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The Reupholster of Stained Glass Designs and “*the deceptive silence of stolen voices*”

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Abstract

Reflecting on the seminal theme of Biography as a provisional means of accessing artistic substance, this study dares a reading of the metamorphosis of the artistry of the Nigerian glass designs of Frank Ugiomoh and Nsikak Essien. Utilising an empirical analysis, principal art works of these masters are examined. However, a hermeneutic investigation is engaged to aid an unraveling of the tooling mechanisms and the art making traditions that the artists deployed in their engagement with the natural synthesis cognomen in affecting the ecclesia in Africa paradigm. The designs of Frank Ugiomoh are discussed with a hermeneutic detailing that draws attention to the peculiarities of his artistry as emblematic in the growth and development of glass designs. However, that investigation revealed (I) that the artist Nsikak Essien in reupholstering his pictures diligently sourced his devises on mimetic reinstatements of the canons of academe; but introduced lineal schemes culled from the art forms of his Nigerian art world, specifically Uli and Nsibidi; while (II) Ugiomoh toed the intellectually subtle repositioning of themes and tooling mechanisms, declaiming the

prime masters' narratives but implanting a language of pictorial codes that deter the dearth of symbols.

Key Words: biography, provisional, metamorphosis, hermeneutic, paradigm shift, re-upholster, deceptive silence of stolen voices

Introduction

Site-specific Church images offer nuanced commentaries on biblical messages, Church teaching and the Liturgy. With picture making tooling mechanisms and the story-telling traditions commonplace in Nigeria's art world. In fact, in re-calibrations of imageries, the diverse glass designs of Frank Ugiomoh and Nsikak Essien recite the same stories as that of the prime masters in versed, poetic and political language. These diverse representations in the Church are not only distinct modes of discourse, but also single visual experiments reflecting the new religious and political ethos of Nigerian Independence; and expressive of the cultural vivacity of Nigeria's art world, and the inexhaustible creative capital its artists. These images expressively celebrate the adage "*anya diali bu anya eke! The proverb aptly translated, reads: "The eye of the man with local roots is (as penetrating as) the python's eye"*" (Ebiegberi J. Alagoa, 1997).

This most spectacular of ecclesiastic art, in spite of the attention and publicity that it deserves in Nigeria, demands a comprehensive and encompassing narrative that would discuss Nigerian glass as the overarching accessory of change for ingraining the truths of the "new thinking". Symbolically it is important to reflect upon the notions of power that these images inflect (Michel Foucault, 1972). Before the details of this essay, it is important to situate the biographies of Ugiomoh, emphasising the parochialism of his education and background; and Essien's liberal artistic exposure to the Canon. From the biographies of these two artists the thrust of their peculiar styles may be read. Both artists are inheritors of the western canon and the modernist tendencies dye-stamped on the Nigerian art world in the 1960s by Y.C.A. Grillo and D.H. Dale; Uche Okeke and the Zaria school of *natural synthesis* fame. With these varied portmanteaus, the artists bestride the tracks of development in the hybridisation of art for the purposes of evangelisation. Hence, this paper attempts a reading of how that cognomen inflects the power of the image at enthroning modernism in contemporary Christian art.

Biography of Francis Ugiomoh

Born in 1954 (Aba, Eastern Nigeria) to the Catholics: Mr. Johnson Gabriel Omosi Ugiomoh, a professional carpenter; and Mrs. Ugiomoh, a traditional weaver, Francis Agbiyola Omoh Ugiomoh was candidate for the Church priesthood at the SS Peter & Paul Major Seminary, Bodija, Ibadan. He terminated that ambition in his first year of Theology in 1976.

