

BEN ENWONWU

Distinguished Lecture Series

Wole Soyinka

Art, Tradition and Modernity

NIGERIAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

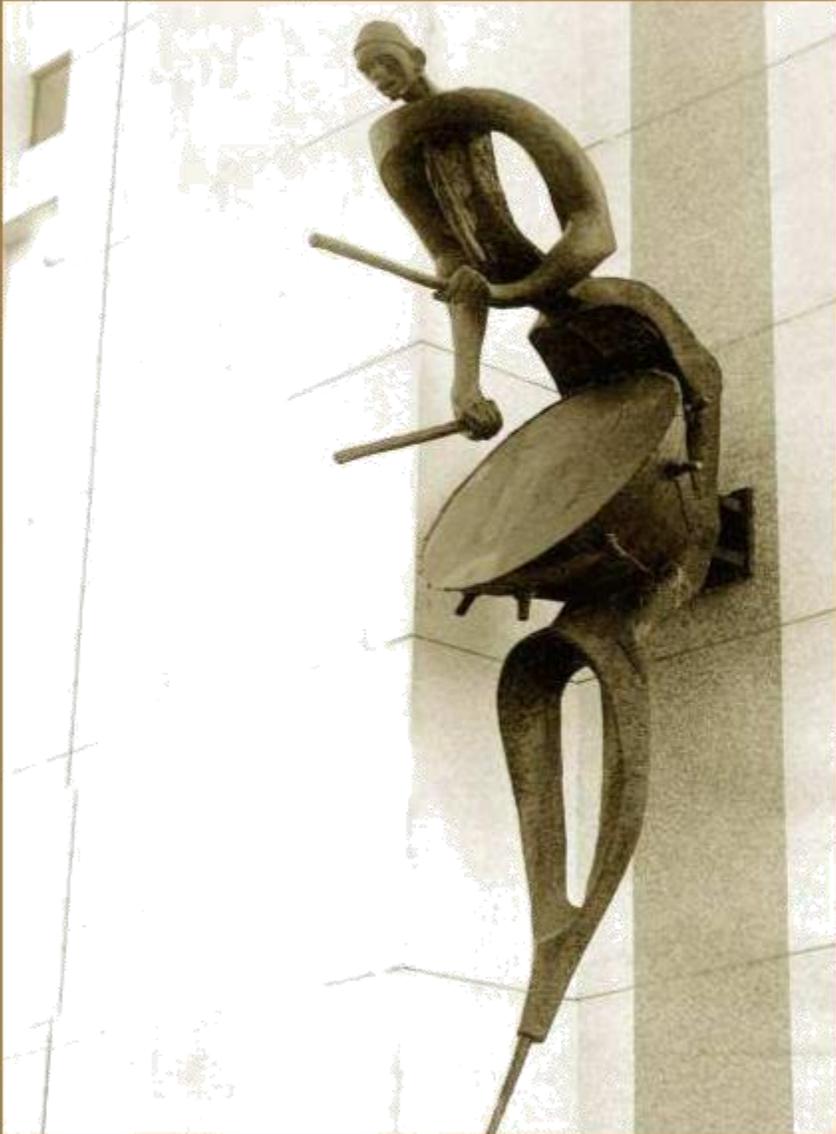


Photo. Kelechi Amadi-Obi

The Drummer 1978, bronze

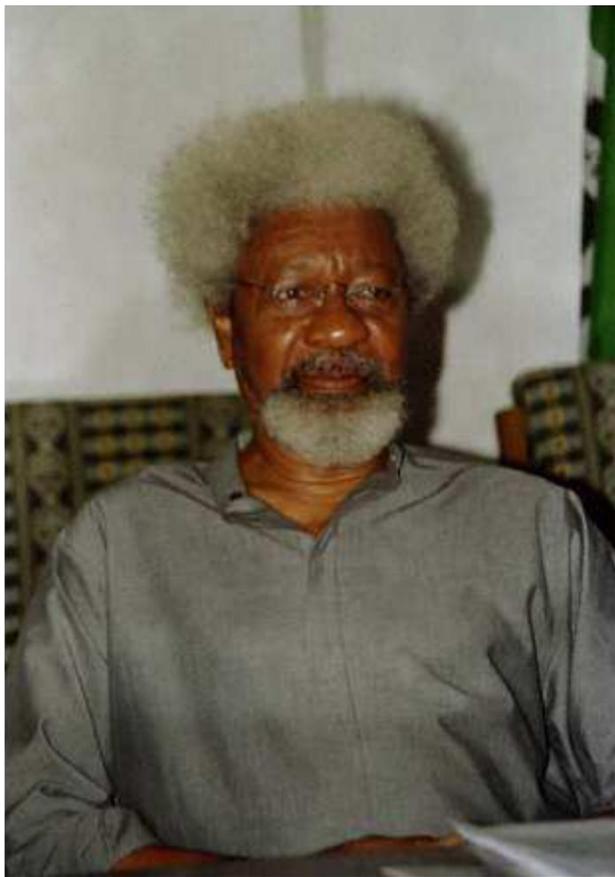
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THE BEN ENWONWU FOUNDATION

Distinguished Lecture Series

**Delivered on the May 2, 2006 at
THE NIGERIAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, LAGOS**

Prof. W ole Soyinka

Art, Tradition and Modernity

under the distinguished chairmanship of

Chief Philip Asiodu, CON

Izoma Onyaa of Asaba

Guests of Honour

Chief (Mrs) Opral M. Benson MON , CSA

Iya Oge of Lagos

Chief Tayo Akpata

Ogbesoba of Benin

BIOGRAPHY OF W OLE SOYINKA

Prof. Oluwole Akinwande Soyinka is the Elias Ghanem Professor of Creative Writing at the English Department of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and the president's Management Institute Professor-in-Residence at Loyola Management University in Los Angeles, California. Soyinka has been a consistently courageous voice for human rights world over and a force in national politics. He is the author of over thirty titles in all genres. In 1986, he became the first black African to win the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Wole Soyinka was born on July 13, 1934 and holds a B.A from the University of Leeds, UK and has held several positions in the academia. From 1969-71 was Head, Department of Theatre Arts, University of Ibadan, Professor of Dramatic Literature, University of Ife, 1972 and visiting Professor in Drama, Sheffield University, UK. In 1975, Soyinka was appointed Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Ife, Nigeria.

Prof. Soyinka has received many awards, including, a New Statesman John Whiting award (1966) and a honorary DLitt by the University of Leeds. He was also awarded the George Benson Medal of the Royal Society of Literature. He was made a Fellow at Churchill College, Cambridge University in 1973-74. He was also awarded a UNESCO medal for the arts.

