in the literature. Grootaers charts the stylistic differences and discusses the local naming of the carvings.

A Portuguese sixteenth-century description of a courtly ritual could possibly have taken shape in one of Siegmann’s pompeo, thus establishing a high-status environment for the figures. This is underscored by the finding of figures mounted on animals, even nowadays associated with nobility, leading Grootaers to the conclusion that the figures probably depict dignitaries. The fact that they are unearthed (and according to one source buried in a tumulus that could contain fifty figures) could point to a funeral context.

In the second half of his essay, Grootaers describes the practice of ritual recycling, a process that can still be observed among the peoples inhabiting the region. Through X-rays and CT-scans, the incorporation of stone carvings into ritual artifacts can be demonstrated.

In his final words, Grootaers emphasizes the dynamics of a culture that is forever developing, adapting, changing. It is sad that this point still needs to be made whenever African sub-Saharan civilization is concerned, and I deliberately use the word civilization in this context for, I hope, obvious reasons.

The final contribution is a more personal celebration by a lifelong friend and colleague of Siegmann’s. Evaluating connoisseurship as a disappearing value in academia, Christine Mullen Kreamer acknowledges the widening perspectives and interdisciplinary approach developed over the last decades; however, the gradual disappearance of connoisseurship might have led (as Herbert Cole remarked earlier) to the admission of high-quality fakes in museum and private collections.

In her final paragraph, Kreamer pleads for a renewed interest in field research in order to (re)assess and expand our understanding of African tradition-based arts, recommending to put the study of the object at the core of the artistic research.

The catalogue section provides an introduction to each of its collections of objects, and references to the articles in the first half. The miniature photographs there are half. The miniature photographs there are

Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonization in Twentieth-Century Nigeria
by Chika Okeke-Agulu
reviewed by Francine Kola-Bankole

Chika Okeke-Agulu’s Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonization in Twentieth-Century Nigeria examines the emergence of postcolonial modernism following Nigeria’s independence from Great Britain. He focuses on the arts discourse within Nigeria from 1957 to 1967. Because any discussion of postcolonial modernism must acknowledge Nigerian sociopolitical and intellectual landscapes, Okeke-Agulu grounds his thesis in historical context. He addresses art historical discourses that have shaped the reception of Nigerian modernism, and he offers new interpretations of the fraught relationships between the educated classes of Nigeria and British colonial administrators while introducing the thread of hope that connects each chapter (p. 2). Nigerians on the cusp of independence hoped for political and economic freedom that would be pan-Nigerian in terms of both representation and governance (p. 19). This hope had all but disappeared within six years of independence and Okeke-Agulu concludes his book by discussing how that euphoria devolved into ethnic regionalism and civil war.

Okeke-Agulu’s premise is that Nigeria’s artistic modernism should reflect its own origins, rather than those of a hierarchical Western system. He asserts that Nigerian modernism is a conjunction of the art and politics of decolonization and that the term “postcolonial” should be used not only to identify the literary discourse and practice that came after independence, but also the continuing realities of imperialism (p. 12). The author takes up debates raised by Simon Ottenberg in New Traditions from Nigeria: Seven Artists of the Nsukka Group (1998) and Olu Oguibe in The Culture Game (2004). Okeke-Agulu’s particular strengths lie as a first-generation artist and historian of post-independent Nigeria who can explain the lingering effects of paternalistic colonialism upon the Nigerian psyche. He provides new interpretations and in-depth historical and ideological analysis of how Nigerian modernism is intertwined with the sociopolitical landscape of educated Nigerians and expatriate stakeholders. He deftly utilizes the language of the colonizer to demonstrate how prevailing imperial biases became entrenched in discourse about African modernism. This is riveting.

The first half of the book discusses conflicts amongst artists and scholars living in Nigeria. While Okeke-Agulu makes clear the parallels between the intellectual ideals in select countries in Anglophone and Francophone Africa, he dismisses assertions that Nigerian modernity is a clone of imported Western ideologies. The second half of the book examines the Zaria Art Society, abstraction, and the emergence of other advanced-study art programs in Nigeria. The last chapter, “Crisis in the Postcolony,” raises questions about the legacy of modernism following Nigeria’s civil war.

In chapter 1, Okeke-Agulu draws parallels between early twentieth-century British colonial policies and those of the US after Reconstruction. In providing the complex cultural interplay between the ideas of self-expression in Nigeria and W.E.B. Du Bois’s call for self-determination, Okeke-Agulu broadens the argument across the Atlantic. He links mimicry, double consciousness, and “Ali Mazuri’s idea of a triple heritage” together, but says that all these concepts still do not adequately explain what he calls “the African strategy of becoming” (pp. 10–11). The author argues that because Africans embrace neither Western absolutes nor worldviews, terms such as “hybridity,” “homogenization,” and “syncretism” are similarly inadequate as explanations of postcolonial Nigerian modernity. Instead, he suggests that the artists create their agency through their use of a “compound consciousness that constantly reconstituted itself by selective incorporation of diverse, oppositional, or complimentary elements” (p. 11).

