and a new image. You are eminently competent to steer the ship of the Arts Council to the desired haven where it can bring added luster to the firmament of socio-cultural and artistic life of the State.

Your Council has been deliberately composed. Your Chairman is a renowned sculptor. Other members are variously versed in archaeology, linguistics, history, play writing, graphic art, ceramic art and geography. There are among you potential producers, actors, and musicologists. His Highness, the Olofa of Offa, represents the pomp and pageantry characteristic of Obaship. His Highness represents the link between the present and past generations and is himself an embodiment of the art and culture of the people.

Coupled with your individual merits, expertise and skills is the fact that Kwara State is in a unique and advantageous position as a melting point of various traditional cultures: the Northern, Middle-belt, Nupe, Akoko, and Edo Culture. This fact underscores the diversity and richness of the culture of the people of this State. And it is this culture that you are now appointed to blend and to nourish.

Put cogently, the objects of the Council will be to promote preserve, revive, develop and encourage the arts and culture within and outside the State.

The objects of your Council are challenging ones. Your Council requires some power to carry out all necessary, advantageous or expedient activities. Although the details of your functions are
contained in the Arts and Culture Edict being reviewed, you are empowered to carry out the following activities among others:

(a) to organize exhibitions and festivals of the arts at Local Government and State levels;

(b) to make arrangements for and generally take charge of the State's participation in Arts Festivals;

(c) to serve as the Cultural Center of the State;

(d) to organize and conduct lectures, demonstrations, and research on matters relating to the arts and culture of the State;

(e) to select, sponsor and make necessary arrangements for the performance of dancing troupes, theatrical and similar clubs undertaking tours whether within or outside the State;

(f) to manage the State Arts Theatre and to establish art galleries and museums;

(g) to make rules and regulations with respect to the holding of competitions in the Arts and to award prizes therefor;

(h) to work in cooperation and enter into arrangements with any other body engaged in or connected with the promotion of the arts and culture of the country or the organization therefor;

(i) to co-opt hold and administer any subscriptions, gifts, legacies, donations, grants or other such benefits for any purpose which may be advantageously concerned with the promotion of arts and culture in the State;
To make, draw, accept or endorse negotiable instruments;
(k) to acquire, hold and dispose of land.

In performing the foregoing functions, I expect your Council to be well organized. You might want to establish Committees to superintend various facets of your activities. I expect also that your Council will set up diversified Performing and Choral Groups who will by their regular or periodic performances, brighten life not only in the State Headquarters but also throughout the State. I also expect you to launch into purposeful systematic and well coordinated research programmes into the histories, folk lores, traditional medicine, etc., of various communities in the State. The Council's magazine "The Image", should be maturely developed and published more regularly. You should also look into the possibility of establishing more journals which will disseminate our histories and culture to the outside world.

I must, at this juncture, warn you that you cannot hope to make great impact on the State and on the Nation if you limit your recruitment for expertise to the State. You should, therefore, interact with Universities, other Institutions of higher learning, external bodies and individuals and involve them in nearly all your activities as may be desirable and as may be approved by the Government.

I do know that we have an art gallery in the Arts Council Building. It is your duty to establish art galleries and museums in different parts of the State.

The Arts Council should give the State Capital and other important towns desirable and long awaited cultural outlook.
The Council's Building should be so decorated with mosaics, sculptures, and other art works that visitors to the building will not need to ask where they are. The same goes for most of the monumental buildings springing up all over the State—the Secretariat buildings, the markets, the Stadium, the Yidi Park under construction, the Civic Center when it is ready and the College of Technology and University of Ilorin Buildings.

I wish to remind you of your responsibility to the local governments. When we talk of Festivals, folk songs, etc., we are, in fact, talking about people in the towns and villages who are purveyors of the cultures of the State. These people you must not forget. Your Festivals and Field Organizations Division should go about to scout for people and draw up a comprehensive list of existing dancing groups for purposes of local government, State and National level competitions and Art Festivals. You have a duty to upgrade the Pategi Regatta into an International Festival. This you can do in collaboration with your parent Ministry, the Ministry of Home Affairs, Information and Social Development.

The Council for Arts and Culture is at present occupying rented building. Plan is underway to build a Civic Center complex which will house the Arts Council, the Library and Graphic Arts Division of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Information and Social Development.

The task before you is not an easy one. I am reassured by your standing experience and competence as individuals and as a Council that you are more than equal to the task. I trust that I can count on your Council to transform the State into one of the Cultural Warehouse and center of the country.
The Government is determined to assist your Council in every way possible to achieve your lofty objectives.

I cannot but emphasize that the best is expected from you. Your ambition should not be to match what is being done by some culturally oriented States in this country, but to excel them in all the activities—performing Arts, Visual Arts, Festivals, Research and Publications by which the efficiency, productivity and success of a Council such as yours are determined.

Chairman and members of the Arts Council, ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to inaugurate the Council for Arts and Culture and charge it with the promotion, preservation, revival, development and encouragement of Arts and Culture.

I wish, once more, to congratulate Dr. Suleiman and the other members and to wish the Council a life of dedicated and useful service to the State in particular, and to the Nation in general.

Thank you.

ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY, THE MILITARY GOVERNOR BRIGADIER GEORGE A. INNIH AT INAUGURATION OF THE KWARA STATE COUNCIL FOR ARTS AND CULTURE ON MONDAY 14th NOVEMBER, 1977. CONFLUENCE VOL. 1 No. 1 JUNE 1978. PP. 4-5.

Olujimi Jolaoso (1980).