Francis eventually studied Fine Art at the University of Benin, Benin City earning a Bachelor of Arts degree (B.A.) with Sculpture as major in 1980. Under the tutelage of pioneer Art history teacher, Marshall Ward Mount, Ugiomoh found a keen interest in Art History. With a Master's degree in Visual Arts from the prestigious Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan; and armed with a Dissertation on the traditions of Benin architecture, Frank proceeded to study for a Ph.D. degree in the Philosophy of History and Aesthetics in the Department of Philosophy, University of Port Harcourt. He worked hard, rose through the ranks to become a Professor of Art History and Theory in the Department of Fine Art and Design, in October 2012.

Biography of Nsikak Okon Essien

Nsikak Okon Essien was born in 1957. Okon was exposed to Art and Craft in the Holy Family College, Abak, Akwa Ibom State (1970-1975). As a young person growing up in Abak and in regular visits to Calabar, Okon was attracted to the Stained Glass Paintings in Presbyterian Churches. Nsikak is a Painting graduate of the Institute of Management and Technology (IMT) Enugu. Until an invitation to decorate a pantry's glass door by the architect Tom Ikimi in Benin City, Edo state; Essien had never ventured into that medium. Research on stained glass, revealed its arduous industrial production. Nsikak, therefore, preferred the counterfeit medium, painted glass, instead of the rigorous processes of classical stained glass production.

George Kubler (1962, 6-19) underscores the place of biographies as milestones for a reading of the flow of ideas from one generation of artists to the next in the "rail track" analogy. The tapestry that straddles the artists Grillo and Dale with that of Ugiomoh and Essien is undergirded by the threads of the artists' common exposure to canonic art. This is the anchor that links the generations, irrespective of the good fortune of age, temperament, training and "good entrance" onto the tapestry of time. Biography, therefore, substantiates the *raison d'être* for the discourse of the pedagogy that links the generations. The *ecclesia* style created by the prime artists is the specie; and the works of Ugiomoh and Essien are its taxonomic varieties. The biological metaphor undergirds the recurrence of certain kinds of events, offering a provisional explanation that precludes making the new art form a lonely *unicorn* but a point of reference for posterity. However, the artists in making their inputs at the break through in the discourses, modernism and post modernism, all dared to "unlearn" what they had learned at college in order to discover their new selves. The new was reflected in "hybridism", expressed in the cognomen, *natural synthesis*, made famous by Uche Okeke (1932-2016) and the Zaria School.

In view of the foregoing, it is my intention in this paper to approach the art historically; taking into consideration specifically styles in the works of the post Vatican II Church. Hence, this paper is concerned with how the new art works from

Nigeria, as a composite art form in the constellation of church art, draw attention to the historicity of the “new” in the disentanglement from Hegelian empiricism (Keith Moxey, 1998). That glass, thusly, reflects the religious, political and social consciousness of the new evangelisation. In that vein, therefore, this paper (I) dares to address the problematisation of the *natural synthesis* ideology and the contributions of younger college trained artists in the overall understanding of the cognomen in modern Nigerian art; and (II) locate these images as quintessential *reconfigurations, repeats and resurgences* of the folios of the first modernist design masters.

The study begins with an empirical analysis of specific works of Ugiomoh and Essien. However, a hermeneutic investigation of the artists’ principal works is directed at an unraveling of the tooling mechanisms and the art making traditions that they deployed in their engagement with the sobriquet. However, the works of Frank Ugiomoh are discussed with a hermeneutic detailing that draws attention to the declamation of the narratives of the prime masters; and his novel contribution to a new language of symbolic codes that deter the dearth of iconography.

Nigerian glass art works are no mere objects of aesthetic contemplation, deemed as precious treasures, perhaps, relegated to the margins of human experience merely. Nigerian designs reflect and speak volumes for genuine human experience, not just about feeling. In this respect, therefore, it is imperative to employ the metaphoric allegory of “*the deceptive silence of stolen voices*” (above), to understand the underpinnings of these para-chronicles and their discursive intellectual empericities as historiographic entities. That grounding afforded the artists the opportunity to discover the africanite of independence and the remnant of self! (Ben Shahn1957) These, in fact, under gird the episteme that ground their cognitive formations.

