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Interrogating Olu Amoda's *Third Eye*: Artist, Poet and Critic?

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Abstract

This essay explores the question of naming as a springboard for delving into some of the deeper issues of the process of artistic production as exemplified in the works of Olu Amoda, one of the most prominent producers of art in the Nigerian scene. It is a perennial issue in art history whether a work of art can stand meaningfully alone, or whether it requires a name for its meaning to become discernible, and for its identity to be established. This essay, from the standpoint of an insider engagement with the social and historical conditions that inform the naming strategies of the artist under study, puts forth the argument that artists have the ultimate responsibility to decide how to situate their works through naming, and that whether or not they situate their works through naming or titling, the works remain situated somewhat. For an artist like Olu Amoda, naming is a necessary part of the process of producing art. And in the classification of his works provided in this essay, it is demonstrated that similar strategies and concerns inform the decisions he makes in terms of selecting materials for producing his sculptures and in terms of naming the works he produces. In his use of naming strategies to locate his works, it is the same vision, the same third eye, that is in control.

Keywords: Olu Amoda; Artistic interrogation; naming in artwork; naming strategies.

Artists use titles to illustrate, explicate, confound, frustrate (or justify a tax deduction). Even "Untitled" suggests a meaning. Kelly Devine Thomas, 2005¹

1. Art and the Problem of Identity

Art is incontrovertibly a high culture endeavour. It is the preserve of a few, even though some art forms are now being described as communal and need-specific in African societies. In today's world, art activity has taken permanent residence in, for want of a better descriptive word, the 'bourgeois' class. It is not uncommon to find that the larger population in African societies are reticent about matters of art in favour of the essential other needs that failing African societies, like Nigeria, are yet or are unable to provide with relative ease. Food and shelter and other basic social needs are examples of some of these needs. It is understandable therefore to assume that the more 'advanced' a particular society is, the more appreciative such a society would be of (its and other) arts, or shall we just say, the more time (and substance) its people may have to attend to issues of art, and thus the more appreciative. This is of course debatable irrespective of whether the arts they show appreciation for are utilitarian or otherwise.

In economies like Nigeria's where basic existence still poses huge problems, talking about art in some circles can earn you the 'wrath' of people. The university campuses are not very different from the larger society in this regard. Seldom do people attend exhibitions or itch to see museums in their environment or out of it. This is best exemplified in how most out-of-Nigeria trips turn out to be shopping and holiday sprees rather than educative excursions. One needs only look at the visitors' book of the numerous widely publicized art exhibitions held on the University

¹ Kelly Devine Thomas, What's in a Name? The Meaning of Titles. *Art News*. November 2005.

of Ibadan campus to judge this issue. At any rate, all art produced drew, still draws and will continue to draw tremendous inspiration from its producer-culture and society. It is incontrovertible therefore that art is a reflection of its producer-society. But this situation is made even more awry when you 'complicate' matters by giving the art an identity (by way of a name) or title that appears to be beyond the easy or ordinary understanding of the viewer from within the same producer-culture and with or without the right sensibilities and qualifications. This is without bias to the fact that all things, indeed, have and/or ought to have an identity, or isn't that the case? In many traditional African societies for example, we know that names were given to newborn babies by studying the history and circumstances or other peculiarities of their birth, or in terms of the circumstances of the larger family. Identity, indeed, is basic to all things.

2. What's in a Name?

We often talk about the title of an artwork, be it a painting or sculpture or any of the newer forms of current art, even photographs now, but what we are actually simply referring to is the given name, or, more appropriately today, the title of the work. It is this name that gives the artwork an identity, even when some artists title their products 'Untitled', sometimes followed by a number. Giving the work an identity, however, does not diminish its aesthetic, utilitarian or other qualities or values. Indeed, some schools of thought believe and have argued that titles sometimes could enhance, affect or cause judgments to be made on the artwork. Notwithstanding, I think identity is still the most important role a title performs in the life of an artwork.²

The difference in name and title as identity of an artwork only borders on semantics and other super-specialized fine points that are beyond the interest of this paper. Instead, the interest of

² I conducted an FGD in my MA art history class, asking the students to comment on what titles or names of pieces of art meant to them.

this paper is of an onomastic nature, interrogating the forms and origins of the names the artist gives his works and the relationships of such names to the works. I am also interested in what one can glean from the names that may advise our thinking about the work. Therefore, my interest lies in questions such as: What is in a name and, therefore, how does the “namer” assign it to an artwork? Where does he derive the name from? What is the relevance of the name to the artwork? etc.