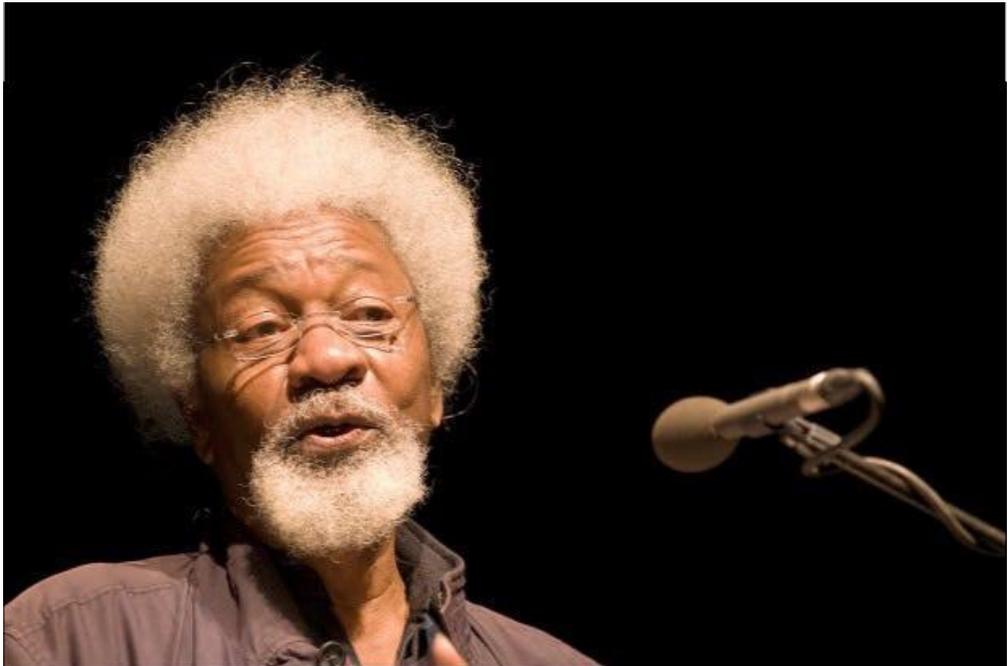
In 1993, Soyinka was awarded a honorary doctorate from Havard University and was appointed UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for the promotion of African Literature and Communication (1994).

Wole Soyinka is the author of many books, plays, poems and short stories. These includes 'The Lion and the Jewel' (1963), The Trials of Brother Jero (1963) and its sequel, Jero's Metamorphosis (1974), 'A Dance of the Forest' (1963), 'Kongi's Harvest' (1967), 'Madmen and Specialists' (1971) 'Death and the King's Horsemen' (1975) and 'The Interpreters' which was awarded the Jock Campbell prize for Commonwealth Literature,

Throughout, Prof. Soyinka has been an ardent advocate of human rights and in 2005 became a founding member of Pro-National Conference Organization (PRONACO). Throughout, Wole Soyinka has been an ardent advocate of human



rights worldwide. In 2005, he became one of the spearheads of an alternative National conference-PRONACO.



OPENING REMARKS BY CHIEF P.C. ASIODU CON

Your Excellencies, Chiefs, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am grateful to the Ben Enwonwu Foundation for inviting me to be the chairman on this occasion - the 3rd Prof. Ben Enwonwu Annual Memorial Lecture. It is for me a great honour. I believe the late Prof. Ben Enwonwu remains Africa's greatest and most famous artist of modern times. I am indeed pleased the lecture is to be delivered by Prof. Wole Soyinka, Africa's First Nobel Laureate in Literature.



We must congratulate the trustees and members of the Ben Enwonwu foundation for the tremendous work which they are doing in sustaining the Foundation. I know how difficult it is in the current circumstances of our country. But, despite all the odds it is necessary to immortalize Prof. Ben Enwonwu, to inform the present and future generations about his great place in the history of art in Africa and beyond. I commend the foundation for its several projects. I appeal to those of us here and our friends who are not already doing so to support the Foundation generously so it can succeed in realising its mission. I first met Prof. Enwonwu early in 1957 when I came back from my studies in England and started work at the Chief Secretary's Office in Lagos. We immediately became friends. He was already then an internationally renowned artist.

Prof. Enwonwu was happy in the company of younger friends. He was an excellent conversationalist, full of jokes and anecdotes. Hours fled away quickly in his company. He was also a good listener to humorous tales and would laugh heartily.

Whenever he visited New York during my posting to the Nigeria Mission to the United Nations from 1960 to 1962 Ben Enwonwu would stay with me. I recall not only the many times we spent together but also how much I learnt from our conversations which ranged widely over art, the history of our people in Nigeria and of course the evolving post-Independence politics of Nigeria. You can imagine how painful it was later for him and I as members of a Nigeria generation born and bred in circumstances

which held out the vista of uninterrupted progress and development for Nigeria, to agonise in our discussions over the post-1964 developments; the first military overthrow of civilian government in 1966, the Civil War years, and the continuing crises after that. Indeed Prof. Ben Enwonwu felt deeply for Nigeria and its peoples.

During his creative years of six decades, Prof. Enwonwu gave the world many great works of sculpture and painting. I hope the foundation will be able to find the major ones and at least catalogue them. My great regret is that I was able to acquire only a few, items - too few. I can confirm what Chief Arthur Mbanefo said at the First Ben. Enwonwu Annual Memorial Lecture. I quote him: "Ben had a special attachment to his works and was always reluctant to sell them as many of his friends will easily testify" How lucky the collectors who have his major works!

I should not tax your patience further, or the patience of our distinguished lecturer. Your Excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I now invite Prof. Wole Soyinka to deliver the 3rd Ben Enwonwu Annual Memorial Lecture.

I thank you.



Art, Tradition and Modernity

The Third Distinguished Lecture

Wole Soyinka

What a great pity we do not treasure archives in this nation the way others do. It would have been most instructive to revisit a tape from the early days of WNTV- the Western Nigeria Television Service, and listen to the tape of a debate that I once held with our late 'Uncle Ben' over his representation of two Nigerian deities that have become iconic landmarks in the progression of Nigerian art into a contemporary world. Those two figures were of 'Mammy Wata', which levitates gracefully, like a ship's figurehead from the wall of the broadcasting station and 'Sango' whose forceful figure stands outside the NEPA building along the Marina. I had certain strictures about the 'literal' forms of those sculptures, especially the former's graft of naturalism with the fantasist and said so on air. Ben was at his combative best refusing to yield an inch. The argument waxed so hot, he even reminded me that he trained at the Slade School of Art and therefore knew his onions. I stuck to my guns and we went at it full tilt until Segun Olusola, who was either moderating or producing, I forget which, regretfully signalled time up. Then we proceeded to, I think it was the Mbari Club and continued the argument over bottles of star. In fact, the argument did not end until some weeks later when we met in Lagos, at his invitation. He had invited me to come and see some of his latest works which, he vowed would underline what I had failed to see in those two public works. No sooner had I stepped into his studio than I stopped at one of his other sculptures, pointed to it and said, "Aha, you see, this illustrates the very point I was making. I prefer the way you've married those elements here." I've never forgotten the look on Enwonwu's face. He stood looking at that piece for some moments, then he gave me a very strange smile and said, "well, that was done later. As a matter of fact, I prefer that too."

It did not of course prove the point I had been making. The story is only offered here as my most vivid recollection of all our encounters. And this was how Ben Enwonwu and I became friends. We did not meet much physically, being both peripatetic, but we kept in touch by phone, especially when he moved to London.

I regard modernity as an expression of the condition of human society at any given moment, irrespective of culture or geography.

Nobody appears to know exactly what post-modernism means, which is perhaps its best known feature. Indeed, the only constant to be found in what goes by post-modernist discourse is the overall confusion about what it is, what it does, how it affects our thinking, living environment and perception habits or indeed, our politics.

