

Article

Humanism through the Pinhole of LIMCAF, and El Anatsui's Mobility Stance in the Making of Great Artists

Trevor Vermont Morgan¹, May Okafor²

Department of Fine and Industrial Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria

¹ morgan.trevor@unn.edu.ng; [Orcid.org/0000-0002-0695-1531](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0695-1531)

² may.okafor@unn.edu.ng; [Orcid.org/0000-0002-4987-7570](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4987-7570)

Correspondence: may.okafor@unn.edu.ng

Abstract

This paper examines the intersection of the 'Life In My City Art Festival' (LIMCAF), humanistic principles, and the artistic philosophy of El Anatsui, a distinguished African artist celebrated for his innovative approach to materials and themes. The 2024 LIMCAF event, themed "Humanism: We Are Thinking... Humanism," invited participation from a diverse array of young creatives across the country, encouraging them to express their unique perspectives in response to the theme. These artworks serve not only as personal reflections but also as collective narratives that inspire dialogue about identity, community, and social justice. Employing a narrative method, this paper articulates connections between the exhibited works and the core tenets of humanism, highlighting how LIMCAF fosters inclusivity and engagement among artists from various backgrounds. It explores how Anatsui's philosophy on mobility and interconnectedness resonates within the festival, promoting the growth of young, talented artists and facilitating a nurturing environment for their artistic development. The paper underscores the significance of art as a transformative tool for social change, empowerment, and interconnectedness, advocating for a shared journey towards self-discovery and collective liberation. Through this exploration, we recognize the power of art to illuminate diverse voices and experiences, championing a vision of humanity that is richer and more inclusive.

Keywords: LIMCAF, El Anatsui, Humanism, Art Exhibition, Annual Festival

Introduction

As the largest and longest-running annual art festival in Nigeria, the *Life In My City Art Festival* (LIMCAF) prides itself as being an all-important meeting point for art enthusiasts, professionals and artists-in-training across the country (LIMCAF 2024a; 2024b). LIMCAF event began in Enugu in 2007 and later took wider coverage. This time, LIMCAF covered the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria in which regional coordinators hosted the exhibitions, and then the best 100 entries were joined at the national centre, in Enugu. This year's event was themed 'Humanism.' In full, it includes the prelude, 'We are thinking... Humanism,' as seen at the entrance to the grand finale exhibition, a week-long event that was held in October 2024 at Enugu. By the prelude, the central theme is conceptually repositioned as an invitation to contemplate and act—a humanistic action. The participating artists were guided by the concept of humanism in the choice of works produced or submitted. The idea of humanism for the show was quite eloquent considering the current situation of suffering, inflation, hunger, insecurity, banditry, kidnapping and living or livelihood is based on 'survival of the fittest.'

Humanism as Cultural and Creative Concept

Humanism which denotes human welfare derives from the principles of collaboration, bilateralism, symbiosis, and standing for the good of 'the goose' and 'the gander'. The concept of humanism can be espoused through language, art and



other means of interaction within the human space. This is relevant to the pursuit of self-discovery and interdependence, culminating in our shared freedom. Humanism in and through art emerges from a philosophical and cultural understanding that emphasizes human values, individual agency, and the importance of human experiences and emotions. The idea of humanism is as deep-rooted as the existence of man and his communality.

One of the most fundamental principles of humanism in art is its emphasis on shared experiences and emotions. Artists attempt to explore and represent the complexities of human life, alongside its various existential questions such as the social, spiritual, and political, among others. This focus allows for a deeper understanding of the human condition and encourages audiences to reflect on the artists' experiences. This is reflected in the portrayal of subjects and narratives that derived from personal agency, identity, skills and self-expression. Artists often seek to present diverse perspectives, allowing for varied interpretations of their works while advocating for the use of reason and critical thinking in making sense of their representation. Through creative curiosity, exploration, experimentation, and innovation, artists question established norms and challenge conventions.

For instance, Renaissance artists pursued classical learning, skills and the study of humanist principles, leading to new techniques in painting, sculpture, and architecture (Burckhardt, 1990; Hall, 2005). In itself, humanism in creative practice often intertwines with social and ethical concerns. Most artists prefer to address such pressing societal issues, advocate for social justice, and challenge injustices through their work. This focus on social responsibility transforms art into a form of activism, prompting audiences to engage with critical issues of society. Humanism fosters interdisciplinary connections across philosophy, science, politics, and social issues and many artists in this regard draw inspiration from various fields, while reflecting holistic humanistic views in creative practices. In contemporary times artists often blend different media, incorporating elements of technology, philosophy, and social commentary into their work (Krauss, 1985). This interdisciplinary approach encourages audience to think critically and engage with various social experiences and complex ideas.

Humanistic approach to creativity encourages an appreciation of the cultural and historical contexts in which the art is created as artists are usually influenced by their surroundings, and individual experiences. This consciousness in the audience can lead to more nuanced interpretations of artworks. The principles of human experience, individuality, critical thinking, socio-cultural values, as well as understanding of interdisciplinary contexts foster a vibrant and reflective artistic landscape that encourages both creators and audiences to engage deeply with the human conditions and complexes. Exploring the idea of humanism in art not only enriches artistic expression but can also contribute to social discourse which in turn promotes empathy and personal growth.

