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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Fine and Applied Arts
in Candidacy for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

CERAMIC ART

A Vehicle for Cultural Awareness

by

Michael Olusola Olugbile

February 24th, 1981

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Date: February 24th, 1981

DEDICATION

In honour and glory to God for giving me a golden opportunity to share in the ceramic expertise of a legend, the late Professor Hobart Cowles. He was an inexhaustible living archive of ceramic information to those privileged under his tutelage and lives in the good works he left behind to potters in embryo.

Unto whom much is given little may be derived and unto whom little is given, much may be derived. Professor Hobart Cowles, the little food I was able to digest during your tenure in the Ceramic world is the source of my strength for ceramic growth.

Michael

INSPIRED ASPIRATION

No matter how much sleek, self-sufficient complacency of thoughts, words and deeds tries to camouflage the influence of the past, the creative artist consciously or unconsciously manifests the tutelage of his roots.

Even more so, when the good intentions of his roots provide the artist with food for thoughts, and his great grand roots, his ancestors, established the norms, folk traditions, and values referred to as culture.

I see culture as an institution of traditional customs, depicting people's heritage, consciously in the manifestations of the arts, or unconsciously contingent.

M. O. Olugbile, Jr.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my sincere thanks to those people who made this development possible -- every instructor with whom I was privileged to study.

I am especially indebted to Professor Robert Schmitz, for his directions toward quality ceramics during my time at R.I.T.

My gratitude is also extended to Mr. Bob Heishman and Dr. Barbara Hodik, for their insights and criticisms which gave me guidance through this thesis.

I also appreciate the kind permission of Dr. Ekpo Eyo, Director of Federal Department of Antiquities, for access into Nigerian Museums to collect information appropriate for my projects.

It's Kabiyesi to his highness, the Oba of Lagos Adeyinka Oyekam II, for granting me audience to inquire first hand knowledge about cultural traditions through one of his oldest chiefs Pa Y. B. Taiwo, to whom credit is due his wealth of traditional experience.

Finally, my sincere thanks to Dorothy Bressieux, for her unflinching efforts in typing this thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to erect a private barricade against the death of a culture by portraying some cultural traditions which have shaped me through Ceramic Art, with emphasis on clay as the basic vehicle for expression.

Ceramic Art, the expression of original creativity formed with clay and hardened by firing in the kiln to maintain its shape, is a beautiful entity from the aesthetic point of view.

Culturally, ceramic art is an archive vividly rich in the preoccupations that established a sedentary way of life, as can be seen by the art's decorative and functional nature. Like painting, weaving, sculpture, dance, drama and other creative arts, Ceramic Art is historical evidence of the heritage of our ancestors.

Politically, ceramic art can stimulate us to uphold the moral and ethical principles of our forefathers and can direct our social motivations toward the glory of our traditional customs.

Naturalism and Realism in Ceramics are important to me and my personal aesthetic. I feel that I must be true to this inner need for figures and realism,

even though at times, I find myself wanting to do work like others around me. At these times I think of an imaginary situation in which I am a boy who experienced another culture and actually took part in it. It is different from that in which I was born. In this imaginary scene, I say good morning to my father by remaining upright and stretching out my hand to shake my father's hand. He rebukes my gesture by inquiring about the old tradition, pointing to a painting which shows a girl kneeling to her mother and a son prostrating to his father, significant illustrations of respect for elders.

Thoughtfully, I imagined that perhaps he would have accepted my greetings as offered and not demanded the old custom if the painting had not been there to remind him of the old tradition. This imaginary scene provides a further confirmation that the arts can serve as a barricade to prevent the complete death of a culture. This instinctual drive of creative artists consciously and unconsciously manifest cultural traditions that narrate the heritage of a people.

The 15th century Ming Dynasty of the Chinese people witnessed a dynasty of native culture, in which the political and economical powers were directed to the flourishing of the arts. In return, the arts served as narrative media for the dynasty's cultural traditions,

either explicitly expressed or symbolized through different vehicles like fibers for weaving, canvas for painting, paper for illustration, wood for carving and especially clay, the almost inexhaustible vehicle with which potters have been blessed from time immemorial.

It was a dynasty based on the Eastern philosophy that believed in mythological phenomena represented in symbols like Lotus, Peony and especially the Dragon, the symbol of royalty, strength, sun, emperor, the bringer of peace and rain. These symbols can be found in their creative arts, particularly ceramics.

As the Tea Bowls and Cups are to the Tea Ceremony-conscious Japanese, or the Totem Poles to the Pacific Northwest Indians, or even the Buddah to the Hindus, so also are the symbolic motifs of my thesis pieces either explicitly symbolized as decorations to adorn my pieces or the elegance of the traditional forms for specific functional and decorative purposes.

Understanding ceramic art in terms of clay characteristics such as plasticity, shrinkage, absorption and colouring oxides that would yield a variety of hues at different temperatures, provided an avenue for the realization of my objective aim, which explores the manifestation of a people's culture through the potter's hands.

Featured cultural aspects include traditional religions, particular idol worship, beliefs, their rites and practices, indigenous occupations, standard norms, folkways and social values peculiar to my culture in Nigeria.

Nigeria, a West African country, is situated between Longitude 0-15 to the West of the North Pole and Latitude 9-11 to the North of the Equator -- the source of our very hot climate, a natural opportunity which are to potters the prima facia beneficiaries in drying their pots -- is geographically divided into three main regions, North, West and East, by two identical physical features. River Niger enters Nigeria from the Northwest and joins River Benue which enters Nigeria from the Northeast at Lokoja, a Northern town a little below the middle of Nigeria. Both rivers flow into the Atlantic Ocean, forming a Delta area in the Southern Part of Nigeria, with clay beds from the most coarse particle-sized primary clays to the finest particle sized secondary clays en route.

Without ethnocentrism but with utmost intent for a unique and genuine presentation of my proposed theme, I deemed it appropriate to research concise traditions worthy of expression. Hence, I took a trip back to Nigeria, where in consultations with the Director of Antiquities and the Oba of Lagos, I was exposed to the materials and techniques used for various pottery

collections on display and in the archives of some Museums, Art Galleries and Cultural festivities that narrate some indigenous traditions and their practices.

From the information gathered, I selected a few major aspects to be explicitly expressed in my thesis projects and narrated literarily in this document.

The idea of using coloured clays for expression, stemmed from a unique experience gained during my contact with some colourful pebbles, picked up along the shore of Lake Ontario.

In the spring of 1979, I went for a day's picnic with a group of friends and found some pebbles on which the work of nature, creating beautiful grains of different colours on smooth, burnish-like surfaces is visible. Picking up a few, I brought them back to the studio where they constantly inspired my imagination. I pondered on their beauty and how to integrate this beautiful effect into my pieces (Fig. I).

