

## ABIODUN OLAKU'S PAINTING: *IN THE SPIRIT*; A CONTEMPLATION OF HEIDEGGER'S AESTHETIC THEORY AND AFRICAN AESTHETIC UNDERSTANDING

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### **Abstract**

*This paper is an attempt to explain the meaning of Heidegger's philosophy of art as a nerve of historicity, imagination and thing hood; it also argues that Heidegger's aesthetic imagination is consistent with African understanding of aesthetics. Heidegger believes that an art object carries meaning of its history and sociological factor of its creator and this disagrees with the Kantian theory that says originality must have no antecedents and no history but sensuous perception and formalistic theory. Abiodun Olaku's painting titled **in the spirit** seems to capture this realisation of Heidegger's aesthetic theory using subtle tones of colours in realistic painting to explain Heidegger's philosophy of aesthetics as well as elaborating on African understanding of aesthetic object as a means of reconstructing the past into the present. How much does Olaku's painting capture the history and the essence of the Igbo people through his painterly reflection on one of the Igbo people's foremost masquerades of beauty, this paper surveys Olaku's painting 'in the spirit' in the context of Heidegger's aesthetic theory contextualising Nigerian contemporary art and its artists. Can this painting unseal the imagination and understanding of Heideggerian aesthetic philosophy? The critical theory in phenomenological psychology was used as a method of reaching an understanding of individual realisation of the aesthetic object in Africa as a modern meaning of European concepts of aesthetics today, especially that of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976).*

**Key words:** Heidegger's theory, Agboghommo, African aesthetics, Olaku's painting title In the Spirit, new impossibilities

### **Introduction**

The broadness of aesthetics as a factor in formalistic art criticism is quite interesting and challenging to engage in, especially, in order to construct and construe the true meaning of an art object. Whether using the Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) formalistic theory or perhaps the phenomenological process of an African understanding of epistemology within the context of art object is the critical position in this paper. The two extreme logics of evaluating an object of art is the centre of interest in this essay.

The thinking of Kantian formalistic theory in art criticism, that of course, was self-appointed by Clement Greenberg (1909-1994) as the first modernist critic might not be a well thought out scholarship if it includes African art perspectives. Contemplations on criticism of paintings as aesthetic objects; or as an event in the historicity of Western culture (from the Greeks onwards as the foundation of Western thought and scholarship) is not a new form of scholarship within the practice of painting in the emerging Nigerian Art criticism forum. It would be good to know where this lies in

the new emerging society, so as to understand the position of painting practice and its intending scholarship in a contemporary society like Nigeria where a good number of the population are illiterate within the context of appreciation of art.

There are three distinct processes of reading an art object, which are quite compelling to know. One is Kant's formalistic theory of the nineteenth century made popular by Clement Greenberg in the twentieth century using the principle of design to evaluate the work of art and the other, symbolism which infers signs and meanings that could be associated to Susana Langer (1895-1985) could create understanding of sixteenth and seventeenth century European art criticism and thirdly reconstructing the history of the past using Heidegger's theory of aesthetics and phenomenology. These three methods provide three processes of interpreting and analysing works of art. Aniakor (2005) provides evidence of the first two and the last could be seen in the Heideggerian aesthetics theory.

What is the purpose of art criticism in the Nigerian art forum, for example-is it still the concept of the modernism introduced by Greenberg in the twentieth century; or perhaps, an old concept of symbols, meaning and representation or presentations art objects as an aesthetic and cultural meaning making objects? Most times, the understanding of aesthetics is based on the Eurocentric idea of beauty in art criticism, which critically does not go with African perspectives of aesthetics or art criticism. There is no understanding of art for the sake of art or perhaps art that is self-referential in African philosophy or criticism. Though the word *aesthetics* could be new among Nigerian art forum, it has long been with Africans before the encounter with Western civilization. Welsh Asante (1993) argues that if one says that aesthetics is the perception and understanding of beauty then it is clear it has long been with the Africans especially the Igbos'.

