

Ola Oloidi in the Development of Modern Art History in Nigeria, 1980 – 2020

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Abstract: Employing historiography, this article traces the roles of the art historian, Ola Oloidi, in the origin and development of modern Nigerian art history. The study of art history in Nigeria before Oloidi's intervention was akin to anthropology. In the mid-1980s, he presumably changed this trend. He originated what is today known as the history of modern Nigerian art and initiated strategies to reposition art historical studies in their correct perspective. He defended the cause of modern Nigerian art and art history through incisive and insightful texts buttressed with objective, constructive, and critical arguments. Thus, he left indelible footprints in the field of art historical studies in Nigeria. Ola Oloidi's innovative and ground-breaking ideas about art and its reportage in Nigeria provide an inestimable fount of knowledge that other Nigerian art historians have drawn from to further advance historical discourses that deepen understanding of modern Nigerian art. He bequeathed the Art Historical Association of Nigeria (AHAN) to art historians to fight against anthropological dominance and the *scientification* of the art historical space.

Keywords: Ola Oloidi, modern Nigerian art, modern Nigerian art history, development, Ola Oloidi foundation and gallery, Nsukka

I. Introduction

Art historians study works of art of all ages across cultures, to understand the intentions of the artist, as well as the art traditions of the cultures that produced them (D'Alleva, 2010). They present art as it changes in time and space and as well strive to explain those changes as products of thought patterns of the artists and their cultures with respect to the meaning of life and of art (Asogwa, 2021a). Art historians write about great artists to promote and immortalise them for posterity but rarely write about themselves; attitude akin to the Igbo adage that derides a cloth merchant that dresses in shabby clothing. Art historical studies have the odd tradition of art historians normally not writing about themselves but about great artists and their works. Ostensibly, they study mainly the works of art than they do the individuals who created the works. However, because hardly could art works be discussed in isolation of their creators, art historical studies make the lives and works of great artists as a part of their primary objects of study. Johnson observes that "even among pure art historians, there is a tendency to neglect the centrality of the artist in art history, since they are more interested in tracing influences than in identifying individual creativity" (Johnson, 2003, p. 749). Many art books nonetheless profile outstanding artists from diverse aesthetic backgrounds to provide information about their personal sources and the processes of how they make their art (Smagula, 1983). Many also devote their studies to a single or a selection of artists that they find their works fascinating (Guillou, 1994).

From the ancient days of the Gaius Plinius Secundus, simply known as Pliny the Elder (circa 23 – 79 BC), through the Middle Ages to the Renaissance (the generation of Giorgio Vasari [AD 1511 – 1574]) to the modern times of Johann Joachim Winckelmann (AD 1717 – 1768), writings on art have always focused on contemporary art practices, and careers of famous artists, mainly the analyses of their works (D'Alleva, 2010). Pliny the Elder and Giorgio Vasari were the first to write on art. Quite long after their generations, Winckelmann, who today in the art world is regarded as the founder of modern art history, appeared on the scene.

Art historians employ a wide range of literary sources, strategies and insights to engage in the artful writing of the complex biographical facts that deal with the intimate, inconsistent textures of artist's personality and experience. In the bid to capture these variables about the lives of their subjects, they explore how artists navigated through all the stages of their lives: birth, education, ambition, conflict, milieu, work, relationship, and sometimes, death. In light of this, Edel (1953, p. v) remarks, "[t]o live over people's lives is nothing unless we live over their perceptions, live over the growth, the change, the varying intensity of the same – since it was *by* these things they themselves lived". Johnson (2003) seems to share similar opinion when he avers that when one knows about the life of an artist, one sees his work in a different light, which implies that works of art speak volumes about the artist's life and perceptions about life.

