

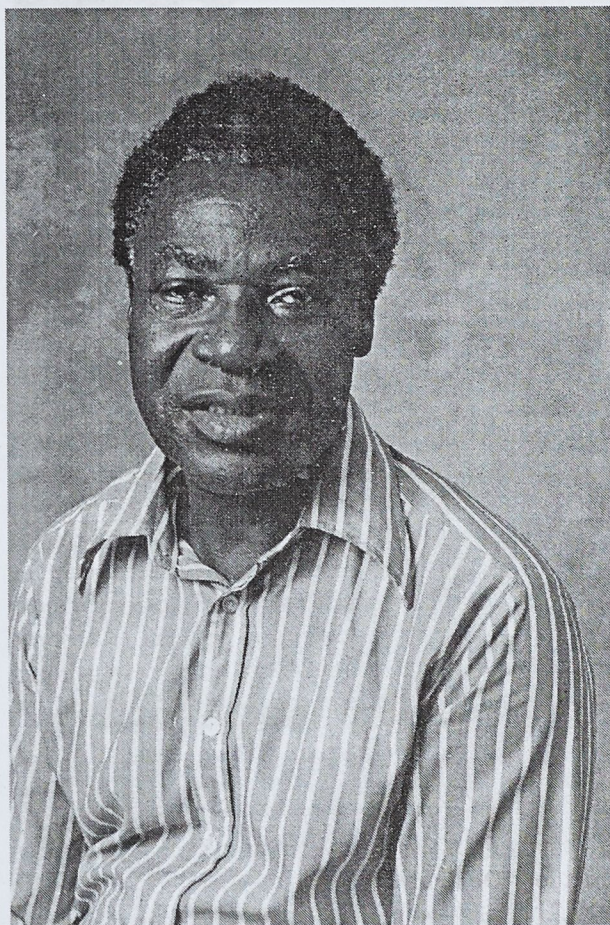
## AGBO FOLARIN: YORUBA ARTIST AND MAN OF THE WORLD

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I am not a traditional artist in the sense of being one who reproduces icons in the replicas of work executed by traditional artists for generations. By presenting traditional images and forms in new ways and by using modern materials, techniques and settings, I give Yoruba icons and myths a 'new look'. In this sense I could be considered 'modern.' I am, however, traditional in a sense of being a sculptor and designer who experiences the deep importance of history.

