AFRICAN HISTORY, WRITTEN IN **AFRICA**

The African Humanities Program has built a vast community of engaged scholars — creating opportunities for intellectual exchange across the continent

By **Aruna D'Souza**

Site-Specific Doung Anwar Jahangeer, a Mauritian-born artist based in South Africa, was included in Ruth Simbao's groundbreaking *Making Way* exhibition, featuring artists from the Global South tackling questions of mobility. Part of Jahangeer's project involved a performance, *The Other Side with the Matebese Family* (2012), in which he ground a special reddish-brown soil traditionally used by the Zulu people for self-adornment and protection from the sun's rays, and applied it to the faces of the (white) figures that compose the 1820 Settlers Monument in Grahamstown, South Africa. The gesture, says Jahangeer, "welcomes this history into the present" — instead of taking down a monument to white colonialism, the artist modifies the sculpture to spark conversations about often-unquestioned aspects of the past. An art historian at Rhodes University whose research ranges widely, from performance theory and site-situational art to the geopolitics of knowledge and "Western-driven theories of diaspora and globalization," Simbao was a 2010 African Humanities Program fellow. COURTESY OF DOUNG ANWAR JAHANGEER; PHOTO: RUTH SIMBAO

A fellowship from the African Humanities Program in 2013 allowed Amanda Tumusiime, an artist and senior lecturer in the Department of Visual Communication, Design and Multimedia at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, to do many things: take a year off from teaching to pursue her research on gender and the visual arts in Uganda; complete a residency at Rhodes University in South Africa, where she met colleagues working in her field; and connect with an important journal of African arts, to which she contributed and eventually edited. It also helped her to enrich her own painting practice by situating it in a larger theoretical field.

But as important, to Tumusiime, was what happened after her fellowship year was complete, which saw her mentoring students and sharing professional development skills and publishing opportunities with her peers. "Through the AHP," she says, "I have been able to influence the communities around me by creating a ripple effect."

The African Humanities Program (AHP) is one of several programs focusing in recent years on the humanities in African academia — most notably, the Mellon Foundation's International Higher Education and Strategic Projects (IHESP) program. These initiatives are largely driven by energetic scholars and university administrators in Africa, with the support and financial backing of global foundations. The program is funded by Carnegie Corporation of New York in partnership with the New York–based American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), an organization dedicated to "the advancement of humanistic studies in all fields of learning in the humanities and the social sciences and the maintenance and strengthening of relations among the national societies devoted to such studies."

> "No knowledge-led development strategy can succeed without a solid core of humanistic understanding and humane values. To envision the future, we must understand the lessons of the past. To act in the present, we must be sensitive to current cultural complexities."
>
> — *Recommendations for Reinvigorating the Humanities in Africa* (2015)

Though supported by American organizations, the AHP is a decidedly African affair, administered, in part, by a small secretariat located in South Africa and guided by an advisory group made up of senior scholars from the five countries in which it operates (Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda), along with two U.S.-based experts. Since its establishment in 2008 the program has supported hundreds of researchers by providing pre- and postdoctoral fellowships, offering travel grants, creating mentoring opportunities, and more. Many of these scholars, like Tumusiime, have subsequently taken on the role of mentor within their own academic communities. Plugging into networks of scholars, they deepen the role of the humanities in Africa while expanding AHP's influence and effects. Now in its tenth year, the AHP is taking stock of its considerable achievements in supporting scholars and institutions of higher education in Africa, and looking toward the future of the humanities on the continent.

Why the Humanities?

In the wake of decolonization across the African continent in the mid-20th century, political leaders of newly independent nations saw education as one of their most urgent priorities. How do you build the infrastructure and gain the knowledge — whether in medicine, science, engineering, economics, or a host of other scientific and technical fields — to improve the lives of their citizens? And, equally important, how do you write a new, postcolonial story of Africa — of its histories, its arts, its philosophies and literatures, its musical and cultural traditions — told not through the eyes of its colonizers, but by its own makers, scholars, and thinkers?

The answer to these questions involved investing heavily in higher education. Among countries in sub-Saharan Africa, between 10 percent and 25 percent of all government spending went toward education in the postindependence era, with up to a quarter of this amount dedicated to colleges and universities; even 50 years later, in African countries an average of 16 percent of all government spending goes to education, more than the U.S. (13 percent) or European nations (11 percent), according to the World Bank.

This investment resulted in great payoffs in the 1960s and 1970s, which many refer to as a "golden age" for higher education among African nations. But challenges emerged in the decades since — a combination of economic shocks, changes in government (including the rise of military and authoritarian regimes), and debt crises leading to interventions by the World Bank and the IMF — that have taken their toll on institutions of tertiary education in a number of countries on the continent. Recent years have witnessed a movement "to build education, training and innovative ecosystems that have local relevance, global competitiveness and mutual recognition to enable us to equip the African citizenry with the necessary knowledge and skills needed to build the Africa we want," said Sarah Anyang Agbor, commissioner for human resources, science, and technology for the African Union. Speaking at a pan-African conference on education held in Nairobi in April 2018, Agbor stressed, "Quality education is imperative if Africa is to attain this vision, generate home-grown solutions to African challenges, and participate fully in, and influence the global knowledge economy."

However, this recommitment to higher education across a number of African nations has tended — as it has in the U.S. in recent years — to focus a vast proportion of resources and attention on STEM areas (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) along with other policy-based subjects, including many in the social sciences and business. In this context, says Professor Bertram Mapunda, principal of Jordan University College in Tanzania, the humanities are at an extreme disadvantage. "Generally, the humanities are undermined. Affected by economic hardship, most leaders become shortsighted, and consider the humanities a noncontributor to the economy. Across the continent, emphasis is placed on technology and research that is seen to alleviate poverty. In fact, direct efforts are sometimes made to undermine humanities scholarship — in Tanzania, for example, student loan programs deliberately favor students in the natural sciences at the expense of the humanities."

This lack of robust support for the humanities has wide-ranging implications. One of them is the fact that much scholarship about Africa is being produced outside the continent. As Andrea Johnson, program officer in Carnegie Corporation of New York's Higher Education and Research in Africa program, puts it, "How do you ensure that African history is written in Africa? The research and ideas of African scholars based in Africa should be elevated at least as high as those of scholars based in the Global North. The challenge is to find ways to sustain humanities research in the continent when financial resources are scarce."

At the same time, there is a growing recognition among education leaders in Africa that the expansion of science, technology, and applied social science must be accompanied by a broader understanding of the human condition, of history, and of the arts. A group of scholars from Tanzania, South Africa, Uganda, Nigeria, and Ethiopia recognized this urgency in a report — titled *Recommendations for Reinvigorating the Humanities in Africa* — prepared for the AHP in 2015. "It is clear," the authors write, "that the marginalization of the humanities must be remedied, because no knowledge-led development strategy can succeed without a solid core of humanistic understanding and humane values. To envision the future, we must understand the lessons of the past. To act in the present, we must be sensitive to current cultural complexities."

