

Simplism and Pluralism: The Dynamics and Evolution of Art Practice in Nsukka School

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Abstract

This paper problematizes and examines the nature and critical evolution of art practice at the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. This study is premised on the art school's prominence, promoted over the years by its notable greats, and its cultural position in Africa. I have articulated and theorised the dynamics of art practice in 'Nsukka' within two key visual methodologies: 'simplism' and 'pluralism.' These philosophies function within the framework of Uche Okeke's postmodernist manifesto, 'Natural Synthesis.' I position this study socio-historically, drawing from archival materials, including texts and images of art produced by Nsukka artists. This study will help underpin various emergent pedagogical practices that define art in Africa and beyond.

Introduction

The history of art practice at the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, (recently changed to Department of Fine and Industrial Arts), and its ideological connection reflected in its creative bud, the 'Nsukka Art School', cannot be separated from the manifesto that formed it. The fundamental manifesto has been rooted in Uche Okeke's theory of 'natural synthesis,' which found expression through the *Uli* creative paradigm. Natural synthesis, as it were, belongs to the postmodern essence which was a departure from modernism and its various characterizations. Over the years, several artists, students, and scholars have absorbed the theory through Okeke and many of his frontline disciples including Obiora Udechukwu, Tayo Adenaike, Ada Udechukwu, Olu Oguibe, and other notable artists from the Nsukka School.

The *Uli* creative paradigm was derived from the Igbo-based decorative body treatment done with *ufie* (camwood dye), featuring design alphabets or elements developed from plants and animals. "There are a great number of local animal and vegetable motifs which have become part of the *uli* artist's picture language" (Uche Okeke n.d., 8). Understanding how the use of these *Uli* elements has influenced art practice, especially following the natural synthesis manifesto in Nsukka Art School, is crucial. The use of *uli* alphabets predisposed

draughtsmanship in Nsukka to a certain kind of simplified linearity, capturing organic *uli* shapes and forms, as well as the creative ideology and methodology. *Uli* alphabets, such as *mpo-mpo* (dots), *akala uli* (lines), *ije agwo* (wavy lines), *akputa* (spirals), *onwa* (circle), *isi-oji* (kolanut head), *anyanwu* (sun), and *agwolagwo* (concentric circle), appeared in drawings and paintings in distinct shapes and forms, making the works exclusive.

The direction of art practice in the Nsukka School since Okeke has been both decolonial and postmodern. The practice paradigms or philosophies, which I refer to as 'simplism' and 'pluralism' in this study, are postmodern expressions that found openings in exploratory art practice. Postmodernism in art is characterized by self-referentiality, reflexivity, epistemological relativism, and eclecticism.

The idea of 'simplism' as I postulate in this study refers to the philosophy of artmaking characterized by individuation of elements, sparing use of imageries, forms, and shapes, and the uniqueness resulting from this approach. It is the pursuit of overt simplification of subjects and forms in creative practice, connected to the peculiarity and eccentricity of Nsukka works. On the other hand, I theorise 'pluralism' 'Pluralism' is a philosophy of art practice where a specific shape or form of element is aggregated, replicated, and integrated in massive numbers to create a particular piece.

It is the plurality of elements that defines the expansiveness, magnitude and mass of art made in Nsukka which reached a very noticeable height in El Anatsui. In other words, while one thinks of the *ulism* as giving expression to postmodern simplism after Uche Okeke, El Anatsui has stood for the great assemblages leading the approach of 'pluralism,' and the Nsukka School being at the centre of both methodologies is currently encountering a creative catalysis.

This study aims to account for the dynamic evolution of visual methodologies that have continued to place Nsukka Art School at the global cutting edge of art practice. Using archival images drawn from exhibition catalogues as visual data, this study provides an understanding of 'simplism' and 'pluralism' as approaches to art production in Nsukka. Dele Jegede's concern about the possibility of stylistic sameness and unbridled sycophancy around *ulism* necessitates a response, especially to afford a connection between former and nascent styles in Nsukka.

