

UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT

***ON AFRICAN ART AND IDENTITY
BLOGGING: A HISTORICAL
PERSPECTIVE***

An Inaugural Lecture

By

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INAUGURAL LECTURE SERIES

NO. 92

AUGUST 31, 2012

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the memory of my father and role model Johnson Gabriel Egbomeade Ugiomoh, and to my mother Beatrice Azitsenomo Omosi Ugiomoh an epitome of love.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Professor Joseph A. Ajiienka, the Vice Chancellor, and the University of Port Harcourt for this unique opportunity to give account of myself in the discipline I profess in and for providing the hospitable atmosphere that has enabled my research and academic career. In this regard also I owe a depth of gratitude to all the students who have in one way or the other studied under me in the past three decades. The realization that I owe them a responsibility to develop them implied that I also develop myself always to confront and equip them for their future life and work experience. The consciousness of that responsibility and what I have made of myself is what I profess today in this lecture. That I am an art historian, a discipline I find so much excitement in, is due to the initial effort of Professor Marshall Ward Mount, my undergraduate teacher of art history who taught me to query methodology. I have forever cherished him with the fondness a son owes a worthy father. In the same vein, I am also grateful to Prof. Christopher S. Nwodo who urged me to consider putting forward a proposition on the problems of African art history in philosophy. In this pursuit I met Professor James Elkins (Chicago Art School, Chicago), the partners Professors Michael Ann Holy (Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts) and Keith Patrick Moxey (Columbia University, New York), and John Picton (SOAS, University of London) whose works in the historiography of art history defined a path for me. In my early years in the University of Port Harcourt I adopted many mentors and they cut across the disciplines. Many of them are now retired. My reverence for them remains confidential, as space would not permit me to name them here. I however mention Professors J. D. Okoh and Andrew Igho Joe who were my teachers at St Paul's Minor Seminary, Benin City (1968-72). I also wish to express my profound gratitude to my colleagues in the Department of Theatre Arts,

Department of English Studies, the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature and the Department of Philosophy. They are always available to think with me on the theory of cultural practice. I have enjoyed immensely the knowledge we share as often as time allowed. I thank the Chaplain, Assistant Chaplains and Resident Associates in Chapel of the Annunciation, Catholic Chaplaincy, University of Port Harcourt; Rev. Frs. Joseph Kabari, John Chukwuemeka Nebo, Christopher Ejizu, Boniface Nwigwe Vincent Nyoyoko and Rev Monsg. Sylvanus Udoidem. I am also indebted to my colleagues in the Department of Fine Art and Design for the bond we share as artists and teachers. I also owe a depth of thanks to my numerous friends and colleagues. Within this broad reference I thank Dr. Basil Nnamdi, Obari Gomba Merses, Onyeakolam Ibekwe and Nelson Graves for their advice and copy reading this text. I am grateful in a very special way to my brothers and sisters Innocent, Emmanuel, Charity, Paul, Hyacinth, Augustine, Mrs. Maria Akpoghomhe and Mrs. Helen Aniya, including the family of Mr. Raphael Nwadike (of Ndi-Owerre In Orlu) my wife's siblings In a special way, I thank God for my wife Ifeoma Gladys and our children Eghiemeh, Eraomeye, Ughiezoa and Egbomeade. Because they are there for me I am imbued always with elation and confidence and for which I have progressed this far in my chosen vocation. In my life aspirations including this lecture I seek always to give due honour to God, the father of Our Lord Jesus Christ in His gifts and talents bestowed on me.

ON AFRICAN ART AND IDENTITY BLOGGING: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

God said; Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves... God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.¹

Preface

Today I join the mission where it is demanded that new professors give a coherent account of their discipline in a university setting. Central to this demand is a proclamation of faith, by the professor, in the discipline he or she professes. In this regard, it has been my preoccupation to breathe the work of art; to reside within its cluster; to ruminate on the depth of knowledge it offers; to appreciate and comprehend its value for culture in ways that are enriching; and to pass these values to others – my fellow humans. This mission has been complex but exciting. It has been fulfilling so far, for the reason that I am an artist myself. It then implies that I am an interested party in what I have set out to provide insight on, especially, from the perspective of the history of art which has dominated my vocation after my initial training as a studio artist. The faith, which I profess in my discipline today, I make from the position of an artist (a sculptor and print maker) who is also a critic, historian and thinker who thinks thoughts.

The interconnected nature of these scholarly disciplines sits squarely with my objective in this lecture. This is to define the character and significance of the work of art as an object of culture that privileges history and creates identities. In other words, I will

be highlighting the work of art as axiology: a repository of values. This objective, thus, makes clear the rationale for art and its value index for culture with special focus on Africa. A run-off from the above objective is how my practice has been applied to teaching these inter-related academic disciplines in the University of Port Harcourt. Beyond the practice of theory in the history of art, which my statement of purpose proposes, I will also highlight how my work has reflected the theory of practice in my studio encounters and engagements. Finally, I will comment on the value of art in culture, considering contemporary pedagogical strategies that now constitute theory as fetish. I submit that such obsession is nothing other than living on the threshold of the death of a truly consummate and incarnate art.

Introduction

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, in all cultures of the world there are legends regarding how the world came to be and how the human became part of the grand idea of creation. None of the stories of creation by our diverse cultures appears to transmit the tenor associated with the Jewish story referenced above (the epigraph of this lecture), taken from the world's most popular library (Biblios). The Jewish account narrates how humanity reconciled with the reality of finding itself in a universe that is dumbfounding and lacking explanation for all practical purposes regarding its existence and the place of the human in it. In assuming the status of homo sapiens (as we have defined ourselves), humanity set out to play God by creating God and, at the same time, locating self next to God in the narration that "God created man in the image of God." Indeed, from the point of that realization as Homo sapiens ensconced by God, humanity decreed thus: "we shall now make every other thing in our own image." It is therefore rational that where "God created man in the image of himself," Man in turn should make his creations in his own image and likeness.

This is a proactive decree that is couched in what appears as mere narrative. But the truth that is built into the creation story simply implies that from the beginning of such consciousness, humanity had taken its destiny in its hands. Ever since, humanity has made everything in the reflection of its image: with the imagery which the biblical story constructs and the actual image emanating from human acts, humanity endorsed the triumph of myth. The above biblical story, thus, stands at the watershed of the evolution of Art (with the capital A) as human engagement and indeed the definition of the identity of the human genus.

The above story of creation narrated by humanity remains apt in any attempt to understand the English word 'art'. The word Art sits at the foundation of all human activities and achievements. I, thus, undertake a hierarchical reconstruction of the word art for the purpose of moderating assumptions associated with what now appears a collective amnesia. In the human's relationship with reality, as established in cultural history, the tendency usually is to assume that a given understanding of a concept in an epoch or time and space coordinates is stable. We are often given to thinking that certain, if not all, aspects of reality in our time have always been the way we have come to know them. This is not so. There is hierarchical reconstruction of meanings and concepts in engagements in cultural history.

The root of the word *Art* is Roman – *Ars*. It means skill. The word accommodates such synonyms as ability, cleverness, dexterity etc. The Marxist scholar Ernst Fisher² provides one example of the origin of art. His position, which is fairly widely accepted, is hinged on anatomical adjustments that occurred in early hominoids. His principal argument is that an erect hominoid with freed hands launched humanity into the magic of skilful manipulation which produced the generic category called Art. The

freed hands allowed for all sorts of manipulative skills, which invariably led to the development of a robust brain that in turn aided in the development of tools and their associated labels and communication device or sign (including language). Fisher's thesis corroborates the archaeological time line that recognises the Homo habilis or the skilful man (2.40-1.9 million years ago), Homo erectus or the erect man (1.8- 1.5 million years ago) and Homo sapiens (300,000 years ago). According to Fisher, the earliest hominoid created the first work of art by responding to the inadequacies of objects of nature adapted for specific objectives. For example, a stick without a stub to harvest a fruit would demand that it be properly adapted and fitted with such device to serve the purpose of harvest and/or other functions that might have been necessary. Retooling or reinvention, which the stick has undergone automatically converts it to an artefact; a product of culture.

Crafted devices by humans required the deployment of skill to refine them. The activities of archaeologists show these early instruments such as stone axes and flints, (Plate 1) which are glued to sticks and used for the purposes of cutting up or slashing things. The decision of the human to craft usable tools over time has led to the accumulation of objects on our planet. The archaeologist refers to these categories of things as material culture. What is considered material culture today approximates to a complex cultural matrix of things made by the human. But the art historian relates with these human-made objects, which are products of skill, as art. The categorization of human endeavours during the mediaeval period in Europe exposes aptly the concept of art as skill in contradistinction to contemporary realities. In the Mediaeval period, art was categorized. The mechanical or servile arts defined human engagements that explored the means of practical technology for their realisation. In other words, studio

disciplines like painting, sculpture and architecture and other devices that required fabrication were accommodated within this categorization. The liberal arts were divided into two categories: the trivium which encompassed grammar, rhetoric, poetry, dialectic and logic; and the quadrivium which encompassed music, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy. The theological arts grappled with the problem of good and beauty within the framework of morality.

During the 14th century, a new dawn in the West defined by its humanistic focus was ushered in as the Renaissance era or the age of rebirth. Humanity, during this period, set out to take its destiny in its hands. It repudiated the wilful surrender of its fate to God; unlike the mediaeval period where it would appear that the human surrendered its will to the will of God. A few cultural historians hold tenaciously to the position that the Renaissance era marks the beginning of modernism in the West, which has run up to present-day. But a lingering mediaeval flavour that guided human endeavours is evident in the claims put forward by Leonardo da Vinci (1456-1526), a contemporary of Michelangelo Buonarotti (1475-1564). da Vinci is regarded as the greatest humanist of the Renaissance era. He laid claim to and indeed demonstrated skill in diverse competences. He painted *Mona Lisa* (Plate 2) and *The last Supper* (Plate 3) among many paintings associated with him. He is known to have dissected many cadavers whereupon he provided the knowledge in drawing of the foetus in the human for the first time (Plate 4); he equally laid claim to competence in military engineering as shown in a letter (1482) and accompanying illustrations (Plate 5), to Ludovico Sforza (1451-1508,).

The point at issue here is the accretion in one individual, identified as an artist, of competence in diverse human needs. This

was possible because the renaissance artist adopted an ideological front that aimed to elevate the status of the artist regarded as merely a craftsman to the respectable position in society in which the philosopher and literary scholar occupied as intellectuals. At the high point of the Renaissance era, in Giorgio Vasari (1511-1571), in *Lives of the Artists*,³ for the first time isolated painting, sculpture and architecture as Fine Art. He distinguished these from the servile arts or crafts. The Enlightenment, a second phase in the forward thrust of human civilization endorsed the categorization of Fine Art as a distinct human engagement. The German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) in *The Critique of Judgment*⁴ gave theoretical backing to Vasari's categorization initiative. Kant's argument is that human-made objects that belong to the category of Fine Art should be seen to be sufficient unto themselves. The doctrine art-for-art-sake or purposefulness without purpose is central to the above notion of self-sufficiency. This internal adequacy is what guarantees their beauty. Where such objects become utilitarian in their relationship to human desires, they have only become *good* and therefore not *beautiful*.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's *Philosophy of Fine Art*⁵ upholds this verdict of Kant but disagrees with him on other grounds. The value of Hegel's aesthetic proposition is that it appropriated the work of art as the manifestation of the human spirit on an earthly journey. This journey began from Asia as a pre-symbolic spirit; it passed through to Egypt as a symbolic spirit and then to Greece as classical spirit and ended its journey in Europe as romantic spirit. Modern approach to western art history adopted the above journey of the spirit as a time line. Hegel's categorization of Fine Art runs thus and in order of their importance: architecture, sculpture and romantic art (where painting, poetry and music are clustered). These engagements of the human industry, because

they do not have tangible utility value, are regarded as epitome of spiritual values of culture.

The above canons of the Enlightenment have been subjected to extreme interrogation. One consequence of such questioning is the rejection of the term Fine Art and the prescription of beauty as a quality of the object since late nineteenth century. This denunciation is partly responsible for deviation from the realistic/naturalistic conventions of western art traditions, which began with the classical tradition of Greece. The drift from realism in turn opened up diverse radicalizations in western art practice. For example an artist like Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) early in the last century, exhibited a urinary sanitary ware, which he did not make but presented it as a work of art he entitled *Water Fountain* (Plate 6). This act was an early sign that challenged the conventional notion that governed art. At present, the understanding of the word art now incorporates the idea of “objecthood,” things of nature appropriated by the artist and things made by humanity equally appropriated or *ab initio* designated art. The mode of displaying art, hitherto regarded as “exhibition” now incorporates the word “installation.” The return of the word installation is meant to blur the distinction created in the world of human-made thing: Whenever humanity made anything of useful value, it was installed for a purpose (and not exhibited). The developments as expected have records of dissenting voices who are custodians of conventions. Art critics have functioned within this role as the theoreticians who present art to humanity. While art as practice has continued in its search for a cutting edge, it no doubt erodes traditional canons, which invariably led to the redefinition of the term fine art. In recent times the term Visual Arts has been in vogue because it brings together again all human-made things under one rubric. Indeed

the premise that funded the divide between fine art /useless art against craft/useful art remains illusory.⁶

Relevant to the above value of the term art, in its relation to skill, is the Greek word *Tekhne* which translates also as skill or art. It precedes the Roman word *Ars*. The word *Tekhne* is the root of the words technical, technique, technology, etc. Of value here is how this word is understood in cultural anthropology. The specific uses of the term technology, in reference to tools application and methods, or machines and systems, seem to cloud the root of the term in contemporary lexicon. In cultural anthropology we encounter systems of practical knowledge associated with objects of human industry. In this guise, an apt understanding of the things made by the human, which are products of technology, recalls Professor Bassey Wei Andah's definition of the term technology as;

What it has taken from man and what it will continue to take from man to put into use his psychobiological and physical attributes to bring about a better society of man and the continued survival of self and specie. And these include recreation/rest; procreation.....⁷

What is Art?

