

African Research Review

International Multi-disciplinary Journal, Ethiopia

Vol. 10(4), Serial No.43, September, 2016: 241-256

ISSN 1994-9057 (Print)

ISSN 2070-0083 (Online)

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/afrrrev.v10i4.17>

Dak'Art 2016, Novelty and the Pale of History

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Abstract

This essay attempted a comprehensive and encompassing narrative that strides towards connecting the *DakArt 2016* exhibition as a discourse of African artists' search by African artists for personal quests centered on self for endogenous visions directed at deconstructing perceptions and fixed notions of self (with notions of identity shifts, nomadism and cross-culturalism as) key to originality in creativity. The approach is historical; grounding the subject "*the use of recyclables and ready-mades for the creation of art*" as the cynosure of the historicity of the new in the disentanglement from Dakarois *Negritude* inspired art. Investigating the effect of colonial materiality employed by three artists, utilising colonial era aesthetics in their work while circumventing its indexicality; finding instead new methods with which to represent individual experiences. That new art form, thus, reflected the political, social, consciousness and avant-gardes' whirlwind stepped up in the 1990's *via* the Texts *Revue Noire* and *NKA*. In their "complexification", the cognomen as a scaffolding of Euro-African postmodernism smuggled in an international message of Conservation via creative utilisation of commonplace products for art making. The strengths of the

hermeneutic discourses of the art works yield insights for critical social commentary and education. *DakArt 2016* points the way forward.

Key Words: DakArt 2016, Comprehensive, “Encompassing narrative”, Deconstruction, Conservation, Creative, Postmodernism

In language reminiscent of Robert Hughes’ best seller *The Shock of the New* the curatorial intentions of Dak’Art 2016’s Simon Njami disclosed the new Dada and African renaissance. In images shocking to the canon, but reminiscent of the grotesqueness of the Senghorian African reimage at Senegalese independence; Dakar dared a position in the art and discourses of post-modernism from the grounds of francophone Africa. Versed in the lines of L. Sedar Senghor’s *City in a Blue Daylight*, Njami dared to create “*a Bandung for culture*”, nostalgically inflecting a renascent Africa in which all countries chanted and danced in the euphoria of a world that would invent relationships to forge a new future (Simon Njami, 2016). Reflecting the thoughts of the erstwhile Senegalese statesman Leopold Sedar Senghor (1905 -2001) and seemed the practice of the contemporary artist, El Anatsui; Njami presented 65 incredible, dazzling artworks in a sumptuous Show: *like propositions containing within them a limitless opportunity to morph into something different* (El Anatsui, 2016). In all declaiming the classics of canonic art, but daring to let loose into the labyrinthine; the artists framed their thought along Anatsui’s (2016) lines:

When I was an art student, what I was shown as art was fixed for centuries. I thought that if art is something that replicates life, if art is life, then it is not static, because life is not static. Life is dynamic, so art should be something that has similar properties.

Fascinatingly engaging a dominant *genre* of art works that reflect Green Revolution concerns: the reality of climate change, dwindling resources and the imperative of conservation *via* recycling, the 12th Contemporary Art Biennale, Dakar, Senegal (2 May- 4 June, 2016); made significant headlines in tabloids. This art is biennale poised to “globally” unite the world and produce a feeling of a singular world in Africa, *Tout-monde*, to use a term coined by Edouard Glissant (2014). Beyond its signature themes of Installation, music, Dance and Performance art, Dak’Art smuggled in a unique message, couched in ephemeral creations, driven in specific works that focused on nature and natural media. These works reflected compositions that emphasised the “temporality of life and things”. In fact, pre-eminent were works that combined “objects either found in nature or are products of industrial production”. These works were intended to allow the viewer to perceive art and nature working as one, within a single unit of expression. The basic underlying intellectual framing of the *genre* evolved from a *concienciento* (Paulo Freire, 1964) that underlies human relationship with nature and an impulse to work with it. It is, however, important to

draw attention to Installations and collages as one other form of ephemeral art. This *genre* explicitly stokes the idea of the “temporariness of things”, objects and their arrangements. Like typical ephemeral artifacts, these works are reminiscent of the diverse ephemera works commonplace in nature: ancient Land art, chalk drawings, graffiti on sidewalks; even ice sculptures and Buddhist sand Mandalas. Usually created with the express intention of dismantling, but best characterised as “see-them-while-you-can installations”, once dismantled, gone forever. That Dadaistic slant in this Show is under girded by novelties, echoes and rethreads of modernist primitivism.

