

**VICTOR EFOSA UWAIFO: AN EMBODIMENT OF
CREATIVITY IN MODERN NIGERIAN ART**

BY

SOGE, EMMANUEL OLUSEGUN

PG/Ph.D/10/52688

**DEPARTMENT OF FINE AND APPLIED ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA**

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**THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF POSTGRADUATE
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CERTIFICATION

Soge, Emmanuel Olusegun, a postgraduate student in the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, with registration number PG/Ph.D/10/52688, has satisfactorily completed the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy degree (Ph.D) in Art History. The work embodied in this thesis is original and has not been submitted in part or in full for any Diploma or Degree of this or any other university.

Professor Ola Oloidi
Supervisor

Dr. V. E. Ali
Ag. Head of Department

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved for the award of Doctor of Philosophy degree of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Professor Ola Oloidi
Supervisor

Dr. V. E. Ali
Ag. Head of Department

Professor P. S. O. Aremu
External Examiner

DEDICATION

To the memory of my beloved parents, Chief Samuel Olaegbe Soge and Mrs. Patience Olusola Soge, who set the standard for, and instilled in me, the spirit of diligence, resilience and uprightness. May their gentle souls rest in perfect peace.

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ABSTRACT

Victor Efosa Uwaifo is synonymous with artistic ingenuity. He is an epitome of creativity and versatility in the visual arts. He pursues his art career with zeal, unwavering commitment and spirited energy. Today, he stands out as one of the most wellread and intellectually sound visual artists and scholars in Nigeria. He is a graphics designer, sculptor, industrial designer and painter. Uwaifo is also a poet, philosopher, architect and art teacher. In spite of his giant stride in the field of the visual arts, he has been given little or no scholarly attention by art scholars. Apart from occasional journalistic reviews in magazines, newspapers and graphic reports in exhibition catalogues, not much scholarly work has been done on Uwaifo's real professional image and contributions as a visual artist. The research, therefore, finds it very necessary to focus on Victor Uwaifo as an embodiment of creativity in modern Nigerian art. This research attempts to document and acknowledge Victor Efosa Uwaifo with regard to his biography and how distinguished he is as an embodiment of creativity in Nigeria. The research also examines some areas of his versatility, his creative expressions that make him unique in the modern art tradition, his stylistic and thematic dynamism, his influence on modern Nigerian art and, finally, his contributions to tourism in Nigeria. The research finds that Uwaifo hails from Benin traditional setting, which influences his creativity. He influences many artists, including his students, with his Benin culture, which they express in art naturalism. The research also proves that his contributions to tourism in Nigeria is great and that the artist is a great factor in the Nigerian culture of art versatility. In this vein, the research attempts to scholarly document and acknowledge Uwaifo as an embodiment of creativity in modern Nigerian art and hopes to inspire further scholarly research on him.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background Study

African people are enormously skilled in art. This is highly evident in Nigeria, particularly among those living in the southern geo-political zone of Nigeria, such as the Edo-Benin people.¹ Before colonization, the ancient Kingdom of Benin had a well organized kingdom that extended to the present Lagos State. Today, the kingdom, though much smaller in size than it used to be, is still well organized.² Its conservative traditions and culture have equally remained largely uncompromising, even in the face of contemporary challenges occasioned by modernization. The place where the monarch or *Oba* lives is the epicenter of cultural activities of the Benin kingdom from where the cultural codes of the people radiate and are regulated.³

Located in the heart of the Benin City, adjacent to St. Peter's Anglican Church at the famous Oke Mole, Lagos Street axis, is the house of the Uwaifos, the family descendants of Emezi lineage.⁴ The house, painted in white gloss colour, is a modern architecture built in the late nineteenth century. Each pillar of the house is artistically designed and executed, using abstract motifs and bright colour flowers in relief form.⁵ The totality of this artistic design could be accepted as a mixed media concept. The high level of aesthetic display on the building also possesses an undertone of functionality, which exhibits a high sense of creativity.⁶ The panache in which such a two dimensional design was executed on the façade of this architectural master piece of the 19th century, is an apt testimony of the unique and rich artistic heritage of the ancient city of Benin.⁷ The impression one gets by merely looking at the house is that it must have been designed by people of rare breed in art work. In

the early and middle 1940s, the house bubbled with Mr. Wilson Omoruyi Uwaifo, his wives and his children. Madam Idusogie, the senior wife of Wilson Omoruyi Uwaifo, had been pregnant for a normal period of nine months and the product of the pregnancy was Victor Efosa Uwaifo (Fig. 1) who was born in March 1, 1941.⁸

This thesis has, as one of its objectives, the task of methodically identifying, studying and documenting Victor Uwaifo, a notable modern Nigerian artist who has distinguished himself as an embodiment of art in visual arts.⁹ This is to discover the innate qualities that set him apart from the rest of the visual artists in Nigeria. Victor Uwaifo has traversed and professionalised in other areas of visual arts, while still holding on tenaciously to his area of specialty.¹⁰ This thesis traces the life history or biography of Victor Efosa Uwaifo and his activities in the visual arts. Although, it is in the music realm that he stands towering and colossal, the researcher wants to explore and document his creativity in the visual arts; his first artistic self realization.¹¹

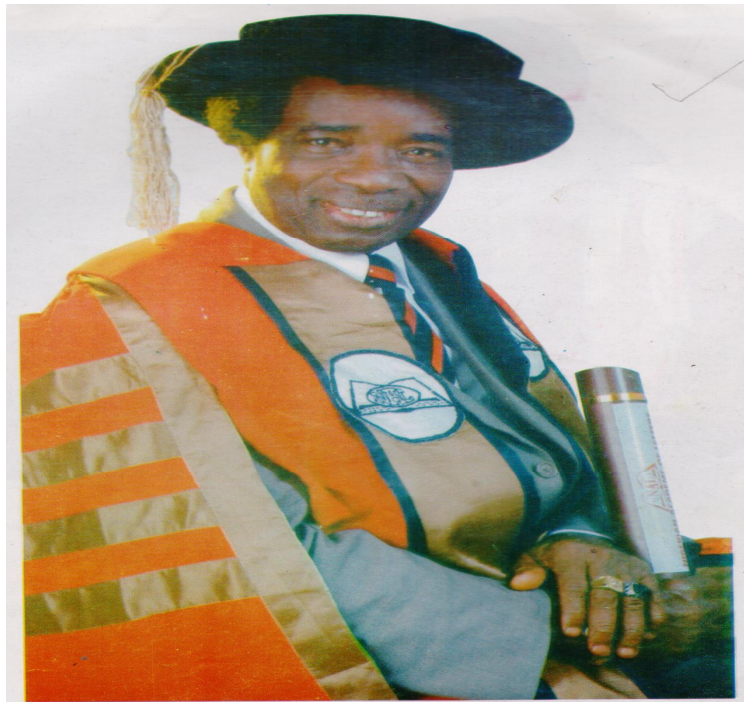


Fig. 1: Victor Efosa Uwaifo, 2011. © Victor Uwaifo

Victor Efosa Uwaifo, deviated from Sculpture, his area of specialization to explore other areas of art such as a poetry, philosophy, architecture, graphic designs, industrial designs and painting.¹² He is versed in these different branches of art where he has explored and expressed his perception of the social, political, religious and cultural environments. He is an academic art wizard with uncommon superhuman talent.¹³ Victor Uwaifo is considered a superhuman professional who exhibited extra ordinary talent for creativity and artistry. Some of his concepts are expressed in solid three dimensional forms, whereas others are in two dimensional forms.¹⁴

Victor Uwaifo is considered a special breed because of his superlative creative endowments. In spite of the above visual arts endowments, he has not received considerable scholarly attention from art scholars or in the academic circle. Rather, only his achievements in music, or performing arts, have been greatly eulogized.¹⁵ It is therefore important to appreciate Uwaifo's creativity, artistic and professional versatility and also discover the innate qualities that distinguish him from other Nigerian visual artists.¹⁶ Visual artists all over the world have been engaged in solving and clarifying difficult intellectual, creative, often abstract, problems. This is due to globalization and revolution in visual arts and technology that foster the rapid transmission of complex artistic tendencies.¹⁷ Its socio-economic and psychological effects have also led to the development of notable global and national achievements through the pioneers of this profession. Victor Uwaifo is part of these achievements. Consequently, it is imperative to examine Uwaifo's groundbreaking efforts in art profession.¹⁸

Statement of the Problem

Victor Efosa Uwaifo, who was seventy in 2011, has played major roles in the development of modern art tradition in Nigeria. As an artist, he has been striving to give Nigeria an identity, particularly through his music and visual arts expressions. However, it is very unfortunate that the activities of Uwaifo in the field of the visual arts have not been well known due to lack of adequate documentation of his achievements. In the same vein, his art works are yet to be subjected to intensive scholarly and artistic study, since art historians and art critics are yet to focus on him in that respect, particularly as regards his ideology, philosophy and aesthetics. It has therefore become very pertinent to study the career of Victor Uwaifo, especially his contributions to the development of modern Nigerian art.

Objectives of the Study

The study has been undertaken with a view to achieving the following objectives:

1. To methodologically identify, study and document the biography of Victor Efosa Uwaifo, and how he has distinguished himself as an embodiment of creativity in Nigeria.
2. To probe into his visual arts and performing arts, with regard to his ideologies and appropriation of media.
3. To study the themes of his art and critically assess his influences on modern African art.
4. To investigate his individual styles, themes, and work processes.
5. To explore the thematic and conceptual inclinations of his works.
6. To determine the degree of the impact he has exerted on the modern Nigerian artists, art students and the general public.

Scope of the Study

This research covers the visual arts of Victor Efosa Uwaifo, particularly his painting, sculpture, designs and architecture. It discusses all the artistic efforts that have given the professional experiences of Victor Uwaifo a national attention. It focuses on the themes, techniques, styles and his general creative versatility.

Significance of the Study

It is expected that the study will help to draw the attention of the art historians, public, researchers and scholars to the visual arts activities of Victor Efosa Uwaifo. It would also provide rich information on the uncommon creativity of Victor Uwaifo. It will also provide an art historical documentation of Uwaifo's contributions not only to the visual arts but also to the modern Nigerian art history but also to knowledge.

Procedure

This study depends mainly on primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include oral interviews with some art collectors, art connoisseurs, students and Uwaifo's colleagues. This was carried out with the aid of camera and tape recorder. In addition, observations in Uwaifo's Art Revelation Tourist Palazzo, workshops, seminars and conferences are also relevant. Secondary sources are books, journals, art brochures, magazines and newspapers in libraries and private collections. These are in addition to sources in unpublished dissertations, theses, proposals and seminar papers.

Limitations

Some problems were encountered in this study. For example, it was difficult to locate some important works of Victor Efosa Uwaifo, many of which were in far away places within and outside Nigeria. Moreover, many of his works have not been properly preserved. There was also dearth of materials or literature on the subject since art scholars initially focused their research activities mainly on his music performance, failing to pay attention to his visual art works. There was also the problem of securing appointment with the artist because he was always busy with various assignments.

Organization

This study is divided into nine chapters. Chapter one contains the background to the study and research methodology. Chapter two centers on the literature review. Victor Uwaifo: A biographical study was discussed in chapter three. His paintings were discussed in chapter four while chapter five focuses on Uwaifo as a Sculptor. Chapter six examines Uwaifo as a graphic and industrial designer. Other creative sides of Uwaifo, his philosophy and reminiscences were discussed in chapters seven and eight respectively. Chapter nine concludes the study.

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CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The subject of this study, 'Victor Efosa Uwaifo: An Embodiment of Creativity in Visual Arts', without doubt, suffers from dearth of literature. This is an area that is yet to be seriously explored by scholars who have concentrated mainly on his music. A few works exist on the subject, but these are mainly found in the daily newspapers, exhibition, catalogues, magazines, unpublished materials and other sources. The above publications are generally biographical studies of Victor Efosa Uwaifo with scanty effort being directed at his works in relation to the contemporary art situation in Nigeria.¹ Some of his achievements in performing arts place him on professional pedestal and relate their relevance to contemporary Nigerian art experience. Unfortunately, none has tried to examine his academic and cultural achievements, some published theses and dissertations, magazines, and journals focus on Uwaifo's musical achievements and not on his visual artistic versatility and creativity. Most significantly, exhibition brochure essays have provided valuable materials that address his achievements in the visual arts. It is proper to review some of these available literature or works.²

One of these is Muyiwa Awodiya's 'The Story of Sir Victor Uwaifo' in *The Making of a Living Legend*; which views historical background of the artist. It discusses the birth of Uwaifo, his creative attributes, formal education and his worldview. The relevance of this publication is that the information on the artist provides fertile ground for the present study to germinate but does not present detailed information about the subject.³ Another relevant book, by Henry John Drewal, is *Mami Wata Arts for Water Spirit in Africa and Its Diaspora*. It makes an in-depth study of the Mami Wata spirit and explains how Victor Uwaifo composed a

favourable song on Mamiwata singing, 'Eeh, if you see mami wata oo, never you run away 'Victor Uwaifo. He further describes the experience as nostalgic and privileged experience. The lyrics are short but still stand the test of time. It is still evergreen. The mami water study provides useful information on the subject, though it does not consider Uwaifo's visual arts.⁴

Managing Art Institutions in Nigeria, a book by Muiyiwa Awodiya, describes how Victor Uwaifo's highlife music brought him to limelight. His music is full of variety that was steeped in Edo culture, rhythm and melodies that are rooted in folklores. He also discusses how Uwaifo employs managerial ingredients of self-discipline, determination, and hard work, a sense of purpose, planning and innovation and group motivation of his band. Also explains how Uwaifo invented a two-neck guitar keyboard on guitar and introduced different rhymes to break the harmonic and rhythmical monotony of highlife, Akwete, Mutaba, Shadow, Ekassa, Sasa Kasa and Titibiti. The publication lacks information on the man's teaching and research aspects as well as his visual arts.⁵ *Origin of Highlife and the Nigerian Music Industry*, a book by Victor Uwaifo, provides a dramatic sketch in all his highlife productions. It examines the ways with which he dealt a devastating blow to the 'Ballad of Joromi.

Although Joromi took him to a great extent, this guitar boy played the highlife music which he has skillfully given to the world as a written story. This publication of Sir Victor Uwaifo is linked to the practical importance of an ethically viable music, the highlife. This is so because he has confronted the facts with integrity and reassures integrity by pragmatically realizing the facts. This then is the town crier's message of the highlife accompanied by his song to the entire universe.⁶ This study stands to benefit from the historical presentations of the work. This work

of his similarly suffers from an inadequacy which is basically the omission of his feat in other fields apart from music. Moreover, his parentage, childhood and educational history are not given considerable attention.⁷ *The Philosophy of Life*, a book by Uwaifo discusses his first artistic self-realization, which is in the area of fine arts, while his second self-realization is music.

The third dimension is writing of poetry, which this book portrays. Uwaifo further stresses that the contents of the book show different degrees of thought and quality of style. The idea behind this writing swept through his mind in 1985, when he decided to write the first few poems which later graduated into a dialogue at different times.⁸ This book basically moves around philosophy, people and their behaviour in their immediate environments. This study will benefit from this work which serves as veritable source of information about the artist, with particular reference to his worldview. However, a major shortcoming of the work is its silence on the man's parentage, schooling, marital life and professional achievements.⁹ *Images of Value*, An Art Exhibition catalogue of the 3rd National Symposium on Art, reveals the profile of Victor Uwaifo; how he was born, his education, as a sculptor, musician, lecturer, position held and how he won the first Gold Disc (record) in Africa with chart buster Joromi in 1965. This information though relevant to the present study, tells us about his musical achievements rather than treating the man's life historically.¹⁰

Another exhibition catalogue, *Revelation Tourists Center, The Key to the Heartbeat of Africa Visitors and Tourist Destination*, by Victor Uwaifo, exposes tourists to the lost generation and great minds that have never lived. It exposes one to a new life and many things inexplicable that no one can share, except through personal experience.¹¹ This Tourists Center, or Palazzo, is a combination of

exposition of life and times of the heroes, living and dead. It opens one's eyes to discoveries, entertainment and leisure. Victor Efosa Uwaifo finally enriches the history and heritage of Benin and Nigeria using visual arts to capture events of history. This catalogue is relevant to the study as it sheds more light on the man's successes in fine and applied arts.¹² Munzali Jibril in his 'Oration at the Twelfth Annual Convocation Fellowship of the Nigerian Academy of Letters' in *Victor Uwaifo's at 70th Brochure*, discusses Uwaifo as a gifted artist, musical maestro, virtuous guitarist, composer, singer, sculptor, fine-artist, lecturer, visiting professor to the American Heritage University, California and a former Edo State Commissioner for Arts, Culture and Tourism, among other numerous achievements.¹³

It shows how this outstanding achiever has endeavoured to always pass on his skills to the younger generation. This information is relevant to the current study as it reveals the impact being made by Uwaifo on the younger generation, though it fails to address the man's education, career and family life etc. 'Discovering and Harnessing your Creative Talents', a conference paper delivered by Victor Uwaifo, is quite relevant to this study. The paper encourages and motivates the younger generation to strive and discover their potentials so as to be able to adequately develop themselves fully. He further explains 'creativity as discovering something new, as breaking barriers, the driving force of life, and chemistry of discoveries fired by the possessor's intentions'.¹⁴

Master of Masters: Yusuf Grillo His Life and Work, P.C. Dike and Pat Oyelola, (eds), is an anthology on the life and works of a Nigerian legend, a multi-talented artist with his works. It is part of the efforts to document creativity and versatility in Nigerian art industry since the time of Aina Onabolu.¹⁵ Yusuf Grillo was a former teacher of Uwaifo at the Yaba College of Technology. The relevance of

the compendium lies in its attempt to document the life and works of an artist who contributed to Uwaifo's art education.¹⁶ In the preface to Uwaifo's autobiography, *Philosophy of Life*, Ola Rotimi describes Victor Uwaifo as a popular musician who has succeeded in reaching his audience through a sensitive blend of traditions African rhythms and lyrics with contemporary instrumentations and statemanship.¹⁷

In fact, Victor Uwaifo could be seen as one of the most creative, innovative and accomplished artists in the West African sub-region. He remains a pacesetter while his ability to coordinate distinctively his creative energies remains an enigma. This book is relevant to the study as it brings to the fore what the man himself feels about life generally which must have galvanized him to take decisions and actions that have resulted in his achievements. However, it has not exhaustively discussed the author's feats in every field he has ventured into.¹⁸ Also in the Foreword to the book *Origin of Highlife and the Nigerian Music Industry* by the maestro himself, the late Emeka Nwabuoku, a professor of theatre art has this to say: 'Sir Victor Uwaifo, the man and the theologian are one, Victor Uwaifo the universal man and the playwright are one.'¹⁹

According to Nwabuoku, Victor Uwaifo ranks as one of the most disciplined art personalities he has ever seen and met. To him, Victor exudes so much energy and his creative energy is unequalled. He compares Uwaifo to the U.S.A Kenny Rogers, Dolly Parton and James Brown. It is a piece of good information on Victor's creative adventure.²⁰ In the book *Origin of Highlife*, Victor Uwaifo describes 'how the exposure of the traditional African musicians to the Western civilization and the introduction of their musical instruments have had a tremendous influence on the birth of highlife music'. He writes:

The presence of the First and Second World War veterans and army musicians stationed in the West Coast of African frontier especially in Nigeria and Ghana, and the exposure of the African traditional musicians to the Western civilization and the introduction of their musical instruments have had a tremendous influence on the birth of highlife music.²¹ He further discusses how highlife music cannot be totally absolved of foreign influence; yet it became a product of a dynamic culture. An important factor which buttresses this point is the introduction of Western musical instruments that gave rise to African traditional musicians to becoming exposed to Western civilization. A major shortcoming of the work is that it does not give information about the man's exploits in the areas of sculpture, graphics and others to be addressed by this present study.²² Asogwa's Ph.D Thesis, *Creative and Artistic Versatility in Modern Nigeria Art*", highlights the biography of Victor Uwaifo, his early life and education. He describes Uwaifo as a sculptor, painter, designer and a graphic artist, how his father was not happy with him for taking to music, as he wanted him to be a lawyer or a medical doctor not a musician. But in order to live up to his father's expectation, he enrolled at the Yaba College of Technology, Lagos and later proceeded to the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Benin, Benin City in 1995 to further his education in visual arts. This time, he enrolled immediately for his Master's degree in 1996.²³

Victor Uwaifo is now a research scholar, pursuing his Ph.D at the same University. Asogwa points out that Uwaifo was appointed by the University of Benin to teach in the Department of Fine and Applied Arts of the University in 2006. As a lecturer in the University, he continued to perform more excellently, making contributions to art. In recognition of these, the University of Benin honoured him with an honorary Doctorate Degree, *Honoris Causa*, in 2008, just two years after he

was employed. Victor Uwaifo is a man of abundant creative energy, multifarious talents, a researcher, scholar, inventor, poet, philosopher, a high life music maestro and sculptor of no mean repute, a great teacher and an embodiment of creativity. He has three solo exhibitions and participated in several group exhibitions within and outside Nigeria. His works adorn different public places in and outside Nigeria. This study provides some vital information about the artist that will be useful in the present research.²⁴

Osayomore Joseph in *Victor Uwaifo at 70th* brochure describes Uwaifo as a silent giver, who sponsored some people to school and others to higher institutions. Some of the beneficiaries are Aghabueze, an accountant and Roland Igbingie (aka *Akabe* man) and how Uwaifo has placed some people on monthly pension for the rest of their life. He further explains how he was given a lavish send-off party as he decided to release Sonny Okosun to form his own band. This interview is relevant to the present study for shedding some light on Uwaifo's life that the present study will benefit from.²⁵ Charles O. Osula, A.E. Orhue, Garrick Aghabueze Egoigbe, Eduwu. Ekhaton Obasogie, Vicent Sunday Okobi and Osunde Joromi in *Victor Uwaifo at 70* brochure recounts the biography of Victor Uwaifo, how his art works demonstrate great splendor, extreme grandeur, unalloyed magnificence, unparalleled magniloquence and an exemplary grand eloquence.²⁶

He is described as the Michelangelo in the Vatican City in Rome of our time. He worked with diverse media, including materials, such as cement, wood and mixed-media in some cases; he combined cast cement sculpture in order to serve his creative visual needs. He bequeathed a remarkable and enduring legacy not just to the historic Benin kingdom or to Nigeria as a nation but to the Pan African entity as a whole. He is a genius, a living legend, with an array of academic distinctions, and

endless list of national awards; both national and international honours. He left his footprints in the sand of time while his fighting spirit to achieve excellence has propelled him to venture into academics where he has excelled and finally attained the professorial title, which is very well deserved considering all he has put in the world of visual arts and music. The essay is of great relevance to the present study.²⁷

The Guardian Newspaper of Saturday March 4, 2000, features Wale Fatade's essay on Sir Victor Uwaifo. He sees him as an evergreen history in motion and a prophet who is honoured in his home town. To him, this is an apt reflection of the tremendous impact his works have made even in his immediate Benin society.²⁸

Fatade presents the work schedule life of Sir Victor Uwaifo as seen by the journalist himself who had to follow the man to his mechanic's workshop, to his printer's printing press and finally his office. The journalist describes the place called office as a large building which is divided into two sections. The first is a bungalow shared by a travel agency and the other part occupied by Uwaifo, is further divided into two. These two divisions have the various sculptural works of Victor Uwaifo prominently and proudly displayed. One of the works on display brings to mind the larger than life statue built by Uwaifo as his final year project at the Ekenwan Campus of the University of Benin and that of Oba Esigie, a famous king of Benin kingdom. The information about the subject is quite relevant to the study for it provides information about the artist's two important works.²⁹ Rotimi Ojomoyeta's essay in *The Newstar* newspaper of March 23, 2000, describes how Victor Uwaifo belongs to the class of music legends like the late Jimmy Hendrix, an American Rock and Roll guitar wizard, Paul McCartney of the famous British group and the Beatles.

To him, Uwaifo possesses the artistry of the renowned American king of Soul, James Brown, a highlife music icon. The essay says that Victor Uwaifo was a lecturer in sculpture at the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Benin.³⁰ The essay also describes Uwaifo's Art Gallery, *Tourism Haven*, compartmentalized into sections with each section telling a historical story. This interview provides useful information on the life and times of the enigmatic Uwaifo although not exhaustive.³¹ The *Saturday Tribune* newspaper of Friday 2, May, 2001 describes how Uwaifo claims to be the art and how art is him; how inseparable both are and how he has put in everything in his life, blood and sweat to build the *Palazzo Tourism Gallery*. He also sheds light on his mode of dressing and how he designs his shoes by himself. He talks about his family life, and how the University community relates with him and what people say about him. The information of the interview is relevant to this study.³²

Tony Osauzo's interview titled 'Wonders of Victor Uwaifo's Tourist Plaza' with *Spectator Newspaper*, June 12 to 18, 2002, describes the Revelation Tourist Center whose concept and content are so amazing. The center is the product of mystical and multi-talented Professor Victor, the maestro viewed from the outside.³³ The building houses an array of collections of priceless art works and antiquities. It is well furnished and decorated. Another noticeable thing in the compound is the vision car constructed by Uwaifo from fibre-glass materials. It further explains that the Palazzo is indeed a place, with a mystical and amazing concept where a collection of living history of generations are packaged and presented in a manner that cannot be described in words.³⁴

Richard Eghagbe in *Independent Newspaper* of Saturday, December, 2006, highly romanticizes Victor Efofa Uwaifo's biography in a personal manner. The

article discusses Uwaifo as a painter, graphic designer, sculptor, architect, scholar, and an ambassador of culture of Cross-Rivers State, a pioneer commissioner for Arts, Culture and Tourism in Edo state, a Member of the Order of the Niger (MON) and Justice of Peace, an athlete who can still do outside and inside press-up with vigour and rhythmic consistency that can challenge 20 -30 years olds;³⁵ a man whose athletic build, vitality and fluidity on stage are breathtaking and captivating a great achiever and accomplished son of the land of the cradle of black civilization, Benin City of Nigeria and indeed Africa. In the same essay, he states that Uwaifo worked with diverse media, including wood, oil and mixed-media and in some cases he combined cast cement with mosaic to serve his creative needs. The essay is highly relevant to the present study.³⁶

Ernest Omarelojie's essay in the *News Magazine* of May 5, 2008 gives an insight into the biometric data of Victor Uwaifo. This also serves as a graphic presentation of Uwaifo's style-realism, which to him is only a means to proceed to other new forms of visual arts. In retrospect the essay takes an insight look on his art training before he went for further studies in University of Benin, Benin City. The essay also takes an historical insight into the repertoire of Uwaifo's prints and paintings, highlighting his styles and techniques. It says that Uwaifo has been experimenting with various media. The essay is highly relevant to the present study.³⁷

In an interview granted in the *This Day* newspaper of October 13, 2008, Uwaifo provides an exposition of the diversity of talents that are packaged in a phenomenal Nigerian better known as 'Guitar Boy'. He engages himself in everything that he does with consummate artistry that is difficult to surpass. He is a sculptor, with his gigantic and monumental works standing all over the country. According to him, he built his own radio and television station studios and transmitted from his house long

before private radio and television stations became fashionable, but the military government then in power frustrated these efforts.³⁸

He further stresses that the Revelation Tourism Center is an all-encompassing showcase of history, cultural heritage, appreciation of the changing society and documentation of Nigerian governments through the years and how fame trails him behind like a shadow right from childhood. The interview provides a good source of information on the artist and therefore to this study.³⁹ Ogbonna Amadi in the *Saturday Vanguard* August 22, 2009 also describes Uwaifo as a man of styles, at the age that his contemporaries had retired because of their fame and wealth. He sees Uwaifo as an unfulfilled man with hunger for education which pushed him to study at the University of Benin and eventually on the pay roll of the University. The paper reveals that he also holds a Honorary Doctor of Letters degree from the same University, yet he refuses to give up his first love for music, a profession that brought him to limelight or fame. With several local and international awards in his kitty, the Benin prince remains undaunted. He explains that his latest creation is a tourism center he calls, “*The Revelation Palazzo*.”⁴⁰

This tourism center unfolds many things which people had taken for granted in the past. Works on display in the center are so horrific that children of less than 16 years of age are not allowed to visit, except they are accompanied by their guardians. The interview is very useful to the study as it discusses Uwaifo’s landmark achievements.⁴¹ The *Nation* newspaper, of February 27, 2010, describes Uwaifo as a musician, writer, sculptor and a business man, born on March 1, 1941 in Benin City. It explains his formative stage, how he was a graphic artist at the Nigerian Television Service, Lagos, between 1964 and 1966; Director, Joromi Multitrack Recording

Studio, Proprietor Hotel Joromi and Multi Cinema, Benin City among other achievements.⁴²

The Vanguard, August, 22, 2010, carries the article by Annette Ogherhaboke. It reveals Uwaifo's life as a musician, an artist and an intellectual except. The essay discusses Victor Uwaifo as one of the living highlife musicians in Nigeria. He is a music maestro, a poet, an inventor, architect, sculptor, scholar and philosopher. Since the 1960s when he entered the Nigerian music industry in a grand style, he has continued to utilize his abundant talents to impact positively on the society. In 1966, he became the first African to win a record Gold Disc.⁴³ After a fulfilling music career which spanned more than three decades, Uwaifo served as a pioneer commissioner for Arts Culture and Tourism in Edo state from 2001 to 2003. Uwaifo, who was the best graduating student of the faculty of arts, University of Benin, UNIBEN in 1995 with a first class honours in Fine and Applied Arts, also holds a Master of Arts degree in sculpture from the same University. The Edo State born music icon turned 69 on March 1, 2010, has since 2006 been a lecturer in the Fine and Applied Arts Department, University of Benin. The essay also discusses Uwaifo as an embodiment of creativity in visual arts which makes it relevant to this study.⁴⁴

Newswatch Magazine, of October 8, 2010 narrates Uwaifo's life history; particularly what informed his decision to go into music, to become a lecturer and his major contributions to the development of Edo State tourism, when he was Commissioner for Art, Culture and Tourism. This information on Victor Uwaifo acts as a baseboard for the present research, though the essay has no detailed information on the man and his works.⁴⁵ Nseobong Okon-Ekong in *ThisDay newspaper* on March 17, 2011, describes Uwaifo as an academic at the University of Benin, still a musician, an inventor, sculptor, artist and promoter of tourism and culture.⁴⁶ Janice

Nkoli Ifemis in *Sunday Vanguard* newspaper, October 27, 2011 describes the Revelation Palazzo Tourist gallery in the heart of Benin City, Edo State, as a center of attraction that draws the attention of lovers of art, music and history. It was founded by Uwaifo. The Palazzo is educative, inspirational and entertaining to all tourists. Here, you would learn about the list of generation of some great minds that ever lived, and what the future holds for humanity.⁴⁷

The Palazzo awakens one's sense and puts one on stage to play. The interview stresses further that the building's Hall of Fame contains Uwaifo's paintings of prominent men such as the late Archbishop Bishop Benson Idahosa, Donald Duke and Nelson Mandela, to mention a few. It houses sculptures and paintings of his parents' 50th birthday anniversary on stage in 2007, books and philosophical quotes, the Ashanti stool, given to him by the King of Ashanti Ghana, as well as the gramophone he inherited from his father, which inspired him into music. Also found in the hall were the double guitar and his magic guitar. Another section contains the sculptures of all the past and present Heads of State and Presidents of Nigeria with a video explaining the periods of their regimes or administrations. The Benin nation's 1000 years of dark history, Joromi, slave trade market, Oba Ovonranwen and the British expedition, gagging, human sacrifice, the loom and cloth weaving, the Palazzo aircraft, Boeing 737, Guitar boy and mammy water. All the above pieces of information can be found in the Palazzo.⁴⁸

The *Sunday Sun* newspaper July of 29, 2012, features an essay by Chika Abanobi describing Uwaifo as a guitar boy, who has conquered the music industry in the 1960s with two hit songs, Joromi and Guitar Boy that came from his encounter with a mermaid, the water spirit queen, in the dead of the night. He also sheds light

on how Uwaifo was born in 1941 and entered a university at the respectable age of 52, to read Fine and Applied Arts. Abanobi discusses how Uwaifo graduated with first class honours in 1995. In 1996, he enrolled and obtained a Master of Arts (M.A.) degree in sculpture. In fact, he emerged as the overall best graduating student and had the honour of reading the valedictory speech on behalf of the other graduating students in the University of Benin in 1997.⁴⁹ Presently, Abanobi continues, he is not only a professor at the University of Benin where he conducts researches and teaches theories as well as practical aspects of sculptures but also a visiting Professor to the American Heritage University in the United States of America (USA). The interview provides a good source of information on the artist and also relevant to this study.⁵⁰

In the *Sun* newspaper of Sunday August 5, 2012, Chika Abanobi also narrates the mysteries and mystique of a music maestro. He describes Uwaifo's story as that of determination, purposefulness and single-mindedness. He further describes how Uwaifo is still working and how he was able to make something out of his God-given talents in music and arts; how he was able to translate his experience in arts into tourism and music.⁵¹ According to Uwaifo's 'Sculptures talk, they have language' and if one is an artist, one will hear them talk as an artist, a piece of wood is crying for you to bring something artistically marvelous out of it, and before you know it, it is alive. An artist is God's assistant because God created man in his own image, sculptured him in clay and breathed life into him and he became man, whereas other creations, he created them by faith, let there be light and there was. But when it came to man, he took his time and used clay to create too. He finally said that sculpture is the 'mother of all arts'. The information about the subject is relevant to the study though it does not address all the achievements of the man.⁵¹

The literature review though scattered, has given some important information on Victor Efosa Uwaifo, especially on his art and music career. However, as indicated earlier, none of them has comprehensive information on his art profession. There is the need, therefore, to carry out a detailed comprehensive study on Victor Uwaifo's visual arts, focusing particularly on his Graphics, Sculpture and Designs, as well as his academic and socio-political experiences.

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CHAPTER THREE

VICTOR UWAIFO: A BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY

The entrance into the world by the ordinary human is quite unknown, while the birth of heroes, kings and princes is often celebrated by the heavens. It was, on that faithful day of March 1, 1941, when hitherto gloomy and cloudy atmosphere uncharacteristically brightened up, that Victor Efosa was born.¹ On the eighth day, after the birth of this baby boy, and in line with tradition which the Uwaifosö religiously adhered to, the child was christened as Efosa. The event was a very elaborate and flamboyant one which was well attended by notable personages. The climax of the event was the grand pronouncement of W.O. Uwaifo, who believed that God has sent the newborn to add wealth to his humble achievements in life so far. He, therefore, named him Efosa (meaning the Wealth of God) Victor Uwaifo.²

Just as all great men through history were nurtured to maturity by the forces of natural environment, the young Victor Efosa Uwaifo got his primary inspiration and training from his father, mother, siblings, the Benin socio-cultural milieu and, of course, his personal encounter with nature³. Victor Efosa Uwaifo grew up under the guidance and love of his parents whose examples instilled in him a special love for humanity. During his tender age, he showed a lot of interest in folktales and visual arts. His father was a retired police intelligence and detective officer. After his retirement, he went into business while his mother Idusogie from a royal family was a full-time house-wife. Victor Uwaifo was born into a polygamous setting and was number twelve in a family of thirteen. As a child, Victor was privileged to learn from his mother's stories, songs and folktales.⁴

Therefore, the songs of his mother influenced him. This childhood influence had a positive effect on Victor's visual arts later in life; even today, he is an embodiment of creativity in both performing and the visual arts. Since birth, he has been very restless. He works all day. In an interview, he reveals that "when I have new ideas, I work them out to give them life and meaning". He exhibited the traces of rascality associated with some normal growing children when he was young. However, he was adequately guided by his parents who instilled discipline in him.⁶ His interaction with other creative people at the primary and secondary school levels (1948-1961) confirmed this academic culture of Uwaifo's family. *Chris Eburu, Uwaifo's Manager*, (Fig.1) in an interview, reveals the impact of arts on Uwaifo's family:

Everyone in their family is artistically inclined and they believed so much in education. Whatever they do reflects academic touch. That makes them real disciplined professionals. Their father brought them up that way.⁷



Fig. 2: *Uwaifo's Manager, Chris Eburu and the Researcher*, 2011. © Dayo Soge.

His teachers were equally instrumental to his disciplined upbringing. At an early age, he started making toys with bamboo, drawing on sand, slate and any paper he found available. According to Muiyiwa Awodiya, Victor began to show signs of diversification, delving into the terrain of technology, first when he tried his hand on making cassava graters for making garri, by punching holes in a metal sheet, like a cheese grater. He eventually became very skillful in it and subsequently learnt to create very unique artistic patterns and designs which were very aesthetically appealing.⁸ This development signaled the beginning of his growth in the field of Fine and Applied Arts, significantly marked the first real manifestation of his creative genius tendency. He also developed the skill of constructing miniature automobiles as toys like an aeroplane, which was lifted off the ground by heavy wind. He continued to experiment and one day, he got a gift of one pound sterling from a white man who saw and greatly appreciated one of his aeroplanes designed with paper foil.⁹

In an interview with Victor Uwaifo, he explained that he learnt how to swim when he was a pupil in school. He added that in the moon-light, when he was young, he would pick up a discarded tube to which he would tie long black thread.¹¹ Whenever he sensed the approach of one or two persons, he would gradually pull the thread thereby causing the tube to glide across the road, giving the impression of a snake to its beholder. He did this only when he would leave his playmates in the neighborhood and after confiding in his intimate friends. The frightful reaction of these victims as they took to their heels, usually provided lots of excitement and amusement for young Victor. He further reveals that at other times, during moonlight play, he would cover himself with white bed sheet and wait in some remote corners of the town, from where he would frighten children returning from moonlight plays, by acting like a ghost. In the past, Benin had strong beliefs in the existence of ghosts.

There were even stories of how people who wandered at night were attacked by ghosts. Victor Uwaifo capitalized on the prevailing feeling and belief system to pull through this trick.¹⁰

Uwaifo and the Researcher (Fig.3) captures the embodiment of creativity, Sir, Prof., Sasakosa, Titibit and Ekasa, Victor Uwaifo and the researcher in an interview. The great artist bares his mind on many issues, including some aspects of his biography. On a set of chairs in his office at the backdrop of a white curtain with flora motif in yellowish green, white and pink, Uwaifo reclines on the seat confidently taking questions from the researcher. He relaxes with a bim of smile on his face. The researcher seats and takes notes in a paper on his laps.



Fig. 3: Uwaifo and the Researcher, 2011.

© Dayo Soge.

Young Victor was also dreaded for his catapult shots. It was a weapon he carried for his personal security. Victor was good at swimming. All experiences he acquired early in life formed part of the strong base of his informal education. Victor builds on that base in his secondary school experiences. He was a very bright student who was much more influenced in art. His art experience at the secondary, polytechnic and university education culminated in the multi-media entity he is today.¹¹ Victor Uwaifo produced his first painting, the portrait of his eldest brother, Eddy, in 1956. Apart from that painting, he also showed skills in other areas early in life. Such skills include riding of bicycle in acrobatic display to entertain the public in a very special manner to the admiration of his audience.

The *Binis*, especially his contemporaries still recall this memory and want him to entertain them once more. Uwaifo heeds to that call and took this skill to the last Nigerian University Games held at the University of Benin, Benin City, in 2011 where he entertained the audiences from who he received great ovation, leaving with them the memory they will not lose in a hurry. Uwaifo, the great entertainer, at seventy years old still demonstrated that skill as usual with the bicycle.¹² In an interview, Chris Eburu, Uwaifo's manager is pertinent here. In support of Uwaifo's position, he affirms that Uwaifo was not taught the skill of bicycle riding but that it was inborn. He adds that he invented a magic revolving guitar which according to him, was the first of its kind in the whole world. He also explains how he played some positive creative pranks when he was a child. The commonest prank was hide and seek games, a situation where one would hide somewhere and jump out to frighten the person coming. He is a skillfull bicycle rider. The *Bicycle* (Fig.4) captures his acrobatic bicycle, which he manipulates with ease and flair.¹³



Fig. 4: Uwaifoös Bicycle, 2009. © Victor Uwaifo.

Victor Uwaifo's Education

Victor Uwaifoös father, Wilson Uwaifo, had interest in education. He therefore vowed that all his children must be giving decent education. In February 1947, Victorös journey into the world of formal education would have begun but for

the fact that he did not have the physical qualification. Aptitude test was not administered to him having failed the physical test to pass his right hand over his head to touch his left ear.¹⁴ However, the following year, precisely in February 1948; Victor's journey to formal education began. He was admitted into the Holy Cross Catholic Primary School, Benin City. According to him, his experience in the school was quite eventful, full of adventures and ultimately rewarding but the family relocated to a new residence which was far away from his School. As a result, he was forced by circumstance to transfer to a nearby school that took him to St John's Primary School, also in Benin City. When he completed his primary school education, he proceeded to Western Boys High School, Benin City, in 1957.¹⁵

However, he could not complete his secondary school education in the Western Boys High School, Benin City, because of the sudden death of his father. He then left for Lagos in 1960 where he was admitted into St Gregory College. In St Gregory College, he distinguished himself both in curricular and extra-curricular activities. This endeared him to Rev. McCarthy, the Principal and Mr Falana, his music teacher who were quick to realize that Victor was a great asset to the college. Mr Falana taught him the formal rudiments of the art. He had been previously introduced to the rudiments of music at an informal level by his brother, George, back in Benin. In an interview Uwaifo reveals thus:

I obtained perfect knowledge of the rudiments of music from my music teacher. In early 1960, I recorded my first singles record with the Philips West Africa Studio, which later changed to Phonogram and now Premier Records. However, I jumped over the school wall to make my first record single. The school authority insisted that I had to choose between the school and the All Stars Band, so I left Olaiya Band to face my education. To keep me strictly within the gates of the college, a school band was formed and I was made the leader.¹⁶

Rev. Fr. McGuiness, the games master raised the standard of the school in sports and athletics to an appreciable level. Victor proved his worth as a good athlete at the St Gregory's College, Lagos, a skill that he started to show in the Western Boys' High School, Benin City.¹⁹ According to Uwaifo, some of his school mates were good athletes. He reveals that Njoku, son of a former Minister in the First Republic who hailed from Eastern Nigeria, was one of his contemporaries who looks like him. He captures Njoku thus:

Njoku stood at a height advantage of six feet, two inches, but notwithstanding, he could not take advantage of this height to jump above six feet. Therefore, I introduced a book on high jump techniques to him. The book really helped as it was evident during the big sporting event, the Grier Cup Competition held in Ibadan in 1961. His performance greatly improved.¹⁷

Victor Uwaifo set a new standard in high jump with a height of six feet and six inches during Grier Cup Competition that was held at the Liberty Stadium in Ibadan. In the competition, some of the other athletes are now imminent men in the society. He recalls the contributions of his former teacher, Mr Amaechi who showed much interest in his progress at Western Boys High School in Benin.¹⁸

In 1961, Victor gained admission into Yaba College of Technology, Lagos, to study Graphic Arts. This was another milestone in his journey to academic greatness. The Head of the Department was an Englishman called Mr. Brown assisted by another expatriate and some Nigerian lecturers. According to him, in an interview, one of them was Mr. Adebayo Ajayi, a lecturer in charge of graphics. Another distinguished lecturer, who made tremendous and appreciable impact on him was the famous Yusuf Grillo. He taught painting and later served as the Head of Department at the exit of the expatriate, Mr. Brown, who held the position for several years. In his

final year, in 1963, Victor Uwaifo was the most revered art student at the Yaba College of Technology. He became the best art student at the end of this programme.¹⁹ According to Muyiwa Awodiya, Victor Uwaifo won the Lintas West Africa Limited scholarship before ultimately obtaining a National Diploma in art. He majored in commercial or graphic art. He also had interest in sculpture. To him:

Sculpture is the mother of all arts; I have always wanted to be a complete artist. I am sure this is what prompted my love for sculpture, every other form of art falls behind sculpture. Looking at a work of sculpture, you are bound to see an embodiment of completeness. So I see myself as a complete artist today.¹⁹

After graduating from the Yaba College of Technology, he got a job as Graphics Officer with the Nigerian Television Services (NTVS), now Nigerian Television, NTA, Lagos. He rose to the position of Assistant Head of Department. Victor Uwaifo did not relent to return to the classroom. This he proved in 1993 at the age of 52 years when he enrolled at the University of Benin where in 1995 he obtained the B.A, First Class, Honours, in Fine and Applied Arts. He emerged as the overall best graduating student and for this, he had the honour of reading the valedictory speech on behalf of the other graduating students in the University of Benin in 1996. He obtained a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) Degree in Sculpture. He is at present undergoing a Ph.D. programme at the same University.²⁰

Victor Uwaifo: An Embodiment Of Creativity

Uwaifo is an artist who is committed to spreading and preserving the cultural heritage of his birthplace, ancient Benin City. He has an unmistakable love for art and African culture. As an artist, he promotes the culture of his forefathers, and as a sculptor, he has been able to write on marbles and stones for posterity. He is an artist

of three worlds: a sculptor, a poet and a philosopher.²² He believes that a man who has a gift of art is endowed with extra sense and perceptual vision and capacity. Victor Uwaifo pointed out that painting is only visual and that combining music with applied arts is not at all difficult for him, therefore, he could write a piece of lyrics and turn it into visual arts and sometimes put it into painting or sculpture. He can also put it down as poem in order not to lose the impression completely. He emphasized that he derived joy and satisfaction in art, since there is no limit in creativity. Victor Uwaifo is an artist, set designer, an inventor, a winner of numerous awards, both nationally and internationally.