These two approaches of art practice are problematized on the backdrop of the concern about Nsukka School's immersion into *ulism* several years ago (Jegede 2022). Dele Jegede worried about what he referred to as a "possibility of stylistic sameness". Writing on Nsukka School, he maintained that if the right leadership and direction was not provided against what he called "unbridled sycophancy" around *ulism*, then there is a potential danger that would "encourage the perpetuation of a one-style-fits-all approach in which it is either *ulism* or nothing" (Jegede 2022, 188). He argues that the younger generation of Nigerian artist might then think that Nsukka success was consequent upon *ulism* rather than the ability to "extrapolate and innovate". Although seemingly erstwhile, this knowledge gap about art making demands a response, especially in order to afford a connection between the former and nascent styles in Nsukka. This study is my reaction to the development of art practice in the school.

In the Beginning: On Uche Okeke's Creative Lineage

The Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, founded in 1961, began to acquire creative traction and direction with

Uche Okeke's arrival in 1971, after the Nigerian-Biafra war, and blossomed into the Nsukka School. The term "Nsukka School" refers to the exhibition front or group of artists from the Department of Fine and Applied Arts (now Department of Fine and Industrial Arts) who present and share their works with a certain creative unity of purpose, experimentalism being a fundamental influence. *Uli* was at the epicentre. Ene-Orji notes that although the fervor for *uli* flourished for about four decades, reaching its peak in the late 1990s, the *uli* spirit remains alive. Over time, the idea of Nsukka School has become synonymous with the exhibiting artists of the art department. *Uli*, with its creative linear expression, has manifested variously in draughtsmanship, painting, textile design, and ceramics, among others, at Nsukka.

The creative paradigm derived from Uche Okeke's recourse to indigenous creative ideals, subtly rooted in his *zarianist* experience, the Zaria Art Society (Jegede, 2022). *Zarianists* were a group of artists at the Zaria College who postmodernly articulated a creative discontentment and rebelled against the colonial curriculum of art (c. 1957-1961). They rather advocated for indigenous interventions. Uche Okeke was at the centre of the pedagogical rebellion and he brought that spirit to the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, which eventually enthused the emergence of *Uli*. It is important to note that the *zarianist* spirit, the natural synthesis manifesto and art emerging from the Nsukka School have been largely entangled in various social, political and economic themes of the Nigeria state. Uche Okeke's presence at Nsukka (1971-1986) was marked by creative experimentalisms, reinventing and exploring methodologies that activated the school's postmodernist oomph, especially in drawing and painting. His works often featured linear brevity and suavity, characteristic of *uli* shapes and forms (see Fig 1).

Oloidi observed that Uche Okeke began exploring *uli* art in 1962, but his sensitivity towards *uli* started in the 1940s, captivated by its varied motifs, underlying logic, brevity of statement, and masterly control of space" (Oloidi 2016, 4). The idea of "brevity of statement" captures the sense in which I

characterize the outcome of Uche's direction of *uli* as manifesting elemental "simplism." Other scholars and exponents translated *uli* basics into a phenomenal tool, taking Nsukka School beyond Africa, each engaging *uli* with a personal style goals (National Museum of African Art, October 22, 1997 – April 26, 1998).

However, my critical observations reveal that several works from Nsukka, years after Uche, do not largely show a perpetuated and strict use of original organic *uli* shapes and forms but rather creative mutations of the alphabets as each artist wished to employ. Ene-Orji substantiated my observation: "several artists from Nsukka have sought ways of extending and enlarging the *uli* paradigm by conjoining it with other Igbo aesthetic traditions and modes from their Nigerian and African neighbors. They have given *uli* an eclectic national and international flavor (Ene-Orji 2019)."



Fig 1: Uche Okeke, *Head of Egbenuoba*, 1962, ink, 7.5 × 5.5 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.

Artists such as Obiora Udechukwu ensured a remarkable engagement of the *Uli* idiom in creative practice through illustrations and paintings while scholars like Krydz Ikwuemesi went on, beyond practice, to define the frontiers of *ulism* through writing and other academic immersions. In the section below I explore the detail of the concept of

simplism in studio practice as emerging from Nsukka taking off from the rise of *uli*.

