

it comprises several artists. One must also remember that Anatsui, before coming into contact with Uli and Okeke's 'natural synthesis' theory, had been involved in the Sankofa philosophy way back in Ghana. These experiences, coupled with his interaction with other artists in Aka and other fora, have contributed to his intellectual and artistic resource. And he blends this with a clear perception of global art trends. This outlook owes as much to Okeke as it does to all the other contributing factors. Together they have enabled the artist's work to shift 'effortlessly between African and Western aesthetic sensibilities, mastering both but belonging to neither one exclusively 'and thus making 'an appropriate example of the transvanguard'. Although each author tries to look at Anatsui from a different standpoint, there seems to be some sort of harmonisation in some of their postulations, especially in relation to issues of definition. Each is aware that he/she is presenting a familiar stranger to the Western audience and attempt is thus made to shed some light on the work of the artist - this new entrant into the highly-policed confines of Occidental internationalism. Of the six authors, however, Elizabeth Peri-Willis' contribution remains the most insightful and composite, not only for its more accessible language but also for the author's ability to weave history, analysis and interpretation into her narrative. This is perhaps enhanced by her earlier personal contacts with Anatsui during her sojourn in Nigeria in the 1980s. In sum, the book epitomises the postmodernist claptrap about its own perceptive generosity and its acclaimed belief in the universality of man and

his vision usually encapsulated in art, culture, science and technology. Simon Njami echoes this sentiment on page 72 when he says that 'La leçon que nous donne depuis quelques années l'art contemporain africain, l'art contemporain tout court, est que tout art est nécessairement le fruit d'un processus de collage et de permanence'. In effect, nothing really new is said. We are presented with the excitement and astonishment of the West at a re-discovery, the re-discovery of African art, garnished with the techniques of art history and criticism. Interestingly, however, *A Sculpted History of Africa* is a harbinger of a gathering culturo-artistic invasion which holds several implications for African art and the African identity in the next century. New Traditions encodes the same potentials. But beyond these possibilities, these books may also change our own perception of our art and our approach to its dissemination. They may do so, not necessarily by presenting new vistas before us, but principally by challenging our 'intimate insiders' to lick their lips, in the words of Chinua Achebe, rather than allow the har-mattan to do it for them. In contemplating this challenge, Mosquera's warning recurs, vis-a-vis the books under discussion: 'the desire and power of the postmodern West to curate the rest of the world now begins. If we uncritically accept it, flattered by being at all paid attention to, we will soon find ourselves in a new, even more sophisticated form of cultural colonialism.'

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Literature Matters returns

THE newsletter *Literature Matters* is issued by the Literature Department of the British Council in London returns after a pause in publication, or at the least a cessation of appearance in Nigeria, for some while.

Literature Matters reappears in a new design format, but not any less committed to the former literary tributes, conference, seminar and other event reports, directories of new book publications from the UK, announcement and reflections on topical issues by writers and critics.

The newlook, now characterised by page-head illustrations, retains the former succinctness and textual economy.

Issue No 25 (January 1999) carries a me-

morial on recently deceased poet, Ted Hughes and among others, reports on the festival of writing from Commonwealth islands, Mauritius, July 1998, the Booker Prize and the Edinburgh Book Festival.

The well-produced, UK-printed paper, however, records in its prefatory sections on a recent and regrettable racial insult on the writer, Caryl Phillips who was on a reading tour overseas from 'someone close to the Council at an official dinner' which Alastair Niven, director of Literature notes with sadness but definitely with a resolve that henceforwards, 'All managers in the Council will have mandatory race awareness training, to which resources will be committed and the consequences of which will be closely monitored'.