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Seeds of Passage

Olu Amoda

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SEEDS OF PASSAGE

by

OLU AMODA

(Under the Direction of Marc Moulton)

ABSTRACT

Seeds of Passage is an exhibition of sculptural ensembles I have created with found-objects, musing the Nobel Prize winning play, *Death and the Horsemen*, by Wole Soyinka. The play is based on the incident that took place in 1946 in the western region of Nigeria, when the cosmological traditions of a colonizing power clashed with those of the indigenous culture. I use found (repurposed) objects to create many of my works.

Three primary concepts guide my work: 1) latent energy - the memory or accumulative consciousness of the object, 2) the *Sieving Process* - the selection of individual parts from the local cache of materials, and 3) the pervasiveness of the material.

Influenced by objects found in my late mother's collection in 1993, I have designed sculptural forms to bubble in latent energy and to emphasize subject-area relationships between theatre and the visual arts; used found-object in exploring the cycle-of-objects—objects-to geographic location-to social class-to sculptural form-to collective object, and the wooden palette-plinths symbolize the cyclic nature of the found-object.

Gestured forms in each subject pose of the collection are designed to be as telling as to objects for aesthetic pleasure and more importantly of educational resource for viewers. I argue that found-objects are *repurposed* materials and thus are essential elements of organization of my sculptural form.

SEEDS OF PASSAGE

by

OLU AMODA

HND Sculpture Auchi Polytechnic

Edo State, Nigeria, 1983

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Georgia Southern University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF FINE ART

Statesboro, Georgia

2009

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SEEDS OF PASSAGE

by

OLU AMODA

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Electronic Version Approved:
December 2009

DEDICATION

For Jiji Karen Ifeoluwa Alero Olu-Amoda my daughter (named after my late mom),
and Lati Amoda my late brother (fallen hero of the Nigeria Civil War 1967 - 69.)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.
Psalm 116 V: 1 & 2.*

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CHAPTER I

This chapter focuses on a journey that explores the cycle of objects, and their meaning or the history acquired in the course of their travel from place to place, their possession (ownership) by a certain class of people in the society, and lastly their latent energy reminding us of the pool from which most found-object artworks derive their circumstantialities.

Autobiographical Origins of the Artwork

At the death of my mother, my siblings and I had the boldness to consume what remained in more than 150 different bottles of liquor that she drank from when she was alive. The assorted bottles of liquor were token gifts from relatives, daughters' suitors, cousins and her children (biological and extended family). The different colors and shapes of the bottles and the fact that less than a shot of the original content remained in each of them stood as cultural record of the kind of life she lived, and especially as a memorial to the happy occasions when those drinks were presented to her. Every shot consumed from those bottles evoked nostalgia, and generated crosscurrents of emotion. It was to ensure that these bottles were not prematurely discarded that my mother had left the less than a shot in most of them. These bottles were the repository of those memories frozen and dated.

Divine intervention seemed to be at work as all my siblings lined up outside my mother's bedroom in the order we were born. Once inside the rooms that held our mother's now lifeless body, we became an honor guard as we drank from the same glass, tasting all the leftovers from the bottles and passing the glass from one to the next in the order of birth. Each person dipped his or her

finger into the glass and smacked their lips with it. As we began to sing, onlookers joined in the chorus and the glass was simply passed from one sibling to the next. Occasionally we giggled as one person would make a face at the harshness of the liquor or show a sign of intoxication as we sampled over 150 brands of whisky, gin, brandy, rum, vodka and the local gin. But, the ritual had a desired effect on us intoxicated or not; it was the beginning of a healing process for the pain suffered from the loss of our mother. Drinking from the same glass silently we connected with our past and resolved to set aside our differences and pull together as a family, which was in fact our mother's lifelong heart's desire.

There is a special significance to the story just told of our mother's death. It clearly illustrates a point I intend to emphasize in my thesis, which is that by investing objects with emotions, you are actually infusing some kind of energy into those objects, whether they are used purposefully or are later discarded. It is this kind of emotional or energy investment that gives rise to one's claim of ownership over property. This can then, using the modern medical scientist's parlance, be authenticated through DNA, that is, if you touch the object. Now, using the methods of the archeologist or forensic scientist, I want, in this research, to seek connections with people and places from which the object originates. A new form [sculpture] will thus be created by harvesting the accumulated energies from the form in which they finally rest. The works are thus the vehicles through which these objects are resurrected to life and become sources for our appreciation and daily contemplation.

Materials

The Cycle of Objects

From place-to-place, social class-class, sculptural form-to-collectible object

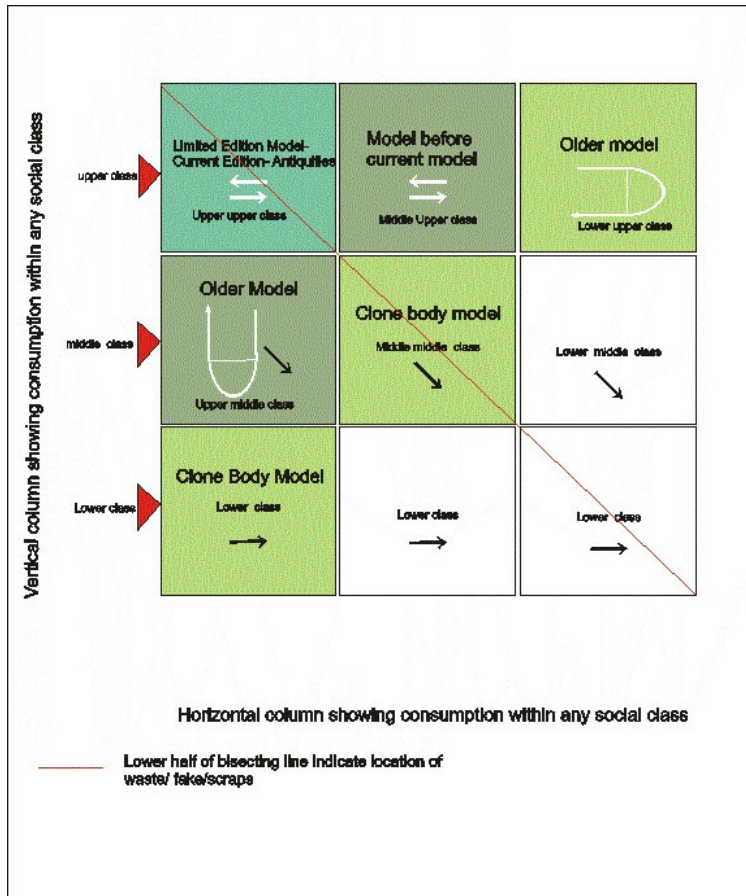


Fig 1. Movement of Object Within Social Class

“Any object that is not meant to be thrown away is securely bolted to the ground in San Francisco”¹ - Rigo 23

This research is based on found-objects², their meaning and their migratory nature in society. The terms, found-objects, ready-mades, collage and

¹ Rigo 23 is a San Francisco base site-specific artist

combines found their way into the vocabulary of art around the early twentieth century. But, actually, all these could date back to before recorded history if the artistic landscape is enlarged to accommodate the civilizations of Black Africa.

Ezio, Bassani, in his *Kongo Nail Fetishes from the Chiloango River Area African Arts* - April 1977, Volume X, states "In the collaborative sculpture of the nail fetish figures in Boma Congo, nails are driven into a carved sculpture ritually to ward off evil spirits".³ In a more recent discourse about found-objects, some scholars have attempted to expand the vocabulary with the inclusion of the word "recycle", a term borrowed from science. "Recycle", however, has not been well received by some artists.

Found-objects play the dual role of subject and process, while the content is embedded in the objects themselves. "Recycle" connotes a process of "renewable-ness" of an object. However, this has not been as successfully carried through in art as it has in science, where the circle is closed.

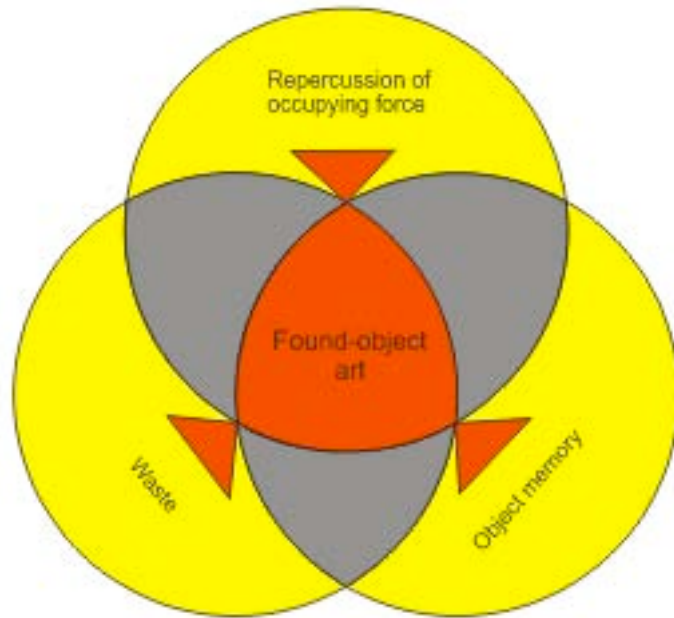
In found-objects, ready-mades and combines, present the familiar in an unfamiliar way. The artist gives new and different meaning to the objects. Many of the arts that are classified as "Recycled" on the other hand, are given different interpretations. "Recycled" art is more or less the propagandist's technique

² Found-object arts are created from the undisguised, but often modified, use of objects that are not normally considered art, often because they already have a non-art function Found art, however, has to have the artist's input, at the very least an idea about it, i.e. the artist's designation of the object as art, which is nearly always reinforced with a title. There is mostly also some degree of modification of the object, although not to the extent that it cannot be recognized. The modification may lead to it being designated a "modified", "interpreted" or "adapted" found object. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ready_made

³ (Ezio Bassani. *Kongo Nail Fetishes from the Chiloango River Area*: Originally published in *African Arts* - April 1977, Volume X, Number 3. http://www.randafricanart.com/Kongo_Nail_Fetishes_Chiloango_River_Area.html.

geared towards enlightening the masses about the alternative uses of such materials. Thus they speak of the wasteful tendencies of the capitalist society of the West. "Recycled" art in this context is geared towards novelty of the material used, which takes its audience for granted and therefore does not attempt to make them think.

On the other hand the art of, found-objects, ready-mades, and combines question the attitude of the viewer. It raises fundamental questions about issues such as consumerism, race, class, gender, form and indeed civilization. The reception given to found-object, ready-made and/or combine artworks is often either shock or excitement. In non-Western cultures, found-objects in art carry the dual insignia of class (vertical) and country (horizontal). In either case, the form, that is the shape, is critical to its admission into the realm of art.



- Waste generated by capitalist culture to meet unsatisfiable appetite of the individual consumer for items made faster and cheaper - resurrected as found object art
- Infusion of objects with life forces resulting in accumulated memories of those who used them at various times
- Repercussion of occupying (colonial) force on occupied indigenous tradition worldwide - desire for imported goods

Fig. 2 Found-Object art

Latent Energy

In recent times, inclusion of found-objects in art has infused art with a new meaning, giving it an energy that is capable of invoking the consciousness of spiritual phenomena. Some traditional societies of the non-Western world, require persons possessing special occult gifts, not necessarily an artist, to invoke the spirit that is assumed to dwell in the object. This is because the spirit is not dead but is alive for ritual purposes in the vehicle, contraption or artwork. The movement of an object from one place of origin to other place and then to the artist's workshop where it is transformed into art and then returned perhaps to its place of origin is the closest artist can get to the concept "recycle".

There are certain misconceptions that are associated with artworks made out of found-objects, especially in their ability to question institutions such as museums, the state and the class structure of most societies.

For example, according to Jacques Maquet, in his *The Aesthetic Experience: An Anthropologist Looks At The Visual Arts*, "... he states as anthropologists, we want to analyze the particular way one looks at art objects. A comparative reflection, remaining very close to experience, reveals differences in our ways of looking at things. I look at a map of sixteen-century London in order to discover how the city space was organized. I analyze the distribution of the different areas" ⁴

⁴ Jacques Maquet, *The Aesthetic Experience: An Anthropologist Looks At The Visual Arts* p. 29

The Anthropologist

The anthropologist's structure seems to be the prism through which most new forms must be viewed and analyzed. The artist's quest for new forms gets truncated not because s/he is incapable of creating new forms but because his/her new form is forced to fit into the structure as laid down by anthropologists. These limitations make the artist's search most often a futile one. Yet they must keep creating and discussing their art with the view to raising people's awareness of people's responsibilities as they pertain to waste.

Artworks made from found-objects give rise to a number of new forms as well as attitudes. The recognizable objects in these works invite commentary from all sorts of people, some actually questioning the legitimacy of such materials or objects as art. Some question the artist's claim as an artist. These reactions sometimes not intended to hurt or to denigrate, are often surprisingly, welcomed by the artists. Most artists believe that an artwork that evokes divergent aesthetics is most satisfying, indeed, more so than those of convergent aesthetics in some instances.

The anthropologists are the most vocal critics of the artist because they complain that the artist makes the deciphering of objects more difficult as the object takes a new life, leaving little clue as to its origin and intent. Fortunately, anthropologists have created a new discipline, anthropology of art, where they are able, using their background, to probe the new art form. However, a lot of problems have arisen from this attempt to understand this new art form. The first was how to classify it. While the anthropologists ponder such questions as how these new objects can be distinguished from man-made things, and while they

acknowledge that this new art form is a mutation of a known art form, they are curiously silent on the creator himself, that is, the artist as a human being. We know that in science, mutation is an abnormality resulting from a mis-match in the order of creative sequence. Many factors could be responsible for these phenomena, some external while others are internal. The practice of the anthropologist is to take the object and judge it by the tools of the craftsman and place it in its primary social context and then possibly relate it to the West's cultural paradigms if the work comes from a non-western culture.

But what happens when the elements are recognized as a fusion of cultures? The first real challenge to the anthropologist is the way of seeing. It is critical to distinguish looking from seeing. You can look and not see. Looking, in this case, means to merely report or describe. In art, this is not enough. You should be able to see what is spiritually there. In other words, you must have an analytical mind when you look and see in order to make sense of the work in cognition which of the artist's intent.

A leading scholar of the Anthropology of Art, Jacques Maquet, opined in his book, *The Aesthetic Experience: An Anthropologist Looks At The Visual Arts*, that visual art, is the melting-pot of all disciplines and, therefore, society owes it a task of analyzing and giving meaning to human activities in the creative field. The author raises important issues about art, its universality and cross-cultural nature, and about how important the observations of object/material(s) are in the creation

of sculpture, architecture, painting, and crafts, this true in the Western or non-Western cultures.⁵

Mobility

The mutation of objects as they move from place to place was best articulated in a video, “Divine Carcasse” by Loreau. The video extols the nature and form of waste and the attitude associated with its material essence. The process of exporting a car from an industrialized to an industrializing nation is like—an exploration without survival kits—open to difficulty. On the other hand, importing may be dictated by a taste for what is foreign, a vehicle in which the captured spirit that once resided in an artifact looted from Africa returns to its source.

European used cars are imported into Africa through trade routes established by the Berlin Conference of 1914 during which Africa was economically partitioned. The truth is, in most former-colonies any industrial product imported from the West attracts a followership that believes the product, whether a used car or refrigerator, will live up to its billing as advertised in commercials.

