

Conflicting Interpretations in the Biography of a Modern Artist of African Descent

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ABSTRACT The author explores the uncertain history of the modern artist Suzanna Ogunjami Wilson, whose birth and death details are uncertain. She acquired a bachelor's and a master's in art education in 1928 and 1929, respectively, from Teacher's College, Columbia University, and from 1928 to 1934 she exhibited in the eastern United States, often with African Americans. If born in Nigeria of Igbo parentage, as all published accounts to the present attest, she would be the first African to exhibit modern art in the United States. If born in Jamaica, as U.S. Census records suggest, she would be the first Jamaican to do so. No actual birth records are available from either country. The author follows her marriage to a Sierra Leone Krio in New York City and their movement to that country, where she was the first person of African descent to exhibit modern art, and where she founded two children's art schools. Regardless of her birthplace, her remarkable record is important to African and African-American art historians and other scholars.

RÉSUMÉ L'auteur explore l'histoire méconnue de l'artiste moderne Suzanna Ogunjami Wilson, dont les dates et circonstances de naissance et de décès sont incertaines. Elle a obtenu un baccalauréat et une maîtrise en éducation des arts, en 1928 et 1929, respectivement, du du Teacher's College, Columbia University, et elle a exposé dans l'est des États-Unis de 1928 à 1934, souvent avec des Africains-Américains. Si elle est effectivement née au Nigéria de parents igbos, tel que l'attestent tous les témoignages écrits, elle aurait été la première Africaine à exposer de l'art moderne aux États-Unis. Si elle est née en Jamaïque, comme le suggèrent les données du bureau de recensement des États-Unis, elle aurait été la première Jamaïcaine à le faire. Aucun certificat de naissance

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n'est disponible dans chacun de ces deux pays. L'auteur retrace le mariage de l'artiste avec un Krio du Sierra Leone à New York et leurs déplacements dans ce pays, où elle fut la première personne d'origine africaine à exposer de l'art moderne, et où elle a fondé deux écoles d'art pour les enfants. Quel que soit son lieu de naissance, sa vie remarquable est importante aux yeux des historiens de l'art et autres chercheurs africains et africains-américains.

There is no satisfactory resolution to the issues raised in this article. The reader will reach his or her own understanding, may accept the existence of unresolved issues, or may be stimulated to carry out further research. The question here is where Suzanna Ogunjami was born, which orients scholars to how her biography should be treated and how it relates to the larger world of African and Afro-American art history. Regardless of where she was born, her life story is unusual for her time.

Written accounts by and of the artist Suzanna Ogunjami, also known as Suzanna Wilson, state that she was born in Nigeria of Igbo parents. She first exhibited in the United States in 1928, so she would be the first African-born modern artist to do so, although I have no evidence that she made such a claim. This date is very early in the history of modern African art. Published accounts of her and her art have been accepted by other writers concerning her place of birth and cultural background. Much of her life was dedicated to African interests.

However, the U.S. Census and marriage records indicate that she was born in in Jamaica, although this is not cited in publications, and there is no evidence that she was known as an artist in that country. If she was born in Jamaica, she was probably the first Jamaican modern artist to exhibit in the United States. For scholars of African art history, questions of artistic priority are crucial when placing her in the historical discourse on modern African and Jamaican art.

The Artist and the Harmon Foundation

In 1960, Evelyn S. Brown, associate director of the Harmon Foundation¹ in New York City, wrote to the Krio modern artist Miranda Burney-Nicol (a.k.a. Olayinka Burney-Nicol) in Freetown, Sierra Leone.² Brown inquired as to what had become of the artist Madame Ogunjami, who “while not a native of Freetown, Sierra Leone, was the wife of an Anglican rector by the name of M. N. Ogunjami Wilson.”³ Burney-Nicol replied that she knew of her but had never met her and thought she was deceased.⁴ These letters led me to the Harmon Foundation archives in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, where I learned

that Madame Ogunjami's first name was Suzanna (also Susanna and Suzanne in publications about her). I will employ the name Ogunjami⁵ in this article, as she sometimes did in her artwork and other artistic activities.

Claiming African birth, beginning in 1928 and for some years after, the Harmon Foundation exhibited and sold her art with those of African American artists.⁶ In a statement for the Harmon Foundation, probably written in 1934, she wrote: "I belong to the Ebo Tribe. Both parents were members of the said Tribe of Nigeria, West Africa. I grew up in Jamaica and came from there to this country. I am interested in African textile work, the designing and weaving, also the manufacturing and dyeing of threads."⁷

Ogunjami's typed three-page version of her longhand statement, dated December 20, 1934, ⁸ is different from her longhand one, which is largely concerned with the production of African cloth and religion. Whether this difference is the result of a subsequent interview with her, or for another reason, is unclear. The typed version focuses on Ogunjami's career, beginning with:

My people were Africans and belonged to the Ebo tribe in West Africa. Both parents were from Nigeria,⁹ where I was born. I had no art training in Africa. I was just trained in general academic work in Jamaica, British West Indies. I grew up in Jamaica and came from there to this country [United States]. Subjects [of her art] are taken from what I know of Africa and what I have read. I read things and then visualize them and then put it on canvas.

On the next page Ogunjami states:

I have not been in Africa for a long, long, time. The memories of Africa I have are from my childhood. The conditions existing in West Africa for my pictures, are similar to Jamaica. There are some forbears who have continued the habits and customs of the tribes and the children still keep up these habits and customs of the tribes and still try to do the things they are taught in the way of making images and other things—Of course a lot of it has been lost. I am going into the primitives as far as I can so that people may now the truth about West Africa.

In a longhand statement for the Harmon Foundation, her husband, Matthew Norman Ogunjami¹⁰ Wilson, wrote:

My father's people are members of the Nupe tribe and my mother's belong [to the] Ebo tribe. I am a third generation Christian. My Father is the late Archdeacon of the Diocese of Sierra Leone, West Africa. My native name is Ogunjami. I came directly from West Africa to the General Theological Seminary of the Episcopal Church at 9th Avenue and 20th Street, New York City.¹¹

In another statement prepared the same year,¹² he adds: "I am a fourth generation Christian—that is my Great Grandfather accepted Christianity, my Grandfather,

my Father was a minister, and I am the fourth generation.” Wilson was a well-educated Anglican of Krio background from Freetown, Sierra Leone.¹³ It remains customary for Krios to have an African name, often from the Yoruba, as well as their English ones.

Art Training

In her longhand statement for the Harmon Foundation, Ogunjami wrote: “My nephew Francis Bowen, who is now in Africa, said I was artistically inclined and should study everything I could in Fine Arts. I took his advice and after completing the course in textiles proceeded with other subjects in the Extension Department.”¹⁴ She attended Teachers College, Columbia University, part-time for three years, while assisting her husband with religious matters, and then attended college full-time for four years. “Miss Elsie Ruffini, one of my instructors and my nephew Francis, who was then a student in Columbia College, advised me to continue my work as a regular student, getting what I could and developing what I wanted. I majored in Fine Art Education, arranging my programme according to the requirements.”¹⁵ Her first degree was in arts in 1927 and she took her master’s in 1928 with a fine arts diploma and a thesis on West African arts and hand industries.