The above definition by Andah would appear to re-transpose technology as a synonym for culture. But it indeed under girds the value of art as another word for culture. Understood in this sense, it returns the idea of art to its pristine value in the terminology Visual Arts. Diverse definitions, no doubt, have been associated with the term art. In contemporary modernism, formalism as a theoretical framework, took centre stage for art appreciation and historical practice. The tenets of formalism are grounded in counterfeit science and Kant's *The Critique of Judgment*, which canvases the doctrine of *purity* (my emphasis) of the artistic form

as a foundational basis for the object to be called art. Purity, therefore, became one of the cardinal principles that confer beauty on an object.⁸ The idea of *purity*, adopted by formalists, became synonymous with the objective that focuses on the empirical given or the visually verifiable aspects of an object. The notion of “Significant Form,” put forward by Clive Bell⁹ rationalises “form” as the common denominator of the object of art. The real meaning or purpose of the artistic form is offered by Leo Tolstoy thus;

Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one man consciously by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that others are infected by these feelings and also experience them...a means of union among men joining them together in the same feelings, and indispensable for the life and progress towards wellbeing of individuals and humanity.¹⁰

To reduce the necessity for art to “feeling”, made manifest by “certain external signs”, as the formalist ethic dictates, remains limiting. Formalism emerged at the heels of the birth of science as a method and it aspired to tailor art appreciation and history to verifiable indices. This is why contexts of reference like subject matter, an artist’s expressive intention, culture and iconography were considered distractions when confronting the work of art.¹¹ Yet the work of art as cultural practice is endowed with governing criteria of values; where culture in its total understanding is an embodiment of values. In essence, the work of art is beyond its visible form, which the formalists celebrate. Ben Shahn, from an anti-formalist or contextual perspective, sees the artistic form as a mere shell that covers content for which reason he describes form as;

[T]he visible shape of man’s growth; it is the living picture of his tribe at its most primitive, and of his

civilization at its most sophisticated state. Form is the many faces of the legend-bardic, epic, sculptural, musical, pictorial, architectural; it is the infinite images of religion; it is the expression and remnant of self. Form is the very shape of content.¹²

Shahn's anti-formalist perspective dominates the views of some idealist philosophers. For Alois Reigl, in making art, humanity expresses its freedom to seek alternatives to an alien world by creating its own world, which she can account for.¹³ Louis Finkelstein says of art that it is "man's erotic longing to possess the world through shapes and colors."¹⁴ The same idea runs through Gyorgy Kepes for whom "[a]rt is a sensuous form of consciousness, an important instrument in the conquest of nature and representation in the creative assimilation of nature."¹⁵ Chinua Achebe; sees art as "man's attempt to create for himself a different order of reality from that which is given him [as nature], to offer himself a second handle on existence through his imagination."¹⁶

The definitions above inspire an analogy I link to the creation of Eve in the Biblical story. In the midst of a beautiful creation that encompassed every imaginable thing (including animals), Adam remained lonely. God noticed his loneliness, put him to sleep and out of *his rib* made a woman. Adam finding a companion exclaimed; "This one at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh." It is the identification with his kind (my kind) which issued from Adam that mankind identifies with art. Mankind seeks to have an alternative hold, possess an alien world with "my-kind" (if you like mankind) as different from alien nature by its self. It is instructive to note that it is not another Adam that was "presented" to Adam. Rather Eve as "another" was "presented" to Adam. This is the habit of art. Thus I define art as;

The presentation to fellow humans, by the artist slices and diverse means of reality distilled in visual, audio,

tactile forms and taste, while in communion with nature, as well as culture, offering an alternative appearance of life and identity that is funded through creative imagination.¹⁷

The above definition of art brings together once again the totality of the products of human industry. Within this conception, the original notion of art as skill remains intact. One thing that is apparent here is the re-designation of two approaches to knowledge that began with modernism as disciplines. The two broad disciplines are Art and Science. I rather would not regard these two approaches to seeking knowledge as disciplines. I rather regard them as epistemologies or knowledge formations. They are ways, if you like, processes of acquiring knowledge and none holds advantage over the other. Inherent in their strategies is the sharpening of skill to serve human needs as Andah's definition of technology states. Thus whereas Science valorizes and at times, in some extreme conditions fertilises empirical data to provide devices and new insights regarding the phenomenal world, art as skill falls back on a methodic procedure to narrate in a systematic manner (discourse), consummated acts of human industry and engagements (without bias to their origin) to enlighten the human mind. Indeed scientific inventions are products of intuitive insights, which the recipient formalises in coded terms. Whereas artistic insight remains personal in execution, those of science can be codified in formulas for general appropriation and application.

Who is the Artist/Hermeneut

Ernest H. Gombrich makes bold to say that "There really is no such thing as Art. There are only artists."¹⁸ He is quite right. The artist is an agency in the production of culture. The artist is that individual enamoured with a communal mission arising from being present in society. The artist, as a member of a public, internalises events that fleet by with time and puts to acute use

his or her reflexive self and as one with active social consciousness. The artist's social consciousness is funded by deep-rooted tendencies and traditions implicit in the artist's society. These tendencies conform to the word ideology. As a discursive practice, ideology is open-ended and allows for the construction of new and diverse meanings. The flexible nature of ideology allows the individual artist to express his or her individuality and at the same time represents society. The artist who is successful often is the one who is able to present the essential features of the society he or she lives in and moves from that standpoint to disclose new realities as time defined them. Therefore, the artist is that individual that gives back to society what society offers or has shaped.¹⁹ The artist, by the above reality, is a barometer of the society he or she lives in. In every work of art, therefore, what is encountered is the birth of communal icon even when it is the product of an individual ego. This is why Beat Wyss rightly says that the spirit of every age finds its image residing in its work of art.²⁰

The Work of Art as Symbol – a Blog

The work of art is an embodiment of values that manifests as form. In that frame it shields the very motivations that inspired it in the first place. The shape an art work assumes is taken as a symbol. A symbol embodies signs. A symbol suggests a range of reference beyond itself as a product of a given ideology. It suggests that the work of art is a story waiting to be told. The work of art is simply beyond its mere visual given or its reality as form. The work of art is an embodiment of its maker in union with the society in which he or she is located. The work of art, thus, is a union of identities. To seek out the sign which the work of art bears is the business of the historian of art. The historian of art is one concerned with looking beyond the veil, beyond the shape of

the symbol or mythical vehemence. The art historian is bound to unravel the history/meaning that the mere shape/form shields.

The work of art, considering the summation above, is an identity posted by the artist whose uncanny insight in societal ordering remains perceptive and of good judgment as he or she converts reality into myth. Like the blog, it is there to be read by all who encounter it; each encounter remains peculiar. The realisation of this unique value of the work of art during my undergraduate studies inspired the zeal in me to look forward to the course in African art history. But in the course of my encounter with African art history I confronted a daunting disappointment. African art history, placed beside the nature of the history of art as a discipline appeared to me remote from the idea of history. I remember asking to be informed on the reason for the difference I noticed from my lecturer Professor Marshall Ward Mount. The response from my lecturer was evasive. I eventually came across an answer to my observation when a colleague, twenty years ago, drew my attention to G. W. F. Hegel's summation of the un-historical nature of Africa and its un-dialectical history. Hegel concluded that:

At this point we must leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the world; it has no movement or development to exhibit. Historical movements in it- that is in its northern part-belong to the Asiatic or European world. Carthage displayed there an important transitional phase of civilization; but, as a Phoenician colony, it belongs to Asia. Egypt will be considered in reference to the passage of the human mind from its Eastern to Western phase, but it does not belong to the African Spirit. What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of

mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World's history.²¹

Before the summation above, Hegel projected the visual arts of Africa as mere objects employed as fetish as he reports thus;

The second element in their religion, consists in their giving an outward form to this supernatural power-projecting their hidden might into the world of phenomena by means of images. What they conceive of as the power in question, is therefore nothing really objective, having a substantial being and different from themselves, but the first thing that comes in their way. This, taken quite indiscriminately, they exalt to the dignity of a "Genius"; it may be an animal, a tree, a stone or a wooden figure. This is their *Fetich*...²²

Two hazy interpretations are explicit in the Hegelian supposition. In the first instance is the accidental nature of events and occurrences on the continent, which renders them unhistorical. The second is an identity dispute that rejects the cartographic boundary of the continent. Hegel's text, therefore, foregrounds a reflection of the static interpretation of African art as examples of primitive, tribal, traditional and unchanging archetypes of material culture. In other words, exploring the inherent values of the work of art as a posted cultural identity the African mind and the consciousness that produced such works of art were still bound to the infancy of human evolution. This verdict is simple. Works of art in Africa have not evolved beyond preminent instrumental use as fetish objects. It has been widely noted that Hegel aimed at the "sensational" in his narration of Africa within the understanding of world history. He may have had at his disposal various travel tales and documents, as travelogues on Africa, which were in much circulation in Europe in his days. A principal source he depended on for his sensational narrative, as

Bernasconi reveals is T. E. Bowdich's *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee*. And as Bernasconi notes Hegel grossly distorted the content of the narrative he appropriated.²³

The Influence of Hegel on the Development of African Art History

Hegel's theoretical supposition is responsible for the ahistorical nature of a supposed African art history. Hegel's philosophy funded anthropology as a predictive science with the focus to study the human species, especially non-western societies that were regarded as primitive.²⁴ Anthropology in recent times has dropped the campaign of primitivism and now functions with the aim to establish human diversity in space. In this regard is it now focuses on the determination of "difference" among human species and also studies the symptoms and conditions of human evolution, development and social ordering. Anthropology's waystation towards understanding human species depends on the evidence of material deposits. Anthropology arrives at its conclusions through the activities of ethnographers and ethnologists.²⁵

As simple as the above task appears, anthropology operates two methodologies. One is a methodologically-minded structural anthropology while the other is an ontologically-minded structural anthropology. The West has relied on the latter methodology which is a priori in studying African cultures through its material culture focussing especially on its visual arts as such evidence. Ontologically-minded structural anthropology works from theoretical supposition to its conclusions while methodologically-minded structural anthropology is guided by the approach of structuralism. The method seeks meaning in the structure of cultural units and how such units inflect one another.

Umberto Eco's reflection on how ontologically-minded structural anthropology has fared with studies in non-western visual arts is worthy of recall here. He likens the West's reliance on anthropology as a predictive science to the strong man who breaks into a weak man's cultural store and selects items with which he prefers to represent the weak man's identity.²⁶ It is in the same token that Clifford Geertz²⁷ appraises the mythic content and value of ontologically-minded structural anthropology when he calls attention to its strong distortion of the cultural space in non-western worlds. Geertz deconstructs anthropology within the framework of an "interpretive theory of culture." His conclusion is that the conclusions of anthropology amount to nothing more than scientific fictions. Indeed they are. Fictive as they are, ethnographic narratives have greatly impacted on cultural production/practice and appropriation in the visual arts of Africa. African art history's quest to establish the identity of objects of art in Africa relying on facts provided by anthropology, has remained largely ahistorical.

Henry John Drewall holds contrary views about the continued influence of anthropology on African art studies.²⁸ Denis Dutton²⁹ rather provides an alternative to Drewall's assumption when he comments on supposed shifts in paradigmatic frames that relate to African art studies as "primitive". Dutton is definite that such new paradigmatic shifts might simply end up as new mythologies replacing old mythologies. Thus, with Drewall's supposed shift in emphasis, African art history still lacks a canon. To reposition African art historical studies should no longer be the responsibility of the western scholar who has dominated the representation of African visual arts from the perspective of ahistory. The deconstructionist historian H. H. White is correct in the observation that "the writing of history is not ideologically

innocent.”³⁰ No one writes history for (an)Other without taking advantage of that Other.

Hegel’s absolute dismissal of the relevance of Africa and Africans to history, unfortunately, has continued to receive undue affirmations from many African scholars. Chinua Achebe’s discomfort with the African’s comfort with Eurocentric labels that define Africans as inferior to other races is worth a recall here.