In Loreau’s video, a used-car was imported into the country of Benin Republic, a former French colony. There the car was naturally subjected to a harsh terrain, which the car was not built for. Within a month, after the car had

⁵ Jacques Maquet, *The Aesthetic Experience: An Anthropologist Looks At The Visual Arts*, p. 33
From observing an urban society in everyday life, we discovered that the reality referred to by the term art included a category of commodities that are found in a specialized segment of the market and have specific use. Further, we observed that the same term art also expressed a positive quality (“Really, this painting is art”), and that the denotations of two meanings were coextensive: all the art objects were not art, and all the objects with an “art quality” were not art objects.

made several trips to the mechanic's workshop, the owner, a French expatriate by the name of Simon, decided to be generous with it and so gave it to a faithful steward, Joseph. After using it for a while, for both his personal comfort and as a taxi, he decided to take it to the village to show it off to his parents. At the same time he tried to extend its life by giving it proper insurance, an amulet, against evil spirits and accidents. Of course, such insurance never covers the wear and tear of the vehicle. He happily returned to the city with the car but after he had paid several trips to the mechanic's workshops, he came to the sad realization that the vehicle had in fact become more a source of sorrow and pain. This is because he was now spending all his meager income from his master on repairs. He had therefore decided to cannibalize it and sell the parts to spare parts dealers.

Finally, a metal sculptor was commissioned to produce a Fetish-Mask, an effigy, for Joseph's village, that is, the village of the steward. The sculptor was compelled to the carcass of Joseph's car because of the latent energy of the vehicle, the protective amulet.

However the video was silent on the importance of the sea and river routes traveled and the amulet which the steward used to insure his car, the latent energies of the car.

Most traditional Africans believe that when an amulet goes over water its power is destroyed. Yet water remains a common route through which people and products travel and with which they identify. The Fetish-Mask found its way to the museums of the West through the rivers of the world, one reason why its

spirit essence was diminished. The sculptured Fetish-Mask has to ride on that element that renders it less potent in order to reunite with its source.

The distinction between invisible and visible hand “can, however, be most clearly seen in the different attitudes to the fetish itself. In the West, it would be seen as a self-contained, finished creation by an individual artist to be consumed simply for its aesthetic value. In Benin it is a functional object constructed by an anonymous craftsman which only fully assumes it’s meaning when it is used as a vessel on which a god alights. Surprisingly, it is Lean Genet who makes this point in the film’s epigraph: “A work of art is not for the generation of children, it is offered to the countless generations of the past, who approve or reject it.”⁶

This may seem to Africans, perhaps, too obvious a point to make. That various man-made objects get a life-boost from the sentimental attachment that people have to them either because the object comes from outside their country or it was a gift.

Plastic Objects

Man-made objects that I have used for this project are mainly plastic, not biodegradable. The non-biodegradable menace of plastics may have contributed to the concept of recycled art. Most recent plastic products have a symbol, stamped on their surface a triangle of arrows, that indicates their recyclability.

The plastic products of the industrial revolution missed the era in which materials were associated with various deities, especially in non-western

⁶ California Newsreel. <http://www.newsreel.org/nav/title.asp?tc=CN0025>

cultures. However, most plastics are barren and lack the traditional potency of objects like steel and wood whose natures are dedicated to or associated with ancient gods.

Plastics do not fall into such a category as they are used mainly for emblems commemorating events. Plastics and other simulated materials which are new entrants as contemporary materials produce waste that has proved to be most difficult to contain. Plastic is the general common term for a wide range of synthetic or semi-synthetic organic amorphous solid materials suitable for the manufacture of industrial products.⁷ Plastics are typically polymers of high molecular weight, and may contain other substances to improve performance and/or reduce costs.

Ease of production and low-cost have made plastic ubiquitous. Recycling for new and developing economies continues to be one of the biggest challenges of the 21st century.

The growth and influx of plastics into our waste bins has been so spectacular that if all the artists living today were to shift to working with this material, present and future generations would have more than enough plastics with which to work.

I agree with the notion that materials, because of their physical characteristics, emotive impact, and idea content, play an essential role in the

⁷ www.dictionary.com Often, plastics. any of a group of synthetic or natural organic materials that may be shaped when soft and then hardened, including many types of resins, resinoids, polymers, cellulose derivatives, casein materials, and proteins: used in place of other materials, as glass, wood, and metals, in construction and decoration, for making many articles, as coatings, and, drawn into filaments, for weaving. They are often known by trademark names, as Bakelite, Vinylite, or Lucite. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/plastic>

creation of artworks. One great advantage of working with man-made materials, inorganic – plastics and other simulated materials is that they can be equally imbued with meanings as significant as those associated with natural organic materials such as wood, steel, and clay. As explained in the movement of objects, the economic considerations far outweigh their value as substitute materials. In the production process in the factory, substitute materials are subjected to rigorous testing.

Cragg, Anthony in *Material-Object-Form*, described these substitutes thus: “Many new materials originated for economic reasons, as substitutes for natural materials, and as such have automatically been valued as inferior. And, as parts of practical constructive and industrial system, many others have assumed an everyday, banal function. This banality that provides a hurdle that is essential to overcome in order to start a dialogue with the works”.⁸

According to Cragg, then, we can conclude that in the quest for and in the process of harvesting objects for the creation of art, the artist is confronted with complex issues: relevance, context, the purpose and objective of art and art form.

As the consumer or viewer questions the aesthetic legitimacy of such objects he is often confused and agitated. Such reactions often leave the artists confounded and bewildered.

⁸ Cragg Anthony in *Material-Object-Form*. P. 60

Ritualistic Objects

Some objects go through rituals in order to inject into them spiritual energy to protect them. This is a common practice among blacksmiths. It is important to examine the place of the blacksmith (metal worker) in the traditional African society in order to gain a deeper understanding of the cult of the Smithies and the role iron plays in socio-cultural and religious lives of these societies.

My conversation with Chief Alfa, a senior wood carver with the Bendel art (now Edo Art) Council in Benin, Nigeria, reveals the strong linkage between craftsmen, kingship and political authority. In Benin City, South-Western Nigeria, according to Chief Alfa, oral traditions often associate cultural heroes or even kings with great craftsmanship. Chief Alfa talked extensively about the guardian spirit, a deity of carving, he often consulted in the forest and from which he derived some of his technical skills. He invokes supernatural forces in the wood through his special medicinal and ritual knowledge. He has a shrine in his home where he makes offerings to this deity. His ongoing apprenticeship teaches him to make the constant adjustments that wood, fuel, and weather conditions demand and to perform ritual offerings to the ancestors and other spirits for his protection, survival, and prosperity. He has also learned how to protect his enterprise from malevolent forces or spiteful competitors through the use of material spiritual intermediaries and prescribed behavior. Indeed, occult powers are often invoked into the carving tools, that is, the tools are consecrated during and after forging by placing ritual objects at the base of each tool in order to strengthen and protect it. The chisel may also be oiled with ritual liquids to give it

strength and protect it or, even perhaps, to cause whatever he creates with it to prosper.

The found-object today, as material, may of course not be subjected to the same ritual practice as described above by Alfa, but it is subjected to a ritual that addresses the same fears as those of the craftsman of the past.

Nevertheless, these objects are carriers of energy and are capable of influencing the behavior of the artist and consumer alike. When these objects pass from country to country they mutate and assume a new language while maintaining their original form. The object, storing both the old and newly acquired energy memories, remains the universal key by which its origin and manufacture can be traced. This combination of the old and the new results in a marriage of energies.

Conclusion

The new form reflects a new state or interpretation which the second-generation user, artist, employs to communicate to his audience. In attempting to communicate, some artists raise issues which focus on doubts or questions rather than certainties. "Certainty"⁹ is merely a dream which the artist strives to conquer. It creates the pressure that permits studies, research or expression - a scope of activities within the limit of experimental error. While others may consider it an unprofitable pursuit, it becomes the point to which all efforts must return.

⁹ certainty is the 25% short plus the visible 75% of the artist's intent.

It is, unfortunately, the case that the effectiveness of the artist to communicate is appreciated through their manipulative skills rather than by the message intended by the collaboration of material and artist. This collaboration is disseminated through latent energy. The audience appreciation of only the manipulative skills is compounded if the work comes from an artist or an art tradition that for long has had an identifiable style.

I cannot but agree with the notion that materials, because of their physical characteristics, emotive impact, and idea content, play an essential role in the creation of artworks. One great advantage of working with man-made materials, inorganic – plastics and other simulated materials is that they can be equally imbued with meanings as significant as those associated with natural organic materials such as wood, steel, and clay. As explained in the movement of objects, the economic considerations far outweigh their value as substitute materials. In the production process in the factory, substitute materials are subjected to rigorous testing.

As the consumer or viewer questions the aesthetic legitimacy of such objects he is often confused and agitated. Such reactions often leave the artists confounded and bewildered.

Found-object artworks appear to raise the fundamental issues of the intent of the first author and the response of the first consumer. The secondary use of these objects in the artworks exposes us to the realization or the consciousness of their functioning as creative partners. To the spiritualists this is an expression of divine intervention.

Before the objects were combined to create such a work of art, they went through a process presumed to be complex and even unknowable. The basis of this presumption is that it is up to the different objects either to reject or accept fusion, that is, the combination of objects, while still maintaining their original states, or while they mutate to form a recognizable hybrid or simulation with which the viewer or observer can nonetheless identify.

Found-objects, combines, and ready-mades enable viewers to recognize that an assemblage of objects can result in a composition that exists within a context, which can be called art.

Art often deals with the spiritual realm. Regardless of our faith, it is imperative that we do not disregard or dismiss the artist's claim that he receives divine inspiration.

Recently, El Anatusi, the Ghanaian sculptor, who lives and works in Nigeria, has produced some of the most sought after found-object art by most Western museums and collectors. *Versatility*, the title of one of his a pieces, is made from aluminum seals and liquor bottle caps that have been flattened and stitched together with copper wire to create sculptural fabric. Kante¹⁰ another piece by El, is a good example of the chemistry in objects combining to illustrate the restlessness of the latent energy created by the human experiences with which these objects had contact.

Viewers of his work continue to be fascinated by his pieces but often fail to see the issue which the artist set out to address.

¹⁰ Kente cloth, known locally as nwentoma, is a type of silk fabric made of interwoven cloth strips and is native to the country of Ghana, where it was first developed in the 12th century. It is sometimes used to make shirts.

In creating Kante, El used copper wire to stitch the pieces together, but unfortunately, most people miss the metaphor of the copper wire. The artist often gets his copper from burnt electric motor coils which come from imported fake electric motors. Metaphorically, the wire is a symbol of imported poison to third-world countries.

Bruce Onobrakpeya, Nigeria's foremost printmaker, recently started using industrial computer parts to represent cityscapes. The motherboard symbolically becomes a grid system reminiscent of aerial shots of large cities. A motherboard of a computer panel with its circuit diagrams becomes a map of the road network.

When the motherboard crashes, the data gets trapped. So the motherboard is not just an electronic panel but also serves as a repository of complex data, information on events and people, and the user of the specific motherboard.

In my cityscape series titled "This is Lagos," I introduce computer motherboards as a metaphor for the haphazard roofs of the casually built houses found in Lagos in contrast with the planned parts of the city.

The artist constantly exploits his creative liberty to introduce new forms and attitudes that come from various combinations and arrangements. S/he sometimes assumes the role of priest who reads the divination board to divine the future. Her/His unique interpretation of the future from the divination board translates into objects of aesthetic beauty.

What does this tell us? To respond to this question, one has to return to the quote by Rigo 23, a visiting artist in my site-specific class at San Francisco Art Institute in the fall of 2007.

“Any object that is not meant to be thrown away is securely¹¹ bolted to the ground in San Francisco” - Rigo 23

Rigo 23 is a site-specific artist who used displaced nature to create his mural pieces which reminds us of the changes that take place daily, moment by moment. These function as an allegory about what takes place while we are busy trying to exist from day to day.

When asked about his works, he talked about the waste that is the result of up-grading by the masses and championed by politicians. Another colleague of mine narrated his family experience in Argentina where a refrigerator gets passed on over several generations. The new owner, even if he had enough money to buy a new refrigerator from America, would prefer to retain the one that carried the family “spirit” simply because it reminded him of the dead.

The generational transfer of property or objects within families or associates is a way of making sure that as long as the product is used, the donor is remembered. The product is not just any product but a conduit or divination object in which one’s ancestors continue to participate in family discourse, as in the doctrine of transubstantiation¹².

Dominique Loreau, California Newsreel: *Divine Carcasse*, interprets giving and receiving gifts as fetishism: “...an object passes from hand to hand changing

¹¹ Securely my word

¹² transubstantiation the Roman Catholic doctrine that the whole substance of the bread and the wine changes into the substance of the body and blood of Christ when ...
transmutation: an act that changes the form or character or substance of something
wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn

its meaning according to how we use it. It is a fiction and reality at the same time. Like a fetish, it is a fiction which creates reality.”¹³

My mother kept liquor bottles because they reminded her of the donors. I was intrigued by as a young boy growing up but no articulated feeling for what she was doing. It was only much later as my feelings and passion for found-objects became articulated that I began to trace those feelings to my mother’s liquor bottles collection. Her attachment to those bottles made me to begin to take notice of beer soaked tablecloths and empty bottles that often littered pubs in Nigeria the morning after. Of course you would not look at those empty smelly bottles without thinking of those who drank from them.

The crux of the matter has always been that some historians in the West have found it difficult to see the meaning or importance of found-objects or traditional African accumulative sculpture even with the stark evidence of Synthetic Cubism, Fauvism, Dada and Surrealism, or the more recent exploitations by contemporary Western artists.

We underestimate the role of the found-object in art regardless of what the artist sets out to say. Fortunately, in spite of the critics’ deliberate attempt to ignore the role of found-objects in contemporary art, collectors are eager to acquire such works simply because s/he is fascinated or intrigued by the mere fact that the work is coming from a part of the world where very few people use electricity. Also, fortunately, the artists get paid for cleaning these objects and reinventing them. In any case, all this ensures the continued mobility of the objects.

¹³ California Newsreel. <http://www.newsreel.org/nav/title.asp?tc=CN0025>

Summary

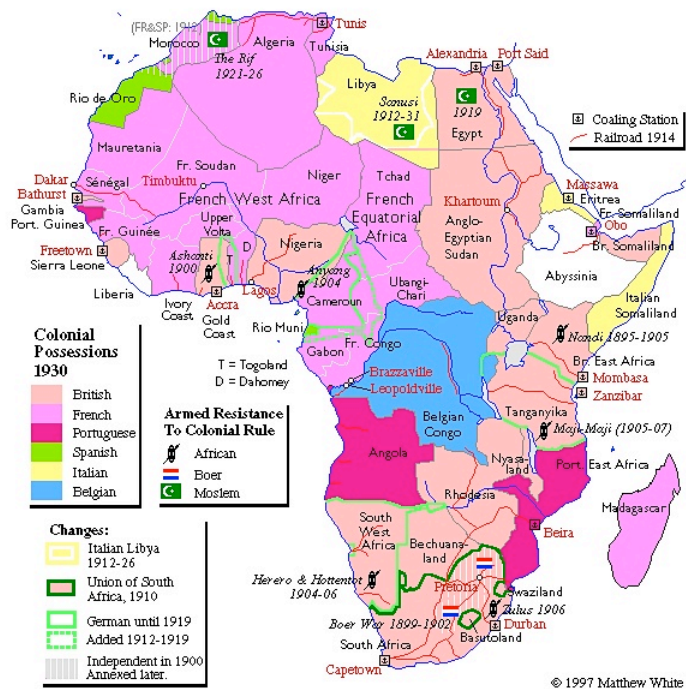
This research is on found-objects, their meaning and their migratory nature in society. The terms found-objects, ready-mades, collages, and combines found their way into the vocabulary of art around the early twentieth century. Found-objects play the dual role of subject and process while the content is embedded in the objects themselves. “Recycle” connotes a process of renewable-ness of an object. In found-objects, ready-mades and combines, the artist presents the familiar in an unfamiliar way giving art a new and different meaning. In non-Western cultures, found-objects in art carry the dual insignia of class (vertical) and country (horizontal). Latent energy – is the memory or accumulative consciousness of the found-objects, acquired when they migrate and mutate from place to place and persons alike.

CHAPTER 2

A GLIMPSE AT COLONIAL AND POST-COLONIAL AFRICA

This chapter seeks to establish a link between objects and the changing attitude of an emerging middle class through a study of conflict belief systems and similitude.

