

Implantations in Indigo and Gold, The Glitter of Nigerian Glass

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Abstract

Implantations in Indigo and gold, the glitter of Nigerian glass in a historical narrative takes on the story of the arrival of the stained-glass painting art form in Nigeria at the behest of the Christian missions in the 1800s; but quickly inures that story onto the reality of the pictorial turn spear-headed by the Catholic Church's new evangelisation paradigm shift, 1962 in the shadow of Vatican Council II. Taking on the story of the evolution and growth of the glass art form, this paper, therefore, discourses the emergence of a Nigerian version of this ecclesial art via the mechanisms of a hybridisation formula, "natural-synthesis" as the rooting of the entire discourse of the implantation of Nigerian glass in the constellation of the, otherwise, European art form. This confirmed the Igbo adage "nkwu di nnamba ne yellu mba nnee". A people 'wood is the source of their cooking fire". The essay looks at the factors that have immensely contributed to the spectacular growth and development of Nigerian glass and its implantation: evangelisation, ecclesial patronage, private individual and corporate patronage, et cetera. An art historical narrative, layered by a hermeneutic analysis of the images in the pictorial turn, was sufficient for the narration of the story of the implantation of the glitter of glass shrouded in the adiresque indigo backgrounds of the africanite metaphors in the glitter of gold.

Keywords: *Implantation, Vatican II, Ecclesial artform, Natural-synthesis, Paradigm shift.*

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Background to the Study

Stained glass painting is a European art form introduced into Nigeria and implanted in metropolitan Christian cathedrals at the behest of the Christian missionary in Nigeria. Success in evangelisation and the entrenchment of church prayer spaces in the homes of prominent converts were the significant signs of the entrenchment of the faith. The emergence of local native church catechists utilizing the native tongues in ministration and teaching were the most edifying signs of missionary success. The major Christian churches (the Roman Catholic and Anglican), therefore, raised funds from their metropolitan European archdioceses in the mother country to grow the missions. By the 1800s, St. Peter's, Ake, Abeokuta, Ogun state; and St. Stephen's, Bonny Island in the Niger Delta, both Anglican Churches, were distinctive colonial style churches in Nigeria.

The foundation stone of the Cathedral Church of Christ, Marina (*Ehingbeti*) Lagos, was laid in 1867 by Sir J. Rawley Glover, colonial administrator of Old Lagos colony. The church was originally cited at *Oko-Faji* as a church for the largely English-speaking congregation of Sierra Leone extraction and other settlers who spoke no Yoruba, in an adjoining neighborhood with the exclusive Yoruba speaking Saint Peter's Anglican Church, *Ajele*. All these churches are in south-western Nigeria. Another important development in church history was the erection of the St. Stephen's Anglican Church, Bonny Island, nick-named the Bishop Ajayi Crowther Church, faraway in the Niger Delta. These Christian edifices were modern churches in distinguishing European style Gothic architecture, with distinct Tabernacle spaces and fitted pipe-organs in choir chambers. Well-built hard wood pews in lavish high veneers and polish dominated the congregation space. The most distinctive interior fittings of these Gothic structures were the concentration of European commissioned lancet-stained glass windows.

In the St. Stephen's Anglican Church, Bonny Island (Fig. 1), giant lancet stained-glass windows dominate the ambulatory wall of the Tabernacle space. Even the ambulatory wall of the small Lady's Chapel (Fig. 2) has an imposing stained glass lancet window, a memorial to the great Anglican Church African pioneer, Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther. The glass window seemed purposefully located to draw attention of Christian communicants, worshippers, and even visitors, to the simple ceremonial altar below. The pastor in residence was the keeper of the lord's place. The other mainstream Christian church, the Roman Catholics sited in the Creole dominated Brazilian quarters of old Lagos *Igboshere*, moved up to erect the Holy Cross Cathedral in 1886. With a defined Tabernacle space, minimalist interior decorations, distinctive glass paintings in lancet windows, and the accompaniment of other architectural features of classical European vintage, it was a Gothic marvel in Nigeria.

The Holy Cross Cathedral was cited on the very land where a Creole preacher and lay-deacon of the old settler church, Pa Antonio, had originally organized the local assembly of the church. The preceding is the story of the implantation of the stained-glass art (henceforth, glass, glass art, etc) in Nigeria. Another major orthodox Christian denomination that set foot on Nigerian soil in the hey days of the missionary was the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Their missionaries arrived in Calabar in April 10, 1886.²



Fig. 1: *The Risen Christ*, Ed. Burne-Jones, St. Stephen's Anglican Church, Bonny Island
Stained glass, 1883.
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However, the decades 1950s and 1960s saw the emergence of modern independent states in West Africa. In the 1960s two distinctive events took place: Nigeria gained her independence from Britain in 1960. In 1962, the dominant orthodox Christian church, the Roman Catholic Church as the distinctive leader in Christendom at the Vatican Council II, declared a dogma of modernisation and re-branding in her new evangelisation. She avowed a policy of openness and the whole-hearted acceptance of the vernacular in the liturgical practices of the new evangelisation. That modernity equally involved, inescapably, the appropriation and assimilation of novel elements from cultures of the new places of evangelisation.