LIMCAF "Humanism," like the previous event, was organized as a mega show with various components: art exhibition, school children's art workshop, artists' talks and the finale gala. Participants in this vital art show are professionally trained artists,

usually from tertiary institutions across Nigeria and, statutorily, are often not more than 35 years of age. The phenomenal event has penetrated key art schools in Nigeria, such as Nsukka School, Zaria Art School, Auchi Art School, and IMT School, among others. The competitive creative concourse has involved key players like El Anatsui, HRM Igwe Nnaemeka Alfred Achebe (Obi of Onitsha), Ford Foundation, MTN Nigeria, and other important patrons, sponsors or art connoisseurs.

Having set the preamble, the focus of this paper is to articulate and draw the connection between the exhibited artworks in the context of humanism. We also underscore the notion of travel as espoused and entangled in the artist talk by Ozioma Onuzulike, a professor of African Art History and Ceramics at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The award-winning artist and curator, Amarachi Okafor, curated the Humanism exhibition. This year's show drew relevant artists and academics as jurors which included Blaise Gbaden, Babasehinde Ademulaya, Areo Margaret Olugbemisola, Obi Nwaegbe, Nadama Mustapha Garba and May Okafor.

We assert that artworks are creative outbursts and conversations between self and reality, and through exhibitions, they provide themselves as visual grounds for social discourse. The idea of humanism is quite essential for Nigeria with its multi-ethnic proclivities, its diversity of cultural systems, and peoples that are variously biased. The LIMCAF event, Humanism, was a means of bringing artworks that emerged from different parts of the nation. Understanding the social, cultural and geopolitical structure of Nigeria, which majorly covers Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba peoples, is vital in viewing the exhibition as sacrosanct in its comprehensiveness. This is relevant for national, political and other humanistic negotiations.

Art acts as both a reflection of society and a critique of reality. In Nigeria, where there are diverse ethnic identities and cultural practices, artworks encapsulate the nuances of personal and collective experiences. Exhibitions become platforms that allow artists to tell their stories and to voice their feelings, invite dialogue, and challenge prevailing social and political norms. By engaging with these artworks, viewers can explore various interpretations and meanings, thus fostering a rich discourse that aligns with humanistic values. Humanism, focused on human welfare and mutual respect, is particularly pertinent in a nation characterized by ethnic diversity and historical tensions. In Nigeria, for instance, each ethnic group—Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, and others—brings its own unique perspectives, traditions, and histories to the tapestry of national experience. Providing a brief artistic profile of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria is vital in this piece in order to guide the understanding of readers around the nature of works done in LIMCAF Humanism 2024 from the various parts of the nation.

For the Igbo, a Nigeria's major ethnic groups, art plays crucial roles in expressing cultural heritage and societal values of the people. Traditionally, Igbo art has often centered on community values, resilience, and the interconnectedness of individuals and groups. Such values are espoused through symbolic elements of art works, wall design, body decoration, mask-making among others, and these artworks are functional in marriage ceremonies, funerals, religion, and masquerade traditions (Ikhwemesi & Onwuegbuna, 2017). Earlier than now, artistic practices among the Igbo often involved multiple local artists and this collaboration enhances creativity

and strengthens community ties, as different skills and perspectives come together in the creative process (Ottenberg, 2002). During communal events and cultural festivals such as the New Yam festival, performances, masquerades, and displays of crafts become crucial expressions of shared experiences, and reinforcement of identity and collective values.

Throughout the artistic expressions of contemporary Igbo, narratives of survival and perseverance emerge as poignant reminders of past struggles. The resilience of the Igbo people, forged through a history marked by colonization, the Biafran War, and ongoing socio-political challenges, is a core theme in Igbo art. In furtherance of adaptability and cultural resilience, artists of Igbo extraction integrate contemporary themes and techniques while preserving traditional forms, showcasing the ability of both artists and the community to navigate and thrive amid changing landscapes. A good example is the Uli creative paradigm for which Nsukka School is known (Ene-Orji, 2019; Morgan, 2024).

On themes and identity, traditional aspects are prominently featured, with artworks often showcasing motifs, colors, and patterns that signify Igbo identity. These distinctive elements not only differentiate Igbo art from other cultural expressions in Nigeria but also cultivate a sense of belonging and pride among the people. Additionally, many Igbo artists engage in storytelling through their works, depicting myths, legends, and historical events that shape the Igbo identity. Such narratives play vital roles in preserving history and imparting cultural values to the younger generations.

Through artistic expressions, the determination and resilience of the Igbo people are clearly represented in performances, festivals, and visual arts exhibitions. These bonding experiences cultivate understanding, solidarity, and collaboration, reinforcing the notion that collective identity is stronger than individual identities (Ikhuemesi & Onwuegbuna, 2017). Through these themes, Igbo art plays a vital role in preserving cultural heritage while addressing contemporary societal issues, ensuring that the voices and experiences of the Igbo people are heard and acknowledged. This is where humanistic approach to artmaking is visible. It is also important to acknowledge the sense in which other ethnic group are different in their own approach to creativity.

