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Abstract

There are fundamental changes that take place in every human structure. These changes are occasioned by evolution; and the underlying characteristics of evolution-ism is the people, culture and environment. All human beings belong to a culture. Man is said to be a rational being. Man gives vent to his rationality with the context of art, society and culture which enhances his creative sensibility. Art has existed in every society at a given time, Ijo sculpture inclusive but the cultural attitude towards arts has been very poor. These ethnic sculpture have not been given comprehensive study and much needed scholarly embrace from the point of view of contribution to regional artistic development. Art is considered as one of the determinants to analyze the cultural system. It would be absurd not to recognize the inextricable connection between man, culture and the arts. The study aims at presenting, analyzing, and to reveal the progressive trend of Ijo sculpture. Instruments such as photographic recordings of visuals, and library studies were used to achieve the desired objective. This can make a more meaningful contribution to modern Nigeria sculpture history.

Key Words: Dynamics, Ijo, Ethnic Sculpture, Individualism, and Technology.

INTRODUCTION

It is always said that the only thing constant in life is change. If there are no changes in human life, man would continue to live life of stagnation. Any form of human activity has its history of change. The art of the Ijo of the Niger Delta has its history and development as the result of changes. The changes are caused by four theories: evolution, innovation, functionalism and transformation.

Evolution as a concept is said to have originated with Herbert Spencer who used it to describe the progressive diversification of living forces as postulated by Charles Darwin in his "The Origin of Species" (Ifie, 1991). Evolution simply means, the continuous biological improvement, progress and changes in human life and activities. As man progresses in his different aspects of life, so his activities and environment changes.

Another theory that causes change in a culture and its activities is innovation. The people in a particular society make progress when they are involved into discovery, invention through experimentation and partly by diffusion. Diffusion is the transfer of elements from one culture to another. Krocher in Ifie (1991) classifies the types of diffusion into "Contact diffusion" and "Idea diffusion". Through these processes the society makes advancement.

The next theory "functionalism theory" states that a society will develop if that culture identifies its operations: agriculture, artworks, etc. which fulfill a useful function and is necessary for the society's survival. On

transformation theory, Malinowski in Ifie (1991) states that changes in culture is based on the interaction of Institutions. He further states that Africa, European institutions and systems have interacted with those of the Africans. Both sets of institutions have impinged on each other; the impact in such cases produces conflict, cooperation and compromise; and the result in Africa has been the emergence of a new African culture.

The views expressed above are some of the factors responsible for culture-change and viz-a-viz the

changes of creative and artistic activities. This is because, individuals and groups within an established social structure do interact with other cultures and possibly learn from one another.

PRE-LITERATE PERIOD

The foundations of visual arts have been built over the years on increased knowledge and changing beliefs about the nature of visual arts, conception of the people and the values of society as conveyed through artistic goals and practices. During the "period of Nigeria's modern art", the visual arts have gone through rapid shifts in emphasis, with far reaching innovations and technological advancement similar to those of science.

To obtain a basic understanding of the dynamic nature of the ethnic sculpture of "Ijo", it is important to trace the evolution of what is now called modern art in the Niger

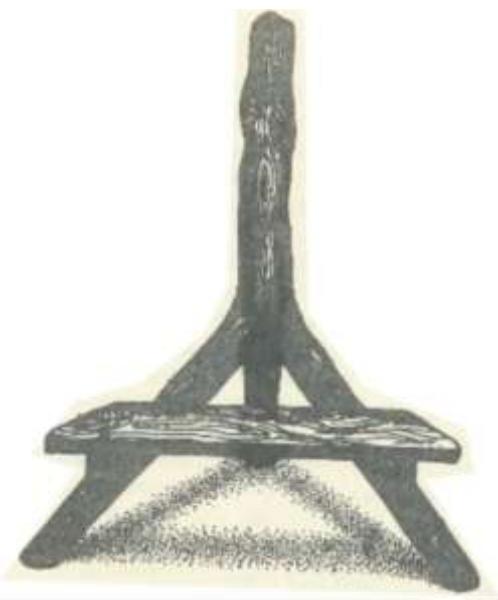


Plate 1: Three Legged Chair, Wood, H:90cm, W:60cm, 1989, in Land and People of Nigeria: Rivers State



Plate 2: Terracotta mask from Ke, Degema L G A (Site dated A.D 900-1705) Courtesy: Land and People of Rivers State

Delta and Nigeria. We can project ourselves back into the pre-literate era. The growth of visual arts in the pre-literate society of "Ijo" had an artistic experience that infused the art work in various materials used for either cultural dances or masquerade performances. According to Haig David –West (1989):

The carvings usually elaborate painted with earth, or plant derived pigments; or the ornate woven fabrics for the adornment of masquerades, womenfolk; or the indigo graphics or symbols inscribed on bodies of young women during puberty rites; were not necessarily regarded as "arts" in its modern usage. Rather, they were intended as part of the social processes in general scheme of traditional life.