Ugiomoh and his Works

The Coronation of the Virgin

Coronation of the Virgin (Fig. 5) celebrates the 5th Glorious mystery of the Rosary, the Coronation of the Virgin as Queen of Heaven and Mother of God. Simulating a commonplace *Ikwereland* celebration with its hypes and fanfare as background, the story is stirred. In the historical sense of this transformation, a mimesis of events in real society is re-enacted as the subject of this window. That the scene in the art work “is not really happening”, remains an important contribution to its enjoyment for it manages to distance the real and at the same time disarm it. *Coronation of the Virgin* is reminiscent of the singular intoxication that the first Pop-Art exhibitions brought spectators: people saw ordinary household objects, such as Ironing Boards, Vacuum Cleaners and other familiar objects in a space where they no longer had power over any of their usual users, helpless and impotent like stranded sea-monsters, in the neutralising theatre of a gallery (Hugh Honor & John Fleming,

2009).

With arresting attention, a photographic recast of a life celebration is the artist's preferred site upon which the Coronation of the Virgin is implanted. The fascination in this ingenious use of mimesis, however, is that the faithful and visitors are witnessing a simple play of fantasy. It is plain to the viewers that the earthly event is utilised as scaffolding for the *Coronation*. This is the import of this omnibus' utilisation of the miraculous transfiguration of the Commonplace (Arthur Danto, 1981) as a tooling ploy for the delivery of distinct visual statements. However, the tying together of the celestial coronation of the Virgin in heaven (represented by the crown in the painting's rhomboid niche) and the local fiesta here on earth (symbolised by the gala of dancers and musicians) in a seamless flow delivers the message.

This panoramic painting with sixteen smaller units is tied together in an aluminum frame. With a Plexiglas ground the graphic trace outlines of each picture motif defines them. Otherwise, there is no evidence of the canonic painterly use of technicalities like contrasts, *chiaroscuro*; not even a tonal gradation of colours necessary to designate and define depth of picture. All the images are sited on the pane of a common picture plane, subtly shared and tucked into sixteen picture sections. However, the prominent use of Yellow in an analogous compliment with secondary colours, Green and Brown in Billboard fashion, create befitting calm and harmony.

Commemoration Jubilee 2000

On this monumental twenty-four panel Plexiglas picture in the Saint Jude's Catholic Church, Port Harcourt (Fig. 1) ambulatory, the artist engages fabric design symbolisms and heraldic yardage colouration of the *Ikwere-Ndoki* peoples. Also distinctive are imageries drawn directly from Nigerian cryptic folklore, oral histories, myths and legends. These strategies emphasise the spirit of the new ecumenism, evangelisation and indigenisation of Liturgy.

Commemoration echoes the biblical places of real encounter: Mount Tabor, Mt. Sinai, Mt. Calvary *et al*; striking viewers to wonder and stutter in awesome speechlessness. This is reminiscent of Grillo's reaction: "*words alone cannot express the feeling*" that persons engaged in commerce in the atmosphere this art form creates. (Yusuf Grillo, 2012). The entire image is tapestry fashion, rich and colourful; resplendent and eloquent! At close scrutiny, however, an immediate recognition is the silhouettes of five pigeons in perpetual cyclic flight but wrapped in the Eucharistic panorama *Jesus Today Yesterday Forever*. In calm relief, a montage of vertical George drapery, *Acha* cloth familiar at distinctive local occasions, is revealed. In closer look, popular motifs and ideograms, culled from the decorative *repertoire* of the peoples' art world, is revealed in the geometricised ground that projects the curtain. *Jubilee 2000* in its movie-like stills creates the illusion of a mobile picture, like a true still-life.

However, in *grilloesque* fashion Ugiomoh steals in the Eucharistic euphemism *Jesus Christ Today Yesterday and Forever* re-echoing the glory of the Eucharistic faith. Declaiming Grillo's iconographic repeats of motifs, however, Ugiomoh engages repeats of colour schemes taken from a simulation of George fabric colours; and a replay of alternate patterns with motifs drawn from Nigerian architectural decorations. With its peculiar selection of iconography, *Commemoration* forces a presence that arrests attention and makes persons assembled before it to genuflection, Benediction and fervent prayer!