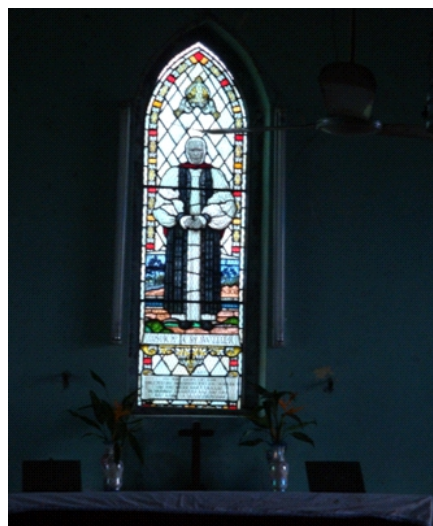


Fig. 2: *Samuel Ajayi Crowther Memorial*, Ed. Burne-Jones, Lady's Chapel,
St. Stephen's Anglican Church, Bonny Island, Stained glass, 1883.
©Nelson Graves, 2010.

Hence, under the circumstance, in the desire for dialogue and engagement with the peoples and cultures in the places of the new evangelization; the Church effected a change from European dominated art of the first generation. That feat was directed at a hegemonic repositioning of the thrust of the new evangelisation. This was not a display of, otherwise, eroticist fascination like the event of the European artists at the encounter with the first African masks and artifacts.³ It was a strategic repositioning of the international Christian church in the new millennium of evangelisation.

The foregoing speaks to a discourse of power, an outrage that burst the euro-centric monocle. The Christian Fathers of the orthodox faiths wrested the power centrality of European style Christianity, opening the doors of faith to Africa and the other new destinations of evangelisation. That singular act by the Christian church, the most coeval institution in Western society, inflects a discourse of power and the new alignment of the church and the emergent nations of the new world. The Christian church, thus, allotted Nigeria, as a destination of evangelisation an authoritative place in the scheme of world power play. Hence, in her most public art for evangelisation and Liturgy, the Church permitted the use of Nigerian visual motifs and her unique visual lexicon in the illustrations for the glass art and other art forms. By granting the Nigerian artists the right to the inclusion of their peculiar visual language, the church endorsed the Nigerian expressive voice in the new evangelisation.

However, in Nigeria, the appearance of the modernist stained-glass artwork in the decades of independence was an opportunity for the major Orthodox Christian churches to win converts. It was also an opportunity to exploit the rhetoric and excitement of independence for each Christian denomination. This was also an opportunity for each Christian congregation to win converts for their own churches in the metropolitan center and Nigerian capital, Lagos. It was an opportunity for one other orthodox Christian denomination, the Presbyterian Church of Scotland that had restricted her operations within the territory of South-eastern Nigeria (the old Calabar and River cross sphere) to stake a place in the Lagos metropolis. The Presbyterians had kept away in the territorial areas of Calabar, Cross Rivers, in the southeast; and Afikpo, Aro-Ohafia and Abakaliki in the old Eastern Region for over a century. Christian orthodox denominations had endorsed a tacit understanding among themselves, restricting operations within marked territories.⁴

The Presbyterian Communion had been part of the Methodist Church in Lagos. In spite of many years of the Presbyterian sojourn in Lagos, they yearned for the establishment of a Presbyterian Church. The Presbyterians had kept away, not venturing beyond the preceding confines for the simple reason that all Christian orthodox denominations had endorsed a tacit understanding among themselves restricting individual operations within certain marked territories.

With the establishment of the Presbyterian Church in May 1963 by committed Presbyterian Christians from the old Eastern Region in metropolitan Lagos, it was a time for the erecting of a landmark and grandiose architecture. The Orthodox Faith would not be outmatched in this game of social prestige and religio-political presence. The Church commissioned a unique

church architecture in the heart of a busy inter-city bus stop area in Yaba, in the middle of a busy traffic thoroughfare. The most distinctive feature of this unusual circular church edifice, in spite of its exaggerated European style spire, is the spiral perpendicular tower that houses a set of glass window units in its cylinder fluting structure (Figs. 3-5).

The Nigerian Christian churches' perception was matched by a visual flowering of the ecclesiastic space by the pioneer glass artists, Grillo and Dale. However, that new art form achieved sophistication in the glass paintings of a group of college artists (here christened as the *Omnibus Group of Artists* from Port Harcourt) in the 1990s. In creating sophistication in church glass, the *Omnibus* became with the earlier duo national exemplars. That flowering of the Christian space expressively reflected a modernistic trend in Nigerian art. Grillo and other artists who engaged in this creative venture remain the heroes whose creative energies have kept the new evangelisation project in ferment.



Fig. 3: *Presbyterian Church, Yaba Lagos, on a typical Sunday*
Atkinson & Associates, 1962.
© Nelson Graves, 2012.

However, the later years of the 1990s have seen reversals of the achievements of the first-generation artists spear headed by Grillo. In fact, reclamation and outright repetition and the resurgence of the European style windows became the distinctive fashion in the art form. Glass paintings have continued to grow and develop as a popular art form, not only in the church but it has also become popular in commercial and domestic architecture in Nigeria.

