

ARCHETYPAL SYMBOLS OF 'TRADITION' IN 'MODERNITY': REVISITING THE WORKS OF THE INDEPENDENCE DECADE IN MODERN NIGERIAN ART

*A. Augustine-Neto Emiemokumo.
Department of Fine, Industrial and Theatre Arts,
Niger Delta University,
Wilberforce Island,
Bayelsa State, Nigeria
emiemokumo@yahoo.com*

Abstract

It is instructive that scholars such as William Fagg (1963), Kenneth Murray (1943) and Ulli Beier (1961) had in their different publications expressed the opinion that considered or portrayed modern African art not sufficiently African. Although quite historical vestiges, rather than contemporary reference points, these notions had since, to a great extent, influenced the way many view the works of modern African artists. Their assessments of modern African art seem to have discarded any continuity that could have emerged from hybrid stylistic mutations. They would have preferred to see stereotypical ancient forms, to give credence to their advertised stylistic rigidity of African art (Egonwa, 2005). This article examines artworks by selected college-trained Nigerian artists to show their relatedness to hybridized Nigerian (African) tradition and culture. The article uses the Iconographic and Stylistic Analytic methods under the auspices of the object-centred approach. Modern Nigerian (African) artists use diverse techniques and media that have ancestry from Africa and Europe in their works (Ikpakronyi, 2009). Their artworks are vibrant and rich with traditional symbols, motifs and patterns. There is an evolution in the form and content of modern Nigerian art which is cognizant of global developments while not completely rejecting local heritage. This means therefore, that what is erroneously seen as alienation is actually synthesized mannerism of adored traditional creative values with the state-of-the-art development in art making worldwide. As a consequence, anything contrary to the foregoing, rules out the dynamism in African art.

Introduction

In this paper an attempt is made to query Fagg's (1963) notion which had, to a great extent, influenced the way many view works of modern African artists. Fagg believes that modern African art, like skyscrapers, is an extension of Europe in Africa; that any art not tribal in Africa is not African. Before this time, Murray (1943) had considered the works of modern African artists not worthy of attention, having accused them of neglecting their cultural heritage. Beier (1961) too once inscribed Ben Enwonwu and other pioneer Nigerian artists as colonial relics (cited in Ogbecchie, 2003). These scholars, like many foreigners, decried a break in cultural continuity caused by the economic and social changes in Africa. They fail to see the natural stylistic mutations in modern African art, as continuity. They would have preferred to see stereotypical ancient forms, to give credence to their advertised stylistic rigidity of African art (Egonwa, 2005). Although much of what is known now as modern art of Africa is affected by extraneous influences and processes, this art is not alienated from the local circumstances and environment (Ikhwemesi, 2000) as has been orchestrated by the West. Earlier, Adepegba (1995:88) had made such assertions, stating that imported tools and materials notwithstanding, contemporary African art is different in content and types from those of Europe. According to him, "the cases in which the artist expresses outside experiences such as in Europe and America are rare. His themes mostly relate to his African background".

Kennedy (1992:15) in her discussion about modern artists also showed their connectedness to their local culture. She argues that, for many African artists, a commitment to traditional values is a fundamental element in the alchemy of creative genius. As Kennedy (1992:15) states:

some synthesize allusions to the past with contemporary content; others create imagery with mythical or ritual references. But the artist, though rooted in tradition, use materials, methods and images foreign to traditional art, and their art is usually based on a personal aesthetic. These artists, who have emerged throughout sub-Saharan Africa in the last forty years, and who are working in new ways with new materials, address their art to a wider public.

Part of the reasons why these works are misunderstood is because they have not been seriously interrogated to illuminate their cultural affiliation with Africa, both in form and content. Due to the fact that most erroneous views were published in the 1960s, the article will dwell on the works of the independence decade (1960 to 1970), with particular reference to modern Nigerian artists to prove the fallacy in them.

The article examines artworks by selected college-trained Nigerian artists to show their relatedness to hybridized forms of Nigerian (African) tradition and culture. It specifically discusses their styles and reflects on their symbolic significance. It also highlights the philosophical, religious, social, political and aesthetic concerns that serve as inspiration and motivation for the artistic creations. In doing so, two interrelated methods have been used: the Iconographic and Stylistic Analytic methods under the auspices of object-centred approach. The article, it is hoped, will not only complement the few existing literatures on modern Nigerian art, but will also contribute to more understanding of modern Nigerian works of art – their iconography and what issues the works address, thereby enabling us to assess their socio-cultural

relevance. It also serves as a contribution to the existing debates on the true identity of modern Nigerian art.