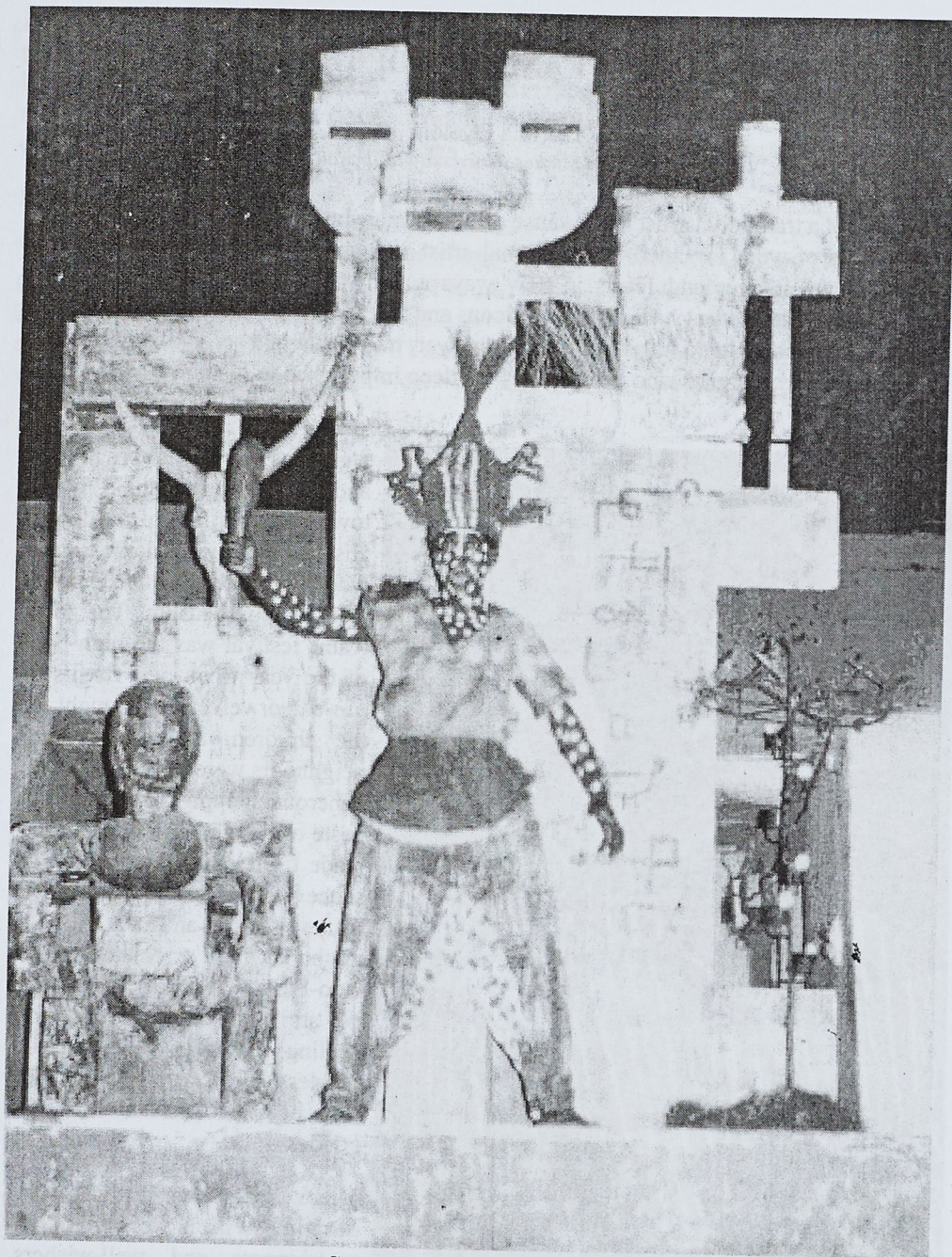
— Agbo Folarin, 1980



Agboola Folarin was born in 1934 and grew up in Ibadan, a Yoruba town on the fringe of the forest. His father, Chief Folarin Solaja, who held the title *Otun Balogun*, was a pious Muslim. The *Id el Kabir* festival was the high-light of the year when new outfits of *aso-oke* or velvet were bought for the children, and friends and neighbours were entertained with generous helpings of *amala* (a paste of dough-like consistency made from yam flour), *ewedu* (a sauce made from a dark green leafy vegetable) and meat. Agbo's mother, who originated from Ado-Ekiti, was converted to Islam but still retained respect for the healing powers of the river goddess, Osun. Her own mother had been a priestess of the goddess.

There were other festivals also during which crowds of worshippers and well-wishers surged through the streets of





Stage set for "Obaluaiye"



Ibadan in colourful procession. Agbo remembers joining in the festival of Yemoja, a river goddess, —Some people in Ibadan said that the disastrous Ogunpa floods of 1980 were caused by Yemoja because her worship had been neglected.— but it was the ancestral masquerades which made the most vivid impression on his mind. The appearance of these masked figures impersonating departed ancestors is a reminder of the unbroken chain which links the living to the dead. It is also an occasion to recall family history, encapsulated in *oriki*.<sup>1</sup> But for a child, the procession of masquerades through the streets is a time of excitement filled with drumming, dancing and colourful display. Both Yemoja and the masquerades lay stored in Agbo's memory until they emerged in visual form several decades later.

Chief Solaja sent all his children, both boys and girls, to St. David's Primary School, Kudeti, a Christian mission school named after the Reverend David Hinderer who brought Christianity to Ibadan in 1851.<sup>2</sup>

In the evenings, Agbo also attended Koranic school where children were taught to recite the Koran in Arabic —These Koranic schools are known as *ile kewu* in Yoruba. Thus he grew up with a knowledge of Christianity, Islam and Yoruba polytheism. Many Yoruba's of Agbo's generation grew up in similar circumstances which exposed them to these three major religions. Adherents of all three religions could be found among the members of many extended families where a spirit of tolerance and mutual respect prevailed. In Yoruba polytheism, religious fanaticism was unknown: each individual worshipped his or her own deity without seeking to convert others.

The energy which Agbo shows in his work as an artist was fostered during his childhood years. Western schooling did not alienate him from practical every-day living. Agbo's mother traded in beans and garri and made palm-oil, a laborious process. Agbo helped by picking the palm-nuts off the prickly bunches, collecting water and firewood and then pounding the boiled palm-nuts. Through members of his extended family he became acquainted with Yoruba technology and design. Some of his male relatives were brass-smiths (*asude*) and the young Agbo often visited their smithy.<sup>3</sup> First he was allowed to operate the bellows and later to try his hand at hammering brass into bracelets for the worshippers of Osun and Yemoja Metal remains one of Agbo's favourite media of artistic expression because of its "potency and vitality." He also observed his female relatives painting designs, in cassava starch on fabric to be dyed in indigo. The designs, *adire eleko* as they called locally, are marked by a crispness and clarity, characteristics which are

<sup>1</sup>S.O. Babayemi, *Egungun among the Oyo Yoruba* (Ibadan: Board publications, 1980), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>Anna Hinderer, *Seventeen years in the Yoruba country* London: Seeley, Jackson and Halliday, 1872.

<sup>3</sup>Bolanle Awe: "The asude," *African Arts*, Vol. IX, no. 1 October 1975.



evident in his own textile designs of the 1970's.<sup>4</sup>



Atilogo dancer

Agbo's father was a prosperous cocoa farmer and trader. He erected two mighty two-storey houses with rooms of heroic size at the foot of the hill that rises to the church of St. David's Kudeti, founded by Reverend David Hinderer in the mid 19th century. From the foot of these mansions stretches a line of bungalows which shelter the descendants of Chief Folarin Solaja. In the room of one mansion are the decaying remnants of a past prosperity. Chairs with lathe-turned legs and backs carved with vases of flowers in low relief. A bent-wood rocking chair with a broken cane seat. Six-foot high mirrors with sculpted surrounds. Pendulum wall-clocks with carved cases, one surmounted by a once-gilt lion. The artistry and scale of these furnishings must

have made a vivid impression on the mind of young Agbo. Chief Solaja also possessed a telephone, car and bath-tub, all rarities in Nigeria of the 1930's. He lies buried in a small court-yard, his grave unmarked but cordoned off by a line of cement balusters.