In addition, he is a multi-talented artist, painter and sculptor, philosopher, architect, scholar, a pioneer commissioner, a former Commissioner for Arts, Culture and Tourism in Edo State, a lecturer and a great visionary. He is reputed to be the first visual artist to become a commissioner in Edo State. He was honoured with a Member of the Order of the Niger (MON) and Justice of Peace. Apart from distinguishing himself in the visual arts circle, Victor Uwaifo created a monumental sculpture without a supporting base. He sculpts *The Chief Homage Dance* (Fig. 5) in front of Oba Akenzua II at the Cultural Center complex, Benin City, Edo State.²¹

The artist composes the dancer with a human figure, using a chief in complete traditional regalia as a model. The work is spatial sculpture, which drapes in a crown, a pair of glasses, beads, bracelets, a shirt and a flowing wrapper. The heavily beaded sculpture holds the *Eben* tenaciously and thrusts it into space. His other hand, left, also thrusts into space horizontally but with a sharp drop at the wrist. In a general frontal plane of reference, the chief stands on one leg and tilts his neck to an angle, showing the head on a profile. Heavy beads hang from his neck to the chest. One structure hangs from the neck to the torso with a very sharp drop. The chief in a

dramatic dance is in serious exctasy, probably communicating with the deity or some ancestors. Contextually, Uwaifo uses the work to comment on royal dance in contrast to Disco or Pop in which the dancers show little or no respect for the dignity of the hunman race.

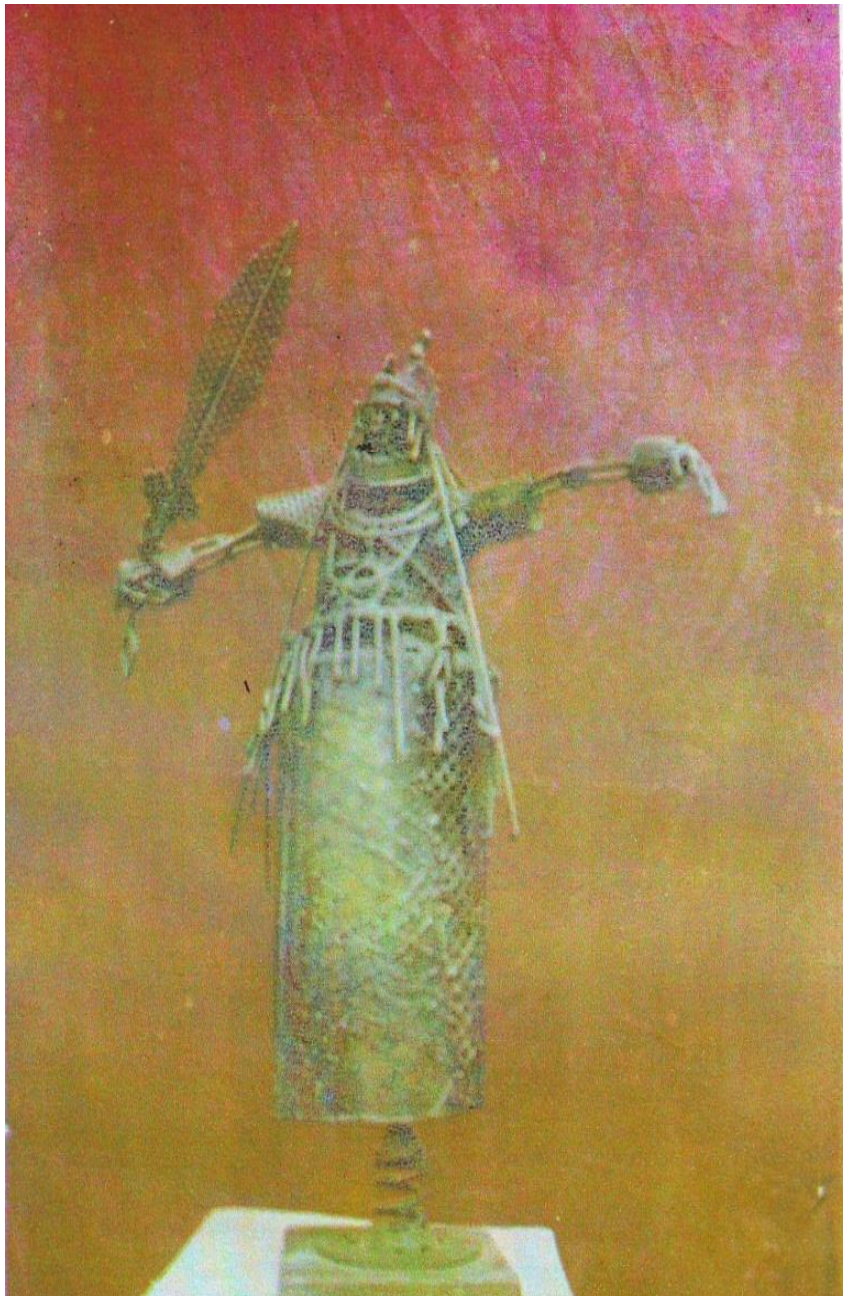


Fig. 5: Victor Uwaifo, The Chief Homage Dance, Metal, 160, 2003. © Victor Uwaifo.

Victor Uwaifo founded the Revelation Tourist Center a gallery that displays the historic events, it exhibit horror, tragedy, the good, the bad and the ugly. It also display the beautiful in forms of letters. Through his art works, he has been able to address and promote universal values using the instrumentality of his immediate Edo cultural heritage. His creative expressions however have strong stylization taken from both European and African traditional forms. He has been greatly influenced by the environmental, traditional and cultural setting occasioned by Benin kingdom. The Palace of the Oba of Benin, the storehouse of Benin culture, remains the base from which the people's art and culture are projected.

Another strong influence on Uwaifo's art practice was his mother, Madam Idusogie, a princess from the Edo royalty. She stimulated her son's zeal for the arts and culture of Edo people.³² She grew up in the palace of her grandfather: the Oba of Benin. Her interest in Benin folk songs and folk tales was developed and nourished by constant palace ceremonies and other cultural activities in the palace. She passed these traits on to her children. Victor Uwaifo benefitted immensely from this influence. As a man with ingenious creative abilities he was able to learn from his mother's knowledge, intelligence and creativity.²²

To trace the history of art in Benin Kingdom from music, dance, painting, sculpture, among others, is like tracing the life of Victor Uwaifo from his people. Arts and culture of Benin, coupled with visual art background of Uwaifo's parents, were the most potent influences on the personal growth and development of Sir Victor Uwaifo, both as a man and an artist. Reviewing a fellow artist who share some attributes with Uwaifo, Ola Olodi, in his article titled, 'Uche Okeke, the Patriarch of art Reformation in Nigeria', writes:

I would not agree that most of my works come from inner self. I paint landscapes, common place things and portraits. All that come from my inner self is the result of my analyses of nature.²³

Just like Yusuf Grillo, his former teacher, Victor Uwaifo influenced the art ideology of Yaba College of Technology to break from Onoboluism; the purely academic or naturalistic mode of art representation in Nigeria. Although he has keen interest in adventure and nature, he was able to use art as a vehicle to translate his developed ideas into visual forms. He was successful in passing his discoveries in sculpture and philosophy in art to the younger generation, most especially students he mentored at the University of Benin, Benin City.²⁴

He has produced many sculptors and artists. Young and older artists visit his art gallery called *Revelation Tourist Palazzo* to experiment, share ideas, and develop skills. He has been a determined, hard-working artist whose influence has been felt; not only on contemporary Nigerian art, but also on art beyond Nigerian boundaries. His art experiences at the Secondary, Polytechnic and University levels form the bedrock that translates into his multi-media entity. He is a multitalented, skilled, creative and an innovative artist. He is a very skillful artist who creates unique artistic patterns and designs that are very aesthetically appealing. He as an embodiment of creativity in the visual arts, belongs to modern Nigerian artists. He employs conventional style; depicting his formal educational cum professional training, and making use of various traditional imageries. In his art, he produced strong stylized, naturalistic, abstract as well as realistic works. In these works, he has evidently demonstrated the professionalism he was taught by his former teacher, Yusuf Grillo, through whom he had passed during his days as a student at the Yaba College of

Technology, Lagos. Indeed, Grillo himself has aptly pointed out the centrality of any theme in art thus:

The theme in an art work is the key or central idea expressed by the artist. The concept is wider and depends on the individual. It is the way in which ideas expressed by the artist are realized. For the impressionists, their concept is light and colour whereas their themes are the subject matter.²⁵

His abstract guitars called the *Mystery Guitar*, the *Blue Note Melody Makers* and the *Classical Guitarist*, (Figs. 6, 7 and 8) are testimonials to his creative expressions. They exhibit strong stylizations appropriated from both European and African traditional forms. They convey the power of music in creating love. The *Mystery Guitar* (Fig. 6) captures Uwaifo music, using the motif of guitar, which is symbolic of Benin culture. He composes it with a figure who plays guitar in a wood carving style. Aesthetically, the artist creates the work in abstraction with reference to a human figure who grips the musical instrument tenaciously. The human figure and the guitar are inseparable, especially at the base area where the work takes the form of the guitar. The work is human only at the tip where it penetrates into space with a spherical form. The linear motifs in their straight, curvature and concavity nature are dominant in the area towards the base. The concave and convex surfaces are also dominated with warp. He partitions the work with hues of red and gold. Contextually, *Mystery Guitar* talks on Edo culture through music.

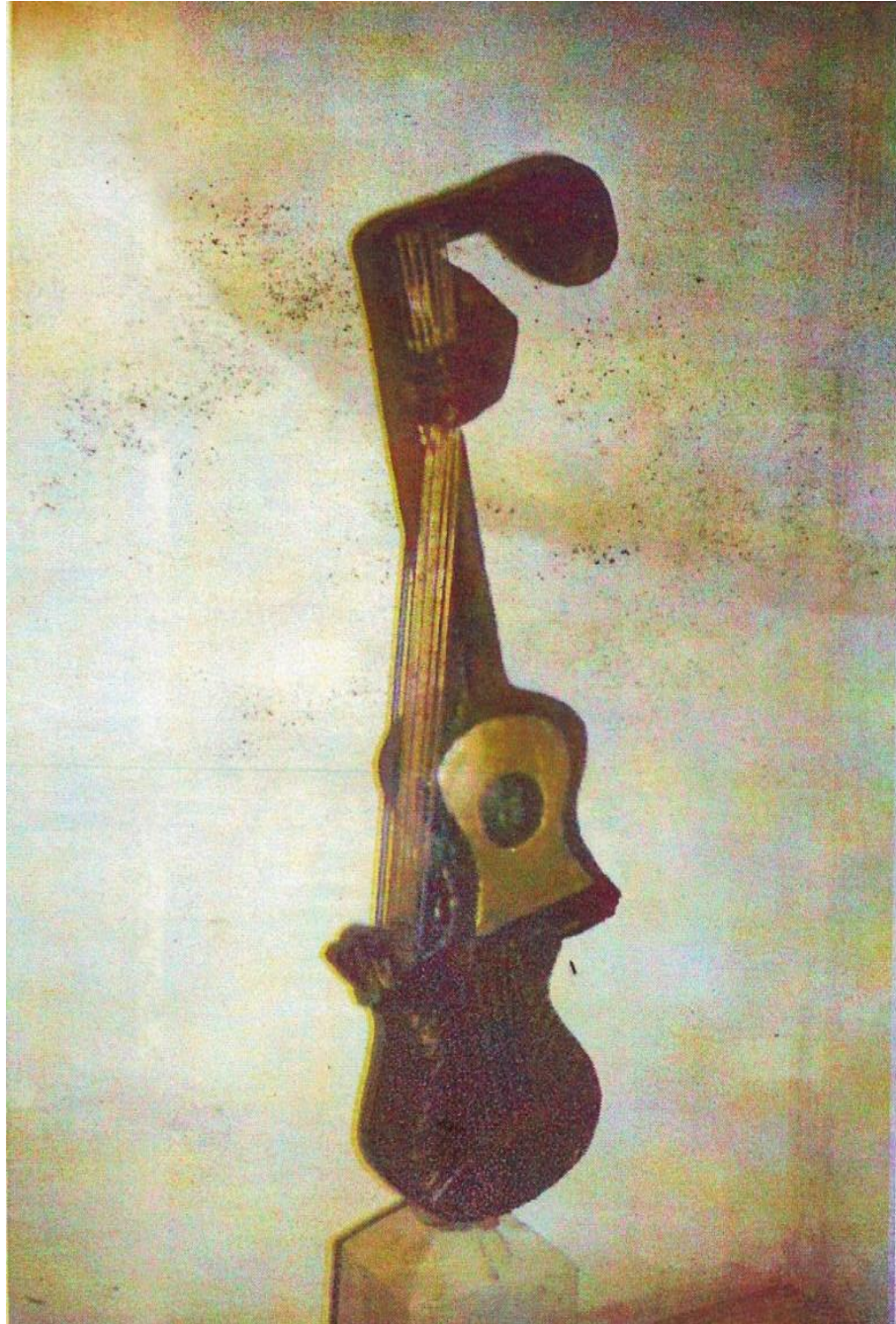


Fig. 6: Victor Uwaifo, *The Mystery Guitar* Oil on Canvas, 137x75cm.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1994.

The *Blue Note Melody Makers* (Fig.7) is an abstraction of drum, flute and two human figures who are engaged in music. The painting is bordered twice with graduation of hues of purple. The painting is flat, but it relies heavily on colour

values and linear effect for artistic mastery. Contextually, *Blue Note Melody Makers* also captures traditional music of the Edo people.²⁶

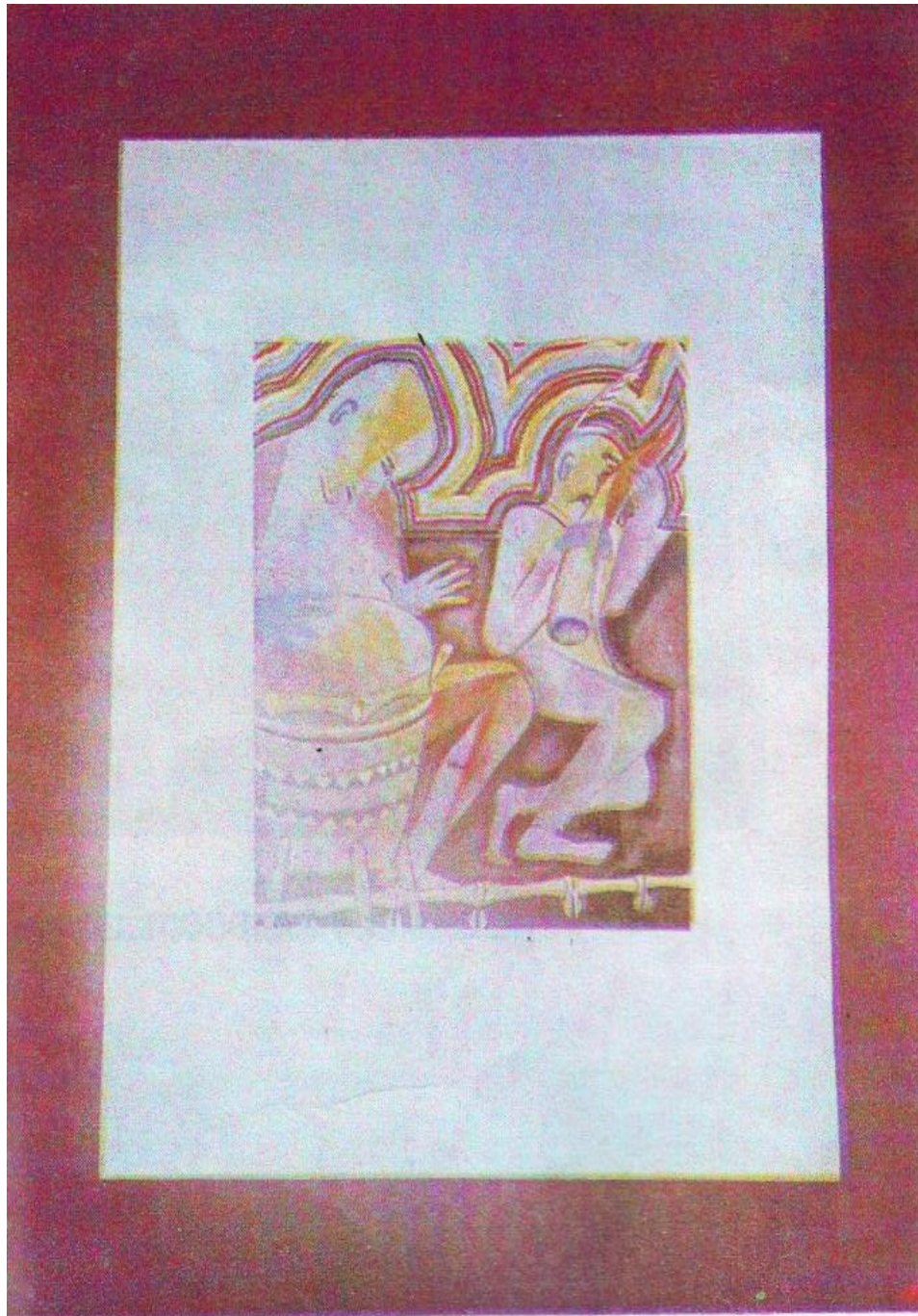


Fig. 7: Victor Uwaifo, *The Blue Note Melody Makers* oil on canvas, 18x36 cm.
© Vtctor Uwaifo, 2001.

Classical Guitarist (Fig.8) is an abstraction of a human figure playing the guitar. Its resemblance to a human being is very remote. However, in the parlance of Expressionism, the work is very effective. The work as a communicative tool, is not in doubt. It grips the guitar firmly and the two are hardly separated. Its context of entertainment through music with the guitar as motif is effective. *Classical Guitarist* seems to call on the audience to be lively and forget their sorrow.



Fig. 8: Victor Uwaifo, *Classical Guitarist*, Oil on canvas, 137 x 76 cm. © Victor Uwaifo, 1994.

Uwaifo is an art wizard with uncommon or superhuman talent. He is a rare artist who belongs to the category of artists who no longer find it satisfying enough to work on only one art medium. He possesses special attributes, which include creativity, strong feeling, uniqueness, imagination and individuality, as exemplified in his expressive artistic freedom. He combines different art materials and media in his art works. He strives to free himself from the slavish fetters of one art medium. To him, no one art technique or medium of expression is adequate enough to explain his creative impulses. According to him:

When I place a concept on the table to see the three dimensional aspect of it, I discover that only sculpture, or only performance or only writing cannot say what I want to say. So, for every work or every concept or every rumbling, I try to look at other ways to put depth and some kind of clarity to it. At times something comes up; at times, it just remains as raw as it is.²⁷

This has indeed made Uwaifo an innovator and an experimentalist whose originality of artistic ideals and approach to materials and techniques are of appreciable quality. He shows unusual technical skill, strong imagination and independence of mind, resourcefulness and highly ingenious approach to achieve creative synthesis. His works, experiments and specialties in different art disciplines confirm him an embodiment of creativity in the visual arts. He has creative ingenuity and artistic intuitiveness that are above the ordinary. He operates even beyond the confines of art to areas like, architecture, music, poem, and administration, which afford him the opportunity to use different traditional and non-traditional materials and media of expression to search for a new and more appropriate creative idiom.

A visit to Uwaifo's Revelation Tourists' Palazzo, at Uwaifo Avenue, off Ekenwan Road, Benin City, convinces one that he is truly an embodiment of creativity; a superhuman professional who exhibits extraordinary talent for creativity

and artistry. That is, he is somebody whose creative ingenuity and artistic intuitiveness are above the ordinary. Judging from the art works in display in the Palazzo one sees how he has advanced from one art discipline to another while exploring and expressing his perception of the social, religious, political and cultural environment. What probably informs his artistic and creative ideology is the fact that some concepts are better expressed in solid, three-dimensional forms while others in two-dimensional forms. These concepts are expressed as stables, mobiles, relief or sculpture in-the-round, showing that the design of an art work is usually governed by nature of the material which guides the artists.⁴³ The collections in *Gold Disks (record) Award* (Fig. 8) lends credence to the recognition of his artistic achievement.²⁸

Uwaifo employs a considerable degree of African musical elements. He creates a tradition of Edo music through a fusion of European and African elements. His music can be closely tied to political, religious and social events. Uwaifo's compositions have reflected the diverse nature of his experience. His stylistic features often reflects influences from Highlife, Jazz and *Bini* traditional music. Joromi the first Gold Record in Africa was presented to Sir Victor Uwaifo by Mr Jan Lewen the managing Director of Philips Records West Africa in 1966, in recognition of his music achievement.



Fig. 9: Uwaifoö, Gold Disks (record) Award. © Victor Uwaifo, 1996.

Though Victor Efosa Uwaifo has been engaged by governments and their agencies, his great impact and accomplishments are to be found in his private working experience and entrepreneurship. Not often known about him are his great

engagements in the creative arts, apart from performing arts like music. He has held several solo exhibitions and has been severally commissioned. The cenotaph at the parade ground in Yola, Adamawa State, in Maiduguri, Bornu State, Isaac Boro Park, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, the Unknown Soldier in Abeokuta, Ogun State, and Akwa Ibom State House beautification in Uyo, are some of such jobs commissions. Others include the Kinectic Sculpture at Oba Akenzua II Cultural Complex Benin City, Pilgrimage ground (45 giant status) stations of the cross at Igarra and many others too numerous to mention. He designed and constructed a functional sculpture of an aeroplane house, now the largest man- made sculpture in Africa, second to the Tower of Liberty in New York, United States of America.²⁹

He stands eminently tall as the first known artist in Nigeria to sculpt a motorized giant kinetic sculpture. The above ground breaking artistic and cultural feats show Uwaifo as a man; full of dreams and accomplishments that should be regarded as an embodiment of creativity. Victor Efosa Uwaifo is a rare breed in the history of modern Nigerian art. He is an inventor and a performer of unprecedented prowess, fundly referred to as the *Ekassa*, *Akwete*, *Titibit*, *Sasakossa*, philosopher, administrator, cultural ambassador and illustrious son of the Benin Kingdom. He is an author and international music maestro. He remians the charismatic, charming and ever looking young *Guitar boy* as exemplified by the sculpture (Fig.10) and the two photographs (Figs.11 &12).

Uwaifo captures the synphony between music and visual arts, using *Guitar Boy* (Fig.10) as a motif of the synphony. Uwaifo in cement sculpture compositionally stands astride with the gaze of one who looks at the distant object for inspiration. It is aesthetically draped in Uwaifo's stage attire with strong resemblance. Marrying

music with sculpture, the artist, Uwaifo, creates the image which holds tightly to the guitar, a symbol of music. The following photograph speaks volume.³⁰



Fig. 10: Victor Uwaifo, Guitar Boy, 4ft, Cement.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1996.

Victor Uwaifo at 12 (Fig.11) captures Uwaifo in action at very early age.

Indeed, Uwaifo acquired skills early in life. The photograph reflects the fashion and

code of dressing at that period. The youthfulness of the artist and the manner he grips the guitar portray a committed young man to duty. The next photograph reveals an improvement.



Fig. 11: Victor Uwaifo at 12. © Victor Uwaifo, 1953.

Victor Uwaifo on Stage (Fig.12) captures Uwaifo about seventy years old doing music on the stage. He stands heavily astride and bends backwards and holds the guitar, which he plays behind his head. He is generally acrobatic. The guitar is

held horizontally. The bodywaist rests on his right arm. In fact, Uwaifo on stage epitomizes games, dance, drama and theatric idiom. His costume of gold and white speak volume of purity, royalty and uncommon neatness in mist of heavy sweat. The creative way of playing the guitar also extends to the plastic art.³¹

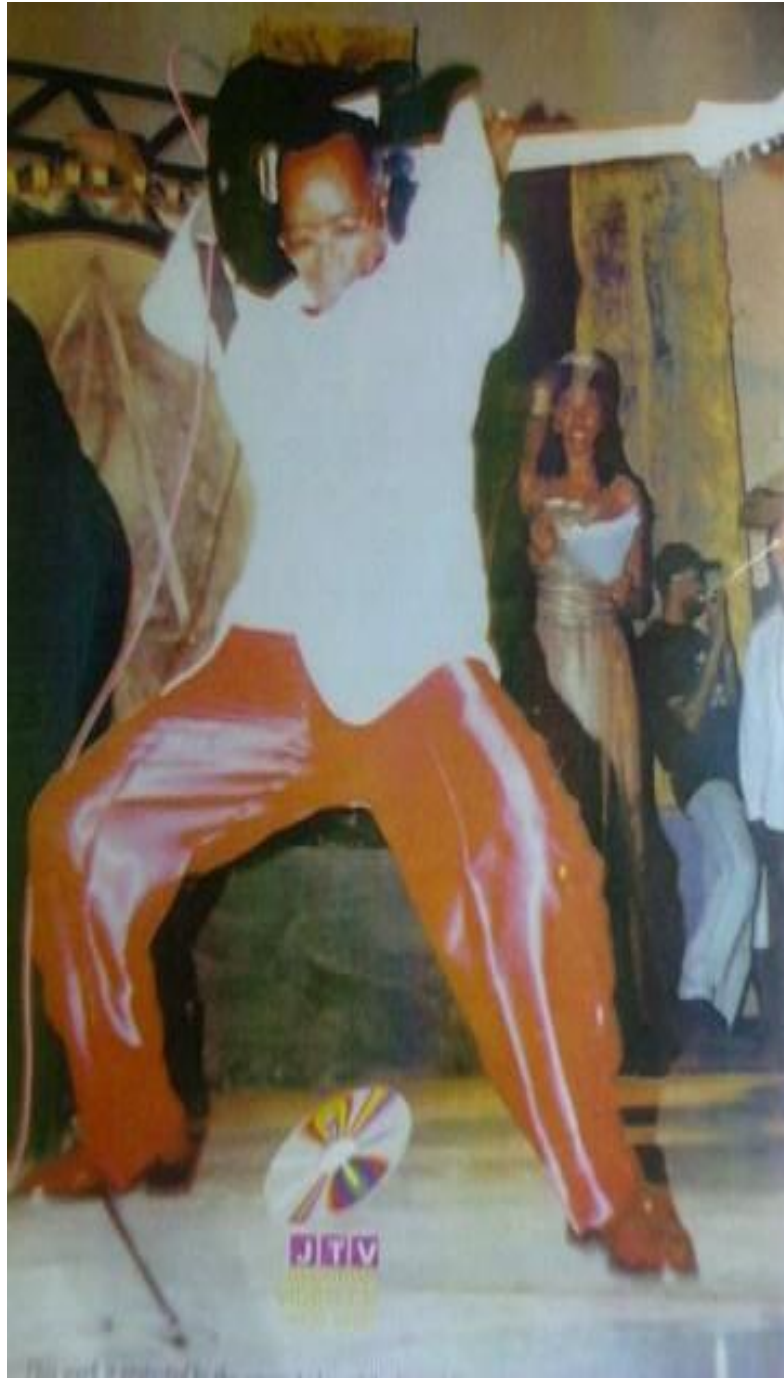


Fig. 12: Victor Uwaifo on Stage, Abuja, N T A Pavilion.
(C) Victor Uwaifo, 2007.

Uwaifo is a man of discipline and good temperament whose amiable and convivial disposition bring people closer. All that add up to honour him with Professor and Doctor of Literature (D.Litt); he is also a Fellow of the Nigerian Academy of Letters. With all these above sterling qualities and endowments, he became a notable figure as an embodiment of creativity in visual arts. Victor is a versatile artist who knows no bounds with regard to areas of specialization, or discipline. He has proved his artistic gifts as an embodiment of creativity by traversing interdisciplinary borders of art, technology and architecture. He writes well-articulated essays on architecture, religion and art technology. He straddles many art disciplines in search of creative fulfillment. He has produced remarkable prints, paintings, sculptures and graphic designs. His contributions in the field of creative arts and projection of African cultural heritage have been outstanding. He is an excellent maestro, outstanding intellectual, cultural icon, administrator, and an elder statesman who has made outstanding contributions to arts and culture. He is a unique individual who has straddled two worlds replete with difficult terrains, the world of music and the world of visual arts.³²

Thus, to be an embodiment of creativity in visual arts, an artist needs not know bounds with regard to areas of specialization, or discipline. Demas Nwoko, for instance, has proved his artistic gifts as an embodiment of creativity by traversing interdisciplinary borders of art, technology and architecture as well as writing well-articulated essays on architecture, religion, art and technology. Different categories of artist who have entranced this trajectory of embodiment of creativity include artists who straddle two or more art disciplines in such creative fulfillment. These are

painters who produce sculptures, printmakers who paint or sculpt, or sculptors who paint and print and textile designers who also sculpt or paint.³³

During his 70th birthday celebration, the President and Commander-in-Chief, Federal Republic of Nigeria, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, eulogized Uwaifo on January 24 2011. He concluded with this statement:

Even more remarkable is your continued contribution not only to the positive projection of diversity and richness of our cultural heritage to the international community, but also to the growth of the theory and practice of the creative arts in Nigeria through your tireless endeavours as an accomplished academic and administrator. On behalf of the government and people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and on my own behalf, I wish you, Sir Victor Uwaifo, as the whole world knows you, many more glorious years of fulfillment and continued distinguished service to the glory of Almighty God and our fatherland.³⁴

The above statement reveals that Victor Uwaifo is an embodiment of creativity in Nigeria who is well known. Many government functionaries including his governor, Adams Oshiomole, Executive Governor of Edo State of Nigeria also made good remarks. The remarks of Oshiomole is very pertinent thus:

Apart from your musical legacies, you have made outstanding impact as a sculptor, with several master pieces across the nation. In you, we have a distinguished scholar, and an accomplished researcher, with respectable intellectual outputs and publications. These professional qualities and accomplishments, as well as other rich combination of talents and skills, mark you out as a man of unique multi-dimensionality. You are an asset and a pride to Africa and Nigeria. Happy birthday to a world-class maestro, outstanding intellectual, cultural icon, administrator and an elder statesman.³⁵

In goodwill message from among the eminent personalities is also pertinent. The *Oba*, Omo N^oOba EreDiauwa, the Oba of Benin, describes Uwaifo thus:

Professor Uwaifo's outstanding contributions to arts and culture, his laudable initiative in entertainment and tourist industry and creative writings have earned him a well-deserved professorial chair in the University.³⁶

Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, former President and Commander in Chief also sent a congratulatory message, Federal Republic of Nigeria reveals Uwaifo's place in music and arts:

We salute your single-minded dedication to your art and the discipline which produced a distinct classical Nigerian sound reflecting the nation's rich and complex cultural heritage. In many ways, you were a trail-blazer and trend-setter whose efforts and accomplishment spawned a generation of disciples of whom have become stars in their own rights.³⁷

Also, another good will message from Professor O.G. Oshodin (JP), Vice-Chancellor, University of Benin, Benin City, captures Uwaifo vividly:

I send warm felicitations to one of us and a new entrant into the exclusive club of septuagenarian. However, as one of our own, we are proud to embrace him as one unique individual who has straddled two worlds replete with difficult terrains, the world of music and the world of visual arts.³⁸

A tribute also came from the wife, Princess Mrs. Osaretin Uwaifo, capturing Uwaifo as a public and private personality:

You have been my closest companion this 23 yrs of marriage. I still feel the way I felt 23 yrs ago when I married you. My darling husband, you are a man of integrity, a kind man, a rare breed of intelligence. You are the best husband any woman would wish for... Happy Birthday my lord!!! Bon Anniversaries Mon PATRON!!!³⁹

Lastly, a tribute from his son, Osamudiamen Alex Uwaifo, a 400 level student, University of Benin also captures Uwaifo very accurately:

I was born into the comfort of my father's world of fame. I grew up knowing that he is my hero and a role model, admired globally. Daddy, at 70, we are proud to note that you have impacted and are still impacting so profoundly on us your children, your generation yet unborn.⁴¹

The above selected few goodwill messages from some of his admirers felicitating with the icon, on the occasion of his 70th birthday anniversary, confirm him as a successful individual and an embodiment of creativity in visual arts.

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CHAPTER FOUR

UWAIFO AS A PAINTER

Victor produced his first significant painting in 1956, when he painted a portrait of his eldest brother, Eddy. His earlier training in the visual arts was in graphics design and later as a sculptor. Today, he is a graphic artist, stage designer, an illustrator, and an accomplished sculptor.¹ To him, he prefers sculpture to painting and, as such, sees himself more as a sculptor than a painter. It is difficult to understand this declaration in terms of proficiencies or expressiveness, because he handles both with equal facility. His landscape painting compositions are an accomplishment of an ardent painter. Though he paints other subjects, portraiture painting is his specialty. His compositions are highly naturalistic.²

A prolific painter, he draws inspiration from traditional African art forms, particularly the African traditional masks and masquerades, as exemplified in the composition, *Koko-nu-te* (Fig.12). The artist composes the painting with four human figures, including the masquerade which wears a mask and heavily draped with flowing garment of mechanical folds. Its face mask is shaped ovally; it has a horizontal line a little above the eyes which divides it into two. The upper part clearly shows a cap which tappers with wood fibres while the lower part that has two holes representing eyes also tappers down the chest area.³ The masquerade is flanked by two figures, one drummer and a dancer who holds an hankerchief. Both are bare at the torso except that their loins are draped with skirt of vertical folds. The figure behind is almost draped like the masquerade except that it has no mask. Aesthetically, the outdoor painting casts the figures in front of a modern building whose colour is harmonious with those of the figures. Their forms stand out in abrupt transition, which share from a combination of naturalism and stylization. The drapery relies heavily on linear effect.⁴



Fig. 13: Victor Uwaifo, *Koko-nu-te*, oil on canvas.
150 x 100 cm. © Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

Contextually, Uwaifo uses *Koko-nu-te* to capture culture in an urban environment with the motif of dance as entertainment. Implicitly, *Koko-nu-te* talks on a die-hard culture of the people in the face of civilization. It could be decrying the rate at which culture is dieing fast in Africa because in spite of the entertaining qualities of the figures the audience is no where. More importantly, the entertainersö

mood does not portray joy of satisfaction not because the artist lacks the skill to do so but that he sought true representation.⁵

Uwaifo's meticulously experimental painting compositions have glaring semblance with the painting techniques of Yusuf Grillo. For example, his abstract design is based on figures of dancers and drummers. This was probably the result of Uwaifo's training at the Yaba College of Technology where Grillo taught art. Also Uwaifo's long interaction with Western artistic aesthetics and cultural values in school has not alienated him from his cultural and artistic values. In his naturalistic paintings, Victor Uwaifo appropriates African symbols and motifs in an astonishing style to show his mastery of forms, light and shadow. Uwaifo is a genre artist whose theme reflects mainly the lives of the common people and their activities. He uses his visual arts to record the simple social life of the people, as seen in *The Vendor* (Fig. 14), his collage painting of 1962.⁶

The artist composes *The Vendor* as a bicycle rider, capturing the prestige and joy of a fulfilled man. The forms are highly abstracted, giving credence to elongation and geometric shapes. The bicycle presents perfect circle and straight lines, which the geometric shape of the human figure echoes. The bicycle and the human figure enfold and penetrate into space with rhythmic flow that is in syphony with the bicycle in a high motion as it descends a hill. Thematically, *The Vendor* stills the motion, prestige, purity and fashion of an age; the rider is clad in white, a sign of purity.⁷



Fig.14: Victor Uwaifo, *The Vendor*, oil on board, 121 x 91 cm,
© Victor Uwaifo, 1996.



Fig.15: Victor Uwaifo, *The Camel Rider*, Mosaic
250 x 120 cm. © Victor Uwaifo, 1995.

The simplicity of his imageries and directness of the message he delivers with his art paintings suggest that he belongs to the generation of Nigerian artists

whose art is not merely artistic. He is a skillful painter who has also produced a large number of paintings. Uwaifo utilizes abstraction in both painting and sculpture in such skillful manner that he has achieved harmony between sculpture and painting. The imageries of his work are usually simple and direct and the forms are unambiguous; they speak directly to the audience. This is evident in *The Camel Rider* (Fig.15), a mosaic painting.⁸

The artist composes the work with human and camel figures. The human figure rides on the animal, a beast of burden. A mosaic type of painting executed in cool, subtle colours that are predominantly purple, the work is abstracted into flat shapes defined by straight lines, but with little or no details. While the forms have flora design the canvas is like a carpet of undulating straps of hues of purple. The harmony between the figures and the carpet is very strong. Conceptually, the painting depicts wealth and a means of communication.⁹

Uwaifo's acquisition of Western education brings about completely new and better opportunities in man's socio-economic development in modern times. Some of the figures are an aggregation of geometric forms. Observing the painting of Uwaifo, what really catches the attention of the viewer are differences in the social classes of figures in his painting through modes of dressing. These dresses show that the figures belong to different social classes in the society. Some of the paintings suggest that every class depends on the other for any meaningful development to be achieved in any society. In most of his paintings, human activities dominate the themes, which are a reflection of his Edo culture.¹⁰

His themes cover a wide range of human activities; from the socio-economic to various social and cultural or traditional practices. Victor Uwaifo, at the age of seventy, combines with ease rare skills in multiple areas of arts. He is engaged in a

large-scale art works or monumental commissions particularly in stained glass and conventional paintings. As already mentioned, he draws his themes from his immediate cultural environment, and communicates with his African audience as well as the international community who are seeking what is new from other parts of the world. Uwaifo is a prolific painter but takes his time to produce a single painting. It takes him months and in some cases years, like Yusuf Grillo, to bring a painting to a state where he can consider it finished. He derives joy and satisfaction from taking a long time to complete a painting. His quality paintings attract high value that makes people want to buy his works. He is a painter par excellence.¹¹

In most of Uwaifo's painting compositions, people are depicted in motion and he avoids photographic realism. There is evidence of elongation, and in some of his other works, the figures appear muscular and well balanced. Traditional drummers and musicians fascinate him most. He also draws inspiration from his former teacher, Yusuf Grillo. The themes of his paintings are derived from his reaction to his environment. Personal experiences of what he has seen, read about and what he has been told abound in his works. The subject of his paintings is generally related to people who are part of the life and culture of Benin where he was born and brought up. Later, Uwaifo moved on to socio-political and cultural themes, which many people often attribute to the influence and inspiration of Aina Onabolu's naturalistic portraiture.¹²

Victor Uwaifo has been able to make his culture global without losing his identity to achieve fame. He has also painted prominent personalities such as the late Archbishop Benson Idahosa, John Kennedy, Nelson Mandela, Professor Wole Soyinka, Adams Aliyu Oshiomole, and General Muhammadu Buhari (Figs. 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21). He shares his time and energy between painting and drawing,

while reflecting the mood of the notable personalities in his portrait paintings, which are personified in different colour of hope and renewal. He can also be regarded as a master of naturalism.¹³

Archbishop Benson Idahosa (Fig.16) reveals Uwaifo's mastery of the study of anatomy. The forms are not suggested but he actually creates them to look real. This in turn strikes the resemblance of the subject. *Archbishop Benson Idahosa* is a clear show of visual correctness of proportion, balance, rhythm, tone and good line quality. The minor forms on the face show subdued texture and transit smoothly. The artist aesthetically creates the portrait in profile. The human figure is draped in a cap, a flowing garment and a ring. Here, Idahosa looks into the void in a quiet mood. He shows some sense of contentment.¹⁴ In fact, Uwaifo is so confident of his artistic standard that he exhibited most of his portraiture of eminent Nigerian politicians, religious leaders as well as various genre experiences in his gallery called *Heaven Palazzo*.



Fig.16: Victor Uwaifo, *Archbishop Benson Idahosa*.
oil on canvas, ©Victor Uwaifo, 1995.

Uwaifo's dynamic visual arts career, particularly as a portrait painter, helps to galvanize his urge, which pays off as a worthy naturalistic painter. His portraits show understanding of character, perspective and anatomical realism that are characterized

by western academic tradition as is exemplified in *John F.Kennedy, Former United States President* (Fig. 17)¹⁵.



Fig. 17: Victor Uwaifo, John F.Kennedy, Former United States President.
oil on canvas, ©Victor Uwaifo, 1996.

Victor Uwaifo cannot be completely divorced from his art, concept, technique and style. He practises, teaches and theorizes visual arts all his life. Uwaifo, just like Kunle Filani, carries out a perfect artistic creation. His humility, which continuously endears him to his contemporaries, old and young artists, has been his greatest asset.¹⁶ Like his character, his colours are delicate and brilliantly

fused with equally flexible figures, while his images are adorned with meaningful ideological forms and patterns. His paintings are distinguished by a refined and subtle use of colour and structuring of picture surfaces. *Nelson Mandela, Former President of South. Africa* (Fig. 18) authenticates the above claim.¹⁷



Fig.18: Victor Uwaifo, Nelson Mandela, Former President of South Africa. oil on canvas, ©Victor Uwaifo, 1992.