Artworks of the Independence Decade (1960-1970)

Truly, in the spirit of independence in Nigeria, the early 1960s witnessed an intense visitation of traditional forms by modern Nigerian artists as part of the aspirations towards the actualization of self rule. There was that obligation to contribute to national pride in their works. They create works from within the knowledge of their cultural backgrounds or from their awareness of the African cultural heritage (Fosu, 1993). Like the Sankofa bird in the Ghanaian mythology, these artists form the habit of turning back on their track in search for nourishment (Ikwemesi, 2000). As further noted by Fosu (1993), their works appear deeply rooted in the traditions of African art and culture. However, they also responded to political, religious, historical and social issues and events. As varied as these themes may appear, a certain ideological focus binds them together which is the synthesis ideology. The ideology of synthesis started with Ben Enwonwu who carried the opinion that the preservation and continuity of the characteristic quality of African art depends largely on how modern African artists can borrow the techniques of the West without copying European art (Oyelola, 1976). This idea was carried on by Uche Okeke and his contemporaries who insisted that such synthesis should be natural. According to him, “we must have our own school of art, independent of European and Oriental schools, but drawing as much as possible from the cream of these influences and *wedding them to our native art culture*” (emphasis, mine) (Okeke cited in Ugiomoh, 2001). We find one of such marriages in Demas Nwoko’s (b.1935) painting entitled *Nigeria in 1959* (1960) (fig.1).

In this painting, Nwoko reflects on the socio-political condition of the time – the eve of Nigeria’s political independence from British colonial rule. It was the peak of Nigeria’s nationalist struggle. Here, he employs a wide range of colours such as blue, gray, purple, red and green effectively to give it a strong expressive quality. These colours are sharply contrasted. The chairs where the colonial masters are seated and the floor take the purple/red colours which are a bit toned down. The two figures of the colonialists, at both ends of the picture, wear almost the colour of blue/green with the one at the right a bit lighter in shade. Their hats and shoes are in dark colours. The central figure among the three colonialists is attired in gray uniform and hat except his waist and shoulder band and emblem and the shoes which are painted in red.

The red shoes, though a bit toned down with little gray or dark, tend to fuse with the colour of the chair and floor. This red colour arrangement is carried into the belt and upper parts of the uniforms of four of the five African figures behind the colonialists. Generally, among these Africans, the order of colours of their attires are in red, blue, light blue, red, dark blue with some highlights with white biases. However, the African figure directly behind the central colonial figure is attired in almost the same blue/green as the two colonial figures at both ends. This tends to create a triangular shape in the same colour tilted to encase the central figure. But Nwoko draws on traditional African formal aesthetics by rendering the facial features of the figures like traditional African wood carvings especially that of masks. These are not the only traditional formal elements appropriated in the work. The three English officers seated before the line of five black soldiers standing at attention also take the traditional African art style of frontal pose and verticality in directional emphasis. Following the straightness of the left leg of the central colonial figure up to the central African figure behind, Nwoko seems to divide the picture into two with the two figures. The division is not only noticeable in their straightness but also of how each contrasts with the other figures beside them in colour. The belts of the black guards

above the hats of the colonialists also create a horizontal line across the picture. Besides that, their forms are rendered in simplified form rather than being strictly imitative (Egonwa, 2005). The all-over pattern composition which evokes the feeling of "picture plane as screen", in the words of Egonwa (2002), is an archetypal symbol of 'tradition' in 'modernity'. In the picture plane as screen, modelling is highly subdued or completely absent. Motifs are artfully distributed all over the picture plane. This form of minimal modelling is characteristic of much ancient paintings exemplified but by no means restricted to Egyptian tomb and Igbo murals or wall paintings. These are techniques of form treatment characteristically African (Egonwa, 2002). Other cultural associations are the concept of power and authority portrayed in the centrality of pose referencing the Kalabari memorial screens (*duen fobara*) meant for their most prominent ancestors (Willett, 2002).

Nwoko employs the mask motif as an effective signifier of moods, identity and content in the picture making process. Interpreting the political ferment of that historic era, the artist skillfully worked the faces of the figures into two categories – "determined" and "dejected" masks corresponding to anxious hopeful Africans and bored frustrated colonialists (Egonwa, 2002). It shows a long drawn battle between the two groups in which a winner was beginning to emerge. Though the masks in Nwoko's painting cannot be identified with any particular African mask, they bear the identifiable elements of African masks.

The expressions on the faces of the colonialists show that these officials were literally mourning their exit from the political scene with all the losses such as absence from next Durbar. In making this probing observation, Nwoko saw the need to render the forms differently between the guards and the officials. The alert and responsive soldiers are depicted with solidly elemental but boldly stylized features against stony, pale, melancholic and uninterested spectators (Egonwa, 2002). The artist reinforces this contrast by the use of colour: the English are dressed in pale gray and khaki while the Africans wear deep richly coloured uniforms, as earlier pointed out (Mount, 1973). It connotes a loser and a winner. The facial expressions and poses of the officials also show absent-mindedness or people in deep thoughts. There are no smiles on the faces of both parties. Besides the contrast in the two sets of people (Blacks and Whites), Nwoko shows us that there was a political hierarchy even among the colonialists, who were in their midst. The middle figure is dressed differently with a belt around his belly and one over his shoulder and the attention of the other two are directed to him. Though the faces of the three colonialists are downward looking, they appear to be engaged in a discussion with the two listening to the one at the centre. The black figures are looking straight. All the three figures wear hats.