Aesthetics and its true meaning within the context of Heidegger and African understanding of object/subject dichotomy of object of art is the main idea in this paper. Understanding Afrocentric aesthetics or art objects in the mix of Eurocentric art culture would require the theory of dislocation of Africans from their present Eurocentric understanding of the meaning of art to a proper African idea of what aesthetics stand for. Any attempt to define it, is equally reconstructing or interpreting the history of mankind before the interruption of Western civilizations in Africa. This imagination is also echoed by Gabriel Okara in a poem: *piano and drums*, here piano represents the emerging strange culture while the drums is the existing culture and the hybrid impact on the poet and African as a whole in the new perspective that intends to dominate them.

Art objects in Africa are symbols of subjective reality within a society, they carry meaning of the gods, dignity and moral understanding of the culture and does not represent a single voice rather a collective authority and order of the society ( Trowell, 1957). Aesthetics draws upon the history, mythology, motif and creative culture of a group of people by virtue of its reflection of the image and symbols of its own group. The African aesthetics is responsible for an art that mirrors, resembles and echoes the creative ethos of specifics or the general African people. An African aesthetic manifests history, mythology and values that transcend time, geography and boundaries, and evidence in both surface and deep structure of realities. In effort to truly encounter with subject of African art object it must have to employ the Heideggerian phenomenological perspective.

In this light, the paper believes that phenomenological approach of Heidegger towards art object is similar to the understanding of art in the African context especially among the Igbos in the south eastern part of Nigeria; hence these two thinking process deals with the metaphysical presence

of thing hood which can be interpreted as being and time within the philosophy of Heidegger. The symbolism of African art provides platform for studying epistemology within African art form as a philosophical understanding of the western culture.

Martin Heidegger's aesthetic theory emerged in 1938, using the painting of Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890) titled the *Farmer's Shoes*, as a focus of his aesthetic theory. Since then art scholars like Aniakor (2005) have continued to scholarly contemplate what could have been in the mind of Van Gogh during this great painting and how he must have seen things around him and the function of equipment like a farmer's shoes in the context of Van Gogh's period. Judging from our relative understanding of the word *aesthetic*, how do we relate it to the critical theories of Heidegger's concept of aesthetic that emphasise –historicity, imagination, understanding and reconstruction of the past through art works like painting? Or the dialectic of art criticism by Aniakor on the two different popular parlances they are described as intrinsic and extrinsic perspective in art objects, (Aniakor2005).

In carefully studying and contemplating on the meaning and state of painting in Nigeria the paper have begun to appreciate that some contemporary artists might bear strong examples of projecting the Heideggerian concept of aesthetics. Perhaps, to understand the Nigeria Art forum one ought to go back to memory lane, to the beginning of the modernist period in Nigerian painting history. The fact of modernism helped most of their ideology in the visual arts to create new understanding of art which embodied the cultural aesthetics of the individual artists. *Dialogue with Mona Lisa* by Gani Odutokun (1990) shows the current dialogue of cross cultural aesthetic by the European and African Artists alike (Irokanulo and Gbaden 2015) but some of these artists remained faithful to the basic understanding of classical European painterly expression which is still taught in our schools till now (Irokanulo 2004).

One of such persons is Abiodun Olaku, the artist whose work forms the focus of this study. Olaku has created oil paintings that are seen in both Europe and American as a standard measure with the old Renaissance masters. According to Elkins (in Gbaden and Irokanulo, 2015) of all the visual arts, painting seems to elicit the most profound effect on lovers of art. Olaku's paintings are characterised by the subtle use of tones of colours and neutral colour (grey) and juxtaposed with warm colours that most times appear at the centre of a composition in depicting development in the rural and urban settings of Nigeria.

He is called *Nigeria painter of light* by the country's local art critics, mainly the news dailies, because of his mastery of the use of chiaroscuro on his painting surfaces. Olaku's paintings tend to reconstruct our sociological history and the rural setting of our living (Nigerians); tracing it to the origin and the essence of it all in the face of the advancing civilization. All the colours are well blended together in most of the compositional designs in form of circles. His paintings seem to evoke the Coubet's words *show me an angel and i will paint one*. His works seem to emanate from studies of photographic and later representing it from the artist's point of view.