There is a case in point where an artist is not even the one who names his works,³ rather he chooses a friend to generate and assign names of his own choice to the artist's own products. Basically, since a name or title is a given reference to a thing, whether physical or not, artists conclude their work and then name them. To get down to further details, the questions would include: How are artworks named? Are there specific ways of naming art? What role does the name play in the life of the artwork? Is there or must there be a direct reference to the whole or part of the work? These questions are applied with especial interest to the arts of one of Nigeria's greatest metal workers, Olu Amoda. He showed his works at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, in November 2011.

3 Who Knows Amoda?

Basically and strictly speaking, Olu Amoda is an installation sculptor by preoccupation and description, since we have to satisfy the need for disciplinary differentiation. This description suffices until his works find their permanent location and abode. Ordinarily he is a multi-talented artist whose capacities straddle many specializations in and outside of art. It will not baffle me at all if Olu Amoda were to, in addition to all he is, be described as an engineer, poet, welder, ‘rewire’ and mechanic. He has been

³ Personal communication with one of Nigeria's foremost artists, Mr Moyo Ogundipe who in a personal conversation in April 2009 mentioned an American artist friend who does not name his own works but allows anyone that he believes truly likes his works to name them.

engaged in and has made his name from welding metals to create art.

As a historian of art, I am interested in understanding the totality of my subjects and their products. I am also interested in recording their actions and reaction to the environment they operate in. It is for this reason that getting to 'know' Olu Amoda was important. I cannot claim to 'know' him even as I write. Really, the task of doing this is daunting considering his hydra-headed character, disposition and experience. Besides, knowing somebody could take a lifetime even when they are not seemingly as complicated in mind, thought and action as Olu Amoda. Often more amiable than not, Olu Amoda cuts a complex personality gravitating between the frivolities and simpler things of life to serious humane empathy for the vicissitudes of life. From his concern for his fellow man to his willingness to make excuses for the feeble and weak-hearted, Olu Amoda is more or less an enigma. He is a stickler for rules and engages all and every attempt to break them. He is an interventionist rather than a protester, a think-doer rather than a think-tank. This is evident in his artworks just as well as in his character. I have interacted with Olu Amoda for some years now. We share a common heritage and similar upbringing and, indeed, have a lot of things in common. He and I have sat up nights discussing his work, his experiences, his fears and his ambitions for the future. I have come to the conclusion that the names of his works are an important aspect of them, and must not be downplayed in their appreciation as we are wont to do because of their overbearing artistic qualities.

Olu Amoda needs little introduction in the Nigerian art circuit. As was also made obvious by the Vice Chancellor of the University of Ibadan at the opening (11th November 2011) ceremony of the 2011 University of Ibadan convocation exhibition, the World Wide Web has made it largely easy to gather any and all information about people like Olu Amoda, indeed anyone with a modest achievement. He demonstrated this by revealing that as soon as he got the invite to the opening reception of 'Cequel', as the

exhibition was titled (this name also requires some examination), he quickly 'googled' Olu Amoda and this enabled him with full access to information about an artist he had never met or heard of over the opening of whose exhibition he had to preside. The Vice Chancellor even came armed with a quote associated with the artist that he got from the internet. This quote set the tone of his discussion about the artist. Olu Amoda has worked, studied, and has participated in workshops/residences in Nigeria, Kenya, France, Germany, Austria, America and South Africa. With such enviable exposure, Olu Amoda qualifies as a world citizen and artist. It is important to note his experiences because they are useful in trying to understand his mind, how he thinks and why he does certain things that appear now to be peculiar to him and his work.

4 Within and Beyond Naming: Classifying Amoda's Works

But let us stop here and look at his works. I have selected some 22 works, a small number considering how prolific the artist is, for discussion of their present identifying names or titles. I use the word 'present' because in the course of writing this essay, I learnt that the globally celebrated 20th-century artist Pablo Picasso is known to have changed the name of his famous painting *Les demoiselles d'Avignon* (*The Young Ladies of Avignon*). This painting was originally called *The Brothel of Avignon*.⁴ I am still in the process of trying to find out what gave impetus to this name change for thought and talk of a brothel was not so obscene among artists at that time in Paris to warrant a name change. What this basically brings out however is that the process by which artists name their artworks is varied and that the possibility of name changes is known and indeed has historical precedents.

According to Kelly Devine Thomas,⁵ Frank Stella named her works after Brooklyn apartment buildings, Polish villages, Nazi

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Les_Demoiselles_d'Avignon.