Now to the substance of this annual lecture to Ben Enwonwu's memory. And let me begin with a minor note, not all that important really, but the full title of the lecture is actually Art, Tradition and Modernity, then hasten to warn that my intention here is not to by it place modernity in a hostile, oppositional mode to tradition, but that will of course become quite clear as we proceed. First of all, I regard modernity as an expression of the condition of human society at any given moment, irrespective of culture or geography. It would thus be a waste of energy to confront, with a negative apprehension, what is, in effect, a reality of human progression. Note, I do not say progress, but progression. Modernity defines the very consciousness of time, and no one is about to argue against time, even within cultures or indeed in some scientific propositions, where time is conceived as cyclic and not linear. All right, we know that even in supposedly advanced nations, we encounter neo-Luddite communities such as the Amish of the United States, where the most modern form of conveyance that is tolerated for daily locomotion is the horse and cart. For such communities, time stood still with the invention of the wheel, the cottage loom, and the scythe. Radio and television remain works of the devil while electricity is a foretaste of the hell fires that await all those who indulge in any of the foregoing corruptions of the human soul, those who attempt to tamper with the pristine, uncorrupted idyll as consecrated usually by one scripture or another. The Talibans also offer us another extreme example, not that this ever stopped them utilizing the most ultra-modern weaponry in their war against 'infidels'. Their war against the devil's innovations such as the cinema, videos, jeans or electric razors was mind-boggling in its selectivity. However, no matter how rigorously such communities persist in remaining 'in denial', they do know that they live within a modern world. In short, there is a palpable reality out there somewhere, which they have chosen to reject and sometimes, they discover

that it is not one that they can avoid in entirety. Indeed, the sociology of such societies indicates very clearly that, from time to time, some accommodation is made towards modernity. Maybe they do remain a century or so behind the rest of the world but, daily existence is never exactly as it was at the origination of their guiding scriptures.

I also have no intention of getting into that quagmire of discourse that goes by faddist expressions such as postmodernism. Nobody appears to know exactly what postmodernism means, which is perhaps its best known feature. Indeed, the only constant to be found in what goes by post-modernist discourse is the overall confusion about what it is, what it does, how it affects our thinking, living environment and perception habits or indeed, our politics. However, postmodernism remains a convenient expression for certain tendencies; artistic, architectural and societal general design that are not entirely covered by the conceptual motions of the past century or so. With modernism or modernity, or the social agenda that goes by the term modernization, I believe we are on safer grounds, certainly one that is devoid of mystification, especially when that word is encountered in tandem with tradition.

It is now three or four years since the London based Nigerian artist, Chris Ofili, created a sensation through an art piece, part of an exhibition of modern art in a New York gallery. I am no longer quite sure of the title of that work, but it was either 'Madonna' or 'The Virgin Mary.' This work would probably have been admired for itself, and perhaps be classified among the so-called naive tradition, or neo-primitivist, except for one factor, its medium. The 'paint' was no paint at all but, as some of you who followed the saga may recall, elephant dung. Was this an artistic breakthrough? We know what a breakthrough it must have been for the elephant as it offloaded its digestive system. And it is tempting to imagine what critical illumination the elephant may have provided, if only it were possible to invite him to view the artistic conversion of his deposit and offer an opinion. That leaves the task to us, the human viewers. And one place where we may usefully begin is with the question, was it relevant that we knew what the medium was to form an opinion of its artistic value? Did the medium thereafter overwhelm the form? Overwhelm the execution? Overwhelm the colour scheme? Overwhelm the figurative composition itself? Think of all the monochromatic subtleties that elephant or indeed any other animal waste can offer! Did the medium permanently impair our perceptions but, finally, could it be

considered a statement of modernism in the painterly mode? Why on earth did the painting create such a furore and does it, even today, defy classification?

There was of course the religious aspect. Complaints were not in short supply the work was blasphemous; you simply do not depict a divine personage in elephant dung. I hold no brief for the offended, needless to say, any more than I place myself in the artist's corner. If one considers a religion like Buddhism, it is more than likely the true Buddhist versed in the profundity of contradictions, ever seeking revelation in seeming trivia or banalities, would find it a most appropriate gesture in the world for an artist to depict a bodhisattva in animal dung. And anyone familiar with the narratives of Ifa, the Yoruba divination corpus where the adventures of the orisa - the deities, often constitute pointers to divination, would find the deities would take no offence whatever in being kneaded and moulded out of a pile of animal dung. The problem therefore appears to have been one of context. A representation that derived from what in other societies, would be regarded as appropriate within the bounds of tradition, but is now projected into an environment that is defined by its own notions of artistic proprieties.

The town in which I was partially raised, Isara, was a typical medium-sized ancient settlement. Fifty years ago, you could describe it as nibbling at, yet retreating from the edges of modernity as understood and lived in the then capital, Lagos, and even to some extent, Abeokuta

the other parental town in which I schooled, and where most of my upbringing took place. Perhaps some of you have encountered the biography that I wrote around my father, and to which I gave the title of that town ISARA: A Voyage Around Essay. Essay was of course the childhood nickname that I gave my father, whose initials - S.A, coalesced in my childhood imagination as one word, 'essay'. Well, unlike Abeokuta just sixty kilometres from Isara, where no structure would be considered civilized or modern unless its floors were finished in cement, then laid over with plastic linoleum, rose above one floor and was crowned in corrugated iron sheets. The traditional material in Isara and similar villages for what you might call a floor finish was, eleboto, cow dung. This dung was pounded into a mush with some special herbs. The slurry was then plastered, usually in spiralling motions on the floor which was made of baked mud.

The plastering, usually done by women, was carried out not only at the time of raising the hut but periodically afterwards. Sometimes the walls were similarly treated, plastered at least halfway up. It gave off a pungent, sweet-sickly smell. I know I was always in two minds about it. There was a peaty tang about the odour, not surprisingly, and it was one that was not unpleasant, but perhaps the association with animal deposit tended to put me off. The remarkable discovery that I made much later was that this paste was proven scientifically, to be an effective germicide. It disinfected the house and repelled many known germs that would normally feel at home within the mud floor.

However, for the indigenes themselves, the cow dung, the herbal augmentation, or the combination of both, also served to keep evil spirits out of the home - and spirits, believe me, were not considered figments of the imagination. That this plastering was also done by women was not without its significance, for women have always been associated with the power of witchcraft and thus, in a way, this power is transferred to protecting the house in that act of coating the floor with their own hands.