Pliny the Elder was a Roman polymath whose versatility transgressed boundaries of disciplines: natural sciences, human sciences and arts. His seminal thirty-seven-volume book *Historia Naturalis* (Natural History) is a classic demonstration of this

versatility. The book focuses principally on science-based disciplines but made a little digression to touch on the history of art. Compendious as the book is, it gives no iota of information on the life of any art historian. Similarly, Giorgio Vasari, an Italian painter, architect and a writer, wrote a handsome volume on the lives of some selected Italian Renaissance artists, painters, sculptors and architects with a critical evaluation of their works. In this huge volume, it seems no art historian also caught his fancy. This seeming neglect of spotlighting art historians in art history texts is also noticeable in the numerous art history books that exist. Vasari's monumental treatise on the *Lives of the Artists*, regarded as the first book on the history of art, did not discuss a single art historian in the ten-volume book. If they were that insignificant, there would not have been the magnitude of literature on art history available as they are today. This tendency seems so obvious that even people outside the visual art circle notice the ugly trend. Henry James, an autobiographer as cited in Edel (1962, p. v) for instance, insinuates, "[t]he artist is present in every page of every (art history) book from which he (the art historian) sought so assiduously to eliminate himself."

Sidelining art historians in art historical discourses and documentation seems to be a universal phenomenon. In Nigeria, Ola Oloidi (1947 – 2020) was one of the most prominent art historians of his generation; yet, there is no pivotal work on his life and phenomenal contributions to the emergence and development of modern Nigerian art history. There has not been any serious scholarly research on the art history and art criticism icon. The only significant work on him is the anthology prepared in the form of a burial brochure in his honour, sketchy studies on his contributions that look more like biographies, and professional articles in the newspapers (Jegade, 2020; Adeyemi, Osuntayo, & Adegbesan, 2021; Ikpakronyi & Onuzulike, 2021; Okpara, 2021; Onuzulike, 2023). Much of the contributions to the anthology were more of panegyrics except for a few scholarly attempts that paid perfunctory attention to the achievements of the art history luminary in the field of modern Nigerian art history and art criticism. This present study employed historiography to spotlight his contributions to the development of these two fields and, finally, provided collectanea of his writings, the major materials in his arsenal.

II. Oloidi's Biographic Vignette

Marcus Oriolakitan Abiodun Oloidi, known simply as Ola Oloidi in the art circle, was born to the family of Alexander Dada Oloidi and Victoria Aina Oloidi on April 25, 1947 in Igede Ekiti, a rural Yoruba town in the southwest Nigeria. His father was a veteran teacher who rose through the ranks to the position of a headmaster before he retired from active service. His mother was a renowned seamstress of her time. Oloidi started his academic journey from St. Benedict's Primary School, in his home town Igede Ekiti in Ekiti State. While in primary school, his encounter with his father's exquisite cursive handwriting and instructional illustrations contained in his *Note of Lesson* tickled his artistic fancy and sparked off in him a keen interest in the visual arts, which he later pursued, developed, and advanced to an enviable level. Before his demise on November 2, 2020, he had left a very rich legacy of art history tradition and the culture of art criticism.

Ola Oloidi completed his elementary education in 1958, after which he proceeded to the Annunciation Secondary School in neighbouring Ikere Ekiti for his secondary education in 1959. He encountered a good tradition of art teaching at school, which helped to sustain his interest in the visual arts. Benedict I. Chukwumah Ijomah (1938-2020), from Aboh in Ndokwa East of Delta State, was the school art teacher at the time. Oloidi described him as "a very dynamic, resolute, and lovely art teacher" (Oloidi, 2011, p. 3). Unfortunately, not long after Oloidi was admitted, Ijomah left for further studies at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, when it was inaugurated in 1960. His exit from the school may have caused the school administration to develop what Oloidi described as a "bellicose attitude towards the art subject" (Oloidi, 2011, p. 3).

At the end of his secondary education, he had a stint as a Third Class Clerk in the Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Research, Lagos. His devotion to art almost cost him his job in the ministry. On one such occasion, when he was drawing a portrait of a colleague in the office instead of idling away his break time, his artistically uninformed boss got infuriated, berated him, and accused him of always "engaging in a useless exercise (of drawing) on duty" (Oloidi, 2011, p. 4). The intervention of the General Director, to whom the matter was reported for disciplinary action against Oloidi, facilitated his admission into the Yaba College of Technology, Lagos. Consequently, in 1967, he gained admission to study fine arts at the Yaba College of Technology, Lagos, and resigned his appointment with the Ministry. Yusuf Cameron Adebayo Grillo (1934-2021), the "Master of Masters" (Dike & Oyelola, 2006) was one of his college teachers. He started early to show signs of academic excellence. At the end of his first year in college, he was the best overall student of his class, which earned him the Lintas (UAC) Scholarship Award for the Best and Outstanding Art Student of the Year in 1968. He also graduated in 1968 as the Department of Fine Arts' overall best graduating student with an Ordinary National Diploma in Fine Arts, specialising in Painting.

