

Inaugural Lecture Series 152

**THE IMPORTANCE OF
CREATIVE EXPERIMENTATION**

BY

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Professor of Fine Arts

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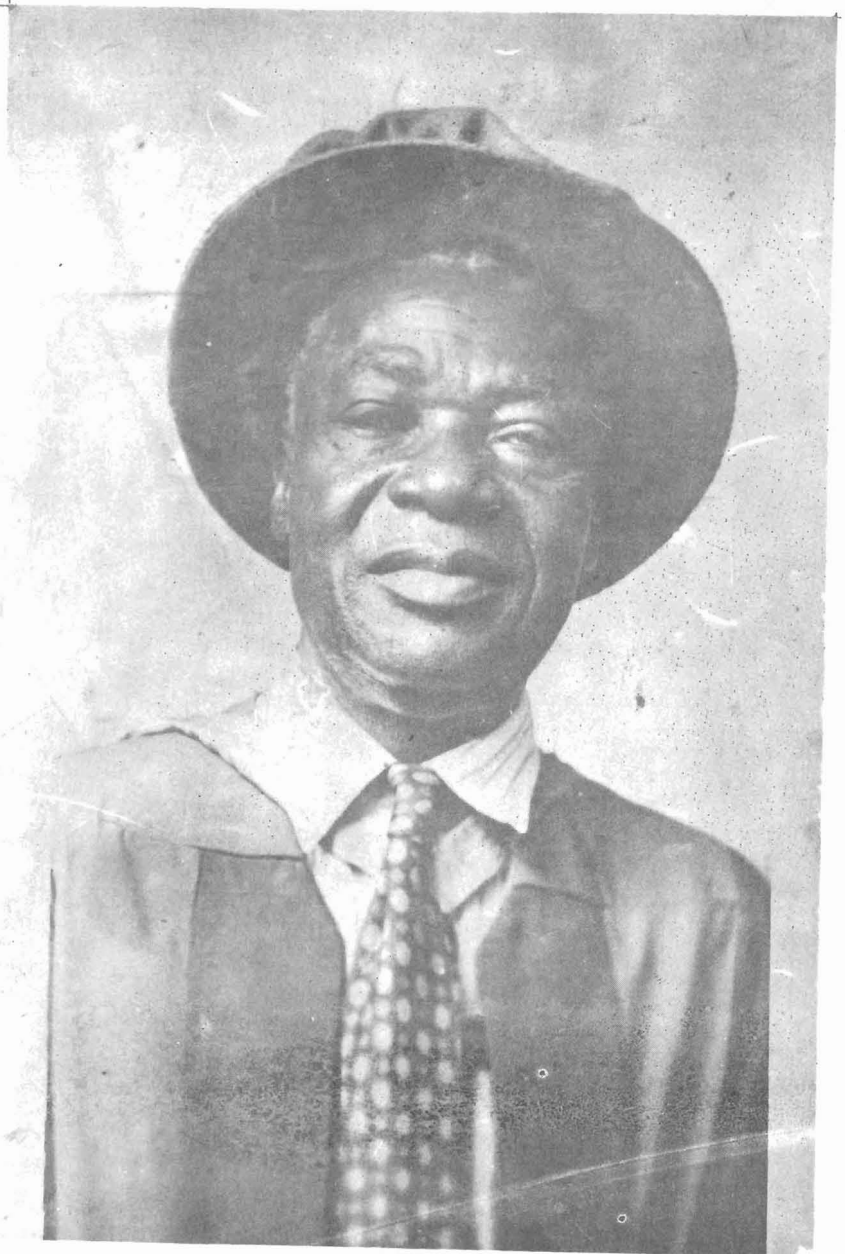
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Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, the Registrar, erudite Scholars, eminent invited Guests, Colleagues, Students, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is with humility and elation that I stand before you this evening to deliver this INAUGURAL LECTURE titled: "The Importance of Creative Experimentation".

It has been a long journey into art from being a student of Fine Arts at Yaba College of Technology in the late fifties. My first appointment after graduation was as the first Television Graphic Artist at WNTV WNBS, Ibadan, Africa's first Television Station, in 1960. Later, equipped with a Nigerian Federal Government Scholarship, I went to study Art and Design at the famous Central School of Art and Design in London, for seven years. In 1967, I won the prestigious British Arts Council Design Award. At the completion of my studies, I was recruited to the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) in 1968 to join the growing Institute of African Studies, under the Directorship of the late Professor Michael Crowder. Since then it has been life for art and art for life*. After all, art gives us pictures of the world in which we live using the life, ideas and discoveries of its age as subject matter and even as medium. Even the so-called "traditional artist" has his eyes open to the relevance of tradition in his own contemporary world recreating the old with a new look if necessary. In short, as life changes the creative artist must find new

ways to digest and talk about new and past experiences. From one piece of his work to another there will always be experiment or development. He will never be happy with carbon copies of his own work, if he is an artist worth his own salt.

Artists, like scientists, are in endless search of truth, as with all responsible researchers, they start with a close study of nature. From the moment an artist proceeds to record his observations, a leaf, an insect, a bird, the changing clouds, the intricacies of human anatomy, or a light falling upon a drapery fold, he is in scientific realm. How well human hand and mind amalgamate information with beauty, therein lies the immeasurable magic of artistic experimentation and communication.

From his first drawing on the walls of darkened caves at Lascaux, Atamira and Tassili, man has had the driving need to document, in image, the world about him. Artists in every era, with growing sophistication, have been experimenting, examining, and delineating all that could be recognised by their perceiving eyes. Physical and mathematical phenomena, optical paradoxes, studies in abstract engineering and technology also fell within their perceptive grasp.

The art of Italian Renaissance abounds with wonderful experimentations and marvelously intense studies of flora and fauna, together with experimental drawings in topology and

geometry. It was a glorious time when the scientific and artistic attitudes resided agreeably within a single man like Leonardo da Vinci. As George Sarton, the historian of science, wrote: "Leonardo saw clearly five hundred years ago what very few people are able to see today, and the few who do see it, can do so only because they stand on his shoulders."¹ Through creative experimentations, he predicted human flight, modern city planning, and undersea warfare, and many other things. His contributions to medicine were innumerable. Indeed, he called himself the "Disciple of Experience." His mind could be described as he himself narrated, a flying machine. It took flight, "filling the universe with amazement". To extend his searches and experimentations, the scientist from Galileo on has relied upon his capability as a renderer or often worked closely with artists of his era. Medicine and the natural sciences are richly endowed with works of Durer, Malpighi, Vesalius, Humboldt, Bodmer, Darwin and Haeckel, to mention only a few. Significant as their purely scientific aspect may be, a natural benefit of many scientific inquiries is their great contribution to the domain of scientific art. Through experimentation, the plastic rendering of the human body now became a veritable passion among the illustrators of medical works, reaching its apex under the influence of the great painterly tradition of the eighteenth century in the work of Gautier d' Agoty (1717-1786).

A collection beyond two-dimensional depiction was later opened in coloured sculptures in wax. This collection in the Palazzo Torrigiani Florence, with 24 complete figures and nearly 2800 models of limbs and organs, amazed the public in the second half of the eighteenth century. We are then enriched not with some dry scientific record, but with a vital documentation of lasting dimension because it is a sublime fusion of the artistic and scientific spirits. Science, in the basic sense, is a creative venture.

Creative societies that do not want to stagnate will also be driven by this same need to experiment and develop. Not unnaturally, creative experimentation in art, science and technology, has always been associated with the great periods of human culture; and also with periods when society's patrons of the arts have themselves encouraged creative dynamism.

Unfortunately, in Nigeria today, we lack this enlightened patronage and our society has little to boast of in the way of dynamic, experimental art. Let it be added in the same breath, however, that Nigeria does not lack creative people. They are simply frustrated; they simply need to be encouraged in the right ways. My lecture is first of all, therefore, a plea to government and the patrons of the arts to see the need to encourage and generously support experimentation in art, science and technology; secondly,

the lecture attempts to show the direction in which experimentation could take place and be patronised.