For the Hausa people, one of the largest ethnic groups in West Africa, art is a vibrant and diverse artistic heritage characterized by a strong tradition of storytelling and craftsmanship. Their artistic expressions engage with significant themes, including faith, urbanization, and cultural exchange, often merging traditional motifs with contemporary issues. This blend reflects not only the rich cultural heritage of the Hausa but also their ability to adapt and respond to changing social dynamics.

The art of the Hausa people is largely intertwined with storytelling, often serving as a medium for conveying moral lessons, historical narratives, and cultural values. This is evident in various art forms, such as textiles, painting, and calligraphy, where stories of faith and spirituality are depicted. The Islamic influence is particularly prominent, with religious themes and motifs appearing in many artistic works. For

example, calligraphic art, which often features verses from the Quran, serves not only as an aesthetic element but also as a vehicle for expressing faith and spirituality. In this context, artists create works that are not just decorative but also imbued with deep meaning, offering insights into the spiritual lives of the Hausa people. In other words, humanism in their art is largely connected to religion

As urbanization sweeps through Nigeria and other West African countries, artists of Hausa origin have responded to the rapid changes in their socio-economic environment. Traditional art forms are being adapted to reflect urban life and its associated challenges. For instance, urban landscapes and the experiences of city dwellers frequently find their way into modern Hausa art. Artists may focus on issues such as migration, economic disparity, and the quest for identity in increasingly diverse urban settings. By blending traditional motifs with contemporary themes, Hausa artists create works that resonate with both local and global situations and audiences, capturing the essence of life in a rapidly changing world.

Cultural exchange is another vital theme in Hausa artistic expression through which there are interactions with various ethnic groups and cultures, resulting in a rich tapestry of artistic influences. This is manifest in the integration of symbols, styles, and narratives from various art cultures. For example, the influence of Tuareg and Fulani designs can be observed in textiles, ornaments, and architectural features in Hausa regions. This is even heightened as several learners of the ethnic group could be found in various tertiary institutions where pedagogical contents are different from those of traditional settings. Such intermingling not only enriches Hausa art but also fosters a sense of shared heritage and cultural dialogue. There are also art forms and techniques involving intricate embroidery, wood carving and leatherwork while incorporating modern subjects that resonate with younger generations.

This is further instantiated by the contemporary artworks that depict scenes of daily life, youth culture, or social issues, all while maintaining traditional aesthetic values. This fusion ensures that Hausa art remains relevant and accessible, allowing it to thrive in contemporary art community. The ability of Hausa artists to blend traditional motifs with contemporary issues speaks to their adaptability in a changing world. While there is an effort towards preserving their cultural identity the group's adaptability also contributes to a broader dialogue that reflects the complexities of modern life. Ultimately, Hausa art serves as a vital medium through which stories, values, and contemporary challenges are communicated as found among artists of other descent. In contemporary art practice Nigeria is a bastion of creative peoples in every front across the world.

The art of the Yoruba in South-western Nigeria is characterized by its rich tradition and vibrant forms, serving not only as a medium of aesthetic expression but also as a means of exploring spirituality and the intricate relationship between the seen and unseen worlds. Yoruba artworks are created to reflect a synthesis of beauty and morality (Leuthold, 2011). The art often promotes unity and cultural pride, reflecting the complexities of Yoruba identity and cosmology (Aremu, Ajiboye & Abiodun, 2010). The Yoruba cosmology embodies a worldview that acknowledges the existence of both visible and invisible realms, with a pantheon of deities playing central roles

in daily life and spiritual practice. Artworks such as sculptures, masks, and ceremonial objects are often created to honor these deities and facilitate communication with them.

For instance, *ifa* divination objects, serve as tools for spiritual guidance and are often elaborately carved with intricate designs that convey sacred meanings. These artifacts reflect the Yoruba belief that the spirituality and material worlds are interconnected, and through artistic expression, these ideas are communicated and preserved (Leuthold, 2011). Yoruba art is often manifested through the use of symbols and motifs to convey deeper meanings, (Aremu, Ajiboye & Abiodun, 2010). In LIMCAF Humanism art in symbolic mode was quite manifest in the works from the region. For example, see Figure 5, (LIMCAF 2024a). Traditional Yoruba sculptures and masks are not merely decorative; they serve as embodiments of spiritual truths and ancestral wisdom. These art forms frequently depict figures that represent the connection between the physical and spiritual realms, illustrating concepts of protection, guidance, and community cohesion.

