# Creative Individualism and Professionalism In Paintings Of Tobenna Okwuosa: An Artistic Challenge To Nigerian Artists of 21st Century And Beyond

**By**

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## Abstract

*Contemporary African artists that have European Art training and compete favourably with any artist on the globe are not analyzed adequately in the professionalism of their profession. Similar situation applies to Nigeria artists of the Pre Nigeria Independence like Aina Onabolu, Ben Enwonwu, and Uche Okeke, among others that have the same European art training and skill. Other Nigerian college trained artists of the Post Nigerian Independence who are exposed to better art resources than ever have varieties of ideas, styles, and techniques of producing art which contributes to the present creative forms are not documented in the Professionalism of the Profession. Axiomatically, the analysis of professionalism would have projected the artists as masters of art and hardworking scholars. This no doubt has created research gap and dearth of literature on professionalism in the profession of the artists. This study focuses on motivating students to choose Fine and Applied Arts as a career, and making them to be pro-active in art productions with particular reference to painting. The specific objective of the study is to examine the history of talent, place, date, and movement*

*in the paintings of Tobenna Okwuosa. The aim of the study is to establish creative professionalism in the individualistic art productions of Tobenna Okwuosa with the view of providing an insightful biography of the artist. The research design is biographical survey of qualitative research methods. It adopts the historical survey technique which relies on primary and secondary source of data collection. It was established that Tobenna is of the fourth decade academic artists of the post Nigeria Independence. He is a painter, an intellectual artist that combines African and Western Culture in producing contemporary paintings, he is individualistic, innovative, and inventive in art productions, and his art inculcates entrepreneur skill. Therefore other intellectual artist should take advantage of his art and broaden their scope of art production in order to be identified for documentation. So also does the intellectuals of other fields of specialization are advised to emulate Tobenna's creative ideas to have diverse occupation to avoid absolute dependent on the unpredictable government or other employers employment to earn a living.*

**Keywords:** Creative, Individualism, Professionalism.

## Introduction

The neglect of recognizing the Nigerian intellectual artists in the professionalism of their profession in Nigerian art historical studies swayed the interest of analyzing professionalism in the art productions of modern Nigerian artists. The analysis of professionalism actually would have proved that artists are masters of art and hardworking. This neglect evokes the feelings of disappointment and loss of confidence in the artists. This feeling seem to be the offshoot of a long history of individual study decision based on academic ignorance and prejudice.

Adio (2015) notes that contemporary African artists who are trained in the European style of art production have evolved new and peculiar styles worthy of analysis, but are rarely celebrated the result of which a lot of them are still left not known in terms of work styles, techniques, and patronage. Egonwa (1994) also observed that Nigeria intellectual artists of the post Nigerian independence who are exposed to better art resources than ever have varieties of ideas, styles, and techniques of producing art which contributes to the present creative forms are not adequately documented despite their enormous contributions to the growth of visual art in Nigeria. Observation also shows that the fourth decade college trained artists of the post Nigeria independence have also evolved new and peculiar creative styles that are worthy of recognition. They have contributed so much to the growth and development of modern Nigerian art nationally and internationally. However, no good insights have been provided into the professionalism of their profession.

El Anatsui (2004) says that the art historians or art schools in Nigeria should re-focus their research interest in order to rectify the situation of studying Nigerian artists as well as meet up with the level and quantity of creative art output. Furthermore, no nation can survive socio-culturally without the proper documentation of her various historical experiences. No art tradition can thrive dynamically if it is not art historically preserved, and no professional artist can find himself on the focus of history if his entire creative professionalism is not looked at art historically. Nigeria is overwhelmingly rich in art professionals and teeming with modern artistic or creative events. As such, modern art traditions need full academic and intellectual attention of not only the art historians but also art scholars as regards proper and serious documentation and study. Okpara (2004) agrees with the ideas above that some art textbooks are now obsolete while others are not available in Nigeria, as such scholars should strive to writing indigenous textbooks, and project the efforts of some Nigerian scholars. Studying Nigerian arts and artists in recent times confronts Nigerian intellectuals with considerable overlap in such issues as who they are, what

they do, how they do it, and what quality of work is produced. This paper therefore focuses on analyzing professionalism in the creative paintings of Tobenna Okwuosa.

