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African Art: an introduction.

Much of the international interest in the visual arts of sub-Saharan Africa was generated within the first decade of the 20th century by artists in Paris and elsewhere in Europe. They saw in the schematisations of its sculpture the possibilities of a return to ways of making art untrammelled by the sophistications of the 19th-century. It was this to the term "primitive" was given; but art in Africa is not primal, as if it merely represented earlier stages in the development of art worldwide. European museums also once promoted the idea of "stages of culture" with Africa at a lower rung on the supposed ladder of progress. Collecting African art for European museums often accompanied the colonial enterprise, and both museum ethnography and "primitivism" had their origins in a modernism in which Europe saw itself as the dominant partner. Fortunately, all these ideas have long since been discarded as intellectually and historically untenable, and morally disreputable. With the advent of first-hand field research, museum ethnography became more sociological and for a while promoted the idea of "tribal" art, a phrase that now survives only in the context of some auction houses and moneyed collectors; for the "tribe" was an ethnographic 'misreading' of ethnicity, that flexible package of resources that permits the definitions of one form of identity-and-difference, as always, to fit the circumstances to hand: once the realities of time and change were allowed into the images of Africa, "tribal" had to go. It was replaced by "traditional", but this is no less problematic when it was set against the "contemporary" as if the latter were no more than the intrusion of Europe into Africa. "Traditional" forms were privileged as essentially African thereby allowing the invention of an authenticity peculiar to the colonial imagination.

The reality is, of course, that 'African art' is the art Africans do, whereas the images of Africa as "primitive/tribal/traditional" have encouraged an image of Europe as "civilised" and "superior" thereby justifying colonial rule. This illusion is of course contested in practice in Africa in many ways, not least by the manner in which local traditions inherited from the past are among the resources used by the artists responsible for the developments of the 20th century; and all these things are worth attending to. Yet we must remember that the diversity of local traditions, the experiences of colonial and post-colonial rule, the development of new traditions of visual practice, while promoting distinct ethnic, national and other identities, cannot be reduced to a common narrative or aesthetic. Moreover, while "traditional" is problematic, tradition really does matter in the sense of what is handed over from one person or generation to another. For traditions are by definition established in the handing on of practices, whether in art or in other domains of social life, and in the processes of handing on change is inevitable. A tradition provides an artist with a framework within which innovation is made possible; and the relationships between differing extant traditions is likely to be complex, one drawing upon another, for example, as subject matter.

Nevertheless, though African art is in no sense "primal" it is in some aspects of the greatest antiquity; for if we are to understand anything about art in the continent of Africa, then we must first recognise that art in the most basic sense of that word, the skillfulness necessary to the making of something that was not already there, begins in Africa. Indeed, with some understanding of the place of art(ifacts) in the inception of human species we can understand better the events in human history that follow from this: the development and purposes of pictorial imagery, of ceramic and metalworking technologies, of sculpture and masquerade, of textiles and personal arts, of cults and kings, cities and states, of diasporas and the transformations of the 20th century. We shall find real evidence for the innovative possibilities of a pre-industrial African social and technological environment; and it is this indigenous creativity that then enables all the engagements between Africa and other parts of the world that follow from the very fact of the dispersal of Homo sapiens from southern Africa. To this end, therefore, this account is given in three parts:

I. From the earliest beginnings to about 500BC. Here we shall find not only tool making but also painting on rock surfaces, and presumably also on the human body (and the walls of dwellings once they began to be made), ceramic technology (and presumably basketry), and built form, together with the basic processes of food production, i.e. foraging (hunting and gathering) and fishing, animal husbandry including pastoralism, and the domestication of plant species.

II. An African 'Middle Age': from about 500 BC to about 1500AD. This period begins with the inception of metalworking technologies, which is also associated with the earliest evidence for developed sculptural traditions, and the distribution of Bantu languages, which, when considered together with the other language groupings, is the final stage in the cultural patterning of Africa as we know it from the very recent past. Africa is open to the rest of the world via trans-Saharan and Indian Ocean trade networks; and we have the first evidences for textile technologies, urban development and state formation, and the advent of Islam and Christianity as African religions, the former especially in the west African sahel and savanna, and in coastal east Africa, the latter in Ethiopia and of Egyptian origin.

III. The Modern Period. This begins as European traders came around the western coasts initiating direct contact with and a demand for African art works in Europe, soon leading to transatlantic slavery. This provided a further basis for the the rise and fall of indigenous states, and further developments in art making. The transatlantic slave trade was brought to an end during the first half of the 19th century to be replaced by a relatively brief period of European colonial rule, paving the way for the emergence of nation states during he 20th century. This latter period has been marked by continuities in some extant traditions, especially in

textiles and masquerade, and the replacement of some older traditions of figure sculpture by modern painting, printmaking, photography, and modern public sculpture.

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I. From the earliest beginnings to about 500BC.

Material artifacts provide diagnostic archaeological evidence for human existence, an existence that begins in Africa. Artifacts appear to have provided an adaptive advantage to a species within a particular ecological context. Yet adaptation to a given set of environmental factors was (or soon became) at the same time an adaptation thereof to human, social ends; for artifacts are much more than (and perhaps only coincidentally) a response to the "natural" environment, as they provide an essential medium of social life and of conceptual thought without which modern humans would not be what they are. Artifacts are always as much vehicles of ideas as they are instruments of practical use; and it is thus impossible to define "work of art" as a particular category of artifact. Some writers encourage us to see aesthetic value even in the making of stone tools.

The earliest human species, *Homo habilis*, found at rift valley sites of some 2.5 million years ago from Ethiopia to Tanzania, was responsible for the first tool forms, the chipped pebbles known as Oldowan. The improvements in tool making identified as Acheulian are attributed to another species, *Homo erectus*, which emerges some 1.5 million years ago in the same area. This species spreads through eastern and southern Africa, to north Africa, and about 1 million years ago to the rest of the world. *Homo sapiens* emerges within the last half-million years, with anatomically modern humans in place by 100,000 years. This too is an African development; and the appearance of *Homo sapiens* is marked by regional diversity in the elaboration of stone (and bone) tool technologies, evidence for death awareness, and pictorial imagery, which appears within the same period in Africa as in Europe, about 30,000 years ago.

The earliest certainly-dated example for Africa is from Namibia, 27,500 - 25,500 years ago (Phillips 1995, pages 1, 187); but in a cave in South Africa, several short sticks or 'crayons' of red ochre have recently been found that are dated to 77,000 years ago. They are carefully shaped, some with geometric patterns incised on their sides, and they provide us with the earliest evidence so far for the possibilities of an art that was more than just the tools of hunting and food preparation. Indeed, paintings and engravings on rock surfaces occur throughout many parts of Africa, and are the most persistent medium of visual representation, in a few places still an extant practice. In southern Africa this art is presumed to be largely the work of San artists (or Bushman - the question of an appropriate name for this group of peoples is not capable of answer), but there are major and unresolved problems about dating and intention. However, by correlating the subject matter of this art with

19th-century and present-day accounts of San myth and ritual it is possible to infer something, at least provisionally, of the motivation of this art. While it would be mistaken to reduce this art to just one purpose, a dominant theme does seem to be the attribution of a protective and healing aura to certain large animal species (e.g. the eland in what is now South Africa, the elephant in Zimbabwe), an aura that can be appropriated and directed through trance. (For further reading see Garlake 2002, pages 28-49.) However, these inferences depend upon southern African ethnography and thus cannot be taken as having any wider relevance elsewhere in Africa. The initiation of warriors as elders in some Kenyan pastoral communities is still marked by painting in red ochre on rocks and bodies.