The ACLS at 100

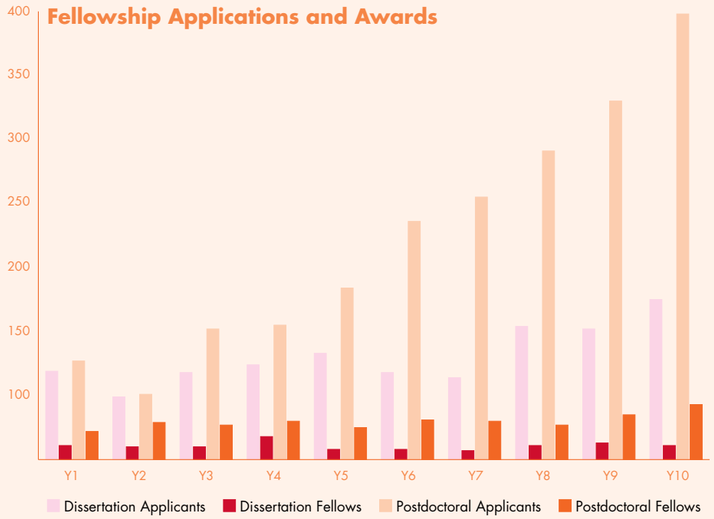
Treasure Hunt In the aftermath of World War II, the U.S. government deployed a group of "Monuments Men" to Europe to recover artworks and artifacts looted by the Nazis and their collaborators. Armed with data compiled by the ACLS and other scholarly bodies in the States, this elite squad — composed primarily of art history professors — retrieved treasures, including the ones pictured here, which were hidden in a cave by Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring, one of the most powerful figures of Nazi Germany and Hitler's designated successor. PHOTO: WILLIAM VANDIVERT/THE LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES

The American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) advances humanities scholarship and fosters connections among societies devoted to the humanities and social sciences. Established in 1919, the organization supports a nonprofit federation of 75 scholarly organizations, including the Modern Language Association and the College Art Association. The ACLS gave out its first grants to scholars — in the amount of $4,500 — in 1926; in the 2016–17 competition year it awarded more than $20 million to 325 humanities researchers worldwide. Over the century of its existence, the organization has also supported conferences, underwritten the publication of reference works, and backed innovations in scholarly communications. In the wake of World War II, addressing the threats posed to important art and artifacts as troops withdrew from the European theater of war, the ACLS created maps, guides, and dossiers to assist the so-called Monuments Men in securing the continent's cultural treasures.

In recent decades the ACLS, a Carnegie Corporation of New York grantee, has expanded its support of humanistic scholarship to countries in the former Soviet Union (Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine), Vietnam, China, and now the five countries in Africa supported by the African Humanities Program (Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda). ■

2008–2017

African Humanities Program by the numbers



Reinvigorating the Humanities in Africa, Visualized A Carnegie Corporation of New York grantee, the African Humanities Program supports scholars based in five countries on the continent pursuing research in a wide range of topics in the humanities and the interpretive social sciences. A good deal of this work, as it happens, is directed toward study of African languages, history, literature, and various aspects of African identity — thus furthering the goal of supporting the study of Africa by Africans. The program is highly selective — only about 16 percent of applications receive funding. In light of the extreme gender imbalance in academia on the continent, it is significant that 34 percent of successful applicants are women.

More recently, Professor Kwesi Yankah, a former associate director of the African Humanities Program who now serves as Ghana's minister of state for tertiary education, made the case. Speaking at a 2018 gathering in Accra, he reminded stakeholders in higher education that the humanities have long played a specific and urgent role in ensuring the sovereignty of African nations in the face of the overwhelming forces of globalization in the postindependence era. Ghana's early leaders were convinced that "through the arts, Ghana could fashion a unique national identity that would be used as a tool for resistance and also for accelerated development," Yankah said. The question that faces Ghana and other African nations now is how to reclaim that legacy.

Reinvigorating the Humanities

The African Humanities Program is one of a number of initiatives focused on shoring up humanities education in the face of such challenges. It emphasizes support for individual researchers in the hopes of strengthening and revitalizing institutions and scholarly networks. This has partly to do with its history, coming on the heels of similar ACLS initiatives in Central and Eastern Europe, according to Andrzej W. Tymowski, director of international programs at the American Council of Learned Societies. "The AHP emerged in the wake of another Carnegie-sponsored program, which was focused on the former Soviet Union. The broad purpose of both was similar — to support individuals in the humanities so that they could continue to build the scholarly infrastructure in their home countries."

The choice to focus on individual researchers is especially crucial within the context of the region. Among the many challenges faced by the humanities in African tertiary education, the stresses placed on the shoulders of university lecturers and professors are near the top of the list. This is in part due to sheer demographic realities — as the population increases and as governments expand access to primary and secondary education, more and more students are pursuing degrees. In fact, university enrollment across all sub-Saharan African countries has grown from 181,000 in 1975 to approximately 8.8 million in 2016, while the number of higher education institutions grew from 130 in 1990 to more than 1,500 in 2014, according to UNESCO's Institute for Statistics and the World Bank, respectively.

Many politicians and policymakers would like to see more students take up STEM and other fields seen as relating directly to development goals in order to train a homegrown citizenry to confront economic, environmental, health-care, and other immediate concerns. But elementary and secondary training in STEM subjects is often lacking, and at the university level these courses of study are expensive to offer, making few seats available. As a consequence, many students end up taking humanities courses instead. This means bigger classes, more demands on lecturers, and less time for mentoring graduate students toward their PhDs, which in turn results in fewer and fewer qualified teachers completing their degrees and entering the academic pipeline, and even less time for research. Salaries for university lecturers are poor, research funding is hard to come by, and working conditions in general are challenging — prompting some of the most qualified researchers and thinkers to move abroad to better-resourced institutions, and others to risk professional stagnation by staying close to home. Financial constraints make traveling to international conferences in one's field difficult, and the relative parochialism of the academic communities in the Global North means that few scholars outside Africa have access to, or cite the work of, their African peers, leading to intellectual isolation on both sides.

The result is startling: while Africa is home to 13.5 percent of the world's population, it accounts for less than one percent of its scholarly output in the humanities, despite producing some of the world's great public intellectuals and demonstrating — throughout the continent — a deep commitment to higher education.

Enriching the Scholarly Experience in Africa

Supporting humanities scholars in multiple ways, the AHP

- offers predoctoral and postdoctoral fellowships to individual scholars, allowing academics at different stages of their careers to take time away from teaching and administrative duties in order to complete their dissertations or the manuscripts of their first books
- works with the U.S. African Studies Association to sponsor scholars from the continent to travel to annual conferences, where they are able to present their work to an international audience and make connections with peers
- sponsors intensive manuscript development workshops and publishes a book series, helping select fellows get their scholarly contributions out in front of a global readership
- sponsors intraregional meetings and colloquia, enabling scholars in Africa to develop networks for mentoring and intellectual exchange
- gives scholars the opportunity to do a residency outside of their home country at one of a number of residency centers in the five AHP countries as well as at the West African Research Center in Senegal, giving them the opportunity to focus on research and writing outside of the demands of day-to-day life and to meet peers and senior colleagues abroad

Moreover, although perhaps less easily measured, the support offered by the African Humanities Program allows ambitious scholars to imagine a professional life in Africa,

Thanks to a history of colonization, many African universities tended to be oriented toward Europe and America, drawing their curricula, exams, external examiners, and other structures and traditions from outside the continent.

without feeling the need to emigrate in order to pursue their research.

The American Council of Learned Societies will mark its 100th anniversary in 2019. As part of the celebrations, in August 2018 it was announced that 11 PhD candidates and 43 early career scholars — drawn from a record number of applicants — had received over $940,000 in fellowship funds. In the decade since its launch in 2008, the AHP has invested more than $14 million to fund 107 predoctoral fellows and 299 postdoctoral fellows working at 66 universities in the five countries in which it operates. The research areas supported include the linguistics of African languages, African histories, and African literatures, but fellows also pursue work in art history, philosophy, gender studies, film and media studies, and English literature, as well as a host of other fields.