Needless to say, we do have our own sins and blasphemies recorded against our name. If I were God I would regard as the very worst our acceptance – for whatever reason – of racial inferiority. It is too late in the day to get worked up about it or to blame others, much as they may deserve such blames and condemnation. What we need to do is to look back and try to find out where we went wrong, where the rain began to beat us.³¹

Few examples suffice regarding the agreement of the African to Eurocentric attributions. In departments of philosophy in universities in Africa “ethno-philosophy” and “philosophical sagacity” are still taken as strands of African philosophy. African languages are vernacular along with its well thought out architecture.³² Our diverse ethnicities are nothing other than “tribes” understood as primary cluster of human societies. In religious studies and art history programmes, we come across such adjective “traditional” that qualifies an academic discipline. And I have asked to know how the explicitly primitive and immobile imputation, which such terms embody in their sense, account for the diverse historical realities and identities which characterize African cultures? A few efforts at redressing these obtuse terminologies rather have been vague. What has sustained their presence is the erroneous belief in constructing a supposed African identity that stands against cultural claims of the West. In this way they embrace a brand of intellectual aphasia. The

aphasiac complex is a self inflicted exclusion. It is associated with cultures that occupy supposed margins in relation to dominant cultures which now seek alternative identities in a bid to stand themselves out. Embracing such trajectory, as some Africanist theorists have done, only reifies the unhistorical character that colours the human science disciplines in Africa. I hold strongly to the view that all cultures are of the same age and are of unique values. The ideal I suppose is to establish commensurate discursive space alongside that of the Other; what is implied here is to take a position by a mainstream idea and to construct a parallel identity and not an alternative identity.³³ In spite of the claim to progress in Africa's cultural history I endorse Valentine Mudimbe's³⁴ observation that Africa still waits to be understood.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, my work as a historian of art is informed by the need to contribute to the understanding of Africa's cultural history through the construction of parallel identities structured on the ideals of the practice of art history. This implies to look back as Achebe suggests, bridging the gap between the present and the lingering past that resist assimilation. The work of art considered as the human-made thing, holds the key to this understanding considering that it is a communal symbol. Conscious, therefore, of the need stated above my work first as an art historian falls under two broad outlines, viz; first is my focus on the methodological concerns in the history of art. But this focus is directed at the practice of African art history. In this direction I have focused on conceptual clarifications in African art and art history, while also demonstrating the value of the work of art as history. My supposition is that art history as a discipline is defined by an invariant core aptly characterized by the two nouns that constitute its nomenclature; art and history. The first noun defines the complicity of the work of art in the betrayal of time. As often as a work of art is created and deposited as a product of

culture, it simply has performed the ritual of betraying fluid time through the definition of the abiding image. Time engages in a continuous flow and it is only events in time that bring about our understanding of time into manageable bits or identifiable durations. History on the hand comes into view in the same nomenclature in a related order. The work of art is a response to human desires that are bound by time. Such human needs are constituents of history. The shape the object or work of art assumes encapsulates this history or the need in culture that informed the birth of the art work. Hence, the discipline *art history*.³⁵ Any deviation from the above focus while relating with the work of art as history, would be nothing other than a history. My second engagement clusters around critical attention to the work of art, especially drawing attention to the symbolic value of the work of art as myth/metaphor or a sign. The object - art is indeed dumb; it often requires words to make it come alive.³⁶ These aspects of my practice are intertwined and remain central to the understanding of cultures. In other words, art history falls within the larger ambit of the discipline cultural history.

Theoretical tools of evaluation

The theoretical tools I have relied on are drawn mainly from structuralism and post-structuralism. And here particularly I mention hermeneutics incorporating deconstruction. With deconstruction I re-present erstwhile conceptions and positions on Africa, African art and artists that emerge from the West's ideologically-motivated interpretations and representations. This is aided by a hermeneutical approach where I enkindle new meanings and preoccupations in images and concepts that administer visual art traditions of Africa. I find value in the method philology suggests. Africa, before contemporary modernism remained largely illiterate in its civilizations. This characteristic of the state of knowledge in Africa has encouraged

myth to override other ways of understanding Africa. It is possible to approximate to logically constructed knowledge of what now as myth is taken as superstition. This condition calls for the engagement of traditions that are not in themselves the object of focus or what one seeks to understand. Philology helps the objective of reconciling a past that resists understanding and the knowledge value of the present that is taken for granted or has become habitual. In all, the meanings I provide are not closed³⁷ but are aimed at opening up diverse forms of dialogue on such subjects with the sole objective to enrich our understanding of our past as history.

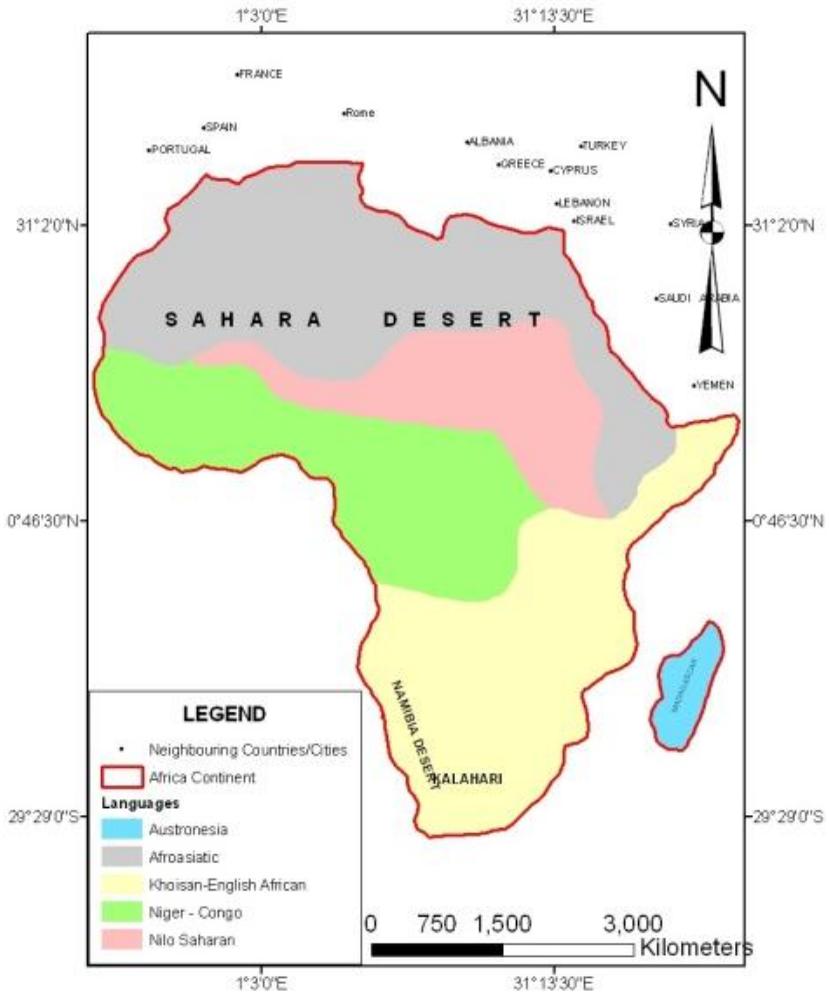
Theorizing Africa within the Frame of Her Cultural History

My work in art historiography and theory confronts Eurocentric views as well as those of African scholars that deny African cultural studies by acts of omission or commission, the status of history. Thus, I present views on such issues as the context of a valid claim to an African identity, the attributes of the object of art including the aesthetic canons that govern such objects, a re-evaluation of the time scale reference to African art in history and a schema defining the canons of a survey history of African art. The issues above, at root, are central to defining a historical status for African art.

The requirement to historicize African art confronts two fallacies which require address. The first is the impression that the continent of Africa is a monolithic culture. The second is the way the continent is split into two distinct cultural spheres by western scholars and the way Hegel's attributions have been reasoned out. In this claim, North Africa is supposedly not a part of its counterpart south of the Sahara Desert. The problem associated with such thinking is that it is devoid of rational reasoning. From a naturalisation stance, Africa is defined by a cartographic

boundary. Accordingly, its enclosure within a boundary, the way it is with other continents, remains its natural identity. It is not out of place, as history bears evidence, that geographical spaces respond to changes arising from shared cultural values with adjoining cultures. This reality is in spite of their exclusivity as authentic cultural spaces.

Initial approach to the contradictions that creates diverse identities for Africa is to summon two factors that define Africa beyond the natural index of a cartographic boundary. These are the race/ethnic and linguistic realities as they obtain on the continent (Figure 1).



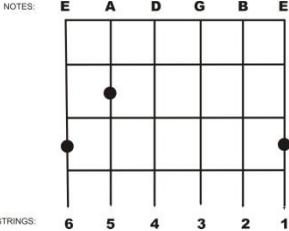
From a race /ethnic consideration are the Bushmanoid, Caucasoid, Mongoloid, Negroid and Pygmanoid. On the other hand is the language classifications comprising of Afro-asiatic, Austronesia, English Africans, Khosian, Niger-Congo and Nilo-Saharan. The

race/ethnic reality and their linguistic manifestations are in keeping with the truth of multiple cultures in a geographical enclosure. It then turns out that each cultural space defines a cohesive heterogeneity considering subtle differences that make up their constituent parts. In spite of such restrained differences, a dominating identity usually is defined in the number of shared properties to be found among them. Dominance, therefore, implies a greater ratio in a given consonance among many parts nestling together. The factor of dominance is what accords identity to a cultural space. Where dominance as difference is a given, a priori subdominant and minor cultural spaces also become an outcome.

The Theory of Circular Association

The logic that recognises dominance is what accords Africa the identity of the Negroid race. This summation is devoid of prejudice to other contending cultural identities found on the continent. The factor of dominance which bequeaths character within a cluster of identities is better understood when likened to the formation of a musical cord. In the formation of the key “G” (Figure 2) in a six stringed instrument, the key is highlighted at three points out of six to dominate other keys relegating them to, sub-dominant and minor positions.

The other keys then function to reinforce and enrich the resonance of the cord “G” within the harmony sought. I relate this understanding to the theory of a circular association of disparate identities. Thus, the



manifestation of the Caucasoid and Mongoloid in terms of racial identity and Afro-asiatic, Austronesia and English Africans on the continent of Africa is a dimension of the circular association theory of disparate cultural spaces on a global scale. Leopold Sedar

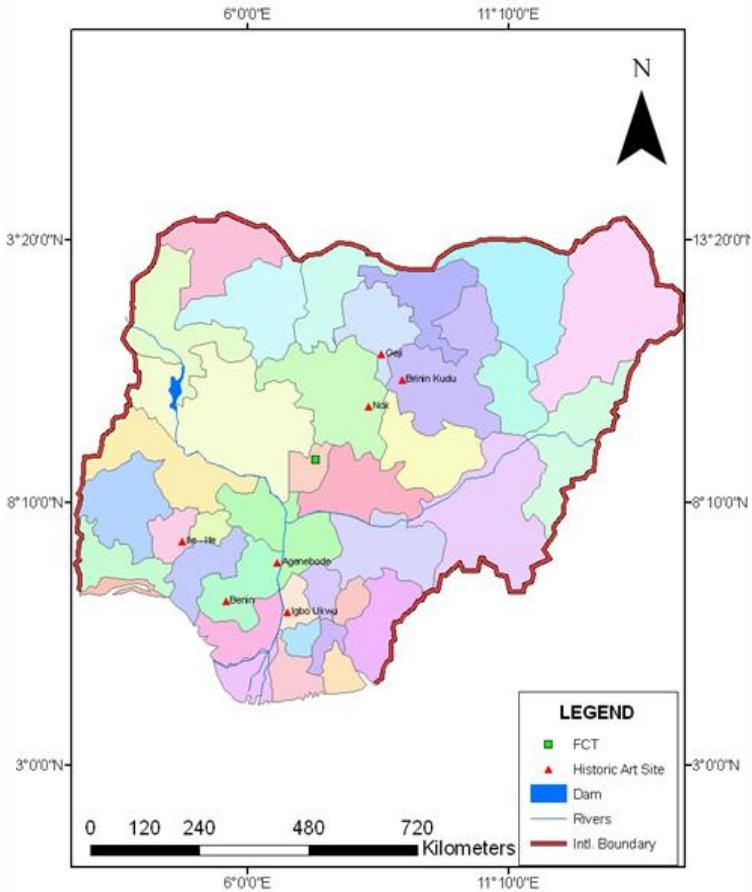
Senghor articulates this association aptly when he notes that “we are all cultural half-castes.”³⁹ Such understanding of cultural mix makes null the constructed binaries foisted on Africa by Africanists of western origin who insist that the Negroid race alone should be seen as the identity of Africa.