Africa in the Early Twentieth Century



Contemporary Context:



Fig. 3. Map of Africa showing European Colonies

In colonial Africa, there are several accounts of expeditions which indicate that the British, the French and Portuguese all came first as traders before Christianity follower later. Objects that were used as bills of exchange for

products ranged from agricultural produce and minerals to slaves. The types of objects ranged from salt and mirrors to machines, cars and bicycles. Most of the activities were initially restricted to the coastlands; but they soon expanded into the hinterland through missionary activities whose sole aim was to abolish the traditional African religious practices and replace them with Christianity. The confluence of the two expeditions (religious and trading) produced a social class that had a profound impact on the social structure. The traditional culture in pre-colonial Nigeria, in which family name and dignity of labor were highly cherished, was soon truncated by the lifestyle introduced by the colonialist.

Colonial Nigeria was a difficult place for the colonialists. One of the reasons had to do with the fact that before the arrival of the Europeans, Nigeria had strong traditional beliefs which constituted a great obstacle to the colonialists' political and economic agenda. These beliefs were very difficult for both traders and missionaries to break down or eliminate. This often led to invasion of localities and the sacking or dethronement of their monarchs. Sometimes, resistance was fierce but at the end such resistance had to yield to the fire power of colonial guns. In all these local wars, palaces were looted and the sacred and exotic objects were removed and taken to collections and museums in the West. Today these objects are kept in glass cases with camera surveillance.

Many anthropologists have observed that encasing of these objects stripped them of their powers. There is a lot of literature indicating that these objects lost the energy and potency that once protected them. Desecration of

these objects and, of course, of the shrines from which they were removed was a major motivation for resistance to the encroachment of missionaries and colonials into local enclaves. It should be clear that while the colonialists came for political and economic reasons and the missionaries came for soul-winning, that is, two ostensibly different agendas, their strategies ultimately coincided: both saw the necessity of first subjugating the local people and then detaching them from their strange traditional worship of local deities and removing objects that symbolized such deities. The British colonialists carted away such objects to metropolitan museums while the missionaries made the locals destroy what was left by burning them. The doggedness and resistance of the local peoples at the end forced the British and missionaries into a compromise which allowed them to keep their objects as long as they were not used as part of Sunday worship.

Soyinka Wole, *Death and the King's Horseman* (1986) vividly narrates an incident in this long drawn battle. The play tells the story of *Elesin Oba*, the King's Horseman, who is expected to commit ritual suicide following the death of the king. The story is based on a historical event in 1946 when the royal horseman known as the *Elesin* was arrested by the British colonial powers in an attempt to prevent him from committing ritual suicide. In the play Soyinka tells of a colonial who wore one of the misused looted items, a masquerade regalia, as his ball costume in the presence of a local steward who had to renounce his belief momentarily by saying "black man juju can't touch master":

"Joseph: Oh, no, master is white man. And a good Christian. Black man juju can't touch master".¹⁴

¹⁴ Wole, Soyinka. *Death and the King's Horseman*. P 29

In other words, knowing the difficulty of micro-managing beliefs, the colonials were compelled to accept a compromise that allowed the caretaker regimes which replaced the sacked monarchs to permit mixed beliefs in order to ensure a steady flow of goods on the transatlantic trade route. Raw goods left the African shores in exchange for finished goods that were sometimes forced on the local peoples. Such was the case in colonial Nigeria. What consumer products were imported to colonial Nigeria depended on a cycle of production and changing tastes. Thus, the British also argued that the trade benefited the West Africans more than it benefited them. In some instances, it could not have been otherwise. The Africans knew what they wanted from each transaction and rejected what was perceived to be sub-standard. One of the aims of this research, which is to establish a link between objects and the changing attitude of an emerging middle class, is clearly empathized by Jeremy Prestholdt in *Domesticating the World African Consumerism and The Genealogies of Globalization*:

“...Fashion was dominant among Central African tribes as among the belles of Paris or London.” “Each tribe”, he explained, “must have its own particular class of cotton, and its own chosen tint, color, and size among beads.” Indicative of the importance of sensitivity to local taste ...”The Absence of the required article at any particular point, might mean nothing less than disaster and failure to the expedition, as people will have nothing but cloth or bead that happens to be in fashion. Everything else is of no value, and will hardly be accepted as a present.” Venting his dissatisfaction with the terms exchange, he added, ” Worse still, the fashions are just as changeable (as in England).¹⁵

¹⁵ Jeremy, Prestholdt. *Domesticating the World African Consumerism and The Genealogies of Globalization*. pps. 63 and 64.

The changing fashion, as informed by fashion news, resulted in the rejection of goods that arrived late from long voyages. The rejects were often not returned but sold for less.

Post-Colonial Nigeria posed another challenge for consumerism, craftsmen who trained in the West brandished their certificates as proofs that they could also produce goods of equal standard as the ones imported. The playing field ordinarily would have favored the local craftsman who trained in London, America, Germany and the Soviet Union, over the craftsman trained in Nigeria and/or Africa.

However, the gains of independence proved to be very costly as the continent became an economic and political battlefield for locals struggling for power and control of their lands. The turbulent wars in Nigeria and all over the continent, escalated until they threatened the social fabric of most African countries; the effects and evidence of this are still with us to date. Allies in wartime become economic allies with aid pacts being signed in exchange for mineral prospecting and importation of used cars, machinery and other items as informed by the local taste.

The local consumer production faced competition from products of industrialized nations. The locals or indigenes were able to stand together to fight a common cause because they were all from the traditional guild system that recognized skilled craftsmanship. Products, that is, locally produced items carried no patent stamp while foreign goods proudly displayed their patent. Post-Colonial Nigeria soon divided all products into four categories based on quality,

not on how they looked. The first category was home-made called “Aba naya, meaning ‘made in Aba’¹⁶”; the second category was the made in England, Germany, Japan and America; the third was the made in China and Taiwan; and the fourth category was made up of imported used products locally known as “Okrika also as tokunbo”.¹⁷

The homemade is crudely made to last, not too expensive but was nonetheless out of the reach of many of the lower class. The lower class consumers consist mainly of the lower cadre civil servants, petty traders and artisans. Products from England, America, Germany and Japan were also durable but more expensive and patronized more by the well-to-do higher ranking civil servants and budding entrepreneurs. The products of China and Taiwan were just a shade above the locally made, not expensive, so more people across the class lines could afford them. “Okrika or tokunbo”, these used objects are imported from Europe, America and Far East. They are more durable because they were once subjected to the scrutiny of the standard organization and consumer advocacy group. They are sold in specialized outlets to meet the demand from related cultural industry. These outlets way far the model of the thrift and goodwill stores as practice in America. They are patronize by all the social class.

Post-colonial Nigerian economy could be described as strong. New and imported goods dominated the stands and the economy withstood the influx of good and bad products as they filtered across the lines differentiated by class

¹⁶ Aba is a commercial city in Eastern Nigeria

¹⁷ Okrika also as tokunbo is the local name for used merchandise.

tastes. Part of the reason the acceptance of the used products was that the ‘new’ products from the West and from Far East were of lesser quality. On the other hand the “tokunbo”, or used products, were of good quality, durable and very affordable, much more so than the new ones coming from the West and Far East.

But of course, the result of this mad love with imported used goods – cars, electrical items and electronics, etc, was that soon all kinds of used and fake objects began to be brought in thus making most of the continent a dumping ground.

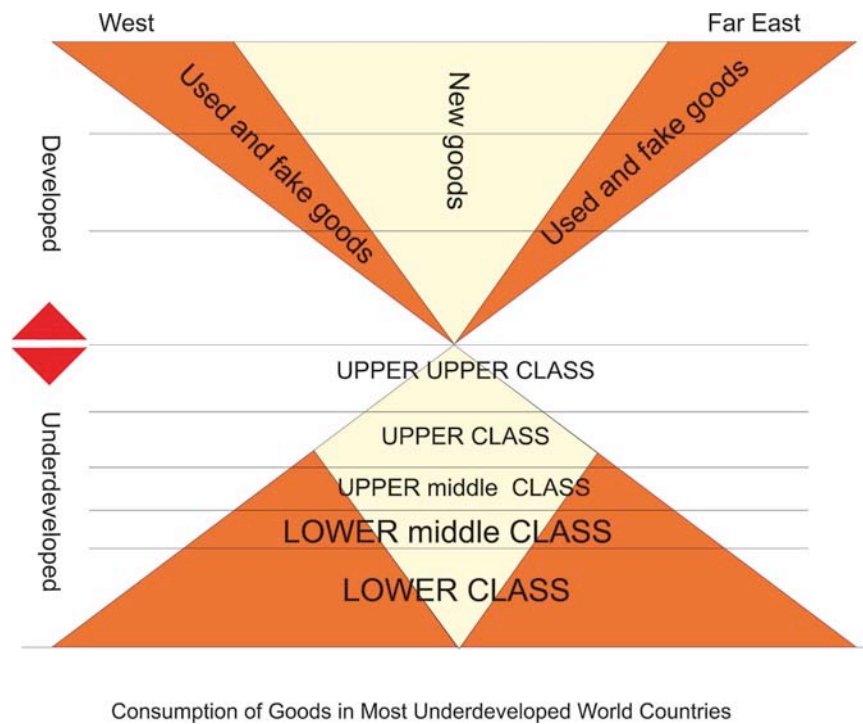


Fig. 4. Consumption of Imported Goods in most Underdeveloped Countries

BBC World Service's "Dirty Business" reporter Liz Camey echoes the Nigerian fear of e-waste in the article 'Toxic Legacy'.¹⁸ The article examined the accumulation of mountains of electronic waste in Nigeria, increasingly the world's Personal Computer (PC) dumping ground. The government now has a national committee to deal with the problem. The article gave the numbers of container loads that came to one warehouse complex in Apapa, Port, Lagos, Nigeria as 40 per month. The article also reported 500 tons of used electronics daily. These figures concerned goods for which documentation was not clear or which were waiting for the paper work to be sorted out. However, it is generally admitted that several containers with their papers have passed into the port and are already in circulation.



Fig.5. Cable Burning in a Dumpsite in Ghana.
news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7543489.stm

The scrap yards in Lagos, as in most sub-Saharan African cities, are overflowing with waste material because the high rate of dumping out-paces consumption. Most Africans and Nigerians in particular, believe that they can be harmed diabolically by envious neighbors or relatives using their personal effects as medium. So, to be on the safe side, they would rather throw away whatever they don't need anymore – shoes, garments, etc – rather than give them away as

¹⁸ Camey, Liz. Nigeria fear e-waste 'toxic legacy'. BBC World Service's Dirty Business.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6193625.stm>

gifts to those envious relatives. Or they could donate them to churches for the anonymous needy.

From the above, it is clear that objects, from a non-western cultural perspective, are repository of latent energy that affects the way they are used and dispensed. Doris T. David in his short write-up on me in the catalog to a group exhibition titled “Out of the Ordinary” and published by the Victoria and Albert museum London, summed up my ideas on found object thus:

“For Amoda, these things vibrate with invisible intentionalities, the residual energies of the past users. Both on and below the surface, an old piece of metal retains the traces of human beings who created it, used it cared for it, damaged it, discarded it. Such an object is an index: it refers us to its own history, and to the absent actors who remain present in its substance.”¹⁹

Most found objects lend themselves to the dictates and manipulative skills of the artists while retaining their latent energies. Most artists working on found objects in Africa today are concerned not only with the form of the object but also with its latent energies and their meanings.

We have mentioned briefly how El Anatsui, who is currently one the most prolific artists from the continent of Africa, used aluminum liquor bottle caps stitched together with copper wire to create simulation of the Kente fabric, indexing these bottle caps and interpreting the various brands, - Dark Sailor, Liquor Head Master, Black Gold, Squadron leader, Chelsea, Johnny Walker, etc, as a reflection of a particular period of African history.

¹⁹ Doris, T, David. Crime and the Index. Out of the Ordinary: Spectacular Craft. V&A Publication and the Crafts Council. P 44.

“When I work with this medium, I have in mind that I am touching or playing around with that time in history,” Anatsui says, referring to the time when sailing ships brought liquor to Africa and took slaves across the Atlantic. “Maybe the people who made the drinks chose their names for different reasons, but for me they ring of that episode.”²⁰

Most of the found-object artworks coming out of Africa within the last decade reveal the artists’ consciously weaving their efforts around the transmutation of objects while they index place, migratory routes, and the attitudes of first and subsequent users. The function and role of these found-objects might not be easily discerned in the art works because people are mostly intrigued by their novelty. Thus, the double jeopardy of the audience and artist on two parallel lines has plagued the art of assemblage, art pauvre, combines, found-object, and the-ready-made since its inception in the early nineteenth century.

The scrap yards, dumpsites, garages, street corners, and closets are a few examples of places where objects transit before entering the discourse of found-object for art’s sake. While objects rest in these sites they acquire and simultaneously release energies that will make for ease of mobility along the horizontal and the vertical axis of the social class that was discussed in the previous chapter. To better understand or articulate this phenomenon, the strategy of the Derive Principle²¹ needs to be studied.

²⁰<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/story/2008/03/20/ST2008032003.html>

²¹ One of the basic situationist practices is the *dérive*, a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. *Dérives* involve playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or

Objects influence a great deal the attitudes of the users who often perceive them as status symbols on the vertical axis. This attitude often spreads or peaks to the horizontal bracketing social class.

Jim Lehere in his novel, *The Phony Marine*, describes how the life of the main character Hugo Marder, a wise and reserved salesman was changed by the simple act of wearing a silver medal, awarded for bravery in battle, which he purchased on eBay. Late one night, Hugo stumbled upon an online auction for a Silver Star, the medal awarded for bravery in battle. He bids and wins. But it is only after he places the medal on his jacket that he realizes the enormity of his actions. Suddenly, ordinary people begin to treat him differently, with dignity and respect.²²

In the article serialized by Guy Debord (1956) in the publication of *Internationale Situationniste #2* (December 1958) "Theory of the Derive", Debord described *Derive* literally as Drifting. Objects drift not of their own desire but due to external categorizations imposed on them by makers and users.

"Among the Various Situationist methods is the *derive* [literally: 'Drifting'], a technique of transient passage through varied ambiances. The *derive* entails playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psycho-geographical effects; which completely distinguishes it from the classical notions of journey and stroll."²³

To explain movement of objects and their latent energy, I will prefix "Found" to qualify the objects Debord talks of as drifting and not having their

stroll.

²² <http://search.barnesandnoble.com/The-Phony-Marine/Jim-Lehrer/e/9781400064861>

²³ Guy, Debord (1956) "Theory of the Derive" *Internationale Situationniste #2* (December 1958)

own desire but are subjected to external categorizations imposed on them by makers, users and recently, scavengers.

Hypothetically, objects transiting in shops are not different from the objects of the Situationist theory, except that their places in shelves are predetermined by the need to sell them to prospective buyers. To prevent any pilfering, in the displayed counters in malls, they are protected by the watchful eyes of attendants, electronic tracking-bar-codes and cameras. As soon as the object is paid for, it embarks on another predetermined journey which starts within the life of the user. This is the time it embarks on the proxy-journey as props in the Situationist drifting described above. But for space, it would have been good to examine in detail the drifting suggested by this hypothesis.

Summary

Objects that were used as bills of exchange for products ranged from agricultural produce, to minerals, to slaves. These types of objects ranged from salt, mirrors machines, cars, guns, and bicycles. Colonial Nigeria was a difficult place for the colonialists. Many anthropologists have observed that encasing of the stolen objects stripped them of their powers. The British colonialists carted away such objects to metropolitan museums while the missionaries made the locals burn and destroy them.

Consumer products were imported to colonial Nigeria depended on a cycle of production and changing tastes. The local consumer production faced competition from products of industrialized nations. Post-Colonial Nigeria attitude

divided all products into four categories based on quality, not on how they looked. (Europe, America, and Japan for top quality; Used, locally manufactured, the China and Taiwan lower quality, and the *Tokunbo*). Most artists working on found-objects in Africa today are concerned not only with the form of the object but also with its latent energies and their new meanings.