David-West observes that in traditional societies, many artworks or art objects were created in non-permanent form, and are made in response to changing social and religious needs. That makes the view of art centred on the society and not on the individual artist. Thus, the works served functional and decorative purposes.

The sculpture of Ijo is influenced by the Ijo religious beliefs. The sculptures are stylized as in many other parts of Africa. This is because, the content of most works is spiritual and portrays some features as spiritually guided, even though the features are semi-human and are therefore, semi-naturalistically treated.

Besides carvings representing human figures and birds, fishes, animals as masks which are worn for masquerade performances and cicatrisation (body markings), there existed terra-cottas. The terra-cottas were recovered through excavation at Ke in Kalabari and Onyoma near Nembe. According to Anozie (1973) the terra-cotta masks were recovered from Ke in Kalabari and the figurine from Onyoma near Nembe which are

dated to about one thousand years.

Plate 2 is a terracotta (baked clay) mask which was discovered through archaeological excavation. The sculpture is a representation of a human face. The whole features in the face are exaggerated. The forehead is represented with three humps which are seated on a cap like mass, representing the forehead. It has bulging, flattened like a slab and shaped in form of triangle attached firmly to very thick eyebrows. The shape of the eyes suggests the characteristic of closed eyes. The teeth are curved in 'V' shape, and projected forward, backward and upward. This suggests that the mouth is open, possibly caused by the long teeth. There are holes at the right and left flanks of the mask probably to accommodate feathers. The chin is triangular in shape. The ridge of the nose is broad and flat. Though it is broken, it is unusually upraised. The mouth is broad and protruding with thin lips. Nothing in the mask suggests ears. The facial expression generally depicts fierceness. It also gives an impression of someone in deep thought.

Plate 3 is a mask which is similar to the preceding one with slight variation. It is also an archaeological find representing a human face. The head is rounded with three large holes in it. The forehead is slightly thicker than the former. The eyes are bulging, flattened like a slab and shaped in form of a triangle. It has thick eyebrows. From the middle of the ridge of the nose to the tip is broken but the remaining part suggests, the nose is crafted in triangle form. It has a broad and protruding mouth with thin lips. The teeth are projected forward which look like shovel. The chin is short compared to the former one. The mouth seems to be open always probably because of the long teeth.



Plate 3: Terracotta mask from Ke, Degema L G A (Site dated A.D 900-1705)
Courtesy: Land and People of Rivers State



Plate 5: Terracotta human head from Onyoma, Brass L G A (site dated A.D 1275-1845).
Courtesy: Land and the people of Nigeria: Rivers State.



Plate 4: Terracotta mask from Ke, Degema L G A (Site dated A.D 900-1705) courtesy: Land and People of Rivers State

Characteristically, all the features give the impression of some one in despair.

This mask (plate 4) is a representation of a human head. The head has two humps which are modeled on a

large protruding mass representing the forehead. The centre of the head has a great depression possibly created to frighten viewers. There are four protruding or projected lumps of circular, oblong and trapezoid shapes. The sculptor possibly tends to portray eyes and eye brows. Though the four projections are indicative of four eyes, they do not have the shape of eyes or eyebrows. The nose is shaped in form of a square at the centre of the two lower eyes. The triangular shaped lump on top of the oblong shape of the lower right eye could be the eye ball. The lower part of the face from the nose to the chin is flat but designed with diagonally cross hatched lines. This depicts the culture of some ethnic groups in Nigeria where the mouth is always covered with cloth.

This terracotta (plate 5) represents a human head. The head is in two segments. The upper part of the head is in triangular shape. It consists of two triangles.

Besides the big triangle that covers the upper region, there is another smaller triangle by the left hand side of the head. The shape of the upper segment of the head seem to be a representation of a traditional cap worn by

chiefs. Two incised vertical lines almost parallel to each other is created on the forehead. Between the two vertical lines are diagonal lines crested to give pleasing aesthetics. It possibly depicts symbol of authority.