I extrapolate further on the theory of circular association of disparate cultural identities. From a global point of view, then, the Negroid index that defines Africa may feature as less dominant in another cultural space. It is of common knowledge that an identity that is dominant somewhere may manifest as minor in another cultural space. This accounts for the Mediterranean character of North Africa and areas in the coast of east Africa in spite of the massive Arabization of that space in the 7th century A.D. It is to be noted that shared characteristics are reciprocal and not unidirectional. However, a variety of factors bring about the merging of cultures to shape new identities. In recent history, the sale of Africans as slaves to the Americas is an example of cultural transposition and it belies the idea of black African Americans, whereas blacks dominate in Africa, they are the minorities in the Americas. The Negroid identity cannot impact on the overall identity of America in a classification premised on the factor of race. It can help highlight its dominant Caucasian identity. The assumption of a circular association of disparate identities in a geographical space, therefore, keeps intact multiple racial and cultural identities in a geographical space like Africa as it obtains elsewhere. The supposition that exploits such reality as difference to define Africa and its cultural attributes as poles apart lacks intellectual merit no matter how the logic on which it is constructed is hoisted. It only foists on consciousness selective amnesia that encourages elisions in the construction of history as a sequence of events that often are interconnected serially. The emergences of formal identities in the history of art demonstrate

the validity of a circular association of disparate cultural identities. Thus the evolution of the artistic form to follow demonstrates how Africa has coped with herself and its nearby cultures.

Tracing Early Manifestations of Artistic form in Africa

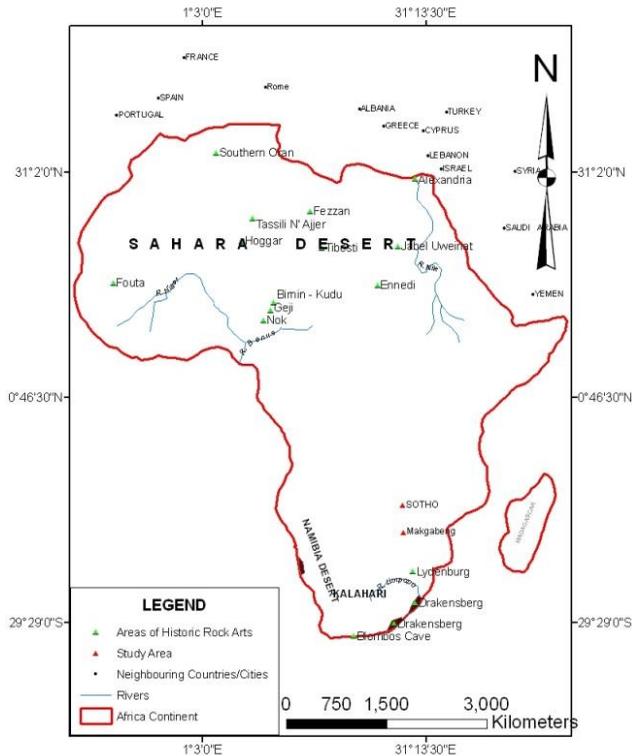
In 2006, from July to October, I embarked on a research leave funded by the McArthur Foundation at The Rock Art Research Institute, the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. The University of Port Harcourt facilitated this grant. My interest in the research was driven by two obsessions. The first was related to initiation-to-manhood ceremonies in Agenebode in Etsako East Local government in Edo State Nigeria Where I hail from (figure 3).



During these initiation ceremonies male adults go on retreat to rock shelters located in the Kukuruku Hills, an adjoining landscape in the area. Some engravings and drawings have been identified in the area, although the practices of drawing in rock shelters there seem to have ceased. I have in the cause of research into rock art come across similar practice in eastern and southern Africa. Some ethnic cultures in Birinin Kudu and Geji who live within Kano and Bauchi are known to retire also into rock

shelters. This is usually before the adult male takes a wife. In this solitary confinement they make music with rock gongs. Drawings have been also identified at these sites but they are not recent engagements. Thus, I considered it worthwhile to research into the commonalities between the South African traditions with their “Bush School” concept and the Agenebode model that also implies a “School” structure.

The second interest arose from the presupposition that the art of Egypt has obscure origin that awaits determination.⁴⁰ The indeterminacy regarding the origin of the art of Egypt is one example that underlies the claim that an African art historical narrative is plausible but awaits realisation. African art history will become realistic when it is possible to account for a smooth transition from one stage of its stylistic development of art to another. To fill the noticed gaps therefore, archaeologists have more work to do to unravel these missing gaps. In southern Africa (figure 4), is located some of the oldest art works so far made by any cultural group, considering available evidence from archaeologists. The Blombos Cave located in the Cape Province is the home of the 77,000 years object now labelled *Blombos Stone* (Plate 7). The Apollo II Cave which so far has provided a provisional date of 28,000 BC is also located in Namibia. However, my research work was carried out in the Northern Province of South Africa among the Sotho who reside in the region of the Makgabeng Massif (Plate 8) close to the Limpopo Valley.⁴¹



In the first objective of my research, I encountered similarities and dissimilarities. The first of these is that among the Sotho, males and females are initiated in the same site but at different times of the year. While among the Northern Edo in Nigeria, the activity is exclusively for males at such sites. Aspects of the value and significance of the male initiation ceremony reinforce each other. For example, both cultures regard the lower primates as totem animals. Individuals who are due for initiation and have not performed such are denied opportunities to offer supposed enlightened opinions in community gatherings. Rather, the

community would prefer to entertain such member's supposed wisdom through an agency that has undergone the rites of initiation at the rock shelter. The discrimination is hinged on the assumption that requisite knowledge or necessary contribution to important issues in the community is acquired during the period of retreat. Hence, among the people of Agenebode where I have witnessed the epic performance that heralds initiates back into the community, the following lyrics become part of the rendition:

I am a doctor

I am a doctor

I am not a doctor who attains knowledge through divination

My head is adorned with red

The symbol of this rite is now hoisted in my house

I am a doctor. ⁴²

Two operative indices are at work here. The initiate is no longer *doxer* who labours plying a trade to acquire knowledge the way the diviner or other labourers do. Rather he is now in a position to construct knowledge as *thea* or *theatai* (the one who reasons out ideas unlike others who ply their trade in search of fame). This status is confirmed as the new initiate now wears a red cap a euphemism for the "red" that now adorns his head. The significance to be drawn from this example is the recognition of the thinker as opposed to the crafts person in at least two African societies. It also presupposes that a level of training is required, if only symbolic now, all the same it is instructive that some training obtained in retreat and seclusion from society is necessary as one transits from one social status to another.

Inventory of Some Rock Art Sites in Africa

Rock art traditions that are of sufficient ancestry and diverse in their outlook are located in the Kalahari Desert in the

Drakensberg Mountain and Makgabeng Massif in South Africa and Brandberg Mountain in the Namibia Desert. Extensive sites are also under investigation in East Africa. The Sahara Desert in North Africa provides another extensive definition of rock painting and engraving traditions. The largest collection is located in Tassili N'Ajjer. There are other sites such as Fezzan, Jebel Uweinat, Tibesti, and Ennedi to the east of Tassili N'Ajjer followed by Southern Oran and Hogger to its west. The Pharaohnic art of Egypt is a continuation of this tradition (cf. Figure 4).

The San or Bushman who are now restricted to the Namibian Desert in southern Africa is identified as the originators of these works. On the other hand the Sahara corpus is associated with the Tuareg who were later joined by the Berber. The objectives of these paintings and engravings have been subjected to great debate. The dominance of the Eland or Antelope (Plate 9) in the Kalahari and Namibian Deserts, which was regarded by the San or Bushman as having magical powers, suggests the possibility that the images were used for sympathetic magic. The communal priest - the Shaman - easily assumed its form when the people needed to make propitiations for divine or spiritual intervention in their lives (plate 10). Hence the therianthropic forms (plate 11) that dominate the drawings of the period. In other words, the Shaman is often depicted as a persona of the Eland and engaged in ritual dance where under possession he made prophecies from the stand point of a medium. The oldest paintings and engravings in the Sahara region, on the other hand, are the now vanished buffalo (*Bubalus Antiquus*), elephant, rhinoceros, hippopotamus, giraffe (plate 12) and ostrich, Cattle and Goat, and then comes the representation of the horse, which is followed by the Carmel (plate 13) all with differing stylistic successions.

It has been convenient to consider these works of art as the outcome of practices in sympathetic magic. The theory of sympathetic magic relates to a situation where a death blow is inflicted on the image of a living object. It is then expected that the image the drawn object represents is inflicted and this is expected to lead to actual death of the animal. But in the rock shelter drawings and engravings, other drawings that depict other life styles are also encountered. A more plausible theory that accounts for the presence of these works, therefore, is one that calls attention to the artist's perception of time and space coordinates which connects the human agency in making such knowledge available in the depicted work of art. The drawings in themselves, therefore, are not magical apparatuses but expressions of diverse perceptions of happenings in time in a given cultural space distilled by the artist in visuals. Plates 14 and 15 contain scenes of technological devices like the rail track, a train with commuters and helicopter. The paintings, therefore, are veritable examples of aesthetic propositions and authentic works of art.

Adjoining Developments with Rock Art Traditions in Africa

Three dimensional arts of sculpture and pottery developed within the time line of the rock art traditions, but in its latter phase. These are accounted for in the Nok region in Kaduna State Nigeria and Lydenberg in Limpopo region in South Africa. Others are Tellem sculptures, Igbo-Ukwu, Ile-Ife terra cotta and stone sculptures, Ghana mixed media sculptures, Kuba portraits of Kings in the Democratic republic of Congo, Benin bronzes and ivory sculptures and architecture. Two dimensional art also blossomed in diverse forms, but significantly as relief sculptures and wall paintings and decorations. The influences of royal patronages are responsible for the diverse stylistic developments associated with this phase.

Developments in Contemporary Modernity

Modern African art is identified with the adoption by Africans of academic traditions of art practice developed in the West. Photography, painting, architecture and continuity in previous traditions from rock art and concurrent developments that emerged in non rock art sites. The works of art under consideration here bear definite imprints of ideological underpinnings of their time. It has been convenient to isolate these into pre-colonial, colonial/anti-colonial and post-colonial responses from artists. The post-colonial trends harbour diverse trends that hint at domestic colonialism and its many contradictions. The Dak'art biennial which holds in Dakar, Senegal, recently witnessed its 12th edition. It has become one platform to evaluate the ideological current that drives modern African art and its trajectories as African artists and its Diasporas make available.

Suggested Chronology

A relative dating so far fits much of the rock art traditions. In this regard, the works suggest sequential transitions in subject matter and theme. The relative dating procedure uses transitions defined in subject matter and thus defines progress by association. In other words, time becomes relative to a known phenomenon that hosts a cleavage. An example is the identification of a series of paintings categorised under “Bubalus Antiquus” or “Pastoralist Period”. Some scientific dates have been secured for these paintings and engravings relying on Carbon Dating (¹⁴C) radioactive nuclide. The dating procedure is not conducted on the paintings but on associated carbon bearing objects like bones and charcoal. Dates acquired through this procedure at best remain relative also. This is why the ¹⁴C date 28,000 BC, acquired for the oldest site at the Apollo II Cave, remains provisional. This is more so when we realise that human activities in the region that suggest

art related activities date back to 77,000 years as the date acquired for the *Blombos Stone* suggests. Accurate dating procedure for paintings is the Amino Acid Racemisation Test, otherwise known as Racemic Dating. Again, conditions that bring about the racemisation process can be unpredictable. More so, the effect of the procedure on a painting can affect its value hence, it is used sparingly. The greatest impediment in ascertaining approximate scientific date for rock paintings is that they do not survive for very long durations on rock shelters. They are known to survive better on rock surfaces within the enclosure of caves.⁴³ The limitations regarding the dates so far ascertained for the traditions under review here demand that we have to rely on relative dating to place the rock art and engravings under provisional chronology. The Thermo Luminescence (TL) Dating is an absolute dating method. However, it is of value only to bronzes, pottery and other materials that undergo natural iodizing radiation process. Thus, a convenient dating procedure adopted here would be one that combines relative dating with known absolute dating procedures. In this regard, the acquired date of 77,000 years for the *Blombos Stone* begins the timeline or sets the canon for African art history. This is chronicled along transitions in theme and stylistic variations suggested in the paintings. In the chronology thus constructed, the modern/contemporary traditions are accommodated. Tentatively, a timeline for African art history is considered here within Early, middle and modern periods.

Stylistic Analysis

The style and approach to engravings and drawings discoursed above are typical and ingenious. It combines recognisable identities of the human form in a composite assemblage. The profile and frontal elements in the human are brought together in one composition. For example a profile face is combined with a frontal shoulder that tapers into a profile waist and legs (plate

16). The figures are usually of the adult humanoid proportion. The proportion for an average adult is seven and half times the length of the head. The Pharaohic art of Egypt (east of the Sahara Desert), by 3,000 BC, privileges a refinement in this optic regime, according it a classical status. During the agriculturalist period, identified as the third periodic style in rock art traditions, the adult humanoid canon is replaced by the infant humanoid canon (plate 17). Structurally, proportion in the infant accommodates three heads to the entire length of its body. The figures lose their details and are presented in schematic forms, especially in two dimensional arts. It was at this period that the Nok and Lydenburg Terra Cotta sculptures which exemplifies the three dimensional arts of Africa also emerged. Animals rendered in this tradition are rendered in profile and are naturalistic. In the third chronology, drawings and engravings where animals are depicted are schematic. Thus, in the rock art and engravings, we encounter two optic regimes or ways in which reality can be represented. These are the composite adult humanoid canon and the schematic infant humanoid canon, which Egypt and Nok respectively represent.