Objects drift not of their own desire but due to external categorizations imposed on them by makers and users.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THE ARTISTIC INTEREST OF THE WEST

This chapter chronicles specific work[s] of artists and thinkers from the West that influenced specific construct of the “Seed of Passage”, namely: Pablo Picasso Naum Gabo, Marcel Duchamp, and Robert Rauschenberg.

Synthetic Cubism - Pablo Picasso

Picasso’s *Violin* (1914), *Guitar* (1916) and *Bull Head* (1943), represents the 2 phases of French Cubism, analytic and synthetic respectively. These works also represent the antecedents I have used in creating the piece titled *New Bride*, bearing in mind that all relief sculptures are object-driven; this means that the object was pivotal to the artist’s subject. Objects utilized were carefully chosen consistent with materials appropriate for the execution of the subject matter. The *Bull Head*, referenced in the sculpting of the *New Bride* is utilized for two reasons: 1) The availability of scrap bicycles, and 2) Soyinka’s play which describes the new bride linking her to the deity god of iron, “*Ogun*”.²⁴ I have, thus, fabricated The New Bride from bicycle parts to illustrate a virgin in a submissive stance.

In the *New Bride*, I welded bicycle parts together to symbolize, in three-dimensional form, a young African woman standing with both legs astride, with both hands holding her wrapper, a gesture of opening herself up to the embrace of *Eleshin Oba*.

²⁴ Ogun is Yoruba deity god of iron. Most blacksmiths in Western Nigeria are worshipers of this god for protection.

The character in representation, in the play, is the virgin bride described in the conversation between *Eleshin Oba*, the King's horseman and *Iyaloja*, 'Mother' of the market.

Eleshin: Enough, enough, you all have cause
 To know me well. But, if you say this earth
 Is still the same as gave birth to those songs,
 Tell me who that goddess through whose
 Lips
 I saw the ivory pebbles of Oya's river-bed.
 Iyaloja, who is she? I saw her enter
 Your stall; all your daughters I know well.
 No, not even Ogun-of-the-farm toiling
 Dawn till dusk on his tuber patch
 Not even Ogun with the finest hoe he ever
 Forged at the anvil could have shaped
 That rise of buttocks, not though he had
 The richest earth between fingers.
 Her wrapper was no disguise
 For thighs whose ripples shamed the river's
 Coils around the hills of Ilesì. Her eyes
 Were new-laid eggs glowing in the dark.
 Her skin..."²⁵

My use of bicycle parts in *New Bride* makes reference to social culture in colonial Africa, akin to Picasso's bull, which exemplifies an aspect of Spanish social culture. Picasso *Bull's Head* is a composite of bicycle seat and handle bars. As his *Bull Head* draws from bull fighting reflecting Spanish culture, so does my *New Bride* draw from Western Nigeria social culture. The dialogue between *Elesin Oba* and *Iyaloja* makes mention of *Ogun*, the god of iron. The virgin is described as more beautiful than even the god of iron could shape. The material of the bicycle lends itself to the beauty of her form. The cultural reference, which links specifically to the bicycle beyond its material, is found in the way people and

²⁵ Soyinka, Wole. *Death and the King's Horseman*. P 19

goods were transported in colonial Africa and the identities of those who had the wealth and position to afford a bicycle.



Fig. 6. King Swazi of Swaziland Picks Another Small Girl (internet circulated email)

Naum Gabo – Constructivism

My Work also reflects the compositional elements, and materials of Naum Gabo, an early 20th century artist associated with the Russian Constructivist movement. His sculpture is similar to my “Seeds of Passage” exhibits that are figurative as these are also allegorical, with exception of a few. Gabo’s stereometric device inspired the use of Plexiglas and Teflon in the sculpture of the women. Gabo’s stereometry is the primary tool of penetration of form – a constructive principle of using planes which serves the purpose of simultaneously defining a form and armature. This method permits visual access to the interior of the form; with the steel armature assist the viewer in reading the stance of the sculpture.

Marcel Duchamp - Ready-made and

Robert Rauschenberg - Combine

Marcel Duchamp’s Ready-mades²⁶ were meant to question the exact recipe for making a work of art; borrowing some of its attitudes from the Roussel’s machines in the 1911 play *“Impression of Africa”*, Going through and sifting the stacks of ubiquitous objects that abound forms the major process in the making of the readymade. The act of making is relegated to insignificance while the audacious move to present these objects as a work of art causes the shock to the viewer from this creation. The objects will however bear the new author’s signature.

²⁶ readymade—sculptures created from the undisguised, but often modified, use of objects that are not normally considered art, often because they already have a non-art function.

Marcel Duchamp seemed to align with the strategy Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jacques used in the play, *Impression of Africa* where the sequence of plots and characters does not follow any logic. Acts and scenes define the moment in a continuum where notions and characters are retained but as successors.

Art critic Rosalind E. Krauss saw in Duchamp's 'work' the placing of such objects into the world of art was an action complementing Roussel's "machines" in the play *Impression of Africa*.

"... For Duchamp's "work" was simply an act of selection. As such, Duchamp had made himself into a kind of switching mechanism to set in motion the impersonal process of generating a work of art – but one that obviously would not stand in the conventional relationship to him as its "author".²⁷

In the sculptural ensemble on which this thesis is based, found objects were gathered using Duchamp's audacious move of allowing objects to retain their primary state; they were cut to fit into a conglomerate of objects to create a sculpture. Very much as the essence of *Impression of Africa*. Rousseau's play provided Duchamp with the tool to set in motion the impersonal process of generating a work of art, musing, as mentioned in my introductory chapter, "*Death and the King's Horseman*", the play by Wole Soyinka, by assigning roles to found objects to closely reflect the characters in the play. Soyinka in consonance to Rousseau employs the non-logical sequences aberration of the theatre where scenes and characters run through the play and where viewers have the benefits of seeing life performed uninterrupted by clocks; actions, once unleashed must run their full course. Soyinka insists that the play be run without

²⁷ Karauss E. Rosalind. *Passages in Modern Sculpture*. p72

the intermission, which normally allows for actors to take a break or the scene and/or set to be changed. Sets and scenes were allegorically infused into spoken words where Soyinka becomes the conduit through which viewers travel back in time to when the plot took place. Viewers of *Seeds of Passage*, are likely to be tempted to rightly or wrongly assign roles and critique the efficiency of found-object as these represent characters in the play. As was the aim of the Duchamp's Readymade, where the thrust was on raising the question of what it is that "makes" a work of art, this ensemble asks the same question: "What is it in this found object that best reflects the characters in the play?" While this thesis cannot very much help those who are likely to micromanage object/character or get carried away by its novelty, consolation could be found in general notion of the subjective-ness in art appreciation.

The 1917 *Fountain* (a urinal) was flipped upside down and placed on a pedestal signed pseudonymously and dated: "R.Mutt/1917. I have conveyed *Wuraola's* quick temper in the work by using broken porcelains visualize anger in sculpture, in reminiscence of the 1917 Fountain of Duchamp. The key word helping the viewer in reading the piece is 'fountain'. So is the attempt to represent *Wuraola's* temper overtly expressed by the combination of steel and broken porcelain. Her name was mentioned as a threat to the African police Sergeant *Amusa* who was caught between obeying the instructions of District officer *Pilkings* and his own tradition and culture. The sculpture is a construction of steel, the structure being stuffed and clad with porcelain. The broken porcelain

signifies the consequence of meddling with custom of the Yoruba people of western Nigeria by the British colonialists.

“ IYALOJA: Well, our elders have said it: Dada may be weak, but he has a younger sibling who is truly fearless.

WOMAN: The next time the white man set shows his face in this market I will set Wuraola on his trail. ²⁸

Reference to the proverbial “bull in the china shop” informed the use of broken china for the character *Wuraola* sending the message to Sergeant *Amusa* of what will befall his partner and him if they chose to stand in the path of tradition and custom.

In the middle of the 20th century, artist Robert Rauschenberg continues this thread. His *Monogram*, for example, combines sculpture and painting together using found (ready-made) objects. Rauschenberg’s “Combine” was inspired by his mother’s solution to waste during the great depression. She arranged paper patterns so tightly on cloth that no scrap was wasted. He claimed that this informed his collages.

“ His respect for texture, patterns, design and more pointedly, for the randomness inherent in a process of arranging and rearranging elements to fit later became an identifiable feature of his own different productions. Two fundamental aspects of own approach may be traced, with some stretch of imagination, to the time he spent watching his mother piece together patterns and fabric”. ²⁹

There is some randomness and chance that resonates in the production of *Wuraola’s* character with the broken porcelain drilled and welded to external-

²⁸ “ Wole Soyinka. *Death and the king’s Horseman*. P 40.

²⁹ Sam Hunter. Robert Rauschenberg P.20

armature.³⁰ This was informed by the Combine attitudes of Robert Rauschenberg.

DIRECT HISTORICAL/ CONTEMPORARY INFLUENCES

This chapter chronicles specific work[s] of artists and thinkers from the Non-West that influenced specific construct of the “Seeds of Passage”, namely El Anatsui, Georgina Beier, and Wole Soyinka

The Accumulative Consciousness – African Traditional Sculpture

Most African traditional sculptures are utilitarian objects. The material used in the creation of these sculptures often times are indicative of the dual availability of technology and materials, thus responding to the economic principle of localization of industries. The clientele are drawn from the vast part of the continent and with the migration and trade route these sculptures can be found in most part of the universe. Although most of the sculptures bear no signature of the artists their origin has never been in contention, even in the case of counterfeits.

Elizabeth Tonkin, in *Mask and Power*, discusses mask and power in the context of simulacra; “human beings cannot exist without simulacra.’ Symbolisation is the essential act of the mind’, and our reality is perceived out of natural endless selectivities, neural and cultural, conceived out of natural and the social world by mental processes which continuously structure and create. The human mind is omnivorous, every perception is a form of action and our deeds gets significance from the meaning we attached to them.”

Tonki further states that “ many makers and users of African masks, for example, seem to regard their creations not as a disguise, nor as the semiotic representation of some spiritual feeling but as a real

³⁰ external-armature – this is a structural device that holds and protect the fragile porcelain. It is part of the final read of the sculpture.

transformation of the mask-carrier's personality: ...the doctrine of transubstantiation.³¹

Having grown in, and been influenced by traditional Nigerian society, I see found objects as potentially artistic medium of engagement in sculpting and these the creation of some of these sculptures.

Found Object – El Anatsui

I have said much about El Anatsui. Knowing him and exhibiting with him in some group shows gives me needed confirmation in the use of found objects in the making of sculptures and expanding the vocabulary of contemporary sculpture, especially from the continent of Africa.

Metal Construction – Georgina Beier

Georgina Bier is a multi-talented artist whose works cut across the visual and the performing arts with each feeding the other. Her marriage to Ulli Beier exposed her to countless artists' workshops in Nigeria, Papua New Guinea and Australia, where she currently resides. Her relief sculptures and murals in which she displays her command of linear structure to convey the complex subjects of Yoruba and Papua New Guinea cultures runs parallel some of the relief sculptures *Seeds of Passage* ensembles.

Death and the King's Horseman- Wole Soyinka

Wole Soyinka is a well-known Nigerian playwright who was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1986. His play, *Death and the King's Horseman* inspires this ensemble in the context of resistance and cross-cultural influences

³¹ Tonkin Elizaberth. *Mask and Powers* Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland. Man, New Series, Vol. 14 No.2 (Jun.1979) p. 238

in pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial Africa. In musing on the play, I have presented each character to fit logically in the selection of found objects for this ensemble.

The play is based on a historical event in 1946 in the Western region of colonial Nigeria. The play has been featured in many theatre festivals in Europe and America as well as Nigeria.

Ketu Katrak H. in his article *Rituals Wait for No Man: A Moment of Hesitation Throws the Universe Out of Whack for a Nigerian Tribe and its Colonizers*". Prologues:

" The Yoruba king died 30 days before and now, according to ancient ritual, Elesin, the Horseman, is about to commit ritual suicide to accompany the king on his journey to the ancestral world. ...Elesin fails in his task, and Soyinka's philosophical dramatization of human being facing death follows."³²

This sculptural ensemble reflects Soyinka's employ of the Yoruba world in the play, where the living, the dead and even the unborn are linked integrally. Death, especially of an elderly person, is not a final event but rather a passage from the human world to that of the departed ancestors.

This ensemble, like Soyinka's portrayal of *Elesin's* death, undertaken for his people, is a kind of willed withdrawal from the life-force and is aimed at a trajectory by which discarded objects are transformed into art, an ancestral world of found object art.

³² Ketu Katrak H. in his article "Rituals Wait for No Man: A Moment of Hesitation Throws the Universe Out of Whack for a Nigerian Tribe and its Colonizers". Oregon Shakespeare Festival p 12-13.

Summary

The West non Western Artists - Pablo Picasso - Synthetic Cubism and Analytical Russian Constructivism, Naum Gabo – Russian Constructivism, Marcel Duchamp's Readymade, Robert Rauschenberg's – Combine, *El Anatsui*, *Georgina Bier*, and *Wole Soyinka Death and the King's Horseman* were some of the precursors that inspired *Seeds of Passage* ensembles.

The sculptures are object driven; this means that the object was pivotal to the artist's subject. *Seeds of Passage* exhibits are figurative as these are also allegorical, with exception of a few. *The New Bride Is* a result of fabrication with bicycle parts in this work makes cultural reference to colonial Africa, as well as to a work like Picasso's bull, made from the seat and handle bar of a bicycle.

In the sculptural ensemble on which this thesis is based, found objects were gathered using Duchamp's audacious move of allowing objects to retain their primary state; they were cut to fit into a conglomerate of objects to create a sculpture. Musing "*Death and the King's Horseman*", the play by Wole Soyinka, this thesis assigns roles to found objects to closely reflect the characters in the play; each character to fit logically in the selection of found objects for this ensemble.

CHAPTER 4

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS FOR SEEDS OF PASSAGE

Conceptual Framework

The sculptural ensembles created for this thesis exhibition attempt to evoke how issues, objects, and dreams in every day situations are made physical as sculpture allegories and metaphors. Art focuses our attention on everyday objects that would be lost to obscurity if we continued to ignore them. We live in an age where we are bombarded with a lot of objects, and we hardly exhaust one before another follows. Soyinka's play exemplifies strength, resilience, life-force, weakness, steadfastness, adulation, desecration, tradition, and social class structures, which are all infused into the various found-objects used in this body of work.

This body of work, *Seeds of Passage* is at its conceptual a socio-political statement which explores the use of found-objects as allegories and metaphors. My use of found-objects is directed by the materials from which each found-object is made and the manipulative skills and processes I use to respond to the material. Conceptually, these works are metaphor for of the repercussion of colonialist occupying forces, consumer waste and object memory as indicated earlier. Consequently, my approach to the aesthetics of found-object as contemporary art expression is two-pronged:

(1) The use of found-object as a metaphor/ ambiguity in the issues raised.

Regarding this, this thesis is an extension of the continuous probes or reactions by artists on the scarce acknowledgments of their role as creators. While its

creation can be said to be born of several factors highlighted by various commentators on visual culture, the broader population has generally paid little attention to the underlying messages the artist invokes. Granted in art of found-object the artist may have altered or tampered with the evidence that could have accrued from dating by his assembling several objects into one piece, thus the only evidence of date left is that of the date of creation. Date is crucial for object to pass as Antiques, but when and if same sister objects are gathered and used for found-object art they are considered contemporary art even as they exist collectively in the collections. The task of authentication for a found-object should not be restricted to date of completion of work or the subject it evokes but should be extended to the collective appraisal of the unit age of each material component, that is, the various found-objects used in the construct or work and their willingness to submit to contemporary use with regards to the issues raised by the artist.

(2) The specific attempt to advance the vocabulary of sculpture through my prism³³, thus creating my own reality.

