

THE ROLE OF ART CENTERS: A LOOK AT PATRICK IGHOGBEDHERE AGOSE'S WORKS AND INFLUENCE IN THE UNIVERSAL STUDIOS OF ART, LAGOS, NIGERIA

Augustine Okolo BARDI
Department of Fine and Applied Arts
University of Benin
Benin City, Nigeria
bardi.austin@yahoo.com

Abstract

The development of workshops and studios of art practices had an initial setback when it was first introduced by the early missionaries. As soon as its interest became clear as regards its benefits, workshops and studios sprung up in different major locations in the country to perfect art beautification and art aesthetics. For these advantages therefore, the Universal Studios of Art, Lagos, groomed many artists like Patrick Ighogbedhere Agose as an apprentice of the studio under Olabisi Onawale Fakeye and his team of professionals and other artists who specialize in sculpture, painting, wood carving, metal design and other forms of art. The varieties of styles and techniques that existed during his apprenticeship benefitted his professional career and enabled his advancement in sculpture and paved way on how he retained and maintained his good grade in his practices.

Key Words: Missionaries, Workshops and Schools, Universal Studios of Art, Styles and techniques, Apprenticeship

Introduction

The Agbarha-Otor Harmattan workshop of Bruce Onabrakpeya, with its modernistic approach to art, has invited both informal and formal art participants nationally and internationally. The popular *Igun* and *Igbesanwan* guilds of ancient Benin kingdom of bronze casters and carvers had been in existence since the reigns of Oba Ewuare and Esigie the Great in the 14th and 15th centuries and this period benefitted many people (Ugowe: 1997). Notable among them were the following: the creative conceptualization in wood carving by the *Oye Ekiti* School, the *Mbari-Mbayo* experiments, the *Ori-Olokun* workshop, the Oshogbo School and the rest. These abundant centers of art knowledge formed professionals in Painting, Graphics, Textiles, Ceramics, Sculpture and other areas of visual art. Today, new centers have emerged; they are the Abayomi Barber School that exposes the youth to modern Nigerian art, the Harmattan workshop of Bruce Onabrakpeya, with its approach to art, with valuable art forms and art styles that contribute to the development of modern Nigerian art. Also among these centers is the Universal Studios of Art with its archetype for stylistic, ideological and philosophical thought in modern Nigerian art as well as a citadel of learning for both budding and professional artists. This paper focuses on Patrick Ighogbedhere Agose a sculptor with good art tendencies, who graduated from the National Studios of Art through the Universal Studios of Art as an apprentice to a formidable instructor of great repute just like youths, apprentices, who benefitted from schools and workshops mentioned above.

Patrick Ighogbedhere Agose: Early Life and Education

Born on the 5th of July 1961 in Ozoro, Delta State, Patrick Ighogbedhere Agose attended Ekweigbe primary School, Ozoro and later Notre Dame College, Ozoro from 1976-1981. He worked with the Federal Ministry of Transport and Aviation, Lagos from 1982-1984 as a clerical officer. In his quest for further education, he studied general arts at the Yaba College of Technology, Lagos from 1984-1989 and obtained the National Diploma and Higher National Diploma certificates in General Arts and Sculpture, respectively. After completing his study at Yaba College of Technology, he was posted to Bauchi Teachers Training College, Bauchi, for his National Youth Service Corp from 1989 to 1990. During his youth service in Bauchi, he organized free sculpture tutorials for teachers on part-time programme at the college. Though he wanted the training to be financially free, those he taught made contributions to assist him. Nevertheless, his popularity and selfless effort attracted more students to his sculpture class and by the end of his service year, the college authority decided to employ him as a full-time staff, but he declined the offer because of commitments to his family. He further explained in an interview that, he moved down to Lagos to pursue a teaching career at Zinnia College Ikeja, Lagos from 1991-1992. During this period, his art practice suffered a slight setback as he could only work on part-time basis under Koko Ayo, a popular Lagos based sculptor. *Stride in Time*

(1996) an Exhibition Catalogue fully agrees that Agose still not getting the required satisfaction with his proficiency in art, joined the Universal Studios of Art in 1992, with Olatunbi Lekan, and his cousin Benson Ogholie who died later.

Agose Patrick is from a family of artists, his eldest brother and two cousins are painters. He has to his credit a solo exhibition and several local and international group exhibitions. His chief patrons are gallery owners, private collectors and corporate bodies. He teaches Drawing, Sculptural Techniques, Cold cast and Fibre glass methods during weekends. An active member of the Society of Nigerian Artists (S.N.A) and of Index Group of Artists, he is married with children.