Tobenna is of the fourth decade Nigerian College trained artist of the post Nigerian independence. He is a painter that combines the conventional painting principles and medium with iconographic images, and found objects in executing his paintings. His works seem to be unique if judged from the perspective of period, style, philosophy and theme of production. The works are many, and are found in both public and private collections in Nigeria and beyond. The spread of the works seem to mean that he must have contributed meaningfully to the growth and development of art in Nigeria. Therefore the need for a biographical survey of his works in contemporary Nigerian art scene becomes obvious.

**Conceptual Clarification**

**Creativity**

Adejumo (2007) defines creative as a quality of uniqueness, originated, newness or freshness which an individual contributes to the conception and development of an idea. Uzoagba (2000, citing Mcfee 1961) has it that, creativity is the ability to invent new symbols and ideas to improve on establishment symbols, to rearrange established organizations into new organizations and to integrate new or bored ideas into previously organized systems or situations. Hornby (2005) also see creative as the use of skill and imagination to produce something new or a work of art. Getlein (2012) opines that; being creative means learning to trust one's own interest, experience, and references, and to use them to enhance life and work. It means discarding rigid notions of what has been or should be in favour of what could be. Creativity develops when the eyes and the mind are wide open, and it is as important to looking at art as it is to making it.

Supporting the views above is the opinion of (Igbokwe, 2012) that art as a manifested feeling of man is only possible when there is someone to skillfully or creatively bring it into existence. Such individuals are considered "Artists, Designers etc, who are looked upon for positive change and reproduction of the individual selves in their generation, even generations after them because of the legacies they live behind. Ago, Egornu, and Attah (2013, citing Preble and Frank, 1998) are of the view that creativity is borne out of creation following men's coordinated activities, including experiences, innovations, interpretation and interactions which at the end result into something new or original. It is this quality of originality that separates man from animal, professional from mediocre and independence from dependence. Therefore, any nation that invests in creativity is investing in originality, professionalism, independence and above all self-reliance and development of man and the society at large, hence individualism.

**Individualism**

Individualism is the self-conscious, reflective conduct of single persons or groups of persons allied by common interest, ideals, and purposes. (Murray, 1901). It is also the intangible elements in a picture which lead to a totally different result. (Uzoagba, 2000). Emiemokumo (1998) supports the ideas above that artists personality otherwise refered to as individualism depends on the variables of style and theme of work.

Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language (2013 edition) defines style as the manner of expressing thought in writing or speaking; and distinctive or characteristics form of expression. Style is a specific artistic character or dominant trend of form noted during a period of history or during an art movement. It is also the expressive use of media that gives an artwork individual character. (Ocvirk, 2006).

Getlein (2002) supports that style refer to a characteristic or group of characteristics that we can recognize as constant, recurring, or coherent.

That if a person we know always wears jeans and cowboy boots; we identify that person with a certain style of dress. If a friend who always wears her long hair in braids gets her hair cult very short, we speak of a change in style. Then if a family has furnished their home entirely in antiques except for one very modern chair in the living room, we would recognize a mix of styles. Therefore, artistic style is the product of constant, recurring, or coherent visual or conceptual traits. In painting, for example, a style might include characteristic materials, brush strokes, colour combinations, subject matter, and techniques of presentation e.g. stylized vs. naturalistic and so on. Style may be associated with an entire culture e.g. Olmec style in Mesoamerica, with a particular time and place e.g. The early Renaissance style in Rome, with a particular group of artists e.g. The impressionist style, with an individual artist e.g. Van Gogh's style, or with a distinct phase of an individual artist e.g. Picasso's Blue Period Style.

Some artist develop a style and stick to it; others work in several styles, either simultaneously or sequential. Ocvirk (1994) defines style as the ideas and techniques of an individual artist or group of artist. So also does Odita in Offoedu-Okeke (2012) beliefs that style connotes mannerisms, characteristics, and perceived disposition of an artist in her response to aesthetic and social stimuli and is of paramount importance to any artist who seeks to negotiate authorship, visibility, and recognition of his or her work in any context. Presently, modern and contemporary Nigerian art contains a notable diversity of styles that artists use to comment on social subcultures whose multimedia experiments are derived from exploration of indigenous and modern art traditions.