Though the source of inspiration for the painting was a scene during a Durbar festival in Zaria in 1959 when Nwoko was still a student then, one supports the view of Egonwa (2002) that the Durbar experience only served to ignite the charged embers of the artist's creative urges. Their mournful appearance could portray pity for Nigerians, whom they may have considered immature for political independence, even though they were leaving. This interpretation arises from our socio-political experiences from the mid-1960s. Judging from the time of Nigerian independence, it is obvious that the figure at the centre is Sir. James Robertson, the Governor-General at the time. His posture exhibits an aura of lordship. The line of pattern also says of closeness or touching – the connectivity of each race: blacks with blacks, whites with whites. And they are an expression of the different moods at that time. Nwoko, though young at that time, was politically conscious, gave the title to draw the viewer's attention to the issues he

addresses in the work. He shows us a scene at the tail end of Nigeria's colonial socio-political drama.

Yusuf Grillo's (b.1934) *Mother and Child*, (c.1960) (fig.2) references African fertility figures and at the same time, speaks about the caring nature of the African mother and the innocence of the African child as shown in his face. The mother in this painting looks towards the child, who also looks towards the ground. She seems to be cuddling the child making the work look like one single or joined figures. Every line moves towards the child. The mother's direct gaze at the child points to an unseen cord of connectivity. And there appears to be a tacit communication between mother and child, which is only spiritual. Like in Aferwerk Tekle's *Mother Ethiopia*, the inspiration may also have been drawn on the values of motherhood in African traditional society. However, it is in the form rendering that the African cultural identity is noticeable in the painting. Grillo, like his contemporary Demas Nwoko, aligns his work to his African formal roots, even as he uses foreign media.

Grillo captures the subject in such dignified simplicity. The nature of the formal simplification makes the figures look almost geometrical in shapes. The simple figures are typified by elongation. The geometrized forms, with long upper arms and shoulders, taper to join the long neck. Such restrained and well-structured manner in Grillo's works is attributed to his interest in mathematics (Uche Okeke as cited in Fosu, 1993). The reference to traditional African forms becomes more pronounced in the concavity of the mother's mask-like face that tappers into her thin narrow chin. The forehead appears shootout as her bulging eyeballs rest on her concave face. The woman wears buba dress and wrapper in a v-shape form at her waist which is purely typical Yoruba women's dress style. Her right hand appears to be holding her wrapper at the down side or the child's hand. With her left hand terminating behind the child's head, she appears to hold the child to herself. The exposed parts – the faces and necks of both mother and child are defined in deep blue with just a slight touch of dark blue to suggest depth. The harmony created in this colour application is such that the child's outfit and the mother's headgear are matched in purple, with hardly any lines to suggest creases or folds. In contrast, the mother's dress has a fascinating sparkle resulting from the grey contrasts which are demarcated in cubic shapes on blue background (Fosu, 1993). The blue face of Grillo's figures evokes a solemn mood that seems to connote meditative powers. It is also reflective of the Yoruba culture as with the hand dyed indigo fabric created and worn by Yoruba women. Grillo also believes in the use of distortion. All what we have seen in Grillo's work is the influence of traditional formal aesthetic idiom which has been individualized. In traditional African arts, the human form is often rendered as a series of planes (Dale, 1998). And Grillo affirms that he surrounds himself with "traditional pieces of art and they influence my work... the clear cut definition of planes... this has worked its way into my work" (Kennedy 1992:35).

Grillo's painting also makes reference to the social and psychological aspects of bonding of a mother with her child. Bonding refers to the intense attachment that develops between parents and their child. It makes parents want to shower their child with love and affection and to protect and nourish their little one. Bonding makes parents attentive to the child's wide range of cries. The strong tie between parents and their child provide the child's first model for intimate relationships and foster a sense of security and positive self-esteem. And parent's responsiveness to a child's signals can affect the child's social and cognitive development. Intuitively, African mothers know that bonding is essential for a child. They know that children would better socialize when they have mothers to interact with. The highest number of African parents understands that bonding is a byproduct of everyday care giving. Touch becomes an early

language as children respond to skin-to-skin contact. It's soothing for both the parent and the child while promoting the child's healthy growth and development (Hirsch, 2008).

Ben Enwonwu (1922–1994), the precursor of the synthesis ideology celebrates an awakened Africa like the Sun, *Anyanwu, 1961* (fig.3). The awakening symbolizes an emergent African continent with some of her countries gaining independence (The Awakening, 2008) – an independence which ought not be only political, but also social, cultural, religious and economical. Here, we see Enwonwu going back to his African cultural roots for formal inspiration. And using the bronze medium, his female figure combines both abstract and naturalistic features. It has long neck on linear curves of an elongated torso. The arms are slightly outstretched. Besides the crowned head, are beads on the neck running down the chest, on her wrists are also beaded bangles. Her wrapper runs down from above her breasts reminiscent of most African women's traditional pattern of tying wrappers, especially the Bini.