Aesthetic Convention of African art

African art is non-realistic in character. The African artist relates with form from an intellectual outlook. This is why the human figure beginning from the earliest examples in Southern Africa are composite. Egypt, from 3,000 BC, provides classical examples of this intellectual relationship in three distinct examples; viz, The Pharaoh as king is a representative of the god. For this reason he was rendered bigger than his subjects irrespective of his physical size. The representation was one of social construction or idealised canonical format. In the second instance one facial feature stood for all the Pharaohs except Pharaoh Akhenaton (Amenhotep IV 1352-1336) who was described as a heretic Pharaoh. The Pharaoh, as earthly representative of god is not depicted in his individual

identity but that of the god he stands for. In a much later date in Ile-Ife, Nigeria (plate 18) and Kuba kingdom, Democratic Republic of Congo the same intellectual disposition is maintained in the depiction of their kings. Thirdly, the burial place of the Pharaohs was such stupendous that it met the mark of the first wonder among the Seven Wonders of the World. Among the Binis', religious architecture is designed as the biggest building considering its overall height. In the second optic regime the child canon is seen to have replaced the adult canon in the representation of the human. In this phase exaggerations of relevant forms, depending on what the art work served, became the norm.

The intellectual traditions that support the noticed deviations, though rooted in Africa, were first articulated by Plato in *The Republic*.⁴⁴ In *The Republic*, he chides the artists of his days for engaging in excessive realism. Such art works were third rate and removed from reality he maintains. The neo-Platonist Plotinus (204-270 AD),⁴⁵ of Egyptian origin, aptly defines the intellectual traditions that govern the idealistic tradition of African art. "The arts give no bare reproduction of the thing seen but go back to the ideas from which nature herself derives." In this regard "bodies live in the species, and the individual in the whole class; from there they derive their life and maintenance, for life here is a thing of change, but in the prior realm it is unmoving."⁴⁶ The sameness that characterise the portrait of the Pharaohs, the portrait of the Oonis of Ife and the adoption of the child canon all respond to this hitherto tacit idealism. At least in the instance of the adoption of the child canon, the names we bear support Plotinus's idealism that life in the prior realm is unmoving. When a child is called *Nnanna*, *Nnenna*, (in Igbo) or *Iyalode/Iyabo* (in Yoruba), *Ekaite* (in Ibibio), *Nomate* (in Ogoni) all of which mean that the child is "the father of the man," we are only in agreement with the idealistic

intellectual relationship on which the canons of practice in African art are foregrounded. But the Igbo of the west and the Edo provide names that are pointed with regard to the above intellectual relationship. They have in place of the above names *Nwàbuzor* or *Nwabuisi* (for the Igbo this means the child is the first). And for the Edo it comes in the following variants *Omorodion*, *Omokhodion* or *Omokhojor* (the child is the senior). In two dimensional arts Plotinus provides other enunciations. These relate to the laws of perspective in relation to the determination of true distance and the effect of light and distance on colours (plate 19). The implication here is that renditions in perspective representation pander to the illusions the depth of space creates. Spatial depth, which perspective conveys, is not a true representation of an actual size. Actual size belongs to the “next opposite plane.” In like manner, shades and tints are detractions from a normal saturation of a colour because of the effect of light on colour bearing surfaces.⁴⁶

Inherited conventions of aesthetic appreciation from the West extol physical appearance as an index of beauty. It leads to the understanding that aesthetics, as a subject of philosophy, is focused on the beautiful and pleasurable alone. But this expectation is remote from the African conception of beauty. Aesthetics is defined by Gottlieb Baumgarten⁴⁷ as a science of sensuous knowledge or sensual perception: a kind of knowledge regarding what we see and the taste it projects, which does not require logic for its justification. It is not limited to the work of art alone. It appertains to a diversity of what we perceive, taste, touch and hear. It is important to note that aesthetics in Africa is bound to morality, where morality extols the good and the virtuous. The names we bear also reveal this dimension of African aesthetics. The Edo people again are direct in reference to this value in the names they give. For example the name *Ekelekhose*, which means

the interior is beauty. This however is what the Igbo reference as *Agwabumma*, *Emelebumma* and *Ugwubumma* and for the Yoruba *Iwa Le wa*, all of which mean “character is beauty”. In the above regard, in Africa the beauty of appearance is secondary. Many legends point to societal discount for external beauty. The characterisation of Ojiugo, Okonkwo’s wife in *Things Fall Apart* is but one example. Conscious of her good looks, she was out on one occasion to enhance her looks. She engaged in this act without regard for her task to provide food for her children and husband. The husband, who returned home to be confronted with such irresponsibility, ruined the sanctity of the week of peace. He did this by fighting Ojiugo to a point of wild spread commotion that engulfed the neighbourhood. The brawl attracted the anger of the community because it occurred in the week of peace. The week of peace, as a holy period, was defied by this act. In summation, aesthetics in African visual arts combines with a moral tenor that extols adequacy in expressive intent, recognisability and functionalism in idealistic format.

Accounting for Time and History in African Art

The rich tradition so far outlined in the arts of Africa, considering the depth of its history, has never been structured historically. Rather what is regarded as African art history adopts a pattern that is cyclic and negates serial progression in the manner in which events unfold. The cyclic narrative adopts a style that discusses diverse ethnicities in Africa as in-groups that are not interconnected. The approach negates the idea of history. The approach is validated in the nature of terminologies that dominate discourse on the subject such as “primitive”, “tribal”, “traditional”, “classical” “non-literate” etc. Texts that address the subject of African art history shy away from using the word history for their engagements. In recent times the use of the word history in some titles would appear as if it was now right. Visona and Vansina

belong to this category of texts. ⁴⁸ Their use of the word history is only a mordant as such application is epiphenomenal. It is used in the context that proclaims: “this is how the idea of art history is conveyed in Africa.” These aberrations in the practice of history pander to and reify Hegel’s excoriation that Africa “has no movement or development to exhibit” even with the very tangible archaeology of visual art typologies available to its history. Some schools of thought that realise the futility of locating Africa’s cultural history in the assert that available information on African visual art is rich and astounding. Nevertheless, they regret that there are too many gaps in-between this astonishing outlay to then develop a proper narrative. They canvas the view, relying on this excuse, that vast archaeological work is needed on the continent before an art history of Africa can be made real.⁴⁹

The excuses outlined above remain difficult to entertain. The work of art, first and foremost, is a text. In that status, it is a veritable ally of history as interpretive practice. History, in its entire agenda, is a contingent construction of meaning. The historian pleads evidence from available texts to present to the public fragments of knowledge that relate to the texts so investigated. The historiography of African art history is heavily populated by scholars of Euro-American extraction. The character which African art history assumes – a product of Euro-American ratio, therefore, is funded by the rationale of the West which lays claim to the status of the perfect example of all civilizations and of all time. A contingent need, considering the unhistorical nature of African art history, is for African historians of art to redefine the character of African art history.

Babatunde Lawal and Cornelius Adegba ⁵⁰ are African art historians who have attempted a critique of the lineal evidence theory, which funds the art history of the West, considering that it

postpones African art history. The lineal evidence theory is Hegelian. It is the main stay of western art historical methodology and its supposition is teleological in character. It accommodates the idea that historical progression must conform to a coherent serial ordering. In essence, in a progression that accommodates the serial B, A, Z, Y, X, zx, W, V, Z, U, T ty in an assumed progression to A, it is expected that they purvey recognisable similarities in their succession of each other (figure 5).



THE REALITY OF EVENTS IN TIME

Where, on the other hand the identities zx, ty and Z emerge, they are regarded as aberrant characters within a supposed consistent serial. For the reason of non-consistency with known antecedents, they are to be discarded. The rational inclination would be to construct a consistent characterization in a known serial such as B, A, Z, Y, X, W, V, U, T etc (figure 6).



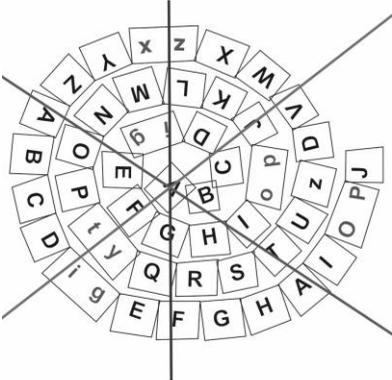
LINEAL HISTORY

For this reason the art history of the West remains an art history of exclusions of unknown identities. Western art history also exhibits a character where the birth of new and latter artistic identity symbolises the temporal death of the artistic form before it. The confounding problem of the lineal evidence theory is that it fosters collective amnesia. This is where the reality of supposedly designated aberrant forms may have occurred in time past.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, in the first inaugural lecture of the University of Port Harcourt, Professor Ebiegberi J. Alagoa ⁵¹ thematised on the problems of lineal evidence theory of history and tacitly recommended the non-lineal evidence theory. He

but, disparate identities. In what occurs in time at any given moment, the old, the not so old and the new are all projected. It happens that in the configuration which time presents there are identities that are of very distant origin. In the same token, there are other identities that are of distant origin but have been forgotten for a while only to be recuperated. Still other identities are hybrids that now alter their combined identities. The non lineal evidence theory reconstructs the consciousness of events and the knowledge they encapsulate as seen in the serial B, A, Z, Y, X, zx, W, V, Z, U, T ty into a spiral (figure 7).

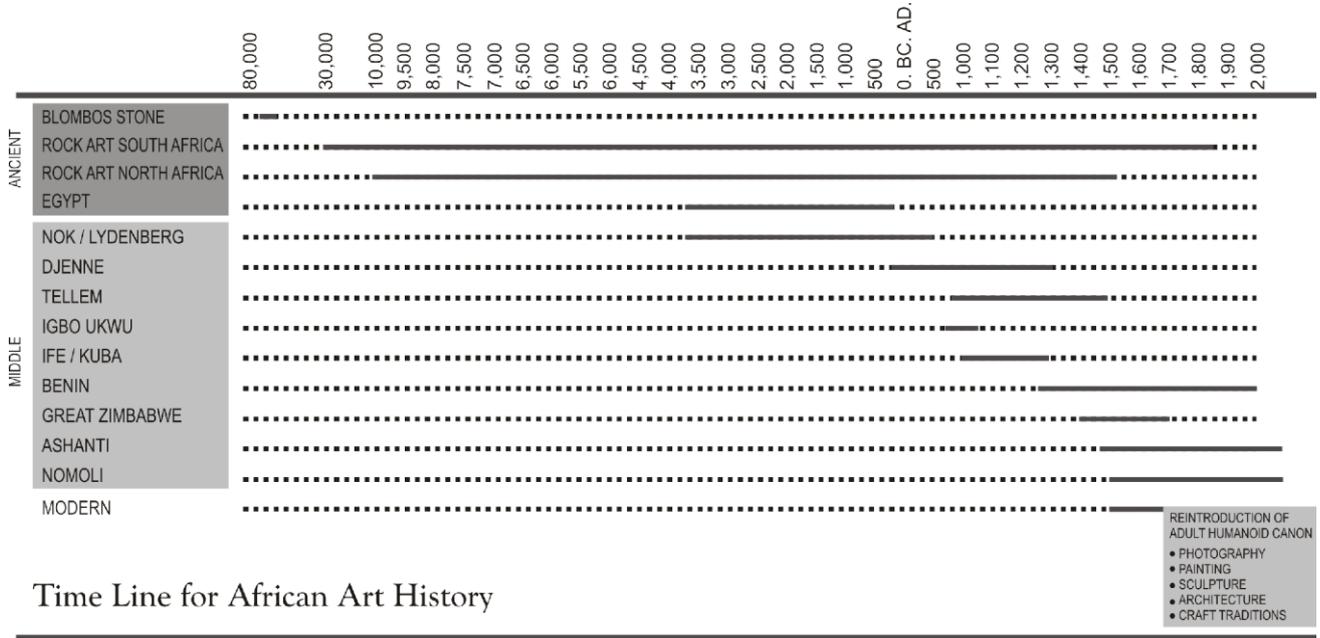
In this way, the present and the future it projects frame the spiral in an outer boundary such that the past becomes an integral part of common consciousness that is easily recalled. The past is not now forgotten or considered a problematic category from seeming collective amnesia. A panoptic nature with the python's eye (figure 8) as metaphor becomes one of reconciliation of disparate identities in customary association.