⁵ Kelly Devine Thomas, What's in a Name? The Meaning of Titles. *Art*

death camp slogans, racetracks, exotic birds and chapters in *Moby Dick*. Another artist, Janine Antoni chose titles like 'Gnaw' and 'Lick' and 'Lather' because she liked the way they felt in her mouth when she said them!⁶ And yet another artist, this one I worked very closely with during the long course of preparing for an exhibition, got the titles of his paintings from an old and worn-out piece of paper that contained over two hundred titles in very small print that he had himself compiled from here and there in the course of his life. The list is still growing and he is still producing paintings. His name is Moyo Ogundipe.⁷ Generally his titles range from the subtleties of life such as *Soliloquy*, 'Life's Fragile Fictions', 'An Unexpected journey' and Detonation of Cosmic Seeds' to titles directly relevant and expressive of his culture and experience such as 'Three Lagos Socialites', 'When Obatala Met Three Men From Another World' and 'Two Negritude Princesses'.⁸ How does Olu Amoda name or title his own works?

Olu Amoda's installations are a basic fascination because they excite the senses in their being made from common, everyday, discarded materials that are quite often seen by all but are perceived as useless. The other day he came to my home and he and I removed some junk, used car parts that I had piled up believing that if I didn't leave them with my mechanic, I would save other car users, including myself, the sad situation of buying back an already discarded car part in the second-hand car parts shops where most replaced parts find their way. So, seeing his sculptures and recognizing these parts in them make Olu Amoda's sculptures *prima facie* exciting. But more exciting is the fact that

News. November 2005.

⁶ Kelly Devine Thomas, What's in a Name? The Meaning of Titles. *Art News*. November 2005.

⁷ Personal communication with one of Nigeria's foremost artists, Mr Moyo Ogundipe, *supra*.

⁸ Ohiona I. Pogson (Editor/Curator), *Life's Fragile Fictions: The Drawings and Paintings of Mayo Ogundipe*. Archers Art Collective and Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan 2011.

he uses them to make a kind of social commentary, at times parodying our society and at times making allusions to aspects of our emerging culture. Without any iota of doubt, Olu Amoda has strong affection for his community and therefore uses his works to hit at the ills in our society in the hope that they will tickle his viewers to changing their attitudes towards common misdemeanours, while working towards a better society. He deals in sarcasm, burlesque and witty cracks. By so doing he picks, coins and contrives names and titles that tend to accentuate the need for further enquiry. This is the basic excitement for me in doing this piece.

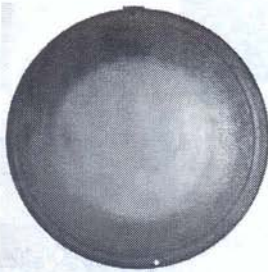
Departing from the more common approach of classifying Olu Amoda's works based on his medium of expression, I hereby attempt a classification of his works based on their themes and perceived contents in order to start off a discussion of their titles. I think using their themes will be more appropriate for this discussion. Olu Amoda, as has been noted earlier, basically works in metals and found objects, using materials, methods and equipment that range from the latest and most modern technology to the more basic means of working metals. He selects his methods of work choice from this very wide range. Then he selects materials that are easily exploited metaphorically, and such materials are indeed common in our history and in this environment; for our inability to maintain a lot of the things we import eventually causes them to become debris of discarded materials now prevalent in our bigger cities. Waste management is still in its infancy here in Nigeria and so many of these things, electronic and mechanical parts, are often found lying all over the place. They provide the materials that Olu Amoda works with to create his wonderful sculptures.

I shall classify the exhibited works used for the purpose of this article (as well as some of his other works) into five categories. I argue that many of Olu Amoda's works can be conveniently fitted into these categories:

1. Works depicting stylized anthropomorphic (two-and three dimensional) figures.
2. Abstracts
3. Utilitarian works
4. Stylized zoomorphic figures, and
5. Strict installations

The works are now discussed but not necessarily in the order in which I have listed them above.

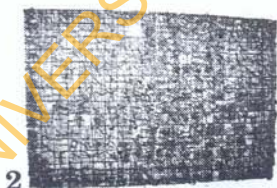
Olu Amoda's 'Sun and Moon' (2004) is a metal disk that has a bright orange colour on one side and a shade of blue on the other side. It can be described as a pendulum or mobile of sorts. According to the artist, it once hung in his bedroom and served the purpose of reminding him of the sun and the moon. The title sounds quite appropriate given that the sun is usually depicted in fiery red colour while the moon is mostly represented in a pale blue colour. Apart from the disc, which the artist might have shaped out, it would appear that his imagery here is in the colours used rather than in the form, even though the disc's shape smacks of similarities with the two celestial objects that he has represented. He smartly uses it as a hanging piece in order to enable both sides to be viewed. To Olu Amoda, this 'Sun and Moon' is his way of compensating for the deprivation of the real thing denied him because of the close cluster of houses in his neighbourhood.



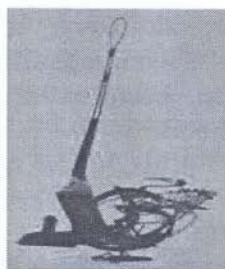
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1. Sun and Moon -2004 (double sided Metal Sculpture, repurposed metal disc.)