Upon graduation, he had a brief but eventful stint as an art teacher at Bariga Girls' Secondary Grammar School, Lagos. Thereafter, he proceeded to the United States of America in 1971 for further studies. He first studied art at Howard University, Washington, D.C., where he obtained a Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) degree in fine arts and art history in 1973. At the university, he continued with painting as his major but embraced art history as his minor. Jeff Donaldson was one of those who taught him at the university. Donaldson was the first to get a Ph.D. in African-American art history. Oloidi's studentship under Donaldson put

him on a stable course in African-American art history, where he later acquired a good grounding that sustained him on the track of academia for life. Later, in 1974, he enrolled as a graduate student at the same university and graduated with a Master of Arts (MA). The title of his Masters dissertation, *Aesthetics and Symbolism of Yoruba Sango Staff*, was more of an ethnographic study than it was art historical, an error he only realised as he continued to advance in the study of art history. It was supervised by Kojo Fosu Baden, who specialised in traditional African art (Onuzulike, 2011).

In 1975, he enrolled in a Ph.D. degree programme at the Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, United States. His thesis was to be supervised by Frank Willet (1925–2006), a renowned archaeologist and a Professor of Art History, African, and Interdisciplinary Studies who was a one-time archaeologist to the Nigerian government during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Unfortunately, the programme was cut short by financial constraints (Oloidi, 2017). After his return to Nigeria, Ola Oloidi joined the Academic Board of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, on a Lecturer II cadre in 1976. On assumption of duty, he taught courses in painting as well as "nearly all the art history courses" (Oloidi, 2017, p. 19) until 1980, when, of his own volition and due to the passion he had developed for art history, he officially relinquished the teaching of painting and took up entirely the teaching of art history until his retirement from active service in 2012 (Asogwa, 2022).

III. Oloidi, The Academic and Art Historian

Ola Oloidi has been described as "a well-known learned scholar, a versatile academic, a fertile intellectual, an expressively instrumentalist art critic, and a fundamental art historian known within and outside Nigeria" (Diogu, 2011, p. 2). He was "an astute scholar, an indefatigable researcher, and a charismatic teacher" (Jegade, 2021, p. 5), and "the leading art historian and critic that has passionately, consistently, and continuously tried to articulate the evolving histories of modern Nigerian art" (Duniya, 2021, p. 42). He equally "worked tirelessly to promote the course of good teaching and fine art criticism in Nigeria" (Okpara, 2021, p. 24). Notwithstanding these revelatory remarks that eloquently describe Ola Oloidi, Saliu (2021) is of the opinion that no one could ever, no matter how adept one is at mobilising media of expression, adequately describe Oloidi's intellectual endowment and pragmatism. He believes that Oloidi's contributions to the development of art history in Nigeria were so monumental that no one could ever describe, evaluate, or express their extent. He was, in fact, "a rich encyclopaedia of modern Nigerian art history (Onifade, 2021, p. 57).

When in the mid-1970s Ola Oloidi applied for a lecturing job at the Department of Fine and Applied Arts of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, to contribute his quota to the development of the department, little did anyone (not even himself) ever fathom that his contributions would assume such national and international dimensions as they did (Oloidi, 1976). He was a humanist art teacher who put in his very best effort and invested so much time, energy, and resources to teach and mentor his students so as to develop their potentials (Asogwa, 2021b). Oloidi never believed that the purpose of education should be materialistic or epicurean but rather humanistic (Oloidi, 2017). He had no reservations about performing that role because, according to him, "a life lived without any impact on people's lives is a wasteful and fruitless life (Ola Oloidi as quoted in Oloidi, 2021, p. 75). He was so passionate about his teaching and mentoring of his students that he denied himself a lot of personal gains. For instance, for the number of years he served the university (1976–2012), he never wanted to and therefore did not for once enjoy a sabbatical leave, an opportunity that is provided for lecturers not only for economic enhancement but also to take a few months off from the arduous job of lecturing and research. As someone who understood teaching as a vocation, he believed that attending to students' needs is not restricted to the classroom but could be given both within and outside the classroom and is something that requires patience, a listening ear, and above all, time. Little wonder then that Toimololu (2021, p. 91) described him as a quintessential public intellectual, an unofficial ombudsman who extended his jurisdiction from academia to the public space.