The *Eyo* festival in Lagos, for instance, features elaborate masks and costumes that symbolize the spirits of the ancestors, highlighting the belief that the deceased continue to influence and protect the living. During these ceremonies, the blending of performance, art, and spirituality fosters a sense of communal identity and continuity, reinforcing the notion that the past is ever-present and influential in the lives of the Yoruba people. Traditional art forms, such as textiles and beadwork, are used in ceremonies and festivals as a means of fostering identity. For a further instance, the artistry involved in the creation of *adire* (tie-dye fabric) is not only a form of individual expression but also a collective cultural practice that reflects Yoruba heritage and aesthetics. The patterns and colors used in *adire* are often imbued with cultural significance, highlighting cultural values and narratives.

In contemporary times, Yoruba artists continue to explore and reinterpret their cultural heritage through various mediums, including painting, sculpture, and digital art. Many contemporary Yoruba artists infuse traditional themes with modern techniques and issues, addressing themes of identity, globalization, and cultural preservation. This dialogue between tradition and modernity ensures that Yoruba art remains dynamic and relevant, continuing to foster a sense of pride and unity within the community.

Art serves as a bridge facilitating understanding among these diverse groups, highlighting shared struggles and aspirations. Exhibitions play a critical role in displaying multifaceted creativity. They not only showcase artworks but also offer a space for dialogue around themes of identity, politics, and human rights. Through carefully curated collections, organizers introduce visitors to the complexities of Nigerian society and foster discussions on cultural identity, social justice, human rights, and political commentary, among others.

Ultimately, artworks break linguistic barriers, conveying messages and emotions that provoke thought and connection across different communities. This aligns well with the humanistic goal of self-discovery and interdependence, allowing individuals to

see beyond their immediate environments and recognize shared humanity. Ultimately, the interplay of art, culture, and humanism in Nigeria not only resonates on an individual level but also cultivates a collective journey toward freedom and understanding. By embracing this multifaceted approach to art and social discourse, Nigeria navigates its complex socio-political landscape, promoting a culture that values both individual expression and communal well-being.

A Visual Critique of selected Artworks of LIMCAF Humanism

Here we show selected works of Humanism. Humanism, as the title for this year's LIMCAF, was hosted in 15 different venues across Nigeria – Abuja, Enugu, Zaria, Lagos, Ibadan, and Port Harcourt, among others, before converging at the national centre in Enugu for the grand finale. In Abuja, Williams Josephine in her mixed media work, titled 'Our blood is the same colour' (Fig. 1), waded against the tide to pick on one of those factors that counteract our common humanity such as racism, religion, cultures, class, gender, and so on.