Chief Solaja has several wives and many children. After his death in 1944, Agbo's mother had to fend for her own three children. Agbo's admiration for the role of his mother and indeed of all women in society is reflected in the images of women which occur frequently

<sup>4</sup>Pat Oyelola, "Everyman's guide to Nigerian art," *Nigeria Magazine*, Lagos, 1976, pp. 86-87.



in his work. His mother lived with him in her advanced years until her death in 1990.

In 1961, Agbo went to London on a Federal Scholarship, first taking general art courses at Regent Street Polytechnic and the Hammersmith College of Art and then specializing in Theatre Design. He also had the opportunity of working under John Neville at the Nottingham Playhouse 1966-67 and doing vacation work with the Ballet Rambert. In 1968 Agbo returned to Nigeria. The late Michael Crowder, then Director of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ife, had seen his work at a group exhibition at the Africa Centre in London and encouraged him to apply for a post at the University. Agbo lived and worked there until his retirement manifesting his protean talent in theatre-design, painting, graphics, textile design and sculpture. He spent one academic year at Howard

University from 1979-1980 working for his M.F.A. and then went on to obtain an M.A in architecture.

Agbo's personality, as well as his art, was characterized by vigour and energy: man and life are never static, he said. He moved swiftly, talked and laughed with an exuberance which filled the whole room. Certain universal themes run through his art, interpreted through specific cultural phenomena which are recreated by the artist in the light of his own individual experience.

The problem of capturing movement in two-dimensional visual form has intrigued artists throughout the ages from the pre-historic rock painters of Hoggar in



Interpreter



North Africa,<sup>5</sup> down to Matisse in France in the 1930's<sup>6</sup> and Ben Enwonwu in present day Nigeria.<sup>7</sup> Few artists have been faced with such an abundance of raw material as Agbo Folarin.

In Nigeria, the dance permeates life in all its seasons: the youngest child, standing straddle-legged, will move to the sound of music, the oldest woman, seated on her mat, will greet good news with rhythmic swaying of arms and torso. The mature and able-bodied have a wide range of movement at their command, guided by the rhythms appropriate to celebrations both secular and religious.<sup>8</sup> Agbo Folarin's works from 1960 to the present day reflect his interest in rhythm and movement. His "Fishermen's Home-coming" (1960) painted when he was working as a graphic artist for Western Nigeria Television, captures the heavy stride of the fishermen with their catch. His "Movement" (1969) evokes through abstract pattern a surging crowd in motion. "Atilogu Dancer", a lino-print dated 1969, vividly evokes the dancer's powerful downward thrust. The groups of curved lines in the background suggest biological diagrams of muscle-action. "Interpreter", a silk-screen dated 1971 builds up the figure of a drummer from sharp pointed lines and forms recalling the staccato rhythms of the bata drum used particularly in the worship of fiery Sango, the god of thunder. Agbo was to return to the theme of the dance in a major work later in the decade.

The culmination of the culture-consciousness of the 1970s came in 1977 when the 2nd World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (popularly known as FESTAC) was staged in Lagos between January 15th and February 12th. Such an enormous undertaking which involved the participation of Africans from all over the continent as well as those of the diaspora was not without its problems, both practical and ideological. However, it is to Nigeria's credit that these problems were overcome and FESTAC did take place.<sup>9</sup>

The focus of most of the activities was the National Theatre in Lagos, a controversial edifice patterned after the palace of Culture and Spots in Varna, Bulgaria, whose shape reminded many people of a military officer's hat. This structure, regarded by many as alien, was however embellished by Nigeria artists.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Rene Huyghe (ed), *Larousse encyclopaedia of prehistoric and ancient art* (London: Paul Hamlyn), 1962, p. 38.

<sup>6</sup>Frederick Brill, *Matisse* (London: Paul Hamlyn), 1962, plates 32, 33.

<sup>7</sup>Pat Oyelola, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-3.

<sup>8</sup>Edith Enem "Nigerian dance," *Nigeria Magazine*, nos. 115-116 (1975).