As an art historian, Ola Oloidi left indelible imprints on the annals of the history of modern Nigerian art history through his impressive and incisive writings and fearless disposition in defense of the cause of art historical studies in Nigeria. He was so dogged and passionate about implanting its enduring tradition in Nigeria. The high level of commitment and doggedness he exhibited in the pursuit of this cause recalled that of Aina Onabolu (1882–1963), the father of modern art in Nigeria. He is to the development of contemporary art history in Nigeria what Aina Onabolu is to the development of art and art education in Nigeria (Omoighe, 2021, p. 31). The common thread that links them was their ability to unwaveringly pursue what they believed in amidst dispiriting challenges.

Challenges encountered by Oloidi in his quest to articulate a critical space for appraising modern Nigerian art history started in the 1980s, when he initiated the idea of modern Nigerian art history. At that point in time, some of his colleagues at the art department misunderstood him as one who had gone amuck and therefore barraged him with criticism. According to him, some of his colleagues vehemently challenged him when he mooted the idea of carrying out academic research on the history of modern Nigerian art for his Ph.D. thesis (personal communication, August 12, 2012). He narrated how they argued against the idea and maintained that there was nothing like modern Nigerian art history, and equally threatened him that should he choose to follow that course of action, they would engage him in an intellectual battle at the appropriate time. As if their threat were not enough, they

even petitioned the university administration, stating that a staff member was admitted for a nonexistent Ph.D. programme in the department (Onuzulike, 2011). However, the petitioners seemed to have acted in ignorance. The department had already begun a Ph.D. programme in art history in 1972, with Ms. Jill Rosemary Salmons as the pioneer student. Donald D. Hartle, a Professor of Archaeology, was her fieldwork supervisor, while Uche Okeke, a Professor of Fine Arts, was to assist in the supervision. Thus, despite the stiff opposition, Oloidi's conviction that every practice has a history made him more resolute in pursuing his dream.

Ola Oloidi was eventually admitted into the Ph.D. programme in 1980, some years after Ms. Salmons, and graduated in 1984. As unassuming as he was, he stated that he was not the first Ph.D. art history graduate of the Nsukka Art Department but rather the first Ph.D. graduate in modern African art history (Onuzulike, 2011). However, it is important to note that, based on available records, Oloidi and Okon Udo Umoetuk were the first art history graduates of the Nsukka Art Department (Obiechina, Ike, and Umeh, 1986). They were admitted after Ms. Salmons, who started the programme earlier than they did but could not proceed because of cultural inhibitions and prohibitions. She proposed to study Ekpe wooden masks as art forms but was advised to jettison the idea because women were not allowed access to information about the secrets of the Igbo masquerade institution. As a result, Oloidi did not only become the first in Nigeria to obtain a Ph.D. degree in modern African art history but also one of the first two Ph.D. art history graduates of the Nsukka Art Department.

Ola Oloidi's thesis, *Modern Nigerian Art: The Implantation, Growth and Development from 1900 to 1960*, is a landmark text that highlights the possibility of framing the history of modern Nigerian art practice. In this well-researched, voluminous thesis submitted to the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Oloidi dug into and unearthed the facts about modern art practice in Nigeria and articulated the accounts of its historical growth and development. To further sustain interest in this field, he integrated the study of modern Nigerian art into the art history curriculum of the Nsukka Art Department, making it the first art department in Nigeria to include modern Nigerian art history in its curriculum. Through his doggedness, the Nsukka Art Department was also the first art department in a Nigerian university to add art criticism to its curriculum.