In her typed interview, Ogunjami described how she was sponsored by the Harmon Foundation. “Professor Martin was my teacher and Miss Ruffini was his Assistant. They advised me to send the [oil painting] “Sunflower.”¹⁶ The Harmon Foundation’s 1935 summary publication notes:¹⁷ “Mme Ogunjami, wife of the Reverend M.N.O. Wilson, was born in Nigeria, Africa,” and on page 53 that “SUZANNA OGUNJAMI. . . Born Nigeria, Africa, member of the Ebo tribe, educated at Jamaica, B.W.I.” A single-page 1937 résumé of the artist in the foundation files, written after she and her husband had left the United States for Sierra Leone in 1935, lists her as “Suzanna Ogunjami (Mrs. M. N. O. Wilson),” and her place of birth as ‘Nigeria, Africa (member of the Ebo tribe).’¹⁸

Exhibitions

Ogunjami exhibited an oil painting on canvas between January 6 and 17, 1928, in the Harmon Foundation’s first African-American art exhibition, which was held in New York.¹⁹ Andrea D. Barnwell writes that “Ogunjami experienced considerable success when *Sunflower*, one of her earliest oil paintings, was included,” although the catalog only lists the work *Still Life* under the name Suzanna Wilson.

She appeared to be the first African-born modern artist to exhibit in the United States, although publications of the time did not make a point of it, nor did she.²⁰

The Harmon Foundation exhibited her *Still Life* between 1929 and 1933, but where is not clear. Between March 31 and April 30, 1935, Ogunjami's work was in the "Arts and Crafts Exhibition" at the New Jersey State Museum, Trenton, but no catalog is available.²¹

Ogunjami's art continued to be displayed by the Harmon Foundation for a number of years, even after she had left the United States in 1935. In 1936, one or more of her works was in the foundation's traveling exhibition where again it was written that she was "Born in Nigeria, Africa, member of the Ebo tribe."²² In a 1937 letter from Evelyn S. Brown at the Foundation to Ogunjami, then in Sierra Leone, Brown wrote:

Your work has been shown quite considerably and has received much favorable comment.²³ In December it went to the Renaissance [*sic*] Society at the University of Chicago for an exhibit were [*sic*] holding.²⁴ In March of this year at the Mulvana Art Museum of Washburn College, Topeka, Kansas, with a small exhibit of Negro work²⁵ and now one piece is in Kansas City at the Church of the Association and the other is at Dillard University with a very distinguished exhibition which is being held during the inauguration ceremonies for President William Stuart Nelson.

In the same letter, Brown suggested that Ogunjami might meet the African-American artist Richard Barthé in Sierra Leone, who "has made quite a success of his work," and was contemplating a trip to Africa. There is no record of such a meeting, although it is not impossible they met.

From December 18, 1961 to January 19, 1962, Ogunjami's *Full Blown Magnolia*, Ogunjami's best known work, was shown in a large Harmon Foundation exhibition of African artists in New York City, "Art from Africa of Our Time." The painting had been with the Harmon Foundation since the 1930s. The catalog caption reads in part: "SUZANNA OGUNJAMI—SIERRA LEONE—she was one of the first African artists to exhibit and sell her work in this country. She was born in Nigeria and is an Ibo. It is not known whether she still lives and paints."²⁶ The only other Sierra Leonean artist in the exhibition was Olayinka (Miranda) Burney-Nicol, mentioned above. The two never met. Another Harmon Foundation summary exhibition held at the Museum of the Philadelphia Civic Center (formerly the Commercial Museum), "African Artists of Our Time," probably contained a work of or two of Ogunjami's, though no catalog was available.²⁷

Full Blown Magnolia was exhibited in nine sites in the eastern United States between 1999 and 2001, in a major exhibition, "To Conserve a Legacy: The Art of

African Americans from Black Colleges and Universities.”²⁸ In the catalog, Barnwell writes: “In 1935 when *Full Blown Magnolia* was first exhibited it was described as mirroring the wild landscape, the exotic foliage and the unusual people of her native land.”²⁹ She notes, however, that magnolias are grown in the southern United States. (They also occur in the Caribbean.) She goes on to comment that the painting

... consists of a single flower in a bulging vase with purple undertones that sits on a table. The dark velvety drape behind the lone flower creates a theatrical tone, removing it further from its natural setting and placing it in isolation. Magnolia trees are common symbols of perseverance, sensuousness, love, beauty and refinement. Considering Ogunjami’s personal and aesthetic interests, it is understandable why she depicted the attractive flower.³⁰

In a footnote on the same page, Barnwell writes that Ogunjami was “born of Igbo (Nigeria) ancestry, [and] left West Africa for Jamaica at a young age,” citing Ogunjami’s 1934 Harmon Foundation interviews. In 1967, the year that the Harmon Foundation ceased operation, it donated *Full Blown Magnolia*, along with works by African modern artists, to the Hampton University Museum.

The Delphic Studios

Between December 3 and 15, 1934, Ogunjami held a solo exhibition at the Delphic Studios, 724 Fifth Avenue, New York City, “Exhibition of Paintings by Suzanna Ogunjami.”³¹ Ogunjami wrote that it was her maiden solo exhibition and

the work of several years of study. I started on the work exhibited after I had my Master’s Degree. With the exception of three pieces, everything else has been done since I left Teachers College. I decided I wanted to do everything by myself without criticisms or instructions. I very seldom went to an exhibition as I really wasn’t interested in them. Once in a while I went up to Wanamakers³² or different picture galleries just to see if there was anything new.³³

On the front cover of the exhibition brochure there is a black-and-white photograph of a painting by Ogunjami showing a seated woman with long black hair tied back in a bun. The woman is wearing a long simple necklace and a flowing light-colored robe. The dress does not appear African: it may be Jamaican. In the Harmon Foundation Ogunjami file there is a sketch by the artist of a female face with a similar hairdo. Beside it she wrote:

This is a rough sketch, but it tells the type. A Bust picture—purple waist, Head dress in rich yellow with borders of colours (subdued). The border of the headdress

shows life. Eyes—are rather dreamy. I consider attractive. I have mislaid the copy. I always make the whole outline and then put [it] on the canvas after my own rigid criticism.³⁴

The small catalog reads in part: “SUZANNA OGUNJAMI seems to have inherited the artistic side of her ancestors, both parents being direct members of the Ibo tribe of Nigeria, West Africa.”³⁵ Twenty-seven paintings are listed, but it is not possible to tell from the titles which one is depicted on the catalog cover, nor does it indicate the media she employed, although she often painted in oil on canvas. Some titles suggest Africa: *Nupi* [sic *Nupe*], *Princess*, *A Susu Beauty*, *Ekandayo*, and *Watching for the Caravans*, which may refer to African trading or slave caravans. Eight titles suggest floral still lifes, including *Sunflower* and *Full Blown Magnolia*. There appear to be no New York City images, although she had lived there for some years. Although Ogunjami was religious, only two titles, under the category of “Metalwork and Jewelry” suggest this: *Alms Basin with Some Stone Settings* and *Cross with Sapphire Setting Pendant*.

The number of paintings in the exhibition suggest a fair level of productivity and at least one of them was sold.³⁶ A black-and-white photograph of *Nupi Princess* in the U.S. Archives, Still Photo Division, is probably the same work as the one at the Delphic Galleries, unless Ogunjami created more than one work with this title. It depicts the left side of the head and left shoulder of a young, clearly-outlined, somewhat dark-featured woman, with a bright eye and wearing a round earring, a beaded necklace, and with her hair tied back with a cloth. We have noted that Ogunjami’s husband’s paternal descent line was Nupe, an important cultural group in central Nigeria. Another black-and-white photograph from the same archive, *Portrait Study*, appears to be a full-face view of the same woman wearing a large scarf in a band design.