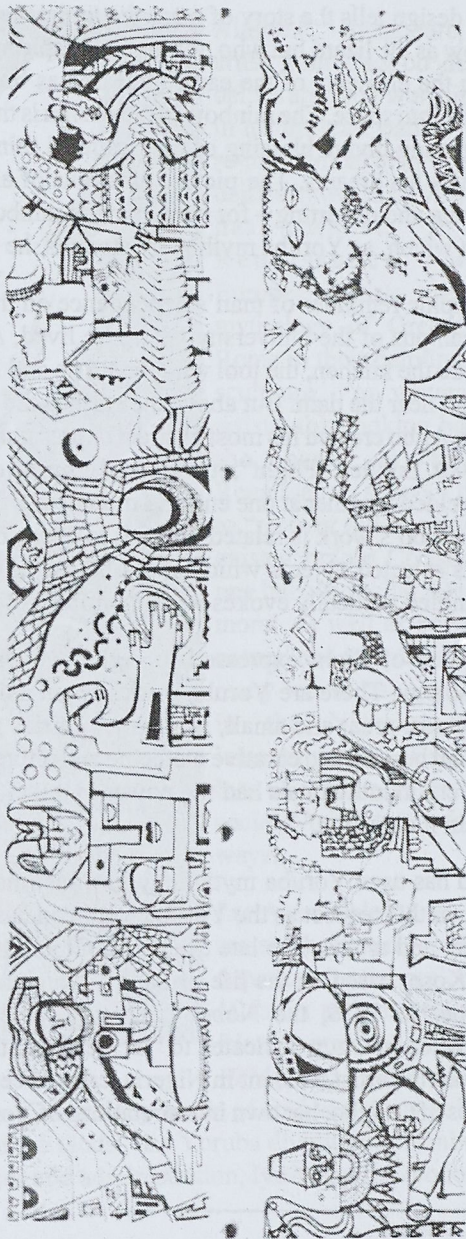
<sup>9</sup>Moyibi Amoda, "FESTAC Colloquium and Black World Development," *Nigeria Magazine*, 1978.

<sup>10</sup>"The National Theatre and makers of modern Nigerian art," *Nigeria Magazine*, n.d.



Agbo's contribution, completed in 1975, was a repousse copper frieze, 7' x 86' 10", entitled "Theatre in Nigeria". Pl. v. In his interpretation of the dancers and instruments characteristic of various groups within Nigeria, he has emphasized line or sometimes mass, depending on the quality of the music and movement depicted. The flaring lines of the whirling costume of the ancestral mask are put next to powerful, forward-thrusting forms which evoke the muscular dancers from east of the Niger. Downward curving lines suggest the movement of the tall, flexible, cloth-covered towers of the masquerade of the Nupe known as Igunnuko in its Yoruba version in Abeokuta whose summits at times bend over and sweep the ground. The main motifs bulge out slightly towards the viewer, asserting the warmth of the beaten copper, while the background areas have been scored with a cross-hatching of lines to give a contrasting effect punctuated by small areas of bright copper.

Agbo's interest in movement as a theme inspired him to take part in a competition for the design of a glass mosaic mural for Murtala Mohammed Airport in Lagos.<sup>11</sup> He had never used mosaic as a medium before, but regarded it as an exciting possibility. His design – The Spirit of Man in Flight – was subsequently executed in 1978 as a 200 sq. metre glass mosaic on an outer wall of the airport. In Agbo's words:



"Theatre in Nigeria" National Theatre Lagos, VIP. Designer-sculptor: Agbo Folarin

<sup>11</sup>"Commissioned works of art at the new Murtala Mohammed airport," *New Culture*, Vol. 1, no. 4 (March 1979).



The design tells the story of man, the toolmaker, *Australopithecus Africanus*, who begins as low as the lizard but who, through his aspiring dreams has taught himself to fashion iron from the elements of the earth until he has built a tool that can lift him into the air and finally into space. The rainbow in the design is the traditional rainbow of Yoruba mythology suggesting divine blessing of the beautiful things man has created, and will create, if he pursues his dreams. The picture also tells of airport scenes, passengers coming in taxis, arriving and departing – for man, like the rainbow, must always have one foot on the earth upon which, as Yoruba mythology stresses, he is so dependent.<sup>12</sup>

A graphic reminder of man's dependence on the earth could be seen in Agbo's house on the campus of the University where he lived. A broad-bladed hoe hung on the wall just outside the kitchen, the tool with which he and his family cultivated food – crops on a plot of land near the dam. But above the earth is the sky: man's clay is animated by his soaring spirit. Agbo created his most abstract expression of man's aspiration at Howard University in 1980. Entitled "Flight", it is formed from two car bumpers found in a scrap yard which are welded together at one end and mounted to thrust upwards like the wings of a powerful bird. Agbo's work is related in spirit to Picasso's "Head of a bull" created in 1943. Both artists selected objects which could be use as metaphors. The shape of the car bumpers assembled vertically evokes wings, symbols of flight.

The idea of flight expressed in Agbo's work does not belong only to 20th century technology. There are Yoruba stories about animals, men and spirits that fly. Aja, god of the winds, great and small, sometimes carries people away, teaches them his own art of magical healing and curative medicine and returns them to their countries. It is also believed that certain individuals had the power to travel through the air unobserved after reciting a certain incantation.<sup>13</sup>