The Python's Eye

The python's eye is the central hub from which tracing trajectories of connecting lines emanate. Because the configuration allows for

multiple trajectories of lineal formations it is also referred to as poly-temporal evidence theory. The non-lineal evidence theory, thus, eliminates strangeness to consciousness, because distant identities that have been part of historical occurrences in any way they present or represent themselves as identities can be traced or linked.⁵³



Time Line for African Art History

This is the future of history and its handmaiden art history in Africa. Its tenets sit squarely with the idea of history and a return of the overall practice of African history to this understanding of events in time would be of great value in recovering past now largely taken as superstition. Its main value is that it places a demand on the practicing historian to engage rigorous research to connect the past that resists comprehension with the present that requires understanding. This approach shuns the temptation to discard identities that supposedly are assumed to be unfamiliar or by products of illogical conclusions. The consciousness to retrieve the past rationally also places a demand on the practicing cultural historian to read and understand at least, more than one African language.

Two Examples of Modern Art in Nigerian Art

We have come a long way considering a pan continental identity that can be so far traced in African art. The peculiar identities African visual arts of the past may exhibit are now hazy. Howbeit, I pursue the identity complex which the work of art exhibits with examples from two contemporary art works. I undertake a critical evaluation of the Mobile Telephony Network (MTN) of Nigeria in the advertisement “Daddy Achieve what You Want to Achieve” and Solomon Irein Ona Wangboje’s “Man, Mask and Myth”. The work of art exhibits the character prevalent in the culture of its origin. In the same token, an artist can construct his or her personality in the created work of art. These are diverse strands of identity blogging.

Daddy Achieve what You Want to Achieve: An Example of Collective Identity

Eight years ago MTN put out an advert created by TBWA, where it sought to highlight the communication value of the cell phone. A new cultural gadget it was. In the advert (plate 21), a man

responded to an invitation to give a prepared lecture to a revered audience. It happened that he forgot his text at home and had arrived at the venue of the lecture before he remembered this act of forgetfulness. He called home to his daughter who was a very young girl regarding his predicament. His daughter searched for the script and found it as directed. On a second's thought she took the option, among other viable ones, to read the text to her father. She probably might have been unsure getting to her father where he was then to meet the time. The high point of the advertisement shows the young girl's father addressing his audience as if reading from a real text. But he was indeed recapitulating the content of the text he prepared as read by the daughter from a proxy position - their home - using the mobile phone and its assorted gadgets. This TV advertisement came with other promotion components such as billboard advertisement, handbills recharge card vouchers etc. There are viable text alternatives that would have served the purpose of the above description where MTN's objective was to highlight the value of the new cultural tool for communication: the mobile phone.⁵⁴

The advert as a text enjoyed an enviable air time. In my interaction with some people who were conversant with the advertisement, they often expressed the view that the young girl was ingenious. "Daddy achieve whatever you want to achieve" attributed to the young girl after she helped her father out of the dilemma he was in constitutes the subtext of the advertisement. Plate 21, is associated with the second subtext for the advertisement "Take a bow and leave." It is significant that when this advertisement was designed, the focus of government was on how to tackle corruption. How to contain corruption, as a national malaise in recent times is still a daunting problem that has become a national desideratum. In the early 1990s indigenous films in Nigeria were beginning to project a social consciousness focused on how some Nigerians secure false

means of livelihood through ritual killing. *Living in Bondage, Glamour Girls* 1 and 2,⁵⁵ which premiered the Nollywood Industry in Nigeria, explored the theme of ritual further. Unfortunately, the truth of ritual as a source of wealth, whether real or imaginary, now became the theme of many celluloid narratives to follow. Within the same period the Catholic Bishops Conference composed the prayer; “Prayer against Bribery and Corruption in Nigeria”. However, the MTN advertisement adopted a form that rearticulates the consciousness of a false livelihood that has engulfed the Nigerian nation. The advertisement as a cultural text is an indexical sign. It is only a banner calling attention to a malaise in society, which are corruption and its handmaiden deceit.

The identity Nigerians associate with Nollywood today arises from its early themes focused on rituals. I realise that many Nigerians voice their hate for Nollywood for the reason of its focus on rituals. Perhaps, is it not true that the artist has only given back to society what society wrought in the first place? And as Nigerians confront the reality of who we are, it becomes discomfoting to recognise this amoral aspect of our identity.

In rejecting Nollywood, as a site where one encounters narratives focused on ritual, the gaze of the Nollywood film public is turned towards social Christian Evangelical video narratives sponsored by the Christian Evangelical Movement that project the idea of the good overcoming evil.⁵⁶ I relate to the genre as social narratives and at best, in their mimetic forthrightness they remain contrived and programmatic. They are designed to counter deceit and the lure of false living by repositioning thoughts against narratives that are focused on rituals as social ill. So far, as contrived social narratives, they have hardly made the desired impact. News of ritual killings is common news items on daily tabloids. A contradiction of intentions, which is noticed with some sects of

the Christian Evangelical Movement, is that they often gather their faithful in prayers preaching prosperity and not for edifying means of life and living. Many people among their congregations do not have any visible means of livelihood, it often turns out. Those with means of livelihood abandon their work time to be prophesied upon as future prosperity testimony bearers. Such spiritual invocations are usually accompanied by thunderous “Amen” – may it be so!

The praying society’s inordinate expectation, addresses precisely the sub text “achieve whatever you want to achieve.” A contemporary popular music ⁵⁷ locates Nigerians as a praying people who conjure the impossible through prayers where they would have taken their destinies in their hands through diligent work consciousness. The new cultural gadget called the cell phone coincidentally debuted at a point Nigeria is mired in corruption. New tools of culture have a way of revealing the character of the time they make their debut into society. Such coincidences are identified as the “style of history” since it is not possible to lay claim to the validity of such occurrence as the norm in culture.

The corruption index that latches on deceit is aptly exhibited in the characterisation projected by the cell phone advertisement. The MTN advertisement celebrates the consciousness of false livelihood, as it were. The prejudice associated with the artist in the metaphors he or she creates, comes to be accomplished because what the artist is familiar with is not basically unlike that of others of his or her public. The artist’s prejudice, as metaphor, usually comes delivered with very strong effect. The effect such new metaphors come with is determined by the way they steer collective consciousness to new realities. Hence, such metaphors uncover new social relationships in such a way that others become conscious of them too. The truth which the cell phone privileges is that it can be explored for deceit and cheating on people and

institutional engagements like examinations. By implication, with the cell phone, a pre-eminently errant ideological culture is bound to use it for ulterior motives. The advert shows equally that the culture of deceit, as an ideological undercurrent, is entrenched in the young girl as a member of the Nigerian public. It is in that social order that she enjoins her father to achieve whatever he wants to achieve *by all means* (my emphasis). The young girl as a standard bearer of deceit is only a metaphor that hints at the burden the Nigerian youth of today bears. This burden is a product of many years of violence inflicted on the objective understanding of reality within the social and psychological space that is Nigeria. The second subtext, “take a bow and leave” is a noticed approach that is adopted in our legislative houses during protocols to endorse government appointees. The pedigree of he or she is given a would-be appointee to public service is often not investigated before acquiring a clean bill. It is a common belief that when an ailment is identified the way the cell phone advertisement has projected Nigeria’s corruption index, it is natural to assume that the end of such ailment is near. As a nation, we hope to contain the ailment so identified as corruption funded largely by deceit.

Man, Mask and Myth: An example in an Artist’s Construction of Self Identity

Man, Mask and Myth (plate 22) ⁵⁸ is a series consisting of eight works by Wangboje. The compositions all consist of three figures. I limit my evaluation to the first work in the series produced in 1964. The work is revealed essentially as portrait heads in profile. The central figure has its eyes wide awake and comes to view as a focaliser to the composition. The central figure is unlike the other two figures that bound it on the left and right sides. These two figures have their gazes disconnected from the viewer. None of the figures wears the semblance of a mask. For this reason the

composition excites an impulse to narrate action in it. The theme, thus, provides apt metaphor for diegesis as an approach to understand the work beyond the claims of the artist regarding what he might have created.

For the above reason, I relate with the composition within the framework of an epic enactment. The work symbolises Wangboje's legendary life and achievements as a teacher. In supplanting Wangboje in the symbol he created, the work becomes neutralised and allows for the appreciation of the historical location of the work. In the reading, I take the three figures as allegories of human actions. The mask directly points to allegory and its mythic value. The mask, as a cultural item is usually an identity in perpetual denial; "I am not myself." In *Man, Mask and Myth* Wangboje identifies with the species "humankind" but the presentation of his personality is reduced to a "mask;" a persona who under anonymity served in an institutional setting as a university teacher. He assumed the mask he inherited from government as a teacher, even where his identity and voice was always obvious to his listeners in the dispensation of this duty. He did this for thirty years in three universities in Nigeria; Obafemi Awolowo University (University of Ife), Ile Ife, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and University of Benin, Benin City between 1968 and 1998.

Wangboje becomes an embodiment of the man, the mask and myth who enacted metaphors of great social contexts. His role as persona became terminated on retirement in 1995. In that year he responded to his colleague⁵⁹ who enquired to know his contribution to the development of art education in Nigeria thus; "Now that we are no longer anonymous, let us see what we have done." This statement foregrounds Wangboje's identity as persona – a mask. The mask (as masquerade) is a product of collective

consciousness. It fosters a dialectic of conventions, which allows for new inventions and new knowledge. The mask permits diverse interpretations of its embodiment as a cultural text. This is where myth is associated with the mask. Myth becomes an intervention between man and mask. Myth, in this context, becomes the interface in the effort to understand culture; it opens the channels that allow us to relentlessly look again at the action of the mask. *Man, Mask and Myth*, therefore, presumes the tropes epic, tragedy and comedy. Comedy never allows for the closure of a narrative.

Wangboje at the beginning of his career as a teacher in a university constituted his persona in the work *Man, Mask and Myth* and unmasked himself when he said “now that we are no longer anonymous, let us see what we have done.” For the coincidence of creating *Man, Mask and Myth* the year he started work as an academic in 1964, and at the point he retired laid claim to having shed anonymity, he did configure his personality in this composition. The work *Man, Mask and Myth* is also an address to conscientiousness and commitment to the actualisation of personal and collective vision. Actualised, our acts metamorphose into masks that eventually will be unveiled in spite of the way they appear to consciousness.

Very Recent Work

Since 2009 my work has included photography narrative. This became possible with the elevation of photography, which was regarded as non art to the status of high art. Photography, as art, made an early debut in Nigeria. Jonathan Adagogo Green (1874-1905) an indigene of Bonny became one of the foremost photographers on the coast of West Africa (plate 23). He clearly recognised himself as an artist photographer. His photographs testify to one who is a consummate artist. In contemporary Niger Delta, where he hails from, however, photography has been of value in highlighting the absence of environmental stewardship.

Artists like George Osodi, Timipre Amah and other contemporary photographers, have provided large body of documentary photographs on the environmental condition in the Niger Delta (plate 23). Their work implicates government agencies who acquiesce in the infractions that negate environmental stewardship. At the same time their work highlights lack of ethical practice on the part of multinational oil companies. In a recent paper⁶⁰ inspired by the infractions, the photographs focus on, we arrived at the conclusion that aesthetic education is the only option to end the never ending environmental infractions in the region. The activities of environmental activists appear far removed from the reality on ground and has hardly impacted on the way the people should appreciate their environment. Aesthetic education would stem violence that is funded by selfishness of militancy. On the other hand it builds the consciousness that allows for communities to appreciate that they are one with the nature which they have contributed to its hurt with a tacit consent to the activities of oil prospecting companies, and in other unconventional approaches to enrich themselves from the wealth in the region.

On the Training of the Artist

Mr Vice Chancellor, Sir, the work of art is humanity transposed in the mere object made by the human. The work of art is the human's perception of the world, as it is also the remnant of the human as often as cultures and civilizations undergo renewal. The arrival of art education at the academy in Africa is expected to hike the awareness and practice of the creative arts. Rather we have been experiencing a slide from what has been accomplished creative output in recent history. This strategic value of art to humanity calls to question the way the artist is currently trained in the university system. The focus on theory, though necessary, is highly detrimental to the making of a true artist and the creation

of a truly incarnate art. Sir Joshua Reynolds is credited with the foregoing quote that “art dies in the arid excesses of reasoning.”⁶² Focus on theory and the demand that artists earn theory degrees is a signal to the death of art. I hold dearly to the philosophy that in as much as the artist as an academic requires theory it should not be made the driving current in the training of the artist. No one goes to an art department to look for written texts. What is expected is works of art.

In recent times, the university system has been under pressure from the National Universities Commission (NUC) to demand the philosophy doctoral from academic personnel in universities. In leading the universities in this direction, the NUC appears not to have shed the cloak of military dictatorship. In many of its directives the NUC usurps the sanctity of the University Senate as the core organ in universities, where academic policies and focuses are defined. The responsibility of the university Senate to direct its academic program has not been repealed. Thus, the directives of the NUC that impinge on the academic culture of a university would require proper legislation for the NUC directives on academic matters to have the force of law. Moreover, it should be noted that in the past academic policies, that were aimed at retooling Nigeria’s educational policies, emerged from collegial input: stakeholders and interested parties and not hand-picked colleagues commissioned to provide a template collectively reasoned out such programs and policy directions.