The artist creates forms, using cool colours that are harmonized with sensitive brush strokes. *Prof. Wole Soyinka* (Fig.19) combines hues of blue, purple, white and brown to fix the form that agrees with those of the subject. It is not in doubt that the colours are not cool or that the forms are not of the subject. The yellowish green and brush strokes of the purple create harmony between the canvas and the subject.¹⁸

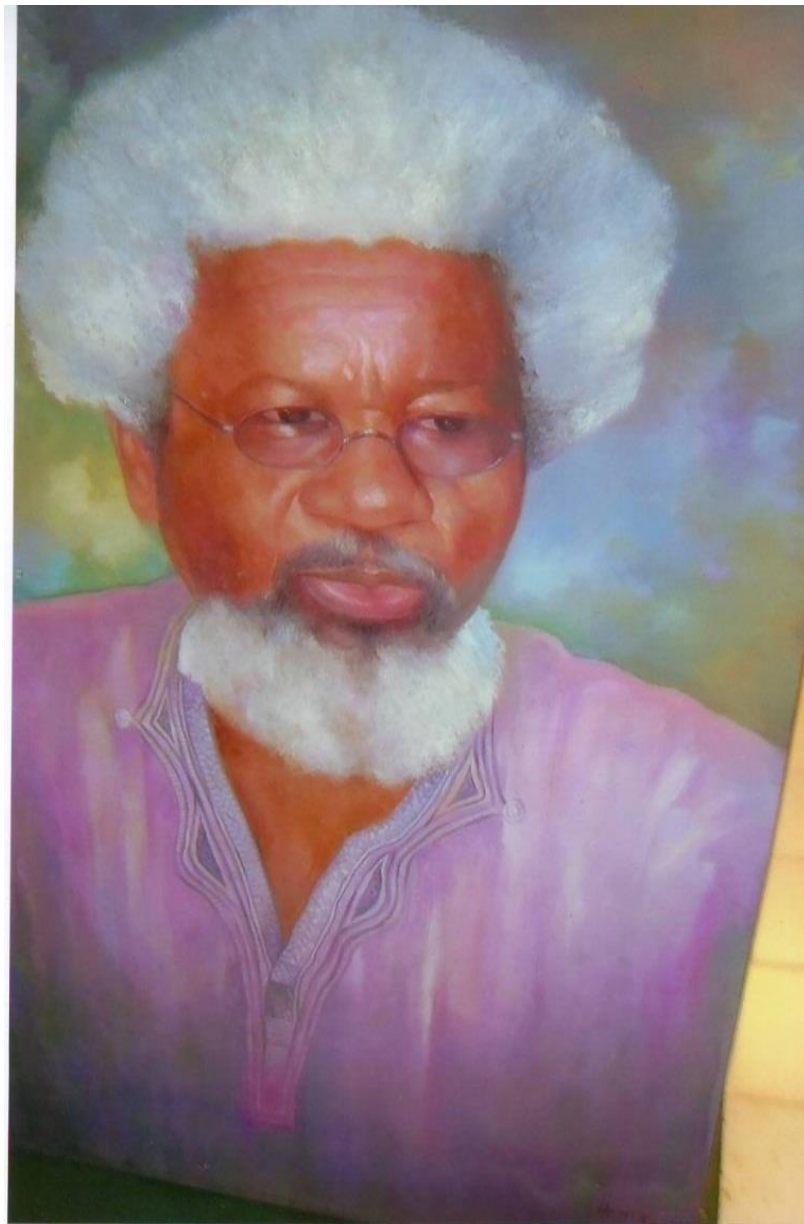


Fig .19: Victor Uwaifo, *Prof. Wole Soyinka*, oil on canvas. © Victor Uwaifo, 1992.

In his article *óIllumination-The stained glass worksô*, in *Master of Masters* by Jerry Buhari, sees art work as an effective outcome of the progression of three processes calls the elements or, the conceptual elements. In his view, an art work can result after an idea has been conceived first in the mind, that is, the conceptual element, and then further processed through the operational element which deals with the material, media and techniques. Finally, he adds that through the synthetic stage was the perception and actualization of the idea in the visual form.¹⁹ óInside Victor Uwaifoôs Tourist Kingdomô by Edeagha, reveals that art products are a certain kind of thought that is definitive and conceptual and that art work or visual response (art form) promotes a type of thought (idea and concept). It further reveals that an art work originates from concepts or ideas pre-conceived and then later expressed in a visual form.

The two reviews above summarize Uwaifoôs artistic feel in the portrait of *Adams Aliyu Oshiomhole Governor of Edo State* (Fig. 20), which captures the visual essence of the subject. The artist creates the forms of Oshiomole in a canvas in which hues of purple and blue are dominant.²⁰ The canvas captures and stills the subjectôs moment of truth in which he explains some policies of his government with heart-felt gestures. The smile on his face brightens his looks which invites the audience to a committed leader. He aesthetically uses the subjectôs mouth to trap space and makes his hand to penetrate space. The minor forms on the face transits smoothly. Contextually, the artist documents the form, prestige and the fashion of a top government functionary.²¹



Fig. 20: Victor Uwaifo, *Adams Aliyu Oshiomhole, Governor, Edo State*. oil on canvas. ©Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

The artist seems to have an eagle's eyes, picking the details of the society and bringing past memory to bear in the present. Committed to reporting many aspects of the society. The artist takes pleasure in documenting the cord between the mother and the child. Uwaifo uses the Mother and Child to bring back the memory of his childhood days, capturing the model of a breast-feeding mother. He uses the liberty

of expression to employ the motif of figures of white people in African context. He creates the images in naturalism.



Fig. 21: Victor Uwaifo, Mother and Child, 120 cm x 100 cm.
©Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

Aesthetically, the artist renders them in profile. The nursing mother enfolds the child in a loving grip. The child returns the love in gripping the breast and sucks the mother into ecstasy. He drapes the mother in red. Her drapery falls off the bust to exposes the breasts, which connect the child further with the mother. The artist also drapes the child in light blue to harmonize the images with the red and blue canvas. Finally, he gives the work double frames.



Fig. 22: Victor Uwaifo, Prof. O. G. Oshodin, 120 cm x 100 cm. ©Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

Uwaifo has friends and colleagues in academia. He shows them respect and goodwill through his art. He uses *Prof. O. G. Oshodin* (Fig. 22) to articulate Oshodin's outline and forms. The artist creates his forms in a green canvas in which hues of purple and brown are dominant. The canvas captures and stills the subject's moment of relaxation in from a very busy man who occupies the apex chair of the academy of the University of Benin. In spite of his demanding office his mood is indifferent. Such indifference shows a stability and order from a committed leader. The artist aesthetically creates the subject's forms to show the natural transition and their peculiar character that define him. Contextually, the artist documents the form, prestige and the fashion of a top academic.

Uwaifo associates much with dignitaries in society. He is Leonardo da Vinci of the present century who dines and wines with the greats in society. This circle of dignitaries also want to identify with him and have as signature the artist work of art at home and offices. In this vein, Uwaifo uses *Donald Duke* (Fig. 23) to capture the government of Cross River State at a point in time. The subject poses with in a very calm mood. He looks at an object that seems to appear some distance from him. The artist captures the forms in their true character that reconcile the portrait and the reference in recognizable visual quality. His forms transit naturally. In a frontal plane, Duke radiates the aura of satisfaction with the joy of a man that is self-made. Above all, he is a very handsome man who is captured here in the dominance of hues of deep blue and brown. The artist proves himself again as a master of portraiture who finds it easy to manipulate materials and tools to achieve a great artistic feel.

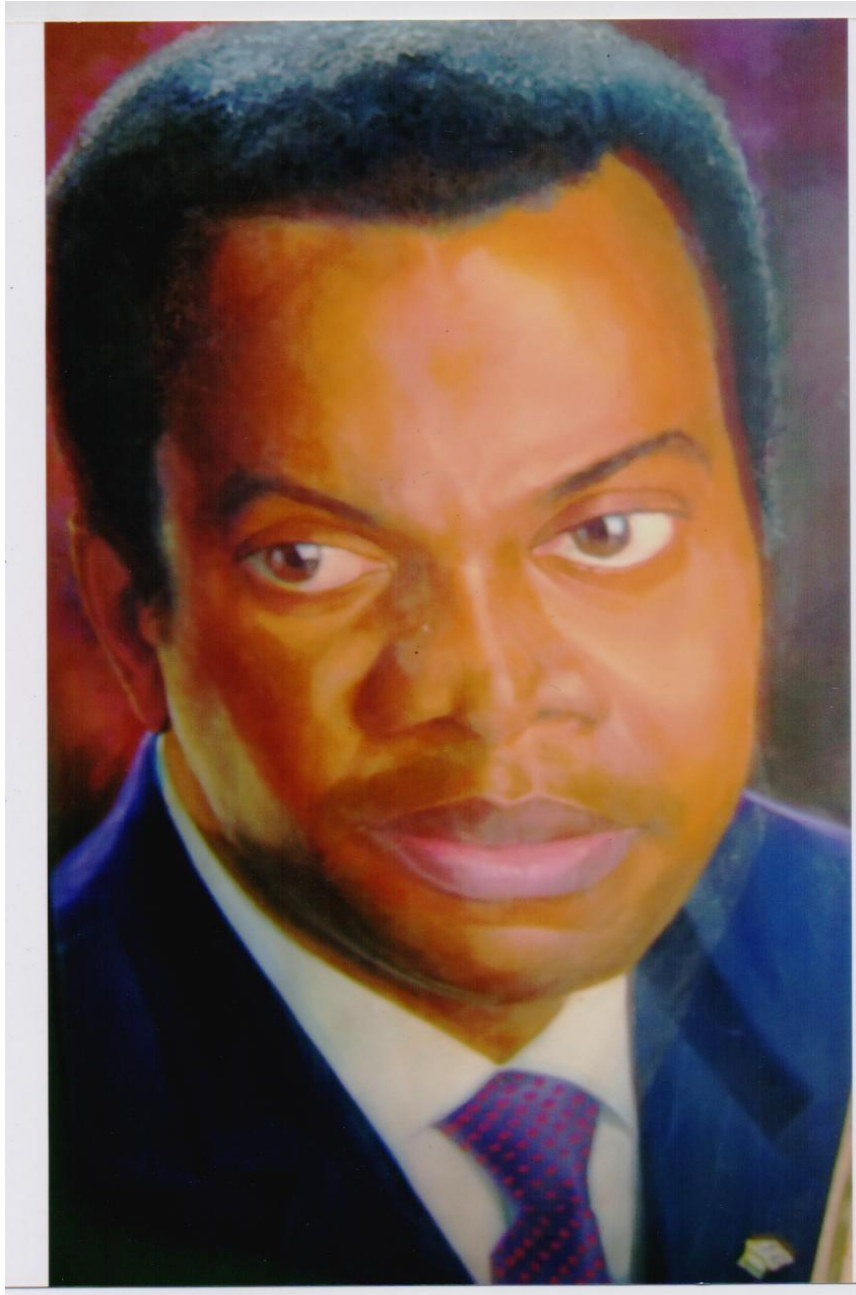


Fig. 23: Victor Uwaifo, Donald Duke, 120 cm x 100 cm.
©Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

The carver of mortars pestles will not pound yam in a basin. At least he will use the best from his works. Uwaifo, the porttaitist, also captures himself, using forms and hues on a canvas. The artist and an awardee of honorary Doctor of Letters articulates the expereince with *Prof. V. E. Uwaifo* (Fig. 24), a fascinating portraiture.

The subject smiles to reveal the joy of achievement in life. Capturing the subject as frontal head on a torso in a profile, the artist keeps to the rules of portraiture, observing each form and transforming it on canvas naturally.

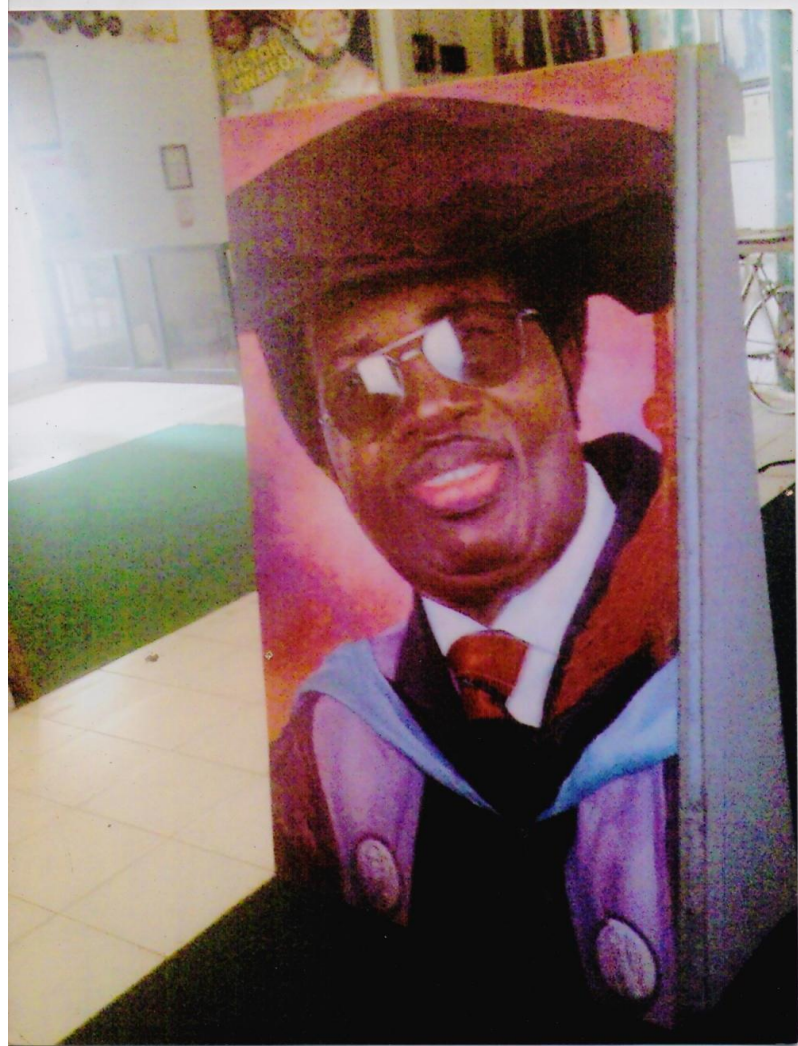


Fig. 24: Victor Uwaifo, 120 cm x 100 cm.
©Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

Uwaifo also uses *V. E. Uwaifo 2*, (Fig.25) to capture his experiences of academic pursuit. He uses his graduation attire as a model. He drapes the model in academic gown and tilts him at the neck region. Aesthetically, the painting combines profile in and overall frontal plane of reference. The youthfulness of the face lights up the entire painting.

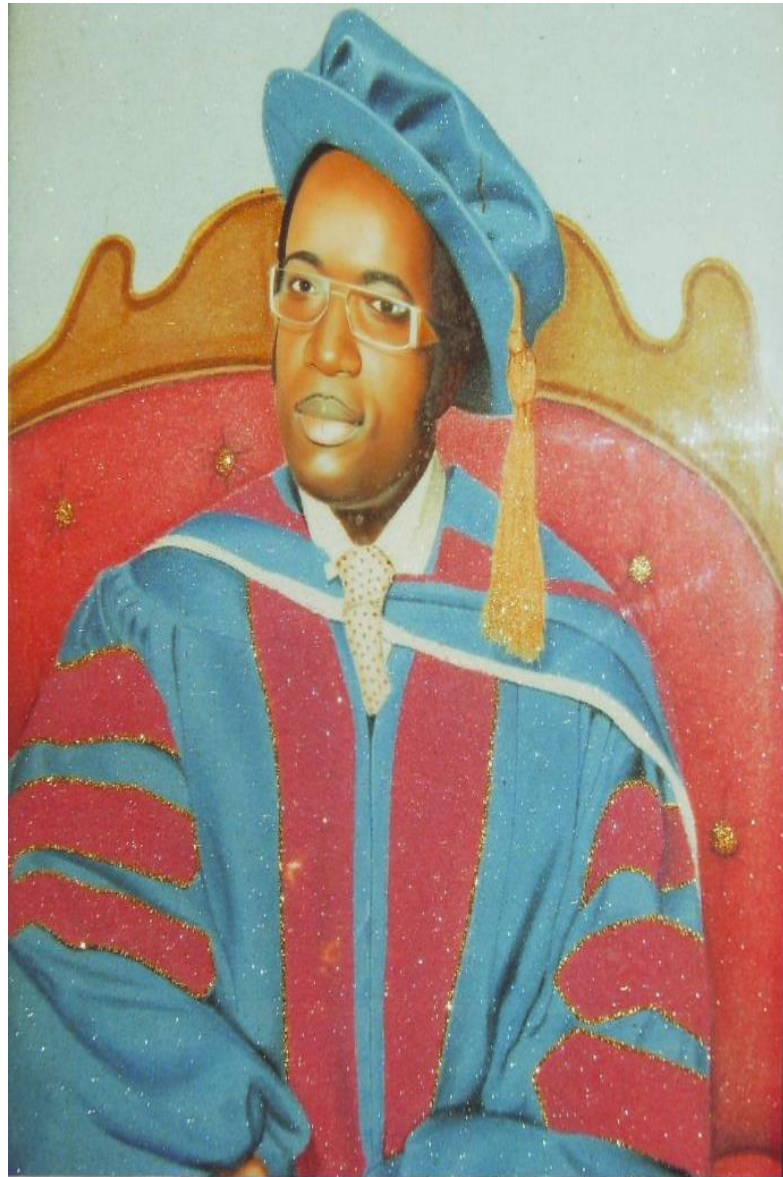


Fig. 25: Victor. Efosa. Uwaifo 2, 120 cm x 100 cm.
©Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

Victor Uwaifo sees certain things spontaneously in the creative process of some art works. To him, “every art work originates from an idea”. Consequently, his contention of amendment to the statement is that every art work elicits a basic idea. He captures such idea visually in the canvas using *General Muhammadu Buhari, former Nigeria Head of State* (Fig. 26). This painting articulates Uwaifo painting a former head of state, Buhari.²²



Fig. 26: Victor Uwaifo, *General Muhammadu Buhari, former Nigeria Head of State*. oil on canvas. © Victor Uwaifo, 1995.

To the artist, an idea may well result or spring from a spontaneous process or productive outcome. Uwaifo also states that ideas appear only after some unconscious manipulation of the materials and techniques. While considerations given to media and technique may sometimes form the basis for an idea, a concept forms preparatory to its visual realization. His works as earlier noted are deeply rooted in the ordinary life of contemporary Nigeria, which defines the identity of the Edo people as *Resurrection* (Fig. 27) depicts.²³



Fig: 27: Victor Uwaifo, *Resurrection*, Stainedglass, 4ft.
©Victor Uwaifo, 1997.

Many of Victor Uwaifo's commissioned paintings are stained glass works for churches. These works illustrate stories from the Bible which are meant to teach

congregations. He has exhibited his artistic power and creative vision in his stained glass paintings that are full of movement and appealing colours. His stained glass, *Resurrection* (Fig.27), executed in 1997 and located at St John's Cathedral, College Road, Benin City, is a good example. This work is the most prominent and impressive among his monumental stained glass paintings. It conveys a biblical story of how Jesus Christ rose from the dead, and how Moses received the ten commandments from God. It shows Christ and his disciples at the last supper, and how Jesus Christ commanded the waves to stop. The work also includes how Jesus was baptised. The stained glass with purple and yellow colours is successfully executed with intricate and romantic lines. The influence of his Christian background and his training at tertiary institutions of learning contributed to his versatility in executing his stained glass generally.²⁴

Another stained glass 2 (Fig.28) by him, executed in 2012 is a modern work in his new gallery near his residence. He adapted themes and motifs from the Bible for this artistic expression. The work is imbued with high sense of spirituality and is awe-inspiring. It is also very transcendental in mood and visual appeal. In the artist's stained glass painting generally, there are multi-directional movements that are created with occasional dark linearity, all of which silently echo against a background of purple and mauve. Spiritual and biblical influence can also be clearly seen in the paintings where human forms are often rendered as a series of planes. Uwai's works are similar to Grillo's stained glass works in St John's Church, Aroloya, in Lagos. His geometrical shapes and straight edges contrast with his three-dimensional sculpture in which he employs knowledge of structural and quantity engineering.²⁵



Fig. 28: Victor Uwaifo, *Stained Glass2*, 4ft.
© Victor Uwaifo, 2012.

Uwaifo and Grillo are known to create glass effects using plexi-glass bonded with glass cement. Uwaifo stained glass is artistically well balanced, while the finishing is excellent. Blue and pink colours successfully manipulated in the stained glass to execute realistic or naturalistic human figures. In fact, his stained glass paintings are multi-coloured, bold and full of pictorial activities. In addition, there are

naturalistic renderings of clothes while the treatment of other pictorial elements are more beautifully arbitrary.²⁶ With a combination of imported elements, he has expressed himself in a way similar to the early work of Picasso. The artist's stained glass paintings are generally very brilliant within his very compact and sensitive compositions. However, his conventional paintings are an affirmation of his knowledge of modern Nigerian painting traditions. He has also employed different painting media to document various social, political, economic, religious and other cultural experiences of Nigeria. Some of his themes are multivalent while his designs are often treading the thin lines between abstraction and realism.²⁷

Victor Uwaifo has consolidated his draughtsmanship and professional sincerity in modern Nigerian art experiences. He infuses many cultural feelings into his paintings that are rich in varied themes. Most of his paintings cover traditional idioms and reveal some political or societal problems. As a culture enthusiast, his paintings show high technical proficiency and creative experimentation.²⁸ Through his paintings, he speaks to his audience, with clear and bold assertiveness. His experimental and explorative tendencies also make his works stand the test of time, despite the diverse artistic styles that have emerged in modern Nigerian art. His paintings are visual metaphors that portray the aesthetic value inherent in traditional Benin art. Through his paintings, he has propagated the dynamics of Benin culture as a fusion of life in its totality.²⁹

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CHAPTER FIVE

VICTOR UWAIFO AS A SCULPTOR

The artistic career of Victor Uwaifo has been well anchored on a solid academic and cultural background. Recognizing fully the importance of education to the growth of a complete man, he pursues with joy, enthusiasm, zest, unwavering commitment and determined resoluteness. As an educationist, he stands out today as one of the most well read and intellectually sound creative visual artists in Nigeria. He specializes in sculpture. Sculptors are predominantly artists who create in three-dimensional forms. They create forms in cement, metals, clay, galvanized steel and many other materials. Victor Uwaifo, however, creates with these but is always seeking new materials, which provide new challenges rather than concentrating on the conventional media. As a sculptor, he works in cement, wood, bronze, metal and terra cotta. His course mates at the University of Benin, Benin City, cannot forget him in a hurry for his leadership and creative roles. He passes his natural talent on to his younger generation. However, his greatest impact and accomplishment are to be found in his private working experience and entrepreneurship. He is very recognized by government functionaries and other well-meaning members of the public that they commission him very often to produce private and public works.¹

The *Binis* cultural language and philosophy deeply influenced and inspired Victor Uwaifo. He is one of the foremost modern Nigerian artists, whose art speaks loud and clear of the Benin worldview. His art works are based on naturalism, using the Benin philosophy and age-long artistic expression for which the *Binis* are known. Many of his works such as *Oba Akenzua* (Fig.29) captures the magnificence of the king. *Oba Akenzua*, a larger-than-life size cement statue, is an expression of Benin contemporary artistic philosophy, which signifies spiritual powers, strength and authority. The sculpture is kinetic. Seated astride, the figure holds handkerchief in one hand and *Eben* in the other. The figure fixes its gaze into the void; the king looks

out to embrace the people of his kingdom. Costumed in full Oba's regalia, the figure wears a crown that penetrates into space with three structures while it enfolds space with two other structures.²

The forms on the face are so natural that one can easily identify the reference, Oba Akenzua. The neck is of woven materials with beads that hang from it down to the chest. The chest and the torso are further connected with two strands of beads that hang from the head down to torso. The hands carry heavy armlets. The regalia are woven to form a linear motif. The two-dimensional Eben combines convex, concave, angular and straight lines and voids to portray a beautiful design and web of rhythmic flow. The rhythmic flow strengthens the dynamic movement of the overall structure. Undoubtedly, the sculpture is a dynamic and an appealingly monumental statue with the ceremonial sword called *Eben*, the symbol of power and authority. Here, forms are carefully textured to project a highly ornamental appeal. The greatly transcendental pose and mood also acknowledge the revered position of kingship. *Oba Akenzua* shows a striking balance between idealized anatomical forms and naturalistic details with extraordinary traditional Benin ornamental beads and a traditional crown rendered in detailed naturalism. The king is adorned with some cultural objects, including metal ring-like beads on his neck.

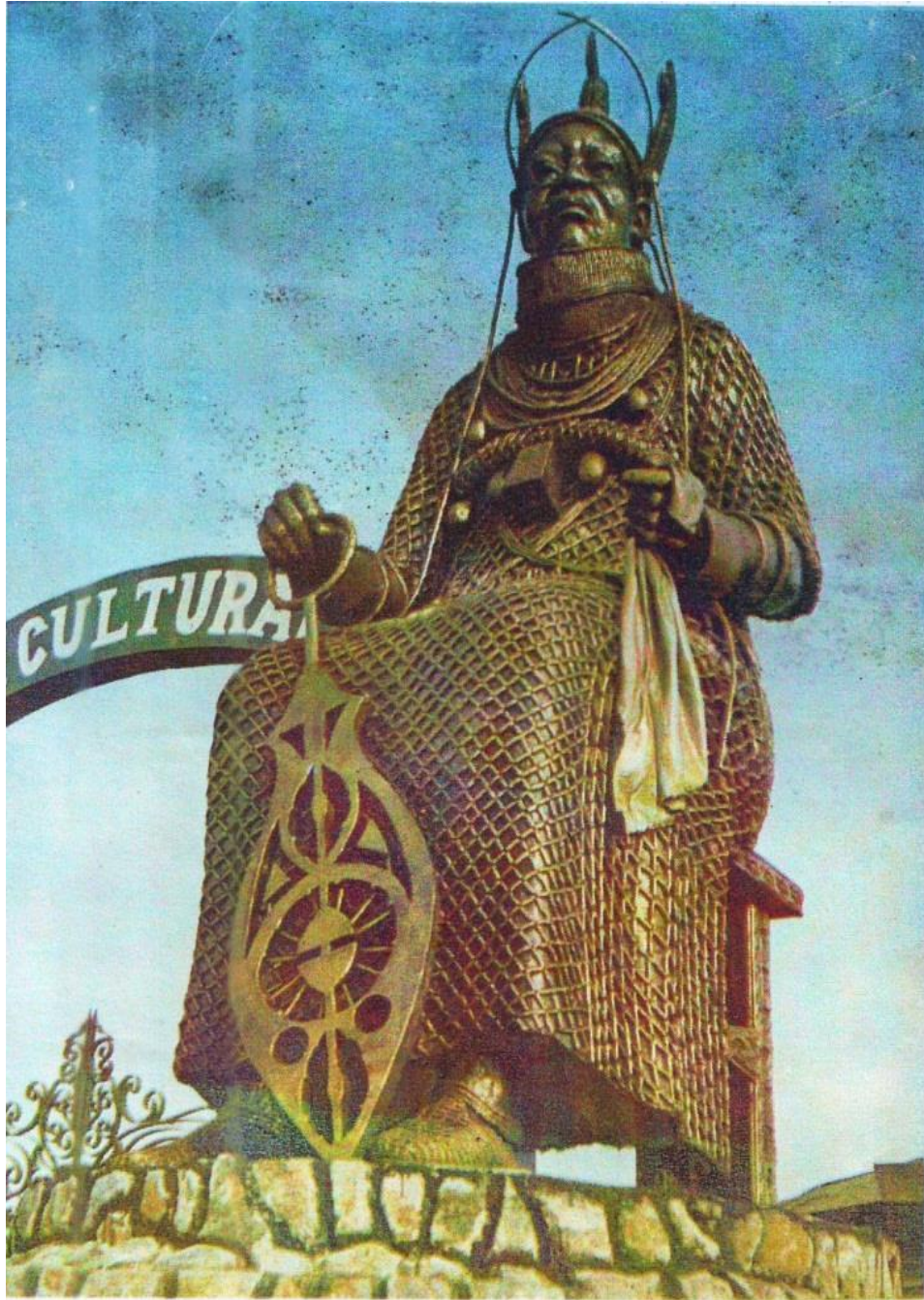


Fig. 29 : Victor Uwaifo, *Oba Akenzua*, *Kinetic sculpture*, 12 ft. Cement, © Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

Oba Akenzua in the Complex (Fig. 30) captures the king in the entrance to the cultural complex. Retainning the same pose and forms, the king is in fronttal axial movement. The base is kinetic and obeys some rotational effect. The

background doors help to highlight the sculpture in gold. The polished pillars and floor add glamour to the magnificence that are attached to the kingdom.³



Fig, 30: Victor Uwaifo, Oba Akenzua in the Complex, 12 ft.Cement.

© Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

The artist captures the magnificence of the kingdom, using *The Throne* (Fig. 30). Exploring installation art, the artist creates the throne of the king with a room well furnished. The room shows an elevation on which there is the chair of the king and a beautiful umbrella hanging over it. The foot stool is well positioned. The backrest of the chair shows a crest. Beside the throne is the two-handed guitar. The king must listen to music of the soul to keep him thrilled. Next to the guitar is a chair and a glass table for the intimate chief.



Fig. 31: Victor Uwaifo, *The Throne*, Fabric, metal and glass.
© Victor Uwaifo, 2011.

Eben (Fig.32) capture the king's sceptre of authority. A spatial sculpture, *Eben* uses metal to articulate the linear motif. It is in three sections. The first section is a flat sheet of metal which uses voids and angular shapes to make a statement. It has a sharp tip. The second section is the handle, which is a rod. This rod is connected with another rod in a circle, which forms the third section. This is welded to a base, which seems to grow from a wooden base. The *Eben* stands erect.



Fig. 32: Victor Uwaifo, *Eben*, 12 ft, Fabric, metal and glass.
© Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

The artist is very committed to the court; especially that he is closely related to it maternally. Uwaifo finds the court, the repertoire of tradition, a veritable subject of art. Therefore, he explores every aspect of it. In this pursuit, he uses Oba *Ovornramwen* (Fig.33) to capture the court art when the British visited the kingdom in 1897. In profile, the two figures are discussing. The British seems to make a point while the Oba who is in red and in a domineering size, listens with disdain. However, the British who is draped in suit seems to be committed to his course. The artist composes the sculpture with two human figures, which are seated but are separated by a table on which is a sword that apparently belongs to alien. This separation also portrays two people in two different worlds.



Fig. 33: Victor Uwaifo, *Ovornramwen*, 5 ft, Cement.
© Victor Uwaifo, 2007.

Contextually, *Ovornramwen* (Fig.33) articulates the British encounter with Oba Ovornramwen. Captain James Phillip sent a local boy to inform the king of Benin that he, Phillip and his entourage, were on their way to the city to visit him. The messenger was told to go and tell Phillip that he could not see the king because he does not receive visitors during Igwe festival and that he could come when the festival was over. However, the white men visited. The Benin people told them to go back but they refused. The Benin shot and killed seven out of nine. The remaining two fled and took the news home. On February 10 1897 the British attacked the Benin and vandalized the palace. The Benin fought back from three flanks: Ughoton, Ologbo and Sokponba. The Benin troops were amazed at the military strength of the white men to which they fell. The palace was destroyed and the British soldiers looted more than 2,500 art works of bronze and ivory heads. The war was on economic reasons. They dethroned the king and sent him on exile to Calabar where he lived for seventeen years and died in 1914.⁴

Uwaifo creates many kinectic sculptures, which are in public and private places. The *Oba* (Fig.34) is a spatial sculpture which depends more on space than the mass to beautify and communicate. The figure performs a dramatic royal dance. It holds an *Eben*, sword, which enfolds and penetrates space in a dramatic pose. The artist aesthetically creates the sculpture with convex, concave and angular linear motif. The *Eben* also uses voids, which help to further define the sculptural figure as the epitome of power and strength. The base gives the work the solidity, order and coherence that the *Oba* represents among his people. The motifs of sceptre of authority, *Eben*, awaken the Africanness in the sculpture.



Fig, 34: Victor Uwaifo, *Oba Abstract Kinetic Sculpture*, 12ft. © Victor Uwaifo, 1995.

Victor Uwaifo is also known for his female sculptures; having produced many works with feminine themes. In fact, his commissioned works seem to be dominated by female figures that are usually executed in the nude such as *The Princes in the Bath* (Fig.35). *The Princes in the Bath* is a sculpture in the nude, using a female figure as a model of beauty. The nude figure is draped only in beads and

headgear. She squats on the heel of her folded right leg, which carries her weight. While she relaxes her left hand on her laps, her right hand enfolds space and finally terminates on her neck. The neck is tilted to the right with such cool mood that can invite any man. The forms are naturalistic and transit smoothly. Partinated with gold to further reflect princeshood.⁵



Fig. 35: Victor Uwaifo, *The Princess in the Bath*, 4 ft, Bronze, 4ft. © Victor Uwaifo, 1995.

Many of Uwaifo's sculptures that are in the nude are human forms. They are either naturalistic or abstract forms, including *Princes* (Fig.36). The figure reclines

with pleasure. The sculpture, like many of his sculptures, are generally appealing for their intricate designs and textures. He uses his sculptures to tell stories about his people. Many of the works are dominated by symbols that are used to interpret *Bini* culture.



Fig. 36: Victor Uwaifo, Princes, Bronze, 3 feet.
© Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

Reclining figure of Princes as well as nearly all Uwaifo's female figures is carefully rendered to acquire luminosity. As already noted, Uwaifo's sculptural inspirations are from the Edo folklores and mythological experiences of his people. Ideologically, therefore, most of his sculptural figures have relationship with the past. Uwaifo explores modern design in many of his art works. In Princes forms were carefully treated in details, reflecting the professional touch of a master of the art industry.

Uwaifo finds the female nude a fascinating subject. He uses it to reveal true nature, seeking real response to forms as it relates to sensory of materials. Sometimes, he uses cement, fibre glass or bronze as in *The Nude Virgin* (Fig. 37), which captures the female forms in bronze. Though he aesthetically produces the work naturalistically, the work shows real elongation, but still maintains the true nature of forms. The breasts are given good treatment, revealing their behaviour when the underlying figure changes poses. The right hand is suspended and pushed to the back of the head. The right breast follows the right hand orderly. However, the left hand is not suspended but the left does not respond accordingly. It rather reacts wrongly to the right hand. The pose of the figure suggest a woman in waiting. She is lost in her desire. She may not know when the man comes in until he begins to her. However, the style of this work is a mark of mastery of artistic feel. The high relief sculpture is partitioned and mounted on a red canvas, which helps to highlight the female figure in the nude.⁶

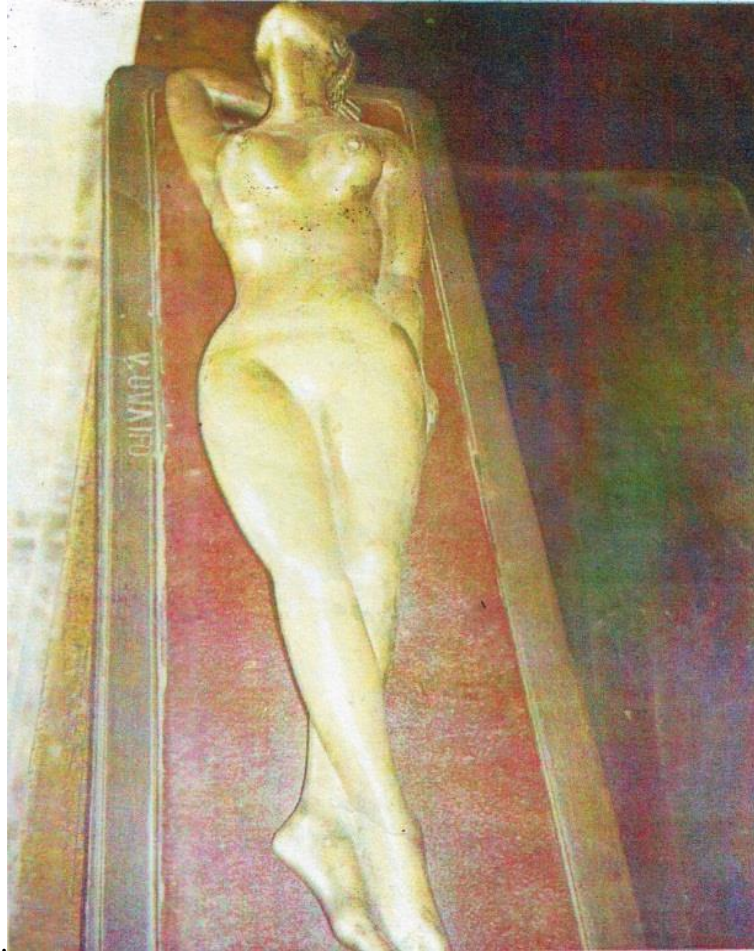


Fig. 37: Victor Uwaifo, *The Nude Virgin*, Bronze, 4 ft. © Victor Uwaifo, 1994.

His art works show a great semblance of Michelangelo's style, particularly his sculptural works. This influence is more on his monumental works. This style and the female nude as a subject have been a great drive of his sojourn as an artist. He intellectually translates African formalism, using European academic technique into modern sculptural works as shown in the *Sleeping Beauty* (Fig.38). The Africanness in his interpretation of the female nude in an academic style further enables him to achieve historical documentation of the Bini culture. *Sleeping Beauty* captures the African sense of beauty, using a female in the nude.



Fig. 38: Victor Uwaifo, *Sleeping Beauty*, 4ft, Bronze.
© Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

However, Uwaifo's occasional preoccupation with many subjects does not distract him from his much loved cultural subjects for sculptural expressions. He highlights for their significance the feminine areas as it is seen in the *The Dream Girl* (Fig.39). The degree of realistic treatment is very high in this work. Every form is carefully created to reflect their true nature. The hair drapes heavily behind her to highlight the minor forms of the face. The face itself drops a little to avoid the dropping water. She seems to gather her breasts with the right hand to further

enhance the movement of water from her head down the legs. The bath under her feet gathers the water. The entire figure, especially the breasts are given emphasis that they do not only look real but that they can tempt an angel. The pubic area is just draped slightly to attract men to want to see all of it. His usual partination with gold is not missing in the sculpture.



Fig. 39: Victor Uwaifo, The Dream Girl, 3 feet, Bronze. © Victor Uwaifo, 2003.



Fig. 40: Victor Uwaifo, *Queen in Waiting*, 5 feet, Bronze. © Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

The artist shows special love for the creation of the female figure. He gives every form some assiduousness, seeking to create forms to agree with their true nature, especially with *Queen in Waiting* (Fig.40). The sculpture wears a cap that portrays some perfect roundness. The figure raises the head, which tilts to frontal axial movement on a general profile structure. In a bare torso, the figure reveals one breast that drops on the rib with some tauntness. Its nipple is inviting. The left hand

relaxes across the left thigh, which lies on top of the other. The figure drapes only at the lower region; one leg is half exposed while the other is fully covered. The figure in naturalism relaxes with the mood of a lady in waiting, gazing straight into the unseen comer. Its lips are set for a kiss. The face itself shows some warmth and it is, indeed, very alive. Contextually, the artist uses the *Queen in Waiting* to identify with nature, especially as it is with the female world. In a pensive mood, the woman must expect the male partner, almost losing the sense of her privacy.⁷



Fig. 41: Victor Uwaifo, *Our Culture*, 5 feet, Bronze. © Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

Uwaifo captures women in a different light, using the *Our Culture* (Fig. 41) as a model of a cultural woman. The artist composes the sculpture with one female figure. The standing figure is costumed with beads and a flowing wrapper, which shows deep folds and a loop at the waist region. A loop of beads hangs from her neck down the chest. She clasps her hands on her laps. Overall, she poses with the dignity of a princess. Uwaifo contextually captures culture with a decent woman.



Fig. 42: Victor Uwaifo, *A Man to be Beheaded*, 7feet, Cement.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1985.

The artist uses his sculptural art works to tell stories about what happened to his people in the past. *A Man to be Beheaded* (Fig.42) is a depiction of the pre-colonial *Bini* life, enacting, visually one of the cultural brutal aspect of the old Benin kingdom. The work depicts and condemns taking of someone's blood a tradition demanded in the past. Uwaifo reveals that in the past if any freeman or chief did something very bad, the king could send for him and tell him to go home and kill himself, but if he fails to do so the king could send men to cut off his head at night.⁸



Fig. 43: Victor Uwaifo, *Suicide*, cement, 4ft. © Victor Uwaifo, 1985.

Interpretation of tradition as a focus in the artist's works is obvious. The *Suicide* (Fig. 43), like *A Man to be Beheaded*, reveals and condemns those bad aspects of tradition. The artist creates the sculpture in naturalism. The figure is draped at the loin area leaving the torso bare. The work is one of Uwaifo's sculptures in mixed media. Even at death the face is still natural. It appears that the man just died since the figure shows little mark of stiffness. The figure is suspended from the floor with the aid of a rope that hangs from the ceiling. The man was asked by the native authority to hang himself. He did just that as tradition demanded.

Uwaifo produces many interesting works with similar characteristics of naturalism combined with either stylization or an element of abstraction. Some of these works include *Ewere*, *High Chief* and *Isoton*. These sculptures form the artist's creation of modernity in sculptural rather than traditional form of interpretation. The forms are carefully rendered with adequate aesthetic attention. He uses fiber glass as a medium to depict the composition, while his inspirations are from the Benin folklores. The Benin social and cultural environments are captured with various imageries. Artists use many of the Benin ornaments and traditional art materials to produce modern art of aesthetic values, which still echoes Benin tradition. In the light of the above and in the pursuance of art as an expression of culture, Uwaifo relentlessly uses his art as a model, especially with *Ewere*.



Fig. 44: Victor Uwaifo, *Ewere*, fiber glass, 4ft.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1996.

Ewere (Fig.44) is one fascinating sculptures in this regard. The seated human figure is highly abstracted. Though the head, half hands and legs are a mass of fibre glass with which the sculpture was produced, the linear motif of intricate design of the entire work is indeed a show of mastery. Legend reveals that *Oba Ewuare*

married a woman called *Were*. She had a male child for him. *Oba Ewuare* considered the news as good luck. It is said that *Oba Ewuare* obtained his good luck from a leaf called *Ewere* that he stumbled on in the bush in refuge. Coincidentally, the name of the leaf happened to be the name of his wife. The *Oba* gained love, good health, conquests, wealth and prosperity from the blessing of his wife and then introduced *Ugie Ewere* Festival to commemorate the goodwill of his wife. *Ugie Ewere* Festival that is celebrated on the fifth day of *Igue* Festival, marks the end of Benin calendar year. *Ugie Ewere* Festival is celebrated by the *Binis* every year coinciding with Christmas.⁹



Fig. 45: Victor Uwaifo, *Woman Sacrifice to god of rain*, 5feet.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1985.