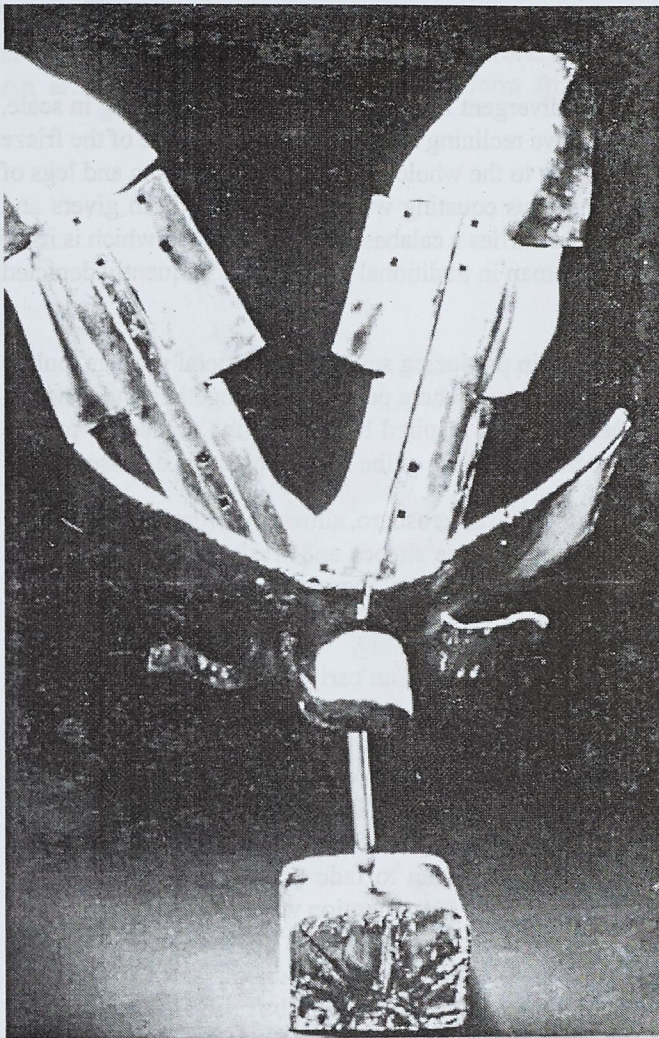
Agbo has used Yoruba mythology as direct inspiration for many of his works. He is not alone in this respect as the Yoruba pantheon has provided themes for the works of several writers and artists. The late dramatist, Chief Duro Ladipo, wrote an opera in the 1960's, *Oba Koso*, based on the life of Sango, which received wide acclaim in both Nigeria and Europe. In 1976, the Nobel Laureate, Wole Soyinka, wrote "Ogun Abibiman", an invocation of Ogun dedicated to "the dead and the maimed of Soweto" Susanne Wenger, an Austrian artist resident in Nigeria, created cement sculpture of heroic size in the sacred groves of Osogbo, her own interpretations of Yoruba deities such as Iya Mapo, Obatala and

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<sup>12</sup>Agbo Folarin, the use of Yoruba iconography and mythology in my work executed at Howard University 1979-80, M.F.A. thesis, p. 60.

<sup>13</sup>Wole Soyinka and D.O. Fagunwa, *The forest of a thousand demons* (Lagos: Nelson, 1968, pp. 16-17.





Flight

University Secretariat of Obafemi Awolowo University, made of cold cast dusty gold and black fibre-glass and entitled "Pantheon of the Gods" has Yoruba divinities as symbols of the various faculties. Esu stands for services and administration, Iya Mapo for economics,

Alajire.<sup>14</sup> Sangodare, an artist from Osogbo depicts deities and their worshippers in his intricate batiks.<sup>15</sup> The re-instatement of the Yoruba deities in works of visual art has parallels in the Renaissance, when European artists used the mythology of Greece and Rome in their paintings and sculpture. For writers and artists, this looking back to the past, as in the Renaissance, shows a desire to "recover the world which existed before Christianity, one believed to be intensely moral, as well as powerful, natural and truthful".<sup>16</sup> How many letters have appeared in the Nigerian press, lamenting, like Cato, the loss of pristine virtue by a society tainted by foreign ways!

For Agbo Folarin, the gods are symbols and a point of departure for the exploration of forms and materials. His frieze executed between 1974 and 1977 in the

<sup>14</sup>Suzanne Wenger, *A life with the gods* (Worgl: Perlinger Verlag), 1980.

<sup>15</sup>Pat Oyelola, *Everyman's guide to Nigerian art*, p. 129.

<sup>16</sup>Michael Levy, *Early Renaissance* (Middlesex: Penguin), 1967, p.151.



Osun for the liberal arts, Osanyin of the cooling leaves for health sciences, Ogun father of the secrets of iron, for technology.

The treatment of the female figures is divergent from traditional Yoruba carving in scale, style and material. The positioning of two reclining female figures at the base of the frieze provides a foundation and gives stability to the whole composition. The torso and legs of one figure resemble landscape forms, thus equating woman and earth, both givers and sustainers of life. Another female figure carries a calabash tray on her head which is itself in the form of a calabash bowl. The woman in traditional sculpture is frequently depicted as a carrier.