This is of course, a strong stand point of the artist. The features of his paintings are most times thrown far off away from the foreground of the surface with a great narrative of the people that inhabit the landscape; this is to allow the viewers to appreciate his strength of stretching his colours into distance without losing the chromatic effect of the colours. The paintings of Olaku holds sway in Nigerian contemporary Art as well as Africa today, we can not successfully narrate the current trends in painting without dwelling much on his works. Not that it holds much scholarly value but a

contemporary monetary value in the Nigerian art market. However, this paper is of the opinion that perhaps, there is a strong belief of scholarship on the surface of Olaku's painting. Perhaps again, this paper might be able to establish that the paintings of Olaku after all have a scholarly value to rethink and construct scholarly theories on the basis of modern aesthetics using Heidegger's theory of aesthetic as a guiding light.

Heidegger's thinking is that the purpose of art most times is to reconstruct the past and give a better narrative to the historicity and imagination on what the past was and how to reconstruct it to what it is now, so that one can have better understanding of it. For Heidegger, the Van Gogh's *farmer's shoes* are an evidence of struggle between the earth and the world; ploughing the earth and the understanding of the universal law of withholding hunger. The shoes provides the experience of equipment and one eternal struggle between the world and the earth; in other word between abstract and physical, the farmer is an experienced person between these two realities. Taking his readers back to the time in Europe where there existed a real struggle to feed one's family from what seems as a difficult farming period. This is the simple understanding of his concept of aesthetics, it must be able to capture the narrative and the history of the society especially the makers.

The painting of Van Gogh *The farmer's Shoe's* serves as the framing of sure philosophy as a gate way to understand philosophy of a society and the makers of the work; by reconstructing their past in effort to understand their present and his idea of a work of art serves this purpose. In this respect presumably, Heidegger's theory on aesthetics and African understanding of art object and aesthetics seems to assume one single meaning of narrative and historicity. It is only now that I have realised that Heideggerian theory on aesthetics and the African concept of art are all one dialectical understanding of meaning and purpose of art. This means that a work of art cannot be separated from the fabric of a society, her history and her imagination of their past and present, following these intending theories of aesthetic by the Heideggerian school and the African art object perspective.

### Contemplation of this Paper

In the words of Welsh-Asante (1993): *the cultural dynamics of a specific aesthetic complexion.... an aesthetic which reflects the images and symbols of a culture exists in harmony with the cosmology of that society, thus facilitating the highest creative expression and innovation.* In this essence, Olaku reveals aesthetic that has meaning not as aesthetic of beauty in the understanding of Kantian theory of aesthetics (Bernstein 1992). Olaku's paintings seem to capture development in the history of the people, agreeing with the theories of Heidegger in the context of aesthetic which brings to bear cultural entities as an intelligential material that processes a metaphysical present that is coming to presence.

This assuming understanding of aesthetic is also in line with African appreciation of what is which *the art object, dance and musical rhythms* stands for in the context of African aesthetic. Olaku's painting of an *Agboghommo* masquerade titled *in the spirit* is a recreation of a masquerade in the eastern part of Nigeria that reveals a cultural imagination of a visitation of the spirit of the dead to the living – it is like the Heideggerian theory of the ancient Greek temple reconstructed to understand the present even better. This phenomena masquerade is a physical reflective of feminism theory in action and the painting of Olaku unseals this contradictions. A contradiction in the sense that feminist masquerade worn by men and intends to exaggerate the beauty and elegance of a maiden spirit.

Can Olaku's painting reveal Heidegger's understanding and thrust of aesthetic theory? Using this cultural entity like Agboghomo which is a symbol of beauty in the eastern part of Nigeria, recreating the philosophy of aesthetics by Heidegger? It is possible for this painting of Olaku's (*in the spirit*) which is the reconstruction of cultural setting of Nigerian people to capture and reveal the essence of Heideggerian philosophy of aesthetic, historicity and thing hood?

### **Objective of the paper**

The idea in this essay is to assess if the paintings of Olaku could reveal the essence of Heideggerian aesthetic phenomenological theory and the reconstruction of the Igbo's aesthetics significance of Agboghomo in painting.