Egonwa (2005) expresses that stylistic analyses seek to appreciate peculiar and general characteristics of artworks, viewed against known criteria and by reference to workshops. Through this morphological evaluation, a lot of historical inferences can be made and logical conclusions reached. He states on further that style is responsible for the distinctiveness of one formal expression from another. Style is the manner in-which a work of

art is organized, by which a manifest constancy of formal properties are observable. Style in artworks can exist in at least four distinct levels, which include; personal, group, regional and period styles. This study however privileges the personal and period styles.The personal style of an artist is like his handwriting. It is peculiar to particular artists and can undergo changes in the course of an artists' career. While period styles are possible because a typical artwork is a child of its historical period. The form an art work takes is very much dependent on its historical period. This is because the categories of ideology, environment, materials and tools, types of training and patronage which condition artistic styles, have direct correlation with historical periods. Odita in Offoedu-Okeke (2012) also notes that modern Nigeria art are made in four major styles. These styles of art include; environmental art, convergent art, traditional art, and synthesized art.

The environmental art developed before and through colonial period, starting in pre to 1890's. Commercial craft and photography were mostly the art products of the time. Emphasis was on surface adornment and taking pictures. Art works reflected Nigeria presence through Nigeria's environment themes. The convergent art developed during colonial period, late 1090's to c.1960. Contents are neither completely foreign nor Nigerian. The art stress western European technical process and Nigerian subject matter. It also shows Nigerian presence through Nigerian models. The traditional art developed during colonial period, late 1890's to c.1960, themes were solely Nigerian that rejects foreign acculturation. The art was based on the wisdom of the past to establish the present a two element phenomenon, it reflected Nigerian presence through traditional Nigerian ideals. The synthesized art developed after colonial period, 1960's to present. The art works of this period are based on mixed motifs, unique ideas and resourcefulness. Artists emphasize going deep and initiating deliberate research. Their artworks reflect Nigerian presence through premeditated vision of Nigerian artistic synthesis: a style of art

which shows individualism and professionalism in the use of techniques, media and theme.

Emiemokumo states further that Ben Enwonwu marked the last phase of popularity in the European realistic style and the period of the adaptation of traditional art forms as well as abstraction. His style of painting and was later influenced partly by the traditional African art, and partly by the European techniques. Even his themes have leaned toward the traditional Nigerian culture. "The pre-independence struggles for self-rule and self-identity were responsible for this change". This change was evident in such works as *Olokun,* and *Negritude,* among others. He treated the neck up of these works in the European realistic format but would subject the lower region to severe abstraction, especially elongating them.



**Plates.1:** Ben Enwonwu's Olokun
Sources: Egonwa, O.D. (2017)



**Plates 2:** Ben Enwonwu's Negritud
Sources: Internet

Emiemekumo citing Fosu (1986) notes that there was a deviation from the total traditional African art without a total alliance to European aesthetic values. Instead both aspects were blended to achieve a uniquely modern artistic expression which can be identified as wholly indigenous in form and in content. Besides there was individualism in their artistic

expression without leaning themselves rigidly towards any ethnic style, rather it selectively borrowed from familiar traditional imagery to transcend the ethnic limits of its appreciation. In the same vein is Simeon Okeke- a water-colorist who draws his subjects mostly from Igbo life and folklore.

So also is Chike .C. Aniakor responsive to his people's culture. He has rooted his paintings in his Igbo art tradition, drawing themes from poetry, proverbs and Igbo philosophy. His forms have elements from Uli body decorations. His works such as the *Atonement, Homage at Full Moon, Initiation, and Triumph of the gods* are evidences of the thematic change. Similarly, the artistic productions of the college trained artists of the Oshogbo art centre have had a traceable effect on contemporary Nigerian art as per their style and response to the country's social and cultural consciousness.Twins seven seven (Taiwo Olaniyi) one of the artists of this centre drew art themes from his richly varied Yoruba culture: deities, and myths, everyday events and most frequently, his fantasies, which often incorporate elements from the other two realms.

Okoronkwo (2012) supports the ideals above as he notes that Onabolu and his foreign art teachers in Nigerian schools sought to develop the Nigerian art schools not only in the art of portraiture as it were in Western art, rather, to develop the aesthetic awareness and creative ability of the child. As such, he gave the students themes that allowed for free expression of moods, feelings, forms and other types of skill development. Okoronkwo citing Ikpakronyi (1999) explains further that Onabolu gave a revelatory documentation to this fact by displaying some early paintings and drawing of Onabolu's students with such titles as *Arrest, the Return, Accident* by Albert Odunsi, *"Wild Wind"* by T. Duncan, and many more. The exhibition of Onabolu's students reveals his dedication to, not only the inclusion of art in the school curriculum, but also to nurture a generation that will carry on and sustain modern art in Nigeria. Okoronkwo also cites Eze (2011) who posits that: "the post-independence artists /students made impact on creating functional,

symbolic and meaningful forms at every stage of the development of art forms in Nigeria. They were able to achieve this because of their art ideology which is based on modernized traditional concepts, forms and styles that are different from the European art styles".