By a coincidence, indeed, perhaps it was that encounter that took my mind back to Chris Ofili's painting and its multiple ramifications. Only six months ago, I was in the ancient city of Benin, filming a documentary for a British TV Channel 4 programme, where our subject took us to an environment that is perhaps best described as a nature preserve of art galleries and religious shrines, carved out of the inner boundaries of that ancient city. It was created and is still maintained by a unique persona who physically, and who knows, perhaps psychically also dominated his environment. He is regarded also as a diviner, artist, entrepreneur, publicist, theatre producer and voluble expositor all rolled in one. That artistic domain is a veritable nature-cum-artifice warren that yields a surprise at every turn, a shrine, a representation of a deity, carvings of legendary figures of Benin history, in some cases, scenic depictions of their adventures in bronze, in ivory, wood and stone, all interspersed with dense foliage, sacred trees, anthills and wooded grottos. In short, one of the most eclectic assemblages of classicism, naturalism and modernity that you could hope to see in man-created enclosure. If you find yourself in Benin, you should make a point of seeing this remarkable space known as the Ebohon Cultural Centre, and hopefully also meet its proprietor, Chief Osemweghie Ebohon. In October last year he was invited

back to the United States, where he mounted an art exhibition, directed his troupe of dancers and engaged a public discourse on Edo traditions between performances. That was not his first visit to the United States, especially in Florida state where he was featured at the grand opening of the African-American Research Centre at Ford Lauderdale in October 2002. High Priest Ebohon, to give him his full traditional title must have made quite an impact, judging by the fact that he had been invited back.

Right. Now why did Chris Ofili's sculpture and his ultra-modernism, take my mind to High Priest Ebohon? The answer is simple enough - the high priest was also rather obsessed with elephants. Their tusks were all over the place, in addition to sculptures and other art works in ivory, both ponderous and miniature. The highlight, and most memorable moment of instruction during that visit however, especially for my camera crew and the producer was when he went into an impassioned thesis on the curative and prophylactic virtues of elephant discharge. No, I'm afraid it was not exactly Chris Ofili's choice of exit but from the opposite end. If you are fortunate to find where the elephant has vomited in the forest, the high priest exhorted us his impromptu pupils, scoop it up, swallow some of it and take the rest home for the family. The producer who was both British and female, turned rather green at the thought of it. Curious and enterprising researcher though I consider myself, always ready to submit myself to any new culinary or prophylactic experience, I'm afraid I shall draw the line there. No matter, if you ever visit the cultural centre and you're not only interested in alternative medicine, but prepared to demonstrate that you have more mettle than Wole Soyinka, ask the High Chief for a spoonful. I am sure he always keeps some handy for emergencies. Allowing for the somewhat off-putting nature of this specific remedy for diseases known and unknown.

That little anecdote is not really intended to churn your stomach but your minds. It should remind us that even the medical field is not exempt from the constant encroachment of tradition on what goes by modernity, creating a constant of revisionism even in science, especially the curative sciences. I shall avoid falling for the tempting consideration of what constitutes modern medicine and traditional, now known today of course, as 'alternative medicine'. Except to remark how the traditional has been somewhat arrogantly deployed by that expression, alternative - to establish the place of Western medicine as the norm by which all scientific knowledge of the



body and its ailments is measured. We know to what 'alternative medicine' is an alternative. By whatever name, the inescapable fact is that traditional methods of diagnosis and medication will now be found on prominent display all over Europe and most especially in the United States. Not merely in hole-in-the-wall shops that deal with the esoteric but in Walgreen and Wal-Mart and Wall Street in short, a constantly ballooning multimillion industry. Traditional medicine has established its credentials in a way that interrogates modernity in the curative sciences. Indeed, the medical field alone makes one wonder if the title of this address should not be re-phrased as Modernity and the Lure of Tradition

Mind you, I would be the last to downgrade advances in medical technology, microsurgery, CAT scan and DOG scan or whatever. Not to mention what we might even designate virtual surgery, or telemedicine, where a patient in Maiduguri can be operated on by a surgeon in New Zealand, that is, without so much as touching the patient. I hope it is understood that I merely use Maiduguri as illustration. Not even the teaching hospitals in Lagos, Ibadan, or Zaria are yet equipped with technology that is fast conquering distances and overcoming inaccessibility in other parts of the world. To return to our theme however, these are unambiguous scientific advances, but they still do not assist us in defining where, today, the mainline curative science, as science parts company from its alternative. There is a lot more to be said in that vein, especially if we treat the principle of healing in a composite way, so we include the preventive, which might indeed have made a surgical intrusion unnecessary in the first place, and so on and on. So, let's pull away at this point from the fascination of Aesculapius, Hippocrates and their peers in antiquity, be they known as shamans, babalawo, mediums, faith healers all over the globe, and return to our chosen fields, cultural and artistic, with all their religious and spiritual implications.

All artists seek to be original, to startle, to astonish, and originality does not always imply significance or profundity, but may be manifested in an unaccustomed way of addressing the mundane, and thus, altering perception.

We were about to move from the domestic purlieu of the eleboto, animal dung to the spiritual. And I wanted to call attention to its use in some of the traditional shrines where it is not unusual to find sacred drums ringed with both human and animal depictions as well as statuaries of deities or cultic forces smeared with some of the same controversial material in addition to chalk, palm oil, camwood, resin, and other natural dyes. Chris Ofili is not Yoruba, but no one will deny that he is Nigerian and African. While I must confess that I have never seen any statuary made entirely of dung, the point one wishes to stress is that cow dung was not considered an impious presence in the sanctuaries of deities in several traditional societies. Was Chris Ofili reaching into traditional resources in the search for a modernist mode of representation? Was it case a of trying to go modern? Was this artist merely being sensationalist, seeking a shock effect? In other words, having taken the measure of artistic trends, and gauging, quite accurately, the fascination of the modern art consumer- especially of the European and American world for the 'bizarre', did our artist decide to beat them at their own game?

I should call your attention to the fact that it was during that same exhibition, that is, sharing the same space at the Tate Gallery, London, that one of the art works on exhibit was a series of photographs of the human edition of the same medium, that is, human turds. This material, in flotation, was photographed to simulate mysterious space objects trapped in weightlessness.

What I personally found far more fascinating reading than this strange object of contemplation were reviews in the British press that sought to explain how these translated into modern art. They varied between what we might call arty-art criticism to, rather laboured or constipated expositions no pun intended, but unavoidable. Not for nothing was the famous impresario, Diaghilev, reputed to have said when he first met Nijinsky, "Surprise me"! All artists seek to be original, to startle, to astonish, and originality does not always imply significance or profundity, but may be manifested in an unaccustomed way of addressing the mundane, and thus, altering perception. Our Nigerian artist here could easily have said to himself, so human waste can be turned into modern art? Well, bigger is better, bring on the pachyderms!

These are musings on the nature of art and, by extension, culture itself, of which art is itself a precipitate. While that controversy raged however, my mind was taken back



to yet another artistic event that took place much earlier, one that spanned two continents, Africa and Europe and was tagged “Africa 1998”. I wrote an article or two on that event, but I think this is a good occasion to revisit it. Its goals were contained in a lofty manifesto, and I quote:

“To facilitate greater visibility, understanding and access to the arts of Africa, and the African diaspora in key institutions in the United Kingdom promote artist - led Pan - African programmes, collaboration and networks both within Africa and the UK....to promote audience development etc”.

What remains unforgettable for me in that 1998 London exhibition - was that it took place at the same time, and within the same cultural environment as one of America's acknowledged moderns, Damien Hirst, right in the artistic heartland of London. If you are interested in issues of modernity in art, you should know something of Damien Hirst. I am no longer sure if he was the innovator, or simply one of the leading lights, of the form of art that is now known as installation. What is indisputable is that he has taken this form to unprecedented heights and scale.