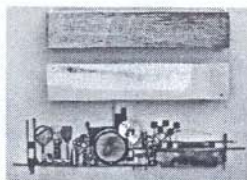
Sun and Moon' (2004) as well as 'Crystal' (2005), 'Lilies in the Pond' (2005) and 'De-Shelling' (1995) are all abstracts even though the titles of the last two are far removed from what is contained in them. In 'Crystal, I perceive a name selected simply because it is the possible result of his ranting with metals considering the multiplicity of crisscrossing lines on the piece. But to see it this way, you may have to borrow Olu Amoda's third eye or work yourself up to be at the same wavelength as he. I see an attempt to name this piece in a deliberate effort to use a name that might be close to what he sees in the work. Whereas, with 'Lilies in the Pond', the name appears more derived from its material and destination, which Olu Amoda might have had prior knowledge of. The work adorns the poolside of the late collector, Tayo Aderinokun. Olu Amoda says he was inspired to create 'Lilies in the Pond' by the work of the French pointillist painter Georges Seurat. Perhaps this sculpture is so titled by him because, made of stainless steel, it is permanently outdoors where reflections from the sun give it a peculiar character and shine.



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2. Crystal, 2005 (repurposed bottle caps, glass, wire and mesh)
3. De Shelling, 1995 (repurposed welded mild steel. In the OYASAF collection)
4. Lilies in the pond, 2005 (In the collection of Tayo Aderinokun, 1955-2011)

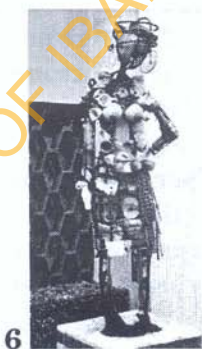
'De Shelling' is undoubtedly an abstract one. It shows Olu Amoda's proficiency with form organization, an aspect of art that only the trained mind may understand. Basically, he uses rods and flat sheets to create this work. Why he calls it 'De Shelling' remains a mystery. 'De Shelling' what? However, this elegant piece reminds me of a huge bird. The artist says that the materials for the work were got from discarded drawing class props that had been used for several years by students of the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, where he had attended a workshop sponsored by the Goethe Institute, Lagos. According to him, the props are responding to the consistent long gazes of students over the long years and are thereby glad to no longer be the centre or focus of the observatory eagle eyes of art students in the drawing classes. But the question, even then, is, are we not now gazing, looking at and studying and examining closely what they have metamorphosed to in 'De Shelling'? Sometimes I think Olu Amoda uses a poetic imagination in naming his work after weaving his stories around them. If 'De Shelling' is to be understood as changing its outer coat, then one can admit the appropriateness of the name, considering that for several years now it has consistently, over periods determined by wear, been given new coats of bright yellow paint that brings it alive and causes it to jealously compete with the avian collection that inhabits its present garden location. It is installed in the famous Prince Yemisi Shyllon (major Nigerian art collector) garden and its continually new look is not the creation of the artist but that of the collector.

Olu Amoda has many works depicting human figures in many positions, including standing, reclining, sitting and so on. Oftentimes, his figures are stylized after his own formats. These formats are in fact the artistry in his works. They form the base of

his creative genius, for when he picks a particular form, he exploits it to the highest level. I will now look at four of his standing figures in this category, 'Queen of the Night' (2006), 'Onana' (2004), 'Wuraola', 'Welded Steel', 'Ceramics and Glass' (2008) and 'New Bride' (2009). In 'Queen of the Night', Olu Amoda depicts a near akimbo-posed elegant, perhaps alluring lady seeking the pleasures of the night. The heavy hairdo is also suggestive of 'ladies of the night' just as her pose also gives the impression of someone out for some fast and 'easy' business. The slim elegant lady is represented with blocks and thick pieces of appropriately and perhaps deliberately shaped cutout metals, giving the impression of strength. But we are all familiar with the kind of character depicted and so one wonders why it is made to possess that strong poise. Perhaps it is only in the hairdo can we find anything suggestive of royalty in her demeanour.