Alma M. Reed, the gallery owner, a former journalist who had lived in Mexico for many years, was then exhibiting little-known Mexican modern artists, such as José Clément Orozco, Diego Rivera, and David Alfaro Siqueiros.³⁷ Perhaps sponsoring Ogunjami was part of a pattern of assisting artists who were not well known. Ogunjami wrote that her art was brought to Reed’s attention through a “young artist, Mr. Dobkin—who admired the paintings and suggested the Delphic Studios for my exhibition.”³⁸ This solo show was the crowning moment of Ogunjami’s American artistic experience.

A Study of Negro Artists

In 1937, the Harmon Foundation released *A Study of Negro Artists*, a silent black-and-white film based on the art of African-American artists it sponsored.

Filed in various settings over a number of years by the well-known African-American photographer, James Latimer Allen,³⁹ its aim was “to interpret the Negro artist through his background and the influences under which he is achieving today.”⁴⁰ Barnwell writes:

This footage is intriguing for the two reel film contains nothing on Ogunjami, but among its outtakes there are several segments concerning her. First, in contrast with the easily recognized and established artists, such as Richmond Barthé, Palmer Hayden, Lois Mailou Jones and Augusta Savage, Ogunjami was not familiar. Her presence in this film invites question about this unknown artist who gained such acclaim that by the 1930s she had a one-person exhibition. Second, since her paintings featured women braiding each others’ hair in idealized African settings, and portraits of Africans, her art stood out the other artists.⁴¹

Some of the African American artists that Allen filmed had indigenous African carvings in their studios. Perhaps this allowed for the acceptance of Ogunjami as an African artist, albeit a modern one.

The outtakes show Ogunjami and her husband at the opening and a number of her works. There are still lifes of white-colored flowers and *Full Blown Magnolia*. One image of tulips in a vase sits beside a carved African figure. Several of her portraits are on the gallery walls. One is of a light skinned, well-dressed, dignified young woman. In sharp contrast there is a standing dark-skinned nude, wearing a loin cloth and a necklace, with high-top hair. A genre painting depicts a seated woman preparing the hair of another female sitting on the ground in front of her, an image that either refers to Africa or the Caribbean. Another genre piece depicts a seated woman weaving multicolored striped cloth on what appears to be a backstrap loom. The setting is unlikely to be African because this type of loom is found only in two Madagascar cultures, although woman’s full vertical looms occur in various groups in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa. It is probably a Meso-American loom.⁴² Gallery scenes suggest that those attending the opening were mostly white, consistent with their role as patrons of African-American art.⁴³

Reactions to Ogunjami’s Art

There is no detailed evaluation of Ogunjami’s art: reactions to it varied, but were generally positive. Evelyn S. Brown at the Harmon Foundation, of course, strongly committed to this artist by her position, wrote in 1960 (years after the artist left the United States): “We considered Madame Ogunjami’s work of high quality in art and think her pictures we have here are very fine.”⁴⁴ A Harmon Foundation summary, possibly written by Brown, states: “Subject matter primarily African, interested

mainly in that country [sic] and in African primitives,” a statement that underplays her floral paintings. An earlier comment in the same publication states:

... her paintings mirror the world landscape, the exotic foliage and the unusual people in her native land. . . . Ogunjami had two interests outside of her painting—African primitives and religion. She has recently returned to Freetown, West Africa, where she hopes to remain to record the bright yellows and deep blues of her surroundings, and to aid her husband in the work of the church.⁴⁵

These comments, as well as others below, reflect the ignorance of Africa in the United States that existed during the existence of the Harmon Foundation.

An anonymous Delphic Studios’ exhibition reviewer wrote: “Painted in America, and done without models, her work includes many impressions of the American Negro.”⁴⁶ Barnwell comments that Ogunjami’s

work evokes powerful connections between ancient African art forms and modern Western themes. . . . The majority of her paintings suggest that although she painted a variety of subjects, she was primarily interested in religious education and in creating images that countered the idea that African peoples were uncivilized. Her paintings suggest that she wanted to depict the sophistication of African peoples and their preoccupation with adornment and physical beauty. Because she left Nigeria at an early age the subjects of her paintings were based on what she recalled of Africa and what she had read.⁴⁷

Howard Devree, reviewing the Delphic Studios’s exhibition for the *New York Times*, wrote of the “exotic oils by Suzanna Ogunjami, described as a daughter of the Ebo tribe. . . . Miss Ogunjami employs rich but well controlled color and has a striking sense of design.”⁴⁸ A press comment in the *Topeka Capital Times*,⁴⁹ as a consequence of a Harmon Foundation exhibition in Topeka, states: “Striking in its strength of character and handling is the ‘Nupe Princess.’” Christine Temin, as recently as 1999, wrote of *Full Blown Magnolia* when it was shown in a traveling exhibition of African American art, *To Conserve a Legacy* at the Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts, that it was “a mesmerizing image of pale petals, bravely flaring open, like someone come out of hiding.”⁵⁰ Freida High, an art historian of African-American and African art, reacting to written statements about Ogunjami in the Harmon Foundation summary publication on its African American artists, wrote that Ogunjami “was reported in stereotypical language that she was an Igbo,”⁵¹ adding that the “language used to discuss Ogunjami was disturbing.”⁵² Unfortunately, she did not expand on her views.⁵³

These are divergent reactions to Ogunjami’s art, although a sense of the exotic can be found in some of them and certain earlier quotes. Except for High, other commentators had probably never evaluated the work of an artist such as Ogunjami, and undoubtedly had limited knowledge of Africa and Jamaica.

It would be helpful to know the reaction to her work by African artists and scholars with whom she exhibited, but no such records are available. The African-American scholar Alain Locke, who was heavily involved in the promotion and study of the black arts and their African connections, although supportive of the Harmon Foundation's activities, seemed to have nothing to say about Ogunjami's art, despite a letter to him from Mary Beattie Brady, the director of the Harmon Foundation: "I am very anxious to have you see the two pieces of her work that we kept to use in connection with our traveling exhibition."⁵⁴

Some General Comments

Ogunjami's art was conventional, in line with many other nineteenth- and early twentieth-century women painters in the United States.⁵⁴ It was technically skilled in a traditional manner, with good control of line and image. Her ability to draw from Jamaican, African, and African-American life provided her with a wide range of materials.

Her art does not compare in quality or imagination with some of the African-American artists with whom she exhibited. Some of her artistic limitations may have been the result of her being trained in art education rather than in an art school. Although she exhibited with other artists, she seems not to have been influenced by them, going her own way. She is largely known for one work, *Full Blown Magnolia*.

Her art appeared in three American settings: with African-American artists under the sponsorship of the Harmon Foundation, in her solo exhibition at the Delphic Studios, and in the 1960s and thereafter, long after she left the United States, with exhibitions of the Harmon Foundation's group of African modern artists. (Some of the exhibitions probably occurred after her death.) Except for the Harmon Foundation's exhibitions in New York and Philadelphia, the organization generally focused on black colleges and universities, small museums, and private white secondary schools. Even the exhibitions in New York and Philadelphia were not at major public events. And the Foundation did not exhibit through major galleries. It is not evident that she had white patrons, as did some African modern artists. These factors limited public awareness of her art.

Her art did not concern issues of social justice, as did the work of some African-American and African artists. And none of her available art is religious in content, except for some jewelry, although she was a religious individual, working closely with her clergyman husband in his clerical activities.⁵⁵ There is no record that she decorated churches or other Christian religious institutions with her

work. She kept interests in art and religion separate, except for her interest in African religions. What her husband thought of her artistic interests is unknown.

It does not appear that Ogunjami was involved with the Harlem Renaissance, which was beginning to decline when Ogunjami was active as artist in the United States. Christian religious issues, of concern to her and her husband, were not driving forces in this movement.