### **Critical theory**

Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy that deals with understanding of beauty in various intellectual and artistic dimensions. There are various schools of aesthetics with different ideologies as to what aesthetic should focus on. Heideggerian school by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) was a German philosopher whose views on Art, language, truth, animality and life seem to have provoked a serious debate in the twentieth century Art dialectics. His submission of the *Farmer's shoes* by Vincent Van Gogh in his essay the *Origin of the Work of Art* is quite critical. There are three basic foundations of his (Heidegger) aesthetic theory, which was first presented in early 1938 and subsequently developed into a critical theory in his philosophy. These three sections of his phenomenological understanding of aesthetics are: *Mayer poetry*, *the Greek lost temple* and the *farmer's shoes* by Vincent van Gogh. These three sections draw and contextualise the Heideggerian philosophy of aesthetic on Olaku's painting. Does Art reconstruct the past and reveal tomorrow today? The critique of Olaku's paintings in this essay would reveal this understanding and locates the essence of art in this attempt: Using phenomenological theory as a method and theory to unseal the meaning and understanding of both the Heideggerian theory and African construction of aesthetic, reflecting this with the painting of Olaku, *in the spirit*.

### **Critique of the painting: *In the Spirit by Olaku***

*In the Spirit* is a painting created by Abiodun Adewale Olaku in 2007, depicting the Agboghomo masquerade a female spiritual being from the eastern of Nigeria. This masquerade symbolises the spirit of the dead visiting the living in the occasion of a burial ceremony of highly placed personality among the people of the eastern Nigeria. In this order the masquerades bridge the gap between the living and the dead, bringing the untold narrative of the unknown world to the earthly people. The unknown world here is the cosmology of the Igbo people and their Chi which is *god of the land*. The masquerade symbolises the height of beauty of the young maiden in the eastern Nigeria.



Title: *In the Spirit*, Medium: Oil on Canvas, Size: 51x40 Inches  
Artist: Abiodun Adewale Olaku, Year 2007

The painting is perhaps, one in the last of his series on his experience with the masquerade *Agboghommo*. *Agbogho* translates in Igbo language as a young beautiful maiden while *Mmo* means the dead, the spirit of the living dead or the masquerade, as the case may be. Masquerade is the representation of the gods in Africa visiting the living to find harmony on law and justice of the land. Also, a message of the gods of the land comes to be revealed, by the visitation of the Masquerade. *Agboghommo* is a maiden spirits masquerade performed annually during the dry season in the Nri-Awake people area in the Northern part of the Igbo people's ethnic territory. The aesthetic of the Igbos is signified by the whiteness of chalk of the *Uli* which the masquerades adorn itself with. The mask of the *Mmo* is white showing purity and beauty; the bearers of the mask imitate the character of an adolescence girl, exaggerating the girl's beauty and movement in a dance.

The painting was executed with artist oil colour on a canvas; size of the surface is fifty one by forty inches. The masquerade features from a dark background in an asymmetrical position leaning somewhat across the surface of the canvas. The body of the masquerade appears in orange with a touch of ochre colour with linear design across the body of the masquerade. The masquerade has a head gear that is adorned with the feathers of an *Ugo* which is an eagle; the *Ugo* represents three important points in the Igbo cultural institution. First, it symbolises the beauty, aura and strength of an eagle dignified among its equals meaning the masquerade is one of a kind. Secondly, *Ugo* feather bring to fore the metaphysical presence of an immortal being among lesser mortals. Thirdly, the feather of *Ugo* presents the rich, strength of the aristocrat within an Igbo society.

The face of the masquerade or rather the mask of the masquerade appears in pure white colour representing beauty and purity of the Igbo culture. The female figure has a grey blue cloth rounding her neck and also from her shin to the feet, with white covering on the arm and with small bells around her waist, that seems to create a celestial sound as the masquerade responds to the rhythms of a drum. The sound of the bells represents the present of the astral world around the masquerade to show her alliance with the spirit world. The dark background seems to suggest our

engagement with *death*, the thinking of death opens up the celestial world of the unknown to us and often the thinking of it terrifies us (humans) or the earthly elements and yet we are together in this and its possibilities is endless like a small ship floating on a deep and stormy sea. We like to think that humanity is on its cause of conquering the universe but art teaches us that we will never exhaust the possibilities inherent in what we call reality.