From the belly down, this slender stem-like figure is an orchestrated series of highly stylized forms that unfold like a fern, but the head and hands are inexplicably naturalistic (Kennedy, 1992). The entire figure appears to be in ascendancy like one shooting out. From the figure's sharp point that pins the base it increases in size upward. The fern-like motifs as well as the other decorative motifs also become richer as your eyes move upward. And the tip of the conical shaped crown on her head vanishes into the sky. Typical of Enwonwu, the long controlled necks on the soft linear curves of the elongated torso recalls the gracefulness in senufo fertility figures. (And elegance and gracefulness are elements of African beauty). Enwonwu had earlier expressed African beauty in Negritude. *Anyanwu* in particular, as rightly described by Fosu (1993), is an aesthetic attribute to linear balance and grace. The realistic facial features, the leaning neck and the crowned head has a formal affinity with the famous bronze statue of the 12th century Benin Queen Mother – *Iyoba*, the magnificent queen. The bronze medium which is used in producing this sculpture attests to its significance. Bronze like coral beads are preferred and reserved for Benin Court Art because of certain qualities and attributes which the people associate them with this material (Ebeigbe, 2004). Considering its ascending posture, Ben Enwonwu's work can be compared to that of Michael Dei-Anang's poem "Dear Africa" wherein he calls on Africa to awake thus: "Awake, sweet Africa/thou sleeping heart!/when the all-summer sun/paints the leafy boughs/with golden rays/know then, thou sleeping heart/Dear Africa stands/knocking at thy door" (Dei-Anang cited in Nwoga, 1967:21).

This reminds us of a period where artists and poets celebrated Africa. The sculpture *Anyanwu* also reminds us of Diop's poem on Africa which tells us about Africa's condition before the era of awakening: "Africa, tell me Africa/ are you the back that bends/lies down under the weight of humbleness?. The trembling back striped red/that says yes to the sjambok on the roads of noon?/solemnly a voice answers me/ "impetuous child, that young and sturdy tree/ that tree that grows/ there splendidly alone among white and faded flowers/is Africa, your Africa. It puts forth new shoots/with patience and stubbornness puts forth new shoots/slowly its fruits grow to have/the bitter taste of liberty" (Diop as cited in Nwoga, 1967:111). It was this same picture Enwonwu captures in this work – a picture of liberty, of self-realization and of cultural consciousness. It is an evolving Africa aspiring to reach out to her own destiny. An Africa putting new shoots may perhaps be the reason why the work carries the face of a maiden. Her adornment with red coral beads underlines her important status (Africa assuming a new status). Enwonwu choice of the female figure can also be linked to Negritude, an influence from Leopold Senghor. For Senghor, the African woman is both mother Africa and of alluring beauty, her body an object of much poetic contemplation (Okeke, 1995).

Uche Okeke (b.1934) is a great painter and exponent of Ulism. In this painting entitled: *Ana (Mother Earth), 1962* (fig.4) in gouache, which is typical of Okeke's *Uli* style as a painter, the artist returns to his Igbo cultural roots, creating imageries with mythical references which have its basis in traditional religion. *Ana* takes the form of a stylized head placed at the right hand side of the horizontal picture plane. Her elongated face, placed vertically terminates at both ends of the picture.

While the ascending nature of her head recalls Igbo anthills or shrine mounds, her enlargement beyond the picture edges may symbolize the boundless powers of the goddess. This is because the artist brings into being those spiritual essences of traditional belief ...that constitute the meat of life's existence. In the Igbo country, the Earth principle is identified symbolically by some as decorated mounds of earth, and by some others as Ala of the Mbari house or mother figure of clay. The one is essentially an abstract conception, the other is manifestly stylized or representational (Okeke, 1982:18-19). *Ana's* hair in the concentric coiling form covers over half of the painting from the right edge towards the left. This helps to create a balance along with the two seemingly monolithic phallic forms at the left of the background. One can see the rhythmic movement of the coily hair. The coiling nature may be the artist's lyrical description or expression of *Ana's* attributes as the mainspring of creativity. As Okeke (1982:17) asserted, "I have not as yet come to terms with my meaning of Art, although I have no doubts as to the mainspring of creativity which is *Ana, Mother Earth*. For me, Art has always signified the search for values". Her bold eyes have the left partly closed while the other though open, appears dizzy. Her mouth appears insignificant, compared to her face and a thick brush stroke forms her nose that straightly points towards it angled by her eyebrow. Other design motifs obviously inspired by the *Uli* lexicon, mainly of abstract forms are derived from nature such as plant, orange or moon. Under them at the foreground are tree branches with leaves giving an impression of a forest – the dwelling place of the goddess. The arrangement of these motifs also helps to create a balance in the work. In all these design elements, the artist distills only their formal essence through an artistic manipulation of lines with his brush (Okeke, 1995. Also see Udechukwu, 1981).

The two monolithic phallic forms at the background on the left earlier mentioned probably points to the goddess (*Ana*) as the giver of life. Uche Okeke does not treat such mythical themes like *Ana (Mother Earth)* for their own sake. It is the artist's own way of celebrating an African goddess and uses that to focus on man's place in the cosmological scheme of things as perceived through myth and folklore. Not only that, like the traditional artist, he seeks through his art, a restatement of basic social values through communal participation in affirming self under the watchful eyes of Ala (*Ana* or *Ani*) (Ogbechie, 1991:9). According to Aradeon (1987:8), "Okeke affirms faith in *Ana*". His painting therefore, could be a way of worship. The deity, *Ana* as conceived in Igbo tradition and folklore is the goddess, who is a creator and giver of life. According to Igbo folklore, Ala or *Ana*, symbolizes the creative and recreative forces of the society, the aesthetic and ethical value system of the kindred communities (Eze, 1995:13 & Okeke, 1982).