The lower segment contains the eyes, nose and mouth. This lower part is cylindrical in shape with a broken neck. The eyes are bulging out in form of a triangle with a flattened tip. The eyes are depicted without eye brows and lid. The eyes are pierced which portray eyes that are wide open, gazing steadily at the distance in deep concentration. The mouth is pushed out as if in anger. The thick lips is separated by a thin groove which does not cover the supposed length of the mouth. The nose is raised as a mound except that the two lines scratched in inverted 'V' shape, suggest the shape of a nose. The nose has no nostrils. The swollen at the left side of the nose, and the unusually extended check by the left side of mouth, makes the head looks like one physically impaired.

AGE OF INDIVIDUALISM

In the 1970s, there was a noticeable transformation and growth from the indigenous arts mainly in style and concept. Like their counterparts in other ethnic groups in Nigeria, the artists addressed themselves to national and international art systems through diffusion and contact with external influences. It is these external influences that impacted on the works of those artists who had their training in conventional schools of art at various educational levels in Nigeria and overseas.

The end of the pre-literate period brought in the new national and international taste in art, the expressive style. The expressive style reached an appreciable climax in a complexity of forms and fantastic elaboration taken to such extremes that it becomes necessary to suggest a special art term "ultra Expression" in Ijo art. The new consciousness in art took up the old ambition of artists to express their feelings and to show the wishes, dreams and conflicts of modern life. It fulfilled a deep need for an expressive art that gave full rein to subjectivity, and by its use of representational imagery demonstrated its involvement with real experience.

Having been profoundly shaken by the Western ideals of art practice, the artists of Ijo shifted from traditional or religious beliefs to the secular. The artists were interested in creating permanent works that promote their individual reputation and pursued more vigorously their own ideas about

art. The visual artist employed new media and techniques in ways that challenged established methods of creating art. In other words, they started thinking of issues as the relevance of medium to form and content with the context of the message they intend to convey in their works. This made the artists seem to have put more effort because the chances of being taken seriously by society were greater and the interest of the artists was geared towards self assertion. The Ijo artists who trained

in formal higher institutions drew inspiration from both foreign and indigenous art idioms. Their efforts manifested in unique modern expression through experimentation and inventiveness.

The then prevailing souvenir art i.e. elaborate carvings of walking sticks which were patronized by home-bound foreign oil executives, Military official, civil servant who present them to their superiors as gift items, and successful businessmen who displayed them in their living rooms to advertise their Status in society changed. The different styles and motifs usually designed on them equally began to reflect new ideals. This souvenir art has been a source of livelihood to local craftsmen.

With the advent of Western education the learned visual artists absorbed the expressive consciousness of specialization. Artists started to classify themselves as painters, sculptors, graphic and advertising designers and fashion designers. Besides

their basic classification of training, the very versatile artists operated across disciplines. The modern artists of "Ijo" started articulating indigenous philosophies to reconstruct their visual grammar. They therefore, had committed studies on indigenous iconography with a view to identifying their works of art with the Ijo culture. The outcome of these studies have earned for a number of visual artists national and international recognition (David-West, 1989).

Some notable "Ijo" visual artists of this period that were engaged in the idea of syntheses are Haig David-West, Jubilee Owei and Jackson Waribugo. Haig David-West demonstrated and applied local motifs such as stylized formations of pythons, lizards, bird feathers, the tortoise shell, and native imitations of water movement in his modern poster designs. Similarly, the portrait artist, jubilee Owei, produces works which recall the vigour of traditional cult art in his use of predominantly riverine imagery. Jackson Waribugo also successfully used traditional ideas and forms in cement and wood (David-West, 1989). They were experimental artists who transform indigenous forms, colours, motifs and materials to modern formats.

NATURE OF THE ART FORM AND DEVELOPMENT

This deals on the development of pre-literate arts, from masks, shrine images, archaeological finds (terra cottas), to the works of contemporary arts and artists. Before 1975 the Ijo artists produced wide range of wooden masks, constructions, souvenir items that present different characters in their mythology, abstract concepts, or the human and animal forms as perceived in their world view.

The theme One Legged beggar plate 6 tends to portray one social malady that plagues the society.