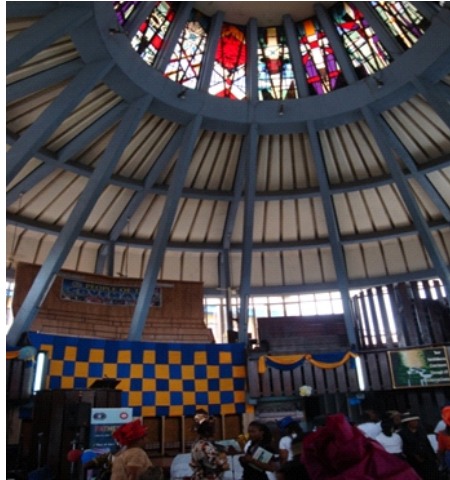


Fig. 4: Presbyterian Church, Yaba with Glass units in circular formation
Yusuf Grillo, glass, 1962.
© Nelson Graves, 2012.



Fig. 5: Presbyterian Church, Yaba, Lagos (detail)
Glass units in circular formation around Tower drum cylinder of the spire.
Yusuf Grillo, Plexiglas 1969.
© Nelson Graves, 2012.

Factors

Glass painting art was implanted in the Christian Churches in the decades of the 1800s by the missionaries. That art form experienced a Nigerian inspired domestication and growth in the decades of the 1960s. That ethos has affected noteworthy growth and development ever since; in fact, with more sophistication in the decades 1980s and 1990s. The factors responsible for that growth and development are: Orthodox Christian Churches' Patronage, Evangelistic Propaganda, Inculturation in the Christian Church, Nigerian Nationalism and Modernity. The Nigerianisation of the, otherwise, European art form, Nigerian Artistic Trends, and Private Patronage were also responsible factors. These factors are now discussed in detail.

Church Patronage

The Orthodox Christian churches, like the Presbyterian Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church, were the principal motivating forces behind the initiation of the Nigerian glass art in Nigeria. They were the principal patrons between 1950s and 1960s. When the Nigerian glass paintings by Grillo were commissioned, the Nigerian artist was purposefully brought in to establish a uniquely Nigerian version of the paintings utilising iconographies drawn from his own visual world. It was an opportunity to express the Bible messages and the Christos story in Nigerian in distinctively imagery and colours. The local artist engaged in the creation of the new glass paintings was, therefore, requested by his principal patrons, the Church, to produce paintings that drew its imageries from the wealth of the locales' history and storytelling traditions. That is telling the Bible stories and expressing the doctrines and teachings of Christianity in themes and images that bring them readily to the peoples. Indeed, in visual terms, create legible elements in the constitution and cartography of the new evangelisation. In effect the Nigerian artists were granted license to freely borrow imagery from both the folklore and the art traditions of their motherland. This effected, first and foremost, a domestication of the themes and subject matter of the biblical stories. Secondly, a recast of the stories utilising Nigerian iconographical imageries, all drawn from her rich visual cultural heritage.

The essence of the Nigerian artists' participation in the new glass initiative was to aid the Christian churches' culturalisation of the message of the Bible, making it intelligible to the peoples of the new evangelisation. The peoples of the new places of evangelisation were, thusly, brought into the "flock of Christ" (to participate as equals). The Nigerian artistic intervention should, therefore, be fully recognised as a creative instrumentality that aided the domestication of the teachings of the Christian Faith. Indeed, the ability of the Nigerian artist's intervention should equally be seen as the reiteration of power drawn from African themes and subject matter. These automatically make the subjects of the glass paintings interpretively Nigerian. That capacity of the Nigerian artist to recast the themes and subject matter of church glass, in ways that made them readily visible and legible, meant that the Christian message was universal.

The Church Fathers parted ways with the conventions of the West to politically authorize African participation in the new evangelisation. Such a move, therefore, implied the Church's endorsement of the native airs of the places of the new evangelisation in the liturgy and celebration of the Pascal mysteries. Implicitly, that also implied the implantation of vernacular imageries in the vistas of the most public spectacle of the new evangelisation, the glass paintings. These paintings, therefore, symbolically integrate and make the Biblical message universal. The implications of the preceding for creative practice in the visual arts, and the radicalisation of creativity in all the arts for that matter; are numerous and far reaching.

The first Nigerian style glass with peculiar iconographical motifs for the Church was created by the Nigerian artist Y.C.A. Grillo. Arguably, it was not intended as a mere establishment of a digest of the faith; instead, I aver that it was purposefully directed to undermine the

ideological foundations of the euro-centric Christian project implanted from Europe. However, expanding the discuss of Nigerian glass painting as an accessory in the new evangelisation reveals that as a historical document so perceived, the new glass was a groundbreaking symbol of the new epoch in the Church's history. Indeed, that new symbol profoundly revealed the ethos of the Church, in the new evangelisation. As a vehicle of evangelisation, the new art with her unique imagery swarmed in local *Adire Eleko* colours was the most public vista of the new evangelisation and Liturgical paradigm shift. The Orthodox Christian churches scripted their new position-takings in elaborate ecclesiastic texts. The most prominent of these was the Roman Catholic Church's Vatican II document *Ecclesia In Africa*.⁵ That document spelled out in clear terms the new Church dogma, emphasizing liberalisms and more openness. It also emphasized the Church's purposive intentions to embrace the African world and the rest of the new World.