Clara Ugbodaga-Ngu's (1924 – 1988) painting, *Horse Rider*, (1965) (fig.5) is one of the earliest adaptations from traditional themes and forms in modern Nigerian art. As usual, it is a revisit of Africa's rich artistic traditions drawing from the theme of equestrian figures in Igbo Ukwu, Benin or Yoruba traditional metal and wood sculptures. The image of equestrian is also common in other West African tribes, such as the Fon, the Dogon, Western Sudan, Senuso, Bamana, among others. Stylistically, it is to the wood sculpture tradition of Africa such as the

decorative house post carvings that the painting owes its angular, squarish and planary forms. The cubical form of brown overtone and vertical format with the square divisions contribute to its strength and harmony (Adepegba, 1995).

The painting is arranged in three segments: a male figure on top of a horse and an image which seems to be a female head over his head above. The pointed triangular shape on the head of the female might be the head tie or hairdo. Only the frontal part of the horse which the man is mounted upon, appears. Though the forms are highly stylized, the overall picture shows some elements of an Uli influence. The horizontal and vertical lines from the waist of the man may be part of his wrapper which covers part of the horse's face. The left leg of the man is placed higher than that of the right one. The angular, circular, plenary and squarish shapes in the work remind one of cubism which is an African artistic trait. There is also frontality in the painting as is common with many African traditional sculptures. The mouth of the horse seems locked as shown with the black thick line across it.

In Africa, the horse rider or equestrian figure is a symbol of wealth, prestige and power, because of the rare and expensive nature of the animal and the rider's ability in forcing the animal to submit to his will. In Yoruba land, the Horse rider symbol brings to mind the importance of the calvary in the campaigns of the kings who created the Oyo empire as early as the 16th century through the 18th century. Only Yoruba chiefs and their personal retinees are privileged to use the horse. In Dogon society, horses are generally considered a luxury reserved for rich and powerful people. Nevertheless, the rider and the horse remained an important social symbol and offered an exciting subject for artistic imagination (Warren, 1966). Clara Ugbodaga-Ngu might be showing us such power and status symbol among the rich or aristocratic members of African societies.

Like his contemporary Uche Okeke, folk tales and myths form an important part in the themes of Bruce Onobrakpeya's (b.1932) art as in *The Seven Hunters*, (1970) (fig.6), using the plastographic technique. He is an artist firmly established in the various nuances of Nigerian lores and myths which he often celebrates. As rightly stated by Jegede (cited in Eze, 1995:13-14), Onobrakpeya's folk memory is ever refreshing. It was for this reason Chika Okeke aptly describes him as a visual folklorist (cited in National Concord 1992:5). And such folktales, myths and legends, he confers with physical attributes. Apart from oral tradition, Onobrakpeya draws inspiration from the works of three Yoruba authors: Amos Tutuola, Fagunwa and Wole Soyinka.

In this work, seven male figures are depicted in a single file as soldiers marching, all looking straight. Four of the men hung their guns on their shoulders and one holding his over his shoulder while the others hold theirs down close to the ground. Except for the fourth figure from the left, all others wore hats on their heads. There has been no rigid attempt at naturalistic representation (Audu, 2002). There appears to be variations in the heights of the figures – a kind of tall-short, tall-short, tall-short-tall arrangement. At the bottom of the print, one observes a slight gradual curve in the placement of their feet. As usual with Onobrakpeya's design repertoire, he draws profusely from traditional African motifs. Their bodies, legs and arms appear either tattooed or banded. The figures are closely connected and the profusion of design on their bodies as well as the background make the work look crowded – a pattern influenced by the interiors of his traditional Urhobo shrines, whose contents are crowded with shrine accoutrements. Such influence can also be seen from the thick vegetation of his traditional environment. Some of the designs are abstract.

As a further assertion of tradition, Onobrakpeya garbs the figures in hunters' smocks. Their bags slung over their shoulders. Some wore trousers while others tie short wrappers. Traditional African medicines in assorted vials or receptacles are used as motifs of the designs on their guns. Probably in allusion to the powers they are believed to give to these ammunitions. The same is applicable to their bodies, which make them as black as oil soap. This goes to show a typical practice in traditional Africa of protection in critical missions. All these give the work a mystic appearance. As narrated by Dale (1998), this visual document is a myth about seven hunters one of whom is Akara-Ogun, a folk hero, who at the bidding of their king went on a long journey to a place called Mount Langbodo. The figures are identified with mythical names such as Koko of the leopard club. This is followed by Imodoye. Fourth from the left is Oloruniyo, the voice of flavours; the fifth is Elegbede-Ode, born with three eyes and referred to as father of the baboon; the sixth is Efiyoye, the archer who belongs to the family of the birds and the seventh, the miraculous man Aramanda-Okunrin. Such myths and folktales are portrayed to show bravery, courage or heroism of Africans. Hunters are seen as brave people. And they are the ones usually sent on heroic missions. Stories like this abound in Nigeria, the Ozidi saga of the Izon of the Niger Delta is a good example.