Begging has become a common phenomenon, an activity carried out by some less privileged. Beggars are persons who have one disability or impairment in the organs or features of the human body. A beggar is a



Front view



Side view

Plate 6: Patrick, A.P. Jumbo, One legged beggar, Wood, 1.5m, 1980, Picture by Mangiri, S. G., Location: Jumboton Gallery, P.H

poor person, a pauper.

The work is stylized, showing the pains suffered by some people in the society. The work is represented in wood. A tapering shaft surmounted by a statuette of an adult beggar. One of his hands is by the side of his body while the other hand has been amputated from the shoulder. The void by the genital region suggests that the other leg was amputated. This therefore means he or she can not participate on any work using physical strength. He turns asking arms.

Apart from the disability depicted on the beggar, he possibly must have been a well to do, because he wears an expensive bead on his neck. The work is portrayed as gracious and as dejection.

Here the artist established certain traditional standard for a constructive sculpture. The mind or consciousness of man progresses from plate 1 to demonstrate an Ontological function as universal significance.

In these works of art, the artists sought to express their inner feelings rather than the outer reality. The artists were concerned with conceptual reality as against visual reality, the geometric shapes, and coordination of shapes, and the interplay of round and angular forms. The art works of this period are distorted and stylized of the entire human body or parts of it. These stylization or distortions (in geometric forms) of human body, that is, the use of angular and round shapes are based on ideologiScal unity of beliefs, customs, and rituals, which resulted in the unified content of the work. The artist's strong un-individualistic tendency is evident on the works,

which perhaps by their early training developed an attitude of submission to their patrons. The most interesting thing is that, the shapes and forms determine the manner in which the component parts contribute to the unity of the work. The art works are seen as products of a fully integrated culture, that they served the purpose of a religio-magical concept. The artists of the pre-literate period became the forerunners of the renaissance era – 1975 – 1985 of the arts of the Ijo.

During this period 1975 – 1985, the creative ingenuity of artists turned to outer reality. The doubt in the nature and appearance of reality, the questioning of the established standard modes of thought or modes of artistic outlook, was further emphasized by the new turn of scientific and Western ideologies. The works of the artists were dictated by proportion and physical realism, - "Naturalism". The artists tended to express and portray their ideas and concepts in recognizable forms.

The works of this period show a conventional approach. The works show individualistic tendency. The artist works in a style of his own, and is guided in the selection of forms by his individual preference. This was not the case with the pre-literate era. This period is marked as the renaissance period of the arts of the Ijos. The artists moved completely away from geometric and semi-abstraction to European academic formalism: expressing elements of balance, proportion and distinct accurate anatomical realism. The sculptures and paintings of this decade depict socio-cultural, socio-political conditions of the time.

In this first period of the art of the Ijo, the highly spirited growth and development of modern art has been the result of the effectual contributions of some serious and active artists. They are: Jubilee Owei (1936 – 1994), Jackson A. Waribugo (1942 – 1989), Patrick A.P. Jumbo (b.1946), Wenikado S. Ganagana (b.1955), Pius O. Waritimi (b. 1955) among others. These are the artists who helped to prepare the fertile ground for the evolution and infusion of the various intellectual and academic dimensions into modern art practice that have made it to be respected, accepted globally. But the study focuses on the works of three artists: Jackson A. Waribugo, Patrick A.P. Jumbo and Pius O. Waritimi. Some selected works of these artists are examined.

The composite sculpture gods and goddesses obsess the religious life of the Ijo who believe in the spirits and the world beyond. Stylistically, the sculpture pieces look naturalistic. The proportions of the bodies and the modeling of their flesh seem to have been closely observed, and the features look more like those of a living model.

Their religious purpose is not clear. Their expressive actions convey an extraordinary sense of alertness and energy. The composition reveals a marked interest in the dynamics of the activities of a King and Queen, warriors and servants. The difference in position is equally revealing individual sense of duty.

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Plate 7: Artist Unknown, Easy chair, wood construction, picture by Asah (Prince Agility)

energy. The composition reveals a marked interest in the dynamics of the activities of a King and Queen, warriors and servants. The difference in position is equally revealing individual sense of duty.

The artist endeavored to stress the human implications of the mythological scene he is depicting through careful differentiation of the attitudes of the various figures. The seated male figure is shown as the ideal head. Attractive yet full of determination, he directs his powerful glance toward the Queen and seems to utter a few quiet words of command. The Queen equally attractive sits with pride and anger and she is like someone who wants to deflate authority. Her facial expression is exceptionally restrained. It has the gravity of a woman who is fully aware of danger but seems confident of the outcome and is able to maintain her composure.