Once upon a time everyone lived by hunting, gathering, and fishing, and this has continued to provide for the livelihood of the human species for more than 90% of its history, and indeed still remains so for some communities in many parts of the world. It is not a "primitive" mode of livelihood, but rather depends upon detailed and sophisticated knowledge of the local environments. Moreover, the advantages of farming are not as obvious as one might think, and it now seems that people were driven by specific local factors, usually motivated by climatic and/or demographic changes, into entering into what was already well known about plant and animal breeding cycles. Clearly, this happened independently in many parts of the world including the Nile valley and the African sahel. Paintings and engravings on rock surfaces in that part of Africa now known as the Sahara provides some of the evidence for this; but it was not always a desert as for some 4000 years after about 10,000 BC the central Saharan region was well wooded, with lakes and rivers and communities living off fish and river mammals, as well as hunting other wild game and harvesting wild grains species, such as guinea corn (Sorghum). Much of this is evident in the earliest rock engravings of the Sahara and North Africa where painting and engraving on rock surfaces has continued through several thousand years to the present day. Changes of form and subject matter provide evidence of changes in ecology, economy, subsistence and population, and leads us on to consider the emergence of domesticated crop and animal species in Africa.

The earliest engravings show many species of tropical animals now well known throughout the sub-Saharan region, and the manner in which images are often engraved over existing images, time and time again as we also find in painted images of eland in South Africa, might suggest that this is an art also associated with healing protection and trance. (See Phillips 1995 page 550; also Willett, 2002, pages 42-54.) However this may be, there were settled communities of people whose bony remains suggest they were physically akin to modern west Africans; and by 8000BC, and perhaps earlier, they had initiated a ceramic technology for the storage and preparation of Sorghum and other wild grain species, earlier in date than pre-dynastic Egypt and independently of developments in western Asia. Amekni is just one of many such sites.

This pottery was, as pottery-making has remained throughout Africa until the very recent past, built by hand without a wheel and fired without a kiln. These techniques are characterised by an almost complete absence of any need for costly materials and tools, they exhibit very considerable technical diversity from one centre to another, they reveal a detailed knowledge of the properties of particular earths in any given locality, and they are highly efficient within local circumstances that require pots that can be placed on an open flame without shattering, and pots that are good for the storage and refrigeration of water. The wheel-and-kiln system cannot improve upon these qualities and requirements (the only exceptions have been the appearance of the wheel and the kiln in Egypt in the second pre-dynastic period, their use by urban Arab potters in north Africa following the advent of Islam, and in post-colonial attempts to develop a mass-produced industry).

It has been suggested that perhaps pottery developed as the by-product of basketry and the application of clay to the outer surface of a basket to make it into a more efficient container for storage purposes. For, if that container had accidentally been burned, a pot would have come into existence. This is, of course, entirely speculative; but perhaps there are vestiges of these possibilities in the modular forms of earthen house construction, whether circular in the savannas or rectangular in the forests, that throughout rural Africa employ one of two basic techniques, the plastering of earth over a framework of interwoven branches or split bamboo, or the building up of earth walls in layers or courses. However this may be, there is no doubt that the period marked by the engravings of animals such as elephant, giraffe, rhinoceros, and the now extinct wild cattle, *Bubalus antiquus*, was a period of settled habitation and technological achievement, and not only in the Sahara but also along the Nile valley where there were also settled communities harvesting the ample wild resources. Indeed, the fishing and ceramic complex developed in the Saharan region proceeds northwards, downstream, in due course feeding into the developments we identify as pre-dynastic Egypt.

The wild animal period in Saharan art is succeeded by engravings in some Saharan regions, and paintings in others, that show cattle herding peoples who gradually spread through the region in a north-east-to-southwest direction. What the purposes of this art might have been and whether their cattle were domesticated local species or imported from beyond Africa are unknown: the cattle of the rock art are not the cattle of modern Africa, which were imported from India. The outer limits to this period (and of course the dates will vary from one part of the region to another given its great size) seem to be about 5000 to 1200BC, by which time the region had turned into the desert that we know today. The advent of pastoral communities together with the changing climate would have threatened the ample wild resources of mammals, fish and grain, perhaps leading to experiments by local inhabitants in their conservation and protection environment. In due course, the central Saharan communities would disappear, with population pressure

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increasing along the Nile valley and later across what is now the Sahel region; and these demographic and climatic changes were very probably the factors encouraging the human intervention in plant-breeding cycles, this bringing about the domestication of local species in these two regions. It is now evident that while the development of domesticated crop species in pre-dynastic Egypt is a coming together of elements coming down the Nile from sub-Saharan region with elements from western Asia, the processes of crop domestication southwards from the Sahel is a development entirely indigenous to that region. The evidence is provided by a mosaic of indigenous wild prototype plant species, including, most especially, Sorghum (guinea corn).

During the cattle-herding period of Saharan rock art, in the north-east corner of Africa the world's first centralised state would emerge from the communities of the lower Nile valley, competing for control over its rich resources. They called their land Kemet, 'the black', from the fertile earth of the Nile valley, in contrast to 'the red', the desert that lay so close at hand. We know this state as Ancient Egypt; and the climatic, demographic and technological factors that condition the eventual rise of dynastic civilization are, in part, as much a consequence of the emergence of the Sahara as are the developments in the sub-Saharan region. Moreover, whatever the original intentions behind the manufacture of the work of art we identify as the Narmer palette (an ornamental version of the palettes used for grinding eye shadow), by showing the same person, Narmer, wearing the crown of Upper Egypt on one side and of Lower Egypt on the other it seems as if we were intended to 'read' it as if it documented the process by which centralised authority in Africa and in the world emerged, a process that also marks the culmination of the developments with origins in the Sahara amongst population, as already noted, genetically akin to modern west Africans.

The cattle-herding phase of Saharan rock art is followed by another, dated from the late 2nd millennium BC to about 200 AD, in which the imagery is dominated by horses, sometimes shown pulling two-wheeled chariots. By this time the Sahara is desert, but the fact that these paintings and engravings are located along western and central routes across it suggests that for as long as this region has been a desert people have been going back and forth between west and north Africa. Moreover, during this period, which overlaps with what I have called 'an African Middle Age', we have the first sub-Saharan evidence of a developed sculptural tradition, and it is the period within which metalworking, especially the smelting and forging of iron is established south of the Sahara (see below). Whether this technology was transferred across the Sahara by means of these trade routes, the horse period of Saharan art seems to be the art of traders, although their identity and the purposes served by their art remain unknown. In the final phase of Saharan rock art, horses disappear and the painted or engraved images are dominated by camels, suggesting that Tuareg pastoralist people were probably responsible, while engravings of aeroplanes and motor transport indicate

that this was an art not yet completely extinguished. These final periods overlaps with what I have identified as the modern age in African cultural development.

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II. An African 'Middle Age'; from about 500 BC to about 1500AD.

This is, in so many ways, the most important and yet the most tantalising and least known of our three periods. On the basis of the innovative developments of previous centuries and millennia, especially those set in motion, so to speak, by the Sahara, this 'Middle Age' is the period in which Africa as we know it from the recent past comes into existence. All the developments of its pre-industrial technologies, especially in metalworking, and the distribution of its languages (there are four major language families), were fully in place by the time European traders began their coastal quest for direct access to gold from Mali, its principal source in Europe until the "discovery" of the Americas. However, very often the best evidence for the history of the art of the period is provided by the works themselves; and, as we know, works of art do not talk (even though we often talk as if they do!). Many of the most striking discoveries have been made by accident and are thus often without any substantial documentary of archaeological context; and this problem has been made more difficult by the thieves whose illegal diggings have fed the appetites of the art-hungry savages of the western world while frustrating archaeological research. This is especially true for the city of ancient Djenné in Mali and for the Nok Culture of Nigeria; just as earlier in the 20th century the European quest for gold in the ruins of Great Zimbabwe destroyed most of its archaeological deposits.