Fascinatingly it is on the avowed themes of the “*miraculousness of the commonplace*” (Arthur C. Danto, 1963) and subversion that the artists have delivered their messages with ease and the “*playfulness of art*” (George Hans-Gadamer, 1986), on the one hand; and the reenactment of themes and rethreads kernelled on the *Negritude* philosophy of the legendary Senegalese President, poet and statesman, Senghor. That philosophical thesis was amply scripted by Elizabeth Harney (2004) in her now famous book *In Senghor’s Shadow, Art, Politics, and the Avant-Garde in Senegal, 1960-1995*. That study of “artistic governmentality” in post Independence Senegal, traces the birth of the *Negritude* movement in early 1930 s Paris, but locates its origin in the shadow of W.E.B. Du Bois’ early twentieth century Pan-Africanism. While exploring how Paris became the center of a fascination with primitive art, Harney acknowledges Senghor's contribution to the blossoming of the arts in Senegal with a deliberate cultural policy that foisted art as an instrumentality of growth and development. Demystifying the distinctive cultural history that shaped Senegalese modernism, she unravels its innovations, diversity, and dynamism. Attention is, however, drawn to the reality that the avant-garde movement was a European phenomenon spear-headed foremost in Paris in the 1800 and 1945.

Danto writes that there is disinclination from established subject matter and themes in the visual arts production, declaiming the grand narratives of the Western canon and its histories, disengagements from the Western classics and its ethos of aesthetics beauty; the new art works, in the words of the art critic Robert Storrs, speaking of the celebrated West African modern artist Elanatsui; aptly fit as art of the “*recycling of industrial production into something that is completely transcendental, made out of junk*” (2016). In gleeful response, however, this show resplendently is a subtext of the larger narratives of modernism.

In spite of the attention and publicity that this most spectacular of African art fairs deserves, there seems not to be an enabling, comprehensive and encompassing narrative that strives towards (i) connecting the cognomen as a subtext of the larger discourses of attempts by African artists to explore personal quests centered on self with notions of identity shift, nomadism, cross-culturalism as key labels in endogenous definitions directed at deconstructing perceptions and fixed notions; and (II) its place as a furtherance of 1990's efforts, spearheaded by the magazine *Revue Noir*, the headstone in that project and *NKA* magazine, an off shot of the exhibition *Africa 90*, and other Africa centered exhibitions and Biennales; contributing to the emancipation of the African voice. Contradicting notions of African unity, that new space was geared, instead, towards making individual artists autonomous.

In view of the foregoing, it is my intention in this essay to approach the subject "the use of re-cyclable materials and the ready-made" as medium for art creation by the artists of the *Dakarois* exhibition historically. Specific works picked would be analysed. The focus of this paper is, therefore, concerned with how these art works as distinctive works in the constellation of Francophone art, draw attention to (I) the historicity of the new in the disentanglement from the earlier focus on African unity in terms that firstly it confirms a virtuality; but emphatically draws attention to the singularity of each artist who would, hence, become an Africa in him/herself. Hence, this paper investigates the intimate effects of colonial materiality employed by the artists, utilising colonial era aesthetics in their work while circumventing its indexicality, finding instead new methods with which to discuss individual experience, the colonial and post colonial; (II) reveal that these creations constitute a sub-text of the larger discourses of Paris inspired modernisms, and (III) in their "complexification", these creations constituted a vehicle for the smuggling in of a convergence point of Euro-Africa postmodernism. In fact, on that scaffolding an international message of Conservation *via* creative utilisation of commonplace products for art making was foist.