IV. Oloidi's Contributions to The Development of Modern Art History and Art Criticism in Nigeria

Ola Oloidi's efforts towards enthrone professionalism and standards in visual art practice and its theorisation combine transformational and combative approaches. These have been beneficial to the art department at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, where he taught, and other art and cultural institutions in Nigeria. He exhibited uncommon passion, commitment, and intellectual vigour in challenging the perceived infractions in the art discipline. For instance, he always stood against any attempt to *scientify* the visual arts. That is, to apply scientific methods of research for solving problems or addressing subjects that are purely historical and artistic, thereby pushing, especially research in the visual arts, to the frontiers of science, which by implication means systematically or methodically initiating the arts and humanities, in parts, into the grasping elitist cult of science (Oloidi, 2013). As a well-known wordsmith, Oloidi uses the term *scientification*, one of his several coinages, to conceptualise this. According to him, *scientification* is the act of making science officially penetrate or colonize other non-science branches of knowledge, subjecting and inuring these branches to their systematic methods of study or fundamental principles and laws; thereby contorting, and fettering, very dangerously, the philosophy, fundamental principles, and objectives of these non-science disciplines. (Oloidi, 2013, pp. 5–6)

Another significant aspect of Ola Oloidi's contribution to the visual arts in Nigeria is giving artist-lecturers a sense of belonging in their careers as lecturers. Until quite recently, before Oloidi intervened, artist-lecturers in the University of Nigeria as well as in other Nigerian tertiary institutions had been neglected and sidelined during promotion exercises. The studio works of the artist-lecturers and people in similar disciplines were hitherto not considered promotable materials (Asogwa, 2022). Oloidi saw this as a deprivation and intervened. At his insistence, the creative works of people in such disciplines as fine arts, music, theatre and film studies, and architecture, among others of that ilk, were integrated into the appraisal requirements for promotion of artist-lecturers. He made a case for catalogues of exhibitions to be adjudged equivalents of books in evaluating artist-lecturers in Nigerian tertiary institutions for promotion. In light of this, in 1979, he initiated and prepared a prototype document for the appraisal and promotion of the artist-lecturers of the University of Nigeria, which, "by the early 1980s, nearly all the Nigerian universities had accepted" as a model (Oloidi, 2013, p.24-25). In the document, a one-person exhibition is considered equal to a single-authored book; a joint exhibition is equivalent to a book by two authors, and so on (University of Nigeria, 2017).

Also in 1979, Oloidi produced the first Nigerian graduate with a Bachelor of Arts degree in art history. He was Crucifix Gregory Emeka Anonyuo. Prior to this period, students in art departments in Nigeria did not know that they could specialise in art history at the undergraduate level. This awareness could be said to be one of the greatest contributions of Ola Oloidi to the development of modern Nigerian art history. Another landmark achievement by Oloidi has to do with his efforts at raising awareness in Nigeria of the need to make an art gallery an essential component of art training institutions. When he assumed duty in 1976, he discovered that the Nsukka Art Department had no art gallery where works of art could be preserved and displayed, as is common practice in the West. He immediately made a case for one to be established; hence, the birth of the Ana Gallery of Modern Art as the first university-owned gallery in black Africa. Uche Okeke, as head of department, gave him every necessary logistical and

moral support to establish the gallery. When it was opened in 1977, it was named Ana, after the Igbo earth goddess. Uche Okeke officially assigned him to midwife and nurture the growth and development of the gallery, an assignment he was saddled with for a period of fifteen years, from 1977 to 1992.

In collaboration with his colleagues, especially Uche Okeke and Chike Aniakor, Oloidi developed an emulative undergraduate art history curriculum for the Department of Fine and Applied Arts of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The comprehensive curriculum has served as a model for many art departments in Nigerian institutions of higher education. It is a rich, well-developed, and well-crafted home-grown curriculum designed to cover areas in African traditional art and African modern art, as well as Western and Oriental art. It has helped to "give continuity and development to the rich traditions of art history" (Oloidi, 2017, p. 20). and has greatly influenced other art institutions. In 1982, he also prepared standard Masters of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) programmes in art history that many other art departments have adopted as a prototype. Ola Oloidi has over the years supervised and subsequently produced forty-seven MA and thirty-seven Ph.D. graduates in art history. These are his presumed "disciples," found in different universities and colleges in Nigeria, where they teach and propagate the cause of art history.