Myths and folklores are traditional stories of a community which they originate from ancient times. They are mostly created to express the history, the culture, and the inner experiences of the African himself. It is in these stories that the African's metaphysics are created and his beliefs constructed. They act as a socializing agent, nourish and continue the traditions of the elders and ancestors. Morals, norms, conventions, customs and manners are embedded in them. Education is another for they are told with the aim of teaching people, especially youngsters, the meaning of the universe and those things which comprise it even as they entertain.

These stories are like the encyclopedia engraved in the chambers of the African mind to be passed from generation to generation at the fireside, at bedtime, and whenever the African seeks to reach other brothers and sisters in the continent (Koech 1977:139). As Eze (1995:11) rightly points out, while these "stories do not pretend to be historical accounts of what actually happened, they portray the traditional wisdom and lore of the people which reflect their deep rooted beliefs about God and confidence about living". The other salient thing the artist has revealed through this work is the respect for hunters in traditional African societies, as people of courage and bravery who are often used in critical situations. Second, is that the hunting business in Africa is an all male affair. What else could the artist Onobrakpeya do better, than celebrating his tradition at this era of independence?

Conclusion

Modern Nigerian (African) artists use diverse techniques and media that have ancestry from Africa and Europe to enhance the power of expression in their works. Their art-works are vibrant and rich with traditional symbols, motifs and patterns (Ikpakronyi, 2009 & Maitland, 2000). However, traditional elements present in the works of modern Nigerian artists are stylistically appropriate to them. The works often exhibit innovation and individualism. These qualities make it dynamic and adaptable to new challenges. The artworks in their content and form consummately evoke the Nigerian spirit; they mostly relate to Nigerian cultural background as they address prevailing feelings that are of concern to Nigerians (Ugiomoh, 2006).

As earlier set out in this article, the intention was to query or correct the erroneous impressions of some foreign scholars on works of modern African art. From the evidence

ARCHETYPAL SYMBOLS OF 'TRADITION' IN 'MODERNITY': REVISITING THE WORKS OF THE INDEPENDENCE DECADE IN MODERN NIGERIAN ART - A. Augustine-Neto Emiemokumo.

provided so far, it can be said that Fagg's view of modern African art as skyscrapers or as an extension of Europe in Africa, with those who still support the notion of the death of African art, is irrelevant. Modern African art is African, as the artists take into consideration indigenously derived compositional elements, motifs, symbols and techniques. There has been an evolution in the form and content of modern Nigerian (African) art which is cognizant of global developments while not completely rejecting local heritage. This means therefore, that what is erroneously seen as alienation is actually a hybridized and synthesized mannerism of adored traditional creative values with the state-of-the-art development in art making worldwide. As a consequence, anything contrary to the foregoing, rules out the dynamism in African art.

The Art Works

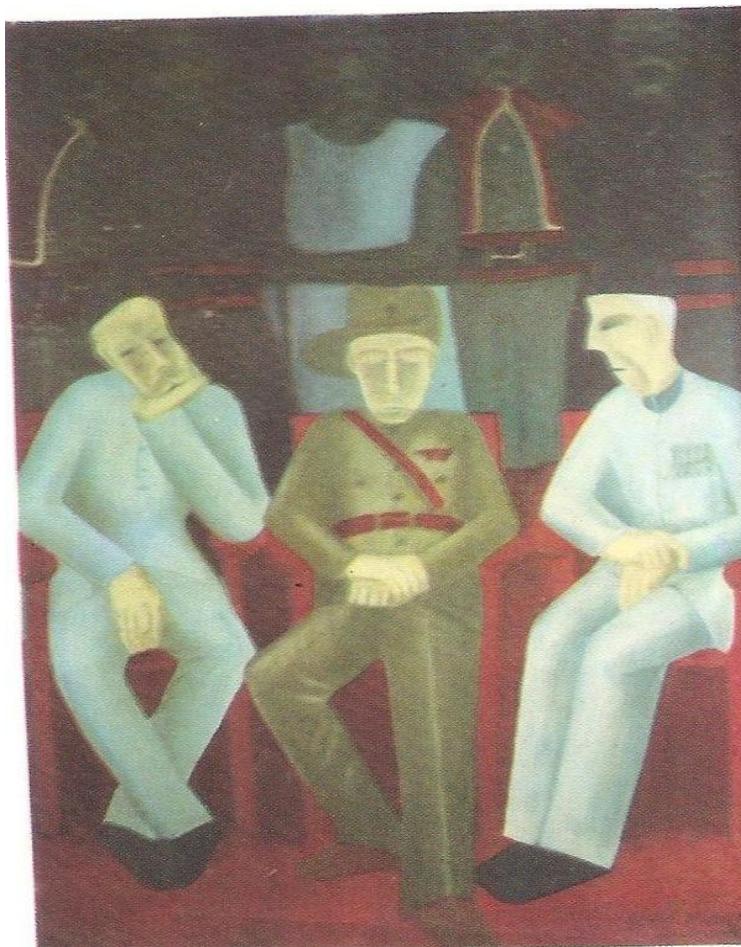


Fig.1: Demas Nwoko, *Nigeria in 1959*, 1960. Oil on board, 136cm x 96.5cm. Courtesy: P.C. Dike and P. Oyelola (eds.), The Zaria Art Society: A New Consciousness.