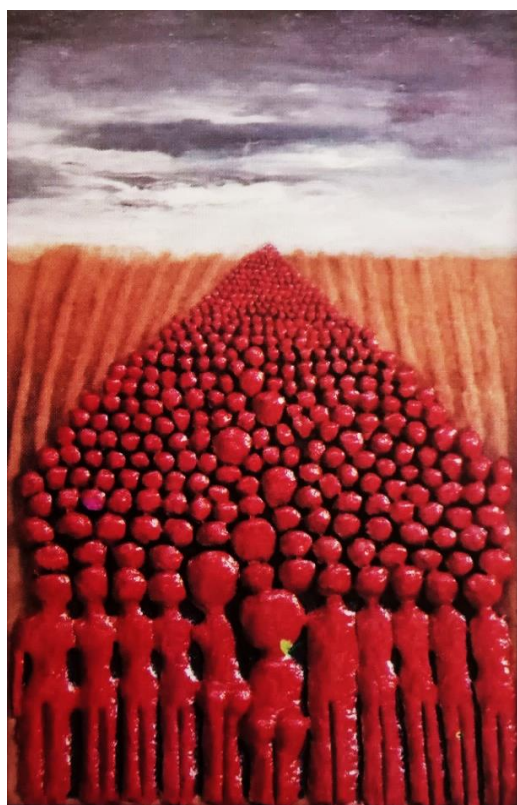


Fig. 1: Williams Josephine, Our blood is the same colour. Mixed media, 1.5x3ft

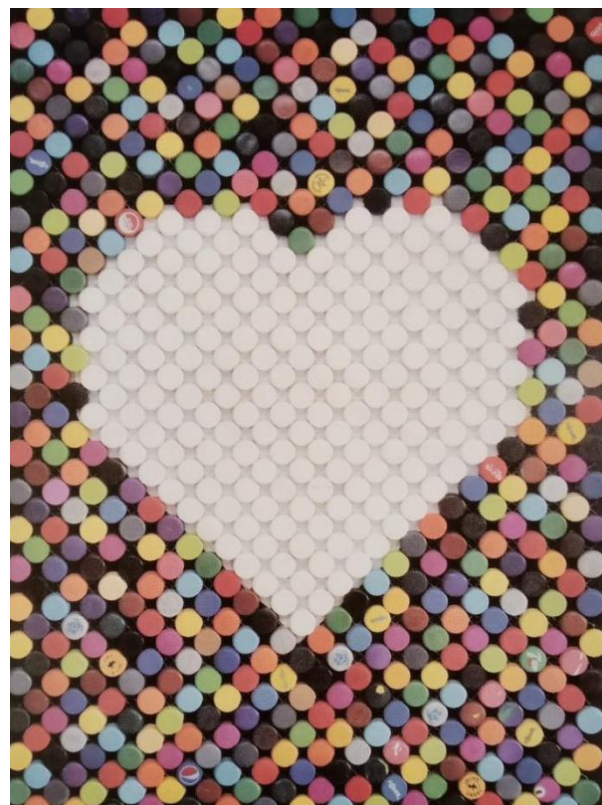


Fig. 2: Dooshima (Love). Mixed media, 36x27inches

Most social inhumanities have come from these factors, yet we have the same colour of blood. Violence and hunger, war and crimes undo our common humanity yet we come with the same colour of blood. A continuation of this theme is evident in works that focus on love. 'Dooshima' (Love) (Fig. 2), a mixed media composition by Damkor Kershim and "Love: in our frailties' (Fig. 3), composed with bamboo, fabric and thread, speak of the conquering force of love that should drive our humanity. Other

titles that run through the exhibition include kindness, gratitude, struggle, hunger, empathy, unity, and helping hands, among others.

A vital entry to the theme of humanism is that captured from the Lagos front of the exhibition in which Hassan Olamilekan explored 'Sorrow, Tears and Blood' (Fig. 4). Once again the idea of blood flows. This artist references the musical oeuvre of the famous Fela Kuti. Fela largely drew his lyrical inspiration from the government ineptitude of his active years (1970s to 1990s). His songs spoke against social injustice and political misnomers. Set against a collage of transparent images on a red background the subject of this mixed media painting is a male figure dressed in a soldier's top of green, brown and light yellow. The figure is shown with a heavy coiffure, carrying a big radio set on his shoulder as a way of listening to it.



Fig. 3: Audu Owoicho, *Love: in our frailties.* Bamboo, fabric and thread, 86x129x9cm

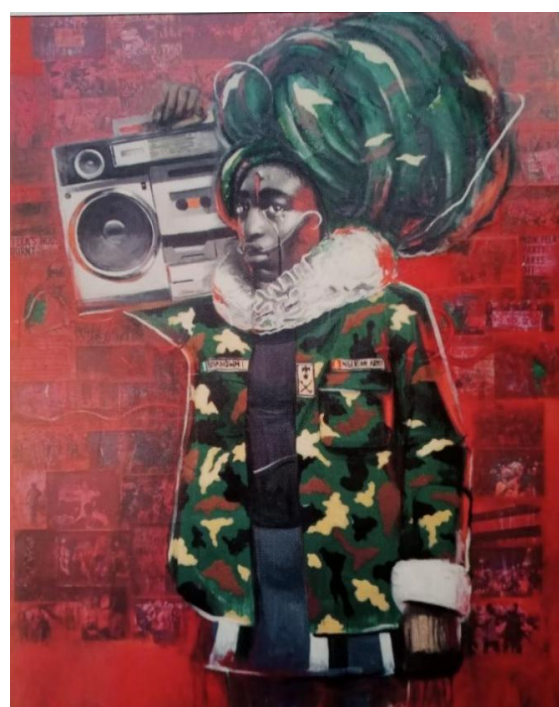


Fig. 4: Hassan Olamilekan, *Sorrow, Tears and Blood*, Mixed media on canvas, 63x81 inches

He sets the subject of the painting as belonging to Nigeria's north where many Hausas and Fulanis are known to listen to their world news by carrying radios on their shoulders, yet it is antitypical to see Northerners commonly carrying such a heavy hairdo. The subject's forehead seems to be ripped open by a bullet and blood smears on the woolly collar of his dress. For us, this art piece metaphorises Nigeria's history of violence, pogroms, military regimes, militancy, banditry and war. With this dress code, the artist captures the essence of many abnormalities of both 'military' and 'militants' operations in Nigeria.

Amidst the overwhelming scourge of governmental failures and social adversities, many Nigerians have resorted to seeking divine interventions using various means. This idea is suggested by the relief piece, the Lagos participant, Olumide Adebowale's 'Sanctuary,' (Fig. 5). Sanctuary quickly reminds us of such ideas as

religion, a place of refuge and worship. The bulgy eyes of the many heads in the painting denote certain curious looking, seeking or struggling to access the available space and opportunity. With the religious connotation of this title, one can understand that humanism has a bent on several biblical principles, especially those taught in Christ's sermons.



Fig. 5: Olumide Adebawale, *Sanctuary*, Mixed media, 26x34 inches

There is no wonder then why the titles or imageries in many of the artworks reference biblical subjects. Examples are found in such works as '*Remembering the poor*' by Emmanuel Eweje (Lagos), '*Hope*' by Linus Oluchi Vanessa (Jos), '*The least of my brethren*' by Ejiga Michael (Jalingo), '*Divinity in the city of the lost souls*' by Prince David Kembukem (Imo), '*The Sower*' by Jimoh Odora Ismaila (Ibadan), '*The m bu*' (what I am) by Omeke John Tochukwu (Enugu/Awka), '*Valley of decision*' by John Ali (Abuja), '*Compassion*' by Success Emmanuel Marcus (Uyo/Calabar), '*The Ten commitments*' by Oladosu Sulaimon Alabi (Ondo), among others.

