

BRUCE ONOBRAKPEYA'S INTEGRATION OF URHOB0 BELIEF SYSTEM IN TWO-DIMENSIONAL VISUAL ART FORMS

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Abstract

Religion and Art are inseparable. Bruce Onobrakpeya is an Urhobo Contemporary artist, whose art has been influenced by the religious motifs derived from his cultural background. Urhobo traditional religion and Bruce Onobrakpeya's artistry have individually attracted scholarly attention, but not the encapsulation of the former in the art medium. Therefore, this paper examines Bruce Onobrakpeya's works and his infusion of Urhobo traditional world view in two-dimensional form. This is with the view to interpreting and foregrounding the nature and religious significance of his work. The study adopted Umberto Eco's Semiotic theory which claims that pictures possess signs and statements signifying cultural and religious values. The methodology for this work is purely qualitative and historical and all the data collected were subjected to Semiotic analysis. We find out that Bruce Onobrakpeya, in synthesizing and by extending the Urhobo world view in his artworks, has created an interface between Urhobo people and their religion. Thus, his works document and integrate Urhobo religious worldview in contemporary Urhobo Art.

Key words: Urhobo world view, Bruce Onobrakpeya and integration.

Introduction

In the Urhobo long history of survival, they have developed some thoughts, beliefs, religions, concepts, rich folklores and culture in their attempt to explain their environment and the world (Bradbury, R.E. & Lloyd P.C. 1957:103). They also create diverse images that reflect and reinforce various aspects of spiritual belief and this they have tried to conceptualize in three dimensional visual art forms by incorporating wide variety of media, including various hard woods; the most common of which are (*isele*) camwood and (*ohanhe*) bombox. Other media include molded clay and low-fired terra cotta, but none was on print or painting. (Singletary, R 2002: 110)

Bruce Onobrakpeya as a young man growing up in Urhobo land was influenced not only by his father, who was a carver but also by various traditional ceremonies. He was exposed to the private and public shrines (*ogwa*) that could be found in every Urhobo village, some of which were filled with wooden sculptures, and sacrificial paraphernalia (Ofuafo, P.U. 2013: 90). Most of these shrines were dedicated to spirits (*edjo*), ancestor and supernatural forces inherent in the forest and the rivers. These powers are potentially both helpful and harmful to man how they are manipulated depends upon the level of control exercised by the community. (Perkins. 1996: 370)

Bruce Onobrakpeya's works are not used for these purposes, but they are closely link to religion and many of the indigenous thoughts and concepts manifested in Urhobo traditional belief system. The most significant change in Onobrakpeya's work is evident in the materials. While the Urhobo mainly use wood adorned with colours for their deities in their religion, Onobrakpeya works in assorted materials ranging from paper to Plaster of Paris and metal foils, all reflecting indigenous values in an era of change. Through the printmaking medium, Bruce Onobrakpeya is able to produce unlimited editions of prints, thus giving ordinary people a change to own art.

Who Is Bruce Onobrakpeya?

Bruce Onobrakpeya is one of Nigerian's most-documented artists, a living legend who has devoted his life to the practice of art such that his works are regarded as one of the main documentary sources of Urhobo culture. Moreover, he has been successful in his synthesis of a great tradition Urhobo Culture with the techniques, conventions and forms associated with an international modernism. His prints, paintings, sculptures and installations are undeniably African, undeniably Urhobo, and undeniably of the modern world in which we live. He has fused his training in western techniques and materials with his own heritage, cultural experience and an inventiveness that is undeniably Urhobo. The results are the creation of paintings and prints of vivid colours, imaginative and magical necessary in a medium that speaks of the past and present to the future in a Language of Pan-Africanize universalism. (Ofuafo, P.U. 2013:p33)