Fig 2: Yusuf Grillo, *Mother & Child*, c.1960. Oil, 1.5cm x 1.0cm. Courtesy: The [Nucleus – Maiden Catalogue of Works in Nigeria's National Gallery of Art.

ARCHETYPAL SYMBOLS OF 'TRADITION' IN 'MODERNITY': REVISITING THE WORKS OF THE INDEPENDENCE DECADE IN MODERN NIGERIAN ART - A. Augustine-Neto Emiemokumo.



Fig 3: Ben Enwonwu, *Anyanwu*, 1961. Bronze, Courtesy: P. Oyelola. Everyman's Guide to Nigerian Art.



Fig 4: Uche Okeke, *Ana (Mother Earth)*, 1962. Gouache, 50.5cm x 38.5cm. Courtesy: P.C. Dike and P. Oyelola (eds.), *The Zaria Art Society: A New Consciousness*.

ARCHETYPAL SYMBOLS OF 'TRADITION' IN 'MODERNITY': REVISITING THE WORKS OF THE INDEPENDENCE DECADE IN MODERN NIGERIAN ART - A. Augustine-Neto Emiemokumo.



Fig 5: Clara Ugbodaga-Ngu, *Horse Rider*, 1965. Oil. Courtesy: C.O. Adepegba. Nigerian Art: Its Traditions and Modern Tendencies

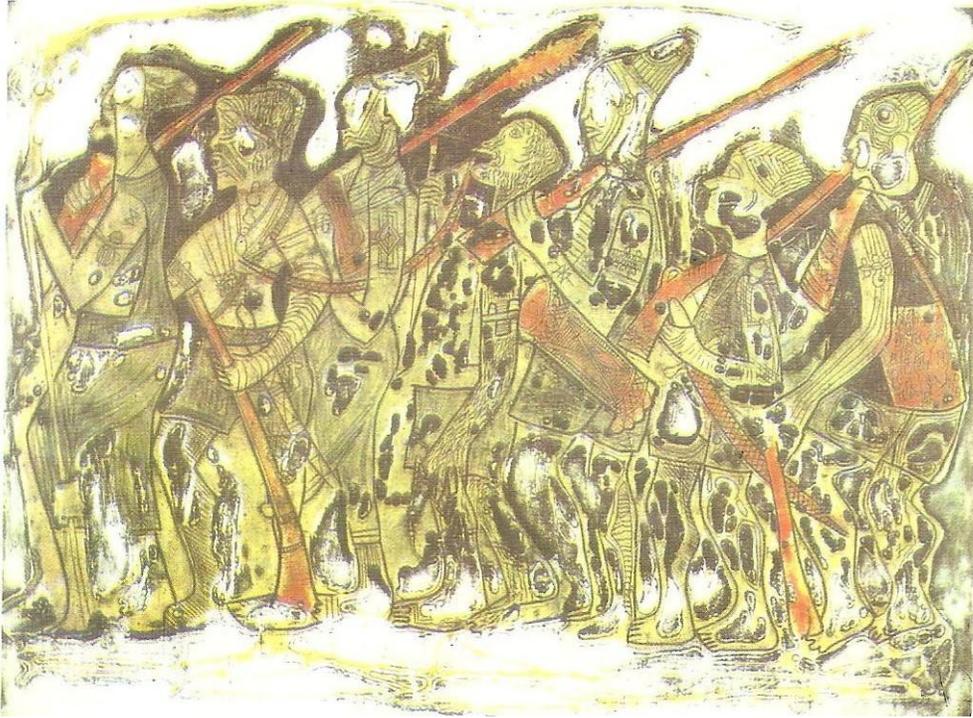


Fig 6: Bruce Onobrakpeya, *The Seven Hunters*, 1970. Plastograph, 59.5cm x 85.3cm. Courtesy: P.C. Dike and P. Oyelola (eds.), *The Zaria Art Society: A New Consciousness*.