The first point I wish to stress is that ideology, art, science and technology are very closely related and inter-related. Ideology, technological invention and scientific discovery have often thrown open doors for the artist and, at times, the artist, the creator who experiments in imaginative worlds, has pioneered paths for ideological and scientific discovery. The rebirth of humanism in the early period of the European Renaissance inspired innumerable works of art. The discovery of the alloy, bronze, paved the way for the creation of some of the most wonderful art works the world has ever known, whether we are thinking of the Ife bronze heads or the whole history of the experimental use and perfection of bronze casting techniques from the time of classical Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece and Rome to those of the peak of the Italian Renaissance. More recently the discovery of laser in 1960 by Theodore Ma'man led to some of the most advanced and sophisticated research in the science and technology of our own era.

Not only do ideology, art, science and technology inspire each other, the arts themselves, especially the physical arts of sculpture, painting and architecture, also lend each other visionary strength as they work and experiment together.

Let me illustrate my points by showing you a couple of slides of work from one of the great periods of Western art, the Renaissance.

Many of you will already be familiar with the picture on the first slide. It is of the creation of Adam as depicted by the great artist, Michael Angelo, on the Sistine Chapel ceiling in Rome. Note that the patron of this humanistic work of art was the head of the Catholic Church itself. Patron and Artist have been inspired by the Neo-Platonic humanism of the age. The beauty of the human figure expresses the belief in humanistic ideals. God's creation in all its initial nakedness is seen as wonderfully beautiful. Even God is painted as a heroic, human figure.

I would also like briefly to illustrate my idea about the importance of creative experimentation by taking examples from the modern period of Western art because this will show you how artists can be pioneers - providing vision where the angels of society fear, at times, to tread. At the turn of the last century, after a period of materialism and relative cultural poverty, brought about, in the main, by the dominant, materialistic influence of the Industrial Revolution, European and American artists longed for a new cultural vision that would take them beyond surface insights. Art of all kinds began to strive to break down traditional vision which for so long had been concerned with external appearance and the

realistic viewpoint. Painters and sculptors began to turn to the so-called 'primitive' art of such cultures as those of traditional Africa, cultures thought, at that time, by conventional Westerners, to be 'uncivilised'. Many European artists, along with the best scientific minds of the day, showed the world that 'primitive' art was, in fact, highly sophisticated; that its vision was simply different from the European, that instead of looking at appearances it looked at form. These Western artists, for example, the cubists, Braque, Picasso and Gris, experimented with volume, space, exponential lines and shifting viewpoints in such ways that liberated Western man's aesthetic vision and ultimately, to some extent, his blinkered view of other races. Like Einstein, perhaps the greatest scientist of the time, they saw the importance of relativity.

Now let us turn to my second main point which concerns the patronage of the arts. Society is the user and consumer of art almost as much as it is the user/consumer of the creations of scientists and technology gurus. We are all such consumers and we all need to think about the role that we play as such. The main point I want to make about patronage is that it must continue over a long period of time for experimentation and the perfection of technique may take a life-time. Let it be realised that one of the reasons why we are now moribund is that the Western countries that have colonised us have been encouraging creative

experimentation for centuries and are consequently alarmingly advanced technologically, even if not morally. It is their technology after all that has enhanced modern life. For hundreds of years the West has seen the importance of patronising its creative talents, even its artists. Moreover, the artists themselves have, at least since the Renaissance, valued the dynamic spirit in art, the spirit that makes art itself a channel of inquiry.

The creation of the Bauhaus in Weimar, Germany, in 1919, is a particularly good example of the way creative experimentation was patronised so as to encourage the co-ordination of art, science and technology in Europe at this time. The Bauhaus, supported by corporate patronage and foundation grants, brought together all sorts of international creative talent and produced such works as the constructivist art of Tatlin, Gabo and Pevsner, and the geometricised paintings of Duchamp, Gris, and Mondrian. Among the Bauhaus artists were those responding to the speed, pressure and force of modern life, the futurist painters, Severini Balla and Boccioni and the Futurist Movement, the poet Filippo Marinetti, a bold and tireless experimenter, who postulated the general character of the movement in a well articulated "Initial Manifesto of Futurism" in February 1909. I cannot resist quoting the following three brief, poetic paragraphs from the Manifesto to illustrate their animating creative gusto.

1. We declare that the world's splendour has been enriched by a new beauty; the beauty of speed. A racing motor-car, its frame adorned with great pipes, like snakes with explosive breath. .. A roaring motor-car, which looks as though running on shrapnel, is more beautiful than the victory of Samothrace.
2. We shall sing of the man at the steering wheel, whose ideal stem transfixes the Earth, rushing over the circuit of her orbit.
3. We stand upon the extreme promontory of the centuries!... Why should we look behind us, when we have to break in the mysterious portals of the impossible? Time and space died yesterday. Already we live in the absolute, since we have already created speed, eternal and ever-present.²

Bauhaus artists not only produced dynamic works of art but also inspired painting, architecture, photography, design and craft throughout the Western world. After the Second World War, the exciting developments in Western science and technology and the tremendous public support for the arts right across the society, helped open up a new period of experimentation in the arts. Art movements such as Pop Art, Op Art, Kinetic Art, Robol Art and Structuralism were all closely associated with technology and science. More recently new experiments with light, holography and

the computer have not only been inspired by technology and science but, as I have already mentioned, have themselves provided the tools for scientific discovery.

Let us now turn specifically to the Nigerian scene. In Nigeria, of course, the relationship between the arts and science is not so marked since science does not play the same role here as it does in the West. Not unnaturally, art and politics have had closer roles than have art and science here, nevertheless Nigeria needs to support its creative talents bringing them together in whatever walks of life, in the arts, the sciences or the fields of social reform.

In our universities, for example, where one would think creative talent of all kinds could congregate we find that such talent is little understood. Creators of all kinds are frustrated; the technological inventions are kept off the market because those who have the money to develop them (including State Governments) prefer to import their equivalent because much of the money of these prospective patrons comes from the multi-nationals who do not want competition. Our campus artists find it hard to get promotion because the majority on faculty committees do not know how to assess creative work. There are few workshops where inventors can come together and inspire each other. Universities, it seems, would rather talk than create.

Even outside the universities the arts are not well patronised by governments or big business. Funds for the arts never approach the value of those for the sciences and technologies; it being felt that the latter bring in more revenue for the government and industries. Yet, evidence abounds to show that arts and sciences must go hand in hand to produce a healthy society. I would even advocate, at least under normal circumstances, the policy of giving arts and sciences equally generous funds each. Money should be used for creative ventures in the arts and sciences rather than for exhibition of material wealth through ostentatious displays of imported products.

After considering the question of patronage and by extension the role of society vis-a-vis the arts and sciences, let us continue by considering what creative people in Nigeria can themselves do to encourage dynamic and creative experiment and development.

Our architects, for example, could experiment like the great Egyptian architect pioneer, Hassan Fathy, who saw new ways of using traditional architectural ideas and materials. He saw the value of adobe earth architecture especially in hot countries - appreciating the fact that, unlike concrete, the Western product, earth is cheap, cool, wears well and is environmentally friendly and harmonious. Today, Fathy's ideas inspire architects the world over even though

in his own country his work was pulled down because it exposed the poor quality and unnecessary expense of buildings that used concrete and imported materials.

Think what a wonderful chance an imaginative government would have had at Abuja to create architectural images that would have represented a great coming together of our national heritage, and that would have thus composed images of our particularly Nigerian identity, if the designs for the public buildings at Abuja had been requested from the whole range of Nigerian artists and if their value had been proved by way of open competition. I do not doubt that our best architects would have responded to the challenge. We might have had a capital city more appropriate to our needs and pockets; one where creative artists from all parts of the country, working in many different media, would have left their mark. Abuja could have been a real national collaborative creation and landmark.

Given a chance, our sculptors, experts in science and technology, today could also work with and conduct research into our ancient knowledge of bronze-casting and iron-smelting with a view to modernising them (even if with Western know-how) in reproductive casting. For example, our government is currently spending huge amounts of money on steel industry when, in fact,

we could have synthesised the old technology with the new as the Chinese and the Japanese have often done to their advantage.