The metals to be considered are copper and its alloys, bronze (with tin) and brass (with zinc, and each alloy usually with some lead), gold and iron. Copper, gold, tin, lead and iron, were each available through mining, gold as naturally-occurring metal, the others compounded with other elements and extracted by the process of smelting. In north Africa, as throughout the Middle East and most of the world, copper and bronze appears archaeologically before iron. Dynastic Egypt remained a conservative 'bronze age' civilization throughout the greater part of its history even though surrounding civilisations had long since discovered the utility of iron. However, iron appears archaeologically either prior to copper throughout the savannas of sub-Saharan Africa, or in the same period in the south-central 'copper-belt' area. It is inherently unlikely that the discovery of iron could have occurred independently without the prior stage of copper given the higher melting point of iron, and the greater complexity of the processes involved in its extraction. The fact that in the sub-Saharan savannas, a stone-tool technology gave way directly to iron using at some point between the middle of the last millennium BC and the middle of the first millennium AD indicates the more-or-less certain transfer of a fully-developed iron metallurgy to the sub-Saharan region. Much of the literature dealing with this has thus

been concerned with the relative merits of Dynastic Egypt via Meroe, or southern Arabia via Axum, or the Phoenicians via Carthage, as the source of sub-Saharan iron working. The structure and dating of early iron-smelting furnaces in the sub-Saharan region, eg at the Nok Culture site of Taruga, Nigeria, effectively rule out Meroe and would suggest Carthage. However, with the discovery of early copper workings at southern Saharan sites, such as Azelik in Niger, one wonders whether Carthaginians traders (perhaps also responsible for the horse-and-chariot imagery) were prospecting for new sources of copper (and iron) ores and brought their technologies across the Sahara, or did they find a copper-working technology already in place?

The earliest appearance of iron in west and southern Africa also provides the earliest evidence for sculpture, in particular the pottery sculptures of the Nok Culture, about 500BC to 200AD (see Phillips 1995 pages 525-530; also Garlake 2002, pages 109-112), and, later, at Lydenburg in southern Africa, about 500-700AD (see Phillips 1995 pages 194-195; also Garlake 2002, pages 144-146). Archaeologically and sculpturally Nok and Lydenburg are very different. The Nok Culture comprises many sites spread across a region not less than 300 by 100 miles (approx 500 by 200 km), mostly located by the accidental discovery of the pottery sculptures characteristic of this culture; and very few sites have received archaeological attention, and publication remains incomplete. Nok itself, the 'type' site, is a small village on the southern escarpment of the Jos plateau, an area commercially important for the mining of tin ore; and to begin with the extraction of this ore also entailed the accidental discovery of archaeological material including stone tools, fragments of forged iron, pottery sculpture, tin and stone beads.

The corpus of Nok sculpture is dominated by the human figure, in a few cases made to almost 75% of normal human size, with very clear-cut features, elaborate hairstyling and beadwork. This work is manifestly a developed tradition rather than its early beginnings, and nothing is known of its origins and development. There are also some very clear formal contrasts across the Nok Culture area such that we can ask if, socially, it was a single 'culture' at all. The purposes served by Nok sculpture remain unknown. At the one site there is the suggestion that figure sculptures were set up to mark out a rectangular space, but while it is convenient to assume some kind of ritual or sacred purpose, this is entirely speculative. At least some Nok pottery sculpture has been made by the technique known as ring building: if one looks inside (the figures must be hollow otherwise they could not have been fired) the evidence of this technique is clearly seen. This is, of course, one of the well-known techniques still in use and the potters using it are always women. If we add to this the fact that at least in some parts of Africa the potters are the wives of the smiths, and that both technologies make use of the transformation wrought by fire, is it at least possible that unlike most wood sculpture and copper-alloy casting, the sculptors of Nok were women?

Lydenburg, in contrast to Nok, is a single site in the Transvaal region of South Africa with the earliest evidence for iron working in this part of the continent and a series of seven pottery sculptures, which may be later in date. The sculptures take the form of heads, mostly human, and while as with Nok there is as yet no evidence of origin, development and purpose, their sculptural qualities are more tentative, without the confident schematisations of Nok. Nevertheless, each in its own region represents the earliest evidence for an art making that was surely more widespread even then; and the dates of Nok and Lydenburg define the period in which iron-making and -using technologies spread through the rest of the continent. For central, eastern and southern Africa, this distribution has become identified as the Early Iron Age Industrial Complex with its distinctive forms of pottery and a reliance upon woodland agriculture, with a mosaic of differing traditions that comes into being as this merges with the pastoralism of eastern and southern Africa; and given the remarkable coincidence in the distribution patterns of Bantu languages and the Early Iron Age Industrial Complex there is manifestly some relationship between them. This has often referred to as the Bantu "migration", which it almost certainly is not, if by that term a large-scale movement of people and communities is intended; and there is no clear evidence that all these elements moved together as a single corpus. Nevertheless, from the middle of the last millennium BC (there are dates from sites around Lake Victoria a little earlier than Nok, but without pottery sculpture) to the middle of the 1st millennium AD, the distribution of languages and technologies had taken place and so it has remained, more or less, for the rest of African history.

While pottery has provided the medium for vessels of immediate domestic use and for sculpture (and it is the same kind of clay used for both: there is no specialist 'terra cotta'), iron is a more intractable medium. Given that the casting of molten iron was impossible within the pre-industrial technologies of sub-Saharan Africa, it could only be worked by forging, i.e. by heating the iron to red heat and then beating it into shape; and while this is the method still employed by smiths in Africa, the use of iron for sculptural purposes is rare. However, given the superior qualities of iron for most utilitarian purposes, in Africa copper and its alloys, bronze and brass, were always for decorative and sculptural uses. They can be worked in one of two ways, either beaten cold (unlike iron, copper and its alloys will shatter if beaten at red heat) or cast as molten metal; and by far the most important and widespread method of casting is the the lost-wax technique (the open mould is rare, and the piece mould completely unknown). This is done by making the desired form in either beeswax or, in a few places, using the latex of certain plants, encasing the form first in fine clay and/or powdered charcoal, and then in the clay used for pottery, but leaving an opening to permit the melting out of the wax and the pouring in of molten copper, bronze or brass, which then solidifies to take the form of the wax (or latex, which is simply burned out by the molten metal). The advantages of

using the alloys is that their melting points are lower than copper, while the addition of small amounts of lead improves the flow of the metal. The advantage of tin over zinc is that the process of extraction is the same as for copper, whereas zinc is a difficult metal to use and its extraction is more complex than pre-industrial technologies in Africa will permit. Thus, whereas the alloying of tin and copper to make bronze could have been done in Africa, zinc only appears ready-made as brass. On the other hand, given that zinc ores are more commonplace than either copper or tin, once the process of its use was mastered, as it was in the Mediterranean region in Roman times, it replaces bronze as the alloy in common use.

The earliest evidence for the use of copper and its alloys in sub-Saharan Africa is provided by the 9th-10th century AD archaeological site of Igbo-Ukwu, to the east of the lower Niger (see Phillips 1995, pages 383-385; also Garlake 2002, pages 117-120). A burial chamber was excavated, of a man, of chiefly status, dressed in bast-fibre textiles (a kind of linen: fragments have been preserved by contact with copper), and beaten copper and cast bronze ornaments, and glass beads, and accompanied by carved ivory and wood, and more cast bronzes. Nearby, a hoard of cast bronze vessels (of unknown purpose) had also been excavated. This is an art characterised by profuse and delicate ornament, and some figurative work including the representation of insects, otherwise unknown in the art of Africa; and it is clear that local smiths had mastered the techniques of beating copper and casting bronze, and, almost certainly, the smelting and alloying of copper and tin. Although copper and brass were traded southwards from north Africa, there is no trace of them in the arts of Igbo-Ukwu. By this time in the Mediterranean region, bronze was rare and unlikely to find its way into the trans-Saharan scrap metal trade. In that case, and given that there were local sources of copper and tin (and lead), it may well be that Igbo-Ukwu is an entirely indigenous and independent centre of copper working and bronze casting.

To the west of the lower Niger, from the 12th to the 15th century AD, Ife flourished as a centre of art making (see Phillips 1995, pages 404-411; and Garlake 2002, pages 121-135). Unlike Igbo-Ukwu, we have a city something like four times (at least in spatial terms) the size of the city of London during this period. Ife may well have had a commanding position linking the forested region to the west of the lower Niger to the trans-Saharan trade routes via Mali; and, again unlike Igbo-Ukwu, it was protected by moated walls suggesting that there may well have been competition and conflict between rival cities (as yet unknown archaeologically) in regard to the wealth coming from that trade. The art of Ife includes sculpture in stone of unknown date, glass making, and a substantial corpus of figurative pottery sculpture, 12th-15th century AD, some approaching 75% normal life size, most of it characterised by an extraordinary naturalism (not in fact as unusual in the art of Africa as was once thought). Some of this work has been excavated in association with architectural features, in particular semi-circular

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platforms on which the sculptures were standing beside the interior paving of courtyards within houses, paving made of potsherds and small pebbles set in decorative patterns. This immediately suggests some kind of ritual or commemorative environment, a hypothesis to some extent reinforced by the former location of some pottery sculpture in ritual spaces within the forests surrounding the city.