However, at the time of the African invasion of London, Damien Hirst's offering was far more modest a mere stuffed sheep or two, complete with their wool, and an entire cow that had been frozen solid, then sliced in halves. Try to imagine the process, sawing an entire frozen cow in two, then preserving the twin halves in formaldehyde, to be placed in a glass case. Quite a striking display, I must admit, but, I would love to see the reaction of a herd of cattle driven past this exhibit, and compelled to pause and contemplate. It would be fascinating to attempt to decode their 'moo' before and after the experience.

Well, if we cannot exactly speak for the sheep and the bovine species, we can at least hazard a guess at the reaction of the traditional artist or art critic, admittedly speculatively, based however on existing theories of African art, especially as pronounced by foreign 'experts', and even their home-grown adherents. There are two conflicting schools: one insists that all African art is religious; the other that all African art is utilitarian. A notion, it must be added, that became quite fashionable by

There are two conflicting schools really; one insists that all African art is religious, the other that all African art is utilitarian. A notion it must be added, that became quite fashionable by African aesthetics theorists as well as African-Americans, especially during the periods of a people's quest for the recovery of their identity.

African aesthetics theorists as well as African-Americans, especially during the periods of a people's quest for the recovery of their identity. Who are we? What are we? Who were we? What were we? What should we become? Questions such as these soon grow tributaries that commence with, and are expressed as differences. How do we eat differently from which others? How do we drink differently? Do such differences bear any relation to our relationship to others? How does our response to phenomena differ from others? And then of course, how did we express such responses before we came into knowledge of parallel processes by the other. In short, what were our modes of representation, be these in wood, bronze, in music, performance or design, all efforts to define the province of aesthetics.

We know the proffered answers to these questions sometimes took on the stridency of radical rhetoric, taking its cue from combative ideologies especially during liberation struggles. It was true of the anticolonialist struggle, and indeed of the post-colonial ideological direction finding. The Black Liberation movement of the United States was not left untouched as it went from one end of the spectrum to the other. It produced essentialist concepts such as 'soul'. Do note however that, as the protagonists of 'soul' became increasingly enamoured of the class struggle as the path to socio-political liberation, even 'soul' underwent its period of repudiation - Soul might be soul, but in the theology of Marxist and allied revolutionary thought, the aesthetics of African art had to be utilitarian and revolutionary, an expression of the material condition of society.

The utilitarian catechism that became the banner of revolutionary art actually took off from ideology based reactions to the nineteenth century manifesto of 'art for art's sake', a notion that was considered a bourgeois, decadent European affectation. As a manifesto that sought to take its authority from the aesthetics of traditional African art

itself, it was based on a generalization that was every bit as invalid as that of its opposing school, the claim that all African art is spiritual. Both implicate the notion the traditional African artist was incapable of being impelled by the notion of 'art as an expression of aesthetic sensibilities'. It was of this latter school of strictly utilitarian art that I was thinking when, in an essay at the time, I proposed that we try to imagine the African traditional art critic encountering Damien Hirst's bovine 'sculpture', the frozen cow for the first time. No question at all, his spontaneous response would be 'ah, what a waste of good suya!

Clearly, as already advanced, the utilitarian theory of traditional art has no more validity than that of the religious, especially in its sweeping claims. Taken to its extreme, this school vilifies the traditional artist by imputing that he or she has no aesthetic sensibility whatever to begin with, and the act of 'making' is never governed by a sense of beauty, of delighting the eye and the senses. Ironically, the two schools end destroying each other's case, for surely the creative devotee of one deity or the other must be impelled by a desire to please the eye of his or her god or goddess. The artist who carves a shrine post to a deity is not thinking of the use to which the deity will put the post, any more than, in placing a votive vase on the altar, he or she believes the deity is going to eat from it or use it from daily ablution. This would be as ludicrous to take the sacrifices that one encounters at crossroads as food placed there, literally, for the gods to eat. Clearly, the artist is motivated by the thought of offering an object of beauty to decorate the shrine and enhance the environment of the gods; once that is conceded, we know we are already in the realm of aesthetic intent. It would be a waste of time to deny the existence of many African traditional art works that belong, unambiguously, to religious inspiration and are an expression of spiritual devotion.

. . . the utilitarian theory of traditional art has no more validity than that of the religious, especially in its sweeping claims.

If I may return briefly to the literal, simplistic, and deliberately derogatory understanding placed on the element of sacrifice in traditional society, I think perhaps it is easy enough to understand when one considers religions such as Christianity

whose lethal battles have been waged between the literal and the symbolic interpretations placed on the doctrine of Transubstantiation. When the words of the great avatar, Jesus Christ, are taken literally 'This is my blood, drink therefrom; this is my flesh, partake of it and live' it becomes easy to understand why, on encountering a strange religion, the school of literalism would feature in interpreting what are purely symbolic acts of reverence to the ancestors or to the deities. The word that deserves a literal interpretation in this process is, in fact, 'communicant'. In other words, the act of placing food on the altar of the gods, on the crossroads, or indeed pouring libation to the ancestors, is no more than a communicant gesture, of binding oneself to the spiritual forces that rule human existence through one of the most basic, indeed unavoidable activity of the human, or indeed, animal species, eating or drinking. This is what sustains life, vitality and the continuity of the species. Whether one believes in any deity or not, we are all compelled to accept that Earth is the Source of the nourishment of life, and Sky is conjoined with earth in the most symbiotic relationship that of nourishing the earth in turn and replenishing the rivers, seas and lakes without which existence would be impossible. More of this in another place. Let us leave the last word to the valedictory liturgy of the Yoruba as they send off one of their own into the ancestral world,

'Ohun ti won ba nje l'orun, ba won je'

Translation: Whatever it is that they eat in the other world, that is what you must partake of. If the act of sacrifice or offering were indeed to be taken literally, such exhortation at the defining moment of transition would not exist. With that appropriately terminal statement on that theme, let us return to where we diverged; we were speaking of the aesthetic impulse of the traditional artist, and its evocation in the service of the deities.

It would be a waste of time to deny the existence of numerous African traditional art works that belong, unambiguously, to religious inspiration and are an expression of spiritual devotion.

My favourite example of such works and perhaps one of the best known all over the world is the Mbari of the Igbo, where clusters of sculptures are created specifically to honour the earth goddess, Ala. You still encounter what is left of these religious sculptures either singly or in groups on the Igbo landscape. They are mostly hidden in bushes, left to collapse and decay in the weather, and lately, suffer even a worse fate at the hands of latter-day Christian fundamentalists who persist in believing that these are relics of paganism and diabolism and deserve no less than instant destruction. I shall waste no more words on those miseducated minds. Let me refer you instead to my lecture, *Forget the Past, Forfeit the Future* delivered at the Conference of African Humanities, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria just a few months ago, in which I devoted a few paragraphs to those mindless zealots, both of the Christian and Islamic faiths, who, even in this twenty-first century have yet to wean themselves of the iconoclastic mentality that alien religions have been branded on their spiritual template.

Back to these innocent victims of blind prejudice: the sculptures are made principally of mud; they are painted over, sometimes in pastel, sometime in striking hues. Even the 'houses' in which the figures are sometimes sheltered, form part of the total sculptured scene, as are the animal figures and objects that adorn what might be a domestic situation, a royal or religious procession or the depiction of a special event in the calendar of the people.