Simplism in Draughtsmanship: Obiora Udechukwu and Krydz Ikwuemesi

The highpoint of the essence of simplism was manifest in draughtsmanship where Nsukka artists could illustrate whole pieces in few strokes of line. The concept of 'simplism' here was largely a product of *ulism*. In order to show how the creative approach of simplism manifested as simplicity and linearity in Nsukka, in this section I reference selected drawings of two artists, those belonging to Obiora Udechukwu and Krydz Ikwuemesi. I am aware that these two artists have worked in other modes beyond drawing and that there are other draught masters in Nsukka but the goal here is to demonstrate the manifestation of *uli* linear culture. Inseparably my attempt is also to underpin the clarity with which the artists' works address social issues in Nigeria using simple creative linear language. As disciples in *ulism* after Uche Okeke, Udechukwu and Ikwuemesi have succeeded to move *ulism* beyond the Nigerian shores through practice and writing. Yet, such art practice and scholarly engagements are not in any way reticent of the social issues that has continued to becloud Nigeria and African socio-political space.

On Nsukka linear renders as art practice, Nkurumeh's provides some clarity on their definition based *uli* creativity and he provides what looks like a prescribed way for articulating and activating the paradigm:

The dominance of space, tension achieved through asymmetric balance and the manipulation of negative and positive space are present in such a way that spaces generates line and vice versa. Other aesthetic devices include the principle of elongation, the economy of means, spontaneous renditions of curvilinear forms that flow like rhythmic lines in poetry through unexpected repetition, and the ingenious balancing of forms that demand and effort to comprehend (Nkurumeh 2002, 137).

The definition above largely relates to principles that guide the organization of elements as well as the

consequence of using of such principles in *uli* design system. The principles here include spacing, balancing, the elongation principle, spontaneity, and the economy of means which would result in a certain visual tension, the poetics, and the overall tacitness in communication. The art of drawing or draughtsmanship in Nsukka has had a very strong bearing, and the notable stance of this art is interlocked in the simplicity and spirit that enable the artists.

Perhaps, Ada Udechukwu describes the nature of creativity in Nsukka more aptly as following “sinuous, lyrical line, a corpus of abstract and

simplified representations, and dynamic balancing of negative and positive space” (A. Udechukwu 2021, 46). Much of the characterization above are evident in Obiora Udechukwu's pieces (Figs 2a,b,c) which reveal subtle, graceful, and discrete use of lines. The artistic lyricism and spontaneity of the strokes in these pieces reveal that a substantial amount of mastery is required to render them. I have maintained that the simplicity, linearity and the control of positive and negative spaces known of Nsukka artists derives strongly from the creative methodology of the *uli* that consists of specific visual alphabets.



Fig 2: Obiora Udechukwu, (a) *Road to Abuja*, 1983, pen and ink on paper, 50.9x38cm; (b) *Two Guards of Honor*, 1980, pen and ink, 42x29.7cm. (c) *Pattern of Vassals*, 1980; pen and ink; 42x29.7cm. Images courtesy of the artist.

Of Udechukwu, Chinua Achebe wrote that he is “the poet of the clean and eloquent line. His work is at once efficient and resonant, elegant and profound” (O. Udechukwu 1981, 3). His linear distinction and precision in creative rendering are worthy of note. One can observe the same creative energy in Ikwuemesi's who employs bold and relatively heavier strokes, or else he prefers a more saturated rendering (see Fig 3a,b). The difference in the linear qualities of both artists may also be informed by the times the artists worked or the type of media used. However, the key idea in both is that they are draughtsmen and painters with lyrical drawing expertise who have overtime sharpened their visuality and creativity using simple lines. This use of few lines with a creative control of negative and positive spaces is what has signalled the notion of simplism in one extreme as against the idea of plurality in the other extreme.

The draughted works by the artists are created with pen and ink wash on paper. One, Udechukwu and Ikwuemesi are painters whose ability to handle inks and colours is not questionable. It is important to note that the use of ink in this regard references the *uli* liquid pigment with which Igbo women drew images and beautified the walls of their bodies and building. Most of Udechukwu's drawings are rendered in curvilinear, ovals and spherical forms and shapes. Sometimes a cursory look could present these drawings as scribbles which require deeper observation to understand the imageries infused in them. In other words, superfluous details are eliminated to give room for better visual perception and appreciation.