Ogunjami and the African-American artists under the Harmon Foundation's patronage underwent similar experiences to what emerging modern African artists later encountered on their continent. There were the Oshogbo artists and their major patron, Ulli Beier in Nigeria, the Zimbabwean Shona soapstone sculptors and Frank McEwen, the modern Makonde sculptors and Portuguese colonial officials and Catholic missionaries in Mozambique.⁵⁶ The Commonwealth Institute Art gallery in London exhibited modern African artists' work, purchased some of it, sold some of it to the public for the benefit of the artists, and exhibited organized traveling exhibitions of this art. In all of these cases the patronage and control appears to have been primarily with middle-class whites, who made selections as to what to exhibit, as was true of the Harmon Foundation.

Ogunjami was fascinated with African material objects, particularly from West Africa. In her handwritten statement for the Harmon Foundation, she wrote favorably of African dyes, calling their use "Industrial Art," and admiring the Africans' ability to control color and set the dyes properly.

I hope I'll be able to do some fine art teaching on the [African] West Coast but primarily I intend to make some research in the Fine Arts of West Africa. What I know of Africa is from my childhood days. The conditions existing in West Africa are to a great extent similar to that of Jamaica, and as to my paintings the subjects are often from what I know and what I have been told. I sometimes visualize the interesting things I read about and finally compose and paint a picture of same. I never studied art in any form before I became a student at Teachers College, Columbia University, but I always had a feeling for it.⁵⁷

Ogunjami also wrote positively about African religion, though imposing her Christian views on some of it:⁵⁸ "In Africa there is a religion of a much higher conception of God than is generally acknowledged by writers on African modes of thought. . . . The African approaches God by all the various means which he has created. . . . He believes the power is in the trees, springs and so forth."⁵⁹

The primitives shown in my painting "The Sculptors" have spiritual meaning. People think that the African people do not know God, but they do know God and in their daily life they praise him. They believe that God is too great, is too wonderful, too exhalted [sic] for people to approach Him in an ordinary way as

the Christians do—they want to worship God through the medium of their sculptures—not as wood or stone.

Elsewhere she wrote “educated Africans and the children of the dispersion are acquainted with the art of Europe, but of the art of their own countries only a few know. The subject can by no means be exhausted.”⁶⁰

The artist’s master’s thesis at Teachers College,⁶¹ “The Arts and Hand Industries of West Africa: Their Social, Economic and Aesthetic Importance,” which appeared in 1928, the year she first exhibited her art, further reveals her views of Africa. This review made use of information and photographs from standard books and articles of the time, and perhaps from her husband. She focused on the value of what Africans made by hand and their close links to African religion. She hoped that modern African life would not destroy these skills. There is an idealization of indigenous African life in her writing, seeing Africans as simple, but technically skilled, peaceful and happy, with hints that Western civilization is not as happy and peaceful. Her views on African culture show greater insight than that of many writers of the period, reflecting a genuine interest, and a wish to be involved with African artists and craftspeople in their own land. But there is not enough information on Ogunjami’s own art to relate it to the African culture she discusses.

Religious Life

A major feature of Ogunjami’s life in America was her religious activities with her husband, under her married surname Wilson. I do not know what her religious beliefs were before marriage, but after she married she followed her husband’s Episcopalian faith. He was ordained in 1914 in New York City as an Episcopal deacon and a priest following four years of study at the General Theological Seminary.⁶² In 1916, he became head of the Chapel of the Messiah at 206 East 95th Street in Manhattan, which was a neighborhood changing in racial composition. It was formerly “a Chapel for white people, and a colored vicar was placed there to undertake work among his own people.”⁶³ Ogunjami wrote that the congregation was made up of “Africans, West Indians and Americans” (probably African Americans).⁶⁴ The Chapel also catered to black troops during and after World War I.⁶⁵ “Great gratitude is due the vicar and his wife for their establishing this work and for their undertaking along the lines of clubs and classes for the people of the neighborhood.”⁶⁶ In 1919, although no longer a student, Reverend Wilson was listed as president of the African Students’ Union of America at its sixth annual conference at Hampton Institute.⁶⁷ The couple lived in the Chapel and the

congregation grew rapidly. In 1919, Reverend Wilson wrote of the successful rehabilitation of the mission: “The untiring, unselfish efforts and devotion of Mrs. Wilson in everything that concerns the work—according to existing circumstances—is unparalleled. Without hesitancy she relinquished her position in the Public School, immediately after the work started here. . . . We have worked side by side in sickness and health.”⁶⁸ In 1920, Ogunjami wrote enthusiastically about the Chapel’s activities.⁶⁹ On December 29, 1925, the Wilsons lost all of their possessions when the Chapel burned to the ground during a holiday festival; there was no loss of life,⁷⁰ but Ogunjami’s husband lost a substantial collection of African cloth and other African objects. The congregation, still under the Wilsons, then met here and there in New York City, but it was disbanded in 1935 due to financial reasons and the lack of a permanent home.⁷¹

From 1927 to 1934, Matthew Wilson also served as missionary-in-charge of St. Simon’s Mission, New Rochelle, north of New York City, though according to the 1930 Census, the couple still lived in New York. The appointment terminated as a consequence of the dissatisfaction of some congregation members with Wilson’s leadership, his ill health, and the deteriorating condition of the mission’s building.⁷² The Wilsons were anxious to go to Africa and the Anglican clergy in Sierra Leone wanted him back home for service. Ogunjami wrote: “We are going back to Mr. Wilson’s diocese in Africa, and he doesn’t expect to ever return to this country to do any work. My main object is to be with him and help him with his work, and primarily to devote the balance of my life God granting, for the interest of my people on those lines established.”⁷³

Contradictory Information

The 1930 U.S. Census document places “Suzanne (*sic*) Wilson’s” name below her husband’s, who is head of household.⁷⁴ She is listed as having been born in the British West Indies, as were both her parents. She was thirty-one when she and Matthew Wilson married in 1916 and her occupation is listed as artist. Her husband was born in Sierra Leone about 1887, as were his parents, and he is listed as an Episcopal clergyman; no children are indicated.

Both Ogunjami’s nephew Francis H. Bowen and her cousin Lena Benford are listed as unmarried members of Matthew Wilson’s household and both were born in the British West Indies, as were their parents. Francis came to the United States in 1919 and Lena in 1917. What Ogunjami wrote of Francis Bowen is consistent with the Census.⁷⁵

In the 1920 U.S. Census, Ogunjami was listed as “Suzanna Wilson” and her parents as having been born in the West Indies,⁷⁶ whereas her husband and his

parents were born in Africa.⁷⁷ She had no occupation at the time and he is listed as a priest and clergyman. Francis Bowen and Lena Benford are placed under Matthew Wilson as before, with both parents born in the West Indies. The only discrepancy between the two censuses is that in 1920 Ogunjami is listed as entering the United States in 1906, whereas the 1930 census listed her entering the United States in 1910.

Ogunjami's New York City marriage certificate provides a wedding date as 1915 (not 1916, as in the Census).⁷⁸ It lists her as widowed, and having had the married name of "Suzanna M. Maclean." The certificate indicates that her maiden name was "Suzanna M. Scott," her father's name Benjamin Scott, and her mother's maiden name Sarah Reid. This was Matthew's first marriage; he is listed as born in Sierra Leone, whereas she is recorded in the census as being born in Jamaica.