The art of Ife is, however, perhaps best known for its corpus of cast brass sculpture, again of an astonishing naturalism, including some figure sculptures, and a series of life-sized heads that look as if they were intended to be mounted on wooden frames, and the complete ensemble perhaps dressed for the purposes of commemorative celebrations. All but one of these sculptures were discovered by accident when people were digging out the foundations for houses. The proposition is that in Ife we have an art that soon developed its naturalistic forms in pottery sculpture, and later transferred these forms to cast brass, a technology that would have arrived in consequence of the place of Ife at the southernmost end of the trans-Saharan trade. We know that large quantities of brass and copper were traded southwards from Morocco, and it would be surprising if the lost-wax casting technology did not come with it. So, during the period in question in the lower Niger region there would have been two sources of casting technology, one entirely local, as represented by Igbo-Ukwu, the other of trans-Saharan origin as represented by Ife.

With the rise of neighbouring states, especially Edo (also known as Benin) to its southeast, and Oyo to its northwest, Ife lost its economic importance and its visual art traditions: certainly there was no continuity to be found in current practice. However, Ife retained its mythic status as the place where one of the gods climbed down from the sky to create the world and to become the ancestors of all the kings in what is now known as the Yoruba-speaking region. 'Yoruba' is, however, derived from the Hausa word for the kingdom of Oyo, and its use in identifying a social and cultural unity among the kingdoms and communities claiming descent from Ife is a development of the period since about 1850. Moreover, there is no obvious relationship between the art of Ife and the visual practices of the Yoruba region as known from the recent past. In any case, the probability is that there were other city states each with its art making; and some evidence for this is provided by a series of bronze castings that have evidently come from unknown locations to the west of the lower Niger. Some remain in Nigeria while others entered British museums together with material from Benin City (see Phillips 1995 page 335); but they do not resemble the art of Benin (or Ife) either in form (in which they seem more akin to early 20th century Yoruba art) or in metal content, confirming that there must have been other casting centres independent of either Ife or Benin, well established long before the late 15th-century arrival of Europeans. However, the earliest works within the Benin corpus of castings are cast neither in the imported European brass available as a result of coastal trade with Europe, nor in tin-bronze,

but from an alloy of copper with small amounts of both tin and zinc. This suggests that in Benin (which will be discussed further below) we can observe traces of both trans-Saharan and indigenous technologies.

The reason for including copper and brass in the trans-Saharan trade was, of course, because they were in demand in west Africa and an essential commodity in exchange for the gold of Mali, its source in Europe until the discovery of the Americas. Indeed, it had been an emperor of Mali, Mansa Musa, who in AD1324 had spent so much gold in Cairo while on pilgrimage to Mecca that he had for a while ruined its value; and it was the wish to subvert Moroccan control over European access to Malian gold that drove the Portuguese around the west African coast in the late 15th century. Mali also provides us with a distinct and often spectacular earthen architectural tradition, as in the mosques of cities such as Djenne and Mopti. However, beside the present city of Djenne there was another, Jenne-jeno, ancient Djenne, founded about 250BC and thus providing the earliest evidence for city development south of the Sahara. It seems not to have been a monarchy in the manner of Edo-Benin and, presumably, Ife, with a hierarchy of chiefly offices centred upon a king. Ancient Djenne seems instead to develop as a series of interdependent communities, each with its particular specialisation: smithing, pottery, textiles, etc; and as such it has been described as a 'heterarchy', i.e. city governed by interdependent authorities. The presence of spindle whorls (the weights used in spinning cotton or wool) suggests the weaving of textiles, and archaeological investigation of the Tellem caves of the Bandiagara cliffs of Mali, to the east of Djenne, has shown that by the 11th century woven textiles were well-established in the region, with warp and weft patterning not unlike extant weaving traditions of the present time. By the later phases of its development, a period corresponding more-or-less exactly with ancient Ife, Jenne-Jeno had developed its own very distinctive tradition of pottery sculpture, which may have had their place in the contexts of ritual and healing. (See Phillips 1995 pages 488-495, Garlake 2002 pages 97-108.) Some appear to show prayer gestures, while others show disease; but there are yet others showing men on horseback that cannot be interpreted in these ways. They are without any hint of the naturalism of Ife. However, by AD1400 a Muslim city had developed, the modern city of Djenne, and by 1450 Jenne-Jeno was abandoned.

The trans-Saharan trade was also the means whereby Islam entered and became established among the religions of west Africa, with its influences decorative arts, textiles and architecture, though most of what we know about this is based upon 20th-century ethnographic research. Trade was equally the medium for the advent of Islam in the Horn of Africa and along the Swahili coast, due to the involvement of these areas in trade across the Indian Ocean and with Arabia. This has promoted a distinctive decorative tradition around the east African coast from the regions now known as Somalia to Mozambique, sometimes called the Azanian art style, together with the architecture of this region. (See Garlake 2002,

pages 166-187; Phillips 1995, pages 146-147.) However, the ethnic and economic origins of the Swahili towns such as Lamu and Zanzibar, and their predecessor, Kilwa, are subjects of continuing controversy as the older model of colonization from elsewhere around the Indian Ocean, has been largely rejected by historians and archaeologists. Swahili is a Bantu-related language, but the derivation of elements leading to the formation of distinctive Swahili social and visual practices is complex, as is their relationship to the arts of inland agricultural, pastoral and foraging communities. Does the decorative patterning of Giriama *vigango* (singular *kigango*; see Phillips 1995, page 145), for example, derive from or provide for the decorative patterning of Swahili and Azanian arts? (A *kigango* is a schematic figure sculptures that provides a resting place to settle a deceased and man of rank.)

With the development of long-distance trading routes and of control over access to scarce commodities, including the gold of south-central Africa, the conditions were set, as in West Africa, for the emergence of centralised structures and systems of authority; and in addition to the cities of the east African coastal, the ruins of Great Zimbabwe provide the most dramatic material evidence (Garlake 2002, pages 146-165; Phillips 1995, pages 197-199). Great Zimbabwe reached its peak of prosperity and technical achievement probably in the early 15th century AD, suggesting that its development is comparable in time with both ancient Ife and the later phases of Jenne-Jeno, indicating the extent to which all parts of Africa were fully functioning elements of a world economic system, what with Malian gold in London, as throughout Europe, Mediterranean brass casting in Ife, and Chinese ceramics in Great Zimbabwe. The technical achievements of Great Zimbabwe are most obvious now in the skills developed in the use of dressed stone for dry-stone walling, although it cannot be forgotten that these structures, with what remains of their sculptural embellishments, are but the skeletons of more complex architectural constructions. During the course of the 15th century, however, Great Zimbabwe was in decline and the centre of authority in south-central Africa passed to Mwene-Mutapa.

Islam is not the only 'world religion' to be domesticated within Africa; for with Egypt brought into the Roman Empire, the creative and conceptual interests once manifest in Dynastic visual culture were finally absorbed into Christianity; and by the 4th century AD Egyptian Christianity had been taken upstream along the Nile to Axum and Ethiopia as the foundation of the visual culture and imagery of what is now the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (although until recently Ethiopian and Coptic Christianity were on the 'wrong' side of the theological controversies discussed at the 4th century council of Chalcedon, the dispute has been resolved with both the Roman and the Orthodox churches). Perhaps the most spectacular manifestation of the conversion of Ethiopia is provided by the churches of Lalibella cut from the rock by the orders of King Lalibella who had wanted to recreate the pilgrimage sites of Jerusalem in Africa (see Garlake 2002, pages 72-95; Phillips

1995, pages 124-125). (Elsewhere in Africa, the contemporary popularity of Christianity is due to 19th- and 20th-century European and American missionary activity.)

There is almost nothing one can say about wood sculpture during this period as almost nothing has survived. The wooden head of an animal from central Angola (see Phillips 1995, page 240) has been dated to 8th-9th century AD, while a wooden vessel with a basket-like surface texture was excavated in Kenya and has been dated to 1000 BC. It is unwise to make suggestions on the basis of the processes of building a sculpture in pottery or wax (for casting) discussed so far, as the cutting away as in wood sculpture make very different demands upon the artist.