Bruce Obomeyoma Onobrakpeya was born of Urhobo parents on August 30, 1932 at Agborho-Otor in Ughelli North Local Government Area of Delta State. He received his early primary school education at the Baptist school, Oke-Enivbi near Benin-city; the Native Authority School, Ughelli; Eweka Memorial school, Iyaro, Benin (1941-1942) Zik Academy school, Sapele (1943-46) and Saint Luke's C.M.S Sapele (1947). (Onobrakpeya. 2013). He had his secondary school education at the Western Boy's High School, Benin-City, where he was introduced to art as one of the secondary school subjects taught by Edward Irhivboje¹. (Onobrakpeya: 2012). As a student, he attended drawing classes taught at the British Council Art Club, Benin-city. According to him, "I was inspired to study art by the watercolour paintings of Emmanuel Erabor and the lectures given in Benin-city in the 1950s by Ben. Enwonwu"² (Onobrakpeya 2012:28)

On completion of his secondary school education, Onobrakpeya was employed as an art teacher at the western Boys' High School, Benin City (1953-56)³. In 1956, he left for Ondo town in the then western region of Nigeria, where he taught art at the Ondo Boys' High School (Onobrakpeya. 2012:). In October 1957, he gained admission into the Nigeria College of Arts, Science and Technology, Zaria, (now Ahmadu Bello University) where he studied Fine Arts under the federal Government of Nigeria scholarship scheme. Most of the teachers at the Zaria school were European who imposed *academic realism* on their students. This characteristic is reflected in Onobrakpeya's early works, which consist of figure drawing, still life and landscapes. His ideas began to change into experimenting with forms in relation to Nigeria folklores, myths and legends after a group of young Nigerian scholars labeled "Zaria art rebels" led by Uche Okeke challenged the *aesthetic imperialism* of the white (Singletary, R. 2002:2). He graduated in 1961 with a diploma in Fine Art and Teacher's Certificate Grade 1 in

1962. (Onobrakpeya. 2012: 28). He is happily married to Mrs. Victoria Onobrakpeya and they are blessed with five children (three boys and two girls).

Urhobo World view and the Art.

The Urhobo worldview is based on a polarity between a known world, *akpo*, and an unseen spirit world, *erivwin*, in which the well-being of people in *akpo* depends very much upon the goodwill of the forces in *erivwin* (see Nabofa and Ekeh in Foss 2005). In this context, Nabofa writes:

... all manner of entities can assume symbolic religious significance. Living things like plants and animals, sacred persons like priests and priestesses, natural objects like stones, molehills, valleys, river rapids, sun, moon, stars, wind, water and fire, human properties like saliva and blood, man-made things like boats and canoes, and abstract things like numbers, the square, or the circle ... He may use the young palm frond, for example, to isolate the sacred from the profane: when they curtain off a place, they indicate that it has been declared holy; when they are spread in front of, behind, or to the sides of an automobile or truck, they communicate the presence of a corpse, which is believed to be a sacred entity.' (Nabofa in Foss 2004, 37; and see Foss *et al* 2005 for illustrations and descriptions of all aspects of Urhobo visual culture and religious ideas).

Generally, among the Urhobo, the word Art (*Ona*) is inseparable from life. An artist is called *Owena*, the creator of useful things. While some artists produce masks and figurines used in sacred ritual; others produce other things such as weavers, blacksmiths, tattoo specialists, and potters. Some *edjo*, (*Divinities*) may be represented with figurative Sculptures, while others with non-representational objects such as stones, shells, lumps of clay or metal however the spirit of the ancestors (*esemo*) are usually anthropomorphized. (Bradbury and Lloyd 1957:103). These were the objects found by the early missionaries' anthropologists in the shrines that make them to describe the African religion with derogative terms such as: animism, idolatry, fetish, pagan, heathen, primitive Juju and so on. (Nabofa, 1994:21) In fact, it was the non-understanding of the traditional African religious symbols and ideas that partly contributed to the ways in which some of the early Western and Arab Scholars, investigating African thought forms looked at the indigenous Africans as having no religion or belief in God. In consonance with the above reason Omijeh says: "*Nowhere did early missionaries and Western writers misunderstand African culture and societies as in the rituals and symbolism*" (Omijeh 1973:105)

The Urhobo artist is the people's theologian, philosopher, historian, poet, psychologist, and metaphysician. He reshapes natural forms to express ideas about the universe' (Nabofa in Foss 2005, 37). Therefore, it is from this premise that the works of Bruce Onobrakpeya, a distinguished Nigerian and Urhobo artist who has used his art and his Christian upbringing to reinforce Urhobo tradition religion would be discussed.