The census and marriage records, consistent as to place of Ogunjami's birth, contradict her and the Harmon Foundation's statements concerning her birthplace, which the Foundation publicized from 1928 to 1967. Her story of Nigerian and Igbo ancestry appears to be inaccurate— unless she had some reason to hide her Nigerian past in the United States. Because her husband is listed as being from Sierra Leone in the 1920 and 1930 censuses, it is not clear why, if Ogunjami was born in Nigeria, this was not indicated. Possibly she came to Jamaica illegally or as an unregistered infant or child, and her parents changed their and her names and her birthplace for reasons they did not wish to reveal. Yet Ogunjami does not appear to have discouraged the published claims of her Nigerian birth. That her parents, her cousin, and her nephew are also listed as born in the West Indies does not strengthen her claim to Nigerian ancestry.

Ogunjami might have been born in Jamaica from Igbo parents born in Nigeria, making her claim of African links possible. Nigerians did migrate to Jamaica, and some of them moved back and forth between the two countries. But if she was of Igbo birth, why did she not take an Igbo name as an artist rather than her husband's Yoruba one (although he was from Sierra Leone)? She may have wished to please him, or there may have been some other reason. And if she came from Nigeria to Jamaica with African names, it is likely that they would have been replaced with Jamaican-English ones as occurred to others who migrated there from Africa. This would create difficulties in tracing her African birth surname, which remains unknown.⁷⁹

Her master's thesis does not discuss Igbo arts and crafts, although there was only a little in print on the subject at the time, and what existed might have been beyond her ability to locate. That the Harmon Foundation would knowingly build on a false statement of Ogunjami's Nigerian birth does not seem likely. A more reasonable assumption is that the Foundation accepted her word and was delighted to have an interesting addition to their African-American artists "on

board.” It appears that she wrote of her origin some years after she had evidently told it to the Foundation, because they used the information as early as 1928, although the handwritten statement is dated 1934.⁸⁰

Why falsify her origin, if she did so? Was it to make herself more attractive in her artistic work and as a person? Would it not have been enough to represent herself as a black Jamaican artist living in the United States in the context of modern African-American art, where she would still have been a rarity? If she was untruthful, her husband, a priest, would surely have known of it, through the publicity associated with her exhibitions. If so, he would have known and accepted the false story.

The evidence leaves us in doubt whether she was the first African modern artist to exhibit in the United States. If she was not born in Nigeria, the published record requires correction. If she was born in Nigeria, it is difficult to verify her claim of being African without knowing her Nigerian names and birthplace. If she was born in Jamaica, this would be difficult to trace without knowing the community she came from, for at the time of her birth most birth records were recorded locally; I have no record of her parents’ residence.

Yet Ogunjami was clearly an ambitious person, and she had strong goals aimed at knowing and experiencing Africa and changing it. She expressed genuine interest in Africa in her papers for the Harmon Foundation, in some of her artwork (e.g., *Nupe Princess*), in her master’s thesis, in her marriage to an African, in her contacts with Africans at the Chapel of the Messiah, in her wish to improve African education, and in her desire to live in Africa. She undoubtedly knew more about Africa than Mary Beattie Brady, the Harmon Foundation’s director, or her assistant, Evelyn S. Brown, so that they could believe her story without questioning her birth, what age she was when she left Africa, who traveled with her to Jamaica, and so on. Or, if such questions were asked, there is no archival record. Yet I am not fully convinced that the Census and marriage records present the full picture.

There is, however, no evidence of a persistent pattern of falsifications in Ogunjami’s life. Everything appears correct. There is no doubt about the reality of her other life events, insofar as we know of them. If she falsified her birth, she used that falsification to carry her through her career; she might have had a different of a career if she had not claimed Igbo birth. If she did not falsify, she had the right to employ her birth to promote her career, even if the length of her stay in her birthplace was brief. If Ogunjami was untruthful about her birth, her falsification is a serious issue. Yet, I wonder why scholars who believe it to be so should totally reject her life and art, for she had a most interesting career.

Unfortunately, if she did mislead, we have no evidence as to why she did so. Was it in her nature? Were there family or other social pressures placed on her

to do so? What role would her husband, a minister, have played in such a situation?

If she was not of African birth but Jamaican born, was Ogunjami the first modern Jamaican artist to exhibit in the United States? There were Jamaicans who came to the United States over time, and one or more of them may have been artists. However, the Jamaican art historian David Boxer does not mention Ogunjami.⁸¹ Email inquiries sent to six modern art galleries in Jamaica were negative; none had heard of her or seen her work. She appears to have been unknown in Jamaica as an artist, although she eventually returned there from Sierra Leone. The earliest Jamaican artist exhibiting outside of Jamaica was Edna Manley, who showed three bronze statues in England with the London Group in 1928, and had a solo exhibition at the Goupil Gallery in London the next year.⁸² In those years, colonial Jamaica's main links were to Britain and not to the United States. If Ogunjami was born in Jamaica, she was probably the first modern Jamaican artist to exhibit in the United States.

In Sierra Leone

A comment in a review of Ogunjami's Delphic Studios exhibition states, "the artist expects to return to Africa soon to do research work in the field of West African art with a view of presenting her findings."⁸³ The next stage in Ogunjami's life reaffirmed her African interests. In 1934, Reverend Wilson, lacking a position and with Sierra Leone's Anglican officials urging him to come home to continue his career, wrote to the Episcopal bishop of New York that he was "desirous to return to my Native Church. This I made known to the bishop about four years ago."⁸⁴ The couple arrived in Freetown in 1935, where he was soon involved with Anglican church activities.⁸⁵ The Harmon Foundation maintained contact with Ogunjami between 1935 and 1941, through which we learn that one of her aims was to found a school to "build strong character and to train our girls and boys, not only how to use their brains but their hands also, and to fit them for future useful service."⁸⁶ She developed a Freetown school modeled on the concept of industrial education developed at the Tuskegee and Hampton Institutes in the United States, which she probably learned of while studying at Teachers College. This model arose in the United States after the Civil War to train former slaves at a time when American industry was expanding and required skilled working hands. Led by Booker T. Washington, it peaked in the 1890s.⁸⁷ Thomas Jesse Jones, in a major survey of the continent's educational needs, suggested it would be useful for Africa.⁸⁸ "This form of education was believed by some to create happy and productive workers for the business trades, such as carpentry, rather than having

students learn Greek and Latin.”⁸⁹ The industrial education approach was a dramatic alternative to the British-oriented educational system then existing in Sierra Leone’s colonial schools, which focused on the classics, Greek, Latin, English literature, and European history.

Ogunjami’s school prospectus states:

We have Chapel, St. Matthew (Archdeacon Wilson’s Memorial) through which the spiritual life of the Pupils is looked after. . . . Among the subjects taught in the various Departments are the following: English and History, Languages, Mathematics, Science, etc., Physical Education, Special Subjects (Extra Fees) consult the Directress: Arabic, Hebrew, Instrumental Music, Commercial Course, Home Economics and the Arts.⁹⁰

Then she founded another school twelve miles outside of Freetown in a rural village where no British educational system existed. Art was apparently taught in her schools, although whether it was taught by Ogunjami or someone else is not known.

Ogunjami was also active in creating and exhibiting art in Freetown. She was probably the first modern artist of African ancestry—whether born in Nigeria or Jamaica—to do so in Sierra Leone. Other artists did not appear in Sierra Leone until the 1950s.⁹¹ Barnwell writes that there “she pursued printmaking: however most of her time and energies were dedicated to religious service.”⁹² In a 1938 letter to Brown at the Harmon Foundation, Ogunjami wrote from Freetown: “I am hoping to go to Liberia soon to exhibit some of the paintings I have here and to make a study of the art of that region. However, I shall send you what I can. Possibly two or three pieces will be included.”⁹³ There is no record of these works in the Harmon Foundation archives; whether she went to neighboring Liberia is not known.