References

- Adepegba, C.O. (1995). *Nigerian Art: Its Traditions and Modern Tendencies*. Ibadan: Jodad Publishers.
- Aradeon, S.B. (1987). "Contemporary Nigerian Art, Tradition and National Unity", *Nigerian Magazine*, 55(1), 1-10.
- Audu, O.F. (2002). "Bruce Onobrakpeya's Rain and Cry at Otorogba: A Critical Analysis", in *Africa Studio – Journal of Creative Practice*. Harmattan, No. 3&4, pp.57-62.
- Beier, U. (1961). "Contemporary Nigerian Art", in *Nigerian Magazine*. No.68, March 1961.
- Dale, D. (1998). "Artists' Profiles" in Paul C. Dike and Pat Oyelola (eds.), *The Zaria Society: A New Consciousness*. Lagos: National Gallery of Art, pp.86-265.
- Dei-Anang, M. (1967). "Dear Africa" in Donatus, I. Nwoga (ed.) *West African Verse*.p.21.
- Diop, D. (1967). "Africa" in Donatus I. Nwoga (ed.) *West African Verse*. p.11.
- Ebeigbe, S. (2004). "Coral Beads: Its Significance and Uses in Benin Culture" in *Emotan: Journal of The Arts*. Vol. 2, 9-14.
- Egonwa, O.D. (2002). "Paintings of Demas Nwoko as an Aspect of Nigeria's Design History", *Design History in Nigeria*. Agberia, J.T. (ed). Abuja: NGA and AAID.
- Egonwa, O.D. (2005). *African Art: A Contemporary Source Book*. Abuja: National Gallery of Art.
- Egonwa, O.D. (2007). "Africa Versus Contemporary Art: That Which Jingles is Inexhaustible in a Healer's Goatskin Bag", *Abraka Humanities Review: A Journal of the Faculty of Arts*, pp.97 – 106.
- Eze, O.A. (1995). "Impact of Folklore on Nigerian Visual Art" in *USO: Nigerian Journal of Art*. 1 (1).
- Fagg, W. (1963). *Nigerian Images*. London: Lund Humphries.
- Fosu, K. (1993). *20th Century Art of Africa*. Accra: Artists Alliance.
- Hirsch, L. (2008). "Bonding With Your Baby". [www.Kidshealth.org>KidsHealth> Parent](http://www.Kidshealth.org/KidsHealth/Parent). Accessed on 20/8/2011
- Ikpakronyi, S.O. (2009). "Modern African Art: Issues and Matters Asiring" in *Aresuva: African Regional Summit and Exhibition on Visual Arts*. Abuja: National Gallery of Arts, pp.10-34.
- Ikwuemesi, C.K. (2000). "Beyond these Pigeonholes: Redefining African Art in the 21st Century", Chike, C. Aniakor & C. Krydz Ikwuemesi (eds). *Crossroads: Africa in the Twilight*. Abuja: National Gallery of Arts. pp. 17 – 28.
- Kennedy, J. (1992). *New Currents, Ancient Rivers: Contemporary African Artists in a Generation of Change*. London: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Koech, K. (1977). "African Mythology: A Key to Understanding African Religion" in Newell S. Booth Jr. (ed.), *African Religions: A Symposium*. New Delhi: Nok Publishers Ltd, pp.117-139.
- Maitland, C. (2000). "Contemporary African Art: Western Attitudes", in Aniakor C.C. and C. Krydz Ikwuemesi (eds.) *Crossroads: Africa in the Twilight*. Abuja: National Gallery of Art, pp.47-60.
- Mount, M.W. (1973). *African Art: The Years Since 1920*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

- Murray, K.C. (1943). "Arts and Crafts in Nigeria: Their Past and Future", *Africa*. 14(4), pp.155-163.
- National Concord Newspaper (1992), p. 5.
- Ogbechie, S.O. (1991). "Introduction: The Nsukka School in Modern Nigerian Art" in *Homage: ArtGrads – UNN Exhibition Catalogue*, pp.9-11.
- Ogbechie, S.O. (2003). "Ben Enwonwu, Zarianist Aesthetics and the Postcolonial Criticism of Modern Nigerian Art", C. Krydz Ikwuemesi (ed). *The Triumph of a Vision: An Anthology on Uche Okeke and Modern Art in Nigeria*. Lagos: Pendulum Art Gallery. pp. 175 – 192.
- Okeke, C. (1995). "The Quest: From Zaria to Nsukka" in Deliss, C. (ed.), *Seven Stories About Modern Art in Africa*. London: White Chapel Gallery, pp.41-75.
- Okeke, U. (1982). *Art in Development: A Nigerian Perspective*. Nimo: Orion Printing Inc.
- Oyelola, P. (1976). *Everyman's Guide to Nigerian Art*. Lagos: Nigeria Magazine Cultural Division, Federal Ministry of Information.
- The Awakening* (2008). The Ben Enwonwu Foundation Bulletin. Lagos: Revilo Design in Association with the Ben Enwonwu Foundation. No. 1. July-Sept.
- Udechukwu, O. (1981). "Uli" and "Li": Aspects of Igbo and Chinese Drawing and Painting" in *Nigeria Magazine*, No. 134-135, pp.40-50.
- Ugiomoh, F. (2001). "Rethinking Eclecticism and Hybridization in Contemporary Visual Arts in Nigeria", C. Krydz Ikwuemesi and Ayo Adewunmi (eds). *A Discursive Bazaar: Writing on African Art, Culture and Literature*. Enugu: The Pan-African Circle of Artists. pp. 77 – 92.
- Ugiomoh, F. (2006). "Dak' Art 06: On/Of Identity Politics" in *Agufon: Journal of the Arts and Architecture*, 3 (1), 15-18.
- Willett, F. (2002). *African Art*. New York: Thames & Hudson Inc.