Oloidi became a sought-after external examiner for various Nigerian art departments, universities, and colleges of education due to his extensive understanding of art history and art criticism. Universities and colleges of technology, as well as colleges of education, solicited and received his assistance in mounting art history programmes at different levels. For instance, he assisted the Department of Fine Arts at Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria to mount and nurture their Ph.D. art history programme. To ensure that the programme was nurtured to maturity, he equally supervised their students for two consecutive years, between 1992 and 1994. As a scholar of high repute, universities within and outside Nigeria also sought his assistance to assess their candidates for either professorial positions or readership positions. Consequently, he assessed thirty-one candidates, both in Nigeria and Ghana.

In order to ensure that the art history and art criticism tradition he established is sustained, he founded the Art Historical Association of Nigeria (AHAN) in 2001 with nine well-articulated objectives. AHAN is part of his dream to make modern Nigerian art history sustainable. He founded AHAN to "encourage positive research and scholarship capable of putting modern Nigerian art in time and space, and to create a forum for intellectual interactions among committed art historians in Nigeria through seminars and conferences" (Ikpakronyi, 2021, p. 29). Other goals included creating art historical literature that accurately defines the intrinsic nature of art history and an art historian and inspiring a critical attitude that can further fertilise and professionalise the field of art criticism in Nigeria (Ikpakronyi, 2021). Most importantly, AHAN was founded to be used as an instrument of intellectual warfare against "the prevailing authoritarian, preponderant influences of anthropology in the study and articulation of modern Nigerian art history" and to "separate art history from the rather repetitive documentation of cultural materials or anthropological (ethnographic) motifs" (Ikpakronyi, 2021, p. 30).

Ola Oloidi had the conviction that to properly situate the teaching and study of art history on its rightful pedestal in the face of the pervasive influence of anthropology, there was a need for the concerted efforts of all committed professional and nascent art historians in Nigeria. Through this collective effort, art history and art historians in Nigeria would be able to "produce literature that will realistically be a living history and not an anthropology of modern Nigerian art" (Ikpakronyi, 2021, p. 30). Under the supervision of Oloidi, AHAN successfully organised two conferences that created fora for intellectual interactions among established and upcoming art historians in Nigeria. The conferences encouraged positive research and scholarship in modern Nigerian art and fruitful interactions among artists and art historians. The papers presented in her first conference were articulated and published in a book of art history titled *Modern Nigerian Art in Historical Perspectives*. The papers presented at the second conference were still being collected from the reviewers and collated when he passed on.

Oloidi's intellectual contributions to the teaching and development of modern Nigerian art history and art criticism provide critical spaces for understanding the positions he has taken in defending them and also championing their relevancy as an important aspect of Nigeria's art historical and pedagogical discourse. Dele Jegede, also an acknowledged art historian, testifies that by "the mid-1980s, Oloidi had established himself as an inveterate scholar and quotable authority on modern Nigerian art" (Jegede, 2021, p. 6). He was so passionate about securing the correct image for art and artists through his insightful and penetrating writings. Saliu's (2021) perception of Oloidi's intellectual ability and output is that he utilised any slightest opportunity he had to spread the "gospel" of modern Nigerian art history. His major concerns oftentimes were to see that art history, particularly African art history, was understood and taught as adequately as possible.

V. Collectanea Of Ola Oloidi's Writings

Oloidi was an assiduous scholar. His incisive publications helped to expose the culturally, ideologically, and intellectually sound attributes of *uli*, the creative symbol of the Nsukka art school, to the world (Diogu, 2011, p. 3). In his persistent effort to improve the "state of research, teaching, study, and conception of art historical studies in Nigeria" (Oloidi, 2004, p. 2), he had written countless incisive articles that had been published both locally and internationally. He targeted mainly the Nigerian audience

because of "how modern Nigerian art history has been totally made captive to anthropology" and science through the *scientification* of research and the presentation of art historical research results " (Oloidi, 2004, p. 2). As a result, many of his articles were published in reputable journals in Nigeria to make them easily and readily accessible to his target audience.