Okoronkwo further cites Areh (2003) who says that, current trend in the art scene reflect that the momentous episode in Zaria has been very crucial to art development in Nigeria.That the revolution by Okeke and contemporaries equates Aniakor's(2005) statement, that "a radical force of creative experimentation has considerable revolutionary and aesthetic power to change the direction of art development" He cites Oloidi (1989) that, the Zaria Art society demanded a total radicalization to reflect meaningfully the African situations. Subjects for art, to them, should be inspired by their own cultural background, hence professionalism.

**Professionalism**

Professionalism is described as "skill at doing a job" B.B.C. (1992). Okpara (2002) views professionalism as a factor that affects a recognizable creative trait of a person; a factor which manifests in a number of situations and among people in varying degrees. According to him, professionalism in art included the sequence of all the elements and principles of art practice that programs through artistic products, that is, the sequence of skill acquisition in structured curriculum or tradition in a given environment, and the classical approach to works of art which ignores primary principles of professionalism, but insists on long-periods of apprenticeship in order to define creativity and originality as ability to create things in an imaginative way. This classical approach also stress that creativity and originality are more important than technical skill.

Supporting similar view is the opinion of Igbokwe (2012) that Art and Design requires professionalism to be admired or adopted for any use. This therefore suggests that Artists and Designers who promote the tough of professionalism are worth awarding honour and recognition as their works

show skillful master pieces to stand-out in the crowd of the unmindful. However, as discussed professionalism cannot be complete without a mention of "Profession" the parent world. Okoh (2004) describes profession as a job with specialized training. He also defines it as a specially desirable and dignified occupation with an implication of intellectual training and largely mental expertise". In addition, a profession is an occupation demanding specialized skills and knowledge: requiring an extended time for their acquisition, where the practitioners carefully select and limit the members admitted to its ranks and maintain high standard of performance through methods of self-discipline. It usually wields certain powers, not only over those who render the services it gives but also those who receive them".

Mba (2005) views profession in a number of ways. It could simply be an occupation, that is, an activity from which one earns a living. This concept of a profession is usually used when someone is remunerated for something which everybody does without remuneration. A professional dancer, footballer or drummer is good example because one is so skilled in a particular area that he is paid to do what he does. Not just being paid but earns his living through doing that particular thing. A profession, in its most common usage, is an occupation that requires advantaged education and especially training and carries a certain social prestige. It is usually marked out from others by identifiable characters. This definition of a profession implies that it has to be specially acquired. One must undergo certain things or processes or activities in order to acquire the necessary skills. A profession must be one which commands respect. The activities and training involved make people in the society have high regard for it and for those who practice it.

Tobenna's creative painting is based on the idea of solving some societal problems in view of restoring universal peace, and renewal of thought for the betterment of the future. His works are based on his creative philosophy

of *Afrocentricism* and *Soulcentricism* and his concepts are mythological and meta-philosophical issues. He uses his expressive media to call attention to the cultural, natural, and social phenomena in Nigeria. The researcher has therefore identified, grouped and subjected his works that reflect the aforementioned phenomena to visual readings. From the readings, the works on cultural phenomenon addresses African cultural life of the Igbo with particular reference to Oraifite Community of Anambra State of Nigeria. Tobenna strives to project the pride and rich cultural heritage of the Igbo in true and unadulterated forms in the sense of beauty and utility. The works of Tobenna as shown in plates 3, 4, 5, and 6 evidently show that peace, happiness, and unity are derived from the cultural life of the people. The works on natural phenomenon as shown in plate 7, and 8 dwell on the challenges of life, and addresses wisdom and determination as the key to success. While the works on social phenomenon as shown in plate 9, 10 and 11 with Nigerian political issues, and national development. All the works show evidence of his creative ideology of reformation, and restoration of universal peace.