To address the psychological import of extant colonial material culture, I analyse the creations of three artists', Folakunle Oshun and Victor Ekihamenor, both from Nigeria; and the Swiss/Egyptian, Youseff Limoud; particular negotiations of plural locales and temporalities in their specific works as methods of re-achieving postcolonial artistry in terms of individual experience. Their art deal in terms of scale shifts from locale to global, individual to empire, and from the intimate to the immense! Reflecting, therefore, the purposes of Senghor's grand metaphor *City in the Blue Day Light*; engage a hermeneutic analysis of the creations to see how they reflect a rekindling of individual vision in the drive for the calibration of new strategies and aesthetics reflecting the sole purpose of re-enchanting the world and the continent (Njami, 2016). While recognising the *Dakarois avant-garde* as the grounding for

Senegalese artistic post-modernism; this paper would attempt to unravel the innovations, diversity, and dynamism of the creations. In fact, I dare suggest the Dakar Biennale as a manifesto that crystallises a departure from the Old school works of the 60s. In fact, claim that it establishes a new space that debunks the group psyche but ushers in the singularity of the individual artistic space, while spelling out the ethos of the new artistic substance in Foucaultian *reappearances, repeats and rethreads* (Michel Foucault, 1998).

In *nouvelle* shapes and volumes reminiscent of the playfulness of art (Gadamer, 1986:123-6) these artists seemed “got rid of everything that smacks of journalism, worms, everything nice and right, blinkered, moralistic, Europeanized, enervated by saying dada like the Zurich artists 100 years ago.” (Karen Kedmey, 2016). In concert with the kin-folk consciousness of the erstwhile cultural policies of Senghor, the artists utilised endogenous cosmological imageries, manmade factory products: pots, pans, plastic bottles, even wires and threads; to create art works. These creations, distinguished by their characteristic transience, simply played out the texts of the fiesta. Epitomising “recycling”, these images are directed to the *literati*, the *Élan vital*; people with a certain level of intellection and education, ready to read the images that are cast in front of them. With convergence of “conscious evolution”, among the artists, nuanced in the regimen of the ephemeral arts, these creations lack the tangibility of material things, yet the fleeting and flimsy stuff with which they are made does compose itself into the compact unity of a creation: one that always remains the same (Gadamer, 1986:26). .

2016 Creations

- **Jollof Rice**

In a tripartite Installation, *United Nation of Joloff Rice* (UNJR) and the duo *Taxi and Mama Charlie*; Folakunle Osun weaves a narrative that is a representation subtext of the larger discourse “*Wollof Jollof*”. Interweaving curatorial and artistic narratives, ‘Kunle stages artistic spaces in unprecedented collaborative and interactive rhetorical possibilities. However, grounded in sculpture, he explores forms in dimensions that are tangible.

Exploring the story of the migratory controversy of a favorite culinary dish, Jollof Rice, Osun focuses on an elaborate installation, several stories and tastes which underlay the now common place West African dish. The origin of this dish is a matter of keen debate in West Africa. Each country has its own version of the culinary dish. It is common place conversation as to who invented the dish: a Ghanaian would chub-in “*Challe, we originated Jollof*”, while in common aloud stake, the Nigerian would allude to ownership, *tah, na we get am!* To unravel some of the “authenticity” polemics,

it is necessary to weave in the pleats of West African history and the consequential exchanges with other cultures, specifically Arab and European. These introduced ingredients that have over the centuries become key elements in African gastronomy. The Arabs, for example, introduced spices such as saffron, cinnamon, ginger, cloves nutmegs in the 7th century. Colonials like the Portuguese also introduced techniques of roasting and marinating using Chilli seasonings, now common practice.

It is, however, believed that Jollof rice appeared as a regular delight in the Jollof Empire, a medieval West African state that ruled large swathes of territory in the Senegambia region circa 14th and 19th centuries. Jollof is today a national dish popularly named *Theibou Dienn* (rice with fish or *Benachin*, “one pot”) of modern Senegal. A popular mythology claims that the migration of the dish began in the grand days of Great Mali by way of the *Djula* trade in the coastal regions of West Africa. Many years before contact with Europe, West African farmers of the inland Niger delta had already domesticated hardy specie of rice, *Oryza glaberrima*. This became a dietary staple of the awesome 11th and 16th centuries Mali, Ghana and Songhai empires (Folakunle Oshun, 2016). European traders and merchant ship captains on the west coast not only obtained the local rice specie to provision their ships, but also admired ingenious African systems of cultivation. The locals obtained three seasons of rice production due to cultivation that allowed planting along tidal rivers, in swamps and in upland fields. African slaves taken from these fields were shipped to the New World to engage their expertise in the plantations. Acknowledging the richness of the African enterprise, the European masters built giant fortes and store houses for both the human cargo and local mercantile goods.