The impact of the African Humanities Program, including the communities it has generated, is already visible in myriad ways. Bertram Mapunda, who has been a core advisor to the AHP since the third year of the program, sees several tangible effects. "First, of course, it provides research opportunities for young humanities scholars. This spills over into more publications, and, consequently, into accelerated promotions to senior lectureships and professorships. Thanks to the predoctoral fellowships, we also see students completing their PhDs faster than before. Both junior and senior scholars are able to travel within the continent — junior scholars have the opportunity to take up residencies at research institutions during their fellowship year, and senior scholars, who act as mentors and assessors within the AHP structure, receive travel grants."

Mapunda adds: "The mobility offered by the AHP has resulted in the development of a strong scholarly network, enabling researchers to share experiences and enrich their research."

Only Connect

Creating the right conditions — so that scholars and ideas could move freely within the continent — was very much at the heart of the conception of the African Humanities Program. Kwame Anthony Appiah, professor of philosophy and law at New York University and chair of the board of the ACLS at the time the program was conceived, notes that thanks to a history of colonization, many African universities tended to be oriented toward Europe and America, drawing their curricula, exams, external examiners, and other structures and traditions from outside the continent. "Against that background, it seemed like a good idea to create interconnections within the continent," Appiah explains. "And this is something that the ACLS knows how to do very well. ACLS is the collection of the American learned societies, the academic professional organizations of various fields. And those organizations connect departments and programs across universities. The ACLS has helped create networks that develop professional fields, develop and raise standards, and so forth.

"It's expensive to do that, and African universities operate with severe economic limitations, by American or British standards. There's not money sitting around just waiting to be used. But our idea was if you could set this up and get it going, then the institutions themselves might realize that there was a value in connecting your faculty with other people outside your university. You could show the yield that comes from collaboration."

Appiah notes that in the 1980s and 1990s, the main professional and scholarly group for historians of Africa was in fact based in the U.S. That scholarly landscape is starting to change. AHP fellows, along with the scores of scholars who have worked with the program as advisors, application reviewers, and mentors, are beginning to coalesce into a cross-continental network of advocates for the humanities in African higher education. Some of these networks are informal, while others are being formalized as structured bodies, including the newly formed Network of Nigerian Historians, the Nigerian Humanities Society, the African Humanities Forum, and the African Studies Association of Africa. Fellows who connected through the AHP have organized transcontinental comparative research conferences, making the work of geographically distant scholars available to a pan-African audience.

A Ripple Effect

As Bertram Mapunda points out, a significant increase in mentoring is one of the most important consequences of the African Humanities Program. Former fellows and

Carnegie Corporation of New York **in Africa**

When Andrew Carnegie established Carnegie Corporation of New York in 1911, the foundation focused on giving money to organizations in the United States. But the philanthropy quickly expanded its program to include the British dominions and colonies in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa. (The attention to former British colonies accounts for the fact that the African Humanities Program operates in the five countries that it does.)

The Corporation's involvement in Africa dates to the 1920s and 1930s, a period in the foundation's history described by Patricia L. Rosenfield in her book *A World of Giving: Carnegie Corporation of New York — A Century of International Philanthropy* as one of "energetic internationalism." This involvement ramped up in the 1950s and 1960s, in concert with the rapid decolonization of many African nations. The Corporation worked with leaders of the newly independent states, while encouraging other donors and U.S. policymakers to pay attention to the region.

"Along with the Ford and Rockefeller foundations," notes Rosenfield, "Carnegie Corporation recognized that you could not impose a particular worldview on newly developed and newly independent nations. They wanted to strengthen those nations so that they could participate actively in the world."

In FY 2017–18, nearly 40 percent of the $156 million Carnegie Corporation of New York gave away was directed toward international activities, $15.8 million to African programs specifically. The Africa grantmaking focuses on two broad areas: extending access to knowledge and ideas (including through the support of educational institutions and libraries), and the promotion of peace, democratic institutions, socioeconomic development, and international engagement.

"Starting in the 1920s, when there were not a lot of external donors in the African region, Carnegie Corporation's grantmaking was based on its mission, its programmatic interests, opportunities it identified from site visits, and its experience in the United States," says Rosenfield. From the 1950s onwards, as more foundations and agencies began to support activities in the region, Carnegie Corporation focused on working with colleagues in African countries to identify under-addressed grantmaking opportunities — areas where limited resources could make a significant difference. This meant, for example, a shift in the 1960s from broad-based funding of African universities to a more strategic focus on human capital within those institutions.

Turning Seaweed into Subsistence Carnegie Corporation of New York has long been involved in working to strengthen a number of universities in selected sub-Saharan countries. But the Corporation has also focused on more individual efforts, for example in 2007 joining with the Science Initiative Group to create the Regional Initiative in Science and Education (RISE), a program dedicated to bolstering regional university networks by supporting postgraduate students and faculty in their pursuit of scientific research. The Kenyan marine biologist Grace Mutia was able to undertake her PhD fieldwork at the Institute of Marine Sciences in Zanzibar, part of the University of Dar es Salaam in neighboring Tanzania, thanks to WIO-RISE (Western Indian Ocean Regional Initiative). Her work has focused on developing seaweed as a commercial crop in coastal regions in ways that are economically and environmentally sustainable. PHOTO: ALAN ANDERSON

Rosenfield notes that under its current president, Vartan Gregorian, the Corporation has extensively reshaped its efforts in Africa, "combining its earlier support for universities and libraries with a more recent focus ... on information technologies, women's advancement in higher education and the sciences, and the next generation of university faculty." Spearheaded by Gregorian, the African Humanities Program, created in partnership with the American Council of Learned Societies, is a key part of these efforts. ■

Globalizing **Knowledge**

One of the major challenges facing scholars in Africa is the relative invisibility of their work to their peers. A recent study in the British medical journal the *Lancet* notes that the work of Africa-based researchers represents significantly less than one percent of all global citations — an important marker of the reach and influence of ideas.

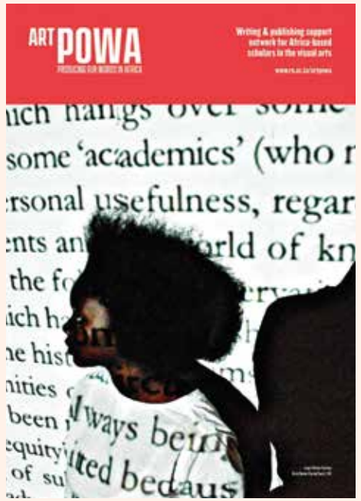
According to Dr. Steven Nelson, director of the African Studies Center at UCLA, this fact has hamstrung academic publishing on the continent: "If scholars publish in African-based journals, the work doesn't get distributed and cited by American and European scholars. The lack of attention from a global community of scholars in turn makes it hard for publications to get funding and support — you have no international profile. And if researchers publish their work abroad, that does little to support the development of a robust conversation among African scholars. It's a push-and-pull situation, that needs in part to be rectified by American and European-based scholars paying attention to and citing the work of our peers in Africa."