Ogunjami held solo exhibitions in Freetown in 1935 and 1937.⁹⁴ In 1936, she wrote from Freetown to Mary Beattie Brady:

I held an exhibition of my paintings here in December. The Colonial Secretary, in the absence of the Governor, declared the exhibition opened by his presence. Individuals still come to view the paintings. I did not sell any, because as yet the people are not educated up to that standard; hence I did not expect that any would have been sold. It was only to give inspiration. In the history of the colony, such a thing had never been done before, and indeed, as far as I know, not on the entire West Coast.⁹⁵ It was a steady, continuous crowd of people every day for the ten days in which it was opened to the public. It seemed so wonderful to them. It is my intention, if I am able to use the school as an Art Center. This will take time and much work, but there must always be a beginning in everything. It even takes time to make people see how very necessary it is for them to use their hands.⁹⁶

It is likely that Ogunjami had influential patrons in Freetown—British and Krio—to support her several exhibitions, as her husband would have been an elite African in Sierra Leone, an Anglican clergyman, a Krio member of Sierra Leone’s politically dominant Anglican Christian faith, and his late father having been an archdeacon. No starving artist here. Although Ogunjami undoubtedly moved in circles of influence in Sierra Leone and had patrons who supported her exhibitions, she was apparently unable to sell her work. The difficulty of selling modern African art in Freetown also was to be a problem for other modern Sierra Leone artists later on.⁹⁷

In 1960, the modern artist Burney-Nicol, who was living in Freetown, wrote to Brown of Ogunjami:

She ended up returning to Jamaica and for all we know it is believed she is dead. Her husband, Reverend Wilson is also dead. . . . I have heard my mother talk many a time of a Mrs. Wilson, the artist, wife of Reverend Ogunjami Wilson, who held an open air art exhibition of her paintings in Freetown around 1934–1935.⁹⁸

Burney-Nicol does not mention in her letters or writings ever meeting Ogunjami or seeing her work, but she did know her husband. Eddie Davies wrote to Brown:⁹⁹

I remember her as a schoolboy having to pass her house to school and going to one or two exhibitions of her work in King Town where she then lived and in Wilberforce Memorial Hall. The Revd Mr. Wilson was curate of our church for some years after his return from America. Mr. Wilson died sometime in the late thirties and I left home for Nigeria and have never since then found out what became of Mrs. Wilson.

The date and place of her death in Jamaica remain unknown. The record indicates that Matthew Wilson was still alive in Freetown in 1952.¹⁰⁰

In Sierra Leone, Ogunjami was a pioneer in modern art and radical in her educational activities, whereas in the United States her art was conventional and her educational ideas were going out of date. Today in Freetown she remains unknown to officials in the Anglican Church, and the artists that I interviewed there in the early 2000s were surprised to learn of her existence. The Sierra Leone National Museum owns none of her work. Its acting director had no knowledge or record of her. Joseph Opala, an American anthropologist who spent over twenty years in Freetown and who was interested in modern Sierra Leone art,¹⁰¹ did not know of her. Suzanna Ogunjami left no artistic tradition in Sierra Leone, even though she was probably the first modern artist of African descent to create and exhibit there.¹⁰²

NOTES

1. Between the 1920s and the 1950s the Harmon Foundation supported the work of African American modern artists through exhibitions and sales designed to make their work better known, offering prizes for the best work (Mary Beattie Brady, “An Experiment in Inductive Service. *Opportunity* 9 (1931): 142–4; Harmon Foundation, *Materials on Negro Achievement in Art*, (New York: Harmon Foundation, n.d.). Between the 1950s and 1967 the foundation collected information on African contemporary art and artists, exhibiting and arranging to sell their work in the United States. Evelyn S. Brown, *Africa’s Contemporary Art and Artist* (New York: Harmon Foundation, 1966).
2. Simon Ottenberg, *Olayinka: A Woman’s View. The Life of an African Modern Artist* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2013).
3. Evelyn S. Brown to Miranda Burney-Nicol, letter, November 10, 1960.
4. Miranda Burney-Nicol to Evelyn S. Brown, letter, November 23, 1960.
5. According to the art historian Rowland Abiodun, *Ogunjami* is a Yoruba word literally meaning “Ogun (the Yoruba God of Iron) fought me.” Abiodun believes the term to be a contraction of *Ogunjami*, meaning “Ogun fights on my behalf.”
6. Harmon Foundation, *Negro Artists: An Illustrated Review of their Achievements* (New York: Harmon Foundation, 1935; reprinted, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971); Harmon Foundation, *Exhibition of Fine Arts: Productions of American Negro Artists* (New York: Harmon Foundation, 1928).
7. Suzanna Ogunjami, *Interview*, interviewer not stated, Harmon Foundation Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, ca. 1934, six handwritten pages. From the seventeenth to the early twentieth century “Ebo” was the common name in the Western world for a people later known as “Ibo,” and now sometimes called “Igbo,” the largest cultural group in southeastern Nigeria. See Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1976); Herbert M. Cole and Chike Aniakor, eds., *Igbo Arts: Community and Cosmos* (Los Angeles: Museum of Cultural History, University of California, 1984); Toyin Falola, ed., *Igbo History and Society: The Essays of Adiele Afigbo* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press 2005); Toyin Falola, ed., *Igbo Religion and Social Life and Other Essay by Simon Ottenberg* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2006); Toyin Falola, ed., *Igbo Art and Culture and Other Essays by Simon Ottenberg* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2006).
8. Suzanna Ogunjami, *Interview with Madame Suzanne [sic] Ogunjami—Negro Artist*, Harmon Foundation Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, 1934, three typed pages.
9. Although the British kept competent records of those entering their colony of Jamaica, unfortunately I do not know the African names of the couple, and so I cannot trace whether they came to Jamaica.

10. Mr. Wilson was a Krio from Freetown, Sierra Leone. The British-oriented Krio generally adopted an African name, often from the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria, even though they may not have had Yoruba ancestry.
11. M. N. Wilson. *Interview with the Rev. Mr. Wilson* (New York: Harmon Foundation, 1934), handwritten.
12. M. N. Wilson, *Interview with the Rev. Mr. Wilson* (New York: Harmon Foundation, 1934), typewritten.
13. Leo Spitzer, *The Creoles of Sierra Leone: Responses to Colonialism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974); Akintola J. G. Wyse, *The Krio of Sierra Leone: An Interpretive History* (London: Hurst, 1989).
14. Ogunjami, *Interview*, ca. 1934, 1.
15. Ibid.
16. Ogunjami, *Interview with Madame Suzanne [sic] Ogunjami*, 2–3.
17. Harmon Foundation, *Negro Artists*, 3–5.
18. Susanna Ogunjami, *Résumé* (New York: Harmon Foundation, 1937), unpublished.
19. Harmon Foundation, *Exhibition of Fine Arts*; Harmon Foundation, *Negro Artists*; Richard J. Powell and Jack Reynolds, *To Conserve a Legacy American Art from Historically Black Colleges and Universities* (New York: Studio Museum, 1999).
20. Andrea D. Barnwell, “Suzanna Ogunjami,” in Powell and Reynolds, *To Conserve a Legacy*, 217–8; Harmon Foundation, *Exhibition of Fine Arts*, 6. The only modern African artist who might have exhibited in the United States at such an early date was the Nigerian, Aina Onabolu. There is no indication that he did so, confirmed in an email of January 2009 from the African art historian Chika Okeke-Agulu. In the 1920s and 1930s Onabolu was in art training in England, briefly in France, and was establishing art education in the Lagos schools. There is no record that he had contact with the Harmon Foundation in that period. In 1950, sponsored by the Harmon Foundation and the British Information Service, he exhibited at Howard University and at a number of other eastern United States’ locations. Sylvester O. Ogbechie, *Ben Enwonwu: The Makings of an African Modernist* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2008), 105–106.
21. Gary A. Reynolds, Beryl J. Wright, David C. Driskell, Gibbes Museum of Art, Newark Museum, and Chicago Public Library Cultural Center, *Against the Odds: African-American Artists and the Harmon Foundation* (Newark, NJ: Newark Museum, 1989), 288; New Jersey State Museum, *Activities and Exhibitions 1929–1939* (Trenton, NJ: New Jersey State Museum, n.d.); Harmon Foundation, *Negro Artists*, 16–17, 53. Harmon Foundation, papers, small printed ten-line biography of Susanna Ogunjami, with the penciled note: “Harmon Traveling Exhibits, Aug 5, 1936,” Ogunjami file, Harmon Foundation, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.
22. Harmon Foundation, papers, “Harmon Traveling Exhibits, Aug 5, 1936.”
23. Evelyn S. Brown to Suzanna Wilson, letter, April 13, 1937.
24. Joseph Scanlon, ed., *A History of the Renaissance Society: The First Seventy Five Years* (Chicago: Renaissance Society 1993), 14. Among the sixteen African-American artists