The two men standing have their eyes focused to the distance in surprise. The one at the back of the Queen looks like a warrior. His whole attitude is summed up in the imperious gesture of his left hand holding a weapon.

There is graceful dignity in the attitude of the three women who seem to be attendants carrying various items to the King. The artist shows their feeling of joy in their sense of movement and particularly the woman with outstretched hands backing the viewer.

Clearly, the bodily and facial expression of each member of the group is superbly related to its role in the scene. This articulate differentiation of expression is totally novel and represents vast progress over the achievement of the artist's dramatic expression.

The artist attained a balance between the physical and the spiritual. He had a considerable knowledge of its technical modeling and the treatment of all the intricate contours that are beyond any possibility of execution by a non-professional; contains a complex of cultural and religious symbolism and or mythological representation. The key to this extraordinary composition and its achievement was the use of concrete. The centre of gravity is kept open like the work of Auguste Rodin "The Burghers of Calais". Waribugo used impressionistic principle; the surfaces of the figures appear to shimmer as light plays on their irregularities, but they are more than reflective surfaces. They give his work dynamic and dramatic qualities. Waribugo worked fairly realistically, he created a subjective reality beyond the surface.

AGE OF TECHNOLOGY

The artists of this period in the 1990s looked higher and wider than the artists of the previous periods in terms of plastic language. The artists were motivated by the fact that they can contribute to enhance the physical and intellectual needs of the whole of society. The artists believed that their creative designs should take alongside the scientific and engineering technology. Therefore, the artists went into constructivism which gave birth to installation art. Constructivism had been an art method of the pre-literate era. See plates 1 and 7, "the three legged chair". This method of production went



Plate 8: Jackson A. Waribugo, *gods and goddesses*, Cement, Life Size, 1970, Picture by Mangiri S.G., Presidential Hotel premises, Port Harcourt

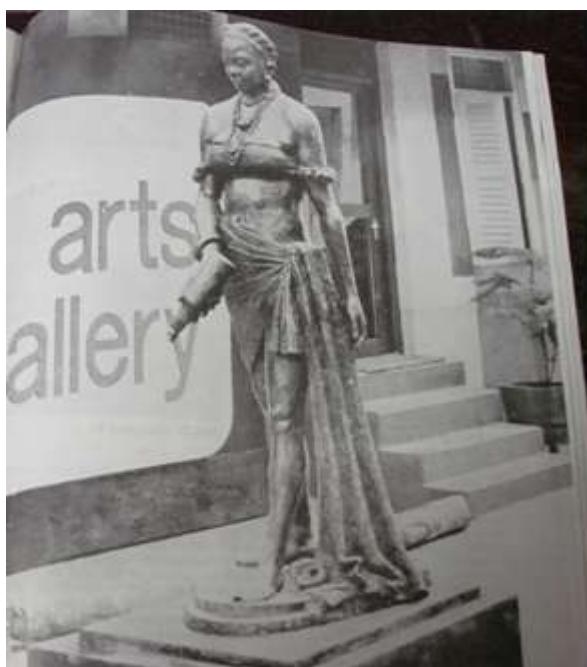


Plate 9: Jackson A. Waribugo, *Fountain of Life*, Cement, Life Size, 1975, Picture by Mangiri S.G., Council for Arts and Culture, Port Harcourt

underground so to say. It emerged again in this period. According to Waritimi, he had the consumers in mind: the environment and its mentality. The artists therefore,

produced utilitarian and functional arts. As they aspired towards the unification of the art and society, the constructionists and abstract - expressionists did not entirely discard naturalism.

The entire concept surrounding the creations of the art pieces was to reflect on the forms and symbols, the characteristics of the social and cultural milieu. Scientific ideas and technological advancement was another stimulus for a number of imaginative departures in the arts of this decade. The new scientific and technological ideas helped channel imaginative activity in new directions and also encouraged experimentation. Experimentation continued in this period.

Plate 10 "traditional chairs" were constructed from tree branches. The tree branches are creatively cut into desired proportions. These are then fixed to each other to form good sitting arrangement. There are two chairs and a center table. The structure of the woods is natural and raw. The woods are joined together by riveting, nailing, or merely hooked on each other. See the center table for example, wood stems of different sizes were cut and hollowed; another wood is pressed through them which is nailed to a base as its stand and to another flat wooden slab on top. That gives it the structure of a table.