Even our painters and scientists can experiment in paper production. They can use local materials to make their own paper, canvases and textiles. They can make their own colours and dyes. This does not mean we have to go back to the past; only that we must develop out of our own roots. If we draw from our own roots we will be better able to graft on what we need from abroad, whether in terms of ideas or materials.

The inappropriate use of imports has ruined our culture because importation is organised by the uncreative middlemen among us, that is to say, by people who do business to line their own pockets, not to help develop and create a flourishing nation. To counter the business of these people who feed the debilitating system of neo-colonialism, creative men must make a united effort whether they are scientists, technologists or artists; whether they are challenging the international drug trade by making Nigerian drugs; whether they are transforming local implements to mechanise agriculture and prevent unnecessary importation of tractors, fertilizer and food; and whether they are artists helping us to change our colonial mentality. Whoever they are they must, if they are creative, unite to resist those pressures that crush creativity in this country.

I have myself been concerned with the importance of creative experimentation all my adult life and I want finally, to end my lecture by showing you a selection of slides of a few of my creative works undertaken since joining the staff at Obafemi Awolowo University.

As many of you may know I have worked in many media since I came to Ife. I started as a Junior Research Fellow in the development of theatre design of sets and costumes, with the late Professor Ola Rotimi. Together we experimented with a Yoruba version of Oedipus Rex, "The Gods Are Not to Blame," seeing it as a Yoruba as well as an ancient Greek tale both in its text and stage design. My sets and costumes were made with local materials. Later, I worked with Nigeria's wonderfully experimental dramatist, Wole Soyinka, with his finger tips on innumerable currents of contemporary and traditional thought both of Nigeria, Africa, its diaspora and the West. It was a most productive period of experimentation in art and culture.

In the field of theatre design, I designed sets and costumes for the following plays, "Kurunmi", "Palwine Drinkard", "Holding Talk", "Roshomon", "Death and the Kings Horse-man", "Opera Wonyosi", "Esu and Vagabond Minstrel", "Haba Director" and "Langbodo", the Nigerian National Award play during FESTAC 77. The dance drama for which I designed are "Obaluwaiye",

"Chaka", and "Dirges"; the latter, directed by Professor Akin Euba, was taken by University of Ife to represent Nigeria at the Munich Olympic in 1972. I took advantage of the opportunity to exhibit my theatre design at Haus Dakunst in Munich.

In the 70s, I also set up and for many years ran a textile design research workshop using traditional African designs printed with silk screens, a technique adopted from the West.

After working at the University of Ife for eleven years, I proceeded to the United States of America, where I obtained an MFA in Sculpture and an M.A. in Architecture at Howard University, in Washington, D.C. In 1986, I was invited as a visiting artist to China by the Chinese Government. Later in 1991, I had the privilege of being appointed as Visiting Artist at the Rockefeller Conference Centre in Bellagio, Italy. And during the 1993-94 academic year, I gained another Rockefeller award as a Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study and Research in the African Humanities, at Northwestern University in the U.S. Furthermore, in the year 2000, nominated by the Smithsonian Institution in Washington. I won the Marshall Frankel award as visiting artist at the Vermont Studio Centre, In the spring semester of 1993, I was a Visiting Professor of Art at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside as part of the inter-University Exchange Programme with the Obafemi Awolowo University.

Over the years, I have moved further in multidimensional art forms, employing a wider variety of media and influenced by contemporary art trends. Art, after all, speaks a universal language that appeals to humankind all over the world. I have used mythology from Yoruba culture as the basis for creating many works of art. The richness of myth provides an imperishable legacy due to its potency. Myths help develop civilisation and people, if they know how to listen and adhere to certain canons of societal norms. I believe as an artist that one should not be inhibited, but take ideas from far and near and use them intelligently for a better synthesis in the art.

However, it is in the field of sculpture, especially of my sculpture on this campus, that I would like to talk briefly. Most of them were commissioned by the late Professor Hezekiah Oluwasanmi, the illustrious second Vice-Chancellor of this University. I will begin by saying that I see sculpture as an activity that explores, discovers and even creates order, harmony and meaning in human experience and that I see the role of sculpture as helping to discover such harmony particularly through the discovery and exploitation of form and material.

More perhaps than any other art form, sculpture has a strange ability to harmonise with, and even impose harmony, order

and proportion upon an environment. Its very aesthetic appeal is, therefore, in a strange way, functional.

I have tried to use sculpture in this light in the environment of the University architecture which is almost all the work of contemporary Western architects. I have wanted to respect these twentieth century buildings that help usher Nigeria into the spirit of the contemporary world but at the same time I have wanted to remind those who frequent them to respect the local Nigerian culture as well. For this reason my works in various University buildings and spaces try to blend both the modern and the traditional.

Let me show you what I mean by looking at a slide of my earliest Ife mural at the Students' Union/Sports Centre which I designed and erected in 1973. The buildings were designed by British architects and the environment with its big stadium is decidedly modern. The subjects of the mural--student activities at the Sports Centre on the one hand and student protest, representing Union activities on the other - are modern too. So is the material: fabricated aluminum. (In Ife town where I did most of the work, people, thought I was building an aeroplane!). But the forms of the mural in their stylisation, their large planes and forms, recollect the works of traditional African sculpture. The figures themselves apparently supporting the big beam of the building above them look

like caryatids, and in that sense recall the carved posts that support traditional Yoruba palace architecture. The result, hopefully, marks possible union and harmony between the old and the new in our lives.

Another mural that illustrates my points well is the one I made for the University Hall, the Secretariat Building of the University. This huge, tower-like structure of offices of relatively sky-scraper dimensions rises up six floors. The subject of the mural is again contemporary in the sense that the mural depicts the Governing Council and the faculties of the University. This time, however, the imagery is traditional in the sense that the Governing Council and the Government are represented by a pantheon of Yoruba gods. Olodumare represents, as it were, the Government and the University Council. Esu, the trickster messenger of the gods, represents the Civil Service or the administrative staff. Orunmila, Father of Divination, stands for Astronomy. Sango represents Electronics and Cybernetics. Osanyin, god of Herbs, and Obaluwaye, god of Sickness, represent the Health Sciences. Orisa-Oko stands, of course, for the Faculty of Agriculture, and Ogun, the god of iron and alloys, for Technology.

The stylisation and forms of the mural are again traditional but in their simplicity they harmonise quite nicely with the austerity of the modern architectural setting.

The material (fibre-glass) is modern, but it is designed to recall traditional materials e.g. mahogany and metal overlays. Some people have also felt that it resembles the moulded laterite used for sculpture and architecture in traditional Africa - no doubt as a result of the textured surfaces and moulded shapes obtained by using moulds made of polystyrene textured with a hot knife.

In this context I would also like to say a word about my welded metal screen at the Conference Centre. Again, the subject, "Faces at a Conference", is inspired by the modern University setting but the imagery and forms are traditional in the sense that I have exploited the form and idea of the mask, my point being that conference goers always wear masks to impress their audiences! The long narrow mask with penetrating eyes suggests to me, for example, the disparaging type of intellectual, the cynical critic with disdainful eyes! There are also masks representing the loquacious type with mouth rambling and railing at everybody good and bad indiscriminately. There is also the bored delegate who has dozed off and the voluptuous man celebrating his finery and dandified looks - all testifying to the old adage that it takes all sorts to make a world, even a University!

Ultimately, however, the piece is not, in fact, so satirical as I am making it sound. The simple monumental mask forms help to

save it from the negativity and superficiality of straight satirical comment.

The material of this piece was particularly exciting to me and I would like to talk about it because I feel it serves to show that there are appropriate times to use modern materials and technology in Nigerian art especially for sculpture in a modern building. Of course, the use of metal for sculpture and masks has long existed in traditional African sculpture, but this particular technique of joining steel, made possible by the late 19th century discovery of oxy-acetylene welding, allows the artist to explore the use of metal in a more complex way, on a much bigger scale than was ever possible before the coming of modern technology. I must say, I am not the only modern Nigerian sculptor who has seen the need to exploit materials and techniques discovered and explored by Western technology and art. Inevitably, modern Nigerian artists explore these things not only because they offer so much but because they keep us in tune with new environments of life and art. The materials, like life, can at times be frighteningly inorganic but finding beauty in and creating vitality with such things is exciting.