**Okwusa's creative works**



**Plate 3***:* Igbo drummer, 1997
, ink and water colouron paper 13x38.5cm.
Source: Okwuosa T. (Collection of The Artist)



**Plate 4:** Duality and Life, 2001 oil on canvas, 80. 3x100
Source: Okwuosa T. (Collection of The Artist)



**Plate 5:** My grandfather with his two wives, 2005, oil on canvas, 81.5x91.5cm
Source: Okwuosa T. (Collection of The Artist)



**Plate 6:** Three fertility deities, 2005, oil on canvas, 122x91.5cm
Source: Okwuosa T. (Collection of The Artist)

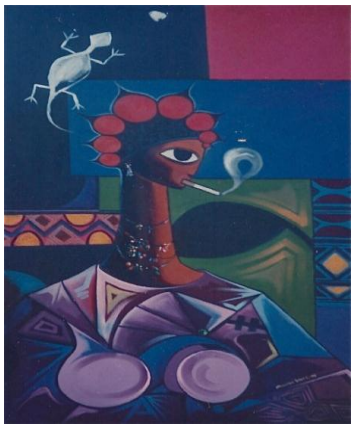


**Plate 7:** Negative Western Influence, 1999, oil on canvas, 66cm x 116.5cm
Source: Okwuosa T. (Collection of The Artist)



**Plate 8*:*** Another beginning, 2008 mixed media 81x66cm
Source: Okwuosa T. (Collection of The Artist)



**Plate 9:** Greed will kill the beast 2010, Acrylic on canvas textured paper, 16x12 inches Source: Okwuosa T. (Collection of The Artist)




**Plate 10:** Okwuosa Tobenna (2015), The New Face of Lagos, Enamel on plywood, 5 panels, each 15¾ x15cm. Source: Okwuosa's Ph.D. Art Exhibition catalogue (2017), Visual Dialectics of Texts and Forms on Recent Changes in Urban Spaces.




**Plate 11:** Okwuosa Tobenna (2016), Land of the rising sun, we love and cherish, beloved homeland of our brave heroes; we must defend our lives or we perish, We shall protect our hearth from all our foes; but if the price is death for all we hold dear, Then let us die without a shred of fear. Oil, acrylic, photographs, and marker on canvas 173 x 122 cm Source: Okwuosa T. (Collection of The Artist)

## Theoretical Framework

This research study of creative individualism and professionalism in the painting of Tobenna Okwuosa is guided by two theories, psychoanalysis, and professionalism.

## Theory of Psychoanalysis

The theory proposes that creativity wells up from unconscious drives and that there are differing opinions about how it occurs, but the various psychoanalytic schools of thought generally suggest that creativity is a by-product of primary processes.

Arieti (1976, citing Kubie, 1958) adds that neurotic distortion can occur when the conscious mind inhibits the creative process by rigid use of symbolic functions. That the unconscious can hinder with even more rigid anchorage in unreality. Samuels and Samuels, (1976 citing Greenacre, 1957) in addressing the source and motive of the creative act in psychoanalytic theory of creativity, notes that, the future artist learns to disassociate with real objects and falls in love with the worlds as a whole. This happens through a heightened sensory awareness as early as breast feeding. Arieti (1976, citing Weissman, 1968) says these capacities may be the infant learning to hallucinate the mothers' breast independently of oral needs, later in life. This endowment is preserved and transformed into the creative act. In this study, this theory enabled the researcher to make psychological enquiry about Tobenna's artistic background from childhood experiences, which made the researcher to examine Tobenna's training and established the history of creative professionalism in his painting.

## Theory of Professionalism

In affirmation of psychoanalysis theory, is the theory of professionalism by MacDonald, (1995). MacDonald explains the relationship between professional groups, theoretical knowledge and the possibilities for practitioners to exclusively apply such knowledge within their

professional practice. This theory compares the traits of occupational groups in order to distinguish professions from other occupational groups. Some of the distinguishing traits are that professional practice should be recognized as an authority within its domain, the society sanctions the enterprise in question, the practitioners work in accordance with ethical codes, and the professional body controls its own training programme. During training for a profession, students do not only learn to master a set of intellectual and practical skills, they also become part of a community with specific norms, values, and expectations concerning personal conduct.

Theory of professions, together with the concepts of cognitive authority, occupational identity, and information interests, contribute to a deeper understanding of issues concerning how practitioners' information behavior is formed, maintained and mediated in society. For instance, the theory of painting of Paul Klee an (avamt-garde artists of the 1920s) which explains how occupational groups apply their technical knowledge to their occupational practice, posits that painting is the practice of applying paint, pigment, colour or other medium to a surface or support base. The base includes walls, paper, canvas, wood, glass, lacquer, clay, leaf, cooper or concrete. The medium is commonly applied to the base with a brush, but other implements, such as knives, sponges, and airbrushes, can be used. Painting is a mode of creative expression, and the forms are numerous. It can be naturalistic and representational but loaded with narrative content, symbol, emotion and politics.