Oloidi also interrogated Western hegemonic narratives, which tend to diminish the effectual contributions made by African art and artists to world art history. A good example is the essay "De-Africanization and Europeanization: The Non-acknowledgement of African Influence on Modern Art," a critical treatise on how Europeans overtly subvert and demean the influence of African art on European art culture and on the development of Western modern art culture. His essays that focus on art culture in Nigeria are also insightful and instructive. For instance, his essay, "The Growth and Development of Formal Art Education in Nigeria, 1900–1960," is the first documented history of art education in Nigeria. Due to space constraints, select essays written by Ola Oloidi are presented here with the hope that they will offer insight and a greater understanding of his hopes and aspirations for the growth and development of art history in Nigeria. They include:

1. Constraints on the Growth and Development in Modern Nigerian Art in the Colonial Period. *Nsukka Journal of Humanities*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1981, pp. 66 – 73.
2. Elitism and Modern African Artists. *Nigeria Magazine*, 1981, Nos. 124 – 125, pp. 71 – 74.
3. "African sculpture and Twentieth Century European Art: a Productive Misunderstanding." In I.T.K Egonu (Ed.) *Readings in African Humanities: African Perspectives in World Culture*, 1988, pp. 217 – 250.
4. "Art and Nationalism in Colonial Nigeria." *Nsukka Journal of History*, No. 1, December 1989, pp. 92 – 109.
5. "Three Decades of Modern Nigerian Art (1960 – 1990): General Observation and Critique." In P. Chike Dike (Ed.) *USO: Nigerian Journal of Art*, Vol. 1, No. 1, July – Dec. 1995, pp. 66 – 73.
6. Mediarization, Academization and Professionalism: Art Criticism in Nigeria, 1920 – 1996, *Art Criticism and Africa*, K. Deepwell (Ed.), London: Shaffron Books, 1997, pp. 41 – 54.
7. "Zarianism: The Crusading Spirit of a Revolution in Nigeria." In P. Chike Dike & P. Oyelola (Eds.). *The Zaria Art Society: A New Consciousness*, Abuja: NGA, 1998, pp. 34 – 38.
8. Art Recentism, Art Currentism and the Physiognomy of Modern Nigerian Art from 1970 to 2003. *Dakar-Art, Minorities, Majorities*, Dakar, July 2003, pp. 1 – 7.
9. Towards Proper Art Historical Studies in Nigeria, An Introduction. *Modern Nigerian Art in Historical Perspectives*. Ola Oloidi (Ed.), 2004, pp. 1 – 3.
10. "Yusuf Grillo: Imaging Pride and Respect for Art in Nigeria." In Paul Chike Dike & Patricia Oyelola (Eds.) *Master of Masters: Yusuf Grillo, His Life and Works*. Abuja: NGA, 2006, pp. 90 – 98.
11. "Modern African Art: Yesterday and Today." In ARESUVA: A publication of NGA, 2009. Pp. xi – xv.
12. "Zaria Art School: A Creative Sanctum in Modern Nigerian art." In Jerry Buhari, Simon O. Ikpakronyi Caleb Samuel & Lasisi Lamidi (curators). *Zaria Art School: 50th anniversary exhibition*, 2009, pp. 182 – 194.
13. "Uche Okeke: the Unchallengeable Pioneer and Embodiment of Modern Igbo *Uli* Art Form." *Special tribute to a Master Artist: Uche Okeke (April 30, 1933 – January 5, 2016)*. A publication of National Gallery of Art, 2016, pp. 2 – 6.
14. Paul Chike Dike & Patricia Oyelola (Eds) (2006) *Master of Masters, Yusuf Grillo: His Life and Works*. A publication of the National Gallery of Art, Nigeria Based on the criticality and logicity of Oloidi's writings, Dele Jegede observes, His (Oloidi's) body of work lays out an academic path that foregrounds subsequent studies on Nigerian modern art. In addition to a slew of scholarly publications, Oloidi championed the cause of art criticism by turning attention to what he saw as wimpy and effeminate jeremiads that passed as art criticism in many Nigerian newspapers of the 1980s. (Jegede, 2021, p. 6)