Uwaifo is total in reporting tradition through his art. He uses *Woman Sacrifice to god of Rain* (Fig.45) to capture another bad aspect of tradition in the past. It relates and condemns the culture of sacrificing an innocent woman to the gods for rain in times of drought. The Binis in the past felt that whenever there was famine the gods needed a woman who must be sacrificed to them. The artist combines a human skeleton and a figure of a woman to depict this aspect of tradition. Two structures that look like ladder form serve as the pinion. The canvas is in bright colours to highlight the figures. This work is clearly displayed in the Pallazzo Tourist Center. The sense of structure in this composition is seen through all Victor Uwaifo's sculptural works. His exposure to European art when he was in school, with particular reference to Expressionism as an art movement, has had a tremendous influence on his figurative works. He uses most of his sculptures to portray Benin in transition in realistic, stylized or abstracted forms. He demonstrated the typical characteristic of the Benin, his people, with simple and complex styles. The artist produces *Woman Sacrifice to God of Rain* in mixed media. He uses various forms of media such as ropes, planks, plastic, cement and colour to make the composition look realistic. This points to his versatility as an artist.

In Benin tradition, a man ceases to be ordinary immediately he is invested as a chief. In fact, the chief becomes a transcendental being among his people. The symbol of authority, the *Eben*, is his weapon of sanity and a mark of the presence of the ancestors. Despite changes in the society, the Oba and his chiefs play important role in maintaining peace and mobilizing the people at the grassroots to embrace government policies. The artist visualizes all these in *High Chief* (Fig.46), using the figures of chief with fibre glass in both 2- dimensionality and 3- dimensionality. The Eben suspends and separates the two figure heads, which are heavily ornamented.

The Eben is flat as a 2- dimensional structure with intricate design of small heads. The two heads are in 3-dimensional form with a crown each that penetrate into space with three structures. The human faces are natural. The base with linear motif and the work mark off the artist as a creative master.¹⁰



Fig. 46 : Victor Uwaifo, *High Chief*, fiberglass, 36".
© Victor Uwaifo, 1995.

The artist translates tradition visually with his art works. The tradition of kingship in Benin is that one that permits the son to succeed his father. Kingship in

Benin is based on heritage, which crystallizes from the primogeniture practice associated with the Oba's palace. The *Isoton* (Fig.47) highlights of this tradition. *Isoton* is an aspect of the tradition that involves an elaborate system of burial rites which when completed empowers the eldest son to succeed the throne. He then inherits every thing from his father, including property, chieftaincy title wives. Although, the practice of succession and inheritance has whittled down considerably in the wave of modern civilization, yet *Isoton* ceremony is still very much practiced all over Benin.

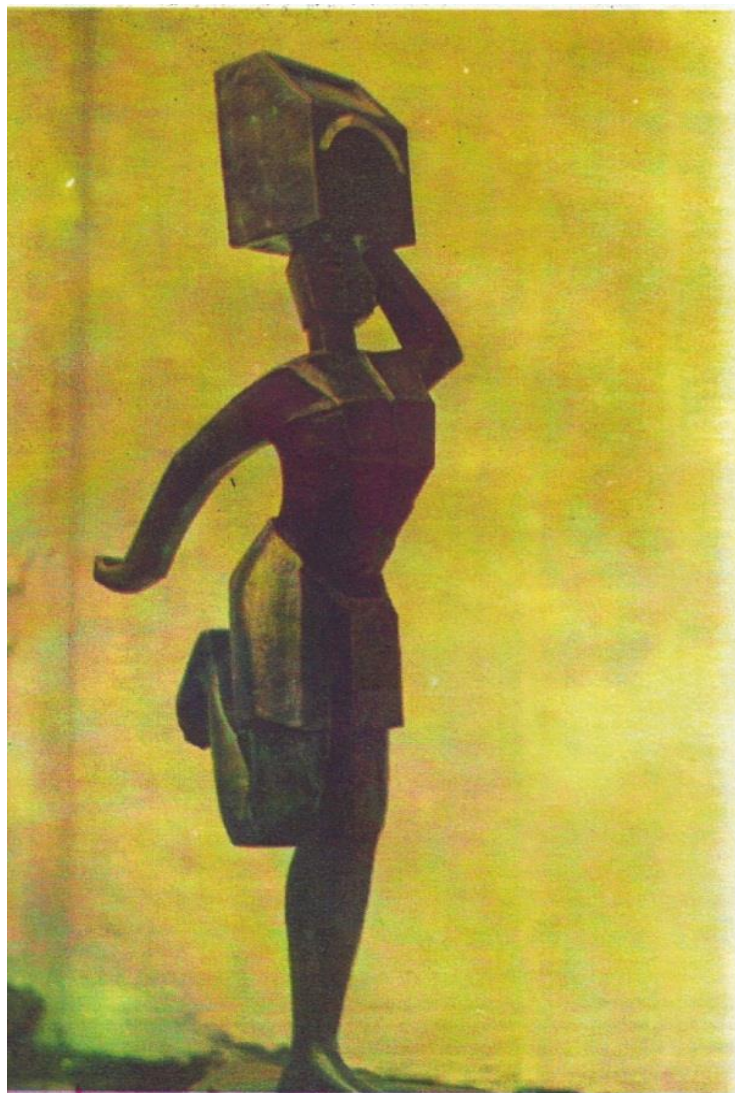


Fig. 47: Victor Uwaifo, *Isoton*, 7feet, fiber glass.
©Victor Uwaifo, 1995.

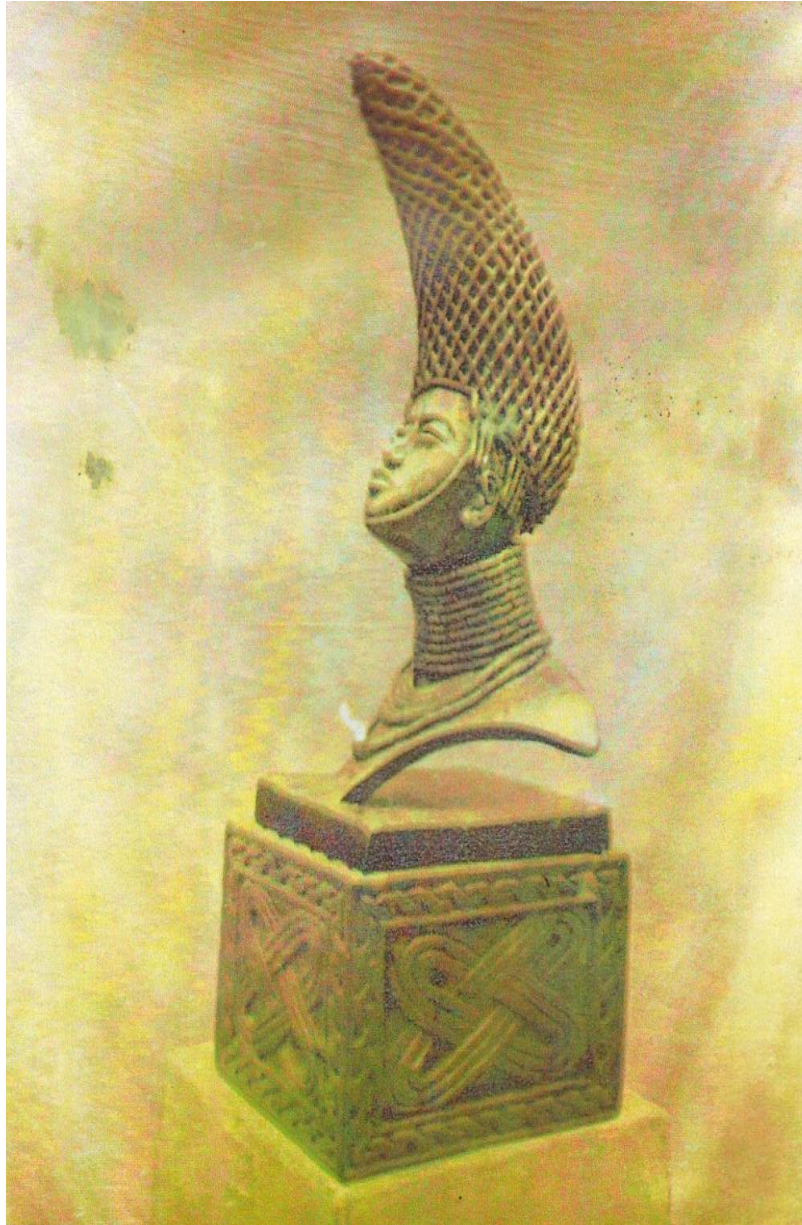


Fig. 48: Victor Uwaifo, Queen Mother (Iye Esigie), 4ft, Bronze. © Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

Uwaifo's *Queen Mother*, *Nigerian coat of arms* and *Mother and child* (Figs: 48, 49 and 50) are produced in Bronze. *Queen Mother*, (Fig.48) inspired by the *Bini* mythology, is mounted on a wood stand with Benin ornamental beads on her neck. The figure shows intricate designs with interesting textures and highly mathematical linearity that echoes its serene naturalism. Through out his works, he has imparted knowledge to those who passed through him as students, artists in residence, and

students on industrial attachment. The Queen Mother (Iye Esigie) is aesthetically appealing, with an aura of creative accomplishment. Victor Uwaifo's theme, from the gender perspective, shows that womanhood should be entrusted in every giving position in life.¹¹



Fig. 49 : Victor Uwaifo, The Nigerian Coat of Arms, 26 x28, Bronze. © Victor Uwaifo, 1984.

The Nigerian Coat of Arms, coated with gold brass, (Fig. 49) signifies unity in diversity, it is sited at the government house, Port Harcourt in Rivers State. This art work was one of Victor Uwaifo's commissioned jobs. It is naturalistic detailed work

with extraordinary intensity. It is an idealized emblem rendered in detailed naturalism. The work is rhythmic in form and provides Victor Uwaifo a favourable social climate in which he incorporates African ideas in his work. The art work is successfully executed showing that the artist is no doubt versatile with his casting.¹²

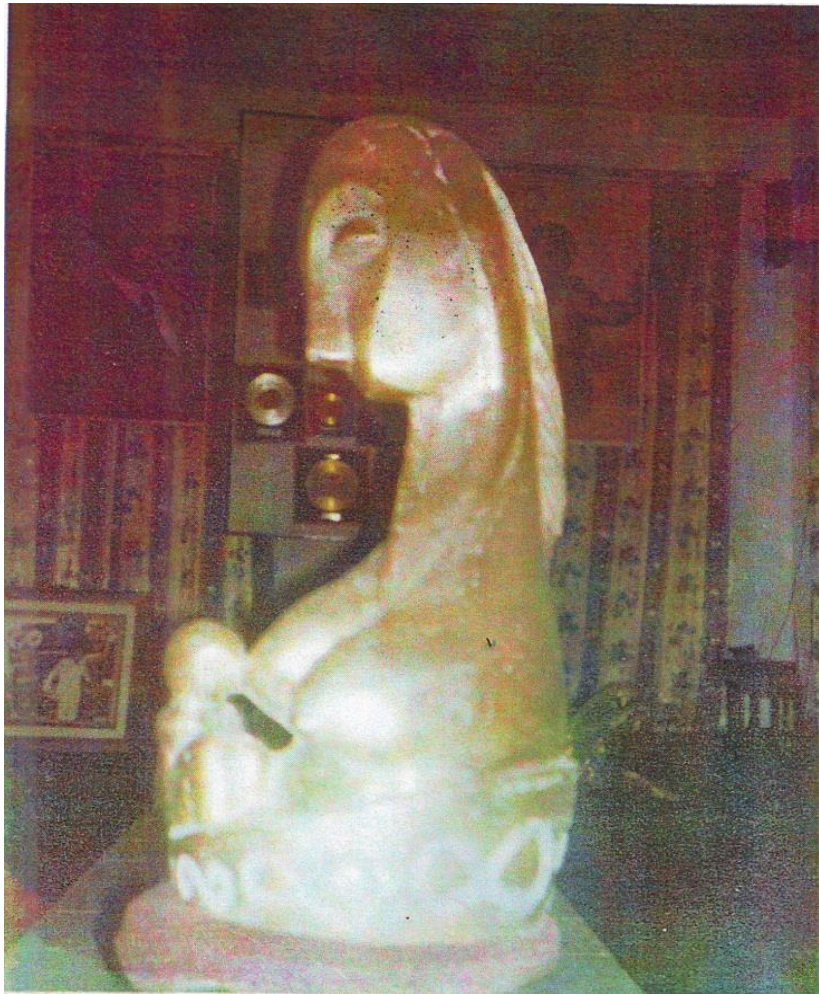


Fig. 50 : Victor Uwaifo, Mother and Child,
26 x 28, Bronze. ©Victor Uwaifo, 1984.

Mother and Child (Fig.50), a geometrical and abstracted image, is executed in bronze. It is highly abstracted with rounded and curved forms. It is executed in symmetrical vertical form. It has a relatively elongated neck of a female figure with beautiful sportless body. His treatment of the mother's face is based on the form of concave shape. He shows the mood and the anxious moments a mother experiences

while her child is growing up. She focuses on the child, the object of her care and affection is obvious in the mother's mood. Her eyes are cast down. The affection of the child shows when the child is sucking her mother's breast.¹³ The style of Uwaifo's *Mother and Child* (Fig. 50) is cubism. He imbues it with affective dimension derived from African cultural values. He stylizes and elongates the neck of the figure, while the work looks elegant; it represents the contemporary ideal of beauty in urban setting. In this work, the figure appears well balanced and muscular; it shows that the work is successfully executed.



Fig. 51: Victor Uwaifo, *Oba Overawen Nogbusi and his Warlords*, Bronze, 12x14 inches. © Victor Uwaifo, 1985.

The artist executes *Oba Overawen Nogbusi and his Warlords* (Fig.51) in bronze. The art work depicts myth of Benin kingdom. It talks on how the king was captured by the British army because he resisted their order.¹⁴ The artist uses the sculptural forms to reveal the stories. The figures show a sad moment for the Oba and his warlords. The themes reflect the protection of *Bini* cultural values and background. Uwaifo also borrowed much from the traditional art of his *Bini* culture. His sculptures estrange from his tradition to adapt to the new artistic trend. His sculptural figures are naturalistic and show severe stylization, which manifested in his present sculpture. The artist believes the power of visual art as an instrument for offensive and defensive war against injustices.¹⁵

Some of Uwaifo's works focus on the aftermath of the war. The *Bini War General* (Fig. 52) visually captures the pensive mood of a warrior ready to go to a war front. It also portrays the horrors and the sad impact of the war on the psyche of the figure. The work depicts a society that is degenerating because of British war expedition and sordid experience of war. The figure at the center looks very real and naturalistic while holding gun and armlet, ready to go to war. He has as his symbol *Tigermask*, which represents power and dignity, its pose tells its own mood story.¹⁶ His figures are usually real and looks naturalistic. The pose of the warlords and the king depicts one who is emotionally sober, a reflection of sad experiences of the captured war action. The figure is heavily draped in war costume with linear effects. However, linear motif tends to convey the intricacies of war.



Fig. 52: Victor Uwaifo, Benin War General, Cement, 8ft.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1996.



Fig. 53: Victor Uwaifo, *The Prince must walk naked*, 180cm, Cement.
©Victor Uwaifo, 1985.

The Prince must walk Naked (Fig.53) is naturalistic. Uwaifo employs modern conventional styles in executing this work. He uses this work to tell story about king

Ehengbuda's son who was so handsome that he looked feminine and people thought he was a woman. To correct this wrong impression, the king ordered his son called *Odogbo* to walk naked from Uselu to the palace he could succeed him when he died. The figure looks feminine and it is perfectly treated by the artist. It is naturalistic and romantic because of its use of the character of female forms. In a frontal plane of reference, the sculpture raises the left leg slightly thereby leaning on the right with the left hand in front of the left thigh and the other behind. Stylistically, Uwaifo synthesizes indigenous concepts and modern aesthetic values to express contemporary ideas. He appropriates sculpture to interpret traditional and contemporary issues. He draws inspiration from his cultural backgrounds, while his artistic creation is inspired by Bini mythologies, particularly stories that celebrate the Benin concept of creativity.¹⁷

In some cases, art is for the rich. Everyone appears to love art, but not many can afford it. Art itself captures the rich such as *Chief Igbinedion* (Fig. 54), which reflects an influential figure in the society. The artist uses most of his art works to comment on contemporary issues. His works are in private and public collections in Nigeria, Africa and Europe. He sculpts most of his sculptural figures making it look highly abstract, naturalistic and realistic. The work is larger-than-life cement statue, sited at the main entrance of Igbinedion University, Okada in Benin City. The work is more than a full-length figure wearing an academic gown, looks real with detailed design on the cloth. He is more detailed in treating the folds while the treatment of the face of the figure was perfectly done. Also, Uwaifo's ethnic culture had a great impact on his earlier artistic development and styles. It provided those useful cultural ideas, folktales and myths. Just like most of his contemporaries in modern Nigerian

art who drew inspiration from their cultural background, he creates works that are interpretations of Benin socio-cultural life.¹⁸



Fig. 54 : Victor Uwaifo, Chief (Dr) G.O Igbinedion, 12 feet, cement.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1986.

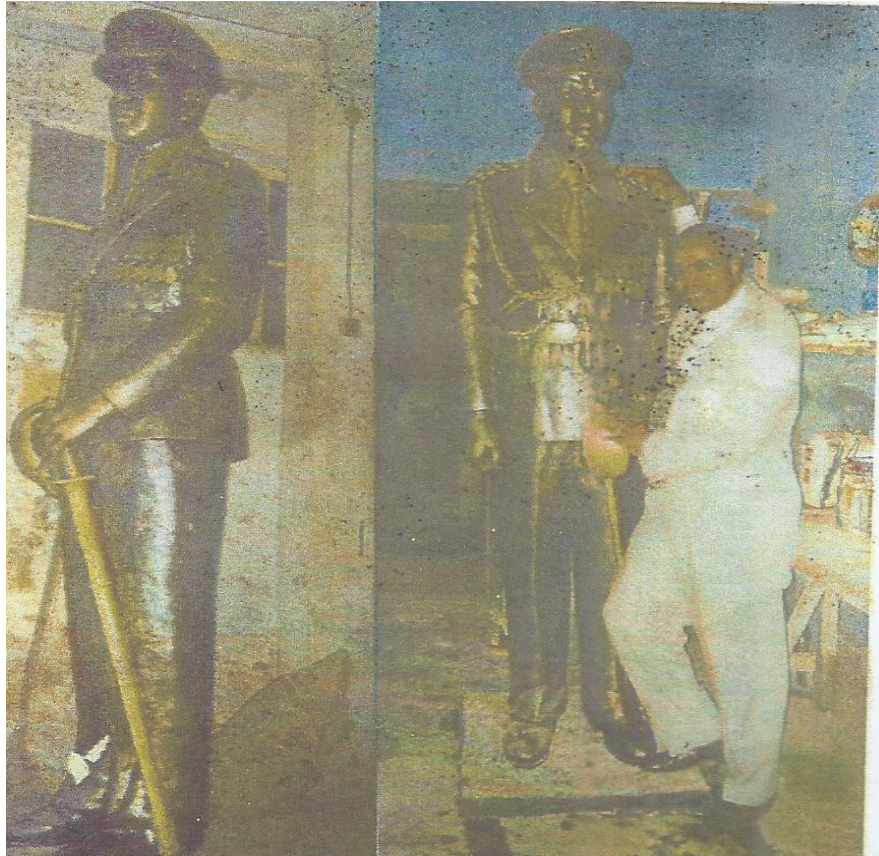


Fig. 55 : Victor Uwaifo, Gomwalk, 12 feet, cement.
© Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

The artist captures great personalities with his art works. It is no longer news that Uwaifo gets art commissions among government functionaries. In the course of using art to capture the rich and top government functionaries, Uwaifo's modeling hands find the former Governor of Plateau State, late Gomwalk, whose statue was commissioned by the state. Using *Gomwalk* (Fig. 55), the artist captures the magnificence of statehood of Plateau State. The sculpture is one-figure composition, which he costumes with the Officer's Ceremonious Uniform of the Nigerian Army with full decoration. Standing upright, the sculpture holds a sword in its sheath and looks into the void with contentment. The sword is an instrument of defence. Contextually, the sculpture documents Gomwalk's forms, rank, fashion and age at a point in time. The artist patinates it golden green. Uwaifo also ceremoniously

dressed in white suit, clings to the work in the admiration of what manifests from his creative ingenuity.¹⁹



Fig.56 : Victor Uwaifo, Gomwalk and Uwaifo,12 feet, cement.

© Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

Artists are students of nature who can also be identify with. When they are able to capture nature correctly, they are not only happy but also show it to the world as it is exemplified in *Gomwalk and Uwaifo* (Fig.56). Uwaifo here identifies with his creation with such smile that invites people not only to enjoy his creation but also to be involved in further creation. Late Gomwalk might have also been his friend. However, the composition here adds to the beauty of art. Uwaifo, life and dressed in white fabric complements the rhythmic flow of a web of forms. His smile enlivens the sculpture the more. The white fabric highlights the sculpture in a dignified harmony.

The *School Girl* (Fig. 57) captures education. It is sited at the main gate of our Lady of Apostle Secondary School in Ijebu- Ode, Ogun State. The figure of a female student is in an up-right standing position. The artist composes the sculpture in asymmetrical design with one arm stretched down ward while the other carries some books. Her eyes full of life, she gazes into the void with vibrant youghtfulness. She drapes in hues of deep blue gown with a pair of sandals. The waist shows a belt that keeps the dress in a proper shape. The artist mounts the sculpture on a pillar-base in front of the school gate. Evidently, Uwaifo also creates the sculpture naturalistically and as always, his sculptures are expressive with humanistic feel.²⁰



Fig. 57 : Victor Uwaifo, A School Girl,
5feet, cement. © Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

The *School Girl* (58) is the closeup version of Fig. 57, captures education. It is at the main gate of our Lady of Apostle Secondary School in Ijebu- Ode, Ogun State. The artist composes the sculpture with some books in asymmetrical design. The sculptor creates the sculpture naturalistically with expressive forms. The face is very much alive with the minor forms that transit smoothly. The sculpture contextually invites children of school age to go to school. It discourages parents from child abuse.



Fig. 58 : Victor Uwaifo, A School Girl, 5 feet, cement.
© Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

The culture of Benin revolves round the *Oba* who is the custodian. The centrality of the king is evident in the Benin songs, dance, dress code, folklores and fables. This also defines the great respect the king commands among his subjects. The king, who is divine, blesses the people accordingly. The visual arts also take note of the Benin royalty, which *Oba Esigie*, 1504-1550 (Fig. 59) captures. The sculpture portrays Benin culture, depicting the Oba on a horse, accompanied by a leopard, a group of invisible chiefs, drummers and dancers. He rides on a horse in a procession round Benin City to greet his subjects and reassures them of total control of the Benin Empire. During his reign, he encourages art and introduces the guild of artists according to their areas of specialization. Specialty like metal casting, wood and ivory carving and bead weaving enjoyed the guild system. He expanded Benin through his many wars of conquest to Idah in the northern part of the kingdom.²¹

Compositionally, the artist creates a horse rider and a leopard. The king in his full regalia mounts the horse that is motion. In a woven costume, the king looks down on the leopard. His cap has a structure that penetrates into space. His neck is heavy with beads that hang from it to the chest. His sitting position is a little bit awkward; he is almost in a standing position with the legs very short. The creative fire has not come enough as he was in his final year at the university and the work was his project. However, the work is aesthetically naturalistic. Observing the composition, the work shows that the Oba and the chiefs are in different social classes in the society. The figures are unified with the focus that defines the kingdom as a peaceful one, capturing the kingdom at a glance.



Fig. 59 : Victor Uwaifo, *Oba Esigie*, 1504-1550, 12ft, cement.
© Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

Contextually, *Oba Esigie* captures the Oba while fulfilling some of the rites of the kingdom. The Oba attempts to monitor his kingdom by visiting his subject without

discrimination. The king rides to glory. The animals are means of movement which aid the king into glory. This rite takes off from the climbing of the palm tree by the king during coronation, which suggests suffering before pleasure. Implicitly, just as people belong to classes so animals do. However, every class depends on the other for any meaningful development to be achieved in any society. Uwaifo makes use of traditional *Bini* themes and motifs taken from folklores, legends and myths to create most of his works, which usually transcend his local status to assume a universal one as a result of his artistic blend of Western technique in his own unique style. Uwaifo created the work when he was a final year student at the University of Benin, Benin City.²²

óYusuf Grillo: his Life and Worksôby Kunle Filani in *Master of Masters* discusses extensively how Yusuf Grillo makes use of ideas and forms, which inevitably reflects on his works as cultural products. By extension, Kunle Filani discusses Victor Efosa Uwaifo's approach to art. His early contact with Yusuf Grillo at the Yaba College of Technology as a student actually inspires and influences Uwaifo with regard to the form and style of his works. His artistic forms capture the social reality in which the works are executed.

In the same vein, Uwaifo uses sculpture to serve as a channel of social knowledge and cultural values to his audience and *Bini* people at large. Many of his works such as the *Cenotaph, Unknown Soldier* (Fig. 60) sited at Oke Mosan cenotaph, Governor's office, Abeokuta, Ogun State, talk about the society. He executes the two-figure composition in cement and paint set in deep green. One soldier falls down while the other who is brave and courageous tries to help the fallen one up. The subject is war, using the figures of soldier as a model. Their faces show the agonizing experiences of war.



Fig. 60: Victor Uwaifo, *Cenotaph, Unknown Soldier*, 10ft, cement. © Victor Uwaifo, 1986.

Compositionally, *Cenotaph, Unknown Soldier* (Fig. 61) uses two human figures. One figure holds a gun by the left hand and supports the other wounded soldier with his right hand to take him to where they can have refuge. Draped in war costume, the figures wear helmet for protection, chains of bullets and uniform. With a bag that serves as a food container that hangs from his shoulder, the figure drags the other Soldier with great strength. The stronger soldier lifts his left leg high to walk

from danger but the other may not make it as he is weak. His themes were made to reflect the war situation with greater emphasis on the carnages of the war to win the support for the fallen heroes. They are highly natural figures and Uwaifo achieves harmony in the composition. The imageries of his work are usually simple and the forms speak directly to the audience. He makes comments on social issues in his sculptural art works.



Fig. 61: Victor Uwaifo, Cenotaph, Unknown Soldier, 10ft, cement.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1986.

Uwaifo has been commissioned severally to produce the cenotaph of a war, using soldiers and arms as model. The creative man varies the composition but

maintains the model such as it is clearly shown in *Cenotaph, Unknown Soldier* (Fig. 62). The sculpture is one human figure, which is flanked with war ship, a fighter jet and directly in front is an armour tank, all of which are in deep green.

The soldier stands at ease and raises his gun, which penetrates into space and signifies that war is over. He stands on a base, which has a portrait of a soldier. However, while the soldier seems to say that the war is over, his arms below him are still in action. Contextually, *Cenotaph, Unknown Soldier* commemorates the fallen soldiers during the Nigerian civil war. In another vein, it condemns war.²³

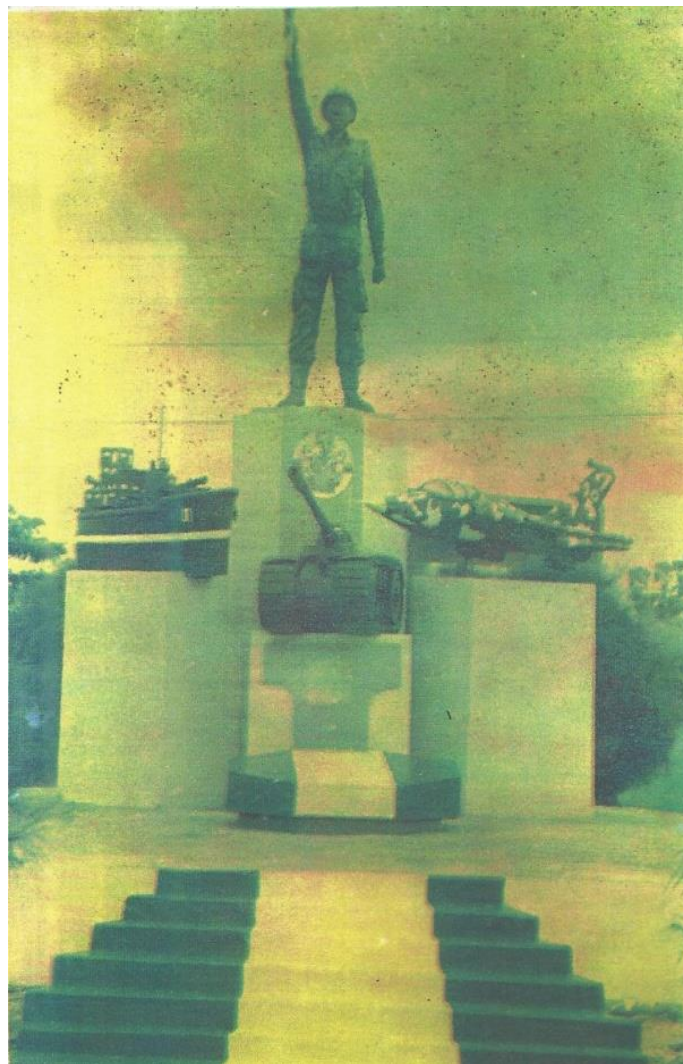


Fig. 62: Victor Uwaifo, *Cenotaph, Unknown Soldier*, 10ft, cement. © Victor Uwaifo, 1986.

Uwaifo combines architecture with figure sculpture. He uses this to embellish sculpture with architectural characteristics such as lines, mass, texture, projection, weight and colour. *Cenotaph, Unknown Soldier* (Fig. 63) captures architectural characteristics to embellish further figure and equipment his sculptural work. The work is an array of architectural sculpture.

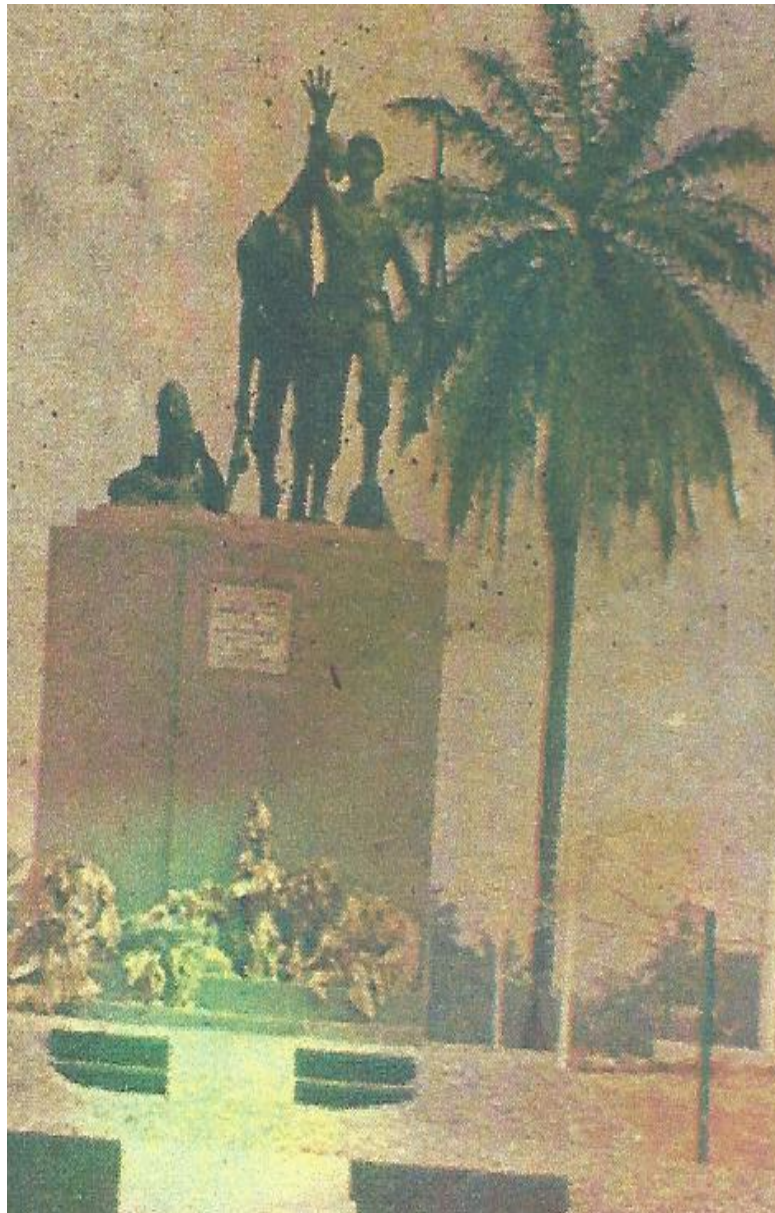


Fig. 63: Victor Uwaifo, *Cenotaph, Unknown Soldier*, 10ft, cement. © Victor Uwaifo, 1986.

There are other versions of the cenotaph, which also vary the composition such as *Cenotaph, Unknown Soldier* (Fig.63). This sculpture compositionally uses one base with many fallen soldiers at its foot. The base also shows a crest of letter words. The soldiers on the base are aesthetically naturalistic while others at the foot are highly abstracted. The soldiers are engaged in fast walk thereby creating an amazing rhythm. Due to these variations, *Cenotaph, Unknown Soldier* in one location is not the same in another location. Again, such variety in composition and aesthetic value provides delight and pleasure that any viewer will appreciate.

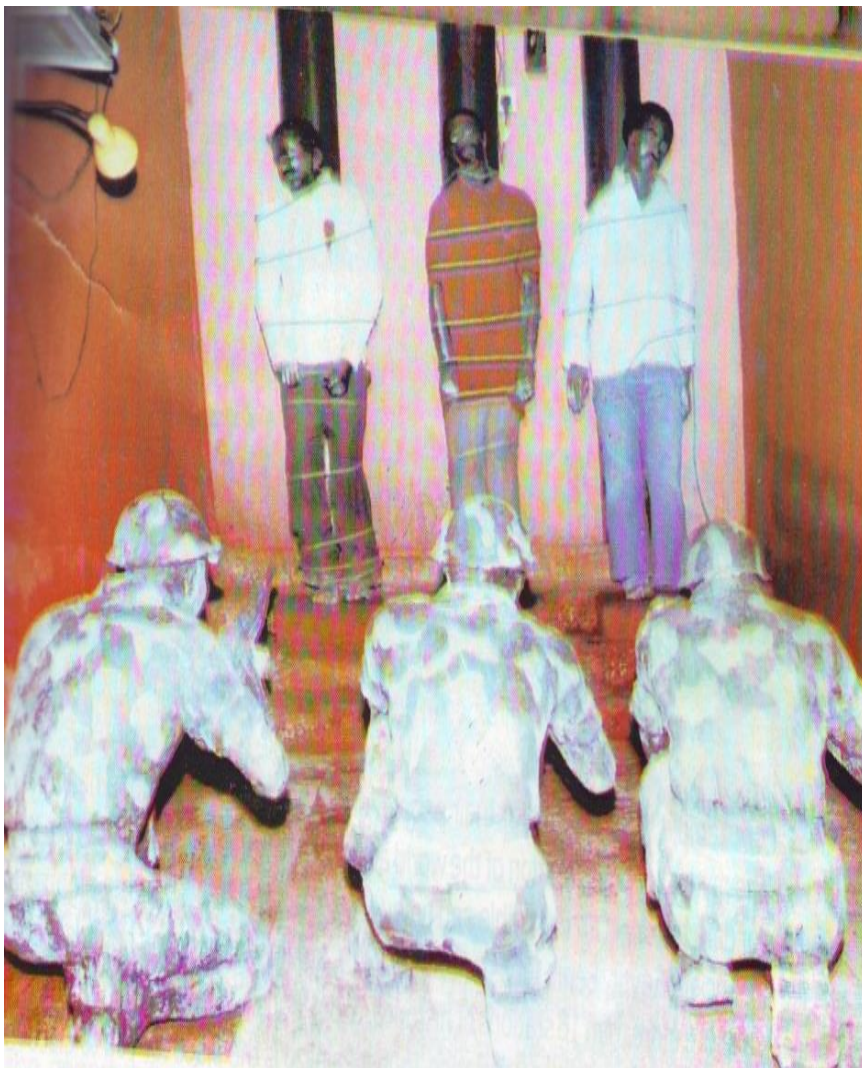


Fig. 64 : Victor Uwaifo, Anini-Saga, 7ft, Cement.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1987.

Anini-Saga (Fig. 64) captures social vices. He executes this sculpture in mixed media. Lawrence Anini and members of his gang in the 80s terrorized the masses. Nevertheless, they were later apprehended and condemned to death by firing squad. The criminals are tied to the stakes before their lives were sniffed out by a hail of bullets, paying the supreme price for their crime. In this artwork, Uwaifo, an embodiment of creativity in visual art, uses cement, cloth, ropes, planks, colour and iron rods to produce this mixed media sculpture. Most of his sculptural works were produced based on simple stories from the area. Some of his themes are narrative; he uses his artworks to correct social vices among the youth. This sculptural artwork is a commentary on social malaise in the present day Nigeria. The work looks real and balanced. The sad mood exhibited by the condemned robbers is seen on their faces.

Humanity is limited in dealing with nature. Therefore, humanity has been continually confronted with why and how certain things occur. Man believes that someone or forces are responsible for those and other occurrences. He also believes that he could get close to that someone or those forces to control or influence them in order to reorder his world. In this course, man then sought to make what is intangible tangible, immaterial, material and superhuman individual. So traditional religion was born, including voodoo practices. With this understanding, Uwaifo uses his art to document voodoo.

Voodoo Room (Fig. 65), is an installation, Uwaifo uses to capture the traditional spirituality of the *Binis* in the past. The artist portrays rituals, occultists and their practices in installation sculpture. In the past, the *voodoo room* was a place individuals run to in order to seek information about the causes of their problems. The artist uses materials such as cement, wood, metal, planks, pot, horn, bone and

colour to produce work of installation. The colour of the background is calm and blends very well with the sculptural figures.²⁴



Fig. 65: Victor Uwaifo, *Voodoo Room*, 5 ft, mixed-media. © Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

Another selected installation work, *The Bini Nation* (Fig. 66) captures the catalyst that gives birth to a new civilization in Benin. The people believe in their

ancestors. In the past when the shrines were consulted, the spirit provided answers to causes of problems, offered protection, good health and wealth. The spirit also presented the king as divine and the symbol of the ancestors. The artwork depicts the myths about *Bini* kingdom, revealing why traditional art portrays the head of human beings, including that of the Oba bigger in proportion than the body. It is regarded as the seat of power and authority. The artist uses beads, clothes, wood and mirror to install this work.



Fig. 66, *The Benin Nation*, Height, 5 feet, Medium, mixed-media,
© Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

Ancestral shrine (Fig.67) is also an installation, capturing an ancestral shrine. The *Binis* consult the shrine for the unknown thereby seeking solution to their problems. The artist executes the artwork, using a seated skeleton and many staffs carefully arranged on a table indoors. The table and the skeleton are dressed with white fabric at the backdrop of a red fabric. Another structure that combines red, blue and white hangs from the ceiling. With these structures, the artist successfully installs a shrine defined by *Bini* tradition.



Fig. 67: Victor Uwaifo, *Ancestral Shrine*, 5 ft, mixed media. © Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

Ancestral shrine (Fig. 68) is another version of his installation art, which also captures an ancestral shrine the the *Binis* consult for the unknown. The artist also executes the artwork with a seated skeleton, which is dressed with white fabric. A table is also dressed with white fabric on which are a face mask and an ancestral staff, all of which rest on the backdrop of a red fabric.²⁵



Fig. 68 : Victor Uwaifo, *Ancestral Shrine*, 5 ft, mixed media.
© Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

Uwaifo is a versatile artist whose themes reflect *Bini* mythology and socio-economic as well as religion with emphasis on traditional and spiritual beliefs. Uwaifo appropriates wood as a symbol and motif in an astonishing style to show his mastery of form, light and shadow. Some of his works such as *Knowledge and*

growth (Fig.69) appropriates wood as a symbol and motif in an astonishing style. He executes it in wood with very smooth textures. He combines concavity and convexity to stylize the work. The theme reflects the life of the common man in the society. *Knowledge and growth* implies that as the young grows, he gets taller and bigger in wisdom, body and mind. The artist uses his art medium to comment on contemporary issues. The artwork is a commentary on the social activities of the present youth in the society. The meaning of this work is that knowledge is wisdom; youth should shun cultism and embrace knowledge. The artist uses different shapes to communicate his message to the public.



Fig. 69: Victor Uwaifo, *Knowledge and Growth*, 4feet, wood.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1994.

Another of his wood sculpture, *World Peace* (Fig.70) preaches world peace and unity among the people in the global world. The message is that if the world can have one big health, one light, one spirit, then world peace will be a reality. In this artwork, the artist communicates his message of peace and love to the masses. The artwork is geometrical in shape and abstracted. Stylistically, Uwaifo painted the artwork in cool harmonious colours to depict love and an object as if candle light was in the hand of the object showing peace to the global world. The artwork is well-positioned, smooth surface and well finished.



Fig.70: Victor Uwaifo, *World Peace*, 4ft, wood.
©Victor Uwaifo, 1994

Slave trade was abolished though at different times in different places. It was also abolished in Nigeria. Uwaifo uses his works to capture the experience. *Freedom* (Fig.71) captures the freed slave, using a human figure in the nude. It raises the closefisted right hand up and puts the other behind. It looks down probably on his one-time fetters.



Fig. 71: Victor Uwaifo, *Freedom*, 6ft, cement.
© Victor Uwaifo, 2009.

Three Gigantic Sculptures (Fig.72) represents three human figures. The figures are three traditional creation of *Bini* high chiefs. They are highly naturalistic and capture *Bini* culture. The work enjoins the three people involved in a secret matter not to divulge it. The figures are stylistically painted in a naturalistic style with cool grey colours. The three images here are able-bodied persons with traditional *Bini* attires welcoming visitors to the artist's residence.²⁶



Fig. 72: Victor Uwaifo, *Three Gigantic Sculptures*, 6 ft, cement.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1996.

The artist executes *The Thinker* (Fig.73) in mortar. The theme covers a wide range of traditional human activities. The figure reveals the ideal traditional *Bini*

cultural activities with the motif of an aged woman. The thinking mood exhibited by the woman in the figure is a testimony of sad moment the society is facing. Uwaifo uses sculptural images to reveal *Bini* oral tradition and history. The sculptural figure shows a depressed personality with details of realistic forms that depicts bad mood; obviously showing on the sculptural image.