Then one day during my undergraduate tenure at R.I.T., an Oriental man, Ban Kajitomi, a Japanese Potter with experience in Western technology, gave a demonstration at a workshop. "Neriage" and "Zoughen"¹ were the techniques of his demonstrations, with coloured clays attained by adding colouring oxides into clay.

¹Michael Olugbile, Coloured Clay Bodies as Basic Design Elements in Pottery Decoration, B.F.A. Thesis, R.I.T., 1979, pages 7-10.

Figure I - Natural Source of Colour Inspiration

.



From his demonstrations I learned how to realize the beautiful colour grain effects of the pebbles on my pot. Further research and experiments led to my belief that the traditional pottery acclaimed in my country could be further enhanced.

In an effort to effect similar traditional elegance and vivid expressions of specific representations in my thesis pieces, improvisations were made in the absence of some local materials used by our native potters to finish or adorn their wares, either before or after firing.

Unlike the lowfire, gritty, local clay which abounds almost everywhere in Nigeria, highfire stoneware clay composed of Fireclay Missouri, Kentucky ball clay #4, Custer Feldspar and Flint Silica was used as the basic white clay body, to which colouring oxides were added in varying ratios for different coloured clays.

Familiarity with this clay body from experiments indicated that it was of very high vitreosity. It can withstand high temperatures and longer utilitarian daily use. It has an advantage over the lowfire, gritty, local clay, because it conducts heat well enough and does not crack with very careful handling. This is due to its low thermal expansion characteristic when used for hot foods or for cooking.

Other improvisations made include coloured slips, wax and glaze rather than "a fine paste of ground red earth of the laterite type" and "extract of the locust bean pods"² for painting and for sheen effects respectively. Silk instead of raffia was also improvised for surface embellishment.

Furthermore, since the primary aim is to use clay as the medium of expression, it is used to replace other materials as can be seen in Figure VII, which shows a Mobile Canteen, usually made out of Calabash kegs, or in Figure X, which shows a traditional fireplace, usually constructed by welding scraps of old metal sheets, on which pots are placed when cooking in them. Figure XVI also shows a board of the world's oldest game, usually carved out of ebony or oak timbers and played with *Caesalpinia Crista* seeds or stone pebbles in some cases.

²Guide to the Nigerian Museum, Lagos. Associated Press of Nigeria Limited, page 44.

MATERIALS

Clay

Exercises to appreciate clay as a physical, natural material to be fond of, want to touch, keep and possibly adore, by using it in ways that would induce these responses, made me decide on a stoneware clay with which I am very familiar, as having the appropriate characteristics providing an avenue for the accomplishment of my objectives.

The clay is composed of 60 parts AP Green Fireclay, 40 parts Kentucky Ball Clay OM 4, 10 parts Custer Feldspar and 10 parts Flint Silica. It has a satisfactory reaction to colouring oxides, by portraying their colours in beautiful hues at different maturing temperatures.

Oxides

Adequate percentages of colouring oxides found to suit the purpose of this thesis include 4% of Vanadium Pentoxide for bright Yellow colour at low temperatures, 4% of Yellow Ochre for semi-dark Yellow, 4% of Red Iron Oxide for Brown, .5% of Cobalt Carbonate and 1.5% of

Chromium Oxide for Blue Green, 3% of Cobalt Carbonate for light Blue, 5% of Cobalt Carbonate for dark Blue and Black is a mixture of 1% of Red Iron Oxide, 1% of Cobalt Carbonate, 3% of Chromium Oxide and 5% of Manganese Dioxide.

Figure II.

All the coloured clays have the same basic white clay components, hence they have approximately the same qualities of workability, characterized by approximately the same percentages of water of plasticity, shrinkages and absorptions with very small ratio in difference to the basic white clay because of the colouring oxides which react to water in different ways. Nonetheless, all clays vitrify in considerable degrees as from cone 5 to cone 10.

Careful mixing of clays in dry states especially those with colouring oxides, prevented the concentration of oxides in different areas of the clay bodies. White clay components were first dry mixed before adding water, so also were the coloured clays, but with the addition of oxides in powder form before adding water and passing through the extruder.

As might be expected of dry mixed clays, they tend to have little or no particle sizes in them, but for double assurance, proper cutting, wedging and kneading exercises were performed to rid the clays of air pockets or particles that might be formed during their passages through the extruder.

Figure II - Coloured Clay Tests



Other materials include extended wire gauze for internal support in concrete mixture of playground sand and Portland Cement, on which the wall murals were mounted.

PROJECTS

The following narrations deal with the introductions, materials, processes and intended purposes of my project pieces as they relate to the theme of this thesis.

Fig. III - Sacred Cult Pot

Idol worship involves pots which store liquid extracts from herbs, shrubs, tree trunks, barks or roots used in the administration of Oracular healings to sick people, or those seeking advice from Cult-Priests, due to setbacks in their live's patterns or when confronted with emotional problems.

The pot was thrown on the wheel with stoneware clay and decorated with slip, coils and ridges. The pot was then covered with a plastic bag for a slow drying process to induce firm adhesion of the decorations. After it was bone dry, it was bisque fired to cone 08 and glaze fired to cone 04 oxidation, for bright colour effects.

It is intended to portray one of the most important utensils solemnly used by Cult Priests when performing

Figure III - Sacred Cult Pot



Cult rites, to appease their gods for effective implementation of their spiritual powers.

Fig. IV - Eyo Masqueraders

This decorative piece manifests Adamuorisha play, a traditional festivity typical of Lagos state community, in praise and honour of a deceased or influential personality in the community.

It is a two-piece pot and a lid, all thrown on the wheel. Using the periphery of the pot as a format, a compositional sketch of Eyo masqueraders and procedural events were drawn with the tip of a trimming tool, after which coloured clays were modeled to create a low relief effect with colour perception. The pot was then left to bone dry under a plastic bag, for a slow drying process and firm adhesion of the modeled figures, after which it was once fired to cone 5 reduction.

The pot is a portrayal of traditional norms as implied in an Adamuorisha play, its costumes, rites and practice. "Any occasion of the staging of an Eyo play must restore, at any rate to the older people, the splendour, the gaiety and perhaps as well the exuberance which once characterized Lagos."³

³Souvenir Programme for Adamuorisha play staged on Saturday, 23rd of February, 1980, in Memory of the late Chief Sir Koworola Adekunle Abayomi. Page 5.

