

The exchange agreement between UW-Parkside and Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife, Nigeria, is being funded by both institutions and the U.S. Information Agency.

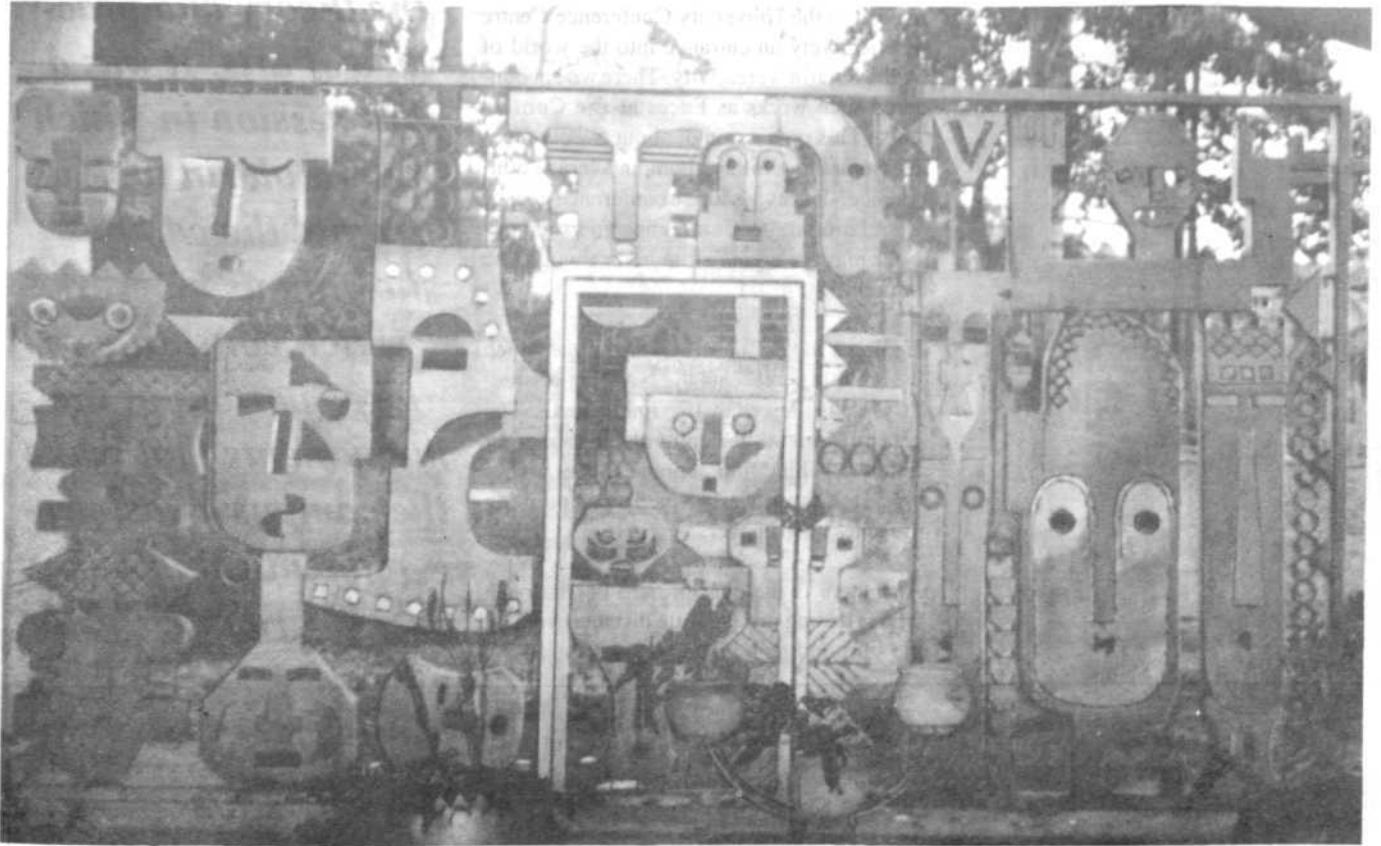
The programme was established through the connections of Lillian Traeger, professor of anthropology who has researched in Nigeria for years and travelled extensively in the

country.