A European and American scholarship that unfortunately projected a Western viewpoint. That profile, therefore, excluded Africa and African art history in its enactment of “the history of things”, hence, the writing of the history of the stained-glass art, indeed, all art forms, has been dominated by the West. That cited Art in a view-point replete with the standards and notions of the West, as the exemplar for all civilisation and all time. *Implantations in Indigo and gold, the glitter of Nigerian glass* dares to contest. For the orthodox Christian Churches in the 1960s had parted ways with the threads of complacency in the European imagery of the most public of her evangelisation and liturgical art form. The Church, indeed, hacked a new path in the choice of iconographies for the new artwork.

That significant step at modernisation, in her principal theatre of Faith by the Church in Nigeria at the 1960s, affected an inclusion of Nigeria in the *dicta* of Christianity. It also affected the visual flowering of not only the Christian religious art in the glass painting constellation, but also Nigerian visual culture. Changes were affected through a plan of formal adoption of a substantial blending of the language and idioms of Western visual expression with Nigerian iconographical elements. Thus, “*natural synthesis*” was accomplished utilising the medium of glass. The orthodox Churches: the Presbyterian Church, the Anglican Church in Nigeria and the Roman Catholic Church, were the important patrons, who, for evangelisation and liturgy purposes, were important for the appearance of the Nigerian style in glass art in 1962. The 1980s witnessed sophistication in glass painting with the enrichment in Nigerian artistry utilising newer materials.

The Nigerian style was a shock that jolted the Church out of her complacency in the use of the medley of images in the first glass series lodged onto Nigerian shores earlier in the 1800s. That was at the behest of the missionary interventions. Hence, the Nigerian style pictures with their peculiar iconography, marked a sharp departure from the European glass of the first generation.

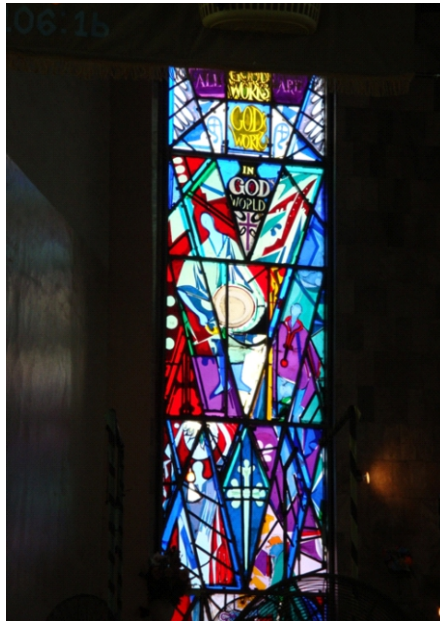


Fig. 6: *Celebration*
 Yusuf Grillo, Plexiglas, 214 x 334cm, 1962.
 © Nelson Graves, 2012.

The appearance of these uniquely Nigerian art works in glass, in fact, reflected a new regime of imagery in the history of Church art. The Anglican Church silently, without fanfare, launched her first set of new images in 1962 in the All-Saints Anglican Church, Yaba, Lagos (Fig. 6). This is a modern church house with highly moderated Gothic architectural trimmings and bell tower, but with two giant stained glass windows dominating the ornate walls of the ambulatory overlooking a simple altar in the Tabernacle space below.



Fig. 7: *Celebration* windows,
 Yusuf Grillo, Plexiglas, 1962.
 © Nelson Graves, 2012.

Next to the old church (in the old Yaba neighborhood) the Anglicans erected a modernist All Saints Anglican Church in 1961. Instead of European mimetic and naturalistic pictures like the Christ Church Cathedral, Lagos, the Church patrons commissioned a glass painting feat that incorporated in its melee of imageries distinctively Nigerian elements. These images were drawn directly from folklore, myths and legends of the *Egba-Brazilian* heritage of the Lagos cultural environment. To further distinguish these images, they were all swarmed in colours derived from *Adire-eleko* fabric dyes.

The New Evangelisation Stratagem

Lagos (the major Nigerian metropolitan center) was the heartbeat of the new evangelisation of the 1960s in Nigeria. As the major metropolitan town in Nigeria, Lagos was the going place for openings in business and commerce. Hence, Lagos became the melting pot for the hoards of civil servants, traders and business people. Most importantly, it was the 'place' for the hoards of Christian Ibo speaking groups that thronged in from the Niger River dioceses of the South-South and the Presbyterian South-East. Besides, Lagos in spite of her large Brazilian settler Christian population; was receptive to all Christians. It was, thus, the center for the subsequent contest and quest for territory by the major orthodox Faiths: the Catholics, the Anglicans and the Presbyterians. At the auspicious time of the new evangelisation in the 1960s, at the time of renovation and modernisation in the stratagem of evangelisation and Liturgy, Lagos was the most visible space for that encounter of the Faiths.

This *Egba-Brazilian* metropolis was the ground for the immediate propaganda exploits of the new evangelisation. To boost their evangelisation and conversion engagements, therefore, the principal Churches in Nigeria launched not only strategies of appeal but also invested in magnificent church architecture. With determination and political fiat, these churches also significantly invested in the most public of all, the display of a visual accessory for the Bible and Christian messages. The Presbyterians, who had only found a foothold in Lagos for the first time after years of absence on the scene, joined the bandwagon. They invested in a unique church edifice (Fig. 3). That edifice announced their presence on the Lagos scene with the most public art of evangelisation and liturgy, glass paintings. This was delivered in the most distinguishing of styles, the Nigerian glass style, cited in the spire cylinder of the church (Fig. 4).