The Ten Commitments (Fig. 6) reminds one of the Ten Commandments in the Holy Bible, which provides room for different interpersonal relationships for humanistic ambience in society. This oil painting done is a spherical ground shows a pastiche of 10 subjects or icons which are references to and metaphors of various social practices. Divided into ten concentrically arranged parts, some of the visual representations include a religious woman in meditation, two hands holding a growing plant with some quantity of soil, an individual disposing of a waste bag into a plastic bin, an ant moving a load with its back, a gavel placed vertically atop the sound block, and others. Through these iconic representations, it is obvious the artist articulates humanism through a commitment to responsibilities rather than just rights. If everyone followed their duties and were committed to social commandments, as it were, everyone's rights would not suffer.



Fig. 6: Oladosu Sulaimon Alabi, *The Ten Commitments*
Oil on canvas, 43x43 inches

As part of the grand event of the event, Ozioma Onuzulike, a professor of art history and ceramic art, at the University of Nigeria gave an all-important talk that revealed the essence of mobility and travels in the making of great artists. Mobility has almost always been a major factor in the making of great people—artists, scholars, merchants, and missionaries, among others. On its own part, humanistic encounters most often involve ‘people meeting people’ across space and time, and the young artists on this LIMCAF had a taste of it. Moreover, beyond transiting material spaces in time, an artist can encounter the creative mobility of ideas, philosophy, and media of practice in the course of his creative voyage.

El Anatsui’s Artistic Voyage and the Philosophy of Mobility

With El Anatsui as a key reference, Onuzulike’s lecture titled, *Travel as a Catalyst for Artist Growth*, x-rayed how an artist’s creative journey can be shaped by physical integration and re-integration in different social spaces and cultures (Onuzulike 2024). Here, Onuzulike noted that “El Anatsui, one of Africa’s most renowned contemporary artists, provides a compelling case study of how movement across borders can profoundly shape an artist’s practice” (p.1).

Born in Ghana, on February 4, 1944, El Anatsui grew up in Ghana and, in 1968, obtained a Bachelor’s degree from the University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana. He later relocated to Nigeria in 1975 to teach at the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Onuzulike noted that this relocation to Nigeria uniquely shaped Anatsui’s artistic journey, serving as “a turning point that expanded his artistic horizon and pushed him to explore new forms and materials” (Onuzulike 2024, p.1; Also, see Anikpe et al. 2024). At the Nsukka art department, Anatsui worked alongside notable artists like Uche Okeke, Chike Aniakor, Seth Anku

and Obiora Udechukwu. At the time, the creative vibrancy for which the Nsukka department is now known had just begun (Morgan, 2016; Okafor, 2024a).

It was in the 1970s, shortly after the end of the Nigeria-Biafran war, that the creatives at Nsukka began to integrate ideas from the cultural background of the Igbo, especially the 'Uli' creative paradigm (Okeke 1999). The creative experimentation with 'uli,' a traditional wall painting style of the Igbo women of Southeast Nigeria in Nsukka Art School has continued to date. It is in this kind of creative setting that El Anatsui thrived. The period was very significant for Anatsui's explorations with various local materials. Instances include his clay *Broken Pot Series*, and later, scavenged wooden forms like mortar, doors and ploughs disposed of after they have been severed by several years of usage by the locals (see James 2008). Following that, Anatsui's creative trajectory led him to experimenting with wood, and later, newspaper printers' plates, discarded milk-can tops and liquor bottle caps, among others. The liquor bottle caps have now become his most enduring medium to date (Anikpe et al. 2024).

Acknowledging the diversity of Anatsui's creative medium through the years, James (2008) inquired, in an interview with the artist, if any connections were interlinking his materials. Anatsui then observed that most of his art mediums have to do with materials or objects that have had some lingering interaction with the human hands. For him, such interactions create some bond among the people who have touched them. By extrapolation, narratives of travel, in terms of where the items have been handled or interacted with, are also of creative significance. In these processes, according to Anatsui, the objects are charged with meanings which may be spiritual, or scientific, like the invisible remnants of DNA on items touched by the human skin.

For Anatsui, "all objects— used or abandoned— carry the deposits of the object's user. The artist, El Anatsui, uses these cast-off materials to explore unseen human connections" (James 2008). He, therefore, considers his medium and works as some conceptual data that suggest journeys from hand to hand, place to place and evidence of human interactions and bonding. To draw from a specific example, Anatsui relates his recent projects with liquor bottle caps as explorations of the historical associations of hard drinks with the earliest contact between Africa and Europe (James 2008).