Figure IV - Eyo Masqueraders



According to ableaid, "The Yorubas believe that contact between the living and their dead is real and vivid and that those who had physically departed from this world are always at hand, and do always get re-incarnated and in any case they perpetually watch and protect their progeny from their abodes. This belief is manifested on the day of an Adamuorisha Play in the effusion of joy in the hearts of all people and in the physical buoyancy with which the Eyo performs his feats both showing the assurances for a traditional which brings in its trail abundance of prosperity and happy memories of a great day."⁴

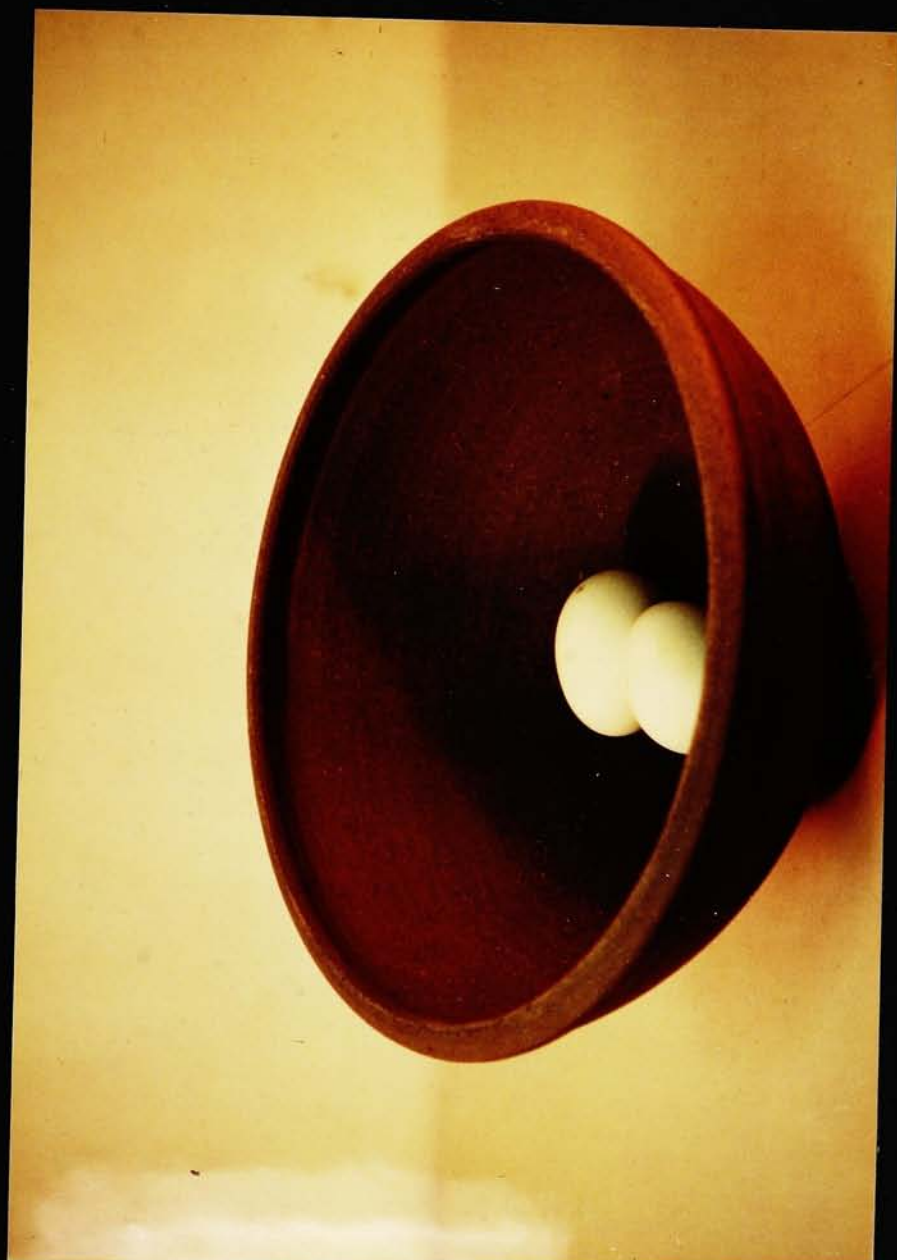
Fig. V - Sacrificial Bowl

Idol worship oftentimes involve sacrificial rites in which worshippers offer sacrifices like whole chicken, palm oil, kola nuts and fresh eggs, which they put together in small clay bowls, to appease the spirit of their idols from which they seek blessings.

This pot was wheel-thrown and trimmed after it was leather hard to give it a foot to rest on, then left in room temperature to bone dry and was once fired to cone 5 reduction.

⁴Souvenir Programme for Adamuorisha play. Page 5.

Figure V - Sacrificial Bowl



The pot portrays one of the ritualistic practices of idol worshippers. It is usually placed in open areas of two, three or four crossroads, for people to see and thus induce further prayers from the human spirit of those who believe in idol worship.

Fig. VI - Cattle Rearing - Mosaic Wall Mural

Cattle rearing is an occupation typical in the norther part of Nigeria, in which cattlemen tend or breed cattle, particularly cows, for daily consumption, for dairy products, and leather-manufactured commodities.

Coloured clays were stretched out into one quarter of an inch thickness and then cut to one and a quarter of an inch square sizes. After becoming bone dry in room temperature, they were fired to different temperatures of both oxidation and reduction atmosphere of cones 04 oxidation, 5 oxidation, 5 reduction, 9 oxidation, and 9 reduction respectively. These firing temperatures produced five different tones, each of the eight coloured clay bodies including white and black, totalling forty different colour tones.

They were then arranged in Mosaic pictorial form, on an 8 by 4 feet drawing composition of grazing cows and two cattlemen. One of the men sits to eat his lunch while the other stands to watch vigilantly on the cows,

Figure VI - Cattle Rearing - Mosaic Wall Mural



one resting and the others grazing in an open land of folding mountain view in the distant background with a disappearing horizon into the sky.

The mosaic was then covered with newsprint paper on which Elmer's Glue-All adhesive was already applied and then cut into smaller sections.

They were then rearranged upside down, to show the surface on which concrete mixture of playground sand and Portland Cement was applied to about half of an inch thickness, then wire gauze was laid on the concrete mixture for internal support. More concrete mixture was again applied on the wire gauze to about one inch thickness, into which metal screws were implanted for easy hanging or mounting.

At this stage the project was covered with plastic bags for the concrete mixture to set and then lifted the third day to remove the Elmer's Glue-All adhesive newsprint paper, to reveal the proper side of the mosaic composition.

Apart from the significance of colours in clay, it is a project intended to serve as a ceramic avenue through which the practice of typical traditional pattern of cattle rearing is expressed.

This mural manifests one of the oldest indigenous occupations passed down from one generation to another ad infinitum.

It is an appropriate wall decoration for a market place, butcher's company, or restaurants like the Beef Steak Mining Company.