Even more significant in their lives however, is the process that results in these artefacts. One that integrates the community as one, even as it identifies the chosen among them for this homage to the earth goddess, Ala. The artists are selected by revelation from the priest, although there are also cases where the individual artist obtains his inspiration directly from godhead. The collective process results in isolating the chosen artist or artists in a specially built compound and huts erected by the community. In previous times, they were led into this space in a celebratory procession by the entire village, after which they are shut off from the world. They undergo a process of purification and communion, and then commence work, remaining within the compound for weeks, sometimes months. Depending on the fecundity of the artistic impulse, they might remain within for almost a year, fed and nourished by the community. Our numerous state council of the Arts, and indeed the

Ministry of Culture may wish to take note and emulate. All mundane preoccupations are banished; the artist devotes himself or herself to the activity of homage to earth and its goddess, Ala, through a replication of her own act of creativity.

When they indicate their readiness, the outer wall is ceremonially taken down, the sculptures are consecrated and for a while, the environment of these artworks is carefully tended. Sometimes, the sculptures themselves are renovated as needed - a new coat of paint here and there, restoration to some cracks in the figures and so on.

When later, the priest obtains yet another vision for a new phase of creative reverence, the earlier sculptures are left to fend for themselves. They are overgrown by foliage, collapse or survive out of sight of humans, obeying the rhythms of birth and decay as an integrated process of Nature. Do observe that individually inspired artist, working in their own secluded spaces, also undergo the same process of purification, seclusion, communal care and outing.

Such religious works, and indeed the processes that result in the actual works, do not provoke the kind of reaction that we obtain from, shall we say, the Damien Hirst and allied modernist schools; installation, conceptual and so on, where we are sometimes compelled to confront the question of where the taxidermist and the artist meet or part company. They do not overturn the nature of mundane encounters. That is, they do not lead to a consciousness of a different relationship with either urban or rural realities. In other words, on passing for instance by a building site and responding with our normal fascination and admiration for the technology of ponderous excavators, high-rise cranes with vertiginously perched operators, stone crushers and pneumatic drills, we do not find ourselves tempted to commence an aesthetic interrogation of buildings under construction or restoration. Especially if they happen to be covered in dust-sheets or hoardings as they usually are in advanced countries, to conform perhaps with Local government council regulations for protection of passers-by. We do not by it begin to view such sites from an aesthetic point of view, asking, well, is this just a building site, or is it a work of art? Perhaps it is this blurring of artistic intent and designation that is responsible for that discourse the postmodernist towards which I have already signalled my own lack of interest. Certainly an intensified awareness of the blurring of categories, owing to many factors, including dramatic strides in technological innovations, has proved a non-negligible factor in inaugurating the so-



called postmodernist discourse.

Fortunately, we do not lack for examples of the conscious exploration of traditional art forms that have been translated on to a modernistic template. The European Expressionists remain the most notable instances of this genre and this applies not only to the art of the easel and chisel but also to dramatic texts and presentation modes of the expressionist period. Many art critics however fail to highlight the transition from tradition into modernity within the culture itself, being principally taken with the transcultural statements of Art, in the works of artists such as Picasso and Brancusi and so on. So let me leave with you with one example of this internal translation of past into present, of tradition into modern, settling any question of the notion of the transitional process from within our own environment.

We have already briefly introduced the Mbari of the Igbo, at once an artistic manifestation and a process of spiritual devotion. It is from within that culture that artists such as Chris Ofili have emerged but, far less controversially, the artistic works of even more seasoned artists such as Bruce Onobrakpeya, Muraina Oyelami, Twins Seven-seven, Uche Okeke, Onuora Udechukwu, El Anatsui - and more recently, Tola Wewe, Promise Ugochukwu and so on. They represent the modernist face of the Mbari and other traditional aesthetic sources. These artists have quarried backwards into traditional motifs of their own cultures and society and invest their works with an undeniable modernity that enable those works to take their place in galleries of modern art, whether on the African continent, in Europe or the United States. And thus, it is on the note of the Uli school that I wish to end, for reasons that will be made obvious in a moment. Uli is the collective name by which a group of modern Igbo artists identify themselves; Udechukwu, Uche Okeke among others. Despite their distinct individualities, the name summarises their mission, not simply to modernize, but to stress the modernity of the singular traditional art form that is the inspiration of

Many art critics however fail to highlight the transition from tradition into modernity within the culture itself, being principally taken with the trans-cultural statements of art, in the works of artists such as Picasso, Brancusi etc.

their own development.

But not just any art form. Quite deliberately, these artists set out to identify and isolate a specific artistic tradition, one that, significantly, belonged to women. Now why do I say, 'significantly'? Innovations in art often correspond to certain social developments be it in technology or the sciences, in response to social theories or, most dramatically, responses to certain events of immense social significance. Let us take a look at the period from which the Uli school emerged. It was after the Nigerian Civil War. The Igbo had fought a war of secession from the Nigerian nation, and they had lost. Igbo culture was battered, its self-assurance in tatters, its social achievements in disarray. There was a need for new directions and these were sought in every field, from religion to economics and the arts. A familiar project of self-recovery. New symbols of self-definition were sought, new insights into the nature of society itself. It was, let us recall, a dream of a new nation, Biafra that began with vibrant confidence, as expressed in these lines by Dorothy Obi, an Igbo poet:

The fire of their spirit which glows like a brand in the night
And flings a new anthem into the wind -
A pledge of allegiance, a promise,
Celebrating amidst travail and sorrow
the birth of our Nation, Biafra. (Biafra)

That dream ended in tragedy, a conclusion so poignantly given voice by that same poet:

Beyond the unknown dead along the rivers
Over whose bodies the worms twist and quiver
Desolation has passed into the tiny villages
To caress with cold fingers the foreheads of the mothers

We left the fields to the mobilized marchers
Our houses have been broken open for looters
Our flower gardens ground beneath the soldiers' heels

The poet however asserts the place of commitment, and the hope of renewal:

Land that I love, Biafra, from whose pan-roofed schools have
come Ahoard of barefoot children bravely sporting uniforms
My memories arise and catch me by the throat...
....But our spirits rise like our breath from this frosty air
To hover over the fields of Nsukka...

This was the world of despondency from which the new artists strove to find meaning, to extract symbols for the resuscitation of a battered identity. They found it in the art of the women, their fabric designs which were themselves derivatives of religious symbols from antiquity, carefully preserved by the women and brought into the contemporary moment of their lives. The contemporary artist often finds himself thrust into the role of the healer, a mender of broken images.