Similar to El Anatsui's interest in the physical journeys of material objects that can be repurposed as art materials, he opines that travel is a catalyst for igniting or fertilizing creative ideas. We have highlighted, earlier in this text, how his relocation from Ghana to Nigeria expanded his artistic practice. In his 2024 LIMCAF lecture, Onuzulike (2024, p.1) also noted that "one particular travel for an art residency changed the face of Anatsui's career and set it on steady ascendance in a remarkable trajectory. This was his 1980 residency at the Cummington Community of the Arts in Cummington, Massachusetts." There, Anatsui discovered an experimental approach to using the chainsaw as a sculpture tool. Onuzulike wrote, "He began to use the chainsaw not just as a tool to cut wood, but as a creative tool to express the ravages of colonialism on African peoples and cultures" (Onuzulike 2024). Works from the experiments culminated in a series of exhibitions, first in Lagos, and later in the Venice Biennale and many other art shows.

El Anatsui's creative shift to metal tins like milk tins and liquor bottle caps is also a product of his walkout exercises within Nsukka. At the walkout, his creative instinct leads him to observe his environment. Through this process, as Anikpe et al. (2024, p.21) observed, "he refined his ability to uncover art in unconventional places, underscoring that art can be unearthed anywhere." To do this, the authors noted that one has to develop an eye for 'seeing' rather than just 'looking' (Anikpe et al 2024). One, therefore, finds that the concept of journey, for El Anatsui, is inclusive of physical mobility to both nearby and distant locations in which attention must be paid for successful conceptualization and appropriation of every day ideas into creativity. The physical mobility led to media and ideological mobilities in his creative practice.

Significantly, travel as a creative catalyst is reminiscent of historical instances. Onuzulike explained, for instance, that travel has influenced the development of traditional African art and craft by facilitating knowledge exchange across regions. He narrated that through the trade routes of the Sahara Desert and river systems, particularly, artists acquired raw materials and spread specialized techniques. In Western art history, popular instances include the trips of artists like Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo during the Renaissance era. In what is now known as the Grand Tour, young artists and intellectuals commonly travelled across Europe, in the form of rite, to learn from diverse traditions (Salzberg 2003; Verhoeven 2023). The Grand Tour influenced movements like Baroque, Rococo, and Neoclassicism (Onuzulike 2024). Through these pointers, therefore, Onuzulike's lecture posits Anatsui's travel explorations as capable of sparking new artistic insights and serving as a tool in charting new courses. In his words, as Onuzulike (2024, p.1) observed, "When I come to the West, I encounter works of art which not only excite me but also enable me to understand better things in my own environment when I go back."

El Anatsui's Enduring Influence and Humanism

With a dedicated interest in nurturing young or aspiring artists, El Anatsui's yearly involvement in the LIMCAF event is remarkably attuned to his artistic philosophy on mobility as previously espoused in the paper. Every year, an El Anatsui Prize—International Travel for Dak'Art Biennial—is awarded to a selection of outstanding artists from the LIMCAF event. The Dak'Art is an art exhibition that takes place in Dakar, Senegal, every two years. As a premier art event in the continent, it is a major meeting point for artists, patrons, gallery owners, scholars and art enthusiasts from across the globe. In his vested interest in mobility as a creative catalyst, and particularly, nudging on young talented artists, Anatsui's International Travel prize is awarded to 6 LIMCAF most outstanding artists, yearly.

For each Dak'Art Biennial, therefore, El Anatsui mobilizes 12 talented young Nigerian artists in an all-expense paid trip, granting them the opportunity to exhibit their work internationally. Specifically, the 12 outstanding artists from the 2022 and 2023 LIMCAF (6 from each year) were sponsored by Anatsui to the 2024 Dak'Art. Those from the 2024 event and the upcoming one in October 2025 will be to the 2026 Dak'Art. The 2024 winners are Paul Chibuike Emenike, Olayemi Sunday Opeyemi, Victor Olaoluwa Ogundeji, Teniola Oyefoso Ayomide, Emmanuel Eweje and Ibrahim Adavize. Like the artists of the Renaissance, or like Anatsui himself, whose creative

trajectories have significantly benefited from travels and connections, it is hoped that the sponsored trip becomes a growth springboard for the participants.

Anatsui's sponsorship and its attunement with his artistic philosophy invites one to reflect again on the concept of Humanism. In a statement, the curator, Amarachi Okafor, rightly suggested that every category of participants in the LIMCAF event has contributed their lot toward humanism (LIMCAF 2024a). Through such participation, young talents are nurtured and togetherness is facilitated among creatives and art enthusiasts across the country. In her words, "Creating and advancing such efforts as this, would be a most direct implication of 'taking responsibility'" (Okafor 2024a, p.4) It is a balanced combination of talk and action. The curator explains:

We are thinking Humanism! Humanism can be summarised to mean a really strong interest in, and consequently, loyalty to the human welfare. It is a principle, a stance, and perhaps actual behaviour or set of behaviours- a way of life, devoted to human interest or values (Okafor 2024a, p.1).

Through his dedicated interest in nurturing young artists, demonstrable through his mobility support to outstanding artists from LIMCAF over the years, El Anatsui has continued to show that his way of life is of humanism, a devoted interest in lifting others.