Fig. 1: Patrick Agose at Work. 2008, © Patrick Agose's Library.

Studio Practice/Techniques

On joining the Universal Studios of Art in 1992, Agose had worked as an apprentice in Lagos under Sam Ovaraiti and Alex Nwaokolo both Lagos based professional painters. Apart from his initial experiences, in a bid to further his art craftsmanship, he attended many workshops and was resource person. Art exhibitions strengthened his performances and credited his application to secure a placement at the Universal Studios of Art as an apprentice. *The Guardian* newspaper (2007) states that Agose's aspirations to be a versatile artist made him to opt for the cold-cast techniques of sculpture (Fig. 1), but that did not mean that he could not carve on wood, which happened to be his first devotion. His style and method of working out average finicky detail in cold-cast and wood sculpture requires patience. He employs a cast technique, which is aided by the use of palm oil to lubricate all curves in his art pieces, as soon as this is achieved; he puts them in the hot sun so that the oil penetrates into the pieces for a positive result. Agose uses this technique to eliminate abundant humidity that might hamper a good cold-cast procedure. On wood, he uses tough scraping system to reduce roughness and undulating parts of the wood, by so doing, the wood maintains an absolute uniformity at finishing. His cold-cast monumental projects are on billboard in relief commissioned by the Hunter Advertising limited in Lagos and Abuja.

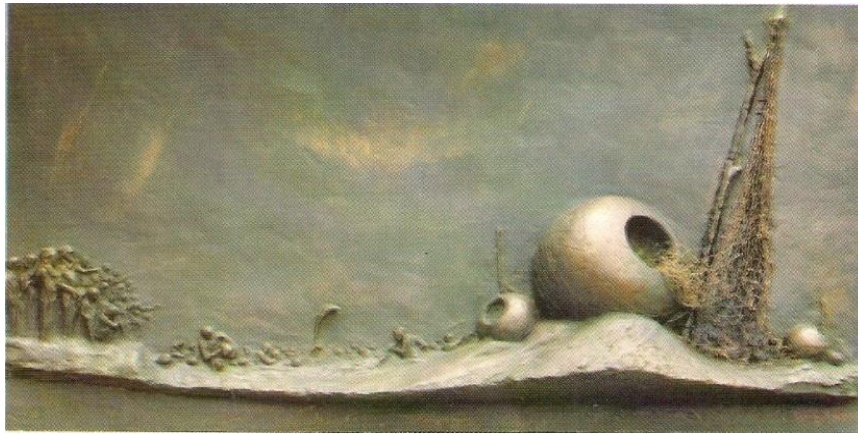


Fig. 2: Spirit of Argungu. Patrick Agose, Fibre, 2006.© Patrick Agose's Library.

His Experimentations

Maduka (1999) agrees that elements in *Spirit of Argungu* (Fig. 2) appear real in conception. In the work, he has been able to visually articulate the reaction of an anxious crowd that he represents at the left side corner of the work. The agitated crowd is facing a giant calabash that is reposed on a white heap of soft sand. The participants at the fiesta are struggling to get a firm grip of their calabashes and net while fishing. His harmonization of the background and foreground is in conformity with the principle of artistic design. Okolo (2000) discusses that *learning the Ropes* (Fig. 3) is a cold-cast bronze that shows a little girl who is probably learning how to tie a wrapper round her body. The reflection on the work shows some technicalities that have been added in order to make the work attractive and aesthetically appealing.



Fig. 3: Learning the Ropes. Patrick Agose, Cold Cast Bronze, 2003, © Universal Studios of Art.



Fig. 4: Homage To Ancestors. Patrick Agose, Cold Cast Bronze, 2003 © Universal Studios of Art. *Homage to Ancestors* (Fig. 4), according to Akaniro (1998) rendered in cold-cast bronze, is a naturalistic figure of a man who appears to love relating with his ancestors. The man holds a small calabash on his left hand while making gestural communication with the right hand. There is perfection in the structural rendering of the head and the broad shoulders. The depiction of the drapery on the wrapper around the figure is commendable. Another captivating piece is the cold-cast titled *Country Boy* (Fig 5). The focus of the work is to reminisce on the importance of wheels and bicycle rims that children play with on the streets in cities and mostly in villages where vehicles do not pass often.



Fig. 5 : Country Boy. Patrick Agose, Fibre Glass, 2006, © Patrick Agose's Collection. Agose builds the gestural posture of the boy with the right hand handling the rim, and the left hand supporting his dropping short pant in (Fig. 5). The figure of a little girl in *interlude* (Fig. 6) is depicted, placing her head in a sleeping position over her book perhaps as a result of fatigue. In the work, Agose has introduced the technique of foreshortening to appropriate the girl's sleeping position. The head and the hands appear larger, compared to other parts of the body. His technical understanding of human anatomy regularly fetches him invitation to participate in public sculptural projects within and outside of Lagos.