Ugiomoh engages no tangible imageries, only emblematic Church and *Ikwere-Ndoki* art gestures! How does this speechlessness address us in spite of its mute eloquence? With Compositional freedom, no mimesis, an evanescent relay of the sole *Acha* Fabric; and the Eucharistic euphemism *Christ Today and Forever*; and George fabric colours, the artist made up his palette: with Red and shades of Crimson, all derived from that same primary colour. Red is a reminder of the traditional symbolism of blood from sacrifice of old, indeed it re-echoes the logic of sacrifice; reflecting Divinity and humanity brought together for cleansing (Jeremiah 41:31). In significant self-representation, Ugiomoh engages the Cloth as a symbol of "transience and impermanence", originally plucked from Ikwere land funerals, in contrast to the euphemism that affirms a "constant". In an all-over pattern effect this central motif is repeated in the entire picture, capturing mortality, evanescence and transience within the picture. However, the Eucharistic affirmation invokes the purposes of *Commemoration*! In spite of the absence of mimesis and other characteristics of canonic compositions, a rich decorative and colourful tapestry effect is achieved in this montage. In an enigmatic Cezanne-like fashion, the invocation is embedded in *Jubilee 2000*. This is convocation; the viewers and community are called to a Eucharistic meal in a dramatic sharing on the altar below; here divinity and humanity are reconciled.

George, *Acha* Cloth

Acha Cloth is a significant cultural and prestige item in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. For that matter at the Burial rites and Obsequies for the strong and mighty in the land cloth (expensive George material specifically) is hoisted as a marker of the status and prestige of the deceased. In fact, rites of passage of dignitaries and persons of high social standing cloth is distinguished by hoisted *Acha* cloth and significant blasts of canon shots. This spectacle is eclectically transferred as a spectral in the Church Liturgy. In a blatant display of power, Ugiomoh takes on iconographies directly from the *Ikwere-Ndoki* world. These in Foucaultian terms are the 'capillary' modes of power that control individuals and their...' With sobriety traditions of festival, elements of the theatre and entertainment in modern fashion, distinguished by the George cloth symbol are deployed as platforms to drive home notions of celebration in the ecclesial Commemoration. Drawing attention to the familiar in culture the artist

makes visible the essence of the occasion. A gaze at this art work ephemerally, remains a kind recognition offering a pictorial code that is decipherable in the locale language.

The *simulacrum* of a fleeting memorial of George yardage in its vitality adds integration. Metaphorically death and resurrection are reflected in rich, decorative and festive colours with symbolisms that add a touch of heraldry to the event. This is mythical and emblematic of the popular notions of duality in African thought systems: life and death; as the *Ikwere* would say *ofuiife kula nkozo a kuo so nya*. In spite of the rhomboid composition and its geometricised format, the illusion of giant “cut-outs strip” distinctive silhouettes embedded on a water-mark dreamily persist. These graphic formulations embed the gestures and devices for the discourse of the picture. These as strands of knowledge are directly drawn from the lexicons of the *Ikwere-Ndoki* people’s visual mechanisms taken from culture, facilitates the narration of biblical and church events. Hence, through the agency of African iconography the Church and its messages reach the hearts and minds of the people. That is the schema summed in Foucaultian: “reaches into the very grains of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives” (Foucault 1990, 31)