This prism is built on shifting grounds as determined by the location and availability of materials as well as the contemporary issues they evoke. This interception or intersection of material and issues traverses several routes before manifesting as art. Some of these routes are the places of making what the object means, and when it was made. The final artwork (an instrumentalist object intended to communicate larger ideas) continues to exhibit some of the

³³ Prism here refers to my interpretation of subject matter.

physical characteristics of the utilitarian form in which it was originally created, thus evoking memories, association of the previous reincarnation and becoming the metaphoric content for the instrumentalist artwork. See illustrations below.

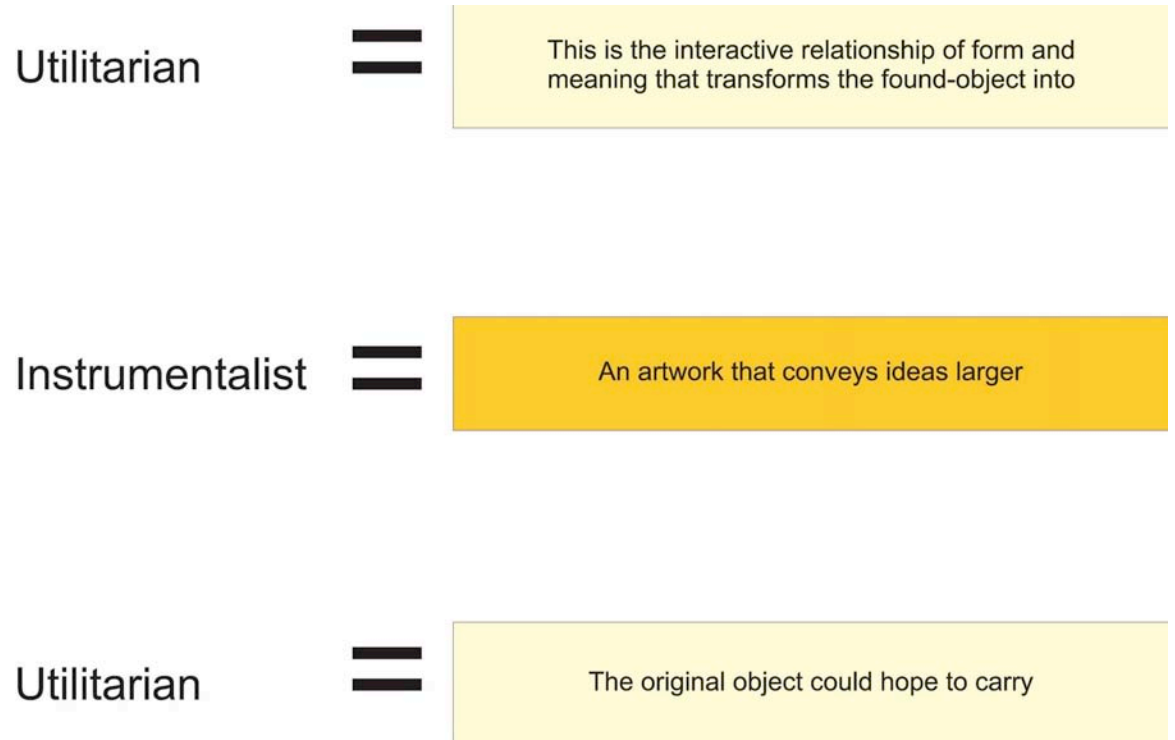


Fig. 7. Cycle of Found-Object in Socio-class Discourse

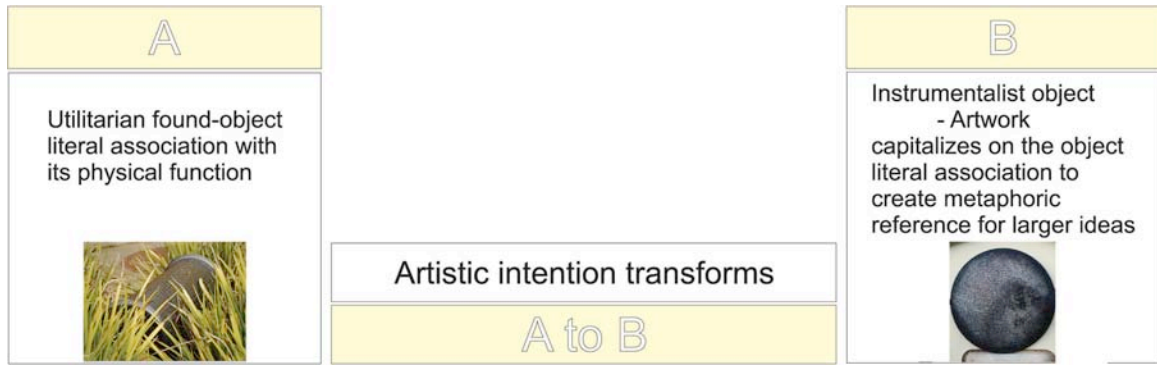


Fig. 8. Artistic intervention on Found-Object as Transformative Instrument to Artwork

Technical Framework

The nature of found-objects poses a challenge in the technical quest to fuse two unrelated objects in such a way that they embody the meaning assigned by the artist. Welding, gluing, riveting, nailing and joining with nuts are the processes used in the creation of these works. Surface finish modification of the original was very minimal to preserve the state of the source material, even though it was cut in size to suit artistic intent. The finishing of some of the works was far from pristine, as is typical of such material. The conventional methods of fusing material are a given, but there has been a concerted effort at improvisation that run counter to traditional notions of meticulously crafted points of fusion. This might offend the sensibilities of some conservatives.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF ELEMENTS AND PRINCIPLES CONSIDERATIONS RELATED TO THESIS WORKS

One primary consideration in the creation of the thesis works was the attempt to downplay the old boundaries and guiding principles that have generally governed the practice of art. This allowed the net of knowledge to be cast wider, with all techniques collapsing into one for the purpose of creating the thesis artworks. The common ground between different art disciplines was pursued vigorously to demystify/debunk the claims of specialization that inhibit collaboration. The aim here was to retain the essential components and the cultural relevance that once existed in these objects and lay these bare in this new creation. Here, concept and actual work exist as conjoined twins that live in perfect harmony while fitting into the formal expectation of art form.

Discussion of Individual Art Works.

In this musing on the Wole Soyinka play *Death and the King's Horseman*, just as the author wishes that the play be performed without intermission, so the entire sculptural ensemble is to be viewed as one life experience that encompasses action, tribe, place and time. Material and roles assigned to characters mutate, thus emphasizing not identity but rather how issues change from place to place and culture to culture. Assigning characters to objects is coincidental, not planned, since it is subject to the availability of objects found. In some instances the lack of certain object I hoped to use to represent a character forced me to come up with another strategy. I found the material first, and then

refer to the play to determine the material's appropriateness. The experimental outcome in some of the low and high relief and freestanding sculptures is an exercise to redefine and stretch traditional modes of working on some materials on scenes that are medium/technique friendly³⁴. For example, shelf and cabinet panels were used as canvas on which to draw using the plasma cutter. These drawings with plasma cutter have the potential printing plate from which prints can be pulled, thus expanding the collapsing the boundaries between print making and that of sculpture.

Wood

Wood was used as a structural support in some of the sculptures, it was the primary material used to portray the character of *Elesin Oba*, with the wood suggesting the cloak or wooden coffin in which the body travels to the world beyond. Wood was partly used in the construct of another characters *Olunde* the heir apparent of *Elesin Oba* and *Jane Pilkings*, the wife of District Officer, could be read as representing the ubiquity of ever-sensitive gender roles in most cultures. The pose as allowed in woodwork is rigid; the voids were enclosed for strength. Hands are arrested or locked into position to minimize movement. Glue and wooden dowel rods were employed in construction to create a sculpture that is almost 100 % wood. Just as in the construction of houses, metal braces [angle plates fastened with bolt and nuts] are used for complex joints. The legs of the sculptural construct of *Elesin Oba* are held together with the aid of thick bolts and nut braces. The rigid pose of *Elesin Oba* is stylistically similar to that of ancient

³⁴ Medium friendly is term to describe mediums that lend it to conventional techniques.

Egyptian sculpture.



Fig. 9. Elesin Oba (wood Construction) 2008

The nude figure is not provocative despite the use of a stool leg to indicate his penis. The teats are suggested by the implant of two metal castors meant to protect the legs of chairs from wear and tear caused by the weight and movement to which they get subjected with every use.

The sculpture, *Elesin Oba*, measures (92 x 40 x 32) inches. The finishing is left in the raw, with the patina from the handling of the unit-lumber pieces. The pieces were found at various construction sites in Statesboro, Stubs Scrap Yard, and pieces from a discarded wooden bunk bed), and waste cut-offs from other students' projects.



Fig. 10. *Elesin Oba* (detail) 2008

Bicycle Parts

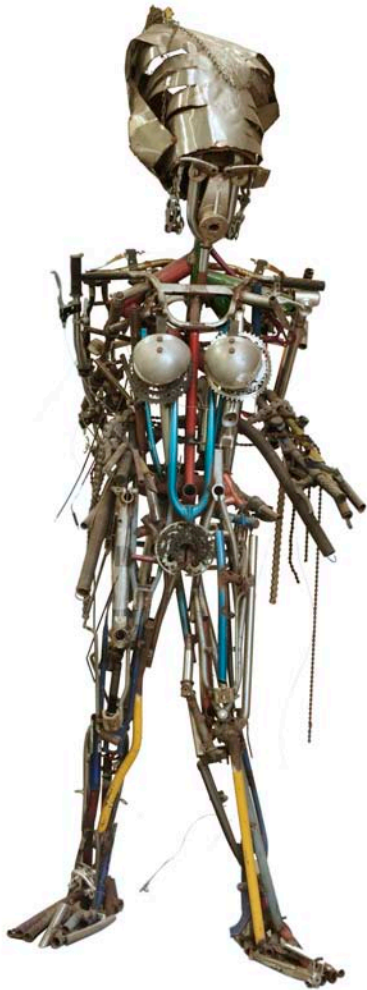


Fig.11. New Bride (welded Bicycle Parts) 2008

The Bicycle parts were selected as the primary found object materials assigned to the *New Bride*. In the play, *Elesin* compared the *New Bride's* beauty to objects created from the anvil of the Yoruba God of Iron *Ogun*. Some parts of the bicycle were not only left in the manufacturer's color but also served as the scale for the size of the sculpture. Bicycle parts seemed appropriate for the *New Bride* because, in the contemporary countryside of Nigeria, it may not be an

exaggeration to say that women account for more than 60% ownership of the bicycles. This is because bicycles are the most common mode of transportation.

The standing bride is submissively posed with legs apart, ready to accept her fate that in a moment she will be married to the most powerful chief, second in command to the *Oba*³⁵, only to be a widow days later. Her eyes are popping out or at least dazed by this great dilemma, this great contradiction that tests her soul. The steel components in the sculpture were welded and the aluminum was fastened together with bolts and nuts. Her *wrapper*³⁶ is suggested by spring-loaded steel which vibrates when disturbed. Her virgin waist beads are made out of cut bicycle chains, indicating her deflowering.

The finishes on the sculpture which measures (100 x 40x 31) inches are left in the raw, with the patina from handling and dust from riding around the campus of Georgia Southern University and Statesboro. Scraps are off-cuts from other students' projects and the bicycle of a past professor who upgraded his bike.

³⁵ Oba – the traditional monarch (King)

³⁶ African Skirts usually worn from waist down

Porcelain



Fig. 12. Worauola (Welded Steel, Ceramics and Glass) 2008

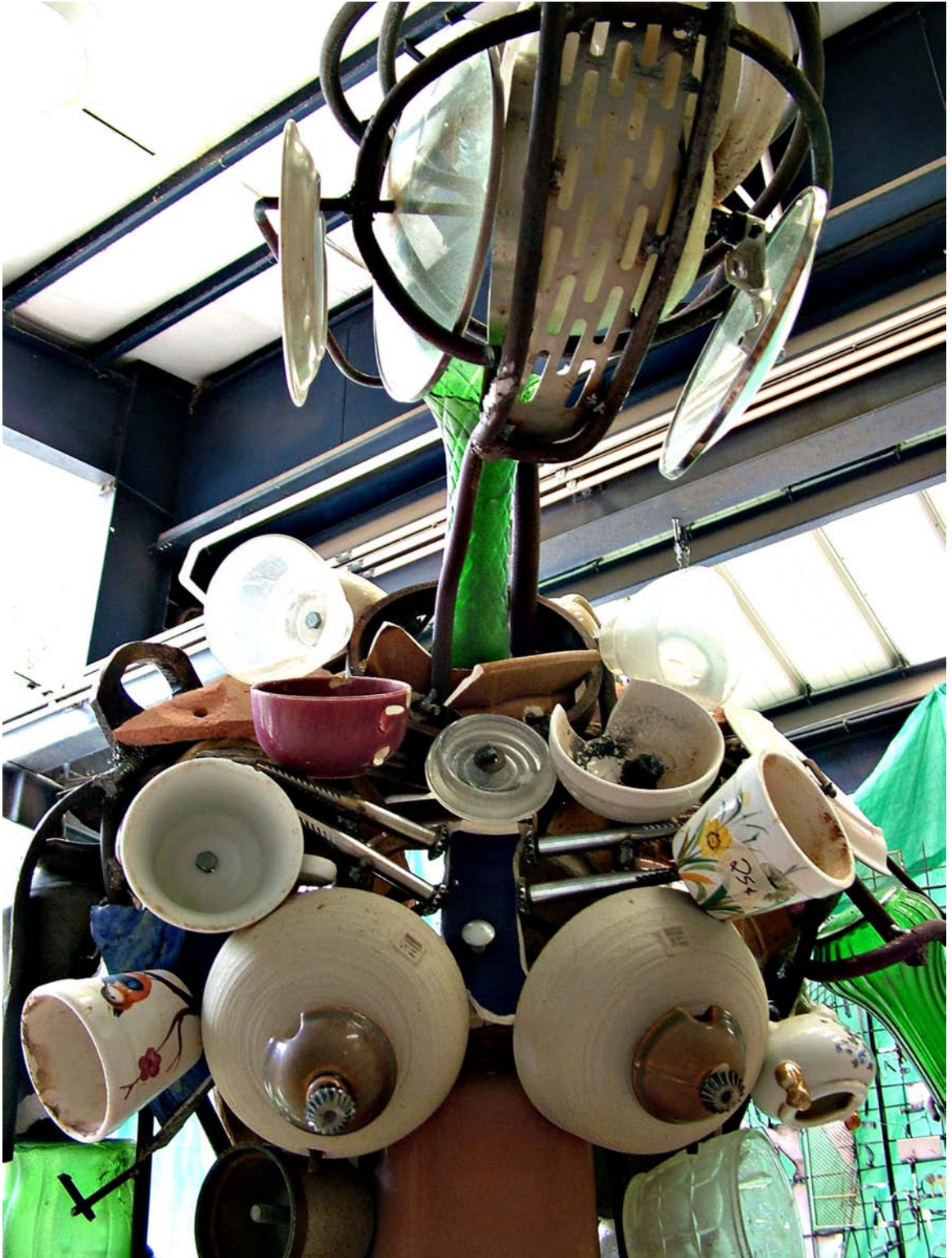


Fig. 13. Worauola (detail I)



Fig. 14. Worauola (detail II)

Another female character named *Wuraola*, is represented in a sculpture compared to the actual nature of ceramic porcelain. The broken porcelain is drilled and inserted with a steel rod that is welded to the external armature,³⁷ which is a cage that protects the porcelain from accidents. Most of the ceramics are drilled with two holes to provide better anchorage against gravitational oscillations than one hole would. Some pieces that are meant to oscillate due to gravity have a single hole. Ceramic firing cones are used for hair strands. The uses of porcelain for this sculpture was informed by electrical devices in which ceramic part are used as electrical insulators. Metaphorically, this sculpture expresses the fragile temper of the character *Wuraola* in the play. The sculpture utilizes some pieces of colored glass that allow for the dramatic play of light, reminiscent of stained glass, with the steel structures acting as the leaded line in stained glass. The pose is that of a walking female, nude to the waist with a short skirt, typical of contemporary demeanor of protesting Nigeria aged women. See image bellow

³⁷ External armature – this is a structural device that holds and protects the fragile porcelain. It is part of the final read of the sculpture.