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5. Onana, 2004 (repurposed welded mild steel. In the OYASAF collection)
6. Wuraola 2008 (repurposed ceramics, bottles, glass cups and welded mild steel. In the OYASAF collection)
7. New Bride, 2009 (Repurposed welded bicycle parts. In the artist's collection)
8. Queen of the Night, 2006 (Welded rectangular steel tubing. In the OYASAF collection)

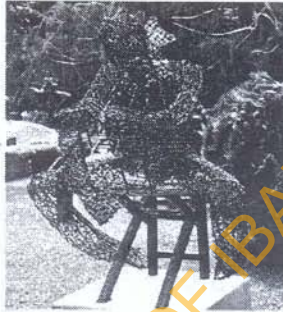
'Wuraola' is an interesting mix and combination of welded steel, old pieces of ceramics and coloured glass. According to the artist, his use of ceramic pieces is advised by their being used as electrical insulators. He says that the name derives from a character in one of Wole Soyinka's plays. The question is why Wuraola? The character of Wuraola in the play is one that the people know is very strong and would even make the 'white man' flinch. Using the names of characters from the writings of Wole Soyinka to title his artworks is not unlike Olu Amoda because he admires the latter's struggles for justice in our country, Nigeria, and indeed his success in spite of all the challenges of oppression and repression that he has witnessed in this environment. In some ways, Olu Amoda shares a lot in common with Wole Soyinka. His queries and fights for doing what is right have more often than not put him in precarious situations that are now a constant in his work life.

Wuraola' he says expresses the flaming temper of the character in the play. The coloured glasses are, according to him, meant to allow for light to play naturally on the work. Now in the collection of Prince Yemisi Shyllon, 'Wuraola' as a name seems appropriate because it enables easy locational description and seems apt. But for his depiction of breasts in the work, Wuraola could have been a man. In his choice of a name for this work and many others that draw from the famed Nigerian author, I think Olu Amoda is simply establishing an admiration for the work of the great Wole Soyinka. The work itself is exquisite and elegant

and with several drilled-out pieces of ceramic hanging from it, it emphasizes fragility.

'New Bride', again drawing from Wole Soyinka, is made entirely of cut and welded bicycle parts. For Olu Amoda, bicycles are reminiscent of colonial Africa when it was prestigious to own a bicycle. Indeed, in Olu Amoda's Warri and surrounding areas, bicycles are still considered a possession of great prestige among ordinary people. In fact today, it is not uncommon to still find in homes the famed 'white superb bicycles', the 'Mercedes' of bicycles in those days. Why Olu Amoda refers to this piece as 'New Bride' is hard to fathom for, like 'Wuraola', perhaps but for the two round cone-shaped pieces of metal bowls at the approximate locations of human mammary glands, and the hairdo, the work could hardly pass for a woman. Olu Amoda has a penchant for women, period! Females surround him. Could the names and forms be reminiscent of the influence of women in his life, or are they conscious and unconscious afterthoughts? Then, what is new in the bride, a bride is simply a newly married woman or a woman about to be married. But one might as well ask, what's in a name?

Amoda's reclining human figures include 'I got a letter' (2004), 'Katherine' (2003) and 'Conceal 1' (2010). 'Katherine' is an interesting piece that represents a figure seated on a high stool with its legs crossed and arms resting comfortable on its thighs. In 2003, as the German government was busy bringing down old buildings in Berlin to make way for new ones, Olu Amoda, then a participant at an artists' workshop there, was busy collecting pieces of wood and conceptualizing what use to put them to. The inspiration for this work derives from his observation of the lady that had been put in charge of African and South American participants at the Berlin workshop. According to Olu Amoda, she always sat cross-legged, sipping from her coffee and smoking, while keeping an eagle eye on them. Perhaps her eyes bore too deeply into Olu Amoda and this aroused in him the consciousness of the partitioning (sharing) of Africa at the Berlin Conference, whose venue, he said, was perhaps not far from the location of the workshop. Katherine is the name of the lady. And why not?



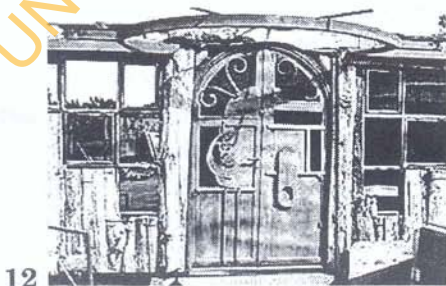
9. I got a letter, 2004 (welded mild steel. In the OYASAF collection)
10. Katherine, 2003 (repurposed wood scraps from the streets of Berlin. In the artists collection)
11. Conceal 1, 2010 (repurposed welded nails and mild steel In the OYASAF collection)

'I got a letter' is one of the easier to understand ones. Yes, she got a letter, and the story behind it is that of a neighbour's maid who received a letter after many years of silence from her family. Excited, she took to a secluded corner in her compound and settled down to the contents of the letter. Here, I think, in play is Olu Amoda's concern for the weak, and we see his humane personality. This is what causes him to empathetically capture the 'poor' girl enjoying news from home. In itself the work is cubist in style and shows the artist's mastery of the skills of forging and shaping steel

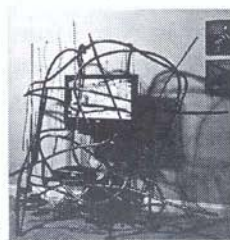
plates and his control of metals in spite of their rigid nature. The name of this work speaks for itself in terms of the theme expressed. We see a letter and we see a humanlike figure reading it. In its present location in the home of Prince Yemisi Shyllon, in the serenity of his exquisite garden, the work is sublime.