Urhobo Sacred Religious Arts from Bruce Onobrakpeya integration:

In Urhobo, there are various categories of artistic statuettes used to represent their belief system such as; ancestry, divinities and physiognomic objects. These works are mainly carvings in three-dimensional formats representing various aspects of worship and belief system of the Urhobo. The cult of the Ancestry

called *ogwaOniemo* (female) and *ogwaOsemo* (male) are represented by a male and a female wooden sculpture placed at the right and left side corner of the house respectively. The Cults of the divinities are shrines with lots of sacrificial paraphernalia. These shrines; *Okonovu*, *Agbogidi* and *Urapele* are believed to have played lots of roles in the history of the Urhobo. These religious sacred objects have been encapsulated and integrated by Bruce Onobrakpeya in two-dimensional visual form to the general acceptance of the society.

A. Ancestry (*Oniemo/Osemo*)

Of all the spiritual allegiance held sacred by the Urhobo, that relating to the ancestor is most prominent. At every level; individual family, quarters and villages-community, the deceased family members must receive at regular bases, the honour due to them. The Urhobo see death as a return to the spirit world, which they believe is our original home. They see themselves as strangers on this earth who must return one day to give account of his or her stewardship to the creator. This lyric which is usually sang at the burial ceremony of the dead buttress this believe.

*Akpona ma re le na.
Eki ma re cho, Ma re cho
Or re chonu ko kpo, ko kpo*

Meaning

*In this world we are living in now
We are all traders
Whoever finish selling, goeshome. (Ofuafo. P.U.*

2013:89)

Burial rites are regarded as send-off ceremonies for the dead and must be properly and fully carried out if the soul must return to the spiritual realm. In Urhobo cosmology ancestors consist of the *esemo* (dead fathers) and *ineimo* (dead mothers), who were once living on earth, they know the trail and temptation of their descendants with whom they continue to maintain a link which even death could not sever. Hence, in the belief of Urhobo the *esemo* and *iniemo* have the interest of their offspring at heart. They bestow blessing on them and they are regarded as the supreme guardians of morality. They are represented with a single art object, mainly sculpture which is displayed at a conspicuous corner of the room or the *Ogwa*.

An *Oniemo* signify the cult of the ancestress, in most cases, depending on the community and the family, it is represented by a carving of a woman with a baby either strapped to her back or being breast fed, signifying motherhood, fertility and the relationship between mother and child. This object which is in three dimensional formats is kept in the homes of many of the first daughter. It is sculpted after the death of a woman and venerated during the second burial rites. A woman with seven children or more are given special honour. This believes is also practice by the Igbo called *Ibu ewe ukwu* and the kalabaris. *Oniemo* represent the goddess of fertility because of its capacity to enhance procreation and fertility.

In projecting the cult of ancestress, Bruce Onobrakpeya conceptualize the importance of motherhood in two dimensional formats. This he titled; *Arooniomo* (mother's shrine). The technique of production is additive plastograph and the picture is a

tribute to mothers (Onobrakpeya 1992:67) The print is a cluster of an ant hill. The central figure in the print represents the mother and her many responsibilities. In the chest and shoulder, children hang loosely around. On neither sides of the main figure are two salver vertical forms crowned with mother and child finials. (see fig. below). The picture, which is in the shape of an ant hill (red earth mountain with many peaks), could be seen as a common feature in forests, bushes or the water-side. According to Nabofa, the Urhobo woman is seen as an ant hill because of her ability to bring forth children. They frown seriously at any woman who could not bear a child. She is describe as *Oshare* (a man), *oreda*(witch); *O vwoomo re wvokedagbaravwo be gbe*. (She has mortage her children at the coven). She is treated as a leper and she is not accorded a proper burial right because she has no one to carry out her name. (Nabofa. 2005:). She doesnot have an *Oniemo* sculpture.