When the government of Nigeria some months ago took the decision to permit the showing here in the United States of the treasures which will be on exhibition from this evening on, it did so in the belief that the steady improvement that has characterized the overall relations between our two countries would be strengthened and
fortified if this cultural dimension was added. In this day when emphasis is almost exclusively placed on economic and political interdependence among nations, we have to remind ourselves always that man is part human and part spirit, and that relations between peoples must reflect this complexity of our nations.

About a month ago, I visited this museum in preparation for this affair and I had the privilege of talking with quite a few representatives of the media in the course of that visit. After a brief initial reference to the main purpose of my being here, our conversation always switched to the consideration of the price and quantity of petroleum which Nigeria exports to the U.S. I make reference to this, not to criticize these friendly people, but mainly to underline the dominance which the physical part has come to exercise over the spiritual part of our existence. To us, civilization is the aggregate of the two parts, and that is the main purpose which the tour of these United States by these treasures of ancient Nigeria is meant to serve.

It is true that the relationships based on our political and economic well being are very important. In this regard, we have made tremendous progress in the last few years. This cordiality has been reflected in the increased interest shown by citizens of this country in our own, not only as a source of petroleum, but as a country across the ocean which has a great personality of its own, a country which comprises some 80 million people who are very proud of their heritage and are closely linked by blood and kinship to some 25 million Africans—I mean, African-Americans—born in these
United States. That is a substantial fraction of your entire population. We must recognize this always in our other relationships, for the black community here is the largest outside Africa, and only Nigeria has a larger one.

This exhibition fills me with many deep emotions. That is not because I happen to have been born into the tradition it represents and am steeped in its significance, but because it permits Nigerians to share with you those "things of value" in our African heritage. These treasures, which date back to the period before the birth of Christ, at once confirm that we too made our independent and significant contributions to civilization and that we were already doing so before Julius Caesar, in his military campaigns in Western Europe, discovered an island whose inhabitants painted themselves in blue woad and hunted rabbits for food with very primitive weapons. I believe that he called that island "Anglia." The treasures further confirm that we even influenced that history and the trend of later European art—that just as anonymous artists of ancient Greece and ancient Rome sculpted the figures adorning their palaces and temples, so did our forebears furnish the courts of our kings and the shrines of our gods with some of these masterpieces.

Alas, I wish the similarity could have ended on that felicitous note. But no, for just as the conquering hordes of plundering Roman soldiers desecrated those temples and violated the precious works of art they found when they brought Greece down, throwing darts against the delicately frescoed walls and shooting dice on intricately executed marble tabletops, so were our courts and our shrines violated by at
sometimes civilizing missions and at others punitive expeditions.

Expatriate historians of the last century did not help matters because their scholarship and research formed the only basis for the evaluation and compilation of African history. They claimed that we had no history until the white man came, and only grudgingly, sometimes agreed that there might have been a meaningful past. We must be eternally grateful that the very same technology which has made it possible today for mankind to reconstruct the silent history of the defunct empires of the past in Europe and beyond, and which has only recently uncovered to the world the treasures of Pompeii, covered in those three fateful and dramatic days in A.D. 79, is now being applied to our past and is uncovering our treasures, so that no one will ever again say, "These are a people without an indigenous civilization, a people without a heritage."

I have digressed somewhat in these remarks not just to glorify a past but specifically to emphasize how important we feel about establishing our character and our identity as a people not limited to a manmade time frame in human history. I am happy to commend to you for your viewing enjoyment these priceless pieces which are testimony to the claim that I have just made. As the international Festival of Black Arts and Culture held in Nigeria in 1977 gave the world an idea of our cultural strength, today Nigeria presents to the United States of America some representatives of her cultural heritage and standing. I hope that they will lead all those who came to view them to question and perhaps reject the Tarzan image and the vulgar concept of Africa and Africans. I hope that many Americans
will find in them an additional strand in the bond of humanity which binds us all and transcends national exclusiveness.

It would, of course, be unthinkable for me to omit, in these remarks, the appropriate recognition of, and profound thanks to, all those who have made this exhibition possible. Not too many people know that this tour of the treasures owes its genesis to none other than that great and distinguished friend of Africa and Nigeria within your Federal Legislature. I refer to the Honorable Charles Diggs, whose idea it was in the first place that there was merit in such an undertaking as a potentially beneficial exchange in our bilateral relations. We thank you for your foresight and confidence, Congressman Diggs.

When matters cross national frontiers, they are usually carried by those specially entrusted with foreign relations. Your Department of State has carried that burden admirably, acting on behalf of and with the approval of the Federal Government, working tirelessly to facilitate at all states the mounting of the exhibition. As a professional myself, I appreciate, more than most people, their efforts and their commitment to the success of the project.

As we indicated from the Embassy when we announced this tour, funding for it has come from grants by the National Endowment for the Arts, Mobil, and the Founders Society, Detroit Institute of Arts. It is also supported by a Federal Indemnity from the Federal Council on Arts and Humanities. To all these, I extend the sincere gratitude of the Federal Government of Nigeria for providing in the U.S. temporary accommodation and protection for these treasures.
Mr. Cummings and Mr. Kan (Frederick J. Cummings, Director of the Detroit Institute of Arts, and Michael Kan, Curator of African, Oceanic, and New World Cultures, the Detroit Institute of Arts), we are deeply in your debt for the unstinting efforts which you have put into this project and wish you more success.

"What touches us ourselves shall be last served." To Dr. Ekpo Eyo and his Nigerian staff, I extend my congratulations and personal gratitude. This is the first time ever that this prestigious undertaking has been attempted. You have done me proud in your choice of the exhibits and in your dedication and cooperation.

Finally, it is my fervent hope that these treasures will be as well received here and on the rest of their tour in this country as were other foreign ones which have preceded them.

To all of you, I am most grateful.


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