Let us recognize that creative movements do not always require thank goodness! the visitation of collective disasters, to translate the past into the present. However, they serve as a process that acts as a bridge between both, over which our sensibilities as appreciative consumers of works of imagination are manipulated. What the Uli school set out to achieve in the representational medium is more or less what the modern African writer, or indeed, performer, dance, theatre, music strives towards. It underlines for us this truth: that our concept of tradition, and of modernity cannot expect to be exempted from the blurring of lines of division. And this is certainly one helpful way for the outsider to learn to view African cultural traditions, recognizing that, just as with Europe, the lines of modernity and tradition are often indistinct, even so must it be in other cultures. And as our artists increasingly encounter, interact with, influence and are influenced by the works of their counterparts outside the continent, it becomes even clearer the binary concept of Africa and Europe as paradigms of

... that our very concept of tradition, and of modernity cannot expect to be exempted from the blurring of lines of division, and this is certainly one helpful way for the outsider to learn to view african cultural traditions, recognizing that, just as with europe, the lines of modernity and tradition are often indistinct, even so must it be in other cultures.

tradition and modernity needs to be similarly discarded or drastically modified. When we view the work of Brazilian or Cuban artists for instance, Abdias do Nascimento to name one who is known to many of us here, with their vibrant use of traditional motifs from Africa, we encounter further evidence of the wilful, promiscuous nature of art, as a vehicle for man's innermost, yet restless, transformative intuitions, transcending boundaries, ages and races. Thus, while it is useful to point out the European expressionists as I did earlier as the movement that validated African art in the domain of the Western world, it is even more important to recall that formal transpositions have also been taking place in that part of the African continent that was forcibly transported to Brazil, Cuba, Columbia, Mexico and indeed North America. A new contemporary wave of which Chris Ofili, the artist with whom I begin this discourse is a part constantly questions and expands even the modernist parameters of a world outside our own continent. As the lesser known within the continent itself, continue to refurbish those forms that modernization or religious assaults have thrown on to the scrap heap of neglect and obscurity. And there lies the grand paradox of the artistic process. These artists often prove the true modernizers who, quarrying deeply into the past, bring out the ancestral forms to give meaning to our increasingly fractured, often alienating present.



RELATED RESOURCES

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WEBSITES:

Tate Gallery of Art. Tate is the United Kingdom's national museum of British and Modern Art, and is a network of four art galleries in England: Tate Britain (opened in 1897 and renamed in 2000), Tate Liverpool (1988), Tate St Ives (1993) and Tate Modern (2000). Visit <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tate>

'Holy Virgin Mary'. Chris Ofili's 1996 portrait of a black Madonna at <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G1-58616908.html>

The Turner Prize. A contemporary art award that was set up in 1984 to celebrate new developments in contemporary art. The prize is awarded each year to: 'a British artist under fifty for an outstanding exhibition or other presentation of their work in the twelve months preceding'.

Nominations are invited each year, and the prize is judged by an independent jury that changes annually. The four shortlisted artists' present works in a show normally held at Tate Britain before the winner is announced in December. Artists are not judged on their show at Tate the decision is based on the work they were nominated for. Over the last two decades the Turner Prize has played a significant role in provoking debate about visual art and the growing public interest in contemporary British art in particular, and has become widely recognized as one of the most important and prestigious awards for the visual arts in Europe. Retrieved November 2008 from <http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/turnerprize/>. "Elephant Dung" artist, Chris Ofili wins the 1988 Turner Prize see. <http://www.culturekiosque.com/art/news/rheturn.htm>. (also See Damien Hirst at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Damien_Hirst)

Expressionist Period at <http://www.arthistoryguide.com/Expressionism.aspx>
Retrieved September 2008 from <http://www.art-prints-on-demand.com/a/franz-marc.html>

African mythology. Covers a large area. There are so many countries, regions, languages, tribes, cultures and imperialist crossovers that the sheer diversity of prevailing Gods would seem overwhelming if there weren't a few handy shortcuts. Traditional African belief is overwhelmingly monotheistic. There may be spirits and ancestors floating around, but there's only one God. Early missionaries made a complete pig's ear of their research in this respect and seem to have delighted in cataloging as many 'heathen' Gods as they could possibly getaway with. Retrieved November 2008 from <http://www.godchecker.com>

Yoruba mythology. One of the world's oldest widely practised religions. It is a major religion in Africa, chiefly in Nigeria, and it has given origin to several New World religions such as Santería in Cuba and Candomblé in Brazil. Itan is the term for the sum total of all Yoruba myths, songs, histories, and other cultural components. Many ethnic Yoruba were enslaved and taken to Cuba, Brazil, Trinidad and the rest of the New World (chiefly in the 19th century, after the Oyo empire collapsed and Yoruba mythology is only one part of itan the complex of myths, songs, histories and other cultural concepts which make up the Yorùbá religion and society. Itan is the term for the sum total of all Yoruba myths, songs, histories, and other cultural components. Retrieved November 2008 <http://www.onlinenigeria.com> A

Luddite. A person who dislikes technology, especially technological devices that threaten existing jobs or interfere with personal privacy. The word Luddite has an interesting origin in pop culture of the early 1800's. Legend has it that a young man name Ned Ludd broke an expensive knitting machine in Nottingham, England. Because Ned was considered to be "feeble-minded" by his boss, he wasn't held financially responsible for the broken equipment. Afterwards, when factory equipment broke, the damage was always blamed on Ned Ludd. Retrieved November

2008 <http://whatis.techtarget.com/>

Black Liberation Movement. Marcus Garvey and the Black liberation movement he founded are largely forgotten today. But Garvey and his movement constitute one of the most important, innovative, and original of all contributions to the struggle for Black and African liberation. Moreover, in the current period of decline in the world economic culture, with its inevitable concomitant revival of issues of class and race, Garvey and his movement can provide powerful inspiration and lessons for both Black and Non-Black members of the planetary under and working classes.

Essentially, the Black liberation movement in the United States is constituted to secure and safeguard the rights of a people to be free from all oppression Retrieved November 2008 from <http://www.pww.org/article/articleprint/6513/>

Doctrine of Transubstantiation. Eleventh century dogma of the Catholic Church; proclaiming that in Holy Communion, the bread and wine of the host are transmogrified into the body and blood of Christ; doctrinal basis for the validity of what is obviously a placebo sacrament. Retrieved November 2008 from <http://deoxy.org>

Modern Art logo. Artists · Exhibitions · News · Publications · Contact · David Altmejd - The Healers - Modern Art · David Altmejd / 17 October - 15 .www.modernart.net

Mbari of the Igbo. The first Mbari Club was founded in Ibadan in 1961 by a group of young writers with the help of Ulli Beier, a teacher at the University of Ibadan. Mbari, an Igbo (Ibo) word for “creation,” refers to the traditional painted mud houses of the area, which must be renewed periodically. Retrieved November 2008 www.britannica.com

African Art & Religion

The arts are integral to the expression of African-derived religions and include chants, dance, rituals, ceremonies, feasts, altar construction, cloth work, beadwork (collares de mazo), ritual coverings (bandeles), carvings, paintings, and sculptures. The arts bring cosmology and ritual into the quotidian and the ceremonial without losing the



profundity of their contextual (and contested) referential meanings. The visual arts come in a variety of media and colors; the drums and divination tools are constructed from a variety of colorful materials. Artistic objects ground ashe in the individual and the community.

<http://science.jrank.org/pages/11057/Religion-African-Diaspora-Religion-Arts.html>>Religion - African Diaspora - Religion And The Arts

Aesthetics in African art. In African art, 'aesthetics' is a term used to sum up the characteristics and elements clearly present in all arts objects. These elements include, for example, the resemblance of sculptures to human beings, the luminosity or smoothness of an objects surface, the youthful appearance of sculptures, and the way sculptures portray a reserved or composed demeanor. Similarly, in Western art aesthetics is also the term used to sum up the search for beauty, balance, proportion and conscientious use of materials, in order to achieve good craftsmanship in art objects. (Bromer, Gerald F. Discovering Art History, 1981.)