The Presbyterian Christian Church, originally called the Church of Scotland Mission, found a foothold in metropolitan Lagos in May 1963. In the early years of the Christian venture in Nigeria, there was a tacit understanding among the principal missions operating in the country to restrict their operations within certain territorial zones. This accounts for the near total absence of the Presbyterian establishment or influence in the South-Western Region of Nigeria until the establishment of the Lagos Presbyterian Church. That deed was achieved by dint of the efforts of the Presbyterians of Eastern Nigerian origin resident in Lagos. That move was spear-headed by one Mr. E. Udofia, a Presbyterian leader in the Trinity Methodist Church, Tinubu, Lagos. Presbyterians trace their roots to the early church of Jerusalem, to Augustine and to Paul. The Church's doctrine is democratic. Presbyterianism was made popular in the Reformation by John Calvin. However, the missionary team set foot in Calabar

on April 10, 1846. The team that arrived Calabar was led by the Reverend Hope Masterson Waddell and a team of Scottish missionaries as well as Jamaican Church workers.⁶

The Presbyterian exhilaration of that accomplishment was, therefore, crystallized with the erection of the unique Church edifice for the Church, Yaba, Lagos (Fig. 3). Its most distinctive Christian art form, the glass paintings, was located in a unique cyclic formation in the cylinder of the Cathedral's spire tower (Figs. 4 & 5). The acquisition of the most characteristic public art of Christian evangelisation and liturgy draws attention to the propagandist pageantries of the orthodox Christian Churches in Nigeria. Moreover, the glass paintings were couched in distinctly indigenous Nigerian nationalistic styles. From each of the Christian churches, therefore, there appeared a new iconography and rhetoric in the dynamics of church evangelisation. All this was geared to the winning of converts and even the winning over of converts from the other faiths, consolidation of doctrine and the goals of Nigerianisation. It also reflected not only a strategic move by the churches to clinically define and enlarge their holdings, principally in the Lagos metropolis.

Christian churches were conscious of the diversity of the ethnic population of Nigeria. The Lagos metropolitan arch-diocese of the Christian Churches in Nigeria, without prejudice, was the site for a bitterly contested claim to territory. In fact, one of the most prominent of the orthodox Christian Churches, the Roman Catholic Church, the matter of territorialisation assumed definitive directions. She declared a policy of openness and Nigerianisation of church doctrine and teaching in its new evangelisation and liturgy. That policy was drawn up in a mission statement. It was also emphatically the most distinctive feature in the choice imagery in the makeup of her new evangelisation-stained glass art. That artwork dominates the ambulatory walls of her church architecture. Artt was, thus, conceived as a vital instrumentality of progress and effective publicity in the Churches. From strict strategic perspectives, nothing could be more explicit than the engagement of an indigenous Nigerian college trained artist, and the inclusion of vernacular imagery drawn from the locales of evangelisation in Nigeria (Figs. 6 & 7). These imageries were rendered in familiar *Adire eleko* colour schemes, impressionistic of traditional fabric colours and dye pit resins culled from the *Egba* Land.



Fig. 8: *The Coronation of the Virgin*: Frank Ugiomoh, Glass, Plexiglas & pigment, 2002.
© Nelson Graves, 2012.

In another Church, in faraway Port Harcourt (Fig. 8), imageries also included symbolic fabric symbolisms and heraldic fabrics colours of the Ikwerr and Ndoki people.



Fig. 9: *Commemoration Jubilee2000*, Frank Ugiomoh, glass lancet, Plexiglas & pigment, 2002.
© Nelson Graves, 2012.

Also prominent were imageries drawn directly from Nigerian cryptic folklore, oral histories, myths and legends. Motifs created from these imageries formed the composite elements in the new Church-stained glass windows (Figs. 6-9). To really catch the locales in an all-inclusive campaign, the Catholic Church even ventured.



Fig. 10: *Glass Painting*, St. Dominic's Catholic Church Yaba, Lagos, Yusuf Grillo, Plexiglas & Pigment, 1360 x 680m, 1963. ©Nelson Graves, 2012.

To serialise the celebration of everyday events from the places of evangelisation (Figs. 8 & 9). These modernisation strategies were directed to highlight the spirit of the new ecumenism in its evangelisation and indigenization of Liturgy.

In that campaign to win the hearts of the Christian population, the Catholic Church was categorical in her overhaul and even the recreation of the major symbols of the faith. This is to the extent that she dared to incorporate even vernacular forms in her glass paintings. The traditional symbols like the cross remained but symbols like the dove, the hook and anchor were given added prominence (Fig. 11).



Fig. 11: *Glass painting* (detail of upper section) St. Dominic's Catholic Church, Yaba, Lagos; Yusuf Grillo, Plexiglas & pigment, 1963.
© Nelson Graves, 2012.