Conclusion

In sum, it is important to acknowledge that this exhibition held a variety of art media – oil on canvas; mixed media installations; pen, pencil and charcoal drawings; ceramic materials; digital art, videos and animations; photography; sculptures, fibre art, and so on. Following our line of thought in this paper only a few works of the entire exhibition are reflected in this article, yet several works in the show are highly pertinent to the cause of humanism. All of the 100 final artworks were captured in a high-end full-colour catalogue. Humanism ended in a grand gala in which the best submissions in the various categories and the overall prize were awarded. Yet it is enthusiastic to encounter the persona, El Anatsui, as the artist's talk revealed an important secret of his making, which is mobility.

Not only has mobility been a key factor in exposing El to the world, but it has also been an important element in the growth of Nsukka School, as several progenies of the school have encountered intercultural creative intercourse by spreading across the West and the rest of the world. This secret of mobility in the making of an artist concurs with the Igbo maxim that '*adighi anọ otu ebe ekiri mmanwu*,' which loosely translates that 'masquerades are rarely watched (enjoyed) from a single point'.

Humanism and mobility as a rallying point of this piece further found expression in the participation of the young artists as well as in the humanistic person of Anatsui who wields great support towards exhibiting younger artists in higher world pedestals of show. And it is important that relevant artists who have thrived lend support like El. From our own standpoint therefore we adjudge Humanism as successful and LIMCAF as integral part of artists' growth in Nigeria currently, and hope this festive show spreads to other parts of Africa.

References

- Anikpe, E. A., Itiav, V. J., Akabuike, C. C. & Ngwu, L. K. (2024). El Anatsui: Redefining Sculpture at the Nsukka Art School and Beyond. *Nsukka Journal of the Humanities*, 32 (1), 14-25. doi.org/10.62250/nsuk.2024.32.1.14-25
- Aremu, P.S.O., Ajiboye, O. J., Abiodun, B. (2010). Art and culture as a viable currency in Yoruba traditional architecture. In *WIT Transactions on Ecology and the Environment*, 142, 737-744.
- Ene-Orji, C. (2019). Continuity and Change in Nsukka Art: George Odoh's Illustration of Things Fall Apart. *African Arts*, 52(3), 48-61. doi: 10.1162/afar_a_00481
- Ikwuemesi, C. K., & Onwuegbuna, I. E. (2017). Creativity in calamity: Igbo funeral as interface of visibility and performance. *Continuum*, 32(2), 184-200. doi:10.1080/10304312.2017.1391176
- James, L. L. (2008). Convergence: History, Materials, and the Human Hand – An Interview with El Anatsui. *Art Journal*, 67(2), 36-53, doi: 10.1080/00043249.2008.10791303
- Leuthold, S. M. (2011). *Cross-Cultural Issues in Art: Frames for understanding*. New York, Abingdon: Routledge.
- LIMCAF (2024a). *Life In My City Art Festival XVII*, An Exhibition Catalogue. Rhyce Kerex Publishers
- LIMCAF (2024b). *Trailer cut of LIMCAF 2024*. A YouTube video. Accessed December 7, 2024. 21:15 GMT+1. Rhyce Kerex Publishers
- Morgan, T. (2016). Anya fulu Ugo: Exhibition in Honour of Obiora and Udechukwu. *African Arts*, 49(3), 87-89. doi: https://doi.org/10.1162/AFAR_r_00304
- Morgan, T. V. (2024). Simplism and Pluralism: The Dynamics and Evolution of Art Practice in Nsukka School. *Resonance: Journal of contemporary art scholarship*, 7(3), 99-111.
- Ogbechie, S. (2009). From Masks to Metal Cloth: Artists of the Nsukka School and the Problem of Ethnicity. *Critical Interventions*. 3(4), 133-146.
- Okafor, M. (2024a). Curator Introduction. In *Life In My City Art Festival XV11*. An Exhibition Catalogue. Rhyce Kerex Publishers
- Okafor, M. (2024b). Clay, Culture, and Creativity – the Ceramic Art of Echeta, Onuzulike, and Omeje of the Nsukka School (2000-2010). *Nsukka Journal of the Humanities*. 32 (3), 1-7. doi: <https://doi.org/10.62250/nsuk.2024.32.3.1-7>
- Onuzulike, O. (2024). Travel as a Catalyst for Artistic Growth: Insights from Art History and El Anatsui. *The 2024 LIMCAF Lecture Note*.
- Ottenberg S. (2002) Reflections on a Symposium and an Exhibition. In Ottenberg S (Ed), *Nsukka Artists and Nigeria Contemporary Art*. University of Washington Press, pp. 3-33.

-
- Porges, E. (1981). The grand tour travel as an educational device 1600–1800. *Annals of Tourism Research*; 8(2), 171-186. doi: [10.1016/0160-7383\(81\)90081-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383(81)90081-5)
- Salzberg, R. (2023). *The Renaissance on the Road: Mobility, Migration and Cultural Exchange*. Cambridge University Press.
- Verhoeven, G. (2023). Wading Through the Mire. Mobility on the Grand Tour (1585–1750). *Nelles and Salzberg, Connected Mobilities*, 63-85.
-

Publisher's Note/Disclaimer: The statements, opinions, and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of NJH. NJH disclaims responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions, or products referred to in the content.