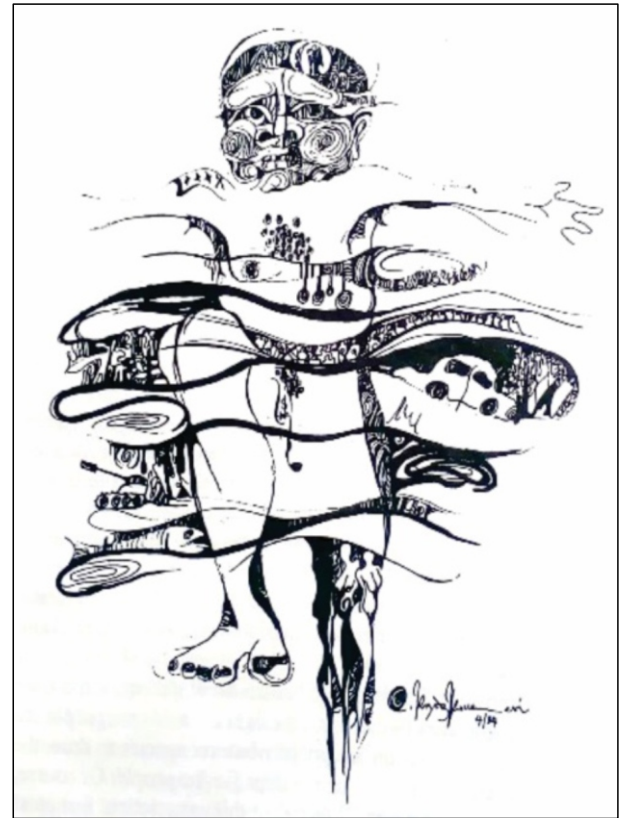


Fig 3. Krydz Ikwuemesi, (a) *Hunger and Apathy driving the children of violence*, 2007, pen and ink, 21x26cm; (b) *The Drowning of the General Oracle*, Pen and ink, 1994. Images courtesy of the artist.

Notwithstanding the linearity, these drawings are not simple for nothing: they convey strong messages around social, political, cultural or economic needs of the time. It is relevant to provide understanding around some of the issues addressed in these works in order to bind meaning with the approach of simplism espoused in the drawings. For instance, Obiora Udechukwu's "Road to Abuja" (Fig. 2a) alludes to the potentials of Nigeria's political figures to be led, overshadowed and influenced by the vulture spirit as shown at the bottom right and top left of this piece. Vulture here signifies greed and corruption. As the major subjects of this piece, the political leaders, could be seen immersed in their deceptive religious garb, with briefcases in their hand.

At the time of this drawing, the artist possibly thought about the relocation of Nigerian capital from Lagos to Abuja, which took place in 1985 and how the political vultures would move themselves to continue their escapades in corruption, bribery and looting of public coffers. So one vulture leads and another monitors. There could be myriads of interpretations to this piece assuming different

perspectives of the viewers. Many of Udechukwu's works are embedded in social and political problems that have continued to undermine Nigeria such as bad leadership, poverty and suffering, lack of social infrastructures, among others.

Krydz Ikwuemesi's "Hunger and Apathy driving the children of violence" (Fig 3a) in its creative affordance covers socioeconomic, -cultural or -political dimensions. The title provides a cue for understanding the artist's point of vision. This drawing shows visual tension and figural dynamics of the suffering people of the world. Krydz's piece shows a space agitated by different human postures, gestures and actions such as squawking, whining, wriggling, fighting, subjugation and desire for freedom. These actions relate to the dual social classes of the oppressor and the oppressed. The oppressed engages different kinds of lethal tools such as gun, sickle, axe and arrow, among others. Of course, it is highly potential that the artist is referencing the various socio-political issues Nigerians have faced in the face of different oppressive political regimes, otherworldly elements and among themselves.

This piece literally defines the *ulist* linear ambience in which the unitary visual composition here is rendered as a vegetative and floral body. The imageries in this piece, which are largely parts of the human figure, are composed as plants budding with their tendrils. So it becomes antithetical to adorn and glamorize cruelty, violence and callousness, howbeit, playing on the visual effects of lines. Many societies such as Nigeria epitomize the nature of evil and falsehood, where many 'negatives' are so shared and ingrained in their social fabrics. Moreover, a key manifestation of *ulism* in Ikwuemesi's work is the exotic use of shapes and forms as well as the management of negative and positive spaces.