The fisher man Parlour plate 11 is a typical sitting room of a fisher man. The chairs are constructed with angala (mangrove) tree and branches. Mangrove is a hardwood commonly found in the salt-water areas of the Rivers and Bayelsa States. The rough geometric structure which often involves the original forms of the tree is found to a greater degree in all his works of



Plate 10: Pius O. Waritimi, *Traditional Chairs/Sittings*, Wood, 190cm x 83cm, 1997, Artist's Collection.



Plate 11: Pius O. Waritimi, *Fisher-man Parlour*, Wood, Standard Size, 2005, Artist's Collection.

constructive sculptures. The chairs are patinated to conceal the type of wood used which also expresses the aesthetic experience of the artist.

Plate 12 "Niger Delta dialogue" is a set of chairs constructed, designed for a modern sitting-room. They are an improvement, development from plate 10 –

Traditional Chair/Sittings. While the finishing of the previous one shows the natural formations of the tree branches, the present one is covered with fabric and foam. The concept and the production technique is the same. Little stems of wood are cut and trimmed to different shapes which are used for constructing the



Plate 12: Pius O. Waritimi, Niger Delta (Dialogue), Wood, Fabric, Used Bike Twine, Acrylic and Colour, 62cm x 60cm, 2007, Picture by Mangiri, S.G., Location: Otobo Gallery, P.H.

chairs. The center table is fabricated like a motor-bike. It has head light, two handles and a long pole which is like an antenna; a feeler, structure, for sending and receiving electromagnetic signals. A flat egg shaped wood is provided as the seat for the motorbike; this flat surface also serves as table. It is a beautiful construction.

This is an advanced wood construction. The artist leads the eyes of the viewer from a point to an unending dynamic and rhythmic movement of lines and curves. This is a new invention (fabrication) of the former easy chair plate 7. The geometric forms convey or symbolize man's ascendancy of the chaos of nature. The artist seems to have been influenced by this age of science and technology.

The experimenting attitude of the artist did not stop with materials in sculpture but went into furniture design plate 14. The bed consists of iron rods, fabric and foam. The design with curves creates a movement which leads the viewer's eyes round the bed. The simple repetitive rhythm of the curves stresses the strength of the bed. The chair consists of wood, fabric and fiberglass. The design of the chair is much the same as those made by cabinet workers. The only difference is the inclusion of fiberglass. There are warriors in the composition in front of the chair. The composition at the side of the chair represents attitudes and gestures of people which suggest the casual confusion in mundane life. The figures are gesticulating and glancing in different directions. This marks a distinct departure from the

attempt at objective rendering of forms in space.

CONCLUSION

In the social sphere, Ijo culture and practices have also witnessed tremendous changes. Western education has greatly changed the outlook of the average Ijo person. His or her way of life, philosophy, religion, and life-expectations have all changed to greater or lesser degree. In religion, more than sixty percent of all Ijos now claim adherence to one of the foreign world religions, and these religions have as a matter of fact affected other aspects of people's social lives including the arts (sculpture).

This trend of accelerated change of art during these periods was due to the ever increasing influx of Western ideas and technology (Willett, 2003). He went further to explain and gave examples of how Islam, Christianity and Western education is greatly responsible for the changes. Willett's view stems from the traditional stand point. He sees it as a revolutionary process which made a radical departure from the communal socio-ritual view held by the traditional school.

Filani (1997/1998) in support of this notion of change through foreign influence examined the past and the present working conditions of the artists in Africa and its importance to appreciate and improve the social status of the artist. He further discussed the forces responsible



Side view

Front view

Plate 13: Artist Unknown, Easy chair, wood and foam construction. Picture by Asah (Prince Agility) photos.



Plate 14: Patrick, A.P. Jumbo, Furniture, Mixed Media, Normal Size, 2000, Picture by Artist's Collection, Location: Jumboton Gallery, P.H.

for the change of attitude and style of the African Artist, Ijo inclusive. He states that:

With the influx of foreign culture and advancement in technology and education, the entire concept of life and society underwent a complete transformation in most African societies. It involves all the forces that are brought to bear on any individual artist: his religion or community, his economic status, geographical location, mechanical advancement and political ideas, his social status and that of the public play important roles.

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