Reality is deep and stormy thus difficult to understand in one look just like the Igbo philosophy that says *one does not understand a masquerade from one position and perspective point, but by going round and engaging with it*. For the artist Olaku explained that a masquerade in general in Africa represents the ancestral guiding spirit whether it is Eyo, Gelede or Agboghommo. It is a guiding light from the ancient wisdom which guided our fore fathers before the interruption of the western civilization. For him the graceful motion of the Agboghommo and its interpretation of the feminism is the key to his painting. The masquerade is a symbol of truth within untruth elements in the world that manifest on earth.

### **Theorisation of the painting**

The basic problem, the paper have seen is that, the way art works function in the background of our everyday experience cannot adequately be described in aesthetic terms (as subject's experience of an art object). How the artist expresses such engagement with the subject of his art as the primordial level of his experience that often propels art (which is experienced or encountered with phenomena) into being and what is. The experience or the engagement of the artist with the subject matter is for us what forms his experience which represents his unseen world and his struggle to materialise this engagement as an object of art is the contemplative position of this writing.

A lot of Nigerians have created painting of Agboghommo from Ben Enwonwu (1917-1994) to the present contemporary painters like Olaku. The idea has always been to modernise our cultural understanding of masquerades into new perspectives. It is our thinking that Agboghommo is a clear vehicle and metaphor of expressing womanhood as a feminist masquerade even when it matters in the theory and the understanding of the womanhood as a living and expanding masquerade in the living theatre in the postmodern era. The womanhood is a complex entity that reflects the feeling and understanding of a masquerade in our imagination, it is often difficult to say what is really on the mind of a woman.

The Igbo culture presumes that everything in creation is dual that means there are the physical and the spiritual of any given thing. Which means the inner and outer forces, each component reflects a preponderance of either one or the other quality. Each factor must be understood in the artist's language of expression. Masquerade is of two kinds in the Igbo culture the ugly and the beautiful. The Mmo is re-enacting of death from the process of the living taking us to the circular of life and death in the belief of the Igbos. Agboghommo presents the beauty and the dead imagination of the Igbo in the form of a masquerade, which represents feminism and beauty within the cultural context of the Igbos. In that, it is a symbol of the past in the present in reconstruction of the understanding of life and death of the Igbo belief system and imagination; that is in the same understanding and imagination of aesthetic as constructed by Heideggerian school of aesthetic.

The lost Greek temple in the theory of Heidegger is an attempt to reconstruct the past into the existing situation of the present, using the elements in the past in building visible understanding of its features in the present world; in so doing re-exacting the history as a vital source of understanding the

present condition. The painting of Olaku draws the Philosophy of the duality of the Igbo masquerades into contemplation with the Heideggerian theory of phenomenology. Phenomenology employed by Heidegger supports the theory of duality which is consistent with the African aesthetics, Heideggerian phenomenology questions creations of any knowledge outside interpretative position which his philosophy stance for, his position and ideas in phenomenology became too abstracted and highly theoretical that led to unfolding into his philosophy of *being and time*. His position in *being and time* parted company with elementary phenomenology ideology into the complexity of *being and time* as a transcendental philosophy. The painting *in the spirit* features the motions of Agboghommo as it presents the essence of beauty among the Igbos with elegance of refined dance steps that invokes questioning of feminism within a masculinity society like the Igbo community, the uli drawing she bears on the Igbo culture as well as the African traditional beliefs. The general characteristic of the Igbo masks is their extreme refinement and delicacy of features of a beautiful maiden. This shows their understanding of what female qualities should look like within the Igbo culture.

The painting again began to question the feminism in the Igbo culture, if there is such existence in the modernism to post-modernist Igbo culture? The female figure in the cultural institution is quite straight forward to narrate. Let's refer to Achebe's writings in *Things Fall Apart*, *The Arrow of the Gods* and *No longer at Ease* and *The man of the people*. The female figure is a supporter of the male figure and does not take a front row in any culture or social matters concerning the family or society. Okonkwo admires the strength in his daughter rather than his son and had wished she is the son for him.