In fact, to be more projected onto the classes of the burgeoning elite college educated middle-classes, the Catholic Church's-stained window in the St. Dominic's Catholic Church expanded the variety of imageries in her lancet window. Images in this Catholic Church's-stained window show much more readable imagery in simple graphic varieties reflecting the biblical messages, the Bible and liturgy. The straightforwardness in imagery was intended to reach the population irrespective of education, tongue and clime. The re-evangelisation drive was equally geared to meet the needs of a 20th century Nigeria.

Church, therefore, included the symbol of the Trinity, the leading symbol of ecumenism and peace, the dove; and other liturgical symbols reflective of the change to the cherubic or seraphic for agreement of the Christian faith. These images were conceived as magnets in the overall strategy for the attraction of the faithful followers, and also the conversion of Christians from the other denominations



Fig. 12: *Glass Painting* (detail of lower section), St. Dominic's Catholic Church, Yaba, Lagos; Yusuf Grillo, Plexiglas & pigment, 1963.
© Nelson Graves, 2012.

As Ben Shahn (1982) points out:

Form is the most visible shape of all man's growth. It is the living picture of his tribe at its most primitive, and of his civilization at its most sophisticated state. Form is the many faces of the legend: bardic, epic, sculptural, musical, pictorial, architectural, it is the infinite remnant of self. Form is the very shape of content.

The orthodox faiths proclaimed the uncompromising values of artistic sincerity to a sourcing of imageries from the art world of the places of the new evangelisation. The glass images in the St. Dominic's Catholic Church (Figs.11-13) for example, became more simplified and readily readable for both the congregation and even the ordinary visitor. For example, the bottom panel of the single lancet window glass in this modern Christian Church (Fig. 12) shows five figures: the central figure of the Christ as the Paschal lamb on the cross, and two paired figures each on both sides. These stand for the four chief duties that the Dominicans as priests perform. Each pair is symbolically directed at the central figure of Christ on the cross of Calvary.

Nigerian Nationalism

The advent of a new artistic idiom different from the European, in the new evangelisation (1962), was not intended to undermine the stained glass of European vintage. It was, instead, intended to herald the ideological and doctrinal foundations of the new evangelisation. The Church, explicitly declared, in public, the acknowledgement of Nigerian sovereignty. Hence, was, imperative to recognise the need for the expression of the basic tenets of doctrine in ways that were unique and indigenous to Nigeria. The Bible and the Redemption story framed on the Paschal mysteries and the theatre of Calvary were illustrated in ways that were peculiarly Nigerian. The Fathers, in the Christian Churches, avid scholars of the Enlightenment and

Scholastic traditions in chose a college trained artist, Yusuf C.A. Grillo. Yusuf's College training instilled the canons of Western style art. It is important, however, to remember that mimetic and figurative realism were part of Grillo's native Yoruba artistic heritage, the classical court art of ancient *Ile Ife*.

Grillo must also be remembered as a key player in the proper re-formation of the mimetic tradition that the western canon had dominated. Choice of idiom in expressing an acculturation vista to the stained-glass art, therefore, despite its immediate inspiration and sourcing, was in a way a transfiguration of the realistic heritage of the art. Grillo employed themes and subject matter drawn from the Oral Literature of the local Yoruba and Brazilian heritage of Creole Lagos. This should be read as a reinstatement and continuity of the Church's traditions. However, in a culturalisation digest of the Messages, these paintings brought the Bible "home" to the local people.

Nigerian glass painting creator's engagements with indigenous cultural forms reflect adoptions of local cultural conceptual forms, shapes and colours. This served the purpose of the contemporary creation of images for the concerns of Church liturgy and evangelisation. The artworks created by Nigerian artists are neither a continuation nor a reconfiguration of extant African art and traditions from where they dared source the inspirations for their new works. The appearance of these unique Nigerian images onto the corpus of images in Church glass, heralds a radical rupture in the otherwise conformist stance of Euro-centric stained-glass art. The Nigerian style proclaimed the uncompromising values of artistic sincerity as against the deft handlings of traditional clichés of the past. Nigerian glass, therefore, scoffs the logic and mechanics of linearism with its perspective projected fictive tastes. It also rejected the ahistorical aura of African art and the Imperial power game in its colonial devices. The Nigerian art form forced a modernism onto the narratives of modern African art. It also achieved this for Nigerian art, African art, and both European and world art.

The first generation of Nigerian glass images effected a radicalization even in imagery by the Nigerian artists that identify with a consciousness of the political *status quo* at independence in 1960. In the elated air of independence from Britain, the Nigerian artists resorted to imagery that deftly parted ways with the tenets of European canonic art. Their art emphasised, henceforth, nascent discourses that readily pander to political art as ideology. In that guise, the new art works by Yusuf Grillo differed from the works of Aina Onabolu in the 1800s. Onabolu's works were assertively political art as experience of the artist.⁸ It is important that the glass paintings that drew the attention of the contemporary art world to Grillo's work emblematically evoked the indigenous fabric of *africanite*. It emphasised the iconography of renaissance Africa. Grillo in his indulgence in critical literature, must have read Kwame Nkrumah's seminal work *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*.⁹