Although Agbo is "especially interested in producing sculpture for social settings, public buildings and especially public meeting places where people come together and function as a social body", he has also created images inspired by the Yoruba deities for private contemplation. For these he has chosen the medium of the lithograph since it possesses the

potential for the use of sensitive tones and chiaroscuro, allows the artist to develop history in subtle detail, potent sculptural shapes and fresh, fluid dramatic movement...all these qualities are exploited to express the potency of the orisa...<sup>17</sup>

Whilst in other countries of the world children from an early age have access to picture books of myths and legends drawn from their own culture, in Nigeria, such books are lacking. In pre-colonial times, the images of the Yoruba *orisa* were created in oral poetry, music, dance and ritual by their worshippers. Very few were created in concrete form.<sup>18</sup> With the evangelization of Nigeria by Christian and Muslim preachers, Orisa worship was almost stamped out. Since there was no written corpus of Yoruba religious traditions, the myths and legends connected with the orisa began to fade away. However, with the resurgence of national pride at independence in 1960, attention was focused on indigenous culture and attempts were made to record and translate Yoruba poetry, both secular and religious —Pioneers in this field are Wande Abimbola, S.A. Babalola and Ulli Beier. In the 1960s, the Osogbo artists began to use the myths of the Yoruba orisa as inspiration for their visual art. The use of myth and legend became the trade-mark of these artists who had not been trained in academic institutions. Agbo Folarin is one of the few academic visual artists who has used Yoruba myths and legends as inspiration.

Agbo started his *orisa* lithograph series in 1979/80 at Howard University, selecting those

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<sup>17</sup>Agbo Folarin, M.F.A. thesis, P. 65.

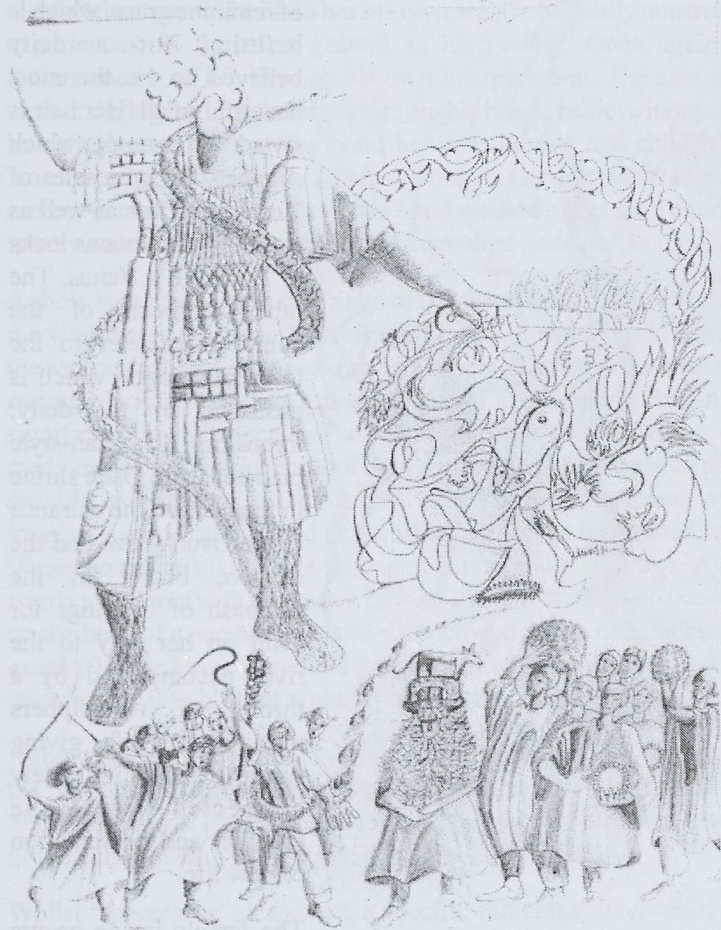
<sup>18</sup>Father K.F. Carroll, "Art in wood", in *Sources of Yoruba history* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 166.



stories which "celebrate Yoruba concepts of creativity".<sup>19</sup> The concepts associated with creativity are central to Agbo's own life and work. Every artist is creative: this is axiomatic. An artist is always making significant form from raw material by the light of his

imagination and skill of his hands. However, Agbo is always seeking new materials which provide new challenges and bring forth new forms rather than concentrating on one medium.

Two of the most vivid images of the *orisa* that Agbo has created are in the preparatory drawings for Ogun and Osun. According to Yoruba mythology, when the gods first came down to earth, their progress was impeded by the rank tangle of the primeval forest. They tried in vain to clear it until Ogun appeared with his iron cutlass and accomplished the task which for so long had defeated them. He taught the secret of iron to *orisa* and to men but was later rejected by them because they did not like the unkempt



Osun

<sup>19</sup>Agbo Folarin, M. F.A. thesis, p. 66.



appearance of the innovator.<sup>20</sup> Agbo's Ogun is shown in the act of clearing the forest with his pet python round his neck. One hand swings the cutlass while the other passes on to men the knowledge of making iron. His head is a grim, cubist form, looking as though it has been cast in iron.



Osun

The image of Osun, on the other hand is the epitome of feminine grace, which is befitting for a deity believed to be the most beautiful of all. Her hair is styled in a mode which suggests the intricacies of Yoruba coiffure as well as recalling the sinuous locks of Botticelli's Venus. The other elements of the composition refer to the town of Osogbo which is protected by the deity: imposing Brazilian-style mansions, the Osun shrine in the market, the entrance to the Osun grove and the *arugba*, bearer of the calabash of offerings for osun on her way to the river accompanied by a throng of worshippers through her life giving waters, Osun is intimately connected with the creation and preservation of new life.