One of the ways the African Humanities Program (AHP) is tackling this problem is by making excellent research from the continent available to a global academic readership, thanks to its African Humanities Series. Launched in 2014, the series was initially established by Sandra Barnes of the University of Pennsylvania and Kwesi Yankah, minister of higher education in Ghana. It has since developed under the guidance of Fred Hendricks of Rhodes University in South Africa and Adigun Agbaje of the University of Ibadan in Nigeria, who hope to develop the series into a global showcase of the important humanities research being pursued by a new generation of Africa-based scholars.

Submissions are solicited from fellows of the AHP, and cover African histories, literatures, languages, and cultures. The series aims to publish work of the highest quality, foregrounding the best research being done by these emerging scholars.

Titles in the series include *Gender Terrains in African Cinema* by Dominica Dipio, Makerere University, Uganda; *What the Forest Told Me: Yoruba Hunter, Culture and Narrative Performance* by Ayo Adeduntan, University of Idaban, Nigeria; *Nation, Power and Dissidence in Third Generation Nigerian Poetry in English* by Sule E. Egya, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Nigeria; *The Anglophone Literary–Linguistic Continuum: English and Indigenous Languages in African Literary Discourse* by Michael Andindilile, University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania; and *Parading Respectability: The Cultural and Moral Aesthetics of the Christmas Bands Movement in the Western Cape, South Africa* by Sylvia Bruinders, University of Cape Town, South Africa. In 2019 the series will continue with new titles on African intellectual history, the Nigerian novel, notions of democracy in Africa, and Ghanaian boxing.

Making such studies available to a worldwide audience is crucial, notes philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah, author of *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2006) and, most recently, *The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity* (2018). "In the humanities, more than in the natural sciences, African scholars have access to important material that is difficult to get access to except through them. Of course an African physicist must keep an eye on what's going on in the European nuclear reactor, or MIT, or the South African observatory, but the details of physics don't depend on where you are. But in the humanities, the details *do* depend on where you are. It's a waste not to take advantage of that. We can't do it right if we don't have these voices as part of our understanding of the humanities. It's not just politically correct to do so — it's intellectually correct." ■



Networked Founded in 2017 as part of Rhodes University's Arts of Africa research initiative and comprising a significant number of former AHP fellows, Art POWA ("Producing Our Words in Africa") is a writing and publishing network that aims to support Africa-based scholars whose work focuses on the visual arts. Continental researchers are often separated by vast geographical distances, with few opportunities to convene in person. The Mellon-funded program allows them to participate in publishing workshops, share publications, and discover new opportunities to create connections with other engaged thinkers. COURTESY ART POWA; PHOTO: RUTH SIMBAO

"Because the humanities study the natural human propensity to tell stories, it is easy to see why the humanities are crucial for understanding African cultures. The goal of the African Humanities Program is to encourage and enable Africans to tell their stories in as many ways and to as many audiences as possible."

— **Andrzej W. Tymowski**, American Council of Learned Societies

program advisors are enthusiastically passing along their expertise to their PhD students and peers in many ways. They're organizing professional development workshops at their home institutions; they're guiding next-generation and new-generation academics in grant writing and manuscript development; and they're holding writing retreats. Such initiatives, often begun at the major research universities spanning the continent, are sometimes replicated at smaller institutions, expanding the reach and impact of the larger schools.

At Makerere University in Uganda, Angelo Kakande, chair of the Department of Industrial Art and Applied Design and a former AHP fellow, began conducting writing workshops for his students and colleagues. "When I returned from a manuscript development workshop in Dar es Salaam [Tanzania], I wanted to test out how someone could write an article in 12 weeks. I got the opportunity to introduce what I learned there to the doctoral students at the art school."

"There were students who had been writing their proposals for five or six years," notes Dr. Kizito Maria Kasule, dean of the school. "Since Dr. Kakande introduced this platform, we have been able, during the previous two or three years, to have about seven students who have successfully defended their PhD proposals or their doctoral theses. So I requested that he coordinate the PhD seminar."

Such efforts have resulted in a sharp uptick in published research. "The academic staff and students have published over 23 papers" since the workshops began, says Kasule. Furthermore, according to Dr. Henry Alinaitwe, principal at the College of Engineering, Design, Art and Technology at Makerere University, "Most of the faculty who have taken part in the manuscript development workshops have been promoted to the rank of senior lecturer" thanks to their increased scholarly output.

African-Focused and Sustainable

Funding for the African Humanities Program was to end in 2018. But at its December board meeting, Carnegie Corporation of New York approved an additional centenary grant to ACLS to support the work of the AHP for a further three years, allowing its African partners to usher the program into its next phase of existence. "The goal now is to build on the network and mentoring successes of the AHP, so that in the near term it can become not only Africa-focused but also African-directed. The legacy of Carnegie funding would be, we hope, an autonomous and self-sustaining African Humanities Program," says ACLS's Andrzej W. Tymowski.

"This means deploying the tremendous capital that has been accumulated by the program so far. The active community of AHP scholars can build bridges across the continent to catalyze intellectual exchanges," Tymowski continues. "Because the humanities study the natural human propensity to tell stories, it is easy to see why the humanities are crucial for understanding African cultures. The goal of the African Humanities Program is to encourage and enable Africans to tell their stories in as many ways and to as many audiences as possible."

The goal of centering the priorities of their African partners and achieving sustainability is also at the heart of another major funding initiative on the continent — The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's International Higher Education and Strategic Projects (IHESP) program, created in 2014 and headed by Saleem Badat.

While the African Humanities Program offers fellowships to individual scholars, the Mellon Foundation's work in the region focuses on supporting universities and other institutions — in South Africa (where Mellon has been working for 30 years), plus institutions in Uganda, Ghana, Egypt, Lebanon, and Senegal. "So what exactly do we

Visual Activism In *Flora III* (2010), the Nigerian artist Nnenna Okore uses cast-off paper and rope, glued together in complex coils and swirls, to create an abstract arabesque design that evokes a blossom — transmuting detritus into an image of the organic. Art historian Nkiruka Nwafor, a 2014 AHP fellow, is interested in the younger generation of African artists like Okore, whose artistic projects "constitute contemporary visual activism, intended to bring to the fore political, cultural, societal, and historical issues in Africa." For more on both women, see pp. 66–7. COURTESY OF NNENNA OKORE

support?" asks Badat. "We support *their* priorities in the arts, humanities, and interpretive social sciences."

This support may be in the form of research, faculty and graduate development initiatives at each individual university, collaborations with other institutions in their countries, and transnational collaborations with other institutions, located mainly in the Global South. It also includes building scholarly infrastructure, which could encompass the establishment of archives, digitization, library development, and the creation of graduate programs. (Physical infrastructure is not a priority for IHESP, although the foundation has supported increasing internet bandwidth, a crucial prerequisite for scholarly research and one that is often lacking.)

Badat emphasizes that the work the Mellon Foundation does in supporting institutions in Africa is done with an eye to — and in conversation with — other agencies working in the field, including the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the Ford Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, the Canadian International Development Research Centre, and Carnegie Corporation of New York. "We talk to each other about our grantmaking and experiences. We know each other. We know that we don't need to put resources into certain areas because our colleagues at other agencies are doing that, so we can focus our attention where it makes sense to us and our mission. We meet regularly with Carnegie around questions of who we are supporting, and what issues are important. We share information and ideas, because we have a common commitment to helping build institutions in Africa and the Middle East."