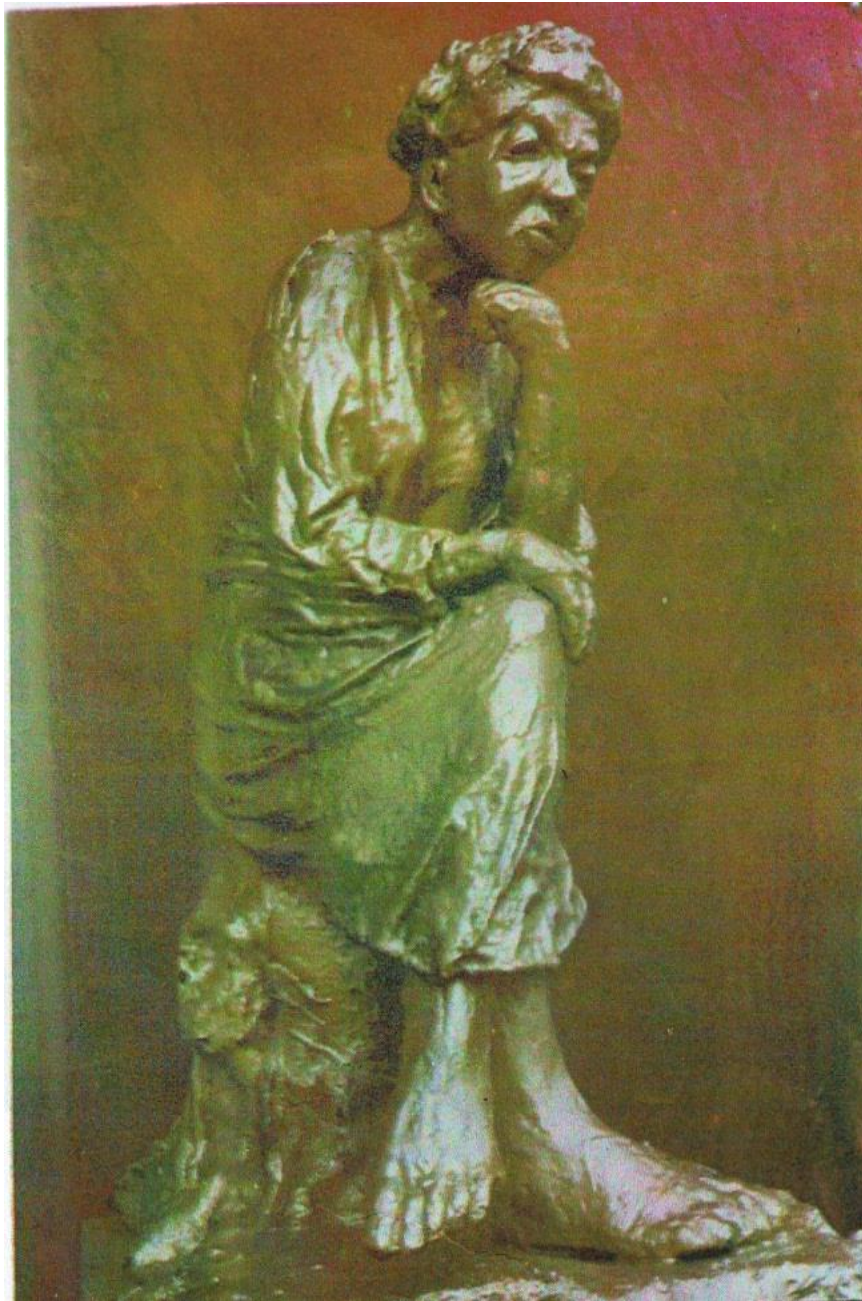


Fig. 73: Victor Uwaifo, *The Thinker*, 4 ft, Cement.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1995.



Fig. 74: Victor Uwaifo, *Dancing Chief*, 3ft, metal.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1995.

Dancing chief (Fig. 74) executed with metal, is a commentary on the traditional social activities of *Bini* chiefs in the past. The figure predominantly executed in metals is full of actions and in joyful mood. From all indications, the work is an extension of the chief homage dance. The image of the dancing chief as depicted in homage dance displays his dancing skills with *Eben*

ceremonial sword before the Oba and spectators. Very few chiefs are allowed to use some paraphernalia similar to those used by the Oba except by the special approval of Oba. Some of these special privileges were granted by the Oba as a sign of his gratitude to a loyal war general for bravery and outstanding conquests. The theme is a common scene after every social cultural activity. It also depicts the mood of relief after the festival. The figure is abstracted and stylized. He has creatively produced metal sculptures in both relief forms and in the round.²⁷



Fig. 75 : Victor Uwaifo, Dancers, 4 ft, Iron Rod.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1995.

Victor Uwaifo creates his works in different media with equal competence. He creates with clay, mortar, resin and metal such as in the *Dancers* (Fig.75), which

combines rods, car parts and metal sheets as welded sculpture to capture traditional dance. The work uses mass and space to portray forms of the models of culture. The sheets, pointing to the strong rhythm that is peculiar to music and dance, complement the movement generated by the flow of the rods. Indeed, Uwaifo has a way of determining themes with sensory of materials there-by using the most suitable material to achieve results. The five-figure composition aesthetically penetrates into and enfolds space in a manner that space plays a major role in defining the action of a figure. The work is successful.



Fig. 76: Victor Uwaifo, *Joromi Metal Gate*, 4ft, Iron Rod.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1995

Victor Uwaifo's sculpture often explores African aesthetic. He produces *Metal gates* (Fig.76) with African aesthetics, using motifs of music, animals, the walking stick and lines in different techniques. He explores different media such as iron- rods and sheet metals. Most of sheet metal works are produced in panels, which are later assembled to give a unified piece. His stylistic use of metal as sculptural material has made many artists to prefer metal sculpture. Uwaifo draws inspiration from the musical motifs to create very impressive pictorial design on his metal gate. He has evolved many shapes like spherical, elongated, angular and other forms at different and appropriate points in order to vary his abstraction style in the design of his *Joromi metal gates*. His metal gate also involves the necessary communication agents like colour to a much restricted level. In conclusion, the metal works not only satisfy the aesthetic stylization of the artist, but also promote his whole sculptural works to a higher level.²⁸

The artist is a meticulous watchdog whose themes reflect the life of the common man in the society. That is, he uses his art to comment on contemporary issues. *Help* (Fig. 77) captures the less privileged with the motif of a beggar. Compositionally, the work is an abstraction of a seated human figure with a bowl. The right hand assumes the nature of a skeleton fixed on the lap. The empty bowl hangs loosely on his lap. The artist executes the artwork in abstraction, using wood to identify human with nature. The work is characterized by linear motif, which thrives in expressionism. The artist concerns himself with the communicative sense, using the distorted forms as an aspect of depravity that is associated with the less privileged in the society. Though this treatment is prominent in some of his artworks just like the works of great masters such as Yusuf Grillo and Ben Enwonwu, this particular one defines depravity.



Fig. 77: Victor Uwaifo, *Help*, 4ft, Wood.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1994.

Help (Fig.77) is executed with good skill. The geometrical designs on the artwork are purely for decorative purposes. His style and form are acquired by intuition through academic training. The figure depicts a beggar seeking to be helped by people who can afford to give. Uwaifo is reacting to the malaise of street begging pervading the contemporary society. Implicitly, the artist uses the work to challenge

the wealthy who do not give to the poor. It is pathetic to live in squalor yet others are in affluence. Government does little or nothing to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor. Man is insensitive to his obligations. The emotion of the beggar is obvious, sad and deprived. The colour of the figure is warm, which defines further the heat of suffering.



Fig. 78: Victor Uwaifo, *Better to Give*, 4 ft, Cement.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1994.

Sometimes to explain the opposite makes the subject clearer. Uwaifo understands this communicative technique and deploys it in the visual arts. *Better to*

Give (Fig.78) captures the technique while using the model of a beggar to condemn begging. The one-figure composition uses the model of an old man who is seated with a bowl to beg for alms. The figure is bare except that it is draped with a cap on the head and a wrapper at the loin. His forms reveal that age and hard condition do not favour beauty. His facial expression tells it all. The sculpture is communicatively successful.²⁹



Fig. 79: Victor Uwaifo, *Gagging*, 5ft, Cement.
© Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

The artist keeps faith with tradition there by documenting and reporting many aspects of it. The people's response to his authority, forms an aspect that Uwaifo uses sculpture to document. *Gagging* (Fig.79) captures tradition, telling how human beings are killed for disobeying the order of the Oba. The Oba is a deity of some sort who must not be disobeyed; the subject cannot be greater than his master. *Binis* are subjects of the Oba. The native fishermen and hunters gag crocodiles and alligators in their mouths because they are dangerous and can kill with one big bite. In the same vein, prisoners awaiting execution who were stubborn were gagged because they could kill with one bite. It is believed that they could be dangerous. Not only slaves and prisoners suffer this fate. If any chief or subject breaks the customary law and he is found guilty, the King and his cabinet could send for him and tell him to go and kill himself. The work is a commentary on old *Bini* obnoxious cultural values or lifestyles. The artist creates the work naturalistically, showing the forms of a man and the mood of the figure, which aesthetically depicts African muscular body built and sadness respectively. They are highly naturalistic figures in symetric composition. The work further shows the artist's usual direct and simple imageries of his tradition.

Many of the artist's works speak loud on tradition. Another work that focuses on tradition is *Laddolphe* (Fig.80), which tells the stories of how prisoners in the old *Bini* world were maltreated and punished unjustly. Composed of a corpse, six human skulls, a vulture, all of which are on a red floor. *Laddolphe* depicts the sad historical events in the old *Bini* culture. The artist executes the work in mixed media, cement and wood. It is highly naturalistic. The people had special method of execution; first, they would bind the offender's arms behind his back, blindfold him, or asked him to commit suicide. The work captures the story of a man convicted of divulging state secrets. He was fastened to the top of a high tree, planted in the center of the town

and exposed alive to the vultures, which plucked out his eyes and destroyed other portions of his body. In ancient time, *Bini* Kingdom was often referred to as the city of blood (*Ile-Ibinu*). Victor Uwaifo explained the story successfully using sculptural forms and shapes perfectly.³⁰



Fig. 80: Victor Uwaifo, *Laddolphe*, 2ft, Cement and wood.
© Victor Uwaifo, 2010.



Fig. 81: Victor Uwaifo, *Sacrifice*, 7ft, Cement.
© Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

Uwaifo documents another special method of execution with *Sacrifice* (Fig.81). It captures tradition, using cement as a sculptural material. He composes the

work with male human, using chief as a model. The figures are naturalistic and draped like the Benin traditional chiefs in dramatic poses. In a flowing wrapper with a heavy poop at the loin, the chiefs hold cutlasses to their throats to slit them. However, the mood here is that of festival, which means the artist is only reflect this aspect of the tradition in a dramatic dance during the celebration of festival. The people dance to show aspects of their tradition. The work represents an exposition of numerous human sacrifices done in ancient *Bini* Kingdom. Human beings were sacrificed to the god of rain to make the rain cease. The victim was hung in a gruesome manner at the neck while the hands were tied together. The sacrificial room was always filled with skeletons and dead bodies.

Victor Uwaifo is a visual artist who is sensitive to the folklore of his people. The folklore is revealed with the songs, chants and riddles. All these stories are now turned into artifacts between their narrative structures, social and political instructions of the *Binis*. Uwaifo also captures all that in his art works such as *Eyo Masquerade* (Fig.82). He teaches moral and virtues with sculptural themes often charged with deep meanings. In his sculptures, he pays more attention to the dictates of the society, his clients or audience.⁵⁷ What really catches the attention of the viewer are the differences in the social classes of sculptural figures that Uwaifo implies in the sculpture through their forms, emotions and mood. The human figures in his sculpture are masculine and look real. He uses sculpture to explore human thoughts and belief system. His sculpture is usually rendered in naturalism and usually employs bright hues to partenate them. However, his *Bini* cultural influences have left impressions that are more lasting on him. Borrowing the images of *Eyo Masquerade* executed in mixed media from his experiences in Lagos, Uwaifo documents the folklore of his people. The ancestral figure is celebrated in form of a

masquerade in Lagos. He creates it with wrappers which covered the work from head to toe in flowing white outfits and crowned with a hat.



Fig. 82: Victor Uwaifo, *Eyo Masquerade*, 5ft, Costume.
© Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

During the festival, top government personalities identify with the tradition, as they turn up dressed like *Eyo*. Women are not permitted to wear headdresses or shoes. There is no doubt that Victor Uwaifo's contact during his academic training in Lagos, has inspired and influenced his art works. He also draws inspiration mainly from people and their moods. Victor Uwaifo's exposures to western art make full richness or texture on his art works. Some of his sculptural works imply social commentary. According to Asogwa, his creativity can easily be measured alongside the legendary Leonardo da Vinci who investigated the blood circulatory system, human anatomy and aero-engineering, apart from executing sculpture. As a sculptor, he had certain level of tenacity, ruggedness and perseverance, as the technical process in sculpture demands a calculating mind. Most of his sculptural works are painted.³¹

Victor Uwaifo is well known as Joromi. This is an accolade he got from music, which he interpreted with sculpture. He uses *Joromi Mask* (Fig. 83) to capture the folklore, this is about a *Bini* boy. Nothing was bequeathed to the boy except warning, that a mysterious palm tree in the backyard must not be climbed, no matter the situation. In spite of the warning, *Joromi* climbed the tree, and when he reached the top of the tree, he began to grow up mysteriously and found himself in hell where wrestling contest was on. The boy was a wrestling champion before climbing the tree. His sister who noticed what has happened to her brother suddenly turned into unseen chorister and chanted a song, *Joromi O Omimijoro*. He engaged himself in a combat with various devils. As he matched the brute, her sister sang the song in more enchanting style to spur the champion.



Fig. 83: Victor Uwaifo, *Joromi Mask*, 4ft, mixed media.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1996.

However, *Joromi* slipped and fell and became dizzy but the wrestling went on. He suddenly regained consciousness, sprang up with the agility of a tiger, picked

and tore the belly of his opponent. While his opponent, the giant, groaned in pains, *Joromi* raced down towards the planet-earth. Another giant who was a seven headed devil took fourteen strides, stretched out his hand to catch *Joromi* but narrowly missed him and that caused the permanent groove on the back running down the spinal bone.⁶² Victor Uwaifo's art therefore is an eloquent synthesis of folklore and new culture in modern Nigeria visual art expression. The carved image of *Joromi* the great wrestler who conquered the earth and proceeded to conquer in the spirit world, is a good example of his folklore inspired sculptural work. It communicates and he employs a cyclical, cubist approach and geometric shapes in the execution of his artwork. He paints some of his sculptural figures making it to look real and naturalistic.

Even animals fascinate the artist. He uses them to satirically talk to his people. His *Gorilla* (Fig.84) is one among others in this regard. It is a sculptural figure of an animal in mixed media. Compositionally, the one animal figure communicates a cultural message. The artist stylizes the figure almost to the point of abstraction yet it appears very naturalistic. The figure squats, raises the left hand with which it penetrates space and uses the other to enfold space. The work with what look like hair communicates a cultural message. The artist stylizes the figure almost to the point of abstraction yet it appears very naturalistic. Uwaifo treats the animal's head with direct reference to African mask. In this manner of treatment, Uwaifo reveals that: 'my sculptures originate from within, my feelings, thoughts, experiences, particularly things that have to do with human beings or animals with regards to Africanness'. This subject is a private work, conveying mythical stories that man originated from it. However, when a man is always known to misbehave people

around refer to him as the gorilla, meaning he is not to be among people but among animals. His sculptures are as detailed as his painting and graphics.³²



Fig. 84: Victor Uwaifo, *Gorilla*, 5ft, mixed media. © Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

Man as a subject in art interests Uwaifo so much so that he hardly stay a way from it even when he shows interest in animals. He returns to human figure to use it in full or portrait, sometimes just the head such as *Which Way Nigeria* (Fig.85). He uses the human head, *Which Way Nigeria* to make comments on social issues. He executes the work in polyester, resin an fibre. He aesthetically divides the head with a vertical line from the forehead through the nose to the lower chin with the forms of

each halve varying in structure. This is to interpret two opposing issues, the good and the bad, and there by asks the society which way Nigeria. In the course of his studies in University of Benin, the artist was introduced to the use of polyester, resin and fibreglass to make sculpture. He executes the human head frontally in symmetrical and vertical form. The head is relatively natural but slightly elongated with altered forms. He captures the openness of abstraction with aspects of his Bini cultural values in a sculpture that gives different meanings to different people. The artist is proud of his

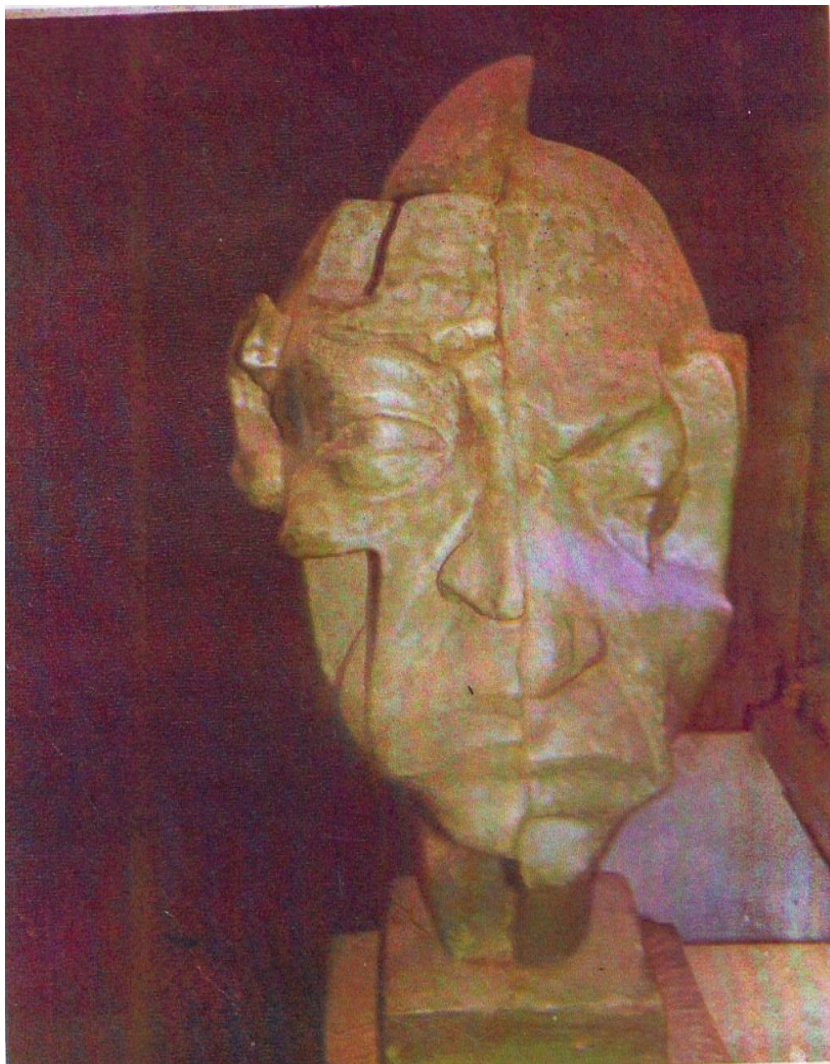


Fig. 85: Victor Uwaifo, *Which Way Nigeria*, 3ft, fibre Polythene Resin. © Victor Uwaifo, 2003.



Fig. 86: *Victor Uwaifo and Wife*, 3ft,
Cement. © Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

colour,there by documenting himself in the best way he sees himself. The artist is also close to nature, not only to study it but to love it. Therefore, Uwaifo loves his wife, a product of nature. In keeping faith with this, Uwaifo uses *Bust of Victor Uwaifo and Wife* (Fig.86) to document him and his wife with regard to their

personality , fashion, love and forms. It is evident that the artist translates his knowledge of advance study in forms to this work. He executes the bust in cement, which points to the great influence of his knowledge of naturalism. His style of sculpting is highly naturalistic with respect to behaviour of forms. His images are so philosophical and symbolic. The sculptures are busts, one of which is a mixed media, using a non-sculptural cap. This male bust is draped in suit with a tie thereby making its dress code cooperate. The female bust is draped in hat, suit and chain that hangs from the neck.³³



Fig. 87: Victor Uwaifo, *Princess Idusogie*, Cement. © Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

Uwaifo treats his busts with historical touch. Therefore, his sculptural busts have both humanistic and historical validity. The forms are very realistic with careful attention to details often with social and historical significance such as *Princess Idusogie* (Fig.87). The bust captures the forms of his mother with peculiar costume of a memorable event. The beads and the dress are not meant for every day occasion but that they have a lot to do with the Oba. Therefore, their uniqueness is both royal and historical as they are used only on special royal occasion. He aesthetically produces the bust to tilt at the neck region and to look down in contentment. Just like Abayomi Barber, Uwaifo is an acclaimed photo-realist sculptor who ventures into using Bini myths and legends to Africanize his forms. He has developed innovative techniques of painting his sculptural works to express his creativity.

Uwaifo is prolific with the creation of busts. *Alhaji Tafawa Balewa* (Fig. 88) is just another among many. The artist aesthetically produces it in frontal plane of reference with the animated smile that enlivens his frame. The artist captures the turban vividly to show that he gives equal attention to any thing that defines the personality. The turban generates rhythmic flow that adds aesthetics to the natural forms of the subject. The minor forms on the face transist smoothly with a clear delineation. The beard is textured rough to contrast the smooth forms of the face. The drapery at the neck reemphasizes the rhythmic flow of the turban. This work also confirms that the artist produces his busts to portray both humanistic and historical validity. The forms are very realistic with careful attention to details. The base is an innovation to add aesthetics. There are more from the selection of Uwaifo's busts.



Fig. 88: Victor Uwaifo, *Alhaji Tafawa Balewa*,
3ft, Cement. © Victor Uwaifo, 1987.

Indeed, *General Ibrahim Babangida* (Fig.89) also confirms the usual dedication of Uwaifo to the creation busts. The work that is very naturalistic is also in

profile. The crested cap fits the human head so much so that one will think that it is real. The uniform portrays the rank of the soldier. The artist captures the forms, person, rank and the Nigerian soldier. Uwaifo has romance



Fig. 89: Victor Uwaifo, *General Ibrahim Babangida*,
Former President of Nigeria, 3ft, cement.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1988.

with governments, which results into many commissions.³⁴ He produces the bust of the leadership of governments. He renders the busts with his academic naturalism

based on correct rendition of anatomy. *Alhaji Shehu Shagari* (Fig. 80), one among the many commissions, documents the personality, his forms and fashion of Alhaji Shehu Shagari, a former president of Nigeria. Uwaifo also

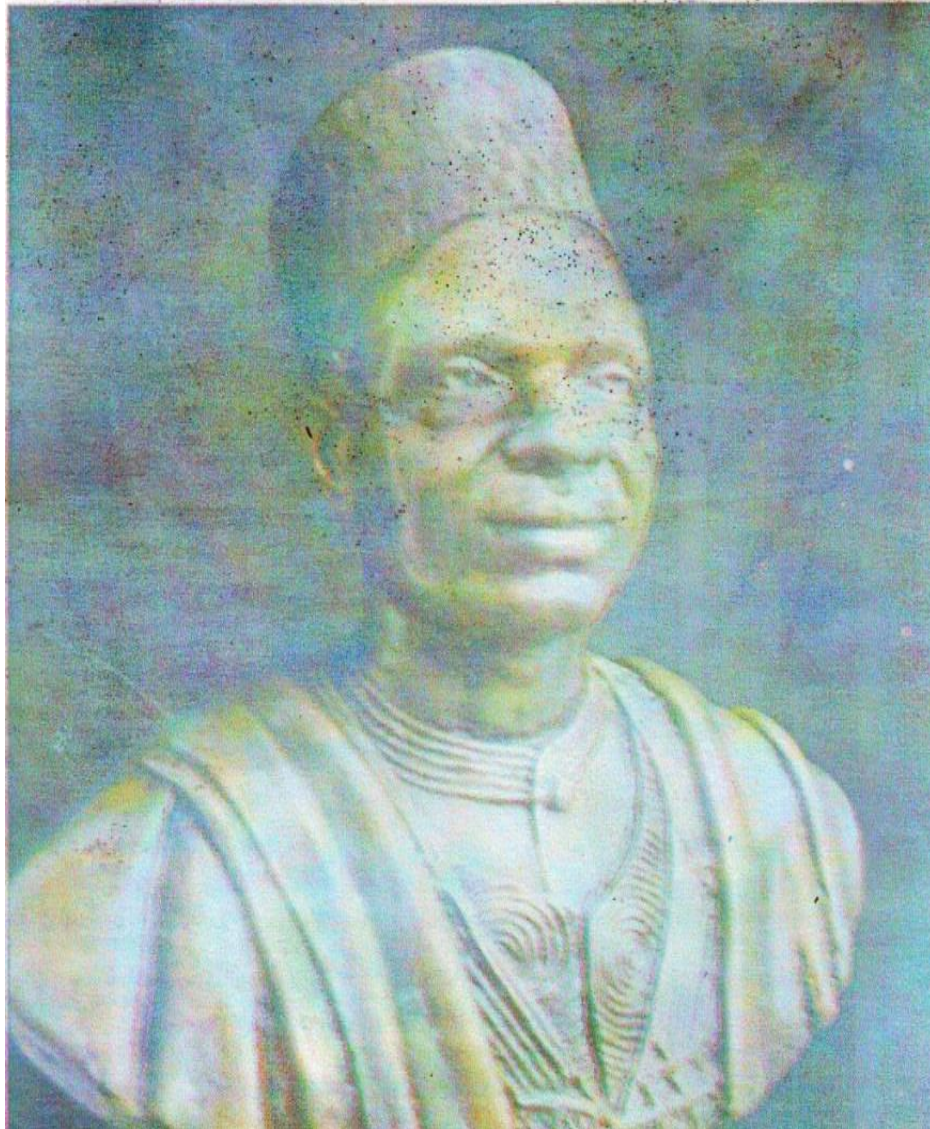


Fig. 90: *Alhaji Shehu Shagari* (Former President Of Nigeria) 3ft, Cement. © Victor Uwaifo, 1985.

captures Obasanjo, using fibre glass on a 2-dimensional space. He creates *Chief Olusegun Obasanjo* (Fig.81) in a profile and wears it glasses. The canvas is in bright

purple which highlights the main forms. The emblem of the Nigerian Coat of Arms. The resemblance is very strong. From the busts above,

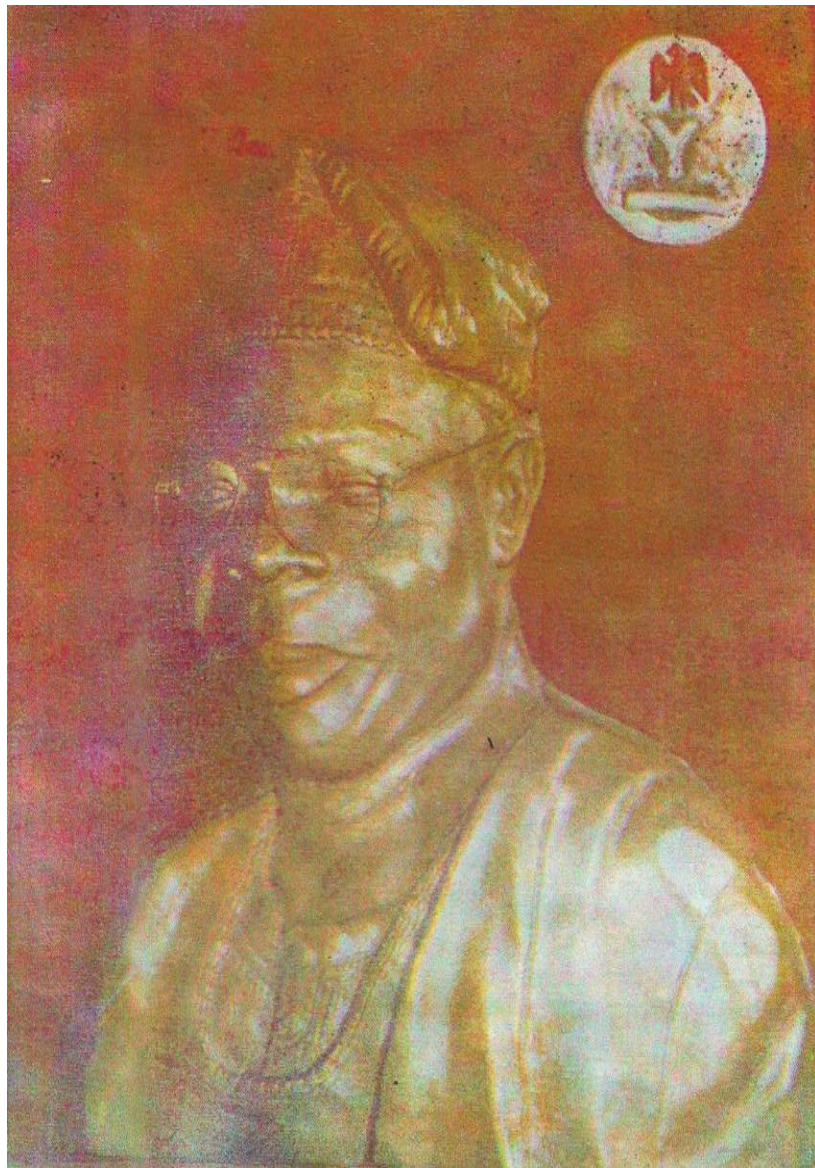


Fig. 91: Victor Uwaifo, *Chief Olusegun Obasanjo (Relief Bust)*, Former President of Nigeria, 3ft, cement.

© Victor Uwaifo, 2001.

Uwaifo's works are highly expressive forms. With this, he achieved an excellent result. The sculptural busts are embellished with ornaments such as beads, bangles, and necklace while the fold of the attires looks real and successfully finished. Also, all the socio-political activities of the early decades of this century

and the busts of present and past Nigeria Presidents were captured in sculptural figures.

His art works present a flow in certain directions, which reveals his intellectual mind and an awareness of his socio-cultural background. Additionally, his works show contemporary settings, which reassure the audience of his continuous dedication to the Edo-Benin cultural norms and values.⁶⁹ He teaches morals and virtues with his themes that are often charged with deep meanings. The colours in his painting are in consonance with the temperaments portrayed by his works. In his sculptural works, he pays attention to the dictates of the society, his clients or audience.

Sculptures are his most prolific enterprise for which he has passion. His art simply appears in material, technique but the messages they carry signify them as highly loaded with succour to the immediate society, and perhaps, the world. As a contemporary Nigerian artist, he has been able to stress humanistic approach in his art while he tries to invent new styles and idioms. Victor Uwaifo's art therefore is an eloquent synthesis of fertile fusion of folklore and new culture in modern Nigeria art. The carved image of *Joromi*, the great wrestler who conquered the earth and proceeded to conquer in the spirit world, is a good example of his folklore art work in the Tourist Palazzo. *Guitar boy and Mammy Water* are others. According to Uwaifo, Benin folklore, mammy water mermaid symbolizes the creative forces of the society, the aesthetic and ethical value system of the kindred communities. Every stream and river are inhabited by a water spirit. The colours in his painting are in consonance with the temperaments portrayed by his works such as *Wilson Omoruyi Uwaifo and Wife Princess Idusogie* (Fig.82) in his Tourist Palazzo. The work is a full

portrait of Victor's parents, Wilson and Princess Idusogie Uwaifo. They are captured with their fashion that portray them wealthy.



Fig. 92 : Victor Uwaifo, *Wilson Omoruyi Uwaifo and Wife Princess Idusogie*, 5feet, Cement. © Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

Uwaifo has been commonly identified with *Mammy water*, water spirit. Victor Uwaifo depicts this not only in music but also in sculpture. *Guitar boy and Mammy water* (Fig. 83) captures the story of his alleged contact with mammy water spirit or mermaid at night. He was allegedly strumming his guitar somewhere at the bar beach at the back of NTA office building, Lagos, where he (Uwaifo) was an employee.⁷² His artworks have been influenced by folklore and cultural background from his major art tradition: Benin/Urhobo. Uwaifo's works are meant to explore

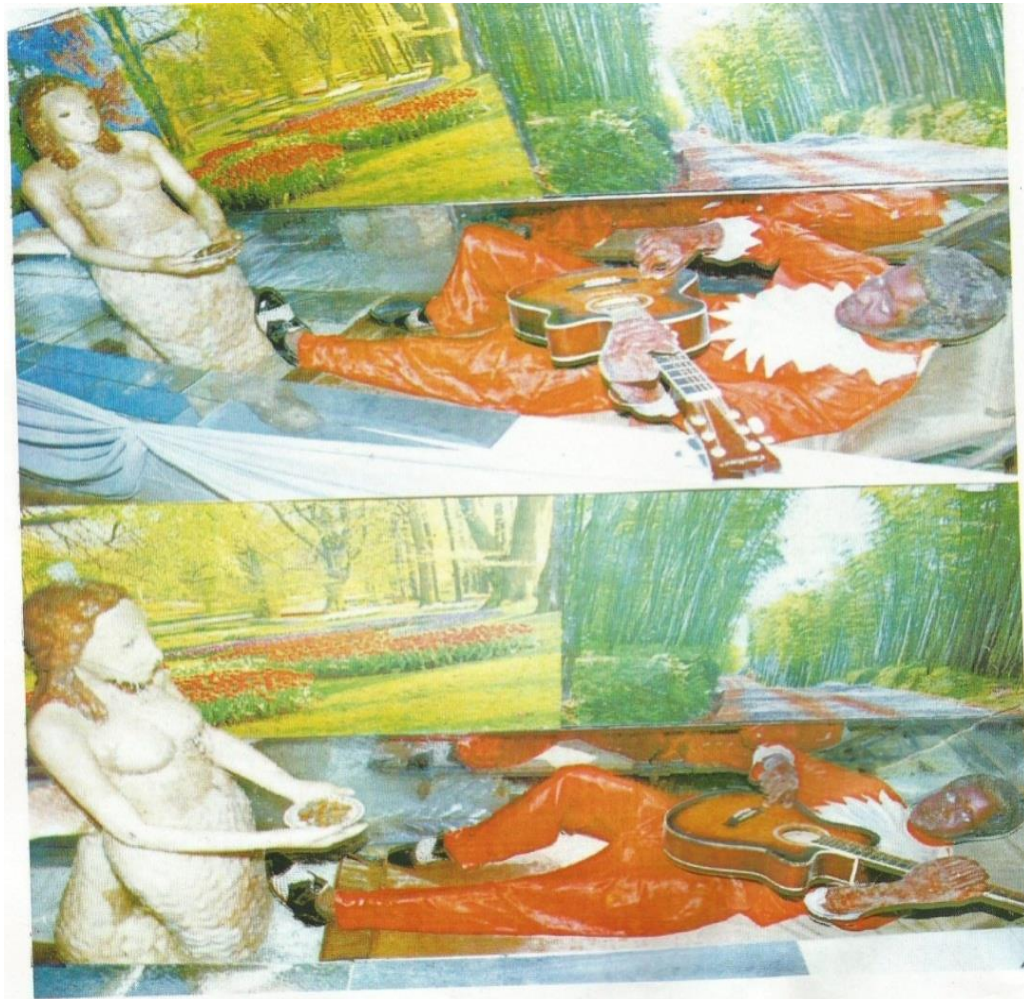


Fig. 93: Victor Uwaifo, *Guitar boy and Mamywater*, Cement, 5feet.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1966.

the impact of folklore on Nigerian visual arts as far. His mammy water spirit work has been influenced by traditional folklores and beliefs. He embraced traditional mythology for the development of his visual images that are conspicuously massive, compact and humanistic. Most of his themes are derived from Bini folklore and mythology. He is very analytical and thorough in presentation. Most of his works such as *traditional weaver* and *Victor at work* (Figs.84&85) bear these marks. The *Traditional Weaver* is very naturalistic even in mixed media. This work reveals the vocational skills of the Benin people in the past. Victor Uwaifo likes to present humanistic subject in abstract forms, using simple ideas. He also uses his art to

communicate his ideas, to record or recapture the past and the present. *Victor Uwaifo at work*



Fig. 94: Victor Uwaifo, *Traditional Weaver*, 4feet, Mixed media.© Victor Uwaifo, 1996.

(Fig.85) captures the artist at work. Uwaifo shows the studio where he turns out the sculptures. The great artist is here working on the bust of the mother of the Vice Chancellor, Prof. Oshodin. Though he has not completed the work the bust shows great resemblance. *The Palazzo* wakes one to a world of visual arts.



Figure. 95: *Victor Uwaifo at work.* © Victor Uwaifo, 2011.

On entering the main gate of the building, one is greeted with three gigantic bronze sculptural works of the Benin chiefs and other massive art works. Inside the building, the first port of call is the *Hall of Fame*, which is filled with portraits of great personalities in Nigeria. Beautiful graphic paintings of Wole Soyinka, Adams Oshiomole, Winston Churchill, Nelson Mandela and the late Benson Idahosa are hanging in the gallery. Others that are hanging in there are the sculptural busts of Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe. General Muhammadu Buhari, *Oba Eradiuwa* and so many others are on display.

This house of fame contains sculptural works, graphic, paintings and personal artworks, such as the bronze/copper bust of his father and mother. The slave market section is the beginning of the three-dimensional experience. The story of slavery is revealed in sculptural forms. It presents a horrible display of naked men and women in chains, being tortured by their slave lords. As these are depicted with the bronze sculptures, he/she could also watch the story on a screen. Uwaifo's "Revelation Palazzo" or "Tourist center" depicts the reflection of the tremendous impact of his sculptural works, revealing the Benin an assemblage of Edo history, presented with visuals and sound. It is educative, informative, inspirational and entertaining. Many facts of history, the unexplained mysteries are all explained. The artist keeps faith with his society, reporting the daily life of the people.

In this capacity, the artist either spiritualizes or symbolizes culture, which he interpretes using motifs and forms recorded with colour or some permanent materials like cement. Uwaifo uses his art to document society. The artist uses the *Untitled Sculpture* (Fig.86) to capture merrymen with the motif palmwine. Compositionally, he creates a gourd and a male figure seated on the floor to drink palmwine. Aesthetically, the artist relies heavily on naturalism in creating the forms of a figure that slightly folds his legs. The figure serves palmwine from a bottle into a bowl. While he suspends the left hand holding the bottle he rests his right hand holding the bowl on his kneelcap. Defined in frontal plane of reference, the sculpture is draped only at the loin, leaving the torso bare. Though the figure is created to capture merrymaking, its disposition of a frowning face does not agree to it.

Thematically, the *Untitled Sculpture* portrays the theme of merriment, using forms and motifs of a palmwine drinker. The subject of merriment in society is very

strong. Though some mourn, others are happy and celebrate, sometimes engaging in fun and games. Implicitly, however, the sculpture suggests the theme of libation. Africans respect their ancestors and believe that they have control on the living. Africans also believe that the ancestors have the power to protect the living. Therefore, to keep faith with them, Africans are engaged in libation in order to appease the ancestors. Therefore, the sculpture implies libation. It is worthy of note that the sculpture is successful in the articulation of forms which answers correctly to the subject.³⁵



Fig. 96: Victor Uwaifo, *Untitled Sculpture*, 4 feet, cement.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1996.

Like literature, art records events, personalities and places. Objectively or subjectively, both literature and visual arts have been known to play the role of a social force. In the light of this, Uwaifo uses the *Bini Chief* (Fig.87) to capture the

functionaries of tradition. The artist produces the standing sculpture in frontal plane of reference with the neck slightly tilting to the left. The sculpture exudes stability, order and strength with forms that stand out in abrupt manner. A bare torso that is punctuated with a bead that hangs from the neck, the sculpture drapes only at the loin with a flowing wrapper. Though the figure is naturalistic, its wrapper is mechanical with creases that are arranged stylistically. The figure traps space with the two hands which run from the shoulders, open at the ribs side and terminate with the wrapper. Contextually, Uwaifo captures a chief and a very powerful warrior. The pose is that of a warrior. Warriors defend the *Oba* and his kingdom. Very often the artist



Fig. 97: Victor Uwaifo, *Bini Chief*, 5 feet, cement.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1996.



Fig. 98: Victor Uwaifo, *Slave Trade Market*, 4 feet, Cement.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1996.

engages history with visual art. He documents historical events. In this manner, Uwaifo brings back the memory of slave trade with *Slave Trade Market* (Fig. 88). It captures the activity of slave trade, using male figures in the nude. He composes these figures in different poses, some standing while others are sitting down. The artist aesthetically produces them in realism with gestures that portray suffering. Though their forms transit smoothly as naturalistic they drop as if the overall underlying structure is from aged people. The standing figure conveys a very

sad mood that he seems to say when shall this suffering be over! The sitting figure looks out in fear propably saying that the overbearing lord is coming again! Contextually, *Slave Trade Market* unambiguously portrays slave trade, which was abolished in different places at different times. However, the sculpture suggests that the pain and memory of the activities of slave trade will linger on in the memory of Africans.



Fig. 99 : Victor Uwaifo, *Slave Trade Market*, 4feet, Cement.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1996.

Slave Trade Market (Fig.89) a life-size statue executed in cement. The statues pose in tortured and horrible manner crying for help. All the statues are rendered in detailed naturalism, forming pools of tears on the ground. The female slaves are in nude showing human forms or figurative shapes. In other words,. Uwaifo uses his art to interpret Europe's slave trade in Africa



Fig.100 : Victor Uwaifo, *Drummer 1*, 12 feet, Cement.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1987.

The *Drummer 1* (Fig. 90) is an excellent depiction of Uwaifo's mastery of his media. The curvature of the figure and the rhythmic pose of the elegantly dramatic attitude of the drummer accentuates Uwaifo's adroitness. The sculpture also echoes

beautifully in its well-segmented body formation. The visual arts express culture, which is a very good ambience of the visual arts, supplying forms, motifs and themes. The *Drummer 2* (Fig. 91) also expresses culture, capturing model of a drummer. Uwaifo articulates the sculpture with male figures in the nude which seats on a drum that it beats very hard. He aesthetically creates the sculpture in stylization, altering and stretching forms in a very taunt manner to reflect the action of drumming. The uderlying figures framed up in ósô shape, seat astride the drum and is lost in ecstasy. Thematically, the *Drummer 1* and *Drummer 2* convey merryment.



Fig. 101: Victor Uwaifo, *Drummer 2*, Side veiw, 360 cm, cement.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1987.



Fig. 102: Victor Uwaifo, *Oba Ovorramwen*, 4feet, cement.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1995.

The Benin artist keeps faith with court art, capturing the magnificence of the Oba of Benin in sculpture. *Oba Ovorramwen* (Fig.92) articulates the throne, using three figures, two human and the other a lion. The human figure representing the Oba seats on a chair and drapes in his traditional attire, a red cap, bead that hangs from the neck, a flowing garment and a walking stick. An attendant in a standing position,

carries *Ada*, a scepter of authority and looks into the void. A looming structure of a lion, stands in front of the Oba with an intimidating look to protect the *Oba*. Aesthetically, The lion is partinated with gold. Thematically, *Oba Ovornramwen* portrays the throne, the seat of authority and control and the symbol of unity of the Edo speaking people. His Royal Majesty, *Oba Ovornramwen* and any *Oba* on the throne, who is divine, is the spiritual father and owner of the land.