Oloidi did not only champion the development of the history of modern Nigerian art but also introduced the professional angle to its organisation in Nigeria in the early 1980s (Omoighe, 2021). In his tribute to the modern art history icon, Ben Toimolaju (2021) re-echoed Oloidi's ubiquitous stance and significant contributions in the field of art history and art criticism in Nigeria. He called Oloidi's article "Critic as Criticasters" in *The Guardian* newspaper "an earthquake, a seismic awakener from a presumed nadir of intellectual complacency" that "actually stimulated a process of capacity building in writing on the visual arts" in Nigerian art journalism and reportage" (p. 91).

Oloidi's passion for sustained improvement of the quality of art historical teaching, research, and documentation made him a father figure in art historical studies in Nigeria. As a result, he was frequently invited by institutions within and outside Nigeria to art events on modern Nigerian art, either as a keynote speaker, the lead paper presenter, or guest lecturer. Such events provided him with ample opportunity to sell his fructifying ideas and also to make his position(s) known on issues relating to art, its practice, and pedagogy. Beyond the enriching influence of his oral presentations, his literary exertions have also significantly influenced Nigeria's art historical scholarship. His works have "been cited in over 300 books, journals, art brochures, and newspapers all over the world (Diogu, 2011). These publications clearly foreground Oloidi's embodied presence and influence in modern Nigerian art and its historical narrative.

VI. Conclusion

This essay has made an effort to highlight Ola Oloidi's significant contributions to the creation and advancement of the conversation about modern Nigerian art history. As the study demonstrated, his enthusiasm for, interest in, and dedication to the establishment of a strong and well-respected culture of art historical discourse in Nigeria are matched by his meticulousness in recording its multifaceted perspectives and his tenacity in opposing practices that diminish the value of art as well as the approaches used in its study and documentation.

Ola Oloidi was a giant who dominated contemporary Nigerian art history and art criticism. His insistence on pursuing a doctoral research project on the history of modern art in Nigeria, despite the stiff opposition he encountered from his colleague at the Nsukka art department, opened up intellectual and historical spaces for further engagement with the culture of modern art practice in Nigeria. He was the first art teacher in Nigeria to produce a Ph.D. graduate in art history. He also pioneered the development of an art history curriculum in Nigerian art training institutions. In addition, he not only developed an art-based template that addressed the marginalisation of art teachers in tertiary institutions during promotional exercises but also succeeded in making the establishment of an art gallery a critical component of art training institutions in Nigeria. Furthermore, through the Art Historical Association of Nigeria (AHAN), a body of Nigerian art historians that he formed, he created an intellectual platform that has contributed towards the advancement and sustenance of the tradition of art history and art criticism in Nigeria.

Oloidi's intellectual contributions to contemporary art practice in Nigeria are very evident in the numerous publications he has authored as well as in the thought-provoking ideas he has espoused at the many art-related events he was invited to speak at. His literary and oral presentations are lucid, penetrative, critical, and intellectually grounded. He never accepted mediocrity and "hardly accepted any assignment that would tarnish his image" (Odiboh, 2021, p. 2). He had fascinating ideas that were yet to be articulated into books before his death. Although the book projects did not materialise, his intellectuality and sound knowledge of art history and art criticism are written in the memories of numerous students he mentored, scattered in various art institutions within and outside Nigeria. In addition to writing about art, he also collected art. The number of artworks he collected over the years is enough to form a modest art museum or gallery. If well-researched and organised, the collection will undoubtedly contribute to art history scholarship. Generally speaking, this paper offers only a select view of Ola Oloidi's larger-than-life image as a critical actor and factor in the Nigerian art landscape. His diverse interests and personality necessitate a large canvas on which to paint. Thus, the multifaceted nature of his efforts towards promoting Nigerian art historians and artists as a unified, cohesive, and interdependent whole, demand further critical scholarly attention.

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