

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, titbits 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

1989 to N5 in 1994, may not be the same because of rising costs. When times were better, he says, the newsletter was published with N2,500, but the situation has changed considerably.

'It wasn't initially designed as a profitable venture but to stand on its own and to be circulated free of charge. If for instance we got a little assistance from advertisers in terms of improved advertising support, that could cover the overheads and we could afford to circulate free. But the assistance has to be appropriate; it should not be the proverbial gift horse with pre-conditions,' Shitta says.

Publishing *Arts Illustrated Weekly* has been an outgrowth of Shitta's career as a dedicated photographer of the arts and artists. He started devoting exclusive attention to cultural photography in 1983 and declares the performer to be the primary focus of his photography, 'because performing is a transient art form. A painting is permanent and can always be admired after it has been exhibited, but a concert is something that is not always there. That's why I give performers emphasis. When I attend exhibitions, it is as an event, to photograph the personalities who will be present, and not the works.'

His larger purpose, however, is to have a photo-library on every Nigerian artist and performer of contemporary times so that anybody from any part of the world can tap into an on-line computer network and get the information he needs on any artist or visual. This documentation which he started a long time ago is continuous.

'Anything may happen to me, but if I have this information where others can reach it and use it for the benefit of all then it won't have been a wasted effort.'



Hakeem Shitta

AFRICA CENTRE, LONDON

Sets New Goals

ADOTEY BING

On January 18 after about two years of planning, the Africa Centre played host to a group of invited business people, diplomats, members of the British arts establishment, journalists and well-wishers who were treated to a twenty minute slide presentation of the Centre's plans to become a flagship for Africa in Europe.

The presentation, given by myself and Ms Elizabeth Biggin (its development officer for public relations and fund-raising), was preceded by a short but powerful speech by the High Commissioner for Uganda, Professor George Kirya, who is on the Council of Management for the Africa Centre as one of the three representatives of African High Commissioners and Ambassadors to Great Britain.

The presentation consisted of a brief history of the Centre, an introduction to the building, an overview of its events, an outline of the redevelopment plan, the support received to date and the fund raising strategy.

The Africa Centre was established in 1961, and formally opened in 1964 by Dr. Kenneth Kaunda, then President of Zambia. In 1968 it purchased 38 King Street, in London's Covent Garden, which at the time was the site of London's main fruit and vegetable market. Today Covent Garden is one of London's major tourist attractions.

The Centre is a stone's throw from the Royal Opera, and is close to Bush House from which the BBC's Africa service is broadcast, the Savoy Hotel, Trafalgar Square with its famous Nelson's Column and the National Gallery. Four Africa High Commissions - those of Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Uganda and South Africa - are within four

minute's walking distance.

The list of Africans that have spoken or performed at the Centre over the past three decades reads like a roll call of Africa's

brightest. They include Wole Soyinka, Mahtar m'Bow, Presidents Julius Nyerere, Kenneth Kaunda and Yoweri Museveni, OAU Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the Right Reverend Desmond Tutu, Gracia Machel, Chinua Achebe, Bernard Chidzero, Sally Mugabe, Ousman Sembene and Ben Okri. Among British politicians that have spoken at the Centre are Malcolm Rifkind, Baroness Chalker and David Steel.

The Centre's exhibition of Zimbabwean stone sculptures at the Barbican in 1988 was opened by HRH Prince Charles, the Prince of Wales. Artists such as Malagatana and Ablade Glover have exhibited there.

The Centre's present building, which is of considerable historic interest, houses a restaurant, bar, book shop, craft centre, meeting rooms, a gallery and resource room. Over 160,000 people visit it each year. From 1776 when the doors first opened, it has served a number of different purposes. For the bulk of the time it was the Stephens Auction Rooms.

The purpose of the plan is to provide an attractive, functional and inviting building, inform and educate people about Africa through high profile events about African arts, culture and opinion, and - last but by no means least - make the Centre's building financially self-sustaining.

The plan will involve re-designing the Centre's programmes and extensively redevelop-