One of the many fascinating works of Uwaifo that keeps faith with court art, is the *Oba* (Fig. 93). It also captures the magnificence of the Oba of Benin, combining naturalism with abstraction in a circular sculpture. The centrality of the *Oba*, King, in the Edo culture is given emphasis in the composition, which places his figure at the center while the attendants surround him. In abstraction, the artist creates the figure of the Oba as a round mass of mosaic, which grows from a base and terminates with a structure that penetrates into space. The surrounding figures of attendant are in naturalism. Two of them are in the nude except that one of them who is a touch beare drapes in pant. The remaining figure uses singlet and a pair of shorts. Thematically, like *Oba*, (Fig.93) captures the throne, the seat of authority. Religion has over the years employed the visual arts to document its doctrines and faith. In the service of religion, the visual arts have also played a major role that it is difficult to separate the two. In the past, artist have been engaged to interpret religious themes in the service of man. The centrality of the king among the Benin people is the respect for him in every aspect of the tradition. The pronouncement of the king is sacred, it must not be contravened. If anyone does, he is met with severe punishment. Some unfaithful indegines have been forced to pay for disobedience to the king's pronouncement by hanging. Some were excommunicated. This work condemns this aspect of tradition and

suggests more civilized methods of dealing with breach of law. The civilize methods ranges from arbitration to rehabilitation centers.



Fig .103: Victor Uwaifo, Oba, 6feet, cement.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1995.

Oba Erediauwa (Fig.94) is another version of sculpture that captures the throne, using mixed media. The artist composes the sculpture with two human figures. The king who drapes in red cap, beads hanging from his neck and a flowing

white garment, seats on the throne. He wears glasses from which some sparkling eyes show a fix gaze. The attendant, who stands, holds the *Eben*, which penetrates space. He drapes in shortsleeves and shorts. He also has a fixed gaze. The sculpture thematically captures the throne from which all good things come. Artists today have not broken faith with religion, rather they have



Fig. 104: Victor Uwaifo, Oba Erediauwa, 6feet, cement.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1995.



Fig. 105: Victor Uwaifo, *The sacred Heart of Jesus Christ*, 6feet, Cement. © Victor Uwaifo, 1996.

been evolving the scope. In this respect, Uwaifo engages religion with art, using the *The sacred Heart of Jesus Christ* (Fig.95), among others, to reemphasize the Christian faith. Articulating the religious theme in a standing sculpture with a human

figure, Uwaifo drapes it with a flowing garment. He composes the sculpture with the posture of a superior looking down to the less privilege who needs help.

Producing the work aesthetically in naturalism, the artist makes it to raise the right hand with an open palm and the left to touch its heart that shows a symbol of heart to signify love. While the artist parks the hair heavily behind, he drapes the sculpture with heavy creases, which become taunt at the kneel where the right leg is pushed backwards. Contextually, *The sacred Heart of Jesus Christ* captures the theme of salvation through Christ. The Christian faith reveals that no one goes to the father except through Christ. Uwaifo uses the sculpture, therefore, to identify with the Christian doctrine.

The Holy Virgin Mary Blessing a Girl (Fig. 96) is another of his many religious works. He composes the sculpture with two female figures. The *Virgin Mary* stands while the sister kneels and stretches her hands for favour. Draped heavily in a flowing robe, the standing figure and the kneeling one are cast in the mould of spirituality. The drapery shows folds with deep shadow. Her hands clasped together penetrate space. Her head tilts to an angle, giving her an innocent look. A long rosary hangs from her neck down the kneelcap. Very natural, the forms of the sculptures transit smoothly with clear sections. Aesthetically naturalistic sculpture portray strength, stability and order. The artist partinates the work with hues of gold. Contextually, *The Holy Virgin Mary Blessing a Girl* captures the presence of God and man's desire to reorder his world through God, being incapable of comprehending his environment.

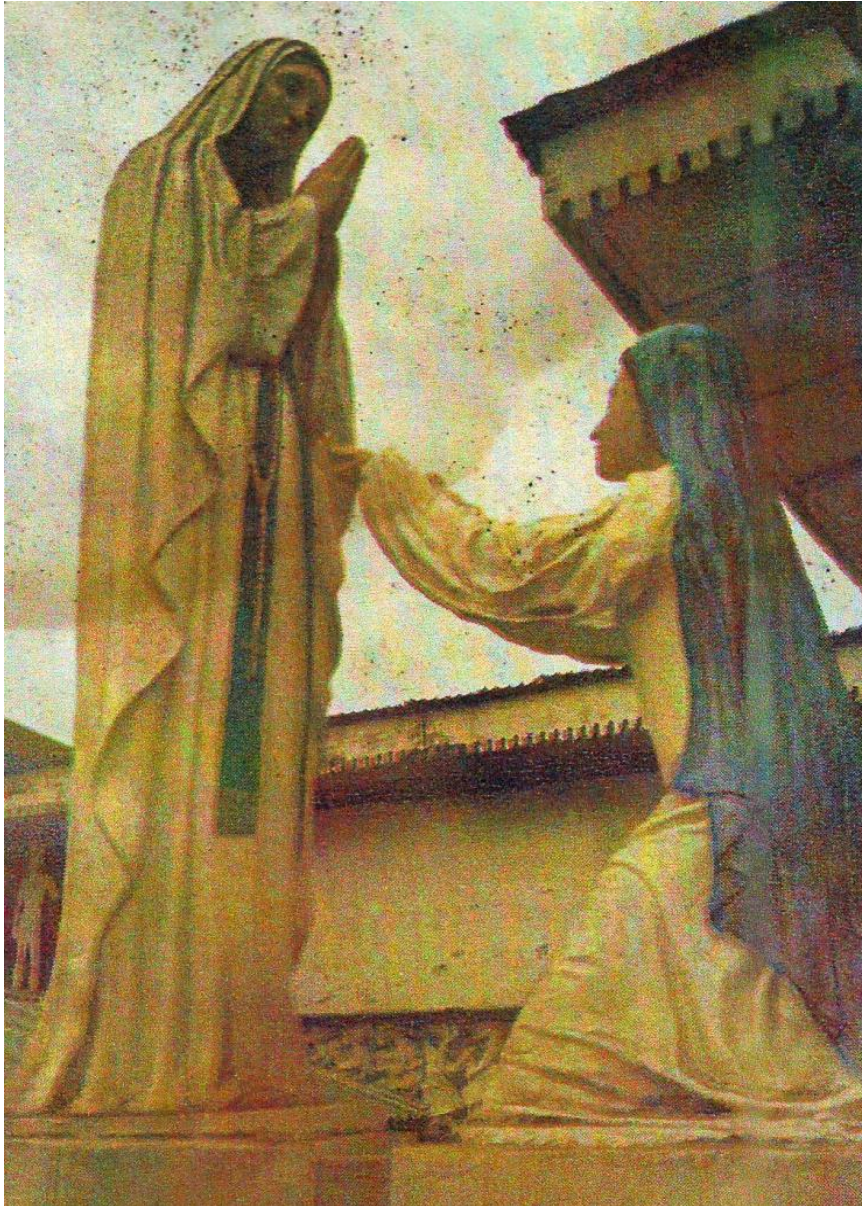


Fig.106 : Victor Uwaifo, *The Holy Virgin Mary Blessing a Girl*, 5feet, cement. © Victor Uwaifo, 2002.

The Holy Virgin Mary (Fig.97) at, St Benedict's Catholic Church grotto, Ijebu Ode, Ogun State, is another version of (Fig.108). He composes the sculpture with a female figure. The *Virgin Mary* stands with her hands clasped together in a spiritual mood. Draped heavily in a flowing robe with a towering crown, the standing figure is cast in the mould of spirituality. Aesthetically naturalistic, the sculpture is partitioned blue and white. Contextually, *The Holy Virgin Mary* also captures man's desire to

reorder his world, being incapable of comprehending his environment. Among his many religious works, is *The*



Fig. 107: Victor Uwaifo, *Holy Virgin Mary*, Cement, 5 feet.
© Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

Crucifix (Fig. 108), which captures Christ on the cross. Combining wood with fibre glass, the artist captures the doctrine of salvation, using the model of Jesus the Christ on the cross. The figure of Christ, which is aesthetically naturalistic, hangs from the cross to which it is nailed. On the cross, the figure looks into the void in agony for help. Christ here wears a crown of thorns. The figure has a bare torso but

its draped at the loin area. The bare torso reveals the forms of a man in the struggle from death. However, he died at last. Contextually, *The Crucifix* portrays the agony and death of Christ through which man attains salvation in the Christian faith. Christianity teaches that Christ is the only son of God who came to die for mankind so that we might be saved. Uwaifo uses the sculpture to advise man to turn to God for salvation for therein lies help.

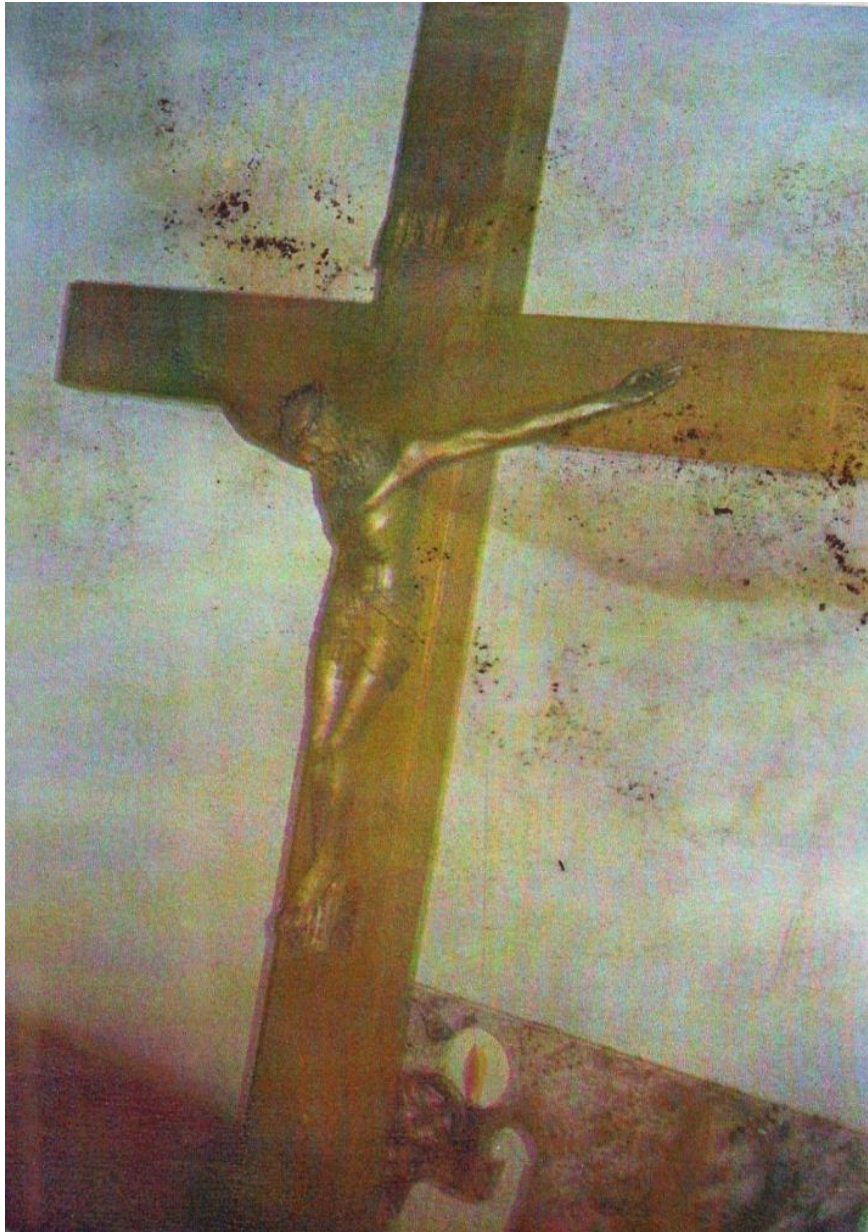


Fig. 108: Victor Uwaifo, *The Crucifix*; 7ft, fibre Glass/wood.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1987.

In the pursuit of religious subjects, especially the Christian Faith, Uwaifo uses his works to capture many stories from the bible. The works dwell more on Christ, his apostles and angels such as *Satiation of the Saint Joseph* (Fig.99). Compositionally, the work portrays three human figures, one kneeling and two walking. Draping in robe with heavy creases, the center figure, which is Christ, is approached by two sick people. The standing one appears insane, judging from his drapery. In both profile and back axial movement, the three figures are aesthetically cast in a triangle, the sideline of the kneeling figure steeper. The artist partitions the figures golden green. Contextually, Uwaifo uses the work to depict the suffering of Christ and God as the one from whom all help come.



Fig.109 : Victor Uwaifo, Saint Joseph, 7ft; ,fibre Glass. © Victor Uwaifo, 1987.

The artist also captures the some of the Saints. His *Saint Joseph* (Fig. 109) is a blossomy of artist mastery. The one figure composition stands, holds a staff and philosophically points to an invisible thing. In a robe of many creases, Saint Joseph is looks beyond the mundane world and points to the world that the bible reveals to humanity. The artistic display in the work can only be traced to Uwaifo who takes pain to treat every form to capture its true nature and by this Uwaifo has become very popular. *Saint Patrick 2* (Fig.111) is the profile



Fig. 110: Victor Uwaifo, Saint Patrick 1, 7ft, fibre Glass. © Victor Uwaifo, 1987.

version of (fig.100), which reveals more forms and reemphasizes the hidden aesthetics in fig.112. Here, the robe reacts to the action of the underlying hand vividly forming the creases that add colour to the work. The behavior of the robe between the two hands creating concavity and convexity and finally casts deep shadow on the underlying structure gives a fascinating visual experience. The figure and the staff create an angle, which the roof reemphasizes.



Fig. 111: Victor Uwaifo, Saint Patrick 2,
Size, 7ft, Medium, fibre Glass.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1987.

The artist portrays the Saints as givers of life. Uwaifo uses *Salvation* (Fig.102) to capture God's divine plan to redeem humankind. The painting of Christ at the center is flanked with two statues of angel. One carries the torch of light while the other beckons on the people to come over. Christ at the center radiates light, its ray spreading and fading into the wall. Satan must be bruised.

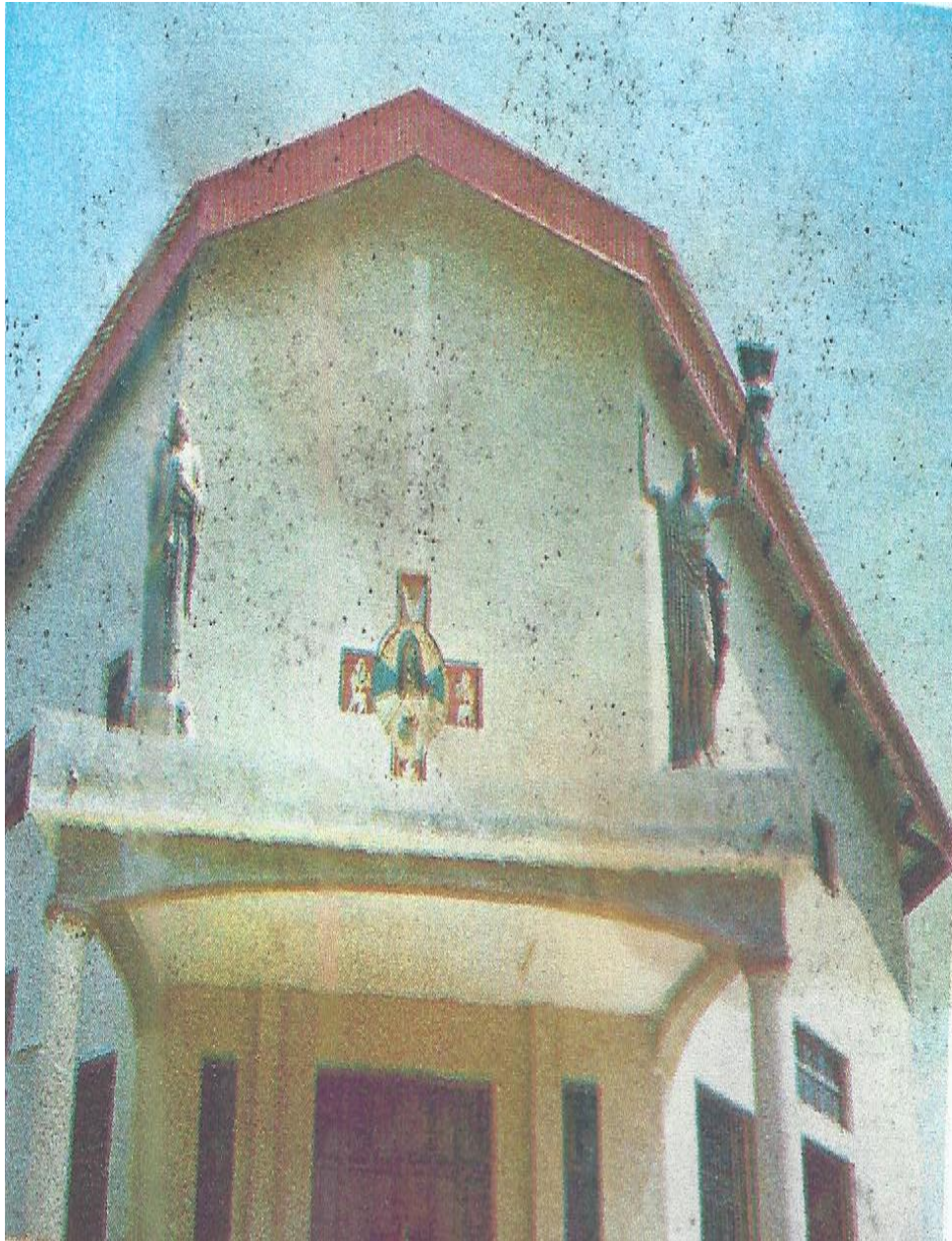


Fig. 112 : Victor Uwaifo, *Salvation*, 7ft, fibre Glass. © Victor Uwaifo, 1987.

Uwaifo uses the *Angel* (Fig.103) to capture the story about the angel who bruises Satan. Compositionally, the work combines two figures: human with wings that holds a spear and serpent. The angel spreading out his wings to gain stability holds the spear tenaciously as a weapon of destruction and hit hard on the serpent, which struggles to no avail. Very pensive, the angel concentrates on killing the serpent. The texture of the wings is flora. A set of sculptres with christian theme is *Fourteen Stations of the Cross* (Fig.104).



Fig. 113: Victor Uwaifo, Angel, 7ft, fibre Glass. © Victor Uwaifo/1987.

The relief sculptures are on pedestal at the grotto of the Holy Cross Cathedral, Benin City. The stations are on high relief but with the aid of an iron bar they are suspended from tall pillars as base in the round. The work depicts the different stages of the suffering of Christ when he was to be killed. They reveal the different stages and their peculiarity of the suffering. Indeed, the degree of suffering portrayed by the work evoke the desire to avoid sin in order that Christ's suffering may not be in vein. The artist details these works to capture the essence of God's love for mankind.



Fig. 114 : Victor Uwaifo, Fourteen Stations of the Cross 1, Cement.4ft, © Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

Fourteen Stations of the Cross 2 (Fig.105) shows the detail of Christ carrying the Cross. The artist composes the work with three human figures: Christ at the center of a soldier and a sympathizer. A white pillar that is aesthetically designed suspends the relief work in space. Christ with a crown of thorns struggles with the cross, grips it and carries it on his shoulder. The soldier tries to position the cross on him. The sympathizer stands and stretches his hands to help but Christ in agony refuses. The cross portrays the figures in a triangle and helps to strengthen the rhythm in the work.



Fig. 115: Victor Uwaifo, *Fourteen Stations of the Cross 2*, Cement, 4ft. © Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

Fourteen Stations of the Cross 3 (Fig.106) vividly captures another stage of the suffering. The artist composes the work with three human figures: Christ, a soldier and a sympathizer. A white pillar that is aesthetically designed suspends the relief work in space. Here Christ in agony falls with the cross on him. The soldier showing no mercy hits him hard with the whip but the sympathizer stretches his hand to help. However, the soldier will not allow it. This time the whip suggests the triangle. The artist also documents the saints,

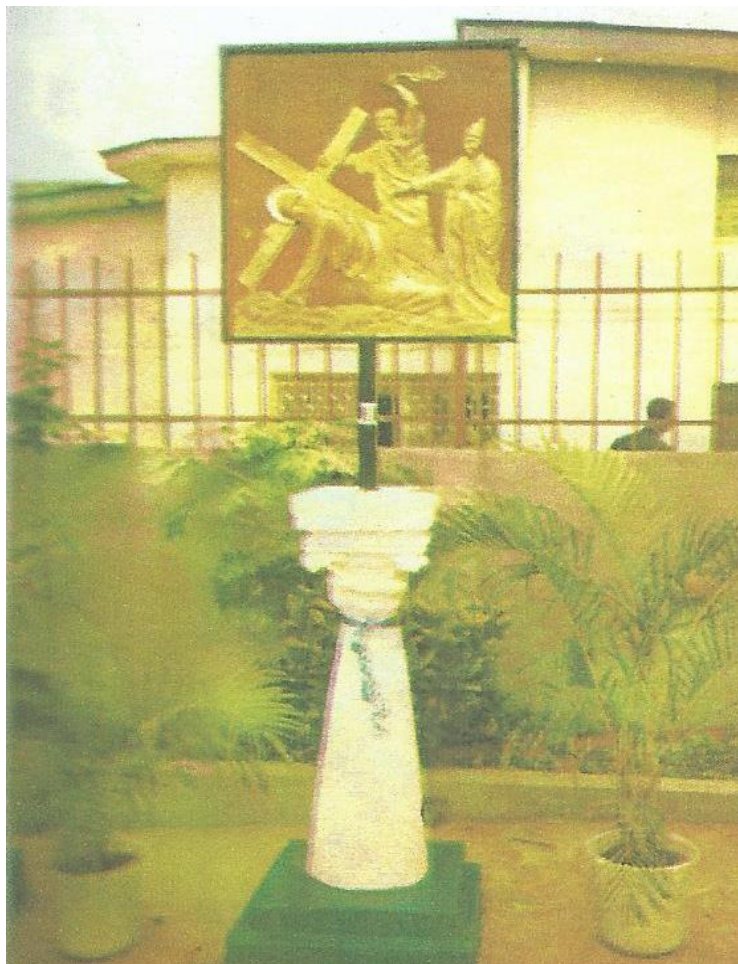


Fig. 116: Victor Uwaifo, *Fourteen Stations of the Cross 3*, Cement, 4ft. © Victor Uwaifo, 2004.

the apostles of Christ. He captures this with his *The Saints* (Fig.117), using relief sculptures attached to the wall. Some of them carry babies, signifying salvation.

Uwaifo also clearly shows his good knowledge of advance study in forms. He captures forms in their true nature. The artist captures personalities,

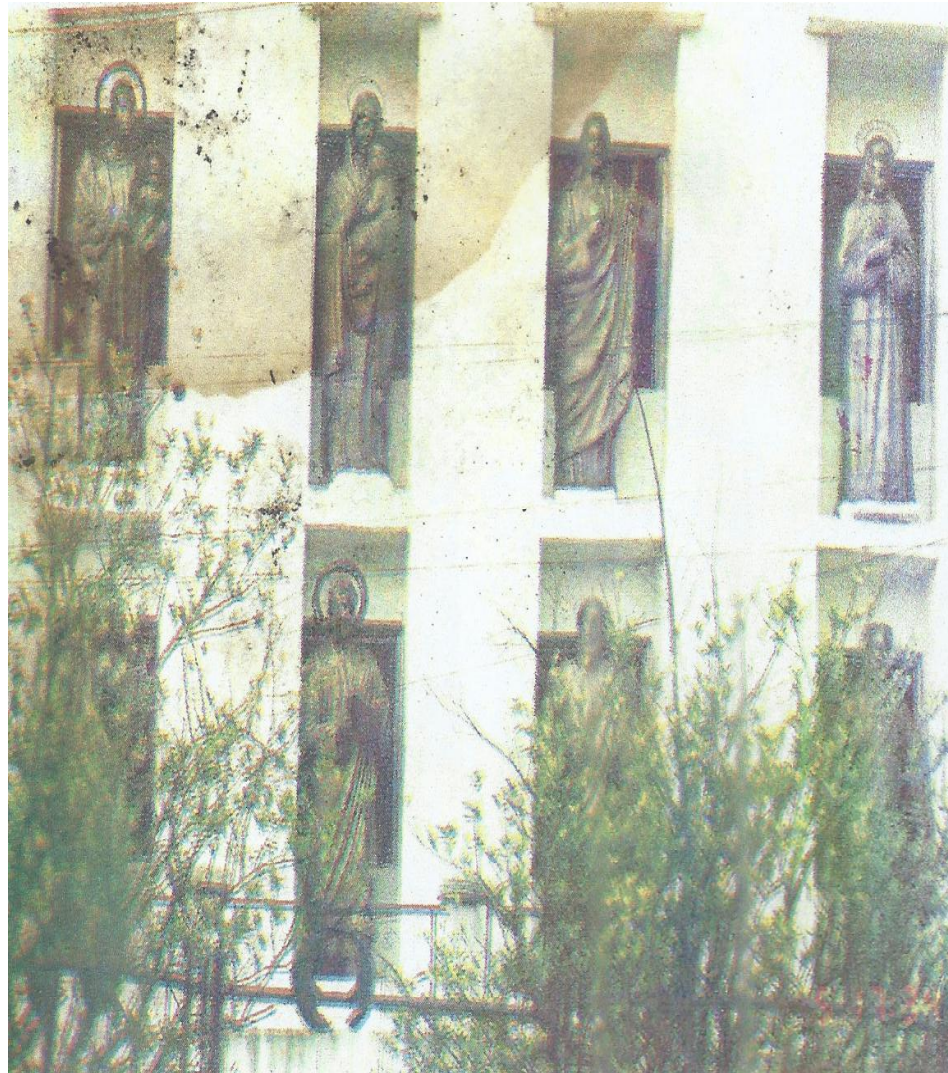


Fig. 117: Victor Uwaifo, *The Saints*, Cement, 4 ft.
© Victor Uwaifo, 2004.

events and even animals, using sculpture as a tool. *Untitled Sculpture* (Fig.108) is one of the many sculptures that Uwaifo uses to capture the symbolism of power with animal, especially lion. He compose the sculpture with the figures of a lion and a human. The lion relaxes on the ground while the human figure reclines on it reading. Aesthetically, the sculpture is naturalistic. Its hair drapes down on it like the foliage of a tree. The human figure is in back axial moveent while the lion is in profile.

Contextually, connotes strength and protection with an underlying theme of education. In one view, the *Untitled Sculpture* portrays protection over the one reading. In another view, the sculpture reveals the strength of the one reading. The artist captures the relationship of sculpture



Fig. 118: Victor Uwaifo, *Untitled*, 4feet, cement.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1995.

with environment, using monumental sculpture as a model. The artist who is a designer believes that monumental sculptures are part of environment, playing the role of beautification, history, security and, sometimes, as a tool for reinforcing buildings. Uwaifo portrays these roles with *Eagle I* (Fig.119), which he composes as a bird just perching on a globe. The bird spreads its wings and stands on the globe above the houses. Titled at the neck to the left, the bird looks down into space probably to discern those who enter the compound. Very naturalistic, the eagle portrays rough texture with clearly delineated sections. The globe on which it stands is composed geometrically with round and rectangular structures. The artist partinates the bird and pillar with gold and white respectively. The pillar seems to grow from a wall of marble, which has linear motifs.

Contextually, *Eagle* portrays the theme of beautification, security and architecture. The quest for beauty through sculpture and architecture by the society cannot be over emphasized in the Nigerian contemporary society. Man uses reinforced concrete to produce amazing sculpture and architecture thereby making monumental sculptures to stand with one-leg and storey buildings larger than their ground floors. Man constructs bridges, arc and vault with reinforcement. Sculpture also gains from such reinforcement and Uwaifo here uses the knowledge to a great advantage. *Eagle* is one of his many sculptures that benefit from reinforced concrete, using a tall pillar on which the giant bird stands with a remarkable balance. Even with the wings spread, the bird commands strength, order and stability that only an experienced artist can create, using reinforced concrete. Uwaifo here continuously proves that he is an embodiment of creativity. That he is endowed with great intellect is not in doubt. That his a good student of humanity is also not indoubt.



Fig. 119: Victor Uwaifo, Eagle 1, cement, 4feet.

© Victor Uwaifo, 1995.

The *Eagle 2* (Fig.120) is another version of the eagle. Uwaifo composes the work as a bird that perches on a globe. The bird spreads its wings and tail while standing, suggesting that it is about to fly. It tilts its neck towards left and looks into space. Its gaze suggests the target unambiguously. The bird is naturally created with rough textures. The warp surfaces combine concave and convex outlines. Its forms are real. The globe on which it stands is composed geometrically with round and

rectangular structures. The strength that the bird conveys is not in doubt. The artist creates many environmental sculptures,



Fig. 120 : Victor Uwaifo, Eagle 2, Cement, 4feet.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1995.

which include *The Fountain* (121). The work is an abstraction of the electrical bulb fitted into its ceiling rose. The work combines spatial and mass characters. The bulb is spatial, relying heavily on thin metal sheets to form a globe. The thin sheets penetrate into a smaller ceiling rose at the top that turns to face a pillar that grows from the bigger ceiling rose. The bigger ceiling rose grows from the ground. At the top of the bigger ceiling rose where the pillar grows from is a glass structure to

collect water. Two other smaller structures like this are still attached to the top of this pillar. The work is both aesthetic and functional. Some animals though not domesticated form part of the human



Fig. 121: Victor Uwaifo, *The Fountain*, Cement, metal, 10 feet.
© Victor Uwaifo, 2006.

society. Their relevance is in their strength which human symbolizes and conceptualizes in art, an expression of culture. Capturing the human thought, especially that of Africa in the visual arts, Uwaifo documents the lion with mortar. In this regard, Uwaifo uses *Lion* (Fig.112) to reveal the symbolism of the royalty where

he seems to capture the biblical maxim, 'The Lion of Judas' and paraphrasingly, the Lion of Edo and Africa! Appearing here in profile, *Lion* stands in aura of strength, stability and dignity. It looks out with much concentration and agility. There is no doubt that the *Lion* is naturalistic, portraying Uwaifo an embodiment of creativity. Slavery in Africa remains very clear in the consciousness of Africans. The memory is bitter, but the visual art



Fig. 122: Victor Uwaifo, *Lion*, cement, 4feet.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1995.

must report the bad, the good and the ugly. In this vein, the artist captures the bitter memory of slavery with the *Slave* (Fig.113). The artist composes the sculpture with a standing male figure in chain which is bare except the little drapery at the loin. In a very weak gesture, the figure signals boredom.

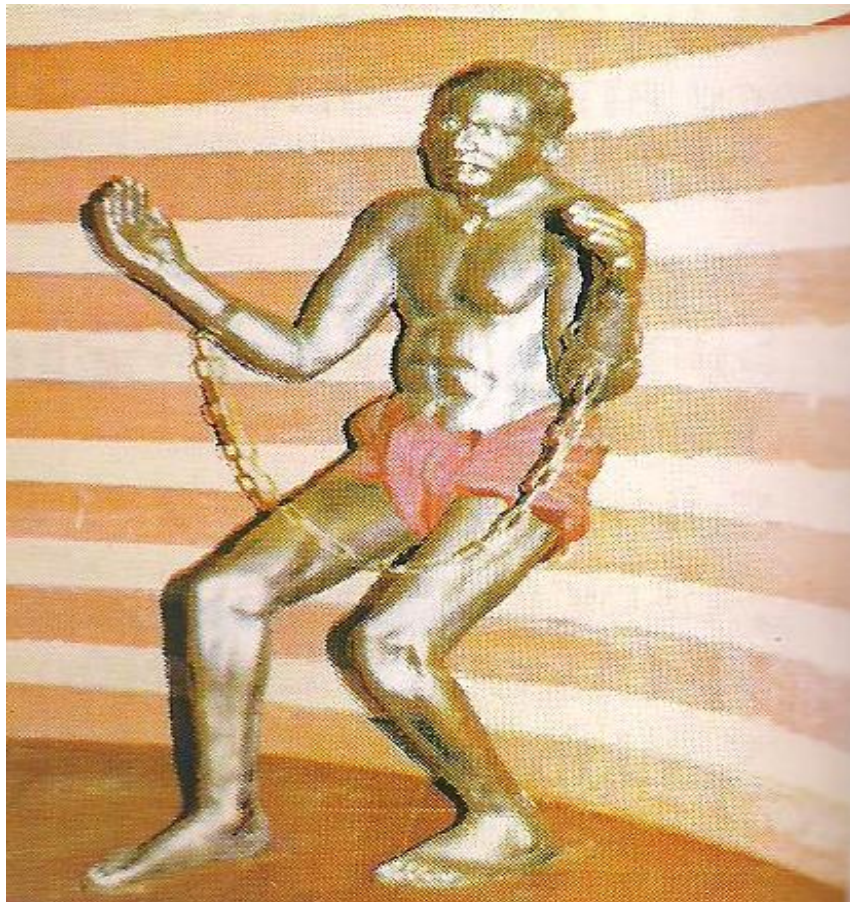


Fig. 123: Victor Uwaifo, *Slave*, Cement, 4feet.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1995.

The Benin kingdom had fought local and national wars. The local wars are numerous. She was winning some and losing others. However, the kingdom was known for her warlords. The Benin Punitive Expedition exposed the kingdom to sophisticated war arms and ammunition. Though the kingdom was defeated, however, the kingdom with her own guns was able to keep the war going for a long time.

Uwaifo captures this experience with the *Warlord* (Fig. 114), using soldier as a model of war. In naturalistic mode, the artist drapes the one-figure sculpture with war attire and charms. The standing figure holds a gun and relaxes, suggesting that the war is over or it is preparing to go to war. Its helmet and the drapery at the torso carry the image of the face of a tiger. The artist might be philosophically condemning war, especially as the soldier relaxes with his eyes closed.



Fig. 124 : Victor Uwaifo, Warlord,
Cement, 7 feet. © Victor Uwaifo, 1995.

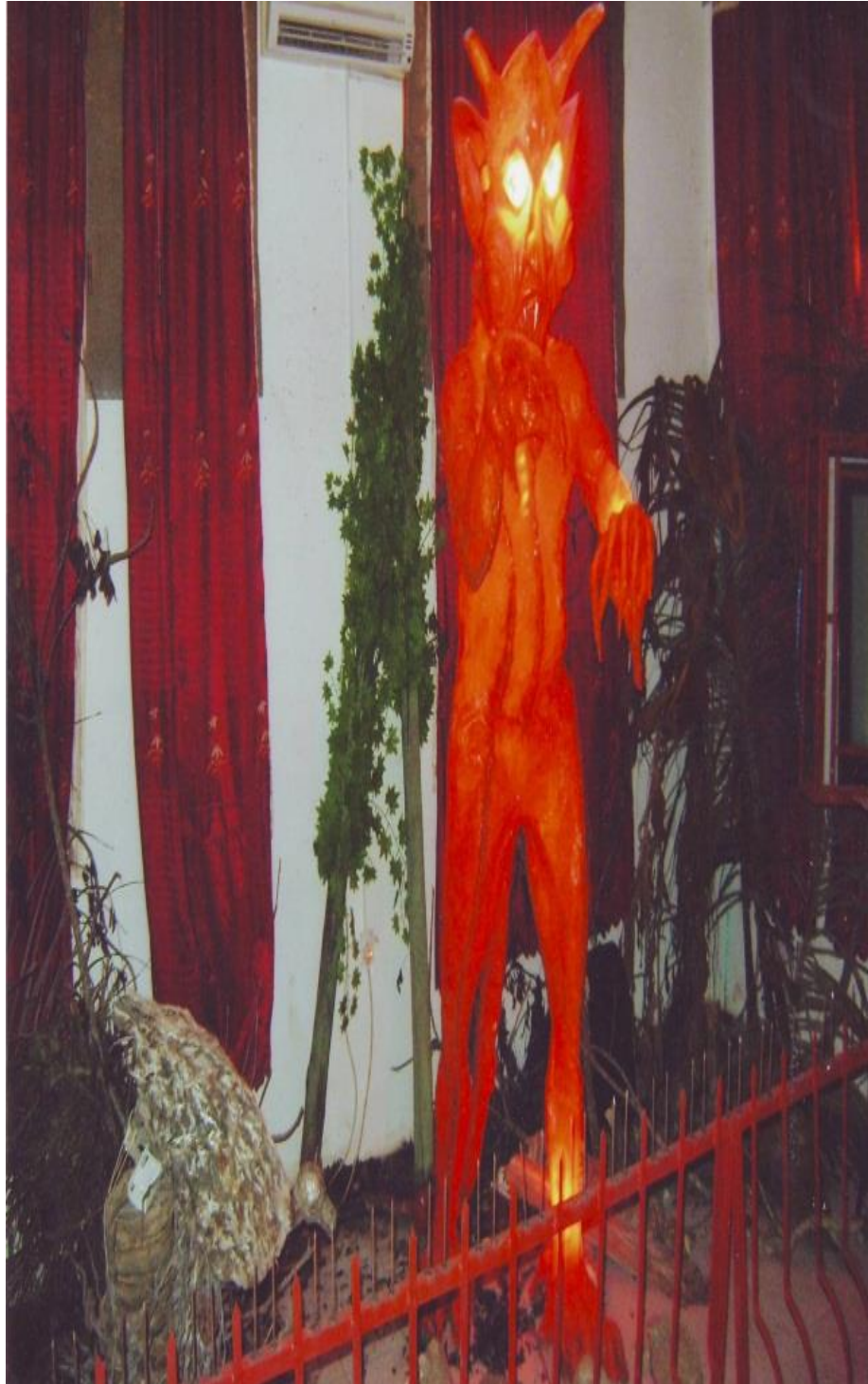


Fig. 125: Victor Uwaifo, *Mysterious Monster*, 5 feet, Mixed Media.
©Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

The *Mysterious Monster* (Fig.125) is an installation art. It uses doll, welded metal, curtains, electric flowers air conditioner set and television set to make a statement on city life. Installation art is a form of visual art in which a space such as a

room is treated as a three-dimensional work of art like sculpture. The materials of installation art are countless and the style varies from stylization to abstract. Though the term, installation art, emerged in the 1970s its appearance dates back to early 20th century. Uwaifo, an embodiment of creative whose style of art takes any form depending on the statement he wishes to make, uses *Mysterious Monster* in form of installation to reveal the dream world. Nightmare is not new to humanity. Uwaifo uses his art to capture the essence of humanity, including nightmare. The domineering doll at the center uses lighting electric bulbs as eyes. The fingers are like those of a crab. The head has two large ears and two growing structures that penetrate into space. It stands feebly on odd toes. The dominance of hues of red and green connotes the work as fundamental in human history³⁶.

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CHAPTER SIX

VICTOR UWAIFO AS A DESIGNER

Uwaifo attended Yaba College of Technology, Lagos, between 1961 and 1963 and obtained Ordinary National Diploma (OND) in Fine and Applied Arts,

specializing in Graphics Design. He graduated with Distinction in 1963. He was the best graduating student of the year and was awarded the Lintas West African scholarship. The training prepared him for media and industrial design. Immediately he graduated, he began to work but briefly as a Graphics Officer at the Nigerian Television Service (NTV), now the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Lagos. His training at the school and the experience as Graphics Officer laid the foundation that results into an enviable career today. Uwaifo, therefore, has become a popular designer in the country today.¹

Experts have severally defined design. The varied definitions are broadly classified into industrial and non-industrial designs. Uwaifo's works share the two classifications, graphics and industrial designs with equal show of competence. His visual communication designs show double visual packages, which attract the viewer by their pictorial aesthetics and humorous thematics often laced with purgent messages. On interview, Uwaifo reveals that visual communication design over the years is full of challenges and agitates for national reorientation and social modernization. He adds that design is visual communication, which entails the use of words and illustration to enhance communication that inform, remind and educate. Concluding, he reveals that designing is a serious enterprise that embellish advertising of goods and services.²

Uwaifo is a serious minded graphic designer who combines posters with printmaking. He learnt printmaking techniques in Yaba College of Technology. He is one of the pioneering professional designers in Edo State who use posters to inform, remind and educate the public. He deploys colours, forms and words to create posters that are simple, informative, interesting and stimulating. He uses posters as a medium of invitation to social events such as festivals, weddings, political meetings, film

shows, burial ceremonies and birthday parties. His birthday cards such as *70th Birthday* (Fig.116) are fascinating.



Fig. 126: Victor Uwaifo, 70th Birthday-card,
4 feet, hard-board, © Victor Uwaifo, 2012.

Uwaifo uses *70th Birthday* (Fig.116) to capture the age of a great personality in colour, words and illustration. The artist articulates the work with hues of yellow, blue and red on paper and mounts it on a polished wood panel. The wood panel that is framed serves as canvas to embellish the work. The panel gives strength to the

paper to stand. The combination of red, green and yellow on the illustration identifies with nature, linking the subject to a naturalistic entity. The work is successful.³

The artist designs packages for corporate use. Raji defines package design as a small-size poster that introduces the contents to prospective customers. He adds that package design is three dimensional and appeals to the viewers accordingly, unlike a poster that is two-dimensional. He reveals that many products are sold in packages and that a good package design captures attention and increases the delight of purchasers as decorative to shelves at home, shops and supermarkets. Furthermore, Raji reveals that packages can improve supermarket appearance while manufacturers learn that packages are potent selling factors in stores, magazines and television commercials, but that despite the general acceptance of the need to protecting and preserving products, package design is not widely appreciated.⁴

Uwaifo supports Raji that a well-designed package holds attention and makes an impression on prospective purchasers. Advertising agencies use package design to resolve the problem of lack of selling. The main function of industrial or commercial designing is to give products and services sellable qualities so that producers and service providers can get their products or services across to the consumers with ease. Therefore, design seeks to embody the totality of humanity.

Uwaifo affirms that design has been part of human culture. He observes that modern design techniques emerged following the Industrial Revolution, which brings about tremendous changes in the conception and practice of design. Industrial Revolution brings about the transition from manual to machine-based techniques of production in Great Britain in the 18th century. Consequently, the modern society, which emerges from industrial society, demands modern designs suitable for mass production. Design, therefore, assumes the character of mass production with visual

scheme to aid programme diversity, appealing to various senses thus enhancing communication.⁵

Uche Okeke also agrees to the position above. He observes that Nigerian visual communication design in the 1960s entered into a new and exciting phase with the introduction of new areas of art and design. He notes that an important element in the development of modern Nigerian art is the founding of private art studios, galleries and design institutions. This view is also expressed by Oloidi. He asserts, 'if the entire tertiary institutions of modern Nigeria art experiences are surveyed as a unit, one will easily find a serenely artistic'. He attributes such achievements to the pioneers who championed the implantation of the art and, by extension; Uwaifo's contribution to the world of design is acknowledged. Uwaifo as an embodiment of creativity in visual arts has been exposed to different spheres of professional engagements. He evolves the process of making art works by printing on paper. However, sometimes he produces multiples of the same print. Each piece, technically known as an impression, is not a copy but an original since it is not a reproduction of another work of art.¹¹ Uwaifo designs his own stage attires such as *Ekasa* (Fig.117).⁶



Fig. 127: Victor Uwaifo, Ekasaa.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1996.