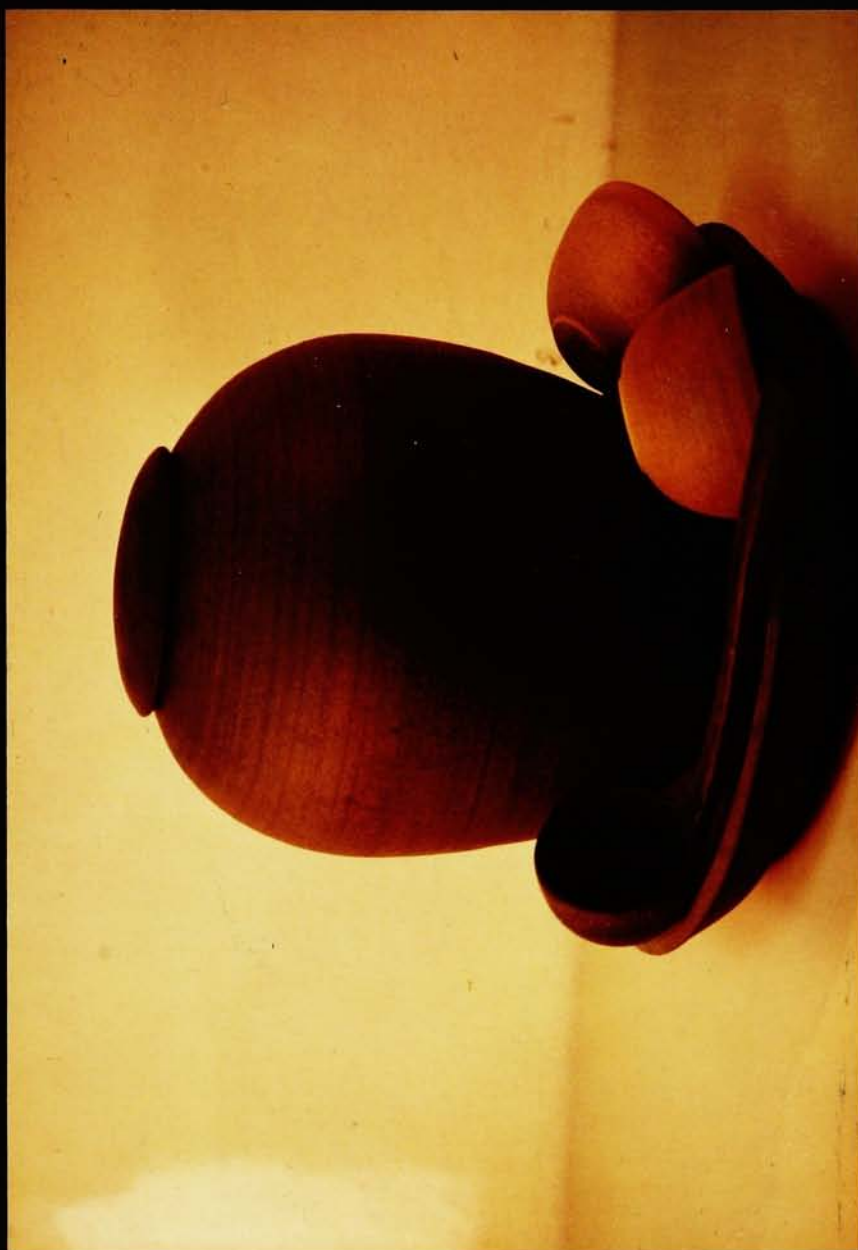
Fig. VII - Mobile Canteen

Since man eats to live, this figure illustrates a utilitarian pot in which kórkó, a custard-like beverage for breakfast is conveyed to early risers, especially men and women labourers. The pot is usually carried on the head early in the mornings by female traders who take selling kórkó as their daily occupation.

It is a wheel-thrown form at both ends, by inverting the pot on a chuck when stiff enough for that purpose, and then rethrown to minimize the weight of the finished pot because of its purpose. After throwing to desired size and thickness, slab of the same thickness was cut to the circumference of the opening and attached with a thick slip, to form the base of the pot. Three other bowls were also wheel-thrown with Yellow clay body, after which a long handle was pulled and attached to one of the bowls for serving the beverage from the big container.

The lid was also thrown on the wheel and trimmed to fit the other opening of the big container, after which they were all left to become bone dry under a plastic bag in order for the attached base and handle

Figure VII - Mobile Canteen



to adhere firmly. The pot and lid with the spoon were then once fired to cone 5 reduction and were waxed for smooth, burnished-like appearance, while the bowls were also once fired to cone 5 oxidation to effect a bright colour hue.

This is another important utensil representing an occupation practiced by women. It is an occupation through which women measure out respect to people. For example, if a trader of this beverage is stopped by say two men, the trader automatically serves in a bigger bowl to the older of the two men from her own judgement of who she thinks is older. Judgement to which oftentimes, sarcastic or jovial and amusing comments are passed by the man who was wrongly judged, either due to his physical appearance or behavior.

Fig. VIII - Water Vessel

Some rural areas which lack tap water usually have women who carry vessels of different sizes early in the mornings, to fetch water from wells or ponds for daily home uses.

This water vessel is a wheel-thrown form, with deliberate horizontal finger decorative grooves intended for good grip, which were later divided into sections by carving long and wide vertical grooves, for passage

Figure VIII - Water Vessel



of excess or drops of water on their way home. After it was bone dry in room temperature, it was fired once to cone 5 reduction and waxed to pronounce its smooth rhythmical surface.

This pot illustrates a daily habitual practice typical of traditional life in villages where modern civilization and technology could not abolish indigenous traditional practices. One wakes up early in the mornings and sees women and their daughters, with various vessels of different sizes going or returning from a nearby pond, where they went to fetch water for the day's use. Some even make it as a part-time occupation by selling water to elderly and disabled people in the villages.

Fig. IX - Drinking Vase

No matter how easy or how comfortable the condition in which we work, man needs water to quench his thirst. This everyday utensil is usually carried by labourers like farmers, hunters and especially cattle rearers. They drink directly from such vases to quench their thirst after a long trek or hard day's work under the burning heat of the sun.

The vase was wheel-thrown and trimmed when it was leather hard, after which it was left to bone dry and once fired to cone 5 reduction and waxed for smooth appearance.

Figure IX - Drinking Vase



It portrays a significant utensil on which the performance of some people in strenuous occupations that require vigour depend. Some even pour Palm wine in this type of pot as in the case of farmers, and especially Palm wine tappers.

Fig. X - Stew Pot on Traditional Stove

Most of our vegetables and other foods need to be cooked before we eat them. Figure X shows a cooking pot in which different stews are cooked, it is placed on a native type of stove in which dried woods are burnt to generate heat that cooks the food in the pot.