In chapters 2 and 3, in purposeful references to several other African countries and to India, Okeke-Agulu draws parallels between Nigerian nationalism and
self-identity and the larger pan-African and Negritude movements in Africa’s diaspora. According to Okeke-Agulu, Nigerian modernism owes its emergence to a triunevitate of pivotal individuals: Aina Onabolu, Kenneth Murray, and Ben Enwonwu. Onabolu, the first Nigerian to paint in a Western style, was an anticolonialist and held beliefs opposite to Murray’s, who promoted colonial nativism. This fundamental opposition, which started in the 1920s, set the stage for the post-independence struggle for power and for the first graduates of the Nigerian College of Arts, Science, and Technology (NCAST) in Zaria. To argue his core theory that it was Onabolu, not Murray, who was the catalyst for the ideas that the Zaria Society students would come to explore, Okeke-Agulu painstakingly details the rise of Natural Synthesis in Nigerian modernism.

Onabolu was the first known Nigerian to conduct reverse appropriation (p. 64). Zaria picked this up in the 1960s, but he had been doing it for at least forty years, before it was labeled anticolonial or nationalist. This, in my opinion, is why Okeke-Agulu’s research is so important: If the African was incapable of original thought, there was no way that Murray could have spurred that type of creativity. Essentially, Okeke-Agulu is asking why it is permissible for the European to appropriate Africa, but the reverse becomes mimicry (pp. 98, 99, 243). I agree with Okeke-Agulu that Onabolu could both be authentic and claim agency with the use of Western aesthetics.

Chapters 4 through 6 contain complex interplays between critical readings in history, literature, artworks, and the artists themselves. Chapter 4 details the growth of critical writings and exhibits. Equally revealing is the criticism of Ulli Beier by a Nigerian (pp. 147, 154, 196). Although Okeke-Agulu acknowledges the intellectual depth brought to the discourse by Beier’s work, the first time, we are witness to a thoughtful and serious reassessment of Beier’s ideologies. He does not dismiss Beier; rather, he suggests a more nuanced narrative on this scholar’s contributions (pp. 158, 166). Chapter 5 is focused on the careers of a number of Zaria Art Society members (p. 183). Chapter 6 highlights the Lagos art scene between 1960 and 1969 by detailing the conflicts (pp. 239, 234, 241–43) and vigorous debates (p. 236) that took place among artists’ groups. Comprehensive and enlightening, his analysis of some of the leading artists of the Zaria Art Society and abstract modernism, however, raises a number of questions. I wonder what cross-currents of modernism similarly existed within the workshop or self-trained artists who were interrogating the same issues. His selective study of studio artists (primarily male) and two-dimensional arts also brings up questions about the importance of female artists, as well as representational and other mediums including mixed media and sculpture. Three female artists are included, but Okeke-Agulu only selects elements of their work that support his larger narrative. Colette Omogbai, the first Nigerian woman to receive a British arts education, receives the most scrutiny (pp. 233–56). Clara Ugbohada-Ngu, the only Nigerian and female faculty member at Zaria prior to independence (pp. 82, 236), seems to be included primarily because her work within the author’s preference for abstraction (p. 127), and Afe Ekong because she wielded considerable political influence on the Lagos arts scene.

In the concluding chapter, Okeke-Agulu examines the “pathologies of newly independent Nigeria” (p. 260). He does not include artists who were not overtly trying to influence Nigeria through their art. Must all postcolonial modernist art be critical of Nigeria’s political morass to be considered postcolonial modernism? I have concerns about his discussion of how Uche Okeke moved his cultural center from northern Nigeria to Enugu, and later we read that the art of Biafra must await systematic study (p. 261).

Other locations do not receive the same level of attention as do Zaria and Enugu. Representational artists such Onabolu heavily influenced subsequent generations of representational artists, including Enwonwu and Grillo. This is interesting because Grillo, a member of the Zaria Art Society, was chair of the art department at Yaba Technical College, located in Lagos. Where is the next generation of academic artists who came after Grillo? Their presence would have been felt prior to Nigeria’s civil war, and discussion of them might have served to offer a more inclusive and thus more complete picture. Zaria begat Nsukka, but what about Auchi Polytechnic (established 1963)? Who else taught in Lagos or Ife? Does Okeke-Agulu believe that Nigeria has reverted to independent Nigeria (p. 261)? Historically complex, thought-provoking, and beautifully illustrated, this book is a valuable resource for scholars of African modernism and Nigerian art who want to unravel the messy and often uncomfortable threads of colonialism. It is not cluttered with complicated theoretical rhetoric, for which I am personally grateful. I eagerly await to learn how the threads Okeke-Agulu skillfully wove up to 1967 take shape in his continued scholarship.

Francine Kola-Bankole is a PhD student in the Department of Art at The University of North Carolina–Chapel-Hill. fkolabankole@gmail.com

References cited

book review

Photography of Personal Adornment: Photographic Techniques for Jewelry/Artwear, Craftspeople, Researchers, Scholars and Museum/Gallery Staff by Robert K. Liu
San Marcos, CA: Ornament, 2014. 160 pp., 50 color ill. $38.95 paper reviewed by Judy Peter

Robert K. Liu has published widely on diverse and comprehensive topics from ethnographic and contemporary beads, to aspects of jewelry design, manufacture and photographic processes. Over four decades, he has studied science, small object photography, and jewelry and model making. He has also extensively observed and photographed small animals. He draws on this extensive background to provide technical and pragmatic methodological