Fig. 15. Women Protest Naked, Ekiti State Nigeria. Photo curtesy: 234NEXT

The sculpture measures (88 x 32 x 16) inches in dimensions. The surface finish is left as it was found, with the patina from handling of the ceramics that were in a crate of broken pieces that I bought from the flea market of Statesboro.

Books



Fig. 16. Iyaloja (Books construction) 2009

IYALOJA : It is the death of war that kills the valiant,
Death of water is how the swimmer goes
It is the death of markets that kills the trader
And death of indecision takes the idle away
The trade of cutlass blunts its edge
It takes an Elesin to die the death ...
Only Elesin ... dies the unknowable death of death
Gracefully, gracefully does the horseman regain
The stables at the end of day, gracefully ...”

Wole Soyinka. *Death and the king's Horseman*. P 43.

In most African cultures women are generally entrusted with the preservation of culture once they reach menopause. Although women are generally perceived as the weaker sex, they generally outlive the men, which is another reason they are saddled with the responsibility of ensuring the continuity of customary practice and traditions. In the play *Death and the King's Horseman*, the head of the women in the community plays a very significant role in ensuring that the customs and traditions of the Yoruba people of the Western Region of Nigeria survive the incursion of the British colonizer. *Iyaloja*, whose name literally means “mother of the market”, was assigned the found-object of books. She is a living repository of knowledge. Her depth of knowledge transcends all disciplines and ages. She plays the role of a psychologist in talking the *Elesin Oba* into committing the ritual suicide. She talks the young bride into marriage to a man who wants to have sex with a virgin before he dies and will thus leave a widow. *Iyaloja* is also a negotiator and accessory to the ritual suicide of *Elesin Oba* while he is in British colonial custody. It therefore makes sense to use books for the creation of her sculpture. The books cover a wide range of disciplines represented in the curriculum of study in Georgia Southern University.

Most of the books are used and have notes in the margin and highlighting by various past readers. The book is a clear example of an object infused with the power of the word, inscribed with notes, indicating memory recorded to be recalled as soon as the page is opened. These objects with traces of the users form a classical case of the latent energy of objects which this thesis invokes. The books are cut, drilled, glued and bolted to create this sculpture. The figure of *Iyaloja*, is bowing forward at the waist with the left hand crossed behind to reach the right-one, of the typical poses of an African sage. This pose suggests the moment of grave consequence when she attempts to persuade *Elesin Oba* to commit the ritual suicide for the sake of the continuity of tradition and custom of their people. The sculpture measures (78 x 18 x 27) inches and the surface finish is left intact display various covers, spines and sides of the books, thus suggesting a *fabrique appliqué* of graphics. The pages are glued and painted with latex to seal them. From my personal experience, most old mothers in Nigeria that have attained the status of *Iyaloja* have small bodies. They participate in almost the entire traditional rite, which involves sampling illicit gins and other liquors that help to burn off excessive weight. Folks at that age also consciously increase their alcohol intake as a preparation for the customary seven days' lying in state when they pass on.

Plexiglas and Teflon

Plexiglas tube and Teflon were used to reflect the *Young Girls* in the play. Plastics, as indicated earlier, are the new entrants among found-objects byproducts of the contemporary industry. The figure represent the sculpture assumes a typical fashion model pose on the catwalk of a fashion runway. The sculpture measures (74 X 10 X15) inches, her basic statistics informed by that of American celebrity Paris Hilton [Height 5' 8" Measurements: 34" - 25" - 35" [http://www.the-alist.org / ParisHilton/ bio.htm](http://www.the-alist.org/ParisHilton/bio.htm)]. (Paris Hilton was part of the political discourse in the recent presidential election that saw the radical change in the White House.) It is from this pack that *Elesin* picks his bride.



Fig. 17. Girl I (detail) 2009



Fig. 18. Girl I (Plexiglas, Teflon, Wood and Steel) 2009

Nails

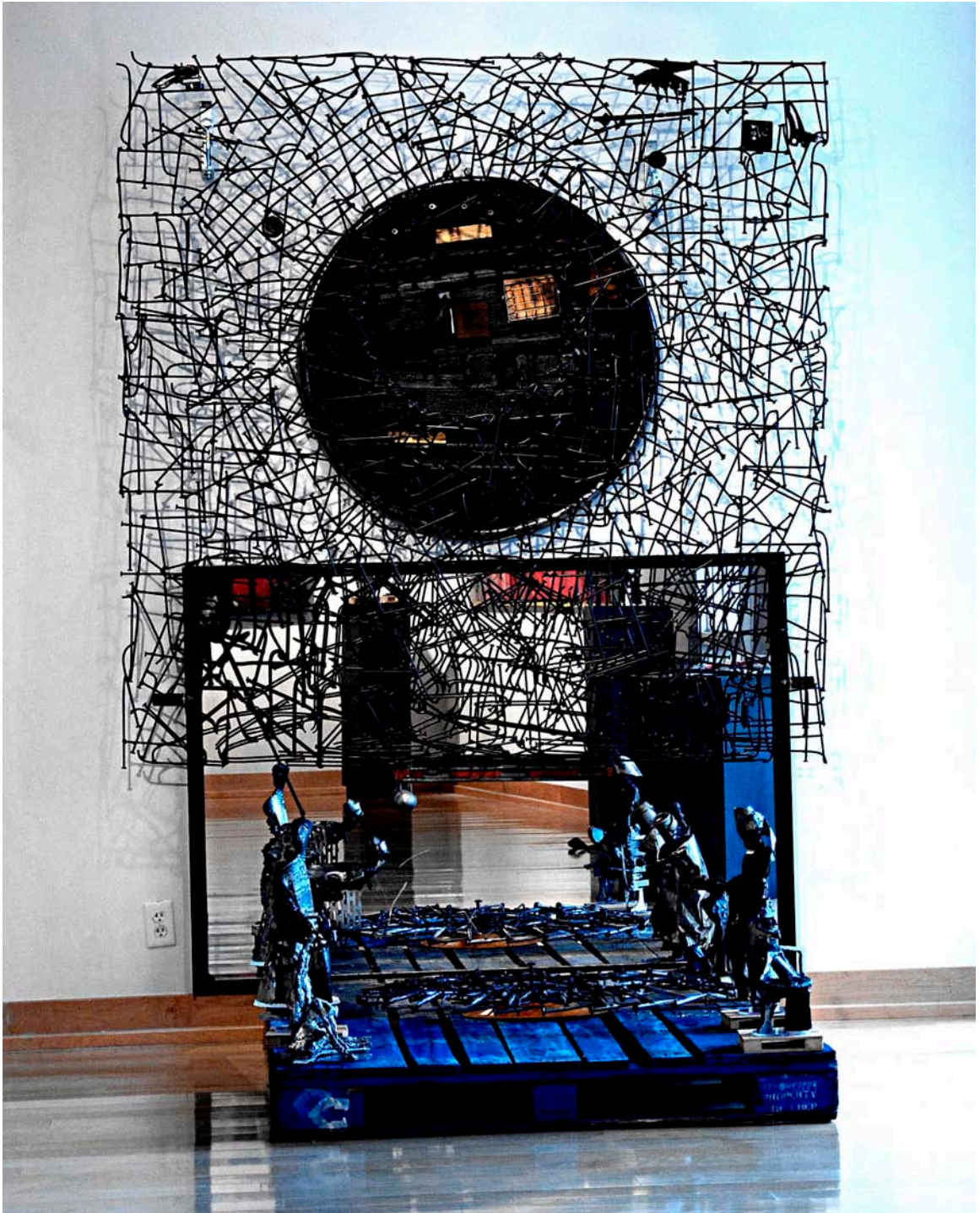


Fig. 19. Divination Apparatus (Cotton Spindle, Nails, Wood and Mirror) 2009

In one of my visits to *Stubs*, the only scrap yard in Statesboro, Georgia, I stumbled on this large collection of roofing nails or farming spikes and ring frames for children's trampolines. These two objects inspire the non-figurative sculpture in this ensemble. The piece *Divination Apparatus* is comprised of burnt wood, the frame ring of a trampoline, and welded roofing nails. This *Divination Apparatus* is the medium by which the living communicates with the dead. Inside the ring, screwed to the burnt wood, are bits of all the materials used in the creation of this sculptural ensemble, entitled *Seeds of Passage*. The wooden core of this relief sculpture is intended to be connected with fiber optics which light a kind of spirit galaxy suggesting the world beyond now replaced with a large mirror. The welded nails suggest a kind of text or DNA configuration. This piece is intended to periodically function as a screen on which excerpts from the play, images of various scrap yards that I have visited around the world, streets of cities where I have picked up scraps, and my interview with Bob Hacker will ultimately be projected. Some older found-object works from my portfolio will also be projected on the *Divination Apparatus*. This multimedia runs for 5 minutes with an interval of 15 minutes in between to allow the piece to exist without any interference. Also, there will be a webcam that will transmit images and sound bites of viewers to another screen located on the adjacent wall in the gallery. This is meant to create a time-based art. I referenced Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*³⁸ by using the mirror as an attempt to blur art and life.

³⁸ Society of the Spectacle – Sturken M. and Cartwright L. Practices of Looking An Introduction to Visual culture. Critiques of the mass media.

Society of the spectacles describes how the social order of the late twentieth-century global economy exerts its influence through representations. Debord put forth the idea of the spectacle

Another nail piece is the portrait of the character, *Mr. Simon Pilkings*, the British district officer. Nails of different shapes are welded into what could be described as the void of the picture space to reveal the shape, a technique known as simultaneous contrast ³⁹in drawing and painting.



Fig. 20. Simon Pilkings (*Metal Mesh*, nails, sheet metal and wood) 2009

The piece is a triptych, with the left and right panels collapsing inward for ease of movement. The third piece *In Defiance II*, a nail and mesh material, is a relief composition of the “Girls” in a defying pose similar to Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger*. In contrast, these ladies are not prostitutes and they are all standing. The mesh allow for the piece to be viewed from either side. If

as both an “instrument of unification” and a world vision that forged a social relationship among people in which images and practices of gazing were central. All that we once directly lived, he argued, had become mere representation. Pg. 164

³⁹ Two colors, side by side, interact with one another and change our perception accordingly. The effect of this interaction is called simultaneous contrast.

mounted against the wall, the cast images create the aura of the third dimension that is the spirit essence of the material rather than of the subject.

Mild Steel, Stainless and Aluminum Sheets



Fig. 21. Before the Ritual Suicide (plasma cutter drawing on steel sheet) 2009

These sheets of mild steel, stainless and aluminum are the canvases on which drawings are made with the aid of the plasma cutter. This format provides a useful platform on which scenes from the play are composed. The technique is comprised of lines and scarifications of the surface of the sheet metal. This technique reveals the physicality of picture making, as against the theory of optical illusion that is frequently used to describe painting and drawing. Some of the surfaces of these drawings manifest the terrain from which they are

harvested. Some are crumbled or buckled due to the heavy-duty truck tires that pressed on them. Scenes from the play are: The Bride and Bride's Maids (44 x 77.5) inches, "After the Act" (93 X 48) inches, "Before the Ritual Suicide", " In Defiance I " and *Jane Pilkings* (74 X 69) inches. These large format panel canvases of steel were made collapsible for ease of transportation. Powder coatings were applied to some of the steel drawings, while others were flamed with a linseed oil patina to emphasize the techniques. These drawings redefine the way of presenting drawing; they are like the coin with two sides. The surfaces of the drawings were perforated to be aerodynamic, thus reducing the vibration if subjected to a windy situation.



Fig. 22. In Defiance (plasma cutter drawing on aluminum) 2009

Waste From the Ensemble *Seed of Passage*

The moral lesson, to live what one professes, comes to bear in the construction of “Meeting of Two Cultures *Jane and Olunde*. All the waste off-cuts from all the other sculptures, plus newly found pieces, were used in this composition which shows two seated figures dialoguing over a cup of tea. The tea party is generally a British tradition. However, Starbucks’ used coffee paper cups will be used to situate this dialogue in America. All the found-objects used in this thesis have the potential of being exported to Africa or third world countries that may have experienced colonial rule. They may not be shipped directly from America but through other trading partners of America.

Olunde is seated to the left hand side of *Jane Pilkings*, facing the viewer, equipped with the knowledge of his study of the British and the Western tradition to argue against the *Pilkings*’ view of the ritual suicide of the *Elisin Oba* decreed by the tradition of Yoruba people of Western Nigeria as barbaric. Soyinka wrote the play while in exile in Britain, fleeing one of the most repressive regimes that succeeded the British Colonial rule in Nigeria. It is an irony that *Olunde* had also been in self exile in Britain studying medicine, a fate that had typified most Africans in the Diaspora. Being educated in two cultures makes them oftentimes viewed as a double-edged sword. Writing the play in Britain which has the theme of the rape of the Nigerian indigenous culture by the British colonials would have been viewed as an act of ingratitude. The British presence in postcolonial Africa has been overshadowed by strong export of goods and waste. Wood, books, Plexiglas and steel were the found-objects recovered from the pile of the waste I

created. Welding, plasma cut, drawing, glue and bolt and nuts are the techniques used in the fabrication. The principle of leaving material unaltered remains visible in this construct. The seats were my design as inspired by the material and the coffee table was made out of salvaged glass from the scene and costume dumpster behind the sculpture studio. A repurposed wooden ceramics crate forms the riser for the table; it houses a soft glowing red bulb. The glass top reveals the red glow and the contents comprising broken ceramics, steel, books, and ticket stubs suggest the gravity of the conversation.



Fig. 23. *Olunde* (Books, steel and Wood Construction) 2009

The sculpture of *Olunde* is constructed of wood and books. Both materials, book and wood, merge to depict, speaking metaphorically, the trans-

cultural persona of the character *Olunde* in the play *Death and the King's Horseman*. The sculpture is posed seated with legs crossed and hands interlocking to create two loops, again suggesting the two cultures, West and non-West or indigenous. The locking of the arms and legs has one purpose: it provides stability for ease in transporting the sculpture, which can be detached from the chair. The sculpture measures (32 X 26 X 43) inches.



Fig. 24. Jane Pilkings (Plexiglas, paper steel and Wood Construction) 2009

The sculpture, *Jane Pilkings*, is eclectic in material and construction. The material or object directs and I simply implement. Also, due partly to the timing of the construction and partly to the concern of this thesis to use up all leftover material, with zero waste, the sculpture becomes a conglomerate of found-objects. This reflects the ubiquity of the colonial in the colonies and the desecration of local indigenous culture evidently seen in the large collection of African art in most collection and museum in the West. The frosted plexiglass used in this construct allows the internal organs of the character to be translucently visible from some angles. Seated with back straight, shoulders squared, hands and legs crossed, is a pose that in the West suggests that one is ladylike, but can be interpreted as arrogance by some Africans.