* * *

III. The Modern Period.

1. The period of transatlantic slave trading, about 1500 to about 1850:

The Portuguese, having solved the navigational problems presented by west African coastal winds, set out in the latter half of the 15th century in search of direct access to Malian gold, and to Indian pepper. The coastal communities they encountered were probably little different in material terms from their home environment, other than in maritime technology and firearms. In Sierra Leone, Benin and Kongo they encountered ivory sculptors of the highest possible skills, from whom they commissioned and purchased elaborately-carved vessels, mostly salt and pepper pots, horns and trumpets, spoons and forks. Documentation in Lisbon give details of the duty paid on the import of ivories from Sierra Leone, and although no mention is made of either Benin or Kongo, we know that in 1485 or 1486 the first Portuguese traders visited Benin City and the evidence of the ivories in European collections shows that some were commissioned there. Moreover, there is a pair of Kongo (one can tell this from the decorative forms employed) carved ivory trumpets that entered the Medici collection, Florence, in the mid 16th century, the earliest specific African works to be documented in a European collection. (See Bassani & Fagg 1988.)

The Sierra Leone sculptors were identified as Sapi, the ancestors of the coastal Bullom or Sherbro people. They had been responsible for a substantial corpus of images in soapstone (so called as, like wood but unlike ivory, is it easy to carve), which share many of the formal features of the ivories. The Sapi, though once more widespread, were pushed to their present location at the coastal fringe by the 16th-century expansion of the Mende people, who, discovering the soapstone figures discarded by the retreating Sapi, set them up as representing protective forces at work promoting the fruitfulness of their farmland. The Mende name for these figures is *nomoli*, but their original Sapi purpose is not known (see Phillips 1995 pages 467-470; Bassani and Fagg 1988, pages 61-147).

Further to the east, the Portuguese found the gold they were looking for, and built the original castle at Elmina ('the mine') on what became known as the Gold Coast, and now the modern state of Ghana (the name of the first of the mediaeval savanna empires, the predecessor to Mali, and chosen by its first president, Kwame Nkrumah, as the name of the first country to gain independence of colonial rule in 1957). However, it soon became clear that to obtain this gold it was necessary to import slaves from Angola, further around the coast; and in this, as we all know, lies the origin of the transatlantic slave trade (and it is worth remembering that at that time, slavery was still endemic throughout much of Europe). Moreover, this was not the gold mined within the empire of Mali, as other sources of gold has already been located in the area inhabited by Twi-speaking kingdoms, otherwise known collectively as Akan, and already in competition over the control over trans-Saharan access to this resource. The arrival of the Portuguese, followed by the Dutch (who established a second castle in Elmina to drive out the Portuguese), the English, the Swedes and the Danes, added both to the demand for gold and the competition over access thereto. In due course, in about 1700, the Asante confederacy, a grouping of Twi-speaking kingdoms acknowledging the authority of Osei Tutu, the Asantehene at Kumasi, came about with the defeat of Denkyira followed by the mythic conjuring of the Golden Stool (a substantial though formally rather simple lost-wax casting) from the sky by his priest, Akomfo Anokye. Asante effectively controlled the mostly forested region from the coastal hinterland of Elmina to the savanna, growing wealthy as a confident expanding state on the basis of conquest and trade; and this provided the context and motivation for the elaboration of the visual arts in support of the state. and its nobility. Gold was beaten and cast for use in regalia, and cast for the figurative ornaments of the state swords of each constituent kingdom within the confederacy; vessels were made of beaten or cast brass the latter also with figurative subject matter, and weights were cast in brass for use with gold (hence the term 'goldweight'). Many of these, too were figurative, and for the most part figurative sculpture in gold and brass was interpreted proverbially in support of the ideas and practices of authority (see Phillips 1995 pages 434-446; also McLeod 1981).

The rise and fall of states in the region once known as the Gold Coast was thus a consequence of competition over access to both trans-Saharan and coastal demands for gold; and the formation and success of the Asante empire promoted also the demand for patterned textiles. In the 1730s a Danish envoy to the Asante court observed that local textile artists unravelled imported silk and woolen cloths in order to reweave the yarn with local hand-spun cotton. The distinctive patterning of Asante is based substantially upon an alternation of warp-faced and weft-faced plainweave made possible by the introduction of a second pair of heddles. There was an increasing use of silk, and elaboration of pattern; and by the late 19th century the weaving of *adwinasa* and *asasia* marked a high

point of creative exploration of the woven textile medium, never to be surpassed in the present century. *Adwinasa*, 'fullness of ornament, were cloths in which the entire surface was covered with weft-float patterns with as little repetition as the skill of the artist would allow; while *asasia* denoted a cloth woven only on commission by the Asanehene using three pairs of heddles, this enabling a slight but, to the Asante eye, immediately recognisable difference. (See Phillips 1995, page 433; also Picton & Mack 1989, pages 113-124; Picton 1995, pages 20-22 and 96-98; Ross 1998, pages 18-125.) It is also worth noting that weavers among the Ewe peoples to the immediate east of Asante, though employing the same techniques, achieved very different visual effects making much greater use of ready-dyed machine spun cotton (see Phillips 1995 page 432; also Picton & Mack 1989, pages 122-126; Picton 1995, pages 99-103; Ross 1998, pages 126-147).

The art of Benin, or, to give it its proper name, Edo, the city, kingdom and empire in the forest to the west of the lower Niger, comprises several thousand objects, now largely scattered through the museums of Europe and America following the British Punitive Expedition of 1897 when the king was exiled, the city burned and the works of art taken. (The word 'Benin' comes from *ubini* or *ibini*, words used of Edo by others.) Its visual character with its emphasis on brass, ivory and red cloth could hardly be more different to the gold and silk of Asante; but as in Asante this corpus raises many issues of concerning the manner in which art participates in the constitution, understanding and articulation of institutions of authority. In Benin an inherited kingship works together with a nobility largely appointed by the king, a nobility that yet includes the Town Chiefs, who must represent non-royal interests and are thus in potential opposition to kingship. In this art, the metaphorical connotations of particular animals, colours and materials are significant. The leopard, for example, a beautiful yet deadly animal, provides a visual metaphor of the authority and powers of the king, whereas the pangolin, or scaly anteater, a docile species with protective scales such that it is the one animal the leopard cannot kill, provides a visual metaphor of the role of the Town Chiefs. Images of leopards are everywhere in Benin art, whereas the pangolin appears visually in the way the dress worn by the Town Chiefs imitates the scaly texture of pangolin skin. (See Phillips 1995 pages 395-403; Bassani and Fagg 1988, pages 148-190; also Ben-Amos, 1995.)

For some ten years before the Portuguese set foot in Benin City it seems that they had already traded with Benin agents: the use of red felted textile and coral beads in Benin regalia are attributed to Ewuare, a heroic king of the 1470s who, in the dynastic myth is largely responsible for the present constitutions and representations of authority in the city and its empire. The Portuguese established an exclusive monopoly in trade that lasted until the 1530s when the then king of imposed heavier taxes; and though the Portuguese ceased trading with Benin, other European nations were quick to take their place. The Portuguese must

have found that there was already a well-established copper-alloy casting industry; and as they brought large quantities of copper and brass, mostly in the form of bracelets, the smiths were provided with a far greater supply of material for casting than had been available from local sources. Their art flourished, with new forms appearing, especially the rectangular plaques cast to be mounted on the pillars of the verandas of the courtyards in the royal palace. The subject matters of the plaques included court ceremonial, and battles, usually emphasising the central role of the king. The image of the European in the dress and weaponry of about 1500 also enters the subject matter of Benin art at this time. Another development of the period can be seen in the memorial heads cast for the altars dedicated to deceased kings, which become heavier and capable of bearing the weight of the ivory tusks that we know from the present day were mounted on them on or beside these royal altars. Although this is an art that can be shown to have been made through five or six centuries, our understanding of it is substantially based upon ethnographic study in the 20th century in the context of the post-1897 reconstruction initiated by Eweka II. In 1914 he succeeded his father, who had had died in exile, and revived much of the palace ritual and ceremonial, and authorised the published account of oral tradition and the dynastic myth.