This does not mean that I feel traditional materials should not be used in modern architectural setting even for large scale work as my own mural on traditional dance and music for the National Theatre in Lagos will bear me witness. This work is a

very large low copper relief and makes use of metal and “repousse” metal beating techniques as they have been used in Africa as well as Europe for hundreds of years. This traditionalism is surely fitting in the cultural setting of the National Theatre for a mural whose subject, as well as imagery and forms, is traditional.

I would also like to tell you about two projects I have done beyond Ife in places where I have had to experiment with ideas for a more international contemporary world, while still taking my Nigerian concerns and traditions with me. As T.S. Eliot remarked in his poem “Little Gidding”, “we shall not cease from exploration. And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started. And know the place for the first time”.³

The first of these projects is the huge 1977 award-winning glass mosaic mural over the entrance of the Murtala Mohammed International Airport in Lagos. The mural is called “The Spirit of Man in Flight” and illustrates human development in terms of man’s inventions on his way to the skies. The lizard symbolises man’s “primitive” earth-bound state, the bird with a human face his Icarian longings, the motor car his invention of the modern engine, the aeroplane and the rocket his ‘take-off’, the rainbow the beauty of his spirit of endeavour in the past and in the future. The subject therefore, is very contemporary, but much is traditional in the conception of the mural’s design. The picture is built up over a

print of one of my cloth designs using traditional motifs, the lizard being one of them. The motion in the circular parts of the cloth's pattern has been emphasised to suggest bird-like or plane-like shapes and movement. The mosaic was executed by traditional Italian craftsmen who work in the medium of glass mosaic.

The second project is a mural made for the University of Wisconsin at Parkside, designed to represent the diversity in American culture. It is called "Diversity of Creation Myths". It is envisioned as a great womb-shaped emblem, similar to the mandala, the symbol of the universe in Oriental religion. It alludes to the rich multi-valent nature of America derived from the many diverse peoples and cultures that have contributed to the country. It alludes as well to the perennial attributes of the divine, the nature of the universe, and the destiny of humankind. America encompasses all these, rich in diversity, both in human and creative resources. The mural draws on sixteen creation myths from among the many different cultures, including the Yoruba, that make up the United States. Through this endeavour, I believe that American plurality can be invigorated and revitalised for present and future prosperity and posterity.

This time the imagery is traditional and international but the theme - the importance of diversity within a culture or nation - is

one with which we are much concerned today whether we live in America, Nigeria or any multi-cultural society.

The range of experimentation of humankind is infinite. Qualities, happenings, paradoxes and startling pronouncements will mould the future. Whereas cycles aligned with the pendulum of history will maintain an equilibrium. During turbulent times, the dictum of Diderot, moral philosopher and apostle of the Enlightenment, that the function of art was to make "virtue adorable and vice repugnant", continued to echo positively.⁴ With that statement in mind would you please have a visual odyssey with me on the architectural sculpture at Ajose Lecture Theatre titled "Good Education", executed in cast aluminum in 1978. Any would-be "Good Education" starts from childhood as represented by the two couples on the left and right of the mural with their children. The progression in good education then follows a programmed pattern, i.e. Kindergarten, Primary, Secondary and finally the Tertiary Institutions, at the apex. The universal teacher perhaps symbolised by our eminent professor pointing to the anthropomorphic hand - depicts the struggle of students to get to the top of their field of endeavour. The huge umbrella-type academic hat has symbols of various faculties of learning engraved on it. This is the crowning moment of a glorious accomplishment.

To enlighten far beyond the limitation of any suggested norm is the artist's highest goal. For instead of neutral or controlled assemblages, art requires personal reactions and inventiveness in experimentations. Relying on the human element, this condition of freedom also evaluates a society. Ralph Waldo Emerson's thought is pertinent here though expressed long ago in society and solitude. He believed that "The true test of a civilisation is not the census, nor the size of cities, nor the crops, but the kind of man the country turns out".⁵ Let us hope that with "Good Education" and experimentations Nigeria will turn out good citizens, instead of perverted materialists, warped mind-benders and incredible anthropophagy that now abound in our society.

I would like to draw towards my conclusion quoting the words of William Fleming, writing like an existentialist, on man's need to take responsibility for his own heritage in a universe that is neither hostile nor benevolent but totally indifferent. "All man has at his command", Fleming says, "are the spark of life and a moment in time". This spark of life, he feels, is expressed in art so that creative forces can become focal points in the act of the reaffirmation of the significance of life in a world that often seems meaningless. To give life to this kind of value is surely, as Fleming suggests, the exciting and exhilarating challenge of our time.

Through creative experimentation, contemporary probing of the subatomic world of matter or the nucleic bases of biological life has brought a new vision into existence; with a concomitant effect upon the artist. The artist has assumed the role as a delinerator of the palpable to that of a conceptualizer giving form and substance to highly theoretical constructs. The new science has liberated the artist and enabled him to devote artistic vision to grander themes. He is further cast as a teacher, explaining graphically the complex processes of life.

Regardless of the progress of the camera and other recording devices, it is still the artist with his talent and intelligence that can bring the dispassionate field of science into a humane visual focus. There is a creative and elevating beauty that flows from brain to hand to image which the machine does not approach. Civilisations rise and fall but technology goes on for ever, inventions and discoveries, once established through creative experimentation, have hardly ever been lost to humankind. This, in fact, is the backbone of the sacred image of progress.

Through creative experimentation the artist has indeed served his own muse well, for the artist in the service of human understanding must to himself be true.

It remains to say that I do hope you will go out of this auditorium and look again at my pieces of architectural sculpture on

this campus. Perhaps you will even be able to get back to me and tell me what you feel about my constant experimentation with the significance of art and the artist's materials in an African setting. Do they help you to see the depth of your own experience and that of the society in which you live here? If so, hopefully, you will 'go forth' and help me campaign for the dynamic world of creative experiment that seems currently in such a state of stagnancy in this country.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you for your attention. Glory be to Jehovah for his undeserved kindness. God bless you all.

NOTES

* I wish to use this opportunity to thank Professor Babs Fafunwa for his generous support, as Federal Minister of Education, in financing our international conference on "Diversity of Creativity in Nigeria" in 1992 while I was Head of Fine Arts Department.

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6. William Fleming, *Arts and Ideas*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1974).
7. James, A. Schinneller, *Art/Search and Self-discovery*, (International Textbook Company, Scranton, Pennsylvania, 1967).
8. E. F. Robert Farris Thompson, *Black gods and Kings: Yoruba Art at UCLA*, (University of California Press, 1971).

9. J. B. deC.M. Saunders; Charles D. O'Malley, *The Illustrations from the Works of Andreas Vesalius of Brussels*, (Dover Publications, Inc., New York), 1973.
10. Ernst Haeckel: *Art Forms in Nature*, (Dover Publication Inc., New York), 1974.
11. Agbo Folarin. "Relating Sculpture to a Modern Nigerian Environment". *Black Orpheus*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1981, pp. 28-31.
12. Agbo Folarin. "Modern Scenography in Western Nigeria", *Nigeria Magazine*, Vol. 53, No. 2, 1985, pp. 14-24.
13. Agbo Folarin. "Notes on Creative Experimentation Nigerian Contemporary Arts Example", *Nigeria Magazine*, Vol. 55, No. 3, 1987, pp. 66-70.
14. Agbo Folarin. "Scenographic Art in Nigerian Dance and Some Suggestions Concerning its Revitalization", *Society of Theatre Arts*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1988, 755N. 0189-9562, pp. 25-29.
15. Agbo Folarin. "The Admirable Creative Spirit of the Chinese", *Voice of Friendship*, 1987, pp. 10-12.
16. Agbo Folarin. "The Role of Public Sculpture in Nigeria", *Nigeria Magazine*, Vol. 56, No. 1-2, January - June, 1988, pp. 58-62.
17. Agbo Folarin. "Design Motifs and the Power of Symbols and Decorating in Art", *INSEA JOURNAL*, 1988, pp. 58-60.
18. Agbo Folarin. "Imaginative Image in Modern Nigerian Contemporary art", *Kurio Africana*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1989, pp. 61-67.
19. Agbo Folarin. "Dualism and Exponential Dynamism in the Sculpture of Emokpae", *Kurio Africana*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1989, pp. 61-67.
20. Agbo Folarin. "Chinese Iron Pictures and Yoruba Metal Relief Pictures", *China-Africa*, No. 1, Sept., 1990, pp. 24-25.