Emphatic on a discursive curatorial reality, Folakunle created two Installations: a multi stereo sound installation *Taxi*, that through echoes inside eleven pots, delineates the eleven major locations of these former colonial settlements by sounds such as the *Thiebu Dienne* drum or the sounds capes captured in particular Atlantic shores that saw more development than hinterland locked areas. These have remained commercial nerve centers. The other installation named *Mama Charlie*, depicts a pot embossed with the Union Jack emblem in which Nigerian and Senegalese *Jollof/Thiebu Dienn* spices are mixed and boiled constantly during the Show as a protest to the lingering political presence of former British and French “colonial masters” in the West African region.

In the primary anchor to the tripartite Installation, *United Nations of Joloff* (UNJR), is an imaginary reality presentation which counters post-colonial peace keeping efforts in the West Africa sub-region at large. Folakunle in undisguised political slant writes, the installation UNJR a parallel (the United Nations Peace Keeping Force) consists of a series of small blue pots, placed upside down in a military formation; bearing the emblem of the UN peace keeping forces. In spite of the

politicking, the kernel of the narrative is the symbolism of sacks of rice prominently positioned at the head mast as representation for the gastronomic delight, Jollof Rice.

Confluence, the third unit in the constellation, is made up of forty unique alloy cooking pots on wheels. The Wheel is taken as a metaphor of the Jollof rice recipe's journey from Wolof country to Nigeria. That installation emphasises the interweaving of West African peoples, revealing the individuality of each people and their various interpretation of the dish's story. Deploying varied iconographical inscriptions both incised and embossed on the giant pots the symbolic referencing of each country is archived. This art work is positioned in close dialogue with a large pot that contains two videos about the *Thiebou Dienne* story.

Conjoining events together, Folakunle incorporates the exploration-installation *Wollof/Jollof Exhibition*, National Museum, Onikan, Lagos (2015) to further a narrative of the migratory controversy of the common place dish. In all, a large outdoor installation incorporating the effects of sound and video interfaces are exploited to piece a narrative together. This is an unusual show. Some of the pots were actually engaged in the cooking of the rice recipe for taste. The artist stages artistic interventions engaging un-presided collaborative and interactive possibilities; varying each installation subject matter to achieve an all purpose narrative. Hence, he employs curatorial mind-spaces to serve as mediators between various parties in the production and contextualisation of his creations. Oshun engages the cuisinery delight as a central iconography, deemed a sinecure of the history of migration. That popular cuisine delight, in spite of its diversity in the sub region, eludes ownership. It is a complex historical dish that has passed through several inter-cultural influences from different West African peoples and even external contamination.

The *Wollof/Jollof* narrative draws attention to the reality, socio-economic conditions of several West African people that keep eking out a living in their seemed hostile environments. That story draws attention also to the distinctiveness of the Nigerian versions of the favorite dish. In punkish attention to innovations, Fola Oshun *dadaistically* in an aligned discourse (2016) reminisced on a site-specific installation *Opeyemi Balogun*, an indigent student's Jollof recipe. Levi Strauss (1948) writes, Food can indubitably be comprehended as a language that exposes social structure and cultural systems; and makes us understand our particular identity!