Tobenna possesses intellectual and practical skills in art, and works in accordance with the art professional ethics. His artistic philosophy hinges on communion between the soul and the body. His creative paintings contain enough of narrative content, symbols, emotions and politics. The works reflect ancient stories and figures (*Mythological)* and the changes of nature, universe, and human life *(Meta-Philosophical)* subject matters which according to him gives relevant comfort in a period of stress. This theory is useful to art researchers in the sense that it is more effective

problem solving as it makes for more effective innovations, makes for financial rewards, and also makes for ethical conduct. On the contrary, it does not regard the art works of the non-professionals. This theory contributes immensely to this study because it enabled the researcher to examine Okwuosa's creative paintings and confirmed them as professional works of art.

**Professionalism in Okwuosa's Creative Works**

Okwuosa's Biography



**Plate 10:**Tobenna Okwuosa: the renowned artist (2008)
Source: Okwuosa T.(2008, an exhibition of scroll paintings)

Tobenna Okwuosa was born on the 24th of September, 1972. He hails from Oraifite in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State of Nigeria. He is the son of a retired school principal and a headmistress. He attended O'connor Memorial Primary School, Onitsha from 1976 to 1980, and Isikwe Central School Isikwe-Achi, Enugu 1980 to 1983, Dennis Memorial Grammar School (DMS) Onitsha 1983 to 1987, and Community Secondary School, Udi, Enugu State 1987 to 1990. He holds B A in

sculpture (first class honours) 1996, from university of Benin, Benin City, Edo State, and served Nigeria under the NYSC Scheme in Edo State from February 1998 to February 1999. He also holds MFA (Painting) 2003, from University of Benin, and Ph.D. studio art (Painting) 2016 from Delta State University, Abrakar, Delta State, Nigeria respectively.

He is currently a lecturer in the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Okwuosa had a three-month artist-in-residence programme at the Visual and Performing Arts Department, Worcester State College, now (Worcester State University), Worcester, Massachussets, USA in 2005. He has earned other grants from institutions in the US and in Nigeria after presented a paper titled contemporary art market in Lagos; patrons, galleries, and Artists in the Worcester State College. He also had university scholarship award for the best 200 level student, Fine and Applied Arts Department, University of Benin, Edo state, Nigeria (Okwuosa, 2008 in Elenwo 2019).

**Okwuosa's Training as an Artist**

Okwuosa's artistic inclination manifested to his parents in his infant age, when he could play with lines using fingers, and charcoal to draw on the ground, walls, and other surfaces. He started his artistic training from the primary school he attended where he learnt how to make designs using pencils, biros, crayon, and other materials which earned him prizes under the tutelage of non-professional art teachers. He proceeded to secondary school and was privileged to receive art lessons from six art teachers of the two secondary schools he attended-a reason for which his artistic talent broadened. Among the art teachers of those secondary schools was the then popular Roland Ndaefo of the old Eastern Region of Nigeria who incidentally had taught the famous art lecturer Professor Obiora Udechukwu of University of Nigeria Nsukka. At this stage of training, Okwuosa included Fine Arts as one of his O'level subjects. He could produce captivating art pieces using Paper, Starch, Clay, Water Colour,

and Poster Colour as major medium of expression. Between 1990 and 1992 he continued to practice art on his own but had a passion for broadening his horizons of creativity through University Education. He actually became a student of Fine and Applied Arts of University of Benin in 1992/1993 academic session, and graduated in 1996. These stages of training exposed him to the need for broadening the scope of his art (Okwuosa 2008 in Elenwo 2019). Today Tobenna has accomplished his goals of becoming a professional artist as he holds a Ph.D. in painting.

**Okwuosa's Reasons of Choosing Fine Arts as Career**

Okwuosa beliefs that he possesses art talent from birth, living a life without art will seem to be dried and boring. Art will make him unique since artists are both intellectual and technicians. Art connects him with the physical and sublime. It also connects him with spirituality and life (Okwuosa 2005 in Elenwo 2019).