21. Agbo Folarin. "The Sacred Expressionistic Architecture of Susan Wenger". *Oritameta Proceedings, International Conference on Yoruba Art*, 1990, pp. 175-182.
22. Agbo Folarin. Transmigratory Images in Art & Architecture - the American Dream What Lessons for Nigeria"? *Nigerian Journal of American Studies* Vol. III, July 1993, pp. 210-226.
23. Agbo Folarin. Maternal Goddess in Yoruba Art. A New Aesthetic Acclamation of Yemoja, Oshun and Iya-Mapo. *African Studies Paper*, Northwestern University Fall 1993, pp. 8-10.
24. Agbo Folarin. "Yoruba Architecture: The Years of Creativity and The Years of Decadence" *Publication of Department of Fine-Arts*. OAU 1993 pp. 201 - 209
25. Agbo Folarin. Political Postals in Presidential Election Campaigns: Appraisal of American and Nigerian Experience. *Nigerian Journal of American Studies* 1997. pp. 449-462.
26. Agbo Folarin and M. Folarin, *Three Birds from Olongo*. (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2001).
27. Agbo Folarin and M. Folarin, *The King of the Frogs*. (Spectrum Books Ibadan, 2001).

Exhibitions:

(a) One-Man Exhibitions

1. Theatre Designs, Nottingham Playhouse, (England), Sept. 1966.

2. Theatre Designs and Paintings at the African Centre, London, June, 1967
3. Theatre Designs Central School, London, July, 1967.
4. Theatre Designs, Obafemi Awolowo University, Oct., 1968.
5. Theatre Designs, University of Ibadan, December, 1968.
6. Paintings, Sculpture and Prints, (Ori Olokun), Ile-Ife, October, 1969.
7. Multi Dimensional Art: Paintings, Sculpture, Theatre Designs. University of Ife April 1971.
8. Multi-Dimensional Art: Paintings, Sculpture, Theatre Designs, U.S.I.S, Ibadan, July, 1971.
9. Theatre Design Exhibition at Haus Da Kunst, Munich Olympic (W. Germany) Sept. 1972)
10. Theatre Workshop and Exhibition at Trenchard Hall, University of Ibadan, March, 1972
11. Exhibitions of Graphics, Paintings, at Migros Bank, Zurich, August, 1973.
12. Paintings, Sculpture and Theatre Designs, at Goethe Institute, Lagos; April, 1974
13. Paintings, Sculpture and Theatre Designs, British Council, Ibadan, July, 1975.

14. M.F.A Dissertation Exhibition, June 29 to July 15, 1980, Howard University, Washington, D.C.
15. Rockefeller Conference Centre, Bellagio, Italy April 1991.
16. University of Wisconsin – Parkside Gallery, April 1993.

(b) Group Exhibitions

1. Contemporary African Arts, London 1967.
2. Contemporary Nigerian Art, Lagos, April, 1969.
3. Contemporary Printmaking, at the Ori-Olokun Cultural Centre, University of Ife, Ile-Ife, Aug. 1969.
4. Contemporary Nigerian Sculpture, University of Ife Library, Sept. 1974.
5. Contemporary Nigerian Paintings and Prints, University of Ife, Ile-Ife, March, 1976.
6. Contemporary Nigerian Art, Mayor's Office, Washington, D.C. September 1980.
7. Participation in the Oyo Trade Fair Textile Designs, Ibadan, January 24 to Feb. 2, 1987.

(c) Exhibitions of Textile Design and Research Workshop:

1. Experiments in Textures and Colours, University of Ife, Sept. 1974.

2. Textile Designs and Fashion Show, University of Ife, June, 1975

DESIGNS:

Graphic Book Cover Designs:

1. Design for the cover of the Associateship Education Magazine, *Magasso*, University of Ife, 1972
2. Design for the cover of Modern European Languages Magazine *DIE SCHIDKOTE*. 1973
3. Design for the cover of "Yoruba Oral Tradition" Festival, 1974.
4. Design for Ife Music Edition, 1975.
5. Design for *The Creoles of Sierra Leone: Their Responses to Colonialism* by Leo Spitzer, University of Ife Press, 1974.
6. Cover Design for *La Route: realite et representation dans l'oeuvre de Wole Soyinka*, by Christiane Fioupou (Amsterdam: Editions Radopi, 1994).

SELECTED WORKS BY AGBO FOLARIN IN PRIVATE AND PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

1. Olokun, Goddess of the Sea (lithograph), Rockefeller Foundation, New York.

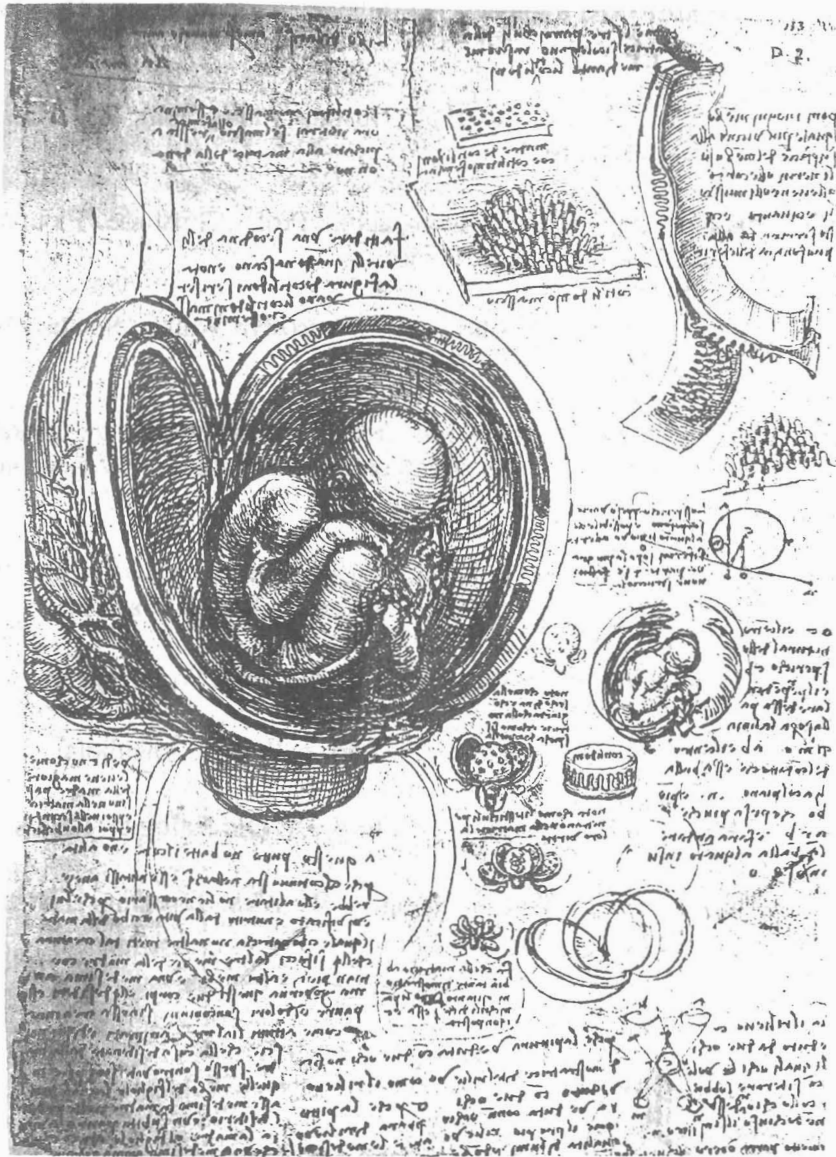
2. Three Phantoms (oil painting), Prof. Sera Berry, Johns Hopkins University.
3. Atilogu Dancers (lino relief print), Prof. David Opkaku, University of Ibadan.
4. The Lovers (wood sculpture), Tayo Aiyebusi, Design Productions, Lagos.
5. Brotherhood (metal sculpture), National Council for Arts and Culture, Lagos.
6. Festival of the Water Spirits (oil painting), Niger Consultants, Port-Harcourt.
7. Appropriations (metal relief); Shango (color silkscreen), Prof. Richard Taylor, University of Bayreuth, Germany.
8. Three Friends (aluminum relief), Dr. V. Pratt, Cardiff, Wales, Great Britain.
9. Oba and Attendants (aluminum and metal screens), Mr. and Mrs. Buchanan, Edinburgh.
10. The Sun Worshippers (copper relief), Prof. Anne Statham and Michael Zupan, Kenosha, Wisconsin.
11. Musical Poets (copper relief), Prof. And Mrs. James Stills, Racine, Wisconsin.
12. Ancient African Kingdom (copper relief); Dundun Dancers (copper relief); Festival of the dance (copper relief), Prof. Lillian Trager and Dr. Richard Ammann, Racine, Wisconsin.
13. Aja, God of the Wind (lithograph), Prof. Lillian Trager and Dr. Richard Ammann, Racine WI.