- **Maqam**

Youseff Limoud's work suggests a miniature landscape, certainly not a *Marquette*, (Fig. 2) sited in the Palais de Justice, Dakar, main hall. It is made from dust and recycled material. Discarded items of courtroom furniture: for example, the Witness stand, are prominently located in the ensemble of the empty Judges' wooden

deck complex, with trimmings from the old Courtroom. This work is reminiscent of the cardboard architectures of the Congolese sculptor [Body Isek Kingelez](#) and the “fun cities” of Peter [Fischli & David Weiss](#). Tapping the debacle and ruin of the Syrian crisis as metaphor for the character of today’s troubled times, Limoud adapts that sensitivity to steer a narrative (Youseff Limoud, 2016). That narrative, writes Elsa Guily (2016), raises questions of socio-political circumstances while speaking about geological facts and passages of time in a chaotic world in constant motion.

Limoud states, “*An artist has to be a visionary. Someone who sees things without looking but senses their materiality*” Utilising that metaphor, therefore, he makes critical statements on the state of the city of Dakar. He sees ingenious survival in spite of the obvious collapse of ideals all round it. Collage and the use of re-cycle able materials are his grounds for analysis. Objects once inhabited with life and the affective presences of their use are now discards. The title of the work, *Maqam*, speaks volumes on the notions of nostalgia for the beauty of the old Senghorian city. That title romanticises the reality of change and a Sun shinny day of the future, staking Hope in spite of destitution and collapse. The Arabic word, *Maqam*, symbolises a place where one feels at home and loves to stay in. It also means the shrine or the place connected with a holy person or event where people go to worship. The installation examines the potential of the creative imagination confronted with a desolate space. With only elements of nature such as earth, sand, pigments, wood, a stone, metal, light; and discards as raw material to create a wide field of an alternative topography.

In a lengthy interview with Elsa Guily, Youseff revealed that *Maqam* deliberately serene, recalling a calm after a storm; is not a *Marquette*. It is, in fact, a poetic reflection utilising discarded materials full of aesthetic qualities. It is about breathing a vision through the materiality of the city. It is a direct response to the curatorial concept of a reincarnation undergirded in the poem, *The City in the Blue Daylight*. The very use of the metaphor compliments the use of the abandoned Palais de Justice as an epitome of nostalgic site. That site represents this neglected place of history and thereby reshapes the confusing narratives embedded in these work.

In a suggestive landscape, Limoud employs objects from the site of a former courtroom such as items of furniture, significantly the Witness stand and railings with highly polished arm rests; and pieces of discarded interior furnishing trimmings, such as wall tilling and shelving units. In combination building construction objects, such as infrastructure metal rods and pile timber; lumber from down town Dakar Construction sites are prominently included. A foreground miniature landscape with suggestive imaginary metropolitan features: gobbled promenades and modern high rise consortiums and condominiums reflect a modern European inspired city. A well ordered landscaped with urban open spaces is symbolically included. However, naked

infrastructure building rods poking skywards; with shells of uncompleted structures, waste timber planks and construction rubble lying loose; workmen's tools and canteen equipage reflect the reality of weird abandonment and unfinished work on sites down town. Desolation is further echoed by the melee of discarded objects reflecting imprints of their former uses. Metaphorically, therefore, Limoud is asking his audience to look and read the picture before them. The future the city of the future resonates here, spite of the desolate landscape

Youseff draws attention to his own way of expressing the central thinking of the Pan-African exhibition kernelled to the general theme of reinventing via a protean creativity of the artist. Keen on reflecting Njami's metaphor, the artist chooses to adapt the materiality of the city. Hence, his appropriation of the space of the Palais de Justice to create the illusion of an imaginary walk through a real city is most apt. But this art work simply shows dust and discards, detritus of a once prosperous condition of life! 'Made of dust and return to dust' as metaphor underscores the imperative for the reengagement with commonplace things in Art's search and disclosure of the "invisible genesis" of things to come (M. Merleau-Ponty, 1945). Indeed, in the spirit of Algiers 1969 and Dakar, *Maquam* addresses notions of "becoming" truly endogenous in ideas and foisting new directions from the grounds of Africa. To borrow Senghor's language, "It is, henceforth, a matter not only of revalorizing cultures but also bringing them to life on a daily basis (L. Sedar Senghor, 1995). In all, this Installation with its religious underpinnings represents the place for spiritual refreshment, rejuvenation and the rooting for the spiritual ethos that would reinvent the Dakarois.