Nkrumah argued that, in the years following independence, that a new form of colonialism would appear that grounds its bombast's on the continued mental subservience of the formerly colonised peoples. In order for full independence to happen, therefore, it was imperative for Africans to engage in a conscious rigorous reorientation of the mind. All Africans were

obliged, as a matter of urgency, to rediscover and recover their cultures rather than succumb wholly to the allure of colonial ways. Rather than dismiss them as inferior to the means and ways of the former colonial master, a renewal of the dignity in their traditions and reliance on their *own* resources was authoritative. Otherwise, political independence would have little or no effect. Grillo's art cannot be estranged from the politics of the day. That artwork was complicit with the Nigerian cultures willed to identify with it. It reflected and foregrounds cultural authority and a form of political power. Hence, it leaves the art historian and critics with the burden of exploring the truths of its aesthetic specificity through immanent criticism. Such an exercise would reveal the art work's social testimony.¹⁰

Nigerianisation of an otherwise European art form

It is mesmerizing to note that the phenomena of Nigerianisation relate to a determinable consciousness of the irreversibility of a break with the traditions of western art and its European ideals. One of the eminent pundits of modern Nigerian art history, the Nigerian Ola Oloidi, a Professor of art history and art criticism, avered that from the late 19th century, it was ostensible that the age old art traditions of Europe would give way to Africa.¹¹ The colonial and postcolonial position-takings in cultural studies have been on the rise in non-western cultures ever since the West took to itself the locus of absolute perfection as well as the ideal for all mankind and all time. It is, therefore, plausible to situate the visual forms in the Nigerian glass as discourses that overwhelmingly affected the pursuits of both the Church and the emergent political and social institutions in the former colony Nigeria towards identity politics. Hence, it is wise to know that the problematic of the colonial and post-colonial rhetorics, and its manifestation in the production of the visual culture of glass art. The historical time frame for this analogy grounds the decade 1955-1965 as definite to the debates of the new art form.

Cultural nationalism prefigured in the philosophy of Negritude firstly defined by Diaspora Africans in literary texts, and the anti-colonialist rhetorics, engaged the consciousness of Africans in the colonies. The search for fresh readings of that philosophy reflected an *instrumentality* of social change and progress. The preceding draws attention to the tactics of acculturation deployed by artists, especially the Nigerian artists engaged in the new evangelisation glass art. Grillo and other artists in pursuit of honest and original expressions in their work emphasised nationalism. The overriding principle reflects "*natural synthesis*", a consciousness at the heart of artistic practice undergirding cultural build up inspired by intercultural dialogue. The Church, thus, made the new art an instrument of publicity. This is the thrust of the utility of the glass painting as gadgetry in the "new thinking" Church. The works of the new evangelisation regime make the experiences of the ecclesiology spatially distinguishable.

Art foregrounds ineluctably cultural authority and symbolises power.¹² The Churches employed the glass window as an artistic vehicle for the hoisting of her strategic tomes of progressivism in her avowal of the new in her ecclesiology. In that vein, the unique Nigerian iconographic imageries in the new glass art expressively hallowed a new art form. That art form originates its unique idioms in the sourcing of its subject matter from home-grown themes, motifs and imageries that its creators have deployed. These, otherwise, commonplace

motifs are transformed in their use for the explication and culturalisation of the Bible and the Christ-centered story. This gives Nigerian glass art its origin and authenticity. Here lies the legacy and identity of glass as church art. True church art remained a model inspired by the *pictorial turn* in the Christian church's foundations of knowledge. These were scripted in church liturgical documents such as the Catholic Church's *Ecclesia in Africa: The Nigerian Response*.¹³

Grillo's stylistic inversion of church art, at the instance of the new evangelisation project, reflected the momentous *pictorial turn* in Church art and its history. That transposal affected a change in the balance of church art and evangelisation culture. In this show, it is important to note the narration of a revivalist home-grown aesthetic in the exercise. This should be regarded as a contemporary context of militant ethnicity; A sounding board for the more profound militant ethnicity reflected in post-independence at the Nigerian first indigenous art college, the Nsukka art school. Reflecting, therefore, on the facts of their fracture and intellectual factorships, this appropriation of indigenous culture is problematic since it filters their modernistic engagements, in Church art, through the lens of ethnic identity. Instead, it would make sense to perceive a review of the uses of revivalist aesthetics as deployed by Grillo, and, elsewhere, by the artists of the Nsukka School, as the specific regime for the identification and reflection on art's role in the production of an intellectual culture. Revivalist aesthetics as deployed here reflects new ways of explaining how the locale artist articulates and interprets subjects within the scope and possibilities of the lexicology of his local culture's visual tooling mechanisms.

The aesthetic regime of the locale Lagos *Egba* cum Diasporas cultural heritage in Grillo's work dominates the Lagos glass aesthetics. This master's approach to the creation of art is informed by his interests and cultural background. That is the grounding from which to appreciate the typographic response to the demands and dictates of the tomes of modernity reflected in his artwork. Modernity for Grillo was channeled through a culture of radical politics hoisted on creative radicalism with appropriations from *creolizational* Yoruba cultural identity as its focus. Grillo was steeped in European art history. Grillo may have simply exhibited a formidable intertextuality in his art works. He also borrowed freely from kindred spirits elsewhere. All artists engaged in the glass art for the evangelisation regime, therefore, were engaged in the transformation of indigenous *realia* to modern art. However, with the humanistic and serenely spiritualising aura of African art, to use Oloidi's language, a clear break with the hegemonic euro-centralism imbued in the regime of church-stained glass art found a complex reverberation in the works of the Omnibus Group of artists in Port Harcourt.