In the kingdom of Kongo, encountered by the Portuguese in 1483, while in pursuit of a route to direct trade with India. The king and his court were soon converted to Catholic Christianity, and this led to the development of a literate intellectual class, with African bishops, and ambassadors to some European courts. Kongo carved ivories and textiles woven of raphia were sufficiently highly prized in Europe to appear in some Catholic iconographical painting of the early 16th century (see Bassani and Fagg 1988, pages 198-208). Tragically, all this was destroyed by the slave dealers of Europe, whose activities brought about the disappearance of Christianity (the one element that survived was the cast brass crucifix as an emblem of chiefly authority), and the implosion of Kongo kingship and destruction of the kingdom in 1665. The moral and social panic induced by slaving may have been responsible for the survival of perhaps the best-known Kongo form, the *nkisi* (plural *minkisi*). Whether these were already in existence at this time of initial Portuguese contact is unclear, though a contrast between royal authority and ritual instruments of individual achievement had been noted; and at conversion there had been the destruction of indigenous cult forms, but again we do not know if these included *minkisi*. These are, of course, the artifacts sometimes known as "nail fetishes" due to the way in which a sculpted wooden figure is covered often all over by iron blades, nails and, occasionally, screws. The figure is usually human, sometimes shown as if about to throw a spear, but only very rarely showing any indication of sexual identity, and then always male; and some are in the shape of dogs, these sometime double-headed. The figure, while it gives some indication of how the object works (the spear, dogs that hunt, two heads to permit a view of both this world and the world of the dead that authorises these

procedures), is little more than the basis for the magical preparation that defines and actualises the scope of its action, whether this is to heal an affliction or to catch a thief or witch. The nail, blade or screw will be identified with a supplicant by means of a token of some kind, and inserted into the body of the figure to release and direct the energy compounded within the magical preparation; and notwithstanding the return of Christianity during the 19th century, together with appearance of western medicine and new forms of education, the healing and protection provided by artifacts of the nkisi kind still remain active and popular. (See Phillips 1995 pages 244-249; also MacGaffey & Harris 1995; Blier 1998, pages 202-229.)

Elsewhere in central Africa, at the southern margin of savanna and forest, by the beginning of the seventeenth century, the "Kuba" hero, Shyaam a-Mbul a-Ngoong had established the dominance of the Bushoong, the ruling group within the region (Kuba is a term of alien origin for people otherwise without a collective name but who acknowledge Bushoong authority). Among other things he introduced the cut-pile embroidery of raphia cloth from Kongo together with the minkishi that secretly sanction royal authority. Shyaam is also said to have initiated the carving of the portrait statues that commemorate individual Bushoong kings and masquerades dramatise the origins of and matrilineal succession to kingship. (See Phillips 1995 pages 271-278; also Mack, 1990; Picton & Mack 1989, pages 194-201; Blier 1998, pages 229-248.)

Throughout the narrative presented so far while the transatlantic slave trade is the inevitable 'backdrop' to the events and art histories described, it is important to remember that it is not the explanation for everything that happened, nor does it in any way produce a unified African experience. Thus, in the late 18th century in the Kalabari area on the eastern side of the Niger Delta, the city state of New Calabar (its European name) was founded under the leadership of a new king, Amakiri, in consequence of the wealth derived from the sale to European traders of slaves taken from inland communities. It also happened that in New Calabar a new form of ancestral memorial sculpture was devised, with the deceased seated at the centre wearing the masquerade headpiece he had been well-known for dancing in his youth. To each side were placed his sons, and the figures were mounted on a screen made of a carpentered frame, the space enclosed thereby filled with horizontally placed lengths of palm branches. Into the framework at the top a row of head was inserted, these representing the deceased's slaves (see Philips 1995 page 392; also Barley 1988.). The joining together of pieces of wood in this way is extremely unusual in African sculpture; but it so happens that the makers of these screens were also the pilots that guided the European trading ships through the creeks of the Niger Delta, the very people who would have gained some familiarity with European carpentry and joinery. The probability is that the first of these was made at the Amakiri's death; but what motivated the evolution of a new form

of ancestral memorial? In other Kalabari communities, ancestral sculpture had taken the form of a stool, on which the ancestor can sit hidden within his temple during the celebrations of rites in his honour. It seems that Amakiri, the first of a new dynasty of Kalabari kings, was himself of slave origin; and that being so, the ancestral memorial already to hand within Kalabari tradition was not available to his sons. This episode brings out well the way in which the widespread circumstances of the trans-Atlantic trade had a unique consequence for the art of a particular city that was entirely dependent upon local historical and social factors.

It has already been mentioned that the decline of Ife can be related to the rise of Edo, and later, Oyo; and for more than two hundred years the kingdom of Oyo controlled the region from the middle Niger to the coast, establishing its authority by means of the effective use of cavalry, until the advent of the Fulani *jihad* in the early 19th century, also dependent upon cavalry. The Oyo empire is also the region of the "classic" (ie best-known, most often cited, etc) account of 'Yoruba' ritual and mythic tradition, with its pantheon of deities, orisa, including Shango the god of thunder and ancestor of the kings of Oyo, Ifa the god of divination, Eshu the trickster of the pantheon, Ogun the god associated with the uses of iron, and so forth. (The literature is extensive; some recent texts include: Pemberton 2000, especially papers by Abiodun and Abimbola; Abiodun, Drewal, Pemberton 1994.) Alongside Islam and Christianity, these deities remain a living force within Yoruba communities, each with its cult, its priests and its distinctive works of art. The horse and rider is one of the recurring themes within this art, both as sculptural form, the heroic warrior (see Philips 1995 pages 420, 421, 427; also Willett 2002, page 103), and as an idea about the possession that is part of these cults, the deity conceived as the rider, the horse as the devotee, the vehicle for the public manifestation of a deity. These forms and ideas derive from the use of cavalry by the armies of Oyo and of the *jihad* that defeated it about 1835 (the present city was founded to the south within a few years). This resulted in a series of wars, one kingdom against another, and peace was only finally established in the 1890s by the imposition of English colonial rule. By this time, there was a black literate intellectual class, lawyers, doctors, priests of the Church of England, that initiated the documentation of what came to be known as Yoruba civilization: the word 'Yoruba' was derived from the Hausa term for Oyo, but until this time no-one had thought of themselves as Yoruba, but as citizens of this or that kingdom. A sense of Yoruba ethnic identity is thus a feature of the post-1850 modern world, with an emphasis on the primacy of Oyo though later with a renewed focus upon Ife as the "cradle" of Yoruba civilization and the source of legitimate kingship. These same intellectuals were also the first to articulate an opposition to colonial rule; and the emergence of Yoruba ethnicity has proved to be a key element of local modernity.

The neighbouring state of Dahomey (or *danhome*) was inevitably in conflict with Oyo and its 19th-century successors over access to and control of coastal ports. Its visual arts emphasised the overt representation of dynastic achievement and succession through a series of images identified with each king, and to be seen in the mural embellishment of the royal place in Abomey, and in appliqued textiles. (See Blier 1998, pages 98-123; also Picton & Mack 1989, page 170.) There had been negotiations during the 19th century between the British and Dahomean governments for the ending of transatlantic slaving, although by the end of the century, Dahomey became part of the French colonial empire. However, due to the slave trade both Yoruba and Dahomean cults were taken to the Americas, where, as in Brazil, Cuba and Haiti, they continue to flourish.