Since the stew pot is usually black in colour, black clay was deliberately used to throw this lidded pot on the wheel, and after trimming to give it a smooth base for easy flow of flames, it was left to dry in room temperature and once fired to cone 5 reduction, which enhanced the quality of the deep black colour. Wax, unlike extract from locust bean pods was then applied thinly when it was still hot for a smooth, burnish-like effect characteristic of cooking pots.

The stove was also thrown on the wheel with light yellow clay, cut to leave ridges on which cooking pots are placed and for space through which firewoods burn. It dried in room temperature and was low fired to cone 08

Figure X - Stew Pot on Traditional Stove



for a bright yellow colour, typical of a traditional stove usually made by welding scraps of old metal sheets together to construct the stove.

It is a ceramic art project especially with emphasis on colour effect to illustrate a common pattern of life as regards a traditional folkway of cooking, that is still practiced even in the large cities which are often subjected to the influence of modern civilization and technological innovations.

Fig. XI - Storage Container

Farmers of produce like rice, corn, and beans oftentimes bring home some of their harvests after the day's work and store them in large clay containers. This pot is a typical container used in homes for storing farm produce until they are ready to be cooked.

It is a two-piece pot, both thrown on the wheel and attached together after which a white slip was applied on both the inside and outside of the pot's lip, the only section that comes up above the ground level in which it is usually buried. The pot was then bone dried in room temperature and was fired once to cone 5 reduction.

This type of container is the most popular for storage, used especially in rural areas. In some cases,

Figure XI - Storage Container



this type of pot is also used as a cool water reservoir in which case the pot is buried in the ground to preserve cool temperatures during the day when the heat from the sun is sometimes above 98°F. It is usually covered with a lid in or on which a small serving bowl is placed for fetching small amounts of water at a time from the water container.

Fig. XII & Fig. XIII - Shopping Pots

When you see young men, gorgeously dressed in native costumes going to the market places, especially on Saturdays, it is because of ladies who carry introductory pots, signifying their willingness and readiness to be courteously approached by eligible bachelors. There are two types of shopping pots, one is usually plain and shallow but wide as in Figure XII, signifying that the carrier is unmarried; the other is usually decorated and deeper as in Figure XIII, also signifying that the carrier is married or engaged.

The pots were thrown on the wheel, trimmed when leather-hard and left to bone dry in room temperature. Figure XIII shows a shopping pot with horizontal finger grooves which were later sectionalized by carving across them vertically when the pot was still in the green state.

Figure XII - Shopping Pot 1



Figure XIII - Shopping Pot 2



After drying, they were both fired to cone 5 reduction and waxed for burnish-like effects.

The pots illustrate a significant folkway among young men and women who are in the process of proving their maturity. Unlike the cases where courtship depends on family introduction or association through occurrences like, "I used to know him from my home town," or "I met her in one of my classes," young women carry plain shopping pots to display their willingness for courtship. Married women carry decorated shopping pots as proof that they are under the protective hands of capable husbands.

Fig. XIV - Mother's Gift

Another societal value of utmost importance is a mother's traditional gift to her daughter on the wedding night. This gift accentuates a visual perception of wedding elegance and pronounces the uniqueness of the occasion, thereby induces verbal appreciation from well-wishers about the beauty of the wedding moment, and thus depicts the joy of a proud and happy mother.

The pot is a wheel-thrown form with equal quantity of all the coloured clays, thoroughly wedged and kneaded together. Thin decorative grooves were then horizontally carved on the pot and left in room temperature to bone dry, after which it was fired once to cone 5 reduction for the rich burnt umber colour effect.

Figure XIV - Mother's Gift



Silk thread, being an expensive and scarce material unlike raffia, was deliberately improvised for surface decoration, by tying, tacking with needle, and gluing the thread ends with Elmer's Glue-All adhesive, to keep the silk design in place.

The pot signifies the high esteem with which a mother portrays her consent and the depth of her heart, with which she blesses her daughter on the wedding day.

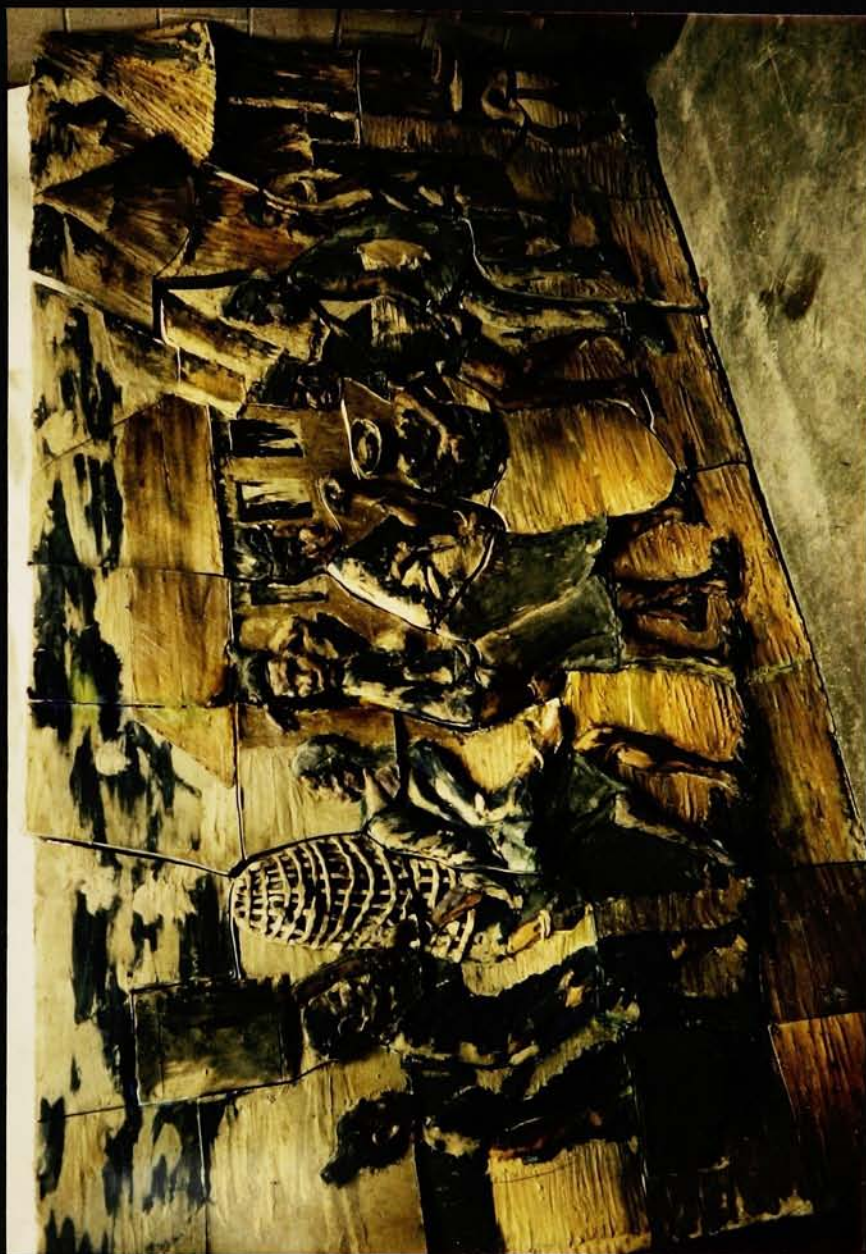
Fig. XV - Bridal Journey - Low Relief Wall Mural

This composition reflects an important scene of a traditional marriage ceremony, before the advent of the white wedding through Christianity. The ceremony is part of a traditional folkway which foreign influences could not erradicate because it is an indigenous social phenomenon in which all people involved are motivated.