From the foregoing it is remarkable how the *uli* niche became highly noticeable with its simple and singular essences which do not give room for excesses. In the spirit of simplism, as seen in this section artworks are purged of creative frivolities while accentuating the essentials. As a matter of Nsukka-*uli* visual culture the sense behind activating positive and negative spaces is that essential parts of an artwork are allowed to speak to the audience. In doing art works are usually rendered in abstracts of semi-abstracts.

Pluralist's Assemblages of El Anatsui and Ozioma Onuzulike

While I have positioned the notion of simplism in art making against the personality of Uche Okeke under *ulism*, El Anatsui's creative vision has popularized a different philosophy of 'pluralism'. The idea of pluralism emerging after El Anatsui is an essence that has produced certain polarity in the history and personality of Nsukka School. The two approaches projected by Uche and El in their different times consequent upon the theory of natural synthesis, have continued to influence young artists of the school, and beyond.

El is a Ghanaian sculptor whose creative weight has been thrown into art practice and pedagogical enterprise at Nsukka for about four decades. He experimented in various materials ranging from wood to clay to metal. El trained in the College of Arts of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology at Kumasi, Ghana as an artist before moving to University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 1975 a young lecturer. Anatsui did not train in

Nigeria, and although he maintained that his influences came from such artists as Akwete Kofi, Anish Kapoor, Antony Gormley, and Endo Toshikatsu, among others, he still acknowledges the influence, philosophy and spirit of 'natural synthesis' (Preece 2006).

As a sculptor El Anatsui used modern carving tools to create his sculptures in woods using pyrography as a method which involves engraving into woods by charring them. The Nsukka spirit of the time was more an experimentalist one cutting across different aspects of artmaking. In 1995, for instance, Anatsui created a sculptural piece from an old mortar formerly used in extracting palm oil. The sculptural piece he called *Adinsibuli Stood Tall* featured *uli*, circular patterns of *Adinkra* textile motifs and *nsibidi* ideograms together (Okeke-Agulu 2010). This is testament to the fact that Nsukka artists sought ways to extend and enlarge the *uli* paradigm in personal ways and for aesthetic outcomes.

Okeke-Agulu maintained that these indigenous signs and symbols were heterogeneous, having come from different parts of Western Africa. In the 1980s or even earlier, Anatsui's wooden sculptures featured these symbols in form of heavy charred intaglio lines or painted signs. On the instance of use of colour, his early 1990s works fashioned with "different power routers, drills, and rotary saws" were also embellished with acrylic and tempera (Okeke-Agulu 2010). Here he would grapple with his earlier creative experience and exposure alongside the new visual language which Nsukka afforded, which is based on natural synthesis—a search for self-discovery.

Owing to the creative success recorded by Anatsui, his influence spread across artists within and outside Nsukka. It was his radical departure from conventional sculpture of the time that led to the visibility that greeted his practice. It is important to note how new frontiers can be opened by a shift from cultures and conventions. The new frontier led to a technique of assemblage of multiples of single sculptural elements in creating visual essays. This formed the principle I refer to as 'plurality'. El Anatsui's new cutting edge of art practice in which he worked with plurality of elements gained traction and led to global visibility.