Feminism is foreign to Igbo culture and moral institution. The masquerade presents yet another window and understanding of the same culture; the female as a personification of masquerade in the world brings to bear another window of understanding the female person. Perhaps this would be clear in the post-modernist theory of *woman as a masquerade in a society*.

The fact that the painting is the framing of this contemplative exercise in the aesthetic and art criticism of Heideggerian theory provokes the thinking of this paper is to see, if there exists an understanding between the Heideggerian schools of aesthetic and the African aesthetic thought, especially the Igbo aesthetics that most times features masquerades as a symbol of understanding its theory of duality of creations in the Igbo popular parlance. For Langer (in Innis 2009), symbols and meaning make man's world far more than sensation. She insists *that our sense data are primarily symbol of human knowledge the exploration of which is the task of epistemology*-which is really all that is left of philosophical heritage. The Agboghommo is the symbol that brings meaning of the cosmology of the Igbo's universe into contemplation.

For the Igbo man exists in the truth and untruth, in concealment and un-concealment together. There is no separate sphere but one critical space of existence; instead, standing in the presumable truth is always in the confrontation with the untruth and the struggle for this realisation manifest in all sphere of life of a man. The more intensely he searches for the truth, the more afflicted man is confronted with untruth continue to afflict and conquer him. The truth disclosed by Olaku's painting, particularly *in the spirit* as a work of art, is thus ontological. That is, the tension between emerging and withdrawing that is visible in Olaku's painting implied conditions all artistic creation, which we have seen, thus goes so far as to claim the reading of Heidegger in (Thomson 2011) that:

The world is the self-disclosing openness of the broad paths of the simple and essential decisions in the destiny of an historical people. The earth is the



spontaneous forthcoming of that which is continually self-secluding and to that extent sheltering and concealing. The world and the earth are essentially different from one another and yet are never separated.

The concept of the Igbo beauty masquerade according to Aniakor (2005) is an ideal of feminine beauty which is known within the geographical areas of the Igbo. Aniakor informs that the in contrast is the female mask spirit known as *Agboghommo* the maiden spirit or the *ikorodu* by the (Nsukka) or perhaps *Okorosia Oma* by the (Owerri area) visual presentation consist of pointed nose, split eyes and white small face and a small opening, as mouth presents the spirit and the culture entity of the Igbos as a people in search of the truth within untruth. The spiritual being of the masquerade is the reconstruction of the spirit world and its visitation to mankind in order to help realise the inner truth in them from the untruth.

The idea the paper brings to focus is on the cross culture of these philosophies which is the African concept, *Agboghommo* is the platform of such dialogue and the Heideggerian phenomenological approach to the concept of masquerade in the painting of Olaku 2007. What philosophical experience do these two concepts bring to bear on the painting of Olaku's *in the spirit*? What symbolic meaning and historical reconstruction does this painting bring to fore in the understanding of Olaku's experiences of this female masquerade that most Igbo artists have tried to recreate in their paintings? The philosophical experience is that both the Heideggerian phenomenology and the African aesthetics shares similar platform of reasoning and perhaps the motion, linear design on the body of the masquerade and colourful attire costume must have arrested the creative emotion of the artist.

Olaku, being a Yoruba man by origin that comes from cultural opposite of the Igbo culture must have been enchanted with this uniqueness of the masquerade and the respect accorded to her among other Igbo masquerades which inspired him to create great portrait of the masquerade. We cannot truly understand nor appreciate that which does not ring true to us because of its natural or historical significance. When we admire something that is beyond our natural or historical reference, it is often because the object of admiration is the opposite of what we know and more than seeing as an aesthetically pleasing; we see it as awesome, exotic, strange or forbidden in this Olaku saw a wonderful masquerade that excited him and questions his artistic ingenuity to relief a pure aesthetic understanding from it; Olaku have revealed his emotion towards this masquerade to present his artistic experience with this being. Be that as it may, to realise that Heidegger's idea of aesthetic and African meaning of art seem to share a similar theoretical platform in understanding the true meaning of aesthetic and art object found in the African perspective and context, knowing that this philosophy also informed the twentieth century European art concept.