Since shooting out into the medium of nails in his works, Olu Amoda has again proved his capacity to innovate and experiment. His eclectic artistic nature permits us the luxury of looking perpetually and eagerly forward to Olu Amoda's future exploits. In the last couple of years, Olu Amoda started and perfected this form here in Nigeria, working with old discarded nails that he purchases from the junk markets or picks up from building sites all over the place. For the sheer amount of time it would take to patiently put small pieces of nails together to create monumental sculptures of at times 16 feet in height, Olu Amoda must not be denied the exalted position of a master of metals in this country and perhaps beyond. The seated female figure in this work is astride a chair and leans on the backrest. The simplicity of this piece is amazing. But more intriguing is his capacity to create forms such as of the rotund human one out of tiny rigid nails. He calls this one 'Conceal 1' (2010). My view is that the name derives from the fact that indeed we can see through the work. Such is the witty burlesque of Olu Amoda.

The works in this third classification are those that are utilitarian. I have chosen, among Olu Amoda's numerous other utilitarian works, to discuss 'Bogobiri' (1999), 'Viewing Centre' (2009) and 'Door of Paradise' (2003).



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12. Wotaside Studio officenow Bogobiri Reception, 1999 (shipping container clad in teak wood bark.)
13. Viewing Centre, 2009 (repurposed welded stainless steel tubing and rod parts. In the artist's collection)
14. Flight across my door-DoP series, 2003 (repurposed welded mild steel and galvanized rectangular tube frame. In the artist's collection)

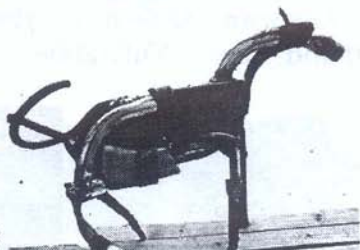
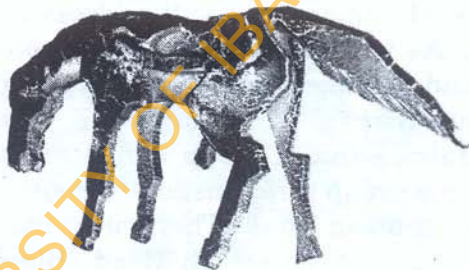
By utilitarian works is meant works that, besides their aesthetic values, serve surpassingly other utility purposes. Olu Amoda has produced many of these utilitarian works around and all over Lagos and beyond into other parts of the country. Once he was making more gates and burglar-proof defences than his other art. And he had indeed built up a good reputation in this area. He has also trained a good number of students that are now making wonderful utilitarian sculptures all over the place. The result of this combination of aesthetics and security is described as the architecture of fear. It is still quite popular today. There are varying reactions to putting bars and rods on our windows and we have sometimes experienced dire consequences in relation to these security ware. Sometime ago the story was reported in a Nigerian newspaper of a whole family that was lost to fire because they were unable to find the keys of the bars to free themselves from their burning home, yet robbers have been deterred by these bars

and lives and properties have been saved. 'Bogobiri' is the reception container of a hotel that Olu Amoda's studio was once a part of. The name derives from the owner of the business, so it is not Olu Amoda's assignation. It does show however that the artist is amenable to names given to his works by others. This flexibility is reminiscent of Olu Amoda's capacity to be simple.

A football fan used to watching matches from the comfort of his home, Olu Amoda sympathizes with people who watch football matches at viewing centres, and thus records the history of their plight in his art. Perchance a few years from now, when we get lucky and everyone is able to watch television in their own *home* and with "nepa" (sic), it will feel strange to see a caged television, as it were, and to think that people would leave their homes and go to these now popular viewing centres to watch television. 'Viewing Centre' and its title are a parody of Nigeria's obtuse development. This is vintage Olu Amoda. Olu Amoda has done a series of works titled *Doors of Paradise-Flight Across my door* that are related to his work on security doors and windows. The major concerns of Olu Amoda in this series of works were to combine security, 'enclosurement' and aesthetics in a frame. By 'enclosurement' Olu Amoda means putting things within an enclosure to serve identified utility purposes. Brilliant as this may sound, Olu Amoda's third eye is once again called to question the relevance of the name. If, however, he says 'Door of Paradise' it is, then we must concur with him; he must see something there that we do not. It must be the Olu in Amoda.