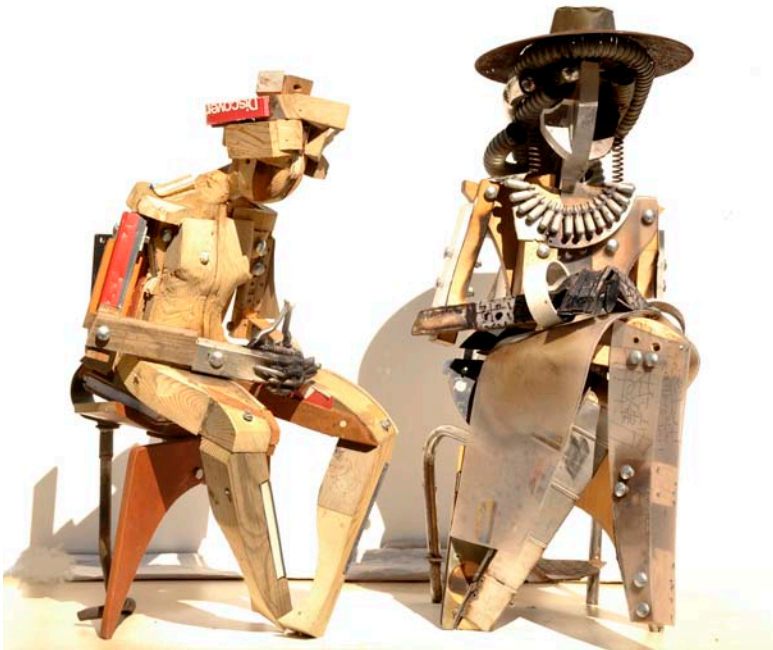


Fig. 25. Jane Pilkings and Olunde

Some returnee Africans from the Diaspora and people living in urban centers exhibit cultural traits similar to what we observe in *Jane Pilkings*, which is

also viewed by locals as arrogance. This is in fact one of the hallmarks of class conflict in contemporary African society. Her bangles are made of white PVC pipes, suggesting both the looting of ivory carvings from palaces and elephant poaching, a trade that continues to flourish even though ostensibly banned by the West. Her jewelry is made of little Co2 gas cylinders, suggesting exploration for and exploitation of petroleum products in Africa, and Nigeria in particular. All of the ticket stubs are mine, from trips in Western Europe and America. Hotel receipts were also glued inside the plexiglas as the road map by which ideas and materials travel. The sculpture measures (49 X 23X 32) inches. Below is an excerpt from the *Death and the King's Horseman* highlighting one of the cosmological traditions of a colonizing power clashed with those of the indigenous culture:

JANE: All this. The Ball. And His Highness being here in person and all that.

OLUNDE (mildly): And that is the good cause for which you desecrate an ancestral mask?

JANE: Oh, so you are shocked after all. How disappointing.

OLUNDE: No I am not shocked Mrs. Pilkings. You forgot that I have now spent four years among your people. I discovered that you have no respect for what you do not understand.

JANE: Oh. So you've returned with a chip on your shoulder.

That's a pity Olunde. I am sorry.

(an uncomfortable silence follows.)

OLUNDE: I don't say that. I found your people quite admirable in many ways, their conduct and courage in the war for instance.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Wole Soyinka. *Death and the King's Horseman*. p 50.

CHAPTER 6

ANALYSIS, MEANING AND THEORETICAL BASIS OF THESIS WORKS.



Fig. 26. Seeds of Passage I (Oct 28th – Nov 12th, 2009)

The Seeds of Passage consists of five larger than life-size sculptures, 24 small sculptures and 4 figurines cast - 1 bronze and 3 aluminum. The ensemble evokes issues of sustainability of the environment, the commercialization of objects, and investigate each object with the negative aura of fetishism. With all this, of course, there is the inevitable expansion of the vocabulary of sculpture using found-objects. Woven into the meaning of the work is the play, *Death and the King's Horseman*. The final scale of the sculptures was determined by

objects found and the material of each sculpture was chosen to symbolize a character in the play. In the play, some characters had specific personae while others were accessories to events. The ensembles comprise two distinctive categories; (1), found-objects which reflect a certain character's persona in the play and (2), those based on my compositional deduction from scenes the play. Some found-objects mutate as scenes and characters do. In other instances, a particular material and scale are used in the composition for emphasis. The prism through which all the compositions are brought to life is my knowledge of African traditional religions and customary practice in contemporary times of the people of Nigeria. Traditions and customs are practices that have been handed down over generations through oral instruction. The images on most of the panel drawings and relief sculptures are inspired by images of models and actresses from the Internet and billboard ads but modified to suit characters in the play. Others are from my photo documentary of one of the numerous performances of the play *Death and the King's Horse Man* by the *Crown Troupe* in Lagos, Nigeria.

In *The Seeds of Passage* these pieces seek meaning, as links between cultures, periods and commerce [Imports and Exports], between the developed West and the developing third world especially Africa, an intersection of colonial and the contemporary Africa. Most importantly, it is hoped that these sculptures expand the meaning of found-objects as a medium, and so participate in the contemporary discourse, of art-making. Just as in the play *Death and the King's Horseman*, Soyinka opined that the colonial factor is merely a catalytic incident,

so are the locations and sources of material with which the ensemble was created merely incidental.

The sculptures may not successfully change the way objects are used and discarded, but one hopes that they change the way objects are processed in our possession before they are discarded, especially in the West. On a daily basis, the refuse collectors come in their trucks, badges and dumpsters and cart things away regularly, to the point that waste is now produced effortlessly. The concern of this thesis, as indicated in the previous chapter, is to give visibility to some of the issues that have been ignored by anthropologists, art historians and art critics regarding found-objects, for instance, the issue of the latent energy as fuel or catalyst for creating artwork. This issue of making the latent energy visible could be found in the exhibition "*Egungun: Diaspora Recycling*⁴¹" curated by Moyo Okediji.

These exhibitions feature cultural artifacts from West Africa, and also two contemporary Nigerian artists, Wole Languju and Moyo Okediji. Juxtaposition traditional artifact with contemporary creativity brings to life the spirit of the deity *Egungun*. The audiences, which in this instance were predominantly American, would have had some issues with the anthropological account on the *Egungun*, but might have had make a leap of faith to accept the contemporary exhibits. Based on the ubiquitous presence of costumes of the *Egungun* in most western museums, one might mistakenly agree with the *Pilkings* that materials lack any sort of latent energy and, therefore, can be displayed in museums as the *Pilkings*

⁴¹ *Egungun: Diaspora Recycling* was mounted at the Fine Arts Library at The University of Texas at Austin from December 5 through March 5, 2009.

do, without the fear of any reprisal from the spirit *Egungun*. The argument might be why they continue to present them in most collections of African artifacts.

The *Seeds of Passage* ensemble is the form made visible in the word of Okedeji⁴² through the sculptor's hands of the invisible latent energy that was invested in objects, which we touched, used and subsequently discarded. As the illustration below indicates, objects from the manufactures first enter our discourse through the social class with more disposable income subsequently falling to the lower class and the scrap yards, but then climbing once again to the upper social class or to the public as artwork. Every exhibited artwork, defines a class or collection, thus giving meaning that matches inner phenomena which Jacques Maquet describes as "Experiential Reference".⁴³ By this process of experiential reference, *Seeds of Passage* is aimed at evoking in the viewer a feeling for the source of the found-object that is the parent material, as well as a sense of how it fits into the discourse of museum artifacts. With these two situations collapsed into one in this artwork, it should expand the vocabulary of sculpture, thus enlarging the lens through which the audience consumes the work. Anthropologists, art historians and critics are now provided with more ammunition to fight the war of words as they attempt to discuss art works. The date of manufacturer for an object applies only to its first reincarnation. As the object is reincarnated, by the artist into an artwork it acquires a new "birth date."

⁴² Moyo Okedeji - Assistant Curator, Native Arts at the Denver Art Museum

⁴³ Jacques Maquet, *The Aesthetic Experience: An Anthropologist Looks At The Visual Arts* Experiential Reference is the first encounter with any art object as informed by the codes or index of similar materials in Museum. p29

The two dates create a conundrum for art historians and anthropologists who base their investigation on such data.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In the thesis support paper, the term *found-object* is closely related to the art historical concepts of *Combines*, *Readymade*, *Art Pauvre*, *Synthetic Cubism*, and more recently, *Repurposed materials*⁴⁴. In these various expressions, the artist generally assumes the multiple personae of archeologist, anthropologist and forensic scientist in order to make the critical judgments necessary to create an art form with Found-objects. Regardless of the complexity and multiplicity involved in creating art with found-objects, it falls short of being elevated to their pride of place alongside archeological objects. Sadly, Found-object artworks evoke the feeling of newness, freshness and “contemporaneity”⁴⁵ resulting in the loss of the latent energy. To consume these artworks solely on their appearance underscores the mis-characterization that is frequently ascribed to Found-objects as merely recycled art by some intellectuals.

An example of the “latent energy “ acknowledged elsewhere is found in an article “Belief Watch: 4 Sale: *Bones of the Saints*” written by Lisa Miller, which describes the beliefs of many Christians that objects which once belonged to or came into contact with a saint have healing powers. She cites objects offered for

⁴⁴ Repurposed – adapted for use of a different purpose.

⁴⁵ Contemporaneity – is the use of found objects relatively to metaphorical and allegorical reflects the artist intent.

bid on eBay that offend the sensibilities of some Catholics. The article explains how some objects in the collection, of *Serafin's* a collector of objects bought from e-bay over 17 years periods, will be amongst the 1.5 million that the archbishop of Manila in the Philippine to venerate. The sale of relics on eBay may just be another small sign of our society's lust for material satisfaction, but the ire it provokes is deep and old. Is it really possible to purchase a piece of God's grace and mystery with a credit card?⁴⁶

Most of the objects from *Serafin's* collection are art works or designed products that were used by one of the saints or an important dignitary in the society. Objects are valued because of the latent energy believed to be infused into them by the first users of the objects.

The thesis exhibition is a product of found-objects, waste, and repurposed materials from Boone, North Carolina and Statesboro, Georgia.

Working within the confines of what is generally considered as sculpture, the body of work examined in this thesis reminds viewers of the feelings these artworks invoke with regard to the aesthetics of material-as-a-medium regardless of place, culture and period. The styles evidently visible in these works are spontaneously derived from both the *found-object* material and available technology. The techniques used in some of the pieces grow out of dialogue with specific works done by artists mentioned elsewhere in this paper. The completed works which are by-products from found-objects that may have fallen as waste from the upper class of the social structure resume the vertical social

⁴⁶ Miller, Lisa in "Belief Watch: 4 Sale: Bones of the Saints" Newsweek 11 February 2008.

climb the moment they become art works. Most found-object pieces are created with bits of objects that occasionally have a commonality of parent or different materials that dictate certain techniques to the artist. This magic of welding unrelated materials together evokes a discourse that generates multiple interpretations that often prove difficult for dating authentications. The date of completion of work by the artist now becomes the authentic date that is often cited with little reference to the dates of the objects that inspire the artist. The body of work examined in this thesis consciously retains traces of previous lives of the found-objects to assist the viewers to step backwards in time in order to make the forward journey intended by me. As I appropriate objects, meanings and latent energies, I hope that these works may soon share their pride of place in similar collections that house parent materials as design⁴⁷ in the sense of antiquities. In some private collection, the parent objects function as the pedestals on which the new assemblage is hoisted. This union, although informed by outlook, could be traced to latent energy that was infused by the first hand that shaped the object.

One of the contesting issues leading to the wrong characterization of found-objects as “Recycled” art is in the failure of viewers to make the connection with the concept of “latent energies” discussed earlier as a critical creative component for creating found-object arts.

While most artists who employ the use of found-objects agree with the complimentary remarks about its freshness, they hope that viewers, art historians, critics and anthropologists will try to make the type of anthropological

⁴⁷ Design is here referred is the product/industrial design.

connections that inform the artist's selection of such objects and become important vehicles of meaning.

Evaluation of Solution

This thesis focuses on two major issues that confront contemporary art namely, 1). the issue of authenticity and 2). the expansion of the vocabulary of sculpture. The body of work titled *Seeds of Passage* adds to the already lively debate surrounding the lack of adequate attention being paid to original use when a found-object as an artistic expression enters the art discourse. The strategy I have employed is to use found-object sculpture to examine an historical event, represented in the play by Wole Soyinka, *Death and the King's Horseman*, at its points of intersection with modern and postmodern cultural attitudes (consumerism leading to waste).

With regard to the artistic task, materials, style, subject/content and philosophical foundations, this body of work represents an autobiographical moment in my quest to use found-objects. The small figurative sculptures in this ensemble, also serve as maquettes which could be later be used as proposals for monumental sculptures which likely will end up in collections of the upper social classes. These works evoke the same debates that have surrounded the use of found-objects over the span of art history.

This thesis also focuses on the interaction of the following four big ideas or concepts summed up in the following bulleted paraphrases:

1. The repercussion of occupying colonial and post forces on indigenous cultures.

2. The use of found materials as metaphors for the transformative state of its functionality to non-functional art without losing the integrity, and the latent energy of the materials.
3. Expanding the sculpture vocabulary, thus enriching the discourse of *Repurposed* materials.
4. A progressively diminishing scale focusing on the following:
 - Pose and action and situation from the play, “Death and the King’s Horseman”
 - Progressively diminishing amounts of leftover Found-object materials, striving for zero waste (ethical concerns for environment).

Insights and Implications

The strategy of using found-objects to muse on this play provide some challenges that prove daunting for a student-artist working in a general studio like the one at Southern Georgia University. Gathering and using found-objects requires timing that tests the patience of both the janitors and the rest of the students that vie for the same space. Consequently, I worked with all materials simultaneously to save both materials and space, much of the time in extreme weather conditions. The scale usually required that the works be created under one of the three hoist systems. Theatrically, this working environment evokes comments that sometimes require one critiquing work-in-progress as though it were finished thus resulting in scales, scenes and number of characters modified so frequently to respond so poignantly to the passing of time. As an

international student with limited time to stay in the country, I responded to the issue of what to do with the finished works by reducing the scale and scope of the work. The nature of working with found-objects may evoke this reaction to work in progress, especially when one's strategy is to retain the state of the material as the link to its source. The other issue is that of presenting the works in the new Center for Art gallery, the wooden floor poses a very serious and genuine concern about the proposal to clad the interior walls and floor with wooden pallets. The concerns to make the exhibit friendly to the physical challenged and to avoid introducing insects into the gallery were not as daunting as the schedule for setting up and dismantling the exhibit without adequate logistics support, see sketches below.