This theory and thinking seems to inform the new perspective of aesthetics that the African philosophy had propelled back from the early periods of the African Art existent before she had contact with the European perspective. The thinking of Heidegger's context of approaching art object through phenomenology seems to bring a clear perspective to this realisation. The similarity of these two philosophies could be looked at as thus: the first is the Heideggerian idea of the Greek temple, temple is a place of wisdom where thing and knowledge are acquired and the *Agboghommo* represents the past guarding spirit that visit the living to continue to keep the tradition of the forefathers alive. This is similar to the lost Greek temple; the two present the contact with the knowledge of the past to duly inform the present. This context clearly shows that the aesthetic that

Olaku brings to bear is the ancient wisdom for us to restudy and reconstruct our understanding of aesthetic again against abstraction which attempt to remove the works of art from the ontological background to which the works of art belong in the post modernism era.

### Conclusion

Having surveyed these two philosophies which empowered our contemplation on Olaku's painting *in the spirit*, we have come to realise that Heidegger's aesthetics theory and the African aesthetic perspective can be discussed on a single platform bringing historical and sociological contexts within the framing of aesthetics for dialectical contemplation. This brings the painting of Olaku to create a scholarly discourse from these two thought process that seem to have emerged into a single impetus perspective of thinking using a methodology of phenomenological perspective, that eventually yielded the artist's objective representation of *being and the world* of the Agboghommo masquerade.

Unlike the interpretation of Vincent Van Gogh's painting of *the farmer's shoes* by Heidegger, Meyer Schapiro (1968) a critic of Heideggerian submission on Van Gogh's painting concluded not just that Heidegger had melded several paintings together in his memory but he argues, that in so doing Heidegger could not bring to focus the correct philosophical content of Van Gogh's painting - Thomson (2011). Schapiro essentially argues that the shoe in the painting by Van Gogh belongs to Van Gogh not a farmer's shoes as Heidegger informed his audience but, the real owner of the shoe was not the essence in the submission of Heideggerian theory rather the usefulness of it. According to Van Gogh in Gauguin in 1888 the shoes signifies the artist's long journey from Holland to Belgium in search of truth in painting and the realisation of it thereafter. The shoe embodies the being of Van Gogh as a painter and his journey through time. The shoe was the carrier of memories of struggle to realisation like Heidegger informs with the idea of the farmer shoe which ploughing the earth and the realisation therein. What Schapiro seems not to realise or perhaps content with is the thinking of Gadamer (1960) argues,

That aesthetic experience may involve interplay between the subjectivity of the work of art and the subjectivity of the spectator. The work of art is not merely a perceptual object in the mind of the spectator but is also a subject which is capable of expressing itself. Thus, its mode of being is characterized by interplay between its functions as subject and object. It's being is changed as it becomes an experience of the spectator, and the being of the spectator is changed by experiencing the work of art.

Olaku's series of Agboghommo bring to focus the rich philosophical heritage of the Igbos' perspective of a masquerade as a bringer of life and death from their ancestral belief system. It also engaged the aesthetic philosophy of Heidegger into one philosophical perspective to bring the Igbo culture as a process of phenomenological thinking of *being and time* using the painting of Olaku as a focal point to this discourse. What this paper believes must have confused Schapiro is the transcendental position of Heideggerian philosophy on interpretative theory which he believe is the basis of construction of any knowledge, which art criticism a discipline set out to achieve. It is obvious enough that the Igbos' and Africans at large thinking towards masquerade is phenomenological in nature.

The controversy of Heidegger and Schapiro over Van Gogh painting of shoes, however, does not exist here what readily exist in mind is that this painting and the artist's intentions towards the Agboghommo is a welcome contemporary thinking in the practice of his painting. The painting provides vital information of the Igbo culture and point at the possibilities of new perspective that might evolve into a critical space to examine the *role of feminism as a masquerade in the postmodernist era* perhaps in the Igbo culture itself and bring to the fore a new perspective for critical debate.

Maybe this masquerade would provide a re-theorisation of the queer theory looking into the existence of females in masculine culture of the Igbo people. The artist is able to use this masquerade as bases of phenomenological contest at the wisdom from the past as a way of reconstructing the future moving African heritage away from Eurocentric that permit and interrupts African civilization in the modernism and postmodern era.

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