The pressure from NUC has a negative impact on the training of the artist. The demand by the NUC that all academic personnel in Nigerian universities earn a philosophy doctoral has a peculiar history. This directive is adopted from the West. The tradition of studio philosophy doctoral started in the United Kingdom in 1992 in its bid to meet with the ideals of the new university, which

debuted in Berlin in 1809. Its principal thrust is to pursue research that is new and usable. Research is known to attract funds to universities. In this way the Visual Arts could be admitted into the league of programs that are relevant within the objective of the new university. The UK followed the research direction for the studio with full knowledge of its implications. In the UK the United Kingdom Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE) set out the criteria and benchmark for the philosophy doctoral program in the creative arts. After twenty years since the philosophy doctoral was initiated in Britain, the degree is still considered as an experimental project. The reason for this is the dearth of trained manpower as supervisors and examiners. On the other hand the tradition in the Americas upholds the philosophy that in the Visual Arts the Master of Fine Art (MFA) degree is the ultimate or terminal degree. America so describes the MFA as a terminal degree in the making of art. But it recognises the philosophy doctoral as the highest degree a university awards. The value of the option in the Americas is the recognition that any rule without exception becomes a problem unto itself. Moreover, the craft traditions in the university system are designed to produce a master crafts-person. An ideal philosophy doctoral would demand that the artist is distanced from practice to theorise on same practice he or she engages. The philosophy doctoral degree in the craft traditions remains a paradox, considering for example that a dancer is expected to suspend dancing for a while and theorise of the dance so far. It is important to realise that the artist cannot provide a fecund reading of his or her work. A theory degree demands from the recipient the delivery of new and usable knowledge. This value may be located in the work the artist has created. To arrive at such knowledge is the business of the other humanist.

The fiat NUC issues regarding the philosophy doctoral status for academics appears to lump all disciplines together without considering their peculiarities. For example, Fine Art as a discipline is only sixty-two years in the university culture. It thus requires a guide to the theory degree as the UK example stands, and this is where it is considered necessary. This is the situation in Nigeria currently, where the academic personnel are given a fiat to earn a philosophy doctoral or lose his or her tenures. It has led to academic staff in the discipline in Nigerian universities scampering for PhD degrees in anything to be able to earn higher promotion. In as much as this is condemnable it poses three problems for the discipline. The first is that a looming methodological harlotry might distort the future of the discipline. The second is the acceptance of horizontally accumulated degrees against vertically accumulated degrees that emphasise specialization. Its greatest flaw is that artists in training are no longer exposed to professionals in the field who are their teachers. The creative arts are a hands-on studio discipline. Studio experience informs instructions in studio pedagogy. This focus has diminished in recent times with the demand on artists who are lecturers to earn the philosophy doctoral. The PhD certification in some departments has led to the professionals being sidelined in the teaching of artists. This definitely is not good news

It is important to note that in the UK and the Americas the Fine Art programs make provision for professional artists to teach in their institutions. The initiative allows for the students to gain experience from professionals and anticipate being professionals also. It is important that the artist trained in Nigeria, considering the value of art to culture, should be given the right professional training. Nigeria practices a mixed educational policy. Like any forward looking democracy, Nigeria has always appropriated what she considers best from other climes in consultation with

stakeholders and interested parties. Any law without exception is not a law. The creative arts disciplines should be spared the demand for the entirety of its studio academic personnel to earn any doctoral at all. The university should be the last home for orthodoxy in any guise.

Conclusion

Man, Mask and Myth is a metaphor that I have appropriated as a trope considering the scope of this lecture, which calls attention to the value of art and the place of the artist in shaping consciousness. The artist is central to the shape of humanity's collective consciousness the way he or she converts reality into myth. Myth, understood as comedy, is synonymous with the past and its reality in the present. As often as we relate with the mask we have one aspiration: to recover its essence as the past that is deposited for our attention. Our attention comes by way of interpretations that flare up interests in that past. The truth about interpretations is that words are bound to misrepresent images. But to invest words on the image, as the critic or historian is bound to do, is to bring the image out of seclusion back to life: The work of art no doubt is forever present. It outlives its makers only to bear witness to whom and what they were. The above understanding is the reason why the work of art is beyond its mere appearance. Thus, the essence of the work of art is beyond the beautiful as an external quality. Like the conception of the beautiful in the African cosmos the built-in worth of the work of art (as myth) is of essence to its identity. To conceive art as a human product that embodies physical beauty and that accords pleasure is to be hedonistic in our attitude to the work of art.

Africa enjoys the reputation of hosting vast antiques and a panoply of art works that are of considerable ancestry. In the contemporary, this rich outlay has not diminished in its vibrant

community of artists. This vast cultural wealth that Africa hosts has remained largely unspoken about. We should not allow Africa's vast artistic heritage for all its worth to slip into the realm of superstition any more. We should be in the vanguard to keep them alive. It is with such attitude that their value as cultural, symbolic and economic capitals is awakened. The point at issue here is that there is a dearth of art critics and historians in Africa whose duty it is to present the work of art to the public.⁶¹ Aware of this short coming, the Department of Fine Art and Design has since focused its attention in training art critics and historians to fill this gap at the undergraduate and graduate programs through courses designed to enrich the theory of practice and the practice of theory. The repositioning is such that provides the studio artist with the tools also to verbalise on the work he or she has created.

African cultures for some accident of history remain for some world cultures as primitive. The reality this lecture makes available is an exact opposite of such mind set. The trajectory of world art in its development shows that the inventive artists from Africa, twice in history, have offered the world two optic regimes or ways in which reality can be apprehended. It was first with Egypt giving to Europe through Greece the realistic tradition of rendering nature. At a later date Europe found value in the second optic regime associated with intense intellectual relationship with reality. The art of Nok and Lydenburg ushered in this tradition. This art tradition offered Pablo Picasso and his co-travellers another option to escape from the exhaustion which realistic verisimilitude later instigated. To come to terms with the values that inhere in Africa's past is of great value to our collective humanity. The absence of the truth this past purveys is responsible for this painful conclusion that I have come to that today, we live in modern infrastructures with a medieval mind-set. This is a severe cultural disconnect. We are bound to correct the above disruption

in the supposed progress expected of Africa. Nevertheless we must come to terms with the truth of the disparate identities that the artists have constructed for us through time. The knowledge of the past reposed in art is of immense value as we live by the day in anticipation of the future.

I thank you sincerely for being here and for listening to this lecture. I would be fulfilled where I realise that we will leave here with a new mind-set to appreciate the past that makes up our cultural heritage. Our works of art are not fetish. They are the bits and pieces that define who we are what we have been and what we will be.

End Notes

1. Genesis 1: 26-27, (New Jerusalem Bible).
2. Ernst Fisher, *The Necessity of Art: A Marxist Approach*, trans. Anna Bostok, (London: Penguin, 1964)
3. Giorgio Vasari, *The Life of Artists*, trans. George Bull, (Great Britain: Penguin Classics, 1975).
4. Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. Werner S. Pulhar, (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987).
5. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, 4 vols., trans. with intro. by F. P. B. Osmatson, (New York: Harper Press, 1975)
6. Contemporary commentators on the subject of aesthetics like Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, trans. Nicolas Walker, ed. Robert Bernasconi, (Cambridge: University Press, 1998); George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Reflection on the History of Things*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962); Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, translated and ed. Robert Hullot Kentor, (London: Continuum, 1997) do not see any demarcation in the products of human industry. Kubler is so fitting in the choice of the phrase man-made things as the word for art.
7. Bassey Wei Andah “No Past! No Present! No Future: Anthropological Education and African Revolution” *Inaugural Lecture*, University of Ibadan, Ibadan (1985).
8. Kant, *ibid.*, 70.
9. Clive Bell “Art as Significant Form: The Aesthetic Hypothesis,” *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology*, eds. George Dickie and Richard Sclafani, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1977), 36-48.
10. Leo Tolstoy, *What is Art*, trans. Aylmer Maude, (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill Company Inc, 1960), 60.
11. Frank Ugiomoh, “Novelty and Art Historical Identities: A Retrieval to Overtake Adepegba’s *Ara Allegory*,” *Critical Interventions*, 2:4 (2009): 232-244.
12. Ben Shahn, *The Shape of Content*, (Massachusetts and England: Harvard University Press, 1957) , 53.

13. Alois Reigl quoted in Michael Podro, *Critical Historians of Art*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 7.
14. Louis Finkelstein, "Some Preliminary Considerations regarding the Education of the Artist" *Art Journal*, 4:1 (1982): 95-99.
15. Gyorgy Kepes, *Language of Vision*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1995), 29.
16. Christopher Nwodo's reference to Chinua Achebe is referenced by Frank Ugiomoh in "African Arts and the Museums" *The Guardian*, (Friday, May 17, 2002, Lagos) 35.
17. Genesis 2, 22; 23, *ibid.* At various times the biblical analogy has featured in the new understanding I bring to the notion of art as a human activity. Cf. Frank Ugiomoh, "To Install: To Represent Art to Mankind," in *Otuewena: Announcing the African Renaissance*, ed. P. K. Da'Silva, Lagos: National Gallery of Art and Bruce Onobrakpeya Foundation, 2002), 61-65; Frank Ugiomoh, "The Crises of Modernity: Art and the Definition of Cultures in Africa," *Third Text*, 21 (2007): 229, where I repeated an earlier definition derived from my doctoral thesis, *The Philosophy of African Art History: A Hegelian Interpretation*, Ph. D. Dissertation (Unpublished), University of Port Harcourt, 2003. The current definition is a product of a new insight I have imposed on art considering the context of the above quotation from Genesis.
18. Ernst H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, 12th Edition, (London: Phaidon, 1974), 4.
19. Frank Ugiomoh, "Ulism, Uche Okeke and the Dialectics of a Consciousness," *The Triumph of a Vision: An Anthology on Uche Okeke and Modern Art in Nigeria*, ed, Krydz Ikwuemesi, (Lagos: Pendulum Art Gallery, 2003), 219-235.
20. Beat Wyss, *Hegel's Art History and the Critique of Modernity*, trans. Caroline Dobson Saltzwedel, (Cambridge: University Press, 1999), 135.
21. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. with introduction by J. Sibire, (New York: Dover Press, 1956), 99.
22. *Ibid.*, 94.

23. Robert Bernasconi "Hegel at the Court of the Ashanti," in *Hegel after Derrida*, ed. Stuart. Barnett, (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 41-46.
24. Frank Ugiomoh, "The Object as Knowledge: Poststructuralism and Discourse in African Studies," in *African Development Crisis: A Festschrift for Ikenna Nzimiro...* ed. Martin Ifeanachor, (Owerri: Springfield, 2006)
25. Ibid.
26. Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976).
27. Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author*, (Stanford: University Press, 1988).
28. Henry J. Drewall, "African Art Studies Today," *African Art Studies: The State of the Discipline*, Washington DC: National Museum of African Art, 1990), 29-62.
29. Dennis Dutton, "Mythologies of Tribal Art" *African Arts*, 28 (1995): 32-43 and 90.
30. H. H. White, *Meta History: The Historical Imagination in the Nineteenth Century*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1973).
31. Chinua Achebe, "The Novelist as Teacher" in *African Writers on African Writing*, ed G. D. Killam, (London, Ibadan, Nairobi and Lusaka: Heinemann, 1978) 3.
32. Frank Ugiomoh and Isaac Okony, "A Taxonomy of Medieval Architecture in Nigeria: A Study in Ecological Adaptations," *Nigerian Field*, 64 (1999)132-147. Frank Ugiomoh, "Typology, Form and Function in Traditions of Ancient Benin Architecture," *Journal of Minority Studies*, 2 (1997)105-115. Cf. Judith Perani and Fred T Smith, *The Visual Arts of Africa: Gender, Power and life Circle Rituals*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1998), 15, suggest erroneously that the art of building in mud in Africa was a recent development that was introduced into sub-Saharan Africa, during the trans Saharan trade.
33. Frank Ugiomoh, "Đak'art 2006: Yawning Cultural Gaps in Fusing Landscapes," *Third Text*, 21 (2006): 95-99.
34. V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and Order of Knowledge*, (Indiana: University Press, 1988).

