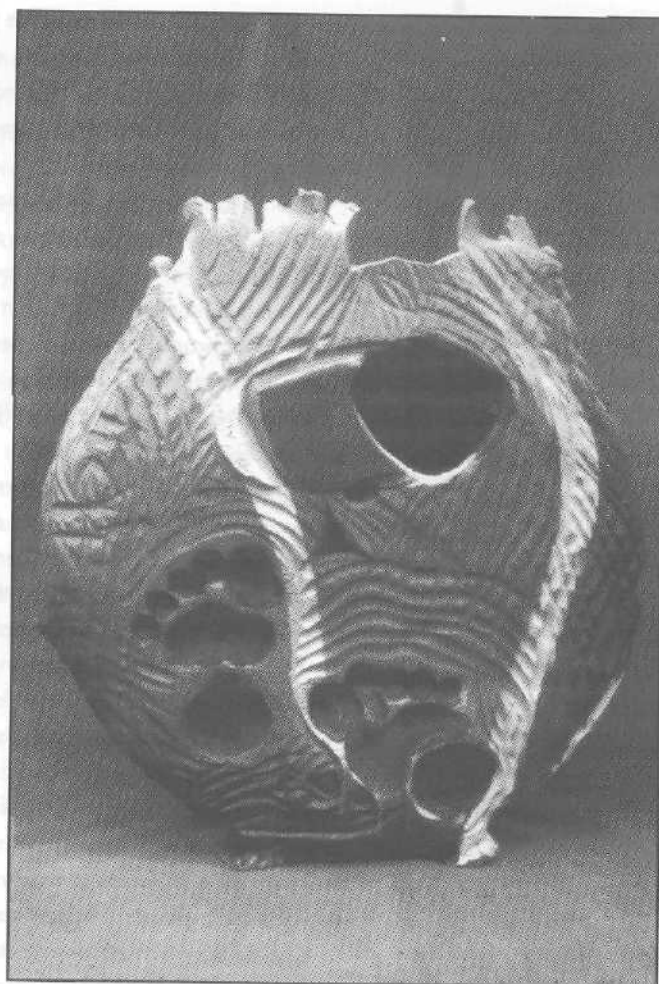


Still on '...the Curse of Postmodernism'



**Onuzulike
Ozioma,**
Stoneware, 1997.
*'Africa: Stories of
Pain, stories of
Hope'.*

Krydz
Ikwuemesi

It is rather strange that Peter Ezeh's grouse with my thesis is narrowed down and predicated on one statement contained in the essay: 'There are no installations here.'

Before I made that pronouncement, I had drawn the reader's attention to many other issues, insisting on my well-known theory that in the African's efforts to catch up with what is in vogue in the West or in the First World, he should not facilitate the obliteration of his own culture, his own identity.

And besides, how far can today's Africa go with postmodernism? The postmodernist spirit is sustained by supertechnology, and how much of that does Africa possess at the moment? As I duly pointed out in the lead essay, I find it ridiculous that an artist whose national consciousness is defined by hunger, instability, war, corruption and privations should bother himself/herself with ideologies and theories which do not practically benefit his/

her environment. For art in Africa, even beyond the so-called traditional era, has refused to be completely severed from Africa's holistic concept of life. We must not swallow, hook, line and sinker, every concept advanced by the West just in order to remain contemporary in the eye of the West.

I had said this much and more, before I made the declaration which Ekeh focuses on. Nevertheless I must confess that I was very delighted that there were no installations in the Biennale. I confess also that in the particular essay, I was being somewhat subjective - purposefully. But the views expressed there were not the official position of PACA.

PACA's contentions over the years has been that our art - African art - should be made and propagated 'on our own terms', that is on Africa's terms, without prejudice to the West's attempts at cultural and curatorial monotheism. PACA does not advance any stylistic paradigm nor does it align itself with any ideological zeitgeist. Rather it encourages free thought and creative adventurism among its members and associates. This is obviously why each PACA Biennale is left without themes or agenda.

What I did in the essay was to warn of the dangers of post-modernism with its tendency to transform art into a whore in the supersonic brothel of science. Even at that, I did not pronounce a blanket condemnation of postmodernism. I merely expressed apprehension at the anti-artistic nature of what may be called 'extremist installation,' which are, to my mind,

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redundant, empty, and ephemeral. This is regardless of whatever opinion the art world may hold about them. As I pointed out in my essay, such installations and techno-art, being inventions of the West, are clear echoes of the death-pangs of Western art. Like the legendary phoenix, Western art is dying. It may have to burn itself once again on the urn of African art in an attempt to rise and blossom again.

Yet one point remains to be made. What does one mean by installations? And did we not have installations in Africa before the advent of postmodernism? Or how does one describe classical African public sculptures and other functional sculptures which were used in village squares and other places? Or even the beautiful installations one finds in local wood markets for instance? When an artist creates sculptures in the round, is he/she not 'installing'? Every work of art whose form or content is enhanced by space is fundamentally an installation. To that extent, we have many installations at the last Biennale. What was being decried - albeit from a personal point of view - is the classic installation.

The argument, of course, does not undermine my belief that all art is legitimate, even when it fails to appeal to some people. I agree with Mr. Ekeh that 'Censorship is the very worst that can happen to any domain of art, or intellectual enterprise.' But I also believe that one day, some of us would wake up and ask - bemused - 'Where are our artists?!', and perhaps, 'Who wrapped the Reichstag!?' **GR**