Borrowing themes from the 1970s Swiss duo Fischle and Weiss, Limoud crossed the unusual materials and processes of post-minimalism with a squirrely spirit of inquiry via fanciful metaphysical experiments and arrived at his own stylistic blend of architectural philosophy. These are spanners in the works of art, truth-seeking phenomenology in pursuit of what may be described as "the pleasure of misuse" looking for success in failure, asking unexpected questions, and of arriving at waggish answers like an *Illuminati* alchemist of modern life. Debunking strapped and spooked art-school strictures and what's "permissible," Limoud reflects the ultra-self-conscious, creativity of the 1990s. Youseff lets art unspool. No part of the Installation is any more or less important than any other part and the entropic work as a whole perfectly encapsulates seeing all those jumbled structures. It is evidence of a succession of manmade systems mired in abandoned hopes. *Maquam* is all about systems forming and breaking down, inertia and structure, perpetual motion, decay, growth, and the Swiss obsession with time. Most of all, it's about how order comes from chaos and chaos from order and whatnot in odd arrangements. Soon your eye gleams that the picture is a lie, that what you're seeing is the precarious instant before the arrangement collapses.

It can't be a coincidence that the doctrine Egyptian/Swiss artist begins with is the most Swiss one of all: *Dada*.

▪ ***The Prayer Room***

Victor Ehikhamenor's psychedelic work forces the attention of both visitors and social media audience. *Prayer Room* (Fig. 3) is made up of a loop shaped Mirror located on one wall of a rectangular shaped wall draped with canvas. Drawings and an All Over pattern rendition of iconographic motifs covering all the four walls and ceiling of the interior of this rectangular space, adapted from regular commonplace parlor design in Esan-land, this space is reminiscent of the "*Okougheleh*", elders' communal meeting room. Victor takes his architectural idiom from the upland Edo tradition derived from Benin royal architecture. An elders' rectangular aligned meeting space is a place of solace, a place of prayer, meditation and self reflection for the folks! Here elders, usually peasant farmers and artisans find moments of reflection, a little relaxation and entertainment after a grinding day's work.

Prayer Room is characterised by endless line work, shapes and hidden faces shrouded in a cover of motifs. With a giant loop shaped mirror dominating one wall of a rectangular space, inflecting *trompe l'oeil* affects relief sculpture on two walls, creating the illusion of a repeat sculptural motif on all four walls. Otherwise, the entire wall surfaces of vibrant deep white wash paint are simply enveloped in a montage of abstract motifs and symbols. That illusionary white ground, reminiscent of traditional Benin shrine walls, permits the roll-off of blue *Orishaic* symbols and patched motifs enveloping the entire surface. These symbols and motifs are alluded to as visual alphabets and codes by the artist (Dave Mann, 2016). Distinctive in this florescent Light lit room is the enforced gaze effect created by the All Over pattern repeats on entire interior surfaces. Capturing humanity, evanescence and transience within the picture, Ehikhamenor enacts his story incorporating traditional African motifs and religious cosmological iconography into a contemporary artistic medium.

Let us dare to look at this velvety shroud in its deep blue cool speechlessness and reflect on what it says in its mute eloquence. Declaiming all mimetic representation, a garland of abstract motifs and symbols invoke absolute music to the eyes of initiates. Only the relation of flat shapes and colour, without reference to specific objects, remain as a kind of visual music which addresses us in the speechlessness of this modernistic tableau. In spite of

his canonic art education, Victor *dadiastically* takes inspiration from the ontology of his native Esan roots. Culling its Traditional architecture and decorative tableau specifically the “*Okougheleh*”, elders’ communal meeting room is central to all his works (Victor Ehikhamenor, 2016). It is apt to look at that ground for the poetic ontology of *Prayer Room*. He dares a synchronisation, crossing borders via confluences of two traditions (the Esan for shapes and forms, and the western by way of pigments). Through critical negotiations, this is the vernacular base, to borrow a word from Stuart Hall (2008) that inspires his forms and shapes. Unconscious factors, compulsive drives, and interests not only determine our behavior, but our perception as well. Claiming that Esan poetic literature is the religion of his art; he engages inveterate repeats of imageries drawn from that cosmology. In adaptive human play, therefore, his work is expressive of that heartfelt polemic and its rhetoric’s.