Obafemi Awolowo University, a 25,000-student campus on the western edge of Nigeria, is situated on a large parcel between a rain forest and a savannah. Agbo Folarin is the second Nigerian faculty member to visit UW-Parkside. No UW-Parkside faculty have taken part in the exchange yet but several

have expressed interest. Traeger said the exchange will have benefits for faculty and students.

'They have a highly qualified set of faculty,' she said. The exchange gives students exposure to different perspectives and benefits the University 'just in terms of expanding our knowledge.' **GR**



## BACK IN IFE: THE SCULPTOR - STORY-TELLER BACK AT HIS BASE.

TAI ADE FATO

The campus of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife is well regarded among Africa's most beautiful campuses. It derives its beauty not only from the serene driveway that ushers the visitor through a distance of about two kilometres from the gate to the main campus. The buildings still stand as masterpieces of modern architectural design. Above all, there are the sculptural works and murals found all over the campus which make a statement about the tastes of the founding fathers of this monumental community.

We drove into the campus on a sunny day, late for our appointment with Agbo Folarin. The appointment had been booked by Lillian Traeger, a lecturer from the University of Wisconsin - Parkside.

We had to pay a price for coming late, thanks to a flat tyre in the course of the Lagos-Ife trip. After a long wait, we finally located him; it was as if he was the one that had been late for the appointment. He fussed over us, sympathising with us over the journey's slight misfortune.

Then Agbo Folarin insisted we must have something to eat. The pounded yam at the *buka* (bamboo-shed restaurant) just behind the Fine and Applied Arts Department building was a finger-licking affair. Then we got down to business.

This was not to be another long session of interview discussing the theory and practice of arts. It was a tour session in which Agbo Folarin took us round the campus showing us

his works which constitute a large portion of the monuments that make the campus a vast permanent exhibition ground.

The first was in 1973. It is a metal mural in front of the Students' Union Building. It is a melange of themes, a trend we were to find in a lot of Agbo Folarin's works. The mural is about protest, which symbolises students' unionism. As Agbo Folarin put it, 'Unionism is always about protesting about treatment of students by the government or by the university authorities.'

There are representations of different sports. The building also houses the administrative offices of the sports complex of the university. There are the footballer, the netballer, weight-lifter and people in different forms of

physical exercises all built into Folarin's work here.

An observable tendency in Folarin (all his works are sculptures) is a bent towards storytelling. An aspect of history is more often chronicled.



At the University Hall, a gigantic mural is titled **The Ife Story**. It portrays the Yoruba creation myth with focus on the cradle of a race in the historical city of Ile-Ife. The individuals who migrated to found the Yoruba nation are the heroes of this work. This is the work that *New Currents, Ancient Rivers*, a book published by the Smithsonian Foundation on contemporary African art exhibited.

A visit to the University Conference Centre is effectively an entrance into the world of Agbo Folarin's creativity. There we encountered such works as **Faces at the Conference**. This procession of about twenty faces has something to say about an average conference. 'It tries to satirise conference goers,' as Folarin put it. 'Conference goers always wear masks - an invisible mask though,' he remarked.

Doning a wig is an overbearing image which we are told represents the Nigerian aristocracy. He is flanked by two intellectuals. The generalissimo at the centre also has another follower behind him, a praise-singer archetype. He is the proverbial paid piper imbibing the tunes of his payer.

And there is the ever-present bored Jonah who is dosing away a little distance from all the surrounding hullabaloo.

Also on doors at the Centre are **The Story of Iyamopo** which presents the Yoruba mythological spirit behind the success of women's

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From Left, John Picton, reporter & Agbo Folarin

commercial endeavours and **The Story of Ibeji**. The latter presents one of the most popular of Yoruba beliefs which is that twins are special spiritual beings that must be revered. This myth is skilfully depicted in a brass work of many faces. There is also **The Story of the Sango Priest**, a devotee of the Yoruba deity of thunder and lightning.

There are others of the sculptor's works all over the campus of Obafemi Awolowo University such as a larger-than-life metal sculpture of Hezekiah Oluwasanmi, the university's second vice-chancellor mounted in front of the University Library named after him.