At this point it is important to remember that indigenous cultural innovation provided the basis for engagements with the world beyond, whether via trans-Saharan, Nile valley, or Indian Ocean trade. The story did not stop there, however, even though the principles established remain intact; for the advent of the coastal trade with Europe from the late 15th century onwards had its effects. We have already noted the use of European brass for casting in Benin City from about 1500, and the use of imported silk by Asante weavers from the early 18th century. These stand as examples of significance of local agency determining the usefulness (or otherwise) of imported goods. The European presence soon led to the evils of trans-Atlantic slavery, and a trade that persisted for more than 300 years only to be replaced by European colonial rule, against which, from its inception, there were local independence movements. It is also now obvious that the ethnicities of modern Africa are among the elements that constitute local modernities. In West Africa these evolved in the contesting of colonial rule, a movement that also made necessary the consideration of local identity. In South Africa, in contrast, the very emergence of apartheid, for a time South Africa's own brand of modernity, was founded upon a traumatic nineteenth-century narrative of population growth, land hunger and warfare. These were among the historical and social context within which the ethnicities of modern South Africa were forged, Afrikaner as well as Zulu. The rise of the Zulu nation, with its weaponry and emblems of chiefly status was indeed a 19th-century phenomenon, and whether by incorporation or resistance other identities were brought into existence, each of course with its distinctive artifacts, beadwork, initiation sculpture, emblems of status, and so forth (see Phillips 1995 pages 202-228; also Johannesburg Art Gallery 1991, Reunion des musees nationaux 2002).

2. 1850 to the present.

All the research into African visual arts dates from either the colonial period or later, and to a very considerable extent, therefore, this research is the exoticising child of European intellectual interests of its time, including the Ethnographic Present (the mode of writing of colonial anthropology that idealised a "timeless", "tribal", "traditional" social

world in which neither history nor the modern world had any place), as well as semiology and structuralism (which emphasised the quest for hidden meanings, arcane codes, etc). Nevertheless, with progress in research into the history and prehistory of Africa, an increasingly reflexive anthropology, and with due attention paid to artists themselves, we are able to demystify Africa, thereby also allowing us to concentrate attention on the very real, innovative achievements of its peoples from the earliest times to the present.

In the course of the 19th century transatlantic slavery was replaced by colonial rule, which, in due course, promoted the emergence of modern ethnic identities and independent nation states. This has been a period of rapid and far-reaching political, technological, religious, etc, change; and in the visual arts perhaps the two most surprising elements have been the presence of African photography throughout this period and the resilience of local traditions, especially in chiefly ceremonial, masquerade and textile production, alongside new techniques such as photography, easel painting, printmaking, and new forms of sculptural practice, introduced via the new institutions of art education. Meanwhile, surviving older traditions have flourished and evolved, even as others lost their relevance and disappeared.

The reality of the present time is that all these arts are contemporary with each other, constituting a range of independent yet interdependent traditions, in ways that simply cannot be grasped within the categories of tribe and traditionality. The concept of an 'art world', the institutional frameworks of education, making, patronage, and display, is more useful: e.g. in a city like Kumasi, there are at least four the inception of each of which can be dated, and the relationships between each of which is a matter of continuing research. The arts of Asante royal and chiefly ceremonial provides the earliest of these (the weavers, adinkra printers, carvers, the smiths in gold and brass, etc.) though many aspects thereof must predate the foundation of the Asante nation about 1700. Other 'art worlds' would include the photographers (African photographic practice was established in coastal west Africa from the 1840s, though somewhat later in Kumasi), the university College of Art (established in the 1950s but with its origins in Achimota in the late 1920s), and the very large number of sign-painting studios (probably from the late 1940s on); and we should not forget the tailors and dressmakers.

The first sub-Saharan African modern painter using easel, canvas, and oils, was Aina Onabolu, 1882-1963, who lived in Lagos. He was self taught, but wanted to establish art education throughout the new institutions of education; and in this he was successful leading also to the emergence of Ben Enwonwu (1921-1994) first sub-Saharan artist to gain an international reputation. Moreover, the publicity given to developments in Nigeria provided the stimulus for similar developments in Uganda. By the late 1950s in Nigeria, in Zaria at the very first tertiary-level fine art institution, a group of students in led by Uche

Okeke (b. 1933), Bruce Onobrakpeya (b. 1932) and others, set about reforming their teaching programme to give attention to the indigenous art traditions of the country, under the rubric of Natural Synthesis. They believed, and continue to believe, that Yoruba, Igbo, Edo, etc., traditions could enrich a modern Nigerian art, and thereby a common national identity; and that those traditions contained visual resources that could be used within the new techniques of art making to which they had been introduced. The result has been a local modernism with a secure local patronage, both state and individual, several universities with Fine Art and Graphic Design departments, and the prospects of employment thereafter notwithstanding the ravages of the civil war. (See Fosu 1993, Deliss 1995, Ottenberg 1997, Kwami 2002.)

In Senegal its first President, Leopold Sedar Senghor devoted 25% of the national budget to the arts, and the philosophy and aesthetic of negritude was implemented under the guidance of Iba N'Diaye (b.1928) and Papa Ibra Taal (b. 1935). Senghor had been one of the group of Francophone African and Caribbean intellectuals who, in the face of French racism in 1930s Paris, formulated the idea of negritude: the word first appears in a poem by Aime Cesaire). Some years after independence in 1960, in the context of budgetary cuts there was an inevitable reaction against what had become known as the Ecole de Dakar and the formation of an alternative Village des Arts. (See Harney 1996, Ebong 1991; also Fosu 1993, Deliss 1995.)

However, the tertiary-level colleges of art were not the only context for the appearance of radically new forms throughout sub-Saharan Africa, for the apprenticeship tradition has continued, typically, to be the means of entry into all the other 'art worlds' and forms, whether inherited from the past or newly invented. For example, in coastal Ghana painted cement sculpture developed both for the construction of Fante military company houses (see Cole and Ross 1977, *The Arts of Ghana*) and for Ewe and Anlo funerary monuments; which sometimes instead now incorporate painted portraits of the deceased. In Teshie, east of Accra, in the late 1940s Kane Kwei (1922-1995 [?]), then an apprentice carpenter, invented the Ga fancy coffin tradition (Secretan 1995). Of course, it must be noted that very occasionally a genuine visionary appears, free of either the art college or the studio master. One such is Frederic Bruly Bouabre (b. 1923 Ivory Coast) once a civil servant who, after a vision of cosmic activity, took to drawing as a way of understanding the world. (see Yakouba Konate in Njami, 2000, pages 120-123, 299-300; also publications by Andre Magnin).

Notwithstanding the dominant and by now domesticated presences of Islam and Christianity throughout Africa, many other ritual and performance traditions continue to thrive with their visual arts for reasons of local and/or personal relevance. Magical healing (eg Kongo *minkisi*; see Philips 1995, pages 244-249) and/or divination (e.g the Yoruba *ifa* cult; see Philips 1995, page 427) can deal with problems Islam

and Christianity are unable to confront. Initiation, e.g. into Bamana masking associations (Colleyn 2001; also Phillips 1995, pages 498-502), or the bwami of Lega people (Biebuyck 1973; also Phillips 1995, page 300-301) provide access to local knowledge, again, in ways Islam and Christianity do not. Ideas about spirit doubles, familiars and spouses are widespread in West Africa. For example, in the Ivory Coast, Senufo women sandogo diviners work with twin-spirit familiars (Glaze 1981), while Baule people have otherworld spouses who can be troublesome, requiring ritual and sexual attention, and a sculptured image (Philip Ravenhill 1996). In the forests of Sierra Leone and Liberia, the Mende and other adjacent peoples of diverse origins and speaking languages of differing groups, but each with a pair of initiation organisations that each entail masked performances, Poro for men and Sande (or Bondo) for women. Sande had its mythic origins in the need for women to 'marry' the aboriginal spirit inhabitants of the forests to allow people to live there, and the masks embody those spirits while also displaying an idealised female beauty (see Ruth Phillips 1995). The women's organisation, Sande (or Bondo), is thus one of the very few cases wherein women are responsible for the masks and masquerades, and their commissioning, ownership and performance (everything except for carving the mask itself). Otherwise, throughout sub-Saharan Africa women's involvement in and knowledge about masquerade is always problematic.