Badat was, after democracy in 1994, the first head of the policy advisory body to the South African minister of higher education, and served as vice chancellor of Rhodes University in South Africa before taking up his current role at the Mellon Foundation. He is pragmatic about what it means to promote, defend, and advance the arts and humanities — the mission of the Mellon Foundation — in the context of African nations: "Because of the particular history of Africa, and of countries shaped by colonialism and neocolonialism and by unequal economic relationships and trade, these societies have major challenges in addressing the legacies of colonialism and apartheid, inequality and poverty, and of creating and ensuring a better life for their citizens and their people. In that context, governments by and large devote much of their scarce resources to economic and social development, and to the STEM areas. So even when, on occasion, there is a recognition that the arts, humanities, and social sciences are important and not just for narrow developmental or instrumental purposes, the budgets simply are not adequate to sustain and support those areas."

At the same time, Badat insists, sustainability is an issue: "A key challenge that the Mellon Foundation and anyone else working in this context has to contend with is how to provide support wisely, but also how to help leverage other support from states, the corporate sector, and other sources. Sustaining universities and the arts and humanities — which is the Mellon Foundation's interest — cannot just be a philanthropic commitment. It has to be a larger commitment. So our grantmaking is constantly looking at how we may engage with universities and simultaneously engage with the state and other potential partners, and how we can build partnerships, so that ultimately we make progress both via Mellon support and via the internal resources in each of these countries that can be galvanized and leveraged to support the arts and humanities.

"Any progressive funder has to constantly think about how you sustain initiatives, how you ensure that important programs and projects are institutionalized," Badat continues. "Not to see themselves as the key and all-knowing actor. That kind of modesty is important if you wish to be a genuine development partner."

Bertram Mapunda agrees that sustainability must be baked into the grantmaking — and for him, the three-year transition period that Carnegie Corporation is funding is a model: "It is important because it offers an opportunity for humanities scholars in Africa as well as their collaborators across the globe to ensure that the gains accrued over the past 10 years are not only sustainably maintained but multiplied." He continues, "We need to turn the AHP into a full-fledged Africa-based program, and to do that we need to make clear to the public, to our governments, and to private and public funders (both inside and outside of Africa) of its considerable achievements so that they will take over support. And we need to continue to develop the network of AHP alumni (both fellows and mentors) so that they become a united block that can then expand outwards, bringing others into the fold so that there is a real strength in numbers among humanities researchers across the continent." ■

Strategic Partnerships = Maximum Impact

One of the most ambitious foundation collaborations ever undertaken, the Partnership for Higher Education in Africa (PHEA) was the brainchild of the presidents of four prestigious American foundations at the turn of the 21st century, including Carnegie Corporation of New York's Vartan Gregorian. As Fabrice Jaumont writes in his 2016 study of the initiative, the PHEA sought to support the "indispensable contribution of higher education to social and economic development" in Africa and accelerate the "processes of comprehensive modernization and strengthening of universities in selected countries."

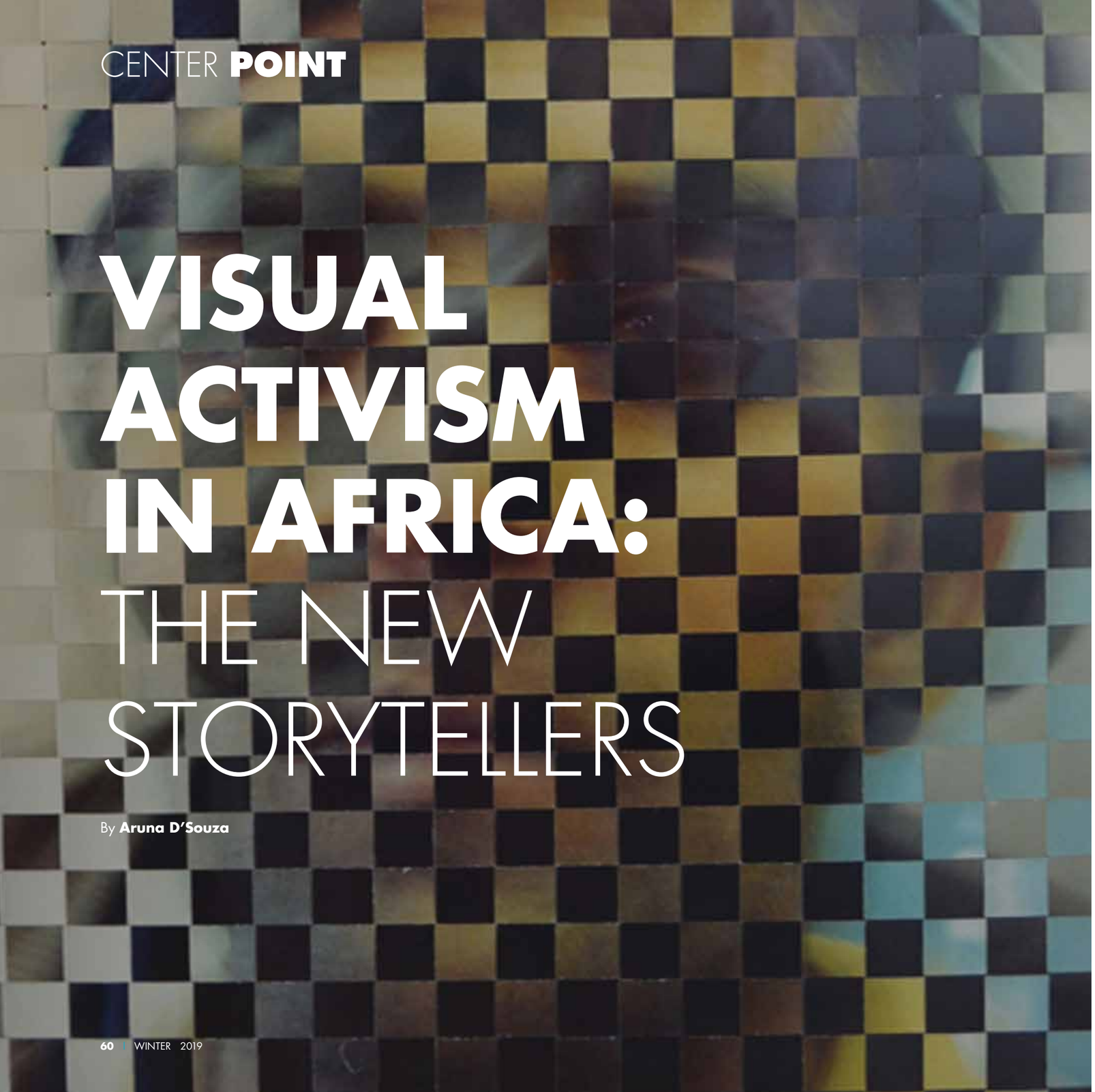
Spearheaded by the Ford Foundation, The Rockefeller Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and Carnegie Corporation of New York (and later, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation), the endeavor emerged amid a new global push for development in Africa. Through coordinated investment in higher education, the PHEA sought nothing less than to, as Jaumont puts it, "unleash the talents of the continent for the well-being of its people and those beyond its borders."

Carnegie's Gregorian, who wrote the foreword to Jaumont's study, cites the late Kofi Annan, former secretary-general of the United Nations, as "the primary source of inspiration" for the Partnership for Higher Education in Africa. The initiative, Gregorian stresses, "should not be considered an end, but a beginning and, we hope, an inspiration to those in the philanthropy, education, and development fields."