Resplendent in endless line work, effecting shapes and shrouded in a cover of motifs, with the canvass molded figures as the only tangible imagery; Ehikhamenor’s (henceforth, VE/ VE’s) poetically couched narrative recreates *Okougheleh*, as the essence of this spectacle. In resplendent blue and white (reminiscent of white chalkiness of Benin shrines and rituals) Ehikhamenor expresses fundamental realities of cool aesthetics. The “cool” is fundamental to his native Edo and the Black Atlantic. It is expressive of the ideals of balance and control; the cool of creative manners, full of motion and brilliance” and the cool of social responsibility. That cool resonates in “shared traits” in West African ritual dress code. In fact, it is evident in the Americas with slaves who wove it into a rich and dynamic Creole civilization (R. Farris Thompson, 1973). Engaging “*line*” as the fundamental essence of art making, the manual and the poetic is clearly determined by the kind of knowledge involved. One hermeneutic view draws attention to the use of poetry as a point of departure in a quest to read this art work. Alluding to the words *poesis* and *poites*, Hans-George Gadamer (1988) emphasises the specific sense in which both words reflect the process of creation and the creator. That double meaning makes a semantic connection between a specific kind of making and producing and other forms of the same activity. That draws attention to the imperative of viewing poetry as the fundamental grounding on which creation and creativity belong. This is the thrust of VE’s work. In fact, knowledge and faculty direct the productive activity of both the craftsman and the poet; whose activity is directed towards the work and its consequent use. How the work is produced and what

it should look like is determined, therefore, by the purposes and uses to which. The work of art's public functionality is embedded in the context of life, where it occupies a position of its own in the processes of religious worship, in recitation/ theatrical performance; and even decoration and embellishment.

In an African setting oral tradition is the mainstay of discourse. The word enjoys unlimited power and ideal perfection in poetic evocation that depends on reproduction via dramatic play, recitation and reading. Hence, there is no other respect in which a linguistic work of art has to be for anything else. The oral traditions that enact the narratives that ground VE's works are properly speaking "made". In his Dadaistic resort to lines and the iconographical decorative tableau and embellishments in *The Prayer Room*, the pleasure of persons who recognise what is represented, show the real significance of imitative representation. There is no question of judging the degree of accuracy with which the representations approach original Esan iconography. This creation like every representation, finds its genuine fulfillment in the reality that what it represents is recognised as categorically there. This is the essential purpose of esoteric character of cults. Knowledge means recognition. Mimesis, says Gadamer (1998) is a representation in which we know and have in view the essential content of what is represented.

In spite of his canonic background, VE recalibrates memory of the tangible past in ephemera, engaging colonial materiality but applying an "*aesthetic of the cool*" taken from his Esan roots, while circumventing western aesthetics. He found, instead, a new way of reinterpretation and discourse of individual experience in *Okoughелеh*. With esoteric cultic suggestiveness, the art represents a transformation of the old Elder's Meeting Room in novel concepts, shapes and volumes. The aesthetic coolness of this work is an absorbing spectacle, resplendently engaging mimesis, poetic lyricisms and share coolness to affect a gaze. In an eternal return to same, Victor restores the essence and values of the past, while validating their timelessness.

Conclusion

Consciously exhibitions express discursive stances, expressing "reality" from a particular standpoint, reflective of particular interests. DakArt 2016 presents an enabling, comprehensive and encompassing narrative that connects the cognomen as a subtext of the larger discourses of attempts by African artists to explore personal quests centered on self with notions of identity shifts. This Exhibition makes visible for all

time the emancipation of the autonomous African voice. Hence, debunking notions of African unity in terms that firstly it confirms and pleads virtuality; DakArt2016 hard-nosedly projected the singularity of each artist's recalibration of their *Africanite* from the vantage point and sensibilities of background codes and taste. That new art form, thusly, reflects departures from the *Negritude* consciousness; but furthers the avant-gardes' of the 1990s and a realisation of her ethos in the international art world. Reveling as a sub-text of the larger discourses of Paris inspired modernisms, the mélange of "complexification", constituted a vehicle for the smuggling in of a convergence point of Euro-Africa postmodernism. On that scaffolding an international message of Conservation *via* creative utilisation of commonplace objects for art making was foisted.