The mural started from my sketch book, from where it was transferred to a one inch thick white clay wall measuring 9 by 5 feet. The clay wall was spread on a hard board which was pre-covered with cellophane, to prevent too rapid drying of the clay wall, especially during modelling.

After a sketchy composition of the bridal journey scene was drawn on the clay wall, coloured clays were modelled in a painterly way to accentuate three-

Figure XV - Bridal Journey - Low Relief Wall Mural



dimensional effect of figures, perspective depth of space and colour value of light and dark tones.

At this stage, the mural was left under cellophane cover to stiffen up a bit for easy cutting into smaller sections that would fit into the kiln. While stiffening up, cutting sketches were drawn to decide suitable areas that would enhance the composition as much as possible.

Smaller sections were cut and stored side by side on shelves in room temperature until bone dried and were once fired to cone 5 reduction, for deep, rich colour effects, and left in the kiln to cool slowly, thereby avoiding the unnecessary cracks that result from cooling too rapidly.

They were then mounted in bigger sections on a concrete mixture of playground sand and Portland Cement, into which wire gauze was put in each section for internal support.

The process was an application of technical knowledge particularly with reference to clay, to ceramic sculpture in order to express an important folkway of a traditional Marriage Institution still practiced in my Culture until this present time.

In cases where a marriage ceremony occurs once in a family (probably due to a fact that the bridegroom or bride concerned is the only child in the family),

it is usually elaborated to last over a month in its preparations. This involves formal introductions of both families, after an official request of the maiden's hand in matrimony by the husband-to-be. Then ceremonial offerings of Monetary dowry, or farm produce like Kola nuts, honey, pepper, sugar, and salt take place in the bride's home.

The wedding day brings together relations, friends and well-wishers, either invited or uninvited, but because it is usually an occasion in which people believe that there is plenty to eat and drink, all roads lead to the wedding scene.

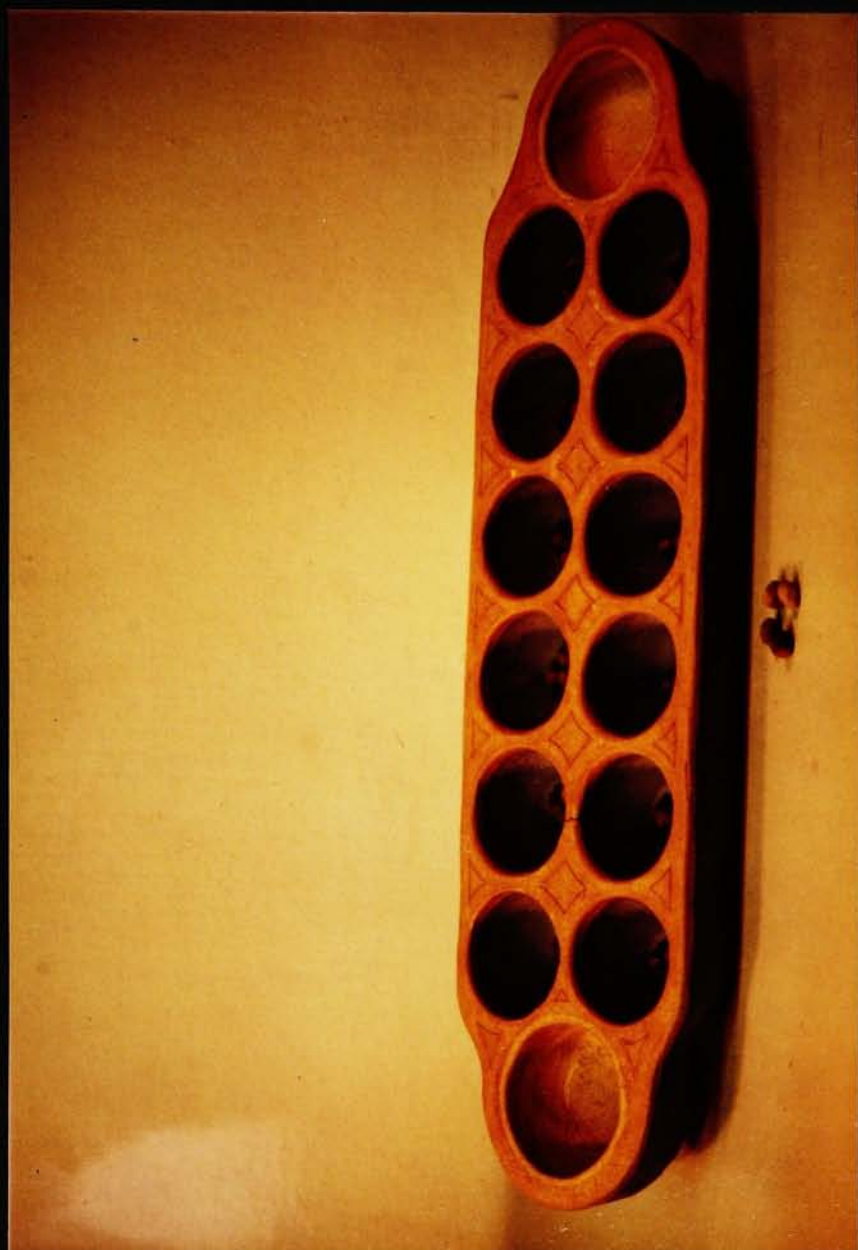
The mural is a decorative piece that could adorn a marriage registry, town or city halls and some public buildings or places.

Fig. XVI - "Opón Ayò" - Game Board

A traditional game board usually carved out of oak, ebony or mahogany timbers, and played by two people at a time, with *Caesalpinia Crista* seeds or pebbles, is a game of skill similar to the chess game peculiar to the western culture.