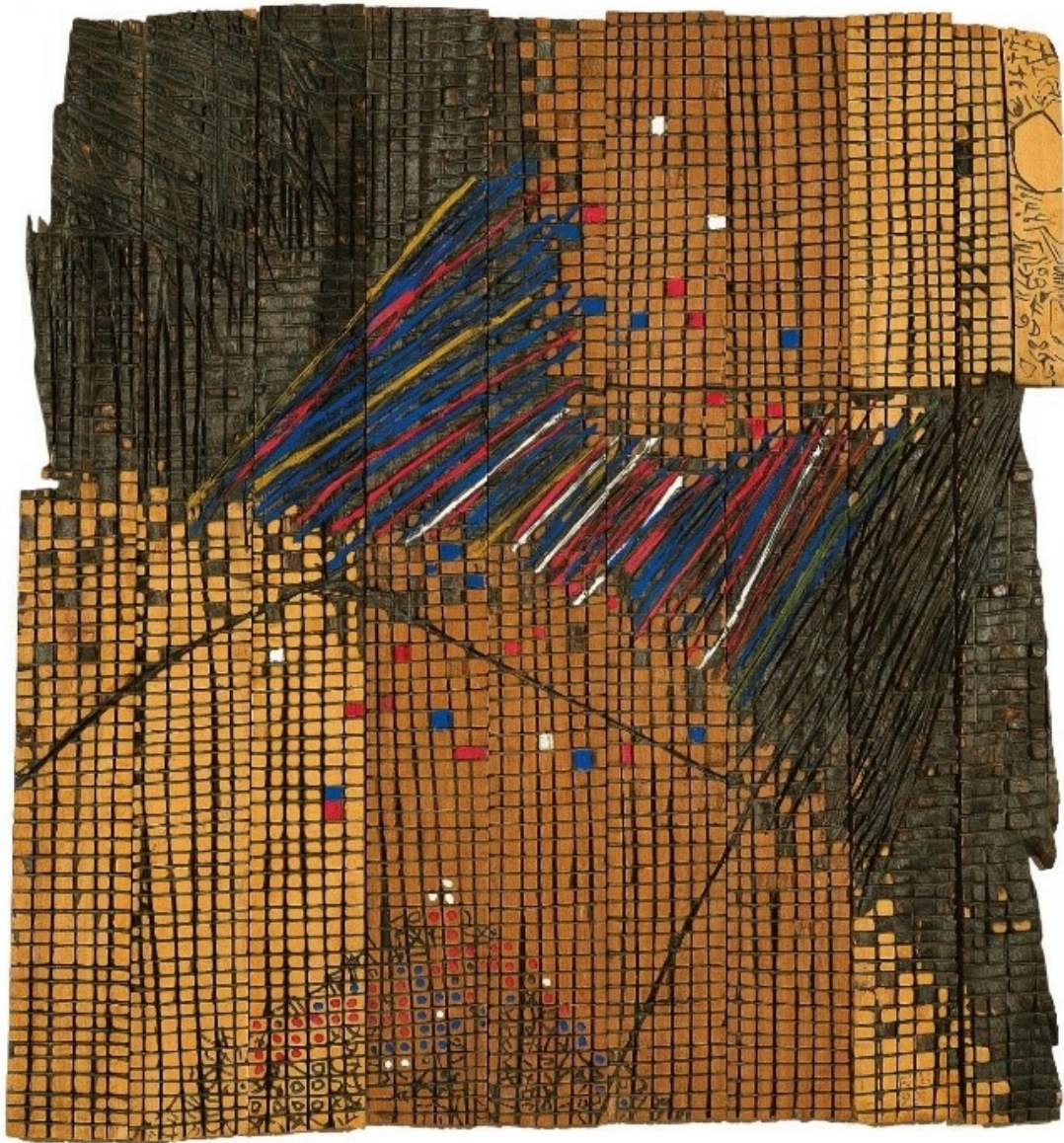


Fig. 4. El Anatsui. *Earth-Moon Connexions*, 1993. Image courtesy of the artist. Photograph by Franko Khoury

But I must acknowledge that the evolution of Uche Okeke' manifesto of natural synthesis has continued to manifest and advance the experimental spirit of Nsukka artists, which began in a rather 'qualitative' simplism and transgressed into the domain pluralism. The spirit of plurality speaks about a 'quantitative' practice—an art practice for creative grandiosity resulting from the assemblage of enormous quantity of design motifs and elements.

In *Earth-Moon Connexions* (Fig.4) one could see part of the beginnings of what eventually matured into El's great assemblages. I am aware that this is not the artist's first pyrographed works in which wood is decomposed and rendered in multiples of

shapes, however, there is a connection between this piece and the artist's later works in which large installation artworks are made by weaving enormous quantities of bottle caps and recyclable metal discards with copper wires. It is evident from here that the artist had begun to develop a sense in which multiples of small geometric forms build into a whole. While the artist in this work achieved visual multiplicity through a rather disintegrative means, his work in Fig 5 is a product of composite and an additive process which is reflective of his latest assemblages, involving “thousands of recycled, crushed, and flattened liquor bottle tops” (Preece 2006, Para. 1).