Other Gestures

Capturing a dynamic interplay between the fabric hoisted at funerals and celebrations in *Ikwere*land with the festive Jubilee Year is a cipher that translates that reality. It is this borrowing from the subterranean presence of africanite, with aided clarity and the splendor of tradition that enables the transmutation of the Good News to the world of the peoples. This is the symbolic essence of imageries utilised in the re-upholster of art in this *paradigm shift*. The symbolism of the *Acha* cloth, therefore, transforms the gaze of the faithful and visitor alike in this mystical encounter in the unfamiliar church space. In this seeming puzzle, the picture challenges the intellect and imagination. Far from overwhelming the viewer, the encounter invokes a meditation and the revelation of a child like fantasy world. In a contemplation of the paradox of Life and Death, the artist employs the commonplace in its transformed state, film-like ephemerality as a *leitmotif* that re-interrogates the mythical concept of *lumen de luminae*, Light from Light. He engages the commonplace, borrowing from the peoples’ ontology and cosmology to affect metaphysics of presence. Declaiming Grillo’s readily decipherable iconography, Ugiomoh makes visible the legible Christian truths in the biblical stories and the Liturgy (Patrick C. Chibuko, 2006). Hence, insinuating the finest tradition of heraldic emblems and devices of the locale, he tells the story. Hans-George Gadamer (1986, 82) sees these artifices by the artists as stage mechanisms in which the viewers recognise the reality of their worlds, in spite of its seemed indecipherability. These are the ciphers that aid the transmutation from unfamiliarity to full understanding of the Theology of the new evangelisation.

Commemoration has a lot to say to us, both as a religious artifact and as a censure of modernism. The symbol of the George cloth facilitates recognition. Recognition is the essence of all symbolic language, and all art of whatever kind will always be a language of recognition (George-Gadamer, 1998). A palpable indecipherability is the first reaction at the encounter of this montage of imageries and colour. A calm reading reveals a pictorial imagery of familiar commonplace iconographies. These unfold in colours and figurations from the common ground of the yardage. This enigmatic image offers a sign language that presents a dynamic interplay between the burial ceremonial use of iconography and the celebration of the Jubilee Year. While invoking the mythical world of the locale, even as it finds expression in the celebration of the obsequies, this art work addresses both the literate and the ordinary folks. The Catholic Church in its art consuming rituals and Liturgy addresses the society *via* symbols that constitute pictorial codes from the humanistic traditions. These effectively link the African traditions and the new evangelisation. This is the fascination that the work as a cynosure of the new evangelisation lays claim to.

As a pictorial code, the symbol sufficiently served as a pedestal upon which to foist the spiritual notions of commemoration in the Jubilee Year. It is fascinating that the brooding subterranean presence of the, otherwise, Otherness of African art forms stood shoulder to shoulder along the clarity and splendor of Christian truths. African imageries speak to the faithful and ordinary viewers anew. The combination of this choice metaphor from Africa and its accompanying iconography in synergy with the euphemism, *Jesus Christ Today, Yesterday and Forever* and the silhouettes of the birds in perpetual flight transform the picture into a permanent source of mythical poetry and song. It is the choice use of visual metaphors drawn entirely from the locale that is the anchor that makes the faithful and ordinary viewers encountering *Commemoration* “more at home” with its message. This enigmatic encounter makes plain the common humanity of mankind.

The language of gesture culled entirely from *Ikwere*land is the artist’s token. A gesture is something wholly corporeal and wholly spiritual at one and the same time (Gadamer, 1986:79). Ugiomoh’s utilisation of corporeal symbol to meet a reinterpretation of the Christos message transcends the physical realm to affect the ethos of the spirituality of Christian theological truths. These corporeal symbols in unison with the other symbols drawn from Nigerian iconography constitute the artist’s pictorial gestures. A certain mythical quality informs the entire art work through the language of heraldic emblems and devices. In that picture the viewers see imageries that remind them of their very corporeal world, in spite of the ephemerality of representations. These are the symbols of the unfamiliarity in which we encounter ourselves and the graphic unfamiliarity of our world. Just as the language of the celebration of the death of a dignitary and its attendant symbolisms in *Ikwere* society

is given distinctive gesture in the language of the corporeal *Acha* fabric banner; so also the celebration of the Christos story is captured in the complexity of this art work. Lodging conveniently in the critical template of prevailing theoretical discourses of postmodernism, with its strategies of pastiche and appropriation, this is Nigeria's contribution to those critical conversations. *Commemoration*, served the signal of a postmodernist collapse of the Nigerian modernist ideology and the dissolution of its foundations.