This project involved the throwing of twelve identical small bowls with blue clay body and two bigger bowls with yellow clay body, which were arranged into two rows

Figure XVI - "Opón Ayð" - Game Board



of six bowls each and one of the bigger bowls at each end of the median of the two rows. They were arranged on a slab of red clay body of about half an inch thickness, in which circular holes of the same circumferences of the bowls have been cut.

The slab and the bowls were then inverted for another slab of yellow clay body, to serve as the base of the game board. It was then left for a little while to stiffen up a bit, for easy handling, and was then scraped to reveal distinct colour effects, after which it was covered with a plastic bag for a slow drying process.

The board was low-fired to cone 08 after it was bone dry and was slightly waxed for a smooth finish.

The game is known world-wide with so many names like Naranj in Ceylon; Indians call it Chongkak, Philip-pines call it Chunglagon and down to the West Coast of Africa, names like Madji, Mungala, Poo, Mbau, Warri, Adjito, Songo, are attributed to Okwe, Iyagbe, Darra and Ayo as the game is called respectively in the East, Mid-west, North and West of Nigeria.

I decided to feature this well known game board mainly because it is a game through which verbal understanding of folkways, norms and values could be mostly appreciated in my society and probably to show that my thesis intent is not ethnocentrically biased.

The game is played by all groups of people -- the young versus the old, contemporaries challenge each other, wives derive pleasure spending time with their husbands over numerous Ayo games, and fathers find it an appropriate avenue to educate their children about life.

In general it is a game through which mutual understanding between neighbours develops.

OBSERVATIONS

Technical observations from my thesis projects include the conditions of clay bodies which need to be of the same workability for firm adhesiveness, while working with them to avoid unnecessary crackings during drying and firing processes.

Temperature effect on coloured clay bodies reveals that the higher the temperature, the deeper the colour hues, unlike in some ceramic cases in which colours burn out when fired too high. Application of adequate quantity of colouring oxides into clay bodies allows ample firing ranges from about cone 08 to cone 10, in both oxidation and reduction atmospheric conditions, for good colour tones.

I had to repeat the low relief wall mural twice, because of some regrettable, unprofessional approaches I used in trying to save time. The first attempt collapsed because clay slabs at the bottom of the clay wall were not stiff enough to hold succeeding slab mounts. Some pieces of the second attempt exploded in the kiln because they were not completely bone dried and due to too rapid temperature increase when firing. Nevertheless, the third one proved that experience is the best teacher,

because it used my own creative prowess and technical capability under the guidance of my thesis advisors.

Aside from the two occasions when I had to repeat the low relief wall mural, I am very proud of myself for being able to accomplish my objectives as proposed and in record time.

CONCLUSIONS

The principle behind my life's learning experience holds that intellectual growth depends on people categorized into three groups.

The first group includes the younger generation which constantly makes me think of what would inform and constantly remind them about their past. The second group includes my egocentric contemporaries, egocentric in that, "It is unfortunate that as a consequence of its divorce from life, the 'applied' no less than the 'fine' art of our time, more than in any other age, suffers from excessive self-consciousness, or what is often called pose, a very different thing from the unconscious, inherent, personal and race character which has distinguished all the great periods of creative art."⁵ The third and last group includes the meticulous, well-groomed and intellectually experienced elders, from whom knowledge often pours down like the gentle rain from heaven on open minds.

This learning principle, coupled with an instinct to manifest culture through my major discipline of ceramic

⁵Bernard Leach. "Towards a Standard." Studio Potter, Volume 8 #1, 1979. page 1.

art underlines the selected experimental projects in this thesis.

Clay has been used for centuries as a vehicle for human expression. Through reasoning, guided by techniques learned from experience and careful execution of planned projects, it is possible to narrate some important aspects of a people's culture. Aspects that deal with religious beliefs, rites and practices; indigenous occupations on which both the cultural life expectancies of those who engage in them and their offsprings depend; standard patterns of traditional customs like respect and admiration for elders; phenomenon by which society displays its moral standards and values. In fact, expressive realism is a style through which the folkways of our ancestors (on which our cultural attainments depend), are constantly made available for reference in the form of antiquities.

For example, between January 15th and February 12th, 1977, Nigeria played host to the 2nd World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture, during which (in spite of the influential impact of this space age on society's artistic involvement and judgements), the obvious appreciation of the traditional moral values and creative wisdom as existed in the past centuries was inevitable during the festival.

The festival witnessed indigenous traditional dances, native costumes, literature and drama of customary institutions of different black cultures such as, child naming ceremony, which involves profound deliberation and examination of the family's roots to life and circumstances surrounding a child's birth before selecting suitable names for the child, traditional folkways of native wedding ceremonies before the advent of Christianity and Islam, and some burial obsequies which involve sacred rituals. Inclusive at the festival were numerous collections of antiquities and recent creative arts like drawings, paintings, carvings, and especially pots of different periods, functions and purposes, which were on display at the National Theatre in Lagos and in various locations throughout the country during the festival.

The fact that art brings inspiration and pleasure to the mind depressed by either the chaotic state of affairs in this world, or the individual internal conflict that sometimes prevents the determination of what would make man realize self-satisfaction, make art an effective avenue for the betterment of mankind.

Art has been, still is, and will continue to be for the progress of humanity, no matter how trashy it becomes, as Erich Frank pointed out, "...both Aristotle and Plato believed that every Art and Science had many times

developed to its apogee and then perished."⁶ History shall always repeat itself in that art would always account for historical backgrounds on which human values are judged, provide insight and perhaps better world views for today's man and inevitably continue to prophesy a preconception of an optimistic world view, on which the existence of the generation in embryo is attainable.

"Since the study of art is a study of tradition linked to the past, the more we know about the past the more likely we can add insight to the present or the future."⁷ Hence, my strong belief that art in general is a medium through which the human spirit and values are being revived and thus makes our era an exciting one, full of growth and diversity.

⁶Erich Frank, Saint Augustine and Greek Thoughts, The Augustinian Society, pages 9-10

⁷Dr. Robert H. Johnston, Pottery Practices During the 6th-8th Centuries, B.C., at Gordon in Central Anatolia, an Analytical and Synthesizing Study. Doctorate dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 1970, page 2.

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SAC CERAMICS
College of Fine & Applied Arts
Rochester Institute of Technology
One Lomb Memorial Drive
Rochester, NY 14623

March 19, 1980

Dr. B. Hodik
College of Fine & Applied Arts
One Lomb Memorial Drive
Rochester, NY 14623

Dear Dr. Hodik:

THESIS COMMITTEE

"Ceramic Art a Vehicle for Cultural Awareness" is the topic of my Graduate Thesis. Projects will commence next fall quarter, if the proposal that I am expected to submit before March 28th 1980 is accepted by the Academic Council.