Foundations have long played a central role in the development and sustenance of the social sector. Today, when federal budget cuts could put the work of nonprofit and educational institutions substantially at risk, many expect foundations to fill this widening funding gap. Indeed, as cuts to federal funding for both education and international development take hold, philanthropic institutions, where the political will exists, may seek to partner in an effort of solidarity to fill potential funding gaps. The PHEA stands as a timely case study worthy of consultation. ■

VISUAL ACTIVISM IN AFRICA: THE NEW STORYTELLERS

By **Aruna D'Souza**



Nomusa Makhubu
Untitled, 2005. Two woven color photographs. From the *Fragments* series.
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

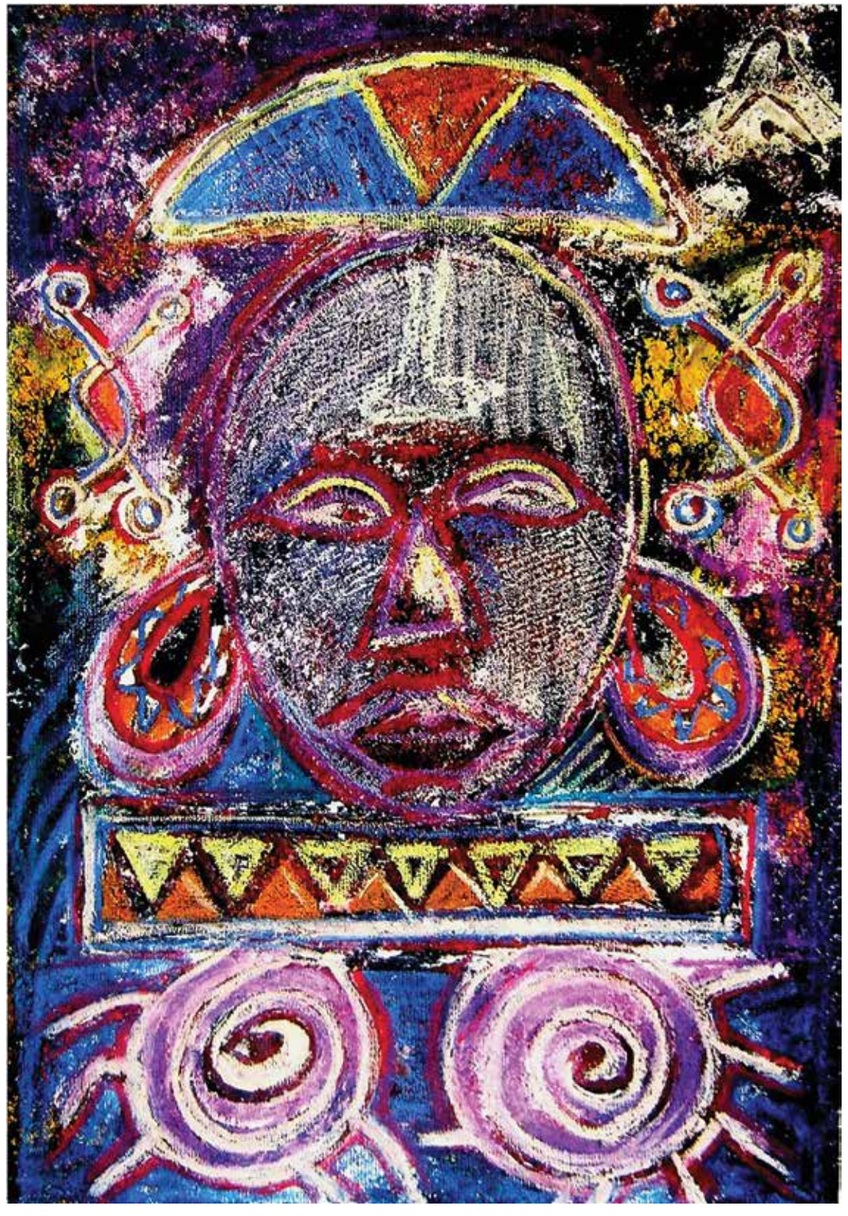
Scholars and practitioners of the arts all across the continent are transforming the ways their histories, past and present, are told

Africa is a continent of 54 nation states, more than 1,500 languages, and roughly 3,000 ethnic groups, making it the most diverse and culturally rich place on earth. It is impossible to speak of it as a singularity. This is why many scholars on the continent refer not to African art, but to the *arts of Africa* when speaking of the visual and material cultures produced across a vast range of eras, spaces, and traditions.

While much writing on the arts of Africa is produced outside of the continent, especially in the U.S. — *African Arts*, the most important journal in the field, is published by UCLA with MIT Press, for example — there is a growing network of Africa-based scholars who are working to develop an African-centric approach to understanding the arts produced there, both historical and contemporary.

For some, this means challenging and transforming long-entrenched art historical curricula in the academy. Others are delving deep into histories of gender, race, inequality, colonial power, material culture, sociopolitical economy, and more to deepen their own artwork. And yet others are developing and supporting new generations of scholars who will join in the efforts to rewrite the history of the arts in Africa — in Africa itself.

Here are some of those researchers, scholars, and artists, all alumni of the African Humanities Program (AHP), a partnership of the American Council of Learned Societies and Carnegie Corporation of New York that, since 2008, has been working to reinvigorate the humanities in Africa through fellowship competitions and related activities. These thinkers and makers are telling new stories about some of the myriad cultural forms, past and present, that are shaping — and reshaping — the lived experience of contemporary Africa. Art POWA, the recently established network of Africa-based scholars whose work focuses on the visual arts, put the message right in their name: **P**roducing **O**ur **W**ords in **A**frica. ■



Eyitayo Tolulope Ijisakin's ongoing study of the history of Nigerian printmaking was born of and continues to shape his own work as an artist. His collagraph print *African Bride* (2007) incorporates a complex symbolic and coloristic language to represent Yoruba conceptions of the role women are expected to play in marriage. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Eyitayo Tolulope Ijisakin

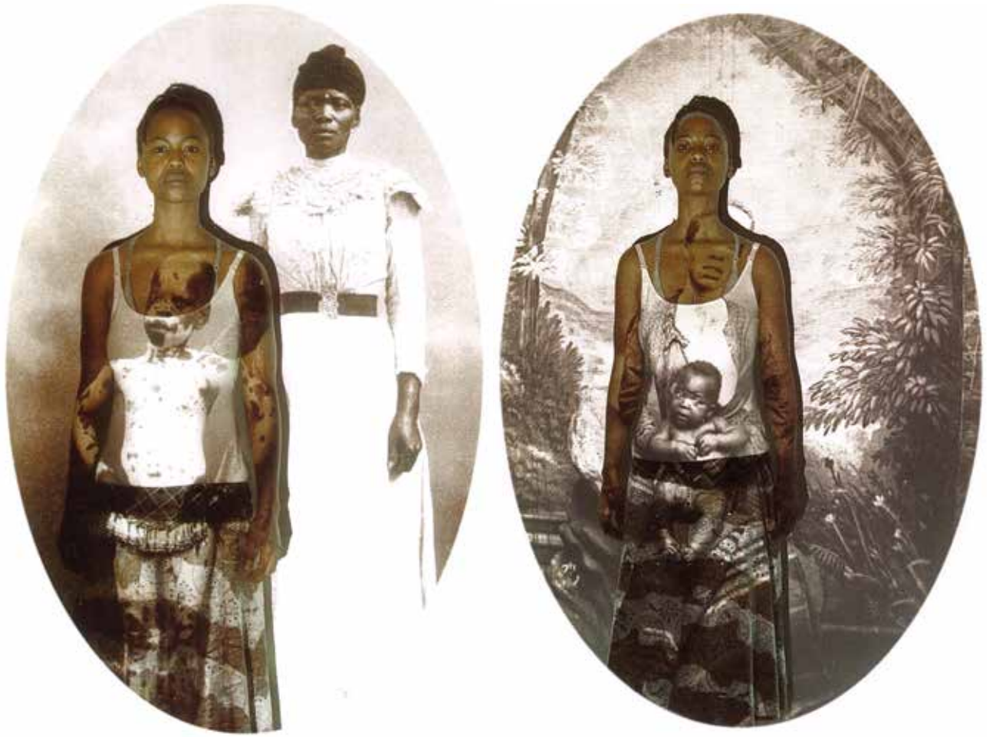
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria
2015 and 2018 African Humanities Program Fellow