Ekassa uses colour and linear motif to make stage attire. It combines the hues of yellow and blue to turn out a functional artistic fabric design. *Ekasa* finds expression in *Art the Way* by Richardson, which reveals that the aim of printmaking is to produce multiple originals of genuine quality and that an art work or print does not just create momentary enjoyment for people but to edify them and add to their knowledge. In the same vein, Uka Godwin Ogbu's *Pioneer of Visual Communication Design in Eastern Nigeria, 1959-1979* reveals that graphics designers create in order

to communicate ideas, thoughts or feelings and that they employ a variety of methods and materials to achieve their aims.¹³ Victor Uwaifo uses *Ekasa* to successfully fulfill these roles.⁷

(a) Graphic Designs/Civil Designs

Graphics design is a creative process employing art and technology to communicate ideas, with control of symbols, types, colour and illustration meant to attract, inform and persuade a given audience. According to Uka, graphic designers create in order to communicate ideas, thoughts or feelings. They employ a variety of methods and materials to achieve their aim. In recent times, computer aided graphics have started taking over the manual methods and techniques of graphics presentation. Uka states that graphics designs is part of visual communication design practice. Graphics designers are responsible for making ideas and services as diverse as child immunization, political votersöregistration, school registration through such channels as posters, logos and advertisement brochures. Visual communication design, therefore, is the act of communicating in visual terms. In passing information via the media of communication, the designer uses illustrations, typefaces and other imageries to do this.⁸

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The 'Introduction' in *Digital Graphic Design* by Ken Pender reveals that while 'classical values endure, the boundaries of art continue to change to reflect our changing society and environment both in content and means of rendering'.⁹

A lot of graphics designers today practice on an individual basis or in the private or public sectors. Some of these practitioners include Jide Oshiga, David H. Dale in Lagos, Akin Saliu and Ayo Ajayi including Victor Efosa Uwaifo in Benin City. In private practice, Uwaifo established a publishing house at 4-12, Uwaifo Avenue, off Ekenwan/College Road, Benin City, and turns out fascinating works such as *Osogan* (Fig. 118). The artist uses the work to direct tourists to *Osogan*, the legendary mysterious monster. The work uses words and illustration on a large dark two-dimensional space. The top is very dark but it tints down to a ball of a greater tint. The work is successful indeed.



Fig. 128 : Victor Uwaifo, *Osogan*, 2feet,
© Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

Osogan, like many works of the graphic designer, communicates visually. The graphical work from the field of applied arts is a two-dimensional artistic creation. Though graphics design is two-dimensional and package design and animation are three-dimensional they use the same process of working with words and pictures to create solution to problems of communication.¹⁰

“Pioneers of Visual Communication Design in Eastern Nigeria, 1959-1979” by Uka, Godwin Ogbu characterizes the practitioners that there are two types of graphics designers, academic and non-academic. He reveals that the non-academic artists attend up to primary or secondary school level and acquired the skill and professional competence through apprenticeship. He adds that with the introduction of art at the Yaba College of Technology in the early 1950s academic practitioners began to emerge. He further reveals that Paul Igboanugo, a pioneer graphics artist in Nigeria, and Victor Efosa Uwaifo attended this institution, Yaba College of Technology, though at different times. Uwaifo’s poster such as his *Coat of Arms* (Fig.119) is a visual announcement that provides information through integrated design of typographic and pictorial images. Steven and Nicholas define poster as “a visual presentation, comprising whatever the contributor wishes to display on the poster board”. Akpan explains reveals that poster is basically large-scale advertising, illustration to remind the viewer of an important idea. He went further to explain that posters are designed by both professional and the roadside artist but qualities differ in terms of communication of ideas in various forms using few words. Ken Garland also defines poster “as a medium of advertising which uses visual symbol and words to bring about a desired response which could either be selling a product or an idea”. He constitutes that it is one of the mass communication media and can be seen as instructional materials that summarize significant

information of drawings, words, symbols and pictures. He adds that posters are also useful in informing people of significant change in the society.¹¹



Fig. 129: Victor Uwaifo, Coat of Arms.
© Victor Efosa Uwaifo, 1996.

Coat of Arms, like many printing works, involves planning; including practical and aesthetic consideration. Discretion is required to avoid ineffective waste, and the best typography is produced when the number of these shortcomings is reduced. Combining simplicity and clarity, Uwaifo uses *Coat of Arms* (Fig.129) as corporate advertising. He composes the work with an eagle on which is a star and

flanked by two horses. Under the eagle are *Ada* and *Eben*. The caption captures the image of the company.

The process of *Coat of Arms* involves preparation of the paper, sketching and correct application of pigments. The artist mixes the pigments with water-based glue. It is also possible to colour any monochrome print by hand, either in specific areas or all over. One can also print lines with coloured pigment on colour paper, white paper or in a variety of colour combinations. The graphic artist can use several methods in producing prints. It can also be used for commercial purposes such as in book illustration and production. Using typographic design, *Coat of Arms* involves the art and technique of composing printed material from letter, typefaces or fonts. It requires the knowledge of common types, relative sizes and measurement and spacing. The artist considers the position of the type, the style, size and weight of the text type on the work. The artist also considers spacing of typefaces, position of the illustrations, the colour of the ink and the quality of paper. The typefaces are suitable to the subject matter in form and weight. *Coat of Arms* conforms to certain practical and economic requirements, such as avoiding non-standard paper.¹²

Designing seeks to advertise. Advertising in its totality is a communication process, marketing process, a public relations process or an information and persuasion process, depending on one's point of view. With well-organized and good advertising, one can create the necessary awareness needed for the promotion of good services. Also with a well-planned and organized advertisement, one can easily reach most of its consumers, with a good product or service. Webster Dictionary describes advertising as 'the action of calling something to the attention of the public'. Victor Uwaifo designs the jacket of his *Music Albums* (Fig.120) as 'the action of calling something to the attention of the public'.¹³



Fig. 130: Victor Uwaifo, Jacket Album.
© Victor Efosa Uwaifo, 1996.

Sign and architectural design are very important and useful in our present changing world. They point the way or direct strangers or travelers quickly and clearly. They play a crucial role in making life worth living. Colourful design elements are particularly useful in old and new buildings or projects where there is a rich mixture of restaurants in airports, hospitals, galleries and other public places. There are no significant differences between signing and architectural graphics for example Victor Efosa Uwaifo designed his new palazzo gallery building (Figs.121 - 126).

The *New Pallazo Tourism Center* (Fig.121) design serves the dual functions of displaying information and aesthetics, using fascinating motif of linear design in

colour. However, architectural graphics, especially abstract wall designs are mostly used to enhance large public spaces. The work uses mass of pillars, wall, windows and doors to create an architectural design, which eventually transforms to a habitable space. The work combines triangle, ark, straight and broken lines. Designers use the sign language, as with *New Pallazo Tourism Center*, to identify, direct and inform viewers. Signs form an essential part of overall communication, creating easily recognizable and distinctive images.¹⁴ Uwaifo personally supervises the implimentation of some of his civil

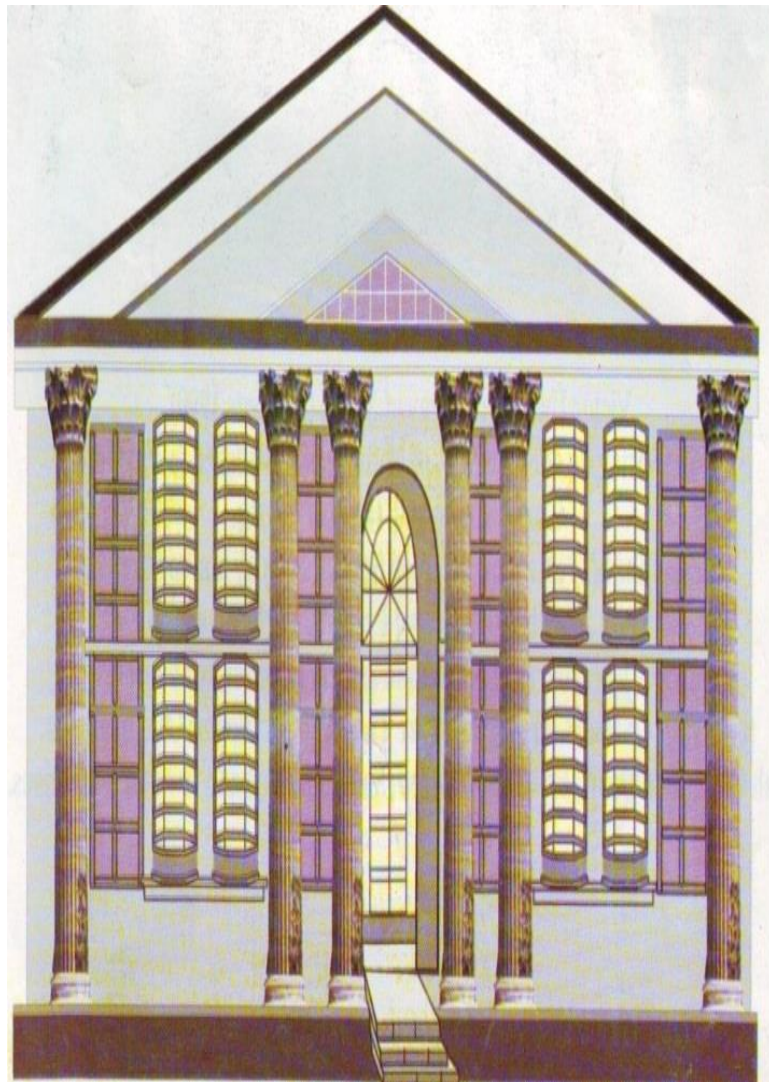


Fig. 131: Victor Uwaifo New Pallazo Tourism Center.

© Victor Uwaifo, 2010.

designs such as in *Uwaifo at Work* (Fig.122). Here the artist supervises the construction of the archway that leads to his new Turist Palazzo, Benin SAsCity. The artist climbs up the ladder to direct workers who translate the master's sign language on paper. *Victor Uwaifo at Work* (fig.123) is an advanced



Fig. 132: Victor Uwaifo at Work. ©Victor Uwaifo, 2012.

version of Fig.133. It shows half of the gateway under construction with Uwaifo up directing. A worker is in the wood mould arranging the rods across the arc to make it reading for a beam. *Victor Uwaifo at Work* reveals the behind-the-scene of Uwaifo's wonderful and fascinating civil design and construction. The artist adds artistic feel

into the construction which otherwise would have just been ordinary. The *New Palazzo* (Fig.124), one-storey



Fig. 133: Victor Uwaifo at Work 2. © Victor Uwaifo, 2012.

building, is strengthened with six columns (pillars) with a walkway. The walkway puts three columns on either side. The numerous glass windows give adequate ventilation and light to the interior. This is valid for a functional gallery. The columns, beams and walkway recall the memory of the Propylaea of the Athenianös Parthenon, the Doric masterpiece on the Acropolis. However, the columns are a Corinthian Order of the first classical orders of architecture developed in the 7th century BC in Greece. Each column classified from the roof to the base has

entablature, capital, shaft, base and stylobate. The entablature shows the end of the column where the beam rests and from which the ceiling takes off. The beam is in form of a slab, a kind of another floor that projects out of the wall to sit on the columns. The capital, which is next to the entablature, shows a four-corner mould of leaves and sits on the shaft. The shaft next to the capital is a slim-flute like structure striated with vertical lines. The base, which sits on the floor, is curvilinear shape that rises from the column to sit on the floor. The stylobate is flat and in two steps grows the ground with strength, order and stability. National flags of some countries, including that of Nigeria hang from staffs on full masts. The masts stand erect with the character of growth that penetrates into space.



Fig. 134: New Palazzo, Front view. © Victor Uwaifo, 2012.

New PALAZZO, Profile (Fig.125) captures civil technology and artistic embellishment of the new Palazzo building. The building on its profile is opened to the double gate of steel. The top floor, using reinforced concrete, grows out and penetrates space. On the ground are two figures of a lion in action. The two stand facing each other. They seem to warn unwanted visitors of the underworld of the danger that could be hidden in the beauty of art.¹⁵



Fig. 135: New PALAZZO, Profile,
© Victor Uwaifo, 2012.

(b) Industrial Design

Industrial design in art and science is fundamental to humanity. Its centrality in life points to the creation of the numerous machine-made products all over the world. Industrial design concerns itself with aesthetics, functional efficiency, durability and pleasure. The term, Industrial design, was first used by an American industrial designer, Joseph Sinel, in 1919. Ceramics has enjoyed commercially produce high quality wears, which owes to commercial design. Owing to high commercial design, the products of Royal Porcelain factory in Copenhagen are household names in the world. The Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA) defines industrial design as the óprofessional service of creating and developing concepts and specifications that optimize the function, value and appearance of products and systems for mutual benefits of both users and manufacturers.ô Industrial design determines a product's look and feel, which is directly related to the public perception of the firm.¹⁶

Uwaifo uses Commercial Art involving creation of art works that help to sell products, services, ideas or phenomena, which may be political, socio-cultural or educational very effectively through industrial design. The artist understands the ductility of Commercial Art and deploys it in many areas of art such as advertising, packaging, publishing and industrial design. Apart from the iron-base parts, Uwaifo constructs the body parts with fibreglass. The *Visionary Car* won a prize at the National Trade Fair exhibition in 1996. The *Visionary Car I* (Fig.126) underscores the artist's ingenuity in Commercial Art as industrial design. Uwaifo uses it to capture aesthetics, functional efficiency, durability and pleasure. What could be termed, *Uwaifoism* (Uwaifo's intellectual property) only can conveniently define the

uniqueness of the car. Above all, the car is worth purchasing and, of course, his industrial design is effective.¹⁷ The *The Visionary Car 2* (Fig.127) is the front view of Fig.137.



Fig. 136 : Victor Uwaifo, Visionary Car 1, 5 feet, fiber-glass.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1996.

At first one will think it is a Beetle car. At a second look, one will think it is a Jet plane. At a third look, one will think it is a Jeep. However, on a proper look, all

the confusion will lead to the *Visionary Car*, which is unique. The fenders use convex and concave outlines. The two taken in one breath, gives the illusion of a bird in space. A large fan is flanked by two headlights, which redefine the circular nature of the structure that houses the fan. The structure begins the burnet, which expands into the windscreen. The burnet at either side curves and drops sharply into the fender, creating the two structures that lie side by side. The *The Visionary Car 3* (Fig.128) is the side view of Fig.137.



Fig. 137: Victor Uwaifo, Visionary Car 2, 5 feet, fiber-glass.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1996.

This view portrays a posh car, which uses elongation, curves and convexes as a motif of design. The musical icon marries music and commercial art together,



Fig. 138: Victor Uwaifo, Visionary Car 3, 5 feet, fiber-glass.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1996.

using industrial design, which captures guitar. *Double Guitar* (Fig.129) captures the motif of music, using the guitar of the plucked chordophone as a model. The artist designs the guitar as double-hands guitar, having a flat, waist-like body without the

usual round sound hole. It has two fretted necks from the two hands on which runs six and seven strings respectively. On top of the necks are tuning screws from which the screws run down to some bridges glued to the guitar's soundboard. *Double Guitar* is a successful work of industrial design and Commercial Art as the first ever made in Africa.¹⁸



Fig. 139 Victor Uwaifo, *Double Guitar*, 4ft, mixed media.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1996.



Fig.140: Victor Uwaifo, Aeroplane House 1, 18 feet, fiberglass.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1996.

The *Aeroplane House 1* (Fig.130) is another wonderful design. The artist is relentless in creativity. He does not stop at designing but proceeds to interpret his designs with concrete. Uwaifo designs and builds an aeroplane house at Revelation Tourist Palazzo, Benin City. The *Aeroplane House* captures the services of a gallery,

using motif of an aeroplane as a model. The work shows an engine compartment, the fuselage, the wings and tail of an airplane. The nose is spherical. It begins with a rounded structure, which expands into the cabin of three windows showing three compartments of glasses. The cabin also runs into a fuselage of glass windows, which reduce in size towards the tail where the wings are suspended and penetrate into space; indeed, like a bird in space. *Aeroplane House, Interior 2* (Fig.131) is the interior of the fuselage of



Fig. 141: Victor Uwaifo posed inside the Aeroplane House, *Interior 2*, 18 ft, fiberglass. © Victor Uwaifo, 1996.

Fig. 130. It shows the different classes in the compartment. A row of seats lines the interior. Uwaifo relaxes on an executive seat near the cabin, which, with the other three, is cast at the background of blue. Other seats are not occupied. Some art works hang from the wall of the plane. The numerous windows let in ventilation, which help to brighten the interior that is dominant with hue of red. The rear is another compartment showing some rows of seats, a table and the chief executive's seat at the head of the table.¹⁹

Another part of the interior of the fuselage of Fig.132 is *Air Hostess, Interior 3* (Fig.132). It shows the entrance that opens to the fuselage, which also shows rows of seats and the Air Hostess standing by. In an interview, the designer reveals that the fuselage houses the pilots, the passengers (art collectors and viewers) and the cargo (works of art). He adds that the wings provide the lift that enables the plane to fly. He further reveals that the duty of the movable ailerons in the wings is to help to control lateral motions while the movable gargets in the tail control vertical motions and that the fixed parts in the tail ensure stability during flight. He asks, 'I am sure you will fly with us?'²⁰

When he was asked that its landing geer could not be seen,

He laughed humorously.

He continued: 'This plane is already in space. If you cannot see the landing gear, it is just because you are inside. Oh, the Air Hostess announced earlier that you should fasten your seat belt. You did not. Don not worry, you will land safely.' The *Palazzo/Aeroplane House/Gallery* (Fig.133) has some



Fig. 142: Victor Uwaifo, Air Hostess 3, Interior, 18 ft, fiberglass.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1996.

staff other than the Air Hostess. The beautiful members of staff who show satisfaction with their job pose with the boss. The boss is happy with himself. In a brown suit, the boss stands with his hands clasped.²¹ *Revelation Tourist*



Fig.143: Victor Uwaifo and his Palazzo Gallery Staff.

© Victor Uwaifo, 1996.

Pallazzo and Aeroplane House/Gallery (Fig.134) shows pupils on excursion. A cross section of the ceremony shows Figs. 121-123, which portray pupils and students jubilating with the great artist during the opening ceremony of the *Palazzo*. Another section of the ceremony reveals pupils and their teachers in a



Fig.144: Pupils on excursion at the Gallery.

© Victor Uwaifo, 1996.

very happy mood. The aeroplane lies at the background. *Aeroplane House/Gallery* (Fig.135) captures the mood. *Palazzo/Aeroplane House/Gallery*

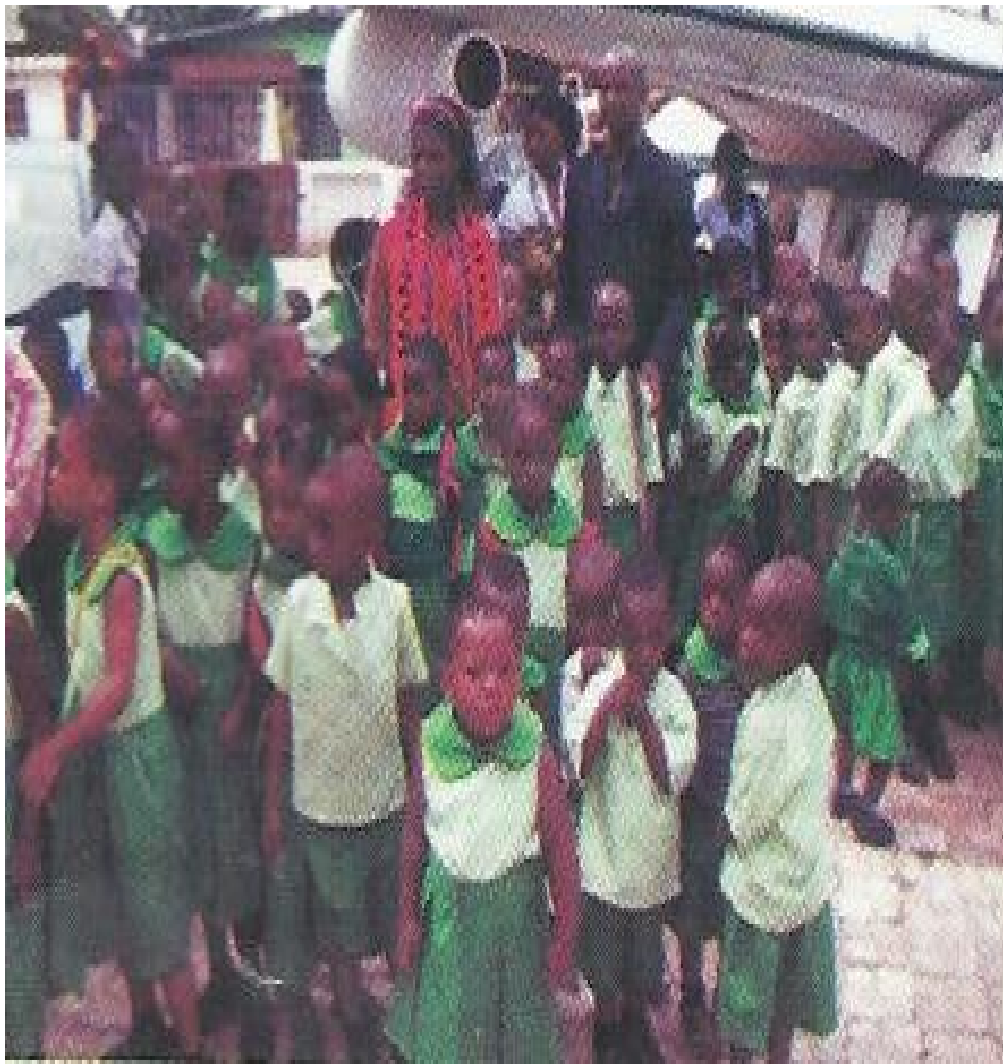


Fig.145: Another cross section of Pupils on excursion at the Palazzo Gallery.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1996.

(Fig.136) captures two cross sections, pupils and students. The pupils are at the foreground, the plane is at the middle and the students are at the background. Some of the students at the background are on top of the plane. The plane shows steps on top but the sleek nature of the plane is still clear. The mood of the pupils and the students is unambiguous; they are elated with what their great artist has done. In an interview, the embodiment of creativity reveals that some of the pupils and

students avow to study art, but he regrets that most schools that offer visual art do that only at the junior classes. He condemns this trend in the secondary schools and wishes that government could do better to evolve the curricula to take care of visual arts. He was optimistic that government would resuscitate the teaching of visual arts in schools.²²



Fig.146: A cross section of students standing on top of the Palazzo, Aeroplane House. © Victor Uwaifo, 1996.

Other cross sections *Palazzo/Aeroplane House/Gallery* (Figs.147 & 148) also show some National Association of Fine Art Students who are in a festival mood.

The great artist/lecturer poses with his students of Fine and Applied Arts Department, University of Benin, who are in a very colourful costumes. The students daub themselves with different colours. They are celebrating arts festival that coincides with the Palazzo's function. Annually, the executive of the association organizes festival of the arts, which involves cartooning, drawing, dance, jokes and fun. It is in this mood that the students are celebrating with their great artist/art lecturer who also features as musician, philosopher, acrobat, writer and designer.



Fig. 147: Victor Uwaifo and some tourists at the Palazzo Gallery.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1996.

Palazzo/Aeroplane House/Gallery (Fig. 148) is another cross section of the students.

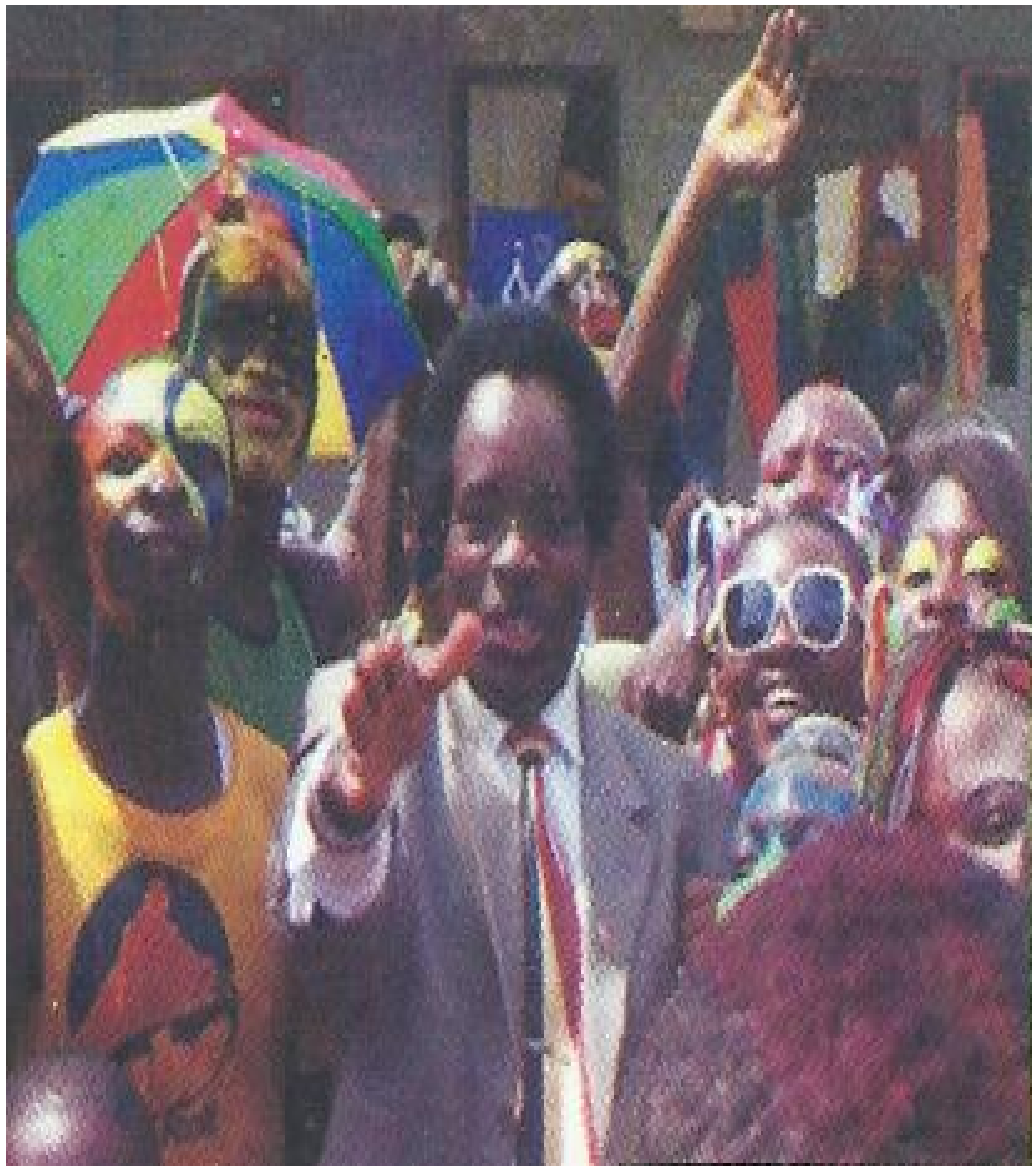


Fig. 148: Another cross section of the tourists at the Palazzo House Gallery. © Victor Uwaifo, 1996.

The Palazzo and Aeroplane House attracts tourists from local and international scene. The Visitor Note Book of the center indicates tourists from many countries. *Palazzo/Aeroplane House/Gallery* (Fig.139) captures tourists from Belgium. Uwaifo and the tourists pose in front of the aeroplane house. Uwaifo who dresses with white Agbada and a red bead that hangs from his neck is in the middle

of the two male tourists. Uwaifo grips the two men impressively.²³ Some government top functionaries and very important



Fig. 149: Victor Uwaifo and some tourists from Belgium at the Palazzo House Gallery. © Victor Uwaifo, 1996.

personalities also visit the tourist center and identify with the artist. *Palazzo/Aeroplane House/Gallery* (Fig. 140) captures His Excellency, Donald Duke in Revelation Tourist Palazzo. Uwaifo in his music costume poses with Duke who

rests his hand on the artist's shoulders. The two are in a very happy mood as they smile to each other. Among the very important personalities are

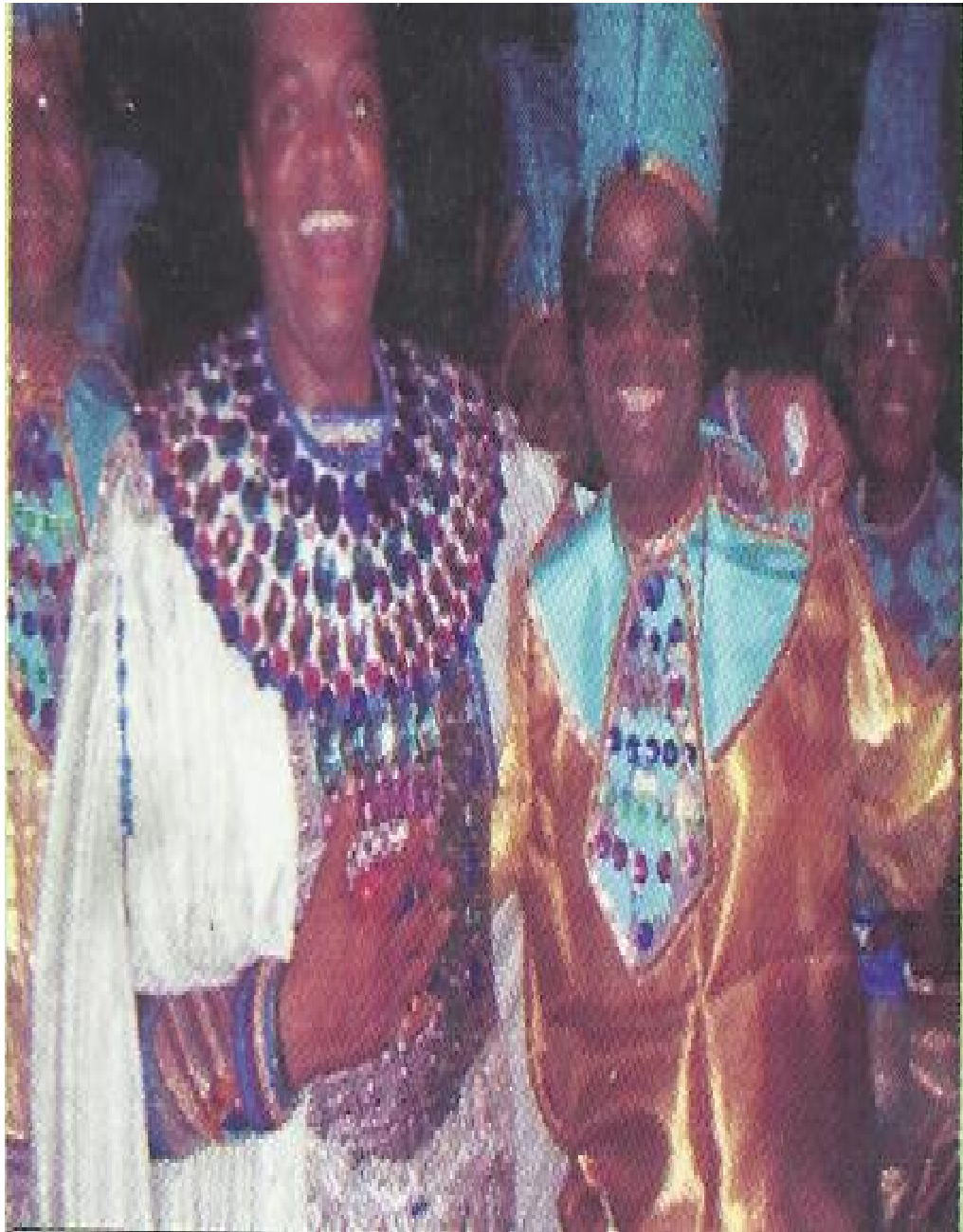


Fig. 150: Victor Uwaifo and His Excellency, Donald Duke in Revelation Tourist Palazzo. © Victor Uwaifo, 1996

His Excellencies, Moshe Ran (Ambassador of Israel) and Sir Gabriel Osawaru Igbinedion (Ambassador of Romania to Edo and Delta States. *Palazzo/Aeroplane House/Gallery* (Fig.141) portrays the two great personalities who pose for the

camera. Many who acknowledge Uwaifo's versatility in some areas of the visual arts identify with him. Victor Efosa Uwaifo has earned much recognition across the world.



Fig. 151: His Excellencies, Moshe Ran (Ambassador of Israel) and Sir Gabriel Osawaru Igbinedion at the Palazzo House Gallery.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1996.

His Excellency, Moshe Ran (Ambassador of Israel) was very prominent in the tourist center. *Palazzo/Aeroplane House/Gallery* (Figs.152&153) captures him

delivering a speech in the occasion. He highlights Uwaifo's personality and contributions to the art world. His music, plastic and pictorial art cut across the world. In fact, he is so popular in the music circle that one hardly believes that he has achievements in other areas of the arts. The Ambassador of Israel captures Uwaifo in all his areas of achievements.



Fig. 152: His Excellency, Moshe Ran (Ambassador of Israel) delivering a speech at the Palazzo/Aeroplane House/Gallery.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1996.

Palazzo/Aeroplane House/Gallery (Fig.143) shows His Excellency, Moshe Ran (Ambassador of Israel) in another section chairing a session of the occasion. Ran addresses the students and pupils. Though not an artist, Ran uses the achievements of Uwaifo to educate the students on the potentials of art and artists. Moshe Ran writes:

The history of Nigeria is coming alive when you visit the Revelation Tourist Palazzo. The music is a universal language through it you can be acquainted to different aspects of the Nigerian life. I was very much impressed everything, especially with our host, Hon. Prof. Victor Efosa Uwaifo. All the Best.²⁴



Fig. 153 : His Excellency, Moshe Ran (Ambassador of Israel) in another section chairing a session of the occasion. At the Palazzo/Aeroplane House/Gallery. © Victor Uwaifo, 1996.

From the works and activities above, Uwaifo is no mean artist. His achievements clearly portray a man of many sides who is competent in all his areas of operation. The works and activities also show him as a socio-cultural man who connects the top government functionaries and the eminent people with young ones through art. His works teach success through hard work. It is also evident that works of art are not limited to plastic and pictorial works but that architecture is an integral part of the arts. The lesson from Palazzo and the aeroplane house is great, fascinating and rewarding. It is also deduced that many people identify with the artist.²⁵

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CHAPTER SEVEN

OTHER CREATIVE SIDES OF VICTOR UWAIFO

Some artists are notable for their competence in some areas of visual arts. Artists such as Bruce Onobrakpeya, Yusuf Grillo, Kolade Osinowo and young Mufu Onifade who are versatile are highly respected. Victor Efosa Uwaifo is also an artist of many sides who commands respect. His many sidedness cannot be captured in one breath. One good thing about him is that he is equally competent in any area of his versatility: visual art, politics, administration, poem, philosophy and music. Very proficient and skillful in Graphics, Painting and Sculpture, Victor Efosa Uwaifo has earned much recognition across the globe through his marvelous art-works. He has been exposed to different spheres of professional engagements.¹

He is also the recipient of both national and international awards. Umezulike and Nwoye in *Learn from the Icon* states how Uwaifo was honoured with a National Honour Merit Award, Member of the Order of the Niger, MON, in 1983 by the Federal Government of Nigeria. This is in appreciation of his artistic talent and contributions to national development. *National Merit Award* (Fig 144) shows Uwaifo being honoured by the Federal Government of Nigeria. Other recipients of the National Award in the same occasion include Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief Anthony Anahoro. Uwaifo was the first Nigerian professional artist to receive such an award. He was the first artist to be appointed as Justice of the Peace (JP) in Nigeria in 1990. He received a Doctorate Degree (*Honouris Causa*) from Northgate University, Bellingham, United States of America in 1993. In 1994, the Association of Nigerian Authors and publishers an award. Uwaifo received the Resourcefulness Productivity Merit Award in 1996. In an interview. Uwaifo reveals that some politicians are made while others are born.⁹ However, Victor Uwaifo combines the two traits.²



Fig. 154: Victor Uwaifo, National Merit Award.

© Victor Uwaifo, 1983.

He was awarded the Certificate of Honour by House of Representatives, Boston, Massachusetts, in the United States of America, in 1997. In 2002, he received the Rotary International Award for Service to Humanity. In the same year,

he bagged the University of Benin distinguished Alumni Award. Uwaifo was appointed a lecturer in the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Benin, Benin City, in 2006. In 2007, he got the Benin National Merit Award (BNMA). The University of Benin also conferred on him Doctor of Letters (D. Litt) *honouris causal* in 2008.³ Uwaifo's personality cannot be better captured than a brochure on a citation on *Victor Uwaifo at 70* has done. In it, the orator, Jibril Munzali, writes thus:

If any man deserved to be honoured for services to the arts, that man is he who now stands before you. What musician has used his music to promote Nigerian and African culture as he has done? What sculpture has used his God-given talent to adorn monument in all parts of the country as he has done? What sexagenarian First Class Degree holder has offered himself as a University teacher to pass on his skills to the younger generation as he has done? Mr. President, I beseech you then to admit Victor Uwaifo to the Fellow of the Nigerian Academy of Letters.⁴

In politics, some politicians also make a mark. Among those who make a mark is Uwaifo. His name has been written in gold in Edo State politics. He has some innate qualities of a leader in addition to those he attained by conscious efforts. He has a rare quiet disposition of a leader who is unassuming. That is why he has been adjudged by his professional colleagues and government officials as a leading figure in all the groups to which he belongs. He works for leadership position and earns it. He also selflessly works for groups' interest and such group confers on him the well-deserved leadership. One is convinced that most of the positive leadership status conferred on him was well deserved. This he acquired through his contributions to humanity.⁵

On his political career, Uwaifo explains that everybody is a political leader and that being the head of a house-hold, makes one a political leader. As a leader, the family stands as a democratic setting. A man is the head of a household who gives directives to other members of the family to follow. A leader, either in the school or in the community led others who obey. As a leader, you do not need to go into politics before you can be selected or invited to serve your country. An individual due to experience or achievement acquires leadership. Immediately Victor Uwaifo assumed the political post of the Honourable Commissioner for Culture and Tourism between 2000 and 2003, he immediately changed the blue-print of the ministry. What he met on the ground was nothing to write home about as it was a pathetic reflection of lost illustrious, historical and cultural heritage of Benin people.⁶

He changed the name from Bendel Arts Council to Edo State Council of Arts, Culture and Tourism, This blue-print was aimed at resuscitating and reenacting the tradition. He also proposed a 2,500-capacity building as a strategy to upgrade and explore opportunities for tourism, recreation and technology. The Akenzua Cultural Center was given a new face-lift. Indeed, this development showed that Edo State is viable for the development of tourism comparable to other countries like Egypt, Israel and Thailand.

In recognition of his qualities, Uwaifo was appointed Chairman Committee on Cultural Activities, University of Benin in 2010. He was similarly appointed member Ceremonial and Award Committee, Nigerian University Games in 2012. He was appointed Honourable Commissioner for Arts, Culture and Tourism and member of Edo State Executive Council, the highest policy making body in the State. He served in that capacity from 2000 to 2003. Uwaifo reveals thus:

Every successful man in any business is a great administrator and that as an administrator; you don't have to go to formal school before you can be a successful administrator. All what it requires are forthrightness, vision, talents and creativity. Most people fail in business simply because they lack dynamic administrative prowess and that discipline is the secret of a good administrator. Victor Uwaifo further reveals that vision and mission must be the target. Mistakes are possible but that you don't have to worry, because this can lead you to the next level. In art administration, something is common to all artists, which is creativity. As a graphic artist, painter or sculpture, talent is not enough to make somebody a great administrator. One must derive joy and interest in his chosen field before he can grow, his creativity blossoms right from the youth. The secret is imagination theory and vision. You have to think and leave ahead of time, this is simply being creativity. Thinking faster than time, creativity comes in different directions, through dream, meditation, and contact, while some come by accident. One must not waste time because, time is money. According to Uwaifo success is speed, you don't waste time you always keep yourself busy at all time. This is the only way or secret to success.⁷

The following three goodwill messages from the *Federal Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Orientation, University of Benin and Chief Olusegun Obasanjo* are very pertinent to knowing the *Other Side of Victor Uwaifo*, see letter 1, 2 and 3.



FEDERAL MINISTRY OF TOURISM, CULTURE & NATIONAL ORIENTATION

Office Of The Honourable Minister
Federal Secretariat, Phase II, P.M.B. 473, Abuja
Tel: +234-9-2348297 Fax: +234-9-2348297

FMCT/ECR/25/II/247

19th January, 2011

70TH BIRTHDAY GOODWILL MESSAGE

On behalf of myself and the Federal Ministry of Tourism, Culture and National Orientation, I wish to also place on record my warmest regards and congratulation to him on this milestone.

Since he came to public consciousness sir Victor Uwaifo has remained a constant firmament in the constellation of stars our great country has produced. For being an adolescent star athlete in school, Sir Victor Uwaifo went on to become a consummate Guitarist, engaging composer and the ultimate showman, albeit a complete Musician.

This most enigmatic cultural icon has since transcended any categorization as he has continued to re-invent himself. To all intents and purposes, Sir Victor has metamorphosed from being that great musician that bequeath to us evergreen hits like "Joromi" Guitar Boy" "MAMMY Water" to the pursuit of intellectual endeavour which he has equally distinguished himself. His academic achievement has no doubt propelled him towards cultural administration both at the Edo State Arts Council and at the apex of the policy arm of the Ministry. Athlete, composer, singer, guitarist, musician, sculptor, graphic artist, technocrat, administrator, businessman all fit Sir Victor Uwaifo as a quintessential 21st Century man and multi-dimensional global citizen.