AroOniemo (mother's Shrine). Blue base. Plastograph. 61cmx45.8cm.1972.

The next picture titled *Aroosemo* (fathers' shrine) is also produced in plastograph and in two dimensional formats. *AnOsemo*; (the cult of the ancestor in Urhobo land), The *osemo* signify guidance of morality, disciplinarian, family head, and the bread winner of the home. At the dead of the man and during the second burial rite, a sculpture representing the man is sculpt and kept at the corner of the house and venerated. The sculpture is kept in the house of the dead man or with the first son and if the man does not have a son, but only daughters, it is kept with the younger brother's son or whoever the family assign to take the responsibility of housing the *Osemo*. It is mandatory for every Urhobo family to have an *osemo* in their homes after the death of the father because they believe that the *osemo* has the capacity to enhance family, clan and community solidarity, success in farming, general prosperity, trade and serves as an instrument for settling communal conflicts by those bonds by this symbol. (Erhueh.2005: 220)

In Bruce's encapsulation, *Osemo* is presented as a huge man with two diminutive men at his sides to represent the authority of the father as a moral and social being. The picture is a tribute to fathers who is represented by the central image. While object and other figures attached to its body, denote further responsibilities particularly in the extended family system. Cowries in the picture show the father as the main wage owner or one who co-ordinates the economics and social activities of the home. The first of the two faces show him as a wise counsellor, and second, as a disciplinarian who also set the tone of good morals by his own behaviours.



AroOsemo (father's Shrine) by Bruce Onobrakpeya. Plastograph. 61cm x 47.7cm. 1972.

The semiotic relationship of these two artworks explain the Urhobo concept of the cult of ancestry, while *AroOniemo* depicts the supremacy of a mother by using the ant hills analogy; *AroOsemo* shows the function of the ancestors as being the power to bless, protect and also guardian of morality. They are also the one who ensure that the solidarity of the family unit is not jeopardized by any of their children. Hence the elders, the immediate successors of the ancestors, scowl upon insubordination and recalcitrance. They are quick to punish any disobedient members of the family by inflicting them with mysterious illness such as swollen stomach, or swollen feet. When such happened the Urhobo would say: *erivwin mu ro, to buoworuru* (the ancestor has dealt with you, confess your sins) or *oremueriwvin jo fa*, (he has offended the ancestors, confess). In case of disputes or conflicts among two brothers or communities, the sculpture of the *osemo* is brought in to settle the issues by swearing at the cult. During marriage the girl is made to kneel at the *ogwa* of her family *osemo*, and the eldest member of the family would evoke the spirit of the ancestors and asking them to release her spiritually because she now belongs to another family. When she gets to her husband's house, she is also taking before the family *ogwa* and the *esimo* is called upon to accommodate her as new member of the family. From that moment, she is under the guide and guardianship of the husband's *sesemo*. Hence the Urhobo would say: *erivwinoseomotesamuo*. (the father can't punish her married daughter). Moreover, the acts of incest, adultery, stealing (brigandage), especially where a member of the family invites outsider to break into the

house of his kinsmen, acts of witchcraft and wizardry are punishable by the ancestors who now reside in *Erivwin*, from where they act as guide and guardians to their loved ones here on earth. According to S. U. Erivwo:

It is deemed that the living dead have power to punish the nefarious men because the Urhobo believe that once a man passes from the earth plane to the nether plane he is imbued with super natural power – powers not only of blessing, preserving and sustaining the family is a whole and healthy state but also of plucking away the nefarious in his pine of youth. (Erivwo, 2005:158)

This believe in ancestor is not common to the Urhobo along. In all Africa sub-Saharan, the belief is so real. Hence Awolalu and Dopamu (1979:14) speaking of the Yoruba culture say, “While here on earth the ancestors were the custodian and guardians of morality in the society. They set the norm of conduct, which the society most follow as given, to them by their own ancestor”. Also, Odejebi Cecelia (2014:386) writes that Ancestral worship is common among Yoruba, and it is a major belief in the traditional religion. The word, Egungun has become a representation of dead individual/ancestor. The idea of ancestral artis so strong among the Urhobo that Perkin Foss writes that:

The particular types of sites chosen for Urhobo art-for- ancestor present an exception to the Urhobo productivity for privacy for works of art. Indeed these pieces are so positioned to offer maximum exposure. The eshe figure is usually placed at the front-centre of a meeting hall (ogwa-rode) and in many cases will he so design as to have two faces, one inward toward the meeting chamber and the other outward toward the public area outside. (Perkin Foss, 2005:45)

B. Divinities. (Edjo)

Next in Urhobo cosmology are the divinities. The Urhobo believe that Oghene is not only the creator and sustainers of the world but also the ultimate source and end of morality. He therefore created the divinities as His functionaries and intermediaries between Himself and man. (Ofuafo, 2014:27). Every Urhobo polity has its own divinities and it is believed that the power of each divinity is confined to the locality that acknowledge it, but one may not be tempted to look at these divinities as territorial Spiritual forces, because they are capable of extending their influences to their devotees who may be living in places outside their territories or other part of the world. Peculiar to the Urhobo, is the fact that apart from *Oghene*, there is no singular divinity which the whole of Urhobo worship together. This indicate that each of the twenty two socio-political units has its own *edjo* (divinity) with whom the various polities have entered into a kind of special covenant relationship in consequence of their place of origin and blood relationship. Although these divinities are known by different names in various parts of Urhobo land, some of them perform identical functions. It is only their names and theogonies that differentiate them. In a simplified form, the Urhobo divinities could be classified into four main categories which probably deal with the historical development of the people. Each of these divinities has its own shrine called *Ogwaw* which is peculiar to its revelation and relationship with its people.

The size of an *Ogwa* depends mostly upon the number of people who go there for worship. It could be big or small, but all *Igwa (Ogwa)* must have an altar or holy of holies, which is strategically situated, at one end of the *Ogwa*, directly opposite the main entrance into the hall. The items on display at the holy of holies (the altar) varied from one *Ogwato* another, depending upon the instruction the chief priest or priestess received from the diviner. No two individuals receive the same divine revelation, also their symbolic items differ. However according to Onobrakpeya (2008:78), a typical shrine in Urhobo society is divided into three sections. The first section comprises of the main objects of the shrine, which may be sculpted or molded. The second section a horizontal complement to the vertically arranged sculptures, is made up of items spread at the bottom such as cowries, pebbles and small pots. The third section consists of objects suspended either from the roof, walls, or tree branches, depending on the location of the shrine. Bruce Onobrakpeya in his conceptualized paid attention to these three divisions in two-dimensional formats of Urhobo world view for the general aesthetics of the masses. The divinities in his works are: *Okunovu* a community or primordial shrine from Idjerhe, *Agbogidi*, a personalized shrine from Ogharaki and *Urapele* a communal shrine from sapele.

i. AroOkunovo(Idjerhe.)

Aro is a Benin word meaning shrine. *Arookunovo* means *Okunovo* shrine. It is a primordial divinity among the *Idjerhe* people. Bruce Onobrakpeya gave a visual representation of this shrine after a visit to *Okunovu* shrine in *Idjerhe clan*. His print shows a larger bottom segment, of the stylized *Oloku* figure dressed like a chief and flanked on both sides by chiefs and their wives. The figures are interspaced with ornamental staffs and objects. The top tier is a tableau of animal skulls. According to him, "the picture was inspired by a visit to *Okunovu* shrine in *Idjerhe*, a community shrine dedicated to *Oloku* deity and built on an escarpment which overlooks a river." (Onobrakpeya. 1987: 87). From Bruce Onobrakpeya's composition, the shrine is one in which wealth is personified as the Benin *Oloku* the goddess of the sea who is believed to bestow fortune and riches. The setting of the picture is like a traditional shrine where some divinities and spirits are given regular appearance. The method and medium of production is plastograph and the motif used in this print was adopted 'from an earlier one designed for a postage stamp in 1978. The concept of *AroOloku* (water divinity) as a model for his creative concept could be attributed to his relationship with the Benin culture and the prevalent of *Igbereligion* among the Urhobo people, most especially those along the river belt. Moreover the Urhobo belong to the Ediod speaking tribe who migrated from the Benin kingdom in the 15th century. (Charles Gore. 2007:)