A Nigerian artist and art historian offers the first comprehensive study of printmaking in his country

I benefited from two fellowships from the AHP (one predoctoral fellowship, the other postdoctoral): an AHP Manuscript Development Workshop in Ghana and an AHP residency at the International Institute for the Advanced Study of Cultures, Institutions, and Economic Enterprises at the University of Ghana in Accra. I am presently using my postdoctoral fellowship to rework my PhD dissertation into a book on the evolution and development of printmaking in Nigeria, with a view to extending the frontiers of knowledge on art history in my country. As a printmaker myself, this knowledge also deepens my own work in the medium, and allows me to place my practice in a larger context.

Compared to sculpture and painting traditions, printmaking practices in Nigeria have been grossly neglected, with very little available literature to draw on — a few exhibition catalogues, scanty newspaper reviews, and autobiographical sketches here and there. No single text exists to tell the story of how printmaking evolved in the country, to note the landmark events, to identify printmakers and their techniques, and to assess their significant contributions to the development of contemporary art praxis in Nigeria.

Collecting data for my study was almost overwhelming. Literature was scarce, and I had to track down individual printmakers all across the country — in the end, I identified 220 practitioners! Many of these ... well, I met and interviewed some of them one-on-one — at the Harmattan Workshop (a meeting point for visual artists from across Nigeria and abroad). I met others in their homes or studios, or I spoke with them by phone. My work argues that Nigerian printmaking artists — appropriating cultural heritage, aesthetics, and sociopolitical thoughts from their environment — are defining new perspectives of national identity.



The research pursued by **Nomusa Makhubu** informs her own artistic practice. In *Umasifanisane I* and *Umasifanisane II* (*Comparison I* and *Comparison II*; both 2013), she explores the way colonial photographs "reduce human beings to specimens." By projecting historical images over her own living body, the artist is commenting on how living subjects are informed by and can resist such modes of representation and classification. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Nomusa Makhubu

University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa
2016 African Humanities Program Fellow

A South African artist and researcher uses colonial photographs to highlight the deep history of South Africa's ethnic divisions

Often when one presents oneself as an African artist, the question of ethnic background arises — are you a Zulu artist or a Xhosa artist? But we live in such a complex time, and ethnic identities are complicated and fluid — they don't necessarily define you. My creative research focuses on the representation of ethnic identities in colonial photographs and in museums. My work is a response to the ways in which ethnic divisions in South Africa were constructed under colonialism through British Indirect Rule, and later through Apartheid policies established to create Bantustans (homelands) that separated races and ethnic groups.

The colonial photographs I used in the *Self-Portrait Project* series were presented as scientific evidence, documenting different 'tribes' of the Zulu people or Xhosa people and so on. They are often labeled with the titles of the ethnic group that's being represented or they have classification numbers. Many of them were made in photographic studios, with people posed in front of painted backdrops. These so-called documentary photographs are actually factitious works, rooted in the colonial imagination — fantastic fictions of the colonial archives that were presented as truth.

During that research, I was also interested in how museums are organized. I focused specifically on a museum in Grahamstown, where I used to live, that was divided into two sections — it had a Xhosa side and a British settler side. On the British side, objects were associated with specific names. But on the Xhosa side, things were only identified by ethnicity — 'Xhosa beaded skirt,' for example. By locking people into ethnic categories, museums tend to reduce complex sociopolitical identities into these static, ethnic identities. In the museum, we cease to be human. How is it possible to subvert and rewrite the political implications of these photographs, which are part of our history and our collective memory? Of what use are they to contemporary politics? Of what use are the tools of memory if they serve a denigrating history?

Even though it is my body depicted in these works, rather than being explorations of the self, the project explores the representation of African women. Colonial photography is the documentation of violation and the terror of dispossession. Reenacting these scenes brought me closer to this terror. For me, the past is living memory — this work is a way of coming to terms with the persistence of the same repressive structures.

Nkiruka Nwafor is seeking to write new histories of the art of Nigeria, in part by highlighting the work of women artists, including that of Nnenna Okore. Okore's installation *Emissaries* (2011), made from handmade paper, dye, yarn, and burlap, engages questions of environmentalism and the fragile quality of earthly existence by recycling the detritus of everyday life through labor-intensive processes. COURTESY OF NNENNA OKORE

Nkiruka Nwafor

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria
2014 African Humanities Program Fellow

A Nigerian art historian changes the narrative by writing about women artists

When I was deciding on my dissertation, someone said to me, 'You are a woman, and most women artists in Nigeria have not been researched at all. Who will do that? Who will change that narrative if not other women?' And so I decided to write on two artists, Nnenna Okore and Lucy Azubuike. What interested me was that they had diverse themes in their art — while Okore was interested in repurposing waste into valuable works of art, Azubuike was using photography to talk about female degradation and other subjects. But at the same time, there was a connection between their practices: I see their works as forms of visual activism.

Okore uses discarded materials like jute, paper, plastic, and fired clay to create works that talk about consumerism. And there is another dimension, too, because these materials degenerate over time, so the artwork goes through a process that is sort of like the life of a person: it's created, it ages, and eventually it 'dies.' In that sense, the work reflects an African concept of ancestral existence, which connects the past with the present, and the living with the dead.

In fact, some of Okore's works use the concept of the ancestral emissary or messenger — an entity that links the ancestors and communicates between the dead and the living in many African cultures. My writing on Okore tries to connect the materials she uses with these traditional notions. Usually these ideas are the purview of men in Nigeria — it's men who create, produce, and practice these roles. But now, she's able to claim this aesthetic in her art, and create her own vision of it. Art gives her the opportunity to delve into a space she wouldn't normally be able to enter in everyday African life.

One strategy for resisting the colonialist assumptions and biases of the art historical discipline is to expand its purview to encompass not just traditional media (such as painting and sculpture), but much broader swaths of visual culture. This goal animates **Okechukwu Nwafor**'s study of the ways a particular textile — the *aso ebi* cloth — is used to define community in new and disruptive ways when it is gifted by brides to their wedding guests. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Okechukwu Nwafor

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria
2013 African Humanities Program Fellow

A visual historian trains his eye on contemporary wedding practices in Nigeria

I studied *aso ebi* textiles — fabrics that are distributed by brides to wedding guests, and used to make outfits for the event — in western and southeastern Nigeria. The idea behind this long-standing practice is that by dressing in matching textiles, your guests are defining themselves as part of your community. In return, the bride gives gifts to those wearing the special clothing. Aso ebi is the name for the fabric, but it's also a practice in which people dress in similar uniforms and then attend social ceremonies, such as weddings, parties, and funerals. It's one of the ways in which Nigerian society constructs and reconstructs things like friendship.