Patronage

Despite the monopoly in patronage from the orthodox Christian Churches, there were also commissions granted by individual clerics, architects and builders. There were private commissions from industrialists, both Nigerian and expatriate, and even owners of new Housing estates. These private individuals' commissions have encouraged the growth and development of the art form in Nigeria. The British expatriate architects engaged in the massive construction projects in Nigeria at the time of Independence in the 1960s were the first

to identify the value of skilled personnel from the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology, Zaria (NCAST). Such personnel were knowledgeable in the valuable skills of the design trade. College Basic Design courses had exposed graduates like Grillo, to further design skills in real professional practice.

Fascinated by the successful engagements with Grillo in the construction of Mosaics and Murals in the Ibadan commissions, Atkinson turned to the versatile and eclectic Nigerian artist for the execution of the Presbyterian Church glass units, Yaba, Lagos, in 1963.¹⁴ Grillo was engaged by the Industrialist Chief Christopher Ogunbanjo to execute the stained-glass paintings for a private Church donation (St John's Church, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun state). The former Vice-President of the Republic of Nigeria, Dr. Alex Ekueme, also commissioned Grillo to execute all the glass windows for the St. John's Anglican Church, Oko, Anambra State in 1991. That Church and its Presbytery were the Former Vice-President's personal gift to the Anglican Diocese of Idemilli, Orumba north L.G.A. Anambra state. The commission for the windows in the former Vice-President's Oko Country Home was also granted to Grillo.

The other leading glass artist, David Herbert Dale, however, found patronage in the Emeritus Catholic Bishop of the Lagos archdiocese, Bishop Fitzgibbons. He did not only enjoy commissions for glass in the priest's private Chapel, but was also commissioned to design and build the entire Garden and Grounds of the Marian Shrine located in the Parish Church of St Ann', Maryland, Lagos .¹⁵ Nigerian architects and builders like Tom Ikimi have engaged the services of Nigerian glass artist like Nsikak Essien. Nsikak Essien enjoyed regular commissions from the indigenous Nigerian Pentecostal Church, the Redeemed Christian Church. In fact, Nsikak has been engaged in the creation of windows for this Church Headquarters, Banana Island, Lagos, since 2012.¹⁶

Nigerian Artistic Trends

The utilisation of modern architectural fabrication material such as Plexiglas and Perspex PMA as substrates instead of traditional glass has made glass art readily available to both the professional and amateur artists alike. A readily malleable substrate, Plexiglas, is easy to work with, less cumbersome to transport. Commissions for the Presbyterian Church, Yaba, Lagos and the St. John's Anglican Church, Oko, Anambra state are entirely executed on Plexiglas substrates. The Omnibus Group of Artists, creators of the St. Jude's Catholic Church, Rumuokoro, Port Harcourt, glass, executed the entire pieces for that church in Plexiglas. The infusion of new technological materials has made the art of glass painting much simpler to execute and less technical. Similarly, Nigerian glass artists are now more focused on the design of glass as an architectural functional accessory and less on its role as traditional aesthetic religious accessory. The simultaneous creation of a lit-up interior appears the new interest.

College trained Nigerian artists, especially painters and sculptors are eclectic. They not only subscribe to Western Technology journals but dare to take inspiration from technological advancements in studios as far away as Germany. These intellectual stray-ways have aided technological transfers. A conscious transfer of sophisticated techniques of production are invaluable to the growth and development of local glass artists' technical knowledge.



Fig. 13: *Rose window Logo*, Nsikak Essien, glass,
Glass and metal Collage, 2012.
© Nsikak Essien Estate, 2012.

These techniques include fabrication methods in kiln-formed and laminated glass, to traditional leaded glass, with applied imagery using silkscreen photographic transfer techniques. Young artists are already conversant with the use of enamel paint in place of traditional stained glass colours. They are also familiar with etching and engraving techniques. Such knowledge has added to the sophistication in their glass products. The fabrication facilities in European studios, such as Mayer of Munich and Heinrich Oidmann Studios, Linnich; are now open to international artists.

More than twenty years since the successful reinvigoration and re-implantation of the Christian Church and its traditions in Nigeria, stained glass art has remained a vigorous and prominent feature in both Church art and architecture. It has also become a distinctive feature in private housing and commercial estates. Nigerian images of the 1960s achieved the habituation of the Bible stories and the dicta of church doctrine. Evangelisation had moved beyond the regime of conversion campaigns, the institutionalisation and definition of territories by the orthodox faiths. To be sure, people had been enchanted with the seeing of Bible images in their own Nigerian stained glass. The new awareness preached by the new evangelism equally emphasised universalism of the faith. The orthodox Christian faith was, therefore, left with a vulnerable threshold open to the consequences of the assault of the fleeting forces of the new Right leaning Church movements. These Pentecostals, as they are now popularly called, are keen on the spread of a strange kind of prosperity and miracle making ministration regime. That fleeting force challenges the Christian spectacle of the stained glass.

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