Okunovo Shrine. 1970. Plastograph. 54x60 cm. *This is a community shrine. It is the primordial divinity of the Idjerhe people*

ii. Agbogidi (Oghareki)

The word *Agbogidi* (the name of a legendary hero) is an Urhobo words which suggests power and the shrine like others in the area is related to *Olokun* the goddess of good fortune. It is a personalized divinity. The general believe among the Urhobo is that it only reveals itself to those it wishes to bless. According to oral tradition, the Urhobo belief that an *Agbogidi* could make one wealthy and could also make one poor. An *Agbogidi* shrine usually consists of aquatic objects such as snail shells, pots, cups of powder and so on. The shrine of *Agbogidi* (see below) in Bruce Onobrakpeya's print, depicts fertility shrine owned by an individual. The technique of production is plastography. Accordingly to him, "the inspiration to produce the work came after paying a visit to the shrine in an Urhobo community" *OgharakinearIdjerhe*. (Onobrakpeya 2008.)



Agbogidi Shrine. 1972. Plastograph. 46.1x62.2. (Personalized shrine. It is the divinity of fertility and wealth. It is associated with the Olokundivinity of the sea).

From the print above, dominant forms are the middle section in *Agbogidi* which is a two mud-sculpture figures, a carved wooden staff with figure at the top; two pots, one containing snail shells; and a vertical wooden rattle with cowries tied to its middle. Vertical staffs form a kind of support for these objects. The first of the two main figures bears the paraphernalia of a chief or priest. It is bedecked with ritual objects, including gourds containing charms (*Ukokogho*), a colonial bowler hat, bangle (*egboghho Obo*) and apron (*buluku*) to which are tied cowries (*Igho*) and metal rattles (*Ugherighe*). The second figure is a soldier brandishing a spear (*Oshue*) and a cutlass (*Opia*). It wears a cap on its head and an elephant tusk (*Ukoro*) at each ankle. Other items in the composition are carving of *Obo* (hand) status worshipped for good fortune, on a plate a rattle (*Aghwala*) Kaolin chalk (*Orhe*) cowries (*ibigho*) palm kernels (*Ibi*) a hoe (*eghwlo*) and smaller objects, which serve as textures welding the layer forms together. At the background are chicken legs (*Igbawo-echo*), a mirror with a decorated frame. At the top of the painted background is a collection of objects including figurines and masks. (Onobrakpeya.1987: 107)

iii. *Urapele* shrine (Sapele)

Urapele (water spirit) is the communal divinity of the Okpeclan and the shrine is located in Sapele. The origin of *Urapele* surrounds revelation of the aquatic spirit itself to Abeke one of the founders of town. According to oral tradition, He (Abeke) was having his bath in river Ethiope, when a young beautiful lady appeared from the water requesting him to be her lover and promised to bless him with wealth and gold (Ofuafo: 2014: 78). Abeke accepted the offer and then built an *ogwa* (shrine) at the bank of the river as their place of communication and communion with each other. In Bruce Onobrakpeya's work, the print *Urapele* shrine is an ensemble of ritual objects (figure, ware pots, staffs, animal skull, white chalks and cowries) found in a traditional shrine style. In his conceptualization and by extension in two dimensional formats of the divinities, he tried to differentiate various categories of divinity as it relates to the people's belief and practice: According to Him:

These pictures were created after visits to Oghareki (a small town on river Ethiope), Idjerhe and near Sapele in August 1973. The tour took me to community shrines and grove where used marks (some decaying) wait for the next festival. I met a traditional artist Edjobeguo, who is also a priest of his own shrine which figures he carved himself... Thus *urapele* shrine is one of several in the area dedicated to the water – spirit named *Urapele* claimed to have been originally worshipped at the confluence of River Ethiope and Jamison. A seaport later grew from this confluence and the colonies traders or administrators named the town Sapele after the water god *Urapele*. Edjobeguo's shrine, illuminated with sunlight peeping through the rafters of the isolated hut in which it is housed, was the inspirations for my picture. (Onobrakpeya. 1987:86)