Fig 5: El Anatsui, "Peak Project" 2019, in his exhibition "Triumphant Scale", Germany. Image courtesy of the artist. Photo by Christof STACHE / AFP

Although Anatsui did not present a different formal manifesto, as it were, of the principle of plurality which established his global creative personality, at the current time this approach seems to be pervading the studio processes in sculpture and ceramics at Nsukka. This is evident in the works of Uche Onyishi, Ozioma Onuzulike, Sabastine Ugwuoke, Eva Obodo, Chukwuemeka Okpara, and others. Several artists using the principle of plurality after Anatsui have worked with different kinds of materials such as metal plates, plastic, flip-flops, clay, stones, and stoneware, and other recyclable discards. Emerging works of the plurality of such materials defy voluminosity and present such astounding and enigmatic ambience of creativity.



Fig. 6: Ozioma Onuzulike, "Of Harvest and Mixed Feelings", 2023, earthenware and stoneware clays, iron oxide engobe, recycled glasses, burnt wood and copper wire, 131x221x11cm. Image courtesy of the artist.

Perhaps Ozioma's terracotta yam tubers series (see Figs 6) adorning the front of Institute of African Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, arranged using Igbo traditional barn formula gives us the nearest reminder of and reference to the indigenous idea of plurality and assemblage. This is just as the Nsukka creative simplism references the indigenous *uli* design paradigm. His recent series of 'assemblages' are expansive artworks created by sewing together palm kernel shell sized ceramics in their thousands using copper wires. *Chequered Jumper for Anatsui* (Fig 7) is an example of work in that series, which are massive and intriguing wall hangings that effectively follow Anatsui's huge wall art installations.

By composing works that involve multiples of ceramic palm kernel beads as can be seen in Figures 7 and 8, Ozioma follows the principle of plurality as espoused by El Anatsui, which for me moves Nsukka School away or forward from the fear of a potential 'one-style-fits-all' approach expressed by

jegade (Jegade 2022). Using the same conceptual approach of plurality, Ozioma explores other natural or indigenous phenomena which occur or are set in mass such as honeycombs with their dome-shaped or box-like design. While I do not intend to provide extensive interpretation of Ozioma's pieces here, I am aware that they provide a ground for various social, cultural, economic and political discourses around colonialism in Nigeria, and Africa.

In a nutshell, Ozioma speaks of his palm kernel terra-cotta works as connecting colonial issues and conditions in Nigeria and Africa. He explores the historical origins of political and socio-economic confusion in Africa and its daily sociological effects on the people. Through the materiality of his work, he underscores the trade and power relations that surrounded the commercial deals between his people producing the palm oil and kernel, and the Western world as consumers.



Fig 7: Ozioma Onuzulike, *Chequered Jumper for Anatsui*, 2023, earthenware and stoneware clays, ash glazes, recycled glasses and copper wire (5,593 ceramic palm kernel shell beads), 220x170x8cm. Image courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 8: Ozioma Onuzulike, *Embroidered Agbada with Golden Shine-Shine*, 2022, earthenware and stoneware clay bodies, engobes, ash glazes, recycled glasses, copper wires and natural palm kernel shells (144kg; 17,978 ceramic and natural palm kernel shell beads), 320 x 303 x 18cm. Photo Credit: Kai Mewes, Die Neue Sammlung. Image courtesy of the artist.

To clarify how art by plurality has quite become a niche for Nsukka artists and still advancing, in 2015 Sabastine Ugwuoke, May Okafor and Ngozi Omeje garnered the first three prizes available in a National Art Competition organized by African Artist's Foundation (Egbe 2015). The three award-winning works were products of creative plurality. Ugwuoke's *No Rest, No Comfort, Confusion Everywhere* was a massive piece composed of tens of thousands of toothpicks, and boards (Morgan

2017). In the piece, the artist created a life-sized bed with pillows. In place of foam he bored tiny holes to stick several thousands of toothpicks unto the base, side and pillows of the bed. The focal point of his practice was to reimagine the suffering of several Nigerians who encounter the worse in attempt to migrate for greener pastures outside African borders (Morgan 2017). Sabastine Ugwuoke, in his pluralist's works continues to rethink materials and materiality, forms and social discourse (See Fig. 9)



Fig. 9: Sabastine Ugwuoke. *Emerging from the past III*, 2022. Aluminum printing plates, aluminum wire, variable dimension. Image courtesy of the artist.