In much of sub-Saharan Africa, masquerade continues to be, according to the appropriate event and season, a commonplace and contemporary activity of social (etc) consequence. One of the reasons for this must surely be the way masquerade is, clearly, about many things including entertainment (see Arnoldi 1995). Whatever the overt purpose of any given masking institution and performance, all manner of concerns will be addressed thereby: questions of authority, gender, social identity, seniority, ancestral status, affliction, healing, and the need to laugh. Masked performances sometimes achieve their purpose by the public criticism of those in authority as with the south-west Yoruba efe-gelede, in which performers are protected by the witches for whose entertainment the performances are staged (Lawal 1996); and Afikpo-Igbo okumkpa in which performers are protected by a male deity that authorises performance (Ottenberg 1975). In Kalabari a woman in the mythic past introduced the water spirit masquerades to Kalabari people, and men then appropriated them. The performances themselves are entertainments which, at the same time allow for the ridicule of antisocial forms of behaviour. Yet masquerade in only one of the ways of (re)presenting the world of spirits; and most Kalabari spirit mediums are (in contrast to masked performers) women; moreover, one kind of Kalabari ancestral memorial, as noted previously, provides for a local image of masked performance (Horton 1967). Among Senufo people in Ivory Coast, as noted, women are the diviners, mediating and regulating the relationship between people and spirits, while men and boys were concerned with masquerades, especially in the context of training for

adulthood. In Mali Dogon people perform in masks for the tourists as well as, on other funerary and celebratory occasions, for themselves (Richards 2000). In Congo-Zaire (DRC), young Pende men invent and perform new masks as a good way of attracting girlfriends, while some older aspects of mask use evolved during the colonial period presenting it dramatically as a sorcery attack (Strother 1998). In Gabon in the late 19th and early 20th century, Kwele warlords made use of gorilla-shaped masks (Siroto 1972, also Philips 1995, page 312) to terrify subject communities; while in many communities across sub-Saharan Africa masks were used to terrify small boys at their initiations to manhood, while also serving as the executioners of criminals.

Looking at art, whether or not it is performance based, is not a uniquely 'western' preoccupation even if there are aesthetic, social and signifying fields that are indigenous to particular times and places in Africa. Masquerades, temples and diviners, and the palaces and ceremonial of a local nobility (e.g. Walker 1998) had always provided times and places for a critical viewing of art. The human body and person was easily identifiable as a principal locus of these times, places and fields, whether through masked articulations of identity, gender, power, and play (see Rubin 1988); or because sculptors have not shown the naked body but, rather, the body as already socialised by means of other arts such as painting, tattooing, cicatrisation, hair-dressing, textiles and dress, and now, of course, the arts of modern fashion. Bruce Onobrakpeya has noted that 'body marking is a corner-stone in African art' (Onobrakpeya 1992, page 139); and though many older forms are obsolescent with the advent of modern education, dress, and so forth, these arts are still recognised as a source of distinctive cultural identity. Indeed, in post-Independence period these have sometimes been recognised and celebrated as forms of drawing and graphic design of local origin, and as Okeke and Onobrakpeya had determined, valued precisely because they were not part of the package of technical means inherited via the colonial encounter, even as they could be adapted for use within these technical means.

Textiles and dress have played a key role in definitions of ethnicity and nationality. In late 19th-century Lagos, for example, the question of what to wear had precisely these significances and was vigorously debated among a middle-class intelligensia increasingly excluded from government by the colonial regime. The concept of 'national dress' has its origins here, just as in due course Kwame Nkrumah would extol the virtues of wearing local cloth as a means of asserting a new national identity. In Ghana this has ensured the continued demand for the hand-woven cloths now known as kente; while the weaving by Yoruba men of *aso oke* (literally 'uphill cloth', the hill here representing the past, ie cloth of a kind inherited from the past) has flourished, in part, because of their readiness to experiment with new yarns, most especially in recent decades with the laminated plastic fibre with a metallic-looking core, known as 'lurex'. Then, during the late 20th century Yoruba women

from weaving households became weavers when other professions, such as schoolteaching have failed to provide them with work. Elsewhere in Nigeria, southern Igbo women from Akwete supplied Kalabari with cloth woven to a distinctive patterning known in the Niger delta as 'tortoise cloth' *ikakibite*, which is now proven as originating in a southern Yoruba broadloom tradition (the earliest known example was collected in the 18th century and is in the Royal Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh; whereas most west African weaving, including Kente and *aso oke*, makes use of a narrow strip which can be sewn together edge to edge, a technology that allows for the radical juxtapositioning of pattern using a simple technical means). The developments in both *ikakibite* and *aso oke* (and Kente) appear to be flourishing and continue to function as participant elements in the history and constitution of ethnic and national identities.

Resist-dyeing using indigo and other colours, whether local or imported, is also widespread through many parts of west Africa: Senegal, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Mali, Nigeria, etc. The distinctive Yoruba techniques and patterns known as *adire* gave way to these other techniques (known in Yoruba as *kampala*) as they spread from one country to another. Meanwhile, the embroidery of tailored gowns in Nigeria, Mali and elsewhere continues, as does the Asante printed *adinkra*; and Fante appliqued flags continue to be made. The decorative forms and proverbial content of these Ghanaian cloths are probably the local basis for the development of African-print fabric, factory-printed textiles with an origin in the 19th-century Dutch attempts to subvert Indonesian batik production. Their unexpected popularity in west Africa led to the rapid development of popular and distinctive patterns that provided a means of maintaining local tradition, proclaiming a modern identity and subverting colonial pretence. Since independence, their manufacture has been largely transferred to west Africa, with just one factory left in England and one in the Netherlands. (See Picton & Mack 1989, Picton et al 1995; also Prince Claus Fund 1998.)

Photography, the first of the modern arts in sub-Saharan Africa, was brought to the cities of coastal west Africa from the 1840s by African, African-American and European photographers. (See *Revue Noire*, 1999) Traditions of portraiture and documentation began to develop in ways that differ from Europe, avoiding the exoticising and primitivising to which European photographers were prone. It was clearly popular as a means of enabling self-representation, and most houses are full of photographs articulating the realities and choices of fashion, status, modernity and tradition. In west Africa, one of the many outstanding portraitists was the Malian Seydou Keita (Magnin 1997) active in Bamako in the 1950s. In South Africa, however, local photographers, especially through *Drum* magazine, were more concerned with photojournalism, and the brutal realities of apartheid; while in the period since its official demise photographers such as Zwelethu Mthethwa have

focused attention upon continuing inequalities (see Museum for African Art 1999).

In South Africa, indeed, the facts of and the relationships between English and Dutch colonists, and between them and San foragers and Bantu-speaking mixed farmers, entailed a set of very different histories. While a few late examples of San rock painting in the Drakensburg mountains record conflicts between Europeans and others, for the most part the material artifact traditions of black South Africans were concerned with strategies of gender, initiation to maturity, warfare and internal hierarchy; whereas white artists seem to have focused attention upon the illusion of a seemingly unpopulated landscape. During the 20th century, however, an interest in painting, sculpture, graphics and installation developed within both rural areas and black townships; and, inevitably, the politics of apartheid laid upon artists of all populations a very specific set of responses and responsibilities, particularly in the years when, following the success of independence movements throughout sub-Saharan Africa, the regime in South Africa became ever more brutal until its inevitable collapse. Under the education of apartheid, 'art' was deemed inappropriate for black South Africans, though projects developed, such as the Polly Street recreational centre in Johannesburg in the 1950s or the Rorke's Drift Arts and Crafts Centre in the 1960s. Moreover, there were white artists such as Bill Ainslie who opened their studios to black South Africans such as David Koloane, and Penny Siopis and Jane Alexander whose work continues to expose the inequalities and traumas of the apartheid system. Meanwhile, in rural Transvaal the sculptor Jackson Hlungwani continues his work of healing the world through his own New Jerusalem. (See Sack 1988, Younge 1988, Williamson 1998, Elliot 1990, Williamson & Jamal 1996.)

Elsewhere, as in Kenya and Uganda, artists have been consistently active in the opposition to oppressive regimes. Etale Sukuro's 'art to the people' movement in 1980s Nairobi was one example, in which open air displays of painting would include work critical of the regime. In Uganda, through repression and civil war artists at the University of Makerere also maintain a visual record of oblique criticism. (See Agthe 1990, Picton 2002.) For the latest surveys of the fields of 20th century African art see Njami 2000, Fall & Pivin 2001, and Hassan & Oguibe 2001; and in conclusion, it can be said that not only is art alive and well, and flourishing in many guises, but that its continued florescence is the current manifestation of a history of art of greater antiquity than in any other continent of the world.

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