Independence and the whirl wind of globalisation enshrined variability and individualisation of roles instead of the collectivism that *Negritude* instituted. Rather than define themselves as groups wherein the same dynamic was at work, Africans led by artists entered a phase leading them to explore personal quests centered on self. Deconstructing perceptions and preconceived notions of unity, therefore, notions of identity, revision, nomadism, cross-culturalism became the *leitmotif* in an endogenous definition of self (Njami, 2012). Artists like Limoud and Ekihimantor, for example, found new spaces for individual expressions. Guided by the revolutionary literature of the 90's, principally *Revue Noire*, an instrumentality of growth, development and change in the drive towards a redefinition of the subject of African art; the artist found ready armory for breaking new ground. These textual realities were, however, translated to subsequent biennales in which these manifestoes were recited in artistic creations: Dakar, Bamako, and Johannesburg, *et cetera*.

In attempts at the unlocking of the new self-image and meaning, "*the shock of the new*" to borrow Hughes' (1980) language, should be seen in two folds. Firstly, with the new freedom to act out their individual world views, artists achieved freedom that permitted individual expressions as seeing subjects. Hence, artists in attempts at mastery, introduced into their works colours, diverse contents, their own versions of self; doing so in accordance with personal codes and aesthetics with a re-appropriation of time.

Grounded on the word "gaze", therefore, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945) in terms reminiscent of Alagoa's "The Python's Eye" (1997) points out that nothing is new; only an "eternal return of the same", for artists take their texts from backgrounds that are entrenched in their histories as pits of real inspiration. Validating E.J. Alagoa's "The Python's Eye" (1997), Nietzsche further informs that once the artist captures that

past in present imagery, it becomes automatically frozen in time. The future, therefore, would reflect an extrapolation of the lived instant, a projection that would hold only through the strength of the artists' personal vision, in the light shed by the gaze. This is the real essence of the artistic works. Little wonder, that the artists delve into the domain of metaphor and legend. This is the *raison d'être* for the artistic imaginary and its resort to the ephemeral in the works of their contemporaneity. This postmodernist stance confirmed the collapse of the modernist ideology of the 1960s; and the dissolution of modernisms foundations in authenticity!

Distinguished by the reality of intangibility, reincarnating a living collective memory, with its rituals and sacred experiences of commencements, however, contemporary art and its artists face the reality of the credibility of the reinterpretations of endogenous history. That is the task for future work: keeping history intact in the spate of reinterpretation of oral history and tradition in their continuous re-workings to suit the codes of artists. To give meaning to individual works, a deconstruction of the past and inventing a future is a hard nut to crack! However, Simon Njami (2016) draws attention to the ethos validated by Nietzsche, Alagoa et al, emphasising every approach as fragmentary, illustrating that we are simply part and parcel of the puzzle whose general contours escape us to the very end. The individual artists in their attempts at nouvelle imaginary borrowed from both extant histories and even fancy imageries and vignettes culled directly from artists of the twentieth century like Peter Fischli and David Weiss. Ehikhamenor's *Okougheleh*, reincarnated in *The Prayer Room*, simply put is a metaphor that undergirds the universal truth that art every art work is an incarnation of some earlier form. A common thread among the works is the seemed artistic fascination with the banalities of life, the enduring love for everyday objects as the stuff of art, while entrancing the playfulness of art with spontaneous creativity.



Fig. 1. Folakunle Oshun, Nation of *Joloff Rice*, Instalation, C&



Fig. 3. Victor Ehikhamenor, *The Prayer Room*, 2016, Mixed media Installation, Dak'Art 2016 international exhibition, Installation view, Palais de Justice © C&



Fig. 2. Youssef Limoud, *Maqam*, 2016. Mixed-media Installation. Dak'Art 2016, international exhibition, Installation view, Palais de Justice © C&

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