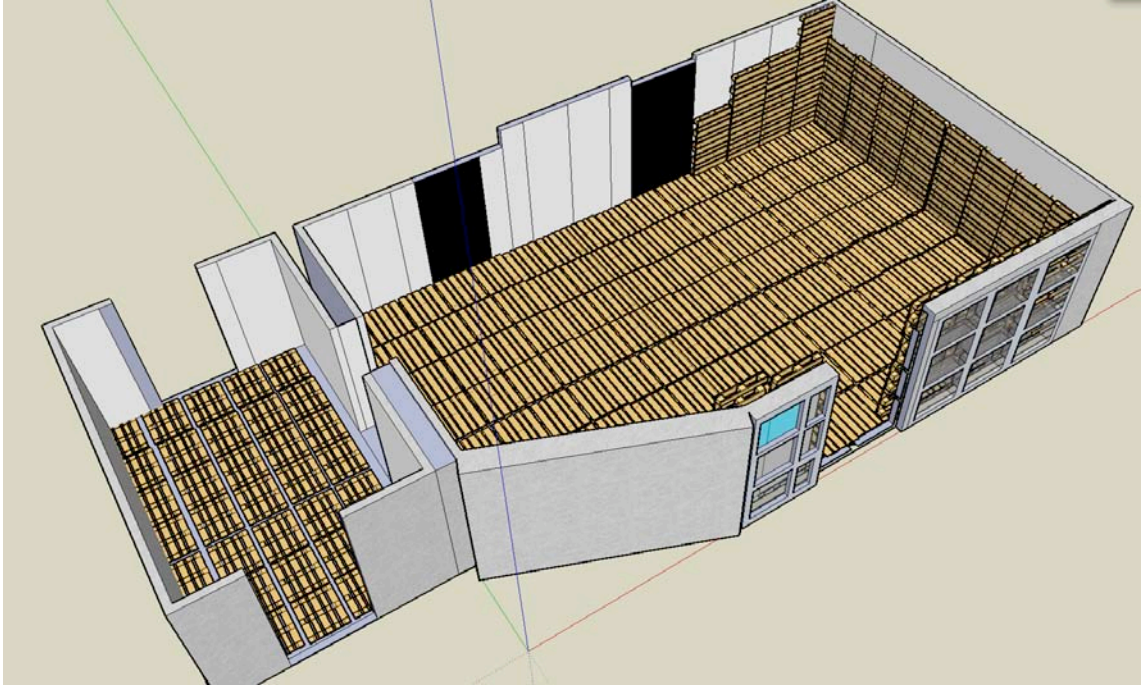


Fig. 27. Initial Proposal for Interior of Gallery for Seeds of Passage

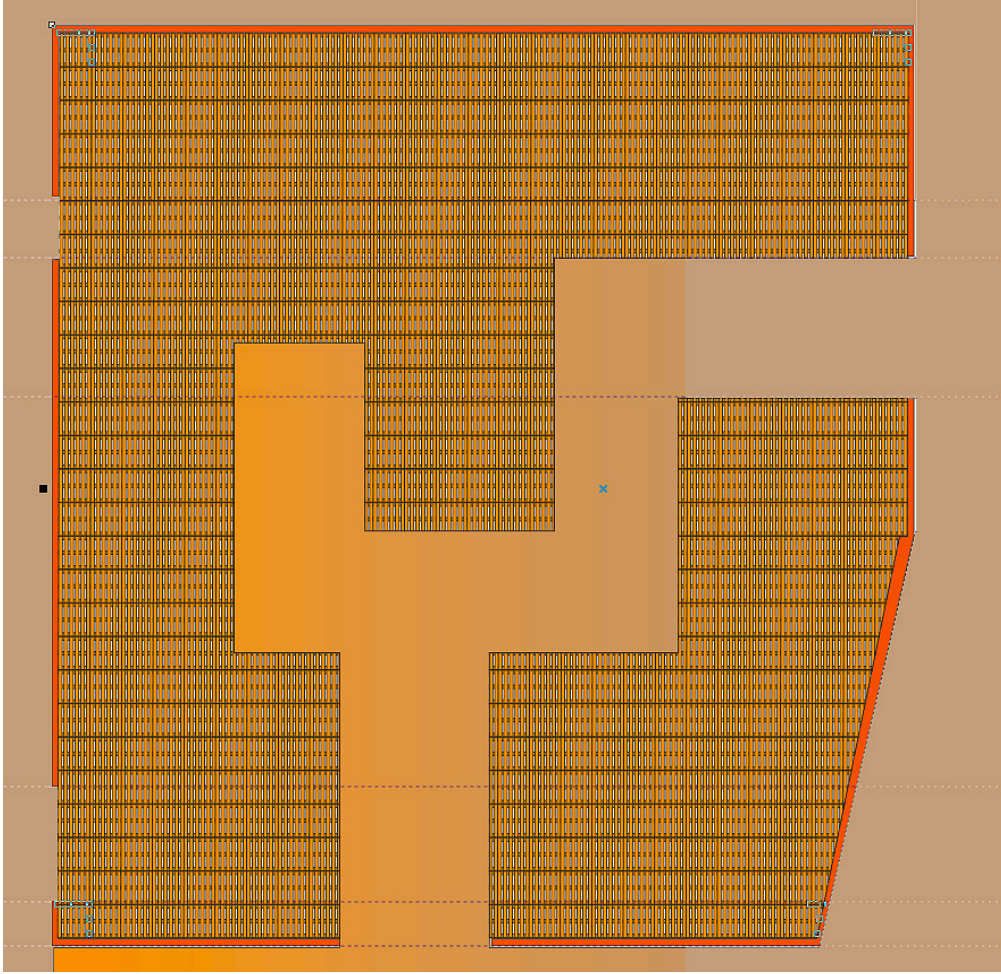


Fig. 28. Proposal Indicating Gallery Path for the Physically Challenged

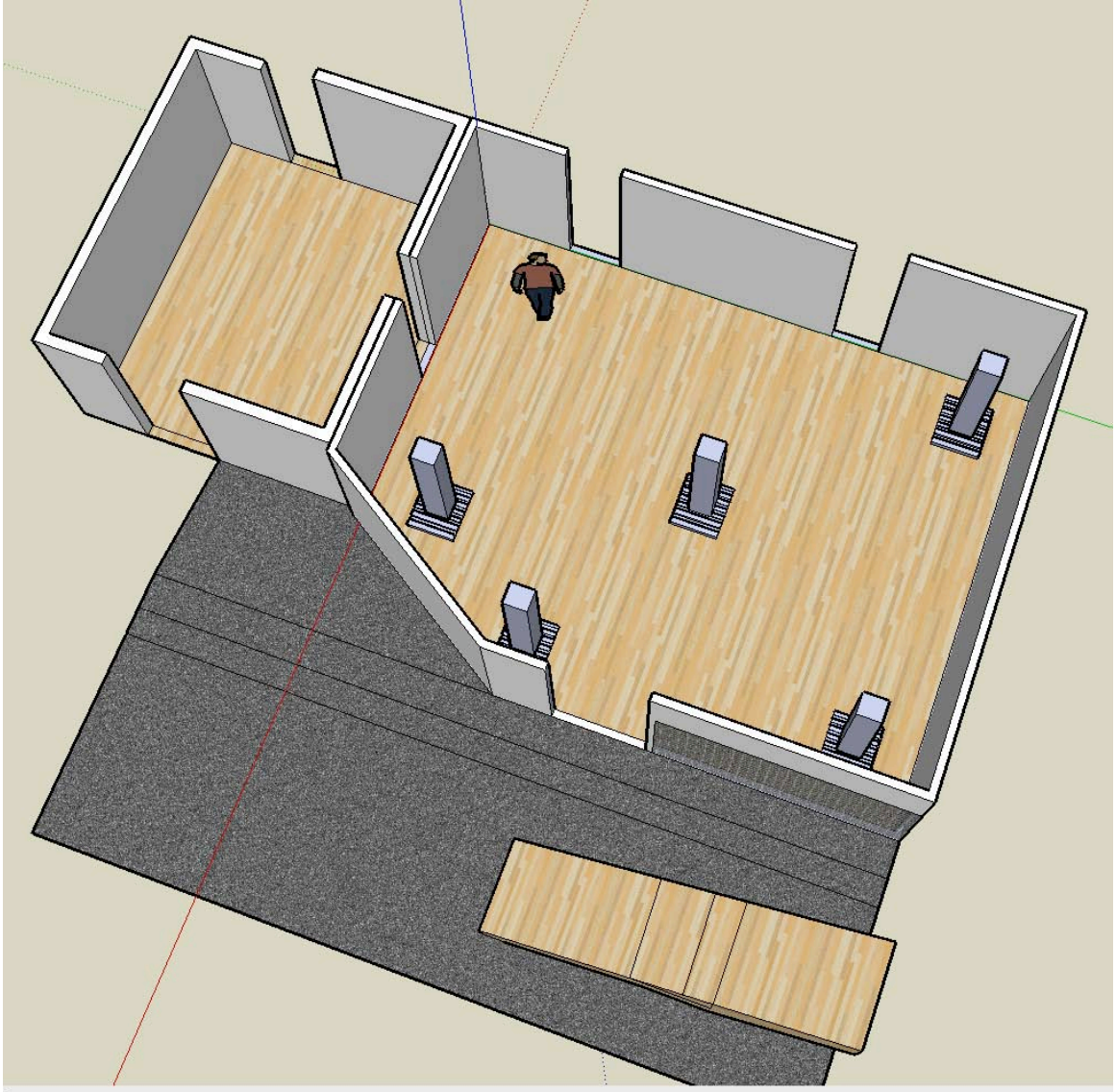


Fig. 29. Interior of final proposal limiting pallets to large works

I will revisit the ensemble after graduation, to complete the initial concept of seven senses/seven materials to be presented in Nigeria during the annual Wole Soyinka festival that features his works in 2011. The smaller pieces from this ensemble will form part of my next solo exhibition “Template” the recent work of Olu Amoda” at Skoto Gallery in New York, which opens in December 2009 and runs through January– 2010. The big works have the potential to be loaned

to the Museum of African Art in New York if they meet all curatorial and museum conservator's standards.

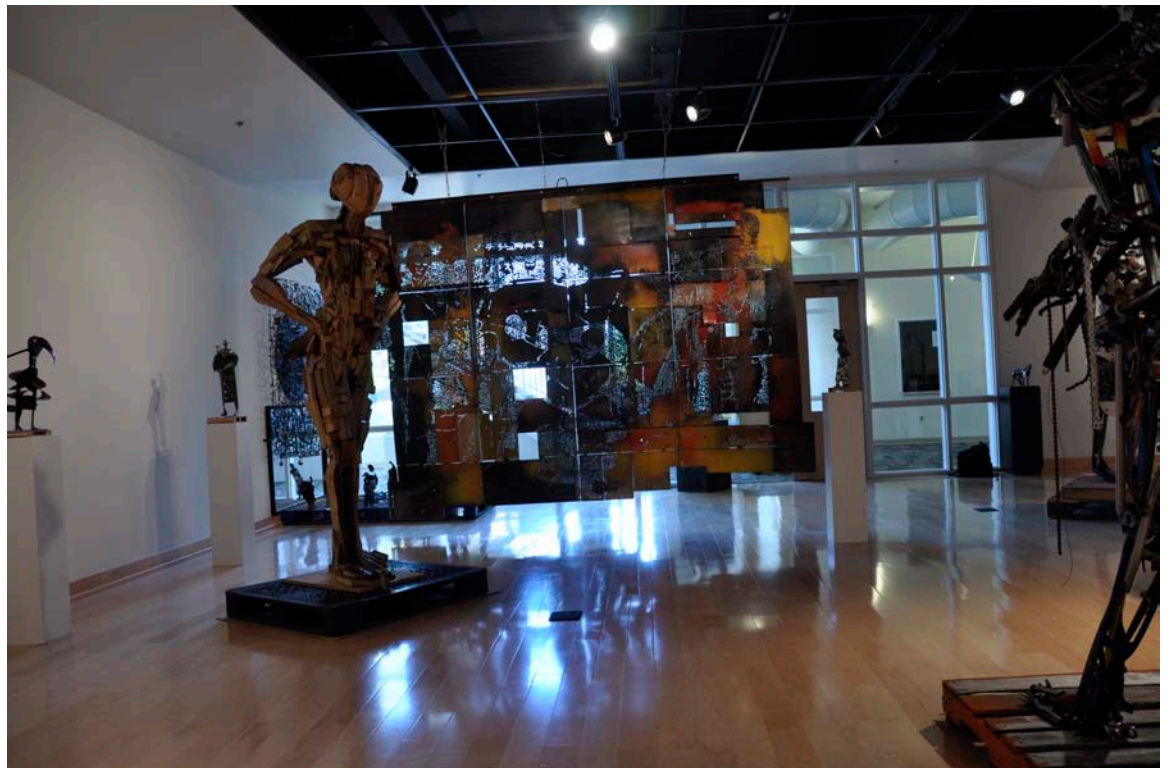


Fig. 30. Seeds of Passage II (Oct 28th – Nov 12th, 2009)



Fig. 31. Seeds of Passage III (Oct 28th – Nov 12th, 2009)



Fig. 32. Seeds of Passage IV (Oct 28th – Nov 12th, 2009)



Fig. 33. Jane Pilkings II (Plasma Cutter Drawing on Steel) 2009

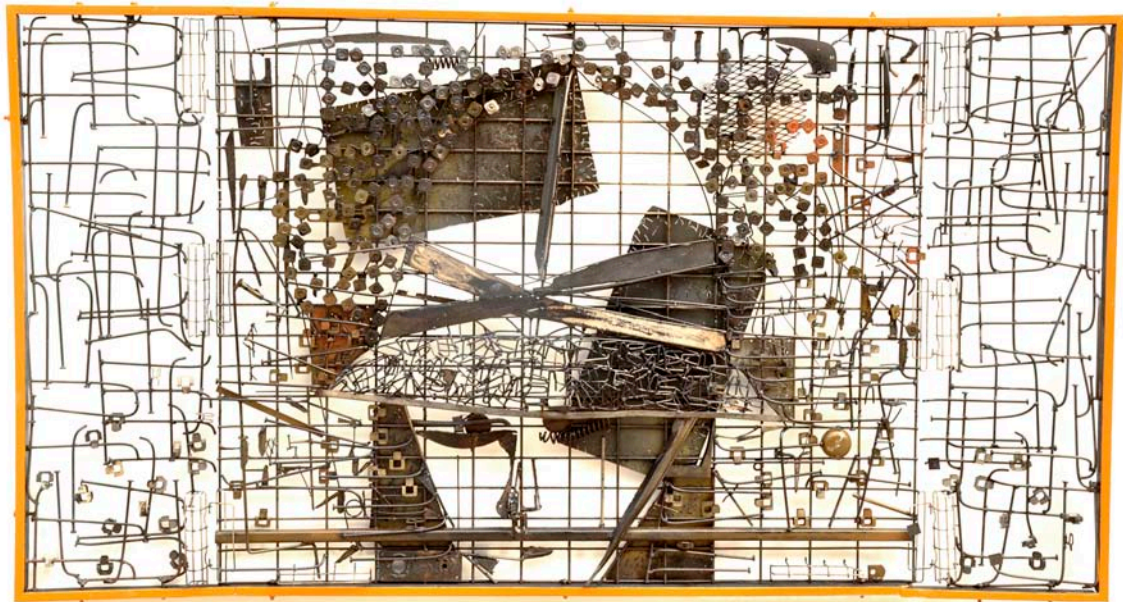


Fig. 34. Simon Pilkings II



Fig. 35. After Deflowering (Plasma cutter drawing on stainless steel sheet) 2009



Fig. 36. At the Ball I (Welded Steel and keys) 2009



Fig. 37. At the Ball II (Welded Mild and Stainless Steel) 2009



Fig. 38. Market Woman I (Welded Mild and Stainless Steel) 2009



Fig. 39. Iyaloja I (Welded Mild and Stainless Steel) 2009



Fig. 40. Pilking the Ball Masquerade (Welded Mild Steel) 2009



Fig. 41. Egungun I (Welded Cast Bronze and Stainless Steel) 2009



Fig. 42. Market Woman II (Welded Mild and Stainless Steel) 2009



Fig. 43. Market Woman III (Welded Mild Steel) 2009



Fig. 44. Sergeant Amusa (Welded Mild Steel) 2009

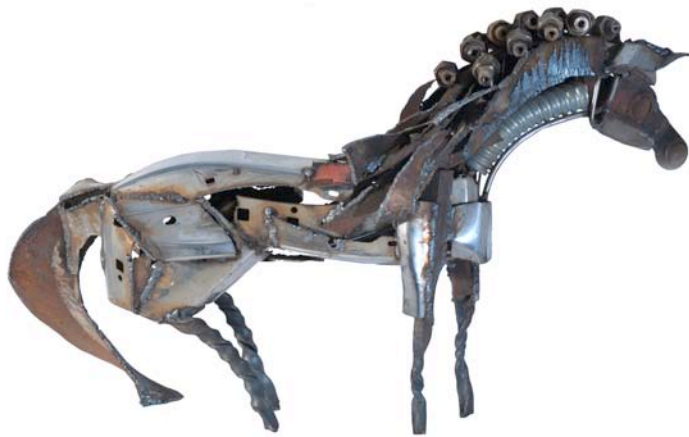


Fig. 45. Esin I (Welded Mild Steel) 2009



Fig. 46. Esin II (Welded Mild Steel) 2009



Fig. 47. Esin III (Welded Mild Steel) 2009



Fig. 48. Esin IV



Fig. 49. Elesin Oba, Iyaloja and Girls I (wood and Plexiglas) 2007

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22.

(1) Securely my word

(2) "It a matter of cash". This is the response often given by Dandy a character in a Nigerian soap TV drama, "Bassey and Company". The drama focuses on social classes where information is highly priced. Dandy, an information hound, has his ears to the ground, and is a darling of all who need information for one purpose or the other. The cold war was about trade secret on Google or internet for domestic use.