Postmodern art. A term used to describe art which is thought to be in contradiction to some aspect of modernism, or to have emerged or developed in its aftermath. In general movements such as Intermedia, Installation art, Conceptual Art and Multimedia, particularly involving video are described as postmodern. The traits associated with the use of the term postmodern in art include bricolage, use of words prominently as the central artistic element, collage, simplification, appropriation, depiction of consumer or popular culture and Performance art.

Source: Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Uli. The ancient body painting art form practiced by and for Igbo women, a predominantly Christian ethnic group in Nigeria. Uli artists adorned women's bodies with geometric and organic designs for special occasions or ceremonies, using dark ink that temporarily stained the skin. Historically, uli art could be found all over southeastern Nigeria, where Igbo peoples mainly reside, but by the mid 20th century the tradition had almost died out. In the 1970s, uli forms began appearing in the work

of contemporary male Nigerian artists. Retrieved November 2008 <http://www.imow.org>

NIJINSKY

Vaslav Nijinsky (1890-1950), Russian ballet dancer and choreographer, celebrated for his virtuosity and for the depth and intensity of his characterizations. Considered among the great male dancers in history, Nijinsky had remarkable technical powers; his grands jetés, for example, created the illusion that he was suspended in midair. Retrieved November 2008 from <http://www.encarta.msn.com>

Nijinsky. His brilliant career as a choreographer and performer was cut drastically short by a nervous breakdown he suffered in his mid-twenties. He returned to dancing in his thirties, but was subsequently hospitalized as suffering from chronic schizophrenia. Retrieved November 2008 from <http://www.artandculture.com>

Diaghilev, Sergei (1872-1929) . The Russian nobleman Sergei (or Serge) Pavlovitch Diaghilev revolutionized music, the visual arts, theater, and dance, and he set the course of the arts for the twentieth century. He discovered talent and nurtured it to fulfillment in breathtaking productions of art exhibitions, concerts, operas, and, especially, ballets. Diaghilev brought together the talents of his discoveries--artists such as Vaslav Nijinsky, Igor Stravinsky, Jean Cocteau, Pablo Picasso, Michel Fokine, Léonide Massine, and George Balanchine, to name only a few--to assemble an unsurpassed "total theater." Retrieved November 2008 from http://www.glbtq.com/arts/diaghilev_s.html

Bovine Cow Of Damien Hirst. Mother and Child Dived. Bisected cow and calf in formaldehyde. The original cow and calf won the 1995 Turner prize. The Turner Prize, awarded annually to a contemporary artist, has played a huge role in refocusing public attention on art. Retrieved September 2008 from <http://www.cbc.ca/arts/artdesign>

Damien Hirst Total Sets Record For One-Artist Auction. Damien Hirst's trailblazing two-day auction at Sotheby's on september 16, 2008 made a total of £111m. Hirst,

now a global brand, was the first to take a vast purpose-made collection of his own works direct to auction.

The Nigerian Civil War. The Nigerian Civil War was fought to reintegrate and reunify the country. The Nigerian Civil War broke out on 6 July 1967. The war was the culmination of an uneasy peace and stability that had plagued the Nation from independence in 1960. This situation had its genesis in the geography, history, culture and demography of Nigeria Retrieved November <http://www.dawodu.com/atofarati1.htm>

Abdias do Nascimento

Abdias Do Nascimento, the African-Brazilian Senator, Artist and Author. He founded the Black Experimental Theater -- BET -- which I founded in the city of Rio de Janeiro in 1944, as an exigency of the lamentable situation in which black people found themselves in Brazilian society and, particularly, in the Brazilian Theater.

He became a leader in Brazil's Black and was forced into exile by the military regime in 1968. After 14 years of working in universities in the United States, he returned to Brazil and in 1982 was elected to the federal Chamber of Deputies. There his focus was supporting legislation to address racial problems. Retrieved November <http://www.nationmaster.com>

Neo Luddite. During the Industrial Revolution, when factory workers organized to express their dissatisfaction with work conditions, the legend of Ned Ludd was politicized. One well-known method of protest was for workers to dress up in disguise and visit a factory owner late at night. The workers, claiming they had been sent by General Ned Ludd, demanded changes in the workplace. The invocation of Ned Ludd's name made it clear to the factory owner that if the demands weren't met, the owner's expensive machinery would be destroyed. The Luddites enjoyed a kind of Robin Hood reputation and the movement was generally supported by the public until a protest at a Lancashire mill went terribly wrong and several people were killed.

A Neo-Luddite is someone who believes that the use of technology has serious ethical, moral, and social ramifications. Operating under this belief, Neo-Luddites are cautious to promote early adoption of technology, and while they are not necessarily

opposed to technology, they would prefer to see a more serious discussion of the role of technology in society. Some Neo-Luddites actually dislike technology, opting for a life of “voluntary simplicity,” but this is not always the case.

The term “Luddite” comes from a political movement during the Industrial Revolution. The Luddites disliked the spread of mechanical devices such as mechanized looms to accomplish tasks which were formerly performed by people. They held marches, destroyed factories, and engaged in other types of activism in an attempt to prevent further technological development. Ultimately, the Luddites were unsuccessful, but when people started to question technology in large numbers again in the 1970s, they revived the concept, calling themselves the “New Luddites,” and the Neo-Luddite movement was born.

Retrieved November 2008 from <http://www.wisegeek.com>

Chris Ofili Madonna/ Virgin Mary. 1996 Collage Painting by Chris Ofili depicting the Holy Virgin Mary exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum of Art in New York exhibited there in 1999 as part of the 'Sensation' exhibit.. The painting depicted a black African Mary surrounded by images from blaxploitation movies and close-ups of female genitalia cut from pornographic magazines, and elephant dung.

Uses of Elephant Dung in Africa

1. As fertilizer elephant dung is fibrous [www. Halfbakery.com](http://www.halfbakery.com)
2. To manufacture paper www.copperwiki.org

Elephant Dung Paper. Paper manufactured from the fibre in elephant dung is called elephant dung paper. It is 100 per cent bacteria free, 100 per cent odour free and 100 per cent recycled.

Elephant dung paper is uniquely textured and has a papyrus-like quality. It can be used to make many different products, such as stationery items, diaries, greeting cards and coasters, in a wide variety of styles and colours. Elephant dung can also be blended with a great variety of fibres and dyes to make it interesting and commercially viable.

Retrieved September 2008 from <http://www.copperwiki.com>

The Marxist/Leninist worldview's theology is atheism; its philosophy is dialectical materialism; its economics is socialism/communism. It is probably safe to say that before Karl Marx, people did not view economics and modes of production as crucial to either their consciousness or the quest for utopia. Since Marx, economics has never been the same.

Marx's counterpart, Frederick Engels, best demonstrated the primacy of economic theory in Marxism's worldview when he declared, "the final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought, not in men's brains, not in man's better insight into eternal truth and justice, but in changes in the modes of production and exchange. They are to be sought, not in the philosophy, but in the economics of each particular epoch."1

[Http://www.schwarzreport.org/Essays/M-L_Summaries/economics.htm](http://www.schwarzreport.org/Essays/M-L_Summaries/economics.htm)

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