The female image occurs frequently in the work of Agbo Folarin as has ben

<sup>20</sup>Harold Courlander, *Tales of Yoruba gods and heroes* (New York: Crown, 1973), PP. 33-37.



mentioned. He admired the power wielded by women in pre-colonial society through the important roles they play in the family compound and the market.

The mother and child is another common theme in Yoruba carving, but Agbo's 1976 interpretation of this in cast bronze shows once again his original approach to traditional themes. Whilst the child in traditional carvings is shown in a position of dependence on the mother, Agbo's version shows the child being launched into the world by his mother's outstretched arms. The child has his own arms confidently outstretched, eager to grasp new experiences, in the same gesture as his mother. Once again the artist enriches our understanding of life through his own interpretation. The care and effort exerted by the mother during her child's early years enable him to achieve independence from the one who loves him most dearly. The bond between mother and child is particularly strong in a Yoruba polygamous family where the father is a remote and authoritarian figure while the mother is responsible for the nurture and welfare of her own children. The Yoruba mother is very much akin to a "potent and benevolent goddess" in the lives of her children.

Agbo's home town is on the fringe of the forest. His respect for the bond between man and the vital forces of the earth is reflected in his appreciation of natural forms. His garden on the campus of Obafemi Awolowo University was full of trees planted by himself. His final resting place is beneath a grapefruit tree in his garden in Ibadan. Trees were particularly significant for him since they are "the source of the necessities of life: food, shelter and medicine (as well as) symbols of man's ultimate dependence on nature". Certain trees have specific associations in Yoruba culture. Peregun (*dracaena fragrans*) is a symbol of longevity and is often found near shrines as well as being used to mark boundaries. Odan (*ficus thonningii*) is a shade tree, with connotations of peace. Ayunre (*albisia zygia*) is a sturdy shade tree with protective power. The leaves of akoko (*new boldia laevis*) are placed on the head of a person who is being endowed with a chieftancy title. Iroko (*chlorophora excelsis*) is the king of trees and the abode of spirits and plays host to witches when they are transformed into birds at night.<sup>21</sup>

Agbo's "Silver tree in the sky" is an oil-painting celebrating the beauty of tree form. It is the portrait of a tree which once stood on the university campus but was later cut down. Its branches, bare of leaves, reach upwards towards the sun which suffuses the whole surface of the canvas with yellow light.

Whilst "Silver tree" deals with a specific individual tree, "Bird under the tree of life", a welded metal sculpture which dates from 1979/80 employs an ideo-plastic approach to its theme. This is "nature remodeled by thought", the approach used by the adire (batik) artists whom Agbo observed during his childhood. Natural forms are not copied but used as a

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<sup>21</sup>G.J. Afolabi Ojo, *Yoruba Culture* (London: University of Ife and University of London, 1971), pp. 166-167.



point of reference for the artistic re-creation of form.<sup>22</sup> No specific tree or bird can be identified but the two forms comprise features which are generic.

The metal for this sculpture came from the scrap-yards around Howard University. Sections of pipe, bicycle handles and car bumpers were cut and welded to evoke the sylvan image of bird and tree. Metal is one of Agbo's favourite materials:

Metal appeals to me because it has great potency and even vitality. It is as able as clay to suggest something that is of the earth or something that is as sensuous and surging as the limbs of a plant or animal.<sup>23</sup>

In pre-colonial Yoruba art, birds perched on the top of the Oba's beaded crown and the herbalist's metal staff symbolized supernatural powers. Birds as decorative motifs were also found in shrine-paintings, carved doors and calabashes, and adire eleko wrappers. In those contexts, they

symbolize the life provided for the sustenance of mankind by the supreme god, Olodumare (and) the same sense of divine providence.<sup>24</sup>

Agbo's ultimate artistic statement about the relationship between the artist and his own ethnic culture is a glazed ceramic piece entitled "The Artist as A Growing Tree" (1979/80):

The head of the artist, naturalistically portrayed, is set on a stylised tree which forms the window through which he views the world.

Just as the tree sends its roots deep into the soil in search of sustenance, so does the artist derive his inspiration from those elements of culture which nourished him in his formative years.

The "window through which he sees the world" is his own culture which he absorbs from the day he is born, first unconsciously and then through a process of home education aimed at enculturation. Such education, imbibed from those with whom the child has a close affective relationship, penetrates deeply into the psyche and moulds attitudes and behaviour patterns.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Patricia Oyelola, *Yoruba decorative batik, the rise and development of a new art Form*, M.A. dissertation, University of Ibadan, 1981, P. 45

<sup>23</sup>Agbo Folarin, M.F.A. thesis, p. 58.

<sup>24</sup>Agbo Folarin, M.F.A thesis, pp. 18-19.

<sup>25</sup>R.L. Beals, H. Hoijer and A.R. Beals, *An introduction to anthropology* (New York and London: Collier Macmillan, 1997), p. 576-8.