14. Aja, God of the Wind (lithograph), Prof. Helen Rosenberg, Glenview, Illinois.
15. Creation of the World by Obatala; Olokun, Goddess of the Sea; Dr. Richard Amman Racine Wisconsin.
16. Eshu Messenger of the Gods; Osumare, The Rainbow God (lithographs), Ganyelele Reed Lewis, Washington DC.
17. Olokun, Goddess of the Sea; Aja; Creation of the World by Obatala; Osumare; Eshu (lithographs), Prof. Winston Kennedy, Washington DC.
18. Women as Pillar of the House (ceramic sculpture), Prof. Samantha Bullock, Washington DC.
19. Bird under the Tree (welded sculpture), Prof. Anthony Johns - Baltimore, MD.
20. Osumare, the Rainbow God (lithograph), Prof. Jutta Berndt, Ostendorf, Germany.
21. Their Future is in the Hand of Elders (limestone sculpture), Nigerian University Commission, Washington DC.
22. Olokun; Aja; Creation of the World by Obatala; Osumare; Eshu (lithographs), Mr. Aig. Imokhuede, Director National Council for Arts and Culture.
23. Shango (color silkscreen), Alan Edmond, Brandywine Art Gallery and Workshop, Philadelphia.

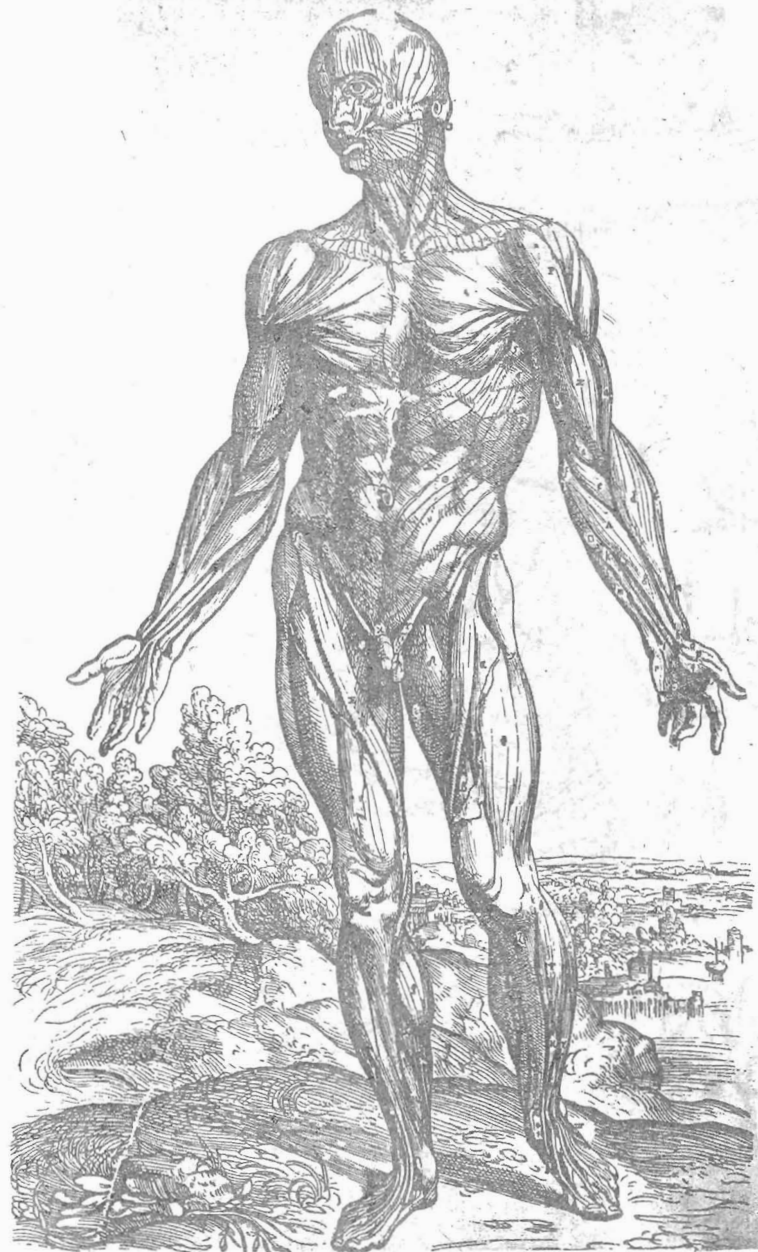
24. Yoruba Gods (copper relief panels), Prof. Frank Van Buer, University of Northern Illinois, Dekalb.
25. Court Dancer in the Festival, Dr. David King, University of Wisconsin, Madison.
26. Animal in the Zoo (aluminum relief door panel), Mrs. Bobby Fenster, University of Minnesota.
27. Festival (aluminum relief), Mrs. Gearson, University of Montana.
28. Yoruba Musical Communicators (relief), Oyo State Radio, Ibadan, Nigeria.
29. Roosting Bird (colored relief print), Mr. Peter Walton, London.
30. Land of the Gods; Festival (etchings), Dr. Hertzog, International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, Ibadan, Nigeria.
31. Shango (color silkscreen), Prof. John Picton, University of London.
32. Bust of late Professor Ojetunji Aboiyade (VC, 1975-8), at Development and Policy Centre, Ibadan.
33. Bust of late Professor Adesanya Ige Grillo Commissioned by College of Health Sciences, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.
34. The mural for Zoological Gardens, University of Ife (Obafemi Awolowo University), Ile-Ife.

35. Mural for Student Union Building and Sports Centre, University of Ife (Obafemi Awolowo University), Ile-Ife.
36. Pantheon of the gods, Mural for the University Hall, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife
37. Murals for Conference Centre, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife (a) Faces at Conference (b) Copper Screens (c) Copper Doors.
38. Good Education, Mural for Ajose Lecture Theatre, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.
39. Life-size statue of late Professor Hezekiah Oluwasanmi, (VC, 1966-75) in front of the Library, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.
40. Bust of late Chief I.O. Delano, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.
41. Mural for National Theatre, Lagos, Iganmu, Nigeria.
42. Spirit of Man In Flight, Mural for Murtala International Airport, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria, (National Art Competition First Prize) 1977, Lagos, Nigeria.
43. Diversity of Creation Myths, Mural for University of Wisconsin Parkside, U.S.A.
44. Bust of Professor Wande Abimbola, (Vice-Chancellor, 1983-89), commissioned by Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.
45. Bust of Professor Cyril Onwumechili (Vice-Chancellor, 1979-1983), commissioned by Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.
46. Bust of Professor Caleb Osuntogun, (Vice-Chancellor, 1990-91), commissioned by Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.