Architectural Mechanisms

This site specific picture in the ambulatory space, arrests the attention of persons, who encounter it at all occasions. That spell binding encounter spontaneously draws attention to the celebration of the Redemptive ethos of Calvary. Theatrical ploys embedded in the architecture: Baroque style arches and somberly painted walls, lead the eye to the Tabernacle space. Architectural deterministic ploys are the mechanisms that lead the "encounter effect". It is within that illusionary space that the, otherwise, seamless geometricised picture finds its en-framing mechanism. In fact, the mechanisms of form and colour alone are the overriding, almost musical imageries that address the viewers. The artistic vocabulary centers on geometric abstraction with a grid system as the central format. This is the enabling device for keying in the entire picture. That quintessential African device (John Sims, 2004) transforms this seemed obtrusive art work into a system of coordinates. On the plane the units evolve following a precise algorithm. More or less visible, the entire protocol creates rhythmic variations of patterns in the composition. The colours shift and crawl readily into the mathematical logic of the grid. That picture frame invites the viewer to enter into the depth of the enclosed *Commemoration 2000*. Plexiglas, a modern architectural fabrication material, in spite of yielding a simultaneous creation of a lit up interior does not yield a munificent glass effect; but exudes a peculiar calm ambience on the interior spaces that it envelopes.

Nsikak Essien and His Works

Redeemer's Logo, Banana Island, Lagos

Redeemer's Logo (Fig. 2), reveals Nsikaka's dyed-in-the-wool afro-centricity. The dove motif is located in the innermost ring of a concentric circle. Each circle is defined using the armature ream as a border, causing halation, which makes the unit distinctive with motif induced abstractions reminiscent of calabash and mask derived decorations, wall decorations, and even habiliment embroidery. In simple, easy to read mimetic compositions, Nsikak's works are distinctive in dazzlingly decorative relays (Figs. 2&4). With emphatically contoured lines, he employs silhouette of the metal extrusions to define each figure in tense elastic lines, creating curvilinear shapes that project the central motif. Essien's immersion in the cryptography of both the *Nsibidi*

and the *Uli* traditions of the places of both his birth and education is obvious. This creative envelop as the evangelisation logo of a Christian denomination speaks volumes for his artistic immersion in a cultural consciousness anchored to the apron strings of Nigerian modernity.

Ingeniously deploying the Iron and Steel technology readily available in the ordinary welders' shop, he creates armatures with designs simulated from European Art Nouveau and the late 19th century Art and Crafts movements. In spite of acknowledging Grillo's works in the same medium; Nsikak stubbornly uses regular glass, not stained glass as substrate for all his art work.

With Red and Blue enamel vibrantly applied, Essien's art works boast of well crafted mimetic figurations, with themes and subject matter faithful to biblical page reproductions. Interfaced with metal armature, the impression of silhouettes in bright daylight creates illusive *chiaroscuro* effects in all his pictures. This is the artist's ingenious way for the creation of peculiar picture effects, for example, the *Madonna* (Fig 6); *Come to me little children* and *Good Shepherd* (Figs. 3 & 4) are examples. It is fascinating to note the interplay of a graphic silhouetted metal armature of the main picture motif (Fig. 6), as an interface mechanism, put atop the main pictures in the glass pane (Figs. 6 & 7). This interface creates the illusion of painted drapery folds in the final image. Essien utilises the *trompe l'oeil* effect (Figs. 6) to create mixed media art works in simple glass substrates, Wrought iron and pigment.