- in the exhibition were Richmond Barthé, William H. Johnson, Malvin Grey Johnson, Archibald J. Motley Jr., and Hale Woodruff. Ogunjami was in excellent company.
25. The *Topeka Daily Capital*, March 14, 1937 stated: “The Exhibition of Negro Art at Mulvane Museum has received favorable comment regarding both the work of the Kansas Vocational school and the collection of oil paintings from the Harmon Foundation.”
 26. Harmon Foundation, *Art from Africa in Our Time. Paintings, Sculpture, Ceramics, School Childcare’s Art-crafts, from the Collection Sent to the Harmon Foundation: Exhibition at the Phelps-Stokes Fund, New York, December 18, 1961—January 19, 1962* (New York: Phelps-Stokes Fund, 1961).
 27. Harmon Foundation, *African Artists of Our Time* (New York: Harmon Foundation, 1966), one page announcement.
 28. Powell and Reynolds, *To Conserve a Legacy*, 98, 212–7.
 29. Barnwell, “Suzanna Ogunjami,” 217.
 30. Barnwell, “Suzanna Ogunjami,” 218n1.
 31. Delphic Studios, *An Exhibition of Paintings by Suzanna Ogunjami* (New York: Delphic Studios 1934).
 32. A premier New York City department store at the time.
 33. Ogunjami, *Interview*, ca. 1934, 3.
 34. Delphic Studios, *An Exhibition of Paintings by Suzanna Ogunjami*.
 35. *Ibid.*
 36. Suzanna Wilson to Evelyn S. Brown, letter, February 14, 1938.
 37. Alma M. Reed, *Peregrina: Love and Death in Mexico*, ed. Michael K. Schuessler (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), x–xi; Antionette May, *Passionate Pilgrim: The Extraordinary Life of Alma Reed* (New York: Paragon House, 1993), 227–47.
 38. Evelyn S. Brown to Miranda Burney-Nicol, letter, November 10, 1960.
 39. Evelyn S. Brown was the film’s director, Jules V. D. Bucher was director of photography. Allen was a well-known photographer of African American society figures. The film and its outtakes are in the U.S. National Archives, Moving Film Section, College Park, Maryland. The film, but not the outtakes, is available on the Web at http://www.archive.org/details/study_of_negro_artists.
 40. Reynolds et al., *Against the Odds*, 104.
 41. Barnwell, “Suzanna Ogunjami,” 218. There are nine outtakes in reel 6, with the images relating to Ogunjami in outtakes 4, 5, 8, and 9. Each outtake includes a hodgepodge of images, most of which have nothing to do with Ogunjami.
 42. John Picton and John Mack, *African Textiles* (London: British Museum, 1989), 135; Venice Lamb and Judy Holmes, *Nigerian Weaving* (Roxford, England: H. A. & V. M. Lamb, 1980), 170–264; Lena Bjerregaard, *Techniques of Guatemalan Weaving* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1977); Judy Ziek de Rodriquez and Nona Ziek, *Weaving on a Backstrap Loom* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1978).
 43. Copies of photographs of Ogunjami’s art and of her and her husband, and Ogunjami’s marriage license, the relevant portions of the 1920 U.S. Census, and what both

- Ogunjami and her husband wrote about themselves for the Harmon Foundation, are available at the Harriet Tubman Institute archives, York University, Ontario, Canada.
44. Brown, *Africa's Contemporary Art and Artists*, 10.
 45. Harmon Foundation, *Negro Artists*, 34, 53.
 46. "Artist from Nigeria Shows Art," *Art Digest* 1 (1934): 23.
 47. Barnwell, "Suzanna Ogunjami," 217–8.
 48. Howard Devree, "A Round of Galleries: Current Shows," *New York Times*, December 9, 1934, sec. 10, p. 8.
 49. *Topeka Capital Times*, March 14, 1937, 13B.
 50. Christine Temin, "Forever Free: A Remarkable Exhibit Tells the Story of an African-American Legacy of Art," *Boston Globe*, October 31, 1999, section N. I. .; Powell and Reynolds, *To Conserve a Legacy*.
 51. Freida High, "An Interwoven Framework of Art History and Black Feminism: Framing Nigeria," in *Contemporary Textures: Multidimensionality in Nigerian Art*, ed. Nikru Nzegwu (Binghamton, NY: International Society for the Study of Africa, Binghamton University, 1999), 195.
 52. *Ibid.*, 193.
 53. Mary Beatie to Alain Locke, January 15, 1935. At least two copies of the letter exist. One is in Locke's files at the Howard University Archives, where there is also a black and white reproduction of Ogunjami's *Full Blown Magnolia*. The other copy is in the Brady's file in the Harmon Foundation, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. By 1929, Locke had made contact with Brady and the Harmon Foundation, and apparently served as an informal advisory to it. Jeffery C. Stewart, ed., *The Critical Temper of Alain Locke: A Selection of His Essays on Art and Culture* (New York: Garland, 1983), 159, 178; Alain Locke, "The American Negro as Artist," in Stewart, *The Critical Temper of Alain Locke*, 210–20; Rose Henderson, "Negro Artists in the Fifth Harmon Exhibition," *Southern Workman* 62 (1933): 175–81.
 54. Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art and Power and Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 86.
 55. Ogunjami wrote: "I have been helping Mr. Wilson in the Episcopal church work right along." Ogunjami, *Interview with Madam Suzanne [sic] Ogunjami*, 3.
 56. Ulli Beier, *Thirty Years of Oshogbo Art* (Bayreuth, Germany: Iwalawa-Haus, 1991); Frank McEwen, "Shona Art Today," *African Arts* 5, no. 4 (1971): 8–11; Jeremy Coote, "Making Makonde Carving: The Origin and Development of New African Art Tradition, in *Wooden Sculpture from East Africa from the Molde Collection*, ed. Oxford Museum of Modern Art (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1989), 13–22. Anthony J. Stout, *Modern Makonde Sculpture* (Nairobi, Kenya: Kribo Gallery Publications, ca. 1966); Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Contemporary African Art since 1980* (Bologna, Italy: Damiani, ca. 2009).
 57. Ogunjami, *Interview*, ca. 1934, 2–3.
 58. Ogunjami, *Interview with Madam Suzanne [sic] Ogunjami*, 2.
 59. Ogunjami, *Interview*, ca. 1934, 3–4.