Two important features that mark art practice following the plural essence is the enormity of time and labor required to aggregate thousands of motifs and elements into a whole artwork. While the principle of simplism does not require huge delivery time and great manual labours, it does require more artilly effort and skill mastery developed overtime by the artist. The two approaches involve creative sensibility to translate ideas into visuality, yet, the artist working with plural materials could lessen the burden of practice by engaging assistants as the artists have shown.

Conclusion

In this piece I have examined the development of methodologies of art practice in the Nsukka Art School, Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka whose origins find anchor in the 'natural synthesis' manifesto of Uche Okeke. The dynamics, as have been discussed, split the methodology of art practice, especially in

draughtsmanship, sculpture, painting, ceramics, into two broad parts, others. Moreover the problem of inbreeding based on *ulism* which Dele jegede spoke about (Jegede 2022) was detoured through the ideology and concept of 'pluralism' which was espoused by El Anatsui. This later direction is now at its height further than El Anatsui. These broad dimensions of approach is what I have theorised and described as 'simplism' and 'pluralism' philosophies of art production.

As underscored in this piece, there has been a decline in the fervency with which *ulism* manifested in earlier years than now. In its certain characteristics of linearity and brevity of visual statements, the methodology of *uli* has continued to define art in Nsukka until these later years. The philosophy of simplism maintained the technique of art rendering where non-essential parts of the work are expunged and relevant parts retained and distinctly expressed. Several artist who followed the

Okeke led *ulism* continued in this approach in their various styles.

However, in the spirit of exploration and indigenous search for self-identity and innovation, El Anatsui busted into and espoused a creative approach that became rather opposed to the original singular spirit of *uli*. This later creative direction has been quite revolutionary following its advancement of El's global visibility. The plural approach redirected art to the assembling of overwhelming multiples of objects as motifs into a humongous artworks. Anatsui's plural assemblage and installation principle has continued to encounter a resurgence materials and materiality from various artists of the Nsukka Art School seeking global visibility and relevance for their art practice.

Yet, one must acknowledge that all of these point to the reality of contemporary visual art practice and postmodernist viewpoints as known across the world. Contemporary visual art practice has allowed boundaries that once limited directions in studio practice to be broken. I am aware that the two approaches discussed in this paper are not all there are, even in the School of art, as the theory of natural synthesis keeps finding venting points in many ways.

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Notes

Further than Jegede's position on creative sameness which uli encountered in the school, Ola Oloidi, Nigeria's foremost art historian, during one of his lectures disclosed the grave concern he had about the same issue— about the reductionist influence of *uli* on art students of Nsukka at the time as several students could no longer draw or represent images in realism but would always resort to *ulist* forms and shapes as an escapist rout to creativity.

The Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology, Zaria has now metamorphosed to Ahmadu Bello University. Uche Okeke, Yusuf Grillo, Bruce Onobrakpeya, Oseloka Osadebe, Demas Nwoko were key figures of the Zaria Art society. While referencing Ada Udechukwu, I have already remarked in this paper that the *uli* creative techniques of the Nsukka School

derives from the dyeing and the design marks that Igbo women used to design their bodies and buildings. The paint liquid was sourced from *uli* plant (camwood). In Nsukka School the dye is not necessarily used but replaced with different western art media but the *uli* alphabets subsisted.

Stephen Friedman Gallery. "Yinka Shonibare Cbe Ra Has Curated a Room in Our Current Exhibition. The Presentation Features a Group of African Artists, and Artists from the African Diaspora, Some of Whom Participated in Shonibare's Residency Program at Guest Artists Space Foundation in Lagos, Nigeria. Paintings, Sculptures, Mixed Media Pieces and Works on Paper Are Exhibited...", edited by Stephen Friedman Gallery: Instagram, 2023 https://www.instagram.com/p/CzB9SZ2Mfav/?img_index=1.

I also had a personal communication with SabastineUgwuoke in this regard