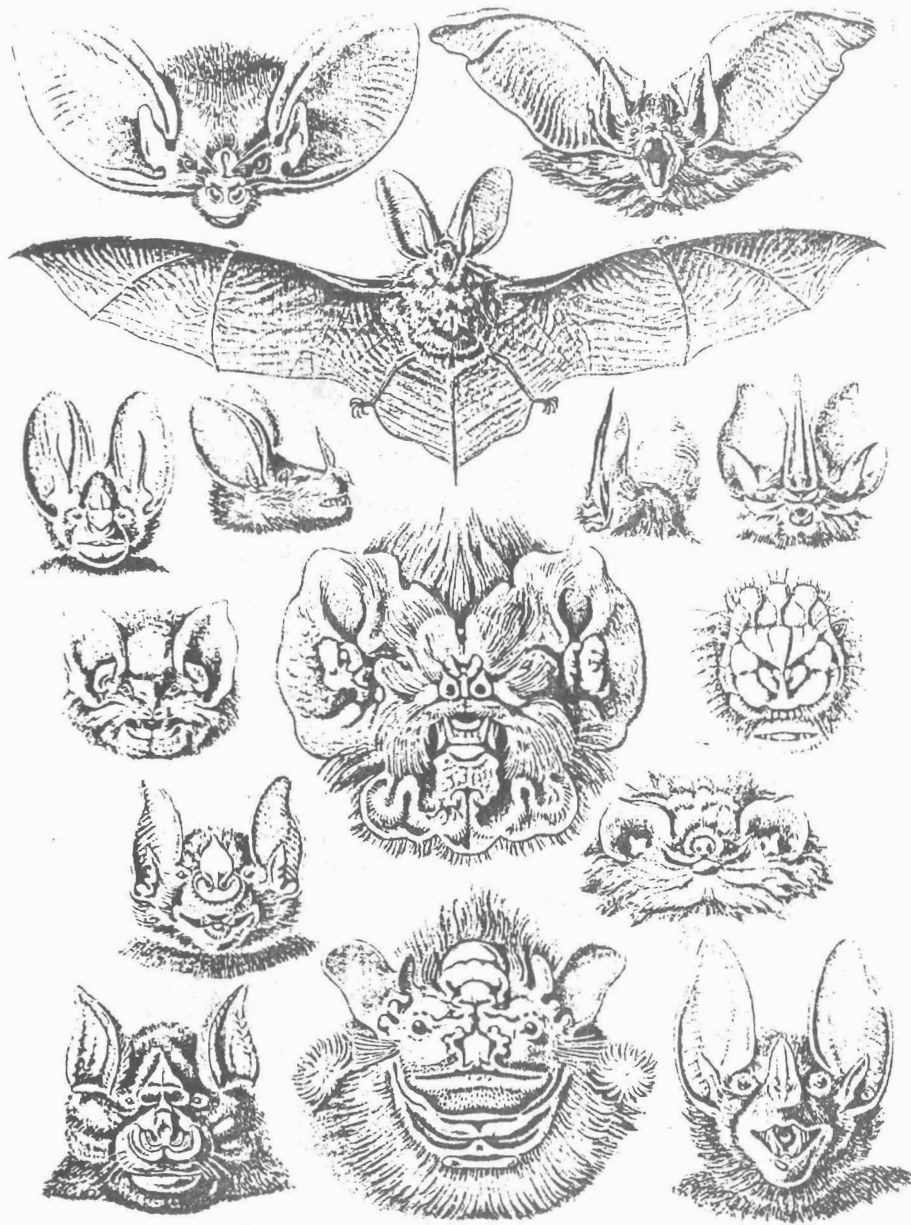
47. Festival (Coloured Etching), Prof. Ian Maclean, Racine Wisconsin.
48. Osumare, The Rainbow God (lithograph), Prof. Dennis Duerden, San Francisco.
49. Creation of the World by Obatala (lithograph), Dr. Kaiser Bernes, Haifa, Israel.
50. Eshu the Trickster (lithograph), Prof. Christiane Fioupou, University of Toulouse, France.
51. The Poet (coloured silkscreen), Dr. Roslyn Walker, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.
52. My Journey (Drawing) and Creation of the World by Obatala (lithograph), Janet Stanley Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.
53. Obafemi Awolowo University Crest, Installed on the tower of the main Gate, commissioned by Obafemi Awolowo University.
54. Olokun Goddess of the sea (lithograph), Prof. Wole Soyinka.
55. Shango (coloured silk screen), Prof. Wande Abimbola.
56. Man in Disintigration. Painting. Dr. Ola Balogun, Lagos.
57. Collection of Textile Samples By Mrs. Daemon - British Consulate, Ibadan.



1. The Foetus in the Womb. By Leonardo da Vinci.



2. The Muscles. By Andreas Vesalius.



67. Various species of bats.

3. Various Species of Bats. By Ernst Haeckel.



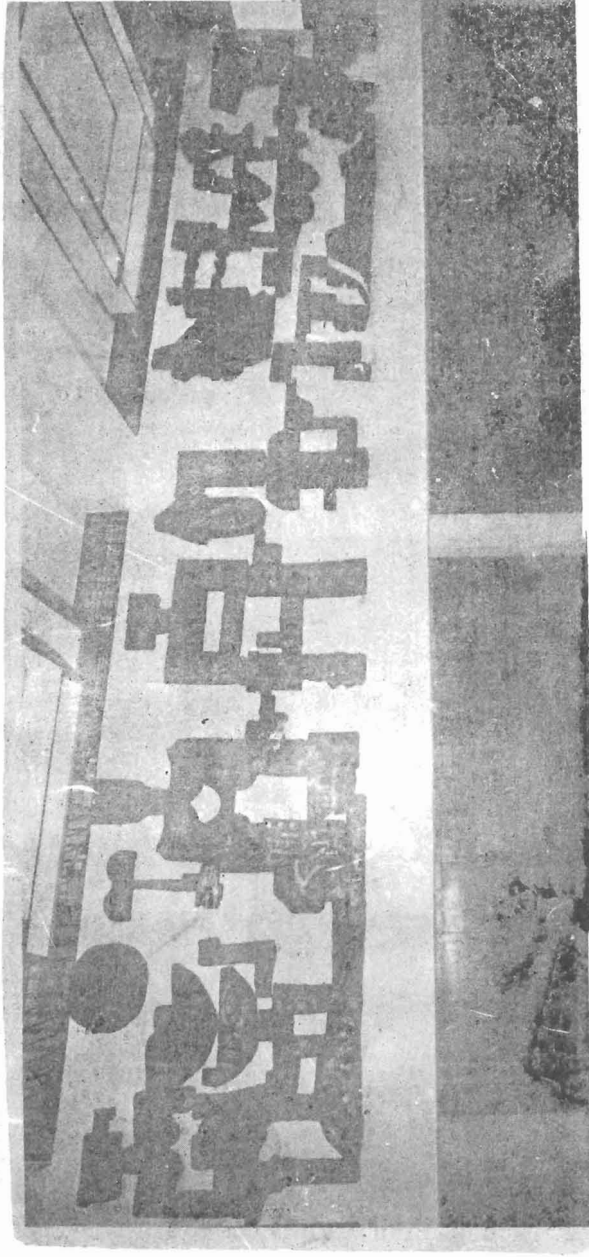
4. The Creation of Adam.