60. *Ibid.*, 5–6.
61. S. Wilson, “The Arts and Handicrafts of West Africa: Their Social, Economic and Aesthetic Importance” (master’s thesis, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1928).
62. Archives, Episcopal Diocese of New York, New York City.
63. “Chapel of the Messiah,” *The New York Protestant Episcopal City Mission Society, Eighty-Eighth Annual Report* (1919): 11.
64. S. Wilson, “The Chapel of the Messiah.” (1920): 31, 5. The Chapel had a “colored congregation” and has “done much for African students and others in New York.” “Chapel of the Messiah,” *The Mission News* (1923): 26. This was still the era of racial segregation. M. Norman Wilson, “The Chapel of the Messiah,” *The Mission News* 30, no. 4 (1919): 398–399; “Chapel of the Messiah,” *The New York Protestant Episcopal City Mission Society, Eighty-Eighth Annual Report* (1919): 11.
65. M. Wilson, “Chapel of the Messiah,” *Mission News* (1919): 398–9.
66. *Ibid.*, 11.
67. “Horizon,” *Mission News* (1920): 241.
68. M. Wilson, “Chapel of the Messiah,” 399. He wrote other articles on the Chapel with the same title: M. Norman Wilson, “The Chapel of the Messiah,” *The Mission News* 32, no 1 (1921): 10–11, and there are two unsigned articles with the title: “Chapel of the Messiah,” 1922 and 1923.
69. S. Wilson, “The Chapel of the Messiah,” *The Mission News* (1920): 20–21.
70. “Passing of the Chapel of the Messiah,” *The Mission News* 37, no, 1 (1926): 7 in the archives of the Episcopal Diocese of New York, New York City, entitled “Church of the Messiah Burned,” stating that “Fr. Wilson lived in the church building and suffered the loss of his belongings.”
71. Letter from M. N. Ogunjami Wilson to the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of New York, October 30, 1933. Typed copy of a letter to R. M. Pott, New York City, from an unsigned sender. Both letters in the archives of the Episcopal Diocese of New York, New York City.
72. Various papers in the archives of the Episcopal Diocese of New York, New York City, under the file “New Rochelle St. Simon’s Mission, 1927–1936.”
73. Ogunjami, *Interview*, ca. 1934, 3.
74. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930 Population Schedule* (New York, New York, Enumeration District 31–1003 Supervisor’s District 24, Sheets 20A and 20B). I thank art historian Professor Steven Nelson, of the University of California, Los Angeles, who read a draft of this manuscript and suggested that I check the 1930 U.S. Census for Suzanna Ogunjami or Suzanna Wilson.
75. Bowen and Ogunjami apparently overlapped in time at Columbia University. For his career, see *Pelican Annual* (University of the West Indies, 1955): 151.

76. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States 1920, Population* (New York, New York; Supervisors District 1, Enumeration District 1173, Ward of City 16A, Page 10B).
77. Wilson arrived in the United States in 1910, according to the 1920 U.S. Census, and the *List or Manifest of Alien Passengers for the United States: S.S. Philadelphia*, sailing from Southampton. Archives of the Episcopal Diocese of New York, New York City (October 8, 1910).
78. State of New York, The City of New York, Department of Health, *Certificate and Record of Marriage* No. 13513, June 19, 1915.
79. Email from Maureen Warner-Lewis to Ottenberg, August 29, 2009.
80. Harmon Foundation, *Exhibition of Fine Arts*.
81. David Boxer, *Jamaican Art, 1922–1982* (Kingston, Jamaica: The Service, 1982), 3–13; Wayne Brown, *Edna Manley: The Private Years* (London: Deutsch, 1975), 166, 196; National Gallery of Jamaica, *Five Centuries of Art in Jamaica* (Kingston, Jamaica: National Gallery of Jamaica, 1978); National Gallery of Jamaica, *The Formative Years, 1922–1940* (Kingston, Jamaica: National Gallery of Jamaica, 1978).
82. Brown, *Edna Manley*.
83. “Artist from Nigeria Shows Art,” *Art Digest* 1 (1934): 23.
84. M. N. Ogunjami Wilson to Bishop Gilbert, letter, September 8, 1934.
85. The details of his church activities in West Africa are to be found in *Crockford’s Clerical Directory, 1951–1952* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952). His work took him to Bathurst (now Banjul) in The Gambia in 1941–45. It is not clear whether Ogunjami went there with him, but it is likely, given her devotion to church work.
86. S. Wilson, *Prospectus: The West African Normal and Industrial Institute*, two leaves, Freetown, 1935; also see Barnwell, “Suzanna Ogunjami,” 218; Jacqueline M. Moore, *Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Dubois and the Struggle for Racial Uplift* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2003), 20–21.
87. Moore, *Booker T. Washington*.
88. Thomas Jesse Jones, *Education in Africa: A Study of West, South, Equatorial Africa by the African Education Commission under the auspices of the Phelps-Stokes Fund and Foreign Mission Societies of North America and Europe* (New York: Phelps-Stokes Fund, 1922).
89. Moore, *Booker T. Washington*, 21, 61–62, 71–72. His American educational approach was criticized by W. E. B. Dubois and other African Americans for setting too low educational goals, as it was undoubtedly viewed by educators in Sierra Leone, more used to a British model. Also see August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880–1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), 95, 196, 199.
90. S. Wilson, *Prospectus*.
91. Ottenberg, *Olayinka*, ch. 3.

92. Barnwell, "Suzanna Ogunjami," 218.
93. Suzanna Wilson to Evelyn S. Brown, February 14, 1938.
94. Ogunjami, *Résumé*.
95. Ogunjami was apparently unaware that this honor belongs to the Nigerian artist Aina Onabolu in Lagos in 1920.
96. Suzanna Wilson to Mary Beattie Brady, March 21, 1936.
97. Ottenberg, *Olyakinka*.
98. Miranda Burney-Nicol to Evelyn S. Brown, November 23, 1960.
99. Eddie Davies to Evelyn S. Brown, November 15, 1960.
100. *Crockford's Clerical Directory*, 1426.
101. Email, Joe Opala to Simon Ottenberg, July 2, 2008.
102. The paucity of the biographical record on Suzanna Ogunjami or Suzanna Wilson, and the scarcity of her art reported on in this article should not be attributed to a lack of effort on the author's part. I checked with most African-American colleges and universities east of the Mississippi and several west of it that had a museum, and only the Hampton University Museum had a painting of hers. The library at Howard University, as well as its Museum had none of her art. Responses were negative from the Studio Museum in Harlem, the DuSable Museum in Chicago and the New Jersey State Museum. In Washington, DC, the National Museum of African Art, the Anacosta Museum, the National Portrait Gallery, nor the National Museum of Women in the Arts had none of her work. At the Schomburg Library branch of the New York Public Library, I was unable to gain access to Ogunjami's transcript at Teachers College because only a relative can do so, and I could not locate one.

SIMON OTTENBERG, Emeritus Professor, received his Ph.D. in anthropology in 1957 at Northwestern University, in the first well-funded African Studies Program in the United States under Melville J. Herskovits. General ethnographic research among the Afikpo, an Igbo group in southeastern Nigeria in 1953–54 and 1959–60, led to four books. In 1960 he studied Abakaliki, a growing Igbo town, writing its history. In the 1970–71 academic year, he taught and wrote on a Guggenheim Fellowship at the University of Ghana. In 1978–80 he researched the Limba of northern Sierra Leone, with a book on three blind musicians. In 1997–98, at the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, he curated an exhibition of seven modern artists from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, with a book on them and an edited, related symposium. In 2013 he published a biography of the modern Sierra Leonean artist, Olayinka.