Essien's metal armatures lack the high ornamental finish of the Art Nouveau movement pioneered by the Belgian Architect, Victor Horta (1862-1947). Horta assumed a conception of the entire environment as an organic whole inundated with sinuous contours. Nsikak conceded that he had sought information on stained glass in Art & Architecture books. It remained a mystery that he never mentioned the direct influences of the Art Nouveau architectural design movement in the development of his works. The rich foliated two-dimensional ornamentation characteristics; the free and sinuous whiplash curves of Japanese print designs that inspired *Art Nouveau* are conspicuously manifest in his works (Figs. 3 & 4).

In simple stories with themes taken from the Bible (Figs. 3 & 4) Essien introduces Nigerian persons, particularly Nigerian children recognisable in their peculiar hand weave styles, as participants in the stories. The metal interface simply aids the story by super-imposing its frame with its design elements to enhance the culturalisation effect. Rhythm, organic flow and movement, characteristics commonplace in Nigerian sculptural traditions, reflect the dominant qualities of Essien's aesthetics. Nsikak does not seem to recognise the implication of time and the vagaries of weather on metal surfaces. These art works lack technical viability as structural interfaces. Even more disgusting is his indifference to realities like the imperative for the durability of glass as a substrate cushioned on plastic bevels. In spite

of the artist's ready appropriation of Nigerian imageries, a sense of historical continuity with the western canon evident in his detours to that tradition seems crucial to the contemporary artist. Nsikak neither demonstrates the adaptive capacity for fresh thinking as a Grillo nor a knack for academic intellectualisation of subject matter. In share simplicity, Nsikak avoids the intellectual vigor and audacity of a Dale; and the international *vivre* that put Grillo and Dale on both the national and international art worlds.

Nsikak Essien's main works are, in fact, hand painted pigment on glass. It would be proper to call this *genre* painted glass. Conscious of the demands of the '*pictorial turn*', Nsikak effects a re-calibration of European style images. Windows in the Redeem Church (Figs.3 & 4); emphasise the sensibilities of European glass from which they stem, though drawing attention to the consciousness of the time. Nsikak's work is directed at the run of the mill church-goers. Borrowing from the "antiquity of world art" and synthesis with Nigerian visual elements, with distinct inclusion of Nigerian models gives his work universality. Nsikak's art works simple in directness meet the needs of a "World spiritual family". Hence, echoing the reminiscence of Henry Focillon emphasising the spiritual ethnography that unites the best profiled races of mankind (Henry Focillon, 1992, 62-3). By share definition and careful reasoning in the creations of forms on the wrought iron frames, Essien creates a "*collage*" of metal armature and glass that renders a *trompe l'oeil* effect Keying eclectically to the traditions of the Opalescent Art Nouveau, and the Art and Craft Movement. However, his works lack the technical finesse of these great traditions in the creation of either stained glass or painted glass.

Conclusion

Presenting new ways of telling the Bible stories, the works of Nsikak and Ugiomoh underline the significance of the purposive novelties inspired by the paradigm shift in Christendom (Giuseppe Alberigo, 2006). These art works effectively reflect the historical development and growth of the tradition of stained glass designs, with histories that can be traceable serially from one generation of images to the others, even to the present (Michel Foucault 1982, 76-100).

The Church arguably the most coeval institution of the western world utilised this art as its *defacto* instrumentality of change; purposefully directed at matters of Liturgy and Evangelisation with the dynamics of ideas, beliefs and cultural practices instituted in Vatican II. The discourse is about power (Foucault, 1982, 21ff). Figuratively Foucault draws attention at the use of commonplace mechanisms of cultural transfer, such as indigenous symbols and modes of vernacular discourse as modes of effecting change. Ugiomoh's use of the George fabric gesture and devices; and Nsikak's use of *Uli* and *Nsibidi* symbolisms, all taken from Nigerian intuitions are

examples. These iconographical elements that insinuated power in circular society were transmuted to personify power in the Spiritual sphere.