**Okwuosa's Artistic Influences**

Okwuosa was influenced by so many artists, art styles, philosophers, and spiritualists, from several cultures. Among the influences are the early history of writing in ancient Egypt, the stylistic painting approach of Clary Nelson-Cole (1945-1990) of the University of Benin, the paintings of surrealist artists such as Salvador Dali (1904-1989), and Yves Tanguy (1900-1955). Other influences include African sculptures and paintings with Uli Motifs found in Igbo-Mbari architecture as representations of gods of the pantheon. Furthermore, the myths and folktales of Igbo origin, fellow students of Uniben art schools whom he interacted and experimented on particularly every artistic activity, and other art teachers who were not only proficient in classroom work, but were also active in their respective studios outside the University were all direct or indirect influences on his art, (Okwuosa 2010 in Elenwo 2019).

**Okwuosa's Favourite Artist: Living or Dead.**

According to Okwuosa (2009) his favourite artists are the unpopular African traditional artists whose artworks are found in many museums and private collections all over the world. The greatness of those artworks lies on their qualities which are spiritual and eternal, rather than on their mere material look. This quality is what makes an artwork a piece master. Another favourite artist he says is Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) painter, who believes that an artist should seek for spiritual possibilities in their art in order to build a spiritual pyramid in heaven.

**Okwuosa's Exhibitions / Research:**

**Solo Exhibitions**

2008 Soulcentricism: A Recovery of Ancient Universal Truths and Indigenous Scripts National Museum, Lagos, Nigeria.

2005 The Igbo World Worcester State College, Worcester, Massachusetts, USA

2003 Motherhood, Femininity and Values Maison de France, Lagos, Nigeria

**Joint Exhibition**

2002 Vibrations of Life (with George Edozie) Wangboje's Art Gallery, Lagos, Nigeria.

**Group Exhibition**

2004 Nigerian Rhythms: Three Modern Streams (with Lawrence Ajanaku and Pius Omogbai) Frederick Scott Gallery, Sudbury, Massachusetts, USA.

**Group Exhibition**

1999 Dynamism (with Peter Akiniwumi, Julia Uzoma and George Edozie) National Museum, Lagos, Nigeria.

**Group Exhibitions**

2005 Nigeria Prelude and Refrain Fscott Gallery Sudbury, Massachusetts, USA

2004 The Search: The First Step Maison de France, Lagos, Nigeria

2003 5th Lagos Book and Art Festival, National Museum, Lagos, Nigeria

2000 Romance with IIiadWangboje's Art Gallery, Lagos, Nigeria

1997 Great Benin Centenary Exhibition, Ode to Joy Wangboje's Art Gallery, Lagos, Nigeria.

1996 Splahes and Forms University of Benin, Ekehuan Campus, Benin City, Edo, Nigeria.

1995 Student Union Week Art Exhibition, University of Benin, Ekehuan Campus, Benin City, Edo, Nigeria.

**List of Exhibits**

i. Revelation through the inner Eyes, Reincarnation Series, 2007- 08,133x75cm
ii. Against all odds, Reincarnation Series,2006-08,133x75cm
iii. An orange Rectangle in a Blue world,2008,97x92cm
iv. Different Parts of a Lifetime I, Reincarnation Series,2007-08,81x66cm
v. Different Parts of a Lifetime II, Reincarnation Series,2007-08,81x66cm
vi. Up in the Sky and Down Below, Reincarnation Series,2008,103x92cm
vii. Five strips and a Red Square, Reincarnation Series,2008,97x92cm
viii. Another Beginning I, Reincarnation Series, 2008,81x66cm
ix. Another Beginning II, Reincarnation Series, 2008,113x84cm