I first perceived Olu Amoda's interest in animals during our work on *Cequel* for the 2011 University of Ibadan convocation exhibition. His 'Big, Strong, Reliable' and 'Big Brown' are chosen for this discussion because they did not feature in the Ibadan *Cequel*, now the first of three *Cequels* that he has mounted, the other two having held in Lagos after the Ibadan event, one at the famous Whitbaker Hotel. In his artist's statement at the opening, Olu Amoda speaks of a childhood fascination with the horses in Nigeria's coat of arms and tells of how the interest had been sustained till now. No wonder then that he uses animals, rams in

this case, for his narration of the Nigerian situation that we all know is economically dire, unsafe and unfriendly to its citizens. In the Ibadan *Cequel*, Olu Amoda deals deserved hard blows on those openly thought to be responsible for our woes, and it is for concentrated efforts like this that Olu Amoda is reputed. As I have indicated earlier on, Olu Amoda tries to find relationships or forms in his works that give him opportunities to reexamine and assess the state of the nation. In 'Big, Strong, Reliable', Olu Amoda thinks first of banking in Nigeria and then switches straight off to 'nepa' (sic) and how its epileptic power supply denies him the opportunity to fully weld his advanced plasma-cut heavy steel plates. It is interesting how his mind works in these extremes. So, 'Big, Strong Reliable' is once again a punch in the face of Nigeria that often prides itself as the Giant of Africa, a Crippled Giant of Africa, to borrow the title of Eghosa Osaghae's book.⁹

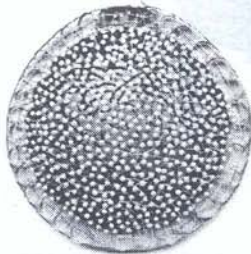


⁹ Eghosa Osaghae. *Crippled Giant: Nigeria Since Independence*, John Archers Publishing Limited 2002.

15. Big, strong, reliable, 2002 (welded mild steel. In the collection of Maen Shour)
16. Big Brown (repurposed welded mild steel and wood frame. In the collection of Lawrence Onana Tsogo)

Big Brown', is so named because the work, although made with the usual metal scraps associated with Olu Amoda, incorporates in addition pieces of naturally toned brown wood that are attractive and awesome. The work has a caricature-like simplicity. Deep in the artist's mind and thoughts is the euthanized Lagos racehorse that could not be well catered and cared for after it fell and became disabled. For him, this is reminiscent of the fate of many of Nigeria's athletes of today. Olu Amoda keeps his ears to the ground, reads a lot, surfs the internet always, listens to the BBC ardently and follows local news in the papers with a passion, all with a view to identifying his next theme or subject.

The last classification I will address is the one I call strict installations. As with all classifications, room must be given for dovetailing and overlap. Depending on your leaning, you may well find or think that a particular work has not been properly compartmentalized into a group and it might not strictly belong there. I call this group strict installation simply with a made-to-fit idea of installation in mind. The five works in this category are 'Sunflower' (2011), '4 Noose 13 Dead, Blood Oil dripping from Nigeria' (2003), 'Gbewan: Queen of the Night series' (2006), 'Rosemary' (2010) and 'Face of Oil' (2008).



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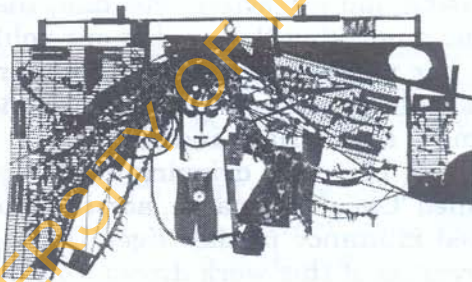


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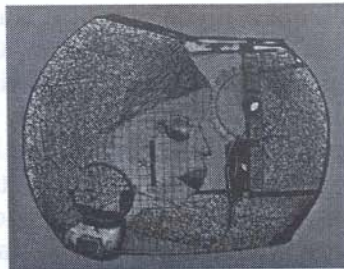


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17. Sunflower IV, 2001 (repurposed roofing nails and steel belt)
18. 4 Noose, 13 death: blood oil dripping from Nigeria, 2003 (cut out mild steel and concrete manhole lid)
19. Face of oil, 2008 (Plasma cut on repurposed drum lid. In the collection of Joe Obiagio)



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19. Gbewan Queen of the night series, 2006 (repurposed keys, mild steel and bakery trays. In the artist's collection)
20. Rosemary, 2010 (repurposed nails, copper a/c tubing, standing fan screen, danfo panel and mesh. In the artist's collection)