Urapele (Water Spirit Shrine). Plastograph, 67cm x 149cm, 1975

Moreover, this concept of aquatic spirit is common among the people of West African most especially the Binis and the Yoruba. For example, there is a myth about the building of the bridge across River Niger at Jebba to link the south with the north. According to oral tradition, there was an encounter between the expert (white man-in charge) of the project and the water – spirit whose domain is under the bridge being traversed, which led to a contest. (Onobrakpeya. 1987: 223) .

From the above we could deduce that Urhobo *traditional religion* are part of our artistic legacy; and like their neighbours (the Edo, Ijo, Isoko and Igbo), they serve as visual-art galleries; each contains assemble of art works, ranging from sculpture (in metal, wood or clay) to pottery, textiles found object and paintings. The priests, who are sometimes also the artists, arrange these works in their Igwa, which maybe a room or an enclosed in the forest. They have tremendous influence not only on prints, paintings, relief and installation but also our religious beliefs. Hence Yinka Shonobare once observed that *the role of the artist is to entertain, to seduce, to provoke, to challenge and to be historically relevant.* (Yinka Shonibare. 2004:11)⁴. All the objects found in the shrine have a divine relationship with the nature of revelation the owner (*Orhele*) had received, they form a revelation source of materials for the studying of Urhobo traditional Religion

Relationship between Urhobo religion and Bruce works

Bruce Onobrakpeya's art is a synthesis of Urhobo tradition, Christianity and the modern world of Nigeria. Although his works of art concerned with Urhobo tradition, with divinities and shrines, are documentary rather than the objects of sacrifice or supplication, for members of the Urhobo diaspora now spread throughout the world Onobrakpeya's art reminds them of and maybe allows them access to the sacred domain of Urhobo tradition. For Christians his representations of Biblical events and scenes in printmaking and painting, while drawing upon forms and other elements within Urhobo tradition, enable people to access Christianity as part of a modern Nigeria. For the Nigerian, both Urhobo tradition and Christianity become essential components within a national identity.

Conclusion;

In conclusion, Bruce Onobrakpeya being fascinated by this experience, tried as a visual artist to focus on some aspects of the Urhobo worldview in his quest for credulity. In synthesizing and extending the Urhobo traditional religious world view in his artworks, he has created an interface between the Urhobo people and their religion. In addition, he has produce some aspect of the Urhobo in two dimensional form to the general acceptance of the people. Bruce would consider himself first as an Urhobo of the Niger Delta before being an artist, he has produced lots of works in various aspects of Urhobo culture, tradition and cosmology to justify this fact and all his works are sub-titled in Urhobo language. He has used his art to document Urhobo traditional religion and other aspects of Urhobo culture in two- dimensional prints making them acceptable to both Urhobo and Non- Urhobo. We could say then that Bruce Onobrakpeya represent today the Urhobo poet, historian, philosopher and his works no doubt are reference material for Urhobo and non-Urhobo. Thus, the works document and integrate Urhobo religious worldview in contemporary Urhobo studies. Decoding Bruce Onobrakpeya's integration of Urhobo traditional religion in visual images had enable us to decipher the relationship between Art and Religion.

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NOTE:

1. According to Bruce Onobrakpeya, Western Boys' High School (now Airwele College, Orebosa Benin-City) was a Secondary school built on the historical site of the palace of Ogiso, the first Oba of Benin. It was here that he first met Demas Nwoko, who later became his classmate at Nigeria College of Arts, Science and Technology and long-life friend. Airwele College later moved from the Ikpoba Valley to the opposite Bridge in Oregbene.
2. Mr. Edward Irhiviboje was the head teacher of the school.
3. Bruce Onobrakpeya stated that his choice of art as a career was encouraged when his proprietor, Mr. Airewale hired him to teach art and other subjects even before qualifying as a teacher.
4. Yemisi Shalloy at an exhibition hosted by the National Museum 2008.