If going through the campus says something

about Folarin's prolificity, what about visiting his home at the University Quarters? Chairs are hewn out of wood trunks, stools are made of teaks, all over shelves and book stands are sculptures not to talk of the walls. He has an impressive collection of other artists' works too. **GR**

## ARTS ILLUSTRATED: TEMPORARILY STALLED



In terms of size, it hadn't much going for it; being a four-page newsletter printed in A4 magazine format did little to differentiate it from the scores of ragsheets churned out from obscure presses secreted in equally obscure corners of Lagos.

But what it lacked in size, the *Arts Illustrated Weekly*, a publication devoted exclusively to chronicling events in the culture sector and beaming the limelight on artists, made up for in aspirations and philosophy.

First published on Thursday May 4, 1989, *Arts Illustrated Weekly* was a welcome drop of moisture in a terrain surfeited with all sorts of magazines and newspapers giving all the attention to politics but precious little to the arts, as is pretty much the case these days.

The anxiety over what appeared to be its demise with its last outing on Thursday March 24, 1994, after almost five years of gallantly braving the challenge of publishing, prompted not a few questions from those concerned.

Long published as a solo effort, its publisher, Hakeem Shitta, a photojournalist who operates from his two-bedroom apartment in the Amuwo Odofin Housing Estate says that *Arts Illustrated Weekly* is not dead but temporarily stalled. 'I have to be dead before the publication can die,' he adds defiantly.

'I had to go to hospital for surgery and it was getting from one to two and so on. So it naturally got stalled; that's how much the surgery has taken.' The sessions with sur-

geons, which was occasioned by a malignant growth in his cranium, lasted almost a year and that meant that the magazine was denied the attention and funds that should have sustained it for the period.

But Shitta holds stubbornly to the original purpose and philosophy of *Arts Illustrated Weekly*, which was, as he puts it, 'to mould the arts and artists within my own kind of small resources, to celebrate the artist. It occurred to me that if the artist can't make as much money as his counterparts elsewhere maybe he'll get as much celebration as he got elsewhere. It's part of the arts to make the limelight and not only money in those other parts of the world.'

In what appears to be its first phase of existence, the publication carried a major cover story surrounded by news from the Nigerian cultural sphere, a column featuring the birthdays of artists, tidbits on prominent cultural personalities, notices and advertisements.

'It was originally designed for contributions, artists telling their story, critiques, an open gate meant to publish the writer as he writes. That's why there's no editor,' explains Shitta. Presented in this way, Shitta necessarily had a one-on-one relationship with such contributors, who were given a predetermined space to fill beyond which they had to do their own editing. 'I always find it distasteful, except for obvious grammatical errors, to tamper with a contribution because I know that the way a person writes, the kind of words he uses and the way he uses them

explain his style and character and make him different. So, what I always do is send the material back to the contributor and tell him, "your material is over-spilling",'

Another quality of the newsletter which he was determined to retain was its editorial independence. As if to repudiate the suspicion that could be harboured that the publication went off the streets due to financial problems, Shitta says he never had real financial problems publishing it. Rather, the only problem he had was with editorial matter, which did not always come in from contributors as scheduled, and which made him sometimes violate the date of publishing.

'It is true that at a time I needed assistance with adverts because I was not getting the type of advertisers I need to help the newsletter. Since editorial materials were not coming in as scheduled and as advertisers wanted to see the publication on its publishing date, I needed advertisers who were patient enough to tolerate the shifts we sometimes had to make and who really cared for their corporate image,' he explains.

According to Shitta, direct financial assistance in the form of grants or monetary gifts from companies or individuals would compromise his editorial independence and put him under obligation to such 'sponsors'. 'I don't need that sort of 'assistance' beyond advertisements that would appear in the paper and leave no weight on my conscience.'

Shitta plans to re-launch the publication 'within a month,' after re-adjusting to the arts scene. But not before fulfilling a condition, which is the concurrent publishing of a directory on Nigerian artists, a document which he has long planned and is almost ready for publishing.

He looks forward to the launch with optimism as the climate in which he used to publish has changed considerably from the days he used to encounter problems with typesetting. He now sets the pages on a personal computer he recently purchased for the purpose. But he hints that the cover price, which had changed from an initial 50 kobo in