x. The Lord's Prayer in Bamum Script, Reincarnation Series,2007- 08,120x74cm
xi. Birth, Death and Liberation I, Reincarnation Series,2007-08,81x66cm
xii. Birth, Death and Liberation I, Reincarnation Series,2007-08,81x66cm
xiii. Square in Square, 2008,81x66cm
xiv. Ancient scroll Recovered,2007,120x84cm
xv. Forces of Defacement, 2007,120x84cm
xvi. Dancing Scripts,2006-07,114x84cm
xvii. Lost History, Lost Identity,2007,102x92cm
xviii. Fragmented Tapestry,2006,97x92cm
xix. Composition with 53 Fragments, Reincarnation series,2008,114x84cm
xx. Lost and Found I,2006-07,127x76cm
xxi. Lost and Found III,2007,114x84cm
xxii. Discussion for Four,2006,97x92cm
xxiii. One Race, One Love, Reincarnation Series,2007-08,114x84cm
xxiv. Remnants of a Glorious Past,2007,120x84cm
xxv. Scripts, Fragments and Dots I, Reincarnation Series,2007,114x84cm
xxvi. Scripts, Fragments and Dots II, Reincarnation Series,2007-08,114x84cm
xxvii. Mutilated History, 20006,97x92cm
xxviii. OCEAN of Scripts,2008,114x84cmMedia: Acrylic, leatherette,
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2010 Twenty acrylic paintings that interpret Dr. Ogaga Ifowodo's poems in three publications. Madiba (2003), the Oil Lamp (2005), Homeland, and other poems (2008), commissioned by Barrister Rockson Igelige.

2008 An oil portrait of the then Governor of Anambra state and visitor of Anambra state University, Peter Obi, commissioned by the university, Uli campus

2006 A portrait of lady Ifeoma Igwilo in oil, commissioned by prof Sir. Benjo Igwilo.

2003 A full- length oil on canvas portrait of Mr. Jude Uzozie commissioned by him.

2000 An oil on canvas portrait of Mr. Obi commissioned by him.

**Okwuosa's Contemporaries**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Onyema | Offoedu-Okeke | Anthea | Epelle |
| Victor | Ehikhamenor | Damola | Adepoju |
| Ogbemi | Heymann | Busayo | Lawal |
| Joshua | Nmesirlonye | Bob-Nosa | Uwagbe |
| A. | Abdulkareem | John | Ogbeta |
| Samuel | Ajobiewe | Ebenezer | Akinola |
| Tayo | Olayode | George | Edozie |
| Segun | Aiyesan | Tobenna | Okwuosa |
| Fidelis | Odogwu | Gerald | Chukwuma |
| Uchay | Chima | Tony | Nsofor |
| Nyemike | Onwuka | Babalola | Lawson |
| Gbolahan | Ayoola | Emmanuel | Dudu |
| O. | Otoki | Chika | Idu |
| Uche | Peters | Odun | Orimolade |
| Oliver | Enwonwu | Peju | Alatise |
| Innua | Emmanuel | Joseph | Eze |
| Ola | Balogun | Uche | Edochie |
| Ibe | Ananaba | Donald | Onuoha |
| Diseya | Tantua | B | Olorunnisomo |
| Aliki | Tolu | Muyiwa | Akinwolere |
| Akin | Baruwa | Juliet | Ezenwa-Pearce |
| Richardson | Ovbeibo | Soji | Adesina |
| Kunle | Osundina | Norbert | Okpu |

*Source: Castellote Jess (ED), Contemporary Nigeria Art (2012* in Elenwo 2019*)*

**Recommendations**

1. The government and general public should embrace art rather than being prejudice and wake up to its educational responsibilities. They should realize that art is the centre point of the development of other subjects and skills.
2. Fine and Applied art students in Nigeria should be given the mandate to study intellectual Nigerian artists in their respective areas of specialization. The study will project mostly the hardworking Nigerian college trained artists to the world reservoir of artists.
3. Intellectual Nigerian artists should take advantage of Tobenna's art and establish their individual contributions to the growth and development of modern art in Nigeria.
4. The government should provide credit facilities that will enable the intellectual Nigerian artists to have fund to purchase their needed working materials, tools and equipment that will enhance the level and quantity of creative art output.
5. There should be regular public lecture on professionalism. The lecture will boost the awareness of professionalism in relation to entrepreneurship amongst Nigerian artists, and offer other entrepreneur skills to them and to the people of other specializations.
6. The government and school administrators should incorporate art exhibition into the school curriculum and make it a regular activity to enhance the economic value of art in Nigeria. The art exhibitions will motivate the academic artists to the contestation of professionalism in art productions, and promote sales of works in Nigeria.

**Conclusion**

This study of professionalism in Okwuosa's creative paintings; the artistic challenge to Nigerian artists of 21st century and beyond provides an

insightful biography of a modern Nigerian artist in the reservoir of world artists. It opens a new vista for the celebration of any hardworking intellectual Nigerian artist in the professionalism of art profession through book writing. So also does it provide information on the professionalism in Okwuosa's creative paintings, and creates room for further academic work on the profession of the artist. The study is indeed the best aspect of learning art as it projects artists as master of art.

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