The sub-title, " *the deceptive silence of stolen voices* ", aptly demonstrates that the production of knowledge through art is always historically determined and knows no closure. This realisation permits us to understand more fully the interpretations of Church teaching, Liturgy and biblical stories using the *natural synthesis* cognomen by the prime artists Grillo and Dale. That is, it sensitises us to how the values and traditions of picture making of their own time framed their pictures for Christendom. It also makes us cognizant of the social and political function of our own activity as purveyors of culture. It is, therefore, significant that the history of the growth and development of stained glass designs from Nigeria and its art traditions maybe likened to railway tracks as elements of continuity. The biographies of the artists were a sufficient provisional means of scanning that artistic substance. It also presented a paradigm for the establishment of a relationship between the works of the prime masters and the works of the new generation artists.

Tradition should not be understood as a set of artistic conventions irretrievable sediment in a fixed past, but as horizons of a particular sort that are still operative in continuous ways in the present. This outlook restates an enduring truth that the present would always lack meaning when not tied to the past that begat it. Fortunately, the past no doubt is so diverse in a way that is baffling. It is such that relating within the present and the multiple traditions that it has shed, perpetually in renewal in diverse forms. This is where the art works of Ugiomoh and Essien seek cleavage. These art works and the design they purvey are tacitly historical as they are valid translations of the past; distilling that past in tangible ways for contemporary appropriation and appreciation.

The reupholster of stained glass by Ugiomoh and Essien relied on the resilience and vitality of artistic idioms drawn from the media of Nigerian textiles and the graphic designs of the *Nsibidi* and *Uli* traditions. These idioms punctuate the experiences of everyday life as well as the exalted and extraordinary nature of African festivals and fiestas. Whatever way we choose to access that vitality, Ugiomoh's design is, first and foremost, informed by the template of expansive strip woven textiles, a mainstay of the George Madras composition. The contiguous bands of design repeat and introduce variation beyond their definition. A critical dimension of their aesthetic impact is flowing movement. Besides the immense montages constitute scores of acts of aesthetic self-determination predicated on the rich variety in which the George privileged cloth has been elaborated.

Artists of all generations borrow freely from other cultures apart from their own. Such borrowings have found their enrichments in the *natural synthesis* experiments of all great masters. Art history is replete with such backwards and forwards movements in its cultural growth. The past has always reflected its inevitable

shapes in all efforts of renewal and refreshment of Church dogma and Liturgy. This is amply demonstrated in classic Foucaultian *repeats, breaks and recalibrations* that have been often problematised as *natural synthesis*. Hence, it is wisdom that tradition is not sequestered past; not laid down principles, but a take-off point in the here and now. Here the artists act, bringing about new understanding of the past and the future that is yet to be shaped. Essien and Ugiomoh speak to us of a past that we all belong to, a cultural context where self-renewal is the norm by taking a bit from another. The success of such cultural dialogues that draw from the traditions of the past and the experiences of Africa is a symbolic halo, “*Art makes the experiences of time spatially perceptible by forcing what is ever fleeting into the calm framework of a symbol*” (Beat Wyss, 1998). The thrust of the discourse of power is a task that must be left to the exegetes of a future paper.

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Fig. 1: *Commemoration Jubilee 2000*, Frank Ugiomoh, Plexiglass & pigment, 2002.

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Fig.2: *Rose window Logo*, Nsikak Essien, *glass and metal Collage*, Redeemed Church, Victoria Island, Lagos, 2012. © Nsikak Essien Estate.



Fig. 3: *Come to me, Little Children*, Redeem Christian Church, Banana Island window, Lagos. , Nsikak Essien, wrought Iron & glass, 2012. © Nsikak Essien Estate.



Fig. 4: *The Good Sheperd*, Redeem Christian Church, Banana Island stained Stained window Lagos. , Nikak Essien, wrought iron & glass, 2012. © O. Ben Ogochukwu.



Fig.5: *The Coronation of the Virgin*, Frank Ugiomoh,
St. Jude's Catholic Church, Rumuokoro, Plexiglass, 2002.
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Fig. 6: Armature inter- face
© Nelson Graves.



Fig. 7: *Madonna*
© Nelson Graves.