I wasn't just looking at the textiles themselves — I was thinking about the political and visual economies that surround them, too.

Over the past 20 years, new ways of using aso ebi have emerged. The altruistic intention of the original transaction, where textiles were given freely to family members, has been complicated by commercialization. Brides now sell the fabric to wedding guests, even those she doesn't know well. It's become a sign of social status — the number of people that attend a wedding in aso ebi tells you how successful the wedding has been. But this has also caused friction among friends, instead of creating feelings of inclusion and belonging. The use of aso ebi plays into the visual hype of contemporary Nigerian society, and a culture of conspicuous consumption. I'm interested in how the intersection of aso ebi, popular photography, and fashion magazines have actually transformed the local visual cultural landscape in Lagos and other parts of Nigeria.

When it comes to art history, the first question you *need* to ask is, 'What do we really need to study when it comes to material culture or visual history?' Art history should not revolve only around paintings, sculpture, graphic arts, and so on — a limited range of objects. It should embrace the political and economic and social networks that circulate around things, too. You can't study objects in a vacuum. Art history should go much, much deeper than the way it is often studied — when I teach my students, I go beyond that to teach them what they need to know to understand their own world.

Freeborn Odiboh is interested in the way that global perspectives on the art histories of African nations often focus on abstraction and modernist "primitivism," resulting in significant omissions. One of these "disappearances" in the global narrative of contemporary art is the Nigerian painter Abayomi Barber, one of his country's most influential artists, whose naturalist style — demonstrated in shimmering, monumental, naturalistic landscapes — has shaped a generation of Nigerian painters who have studied at his art academy. COURTESY OF ABAYOMI BARBER

Freeborn Odiboh

University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria
2010 African Humanities Program Fellow

Through the lens of what he calls "critical citizenship," a researcher and educator decolonizes the African art history curriculum

Art history is taught in Africa largely from Eurocentric points of view, with an emphasis on anthropological methods rather than art historical ones — a legacy of colonialism. My work focuses on creating a new curriculum for the study of African art, one that is situated within the larger discourse of global art historical studies, but that looks at African art from a genuinely African point of view.

For our students, many of whom arrive at university with no understanding of the history of art, it is necessary to start with what is known and to then move on to the unknown. Our art history curriculum starts with the question of geography, and how it determines the art that arises in a place — both in terms of, say, the kinds of materials available to an artist (the types of wood or stone they might choose), as well as economic, political, linguistic, and other factors.

When it comes to contemporary art, much of what is recognized in international exhibitions and biennials as 'African art' (or even 'Nigerian art') is work that fits into certain frameworks that make it legible to non-Africans. Because the West still largely orchestrated the tempo and character of art in postcolonial Africa, many artists here continued to adopt Western, modernist ideas of the grotesque, the naive, or the primitive in their work. But if colonialism brought abstraction and modernism to African colonies, it also brought realist and naturalist art — a fact that is often overlooked. Abayomi Barber, for example, one of Nigeria's foremost artists and the founder of an influential art school in the country, was committed to depicting African subject matter, but rejected primitivism in favor of pictorial naturalism and a focus on technical excellence.

For me, the goal of creating an African approach to the history of art is both to get students to understand their own place — their history — and to get them to understand how they are situated in a global context. I'm interested in the idea of critical citizenship — understanding what it is to be Nigerian, for example, but knowing that you exist in a larger context.

In her curatorial project *Making Way*, **Ruth Simbao** brought together works that complicated the idea of globalization's effect on African nations, especially the idea that the new phase would usher in an almost frictionless movement of labor and capital across borders. Works by artists like Athi-Patra Ruga reflected on questions of how bodies moved through settler colonialist spaces. Ruga's performance *Obscura, Grahamstown* (2014), in which official art viewers missed the most spectacular part of the performance, involved the artist walking through the countryside covered with balloons. COURTESY OF ATHI-PATRA RUGA; PHOTOS: RUTH SIMBAO

Ruth Simbao

Rhodes University, Grahamstown, Eastern Cape, South Africa
2010 African Humanities Program Fellow

Embracing what she calls "strategic southernness," a South African art historian rethinks the study of the arts of Africa

My AHP fellowship project was about representations of Africa-China relations in the visual arts, which was still a fairly new theme for many artists at the time. That led me to curate an exhibition in 2012 called *Making Way*, which included art being produced in China and South Africa that connected the ideas of movement and crossing borders. The exhibition challenged simplistic valorization of fast-paced movement and celebratory approaches to globalization that tend to ignore its underbelly and negative aspects. I focused on artists who represented slower and often painful ways of moving — such as walking, crawling, and scraping their bodies along the ground.

Drawing from this research, I am now thinking about ways we can resituate the study of Africa and its epistemologies within the Global South. Collaborating with various Africa-based scholars, I am asking how we can rewrite art history on the African continent in a way that embraces 'strategic southernness.' What are other ways of looking at the arts of Africa — not 'African art,' which is a largely European and American-produced category? How do our Africa-based art histories reflect what the Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o refers to as a 'quest for relevance'?

I was recently invited to be part of the consortium that publishes *African Arts*, an influential journal based at the UCLA African Studies Center and published by MIT Press, and in 2017 I came on board as the Rhodes University editor. I edit one issue a year of the journal, and I decided to make it my goal to include as many Africa-based authors as possible. (Up until that point only about 12 percent of the journal's contributors were based on the African continent, and only 1.5 percent were based in Africa outside of South Africa.) To achieve this, I founded the Art POWA network that offers publishing workshops that are similar to the AHP manuscript development workshops. I managed to obtain funding from the Mellon Foundation to run this program, and in the first issue I edited, the vast majority of the authors are indeed Africa-based.

Evassy Amanda Tumusiime's practice combines art and activism. Her oil painting *Another Place, Another Time* (2002–16) is believed to be the most expensive artwork ever sold in Uganda, and the proceeds are destined toward funding a hostel for female students to support them in successfully completing their education. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Evassy Amanda Tumusiime

Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda
2013 African Humanities Program Fellow

A Ugandan artist-scholar is empowering marginalized communities in her homeland

Before 2003 I was creating images that were not different from the mass-circulated images which subtly — but purposely — reinforced the silence and subordination of women in Uganda. My images tapped into the narrative of what an ideal woman should be in a patriarchal order. Clearly, I contradicted the position of woman enshrined in the 1995 Uganda Constitution, which was hailed for having given voice to women.

But laws, however progressive, are not enough to build a woman's capacity to challenge deep-seated stereotypes that are circulated through art. The right education and research are very essential to nurture the kind of woman who can unmask layers of control perpetuated through traditions.

After 2003 I pursued graduate studies at the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of South Africa in Pretoria. I gained the knowledge I needed to interrogate the issues of gender in art, and to make paintings that would advocate for women's advancement. My themes and symbolism changed.

This is the context in which in 2016 I mounted *Another Place, Another Time: Million-Dollar Masterpieces from Uganda and America, 2003–2016*, an exhibition showcasing work I made during my sojourn in the U.S. as a Fulbright Scholar the previous year. This was the first time a painting would be sold at that price in Uganda. In 2016 I also presented the million-dollar painting titled *Another Place, Another Time* in Uganda. This canvas took me 13 years to complete. My goal was two-pronged: first, to raise funds, and second, to achieve my dream of supporting girls' education in Kabale, the district where I grew up.

My work has now taken me into the realm of thinking about empowering other marginalized communities — the deaf and other people with disabilities, the elderly, and so on. I am finding ways to use the power of art to empower people.