It seems that Olu' Amoda had a penchant for circular discs. 'Sunflower'. '4 Noose 13 Dead, Blood Oil dripping from Nigeria' and 'Face of Oil' are expressions of the artist on round metal surfaces. It is for this reason and for the fact that they present a drawing plane that I call them the artist's narrative pieces like reliefs in 'strict' sculpture. The technology of the plasma cut allows for drawing on metals. 'Sunflower' is undoubtedly reminiscent of the real thing, only stylized in this case. Made of an intricate combination of metal roofing nails and deliberately twisted flat metal strips, 'Sunflower' sets Olu Amoda apart as a perceptive and engaging artist. It is the peculiar behaviour of the sunflower that provides the impetus for this now very popular piece. The artist has produced them in varying colours and the result is exceptionally pleasing and attractive. For him, there are political undertones in their mimicking the need of our politicians to strive to better our lot. For me, Olu Amoda's 'Sunflower' is a beautiful piece of art that should adorn any home environment to the envy of guests. The name is appropriate and direct.

4 Noose 13 Dead, Blood Oil dripping from Nigeria', which the artist had once called 'Ogoni 13, marks, according to the artist, the beginning of armed militancy in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. The impetus for the creation of this work draws from the murder of 13 Ogoni citizens, 4 by an irate mob, and 9 (including Ken Saro-Wiwa) by the General Sani Abacha administration. That the metal for this work was got from a piece of metal that looks like the cover of a manhole speaks volumes about Olu Amoda's social engagement with regard to the incident that was very widely condemned all over the world. This historical piece will continue to remind us of that ugly occasion. For both the name and for the discernible images on the work, I think the artist comes out straight and makes it easy for the viewer to proceed to understanding the work without much assistance.

'Face of Oil' is the last circular disc in this group. It is a round plasma-cut disc that contains the face of a lady whose hair is covered up in a kind of pious pose. But the artist actually represents the rape of the Niger Delta environment by the oil prospecting multinationals who use their petro-dollars to initially cause dissension and squabbles among the people who own the land, and over the years have now caused very terrible disputes and bloody feuds in communities in the region.

Gbewan' is a term for ladies of easy virtue in Edo slang. But Olu Amoda does not proceed from here. He asks friends to find and donate old disused keys and their history to him. The result of this request was according to him phenomenal. I wonder what he has done with the narratives on the keys? But with the keys he has created a metal picture that depicts a lady with long and very elaborately done hair, bedecked with plenty of jewellery. It is ingenious to pick on an item like a commonplace key and exploit it for benefit to the hilt, especially creatively, but I wonder what prompted the name 'Gbewan'. Olu Amoda owes no explanation but was perhaps expressing disgust for actions that our uncaring and disproportionate political environment forces on people, what with several thousand young girls of Edo extraction now prostituting themselves in Italy.

Finally, 'Rosemary' is a work made out of nails. This would be the relief equivalent of his three-dimensional freestanding works in nails. Combining nails with other found materials, Olu Amoda represents the face of a lady that appears formally made-up, considering the heavy cosmetic on the lips, the elaborate coiffure as well as the big round earrings. She is facing a Rose fan. It belongs to Olu Amoda's *Queen of the Night* series. The name derives from the discarded Rose fan face that Olu Amoda incorporates into the work. He then names the lady Mary. This is simply how the name was derived.

5 Conclusion

We have seen in the works discussed so far how Olu Amoda titles and names his artistic productions. In that he is a social commentator of sorts—I don't want to call him a social critic—Olu Amoda tends to draw heavily on the ills of his environment to name his works. Even when he does so, he is conscious of weaving a narrative around the names he finally adopts. I must recount how the name *Cequel*, the title of his last three exhibitions, was derived. In preparing for the first *Cequel*, I had called up Olu Amoda to find out what the title of the exhibition was going to be. We were going to have his *Rams*, his *post Office*, his *Political Posters*, his *Mice* and his *Crime Index* and so I was at a loss as to what he wanted to call the exhibition. In that conversation, he said we should call it '*Sequel*'. And I asked, *sequel* to what? His answer was simply to ask if I was asking him the last question because I knew the meaning of the word. When I said yes, he simply then said we should change the 's' to 'c' and hence *Cequel*. Why not? Such is the way a creator may name his creation and be legitimately permitted to do so.

Make no mistakes, Olu Amoda is smart and intelligent, he is critical and eminently capable of critically thinking things through, and he loves to interrogate issues. He is loaded with wit and, above all, he is streetwise. All these qualities are besides his other superlatively well-expressed creative attributes. Olu Amoda is current and updates himself frequently; he is of a poetic mien in his everyday manner of speaking. He certainly has a 'third eye', his first eye being the eye of the master of the artistic media he selects for his productions, and his second eye the one with which he reads a metaphoric meaning, a poetic meaning, into his works. Amoda's third eye is the questioning eye with which he uses art to comment on society.

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