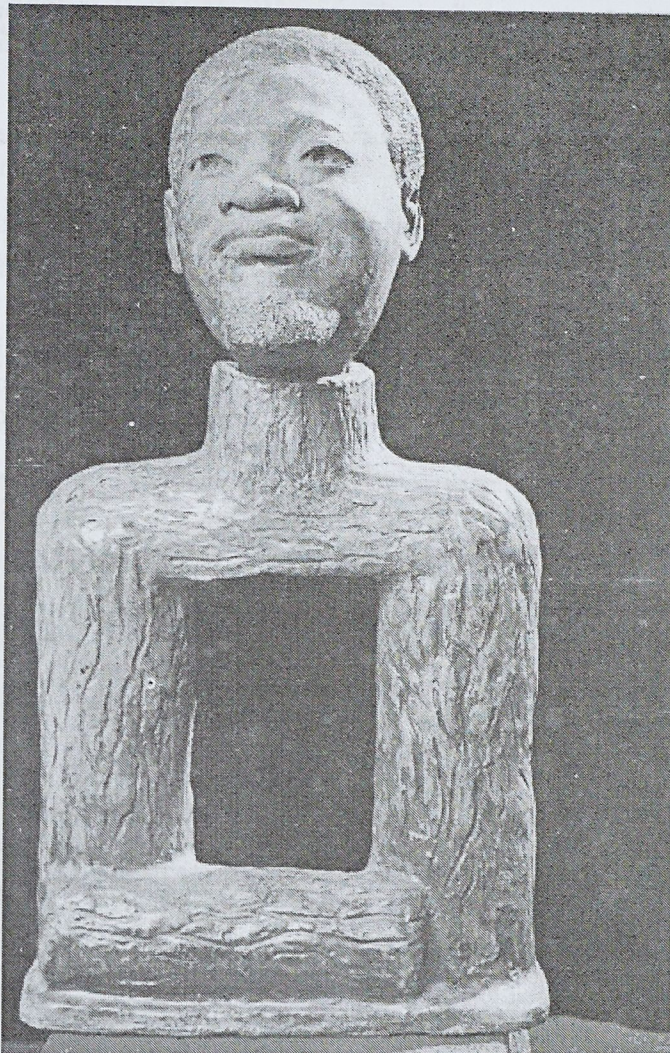


Agbo Folarin as an adult was exposed to cultures other than his own, having spent several years in England and America. Through his reading he was exposed to the art of the world —Agbo's collection of art books which span most countries and most periods is one of the most comprehensive in Nigeria. His widow, Margaret, has donated it to the Department of Fine Art of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.

Thus he admired the energy and craftsmanship evident in the *epa* and *gelede* masks of the Yoruba, the *ikenga* figures of the Igbo and the *chi wara* of the Bambara.

The *epa* mask is a massive structure which may weight from 25-30 kg. A pot-like wooden head with simplified features covers the head of the carrier. This is surmounted by single or multiple male or female figures. They commemorate important events and persons in the history of certain northern Ekiti towns.<sup>26</sup>

*Gelede* head dresses consist of a stylized head with a superstructure which may depict



The Artist as a growing tree

<sup>26</sup>See William Fagg, *Yoruba sculpture of West Africa* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), plates 10, 13, 40, 68.



animals with symbolic significance or human beings going about their daily business. They are worn by the South – Western Yoruba at ceremonies to ensure the positive use of female power.<sup>27</sup>

*Ikenga* are wooden statues carved by the Igbo and Igala representing a stylized male figure endowed with horns. These figures symbolize masculine strength and achievement.<sup>28</sup>

*Chi wara* are head-dresses in the form of stylized antelopes with long horns and gracefully curving necks made by the Bamana people of Mali. They are worn during rites connected with agriculture.<sup>29</sup>

Not only these African art forms, but he also appreciated the linear grace and elegance of Botticelli, the strength of Michelangelo, the dramatic movement of Chagall. Nevertheless he made certain choices in his own work which clearly indicate the influence of his formative ethnic culture. The powerful influence of woman as mother (whether human or divine), the myths of the *orisa* which “provide...highly developed images of individual and social relationships which help or hinder the creativity and workability of society”,<sup>30</sup> the presence of the tree, the importance of the dance—these significant elements of the Yoruba culture that nurtured Agbo are clear indicators of the artist’s ethnic background. They are at the same time themes which strike chords of universal sympathy. The styles and materials he employed came from his international experience as an artist. This fusion of the ethnic with the international illuminates Agbo’s own philosophy of living which regards the realization of the brotherhood of man as the goal of human existence.



<sup>27</sup>See Henry John Drewal and Margaret Thompson Drewal, *Gelede art and female power among the Yoruba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), ch. 6.

<sup>28</sup>See John Boston, *Ikenga figures among the north west Igbo and Igala* (Lagos: Federal Department of Antiquities, 1977), *passim*.

<sup>29</sup>See Roy Sieber and Roslyn Adele Walker, *African art in the cycle of life* (Washington: National Museum of African Art, 1987), pp. 64-65.

<sup>30</sup>Agbo Folarin, M.F.A. thesis, p. 16.