Having gone through your tutelage during my undergraduate pupilage at RIT, I am convinced of further benefits if you would kindly accept my humble invitation, imploring your kindness to be a member of my Thesis Committee as an Associate Advisor, at times convenient to your schedule.

Your kind gesture signifying your acceptance would be appreciated as soon as possible, since my proposal has to show the Thesis Committee of my choice.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Olugbile

Michael Olugbile

*I will be on your committee
and will be pleased to help
you in any ways that I can.*

Dr. Barbara Hodik

3-21-80

SAC CERAMICS
College of Fine & Applied Arts
Rochester Institute of Technology
One Lomb Memorial Drive
Rochester, NY 14623

March 24, 1980

Professor R. Schmitz
SAC Ceramics
College of Fine & Applied Arts
Rochester Institute of Technology
One Lomb Memorial Drive
Rochester, NY 14623

Dear Sir:

THESIS ADVISOR

This is to inform you that you have been profoundly selected as the Chief Advisor to "Ceramic Art a Vehicle for Cultural Awareness" my Graduate Thesis, which projects will start in fall quarter of 1980/1981 academic session.

I am very convinced of benefits from your guidance as the thesis evolves, if you will kindly approve this selection

Yours Obediently,

Michael Olugbile

Michael Olusola Olugbile

Robert W. Schmidt

Thesis Proposal for the Master of Fine Arts Degree

College of Fine and Applied Arts
Rochester Institute of Technology

Title: Ceramic Art a Vehicle for Cultural Awareness

Submitted by: Michael Olusola Olugbile Date: March 24th 1980

Thesis Committee:

Chief Advisor: Professor Robert Schmitz

Associate Advisors: 1. Mr. ~~James Hennessey~~ BOB HEISHMAN
2. Dr. Barbara Hodik

Departmental Approval: Robert W. Schmidt Date: 3.28.80

Approval, Graduate Representative of Academic Council:

Fred Meyer

Date: 4/4/80

Final Committee Decision:

Date:

THESIS PROPOSAL

The purpose of the thesis is to use Ceramic Art as a narrative medium for cultural awareness, because of its spirit of earth, which is the endless vehicle for all cultural traditions.

Without ethnocentrism but utmost respect and admiration for the cultural environment of my student tenure, it is an opportunity that I originated from a different cultural setting. Hence, I intend a deliberate reference to my cultural background to be appropriate for a genuine presentation of my proposal.

Upon acceptance of this proposal, I hope to materialize my objective aim in two steps. The first step will entail two wall murals, one in low relief and the other in mosaic form, measuring about 8' by 4' each and will be executed in the fall quarter of 1980/81 academic year. The second step which will commence in the winter quarter will witness the execution of about ten - fifteen thrown forms, accentuating traditional elegance and cultural decorative design motives.

The literary aspect of the thesis will be completed by the time of its presentation.

SAC Ceramics
College of Fine & Applied Arts
Rochester Institute of
Technology
One Lomb Memorial Drive
Rochester, N.Y. 14623
May 9th, 1980

The Chief Advisor
"Ceramic Art A Vehicle for Cultural Awareness"
Graduate Thesis, SAC Ceramics
College of Fine & Applied Arts
Rochester Institute of Technology
One Lomb Memorial Drive
Rochester, N.Y. 14623

Dear Sir,

REQUEST FOR AN INTRODUCTORY LETTER

I intend an educational trip to Nigeria at the beginning of this summer, for adequate information on traditional customs peculiar to my cultural heritage, which I will like to feature in my graduate thesis starting in fall 1980/81.

I hereby humbly implore the College for an introductory letter, titled "To whom it may concern," stating my pupilage at R.I.T. and purpose of my mission, in regards to research for documentation on cultural traditions that may be available in Museums, Art Galleries, Cultural Centres and during cultural festivals.

Considering the strict measures by my home Government in efforts to prohibit exploitation of our Cultures, may I request that the letter be signed, also by the Graduate Representative of Academic Council, and both the Associate Dean and the Dean of the College for proof of genuineness, when presented to authorities concerned for access and permission to take photographs and notes of preferable reference objects.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Olugbile

Michael Olugbile



May 27, 1980

To Whom It May Concern:

It is with pleasure that I introduce Michael Olusola Olugbile to you. Michael is a graduate student at the School for American Craftsmen at the Rochester Institute of Technology.

As a requirement for the M.F.A. degree, it is necessary that Michael complete a thesis. He has chosen to do his masters' thesis work as a narrative medium on Nigerian cultural awareness. Because of the specific cultural background involved, it is necessary that Michael be allowed access to all pertinent museums, art galleries, cultural centers, festivals and the like. Only through complete and comprehensive research will Michael be assured the best possible success for his masters' thesis.

I therefore kindly urge and request that you assist and accommodate Michael on his momentous task.

Your assistance and cooperation is appreciated and shall be duly noted in any and all references of Michaels' work.

Sincerely,

Robert W. Schmidt

Robert Schmitz
Chief Thesis Advisor

Robert H. Johnston

Dr. Robert Johnston, Dean
College of Fine & Applied Arts

Peter Giopulos

Peter Giopulos, Associate Dean
College of Fine and Applied Arts

RS/jse

SAC Ceramics
College of Fine & Applied Arts
Rochester Institute of
Technology
One Lomb Memorial Drive
Rochester, N.Y. 14623
June 5th, 1980

Director,
National Museum
Lagos

Sir,

PERMISSION APPLICATION TO DOCUMENT MUSEUM PIECES

"Ceramic Art a vehicle for Cultural Awareness" is the topic of my Graduate thesis, proposal which has been approved by both the Thesis Committee and Faculty, College of Fine and Applied Arts, Rochester Institute of Technology, where my student tenure is in session.

I thought it fit to refer to pottery that reflects some Cultural traditions of my country, Nigeria, since I want to deal with precise information, for a genuine presentation of my thesis.

Attached, please find an introductory letter from my College, stating my pupilage and purpose of mission.

Your kind gestures to effect access and permission to document referable pieces will be adequately acknowledged.

Yours truly,

Michael Olugbile

Michael O. Olugbile



FEDERAL DEPARTMENT OF ANTIQUITIES

Telephone :

DIRECTOR : 633890

MUSEUM : 636075

630618

Telegrams : DIRMUSEUMS LAGOS

Ref. No.

DIRECTOR'S OFFICE,
NIGERIAN MUSEUM,
LAGOS, NIGERIA

6th June, 1980

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

The bearer Mr. Michael Olushola Olugbile is a research fellow from Rochester Institute of Technology.

The theme of his research thesis is ceramic Art as a narrative medium for cultural awareness.

He has requested to use some materials in your Museum for his thesis. Kindly render him necessary assistance.

Thanks.

Name Illegible

(I. P. ASHAYE),
Curator i/c Documentation