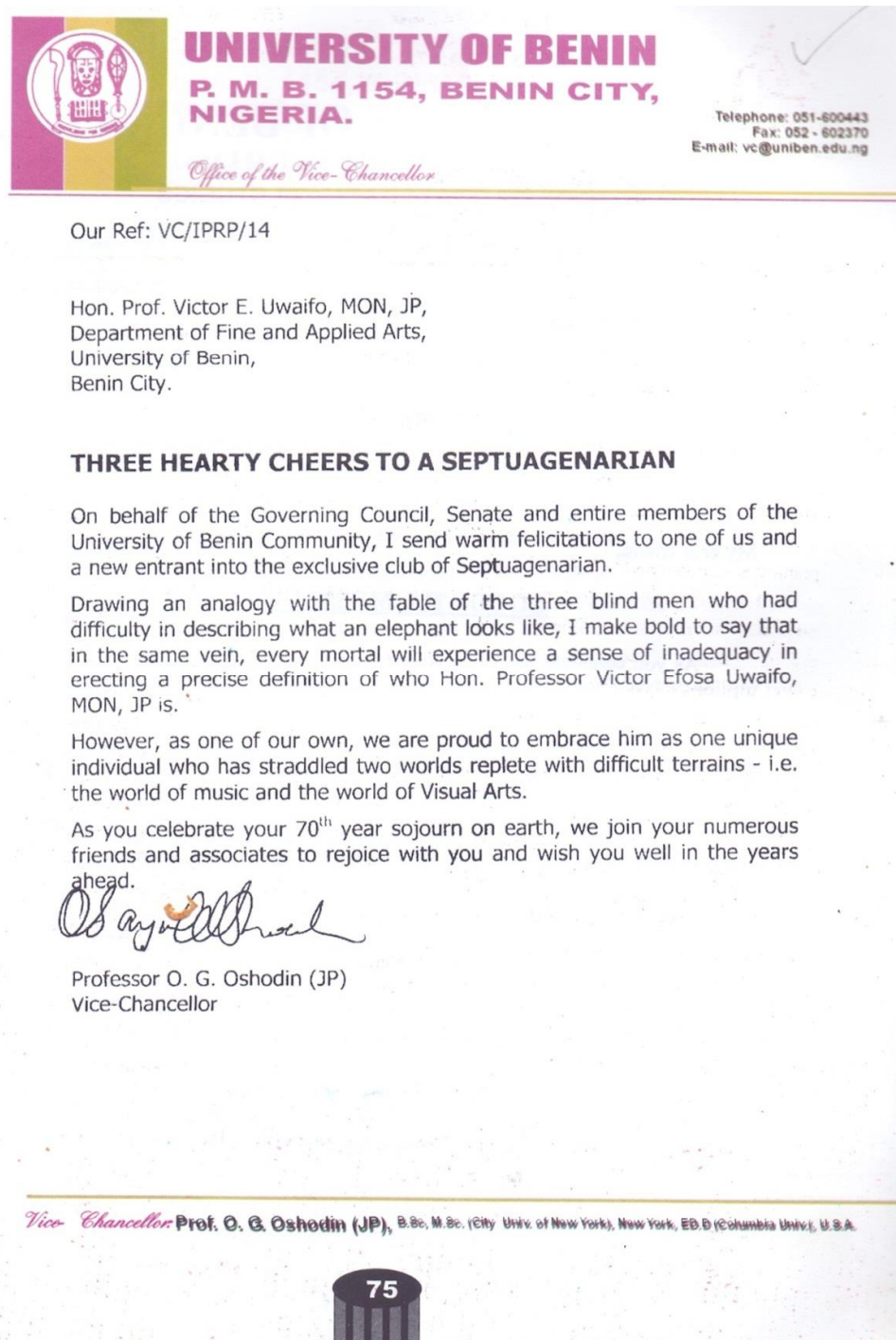
Please accept as always our profound regard and highest esteem.


Abubakar Sadiq Mohammed
Honourable Minister

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Letter 1: Federal Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Orientation.
© Victor Uwaifo, 2011.

Again, to capture the other sides of Uwaifo, the *University of Benin, Benin*,
City Letter 2, is very important. The university describes Uwaifo thus:



Letter 2: University of Benin.
© Victor Uwaifo, 2011.

Furthermore, to capture the other sides of Uwaifo, the former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, *Olusegun Obasanjo*, Letter 3, is very important. He characterizes Uwaifo thus:

Olusegun Obasanjo

Agbe L'oba House, Quarry Road, Ibara
P. O. Box 2286, Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria.

February 8, 2011

Prof. Victor Uwaifo, MGN, JPP,
4-12, Victor Uwaifo Avenue,
Off Ekewan/College Road,
Benin City,
Edo State.
Tel: 08034061495

Dear Victor,

CONGRATULATIONS!

I write, on behalf of my family and on my own behalf, to convey to you our best wishes on this happy occasion of your 70th birthday celebrations.

Over the years, you have steadily progressed from being a singer and guitarist into an entertainment phenomenon, an icon in the musical industry and a world renowned cultural ambassador for our country.

We salute your single-minded dedication to your art and the discipline which has produced a distinct classical Nigerian sound reflecting the nation's rich and complex cultural heritage. In many ways, you were a trail-blazer and trend-setter whose efforts and accomplishments spawned a generation of disciples some of whom have become stars in their own rights.

As a composer, philosopher, teacher and singer, you are definitely one of the rare breed of men whose work impacted positively on the lives of their contemporaries. Your music has entertained and soothed frayed nerves, lifted spirits and lightened moods.

Employing the universal language of music, you have promoted national unity and social harmony across religious and ethnic barriers. Your life and work have definitely enriched our nation and your State in particular through the distinguished service you have rendered as Commissioner for Culture and Tourism.

Indeed, you deserve accolades that have been heaped on you over time, which are an eloquent affirmation of your already assured place in the pantheons of the heroes of Nigerian music industry. I congratulate you and the Uwaifo family on this milestone.

We join you in thanking God for this life and wish you many more productive years of melodious music in the service of mankind.

Happy Birthday!

Yours sincerely
Olusegun Obasanjo
OLUSEGUN OBASANJO

Tel: 234-99-722419, 234-1773-242065, 234-347-722741
Email: obasanjo@uthao.com

The great artist is always in the circle of government top functionaries. Here, *President Olusegun Obasanjo and Victor Uwaifo* (Fig.145) he poses with the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria at the Presidential Villa, Abuja, in 2003. The artist's political career has bearing in his style of



Fig. 155: President Olusegun Obasanjo and Victor Uwaifo.
© Victor Uwaifo, 2003.

administration. *Managing Art Institutions in Nigeria* by Muyiwa Awodiya has an insight into the nature of the artist's art administration. It reveals that art management, especially as it concerns Uwaifo as the organization and coordination of the various people working together in order to achieve arts goals and objectives. It also describes art management in Nigeria as a complex organic system that has been shaped by some major trends over the past years. These trends, according to Awodiya, pose challenges for effective coordination and consolidation of institutions. He adds that the trends which contribute significantly to make arts industry in Nigeria to boom include education, economy, prosperity, culture and infrastructures. Others are demographic change, private sector initiative, societal values, leisure time, growth of arts industry, audience size, decreased government funding and the political environment. By extension, Awodiya gives the general art survey of the great artist, Uwaifo.⁸

One good thing about Uwaifo is how he is critical about the state of the economy in relation to art, which endears his style of administration to many people. He examines the level of economic and artistic performances when critical issues of management and administration are involved. He also involves himself in serious managerial function such as planning, organizing, staffing and control in his art studio and gallery. In his managerial capacity, the artist influences art management in some universities. Art managers of some universities, which run institutional art galleries, consult this great artist. His studio and art gallery offer consultation services to art students, artists and art teachers.¹³ In fact, the research opportunity that his gallery and art studio offer to the academy is priceless. Uwaifo as a lecturer teaches and manages visual art. He takes care of the commercial and administrative aspects of visual art production effectively. He extends the administration to music where he

also performs creditably. He introduces entrepreneurship training to his studio and gallery where trainees acquire skills in basic management and financial management.⁹

The good art manager conveniently transfers his experiences to undergraduates who become self-employed on graduation. He observes self-discipline, determination, hard work, planning and innovation. Previously, Uwaifo had been described as a good leader when he was still young. At Saint Gregory College Lagos, he was made the bandleader of the school band where he demonstrated his leadership quality. He acquired the knowledge of the rudiments of music from his school music teacher, Mr. Falana. This acquired knowledge prompted the school authority to appoint him to this prestigious position of band leader. At the Yaba College of Technology where he trained as a graphic artist; he worked so hard that he became a distinguished scholar at graduation. In the recognition of that he was employed in the Nigerian Television (NTV) where he rose rapidly to become the head of Graphics Unit. He clearly showed his managerial capability as the head of the unit.

In 1965, Uwaifo assembled a group of young and enthusiastic musicians who assisted him in the advancement of African music. With his multifarious creative achievements, he was highly engrossed with the thought of making the difference as a bandleader. He successfully managed the the band and brought it to limelight.¹⁰



Fig 156: Victor Uwaifo and Researcher.
© Soge Emmanuel Olusegun, 2012.

In an interview with him, *Victor Uwaifo and Researcher* (Fig.146), on the success of that band, he reveals that he thought of various ways and strategies that

would transform his idea into reality. He adds that he was able to transform his dream into reality. He further explains that his predecessors sit while entertaining but he stands as a way of innovation. Standing to play, he continues, is one of the outstanding ways to rule musically the African continent in particular and the world in general. To entertain and rule the world musically, he then embarks on training the band vigorously and insists on his style. *Victor Uwaifo and Researcher* (Fig.146) shows Uwaifo explaining his role to the researcher. The photograph portrays the interviewee's confidence in explaining his role.¹¹

The training was total. Uwaifo believes that a musician must keep fit. Therefore, he introduces his band to swimming, wrestling, weightlifting and bodybuilding exercises. *Body Building* (Fig. 147) and *The Deep* (Fig. 148) show Uwaifo teaching the band by demonstration. While *Body Building* portrays exercise to keep fit *The Deep* shows swimming exercise also meant to keep fit. He believes that such exercises enhance perfect breath control and agility on stage. Uwaifo observes that he is the first bandleader to introduce a band manager in the Nigerian music scene. He insists that every member of his group must sing well and play one musical instrument very well. Victor Uwaifo, in another interview, confirms how he imbibes the culture of discipline in the melody band. He further says that in the past you weren't recognized as a band leader unless you could play waltz, quicksteps, rumba, highlife and every foreign tune.¹²

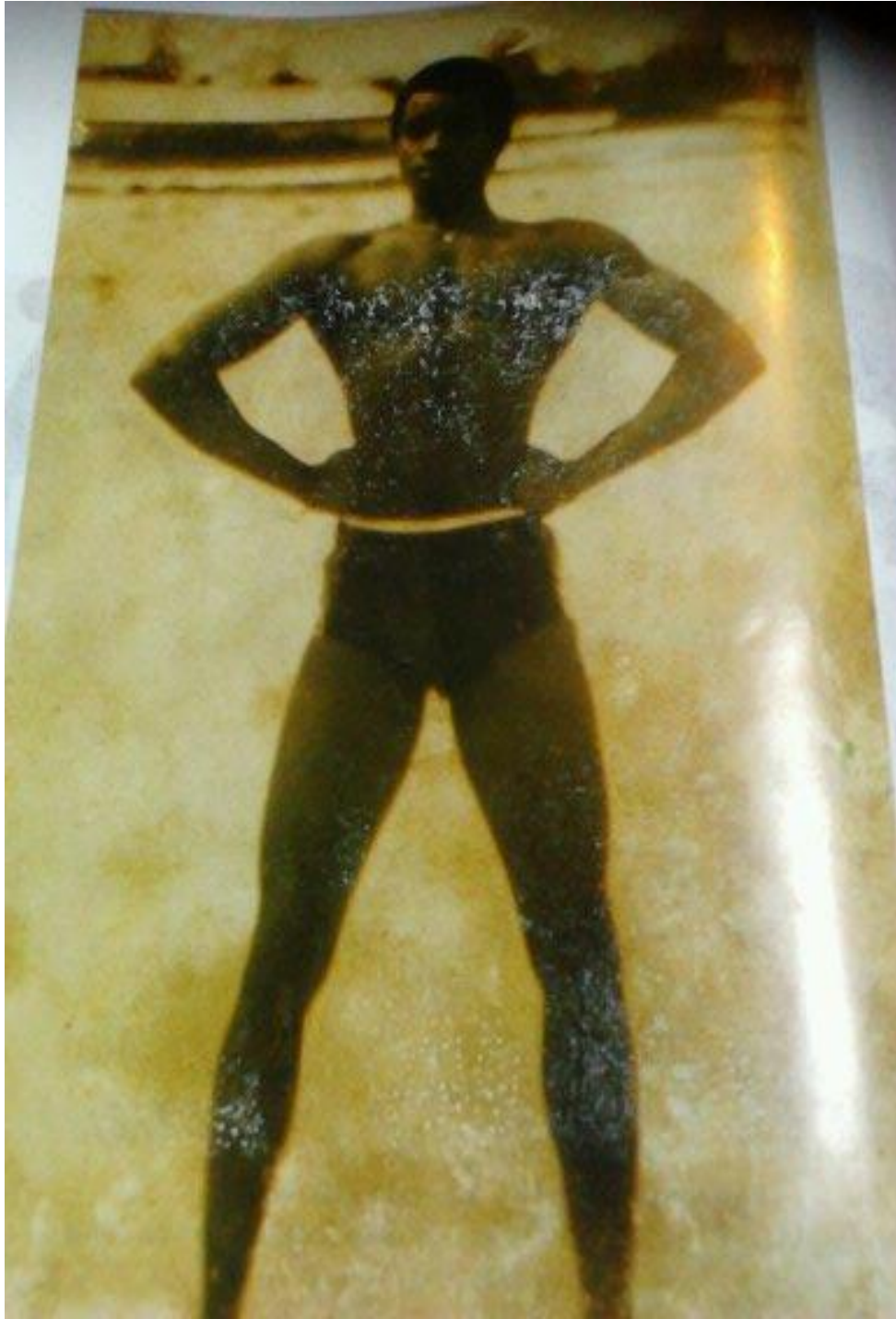


Fig. 157: Victor Uwaifo, Body Building.
© Victor Uwaifo, 1960.

To capture the essence of Uwaifo's philosophy and achievement in his public life, the critical reactions of some people are very pertinent here. He is also critical about himself. His own critical reactions also capture his person, achievement and philosophy:¹³



Fig. 158: The Deepô/Uwaifo teaching swimming.
© Victor Uwaifo/1960.

In *Making of a Living Legend* by Muyiwa Awodiya, Osita Osadebe, a Nigerian music icon, reveals that Victor Uwaifo is a perfectionist who will not take

no for an answer and that he is someone who gets what he wants. He adds that if some members of the band make mistakes, especially when rehearsing his songs, he will scold them and that he will not allow any member of his band to drink or smoke while in action. The music icon also reveals that while performing on stage, Uwaifo does not allow any member to take permission to urinate or eat. As a committed leader, and hardworking artiste, excellence was Uwaifo's watchword as he gives his best in any given work. Uwaifo is talented not only producing art but also in the administration of art activities.¹⁴

Victor Efosa Uwaifo, a professional artist and scholar, has a good knowledge of Benin culture. He believes that the Benin kingdom is endowed with natural resources that could enhance the development of the state if gainfully utilized. *The Blueprint and Strategic for the Benin Kingdom Economic Development* by Igbe agrees to Uwaifo's position thus: Benin kingdom is endowed with a lot of historical facilities, which are capable of becoming a vast industry that will employ a large number of people but that they involve huge capital investment.¹⁵ He states that the facilities include forest, rivers and human resource which could be maximally harnessed to promote tourism.²² He also exploits the usefulness of tourism as another strategic potential to poverty alleviation as well as rural development. It also observes that the tourist centers can also serve as a means for diversifying the rural economy, cultural promotion, employment generation and source of foreign exchange earning. Igbe further reveals that in 1999 a craft center was built and donated to the state government by the Nigerian Breweries Plc.¹⁶ Igbe's other identified tourist centers in the state include the palace of Oba of Benin, Ogba Zoological Garden and the National Museum. Benin moat, Ramat Park, Udo Tourist center, Sokponba Holiday Resort, Arakhuan tourist resort, Okomu wildlife sanctuary,

Ogiamienös Palace, Ikpoba river, Ughoton village and Okadi Health farm are still other identified centers.¹⁷

During his tenure as a commissioner for culture and tourism, Uwaifo discovered that Benin kingdom has a diversity of a remarkable physical feature, all of which had considerable recreational and tourist potentials. He observes that Edo State has almost the highest number of tourist centers in Nigeria. These include traditional woodcarving, cultural centers and historic places. Victor Uwaifo, agreeing with Igbe, explains that tourism is capable of becoming a vast industry which involves huge capital investment. He adds that utilization of tourism facilities would certainly reduce conflict and communal clashes in the state, such that the cultural affiliations of the people of Benin kingdom will be exhibited. He reveals that his development plan during his tenure had a tourism division manned by qualified personnel to handle all matters relating to it in the area. He also reveals further that the state can develop or set up tourist centers outside Benin City, where the Eco- Tourism antiquities could be displayed and the representatives of all the crafts and craftsmen in the kingdom could gather. To make a remarkable impact on tourism in the states, the focus, he observes, should shift from urban to rural area. He adds that this will pave way for showcasing the cultural life of the people and concludes that the need for educating the people to accept leisure and recreation as part of a normal life is essential.¹⁸

Uwaifo captures Edo State socio-culturally thus: A few facilities have been developed. There are vast potentials waiting to be developed. The commissioner advises citizens of the state to see the need to travel for purpose of relaxation since local patronage was vital to the development of tourism in the State. The blueprint was to make the Benin kingdom prosperous while successful implementation of this strategy call for unity of purpose and commitment from all segments of Benin

society. The commissioners suggest specific roles to be assigned to stakeholders based on professionalism and career track record. 'Our youths have deserted the rural areas, which were once thriving centers of culture. They move to the Benin metropolis in search of the white collar jobs which were however, not in existence.'¹⁹ They join bad gangs as a result the rate of crime increases. Do we spend our immediate future sitting on the fence, joining them if we cannot beat them? However, a promising future beckoned, inviting us now to hard work without which there can be no progress. No one should stay without employment in any circumstances, Uwaifo concludes.²⁰

He believes strongly that no one needs to be idle. He makes sure that idleness was not found in the Benin culture during his tenure. He advised the people to assume their responsibilities to enable them care for themselves and improve their living standards. The goal of his new blueprint was to galvanize, promote and stimulate his people into physical economic activities. It also serves as a catalyst for the mobilization of the creative and industrious people for community development. Uwaifo is creative like Onobrakpeya. As an artist-poet in Nigeria, he influences his colleagues and students with the art of poetry. His creative art engagement with Christian theme not only mirrors his idea of functionalism in art, but also tries to represent his concept of natural synthesis. Uwaifo's art works are relevant to contemporary practice. His art works have demonstrated that there is a possibility for verbal and visual dialogue in the creative enterprise. As a visual artist, he believes that art cannot be divorced from poetry. Victor Uwaifo's strong feelings for Edo culture and religion define the presence of deep spiritual feeling and beliefs that are well expressed in his art.²¹

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CHAPTER EIGHT

UWAIFO'S PHILOSOPHY AND REMINISCENCES

Writing Victor Uwaifo's philosophy of life portrays a third dimension of his artistic personality. Such attempt greatly reveals Uwaifo's exploration of his artistic resources. He is into serious writing, which began in 1985 with poems. His philosophy centers on people and their immediate environment. His writings probe the esoteric journey of life, especially to help the masses, free them from psychological and mental slavery, uplift them from darkness and ignorance, heal their wounds and develop their hidden will power. He reveals that he does not write novels but an anthology of poems, using rhymes and prose with some idiom. His philosophy of life is based on his experiences, which include logic, dreams, inspiration and vision. Victor Uwaifo as a philosopher creates numerous words of wisdom, true to life philosophies.¹ Some of his excerpts are very revealing:

God is the ultimate creator and artist. I am just a tool of implementation.

The graveyard is full of the best brains that ever lived the world goes on without them. So the world can do without the best and nobody is indispensable.

A man who thinks he knows it all can never grow.

All women behave alike; the difference is class and upbringing.

What the eyes do not see, the heart does not grieve and superstition is a disease.

There's no history without event. Time will tell.

Idle hands breed evil, to be happy keep busy, if you stay away from evil, you'll be far from sin for evil retards progress.

Promise and fail is a debt if it's a deliberate act. Music is an interpretation of so many vibrations of sound arranged in harmony pleasant to the ears and companion to man both in time of joy and distress.

Good ideas are like musical notes that create perfect harmony and they give birth to creativity.

I have something to learn always even from the foolery of a fool.

If we have one common enemy (laziness), it stands to reason that we think alike.

Everybody stoops for a penny, the rich and the poor and the banks accept not a million minus a penny.

When you nourish a flower it blossoms, when you keep your mind constantly in motion and feed it with good ideas it develops.

Time and chance could happen to attain stardom but not sustenance. Sustenance can only be achieved by real talent, hard works and distance.

Don't wait for your destiny to wake you up wake up your destiny.

I live not for yesterday or today but for tomorrow, history will tell the rest of the story.

The pendulum of a man's temper becomes slow to anger with age.

Your past can affect your present and your present can affect your future, be focused don't under estimate anybody.

Time runs after me, I take the lead that's why I am always busy and have something to occupy my time. Time wasted is time murdered.

Inspiration is like sound waves and vision, when in tune with your extra perception; it sends the right signals into your brain box.

Teaching you is good enough, but your personal experience is your best teacher.

Every bit of labour you put into life accumulates and bears and equivalent of every greater fruit of its benefits.

The best is yet to come. The worst plan is better than no plan at all.

A genius has no duplicate; he comes once in a life time, his successor's very unlikely.²

In the field of oratory, Victor Efosa Uwaifo delivers some philosophical speeches during high profile occasions and events like the 1984, at Rotary Annual Dinner, Benin City. Prominent personalities who visit his Revelation tourist's center called 'Palazzo- gallery' always make good remarks about Uwaifo's attitude to life. People make such comments about Victor Efosa Uwaifo's book, 'Philosophy of life', an anthology of poems. Dignitaries attend his events such as *Victor Uwaifo at 70* (Fig: 135), *Victor Uwaifo at 70* (Fig:136) and *Victor Efosa Uwaifo Discussing* (Fig.137) show dignitaries such as the Governor of Edo State attending Uwaifo's events and pouring encomium on him. An excursion into Victor Uwaifo's reminiscence at 70, reveals his service to humanity. Study reveals that he gives freely to people.

He is a silent philanthropist who sponsors some people to school. According to Roland Igbingie (aka Akabaman) during an interview, Garrick Aghabueze, an accountant of Igbinedion Education center, Benin City was a beneficiary of Uwaifo's philanthropy. Aghabueze attended University of Benin from

Uwaifo's philanthropy scheme for which he remains grateful to Victor Uwaifo⁵. In his own remarks, Garrick says, "What Prof. Victor Efosa Uwaifo did for me has been multiplied in ten folds, because I have extended the kind gesture to more than ten people. I pay their school fees." Mr. Osayomore Joseph also benefitted from Sir Victor Uwaifo.³



Fig. 159: Victor Uwaifo at 70 and Wife, while comrade Governor of Edo State, Adams Aliyu Oshiomhole Launched his new Album.
(C) Photograph by Soge Emmanuel Olusegun, 2011.

Osayomore presented a concert flute to him. Alabevobo E. C. Arinze, musician and bandleader, was Victor's employer in the early 60s. However, when Arinze retired from active service Victor began to pay him monthly as pension since 2007 and this will continue for the rest of his life. Uwaifo is very good in painting,

sculpture, mural, architecture and stained glass. He is also a good teacher, a good trader who is humble, generous, hardworking, humorous and humane. He has a vision and mission, which he shares with his students.⁴



Fig.160: Victor Uwaifo at 70, cutting his birthday cake, with his wife and family while Comrade Governor of Edo State, Adams Aliyu Oshomole joined the occasion, 2011.

His leadership qualities are not contestable. He is a very thorough and well organized man. He successfully combines his studio practice with teaching and

administrative work at his Gallery. He is always interested in the progress of his colleagues and staff, exposing many to local and international opportunities such as workshops, conferences and exhibitions.⁵



Fig.161: Victor Efosa Uwaifo and Comrade Adam Aliyu Oshimole, Governor of Edo State during the Occasion, 2011.

During his tenure as a commissioner for Art, Culture and Tourism, his generosity endeared him to his staff. He was fair to all, but very firm. He is very patient but can rebuke and criticize wrong and failure.⁶ The philanthropy, Victor Uwaifo, made tremendous contributions to the growth and progress of the school of Fine Art and Applied Art, University of Benin and the sculpture section in particular. As a teacher, he transfers his knowledge and skills to his students. He is an icon. He is a fulfilled man. Fulfillment, Uwaifo observes, comes when you are at peace with yourself, your fellow men and your environment. When we, he continues, try to be fair to others, life will be fair to us. He is committed to his family and deeply spiritual. Generally, Uwaifo progresses geometrically, showing depth of knowledge. His unusual insight as an embodiment of creativity in visual arts has marked him out as one of the most outstanding and creative artists in contemporary Nigerian art scene. He is a man of prodigious talent; a prolific artist and seasoned art critic whose art works adorn various private and public places within and outside the country.

He is a genuine, unpretentious and unassuming artist, a lecturer, a good leader who was humble, generous, thorough, hardworking, and humorous and humane.⁷ Uwaifo's diligence, hard work and exceptional performance in almost everything he is involved in has earned him accolades both within and outside the country. A good leader, Uwaifo says, is not just somebody who does great things, he is the one who encourages other people to do greater things. He successfully combines his studio practice with his teaching and administrative work. Uwaifo encourages students in the department, bringing out their best. He always shows interest in the progress of his students. He is fair to all, but very firm. He is very patient and incredibly tolerant. He humbly guides his students without hurting them. He is a teacher who allows students to make mistakes and then corrects later.⁸

He is undoubtedly a mentor to very many upcoming artists. He illuminates the path that many future generation artists will follow. He practically influences students on African philosophies and worldview. He emphasizes traditional African arts and aesthetics, exposing students to art practice and theory thereby providing the basis for understanding the practice. Uwaifo's art works show a myriad of styles, from his formative era to date. His artistic styles are powered by a dynamic interplay between skill, materials and creativity. The themes of Uwaifo's art works clearly reveal his thoughts and ideals, which run through socio-political to cultural affinity. Most of his themes express his bitterness against the wide gap between the rulers and the ruled, the rich and the poor, the privileged and the less privileged. The themes crusade against corruption, bad leadership and bad policies and even the general laxity on the part of the led. Some of his art works even express the consequent hardship experienced by the down trodden. Some of these works include, *Help*, (wood sculpture, 1994), *Better to give* (cement, 1994, and *Which Way Nigeria* (fiber, polythene resin, 1996).⁹

Uwaifo's dedication and commitment to art has been total. He explores indigenous forms and materials in order to subject them to contemporary interpretation. As a versatile culture enthusiast and good draughtsman, his art works show high technical proficiency and embodiment of creative experimentation. He speaks to his audience through artistic expression, using different media. His art works are visual metaphoric that portray the aesthetic value inherent in traditional Benin art. Uwaifo contributes immensely to the growth of art in Nigeria. Today, some of his works are a source of inspiration to many young artists. He is influencing the course of Nigerian art through art bodies and the institutions where he works. Uwaifo is very popular in music. Therefore, it is difficult many people to believe that

Victor Uwaifo is a visual artist and art lecturer. Rather many people know him as a renowned musician. He is a man from humble beginning who rose to prominence through hard work and love for his fellow men. As a critic, his critical experiences have led to standard in art practice and theory. A self-critic, is a perfectionist. His works command respect, using African indigenous traditions for inspiration.¹⁰

Victor Uwaifo is a very good administrator, scholar and a good leader that believes in equal rights and fairness. He is a very pleasant man; he does not hurt anybody. Though very strict in dealing with his fellowmen, he shows good understanding. He is not power drunk, but uses his office well and does not claim to have a monopoly of knowledge. He believes in discussing ideas and not people. He is a good motivator and a role model to many people. The Benin people are curious about the artistic genius of Victor Uwaifo. Some acquaintances of Uwaifo reveal their critical experiences about him. One acquaintance of Uwaifo and who has been following his art practice, Ozokeraha, Ben. A., is a sculptor and lecturer at the Delta State Polytechnic, Fine and Applied Arts Department, Ogwashi -Uku. He knew Victor Uwaifo when he was undergoing his postgraduate degree programme at University of Benin, Benin City. He is critically rewarding:¹¹

Victor Uwaifo is a sculptor and a musician whose art works enfold space, penetrate deeply into space, using voids and holes. His art works are full of interplay of concavity, convexity and warp surfaces. Victor Uwaifo's art piece at Ekenwa Campus titled *Oba Esigie* 1504-1550 is an example of volume and space. Indeed, it is more of a spatial sculpture; it enfolds space with an open hole and a hand thrusting into space. This art work represents spatial sculpture. Another art piece done by Victor Uwaifo is a bust of former Nigerian civilian President Alhaji Shehu Shagari. It represents a class of realism and mastery of forms, a clear advance study

of human forms. Thematically, his art works display the culture and tradition of the Edo people. His work projects Benin worldview. His work speaks loud of Benin court art. In his works, you can see mythology, folklore, story or fable of Bini.¹²

When he was a student in his undergraduate days and at the Post-graduate School, Uwaifo did not miss his lectures. Even as a student, his art works and themes were masterly, folkloristic and a voice of tradition. The works were exceptionally expressive, especially in the articulation of themes and materials. Victor Uwaifo contributes the much that the foreigners know about Benin Empire through his visual art and music. As a versatile artist, he has great interest in professionalism and professionalization.¹⁹ Dr. Mrs. Funke Ifeta, a sculptor, Senior Lecture and former head of the Department of Creative Arts, Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun Ijebu Ode, is another acquaintance of Uwaifo. She is also critical about Uwaifo:¹³

Victor Uwaifo is an artist who contributes his quota to the artistic and cultural development in modern Nigerian Art experiences. Many of his works are monumental such as *Benin War General*. The monumental sculpture is a male figure in a standing pose. It holds an *Ada* (traditional cutlass) in a diagonal position, which evokes fear in front. Though the art piece has a relaxed posture it commands fear that the *Ada* echoes. The overall frame and theme of war attribute attract and retain the attention of the onlooker. The treatment of drapery, which suggests movement further gives strength to the warrior without making the work rigid. This movement can be observed further in the vertically woven motif at the top of his cloak. It is further draped diagonally to the rib area of the warrior. This movement is further pronounced by the diagonal and serial lines raised to his left is contrasted by a plain right side of the figure. All these attributes sustain the interest of the onlooker and help in the appreciation of the work. Victor Uwaifo has brought upliftment, recognition and

fame to Edo people through his art works and music. His sculptures and paintings are great, they are masterpieces that inspire many people.¹⁴

Another acquaintance, Idae Babatunde, a sculptor and lecturer at Ambrose Alli University Ekpoma, is very pertinent here. He describes Victor Uwaifo as an art wizard. He is an art genius, philosopher, inventor and musician who strives to live ahead of time, and believes in exploring every aspect of his talent for the full benefit of mankind.¹⁵ He combines his mental and creative abilities with hardwork to achieve this remarkable status of an inventor. He cites Victor Uwaifo that talent should be put into practice in order to ensure self-actualization. Muiwa Awodiya, Uwaifo's acquaintance, an associate professor and former head of the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Benin, comments seriously in his book on Victor Uwaifo's Biography, *The making of a living legend*. The book describes Uwaifo as a complete and perfect statesman, artist and artiste. The book also reveals interviews on Uwaifo.¹⁶ The interviews are from some of Uwaifo's colleagues including A. I. Izevbigie, Uwaifo's former lecturer and head of department, Fine and Applied Arts, University of Benin. He describes his works as an old wine that improves with time and that his sculptures and paintings are great. Izevbigie further reveals that Uwaifo's sculpture, *Oba Akenzua II*, is a masterpiece and that his art works are like his music, which continue to inspire many people. He describes vividly Uwaifo's *Queen Idia*, popularly known as FESTAC Mask, as another masterpiece. He also reveals that the artist executed the *kinetic sculpture* as another of his masterpieces, which forms part of his contribution to the artistic development of the society.¹⁷ He adds that his *Stations of the Cross* in the Catholic Church across the country speak volume of Uwaifo's artistry, listing Agenebode and Ijebu Ode as some of the places where *Stations of the Cross* are sited.²³ The interviewee discloses that Uwaifo is currently

building a massive structure, which he calls *The Hall of Fame*, which will serve as a gallery that will showcase the evidence of some of his art activities. These will include sculptures, paintings and musical instruments such as gramophones, which he played from the 1940s to 1970s. Others include pictures of his international shows in Algier 1969, Japan 1970 and FESTAC 1977. He observes that *The Hall of Fame* will add to him international recognition.¹⁸

Another interviewee, aquantant, lecturer and former head of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Benin, Benin City, Ellis Erimona, reveals that Victor Uwaifo is a hardworking and creative artist. Another interviewee, aquantant, lecturer and former head of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Benin, Benin City, E.I. Ononeme, holds the same view of Erimona, adding that Uwaifo is a resourceful and imaginative sculptor. Franklyn Egwali, another interviewee, aquantant and lecturer, Fine and Applied Arts Department, University of Benin, discloses that Sir Victor Efosa Uwaifo is a man who for forty two years has talked, designed and molded virtually everything concerning arts and sculpture.¹⁹

Awodiya in an interview describes Uwaifo as a multitalented, creative and innovative artist. He emphasizes that Uwaifo stands as one of the intellectually creative, versatile and sound musicians of Nigeria. He reveals further that Uwaifo is a researcher who discovered the structural rightness in sculpture that stands without a supporting base. He adds that the artist designed and constructed a functional sculpture in form of an aeroplane house, which is now the largest man-made sculpture in Africa and second to the tower of liberty in New York, USA. He further reveals how Uwaifo sculpted a motorized giant kinetic sculpture; also first in Nigeria. He discloses also that Uwaifo is the founder of the Revelation Tourist Palazzo which

stands as the key to historical events, horrors, tragedies, the good, the bad, the ugly and the beautiful. The maestro unusual plays the guitar with his fingers, jaw, toes, teeth, from behind his neck and back. He turns the guitar 360 degrees, suspending in the air with amazing speed. He has been a recipient of national and international awards. Uwaifo is disciplined, amiable, the guitar boy and a devout christian, Awodiya concludes.²⁰

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CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION

The research makes various studies to establish Victor Efosa Uwaifo as an embodiment of creativity in Modern Nigerian Art. The study examines the nature of Uwaifo's art forms, themes, aesthetics, colour and design of his works. The study also investigates his critical philosophy and versatility in some areas of visual art. Uwaifo plays major role in the development of modern Nigerian art, striving to give Nigeria a cultural identity, particularly through his music and visual artistic expressions. Victor Efosa Uwaifo is synonymous with artistic ingenuity, being an epitome of creativity and versatility in visual arts. He has pursued his art career with zeal, unwavering commitment and spirited energy. Today, he stands out as one of the most well read and intellectually sound visual art practitioner and scholar in Nigeria. He is a sculptor, graphics designer, industrial designer and painter.¹

Despite all the above achievements of Victor Uwaifo, he has not been given any scholarly attention by art scholars. Apart from occasional journalistic reviews in magazines, newspapers and graphic reports in exhibition catalogues, nothing significant has been written on Uwaifo's real professional image and contributions as an artist. The research, therefore, finds it very pertinent to study his contributions to the development of modern Nigerian art, showing him as an embodiment of artistic creativity in Nigeria. The study, therefore, identifies some sources of information as primary and secondary, which serve as guide to some findings. The primary sources include oral interviews on the artist's biography, education and art background. The researcher interviews people with the help of a tape recorder and a camera, using private diaries, photographs and observations about the artist. Public galleries and his

private letters and documented films were useful. The secondary sources of information were from published and unpublished materials like books, journals, exhibition catalogues, theses, dissertations, projects, proposals, seminar papers as well as magazines and newspapers.²

To guide the study, some specific objectives were set up as a framework. They include the documentation of Victor Efosa Uwaifo's biography, showing how he has distinguished himself as an embodiment of creativity in Nigerian art. It examines all the creative disciplines that have brought versatility to his profession. It also identifies all the creative expressions that made him unique in the modern art tradition. His stylistic and thematic dynamism are explored. Uwaifo's influence on modern Nigerian art and the general public are examined. Lastly, he promotes tourism in Nigeria.³

The research establishes the findings on the objectives. The research reveals that Victor Uwaifo is an embodiment of creativity and a versatile artist in modern Nigerian art. He creates works with different art media with equal dexterity and proficiency. Thematically, Victor Uwaifo uses *Bini* cultural language and philosophy to create naturalistic works of art.⁴ His art speaks loud and clear of the Benin worldview. His art works use the Benin philosophy and age-long artistic expression for which the *Binis* are known to glorify the court. Many of his works capture the magnificence of the king. His expression of Benin contemporary artistic philosophy signifies spiritual powers, strength and authority of the *Oba* who is divine and whose instructions are carried out without questioning. Chris Ogiemwonyi aptly captures him in December 25 2009 thus:

I wish I came earlier. But very glad I came here on a Christmas day. I saw our culture well displayed. Prof. Uwaifo, I congratulate you and ask our God to grant you more years to help grow and sustain our great culture. Going through the Tourist Palazzo, I found myself in a beautiful planet, now out I am back to reality. Prof., thanks for the opportunity granted me to visit.⁵

The artist marries sculpture with architecture. His works of art are not limited to plastic and pictorial art but that architecture is an integral part of the arts. The Palazzo and the aeroplane house are great, fascinating and rewarding. Uwaifo is no mean artist; a man of many sides who is equally competent in all his areas of versatility. He is a socio-cultural man who attempts to bridge the gap between the top government functionaries, the eminent people and the less privilege through art. His works teach success through hard work.⁶ Many great personalities capture Uwaifo, using the Palazzo as a model of definition. The governor of Edo State, Adams Oshiomhole characterizes the artist thus: "My brother, the Legend, a man of all season. I am very impressed with your effort and determination to contribute to the development of tourism in Edo State. May God continue to bless you."⁷

Prof., O. G. Oshodin, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Benin, Benin City, on behalf of the members of his entourage and management of the university also characterizes Uwaifo thus: I am glad to have visited the Palazzo today 14th January, 2010, which enriched my cultural heritage.

Please continue the good work and mentor our youth. These achievements need to be put on website and encouraged by governments at all levels.

God bless.⁸

Another great personality, the Commissioner for Arts and Culture, Edo State, Hon. Barr. Vincent Akhere, portrays Uwaifo thus:

My predecessor in office, a high life musical mastrio, a sculptor of no mean repute, a great teacher and embodiment of Edo arts and culture.

I congratulate you on this great feat, which I believe, will make Edo State foremost Tourist destination in Nigeria.

Congratulations.⁹

The palace is not left out in the characterization of the great artist. The Enogie of Obazuwa, HRH Edun Akenzua, on 2nd May 210, captures Uwaifo thus:

The impromptu visit was brief. The experience was unique. To get everything in, one needs a full day, at least. The story told here covers more than a thousand years of Benin history. I and the Enigie in my Company congratulate this talented genius of Benin.¹⁰

Uwaifo also excels in painting, printmaking, poetry and architecture, in addition to graphics and sculpture where he specialized. His paintings are portraiture, which capture great personalities, using smooth textures in a framed canvas. Uwaifo, a graphic designer, combines posters with printmaking. His posters use words and images as illustration with the deployment of colours in an intensive state. His printmaking style evolves the printmaking techniques he learnt in Yaba College of Technology. One of the pioneering professional designers in Edo State, he uses posters and printmaking to inform, remind and educate the public. He deploys colours, forms and words to create posters that are simple, informative, interesting and stimulating. With this, Uwaifo agrees with Enwonwu stated; ól would not agree

that most of my works come from my inner self. I paint landscapes, commonplace things and portraits. All that come from my inner self is the result of my analyses of nature¹¹

Stylistically, Victor Efosa Uwaifo realistically expresses Benin culture in his works. To capture Uwaifo's style vividly, the research must return to Ozokeraha. He aptly captures the artist thus:

Victor Uwaifo is a sculptor and a musician whose art works enfold space, penetrate deeply into space, using voids and holes. His art works are full of interplay of concavity, convexity and warp surfaces. Victor Uwaifo's art piece at Ekenwa Campus titled *Oba Esigie, 1504-1550*, is an example of volume and space. Indeed, it is more of a spatial sculpture; it enfolds space with an open hole and a hand thrusting into space. This art work represents spatial sculpture. Another art piece done by Victor Uwaifo is a bust of former Nigerian civilian President Alhaji Shehu Shagari. It represents a class of realism and mastery of forms, a clear advance study of human forms. Thematically, his art works display the culture and tradition of the Edo people. His work projects Benin worldview. His work speaks loud of Benin court art. In his works, you can see mythology, folklore, story or fable of Bini.¹²

Uwaifo's works of art fall under portraiture as busts, full-size human figures, which are naturalistic. He also engages in installation art. Some of his installation art such as the *Voodoo Room* captures the traditional spirituality of the *Binis* in the past. His installation art portrays rituals and occult. In the past, the *voodoo room* was a place individuals run to in order to seek information about the causes of their problems. The artist uses materials such as cement, wood, metal, planks, pot, horn, bone and colour to produce work of installation. He uses different art materials to

execute his works. Uwaifo's usage of media depends on the art forms he intends to produce.¹³

His styles and themes change with the type of art form in socio-cultural and socio-political dynamics. The king is central in his themes. His *Ovornramwen* is political. It articulates the British encounter with Oba Ovornramwen and the war that ensued. It relates Captain James Phillip's involvement in the war. The messenger was told to go and tell Phillip that he could see the king because he does not receive visitors during Igue festival and that he could come when the festival was over. However, the white men visited. The Benin people told them to go back but they refused. The Benin shot and killed seven out of nine. The remaining two fled and took the news home. On February 10, 1897 the British attacked the Benis and vandalized the palace. The Benis fought back from three flanks: Ughoton, Ologbo and Sokponba. The Benin troops were amazed at the military strength of the white men to which they fell. The palace was destroyed and the British soldiers looted more than 2,500 art works of bronze and ivory heads. The war was on economic reasons. They dethroned the king and sent him on exile to Calabar where he lived for seventeen years and died in 1914.¹⁴

Benin fables, legends and folklore take preeminence in his art practice. This is an accolade he got from music, which he interpreted with sculpture. He uses *Joromi Mask* to capture the folklore, this is about a *Bini* boy. Nothing was bequeathed to the boy except warning, that a mysterious palm tree in the backyard must not be climbed, no matter the situation. In spite of the warning, *Joromi* climbed the tree, and when he reached the top of the tree, he began to grow up mysteriously and found himself in hell where wrestling contest was on. The boy was a wrestling champion before climbing the tree. His sister who noticed what has happened to her brother

suddenly turned into unseen chorister and chanted a song, *Joromi O Omimijoro*. He engaged himself in a combat with various devils. As he matched the brute, her sister sang the song in more enchanting style to spur the champion.¹⁵

Uwaifo is philosophical. He lets the world into his worldview through his *Philosophy of Life*. An excerpt captures it:

The graveyard is full of the best brains that ever lived the world goes on without them. So the world can do without the best and nobody is indispensable.

A man who thinks he knows it all can never grow.

All women behave alike; the difference is class and up-bringing.

What the eyes do not see, the heart does not grieve and superstition is a disease.

There's no history without event. Time will tell.

Idle hands breed evil, to be happy keep busy, if you stay away from evil, you'll be far from sin for evil retards progress.

Promise and fail is a debt if it's a deliberate act. Music is an interpretation of so many vibrations of sound arranged in harmony pleasant to the ears and companion to man both in time of joy and distress.¹⁶

Through his excellent artistic exhibitions, many upcoming artists have been greatly influenced. Many artists respect him as a mentor and professional father. The artist is not selfish with his knowledge. Many artists in Benin look up to him as a role model. His aeroplane house is a tourist edifice, which promotes tourism, attract local and foreign comments. The new Palazzo Revelation Tourist Center is a museum of history, music and art in every right. His foresight must be commended. Conclusively,

the research has been able to prove that Uwaifo is an embodiment of creativity whose work are very relivant to the development of humanity in modern Nigerian art.

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