35. Frank Ugiomoh, "Between Frank Willett and Werner Gillon on African art History: A Critical Appraisal" *Kiabara: Journal of the Humanities*, 4:2 (2008): 103-117.
36. Frank Ugiomoh, "Photologos and or Narrative Semiotics: Which Way to Rehabilitating African Art? *Third Text*, 66 (2004): 1-11.
37. Ibid.
38. Ugiomoh, (2006), idem.
39. Leopold Sedar Senghor, *Prose and Poetry*, trans. John Reed and Clive Wake, (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 74-75.
40. Gombrich, ibid.
41. *The Blombos Stone* is currently domiciled at the Origins Centre, Rock Art Research Institute (RARI), University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.
42. *I kilo Obo* I am a doctor
I kilo Obo I am a doctor
I vba kilo Obo idane As a doctor I do not attain
knowledge through divination
Usomi o du mhe adodo My head is adorned with red
petals (the red head cap)
Okaigho oyo mhe ugwa The symbol of my rite of
passage is hosted in my house
I kilo Obo o- o- I am a doctor
43. I am indebted to Dr. Benjamin Smith, the Director of RARI, Professor J. D. Lewis-Williams, the pioneer Director of RARI, Professor Anitra Nettleton, Dr. Thembi Russell, Geoffrey Blundell and Catharine Namono for the cooperation and assistance I was greatly illumined during my research leave at RARI, July-October, 2006. My research and encounters have been of immense value in the time line provided in this lecture. Of value here is Benjamin W. Smith and Johan A. van Schalkwyk, "The White Carmel of the Makgabeng," *Journal of African History*, 43 (2002): 235-54.
44. Plato, *The Republic*, 2nd Ed. Trans. With intro. By Desmond Lee (London: Penguin Books, 1987), 359-374. The sections quoted from Plato's work gives the impression that Plato was iconoclastic. His ideal art was the art of Egypt. Its idealistic frame was well known to him and he endorsed it. When Greek sculptors of Plato's time

- achieved realism he thought that they had strayed. Hegel following in the same track endorsed Egyptian idealism against Greek classicism. It is the reason why he said of Greek classical art that that the spirit was irreconcilable to its material form. Cf. Frank Ugiomoh, “Nigerian Art History and the hegelian Unconscious: The Limits of Lineal Evidence in Historical Practice, *Third Text*, 19, (2005): 335 on the elaborate comment on Hegel, 4 Volumes, (1975) 2, 261ff and Wyss *ibid*, 11-35.
45. Plotinus, *Enneads*, 7 Volumes, trans. A. H. Armstrong, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989).
 46. Plotinus is quoted in Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria: Confrontation with 20th Century Art*, London, Oxford and new York: Oxford University Press, 1972) 298-299.
 47. Monroe C Beardsley, *Aesthetics: From Classical Greece to Present*, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1975) 156-157.
 48. Monica Blackmun Visona et al, *The History of Art in Africa*, with intro by Susan P. Blier and Preface by Roland Abiodun, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001) and Jan Vansina, *Art History in Africa*, London: Heinemann 1984, which is a critique of methods in African art history.
 49. Ugiomoh, *ibid*; Cf. Bruno Latour *We have never been Modern*, translated by Catherine Porter, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993) 75; Michel Foucault, *Archeology of Knowledge*, (London: Routledge, 1991) 5. And
 50. Ugiomoh, *ibid*. and Ugiomoh, (2005), *idem*.
 51. Professor E. J. Alagoa, “The Python’s Eye: The Past in the Living Present,” *Inaugural Lecture Series*, University of Port Harcourt, 1 (December 7, 1997)
 52. Alagoa, *ibid.*, 2.
 53. For the past ten years I have adopted this time line for the course I teach in Ancient African art history. All histories necessarily must accommodate selections that typify significant changes in time. I owe this understanding to E. H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art*.
 54. Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Way of the Mask*, (Washington: University of Washington Press, 1994), 44, is of the view that the mask like a myth “denies as much as it affirms. It is not made solely

for what it says or things it is saying, but of what it excludes.” The method requests that the cultural historian should seek understanding from an object of culture from within its particular context of existence, considering most importantly how the potential but absent identities provide knowledge regarding an identity that is present.

55. Vic Mordi and Chika Onu directed various versions of *Living in Bondage* 1992 and 1993 respectively. The film *Living in Bondage* was in Igbo language. *Living in Bondage* had antecedents in earlier Yoruba films. But *Glamour Girls 1* and *2* directed by Chika Onu reinforced the element of ritual killing prompted by the desire to project a false ego.
56. Some Christian Evangelical video films are as follows; *Endtime*, (Kenneth Nnabue 1999); *Christian Marriage*, (Chika Onu 2001); *Holy Crime and Fast Money* (Teco Benson, 2000); *Rapture* (Fred Amata, 2002); and *Blood of Darkness* (Andy Amenechi, 1996).
57. *The Pulse* is a contemporary pop music group. I find their lyrics transcribed here pertinent to the praying mood in contemporary Nigeria.

We go pray so te
Monkey go win Miss World so te
Limousine go be Nija taxi
I go dey pray so te
Satan go de halla Amin sote
Goat go pursue lion so te...
Fish go de fear water so te
Pikin go breastfeed mama so te

The paradoxes which *The Pulse* outlines here typify the expectation of the ever praying Nigerian who, indeed, should take his/her destiny in their hands. Rather than work to effect positive attitudinal change we forever pray expecting the bizarre to happen. Only recently a town named Nkerehi in Orumba South, Anambra State, Nigeria had a new name Umuchukwu imposed on it. A family that resisted the change was visited with terror by the village youths who destroyed the family's property at the burial of their matriarch. Nkerehi is associated with the elephant, which is

- the community's totem. It is the reason the name must be changed. And it becomes Christ- like to brutalise a family for resisting the change? Cf. *This Day*, 17:6315 (August 7, 2012): 3.
58. Personal communication between John Ogene and Professor Solomon Irein Ona Wangboje.
 59. Basil S. Nnamdi, Obari Gomba and Frank Ugiomoh, "Environmental Challenges and Eco-Aesthetics in Nigeria's Niger Delta" *Third Text*, Winter 120, (Special Issue on Contemporary Art and Politics of Ecology, 2012, forthcoming); Frank Ugiomoh, "Pale Reflections and Fables of Life: George Osodi's "Real People of the Niger Delta in Nigeria, *Camera Austria*, 106 (2009): 23-34; Reproduced in *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, 27 Fall (2012): 28-41. Frank Ugiomoh, "Niger Delta Seen through George Osodi's Lens," *Delta Nigeria: The Rape of Paradise*, George Osodi, (London: Trolley Ltd), 6-11
 60. I wish to appreciate the immense work so far done by the following scholars Professors P.S. Wingert and mentor of my teacher Professor Marshall Ward Mount, Professor John Picton, Professors Babatunde Lawal, Chike Aniakor, Cornelius Oyeleke Adepegba (of blessed memory), Dele Jegede, Ola Oloidi, Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie, Stephen Nelson, Moyo Okediji, Ikem Stanley Okoye, Salah Hassan, Charles Gore, Okwui Enwezor, Chika Agulu-Okeke Elisabeth Harney, Erin Haney and Ben Chukwuemeka Bosah
 61. Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Seven Discourses on Art*, eBook 32176 (May 8, 2005).

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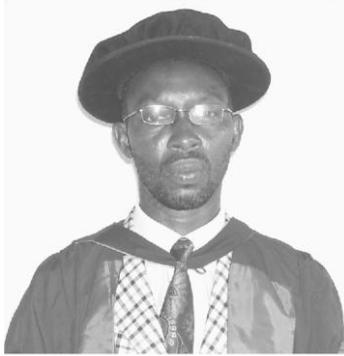
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CITATION ON
PROFESSOR FRANK AGBIYOA OMOH UGIOMOH



Professor Frank Agbiyoha Omoh Ugiomoh was born on January 29, 1954, at Aba, to Mr. and Mrs. Johnson Gabriel Egbomeade (1913-1997) and Beatrice Azitsenomoh Omosi Ugiomoh who hail from Agenebode in Etsako East Local Government area of Edo State, Nigeria. Both parents were dedicated craftpersons. Professor Ugiomoh attended Christ the King Primary school, Aba (1959 – 1966). His family relocated to Warri in Delta State, from Aba, owing to the Nigerian civil war in 1967. He had his secondary school education at St. Paul’s Minor Seminary, Benin City (1968-1972). His zeal to become a Catholic priest, led him further to The Major Seminary of Ss. Peter and Paul, Bodija, Ibadan in January 1973. He was to terminate this ambition in June 1976, in his first year of theology. This was after completing an undergraduate program in philosophy there. In 1977, he gained admission to the University of Benin, Benin City, to study Fine Art. He graduated in 1980 with specialization in sculpture. At graduation, he won the Dean’s Award of the Faculty of Arts. At this, he became the first recipient of the award in the new Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City. In 1985 Professor Ugiomoh proceeded to the

Institute of African Studies where he obtained a Master's degree in African Visual Arts having written a thesis on traditions of Benin architecture. In 2000 Professor Ugiomoh earned another Master of Arts and in 2003, a Ph. D in Philosophy of History and Aesthetics from the Department of Philosophy, University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt.

Since graduation Ugiomoh has worked as a lecturer and a professional sculptor. He started his lecturing career during his NYSC at the Department of Fine Arts, University of Ife now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, (1980-1981). He engaged full time professional practice briefly between 1981 and 1982 in Benin City. Ugiomoh in November 1982 took up a lecturing engagement at the College of Education Agbor and on May 4, 1987 came over to The University of Port Harcourt as an Assistant Lecturer and rose through the ranks to become a Professor of Art History and Theory of the Department of Fine Art and Design, in October 2010.

Ugiomoh has over sixty publications in local and international journals and chapters in books. In 2003 he co-edited with Stella Idiong a book titled *Issues in Creative Arts and Art Education: Wangboje Memorial Essays*. Ugiomoh is regular at local and international conferences. He holds the following editorial positions; a consulting editor, *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Arts*, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, *Critical Interventions: Journal of African Art and Visual Culture*, University of California Santa Cruz and a member of the editorial board of *AACHRON Publications*, University of California, Santa Barbara, all in the United States of America. In Nigeria he also holds similar editorial positions and he is the founding editor of *Africa Studio: Journal of Creative Practice*.

Ugiomoh is a 2006 recipient of the MacArthur Foundation Grant, for a research in comparative ethnography, at the Rock Art Research Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. Ugiomoh's theoretical interests are historiography and methods of art history, aesthetics and art theory. He has earned a global recognition for his papers on the historiography of African art history. In his numerous publications he pursues the religious and spiritual implications of duration in the African imagination as opposed to European concept of time. In all, Ugiomoh demonstrates an interdisciplinary cast of mind, weaving together essential aspects of African art history, Hegelianism, post structuralism. I substantiate the above observation with quote from a citation on Ugiomoh in 2005, as a keynote speaker at Africa 05, which held at the British Museum in London; "What Africans who live and work on the African continent make of [this] Western curatorial dialogue has been little considered beyond its own journals. Frank Ugiomoh, the African art historian has been one of few African continent-based critics who has (sic) vigorously challenged their western counterparts, describing a very different Africa..."

Ugiomoh, as a sculptor, has executed many commissioned sculptures in public and private arenas within Nigeria. He has served as external examiner to the Visual Arts graduate programme of the Department of Creative Arts, University of Lagos, Akoka Lagos. Ugiomoh has served the University of Port Harcourt in many capacities. At official capacities, he has served a term as Acting Head of Department of Fine Art and Design and member of Senate University of Port Harcourt, from 2005-2007; Permanent member of Senate, University of Port Harcourt; Faculty of Humanities representative at SCAPP, 2007-2008; Coordinator SIWES programme, Faculty of Humanities, 1989-1994; and two-time coordinator, Faculty of Humanities Seminar Series.

In community service at the University of Port Harcourt, Ugiomoh in 1989-1991 served as Social Secretary, University of Port Harcourt, Senior Staff Club, P. R. O. Academic Staff Union of Universities. Ugiomoh has also served as Secretary and Chairman University of Benin Alumni Association, Rivers State Chapter at various times. Ugiomoh is a devout Roman Catholic. He describes himself as a dye-in-the-wool Catholic. In the Chapel of the Annunciation, the Catholic Chaplaincy he served as Secretary to Pastoral Council and voluntary Catechist from 1991-2007 and has remained a member of the Council to this day. At the national level he served as member Episcopal Pastoral and Liturgical Committee member, 2007-2010 and member Inculturation Committee 2007-date all of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria. He has also coordinated for the Catholic Church the Forum for the Inculturation of Liturgical Music (FILM), a body dedicated to the development of indigenous liturgical music in university chaplaincies in Nigeria.

Ugiomoh is a member and Fellow of the Pan African Circle of Artists (FPACA). He is also a member of Society of Nigerian Artists, Nigerian Society for Education through Art, Nigerian Field Society, International Council of Art Criticism, Association of Wangboje School of Creative Artists (AWanSCA) and African Design Roundtable

Ugiomoh enjoys all brands of music and enjoys dancing. He was once a virtuoso bass and rhythm guitarist and has a record album to his credit.

Ugiomoh is married to Ifeoma Gladys Ugiomoh (nee Nwadike) and they are blessed with four boys – Eghiemeh, Eraomeye, Ughiezoa and JohnPaul

Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, I present to you a consummate artist and scholar, the art historian's historian, a keen theorist in African cultural studies, Professor Frank Agbiyoa Omoh Ugiomoh

Professor Onyemaechi Udumuku