5. Prof. Hezekiah Oluwasanmi.

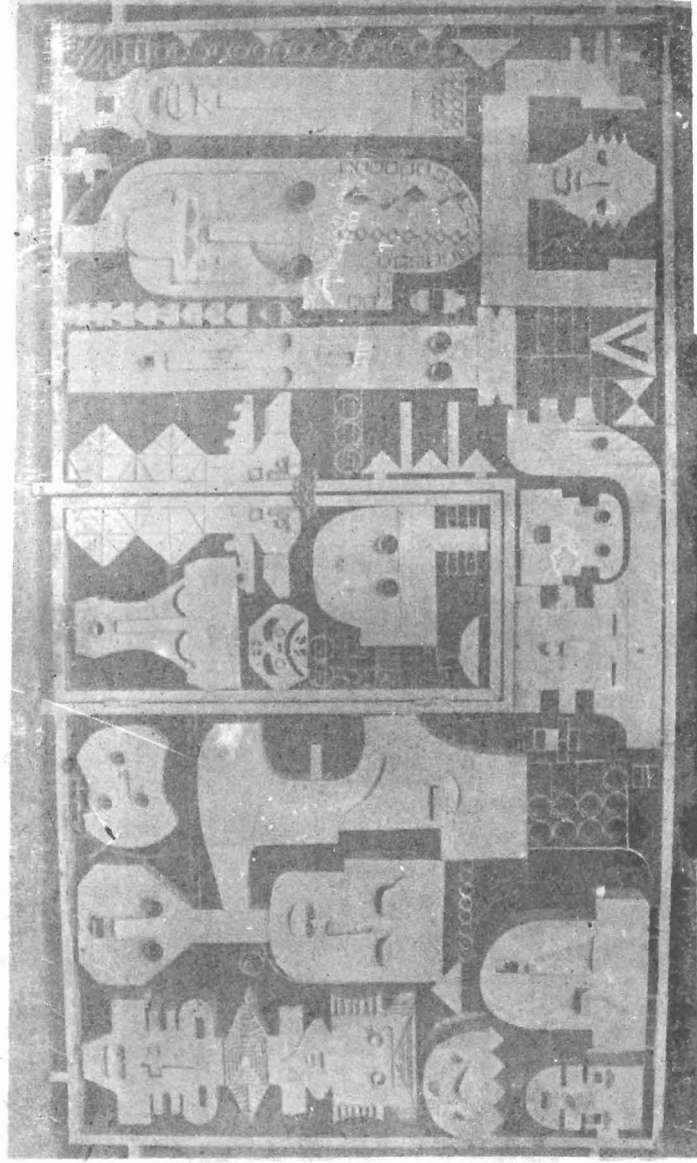


6. "Unionism & Sporting Activities".



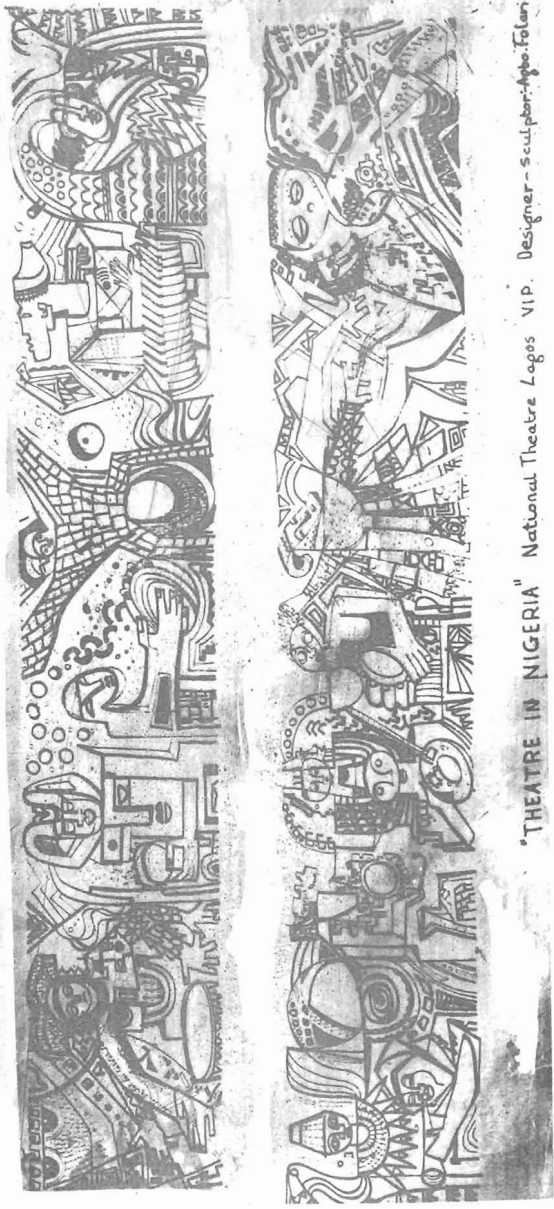
7. Pantheon of the gods.

44



8. "Faces At The Conference".

45



"THEATRE IN NIGERIA" National Theatre Lagos VIP. Designer-sculptor: Ayo Tolan

9. "Theatre In Nigeria".

46

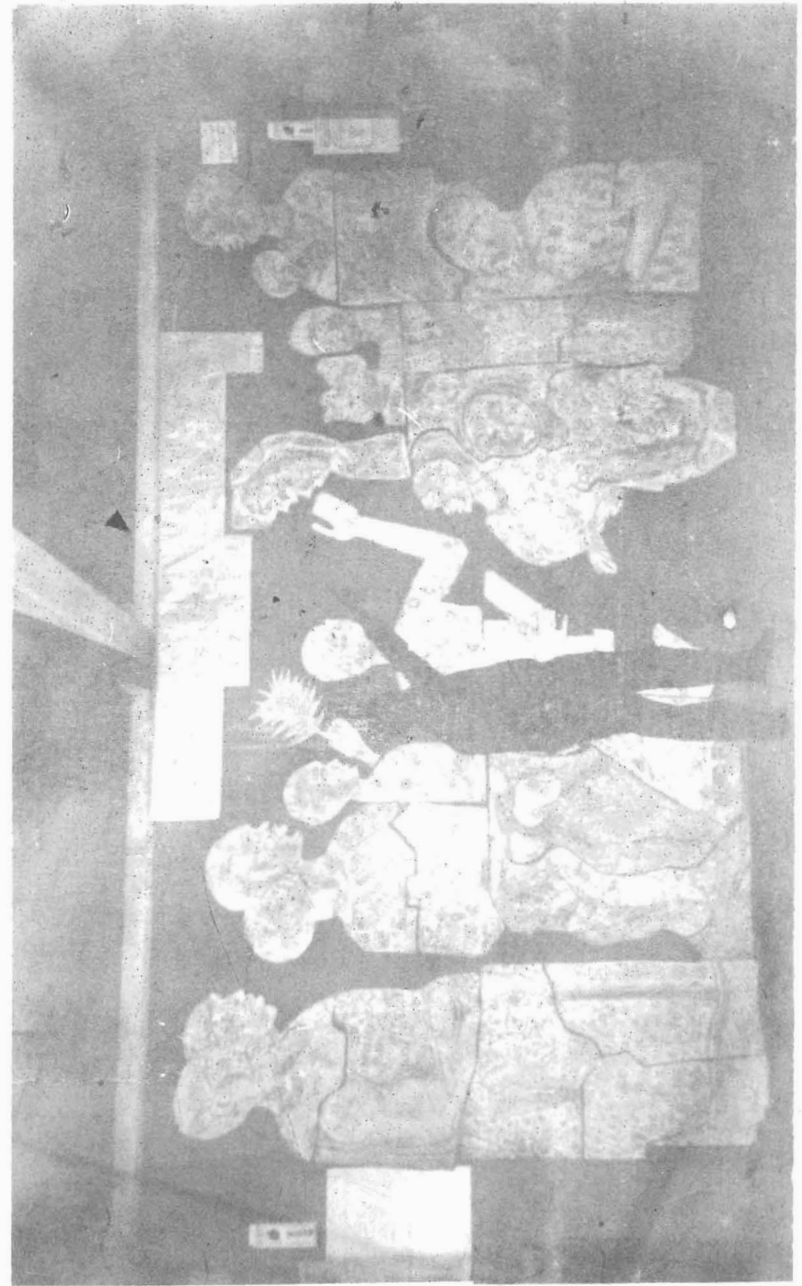


10. "Spirit of Man in Flight".



"DIVERSITY OF CREATION MYTHS" AGBO. FOLARIN 1993

11. Diversity of Creation Myths.



12. Good Education.