Fig. 6: Interlude. Patrick Agose. Fibre Glass, 2007, © Patrick Agose's Collection



Fig. 7: Devotion. Patrick Agose. Wood, 2009. © Patrick Agose's Collection.



Fig. 8: Dignity. Patrick Agose, Wood, 2007, © Patrick Agose's Collection.

The *Devotion* (Fig. 7) depicts the importance of knowledge acquisition. The use of structural aesthetics and perspective gives value to this work. In *Rejuvenation* (1996) an exhibition Catalogue explains how the work reflection shows a studious youth who is engulfed in her reading with her left hand holding firmly to the book while her right supports her head. Agose's draughtsman ship and craftsmanship on wood carving have limitation; that is, his finishing

remains defective compared to his other works on fibre glass and cold cast, his most preferable medium.



Fig. 9: Daily Routine. Patrick Agose, Fibre Glass, 2011, © Augustine Bardi.



Fig. 10: Shy. Patrick Agose, Fibre Glass, 2007, © Augustine Bardi.

Agose in *Dignity* (Fig. 8) shows that there is dignity in labour by presenting the bust of a man at work. The work, no doubt, shows maturity in wood rendering, particularly with its well-executed anatomical features. In *Daily Routine* (Fig. 9), the artist switches his attention to fibre glass. As a multi-talented sculptor, he treats the figure with accuracy. He strikes a perfect balance between the two hands on the hair of his model and the position of the face. Agose concentrates essentially on the finishing aspects of this work. He uses undulating outlines to specify curves in his works, and focuses on both hands that are gracefully attached to the hairs. The artist's creative instinct is also revealed in *Shy* (Fig. 10). Here he conceptually presents the work with both hands of the figure imprisoned behind the head and both legs trapped behind the base. He streamlines the upper region while the lower region is enlarged to accommodate the front and the exposed legs. Agose is very dexterous in the use of fibre glass (see Fig. 11).



Figure 11: Patrick Agose working on Fibre Glass, © Augustine Bardi.

According to him, "Let art be valued beyond aesthetic object acquired by few individuals in our society but be seen as a creative tool for advancement of culture, as obtainable in the West (*Resurgence*, 2007) an exhibition catalogue of the Universal Studios of Art, Lagos).

Conclusion

Despite the inclusion of fine art in our primary and secondary school curriculum, art appreciation is still gathering momentum with the existence of schools and workshops of apprenticeship. In this study therefore, it is revealed that Patrick Agose continues to contribute to the growth of contemporary Nigerian art which cannot be underestimated. These works remain undoubtedly the best of his experimentations. Agose's apprenticeship from the Universal Studios of Art under the tutelage of Olabisi Onawale Fakeye the founder has no doubt inspired his working ability to learn, experience and this is clear seeing the knowledge transmitted to the unemployed youth who passed through him by studio practice or through art workshop experimentation.

References

- Akaniro, H. (1998), Patrick Agose. *The Sculptor*. An Unpublished B.A. Project, Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Benin, Benin City, p.15.
- Maduka, C. (1999), Art: *Nature and Meaning*, An Unpublished Manuscripts, Department of History and International Studies, University of Benin, Benin City, p. 20.
- Okolo, B. (2000), "Communication Aspects of Artworks". *Emotan Journal of Arts*. Vol. 1, No. 1. p. 126.
- Rejuvenation: An Exhibition Catalogue of Contemporary Nigerian Art Lagos; by the Society of Nigerian Artists (S.N.A), June 24th- July 8th, 2005. p. 5.
- Resurgence: An Exhibition Catalogue of Paintings, Sculptures and Drawings* by the Universal Studios of Art, Lagos, 5-22, December, (Lagos: Terra Kulture, 2006), p. 23.
- Stride in Time: An Exhibition Catalogue of Paintings, Ceramics, Textiles, Graphics and Sculptures* by the Universal Studios of Art, Lagos, 12-25, April, (Lagos: Russian Cultural Centre, 1996), p.6.
- The Guardian*, Tuesday, October 16, 2007. "Harvest in Due Season with "USA" Artists", p.84.
- Ugowe, C. (1997), Benin in World History, Hugo Books, Ketu, Lagos. pp. 1-2.

Interviews

- An interview with Bisi Fakeye (Sculptor), Universal Studios of Art, Lagos, November, 2008.
- An interview with Patrick Agose (Sculptor), Universal Studios of Art, Lagos, September, 2011.